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THE BROOKLYN COLLEGE

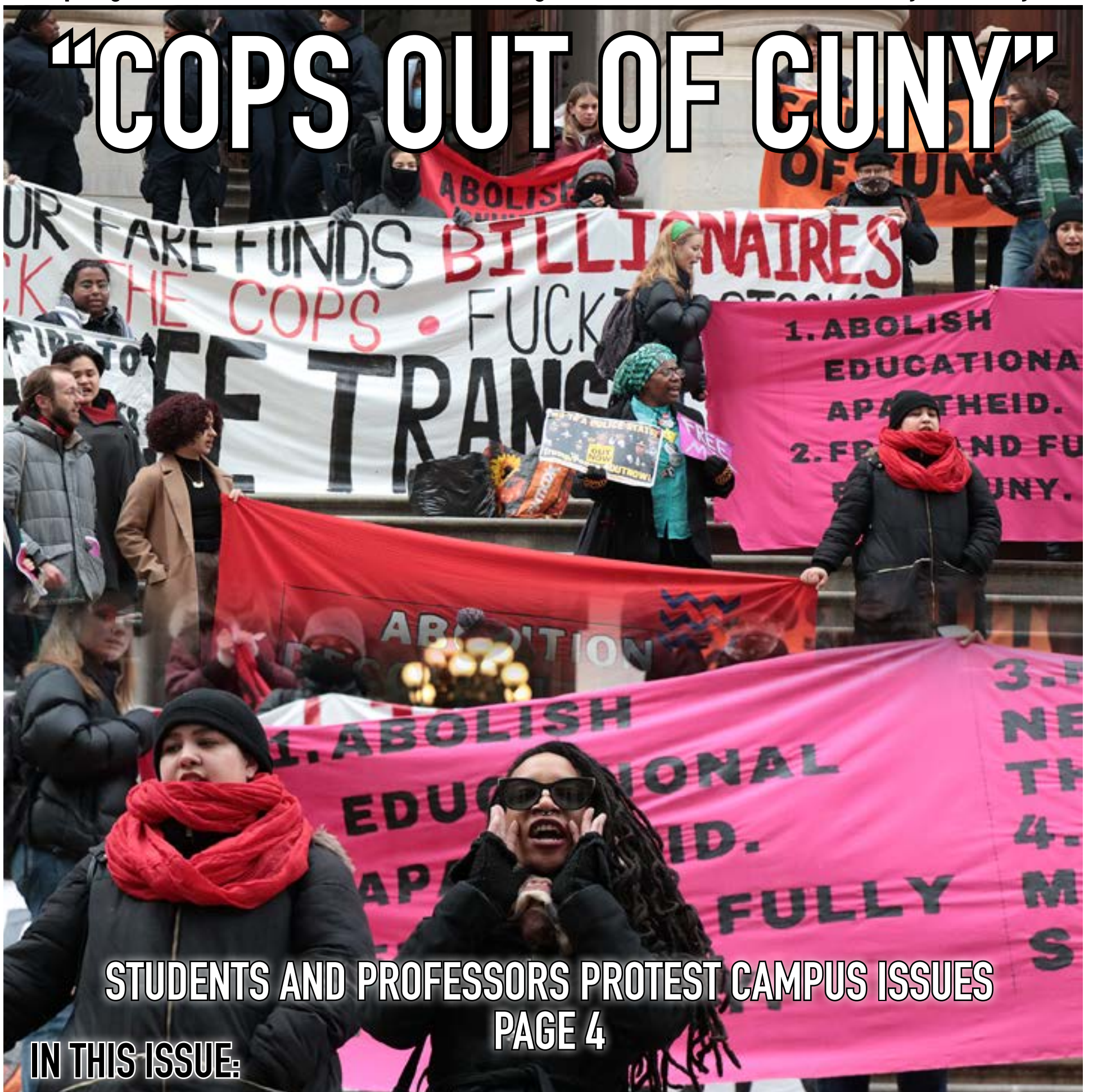
# VANGUARD

Spring 2020, Issue 2

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Wednesday, February 5

## "COPS OUT OF CUNY"



STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS PROTEST CAMPUS ISSUES  
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PHOTO CREDIT: Chloe Abosch





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# Campus Events

## Thursday, February 6

Haitian American Student Association’s Welcome Back Meeting  
12:30 PM - 2:15 PM  
SUBO, Club Room (lower level)

National Association of Black Accountant’s Meet and Greet  
12:15 PM - 2:30 PM  
SUBO, Alumni Lounge (4th floor)

## Friday, February 7

Islamic Society’s Jummah Gathering  
1:00 PM - 2:00 PM  
SUBO, Club Room (lower level)

## Monday, February 10

Health and Nutrition Science Club’s Smart Snack Sale  
11:00 AM - 3:00 PM  
New Ingersoll Hall

The Orthodox Club’s Cinema Shiur  
12:30 PM - 1:30 PM  
Hillel

## February, February 11

Women in Pre-Health Professions Meet and Greet  
12:45 PM - 2:00 PM  
International Room (5th flr)  
Islamic Society’s HALAQAH:

In the Footsteps of the Prophet  
12:15 PM - 2:15 PM  
SUBO, Jefferson-Williams Lounge (4th floor)

Korean Culture Club’s Firtst Spring Meeting  
12:30 PM - 2:15 PM  
SUBO, Occidental Lounge

Marketing Society’s Meeting  
12:15 PM - 3:15 PM  
SUBO, Maroon Room

Accounting Society’s Recruiter Meet and Greet  
11:00 AM - 4:30 PM  
SUBO, Gold Room (6th floor)

## Thursday, February 13

Riverrun’s Writer’s Circle: Valentines Edition  
12:30 PM - 1:45 PM  
Boylan 2307

Minority Association of Pre-Health Students Bake Sale  
12:15 PM - 2:00 PM  
New Ingersoll Lobby

National Student Speech Language Hearing Association’s Bake Sale  
12:15 PM - 2:00 PM  
Whitehead Breezeway

Dominican Student Movement’s Open House  
12:30 PM - 2:00 PM  
WEB Conference Room

Black Student Union’s How To Create a Personal Budget: Finance 101  
12:30 PM - 2:30 PM  
SUBO, Bedford Lounge (2nd floor)

National Association of Black Accountants Black History Month  
12:15 PM - 3:00 PM  
SUBO, Jefferson-Williams Lounge (4th floor)

Undergraduate Student Government’s How to Run for USG  
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM  
SUBO, Amersfort Lounge (2nd floor)

Glamazon’s The Black Couple’s Event  
7:00 PM - 10:00 PM  
SUBO, Bedford Lounge (2nd floor)

## Friday February 14

New York Public Interest Research Group’s Voter Registration Table  
12:00 PM - 2:00 PM

## Saturday February 15

Deadline to file for graduation can file via CUNYfirst

**THE BROOKLYN COLLEGE**



College is closed next Wednesday so  
The Vanguard will not be printing!

# BC Removes Comment Section of Prof Evaluation

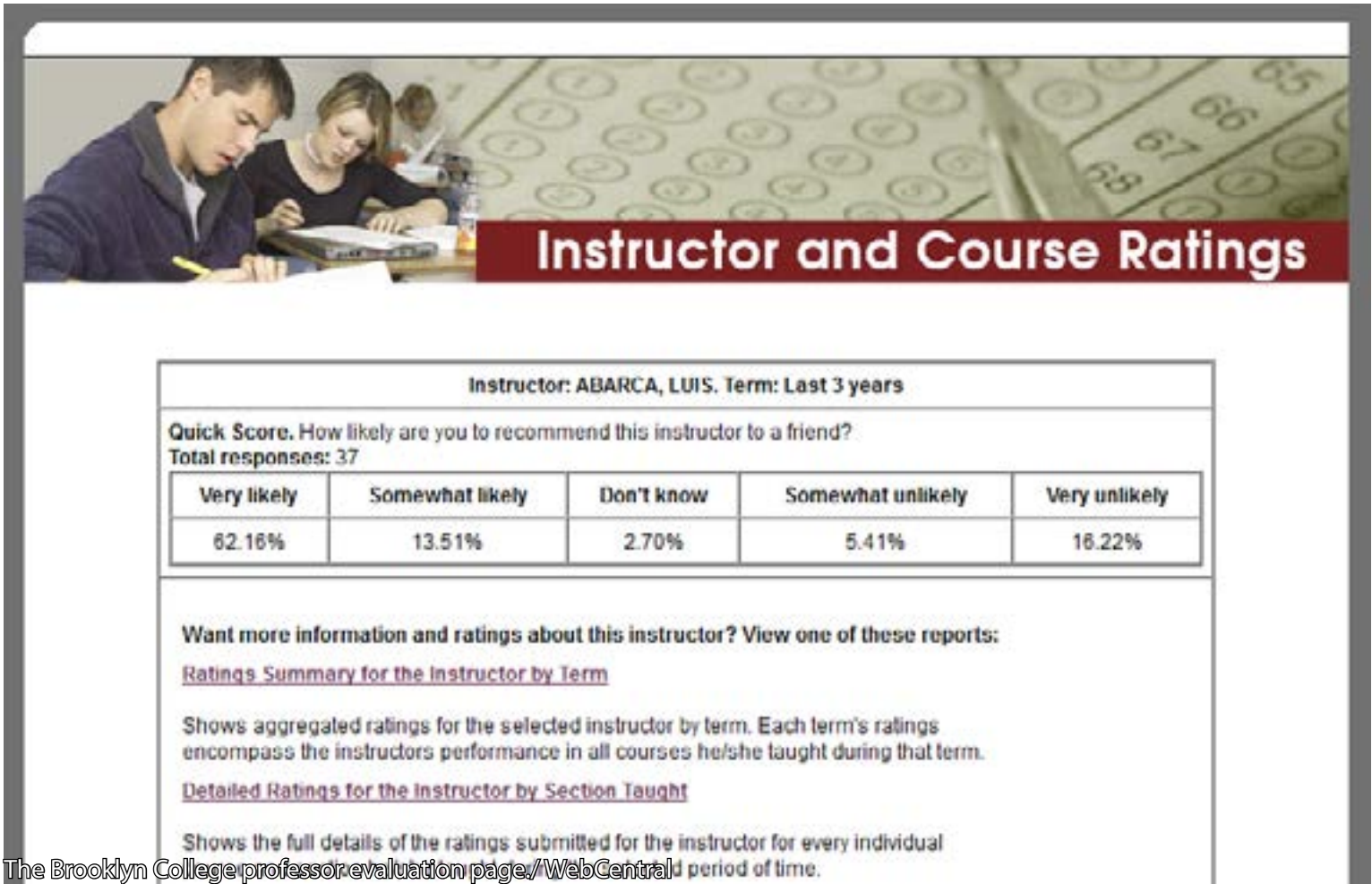
By Natalina Zieman  
*News Editor*

For the last semester here at Brooklyn College, students have been missing the comment section of faculty evaluations when choosing classes for their next semester.

The comments section was crucial for some students who did not fully trust outside professor evaluation sites like “Ratemyprofessor.com”. “Without this comment section we go in blind and are unable to select the professor who best meets our individualized needs as students,” said psychology graduate student, Teddy Boynton, “It places students at a deficit,” he said.

Brooklyn College students now have little to no reliable source when choosing a professor that best suits their educational needs.

BC students now have to rely on less trustworthy sources, and word of mouth, rather than viewing the comments in the student evaluation section. “I



The Brooklyn College professor evaluation page.//WebCentral

wish that I'd get to see what other students had experience-wise when it came to certain professors, and how they liked it because it would impact me if I would choose them for a specific class," said Film major and freshman Sophia Savidis, "Some teachers have different teaching methods, and a lot of how we do in a class depends on the professor."

The comments section

was not only for the students' benefits, but also for faculty benefit. Professors were able to gain a sense of the impact their lessons had on students, and get ideas of how to make their curriculum more efficient.

"I wish when I was choosing classes and professors that I could have known past students' experiences with the professors," said freshman psychology

major, Olivia Livingston, "I think while the feedback was good for professors to see, it was also beneficial for the students enrolled in the college to be able to see as well."

Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Anne Lopes released a statement on the reasoning behind the removal of the comments section: "Students' evaluations of courses and

instruction are critical to assessment and provide helpful information to faculty, administrators and students. Students sometimes included written comments about other students in the class in the comment section. Because we could not redact the comments, we made the decision to not publish the written comment section of evaluations."

# Admin Addresses Transfer Credit Issues

By Martin Samoylov  
*Staff Writer*

The Brooklyn College administration urged faculty to actively allow transfer credits to incoming students as part of last fall's presentation on Oct. 17 to the faculty.

The presentation laid out concerns such as angry graduates, delayed graduations and damaged "word of

mouth" when compared with other CUNY schools pertaining to permitting transfer credits.

"We compete with other CUNY campuses for transfer students. When we don't grant transfer credit and they do, students go elsewhere," read one of the presentation's slides.

It also pointed to Degreeworks' "What If" feature, which

allows students from other CUNY schools to see which of their current credits would hypothetically transfer over to others. It is currently used by thousands, according to the slides.

Transfer credit leniency was one of several arguments presented in the administration's "Strategic Plan," which also includes creating course

rotation schedules and eliminating hidden prerequisites to avoid excess credits.

Currently, individual decisions on transfer credits are made by faculty within academic departments. Administration hopes they can better the process for transfer students moving forward.

"Transfer students are a vital part of Brooklyn

College's student body," said Vice President for Enrollment Management and Retention Lillian O'Reilly, "We are constantly looking at ways to improve the experience of our transfer students through new technology and personalized service."



# Free CUNY! Calls for End to Police Presence in CUNY

By Maya Schubert & Zahra Khan  
*Staff Writers*

A small crowd of students and teachers gathered on the steps of the Department of Education Building at 52 Chambers St. on Friday Jan. 31 to advocate for a decreased police presence in schools, and a fully funded CUNY.

The speak-out, organized by the city-based groups The People’s Culture Plan and Free CUNY!, commenced at 9am. The People’s Cultural Plan leader Alicia Grullon led students and supporters as they gathered on and around the stairs holding signs reading “Cops out of CUNY,” and “Cop free school zone,” in a call and response chant.

“We are here to make demands of the DOE,” she said, listing them as the crowd repeated: “No cops or military in our schools,” “Disarm and abolish the NYPD,” “Abolish educational apartheid,” “Free and fully fund CUNY,” and “Make MTA work for all New Yorkers, not for Wall Street.”

The People’s Culture Plan, an activist group of artists, cultural workers, and educators established in 2017, joined the student and teacher coalition Free CUNY! as part of a day of citywide protests against over-



Free CUNY! and the People’s Culture Plan protest on the steps of Tweed Courthouse / Chloe Abosch

policing. The speak-out specifically addressed an increased police presence in schools that the speakers said victimized minorities.

“The message is that our voices and our education don’t matter as much as our white counterparts,” said Melanie, an advocate from Teens Take Charge, a student led movement for educational equity in New York, according to their website.

A number of Brooklyn College students were present at the rally, including Hailey Lam, an organizer for Free CUNY! who was arrested at a previous protest in December. She, and another Brooklyn College student Sara

Gafur, Free CUNY! member and Students For Justice in Palestine advocate, called out BC security officer David Mercado for racial profiling. Gafur alleged that Mercado detained her for an ID issue in the Boylan cafeteria on Halloween night. Mercado has already had a number of complaints made against him in his few years at BC, which was reported by the Brooklyn College Excelsior in 2017 and 2018. Students were not the only participants in the rally. A number of college professors came out to support the event as well, “We have a city to reclaim,” said Conor Tomás Reed, an organizer for Free CUNY! And BC adjunct professor in Africana and American Studies. Reed welcomed high school students to the CUNY system while calling for reform.

Novel, a public school student from the YA-YA Network, an organization that supports youth empowerment and

young activists, spoke on NYPD officers “over surveilling,” of public schools. She claimed that it’s “evident who’s targeted,” hinting that brown and black students were the targets of metal detector searches in high schools and colleges. She continues on to say that public education has now “become inaccessible,” because CUNY recently increased its college tuition alongside adding a \$120 student wellness fee. “How can we exist in the realm of rapid gentrification?” asked Novel. Free CUNY! and the Peoples Cultural Plan put forth demands for a free and fully funded CUNY and to make MTA fees free for students.

“I’m very angry at the situation we’re in. I’m fed up with the DOE and MTA to implement cops in their system,” said Ian, a 17-year-old high school student who spoke out during the rally on his own personal experience with the NYPD in schools. Ian told the crowd of how a specific

incident of assault with a police officer led him to be there that day. “I was beaten, I was pushed, I was injured, I received a bloody nose from them,” he said. Ian says that during the incident in question, the officer had no right to search him. “So instead of hiring a fascist and racist institution to overcriminalize our black and brown people in this city you should be spending your money on finding actual ways to improve our system,” he said.

Free CUNY! and the Peoples Cultural Plan stood together to speak on issues of policing the subways and education, free transit and an end to harassment of vendors and performers.

Students stood in the cold to protest against a space without policing. The crowd was led in chants shouting: “And that’s why we’re here cause we can’t take it anymore. We just can’t take it anymore.”



Free CUNY! protesters speak up. / Chloe Abosch



# New Yorkers Protest MTA, Policing

By Maya Schubert  
Staff Writer

Hundreds gathered on Friday, Jan. 31 to protest MTA fares and police presence in the subways. The protest, which began in the Grand Central Terminal at about 5:00pm, came in response to a call from Decolonize This Place, an activist group based in New York City, for free transportation and the removal of police from subway stations.

Smaller protests around the city, including the Free CUNY speak-out, erupted during the day, but tensions culminated at the Grand Central gathering, where, according to NBC News, close to a dozen arrests were made within the first half hour. The crowd left the terminal at about 5:30pm, but converged again at the Restoration Plaza in Bed-Stuy, and later moved across Brooklyn towards Utica Avenue on foot.

“People are screaming; we’re all chanting,” said Zach Piper, a freshman philosophy major at Brooklyn College. Piper and some friends joined the crowd at Grand Central, and made the move to Restoration Plaza. “People were



Protesting MTA on the subway. / Zach Pellechia

chaining up doors; people were spray-painting on the walls, filling the swipers with super-glue... drawing all over the train,” he said.

Piper said that the mood heated up when the crowd arrived at Fulton Street to a large police presence. The crowd linked arms as they marched to Restoration Plaza and then circled the plaza, forming a human wall. Protesters who broke away strayed towards surrounding police officers and “got grabbed,” particularly, according to Piper, those wearing masks or scarves obscuring their faces.

“At that point, people were getting dragged away in handcuffs,” said

Zach Pellechia, another Brooklyn College student at the rally. “We started chanting: ‘We are peaceful, what are you? We are peaceful, what are you?’”

Pellechia, a freshman film major, attended a rally protesting MTA fares and over-policed subways in Brooklyn last November, the second of its kind organized by Decolonize This Place.

“This [rally] was a lot bigger,” said Pellechia. “I think that shows what New York is upset with. People are getting angrier and they’re not going to stay silent,” he said.

Friday’s events answered Decolonize This Place’s charge for action on Jan. 31, advertised as

#J31, and #FTP3 on the group’s social media pages. Graffiti reading “KKK MTA” and “FTP” appeared in subway stations before the morning was over.

The rallies follow the cities decision last year to hire an additional 500 NYPD officers to patrol subways. The decision, first proposed by Governor Andrew Cuomo in June 2019, immediately prompted a backlash from activists and politicians claiming an intensified police presence would target minorities.

In recent months, videos of exchanges between cops and minorities in the subway have circled social media, including

one of two women selling churros being arrested, and another of a 15 year-old boy being punched by an officer. Videos showing officers arresting homeless people in the subway have also sparked outrage.

“I’ve always felt that there was a problem with the police,” Piper said. “The police have way too authority...and not in a way where they’re trying to keep the peace. It’s like they almost get off on having that much power.”

The videos, while viral, are not enough in Pellechia’s opinion.

“This issue is so understated in the media,” he said. “The fact that no one is speaking about it is what makes me so passionate about it.”

He was encouraged by Friday’s protest, however, feeling that the crowd’s size was a sign of growing solidarity, and the manifestation of one of the protest’s reoccurring chants: “We keep us safe.”

“This is a sign the city is starting to hear our cries,” he said.



Protesters storm Grand Central Station. / Zach Pellechia



# Coronavirus Fears Reach BC

By Paola Sacerdote  
Staff Writer

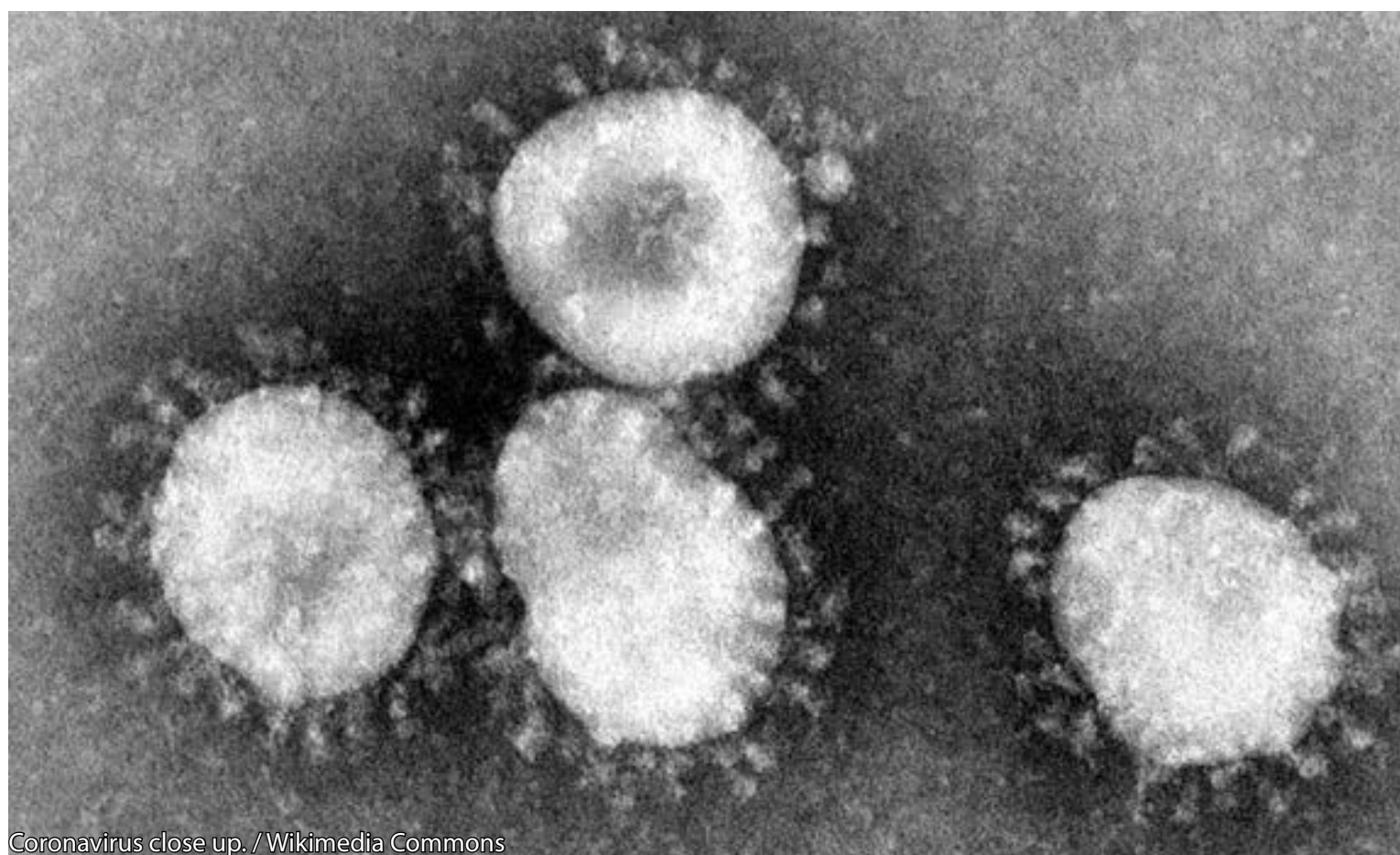
New York officials announced that three elderly patients residing in New York City have been identified as having symptoms of the coronavirus, but have yet to confirm if the patients have the virus.

Officials told New Yorkers to not be overly concerned about the disease spreading, as the virus has not caused a single death in the United States.

Reports of the rapid spread of the coronavirus claim that up to 20,438 people across the globe, the majority of them from China, have contracted the virus, with deaths totalling 425 by Monday evening.

The World Health Organization has publicized a global health emergency and the State Department issued a do not travel warning to China. President Donald Trump included China in the list of banned countries, restricting entry from the country into the U.S.

CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodriguez wrote in an e-mail to CUNY students and staff alike that “The City University of New York is closely monitoring reports involving the outbreak of the 2019 coronavirus, and following the guidance



Coronavirus close up. / Wikimedia Commons

provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), New York State Department of Health and New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to proactively manage the risk.”

Fears over the possibility of an outbreak have fueled xenophobic reports globally towards the Chinese community, with a number of accounts from Japan creating the Twitter hashtag #ChineseDontComeTo-Japan. Stores all over Asia placed signs saying that Chinese tourist customers were not welcome, and a French newspaper, the Courier Picardy, ran a headline saying “Alerte Jaune” which translates to “yellow alert.”

In New York City,

there have been multiple reports of racist remarks after the announcement of the virus. With the Chinese Lunar New Year being this coming weekend, many events have been cancelled over the anxiety from the city’s Chinese community of the virus spreading.

Brooklyn College students have not experienced xenophobic accusations, but some students have grown cautious about the virus.

“If I see someone wearing a mask, I think they are sick,” said a Brooklyn College student requesting anonymity. “Someone that coughs often shows signs of sickness, of which I try to be careful,” they added.

Brooklyn College Health Clinic nurse practitioner

Ilene Tannenbaum informed the Vanguard that “coronavirus prevention measures are essentially the same as those taken to reduce the acquisition or spread of any respiratory illness.”

If you travelled to Wuhan, China, or know anyone who recently travelled there and within the past 14 days has felt sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, visit your health care provider or local hospital.

For precaution, Tannenbaum provided four ways to prevent the virus, including many basic measures such as washing your hands thoroughly, and to get the seasonal flu shot regardless, which is available at no cost to Brooklyn College

students at the BC Health Clinic.

“People who have similar symptoms but have not traveled to Wuhan or been in close contact with someone who has, are likely ill with a seasonal flu, rather than the novel coronavirus. It’s best to stay home to prevent spreading germs to others unless you need medical care,” said Tannenbaum.

For ongoing updates on the coronavirus, visit the New York State Department of Health, CUNY’s Health and Wellness Services, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and/or World Health Organization.

**“Stores all over Asia placed signs saying that Chinese tourist customers were not welcome...”**



# New Club Mixes Giving Back with Athletics



L to R: Rohan Mathur, Moksha Mehra, Yusuf Hasan, Melvin Thomas, Vijay Deopersuad, and Gabriel Cruz. / Moises Taveras

By Moises Taveras  
*Features Editor*

There's a collective image of sports and athleticism that's nigh unshakeable: a competition, complete with a designated champion and loser. Working to try and shake any of those stereotypes, a new Brooklyn College group calling themselves Athletes for Altruism, is working to reach out to their community through sports and athletics.

Athletes in places of privilege, for instance your average NBA player, often exhibit altruism in many shapes and forms. But in a college setting, where athletes are often trying to make a name for themselves and impress recruiters, this seemed like a refreshing tack and approach to athletics.

The club, co-led by presidents Moksha Mehra and Rohan Mathur, is trying something different in its approach to college-level athleticism: it's focusing on sports for the sake of others. In their information session this Tuesday, Feb. 4, the club's leadership outlined a vision for a group of athletes who work "to promote the general welfare and integrate community health initiatives with serving the less fortunate through fitness-centered activities," said Mathur.

This commitment to well-being seems to run deep in the Athletes for Altruism group and is extended to the members of the group as well as their community. Across the whole e-board, there were a range

of forms of exercise represented, and each member seemed intent to pass that knowledge onto willing members. Whether you wanted to get more definition, put on muscle, or get on a healthy diet, there was someone willing and able to point you in the right direction.

"It is also important that we provide fitness and diet counseling to those seeking it in the Brooklyn College community," Mathur told the Vanguard.

As well as their own experience and advice, the club is leveraging its connections to host talks and clinics in the hopes of bolstering the sports and athletics programs, raising awareness of both themselves and healthy practices. Everything from their goal, from

how they accomplish it, to their table of snacks (which included a mixture of traditional snacks and healthy alternatives) and their planned events, which include bake sales that are more health-conscious, seemed united in the vision to help people lead healthier lives.

Perhaps more important to the club than solely promoting healthier lives, the Athletes for Altruism are most dedicated to bettering the community. They are planning on doing community outreach via participation in local events like 5K walks, tennis and ping-pong tournaments. But the club is also planning its own series of events; on their docket are, among other things, a Zumba workout open

to members and BC students that is being sponsored by Cora Dance, an organization that aids underprivileged communities. Even further down the line is a charity basketball tournament and a collaboration with Hamza Khilji, a well-known Brooklyn College student who previously ran for USG President.

The club's first meeting was all too short but very promising. While it may seem like a niche area of the field of sports and athletics, especially one to begin with, the meeting had enough attendants to ensure that they may continue operating smoothly. With a solid, if not firm, idea of their upcoming plans and with the connections they seem to have, I see little to no barrier in the way of the club's efforts to grow their ranks. Above all, it's great to see more organizations on campus devoted to using their connections and knowledge to help and promote others, and it's even downright refreshing to see this effort be student-led.

**"The club is trying something different in its approach to college level athleticism: it's focusing on sports for the sake of others"**

# A Sit Down with Author

By Ian Ezinga  
*Staff Writer*

Shortly before the winter break, I sat down with Ben Lerner and interviewed him about his new book, *The Topeka School*, which came out in October 2019. The book comes in the midst of a distinguished writing career and takes its place on the mantle alongside two other novels and a number of poetry books. Being a distinguished professor of English and

a MacArthur Genius are just two of the many accolades Lerner has amassed over the last few years. While fulfilling his obligations to the vanguard of contemporary fiction, Lerner has made important contributions to our ideas about whiteness in America and ways to inhabit our increasingly tense and stratified experience.

I read Lerner's second novel 10:04 following a friend's

recommendation. The day I finished it, I ordered his first novel, *Leaving the Atocha Station*. Moving cities, finding work, enrolling in a new school and a few other wrenches tossed my way meant that I didn't get to pick up *Leaving The Atocha Station* until early November. With his new book coming out soon, I made quick work of the first novel and reached out to Lerner for an interview for *The Topeka School* before I had even

received my copy. After some back and forth, we found time for an interview in his office in Boylan Hall.

Tragically, I left his office with only twenty minutes of recording from our hour-long conversation. I am left with a few hastily taken notes and some disconnected memories, all of which had particular resonance to both my own station as an undergraduate student and today's cultural and political

landscape. In regards to my own situation, and I believe that of many other current students, *The Topeka School* offers a refreshing invitation to "inhabit the present without irony." This invitation comes conveniently at a time that is marked by extremely high tensions due in part to a national identity crisis which sees growing partisan politics and entrenched factions forming on either side. Throughout both his book and our conversation, Lerner was able to shed light on parts of this landscape and provide glimpses as to how to move forward.

It goes without saying that *The Topeka School* is not a master key to understanding all there is to know about identity politics. The book does offer, however, an exceptionally well written and rewarding narrative which provides insights into poetry, irony, and some of what being white in America entails. Writing about how white people are problematic and how white supremacy is sometimes unassuming are hardly new topics. Lerner doesn't waste time exploring these ideas in a laborious fashion, but instead presents the audience with a history of a voice that is in conflict with this dissonance. The voice in question belongs to a teenage Adam Gordon growing up in Topeka, Kansas during the 1990s. This history shows the ways in which a white midwestern teenager has grown and responded to a locality that is simultaneously isolated from most of the cultural touchstones, while also being the home of the Westboro Baptist Church.





# and Professor Ben Lerner

Adam is not a new character, having also been the subject of Lerner's first novel, *Leaving the Atocha Station*. In both of these books, Adam borrows a large amount of biographical details from Lerner's own experiences. Through both the real and the fictionalized voices of Ben and Adam, the novel is able to provide a colorful and unique perspective which adds to our collective understanding of whiteness in America.

In an earlier interview Lerner gave at the London bookstore, Foyles, he spoke of a "tremendous violence of Topeka, a kind of masculine, unmotivated violence." Adam serves as a vessel to explore and interrogate this violence. Adam is a champion highschool debater and the son of two psychologists; one a famous author. With this affluent domestic background underpinning his experiences, Adam's own yearnings to associate with this violence exposes the fraudulence of his performance.

Adam and his friends demonstrate this fraudulence by picking up the clothes, lingo, and mannerisms of some of the 90s most popular icons—hip hop artists and rappers from the coasts. The fraud inherent to white midwestern teenagers simulating mannerisms and dress belonging to black artists is, of course, problematic, but Lerner is also able to let us in the hilarity of it.

The appropriation of black culture is a common enough story, but in Lerner's narrative, this appropriation is

displayed largely as a means for kids to commit violence while wearing a disguise. For Adam specifically, although he largely keeps his hands clean from physical violence, he is quick to use his dominance as a public speaker to deal tremendous amounts of hilarity participating in backyard freestyling circles. Lerner writes about one such circle where, "Adam managed to rise above the stupid violence of the battles and misogynist cliches and enter a zone in which sentences unfolded at a speed he could not consciously control." This moment of bliss, achieved while performing under comically problematic circumstances, draws the reader to consider a present without irony.

Before discussing the role of irony in popular culture, Lerner set the record straight about where these performative antics fit into a broader story. He brought up James Baldwin as an earlier artist who masterfully exposed and presented the disastrous fiction that white people have been telling themselves and the world for centuries. This fiction arose as a means of constructing and maintaining social structures necessary to support slavery, revolving around the notion that to be white, you must simply not be black or brown. Once the identity of whiteness has been assumed, or in many cases, assigned, the theatrics follow suit.

The disastrous fiction, which is more of a structure of language that Lerner explores in the novel, has been created not only to construct racist ideologies, but also

to maintain their effects long after coming into existence. This discreetly informs the worldview of many people and in turn, has tremendous political, economic, and social implications. Whether in the subtext of the slogan "all lives matter," or in federal legislation that penalizes one form of a drug harsher than another, language has continually been used to tell and enforce a story. This story continues to shape history and although easy to decry, it has proved difficult to uproot.

So what is to be done about this disastrous fiction which permeates the present? In short, we need a new story to tell ourselves. Lerner sees his role, along with other contemporary authors who may still be living within the confines of the old fiction, as to hold a place in time for that new story. As the new story emerges, whenever that may be, it will be aided by works of fiction that have set out to expose the fraudulence of the old story and the different ways it has shaped our culture.

The significance of exposing and dismantling language, as opposed to direct aggression, is rooted within the profound effects it has while remaining beneath the surface of our collective conventions. This language underpins much of our most basic politics and continually asserts a hierarchy while not outwardly marching underneath a banner of hate. Being able to document this language's history and the way it has mutated over time is paramount to dismantling it. It is important to note that this should not

be interpreted as a call for passivity but instead presupposes a direct confrontation against outward hate and encourages a continuation of that struggle into everyday interactions.

This book, and Lerner's other work, are leagues away from just being a righteous manifesto against white supremacy. Recommending this book and Lerner's other work is easy. What was a little more difficult was confronting one of the other explorations Lerner takes up that strikes close to home. For an undergraduate student who is most comfortable cloaked in irony, *The Topeka School* offers a sobering narrative that has graduated from the cheap uses and abuses of ironic storytelling.

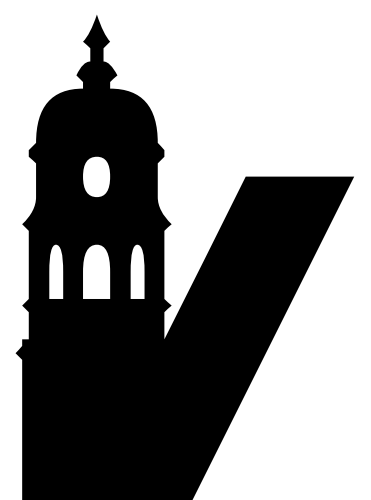
"The irony is that it's not ironic," said Lerner about his latest novel's handling of poetry. Differing from his earlier work where the subject is handled with uncertainty and ambiguity, *The Topeka School* explores the idea that there is still a tremendous amount of value that can be extracted from poetry - and its many forms.

Although a larger comparison can be made about all three of his novels, *The Topeka School* on its own demonstrates a noticeable development in the handling of irony over the course of Adam's growth. While the younger Adam is torn between saying what he truly feels in place of something that would signal his intellect, the character is often reminded of the power of the genuine. The bliss achieved during his freestyling seance or the simple power of

a meaningless poem, amongst other examples, all serve to communicate value in what can often be written off. Towards the end of our conversation, I felt a call for a sort of meditation that evaluates not just art, but the present as well, and seeks to sift out that which is needlessly ironic.

This calling comes at a time where it seems as though the very pillars of our society are built upon a cruel irony. We have an electoral system that doesn't elect the most voted for candidate. We have a news media that spends just as much time debunking fake news as it does reporting it. We are at war in an attempt to stabilize a region that we have directly made unstable. And while my political engagement is at an all-time high, much of my commentary is communicated by saying exactly what I don't believe.

While onboard the great train going nowhere that is popular culture, it is easier now than ever to simply resign to irony. So although it arguably shouldn't have to be, Ben Lerner's *Topeka School* reads as slightly radical when it asks the reader to observe the events earnestly and to inhabit the present without irony.





# Artists Who Teach: Stephen Kwok

By Jack Coleman  
*Arts Editor*

Stephen Kwok is a multidisciplinary artist whose work often warps the very meaning of what it means to make art. This semester is his second at Brooklyn College. After having him as a professor over a jam-packed winter class, I decided to chat with him about his thoughts on teaching, academia, and art. His next show is part of the series entitled HEADS, on April 5th, at 99 Scott in Bushwick.

**Coleman:** Why did you go to art school?

**Kwok:** I studied business in undergrad at the University of Southern California, the scandal laden, expensive, private school in Los Angeles. It was a very Hollywood, very specific environment, all profit driven. It taught you to perpetuate the old boys club. In being taught those values, I tried to maintain some sense of self. I grew up understanding education as a pre-professional pursuit, not a way to further your understanding of the world. It was all about 'do this to get a job.' In my junior year I had a really intense internship at Paramount Pictures, working red carpets and things like that, while taking a feminist theory class—my first real gender studies class. The internship and that class just totally clashed—working the red carpet while learning that capitalism and these things were all just constructs—before that I had never thought of an alternative, things were just how they were. This all resulted in a really severe panic attack that essentially was the beginning point of me studying art. When I was 20 I decided to be an artist, I didn't want to drop out because I was already a junior, so I went abroad, to Amsterdam, and was exposed to a lot of art. Following that, I went to the Rhode Island School

of Design to study fashion design. I dropped a graphic design class and picked up a site specific installation course which is where I started to make my first work. I went back to USC, got my business degree, and then decided to move to New Orleans to make my own work.

That's a long background story to say that, for a long time, theory was very important to my work and it still is. I didn't really, and I still don't know if I think that art has to be taught. I know it's ironic for an art teacher to say that, but the academy, art institutions, art classes can be a good environment for people to experiment and learn but I think that artists primarily learn from their own research and their own interests. I've never been one for a top-down understanding of education. Probably because I never really had that. At times I recognize that I have gaps because I didn't learn certain things, because I didn't really know about art until I was about 20. I just thought that art was, I don't know, making a drawing, or something. In terms of academia, I think it's good supporting material.

**Coleman:** It's just a place to do it, right? Having a physical place to go and experiment.

**Kwok:** Right, so then I went to graduate school when I was 25. I got into an MFA program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and when you go as in MFA you're expected to know already what you're doing. I spent those three years in New Orleans thinking about grad school, reading a lot, and making work. There's a library in Houston, where I'm from, at Rice university that's open to the public so I spent a lot of time there. They have this insanely amazing collection of art books, I would spend days there just looking and looking. When I went to grad school I pulled



Stephen Kwok performing *Our Speed* (2018). Image courtesy Stephen Kwok

together a portfolio after not really being taught. And I loved grad school. It's not just the physical space, it's also the community—you have an audience, which is not something that's easy to have if you're making work outside of an institution.

**Coleman:** I've been seeing a ton of pushback towards MFA programs. People say that it's a waste of money, it's a factory, etc. But you didn't find that?

**Kwok:** Well I think I'm a little different because I think I just needed to go to art school, I didn't have a BFA. I already had a Bachelor's, so I wasn't going to do a four year degree again. I don't think that MFA programs are necessary, but I do think that who you know is really important. Having a community of people who could see my work first hand is what I got out of grad school. At SAIC, there's probably 250 or so people in the MFA program. So maybe it is a bit of a factory.

**Coleman:** So how did you begin teaching?

**Kwok:** I began teaching in New Orleans, right after college. I needed to find work so I worked in education because, at that time, there were a

lot of nonprofits in New Orleans. It was five years after Katrina, so there was a ton of funding and energy going into the city. I started teaching after-school programs for public elementary and middle schools. Being at Brooklyn College and Medgar Evers College is my first higher education teaching experience. It's the best fit for me, I'm happy to be teaching college students. At one point in New York I taught elderly chinese people how to use computers. So it's a combination of just needing a job and there being money in teaching.

**Coleman:** I don't think that it's a coincidence that your artwork is mostly relational which requires a lot of coordinating with people, and you also run a classroom. Do you have similar goals when you're teaching and making work?:

**Kwok:** Yes, for the past couple of years, I've been developing this idea for an alternative school of some sort. All of the classes would be conceptual and experiential exercises where the students are somewhere between audience members and students. This isn't off the ground but it's a very clear bridge between the two, it's what would happen if

I were to merge the two, and really dig into that. But this bridge wouldn't have happened until after I started making performance. And it really came out when I went to grad school and started to reflect on my time teaching in New Orleans, which as a city has its own culture and value system—it's a bit punk, it's not super competitive or ambitious, and I really adopted that ethos. So in grad school, I found myself in an institution again. And so I think the teaching emerged in my work both as a reflection of what I had been doing as a job and the situation that I was in at the moment, and so I was reflecting the situation back on itself—the student taking on the role of the teacher, or the student making a class. A lot of that work was very antagonistic, and not everyone was crazy about it. I did a piece where I called roll on the faculty during a review and some of them really did not like it. The criticism that I got from that piece stuck with me for a long time, from that experience I've learned a lot actually.

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# “Tick Tick Boom” Review

By Quiara Vasquez  
*Editor-in-Chief*

“It’s hard for people born after 1960 to be idealistic or original,” our protagonist pouts in “Tick Tick Boom,” a musical set in 1990. “We’ve seen what happens to ideals: they get assassinated, or corrupted, or co-opted.” Well, 1990 is now just as far from 1960 as it is from 2020, and Larson’s words still ring true.  
Everyso often, some young talent comes along and shakes up the Broadway scene. For one brief shining moment, the composer Jonathan Larson was one of them. As any theater kid will tell you, Larson died in 1996, mere hours before his play “RENT” entered previews. 25 years later, “RENT” remains the defining Broadway musical of the ‘90s. But before then, Larson was a starving artist in Alphabet City, spending his twenties oscillating between waiting tables at dead-end diners and writing musicals no one liked. It’s those experiences which make up the autobiographical “Tick Tick Boom,” as performed by the Brooklyn College

Musical Theater Collective in Whitman Hall this past weekend.  
Now, let’s get this out of the way: the largest problem with this production of “Tick Tick Boom” is that “Tick Tick Boom” is just not a good musical. I’m not even sure it’s a musical in its own right so much as it is a rough draft of “RENT.” From the 90’s NYC setting and overall sense of gen-X ennui, right down to little details like the awkward phone calls with nagging parents and agents. “RENT” is rightfully a classic, but it’s tough to deny the criticism that it reduces gentrification and the AIDS crisis to scene dressing on which disaffected hipsters can gyrate. “RENT” is able to duck this criticism with its sheer scope and emotional power; “Tick Tick Boom” has neither, and frequently reeks of narcissism on Larson’s part. Your goodwill towards the play itself is almost entirely dependent on your awareness of Larson’s later triumph and tragic life path.  
Goodwill towards this production of “Tick Tick Boom,” however, is easily warranted. The minimal

staging is effective; the choreography is top-notch; the five-person cast is quite good. The live quartet plays with gusto - although, I will say that the music occasionally overpowered the performers (an inevitability in a tiny space like the Whitman basement, admittedly).  
Somewhat problematically, the weak link in the cast is arguably the leading man. I derive no joy from slamming Harrison Hernandez like this. He’s an undeniable talent; a hunky baritone with effortless charisma. Problem is, “hunky” and “effortless charisma” are not adjectives anyone would attach to Jon Larson, the spindly neurotic. More problematically, “baritone” isn’t the right adjective either,— when he struggles to hit the high notes during dramatic numbers like “Johnny Can’t Decide” and “Why” it’s becomes all the more notable. Hernandez isn’t bad in the role, per se, but his performance feels somewhat uncanny, like watching Alfred Drake play Evan Hansen. Hernandez is a classic leading man, but here he’s miscast as a misfit.  
During a couple numbers,



I couldn’t help but wonder if the play would be better if he’d swapped places with Antonyio Artis, who plays the serious, Gucci belt-wearing exec Michael. (In “RENT” terms, he’s both the proto-Collins and the proto-Benny.) Artis nails the dramatic moments, like when he admits he has (gasp) AIDS, but he’s also capable of great levity, especially during the “No More” number, which sees him and Hernandez doing some hilariously over-the-top dance moves in his fancy new apartment. (It’s hands down the highlight of the performance - props to choreographer Matthew Williams).  
Rounding out the core cast is Francesca Manligoy as Jon’s girlfriend Susan, who doesn’t have much to do other than look vampy in a green velvet dress and break up with Jon for not moving to Cape Cod;

despite her disappointingly thin characterization, Manligoy stands out as the best singer of the group. Isabella Marinucci and Leslie Joelle Avighna complete the ensemble, playing various random roles (diner patrons; marketing “professionals;” Jon’s parents) with lovable broadness.  
Ultimately, despite my misgivings about the choice of play, there’s no denying the passion that went into “Tick Tick Boom” - the latest fine offering from the Musical Theater Collective. Given the professionalism of the play, it’s a bit surprising to realize they’ve only been around for about three years. I’m hoping that with time and renewed student interest, they’ll work out the snags and create bigger and better productions in the future.

# Artists Who Teach: Stephen Kwok

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I subsequently started to think of myself as a facilitator and to make work in which I was thinking about the audience members’ agency, where there’s not just one but many ways to operate within the performance, but still with a central focus.  
**Coleman:** In your piece, *Charge* (2013-2017), you were performing with the others. Was that something that you were cognizant of because of some of your past criticisms?

**Kwok:** I think so. I think that my philosophy between performance and teaching very much coincide. I’m very much a facilitator who thinks about certain conditions and arranging certain resources, providing a certain amount of structure which is ideally not hierarchical. I think of it as a service. It’s service oriented in the sense that I don’t think of myself as someone who has answers. I very rarely make a performance where I am looked at by the audience. The pizza reading is the closest that I get to something where people are looking at me only. In my performances

I am much more of a worker or a stagehand, I am performing some function that anyone else could. I’m not content. In the class that you were in, I would create frameworks. I would give you all an exercise, and arrange other exercises around it to give a framework but I’d never say this is what it’s supposed to result in. Classrooms are all about the people who are in them. If I’m teaching an art history class, which I do at Medgar Evers, it’s a little different. Because there’s so much content to get to. There’s no real creative input in an art history classroom, at times there’s a lot of pressure to come up

with exercises, which I’ve come to actually like. In our class, the only exercise that I didn’t come up with was the color mixing.  
I know a lot of art teachers or educators who have hesitations about offering degrees that do not guarantee any type of financial stability. Obviously with an MFA you can teach, which is my plan, because I knew that it would open up the door to be able to teach at colleges. But I was having a conversation with a student about how I think that not everyone should be an artist, or to pursue it as a career. I’m not going to tell

anyone that they can’t or shouldn’t, but not everyone has the means to go to an MFA program. The way that I teach or the work that I’m invested in certainly has no financial guarantee. One, it’s ephemeral, there’s really nothing to own or sell; two, it’s a concept. Politically, I’m cool with that, but I don’t feel comfortable promoting the type of work that I make to someone who wants a job or to make money with their work, unless they want to teach. Performance isn’t something that’s easy to sell.



# Finding My Fractured Cuban Roots

By Carmen Saffioti  
*Digital Editor*

When I landed in Havana and was finally able to leave José Martí International Airport after making my way through customs and security, the first thing I noticed was the remarkable beauty of the city — and the stench of gasoline.

Cuba, I would find, is filled with contradictions such as this one; every question I had about Cuba was answered in two or more ways. This past winter break, I had the incredible opportunity to study abroad in Cuba. It was the first time someone in my immediate family has been to Cuba since 1955.

Cuban-Americans are unique in almost every way from other immigrant communities, and especially from other Latino communities.

To various degrees, the Cuba-America embargo has isolated Cuban-Americans from their island. Despite the isolation, lots of Cuban-Americans, especially those who arrived in America in the early 1960s (majority white and upper middle-class), were treated far more favorably by the American government than other immigrant groups. Because of this, Cuban-Americans have a unique and somewhat estranged transnational identity (transnational identity being an immigrant or descendant of immigrants' relationship to the "home country").

This realization struck me dead in the face when I arrived in Cuba. My entire life I told people I am Cuban, but in Cuba I felt like the farthest thing from a Cuban. I embarked on this trip as



A bookstore in Havana./Carmen Saffioti

sort of a return, hoping to find familiarity and the origins of my culture, and while I did find some of that, I found more complexity to my idea of Cuba than I was expecting. Like many other second-generation Americans, I am disconnected from

my forefathers' ways of life and comfortably assimilated into American culture. My ideas of Cuba originated from what my grandparents and parents told me and what I saw in popular media, rather than experiencing the place for itself.

For a Latin American country in the Caribbean, Cuba has a level of notoriety that is unprecedented. Most people have some idea about the politics and systems of government there and most have an opinion. This deeply shaped my identity as a Cuban growing up, but witnessing socialism in Cuba is more complex than people imagine. While talking to Cubans, I heard a wide range of opinions on the government. Some people were anti-Castro and anti-revolution, while others proclaimed their love of Castro and hatred towards the United States.

Cuba is an extremely progressive country in some ways: universal healthcare, legal abortion upon request since 1965, and free education from preschool to university,

among many other things. But Cuba is behind in some areas as well: crumbling housing that the government is slow to restore, sexual harassment towards women (that I experienced first-hand), and repression of free speech. These contradictions make it impossible to pin down Cuba to a single adjective. With that, it was also impossible for me to piece together my Cuban identity from what I experienced in Cuba— and I am fine with that now. When my family left Cuba during Fulgencio Batista's rule, it was a very different country. My culture is based on what they remembered of Cuba, not what Cuba is today.

The study abroad program I went on was hosted by John Jay College, and any CUNY student can register with an e-permit. Our instructor was Professor Lisandro Pérez of the Latinx studies department of John Jay.



The Capitolio in Havana./Carmen Saffioti



# On The Record: Billie Eilish

By Allison Rapp  
*Opinions Editor*

I went to one of the trial sessions for the now-infamous Harvey Weinstein. That name, synonymous with countless blockbuster films, is now also synonymous with a level of greed, power, and brutality that most of us couldn't imagine. Or maybe we could, and chose to sweep it under the rug because that was easier. I willingly chose to go to the courthouse, but being twenty feet away from him wasn't even the most difficult part — it was knowing that this situation is so much bigger than Weinstein.

I was asked to cover the trial by a journalism professor. Our class of only four students wasn't necessarily expecting such a hefty assignment for the first week of classes. We split up, and ironically, it was the two women in the class who volunteered to rise before dawn and head to the criminal courthouse in Manhattan. Maybe it was something subconsciously buried in us, something about us as young women feeling the need to do our part or stand in solidarity. Maybe, like true journalists, we were just honoring our usual desire to have our fingers on the pulse of what's going on. The more people against him, the better. Alongside dozens of others, we waited outside in the cold. We went through metal detectors, switched off cell phones, and sat in our assigned seats. Before long, without warning, Harvey Weinstein shuffled into the courtroom. It was as though all the air had been sucked out of the room.



Weinstein looks a great deal different than he did fifteen or twenty years ago. An automobile accident took its toll and he now uses a walker. He stoops over his feet, and though he's only 67, he looks much closer to 80. But it seems to be a remarkable coincidence that he began using the walker around the same time that the trial began, and I'm sure he'll take all the sympathy he can get. It's true — if you take one look at Harvey Weinstein, it's difficult to imagine that he is physically capable of the acts that women have accused him of.

But that, of course, isn't the point of the trial. The point is that he was capable at one point in time. And he knew it damn well.

On the day I went to the courtroom, the jury heard from a handful of corroborating witnesses, each taking the stand in an effort to bolster the victim's testimony. An

ex-boyfriend of one of the women testified that, yes, his then-girlfriend had indeed come home in hysterical tears because her meeting with Weinstein had included the offer of a movie role, but only if she agreed to sexual favors. He told her that was the way the film industry worked, and if she wanted to make it as an actress, this was a lesson she must learn.

Weinstein appeared quiet during the proceedings. But when he left, he wheeled to the elevator with this attorney by his side and the pair were smiling — as though there wasn't a worry to be had. I felt sick.

And it's not just the movie business, of course. The music industry is no stranger to this type of predatory behavior, and there are hundreds of women, eager to cut a record or sign with a major label, who find themselves face to face with men like

Weinstein. When you're young, you may not even be able to recognize what's happening until it's too late.

This week I listened to Billie Eilish's debut record, *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?*, which took home a Grammy for Album of the Year. Her brother served as the clearly quite talented producer for the album, and the entire thing was put together in his small bedroom studio.

Eilish's voice is soft, almost meek, and seems to float through the melodies of her tracks. The hits like "Bad Guy" and "Bury a Friend" will fit perfectly into any club setting, but it's the simpler songs that caught my attention. On "Xanny", jazz-like chord progressions and melancholy lyrics indicate that Eilish and her brother aren't out to make forgettable music — they want to stand apart.

Eilish only just turned 18 in December. This album, though highly praised, is very much an album about figuring stuff out -- about fear, loss, and pain. Being a young woman in the spotlight makes all of those things ten times harder, and her sudden success means the pressure is on to make more chart-breaking music. I can't help thinking about how deeply depressing it would be if the harsh realities of the business took her down before she had the opportunity to grow as an artist.

We can hope that there is more accountability in the arts industry today than there was 15 or 20 years ago, and we can hope that when young stars like Billie Eilish come around there won't be a looming record label executive to take advantage of them. We can only hope.



# Low Qui Savage: Berniemanía, Take Two

By Quiara Vasquez  
*Editor-in-Chief*

He’s the Brooklyn College alumnus on everyone’s lips. The cable news pundits, the network jokesters, the rose-emoji Twittersphere - everyone is coalescing around the loudmouthed Brooklyn Jew who tells it like it is. Love him or hate him, he’s the biggest name in American politics right now, and he’s not going away any time soon.

But enough about Alan Dershowitz. As of press time, Vermont Senator (and onetime BC attendee) Bernie Sanders has either won or almost won the contentious Iowa caucus, and he’s poised to totally sweep New Hampshire’s presidential primaries. It’s the closest BC has ever gotten to the presidency at least since Shirley Chisholm’s 1972 run - possibly since 1996, if you count Bob Dole’s unsuccessful attempt to unseat Bill Clinton. (Dole took engineering classes at BC in the ‘40s while serving in the military during World War II.)

I don’t have hard data on how popular Bernie Sanders is among BC students now; I don’t have hard data on how popular he was here back in 2016 either, unless you count an Excelsior “poll” which had a sample size of twelve. But anecdotally, based on all the conversations I’ve had, all the Sanders-branded stickers/buttons/thermoses/onesies I’ve eyed, and all the life-sized cardboard cutouts of Sanders I’ve brushed past on Bedford Ave, I’d say Bernie Sanders is hands-down the most popular thing on campus. Maybe he’d have some competition if Cardi B strode along the East Quad on a unicorn while handing out Juul pods, but until then, BC will remain firmly under the thrall of Berniemanía.

But while Brooklyn College students have gleefully embraced the self-styled democratic socialist, Brooklyn College itself has been hesitant to truly acknowledge its most famous student. Oh,

sure, they let Bernie come to campus twice in 2016, and kick off his 2020 campaign on the East Quad last year. At least one student activist I know has told me they came to Brooklyn College in no small part because of Bernie Sanders; I suspect the actual number of students who were attracted to BC in some small part because of Sanders is in the hundreds, maybe even the thousands. Certainly, BC was aware of his power over the 18-29 demographic when they invited him to be the graduation speaker in 2017 - at this time three years ago, every wall was plastered with the image of Sanders’ hair and glasses.

And yet, while Sanders is extremely popular with BC students now, the students he went to school with in 1960 mostly despise him. About once a semester, I get a cranky e-mail from some boomer or another, writing to inform me about how the kids these days are too far left, or how climate change is a



Bernie Sanders at a presidential campaign event./ Phil Roeder

hoax, or about (oh god) the “gay agenda.” I don’t want to imply that the average BC graduate of the ‘60s is a raving right-wing loonie, but they certainly skew towards the conservative side; and without the financial support Albany is supposed to be giving CUNY, they’re Brooklyn College’s main source of cash flow.

This puts BC’s publicity team in a bit of a bind: support Sanders and risk

alienating donors, or ignore Sanders and lose out on an excited student body? Or try to eke out a middle ground between the two positions, and see how close you can fly to the sun?

Brooklyn College would be foolish to not bask in the glow of Sanders’ flame, but as we all know, when you play with fire, you run the risk of getting berned.

## Bullpitt!

by Ryan Gleason

## The Great Gun Debate

This is a letter the Vanguard received over the winter break. We debated and found that to give the Conservative voice equal place in our publications, we have to print it.

“To whom it may concern,

Hi, I am one of the few Republican students still brave enough to stand up for what I believe in. Lately, there have been many discussions and

debates about whether those who own guns should be allowed to carry them on college campuses. I don’t see the problem, but many of my more liberal classmates see to find issue with it.

My grandfather carried one AND my father carried one. I have every right to carry one as well, despite how my classmates, who I see for 2 hours a week, feel. I am sick and tired of this liberal snowflake agenda

being pushed upon this great nation. The scaredy cats in power up on Capitol Hill won’t say anything but I will! This is The United States of America, not “The United Cowards of America” okay? Can we agree that if someone puts the money down, and they take responsibility, they should be allowed to have one wherever and whenever they want?

My grandfather was one of this nation’s most

decorated art supply store managers and he taught me from a young age that hot glue guns are not just a handy dandy tool for quick fixes, but a “Goddamn given right”! I may be one of the few Republicans who makes birdhouses and sock puppets, but I am still a member of this student body! And my voice counts!

I say hot glue guns should be allowed on college campuses for the

pure and simple fact that at any time, someone could come onto campus with felt and glitter and be left glueless. Is that what we want? A loose glitter and unsecure googly eyed generation? Why is it that cold glue is allowed, but not hot? This is ridiculous. Please print this, so that people with like minds and a fascination for hot glue can be heard!

Sincerely, Gray A. Nelson”



# Men’s Volleyball Team Gets New Coach

By Lorenzo Davies  
Staff Writer

As the Brooklyn College men’s volleyball team kicks off their season, one addition was made this off-season that can alter the trajectory of the program. With Brooklyn College still searching for its first CUNYAC championship this century, hopes are high that the newest member of the Bulldog family, Men’s Volleyball head coach Lia Briffa can help make this dream a reality.

There are many challenges that can come with being a college head coach for the first time, and that is without only being appointed a month before the first game of the season. Briffa had several administrative ends to tie up with little time to do so, and lacked the ability to recruit new players for the program, as recruiting season was over by the time she was hired. “Making cuts in a new team is never easy especially when having

to prepare for following years, and trying to recruit for the following year as well,” he said. Fortunately, Briffa brings a wealth of experience in both the college and youth game that has helped her seamlessly transition in spite of the limited preparatory time as Brooklyn has gotten off to a respectable 3-3 record. A New York City native hailing from Whitestone, Queens, Briffa graduated from Queensborough Community College as a scholar athlete and later went on to represent Queens College in both Volleyball and Track— experiences that will no doubt help her understand the challenges that come with being a CUNY athlete. As for her coaching career, Briffa has experience working with both high school and college athletes, having served as a 15s/16s coach at Asphalt Green, and winning several tournaments. However the real feather in her cap



Lia Briffa’s coaching picture for Queens College./ Queens College Sports Faculty

comes from her time as assistant coach at QCC. During her time as part of the Queensboro coaching staff, QCC did not lose a single game in conference play, and placed in the NCAA tournament four years running, causing notable upsets in that time. There is great optimism that Briffa can translate the winning mentality that she helped build at QCC to the program at Brooklyn.

Despite having the experience to build a winning program at Brooklyn, Briffa takes control of a squad with little success in the past few seasons. After two atrocious outings in 2015 and 2016 where Brooklyn posted a combined 9-46 record, Brooklyn rebounded in 2017 and 2018 to post back-to-back winning seasons. 2019 was not a success with Brooklyn only going 2-5 against CUNY opponents and receiving a knockout from Baruch in the playoffs. “My goal as a coach is

always improvement,” said Briffa. She says her players share the same goal as she does, and she is working to make the practices as challenging as possible in order to get them ready. “We will be coming in to compete and we will be putting up a fight at every game just like they do in practice,” she said. In terms of goals, Briffa states that she wants her players to be good sportsmen both on and off the court, and seeks better communication and teamwork from them, reiterating the effect that good team spirit and chemistry can have on results.

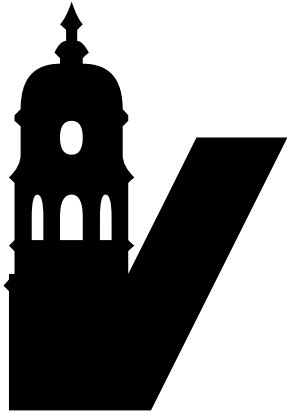
In addition to a new coach, the Brooklyn Men’s Volleyball program also has a few standout players at Briffa’s disposal that can help bring success on the court. While Briffa states that all her players have amazing potential, she spoke about a few particular players on her roster. For instance, Senior Mike Valentin,

who’s ability to assist his teammates both on the court with his playing ability, and off the court with his leadership ability could be keys to a successful season. She also was excited that she may have a diamond in the rough in Omar Rezika who in her words, “has a lot of potential and work ethic as he gets better every practice,” and can be a key player for the program going forward.

While Briffa is looking forward to a prosperous tenure, she hopes that students and staff can come out to a game so she can show us what her and her team is all about. Briffa’s track record certainly shows she has the potential to make her stay here a success.

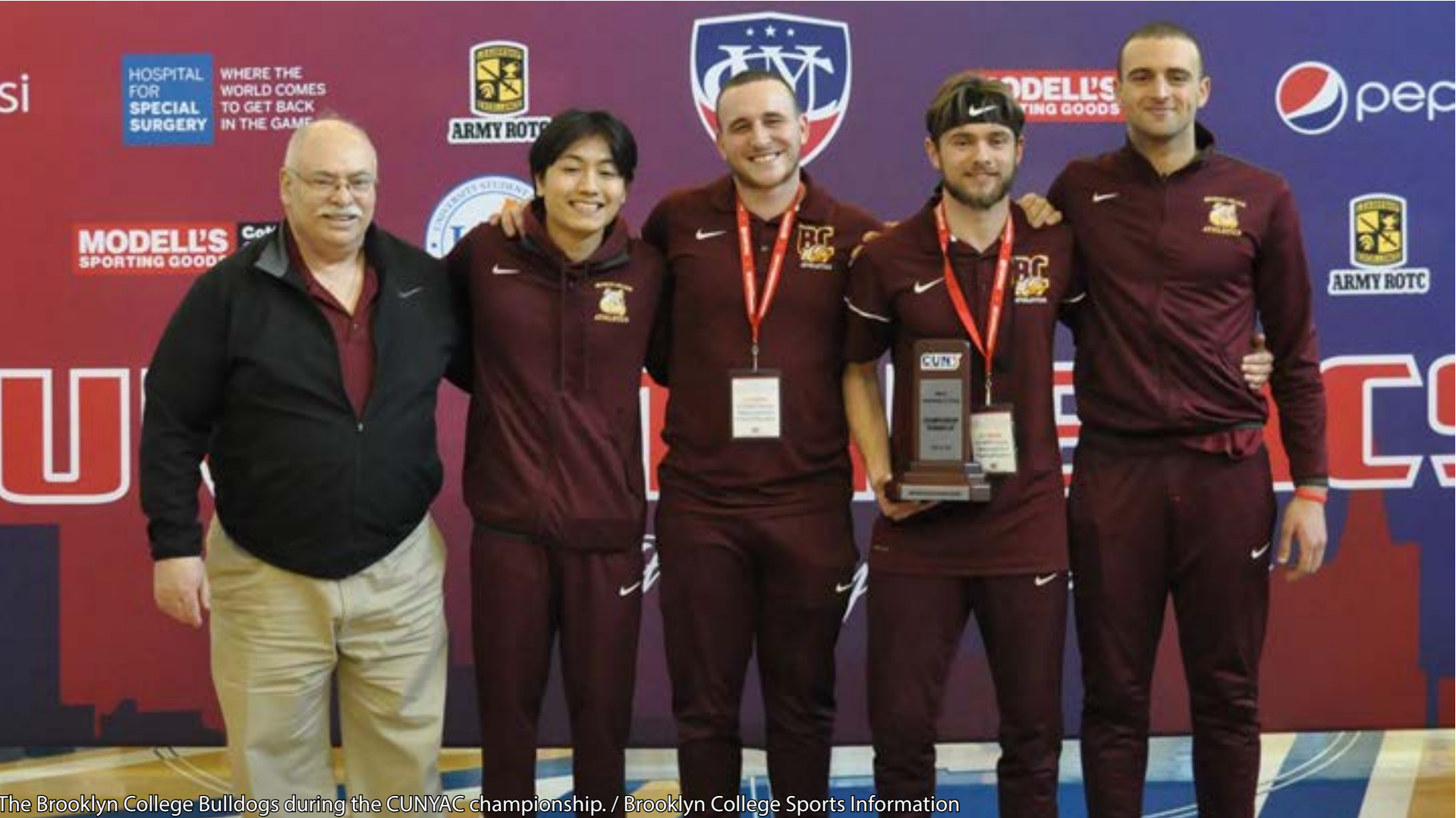


Lia Briffa’s coaching picture for Brooklyn College./ Brooklyn College Athletics





# Men's Swimming Achieves Top Finish in School History



The Brooklyn College Bulldogs during the CUNYAC championship. / Brooklyn College Sports Information

By Conrad Hoyt  
*Sports Editor*

With a team score of 220 points, the men's swimming and diving team took home second place at the CUNYAC Championships, on Sunday, February 2, the best finish for the Bulldogs in program history.

The men's team racked up eight medals on the last day of the tournament,

resulting in 21 total. Baruch College finished first overall for the second straight year, with a score of 336 points.

Sophomore Peter Ebert and Freshman Christian Hoyek of the Bulldogs took home gold and silver respectively in the 1650 freestyle final. Freshman Devin Boodha secured two gold medals for the Bulldogs on the second day of the

tournament, in the 100-yard breaststroke and 100-yard backstroke.

The Vanguard spoke at the beginning of the season with head coach of both the men's and women's teams Brian Jensen, a former Bulldog. He was optimistic about his teams' chances this season, while also trying to build a culture of hard work and honesty within the team. "...at the end

of the day the goal is to win, but the bigger goal is improvement, and knowing that they're in a safe space," said Jensen, who also noted that last year was the best year the program saw.

The men's team finished with an 8-1 regular season record before advancing to the CUNYAC Championships and turning out an impressive result there as well. The

trajectory of this team should delight Jensen, the players (many of whom are underclassmen), and fans of the team.

"What I told a lot of the guys [last year] who returned was kinda 'keep the momentum going.' Next year we're going to get more people, we're going to try even harder, we're going to hopefully do better than we did this year."

## Vinny the Goat by Mo Muhsin & Gabrielle Toro Vivoni

