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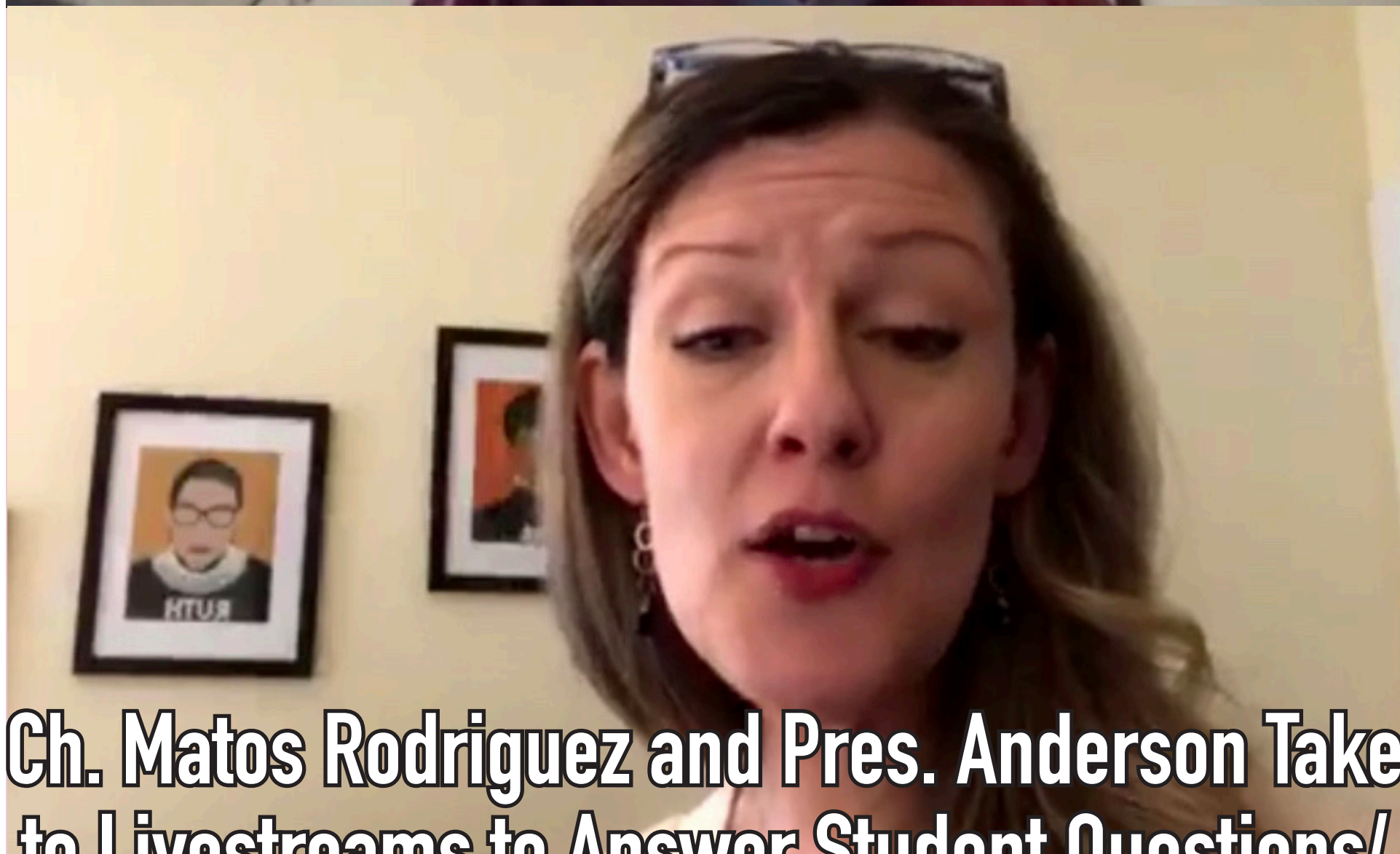
# **VANGUARD**

Spring 2020, Issue 9

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Wednesday, April 1

## **CUNY GOES LIVE**



**Ch. Matos Rodriguez and Pres. Anderson Take  
to Livestreams to Answer Student Questions/**

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# Students and Professors Respond to Schedule Changes

by Chaya Gurkov  
*Staff Writer*

With less than a week of virtual learning underway, the Recalibration Period and shortening of spring break has been drawing backlash from faculty members and students across campus.

“As faculty and students were just beginning to adapt to the new system of online courses, I and many, if not most, of my colleagues think this is absolutely the wrong call,” said a history department professor in an email to the Vanguard who asked to remain anonymous.

The changes made to the distance-learning schedules arrived in CUNY members’ inboxes on March 24, and outlined the cancelation of classes from Friday, March 27 through today, Wednesday, April 1.

The next day another email arrived in which CUNY Chancellor Felix Matos Rodriguez emphasized the reason for this temporary pause: to allow more time for the schools to hand out laptops and devices to students who need them for virtual learning.

“If we do not pause, we would get too far into the semester, and students

who have been without access to technology since March 19 would then have a tough time catching up and likely drop out of the semester,” wrote Rodriguez.

A biology professor explained that the news came as a harsh blow to many professors, but was more understandable now that the reason for the decision has been clarified.

“Just when we thought we had working systems, the university announced they would stop us,” wrote the professor. “In the absence of other information, we thought administrators would be telling us to do different things, based on their whims. So yes, there has been resistance to changing the schedule again for a reason that just seemed arbitrary.”

But to make up for the lost school days, another decision that cuts spring break short by seven days has some students up in arms.

A petition started by Courtney Hakimian with the title “Keep CUNY Spring Break” on Change.com has been making its rounds, asking students to sign to demand the original spring break be reinstated.

“With spring break being cut short considerably, students and faculty are being deprived of their one significant period of time off during the semester to relax and recoup. Considering this time of particular uncertainty and anxiety we are living in, a full and restful spring break is particularly important for CUNY students and staff,” the petition reads.

Adding more fuel to the fire is the fact that the new spring break dates, which run from April 8 till April 10, as opposed to the normal final date on April 17, cuts into religious holidays such as Easter and Passover.

“The presumption that observant students and staff must take off nearly a week of school as a result of this change is preposterous,” the petition stated. “Many faculty members are not so quick or lenient to provide fair opportunities to make up work or to allow students to work around the school schedule.”

The Petition currently has 1,600 signatures at press time.

Students have been vocal in support over WhatsApp. Sam L., who’s finishing up pre-med at Brooklyn College

wrote, “It’s also about the principle of the matter that they’re not respecting our holiday. I can guarantee you they would have never done this if it were Christmas.”

But not all students agree that the new spring break dates means the end of the world. “Guys, it’s two days of missed work on Pesach total...like kids are truly missing weeks of work,” one junior majoring in psychology wrote.

In response to a call for students to spam the chancellor with emails in an effort to help keep spring break out of Passover, one Jewish student wrote on a BC Whatsapp chat, “You know the world doesn’t revolve around Jews right?”

But then there are students who remain undecided, or are simply confused about the whole situation. “They can probably extend school past May if this corona gets worse,” wrote another student. “If the class never gives a midterm and final on schedule to make up for the missed days then missing some spring break might not be bad or it might be extended semester? I don’t know, tough call.”

*Starting with this issue, The Vanguard will be publishing every other Wednesday for the duration of the semester. Our last three issues for spring 2020 will be posted online on April 15, April 29, and May 13. Depending on how the coronavirus pandemic pans out, and whether summer classes are cancelled, our final issue may receive a limited print run; if we do, we’ll keep you posted via social media. Our Twitter and Instagram handles are @TheBCVanguard.*



# USS Holds COVID-19 Town Hall with CUNY Chancellor

by John Schilling  
Staff Writer

On Sunday, March 29, the CUNY University Student Senate hosted a virtual town hall with CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez to answer questions regarding the current unrest that exists from COVID-19 and address the status of CUNY schools.

According to Timothy Hunter, the University Student Senate Chairperson and administrator of the Town Hall, USS, “compiled a list of questions to ask the Chancellor” prior to the meeting to be conscious of his time.

“It’s been a challenging time for our city. From our perspective, we are operating on two guiding principles,” Matos Rodríguez said, “Trying to be always mindful of the health and safety of all the members of the CUNY community [...] and doing that at the same time that we try very hard to protect the academic semester for the students.”

The conversation began regarding the transition to distance learning in which Diana Vargas, a student from Kingsborough Community College, expressed concern for professors who have never used such technology before and what steps CUNY is taking to support them.

According to Matos Rodríguez, CUNY dedicated a couple of days, prior to distance learning, to help faculty members “redesign” their classes to allow for a transition as orderly as possible if needed. This involved the faculty working together, creating support groups, and providing faculty with the proper information via faculty committees working at each campus.

“We recognize that not only are we transitioning to a different mode, but it’s also a very tense, difficult moment in the lives of many of us,” Matos

Rodríguez added.

Kesi Gordon, a student at York College, brought up CUNY’s Recalibration Period, wondering how that was ultimately decided, as well as the number of devices purchased, where the funding came from, and how they would be distributed.

Matos Rodríguez said that when the original plan was made to move classes online, it was done under the impression that students would still have access to campus resources, such as internet or technology access. When this became impossible, Matos Rodríguez explained that CUNY purchased 30,000 computers via capital funds, and they are beginning to be distributed to campuses to help dependent students.

“We felt that if we could adjust the schedule a little bit and move some of those days from the spring break we would give those students a fighting chance,” Matos Rodríguez explained. “Even though there was some element of inconvenience in the move, we needed to do the best we could for students who were most vulnerable and try to accelerate the getting of the computers.”

Ethan Milich, USS delegate, and current candidate for USG President at Brooklyn College, asked the Chancellor to address if there were any plans to accommodate students in different time zones or with different work schedules in terms of the weight of class participation and attendance.

Matos Rodríguez acknowledged these complications, but expressed the difficulty of altering previously scheduled class meeting times.

“We are encouraging faculty to be creative and open about the idea of participating,” Matos Rodríguez noted.

“Communication is key. The students need

to talk and engage their faculty as much as they can about how they are adjusting to things. If they feel the faculty is not being responsive, then elevate that to the department or the dean.”

Nicole Agu, a student from the College of Staten Island and the USS Vice Chairperson of International Affairs, expressed the struggles of international students to make payments on time and requested the Chancellor speak on potentially revising the financial schedule to delay these deadlines for fall 2020, especially if they are unemployed or do not have the means.

Matos Rodríguez revealed that the next steps are currently “in conversation” and that these proposed accommodations are not off the table, as they will consider student recommendations in hopes of providing “flexibility” and “assistance.”

Juvanie Piquant, the USS Vice Chairperson of Legislative Affairs, asked how COVID-19 will impact CUNY funding overall.

“The economy is going to take a hit, and we depend on city and state revenue support to support our work so I assume there is going to be some impact into the overall budget for CUNY,” Matos Rodríguez said.

“We are trying to do some modeling to try to get ready for it. I don’t think anybody has a good sense of what those numbers are going to be.”

Pavitri Dhanpau, the president of the Student Government Association at York College, drew Matos Rodríguez’s attention to CUNY efforts to help students who are homeless, food insecure or living in an abusive home, as well as those aimed at accommodating students with disabilities.

“We always recommend that the best way is for the student to contact their



Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez. / CUNY

office of Student Affairs or Student Life so they can get the support through that office to find partners or city agencies that might be able to provide temporary housing or legal advice,” Matos Rodríguez said in response. “Depending on the kind of accommodation...these cases are being handled one by one.”

The town hall ended with a concern raised by Saaif Alam, the alternate USS delegate from John Jay College, regarding food pantries. Alam requested the Chancellor expand on the steps being taken to deal with food insecurity, as well as the accessibility of campus food pantries to all CUNY students.

Matos Rodríguez noted that the hours of these food pantries may be limited, but acknowledged how important keeping them open is to CUNY students.

“We try to have a balance there. That’s why some of that extra money...is put into supporting the stocking of the pantries,” Matos Rodríguez said.

“We want to put as much money as we can in the students’ hands directly and will continue advocating for that.”

Throughout the virtual town hall, many students raised concerns that were not addressed, such as the

fate of graduation, tuition hikes, dorming evictions, a pass/fail grading policy, upper faculty pay cuts, and Governor Cuomo’s recent comments about cutting education aid. Another criticism was the town hall’s question and answer format.

“We have the chancellor right here. By directing us to a Google form that wasn’t shared before this town hall, you are not advocating for us,” said Corrinne Greene, a student advocate at Brooklyn College.

Timothy Hunter defended the format of the town hall saying “We are not trying to silence voices, just trying to make this town hall productive.”

“There is nothing unproductive by letting us ask questions to the people who are supposed to represent us,” Roland Sosa responded.

As Chancellor Matos Rodríguez departed, some students asked USS to ask him to commit to another town hall or to stay longer than the promised hour, but this did not happen.

Hunter, however, remained afterward to address any remaining concerns, as the town hall seemed to leave students with more questions than answers.

# CUNY Students Removed from Dorms

By Ryan Schwach  
*Managing Editor*

Students dorming at the College of Staten Island, Hunter College, City College, Baruch, and Queens College and have been evicted from the dorms to help satisfy the need for hospital beds during the coronavirus pandemic.

Last Monday, Mar. 23, students at CSI’s “Dolphin Cove,” “The Towers” at CCNY, Hunter’s Brookdale and 79th Street dorms, and Queens College’s “Summit” were told they had a few days to pack up and vacate their dorms in order to consolidate resources, reportedly so the locations could be used to house hospital beds if necessary. Students were advised to head home; those who couldn’t were told they could appeal to be moved to alternate housing at Queens College.

Students at the CSI dorms were notified through an e-mail late Monday night informing them they had to leave, and that leftover items would be packed up

and put into storage.

“We appreciate your cooperation, and assure you we will do all we can to help you through this difficult time,” wrote CSI Vice President for Student Affairs Jenneifer Borrero in the e-mail.

“We were given trolleys to transport our things from the room to the car,” said Josh Dyson, a sophomore at CSI and a resident of Dolphin Cove.

There were reports that the manner in which students were evacuating were not in line with social distancing practices. “There wasn’t much order,” said Dyson. “I believe guests helping to move items weren’t allowed inside the dorms past the lobby.”

RAs and uniformed officers also went around the following day to remind students they had to leave, according to Dyson.

Students who were not able to move somewhere quickly, were told to contact a member of CSI’s student affairs office. Dyson was one of the students who had somewhere to go, and

went home the following day.

At Hunter College’s dorms on 79th Street, students were informed on Tuesday, Mar. 24 via e-mail that they had to vacate by Friday, Mar. 27.

“I was really upset,” said 79th Street dormer Ally Poulin. “I was kind of alarmed how fast they expected us to move out,” she said. Eventually, Poulin was picked up by her father and she was also able to get home. As opposed to CSI, where people helping out were not allowed to come past the lobby, the 79th Street dorms did the opposite, and allowed those helping to come up.

Poulin described the situation on Thursday and Friday as “hectic,” with people packing fast and trying to move belongings with only one elevator. Social distancing guidelines were “thrown out the window.”

It was a similar situation for residents of the Queens College Summit dorms, the location for displaced students from other campuses. At 5:30 pm on

Monday, Mar. 23, Queens students were sent a survey to be filled out that night pertaining to their living arrangements.

“I responded to it, selecting the response that stated I have nowhere else to go, and the Summit is the only place I have to stay,” said Angelina Metzler, a Summit resident. “I live with my parents who are a bit older and my father has a variety of respiratory problems, which makes him a very high risk individual. I did not want to return home and potentially get him sick.”

Metzler says the situation in Queens was erratic, and no one knew quite what was going on, to the point she was using Twitter to find updates.

“I felt like nobody, even those in charge, had any clue what was happening,” she said. After packing and preparing to leave, Metzler was told she was eligible to stay, but after doing the work to pack up, she opted instead to head home to Long Island.

Although many involved understood the need for

such actions from the City and State amidst the crisis, they felt the situation could have been managed better.

“The way this was handled was incredibly poor,” said Corrinne Greene, a Brooklyn College-based student activist.

Student leaders at the University Student Senate and otherwise voiced their concerns with the nature of the moves.

“Students at the CUNY are being forced to leave their dorms into an uncertain and dangerous situation,” USS wrote in a press release. “Governor Cuomo and Attorney General Tisch James must protect the rights of students who are currently in freefall and have nowhere else to go and don’t want to risk infecting their family members if they are carriers.”

On Monday, Mar. 30, the CUNY Board of Trustees announced that students kicked out of their dorms due to the COVID-19 epidemic will be capable of receiving a refund.

## Prez Anderson Answers Questions Via Instagram Live

By Natalina Zieman  
*News Editor*

President Michelle Anderson took to Instagram Live on Tuesday, March 31 to address student concerns surrounding the coronavirus crisis.

Joined by Carrie Sadovnik, the Environmental Health and Safety Director for Brooklyn College, the women answered students’ questions about graduation, reimbursements, summer/fall classes, current remote-class situations, and free services provided for students on campus.

“We’re trying to deliver all of the services that we normally deliver in person,” explained Anderson. “Personal counselling, health clinic, and lots of other services. We’re trying

to deliver those as best we can, in a remote way.”

Sadovnik is leading the ground team on the community’s emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“[Brooklyn College] has an emergency response team. We meet every morning for an hour or more,” said Anderson. “We review all of the key areas across the campus, both academic and operational, trying to ensure campus safety for all of those members of the essential staff who have to remain on campus.”

Anderson and Sadovnik discussed what they knew about the virus, and about what both CUNY and Brooklyn College are doing to fulfill the needs of each and every student. Whether it is a

need for a device to use for their remote learning, or commencement concerns, the women answered questions and concerns thoroughly.

Open-ended questions about whether or not summer and fall classes will be held remotely were answered with uncertainty as the crisis is changing rapidly day-to-day. “We need to plan for every possibility,” Anderson answered. “The reality depends on how spiked or flat the curve is. We are trying to prepare for every eventuality so that we are ready for it.”

Another question-in-demand from the livestream was what will happen to the 2020 graduation - another uncertain answer, as the

commencement issues are being re-evaluated and coordinated by CUNY central.

It was brought to students’ attention that they should be reimbursed for activity fees, since there is no activity happening on campus anymore.

“Just last night, the CUNY Board of Trustees made a decision that 25% of student activities fees were going to be refunded back to the students this year for the Spring semester. But we don’t know how that’s going to happen,” Anderson clarified. Students will not be refunded tuition, because classes are still ongoing, according to CUNY’s rules unless the Board of Trustees change their mind on that issue.

The livestream answered

several ongoing questions that students had confusion about, but some answers are still unknown, as the CUNY system and Brooklyn College are adapting to this new environment.

President Anderson said she will continue to do livestreams, possibly weekly or every couple weeks, to give more answers and directly update students and faculty.



# USG Prez Candidate: Ethan Milich

By Ryan Schwach  
*Managing Editor*

There are three candidates in the running to take over as Undergraduate Student Government (USG) President in the fall. One of them is junior and current University Student Senate (USS) delegate Ethan Milich.

Milich, 26, was born in upstate New York and has bounced around for much of his life, spending most of his childhood in Florida. At 19, Milich enlisted in the United States Marine Corps to satisfy what he calls a “deep rooted belief in service.” Milich reached the rank of Sergeant in the Marines and was deployed overseas twice as part of the Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 232, the oldest and most decorated fighter squadron in the Marine Corps.

“It changed my life,” said Milich. “You are there to serve the person to the left or right of you, that’s the heart of that, you are there for them.”

Milich says he took that understanding into his civilian life, and that he sees those he serves in student government as those to his left or right.

After his service ended, he lived with his brother and went to school at Valencia College in Orlando, Florida, before making the trip up to New York. Here, he moved in with his sister and applied to CUNY.

“It’s the most affordable and it represents everything I believe in,” he said. During his first year in New York, Milich

bounced around various living arrangements, sub-leasing spaces and struggling with housing insecurity.

“I do definitely know the feeling of housing insecurity and trying to find where I am going to sleep at night,” he said.

While at Brooklyn College, Milich decided student government would be a positive way to continue serving those around him. In fall of 2017, he joined what was then CLAS as a member of the assembly. In the spring, he became Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, and then ran for the position with Alyssa Taylor, who would later tap Milich as her VP, as the speaker candidate. He served as speaker for another year.

“I love helping student government make students feel empowered,” he said.

Last spring, after a turbulent election season, Milich was runner up for the USS seat, and he and Taylor were runners up for the USG executive. In both cases, the initial victors were disqualified, and both the USS delegate seat and USG Vice President position fell to Milich. After just a short time as VP, Milich resigned. He described the situation surrounding last year’s election and the events that led to his taking the position as “toxic and very disturbing,” and that it made him want to move away from USG and get some space. Overall, didn’t feel motivated to continue, although he maintained his seat in USS.



*Courtesy of Ethan Milich*

Milich says his campaign platform for this upcoming election stands on four core pillars. The first being more immediate -- helping students navigate through the current Coronavirus pandemic.

Second, he wants to make student government more accessible and inclusive for the wider student body. He intends to make USG representative of the make-up of Brooklyn College, specifically promising to make the executive branch at least 50 percent women. So far, the only announced member of his

campaign is his running mate Samuel Ganthier, a member of the Black and Latino Male Initiative, as well as the VP of the Black History Month Committee.

“He has experience as a leader,” said Milich, “He’s engaged, and he is committed to taking on this leadership role and doing the best he can to serve.”

The third pillar is to foster student empowerment by organizing events and programming for students, including a large concert at the beginning of the year.

“Community inspires empowerment,” Milich said. He also wants to

push for forum-like town halls for students to discuss concerns and issues on campus.

The fourth pillar is a larger issue, shared with many CUNY activists: a free and fully funded CUNY.

“I really want to encourage students to jump in on that fight,” he said.

Milich cites a “myriad” of reasons as to why he is the best candidate for USG President, including his experience in Brooklyn’s Student Government, which is more than either of his opponents combined.

“I truly have what is best for students in my heart,” he said.



# USG Prez Candidate: Michael Davis

By Maya Schubert  
Staff Writer

Three candidates hope to win the presidency of Undergraduate Student Government (USG), including Michael Davis, a double major in Film and Political Science at Brooklyn College.

“I believe in serving the students,” said Davis. “I want my BC family to know they have actual power, and that their voice will be heard through the megaphone that is supposed to be USG.”

Davis is a junior and a Brooklyn native, having grown up mostly in East New York. At ten years old, Davis’ young life was changed by an accident that left him unable to walk. Over the next decade, Davis was mostly homeschooled. Around the same time he got his GED and began applying for colleges, he received surgery on his legs and learned to walk again.

“Once I could wake up in the morning, stand on my own two feet, I knew I could do anything I put my mind to, as long as I had the right help and support along the way,” he said.

Davis was accepted into Brooklyn College’s Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) Program. A passionate writer, Davis took on a film major with a concentration in screenwriting. He chose political science as his second major.

“My experience thus far at Brooklyn College has been life-changing,” he said.

Davis dove immediately into involvement at



Michael Davis./ Facebook

Brooklyn College. Through SEEK, he interned for Puppetry in Practice, a nonprofit organization on BC’s campus providing resources to teachers bringing arts into their classrooms. In his sophomore year, he became a Peer Mentor to freshmen in the SEEK program, and he is currently the Secretary of BC’s African Student Union. He was a member of USG’s Senate last year, but he resigned this semester to intern at the Mayor’s Office of Appointments, where he creates resume profiles for job-seekers and helps write the office’s newsletter, among other duties.

Davis was proud to be a part of USG.

“Yet, I wasn’t satisfied with its lack of presence on campus, lack of outreach, and communication with the student body,” he said.

Davis felt there was a

lack of transparency in the student government, as well as a passive display of title. Both Davis’ opponents for candidacy asked him to be their running mates this semester, but he declined.

“I opted to run myself because this campaign needed to be and is about representation and the call to accountability,” he said. “There’s more to student government than social media logos and looking the part. There’s service.”

Davis says BC’s rich history is defined by diversity and activism, as embodied by alumni like Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to the U.S. Congress, who helped found SEEK. He believes his campaign reflects the diversity of BC’s community. His emphasis on representation is why he chose Vanessa Collazos, a member of

the Political Science club and treasurer of the Queer Student Activist Alliance, as his running mate.

“Vanessa and I are the only team with gender equity, and we’re in this to serve,” Davis said. “Not because we’re seeking a title or trying to make up for previous failures.”

Under his and Collazos’ leadership, Davis promises more town halls to strengthen communication between the student government and students. He wants USG’s presence on campus to be more visible through additional events. He hopes to give students returns on student activity fees, and he says he is committed to democratizing USG’s senator replacement and appointment process. He also wants to create more school merchandise.

Davis is also calling for the organization of a homecoming event

for the class of 2020, who will not have a commencement ceremony because of CUNY’s closure.

“We must have compassion for each other in this crisis, fight for each other and not against, and support each other as best we can,” Davis said. “But that shouldn’t stop when this is over. We students have more power than we realize.”

Though the USG elections have been delayed until after spring break because of the closure, Davis remains hopeful in his campaign’s momentum and message.

“Yes, we are political science students, but, above leadership that people tout in campaigns, we are students,” Davis said. “We tout equality. Sameness. We are you. And we want the best for you and us — together.”



# USG Prez Candidate: Dapo Ibrahim

By Ian Ezinga  
Staff Writer

The semester being put on hold hasn't ended the electoral race for Undergraduate Student Government president. Of the three students making their case for USG president this year, Dapo Ibrahim plans on running a platform that puts safety of students first, with transparency and increased awareness trailing right behind.

Ibrahim was born in Nigeria and moved to the United States in 2014. He currently lives in the Bronx and works full-time as a store manager at Rite Aid. In addition to his organization and managerial skills, in light of the Coronavirus outbreak, Ibrahim has also been trained in the best practices for mitigating many of the common mistakes that people make dealing with widespread illness, having received pharmaceutical training in the field.

"Student safety has always been something that I have pushed for," said Ibrahim while highlighting the contours of his platform. He has reflected this concern while being one of the student government members who actively pushed to keep the library open for twenty-four hours during finals. He said that he recognized both the need to keep the facilities open late but also the importance of having safety officials around and available for students leaving the campus later than usual.

In regards to the Coronavirus in



*Courtesy of Dapo Ibrahim*

particular, Ibrahim was clear about the importance of understanding its impact on the student body. Part of the solution, he suggested, could come in the form of using surplus USG funds in order to create emergency funds, grants, and scholarships to students.

This plan harkens back to one of Ibrahim's core objectives: to help students understand that they are a part of USG even if they aren't an elected member and that their voice matters. The way Ibrahim sees it, the entire USG fund comes from the student activities fee which is paid for by the students enrolling each semester. He wants to make sure that this large pool of money is spent in a way that benefits the student body at large and gets people active in student government.

"Share your voice," is one of the campaign team's slogans which packages this core objective. This platform objective raises the

needs and concerns of the student body at large and aims to make more students aware of their power to affect change in their college.

"When we say share your voice, we mean that every student can come under one, unified voice and put forward all of our demands, issues, and concerns," Ibrahim said. He envisions an administration that thinks just as much about the years to come as it does about the present.

"There is no denying the fact that if we get into office, we only have one year," Ibrahim said. "But with that one year, if anything, we can get so much done if we all come together. And not just get stuff done for our administrative year, we can set a very good foundation for the incoming administration as well and start building a stronger USG."

So while there are many issues that demand immediate concern, part of his objective, if he wins the race, will be

to streamline things to best help students. Part of his vision is to work with the administration to better format online and in-person student resources. As a transfer student, he had first-hand experience navigating the maze of links, offices, different sites, and phone numbers in order to make sure that his status as a student was secure. The plan is to streamline these different resources under one umbrella resource to best help students.

In acknowledging that he would only have one year to enact as much change as he can, his running mate is currently finishing his second semester at Brooklyn College. Chika Otisi is a Freshman Urban Sustainability major who Ibrahim first saw on campus speaking with Financial Aid on behalf of a student who wasn't able to. This younger running mate emphasizes the need for continuity and having an administration focused, in part, on the

future.

Outside of USG, Ibrahim has stayed productive. In addition to his full time career as a manager, he also is an avid reader and writer. He has published a book of poetry entitled *Riveting Oaks*, which is available on Amazon. Apart from his writing, Ibrahim is also the CEO of Ignite Africa, a non-profit which provides support for internally displaced persons in developing countries.

Throughout all of his extracurricular work, the importance of leadership remains throughout. Ibrahim hopes to bring his leadership qualities to USG and enact policies that are designed to "restore a voice to the student body."

"Whatever we do, students come first," reiterated Ibrahim. This phrase almost becomes a mantra that echoes throughout his platform and his plans as he runs for USG president.



# Conservatory Launches Online Recitals With “Chiaroscuro”

By John Schilling  
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, March 24, the Conservatory of Music at Brooklyn College launched their new “Student Recitals Series,” featuring both undergraduate and graduate students of various musical backgrounds. Due to COVID-19, the recitals will either be live-streamed or pre-recorded.

The series began this past weekend with Alan Briones, a baritone, performing his Master’s Recital via live stream from St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Ardsley, New York.

The title of the recital, “Chiaroscuro,” was chosen by Briones for its translation to “clear-dark” or as he puts it: “Clarity in darkness.” Aside from his singing style, Briones chose this title as a reflection of his experiences at Brooklyn College.

After years of singing Tenor, Briones decided he was actually a Baritone with help from Maestro Jack LiVigni, his professor at Brooklyn College.

“That decision felt like finding home, and led to an identity change that rippled beyond the vocal into the artistic and even personal spheres,” Briones said.

“In participating in the musical community here at Brooklyn College, the first without knowledge of my history to accept me in my new identity, I was able to find the light in the darkness.”

Briones began his recital by performing the prologue from Pagliacci by Ruggero Leoncavallo. With a late-Romantic Italian operatic style, Briones started his recital



Alan Briones performing an opera./ *The Conservatory of Music at Brooklyn College*

off strong.

He explained his choice of Pagliacci saying “It serves both as an opening and a symbolic arrival for me in a repertory I have long been aspiring towards.”

Next, Briones sang some selections from Gustav Mahler’s “Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen.” Translated to “Songs of a Wayfarer,” each of the four songs was inspired by Mahler’s “unrequited love” for Johanna Richter, a soprano whom he met in Kassel, Germany.

With seamless transitions from song to song, Briones took on the perspectives of both the narrator and the “wanderer” in telling the story of a rejected lover and his journey to overcome the pain.

According to Briones, this song cycle is “one of the standards of the baritone repertoire,” and this is why he selected it for his recital.

Briones concluded the first part of his recital by singing the music of Ben Moore. For Briones, these selections were special to him as he got to perform

in a recital dedicated to Moore’s music in November 2019.

Inspired by English language poets, the first two Moore selections touched on different emotions with diverse styles.

“Requiem” represents a somber poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, which was a favorite of Moore’s grandfather and read at his funeral. In a similar tone, “When You Are Old” reflects the idea of a William Butler Yeats poem, in which a young man begs the object of his affection to stay with him as she will regret not choosing him when she is older.

In the last two songs however, Moore wrote both the music and lyrics. This includes the nostalgic “Where Has Summer Gone?” and the comedic “I’m Glad I’m Not a Tenor.”

For Briones, this particular song significantly reflects his own experiences, and he chose it to give the audience some insight into what his musical journey has been like in a

humorous way.

After a short intermission, Briones returned with Maurice Ravel’s “Don Quichotte à Dulcinée,” a song cycle largely based on the story of Don Quixote.

Through this selection, Briones was able to express the versatility of his singing in which he performed a romantic song, an epic song, and a drinking song. He sang each of these with swift movements and intense facial expressions that made his passion evident.

This selection was also special for Briones as it was the music in which he met Kessa Mefford, the pianist of the recital, and they began their collaboration.

Lastly, Briones concluded his recital with music from Argentina, his family’s country of origin. With works by Carlos Guastavino, Ariel Ramirez, and Carlos Gardel, these selections allowed Briones to not only highlight significant Argentinean composers, but focus on their emotional impact with topics ranging from

unrequited love to suicide.

After performing Gustavino’s “4 Canciones Coloniales”, Briones was joined by his brother, Julian, to play guitar for the last couple of pieces.

This included Gardel’s “Volver,” which Briones claimed to have performed more than any other song in his life, and “El día que me quieras,” which Briones said “is a song that every Argentinean knows.”

At the end of the recital, Briones expressed his appreciation for those who tuned in to watch. For the audience, the appreciation was mutual.

“Bravo Alan! Beautiful singing and wonderful that you decided to go ahead with your recital,” said Cynthia Shaw. “I’m so happy for you and know you will have a great future even if you’re not a tenor!”

The funniest comment, however, came from an unknown user who said “I was clapping! Here in my kitchen!” A reminder that while Brooklyn College has moved online, the school spirit remains.



# Art Department Juggles Online Transition

By Jack Coleman  
*Arts Editor*

How is the Art Department at Brooklyn College handling the new distance-learning curriculum? According to the department's Deputy Chair, Professor Jennifer Ball: like artists would.

"Art is about solving problems," said Ball. "We have professors who are trying to mail students supplies, others are using platforms like Instagram and Wetransfer for critiques. I'm really seeing the ingenuity of my colleagues through this."

While there's an air of leniency towards expectations for students, the department's faculty is working hard to finish out the semester in the most learning-conducive and effective way possible.

This semester, Ball is teaching two independent studies, as well as an undergraduate course with twenty-nine students. For the art historian, who's also an advisor and overseer for the art department's adjunct professors, the move to online courses has been challenging, but not impossible. After using the initial

instructional recess to figure out the best plan of online-action, she settled on using Zoom for lectures and to account for the lost in-person class time.

Professor Ball also noted that programs such as the college's Carroll and Milton Petrie Student Emergency Grant Fund, which offers up to \$1,500 for eligible students who are in immediate, non-recurring emergencies, should not be overlooked.

After Wednesday, Mar. 11, when students and staff were informed that classes would resume entirely online for the remainder of the semester, faculty got to work on how to efficiently carry out their teaching duties. The distance-learning method, which has been adopted by schools from the elementary to the university level all over the country, poses an especially challenging problem for the art department.

Another art history professor and lecturer, Malka Simon, stresses the importance of being as flexible as possible with students' work and attendance.

"It's difficult for me, with five people in the house all streaming and whatnot, we had to

upgrade our internet. But there are students who don't even have Wi-Fi," said Simon. "It's frustrating and confusing all around."

The architecture historian has been using Zoom once a week for her twice-a-week classes, in order to check in with students and to more thoroughly go over the lectures, which are given to students as PowerPoints embedded with audio. While Zoom seems to be the go-to solution to the complete loss of a physical classroom, it's not always ideal when faculty or students live with many people, including small children.

"While some students are thankful for our class meetings because they're so bored and stuck at home, there are others who really are struggling right now. How demanding am I supposed to be at this moment?" asked Simon.

For both Ball and Simon, the most important thing is to be understanding with their students' time and potential lack of resources, while still carrying out a fruitful, educational semester.

This is no easy feat, especially for fine arts professors, whose

classes often require their students to create physical objects.

For adjunct Tahir Karmali, who teaches a Basic 3-D Design course, the situation seemed to make itself clear before the March 11th announcement.

"I had already prepared my class for this, the eventuality of not having anything physical, or actual objects," said Karmali. "What I wasn't prepared for was doing classes over Zoom, but I just went ahead and downloaded it."

Karmali's method is to split the class into groups, based on their answers to a Google Form sheet which he distributed during the first recess after the move to online-learning was made. These groups were geared towards the students' final project, which Karmali reformulated into three options: use online museum collections; come up with a design proposal which encompasses a budget and production timeline; or create art objects and/or explore a material process which is closer to the original (pre-corona) project.

Karmali is encouraging his students to use household objects in

their work, an option he admits isn't necessarily on the table for courses which require more specialized materials.

"It's really hard for people who don't have the freedom to restructure in the way that I do. If you're teaching etching, what the hell are you gonna do?" said Karmali. "My students will be fine, they have my phone number if they need to directly contact me. I'm trying my best to make time for my students, some of them are going through things at home which they simply cannot control."

All campus events have been cancelled, including the Art Department's Open Studios, previously scheduled to take place on April 3rd, as well as the April 23rd opening reception of Respond BC, and many other arts-related events.



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## @THEBCVANGUARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA



# COVID-19 and the Fibonacci Sequence

By Michael Castaneda  
*Columnist*

One of my favorite movies is *Pi*, written and directed by Darren Aronofsky. I love so many things about this film -- from its film student film student thesis on steroids feel, to its late 1990s techno soundtrack -- but its biggest effect on me was to seed my love of mathematics.

The protagonist, Max Cohen, is a mathematician, and his story arch is punctuated by a series of math troupes and stories brilliantly inserted in a dystopian thriller.

Max often restates his assumptions by giving the time of day then saying:

1. Mathematics is the language of nature.
2. Everything around us can be understood by numbers.
3. If you graph the numbers of a system patterns emerge.

Twice a day, the NYC Health Department provides data on COVID-19. It's interesting. We've learned that the largest age group that has the virus is between the ages of 18 to 44. (43% of all cases.) The virus seems to like men more than women -- 56% of cases are in males. In terms of NYC boroughs, Queens has the most cases at 32%.

I also noticed the overall number of confirmed cases in NYC over the last few weeks:

3/18 : 2k  
3/19 : 5k  
3/21 : 8k  
3/23 : 13k

3/25 : >21k  
3/29: >34K

The numbers aren't a perfect representation, but these are Fibonacci numbers. The Fibonacci sequence is where you take the last two numbers in a sequence and add them to produce the next element in the sequence. The start of the Fibonacci numbers are ; 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144...

Looking at the Fibonacci numbers as a way to understand the growth of the virus in NYC might be a crude yet effective model. First, we see the Fibonacci numbers coming up in the data one after another, then we see the following Fibonacci numbers appearing with a day or two between. That might point to social distancing working in slowing the rate of infection. At the same time, numbers are still going up at predictable levels. It is entirely possible we will see the 55K of New Yorkers having Covid-19 by the end of the week.

As any mathematician will tell you, these numbers are everywhere in nature. For example, the amount of seeds in a fruit -- a banana has 3 sections and an apple, 5 seeds, and flower petals come in "3, 5, 8" variations. The number of sunflower seeds that can be packed into one sunflower works the same way. This often happens to optimize the amount of sunlight exposure or maximize the amount of seeds that can be held. You can check this if you are bored in line at Whole

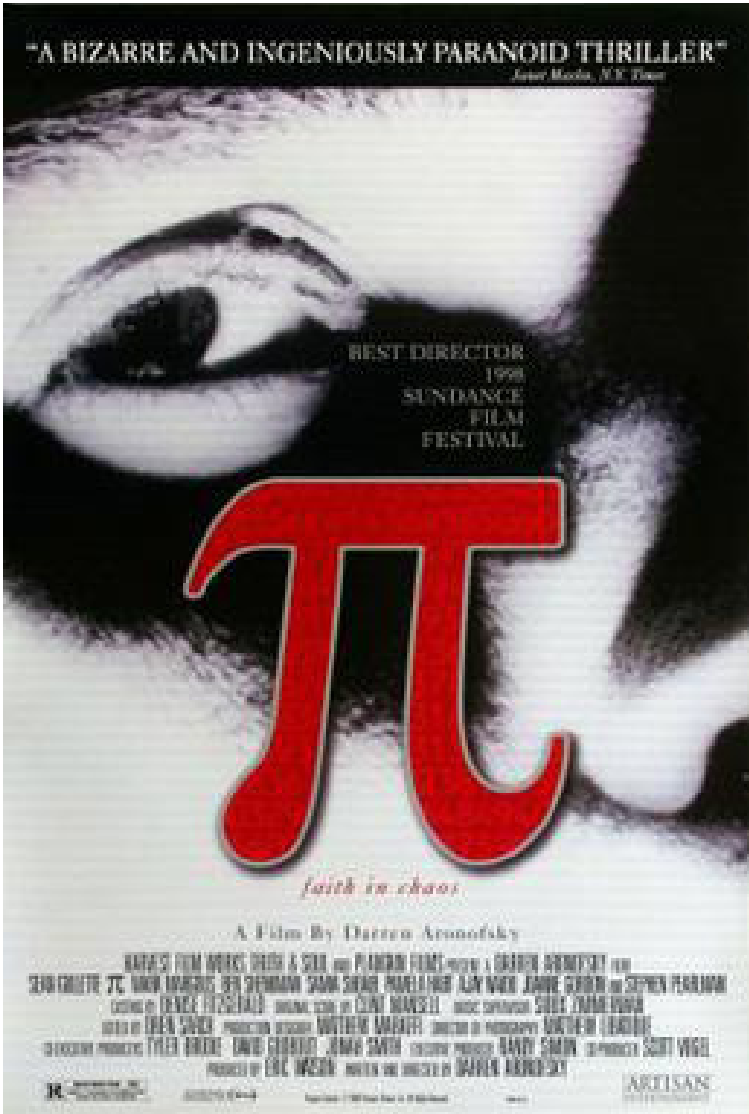
Foods.

If you start to divide the larger Fibonacci number with the smaller number, you will start to get a number that approaches Phi, or 1.61803, which is also known as the Golden Ratio.

Phi is used to describe growth in nature. If you started to draw boxes with the Fibonacci numbers on graph paper, you would create the Golden Rectangle. Your flatscreen TV or IMAX screen has this ratio. If you draw a curve around all these boxes that you drew on your graph paper, you get a spiral. That spiral is seen across nature from the shapes on pineapples and snail shells, to the spiral of galaxies in the universe. Aronofsky did a good job of showing the spiral in cream being added to coffee and smoke being blown from a cigarette in his movie, *Pi*.

If you represented the number COVID-19 infections per country in boxes, you will start to see a similar looking rectangle with a similar spiral. An obvious criticism would be that the numbers don't fit exactly, or that the numbers that resemble the Fibonacci sequences aren't contiguous.

My response would be that the data is imperfect. There are bottlenecks occurring as far as how many tests are available, how many people can be safely tested, and how fast the labs can process tests. According to Governor Cuomo, no place in the world is testing more people per capita than



Pi movie poster./ [Wikimedia Commons](#)

New York State.

Finally, let's not forget that not everyone is being tested -- only those with symptoms severe enough to warrant a test are being tested. (Or if you are rich enough to pay for a private test, like some NBA teams.)

Looking at the COVID-19 numbers in terms of Fibonacci sequence might seem like a collegiate thing to do. Hell, you might have even first heard about Fibonacci in high school. However, these numbers keep coming up in unexpected places.

Music is another Fibonacci experience. You can see Phi or 1.61803 in classical music from Mozart to Debussy. There exists what is known as a Phi moment in music. This happens when the notes start to take the shape of the Fibonacci numbers.

You get to this moment by dividing the length of a piece of music by 0.618. Two famous examples are Drake's "In My Feelings" when he starts singing about Bernadette, or Queen and Bowie's "Under Pressure" at 152 seconds into the song.

I debated whether to write another piece about COVID-19. Despite the fact that my last two pieces were on the subject, lots of the world is under some sort of self-isolation, and they are all producing loads of content. However the Brooklyn College newspaper should document the student experience during this time. It reminds of the Sylvia Path poem, "Tulips": "...like an eye between the two lids that will not shut. Stupid pupil, it has to take everything in..."



# On the Record: Livestreaming from Nursing Homes

By Allison Rapp  
*Opinions Editor*

There's a mural on the side of a well-known music venue in Buffalo that reads "Without music, life would be a mistake." It's a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche, and it dutifully reminds everyone walking from east to west down Allen Street of how dull and fruitless our lives might be without a little music in it.

Historically, music has always played a large role in attempting to heal the world, however free-spirited or optimistic it may have seemed -- the late 80s were full of it: "We Are The World," Live Aid -- music, and the stars it involved, was a smashing success in terms of grabbing the world's attention and requesting help. Things look a little different now.

It doesn't include everyone, and maybe I just don't know what's going on behind the scenes, but I don't see as many high-profile artists lending their hands to the cause. Perhaps they're too

far disconnected from what reality looks like for most of us, or the wealth deludes them into thinking all is fine so long as they never look beneath the surface. Maybe some of them are just plain selfish. What I usually see is local people -- ordinary if you will -- dedicating their time, energy, and money into the community around them.

Take, for example, Buffalo-based musician Tom Bender. For the last several years, he's been packing up his guitars and equipment and heading to nursing homes around the Western New York area, where he plays live concerts for the residents.

"It's like any other job to me at times and I don't want to leave home to go to work either," Bender said of his work, "and then by the time I'm done with that show my attitude's totally changed [...]. The appreciation is incredible."

It's making a visible difference in the lives of seniors. At one

performance, Bender recalls, a resident stood standing, clapping and singing along to the music. His daughter approached Bender after the show to tell him that her father hadn't spoken, or hardly moved, in almost three months -- it was the music that broke the spell and brought him to his feet.

Now that COVID-19 has barred visitors from entering nursing home facilities, Bender has simply changed tactics, and has begun setting up livestream shows to be shown to residents on projectors or tablets.

"I have a 94-year-old mother and I haven't seen her during this whole thing," Bender said, "so I understand what's going on, and it hits close to home."

For many of us, it's the uncertainty of the near future that's driving us crazy. We know that this won't last forever -- it has to break at some point -- but it's impossible for experts to give us any set date for when this long nightmare will be finished. The nature of viruses is that



Tom Bender performing at a nursing home./ Facebook

they are, if nothing else, unpredictable, and they certainly don't adhere to any calendar schedules. The bottom line is: there will be an end to all this, we just don't know when.

And for anyone who has lost work or perhaps their entire job, this uncertainty can mean the difference between fed and hungry children, or can determine whether the rent gets paid on time. Musicians, often notorious for going with the flow, are now caught smack in the middle of a situation that has left them with no income and no solid support system.

Yet, ever the hopeful fool, I'm still convinced that music is going to carry a whole lot of people through this mess, and it appears I'm not entirely alone. My county executive, Mark Poloncarz, has taken to recording YouTube videos of his guitar playing in between crisis managing the city of Buffalo and

informing the public. Last week, he uploaded a brilliant cover of "Iris," a hit, late 90s track from Buffalo's own Goo Goo Dolls. I didn't even know he played an instrument, and here he is, serenading his fellow residents and attempting to bring just a little happiness into people's lives despite grim surroundings. It's working.

For Tom Bender, bringing that happiness to seniors is worth every moment of practice and planning.

"The response from them [the residents] is incredible because they appreciate so much what you're doing for them," Bender said. "I've performed in front of 15,000 people before and it doesn't even compare to having one person say, with tears in their eyes, what it meant to them for you to come there and sing for them."

Perhaps, as David Bowie said, *we can be heroes just for one day.*



Bender serenading an elderly couple./ Facebook



Bull&pit!

by Ryan Gleason

April Fools Pranks For Pros

I am known around the Brooklyn College Campus and amongst my friends and family as a Pranking Prince. I pull pranks and trick just about anyone. Here are some of my MOST POPULAR and MOST HILARIOUS pranks!

**LIT Prank:**  
We all have ear wax. Earwax is yellow, gritty, and gooey. It gets all over our earbuds and is just itchy and annoying. But what can we really do with all of it? PRANKS! Every year, starting April 2nd, I start saving all my earwax and form it into small decorative

candles. I wrap them up and place them all over my 89-year-old grandmother's apartment. Trust me, it is HILARIOUS!

**Grand Theft Awesome:**  
Larger pranks are very hard to manage. Filling a room full of balloons, gift wrapping offices, and putting 200 cups of water on the floor in someone's bedroom are just a few examples. So many things could go wrong, and it is time consuming and sometimes expensive. I have found a way to mess with someone on a big scale with minimum

effort and minimum time put into it. When someone is asleep, go to their car and break the front window (driver's side) and get in. Under the dashboard are wires, snip some and touch them, wait for a spark and DRIVE AWAY. The look on their face when they realize what has happened will be priceless.

**Who Me?**  
Is your girlfriend or boyfriend or partner always nagging you to do stuff and using your relationship as a reason for you to do it? Like, "Take out the

trash, this relationship is a team sport we each need to pull our own weight" or something like that? Well here is a great prank to get those annoying lovers of yours off your back. On April 1st, get into a car accident. When you wake up, make sure to fake amnesia. They will be at your side and with just a "Who are you?" and a "I'm sorry, I don't remember having a (Insert Relationship Role)" you are on your way to the leaderboards of Prank Royalty.

**Did You Fart?**  
This one is easy. Poop

your pants and go to a friends house. The second you see them make a stink face, mirror their disgust and go "Ugh! Did you fart?" and plug your nose. Social norms dictate they will get embarrassed INSTANTLY. They will apologize and try to change the topic. You can do it multiple times in one day. Try it at a restaurant and pull it on the waiter. Imagine all the free drinks and desserts you will get because your table smells bad and the staff can't help. It is a game changer and a stinky surprise.

Vinny The Goat: April Fools Addition

by Mo Muhsin and Gabrielle Toro Vivoni

