

MONTCLAIR

Spring/Summer 2022



**THIS
CLASS
IS A ZOO!**

Students perform research and service at the Turtle Back Zoo

THE BIG PICTURE



verizon



MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

FOOTBALL BOWL III CHAMPIONS

PROGRESS
GROWING



CLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY

Montclair's Class of 2022 came together in one giant Commencement ceremony to celebrate their achievements – and perseverance through unprecedented times – at MetLife Stadium, a large enough outdoor space for unlimited numbers of guests to safely attend. President Jonathan Koppell told attendees that it's easy to give in to fear and doubt in the face of the world's problems, but that the graduates let nothing deter them from their goals. He encouraged them to use their energy and optimism for change. “Each of you ... were fundamentally optimistic about the future, and that got you to this day,” he told the Class, which comprises more than 5,300 graduates. “Do not accept that the world cannot be a better place. It can, and I believe you are the key to making it so.”

See more.



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ON THE COVER:

(From left) Professor Cortni Borgerson talks with student researchers Kristina Ollo and Jaileen Murillo about toucan toucans at the Turtle Back Zoo. See story, page 24.



THIS CLASS IS A ZOO!

Course at Turtle Back Zoo lets students conduct service and conservation research

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



Greetings from Montclair,

What an amazing year! We just celebrated Commencement and I'm still filled with the joyful feelings that graduation brings, especially this year, because we could mark the occasion in one large outdoor ceremony – at MetLife Stadium, no less. After the last couple of years, I felt it important that we all be together. So for the first time in several years, we combined our graduate and undergraduate ceremonies and allowed an unlimited number of family and friends to enjoy the day with us. It was inspiring!

Commencement reminds those of us who devote our lives to higher education why we are here. By providing our students a strong educational foundation – including learning experiences grounded in public service – we prepare them to create the world they want to live in.

As you'll see in these pages, our students get to stretch themselves in innumerable ways while also getting the chance to help others – from changing young lives in Paterson (page 20), to returning to their underserved high schools as teachers (page 16), to learning about primates and helping the Essex County Turtle Back Zoo conduct research to help with their animal conservation efforts (page 24). As New Jersey's premier public service university, making a difference is, quite simply, what we're all about.

This spring I announced another way we are making a difference – through partnership with Bloomfield College, whose mission is closely aligned to ours. As New Jersey's only four-year Predominantly Black Institution, as well as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and Minority Serving Institution, Bloomfield College provides students from these underrepresented communities with the education they need for social and economic mobility. Our relationship with Bloomfield College is meant to ensure that the college can continue to carry out that vital mission for the long term. Read more about our new relationship on page 11.

As I complete my first academic year as president of Montclair State University, my admiration for the passion and innovation of our alumni, students, faculty, staff and community partners only continues to grow. With your support, we will continue to make an impact on our local communities, as well as at the state and national levels.

My investiture, the ceremony in which I will officially be installed as president, takes place September 15, 2022. For specifics and more information as it becomes available, I invite you to visit montclair.edu/investiture.

Carpe Diem!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Koppell". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jonathan Koppell

MONTCLAIR

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Enjoy the magazine? Have a story idea for us? We want to hear from you.

Email us at editor@montclair.edu. (We reserve the right to edit letters.)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I loved reading your magazine yesterday. I was most impressed with the sign language article and the Action Hero article. Wonderful women! Wonderfully written stories!

–Susan Stein Bull

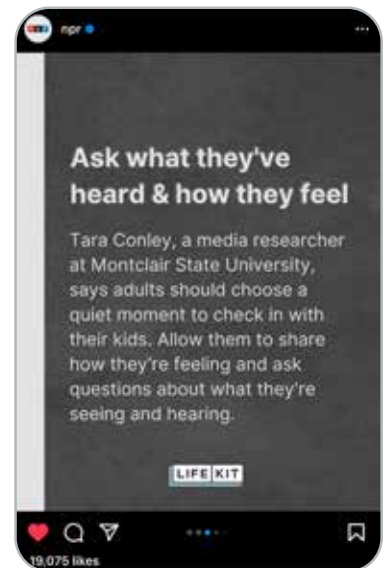


Dear Editor,
I just read the new issue of *Montclair*, and could not feel more proud of my alma mater. Kudos to all of you for an excellent issue that actually brought me to tears (in a good way). I'm grateful to see that Jonathan Koppell is moving MSU forward with a strong emphasis on service – so good for students, staff, faculty and the community.

With best wishes,
Lise Greene '74, '81 MA, retired from Montclair after 25 years



NBC invited Montclair's School of Nursing to hold its nursing graduates pinning ceremony on *The Today Show* on May 11, then tweeted video of the ceremony that was on live TV.



National Public Radio interviewed Professor Tara Conley in 2020 about talking to children about tough topics in the news. They re-aired that story when Russia invaded Ukraine and posted it on Instagram for its 5.5 million followers.



NEXTGEN SERVICE CORPS

Montclair is partnering with the Volcker Alliance, joining the Next Generation Service Corps (NextGen Service), a national network of 11 higher education institutions committed to preparing undergraduate students for public service.

The Volcker Alliance is providing a \$100,000 grant for a NextGen Service Coordinator in the Center for Community Engagement who will oversee the

development, establishment and implementation of academic curriculum, community-based opportunities, services, advocacy and research for the program.

When he was dean of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions at Arizona State University, Montclair President Jonathan Koppell created the Public Service Academy – a first-of-its-kind initiative in higher education that served as the model for NextGen Service. In partnership with the Volcker Alliance, he was instrumental in creating the national network of schools committed to emulating NextGen Service and the Public Service Academy on their campuses.

“We are thrilled to join the Next Generation Service Corps,” says Koppell. “Montclair has a rich history of serving the public good, and this partnership will allow us to continue building on the work already being done throughout the institution.” ■



Study Shows Pandemic's Impact on Students

A new study led by Montclair State University faculty members and doctoral students found that college students at the epicenter of the pandemic were severely affected by academic, financial and COVID-related stressors.

The study, titled “The Psychological, Academic, and Economic Impact of COVID-19 on College Students in the Epicenter of the Pandemic,” is the largest study of its kind and surveyed more than 4,700 students from both public and private institutions in New York and New Jersey during the spring 2020 semester.

The findings show that the pandemic affected the mental health of the entire sample, and self-reports showed

students of color in particular were disproportionately affected by financial stressors. Faculty member Jazmin A. Reyes-Portillo says that feelings of depression, anxiety and hopelessness, sleep problems and increased social isolation are factors that can heighten students’ risk of experiencing suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

“Given how extraordinary these events are, it’s important to document how it’s affected college students, who are particularly vulnerable,” says Reyes-Portillo. “But young adulthood is a high-risk period for the onset of mental health problems, even without a major stressor like the pandemic. It’s a period of immense growth and personal change. Add in COVID, and it’s a one-in-100-year event that we felt was important to highlight.” ■



3 QUESTIONS FOR PROVOST JUNIUS GONZALES

Soon after our new provost, Junius Gonzales, MD, MBA, started his job as the second highest ranking officer at the University in March, we sat down with him to get to know him better. Here are excerpts from that conversation:

1. You are a first-generation college graduate. What was your journey like?

My parents immigrated to the U.S. from Peru separately and met in Hartford. They were not educated. I grew up in Hartford, in a working-class area, and the kids in my neighborhood didn't really have career aspirations. Over half of high school grads didn't go on to higher education, and many, like me, were really poor.

I had four high school friends, and we made an agreement with each other that we were going to make something of ourselves. We were fortunate that we had some teachers and mentors who helped us. One couple from our church even drove us all around New England to visit campuses.

We decided to apply to different schools, to increase our chances, and we were all admitted to prestigious institutions like Dartmouth, Brown and Williams. We were probably the first applicants they'd seen from our poor, urban high school. I am glad for that because it showed the other kids who came after us that they could do it, too.

It was remarkable, really, because none of us had any parents who went to college. It's made me realize how equality of opportunity and access can make a huge difference for people and communities, and it's why a lot of my research is in health disparities. It's also why I got drawn into public higher education, and why I'm so drawn to Montclair.

In my career, I've made big leaps into the unknown: moving from traditional academic medicine at Georgetown into NIH and working on research with people from across the country, technically as a junior person. I was young, but the head of the Institute had been my teacher and mentor and thought I could do it. Then I made a leap to consulting, then a leap to become a dean and create a new

college, and so on. I try to transmit to students that you can take big leaps and you'll be okay. Sometimes they need a nudge. I tell them you can always return.

2. What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?

Finishing medical school and completing my internship in internal medicine and my residency in psychiatry at top-notch hospitals. I entered medical school prepared, but my classmates were really exceptionally well prepared. It was intense, and I was ready to quit after my first semester. A good friend of mine (shout out to Ellen!) said that if I finished that first semester, she would take me to see a Broadway show. The show was the original *Dreamgirls* – and if you know the story, it's about overcoming adversity. Nearly at the same time, a new friend gave me Becker's *The Denial of Death* to read – that was important for me, in part because I was interested in psychiatry, and it opened my eyes to new thinking. Those – and others' belief in me – helped to inspire me. I took a little time off, as did one third of my medical school class, and spent a year as an inaugural Dana Foundation Scholar, where I got to meet peers from other schools across the country, then I went back and completed my education.

3. What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

Walking in nature with my dog Beulah, a mix of one quarter springer spaniel and three quarters Boykin, the state dog of South Carolina. She's fierce in the field as a "bird dog," curious and protective outside the house, and gentle and loving inside. I'm also looking forward to exploring New Jersey's mountains and forests, and enjoying the Shore.

I like spending time with friends, eating and experiencing live theater. I am also a huge music fan, especially jazz vocalists. Two of my favorites are Jackie Ryan and Tessa Souter. Tessa's album *Picture in Black and White* is one that I listen to over and over. She identified as white then found out in her late 20s that her father is Black, and she takes you through her personal journey. It's not easily accessible, but it is terrific, just beautifully done. ■

–Joseph Brennan



CLEANING OUR WATER

The work to improve the systems keeping our water safe is ever-evolving and increasingly challenging, but one that Earth and Environmental Studies Professor Yang Deng is tackling head on. Deng was awarded a \$750,000 grant to research and develop innovative wastewater reuse technologies for agricultural irrigation.

The goal is to develop design principles for a novel iron-based water reuse process to

transform municipal wastewater into quality irrigation water, supporting the resilience and sustainability of U.S. agriculture, while mitigating climate change and adapting to its impacts, Deng says.

“The technology will enable local water recycling in a more cost- and energy-efficient manner and thus reduce the reliance on long-distance water and wastewater transport, which is the current dominant water management scheme,” Deng says.

During his time at Montclair State University, Deng has secured more than \$2.5 million in research funding and authored or co-authored 125 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. Committed to mentoring students and professionals at all levels, Deng has also provided guidance to high school interns from around New Jersey and early-career scientists around the world. ■

Dr. K’s Vinyl Fantasy Funhouse

Listeners of the award-winning WMSC 90.3 FM college radio station at Montclair are treated to surprise visits from President Jonathan Koppell when he stops by to spin his collection of vinyl 45s on what he calls, “Dr. K’s Vinyl Fantasy Funhouse.”

Always dressed in a funkadelic outfit of multi-colored paisley with bell-bottom pants and a gray fedora along with some funky shades (and a face mask), the president channels his inner “Doctor of Funkology” and spins some ‘70s funk and ‘80s college rock along with some one-hit wonders and even The Boss. For one of his shows, his teenage daughter Elsa was in the studio helping him spin the records with recent Montclair graduate Kenny Horn ‘21.

According to “Dr. K,” he saved the 45s from being thrown away and destroyed and brought them to WMSC where they would be enjoyed and protected. “I was in Arizona ... hunting for vinyl and came across the mother lode on its way to a dumpster ... I rescued it from certain doom.” ■



UNIVERSITY ISSUED \$13M IN EMERGENCY RELIEF FUNDS

The University disbursed more than \$13 million in aid to students throughout the month of February from its share of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund III.

Funds awarded under this program include an allocation of over \$2 million of funds originally designated for institutional needs. These payments brought the total pandemic relief aid provided to students since spring 2020 to more than \$60 million. Funds were awarded to the students with the greatest individual need after review of current available financial aid and payment information.

In addition, the University has also expended a significant portion of federal relief aid to protect the campus community against COVID-19 and support student success, including purchasing protective equipment and advanced air filters, upgrading technology, hiring additional tutors and success coaches, expanding access to mental health services, and providing ongoing support for the University Health Center in its pandemic response efforts.

“Many of our students continue to experience financial hardship as a result of the pandemic, so we wanted to create an opportunity for any student to have access to relief funds should they be in need,” says Vice President for Enrollment Management Wendy Lin-Cook. ■

Meeting a Need

The University has launched a Master of Public Health (MPH) in Health Systems Administration and Policy, and Master of Business Administration (MBA) dual graduate degree program for the fall 2022 semester, which will prepare graduates with unique qualifications to meet current health-care system and public health challenges.

In joining together the two successful master's programs, Montclair will provide a high-level experience for students interested in both public health and health-care organization management. Graduates of the program will be positioned to fill the increasing number of roles in the health-care management industry in the tristate area and beyond.

"In this climate of heightened need for and awareness of excellent public health management, the 'marriage' of our business and public health curricula will provide our graduates and their communities with outstanding resources to meet present and future challenges," says Elizabeth Rosini,

associate dean of the Feliciano School of Business.

The MPH curriculum is shaped around the core public health principles of health equity and social justice as the means to improve the health-care system and overall population health. The MBA curriculum instills core business competencies with a real-world focus on innovative problem-solving and global strategic thinking. ■



ROCK ON!

For decades, University organizations have left their mark on campus by painting the boulders that dot the campus. It's a tradition kept alive with each incoming class, which repaints or refreshes the rocks of about 100 different student organizations, and by members of new clubs for whom painting a rock is an inauguration ritual. Through the years, the rocks have become a meeting place on campus for students and alumni and, at times, a sacred space for vigils.

Finding those rocks recently got easier when Director of the Center for Student Involvement Julie Fleming collaborated on a geological survey with Facilities Information Manager Anthony Mennuti, to create a digital tool called "Rock Map," that lets users search by campus organization, to find available rocks to paint and provides descriptions and photos of specific rocks.

As Montclair continues to grow, "the rocks move and they change and some get turned upside down," says Fleming, explaining the need for the map. "I spent a lot of time during the pandemic thinking there's got to be a better way for a lot of things. The rocks were one of those things." ■

PSEG Institute Earns Governor's Award



The University's PSEG Institute for Sustainability Studies received the 2021 Governor's Environmental Excellence Award from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

The Governor's Environmental Excellence Awards Program recognizes outstanding environmental performance, programs and projects throughout the state, including individuals, businesses, institutions, communities, organizations, educators and youth who have made significant contributions to environmental protection in New Jersey.

The Institute was honored during a virtual ceremony that included remarks from New Jersey First Lady Tammy Murphy and Institute Director Amy Tuininga.

"Each of you is a big reason why despite the serious threat of the climate crisis, we are incredibly optimistic about the future," Murphy said during her remarks at the ceremony.

The PSEG Institute for Sustainability Studies supports transdisciplinary research and community projects that grow more resilient communities. Through partnerships with New Jersey and multinational corporations and organizations, the Institute addresses local and global sustainability challenges, including climate change, emissions, energy, clean water, waste, food and food insecurity. ■



Online Rankings Rise

Montclair State University's online Master of Arts in Educational Leadership program is ranked No. 1 in New Jersey and No. 14 in the nation in the *U.S. News & World Report* 2022 Best Online Programs rankings. The national ranking for the program is up one spot from 2021.

Two other online graduate programs offered by Montclair also placed among the nation's best in the annual rankings.

The University's Master of Science in Information Technology with a concentration in Applied Information Technology (Professional Science Master's) is ranked No. 61 in the nation, while Montclair's online Master of Business Administration (MBA) program moved up one spot to No. 78, up from No. 79 in 2021.

U.S. News program rankings are based on scores from five categories: student engagement, services and technologies, student excellence, faculty credentials and training, and opinions of academic experts. ■

A PERFECT UNION

In an effort to meet the community and labor market needs of Union County residents and provide students with convenient access to affordable, quality higher education, Montclair and Union County College have partnered to offer degree programs at Union's University Center in Scotch Plains, New Jersey.

The University Center programs will be open to students with an associate degree or equivalent and priority will be given to Union graduates who have obtained an associate degree.

A total of three bachelor completion programs will be offered: Business, Computer Science and Education, as well as graduate degrees in Business and Educational Leadership.

The University also has a new academic agreement with Hudson County Community College, which will allow associate degree students to plan their total baccalaureate experience at the beginning of their college career and seamlessly transfer into corresponding bachelor's degree programs at Montclair. Both programs begin in fall 2022. ■



President Koppell and Union County College President Margaret M. McMenamain

Tamara Leech Named to 2022 Class of Andrew Carnegie Fellows

Public Health Associate Professor Tamara Leech has been named to the 2022 class of Andrew Carnegie Fellows and will be awarded a \$200,000 stipend to devote up to two years for research and writing in the humanities and social sciences.



Leech's work centers on the well-being of youths who live in marginalized and underserved urban environments. In 2019, Leech co-authored a study about common recruitment and retention obstacles that scholars interested in racial disparities research face: potential mistrust from the Black community; a stigmatized research topic; and high participation burden.

The goal of her fellowship project, "Community Conversations and Reimagining Public Safety," is to help cities center impacted communities in their public safety redesign process.

Her research will involve community conversations and help produce tool kits for scholars, municipalities and community members trying to reimagine first response in their cities. "Ensuring that communities have a meaningful voice in the reform process is critical to developing effective and equitable public safety systems," Leech says.

The fellowship is backed by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a philanthropic foundation that supports scholarship and research into the social sciences and humanities, and addresses important societal issues. Leech is one of 28 distinguished scholars and writers selected for this year's class. ■

SWINGING WITH TINA SINATRA



Tina Sinatra took a spin around campus in December, visiting the residence hall that bears her father's name and the campus radio station, where a student disc jockey keeps the legacy of Frank Sinatra alive with a show devoted to the American songbook.

The campus stop was part of a weekend celebration of the 106th anniversary of the singer's birth on December 12, 1915, including the unveiling of a sculpture in Hoboken, Sinatra's hometown. A broadcast of signature Sinatra songs played on WMSC 90.3 FM during her visit.

Back in 2010, Montclair students voted to honor Sinatra by naming new housing Francis A. Sinatra Hall. The University's residence halls are traditionally named for famous New Jerseyans. In the six-story Sinatra residence, vintage photographs and history of Sinatra's legacy adorn the lobby.

Tina Sinatra, a film producer, entrepreneur and author, manages the Sinatra business. "I love that we have a dormitory here at Montclair. I love that there is a connection to the music department. Your college is very impressive," she said during the radio broadcast. ■



BLOOMFIELD COLLEGE FINDS A LIFELINE IN MONTCLAIR

Montclair State University will provide financial support to neighboring Bloomfield College, if needed, to ensure the College can remain open through the 2022-23 academic year while the two institutions work toward their goal of establishing a permanent relationship.

Bloomfield College, a private, predominantly Black and Hispanic institution, said last year it was in jeopardy of closing its doors without a benefactor. As the missions of the two institutions are closely aligned around providing access to high-quality educational experiences to underserved students, Montclair stepped forward with a financial lifeline.

"This is what it means to be New Jersey's premier public service university: turning challenge into opportunity through collaboration and innovation," said Montclair President Jonathan Koppell.

Bloomfield College is New Jersey's only four-year Predominantly Black Institution, as well as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and Minority Serving Institution. The College is recognized as one of the most diverse national liberal arts colleges in the United States by *U.S. News & World Report*, and offers the lowest tuition among the private four-year institutions in New Jersey.

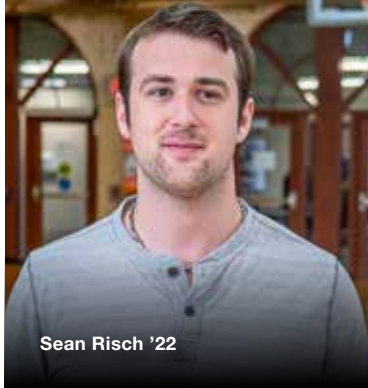
Last fall, it announced it was seeking a partner institution to form a strategic relationship that would ensure that Bloomfield could continue to carry out its vital mission for the long term. Bloomfield President Marcheta P. Evans said the institution was struggling due to plummeting enrollment during the pandemic and ongoing operational deficits.

Montclair's Board of Trustees, at its meeting in March, authorized an interim financial support agreement, essentially creating a line of credit for Bloomfield College, if needed. The level of support needed from Montclair may be reduced, thanks to a \$5 million allocation in Governor Phil Murphy's state budget. That funding will help ensure Bloomfield will remain open and allow time to develop the details of a permanent relationship.

"I look forward to working closely with President Evans to craft a strategic relationship that could serve as a national model of innovation," Koppell said. The two institutions have begun meeting to develop a path forward, and they hope to finalize their plans before this fall.

"We are both committed to providing access to high-quality educational experiences to students who are often marginalized," Koppell said. "So this response to financial adversity is borne of the conviction that together, we can make an even greater impact on the communities we serve." ■

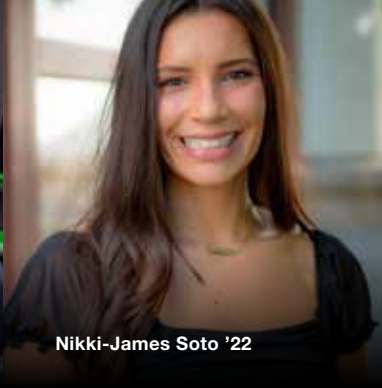
SNAPSHOTS



Sean Risch '22



Ray Vincent De Jesus '22



Nikki-James Soto '22



Samantha Wilk

“If someone said to me a year ago I’d be promoting Montclair on a show, I wouldn’t believe them. Falling in love with your university in a global pandemic is as hard as it sounds.”

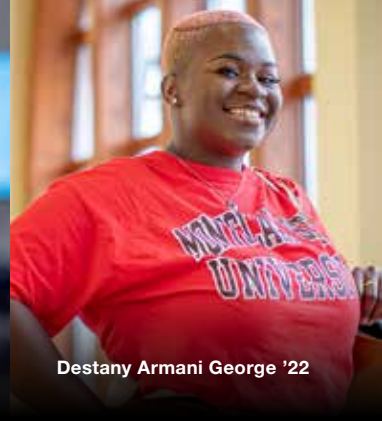
—Samantha Wilk, a Psychology and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies double major



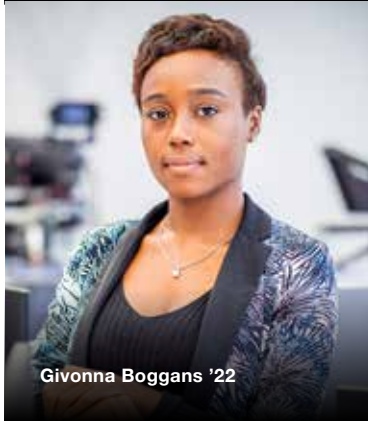
Hunter Ayala



Victoria Povolo



Destany Armani George '22



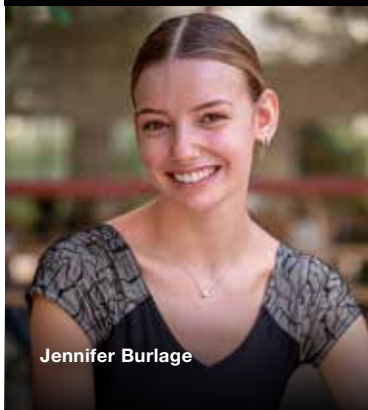
Givonna Boggans '22



Ashon Lanada '22



Jack Barteck '22



Jennifer Burlage



Sienna Grant Mitsak



Natalya Kozlovski



Ciara Chanel Allen '22



Gian Paul Gonzalez '07



Anthony Gachetti



Kaya Maciak '22



Sal Parrinello '16, '18 MBA



Joe Baez '22

Live(stream) From Montclair, it's *The College Tour*

Red Hawks soar on national TV, bringing their stories and campus tours to viewers worldwide

There's a tradition among students who perform as the University's mascot, Rocky the Red Hawk: their identity is kept secret until they cross the graduation stage wearing bright yellow talons to make the "big reveal." But for one member of Team Rocky, that unveiling happened on multiple streaming platforms as he unmasked on the television series *The College Tour*.

Risch represents Montclair along with 18 other students and alumni in the University's hour-long episode, which began running this spring on Amazon Prime Video and other channels. "Being Rocky was a personal thing and sharing that with America is just ... awesome."

A crew from *The College Tour* taped 20 different segments that cover all things Montclair from students who love it here. In an essay she wrote for the student newspaper *The Montclarion*, "Why You'll See Me in *The College Tour*," Samantha Wilk, now a rising junior who began her college experience remotely due to COVID-19, confesses: "If someone said to me a year ago I'd be promoting Montclair on a show, I wouldn't believe them. Falling in love with your university in a global pandemic is as hard as it sounds."

Produced by Emmy-nominated and award-winning TV producers, *The College Tour* helps prospective students around the world travel virtually for an inside look at colleges and universities. Montclair's episode is part of Season 4 on Amazon's streaming service, IMDb TV, on *The College Tour's* app (Android, iOS) and website, Roku, Apple TV, LG Smart TV, Samsung Smart TV, Sony, Philips Smart TV, Amazon FireTV, Android TV and Montclair's YouTube.

Their stories are inspiring. Gian Paul Gonzalez '07, a star athlete during his time at Montclair and now a history teacher

and motivational speaker, describes his concept of being "All In"... committing to your personal dreams no matter the obstacles you face. It was at Montclair, Gonzalez says, where he "developed a love and a passion for how I could help my community, not by studying something that happened in the past, but by being inspired to want to change the present."

Ciara Chanel Allen '22 expresses gratitude for the scholarship support that enabled her to pursue a BFA in Acting. "Montclair State University has molded me into the person that I wanted to be. Confident, independent, outspoken and unapologetically myself."

Filmed last fall, Nikki-James Soto recalls, "The crew let me be my complete, authentic self. I like to try new things and meet new people, but I didn't know what I was walking into."

Soto earned degrees in Psychology and Elementary Education and, as part of Montclair's 4+1 program, will earn her Master of Arts in Teaching next year. "I want to be a teacher. I want to work with kids. I never thought that I'd get a chance to do any sort of production," Soto says.

"But I had such a fun time and was able to have friends be a part of it too," she says. "This is something we're going to have a memory of forever." ■

—Marilyn Joyce Lehren

"This is the coolest kind of reveal for Rocky that you could do," says Sean Risch '22, who graduated in January with a degree in Theatre Studies.



THE FUTURE IS Future College Graduate Academy inspires a path to graduation NOW

By Rosaria Lo Presti

For Nohemi Hernandez, Kevin Bernard and Alexis Garofalo, the goal always was to graduate no matter the obstacles that might arise. Fortunately, programs that comprise the Future College Graduate Academy gave them a lift over any hurdles, keeping them on track for both their career and graduation goals.

As members of the Class of 2022, they are realizing their dreams thanks to a variety

of University programs that assist primarily low-income, first-generation students, set high expectations and help build a community in and out of the classroom.

“It literally takes just one person to give you that hope, motivation and attention you need at that moment,” says Hernandez, who grew up in Union City, New Jersey, and came to college from foster care, enrolling as an independent student so she was able to live on campus year-round.

With a strong support team of peer leaders to lean on, the University felt more than just strictly school for her.

Hernandez also found that as an Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) scholar with a dream of being a social worker, many people gave her that motivation and attention, guiding her way to earning her bachelor’s degree in Family Science and Human Development in May.



Alexis Garofalo credits the Health Careers Program for numerous opportunities.



Nohemi Hernandez credits a strong support system through the Future College Graduate Academy for helping keep her on the path to a degree.

EOF is just one of many assistance programs under the umbrella of the Future College Graduate Academy led by Assistant Provost for Special Programs Daniel Jean. The Academy consists of several state-, federal- or institution-run programs, including Health Careers, Academic Launch, Knowledge is Power, Cooperman Scholars, Give Something Back and Upward Bound.

“The framework is, ‘Let’s work with these urban centers, these low-income areas to provide college access opportunities so these scholars can ultimately become future college graduates,’” says Jean. “We refer to these students as scholars. This sets high expectations for them and helps build a community in and out of the classroom.”

To engage scholars in a mandatory summer academy, Academic Launch provides opportunities for academic advising, academic support and many co-curricular programs. It’s what set Bernard of Newark, New Jersey, to aspire to both teach political science and earn a position on the City Council, perhaps even run for mayor someday. Earning a degree in Political Science, Bernard’s experiences motivated him through the sense of individualism in the community.

“The program allowed me to give myself a comprehensive way to understand and find my own identity within the program, and also generate a kind of brotherhood and

sisterhood, and take on leadership skills that will further my own identity on campus as well,” Bernard says. “It created the best environment for me to understand myself among people who look like me to share the same knowledge and try to advocate for change within my community.”

For Garofalo, who earned a bachelor’s degree in Molecular Biology, her experiences in the Health Careers Program provided paid internship opportunities, class tutoring, a welcoming cohort and a strong support system.

“The motivation and attention that each one of us receives are very special and unique to the program,” says Garofalo, who grew up in Teaneck, New Jersey. “It’s an encouraging environment among students and there are many opportunities that I wouldn’t have applied for or known about if it weren’t for this program.”

The Academy’s mission resonates with Montclair resident Julia Lanigan, who benefited from scholarships as a young immigrant and wants to ensure students can transform their lives through education, as she did.

Lanigan is generously supporting the program and she recently named the Montclair State University Foundation as a beneficiary of her trust to create the Julia



Kevin Bernard found support in Academic Launch as he pursues a career in political science.

Bartko Lanigan Endowed Fund, which will support the priorities of the Future College Graduate Academy for generations to come.

“My own experience has given me a great appreciation for the importance of access and excellence to higher education, and how this opportunity, combined with hard work, provides a pathway to achieve success in America,” says Lanigan. ■

GOING HOME AGAIN

Programs prepare students to give back by teaching in cities where they grew up

By Sylvia A. Martinez and Marilyn Joyce Lehren



Melissa De Almeida, a senior at East Side High School in Newark's Ironbound district, wants to return to teach there.



Childhood experiences in Brazil led Andreia Resende '22 to pursue the study of science. Alex Diaz '12 MAT was a cooperating teacher at East Side High School in Newark, New Jersey, when he inspired Resende to pursue an advanced science class.

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elissa De Almeida loves Newark's Ironbound district, a four-square-mile, largely working-class and restaurant destination near downtown, where Spanish and Portuguese are spoken daily. She lives there, attends high school in the heart of it and appreciates its diversity. When she graduates from Montclair State University, which she'll begin attending full time this fall as part of a program to diversify the ranks of teachers in Newark, she'll be able to return to teach in the neighborhood she calls home.

"It's nice to be in an environment where there's so many different cultures. You

learn things from other cultures that you didn't know," says De Almeida, the daughter of Brazilian immigrants, who says she counts people of various ethnicities among her friends.

"I would like to come back and teach at my old middle school. Oliver Street School is a very important place to me. My cousins and older sister went there. I have history there. So going back would be like giving back to the teachers that taught me so much. Going back has always been in my plans."

It's also the plan of the University and its Red Hawks Rising Teacher Academy, one of several partnership programs Montclair has forged to recruit and prepare

teachers of color, and provide crucial support in the early years of teaching.

De Almeida is a member of the first Red Hawks Rising Teacher Academy – a partnership between the University's College of Education and Human Services, Newark Board of Education and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to help build a locally grown, diverse teacher workforce.

It's a model that the rest of the nation should be paying attention to, according to U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten.

"You're showing the country how it's done, right here in Newark," said Marten during a March visit to the state's largest school

district. Participating students come from East Side High School, where De Almeida is a senior, and University High School.

The program received a significant boost in February when AFT President Randi Weingarten – joined by Montclair State University President Jonathan Koppell and Newark Board of Education Superintendent Roger León – announced that AFT will award each of the 21 students in the Red Hawks Rising Teacher Academy stipends of \$3,700 to help offset education costs.

“We want to make sure that you can dream your dreams and achieve them,” Weingarten told the students, adding that the stipends are meant to make the goal of returning to teach in Newark “doable and workable for you.”

Why Diversity Matters

Nationally and statewide, those in education are focused on the demographic disparities between student populations and the teachers entrusted with their learning. Despite New Jersey being among the most diverse states in the country, its teachers are largely white and female, according to state reports. Only 16% of New Jersey’s almost 130,000 teachers are people of color, while 56% of students are. Research shows students benefit from having teachers who are of the same race or ethnic group and have similar cultural experiences.

“This significant cultural and linguistic mismatch has led to high suspension, expulsion and dropout rates as well as evidence of low academic expectations. Research shows that if a Black student has at least one Black teacher during their academic career, they are more likely to pursue post-secondary education,” says AFT Associate Director for Educational Issues Dyan Smiley, who works with Montclair and Newark program officials.

“We would eradicate the school-to-prison pipeline. Black and brown teachers are more apt to provide counseling and seek resources for students of color before calling law enforcement,” Smiley says. “To be clear, the goal is not to remove all white teachers, but

to provide ongoing professional development and support to all teachers, so they become and further develop as culturally sustaining practitioners.”

Montclair Provides Paths

Montclair has become a magnet for students interested in going into urban education and there are many examples of graduates who return to teach in the schools they grew up in. During the AFT stipend announcement at East Side, covered by multiple media outlets, the Red Hawks Rising students needed to look no further for role models than several teachers present during the news conference.

Among them, Alex Diaz ’12 MAT, a bilingual biology and earth science teacher, would go on to tell CBS News, “You go back to where you want to teach because you want to affect your neighborhood, you want to make it better.” Diaz began his teaching career at East Side as an intern in the Urban Teacher Residency, another of the Montclair programs encouraging students to return to teach in their home districts.

Coming full circle, one of Diaz’s first students, Andreia Resende ’22, was hired to work alongside him as a biology teacher this past January. Resende is a graduate of another of the Montclair programs, the Noyce Science Teacher Program, inspired when she was a student at East Side being taught by Diaz, who saw her potential to pursue her love of science in college.

The story resonates with Center of Pedagogy Executive Director Jennifer Robinson. “I am inspired when our graduates who teach in high-need communities can have this depth of impact upon their students. It means they have found a way to light a spark that lifts their students above any challenges they have faced in their lives,” she says.

A Science Teacher Comes Full Circle

Resende’s story begins as a child in Brazil, where the family farm was her laboratory. She delighted in running after chickens, looking up at the trees. “I would compare



Mayida Zaal, associate professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning, who co-leads the Red Hawks Rising Teacher Academy, was instrumental in developing the Teacher Academy curriculum.

the different birds because we had so many exotic birds on our land,” she says.

Shortly before Resende and her parents immigrated to America, developers purchased the surrounding property. She thought that would be a positive step for the poor, rural region, suggesting to her grandfather that perhaps the developers would turn the area around.

Her grandfather, she recalls, replied, “No, they’re going to destroy the whole land.”

Resende was just 8 at the time. “I didn’t know what he was talking about, but when I was 22 and went back to visit, I saw just how much destruction they caused, and how it affected my grandfather’s farm, too.”

The impact of deforestation on her homeland was a lasting lesson as she worked toward earning her degree in January 2022 and teacher certification in science. But the path from a farm girl chasing chickens to a young



Above: Montclair President Jonathan Koppell addresses Teacher Academy students at East Side High School in Newark's Ironbound district.



Right, top: Biology Professor Sandra Adams and Teaching and Learning Professor Douglas Larkin offer support to Noyce scholars like Andreia Resende.



Right, bottom: AFT President Randi Weingarten talks with Teacher Academy students after announcing stipends that will help them offset the costs of college.

woman chasing her dreams wasn't always easy, and that was another lesson she learned as well.

Challenges like doubting her own talents, limited financial resources and juggling full-time work with classes, would defer her ambitions. But despite the struggles, mentors like Diaz and her professors in the Noyce Science Teacher Program saw her potential, opened doors and guided her to scholarships to help make her dreams come true. Teaching and Learning Professor Douglas Larkin and Biology Professor Sandra Adams were important faculty mentors in helping her persevere while working full time as a registered dental assistant.

The professors helped her get back on track after Resende needed to take a break from classes. "She picked herself up, started again and never looked back. It was forward, full-steam ahead from there," Adams says.

"Sometimes when students hit a stumbling block they disappear," Larkin says. "It's heart-wrenching every time it happens. Because Andreia was accepted as a Noyce scholar, she had that personal connection that wouldn't let her disappear."

"It's not easy doing both and they have always been ready to help with anything I needed," Resende says, including tutoring, academic advice and finding new avenues of financial support.

'Powerful Testament'

Another role model for students is Mayida Zaal, associate professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning who has been doing work in Newark on behalf of Montclair for years.

"Having this opportunity to support young teachers into the profession and then bringing back their knowledge is such a powerful testament to the kind of justice work that I'm committed to," Zaal says.

As a first-generation Arab Latina, Zaal says she did not always know where she belonged. "Creating space for students from non-dominant groups in the teaching profession means they can be a part of transforming education in their own communities."

As she begins her teaching career, Resende reflects, "I want to be able to encourage, to plant the seed where my students can believe in themselves and know that if they work hard enough that they can make it."

De Almeida, who looks forward to the day she returns to the Ironbound district as a teacher, has shown she works hard, and when she attends Montclair in the fall with college credits to her name and a stipend, it will help lighten her family's load. "As someone who wants to become a teacher and loves kids, this program is such a great opportunity," she says. "I've always dreamed of coming back to teach in Newark because to me, Newark is home." ■

CHANGING LIVES IN PATERSON

Researchers and students empower Paterson youths to make healthy life choices

By Sylvia A. Martinez

Adozen teen girls are gathered in small groups in a conference room at Oasis – A Haven for Women and Children, a nonprofit located in the heart of Paterson, on a winter afternoon.

Wheatherly Almonte '20 breaks the chatter with, "Today's topic is social media, social norms and peer pressure." She has their attention.

In an interactive 45-minute session, the 23-year-old Almonte guides the girls, ages 13-17, through the benefits and dangers of social media, warning that they can't believe everything they see on TikTok and that some people are living "Insta-lies." She asks lots of questions: How many use various social media platforms? She ticks off a list. They all raise their hands indicating they are on TikTok and to a lesser extent on Instagram. The girls sheepishly respond to questions about their social media usage. Then Almonte quizzes them about what they see their friends doing on social media. Hands are raised, followed by rapid-fire replies:

"Drinking." "Smoking." "Vaping." "Partying."

“Now we’re getting somewhere,” Almonte responds, handing each girl who participates in the discussion a ticket; there will be a prize drawing at the end of the seven-week program. She also presents the group with different scenarios and reminds them to use a decision-making tool they learned during a previous session. She then quizzes them on everything from how seeing their friends partying makes them feel to how vaping affects their lungs, how many cigarettes are in a pack and how old one has to be to buy them – all of which they also learned during a previous session. Scenarios and lessons are regularly tied back to “substance use and misuse,” as Almonte teaches a new evidence-based curriculum that she helped develop as a member of the P-CASA team.

PARTNERSHIPS, FUNDING AID PATERSON

P-CASA stands for Paterson Coalition Against Substance Abuse, a collaborative effort between Montclair State University and a diverse group of community stakeholders in New Jersey’s third-largest city. P-CASA was founded in 2013 and its work is currently funded by a 10-year, \$1.25 million federal Drug-Free Communities grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, which runs through 2023. In addition, P-CASA receives support from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The program is overseen by Family Science and Human Development Professors Robert Reid and Pauline Garcia-Reid, with Reid serving as principal investigator (PI) and program director and Garcia-Reid as co-PI and director of prevention services.

More recently, the Reids have also received two additional federal grants – Partnerships for Success and Prevention Navigator – to continue their prevention work throughout the Paterson community. All of the programs comprise the Communities Organizing for Prevention and Empowerment or C.O.P.E. Initiative and have impacted 30,000 adolescents



Wheatherly Almonte '20 was once a teen in a P-CASA program and now works as a P-CASA prevention specialist and lead facilitator. Here she is seen teaching an after-school class at Oasis – A Haven for Women and Children.

and young adults in Paterson. All told, the programs have received \$8 million in federal funding, which has been used successfully to develop and coordinate a comprehensive and multitiered prevention strategy, including culturally tailored curricula about substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and viral hepatitis health promotion to underserved populations.

“We were able to show that there’s a real need in Paterson for this type of work,” Reid says. Paterson is one of the most densely populated regions in the United States, with more than a quarter (27.1%) of its residents living in poverty and crime rates higher than state and national averages.

Garcia-Reid emphasizes that their work is meant to empower and not dictate.

“It is the giant ‘E’ [for empowerment] in C.O.P.E. that is driven through all of the work,” she says. “We’re not trying to direct people on how to live their lives; we’re trying to provide them with information so that they can make decisions and choices for their quality of life.”

The Reids are especially proud of empowering young people to affect change in their community. With the help of some P-CASA data showing that Paterson had more than 200 liquor establishments in an 8.2-square-mile area and that alcohol was available for purchase until 3 a.m., youths set about to change that. In July 2017, they showed up in council chambers in large numbers, armed with data, posters and a plea to improve their quality of life.

Despite opposition from liquor stores, the council voted unanimously in favor of reducing sales hours. The council, according to the *Paterson Times*, “enacted a new ordinance to force liquor stores to stop selling package goods – including beer and wine – after 10 p.m. The measure was heavily lobbied for by local young people and anti-drug advocates.”

Reid says, “It’s been pretty remarkable to change ordinances and get that on the books in the city of Paterson.”

Garcia-Reid credits her husband for the almost two decades of relationship-building



Above: Students from P-CASA advocated for ordinances to restrict liquor sales to improve the quality of life in the city. Right: Family Science and Human Development Professors Pauline Garcia-Reid and Robert Reid oversee P-CASA. (Photos courtesy of the Reids)



that has allowed them to continue to do this work in Paterson.

“Through this coalition work, he pulled in key players,” she says. “With multiple grants simultaneously, we’ve been able to harness the resources of each to complement the other, so it’s been a really nice synergistic effect that has allowed us to really continue to work on various grants.”

The couple say they’re fortunate that their respective work complements their partner’s.

“We’ve been able not just to marry our lives but marry our work,” Garcia-Reid says. “His passion has always been in substance abuse and HIV/AIDS, and my area has always been a focus on adolescent and youth development and building positive outcomes among them. So, we’ve been able to infuse both of our interests and research passions to come up with really solid proposals that have been fundable.”

Research indicates that the C.O.P.E. Initiative is working. Teenagers participating in the program “exhibited significant reductions in substance use and sexual risk

behaviors and marked increases in social support, family cohesion and community involvement,” according to research conducted by the Center for Prevention Science at Rutgers University, the University of Iowa College of Public Health, and the University of New Mexico.

In addition, a recent P-CASA study indicates that “Paterson youth are increasingly seeing substance use (alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and e-cigarettes) and the perceived risks of these behaviors in a negative light.”

P-CASA SUCCESS STORY

As someone who went through the P-CASA program and now works for it, Wheatherly Almonte is an example of its success personified. She started as an intern, working as an administrative assistant. She has since graduated from Montclair with a bachelor’s degree in Family Science and Human Development and a minor in Social Work and hopes to earn a master’s in Social Work. As a part-time University employee, Almonte serves as a P-CASA prevention specialist and lead facilitator. She attends and staffs a table at community events, informing people about P-CASA’s work in efforts to partner with more

community organizations, such as Oasis. The Reids say they’re pleased to have Almonte as a member of their team.

“Wheatherly’s a beautiful representative of her community and is doing really amazing things,” Garcia-Reid says. “We’re really fortunate to have her be part of our team. It’s really lovely to see the growth that our work has impacted, and we’re able to give back by hiring in the community.”

Crystal Marrero, the Teen Girl Coordinator at Oasis, says she appreciates Almonte’s contributions to the after-school program attended by the girls.

“Wheatherly’s from the community and has been able to step into the beat that the girls totally have,” she says. “She’s helped create a safe space for the girls to be comfortable, engaged and vulnerable.”

Yadary, a teen in Almonte’s class, agrees, noting that she appreciates the lessons and life skills she’s learning from Almonte.

“It’s good to be informed about substances, social media and safe sex,”



“A lot of times, parents or teachers or anyone older, they tell them [youths], ‘Don’t do drugs. Don’t do drugs.’ But no one’s really informing them why they shouldn’t do drugs.”

Wheathery Almonte is a P-CASA success story who believes in giving back to her community.

she says. “As I grow older, I need to be careful what I do, and it’s good to be prepared as a young adolescent.”

About Almonte, Yadary, 15, adds: “I like her way of teaching, and she’s young, so she relates to us.”

It was only five years ago that Almonte was one of the high school teens listening to a P-CASA employee imparting similar lessons. Recalling her own experience while a student at John F. Kennedy Educational Complex, Almonte says she enjoyed the informational sessions.

“A lot of the information was stuff that we either didn’t know or we didn’t get enough of at school,” she says, adding that as a senior in high school, she didn’t receive enough sex education at home or at school. “This is information that we should be given as early as possible. Because the reality is that in high school, even freshmen sometimes are having sex, and it’s good to have these conversations because some parents are not having those conversations with their kids and it is always better for them to know.”

The same goes for substance use, she says.

“A lot of times, parents or teachers or anyone older, they tell them [youths], ‘Don’t do drugs. Don’t do drugs.’ But no one’s really informing them why they shouldn’t do drugs,” Almonte says. “They’re going to do it because they don’t know how it’s harming them. No one’s telling them how it’s affecting them.”

That’s where she comes in. Rather than speak at and lecture them, she works to engage the youths during her educational sessions.

“When we go into the field, and we tell them, OK, this affects you this way, and you see their faces, they’re like, ‘Wow, I didn’t know that.’ When we teach HIV, which is my favorite topic, a lot of them have so many misconceptions,” she says. “Knowing that I’m going into the field, and I’m leaving them with a piece of knowledge – or even if it’s something that they know it’s a refresher for them – that’s what brings me joy doing this job.”

The oldest of seven children raised by a single mom, who helps make ends meet by working as an Uber and GrubHub delivery driver, Almonte recognizes that her life could have turned out differently, which is what drives her to help other young people.

“I beat the odds,” she says. “There were people in my life who believed in me, who saw something in me that I couldn’t see for myself. I wanted to give back to my community. I wanted to pour into the youth the same way that I, myself, was poured into.”

Almonte was already passionate about community service and P-CASA provided her an opportunity to directly impact her town of Paterson.

“Everyone sees Paterson as this bad place, but Paterson also has so much good in it that a lot of people don’t see,” Almonte says. “So, I am blessed enough to be a part of that. Giving back to the community is good.” ■



THIS CLASS IS A

ZOO!

Diana Sisk-Gritz '22 records information
as Han the otter looks on.

Course at Turtle Back Zoo gives students the opportunity to help keepers with research and animal conservation

By Sylvia A. Martinez and Laura Griffin; Photos by Mike Peters

Some students sit on the ground, others lean against posts or stand as they discuss primates with the professor, who crouches in front of the group, so as not to obstruct the view of the gibbons swinging on ropes behind her. One gibbon hangs from a vine, staring at the students and making faces as though they are the ones on exhibit. Another quietly grooms herself on a ledge, ignoring the rambunctiousness of the others. Welcome to class at the zoo, officially Primate Behavior and Ecology, and Methods in Primatology.

Offered for the first time this spring, the combined undergraduate and graduate course met all day every Thursday at the Essex County Turtle Back Zoo in West Orange. The six-credit course, which started in the bitter cold of January, took place outdoors no matter the weather. Through a partnership with the zoo, 18 graduate and undergraduate students mostly studied primates – gibbons, tamarins, galagos – but also conducted observational research on other species including sea lions, otters, wolves, manta rays, toco toucans, a cheetah, a snow leopard and a red panda.

“These students aren’t just learning how to be scientists, they are scientists in this class, and I couldn’t feel better about the future knowing it’s in their hands,” says Assistant Anthropology Professor Cortni Borgerson.

Borgerson says the students were laser focused on “securing a better world for primates through behavioral research and conservation” and never complained

about being exposed to rain, sleet or snow. Instead, they shared tips on the best outdoor gear, long underwear and layering up for prolonged exposure.

Climate and temperatures aside, zoo class is fun. “The coolest part are the lectures in front of animals. This week it was the gibbons, last week it was in front of the penguins,” says Miranda Muniz, a graduate student in Sustainability Science. “It’s a unique classroom experience.”

Borgerson, a primatologist and conservationist who has been working to save endangered lemurs in Madagascar for years, wanted to offer the primatology class at the zoo because she wanted students to get to observe animals, rather than just look at slides of different species, so she wrote to Zoo Director Jilian Fazio with a proposal to teach her class at the zoo.

Fazio jumped at the proposal. Having taught a similar course while an adjunct professor at George Mason University at the Smithsonian National Zoo in Washington, D.C., she knew it would benefit the students and the zoo.

Fazio gave Borgerson a list of animal behavior research projects that the animal keepers identified for the students to work on. The students added some of their own, resulting in more than 40 areas of study. “They’ve designed their own research, and that really helps build their confidence,” Borgerson says. “And even though the work is hard, it’s fun.”

Throughout the course, students applied for grant funding, conducted research,



Professor Cortni Borgerson crouches in front of the gibbon house as she teaches at the zoo.

and presented or published their findings – and helped the zoo collect data about the behaviors of its animals.

“It’s a phenomenal partnership,” says Fazio, a Cranford native who returned to New Jersey to lead the Turtle Back Zoo in December 2020. “I’m excited about having the next generation of conservationists on zoo grounds.”

The partnership with the zoo also allows students to perform a valuable community service. “The keepers have done a good job of making sure all the work goes back to contribute to the long-term conservation mission of the zoo,” says Borgerson.

Because Turtle Back does not have its own research department, the collaborative research by Montclair students is significant, says Fazio. “All of that information helps us to make decisions on how best to manage the animals.” In addition, some data can be shared with other zoos, which are connected through the 240-member Association of Zoos and Aquariums. “Most people don’t realize that all zoos and aquariums are connected and collaborate both on species we manage and conserve in the wild. We share data and learn from one another,” Fazio says.

On one of two visits to the class, the weather is chilly but not too cold; the students are dressed for rain that’s expected later. The day starts with a lecture and all of the students are engaged and focused, oblivious to zoo staff zipping by on golf carts, the beep-beep-beeping of a nearby earth mover working on a new exhibit – and even to visitors eager to see the white-cheeked gibbons’ exhibit.

After the lecture and discussion, students head to their respective exhibits to do three hours of research and observation of the animals, recording data right through lunch. They reconvene in the afternoon for a session on statistics and interpreting the data they’ve collected.

GIBBON BACK TO THE ZOO

The gibbons – Sumo, 6, Knox, 5, and Mu, 4 – are energized, swinging from rope to rope playing what appears to be a game of tag. Suki, the 19-year-old mother gibbon, surveys her charges from atop a window ledge.

“It’s just beautiful getting to know them,” says Adriana LaVarco, one of four students studying the behavior of the white-cheeked gibbons, which are critically endangered. “Suki has a strict personality.” She especially enjoys napping, eating and being groomed by

her biological son Sumo, and her two fosters, Knox and Mu.

LaVarco and fellow student Hannah Kutler explain they are collecting four types of data: continuous (timing an activity for as long as it lasts); interval (recording what the gibbons are doing every five minutes); spatial (noting the location where the activity takes place); and all occurrence (recording whenever a behavior occurs). The students want to understand which spaces within the enclosure the gibbons enjoy the most.



Hannah Kutler hopes to return to the zoo to continue studying the gibbons.

All of this information is gathered and recorded in Zoo Monitor, an app used by all zoos. It will be analyzed and distilled into statistics and shared with Turtle Back animal keepers at semester’s end.

LaVarco, a graduate student studying Biology with a concentration in Physiology, is researching whether white-cheeked gibbons have a sense of self – and self-recognition. Her proposal

to place a mirror in the gibbon house was approved and she’ll study how the gibbons observe themselves in the mirror. “We know that chimps and orangutans have a sense of self, but gibbons aren’t studied as much,” LaVarco says. “I want to see if they look at themselves or their body parts in the mirror. And to see if they notice anything different if we put a smudge on them.”

Joselyn Molina is studying how Suki interacts with the foster gibbons and whether it differs from her interactions with her biological son Sumo. Meanwhile, Kutler is observing how the fosters and biological offspring interact with mom Suki.

“They go all day long,” observes Molina, a senior Anthropology major who took the class because it sounded so different from anything she’d ever taken. “When else am I going to see primates in person for class?”

A freshman Anthropology major, Kutler wants to be a primatologist and hopes to someday study under Borgerson in Madagascar, where the professor is trying to save endangered lemurs by helping people farm insects as a protein source instead. This class has been inspiring for Kutler, who has applied for a research grant to return to work with the gibbons next fall.

“I have so much to learn,” Kutler says, adding that she has grown particularly fond of Knox. “He’s so sweet.”

CAT’S BEST FRIEND

Up the hill from the gibbon house, Jasper Majeske, an Anthropology major, stands along the fence outside Nandi the cheetah’s habitat. If Nandi moves or walks along the fence, Majeske moves, recording his observations on his tablet. Majeski’s research focuses on how

Nandi uses her new habitat in varying weather conditions and on how often and where she interacts with Bowie, a 3-year-old Labrador Retriever, who is her companion. As nearby signage explains: “In zoos, dogs are used as companions for cheetah cubs that do not have siblings to grow up with.” From the look of things, these two are besties. In fact, born just one week apart, the two have been together since they were cub and pup.

“They’re chill with each other,” says Majeske, keeping an eye on Nandi so he can record her behavior in three-minute intervals. “They nap together and groom one another.”

When the two are apart and Bowie returns, Nandi goes to the gate and starts purring, he says. “It’s really cute.”

Standing in front of Nandi the cheetah’s habitat, Jasper Majeske records the big cat’s every move.



A HOWLING GOOD TIME

Miranda Muniz is studying the gray wolves, Fargo and Zander, two 10-year-old males. Completing her master’s in Sustainability Science, she is examining how the wolves use the space in their exhibit.

Muniz logs how much time the wolves rest, as well as all occurrences of barking, howling and grabbing things. “When ambulances go by, they howl,” Muniz says with a laugh. “The first time it happened, it was super cool. I texted everyone I know and sent a video.” Muniz explains that she’s on the lookout

for stress behaviors but both Zander and Fargo are pretty relaxed.

Despite working solo, she finds the coursework gratifying. “It’s challenging to be very independent and be up here by myself, but my research is very rewarding, so hands on,” she says. “I get to learn by doing. This is not just a term paper I have to complete to get a grade; people are waiting for this information that we were brought on to research.”

RED PANDA-MONIUM!

Each week, Lexie Lawson, a graduate student studying ecology and conservation, sits in front of Jerry the red panda’s house, monitoring his behaviors to get a sense of his overall health. Soon he will be paired with a mate – a recommendation by the Association’s Species Survival Plan – and produce

what zoo officials call “genetically valuable offspring,” or at least that’s the hope, as Jerry will be getting a new home and a “girlfriend” soon. It is like a dating service for animals, Fazio says.

On this day, sitting on the ground on a purple yoga mat under an umbrella to protect her laptop from the drizzle, Lawson logs Jerry’s every move as young children rush up to get a glimpse of him – excited by a real-life version of the animated panda in the Pixar movie *Turning Red* that opened in March.

“As challenging as this course is,” Lawson says it has real-life applications that are already serving her well. “I’ve written my first grant proposal, and I’ll be able to stay on and keep working on this research through the end of the year.”

WHO CAN? TOUCAN!

In the reptile room, students Kristina Ollo and Jaileen Murillo are observing the courtship behavior of toucans, when a 2-foot-long, orange-headed caiman lizard named C.L. – climbs onto and curls



Kristina Ollo observes the toucan’s courtship rituals.

up on animal keeper Rachel Gentzler’s calves as she kneels to clean the pond in the glass enclosure. As lizards go, this one seems particularly friendly.

C.L. then climbs onto Gentzler’s back, to the delight of children visiting the zoo on a class trip. Despite the show C.L. is putting on, Ollo and Murillo keep their focus above the action – on the toucans – noting how the tropical birds’ behavior is affected by humans. Ollo is observing 3-year-old Coco, who wears a silver band around her leg, while Murillo keeps an eye on 2-year-old Julio, who sports a red band and was brought in as a potential mate for Coco.

Mating season begins soon, so the students are observing the birds’ spatial activity – how far from or close to each other they stay and if that behavior changes around humans.

“These birds haven’t mated before but they’re starting to court,” says Murillo, an Anthropology and Spanish major, explaining that in toucan land, “courting” looks like one bird nipping at the other’s beak.

Using a decibel meter, Ollo is recording noise levels when visitors enter the reptile house to determine how sounds might affect Coco's and Julio's courtship behavior.

She plans on writing her thesis on American kestrels, the smallest hawks found in North America. "I want to work with and research birds, so this class helped me figure out how to do that," Ollo says, "It helped with the process of coming up with research questions, writing a grant, things I wouldn't normally learn in any other class."

THIS, THAT AND THE OTTERS

Undergraduate students Vanessa Glaser and Diana Sisk-Gritz spend their days at one of the most popular attractions at the zoo: the otter habitat. The otters, Han and Shelby, are popular because they are playful and their glass enclosure lets them be seen both above and below the water. Plus, otters often put on a show.

Glaser, an Earth and Environmental Science major, and Sisk-Gritz, a Marine Biology and Coastal Sciences major, are studying stress behaviors and how the environment and the seasons affect the otters.

They know that Shelby likes to perform more than Han. Shelby flips and turns and plays to the crowd, whereas Han likes to get away and rest when too many people are around, they say.

Studying the otters' behaviors has been fun but is also hard work.

"It really helps to get this experience – focusing step by step – and practicing applied science," says Sisk-Gritz. "I feel more prepared for post-grad work or grad school."

As Glaser puts it: "I'm learning how to be a scientist rather than just learning about science. That's something we can all take along to all other disciplines."

THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA LIONS

From a roof shed high above the sea lion exhibit, undergraduate students Camila Escobar, Evelyn Villada and Elisa Stone are observing J.R., Zeus and Porter's swimming and interactions in the aquarium down below. Each student watches and logs the behavior of her assigned sea lion. The pod is all male because the zoo isn't looking to breed them, animal keeper Angie Blanco explains later.

"They're our babies," says Stone, a Justice Studies major and Anthropology minor who is taking the course at a graduate level.

"The best part has been getting to know them," says Escobar, who watches J.R., the "old man" of the pod. "When you make eye contact, it feels like they're looking into your soul."

Stone, who observes Zeus, agrees. "Definitely. You feel like you make a connection."

At 32, J.R. is the oldest sea lion in captivity, according to the Species Survival Plan. Zeus is a "child" at 9, and 19-year-old Porter, who was introduced to the pod in December, is the rowdy "teen." Zeus, the students agree, also is a bit of a bully.

Escobar says they're on the lookout for and, of course, logging "any vocals, acts of aggression, different barks, activity on land, such as basking in the sun."

She and Villada are both Biology majors and aspiring veterinarians.

"I've always been connected to animals," says Villada, who works as a vet tech in Fort Lee.

Stone, who is graduate student Emily Rothamel's research partner, will be interning at a law office this summer and



Vanessa Glaser focuses on the behaviors of Han the river otter.



Elisa Stone, Camila Escobar and Evelyn Villada keep track of how the sea lions behave with one another.

is considering animal rights law. She took this class, she says, “because I will never have an opportunity like this again.”

Rothamel has been working at the sea lion exhibit since June 2021. Zoo officials knew that last fall they would be introducing the 800-pound Porter into the mix and her job was first to observe the behaviors of the other two sea lions before Porter’s arrival and then afterward, to note any changes in behavior.

“It’s great that I get to continue my research this summer and to be able to do it for so long. It’s invaluable as a grad student,” says Rothamel, whose graduate focus is marine biology, specifically sea lions and conservation.

The students’ data will provide animal keepers with a more accurate picture of the animals’ welfare, according to Blanco. “They provide a third eye and obtain constant research, which is only going to better the well-being of our animals,” she says.

Blanco adds that the students’ research also will help other institutions. “It’s uncommon for a sea lion to live into its

30s, most only live into their teen years,” Blanco says. That’s why Rothamel and Stone are paying close attention to how J.R. behaves not only around Porter but in general.

ENJOYING SOME RAYS

At the cownose ray touch tank, senior Anthropology and Psychology major Melissa Matyiku and graduate Biology student Lauren Hope have gotten to know the behaviors and swim patterns of the rays quite well.

One ray in particular, a female named Sugar, swims around the edge in a repetitive pattern, letting visitors touch her back as she glides along.

“Sugar’s mom and her baby are both in this tank – so three generations,” says Matyiku. “It’s nice to have an off-campus experience, where we are connecting what we’re learning around the animals to what we’re learning about in the lectures.”

Hope’s focus is how human contact affects the reproductive behavior of the female rays, including how active they are in the tank when humans are around.

Since her area of study is biology, ecology and evaluation of animal behavior, “this is a great class for that,” she says.

Director Fazio, who has enjoyed the collaboration, says if it were up to her, Turtle Back Zoo would partner with Montclair every semester.

“I would like to grow and expand this program,” she says. “This is a template for partnerships with other organizations and provides the next generation an opportunity to be involved in the conservation of some of the most precious species on our planet.”

Melissa Matyiku and Lauren Hope follow the cownose rays’ every move.



Borgerson would love such an arrangement. “The students are going above and beyond every day to use their skills to change the world.” ■

The University Singers perform "Janger," a Balinese traditional dance at The Met.



Percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie performs with the Wind Symphony at the Alexander Kasser Theater.



In return to live performances, Cali hits a high note at The Met and with artists-in-residence

By Marilyn Joyce Lehren
Photos by Mike Peters

We're Back!

University Singers soloists and djembe drum players open a performance at The Met with a traditional Zulu song of welcome. From left, Tim Nuzzetti, Ethan Smith (baritone), Nick Scafuto (tenor) and Julian Dippolito.



Jazz legend Wynton Marsalis gives a lesson of a lifetime to trumpeter Gavin Ard '22 during a master class at the Cali School.

It would have been understandable if Gavin Ard '22 was nervous the day he played for legendary trumpeter and composer Wynton Marsalis. “Oh man, it’s *the guy*,” he recalls thinking during a master class taught by Marsalis. But he kept his cool, attuned to the way Marsalis was connecting with everyone around him.

“I immediately got the vibe that his focus was more about being with people through music than being with musicians. He was focused on the humanity aspect of everything,” says Ard, who graduated in May with a degree in Music Performance. “He’d put his hand on your shoulder and say, ‘You just played, we’ll talk about it, but let’s remind ourselves we’re not just trumpet players, we’re people.’ It was a big thing with Wynton. I played a classical piece and all of his comments were based on things not on the page.”

The opportunities to learn from masters like Marsalis hit a high note for Ard and other students at the John J. Cali School of Music this year, where ensembles and solo artists rotated through a series of professional residencies after the pandemic’s pause.



Live performances were back, including one extraordinary night at the museum. “There was something different about this performance,” says Nick Scafuto, a lead tenor with the University Singers, recalling the March concert with the Wind Symphony and Jazz Ensemble at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

“You’d have to be trying very hard to not feel the electricity in the room. Every single artist on stage was in top form and playing and singing their hearts out,” says Scafuto. “It was the kind of performance that said, ‘Here we are, New York! Where do you want us to play next?’”

In remarks reflecting on the musicians’ return to the world stage, Anthony Mazzocchi, director of the John J. Cali School of Music, thanked the leadership of the museum for collaborating on “a model for how we will move beyond the multiple disruptions the pandemic has leveled on our profession.”

For Lornaa Morales, a classical percussionist in the Music Therapy program, “sharing our art form in a venue full of people who were there to appreciate the arts was one of the most rewarding feelings ever. At the height of the pandemic, we rehearsed in a parking garage in hopes that we might soon return to normalcy, so this experience was an absolute gift.”



The Harlem Quartet, from left, Ilmar Gavilán, Melissa White, Felix Umansky and Jaime Amador, discuss the score of “Dissonance” during an open rehearsal at the John J. Cali School of Music.

Back home on campus, the music was equally thrilling. Visiting musicians crossed boundaries and a variety of genres, from a classical rock-star duo to a vocal band evoking emotional sound palettes to an experimental string quartet. The spring roster included an evening of immersive music with Grammy-winner James Blachly conducting the Experiential Orchestra and Montclair State University Symphony Orchestra.

“We’ve tried to keep the artists diverse in every possible way,” Mazzocchi says. “It’s



Cali musicians applaud Kamala Sankaram after performing with her. Shown from left are Taylor Amato, William Hobbs, Courtney San Martin, Jason Zacher, GaDa Lambert and Seungchan Hong.



Composer and soprano Kamala Sankaram performs during a public event in February at Leshowitz Recital Hall.

“It was the kind of performance that said, ‘Here we are, New York! Where do you want us to play next?’”

—Nick Scafuto

important that students from all walks of life see a part of themselves up on stage, and at the same time to have students exposed to musicians who play a genre that they never thought of, has opened up a lot of eyes.”

Scafuto had the opportunity to workshop with composer, vocalist, playwright and actress Kamala Sankaram on an a cappella commission, *Let My Country Awake*, based on the poetry of Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. “It’s extremely evocative,” Scafuto said of the piece. “Being able to work with interesting meter changes and tonalities is not something you see in the choral space.”

During her residency, Sankaram showcased a variety of creative events, culminating in a performance at Merkin Concert Hall in New York City. “It’s one of those things where you’ve been seeing these people on YouTube videos with millions of views and in different kinds of spaces and then to actually have them in front of you is wild,” says Scafuto, who graduated in May with a degree in Music Education.

An open rehearsal in early February with the Harlem Quartet, Montclair’s quartet-in-

residence, pulled back the curtain on the ensemble’s creative process as they worked through *String Quartet in C Major*, K. 465, “Dissonance” by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The musicians worked on tempo, “leaving room to breathe” between notes, creating space for their imaginations to come through. “We have a plan, but we change and react in the moment,” Harlem Quartet cellist Felix Umansky explained.

Ard says he takes those lessons on interpretation to heart. “Slowing down, pushing through, dynamics that aren’t on the page, there’s a part of me as a young musician that thinks that’s not what the composer said, when in reality that’s what separates incredible musicians from people who play just what’s on the page.”

“It’s incredible that we get to work with the musicians and evolve with them,” says Ard, who came to study at the Cali School from St. Petersburg, Florida. “It reminds us why we’re artists and why we’re musicians, to see these people who are out there doing what we want to do at the very highest levels.” ■



SAM MILLS '80 NAMED TO HALL OF FAME

Linebacker will be enshrined posthumously into the Hall of Fame

By Red Hawks Athletics

True to his inspirational words, Sam Mills kept pounding throughout his NFL career, and in February, it finally paid off for the Montclair State University great.

Mills will be enshrined posthumously into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Class of 2022, on Saturday, August 6 at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton, Ohio. Mills was in his 20th year of eligibility, his third as a finalist.

Mills, who died in April 2005 at 45 after a 20-month battle with cancer, was a Division III standout at Montclair from 1977-80. His 501 career tackles set a school record, 142 tackles as a sophomore the school's single-season mark, and his 22-tackle performance as a junior established a single-game record.

His No. 62 was retired by Montclair in 1981, one of only two numbers in program history to be retired. Mills was inducted as a member of the University's Athletic Hall of Fame in 1992.

Deemed "too small" to play linebacker for the pros, the 5-foot, 9-inch Mills went on to an outstanding career that began in the now-defunct USFL with the Philadelphia Stars before moving to the NFL, where he became an All-Pro with the New Orleans Saints and Carolina Panthers.

"I think people gravitated to him because of his path to get to the NFL," his son, Sam Mills III, told *Montclair* magazine in 2014. "And he never forgot that journey. That journey helped make him who he was."

In 1997, Mills finished his Carolina playing career, having not missed a start in 50 games, including the playoffs, and leading the team in tackles two of his three seasons. His Panthers career was distinguished by two of the biggest plays in team history.

In total, Mills played 12 seasons in the NFL and recorded 1,319 tackles, 20.5 sacks, 11 interceptions and four touchdowns while starting 173 of 181 games.

After his playing career, Mills became an assistant coach with the Panthers and was diagnosed with cancer in 2003. Although told he had only a few months to live, he continued to coach. In the Panthers' postseason run to Super Bowl XXVIII, his plea to "Keep Pounding" in an emotional speech before the Panthers' victory over the Dallas Cowboys became an official team slogan and the name of a fund supporting cancer research. ■

Sports Briefs

Athletics Opens Women's Performance Center

The University's Department of Athletics opened a first-of-its-kind Women's Performance Center in May, as part of the 50th anniversary of Title IX, which since 1972 has prohibited exclusion from participation in education programs or activities on the basis of sex.

"The center will greatly benefit the overall athletic experience for our women athletes and help continue the amazing success they have enjoyed over the years," said Director of Athletics Rob Chesney.

Over the last decade, Montclair women's teams have had a run of success producing some of the best seasons in program history. The nine women's teams have captured 15 conference championships and a total of 25 NCAA Tournament berths, including a national championship game for field hockey, a berth in the Final Four for women's basketball, three consecutive NCAA Division III Softball Championship Tournament appearances and two individual national championships in track and field. ■



Guard Named All-American



Junior guard **Nickie Carter** was named to the 2022 NCAA Division III Women's Basketball Coaches' All-America Team this semester, becoming the 10th player in program history to be recognized. Carter averaged 17.3 points and 4.3 rebounds this season, and was the 16th Red Hawk named All-American by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. ■

Red Hawk an NJAC Track Champ



Sophomore **John Griffith** claimed his second straight NJAC title in the shot put and also added a victory in the discus at the outdoor track and field NJAC Championships in May. Griffith was also Rookie of the Year in 2021. ■

Baseball Returns to NCAA DIII Tourney

A long wait ended for the Red Hawks baseball team, when it grabbed one of 19 at-large bids to the NCAA Division III Baseball Championship Tournament for the first time in 13 years.



Photo courtesy of Spencer Honda, Keystone College Athletics

In a field of 60 teams, the Red Hawks ended their 2022 season with losses to Ithaca College and Immaculata University in the NCAA regional tournament.

Once a fixture in the NCAA Tournament, including three national championships (1987, 1993 and 2000), it was 2009 when the Red Hawks last made it to the tournament.

The appearance in this year's NCAA Tournament is Montclair's 28th overall, which includes trips to the NCAA College Division in 1972 and 1975 before making the Division III Tournament for the first time in 1976. Thirteen of those NCAA Division III berths resulted in championship finals appearances, the last in 2006. ■

Swimmers Set Records, Win Events



Emily Rothamel

Senior **Emily Rothamel** won the 200-yard backstroke while sophomore **Spenser Dubois** notched his second NCAA "B" cut as the Montclair swimming and diving teams closed out the four-day Metropolitan Championships in the spring semester.



Spenser Dubois

A day after setting the school record in the 100-breaststroke, Dubois broke the 200-breaststroke record, notching a time of

2:03.35 during the preliminary and placing third in the finals, clocking in at 2:03.79. Dubois broke the previous record in the 200 by nearly three seconds.

Rothamel became a two-time Metropolitan Champion, winning the 200-back for the second time in her career. She was over two seconds clear of the field, notching a first-place time of 2:07.43. ■

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ALUMNI NEWS

Meet the 2022 Distinguished Alumni



Joetta Di Bella Sautter '69



Frank Alvarez '76



Tracy Doyle '87



Erika Hamden, PhD



Helene Becker '79



Elsie Alabi-Gonzalez '18, '21 MSN

Montclair's class of Distinguished Alumni for 2022 were selected for personal accomplishments, professional achievements, community service involvement and support of the University's mission. Each spoke at a college or school convocation, the first convocations held in three years.

In the photo, the Distinguished Alumni, clockwise from the top left, are:

- COLLEGE OF THE ARTS: Joetta Di Bella Sautter '69** earned a BA in English and then, deviating from her initial plans to become an English teacher, she instead launched a successful career in television and broadcast media that took her from NYC to Hollywood. An Emmy Award-winning producer, she received several Los Angeles area Emmys for her work with KTLA Channel 5 and has served on the Television Academy's Diversity Committee and its Foundation's Education Committee.
- COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES: Frank Alvarez '76** went on to earn an MA and EdD from Teachers College, Columbia University. He is an educational consultant assisting districts to improve educational practices with a focus on underrepresented student achievement, special education and principal effectiveness. During his career, he has served as superintendent of schools in four districts: North Caldwell (N.J.), River Vale (N.J.), Montclair (N.J.) and Rye (N.Y.).
- COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES: Tracy Doyle '87** is a managing partner at eNOVA, a medical communications software and services company serving the life sciences industry. Doyle finds creative solutions to industry challenges and designs initiatives that help health-care providers connect and learn about advances in science and medicine.

- SCHOOL OF NURSING: Elsie Alabi-Gonzalez '18, '21 MSN** was a member of the inaugural RN to BSN class at Montclair State University. As a registered nurse caring for adults in long-term care facilities and in the community, she also served as a peer development coach during her studies at Montclair. In the MSN degree program, her specialty concentration was in the educator role and she joined the Montclair faculty in fall 2021, serving as clinical specialist.
- FELICIANO SCHOOL OF BUSINESS: Helene Becker '79** is a managing director and senior research analyst at Cowen who covers airlines, air freight and aircraft leasing. She has more than 35 years of experience on Wall Street, holding positions within the

research, trading and investment banking departments of several broker/dealers including Citi, Lehman Brothers and Smith Barney.

- COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS: Erika Hamden, PhD** is an astrophysicist. The daughter of Montclair State University Physics and Astronomy Professor Dean Hamden, it's no wonder that she developed a love of science. She attended Montclair before completing her bachelor's degree in Astronomy and Astrophysics at Harvard College in 2006 and a doctorate in Astrophysics at Columbia University in 2014. Her research focuses on measuring and mapping diffuse hydrogen around other galaxies and within star-forming regions in our own galaxy. ■



ONE DAY FOR MONTCLAIR

Montclair's community of alumni, students, parents, faculty, staff and friends came together to make a difference. Here's how each group ranked in giving.



This year's giving day, One Day for Montclair, celebrated donors and their contributions, which help provide opportunities for students through scholarships and programs. Thanks to matching gifts and donation challenges, including a challenge to donate what you'd spend on your latte for one day (or a week or a month), One Day for Montclair raised more than \$225,000 through 1,426 gifts. "We asked our campus to come together to create something special, and they did," says Director of Annual Giving Kara Baldwin Brennan '92. "We are so inspired, knowing how impactful these gifts will be." ■



A Night with The Jersey Four

The Black Alumni Advisory Council hosted an evening with The Jersey Four on campus in February. Twenty-three years ago, Rayshawn Brown, Jarmaine Grant, Keshon Moore and Danny Reyes, headed to North Carolina hoping to play college basketball, but were pulled over and shot by police on the New Jersey Turnpike. Their story continues to resonate today, particularly in the wake of so many high-profile killings by police. ■



Wine Tasting Returns

Sommelier Gerry Piserchia teaches alumni and friends all about wine at the 10th Annual Alumni Wine Tasting event, held for the first time in two years in person at University Hall on April 5, 2022. ■



EOF Champion Awards

From left, Lou Gilleran '79, Julia Lanigan and Greg Collins '79 received EOF Champion Awards at the EOF alumni induction and awards ceremony for graduating seniors on May 4, 2022. ■

A Night of Gratitude

More than 200 supporters of the University gathered in May for a festive celebration at the Alexander Kasser Theater and promenade recognizing their commitment to students. While celebrating and showing appreciation for all donors and the impact they have on student success and Montclair's excellence, the event also honored a singular donor, Josh Weston '97 Hon., by awarding him the Mary Mochary and Michael Kasser Award for Philanthropic Leadership in recognition of his generosity and engagement in supporting the University and Montclair community. "Philanthropy transforms potential into reality...and when you make a contribution you are helping to create the future of this University," said President Jonathan Koppell in acknowledging donor impact. For more information and photos visit the News Center at montclair.edu. ■

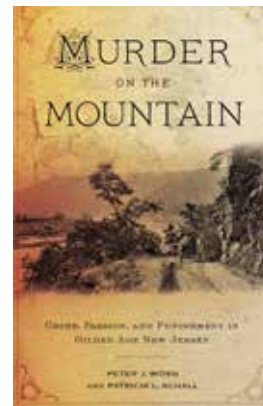


From left, Michael Kasser, President Koppell, award recipient Josh Weston '97 Hon. and Mary Mochary.



Fraternity Celebrates 31st Reunion

The Kappa Chapter of Lambda Theta Phi, Latin Fraternity Inc. celebrated the fraternity's 31st anniversary on campus in February. Reunion committee chairs, Rey Acevedo '13, Jason Velante '00, Antonio Garcia '01 and Luis Roeder '05, worked with Montclair's Annual Giving and Alumni Engagement team on the event. "Thank you Montclair State University for accepting us, many of us first-generation students, from poor or working poor 'at-risk' families, wanting a better life through achieving a college education," said Acevedo. ■



Author and Alumna's Legacy to Endure

The legacy of Patricia Schall '68 will continue for many generations to come – both at Montclair and through a recently published nonfiction historical crime story that occurred in 1879. Peter Wosh, Schall's co-author and husband of more than 30 years, has pledged to fulfill Schall's wish of supporting future students at Montclair State University. Schall was a longtime professor at Saint Elizabeth University in Morristown and a community activist who was admired and loved by her students, colleagues and the community. Before Schall's passing in 2020, she and Wosh co-wrote *Murder on the Mountain: Crime, Passion, and Punishment in Gilded Age New Jersey*, published by Rutgers Press. The University welcomes Pat and Peter to the Carpe Diem Legacy Society. ■



Above: President Koppell and Wendy Gillespie '73, who hosted an event at her home in San Diego, Calif. Right, top: Alumni and friends mingle at scenic Paradise Valley, Ariz., event. Right, bottom: Hosts Robert and Barbara Lieberman (second and third from right) with President Koppell and guests in Delray Beach, Fla.



Back in Your Neighborhood

With the world reopening and alumni living and working remotely across the country, University representatives, including President Jonathan Koppell, were on the road again, visiting gatherings in Arizona, California and Florida this year.

In February, alumni and friends gathered at El Chorro in Paradise Valley, Arizona, enjoying an evening of spectacular views and rekindled connections. There are close to 1,000 alumni living in Arizona.

In March, Wendy Gillespie '73 hosted a reception in her home in San Diego, California. Gillespie, an entrepreneur and Broadway producer of the musical *Come From Away*, has remained engaged with the University, ever grateful for her Montclair education. "With 2,000 alumni and friends living in California, our Red Hawk community is as strong as ever," she says.

Also held in March was a gathering in Florida, a state that more than 6,000 alumni now call home. Hosting the Delray Beach reception were Robert Lieberman and his wife, Barbara. Lieberman, who serves on the University Foundation board, is an enthusiastic advocate for Montclair, regularly supporting scholarships and creating opportunities for students as interns in his business.

"We are grateful for the generosity of our hosts across the country for giving our alumni opportunities to connect," says Jeanne Marano, assistant vice president for Annual Giving and Alumni Engagement. "As part of our series of regional events and activities, we reach beyond campus to host alumni networking opportunities, so even those alumni who don't live in New Jersey can network with fellow alumni and friends in their neighborhood and reconnect with the University." ■



Lou Gilleran '79

CAPTAIN OF DESTINY

When Lou Gilleran '79 says he has an “interesting background,” the physician and retired Navy captain is really underselling himself. A foster child in his teens, he navigated college and career choices alone, worked construction to help pay for college and still found time to play sports.

After graduating Montclair with a BS in Biology, Gilleran dropped out of New Jersey Medical School “because I just don’t think I was ready for it.” He went to St. George’s University School of Medicine in Grenada and then the U.S. invaded Grenada while he was there. “I came back and actually did a television interview with Montclair State after I got evacuated from Grenada.”

Growing up in New York City, Gilleran was one of six children; his parents divorced when he was 5. As a teen, he lived with his aunt briefly, before going to live with a friend’s mother

in Montclair as a foster child at 16. A conversation with a guidance counselor led him to Drew University before he transferred to Montclair.

“A real saving grace is when I spoke to my guidance counselor at Montclair High School, and he told me because I was in the foster care program, I was considered an emancipated minor” and eligible for assistance through the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program, Gilleran recalls.

“I worked all through college,” he says. “If I had had to work any more, there’s no way I would have been able to graduate, let alone excel.”

In addition, Gilleran says he took full advantage of tutoring offered to EOF students, especially for calculus. “So, the program really saved me.”

After completing an internal medicine residency in Cleveland, he

joined the Navy as a medical officer and served as a flight surgeon and in various leadership roles, completing a residency in aerospace medicine. He was deployed to many locations, including Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2016, Gilleran retired from the Navy after 27 years, having achieved the rank of captain and with more than 20 awards, including the Legion of Merit, six Meritorious Service, Navy Commendation, two Navy Achievement and two National Defense medals. Today, Gilleran lives in San Diego, where he practices internal and preventive medicine part time and is also part of the San Diego Sheriff’s Department team that provides medical care for inmates.

Despite his challenges in college, Gilleran remembers Montclair fondly.

“I had time to play water polo and be on the swim team my junior and senior

years and hung out at the Student Center,” he says. “I played some Frisbee on the lawn and spent a lot of time in the library, needless to say.”

He’s donated to Montclair over the years but reading about fellow '79 graduate Greg Collins in *Montclair* magazine last year inspired him to do more. Both were named EOF champions (page 38). Grateful for EOF’s assistance, he has created two scholarships, one to help EOF students with books and other needs, and the other for students in the Health Careers program.

“It’s important to give back; I’m honored to do it,” Gilleran says. He wants to help students the way EOF helped him and demonstrate that “you can get through some of your trials and tribulations and make something of yourself, and then hopefully, help other people out on your way up.” ■

—Sylvia A. Martinez

'70s '80s '90s

CLASSTOTES

Franklin Walker Sr. '74 retired after a 48-year career in Jersey City Public Schools in January.

John F. Clabby '75 MA, PhD was appointed to the position of professor emeritus in the field of Behavioral Health by the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School at Rutgers University.

Joe Cosentino '77 published *Drama TV*, the 13th book of the Nicky and Noah series, in December.

Gregory Dell'Omo '77, president of Rider University, was included in the 2021 *NJBIZ* Education Power 50 list.

Nancy Erika Smith '77, Esq. was included in Senator Loretta Weinberg's 2021 Women's Power List in *InsiderNJ*. (See profile, page 43).

Donna Bonavita '78, principal of Bonavita Design LLC, collected eight awards at the 53rd Annual Jersey Awards statewide competition in September, winning four first and one second place awards as well as three Certificates of Excellence for corporate and promotional marketing material.

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Samuel "Sam" D. Mills Jr. '80 was inducted posthumously into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in February. He played for the New Orleans Saints and the Carolina Panthers. (See story, page 33)

Constantino "Gus" Milano '81 was included on *NJBIZ*'s 2021 Commercial Real Estate Power 50 list.



William C. Petzinger '82, '97 MA was appointed as a major in Civil Air Patrol's Maj Thomas B. McGuire Composite Squadron at Joint Base McGuire Dix

Lakehurst. He is the squadron commander and also serves as its public affairs officer. Founded during World War II, Civil Air Patrol pilots flew missions over the nation's coasts and borders to protect the U.S.

Peter D. Aquino '83 was appointed the new president and chief executive officer of SeaChange International, Inc. – a leading provider of video delivery, advertising and streaming platforms – in September.

Gina Coleman '91 was named chief diversity officer of PNC Bank. She also serves as co-chair of the PNC Corporate Diversity Council, which focuses on embedding inclusion into every aspect of the organization.

James Dorey '92 became senior vice president of operations for In Serra Supermarkets in December.



Kevin J. O'Connor '92 was certified by the Supreme Court of New Jersey as a civil trial attorney in January. Fewer than 2% of attorneys in New Jersey have this

accreditation. He is the chair of Peckar & Abramson P.C.'s business litigation practice and vice-chair of the firm's labor and employment practice.



Mary Bell Steffen '96 MFA exhibited her paintings at the Aiken Center for the Arts in Aiken, Pickens County Museum of Arts & History in Pickens, and ArtFields in Lake City, all located in South Carolina. She was also awarded honorable mention in the Waccamaw Arts & Crafts Guild Members Show in November. Steffen is a member of the National Association of Women Artists and has been treasurer of the South Carolina chapter since 2019.

Anthony J. Scardino '97, PhD was appointed the associate dean of the School of Business and Information Sciences at Felician University in November. He is also an associate professor.



Nancy Erika Smith '77

LEGAL HAWK

Nancy Erika Smith '77 has scaled the heights of her profession as a civil rights lawyer who, since the age of 25, has been breaking ground and making news, winning cases for those who face discrimination based on age, race, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

And as she squares off in court with lawyers who went to institutions like Brown, Columbia and Harvard, she remains proud and appreciative of her degrees from Montclair (Social Work) and Rutgers Law School.

"When an adversary feels the need to tell me where they went to college 30 years ago, I always tell them where I went – starting with Ocean County College. Then I beat them," Smith told graduates as the Distinguished Speaker for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences Commencement last year.

Smith, who has argued before the U.S. Supreme Court, is perhaps most famous for her role in the sexual harassment suit that resulted in Roger Ailes being fired from Fox News, but she has many wins in her column starting with *Slohoda vs. United Parcel Service*, which ultimately rewrote the law on marital status discrimination.

"It helped that I didn't know anything," says Smith, who pursued an argument for the workplace termination suit that big firm lawyers thought was outrageous. "Jon Slohoda was fired from UPS for having a relationship outside his marriage, but he was separated, getting a divorce and not supervising his wife. They fired him because he was an 'adulterer.' Isn't that marital status discrimination?"

It was a heady start to her career, but it didn't go to Smith's head. Coming from a working class background in Keyport, New Jersey, Smith is well grounded. After her father died when she was 15, she and her mother lived in a trailer park in Toms River. Smith started at Ocean County College and ultimately transferred to Montclair as a commuter student when she moved to Parsippany.

Now Smith lives a busy life, rich with court cases, five grown children, nine grandchildren (so far) and a successful law practice with her husband. One secret to her success: "Do your best in everything you do," she told students last spring. "Never settle for OK."

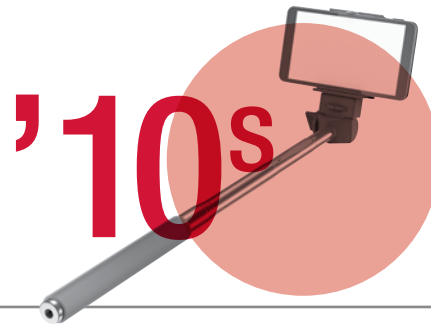
But she also says she doesn't want to play into the Horatio Alger myth.

"Very few people change class in our society," says Smith. "I'm really eternally grateful to Montclair State, and I really hope that we can invest in public education so that kids don't leave with debt and they can afford to do public interest work."

"I think that Montclair doesn't get enough credit for that," says Smith. "We need to really let people know that this is the place where we do public service and train people to do public service."

She adds, "I appreciate and understand the privilege of an affordable public education that prepared me for a life of meaning." ■

—Mary Barr Mann



Allison Bressler '00 became the co-founder and co-director of A Partnership For Change, a New Jersey-based nonprofit organization that trains individuals statewide on preventing and ending domestic violence and dating abuse.



Joseph "Joe" Fiduccia '01 built a full-scale replica of Optimus Prime from the *Transformers* films in 2016 to inspire his son. With approval from Hasbro, he travels with Optimus to elementary schools around the country and shares life experiences to encourage students to stand up to bullies. Upon graduation, Fiduccia dabbled in radio before becoming a software application trainer and consultant.

Alvin Mallette '01 helped welcome Afghan refugees arriving in the United States at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in New Jersey in September. He is an Air Force Major.

Jennifer Higgins '04 MA joined the New Jersey State Health Benefits Commission as the state employee representative of the New Jersey AFL-CIO in November.

Angelo Auteri '05, Esq. was promoted to a partner of Scarinci Hollenbeck in the Public, Labor & Employment group out of the firm's Lyndhurst, N.J., headquarters.

Keith T. Campbell '06, Esq. was promoted to senior associate of Scarinci Hollenbeck out of the firm's Lyndhurst, N.J., headquarters. He practices education and special education law.

Al-Nesha Jones '07, '13 MBA is a member of the Intuit® Tax Council, and recently provided content to "The Path to Advisory," a guide to creating and managing an advisory practice.

Paige A. Dworak '08 played a pivotal role in the rebranding of the East Orange General Hospital, now named CareWell Health Medical Center. She is the co-owner and CEO.

Cristina A. Pinzon '08 was included on *InsiderNJ's* 2021 Top 100 Millennials list. She is the founder of Stateside Affairs, which serves as a critical bridge between the state's political structure and the Latinx community.

Emily Midkiff '10, who went on to earn a master's and a PhD, published a book of research with the University Press of Mississippi. Titled *Equipping Space Cadets: Primary Science Fiction for Young Children*, the book is about how science fiction is great for children.

Mark J. Comesañes '11 MA was named the first full-time executive director of My Brother's Keeper Newark, an initiative of Newark Opportunity Youth Network aimed at helping young people in New Jersey succeed.

Christina A. Vance '11 and **Gregory S. "Greg" Winick '15 Cert.** were married in November 2021, at the Westmount Country Club in Woodland Park, N.J.

Sean R. Verbist '11 and **Matthew Dobrowolski '12** helped save a six-day-old infant in December when his airway was obstructed. They are both Montclair police officers.

Shante D. Palmer '12 was reelected treasurer of the New Jersey Democratic State Committee in January. She was also included in Senator Loretta Weinberg's 2021 Women's Power List in *InsiderNJ*.

Avraham Groll '13 had a conversation about "Using JewishGen to Research Your Roots – Including Holocaust Related Information" with Jerry Zaks, a retired technology expert, who has done just that. He is the executive director of JewishGen – The Global Home for Jewish Genealogy.



Sandy Alzubi '14 MA was named the educational service professional for 2021. She works as a school social worker for the Union City (N.J.) Board of Education.

Amanda J. Del Gaudio '15 became the inaugural director of Gender Equity and LGBTQIA+ Life at Gettysburg (Pa.) College.

Maria Harper '15 joined A.Y. Strauss as a litigation associate in September. She also married fellow alumnus **Ryan J. Harper '16** in September 2020.

Stephen Lyman '15 was named executive director of The Maritime Association of the Port of New York/ New Jersey.

Anthony Fasano '16 was included on *InsiderNJ's* 2021 Top 100 Millennials list. He was elected deputy director of the Hopatcong (N.J.) Board of Education in early 2021.

Hope Kremer '16, '21 MA hopes to raise \$3,000 for the Lymphoma Research Foundation in order to gain entry to the New York City Marathon in October. She also recently began working full time in University College as an academic advisor.

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Diamonique Lundy '21 MS

NOURISHING THE SOUL

Diamonique Lundy '21 MS had always been fascinated by the holistic approach of nutrition and the role our diets play in our overall health. "I love the idea of farm to table and of knowing where your ingredients come from," she says. "Plus, I really enjoy cooking. It is so rewarding to use great ingredients and recipes to make healthy meals."

Lundy's coursework in Montclair's Master of Science in Nutrition and Food Science program added a new dimension to her thinking. "I learned that many communities, both urban and rural, do not have access to fresh ingredients, which leads to poor health and dietary diseases," she says. "In addition, the communities that lacked access to healthy eating options tended to be populated by people of color."

She began creating workshops to educate people about nutrition from a culturally competent viewpoint and began thinking about how she could make healthy, fresh food convenient and represent what people like to eat.

The result is SoLo's Food, a meal prep service specializing in healthy and authentic soul, Caribbean and Latin food. Her company offers research-based meal plans that allow people to enjoy their cultural foods while also meeting their healthy eating goals. The entrepreneurial venture was a winning team at the 2020 Startup Montclair pitch competition, sponsored by the Feliciano Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation.

The company is already reaching a national market and Lundy has plans for more. She earned a

coveted spot in Target's Accelerator program, an online incubator for some of the country's most promising entrepreneurs. "My goal is to get SoLo's Food onto retail shelves, to bring healthy food to an even broader population," she says.

"Montclair State provided my first adult experience with social justice," Lundy continues, noting that as a student at Montclair, she worked part time on campus as a graduate program coordinator. "In addition to the conversations and projects that were part of my classes, Montclair connected me with volunteer opportunities at a community garden and food pantry in Paterson. I learned the importance of equity and inclusion, and of making sure everyone is represented and has a voice."

It's a philosophy that infuses all of Lundy's entrepreneurial ventures, including WEALTH Social, a social networking mobile app that helps business-to-consumer professionals connect in real life.

Despite the demands of entrepreneurship, network building and lifting up the talents of others, Lundy finds time to give back to the community. "I particularly like mentoring students," she says. "I encourage them to always be authentic in what they believe and in their life's mission. When you are sure of your purpose and goals, and you keep them front and center in your mind, you can put your energy into executing your plans." ■

—Michele Hickey



Stephen P. Blazejewski '17 led the branding transformation process of the New Jersey Pride Chamber of Commerce (NJPC). He was appointed president of NJPC in 2021 and is the youngest president to preside over a chamber in the state. He has worked to improve the brand and reorganize the board and its processes, in order to add more value to its membership.



Samantha Johnson Boyer '17 was named the 2021 Cumberland County Teacher of the Year. She is a pre-kindergarten teacher in Upper Deerfield (N.J.) Township at C.F. Seabrook School. She is the first Pre-K teacher to earn this title.

Beth L. Gottung '19 MA joined Montclair Film as the new co-head and executive director in February. In her new role, she leads development, external affairs, education and community relations initiatives for the organization.

Gabrielle "Gabi" Bartnik '21 won a 2021 Jersey Award at the NJ Ad Club's 53rd Annual Jersey Awards, along with **Joanna Zaccardi '21**, **Zoe W. Gleason '21**, and **Christina Giordano '22** in October. They created a Motown curriculum guide for the Motown Museum.

Rahjaun Gordon '21 PhD was promoted to director of the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program at Montclair State University.

Marilyn Joyce Lehren '21 MA and **Ariana Leyton '17, '18 MS, '22 MA** helped produce an episode of Amazon Prime's *The College Tour*, which featured Montclair State University. (See story page 12)

Diamonique Lundy '21 was a featured speaker at the Feliciano School of Business' 8th Annual Women Entrepreneurship Week in October. (See profile, page 45)

Craig J. Merkle '21 was sworn in as a police officer for Montgomery Township, N.J., in January.



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IN MEMORIAM

Muriel Leeming Haag '44

Clorinda M. Daizoni Scagnelli '48, '58 MA

Russell F. Reed '49, '50 MA

Marion Metz Bauermann '50

Catherine J. Buce '51

Nancy L. Geyer '51

J. Robert Parkinson '54, '59 MA

Barbara L. Smith '54

Virginia A. Cavalluzzo '56 MA

John T. Hopkins '57

Angelo R. Costa '62

Joan L. Eacovalle '63

Eileen K. Fallman '64

Mary E. Williams Fisher '65

Carla A. Schechner '67

Jeannette Wiener '69, '73 MA

Miriam H. Willinger '69 MA

Louis F. Broccoletti '70

Cynthia Hasterlis Boyle '71

Marion J. Thomas '71

Judith A. Waage '71

James T. Nally '72

Stephen W. Carroll '73

Raymond "Ray" M. Michue '73

Hugh E. "Hughie" Pryor '77

Dorothy P. Franken '78

David R. Noack '78 MA

Joseph S. Savino '80

Olga Pelesh Maio '84, '92 MA, '11 Cert.

Terry L. Blau '85

Brian T. Lamb '85

Lisette Gutierrez '86

Alyce Jane Suk Strapec '87

Robert A. Frisch '94

John A. Kuzora '03

Hamza Muheisen '19

Alisonstar Molaf '21

*Ron Hollander

*Ludwik Kowalski

*Walter Swales

*Rhoda K. Unger

*Chaim Zemach

**Michele Knobel

**Catherine B. Roland

**Richard O. Taubald '67

*Former Faculty

**Faculty Emeriti

LASTING LESSONS

GERARD COSTA | FORMER DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR AUTISM AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

From 2011 through his retirement at the end of 2021, Gerard “Gerry” Costa took Montclair’s groundbreaking Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health from a founding staff of three to an influential statewide and national beacon of research and knowledge in infant, toddler and early childhood development with a team of more than 70. Corinne Catalano ’95 MEd, ’18 PhD, assistant director for Consultation Services at the Center, met Costa in 1999 while pursuing a certificate in Infant Mental Health. “He has been my mentor, teacher and dear friend ever since. He taught me to wonder about the inner lives of infants, children and families. He taught me about the power of relationships and the need to foster trust before trying any other intervention. Gerry brought these lessons to Montclair State and shared them with others throughout New Jersey.” Colette Ryan met Costa at a conference where he asked her to join the University’s Infant Mental Health fellowship program. “Gerry has the wonderful ability to make everyone want to be better, do better and serve others better,” says Ryan, who is now pursuing a doctorate in Infant and Early Childhood Development. “There are so many impressive things about Gerry but what stands out is his ability to talk to everyone,” says Lorri Sullivan, assistant director for Curriculum and Training at the Center, who worked with Costa since the early 1990s, when they met on the job at the Center for Family Resources in Ringwood, New Jersey. “He thinks about parents, caregivers, children – and he always makes a definite point to talk about infants. To Gerry’s credit, in our state, anyone who is working with infants, toddlers and young children, probably has learned from Gerry in some capacity.” ■

–Mary Barr Mann

Read more at montclair.edu/magazine. Let us know who made a difference during your time at Montclair State at editor@montclair.edu.

“Montclair State University opens doors for me; not only am I able to hone my craft as an actor, but as a dancer and student leader.... Montclair has molded me into the person I have always wanted to be.”

DARE TO DREAM

Ciara Chanel Allen always knew she wanted to go to college. The question was how she would pay for it. As a top student in academics with talent in the arts, Ciara was eligible for financial support, and thanks to generous scholarships made possible by donors, she made her dreams a reality.

Your support helps students like Ciara take their future to the next level.

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CIARA CHANEL ALLEN '22

BFA in Acting, MSU Players, Complexions Band Dance Team, Resident Advisor,
Student Recreation Center dance teacher, featured on *The College Tour*.



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