Our focus is on exploring justice in its many dimensions. Our strong liberal arts curriculum equips students to pursue advanced study and meaningful, rewarding careers in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Our students are eager to engage in original research and experiential learning, excited to study in one of the world’s most dynamic cities, and passionate about shaping the future.

JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE IS ONE OF THE REASONS WHY CUNY IS THE GREATEST URBAN UNIVERSITY IN THE WORLD.

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The JOHN JAY COLLEGE FOUNDATION is a fierce advocate for our students’ success. The Foundation is dedicated to raising funds from alumni, friends, foundations, and corporations to relieve students’ financial hardships and help them stay on track to graduate. We are profoundly grateful to all of those who have contributed to provide:

- Tuition relief to our front-line heroes.
- Emergency assistance for students’ food, housing and other survival needs.
- Critical resources for our immigrant and undocumented students.
- Enhanced academic supports to ensure students earn their degrees.
- Tuition support for students facing financial difficulties.
- Scholarships and fellowships to prepare students for leadership roles.
- Experiential programs beyond the classroom.

If you, too, wish to be a fierce advocate for our students and contribute to their education and their future, please visit www.jjay.cuny.edu/donate

THE JOHN JAY COLLEGE FOUNDATION, INC.
A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established in 1964 to support and raise funds for the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The main office is located at 632 Haaren Hall on the John Jay campus at 524 West 59th street. Phone: 212-237-8624

OFFICE OF ALUMNI RELATIONS
Providing a lifetime of engagement, professional growth opportunities, and support for our alumni.

GAIN ACCESS: Sign up for an Alumni Card or attend a Career Fair.

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To learn more about how to become involved visit giving.jjay.cuny.edu or email us at alumni@jjay.cuny.edu
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E’re living through challenging times.” I’ve found myself writing, saying, and contemplating those five words countless times this year. But as challenging as the times may be, the struggle offers us an opportunity to fully see who we are, embrace our own strength, and unite together in ways we may have never known, because growth always follows adversity.

Being both a New York City-based College and an institution that educates students committed to public service put our community at the center of the crisis during the onset of the pandemic. While our City and the surrounding areas were some of the hardest hit locations in the country, our students, faculty, staff, and alumni were the very individuals specifically trained to keep our communities safe during an emergency. Despite the hardships and health risks, our essential workers and first responders fought—and continue to fight—this devastating disease. In “On the Front Line” (page 4) we salute our fellow Bloodhounds for their unfailing service.

In early March, as the world started to hear about a deadly disease moving across the globe, our community had to abruptly transition to a distance-learning model. Would the students and faculty have enough computers? Could faculty quickly adapt their lessons? How were we going to move thousands of students and faculty to a virtual platform in a matter of weeks? In “Educating Through the Crisis” (page 10) we depict the unity, the ingenuity, and the sheer will that it took to successfully shift our entire campus to a remote-learning model.

Before anyone knew about Covid-19, before anyone witnessed the senseless deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, or Ahmaud Arbery, our Honors Program students traveled down to Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement, to confront our country’s painful history of racial segregation. As we visited the Southern Poverty Law Center, The National Voting Rights Museum and Institute, and the Equal Justice Initiative, I was struck by the depth and quality of our students’ questions. It was an honor to rediscover these historical events through the eyes of our students. The feelings they express in “Understanding the Legacy” (page 16) are powerful, relevant, and encouraging. I hope they inspire you as much as they inspired me.

This August marked the one-year anniversary of the deadly mass shooting in El Paso. As a proud Hispanic-Serving Institution, this hateful act, which specifically targeted Latinx people, deeply impacted our community. “In Solidarity with El Paso” (page 24) details how our Latin American and Latinx Studies Department came together with the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), to create a yearlong series of events and activities called the El Paso Project. This collaboration demonstrated not only our solidarity with UTEP and the people of El Paso, but it also expressed our deep desire to make our country’s long, anti-Latinx history—which directly contributes to violence and discrimination—better known.

Adverse circumstances will never define us. Instead, how we face those struggles, how we come together to overcome those challenges, becomes the true testament of our character. The greatest privilege I have is being able to serve our talented students and work with our dedicated faculty and staff. Even during these “challenging times” it’s evident through the stories of our community, that in the face of adversity, true leadership, resilience, and optimism continues to propel us forward.

Thank you,

Karol V. Mason

@JohnJayPres
John Jay College Extends Partnership with Institutions in El Salvador

Since 2017, John Jay College has worked in partnership with the National Academy of Public Security (ANSP) and the José Simeón Cañas Central American University (UCA) in El Salvador, to develop the Academy for Security Analysis (ASA), a regional capacity-building program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The program, offered to police officers, law enforcement agents, and others working in the criminal justice system, uses research, data, and scientific methods to identify and implement evidence-based policies to reduce crime and violent behavior in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, collectively known as the Northern Triangle region of Central America. Earlier this year, President of John Jay College Karol V. Mason visited the institutions and signed a Declaration of Shared Interests with both ANSP and UCA, extending the College’s partnership role at each institution. At ANSP, John Jay will enhance its cooperation in police modernization, with the new stage of the partnership including a three-week long Police Leadership Program offered by John Jay instructors to Salvadoran police officers. Meanwhile, UCA and John Jay will enhance their collaboration in teaching, research, and justice reform.Already, John Jay faculty has created a master’s degree program in Criminology to be offered at UCA starting in 2021. The program is the first of its kind in the Northern Triangle region.

CUSP Takes Center Stage at 2020 Davos World Economic Forum

The world’s top leaders, thinkers, and innovators saw firsthand the incredible success of John Jay’s Completion for Upper-division Students Program (CUSP) at the 2020 Davos World Economic Forum. A video played at the convening showcased the innovative way CUSP is using “predictive modeling” data—established through a partnership with MasterCard Center for Inclusive Growth, The Rockefeller Foundation, DataKind, and The Price Family Foundation—to identify students needing additional support. These strategic initiatives significantly boosted our graduation rates. Without any intervention, a predicted 54 percent of rising seniors with 90-plus credits would graduate within two years. By using predictive analytics, and providing additional support, 73 percent of those same students graduated within one year in 2019, the pilot year of the CUSP program.

Student Emergency Funding Program Helps Our Most Vulnerable Students During Covid-19 Crisis

As part of a special campaign for Covid-19 relief, and the generosity of the John Jay community and an anonymous donor, funds were raised to support the needs of students for emergency funds and long-term laptop loans in Spring 2020. In total, $128,856 was raised, thanks to a $50,000 match from the anonymous donor. Students—regardless of their status—are able to access the funds by applying for Student Emergency grants. Emergency funds are intended as a supplemental financial resource for students when they’re unable to meet immediate and essential expenses due to temporary hardship. John Jay also offers an array of resources for our students including student emergency wellness grants, the food pantry, book vouchers, and tuition assistance.

Thank you to the John Jay community.

Over $128,000 raised for the student emergency fund. There’s still time to give!

John Jay Students Work to Get Everyone Counted in 2020 Census

While the Covid-19 health crisis put a halt on many Spring 2020 plans, one endeavor that remained full steam ahead was getting everyone counted in the 2020 Census. John Jay students working with the CUNY Census Corps began working remotely in March, providing outreach communications from their homes and informing New Yorkers about the importance of being counted in the Census. Using their digital savvy, students reached out to their communities through a variety of social media platforms, text messaging apps, and phone banking to encourage others to fill out the Census form. The Census ensures communities receive funding for services and programming, as well as representation in Washington. The Covid-19 health crisis has highlighted the glaring inequities in our society and the disproportionate number of underserved, low-income, Black and Latinx communities being impacted by the virus. “The Census affects funding for so many things, including health care. Look at how during this public health crisis the lack of resources is hurting the City’s most underserved and underrepresented communities, which are usually the most undercounted areas,” said Zhanay Thomas ‘23, a John Jay student and member of the CUNY Census Corps. “We need to count every single person for the 2020 Census, so that we can ensure we get the funding to support our medical and health care institutions. This funding can save lives.”
HEN COVID-19 FIRST HIT THE UNITED STATES, New York City became the epicenter of a global health crisis. As a New York City-based institution that educates students committed to public service, our community—alumni, students, faculty, and staff—faced the risks and challenges of keeping others safe as we fought to “flatten the curve.” Their service, expertise, research, and unflappable spirit serve as a testament to a John Jay education. We’re still battling this horrific disease, but as we continue the fight, we’d like to recognize and thank all of our front-line heroes.

KACIA WILSON ’19 SUPPORT SERVICE ASSOCIATE AT LENOX HILL HOSPITAL

Kacia Wilson ’19 works as a Support Service Associate at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan, New York. The John Jay alumna is studying full time at New York Law School, while she puts in long shifts at Lenox Hill, checking medical supplies and transporting patients. Both Wilson’s mother and sister work at the hospital, which heightens the stress levels within her family. “One day I was on the phone with my mom while she was working in a Covid-19 unit. She just broke down saying, ‘Oh my god, a 23-year-old just died. I can’t take it.’ I could hear her crying and I knew why it hit her so hard; I was turning 23,” Wilson recalls. “Just because we’re young doesn’t mean we won’t get this virus.” One shining light in Wilson’s day is seeing patients going home. “We’ve started playing the song ‘Here Comes the Sun’ every time someone gets discharged,” says Wilson, noting that in May they discharged their 1,000th Covid-19 patient. “I know we can get through this, especially with a team like ours. One thing is for sure, New Yorkers don’t quit.”
“JUST BECAUSE WE’RE YOUNG DOESN’T MEAN WE WON’T GET THIS VIRUS.”
—KACIA WILSON ’19, SUPPORT SERVICE ASSOCIATE AT LENOX HILL HOSPITAL

Alumna Kacia Wilson ’19
“With Covid-19, you can’t see it, but you’re immersed in it. You could be responding to an incident, working on a patient, and be sick and not even know it.”

—Richard Sposa ’01, Adjunct Professor, Security, Fire and Emergency Management and Director of Englewood Health’s Emergency Medical Services

Richard Sposa ’01
Adjunct Professor, Security, Fire and Emergency Management and Director of Englewood Health’s Emergency Medical Services

In the race to flatten the curve, EMS (emergency medical services) professionals such as John Jay alumnus and Adjunct Professor Richard Sposa ’01 worked around the clock to acquire life-saving equipment for hospitals. Working in Bergen County, New Jersey, one of the hardest-hit counties in the state, Sposa, Director of Englewood Health’s Emergency Medical Services, runs the hospital command center. At the height of the crisis every day was a scramble. “It was a non-stop race trying to meet the needs of our staff, ensuring they had enough PPE (personal protective equipment), and trying to meet the needs of our patients,” says Sposa, a seasoned EMS professional with operational stress management training. “I’ve responded to incidents following plane crashes, train crashes, fires, hurricane floods, and even 9/11, but I’ve never faced an incident such as Covid-19. In all those other instances I was responding to an incident. I wasn’t in the plane or train that crashed. I wasn’t in the towers on 9/11. With Covid-19, you can’t see it, but you’re immersed in it. You could be responding to an incident, working on a patient, and be sick and not even know it. You could bring it home to your family. And, you don’t know when this crisis is going to end.”
EMT Rosa Jimenez ’20

As an EMT (emergency medical technician), Rosa Jimenez ’20, was working on the front lines of the Covid-19 crisis while she studied to finish earning her degree at John Jay. Her job is focused in the Bronx, New York City’s hardest hit borough.

“The minute I get to work, I punch in and rush back to the bus—that’s what we call the ambulance—to clean and disinfect it,” says Jimenez. At the beginning of the pandemic, Jimenez and her team didn’t have any disinfectant wipes. “So, I’d have to cut up a blanket or sheet and make my own wipes from the cut-up pieces and a disinfectant solution.” After earning her degree, Jimenez has set her sights on becoming a physician assistant, in no small part due to the selfless work she’s witnessed from all the medical professionals around her.

“Every day I’m out in the field, I get to see firsthand how hard our health care professionals are working to save lives. They’re working together to come through on the other side of this pandemic, and that’s really inspiring for me.”

WHEN TRAGEDY HITS A NATION, IT’S ALWAYS THE POOREST AND MOST VULNERABLE AMONG US THAT SEEM TO TAKE THE HARDEST HIT.”

—SHANE WORRELL-LOUIS ’19, NYPD OFFICER

NYPD Officer and John Jay alumnus Shane Worrell-Louis ’19

SHANE WORRELL-LOUIS ’19
NYPD OFFICER

Shane Worrell-Louis ’19, a New York City Police Department (NYPD) Officer from Brooklyn, New York, takes his response to the Covid-19 health crisis day-by-day. “A typical day for me is making sure that businesses that are open follow the guidelines we’ve received, and that the businesses that are closed stay secure,” says Worrell-Louis. “I also provide wellness checks and engage with the public to ensure that everyone is safe during this tough time. I try to both enforce and promote social distancing.” Some of the hardest moments Worrell-Louis has had to face involve seeing people in crisis battling health problems, contending with emotional distress, and experiencing financial struggles—especially within the homeless population. “The homeless population has nowhere to turn and nowhere to feel protected from the virus. When tragedy hits a nation, it’s always the poorest and most vulnerable among us that seem to take the hardest hit,” says Worrell-Louis. “A moment that will always stay with me is when I observed a young adolescent come out of a Wendy’s and donate his meal to a homeless person. That’s what being a New Yorker is all about, getting the job done, and helping others in need.”
One of the front lines that can often be overlooked is the scientific front line. Doctors and scientists like Angelique Corthals, Ph.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Sciences, are working around the clock to find a way to prevent the disease from spreading and produce a viable vaccine. Corthals, a forensic anthropologist and biomedical researcher, is conducting two rapid-response projects funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) specifically related to Covid-19 research. “What I’m interested in is not only the origin of the disease and the process of how it evolved, but also how we can stop the spread and prevent the next pandemic,” she explains. In the first project, Corthals and her colleagues from Stony Brook University and Texas Tech University are examining how bats with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, can be infected but not affected by the virus. “The hope is that through the research, we’ll figure out what proteins in the immune system can be targeted and used for immunization.”

In her second NSF-funded collaborative project, mucin-producing “goblet cells” are the focus (mucins are the major macromolecular components of mucus). “If we go through all the Covid-19 symptoms, and we look at the sites in the human body that Covid-19 affects, the one commonality is the goblet cells,” says Corthals, discussing the research she’s conducting with team members from Yale University and Stony Brook University. “Could it be that upon entry of the virus, goblet cells in bats contain the virus and then dissolve it? Or is it that bats have fewer goblet cells in their upper respiratory tract, making them less susceptible to being invaded by the virus?” She hopes that this research will better inform the scientific community about treatments and immunizations, while also enabling the surveillance of bat populations, to prevent the next pandemic.
MATTHEW HART ’20
NEW YORK NATIONAL GUARD SPECIALIST

New York National Guard Specialist Matthew Hart ’20 has a lot on his plate. This past summer, he typically got up at 4:30 in the morning and juggled six classes at John Jay along with his work schedule, which allowed him to graduate on time. His main jobs with the National Guard are directing traffic at Covid-19 testing sites and helping organize food distribution centers for people in need. At the Covid-19 testing sites, Hart is often assigned the duty of taking patient information through car windows, but he’s assigned himself another task: morale booster. “People come through the testing site and they’re extremely scared. They drive up in their cars, and as instructed, they keep their windows up when they get to my checkpoint,” says Hart. “I’ve almost lost my voice some days because I have to speak really loud to check them in through the glass. After each person drives away from a Covid-19 testing site, I give them a thumbs up. I know that they’re nervous about the results and I want to encourage them to stay positive.”

ANDREW PHELPS ’08
DIRECTOR, OREGON OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

As the Director of Oregon’s Office of Emergency Management, Andrew Phelps ’08 leads statewide efforts to prepare for, mitigate against, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters, regardless of the cause. With an extensive background in emergency management, the hardest part of the pandemic for Phelps is knowing that no matter how hard he works, or how well he does his job, people are still going to die from this virus. But being able to use his knowledge to save as many lives as possible, keeps him going. “It was an amazing experience when I was called by our governor about the idea of sending our allocation of ventilators from the Strategic National Stockpile to New York,” says Phelps, who was inspired to study emergency management after feeling helpless during 9/11. “As an emergency manager, it’s never easy to give up a resource you may need to help save lives in your community, but ultimately, we decided things sitting on a shelf in Oregon could save a life across the country within 24 hours. That thought made the decision an easy one to make. Being able to call my counterpart in New York and make that happen has been one of the most rewarding parts of this experience, not just because it was the right thing to do, but because I was able to help my old stomping grounds a bit.” JM
Educating through the CRISIS

How John Jay students, faculty, and staff successfully transitioned to a distance-learning model.
THIS IS NOT A DRILL.
You have four working days from this overcast Wednesday in mid-March to convert thousands of students and faculty members to an online learning model which is being architected in real time as you mobilize heads of departments across academic disciplines, IT, and myriad support services. And by the way, you’re short a couple thousand laptops.

With the veritable flip of a switch on March 11, the City University of New York (CUNY), and much of New York City, leaned into the race to contain the novel coronavirus which, at that moment, was accelerating statewide by hundreds of cases per day. When John Jay’s campus closed that afternoon, students were almost a third of the way into a 15-week semester. Now what?

UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION
There’s just no playbook for a pandemic, but Thursday, March 19 was showtime, when 5,000 undergraduate courses were set to resume and failure was not an option. The situation required everyone’s full attention, including that of Dara Byrne, Ph.D., Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, who was one of the people at the center of John Jay’s virtual-transition effort.

“Those four days were four days of people working round the clock, not because anybody asked,” says Byrne, “but rather that’s just what happened as a result of people wanting to do the most that they could to make that deadline.”

The job was further complicated by having to solve the “digital divide.” In a Hispanic-Serving and Minority-Serving Institution, where many of our students are first-generation college students, easy access to computers and connectivity was a question mark rather than a checklist item. As Wynne Ferdinand, the Director of Educational Partnerships and General Education, created an online survey to get the full scope of the students’ technology needs, locating available devices became an all-hands-on-deck mission. Faculty and staff started working together to quickly purchase laptops, borrow computers, or tap their personal networks for technology donations or suggestions—even during a time when shipments from China had been severely disrupted by the coronavirus crisis. Hundreds of devices were made available, and the Department of Information and Technology (DoIT) started tackling the gargantuan task of putting them into circulation.

As results started coming in through Ferdinand’s survey, the rush to get students properly wired was on.

“Students were facing a number of challenges in this uncertain time, but of particular concern to us was that nearly 40 percent of students reported that they shared the device they use to complete school work with one or more members of their household,” says Ferdinand. Although the survey was anonymous, she became the conduit for faculty to make referrals for students in need of hardware. She downloaded those referrals and sent them to DoIT for dispatch.

SUPPORTING FACULTY THROUGH THE TRANSITION
Meanwhile, Judith Cahn, Ed.D., Director of the Department of Online Education and Support (DOES), was spearheading the other critical piece of this overnight conversion to a distance-learning model: giving the faculty a crash course on virtual teaching. Before the pandemic even became news, Cahn’s office had expanded its focus as the support center for the fully online graduate courses that John Jay offers, to also serving the entire college. “We had worked with many professors, mostly in the graduate studies to develop online courses,” says Cahn, but there weren’t many of those who also taught undergraduates. As the coronavirus news grew more ominous, Cahn’s team started on March 5 to run webinars for faculty about online teaching and put together a best-practices guide.

BY MARY ANDERSON
Students were facing a number of challenges in this uncertain time, but of particular concern to us was that nearly 40 percent of students reported that they shared the device they use to complete school work with one or more members of their household.”

—Wynne Ferdinand, the Director of Educational Partnerships and General Education

Every faculty member would need to shift from a lecture style to offering different learning experiences via tools like Blackboard, Zoom, and online discussion forums. “I consider this transition to be a major paradigm shift,” says Cahn. “Not so much a technology change but in the methodology of teaching and learning.”

Cahn’s department already offered regular office hours for faculty to meet with instructional advisors, but after the pandemic hit New York, those sessions became virtual meetings. One such online course advisor, Holly Davenport, the Associate Director of Instructional Design, served as a “hotline” resource for faculty members seeking distance-learning advice—while she herself was multitasking work responsibilities with homeschooling her five-year-old twins. “When I’d talk to a faculty member, we’d take a hard look at what they built into their original courses for the semester. Then we decided what could go and what needed to stay. Afterwards, we’d get to work adapting the remaining objectives and information into a distance-learning model,” explains Davenport.

To encourage faculty throughout the semester, Gina Rae Foster, Ph.D., Director of the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), re-envisioned the role of the TLC. “On March 11, we began writing a series of emails to faculty to validate and support their transition to remote teaching and learning,” says Foster. “The emails covered the initial redesign and movement to a remote learning landscape, reentry and support in the new environment, and a recalibration period.”

TRYING NEW STRATEGIES
Everyone at John Jay was acutely aware of the pressure students were under, and they wanted to use existing resources to promote student persistence. A team of faculty and staff met students where they were—primarily on their phones—and initiated a texting campaign to make sure students stayed on track throughout the semester. They sent out messages to over 12,000 students. Eight messages were sent out to the entire student population, and three messages were sent out to small cohorts. Counselors responded to 2,371 messages—answering questions about the new credit/no credit policy, directing students to advisors, offering resources, and clearing up any confusion about the new distance-learning model. “Our texting campaign is a great example of John Jay pivoting to create a solution to help students during a particularly challenging time. It demonstrates our resilience and ability to adapt to a new environment.”

—Laura Ginns, Vice President of Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives

John Jay pivoting to create a solution to help students during a particularly challenging time,” says Laura Ginns, Vice President of Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives. “It demonstrates our resilience and ability to adapt to a new environment.”

FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS
As the administration and faculty mobilized behind the scenes, junior Musarrat Lamia’s ‘21 cell phone kept pinging with emails and texts. Classmates were turning to her for answers as the Student Council

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To encourage faculty throughout the semester, Gina Rae Foster, Ph.D., Director of the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), re-envisioned the role of the TLC. “On March 11, we began writing a series of emails to faculty to validate and support their transition to remote teaching and learning,” says Foster. “The emails covered the initial redesign and movement to a remote learning landscape, reentry and support in the new environment, and a recalibration period.”

TRYING NEW STRATEGIES
Everyone at John Jay was acutely aware of the pressure students were under, and they wanted to use existing resources to promote student persistence. A team of faculty and staff met students where they were—primarily on their phones—and initiated a texting campaign to make sure students stayed on track throughout the semester. They sent out messages to over 12,000 students. Eight messages were sent out to the entire student population, and three messages were sent out to small cohorts. Counselors responded to 2,371 messages—answering questions about the new credit/no credit policy, directing students to advisors, offering resources, and clearing up any confusion about the new distance-learning model. “Our texting campaign is a great example of John Jay pivoting to create a solution to help students during a particularly challenging time. It demonstrates our resilience and ability to adapt to a new environment.”

—Laura Ginns, Vice President of Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives

John Jay pivoting to create a solution to help students during a particularly challenging time,” says Laura Ginns, Vice President of Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives. “It demonstrates our resilience and ability to adapt to a new environment.”

FOSTERING STUDENT SUCCESS
As the administration and faculty mobilized behind the scenes, junior Musarrat Lamia’s ‘21 cell phone kept pinging with emails and texts. Classmates were turning to her for answers as the Student Council
on; they were putting questions in the comment section and then we were answering them.”

Sure enough, when students logged in to their virtual John Jay classrooms that Thursday, the faculty was ready and Zooming. Some professors scheduled check-ins before video lectures to keep tabs on students. Others made certain writing assignments or quizzes optional. All of them encouraged their students to be in contact so that accommodations could be made for the evolving challenges that households were facing.

For her part, Lamia says it was the professors’ flexibility and understanding that was the key to her success—such as when one professor granted her an extension on a writing assignment. “As students, we needed to tell our professors if we were going through something difficult so that our grades weren’t penalized because of an unavoidable challenge,” says Lamia. As for getting on board with online learning, she picked up some tips from students who were already “virtual-learning experts”—including fellow Honors student DeCarlos Hines ’22, who shared his insights in an online article to help acclimate his fellow students.

A Forensic Psychology major, Hines transferred to John Jay and has since taken at least one online course per semester. As all his courses shifted online, Hines compartmentalized the assignments into smaller tasks as he’s done in the past with virtual courses. He likened Blackboard to a higher-level social media site, and explained to classmates, “The discussion forum is like your comments section and you’re among friends in that forum. You give your feedback; you like their posts.” The switch to a distance-learning model may have felt like a fire drill at first for many students, but when they fully immersed themselves into the approach, they, like Hines, learned that a virtual-learning environment wasn’t as unfamiliar as they preconceived it to be.

In spite of the substantial challenges that John Jay students, faculty, and staff faced during the spring semester, the 2020 graduating class was the largest in the school’s history, with 3,897 graduates. It’s still too soon to know what this campus-wide initiation into a distance-learning will fully mean for how courses look like going forward, but for Byrne’s part, she is ultimately proud of how the John Jay community rose to the occasion of going digital in four days’ time. “I get a little emotional thinking about what it is our faculty and staff accomplished for our students. Through sheer will, commitment, work ethic and raw talents, these folks in tiny little offices—some people that have staff of just themselves—pulled this off.”

—Dara Byrne, Ph.D., Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies
Responding to the Call
Alumna Shawyn Patterson-Howard ’05 makes history as the first female Mayor of Mount Vernon, New York.

BY ANDREA DAWN CLARK

SHAWYN PATTERSON-HOWARD, who earned her master’s degree in Public Administration in 2005 from John Jay College, never intended to run for elected office. But when she saw her city in turmoil, “I responded to the call of my community,” she says, becoming the first female Mayor of Mount Vernon, New York, and one of only four African-American mayors in the state. “For me, it was never about trailblazing. It was about seeing needs that were not being met, drilling down, pulling together resources, and really seeking to make a difference in Mount Vernon. I’ve always enjoyed working at the intersection of government, community, civic business, and the faith-based community.”

BEING A JOHN JAY STUDENT
As a non-traditional student, Patterson-Howard took several online and in-person classes to earn her M.P.A. “One of my favorite parts of the experience was learning from my classmates. We had dynamic conversations. There were quite a few people in my class from other countries, and the international presence of law enforcement and government leaders from around the globe helped us discuss innovative solutions to community problems,” says Patterson-Howard. It’s those globally informed strategies that have guided the way she leads today, especially during challenging times, like the current Covid-19 health epidemic that has hit Mount Vernon particularly hard. “We can’t just do things the same old way that we’ve been doing them. We have to make sure that within a government framework, we can still be responsive to the emerging needs of a community, as well as continuing to deal with longstanding challenges.”

BEING THE MAYOR
Actress and activist Lily Tomlin once famously said, “Somebody should do something about that! Then I realized, I am somebody.” Before Mount Vernon’s 2019 mayoral election, Patterson-Howard realized that she was the “somebody” that folks needed to lead them. “After our previous mayor had been indicted, our community was in turmoil,” she remembers. “I went on Facebook and I started making points that I thought were important. After a while, people started saying, ‘Well, why aren’t you running?’ People were asking me to step up.”

In less than 72 hours, Patterson-Howard responded to their call and threw her hat in the ring. “I never saw myself in elected office because I worried that I would lose my voice. But I still very much speak truth to power, I’m still very committed to serving the community in a way that is authentic, and I still put the citizenry and our stakeholders first.”

After winning the election, Patterson-Howard felt the first thing that needed to be done was to reengage the community. Her team put together seven transition teams with over 25 community members on each team, along with experts on the subject matters. She’s also been focusing on critical economic development for Mount Vernon.

BEING A SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATE
In true John Jay form, Patterson-Howard is committed to social justice issues. She’s worked for over 25 years on prisoner-reentry programs and criminal justice reform. “After people have been prosecuted and served their time, when they come back into the community, there are essential services and supports that they need to ensure that they don’t recidivate. This is not only for their betterment, but also for public safety.” For the past 10 years, Patterson-Howard has run a program called SNUG (which is the word “guns” spelled backwards) that helps lower community violence by employing system-impacted individuals to be change agents and credible messengers. “I had one gentleman who went in for second degree murder at the age of 18. He came out at 44,” says Patterson-Howard. “He knows what it’s like to make one stupid decision that changed the trajectory of his life. For the past six years, he’s been working hard to reduce the potential of that happening to more young people like him.”

BEING A LEADER DURING COVID-19
With tens of thousands of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Westchester County, and sadly hundreds of deaths as a result of the disease, being the Mayor of Mount Vernon during these challenging times would test the mettle of any leader. Luckily, Mount Vernon has an inspiring leader at the helm. “As businesses started to shut down, people started to feel anxious. But instead of panicking about the situation, I suggested that they let their anxieties drive them to plan, prepare, and prevent. Use the time at home to connect with your family. We have to take this deadly disease seriously, and as a community we have to practice precaution on the front end to save precious lives.” JM
Charting New Territory

Olivia Orta, Ph.D. ’07 blazed a path for John Jay alumni, being the first John Jay grad to earn her doctoral degree from Harvard.

BY ANDREA DAWN CLARK

As many of our students and alumni know, being the first one in your family to get a bachelor’s degree can be a daunting experience. For Olivia Orta, Ph.D. ’07 that “first-gen” experience extended all the way to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, where she earned her doctorate degree in Epidemiology. “Looking back at the census in Puerto Rico, we can see that my grandmother was one of the first in the family to report being literate,” says Orta, who graduated Magna Cum Laude from John Jay with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forensic Science. “For her daughter to go on and get her associate degree, and her granddaughter to get a doctorate degree, it makes me really proud of where I come from—a long line of very strong women.” Orta shared with us what she learned throughout her noteworthy academic journey.

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO ATTEND JOHN JAY COLLEGE?

When I applied to the College, I clearly remember writing an essay about two important things in my life, the first being my lifelong love of science, and the second being the murder of my cousin. I’m an only child, so my cousin was like a brother to me. In my family I was the unicorn in the room talking about mitochondria at eight years old, and he always encouraged me. He would call me from jail and say, “Yo, how’s your studying going? What are you learning? You know I love you, right?” During the time when I was deciding which college to attend, he was murdered. Losing him made me see the connections between criminal justice and science—particularly forensic science. I know I wouldn’t be where I am now without his encouragement.

HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCE AT JOHN JAY HELP MOVE YOU TOWARD A PH.D. AT HARVARD?

I never grew up saying, “I’m going to go to Harvard.” I didn’t even grow up saying I’m going to get a graduate degree. I grew up saying that I wanted to learn as much as possible wherever I can. I can say with every fiber of my being that throughout my education, I was shaped by the help of others. When I went to John Jay, I started doing research with Anthony [Carpi Ph.D., Dean of Research] and really enjoyed it. After I graduated, I knew I wanted to study epidemiology and biostatistics, so I applied to seven graduate schools. They all said “no”—including Harvard. Those seven rejections really hurt, but I stayed in contact with Anthony and he suggested that we conduct some research together. After I earned my master’s degree in Public Health from Hunter College, and I conducted more research of my own, it was Anthony who insisted that I apply to Harvard again. This time I got in.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE AT HARVARD FOR YOU IN THEIR DOCTORAL PROGRAM?

It was a culture shock. I identify as an Afro-Puerto Rican, and walking down the halls of John Jay and living in the South Bronx, I never understood how we were called a “minority” group. We were everywhere. On day one at Harvard, when I met my cohort of new Ph.D. students, I realized I was the only Black or Latinx person in the room. These are your peers. You need to build relationships with them, share resources with them, and hopefully, share your hardships with them. But I found it really difficult to bring my full self to the table at times. That was really distracting from the learning process.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A STUDENT TRYING TO FOLLOW IN YOUR FOOTSTEPS?

You want to go to Harvard? Good. Apply. You’re worthy. You’re capable. But be prepared, banging down the door to these institutions is only step one. Then you have to exist in these spaces that can be soul crushing. You know how we had the Green Book in the sixties—showing Black people where they could safely go while traveling. I’ve often thought that we need a Green Book for graduate school. I really feel passionate about formalizing strategies for students of color to thrive in these spaces because they’re going to be facing all the “-isms”—sexism, classism, and racism.

WHAT IS YOUR WORK FOCUSING ON NOW?

My official degree is in reproductive perinatal and pediatric epidemiology, which is essentially the process that makes us. I’m interested in applying Black feminism to epidemiological approaches and application. When a researcher uses data from 100,000 people, they have to put some assumptions on the statistical modeling, and even some assumptions on what exposures to look at more closely. These assumptions are implicitly driven by our lived experience. If your lived experience has very little to do with living around people of color, that is going to be reflected in your questions, your approach, and the implications of your findings. Going back to what I would tell the young people who are trying to apply to grad school, I’d like to add this: Do it because who does the research matters. JM
Understanding the Legacy

Students at The National Memorial for Peace and Justice
John Jay students, faculty, and staff visit the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement and contemplate the unsettling history of race in America. By Andrea Dawn Clark

This past January, students from our Honors Program traveled down to Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement, to walk in the footsteps of America’s Civil Rights icons. Their goal was clear: immerse themselves in the history of the American Civil Rights movement to further propel their own journeys in the pursuit of justice and equality. What they didn’t know was that the world would be profoundly changed in the coming months. They didn’t know that a global pandemic was about to turn their world upside down, shedding light on deeply entrenched inequities throughout our country. They didn’t know the names of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. And, they didn’t know that the experience they were about to have would serve as a foundation of knowledge that would help inform them in the challenging times that lay ahead of them.

Understanding the History
In Alabama, our students confronted America’s painful history of racial segregation as they studied the insidious tests and intimidation tactics that denied Black people the right to vote. They walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the same bridge that the late Congressman John Lewis marched upon, where he faced violence and aggression fighting for their right to vote. At the Southern Poverty Law Center, they learned how the devastating effects of racism still affect communities of color today. And, at The Equal Justice Initiative, The Legacy Museum, and The National Memorial for Peace and Justice they absorbed the impact of thousands of racial terror lynchings in America.

“Seeing the pictures of Black men and women being lynched, beaten, and attacked, simply for wanting equality, hit me hard,” said Michelle Naime ’21. “I’ll never forget a postcard that I saw at The Legacy Museum. There was a chilling photo of a Black man being hanged while a mob of white people surrounded him. This public lynching was their entertainment. This was exciting for them. This was—and in many ways still is—life in America.” Months later, after she mourned the death of George Floyd, Naime made the connection. “Mr. Floyd’s death was a public lynching, just like what I saw on that brutal historical postcard at the museum.”

Processing the Pain
After witnessing the shocking injustices Black Americans endured—and people of color continue to contend with today—it was inevitable, knowing how empathetic our students are, that they would grapple with feelings of pain and anger. That’s why Raymond Patton, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History and Faculty Director of the Honors Program and Macaulay Honors College, set up “reflection sessions” after each day of events. There, students, faculty, and staff shared their thoughts on what they learned.

“When I was at the museum, for a good two hours, I started to genuinely hate white people. They put laws in place that enabled people to kill, rape, degrade, and brutalize their fellow human beings, simply because of the color of their skin. Their systemic hatred, for generations, destroyed not only Black families, but Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans,” said Tyler Johnson ’22, who was visibly shaken by the experience.

Dara Byrne, Ph.D., Associate Provost for Undergraduate Retention and Dean of Undergraduate Studies assured her that it was okay to feel anger, rage, or sorrow. “I saw and heard so many of you crying today,” said Byrne. She then asked the students to take a step back and process what they were feeling, and envision the powerful things they could do to enact change in the future. “Really think about all the people that fought for your rights. What are you going to do with that legacy?”

Christian Bethea ’23 took Byrne’s words to heart, considering how he could contribute to the fight for equality, but he also delved into what the struggle for equality meant to him personally. During the trip, Bethea—who was born one day before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday—turned 19. “I’m forever grateful and eternally indebted to him, and all of the Civil Rights leaders whose shoulders I stand on. But if I reflect on what it’s like being an African-American man in the United States, it feels like everywhere you turn, something or someone is against you,” said Bethea. “I’m somebody’s son. I’m somebody’s brother. I’m a boyfriend. I’m a friend. I don’t bother anybody, and I don’t do anything that warrants that sort of unbridled hatred that would have someone stamp out my life.” Bethea told the group

“I don’t do anything that warrants that sort of unbridled hatred that would have someone stamp out my life.”
—Christian Bethea ’23
“We’ve been taught that power dictates the law, and laws change based on the shift in power.” —Denny Boodha ’22

that one day he wanted to have a son, and play basketball and football with him. “But looking at all those names of Black people who were murdered because of their race, it made me think: Would I be selfish to bring a young Black man into this world? Just reflecting on that made me realize that it’s my obligation to do something to effect positive change.”

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS
As a school focused on issues of justice, our scholars naturally drew on their educational experiences, and then connected the dots to what they were seeing. “In Dr. Davidson’s class, we’ve been taught that power dictates the law, and laws change based on the shift in power,” said Denny Boodha ’22, referring to a class with Charles Robert Davidson, Ph.D., the Director of the Pre-Law Institute, who also attended the trip. “When people stopped taking the bus during the boycott, capitalism started to crash, power was taken away from white supremacists, and they changed the law. We have to look at our society and see where we’re giving our power and who we’re taking power from.”

Along with making connections to their studies, students from different races and cultures made connections to their own social justice struggles. “The African-American experience is really close to me because of what’s happening to my people in Tibet,” said Tenzin Andrugstang ’20. Seeing the jars of soil at The Legacy Museum—where volunteers gathered fertile bits of earth, red clay, and sandy soil from sites where Black people died from lynchings—triggered a memory for Andrugstang, making her reflect on the struggles of her own people. “It made me think of a small project that was happening in India, where I was born. A Tibetan guy smuggled a few kilos of soil from Tibet, where he was born, and brought it back to India. Generations of Tibetans who came to India in exile just wanted to touch that soil and feel their homeland. The exploitation of African-Americans, the culture, the language, everything is so similar.” After seeing the power of the soil exhibit in the Legacy Museum, Andrugstang vowed to start documenting the stories of exiled Tibetans.

For President Karol V. Mason seeing students like Boodha and Andrugstang make connections to the history before them and consider all the ways they could enact change was the highlight of her experience. She’d seen her parents fight unjust systems of racial segregation, and she’d lived through moments of discrimination herself, but seeing the way the students listened and asked thoughtful questions filled her with pride. “One of the specific things that we’re going to be talking about in our community is the power of voting. To me, voting is sacred because my parents were in the generation that had to fight for Black folks being able to vote.”

TAKING ACTION
Walking through six-acres of sculptures, messages, and waterfalls dedicated to the lives lost to racial terror instilled an emotional mixture of sorrow, reverence, and even peace within the group. At the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the souls of thousands of men, women, and children finally had a place to be remembered.

As Marcela Ventura ’21 walked in between the 800, six-foot-tall monuments, each with the names of racial terror victims etched on their surfaces, she posed a question to her fellow students. “I understand that this happened, but bad things have happened to other groups of people, too. Why are Black people always so angry?” Three of her friends, all coming from different parts of the world, started to tell Ventura what they already knew and what they recently learned about African-American history.

“The truth was, before the trip, I had no clue what racism was. I’m not white, but I was unaware of the deep-rooted discrimination Black people have faced and continue to face,” said Ventura, months after the trip. “In Alabama I saw photographs of kids younger than me, marching, protesting, and demanding that people acknowledge their rights and recognize that their lives mattered. I thought of them when I saw videos of George Floyd being murdered.”

After the trip to Alabama, Ventura was forever changed. She started making signs in both English and Spanish supporting the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, but she soon realized that one of the most important things she could do was to educate her own family. When Ventura’s mother asked, “Why is there all this fuss about Blacks, but no one mentions the struggles of Hispanics?” She heard her own words in Alabama and remembered how her peers helped to educate her.
“When I came back from Alabama, my mother didn’t really understand my transformative experience, no matter how hard I attempted to explain it.”

Then one afternoon Ventura watched *13th*, the Netflix documentary that explores the long history of racial inequality that African-Americans have faced, with her parents. “My mom just sat there in silence surprised at the segregation signs and the image of Emmett Till,” said Ventura. “I asked my mother to imagine having to bury me at the age of 14—with my face bludgeoned like his—just because my skin was a shade darker than hers. My mother’s eyes spoke for her.”

This past June, Ventura went to a BLM protest, and her mother insisted on going with her. Yes, her daughter’s safety was a big concern, but Ventura’s mother proudly marched alongside her daughter and intently listened as people told their stories. “After my experience in Alabama, I’m committed to spreading the knowledge that I gained. Seeing how moved and involved my mother was during the march has given me hope that real change can happen.”

“One of the things we learned at the Southern Poverty Law Center is that they don’t want you to just learn history, they want you to leave thinking about what you can do to positively change the world.”
—Karol V. Mason, President
HEN FRESHMAN Johanna Molina walked into her LEAP advisor Cortanay Parker’s office one February afternoon, it wasn’t academic help she was looking for. She had a good handle on which courses she should take as she pursued her Criminal Justice major—the same subject Parker had majored in as a John Jay undergrad—but she needed a resume for two internships she was applying to, one at the Bronx District Attorney’s office and the other with the New York City Police Department. “She really took her time with me, giving me a lot of great suggestions from her own personal experiences,” Molina recalls of that meeting with Parker, her third one that month. “Now I have a great resume and a good handle on the next steps I need to take in my journey.” Molina’s path to this turning-point meeting began with an appointment at the campus Career Center. When the counselor realized Molina was a second-semester freshman she suggested LEAP as an additional resource. The counselor even walked Molina down the hall to the offices of the newly-launched program known as LEAP—an acronym for Linking Experience, Academics and Practice, a student-success initiative generously funded by the Booth Ferris Foundation and the ECMC Foundation. “The personalized attention I got from LEAP really helped me focus on my goals. I don’t think I’d be as confident about my future had it not been for Ms. Parker,” says Molina.

John Jay has a number of “cohort programs”—Accelerate Complete Engage (ACE); Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK); the Honors Program; and APPLE Corps to name a few—in which students who are following a specific field of study or meet some other type of eligibility get intensive academic advising, career counseling, and mentoring. “These different programs have shown a great deal of success because they offer wrap-around services for students, that the general student population did not have,” says Sumaya Villanueva, Ph.D., Assistant Provost for Academic Engagement which administrates them. LEAP was conceived to fill that gap. “We realized that when students have that connection to a person who works with them and gets to know them, then the likelihood that these students are going to succeed and complete their degrees is definitely much higher.”

The idea is that LEAP would be the guiding hand which would take students from the second semester of their freshman year through to the end of their sophomore year. This is a crucial window, says Villanueva, when such support makes all the difference. As the College has an ambitious goal underway to exceed national college completion rates for public institutions by the year 2025, it found there was an opportunity to address the drop-off in students returning for their second year of study. “It is that transition from the summer into the fall that we lose a number of students,” says Villanueva. “We knew going in that we wanted to create a structure whereby bringing in additional advisors to work with their students during that critical time was going to be key.”

At the start of the second semester this past January, all LEAP freshman received an email in their inboxes. It was a letter introducing the LEAP program and the dedicated four-person team of advisors: program manager Cristina Di Meo and two other counselors besides Parker, Ahmadou MBoup and Alex Vasquez. “The message to students was that we’re here to help you think about academic advising and career advising together in an integrated model,” says Villanueva. Sure, the LEAP advisors could help puzzle out which course credits are needed to keep students on target for completing the requirements for their major, but they also served to focus students on the bigger picture. It’s about getting them thinking about internships and other career experiences early on. “There’s a lot of research on experiential learning that shows that students are more engaged and that helps with retention,” says Di Meo.
The first LEAP event, held in early February, was an experiential opportunities fair. “We brought together all of the folks on campus who provide experiential learning—the peer programs, CUNY Service Corps, the Office of Student Research and Creativity, the study abroad program—to really present to students what opportunities are available and to get them thinking about how they can get involved,” says Di Meo. The goal is to have students figure out what their interests are early on in their college careers to help them know their path forward. “If they start networking and being connected to certain opportunities and people,” says Villanueva, “then by the time they graduate, they will be more proficient at doing what they need to be able to do to secure not just a job, but actually the beginning stages of a career.”

Aarifah Surujlal was one of the freshmen who attended that LEAP fair. She had learned from the January email that MBoup would be her LEAP advisor and met up with him there. “I set up an appointment with him the following week and he helped me pick out my classes for next semester and plan out internship opportunities,” says Surujlal. It turned out to be fortuitous timing. “I was considering doing my internship in my junior or senior year, but he told me that if I want to go to Columbia Law School, I needed to do two or more internships.” (MBoup received his bachelor’s degree from Columbia University.) Now, whenever Surujlal has a question about those applications, she sends MBoup an email. “He’ll always answer by the next day,” she says.

Equally important, there is another safety net function that LEAP serves. Of the 857 second-semester freshmen under the LEAP umbrella, the College sought to identify those students who had scored a D, F, W or Incomplete in any of their fall courses and those who had not reached 15 credits to be on pace for graduation. In all, 309 freshmen fell into that subset. “That doesn’t mean that all of them were necessarily at risk,” says Villanueva. “But we were persistent with following up with them and trying to identify what are the issues. Is it a time management thing? Is it that you need access to wellness resources or do you need tutoring?” Prior to the inception of LEAP, the College’s regular core advisement team would have been able to send notifications to those students about what next steps they should take. But as those advisors serve the entire College population, their ability to follow through in the high-touch way that the LEAP advisors are doing is more limited.

Of course, the coronavirus pandemic upended campus life in mid-March before the LEAP program could roll out the full scope of its enhanced student support. “One of the things that we are aiming to do is to have students see that an e-portfolio—which many of them have become accustomed to using for their English seminars—is a platform that they can continue to use beyond the classroom,” says Villanueva. To that end, the LEAP program had planned a four-part Level Up series to walk students through the process of designing their e-portfolio to be a career tool with a built-in resume. “At the end, we planned to show them how to make their portfolio more tailored to their interests, but it didn’t get to happen—so that’s something that we’d like to incorporate for next year,” says Di Meo.

LEAP advisors nonetheless continued working with their students remotely through the months of quarantine that followed. In April, freshman Enrique Mendez was emailing with his advisor, Parker, to work out how to switch from his Criminal Justice major to Forensic Science. “I didn’t think it would be an option for me,” says Mendez. Parker not only helped map which courses were needed, she did even one better, offering to connect Mendez with a John Jay alumnus, Andrew Schweighardt, Ph.D., who works at the Office of New York City’s Chief Medical Examiner. When Mendez spoke with Schweighardt later that month, he was prepared with a list of questions that he had formulated with Parker. “He gave me a lot of information about how he started, including what subjects he took as minors—biology and chemistry,” says Mendez of the informational interview.

This type of networking is a case study of LEAP’s potential. It began when Di Meo arranged a meeting with the College’s Director of Alumni Engagement, Rosann Santos. “We discussed how we might partner, since I’d like to create a mentoring piece to our program that would involve alumni—and other professionals—who could help students with informational interviewing and job shadowing,” says Di Meo. It was at that meeting that Santos had mentioned Schweighardt and the lightbulb went off that Mendez had mentioned his interest in this field to Parker. “There is no formal internship currently available with the Medical Examiner’s office, but I’m hoping these kinds of connections lead to future opportunities,” says Di Meo.

Before the end of the spring 2020 semester, when it was time to finalize decisions on which fall classes to register for, Johanna Molina had pretty much figured her out her best class options, but she wanted to check in with Parker, who suggested she also think about fulfilling one of her minor requirements. It was advice the freshman especially took to heart, knowing that Parker completed the same Criminal Justice major she’s now pursuing. “It’s amazing knowing that someone is there to understand you and help you no matter what,” Molina says. “I’m really glad that I have a LEAP advisor in my corner.”

“The message to students was that we’re here to help you think about academic advising and career advising together in an integrated model.”

—SUMAYA VILLANUEVA, DIRECTOR OF THE COLLEGE’S ACADEMIC ADVISEMENT CENTER
A Voice for Victims

Political Science Associate Professor Verónica Michel Explores Victims’ Rights in Latin America.

BY SHIRLEY DEL VALLE

Verónica Michel, Ph.D., has always been an optimist, believing that fairness and equality could be achieved in the world. Growing up in her native Mexico, where news of corruption was part of the norm, Michel found herself as the odd one out during politically-centered conversations. “In Mexico, it’s very normal for one to not trust in government or in government institutions actually working,” says Michel, an Associate Professor in John Jay’s Political Science department. “But I’ve always wanted to believe that fairness in the system can exist.”

Her curiosity and interest in how a political system can shape social outcomes led her to become a human rights scholar. “Trying to find those positive cases that show the system can work and justice can be reached has always been a driving force for me,” she says, pointing to her research on victims’ legal rights. “When do victims get to see their day in court? That’s the question I was asking myself for years. If you look at countries like Chile or Guatemala, where there was previously a dictatorship or a corrupt government in place, oftentimes the state is hesitant to prosecute a case. Usually in those cases the defendant is a high-ranking official. In that case, what happens to the victim’s pursuit of justice? What happens to their rights?”

In her book *Prosecutorial Accountability and Victims’ Rights in Latin America*, Michel finds some of the answers, exploring how the recognition of victims’ rights and the use of private prosecution increases accountability in legal systems in the countries of Chile, Guatemala, and Mexico. “Private prosecution is when an individual, who is the victim or a victims’ relative in a criminal case, can hire a private prosecutor to investigate, interrogate, and bring evidence in a case alongside the public prosecutor—and that evidence may be different to the one the state’s public prosecutor presents.”

Having a prosecutor who is working on behalf of a victim and has a vested interest in the case is essential because it often leads to a greater chance of the case actually going to trial. “The main obstacle for many victims is the ability to build a case by gathering strong evidence and having a good investigation. What I’ve seen in my research is that private prosecution helps bring cases to court, because the private prosecutors are gathering their own evidence, laying out interesting legal arguments, and that helps them fill the gaps, especially where the state prosecutor’s case may be lacking,” Michel explains.

Borrowed from the European court model, private prosecution was implemented in part because of general discontent with the legal systems in Latin America, according to Michel. “For years there had been discussions sponsored by aid agencies and international organizations like the United Nations or the OAS [Organization of American States] on how to make the legal system better and that led to reforming the criminal justice system.” The proactive approach to system reforms is a testament to Latin America’s desire to improve—and that’s something Latinx students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution like John Jay should be proud of, says Michel. “There’s this tendency to think of Latin American countries as ‘backward’ or ‘under-developed’, especially when it comes to their systems of justice, but it’s actually the opposite. Some of the most important developments in victims’ rights and in human rights law have emerged from Latin America because of their struggles in the past. And what these attempts at reforming the criminal justice system show is that Latin American governments want change and are not afraid of bold or drastic reforms.”

Highlighting what message from the book she wants readers to come away with, Michel returns to the idea of maintaining hope. “I want people to have hope. Beyond the frustrations, the disillusionment, and the sense of hopelessness many victims and victims’ families have, there is a way to press for accountability. There’s a way for victims to get some justice,” she says.

When asked about her hopes for the future, Michel envisions a legal system where innocent people are kept out of prisons and where prison overcrowding doesn’t exist. “I’d love to see Latin America, and the rest of the world, really embrace and protect human rights and victims’ rights. I’d love for the system to move toward, and ensure, that no one is above the rule of law,” says Michel. “And, to achieve that, it’s going to require profound structural and political reform and a lot of engaged grassroots mobilization. But what it’s going to require most is that everyone walk on that road together, engaged as a community.”

JM
IN SOLIDARITY WITH El Paso

Through its ties with the University of Texas at El Paso and the El Paso Project, John Jay’s Latin American and Latinx Studies Department seeks to educate, encourage, and empower our Latinx community.

By Shirley Del Valle

On the morning of August 3, 2019, one of the safest cities in the country, El Paso, Texas, became the setting for a deadly mass shooting that specifically targeted the city’s Latinx population. Twenty-three people lost their lives that day—with the latest victim, Guillermo “Memo” Garcia, dying from his injuries on April 26, 2020. “We know from the shooter’s manifesto and from what he said after he was arrested, that he was targeting Mexicans; and by ‘Mexicans’, we’ve all come to understand that he meant anyone who is Latinx,” explains José Luis Morín, Chairperson and Professor of the Department of Latin American and Latinx Studies (LLS) at John Jay College. “The tragedy really hit home for us. Its impact was felt personally by my Department’s faculty, by our Latinx students, and by our institution.”

As a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) that proudly boasts a nearly 50 percent Latinx student body, the tragedy hit our community hard. El Paso was the location of the LLS department’s sister institution, the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), where for nearly a decade, the LLS department and UTEP’s Chicano Studies department have worked together in a collaborative, global learning environment to provide students with an impactful and meaningful cross-national collegiate learning experience. “I remember, the day of the El Paso shooting, my phone started going off alerting me to what had happened,” recalls Associate Professor Isabel Martinez, Ph.D. “Immediately, I got text messages from John Jay students and alumni asking about their UTEP classmates.”
Understanding this connection and the impact the tragedy would have on John Jay students, Morin and Martinez, a native Texan, along with the rest of the department, published an open letter condemning the attack. “We wanted to express our solidarity with El Paso and our sister institution UTEP,” explains Morin. “We wanted to make it clear that we, as a department and as a College, will not forget what happened. And we promised in that open letter to follow up with action, and part of our response is to create the El Paso Project.”

“Through their classroom experience, we want our students to develop a strong, healthy sense of identity.”
—ISABEL MARTINEZ

Encompassing a yearlong series of events and activities, the El Paso Project demonstrates the department’s solidarity with UTEP, honors the victims of the tragedy, and advances the education and empowerment of our students by exploring the history of anti-Latinx rhetoric in the United States, while also including the forgotten history in the creation of a new syllabus. “I think we need to seize this moment and use it to provide context and a historical framework for our students and the larger John Jay community to understand how a tragedy like this can occur,” says Morin. “We need to make the historical connections, because tragedies like the El Paso massacre don’t happen in a vacuum. This is not an isolated moment. This is part of a long history of oppression that Latinx communities have faced in this country for centuries.”

CONNECTING THE DOTS
One of the first El Paso Project activities came during John Jay’s “El Paso Strong” lecture when a poster, designed by students, and symbolizing the LLS department’s connection with UTEP, was given to UTEP’s Irma Montelongo, Ph.D., Professor of Chicano Studies. Prior to the event, the entire John Jay community united to sign the poster with messages of hope and well wishes. “Once I got back on campus, we immediately put it up in the Chicano Studies Department for everyone to see,” says Montelongo. For Martinez, the care and concern from John Jay students for their UTEP counterparts wasn’t surprising. “These global learning communities create collaborations between campuses where students, who may not be able to travel or study abroad, can learn so much from each other,” says Martinez.

The global learning communities also provide students a chance to understand their Latinx identity on a more profound level. “From the very beginning we wanted our students to really think about, examine, and explore the Latinx identity and how it looks different in different regions of the country,” says Martinez. “Latinos are given this monolithic label for all sorts of purposes, and our goal is to deconstruct that for our students, disrupt the stereotypes, and help them become aware of the different ways ‘Latinidad’ is constructed, depending on where you live and what your experiences are.”

RECALLING THE FORGOTTEN HISTORY
Teaching at John Jay for 22 years, Morin has seen firsthand how this lack of knowledge regarding Latinx identity, Latinx populations, and Latinx history in the United States, can negatively impact both students and society. “We have to face the awful truth that the history of the Latinx population in the United States is rarely taught or mentioned in U.S. history books; their presence and contributions are never seen as part of the history of the U.S., regardless of how long Latinx people have been in this country,” says Morin. “Oftentimes students come to our introductory courses feeling that they come from people and cultures that are considered ‘less than.’ They feel ashamed of their own culture and identity because all they have ever seen or heard are negative Latinx depictions and stereotypes, particularly the ‘bandido’ narrative and other criminal tropes. Latinx identity has been criminalized in this country. In the 20th century, films like West Side Story popularized the idea that Puerto Rican and other Latinx youth personify a criminal element in our society. And we see it today, with a whole sub-genre of Hollywood drug cartel stories that reinforce the myth that the U.S. border is besieged by criminals from Mexico.”

It’s these negative stereotypes that are often used as justification for brutal behavior against Latinx people, according to Montelongo. “The way Mexicans are treated after the conquest in 1846, set the tone for the taking of Latinx lands and treatment of Latinx people in the United States to this day,” says Montelongo. At the “El Paso Strong” lecture, Montelongo and Professor Nicolas Natividad, Ph.D., from New Mexico State University, broke down how the history of hate on the borderlands—the lands along the U.S.-Mexico border—and the criminalization of the Mexican identity continues to fuel the “Latinx threat” narrative today. “Between 1848 and 1920, 571 Mexicans were lynched in the United States,” Natividad explained during the presentation. “But these are just documented accounts. The real number is estimated to be closer to 3,000.” Showing newspaper clippings from the last two centuries, that referred to Mexicans as “half-civilized, semi-devils” and “invaders,” along with historical photos that captured the gasoline baths forced upon Mexicans crossing the border, Montelongo and Natividad illustrated how the dehumanization of Mexicans made it possible for institutional racism to take hold.

“What underlies the attack in El Paso is a long narrative and a long history of characterizing and claiming that the Latinx populations in the U.S. are not ‘real Americans.’ Instead, they are ‘others,’ they are criminally inclined, and they should be feared,” says Morin. “We haven’t escaped these negative stereotypes in spite of the overwhelming research that shows Latinx populations tend to be less prone to criminality because they actually tend to be very family and community-oriented, they are hardworking, and they create jobs, start businesses, and employ others.”

CREATING AN EMPOWERING CURRICULUM
So how does the LLS department hope to change the narrative? According to Morin and Martinez, by working with,
Looking ahead, Martinez is currently in the exploratory stage of a new research project, working with Montelongo to explore the impact the current Covid-19 crisis has on Latinx populations both in El Paso and New York. “We want to look at how the crisis looks different in these two distinct places that have totally different density issues,” says Martinez. “We especially need to look at the impact on Latinx college students.”

It’s work like Martinez’s research, the global learning communities and collaborative work with UTEP, and the El Paso Project, that empower Latinx students at John Jay, and have made the College such a proud Hispanic-Serving Institution. “It’s an ongoing effort to expand the availability of resources for our students so that they can continue to develop a better understanding of the Latinx experience in the U.S. and be empowered by what they’re learning at John Jay,” says Morín. “This is what we should be doing and thinking about: Who are our students and how do we serve this population of students? Because when we understand and acknowledge who they are, then we can better serve them. By understanding Latinx populations, we open the doors for understanding other student populations at the College. And building an understanding and greater appreciation of the diversity that exists at John Jay opens the door to being more successful with our entire student body.”

“Tragedies like the El Paso massacre don’t happen in a vacuum. This is not an isolated moment. This is part of a long history of oppression that Latinx communities have faced in this country for centuries.”

—JOSÉ LUIS MORÍN
MEASURING THE IMPACT OF REFORM

The Data Collaborative for Justice evaluates the success of New York City’s Criminal Justice Reform Act.

BY MICHAEL FRIEDRICH

The Data Collaborative for Justice (DCJ) was launched in 2019 on the principle that the U.S. needs data to understand the landscape of today’s criminal legal system, and it needs to assess if reforms are effective. “You need data to see what the problems might be in the system, and how to fix those problems,” says Preeti Chauhan, Ph.D., founding Director of DCJ and Psychology professor at John Jay College.

Today, DCJ researchers are measuring the impact of New York City’s Criminal Justice Reform Act (CJRA). Passed by the City in 2016, the CJRA shifts summonses for common low-level offenses—public consumption of alcohol, public urination, park offenses, unreasonable noise, and littering—from the criminal to the civil arena. It also gives offenders the option to complete community service instead of paying a fine. The point is to reduce the financial burdens many offenders face, as well as to prevent negative outcomes, like open warrants, for failing to appear in court and collateral consequences related to housing, employment, and immigration.

MEASURED REFORMS

DCJ’s new evaluation, contracted by the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, uses public administrative data to measure the issuance of both criminal and civil summonses in the 18 months after CJRA was put in place. It is the organization’s latest in a series of studies to measure the impact of the legislation. “We can tell a story with our data because we’re looking at it over time,” says Shannon Tomascak, a DCJ analyst who is lead author on the new report. That story suggests CJRA is working as intended. New York City saw a 94 percent reduction in criminal summonses for CJRA offenses and a 93 percent reduction in warrants for failure to appear. That adds up to around 123,000 fewer criminal summonses and 58,000 fewer warrants citywide during the 18 months after implementation, according to DCJ projections. Overall, 87 percent of summonses for CJRA offenses are now being issued as civil summonses instead. As many as 73 percent of offenders opt for community service in place of fines.

This means less burden on people who get cited for minor crimes. Tomascak gave an example: “Someone litters in public, and they get a criminal summons, and then they don’t show up in court, and then there’s a warrant out for their arrest. That’s a long chain of events for a really low-level offense.” It also means less burden on criminal courts, since CJRA has reduced their volume significantly. Meanwhile, a separate DCJ study, released in 2019, found that offenders still show up for court at a comparable rate, even as summonses for CJRA offenses have moved into the civil arena.

FOLLOWING THE DATA

For Chauhan, this is all confirmation that data matters. “One big finding for us is that when legislation is implemented, you need to track it to see if it’s having intended outcomes,” she says. Even before DCJ was founded, Chauhan and former John Jay President Jeremy Travis were promoting fact-based analysis through the Misdemeanor Justice Project, which published reports on trends in misdemeanor arrests. As DCJ looks toward the future, it is taking on not only misdemeanors and summonses, but also a range of other data in the system at large. They have recently expanded their work to seven other U.S. cities, where they collaborate with local partners to document patterns in lower-level enforcement. “You need data to guide evidence-based decision making,” Chauhan says. “You need facts and not fear.” JM
In Kingston, New York, NNSC’s new approach has significantly reduced the deadliest forms of intimate-partner violence.

BY MICHAEL FRIEDRICH

A NEW STRATEGY IS CHANGING the way Kingston, New York, addresses the harms of intimate-partner violence. “We had been putting the burden on the victim to remove themselves from an abusive relationship,” says Elizabeth Culmone-Mills, Senior Assistant District Attorney for the Special Victims Bureau in the Ulster County District Attorney’s Office, regarding the way law enforcement approached such violence in the past. Culmone-Mills explained that today the Kingston team focuses squarely on holding abusers accountable. “We’ve always had a coordinated effort, but this helps shift our mind-set to the offender’s behavior.”

Today, Kingston is laser-focused on offenders. A task force composed of law enforcement, community members, victim advocates, and service providers gives them a written notification explaining that the community does not accept their behavior, offers them help and treatment, and outlines their legal consequences for continuing. Victim advocates offer treatment and safety measures to survivors. The Kingston response was coordinated before, but it was never quite this strategic.
NEEDING A NEW APPROACH

Intimate-partner violence is a major problem in America. It accounts for between 40 and 50 percent of all female homicides and 15 percent of all violent crimes. The best efforts at stopping it have been largely ineffective. Batterer treatment programs show very low success rates. Mandatory arrest policies tend to put victims at greater risk when their abuser is released. Even in cases where victims take legal action, they end up facing a system they often distrust, and a system that demands they do things they often don’t want to do: leave their relationship, relocate their children, take out restraining orders, and testify against their partners.

“What we have been doing around intimate-partner violence simply hasn’t worked,” says Kennedy. “We still place the burden on victims. Criminal-justice responses don’t control the most dangerous guys and they require victims to put themselves at further risk.” Meanwhile, the most dangerous people learn from experience that they won’t be held accountable and continue with a sense of impunity.

Kennedy will be the first to tell you he’s no expert on domestic violence. In the mid-1990s, he devised Operation Ceasefire, a strategy to control gang-related homicides. Working as a researcher in Boston, he and a pair of colleagues found that the majority of gun violence was concentrated among a small number of high-risk offenders who were not only shooting each other, but also committing a range of other crimes.

Operation Ceasefire asked that a team of law enforcement, community members, and service providers deliver in-person notifications to gang members, telling them that the community wanted to help them and the shooting had to stop. If they kept shooting, law enforcement cracked down on all the crimes they were committing. Then the team told other gang members about the crackdown. This sent a powerful message. Studies have shown that the approach led to a dramatic 63 percent reduction in gun homicide, which came to be known as the Boston Miracle. It has since had similar impacts in cities like Oakland, California; New Orleans, Louisiana; Cincinnati, Ohio; and High Point, North Carolina.

In the late ’90s, Kennedy wondered whether something similar might be possible in the intimate-partner sphere. His research found that common stories about domestic violence—particularly the story that anyone might commit it and anyone might be victimized—did not hold up at all. For one thing, the most grave and injurious intimate-partner victimization was heavily concentrated among poor women of color. But it was in his research on offenders that Kennedy saw a strategic in-road. The most dangerous abusers were chronic offenders, much like shooters. “Their domestic offending was part of a pattern,” says Kennedy. This meant that law enforcement could create sanctions, even ones that were not directly about intimate-partner violence.

The first city to pilot a new strategy was High Point, which had already reoriented its approach to violent crime around Operation Ceasefire. Beginning in 2009, Kennedy worked with the city’s law enforcement, community, and partnered with other city services to identify all known intimate-partner-violence offenders in the city and craft a four-tiered structure that would respond to each of them. Based on new crimes, police immediately arrested a handful of dangerous abusers with long criminal histories and held them up as an example. Other offenders were placed into a hierarchy and each received different types of in-person and written notifications, with their legal exposure documented and an offer of supportive services.

Recognizing the real possibility that this untested approach could make things more dangerous for survivors, High Point worked closely with national victim support specialists and created a corresponding structure of services—like counseling and safety planning—to ensure their well-being.

The results have been stunning. An evaluation of IPVI in High Point showed strong reductions in intimate-partner homicides, victim injuries, and recidivism among offenders who received notifications. For example, where the

“\n
What we have been doing around intimate-partner violence simply hasn’t worked. We still place the burden on victims.”

—DAVID KENNEDY, NNSC
city saw 18 intimate-partner homicides between 2002 and 2008, after the implementation of IPVI, it saw just three between 2009 and 2016.

“Getting people to shift their thinking about intimate-partner violence as a crime, to shift their thinking about the tools they have available for focusing on individuals, and actually deterring them from committing future acts is extraordinary,” says Rachel Teicher, the director of the IPVI portfolio at NNSC, who now oversees the implementation in High Point and Kingston. “And it works.”

FOLLOWING A NEW SCRIPT
New York State’s Department of Criminal Justice Services identified Kingston in 2016 as a city with a progressive approach to intimate-partner violence—they already had an interagency team, a designated domestic-violence detective, and a special domestic-violence court in place—and named it as a test site for IPVI.

In January 2017, a dispatch from Kingston visited John Jay College to learn about the approach directly from Kennedy and members of the High Point team. Culmone-Mills was especially struck by something she heard from Shay Harger, director of victim services at Family Services of the Piedmont, the lead victim-support organization in High Point. “She said to us, ‘The victims don’t want to leave their relationships. They just want the abuse to stop.’ For me, that’s when it clicked.”

Kingston was fully implementing IPVI by March 2018, with day-to-day guidance from Teicher at NNSC. Following the High Point model, the city uses a four-tiered system. Certain offenders—those on the brink of facing serious legal consequences if they reoffend—receive their notification in a group “call-in” setting, which Kennedy pioneered back in the Boston days. For the call-in, the Kingston team mandates that offenders listen to a message from an array of Kingston officials and citizens including: the mayor, the district attorney, the police chief, a social service provider, a local pastor, and a relative of an intimate-partner-violence victim. “Each of these people speaks, and we let the offenders know intimate-partner violence is not acceptable in our community,” says Culmone-Mills.

Less chronic offenders get a letter or a one-on-one talk with similar information. For victims, Family of Woodstock has outlined a four-tiered service structure that accounts for their level of risk, notifies them in person or by letter about the services available to them, and helps plan for their safety.

SEEING A POSITIVE CHANGE
After two years of implementation, Kingston’s IPVI is showing promising initial outcomes. Kennedy is cautious about making sanguine pronouncements, and there are challenges in measuring success. For example, what counts as recidivism from one study to another often differs, making it hard to establish a standard. Furthermore, it can be hard to compare jurisdictions, since many do not track intimate-partner violence separate from domestic violence more broadly.

But recidivism for intimate-partner violence in Kingston stands at 23 percent over the two-year implementation period, a number that compares favorably to ordinary rates for that crime, which tend to hover at 50 to 60 percent—and even to rates in jurisdictions that have tried other interventions. The city has also seen a 38 percent decrease in the number of domestic incident reports, which suggests deterrence is working, according to Teicher. “It’s really encouraging to think about what this looks like in a city as they become more comfortable with it and it becomes part of how they do things,” she says.

IPVI appears to have more intangible results, as well, like building trust with victims, who are often alienated from the legal system. “When a victim hears that we are offering help to their boyfriend or the father of their child, that we are, as a community, sending a message to them that intimate-partner violence is not acceptable,” says Culmone-Mills. “The sense I get, more often than not, is of appreciation—like, thank you for seeing him in a different way, and not just trying to put him in jail.”

The approach has also strengthened collaboration between the agencies involved in the task force, says Culmone-Mills. They now share a singular goal of stopping offenders, supporting victims, and sharing information to meet those ends. Even the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and their move to remote work, has not diminished their relationship. Buoyed by these outcomes, District Attorney David Clegg is making an effort to take IPVI county-wide.

The approach is also gaining national traction. NNSC now advises an IPVI implementation in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. And under a grant from the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women, Teicher is working with local representatives in Madison County, Illinois; Duchess County, New York; and one precinct in Detroit, Michigan to mount interventions.

Many are ready to adopt a new approach that works. Still, Kennedy readily admits that IPVI isn’t a fix-all. It doesn’t, of course, address the misogyny and toxic masculinity that perpetuate violence against women. Nor does it overhaul the features of the criminal legal system that have long done damage to victims and offenders alike, especially in communities of color. This can be its own challenge in a community new to IPVI. Coming into a city and offering “this clever, tactical thing” can seem at best impractical and at worst disrespectful, says Kennedy. But after more than 20 years of doing this kind of work, he has learned to be patient. “It means sticking with folks while they get used to the idea that maybe something better can be done.”

Where the city saw 18 intimate-partner homicides between 2002 and 2008, after the implementation of IPVI, it saw just three between 2009 and 2016.
"You’re seeing more people of color, more working class folks starting to find their voice a little bit more. That’s why the politics in our country as a whole, regardless of the presidential race, is just shifting. Because you’re seeing these movements spark up backing working-class, everyday citizens as the representatives."

—ILONA DUVERGE, JOHN JAY ALUMNA AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE MOVEMENT SCHOOL, A TRAINING PROGRAM THAT TEACHES WORKING CLASS ACTIVISTS HOW TO RUN GRASSROOTS POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS. MOTHER JONES

"THE ‘DOUBLE GAP’—a term I use to convey that Black women are subject to gender, as well as racial, wage gaps—has real, tangible consequences for the Black community in America. According to quantitative research I’ve conducted for the Roosevelt Institute, Black women in the U.S. were underpaid to the tune of about $50 billion in 2017—and this is an annually recurring loss to the Black community."

—ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS MICHELLE HOLDER ON THE DOUBLE GAP IN PAY BETWEEN BLACK WOMEN AND WHITE MEN. MS. MAGAZINE

"EXPERIENCING THE SPECTRUM OF RACISM— from microaggressions to systemic oppression to hate violence—may negatively affect people whether someone is aware of it or not. If the person who committed the microaggression is in your life, it can always be worth bringing up. In the same way that a family member or friend may hurt you and it takes years to recover, the impact of a microaggression can be long-lasting too."

—PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY KEVIN NADAL’S TOOL KIT, THE GUIDE TO RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS, IS FEATURED IN A STORY ON HOW TO RESPOND TO MICROAGGRESSIONS. THE NEW YORK TIMES

"THERE’S NOT A LOT OF INFORMATION of how long Covid survives on textiles, but lots of places on your textiles can contain metal or plastic. If you’ve touched a contaminated surface with your clothes, sitting in a subway, leaning against a pole, there’s a chance you might bring that back home. As a regular hygienic practice, changing out of clothing you’ve worn outside and taking off your shoes when you enter the home is generally a good idea."

—BIOMEDICAL RESEARCHER AND PROFESSOR OF PATHOLOGY ANGELIQUE CORTHALS, ON HOW TO DO LAUNDRY DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC. THE NEW YORK TIMES

"ASSERTING A DOCTRINE OF ‘STATES RIGHTS,’ Southern Democratic senators consistently thwarted federal anti-lynching legislation over the decades. So although federal anti-lynching legislation enjoyed majority support in the House in the 1920s and ’30s, through the filibuster and other means, Southern Democrats were able to block federal anti-lynching legislation."

—PROFESSOR OF HISTORY MICHAEL J. PFEIFER ON WHY IT TOOK 200 YEARS FOR THE JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF LYING ACT OF 2018 TO PASS, MAKING LYING A FEDERAL CRIME. THE WASHINGTON POST
Looking back at his life, it’s clear that Nasser J. Kazeminy, the Chairman of the Ellis Island Honors Society, has found both success and happiness by following some basic, yet important, life principles. Throughout every encounter, it’s been his natural curiosity, his unfailing compassion, and his resolute refusal to compromise his integrity that’s guided his decisions. We sat down with Kazeminy in hopes of passing on his sage advice to the next generation of leaders.

Find your passion
Growing up, Kazeminy’s strongest subjects were mathematics and physics, and during college in the United Kingdom, he started studying Aeronautical Engineering. “Back then I didn’t know where the field would take me. And I wondered, how am I going to get myself to NASA?” says Kazeminy. Then, at the onset of the digital revolution, one of his professors introduced the students to the world of computers. Instantly, Kazeminy’s aspirations shifted. “Once I started hearing about computers multiplying astronomical figures in five nanoseconds, I was in.” At the end of the class he asked his professor if he thought he’d be good at computing. “His answer came back in a nanosecond. ‘No, there are many British boys who are much smarter than you. You’re not bright enough,’ he told me,” recalls Kazeminy, who had been tutoring other students in the class. He told the professor that he would no longer be taking his class, and he went on to follow his new dream. “I researched classes and found where I could learn about computers. My passion for computing grew daily.” After his graduation, Kazeminy applied for three jobs and received offers from all of them. Just four years later, 200 computer programmers and systems designers were reporting to him.

Be compassionate
His Aeronautical Engineering professor wasn’t the last person to unjustly judge Kazeminy. After graduation, he accepted a position at Honeywell. They assigned him to a computer programming job in Liverpool. “I was working with many bright British boys, but in my estimation, they could be lazy. They’d come to work and talk about football, have tea, eat lunch, and then go to the pub. I was different. I was trying to do something with my life,” says Kazeminy. In an effort to learn more in his spare time, he’d drive to London and work all night testing new computer programs.

One day, his boss, Ken Bentley, called him in. He told him he was a “great guy” but that he didn’t “fit into the culture.” So, he was letting him go. It was the first time Kazeminy had ever lost a job. Luckily, another Honeywell higher-up recognized not only Kazeminy’s talent, but also the error of Bentley’s ways. On the spot, he offered him another job in London. With the help of his new mentor, Kazeminy built up the organization, taking over all of the country’s troubleshooting areas—including Liverpool.

In his new office he asked his assistant to call in Ken Bently. “I let him sit there for about an hour,” says Kazeminy. Bentley was pale, remembering how unfairly he treated Kazeminy. But to Bentley’s surprise, Kazeminy didn’t fire him. “I told him, ‘I want to send you to a management course. I want you to learn how to deal with people. You need to understand different cultures because this field is going to be run by young people like me from all over the world.’”

Let no one define you
That painful experience of being seen as an “other” can permeate an immigrant’s experience in a new country. “I’m an immigrant myself and I know how difficult it can be. As an immigrant, it doesn’t matter how much confidence we have in ourselves, we always compare ourselves to everybody else,” says Kazeminy. “We know that we have to prove ourselves worthy of being an American.” He believes that it’s this internal drive that propels so many immigrants to succeed. “Just look at Fortune 500 companies, 45 percent of them are created by immigrants or the children of immigrants.”

Knowing that many John Jay students are immigrants, he wanted to speak directly to them. “We have kids coming to America, serving their country, working in health care, going to school, and paying their taxes. The fact that they’re living in fear is unfair and unjust,” says Kazeminy. “To our immigrant students, remember, no one can define you, except yourself.”
Reverend Jesse Jackson, a potential democratic nominee for president of the United States spoke at John Jay one evening in February 1984. The event was completely sponsored by the Manhattan Supporters for Jesse Jackson, who rented space in the cafeteria in a fund-raising effort. Some student leaders were invited to serve as hosts and hostesses at the fundraiser. The event stirred up a lot of student interest since it was held on a night when classes were in session and school was in full swing.
**Over 70,000 Strong**

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To learn more about how to become involved visit giving.jjay.cuny.edu or email us at alumni@jjay.cuny.edu

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**Fierce Advocate**

For John Jay students, their education, and their futures

The John Jay College Foundation is a fierce advocate for our students’ success. The Foundation is dedicated to raising funds from alumni, friends, foundations, and corporations to relieve students’ financial hardships and help them stay on track to graduate. We are profoundly grateful to all of those who have contributed to provide:

- Tuition relief to our front-line heroes.
- Emergency assistance for students’ food, housing and other survival needs.
- Critical resources for our immigrant and undocumented students.
- Enhanced academic supports to ensure students earn their degrees.
- Tuition support for students facing financial difficulties.
- Scholarships and fellowships to prepare students for leadership roles.
- Experiential programs beyond the classroom.

If you, too, wish to be a fierce advocate for our students and contribute to their education and their future, please visit www.jjay.cuny.edu/donate

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The John Jay College Foundation, Inc.

A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established in 1964 to support and raise funds for the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The main office is located at 532 Haaren Hall on the John Jay campus at 524 West 59th street. Phone: 212-237-8624

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OFFICE OF ALUMNI RELATIONS
Providing a lifetime of engagement, professional growth opportunities, and support for our alumni.

Shauna-Kay Gooden
President, John Jay College Alumni Association

Steve Dercole
Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving

524 West 59th Street, Haaren Hall, Room 332 | 212-237-8547
Our focus is on exploring justice in its many dimensions. Our strong liberal arts curriculum equips students to pursue advanced study and meaningful, rewarding careers in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Our students are eager to engage in original research and experiential learning, excited to study in one of the world’s most dynamic cities, and passionate about shaping the future.

**John Jay College of Criminal Justice is one of the reasons why CUNY is the greatest urban university in the world.**