



# **COMMENCEMENT**

## **CELEBRATING OUR 2025 GRADUATES**

**Wednesday, May 28, 2025, at 4:00 P.M.**

**Celeste Bartos Forum  
New York Public Library – Stephen A. Schwarzman Building  
476 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10018**

**CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies**

# **ABOUT THE CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES**

The CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies (SLU) offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in Labor Studies and Urban Studies that are designed to meet the needs of working adults as well as traditional-age college students seeking to learn more about the challenges confronting poor and working-class populations in the workplace and the community.

The School also collaborates with other CUNY schools to offer a range of college-credit programs designed to provide workers with the academic and technical skills they need for professional advancement. Its faculty includes distinguished scholars in the social sciences as well as expert practitioners in government, labor, and public service. In addition to its academic programs, SLU sponsors research, organizes public forums and conferences, and publishes a national journal, *New Labor Forum: A Journal of Ideas, Analysis, and Debate*.

In 2018 SLU opened its doors as a self-standing school, an expansion of the Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, named for the former CUNY Chancellor and tireless advocate for the labor movement and worker education. The Institute traces its roots to 1984, when CUNY collaborated with three New York City unions to establish a worker education program at Queens College. That program started with just 52 students.

Today, more than 1,500 students are enrolled in SLU's degree and certificate programs and in workforce development programs across the University, and the leaders of 27 labor and community organizations serve on SLU's Advisory Board. The Joseph S. Murphy Institute continues to be an integral element of the School, focusing on education for workers and union members and serving as a research and resource center for publications and public programming.

The vision for this School derives from its core values: access to education, diversity at every level, social justice, and equality for all. Its goals are to expand higher education opportunities for workers; prepare students who aspire to careers in public service and movements for social justice; promote civic engagement; provide leadership development for union and community activists; and help workers achieve greater economic security. Its perspective is unique, addressing the needs of its constituents while helping New York City and State fulfill their needs for a well-educated, highly skilled workforce.

To accomplish its goals, the School has four foundational pillars: Labor Studies, Urban Studies, Workforce Development, and Community Service. Of equal importance, these pillars support a range of intellectual aspirations and practical needs, and serve as a gateway to college for many workers and working-class communities.

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# THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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# CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES

## FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION

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*Founding Dean*

**Elizabeth Sergile, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate**  
*Interim Associate Dean of Academic Affairs*

**Burton Sacks, M.S., M.S., P.D.**  
*Associate Dean for Administration and Operations*

### FACULTY

**Steve London, Ph.D.**  
*Associate Professor and Chair of Urban Studies*

**Stephanie Luce, Ph.D.**  
*Professor and Chair of Labor Studies*

**Sofya Aptekar, Ph.D.**  
*Associate Professor of Urban Studies*

**Kafui Attah, Ph.D.**  
*Associate Professor of Urban Studies*

**Andres Bernal, Ph.D. Candidate**  
*Substitute Lecturer in Urban Studies*

**Cameron Black, Ph.D.**  
*Assistant Professor of Labor Studies*

**Yolande Cadore, Ed.D.**  
*Substitute Assistant Professor of Urban Studies*

**Ellen Dichner, J.D.**  
*Distinguished Lecturer in Labor Studies*

**Alethia Jones, Ph.D.**  
*Distinguished Lecturer in Labor Studies*

**Penelope Lewis, Ph.D.**  
*Associate Professor of Labor Studies*

**Ruth Milkman, Ph.D.**  
*Distinguished Professor of Labor Studies*

**James Rodriguez, Ph.D.**  
*Assistant Professor of Urban Studies*

**Samir Sonti, Ph.D.**  
*Assistant Professor of Urban Studies*

**Nantina Vgontzas, Ph.D.**  
*Assistant Professor of Labor Studies*

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*Director of Finance and Business Affairs*

**Violet Bube, MSILR**  
*Human Resources Manager*

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*Director, Worker Education and Workforce Development*

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*Director, Bursar and Scholarships*

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*Retention and Prior Learning Assessment Manager*

**Laurie Grimes, M.A.**  
*Enrollment Registrar Director*

**Antoinette Isable-Jones, B.A.**  
*Chief Communications and Marketing Officer*

**Maureen LaMar, M.S.**  
*Manager of Institutional and Academic Partnerships*

**Lindsey McCormack, MIA**  
*Director of Institutional Development*

**Meghan Moore-Wilk, Ph.D.**  
*Interim Assistant Dean for Strategic Initiatives and  
Chief of Staff*

**Rochel Pinder, M.P.A., Ed.D.**  
*Director of Student and Community Affairs*

**Chris Policano**  
*Director of External Relations*

**Jeff Rickman**  
*Director of Technology*

**Sarah Watson, M.A.**  
*Director of the Murphy Institute*

## MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDING DEAN



Dear SLU Graduates, Class of 2025:

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to you and your families on reaching this milestone in your lives. We know how hard you have worked to get to this point and that is precisely why we celebrate today. Now you become part of the mighty, ever-growing group of graduates of the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies.

From our School's beginning in 2018, CUNY's Board of Trustees envisioned SLU as a unique institution with a diverse student body, including union members, community activists, committed and aspiring activists and leaders, and others with scholarly interests in public service and social justice. You are members of a very special

cadre — people who want to advance their own knowledge and careers and make a difference in the world.

The graduates we celebrate today have risen to the challenges of this tumultuous time in our history. Your degrees reflect your dedication to enrichment despite — or because of — systemic racism and sexism, gross economic inequities, wars around the world, attacks on immigrants and LGBTQIA+ communities, and efforts to dismantle our democracy. We hope the education you've received at SLU has equipped you with the tools and confidence to show leadership in the fight for equality, peace and justice.

Each of you has an important role to play. I encourage you to hold on to your optimism, your passion for learning, and your dedication to making a difference. These are the very qualities that led you to SLU and will continue to drive you toward a life of purpose and significance. By embracing leadership and advocating for change, you will honor both this great University and our School, helping to build a better world.

I also want to encourage you to remain an active member of the SLU community. Continue your personal journey by continuing your education; participating in SLU's public forums and conferences; staying in touch with faculty and fellow students; and helping others succeed academically by sharing your experiences. We are counting on you to play an ongoing part in SLU's story.

My warmest congratulations and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Gregory Mantsios". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Gregory Mantsios, Ph.D.

Founding Dean

CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies

# CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES

## LABOR AND COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

### University Representatives

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor, The City University of New York

Assoc. Prof. Kafui Attoh, Chair, Academic Governing Council, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies

Prof. Stephanie Luce, Labor Studies Chair, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies

Assoc. Prof. Steve London, Urban Studies Chair, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies

New York State AFL-CIO

Mario Cilento, President

New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Vincent Alvarez, President

Local 1180, Communications Workers of America (CWA)

Gloria Middleton, President

\* Arthur Cheliotis, Business Manager

District Council 37, American Federation of State, County, & Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

Henry Garrido, Executive Director

(alt. Barbara Ingram-Edmonds, Dir. of Field Operations)

(alt. Stephen Johnson, Administrator, Education Fund)

Local 1549, NYC Clerical-Administrative Employees

Anthony Lackhan, President

(alt. vacant)

Workers United (SEIU)

Edgar Romney, Secretary-Treasurer

1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East

**Vacant**

(alt. Samantha Morales, Director Education/Leadership Dev)

1199SEIU Training and Upgrading Fund

Sandi Vito, Executive Director

United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

Michael Mulgrew, President

(alt. Mary Vaccaro, Vice President of Education)

Public Employees Federation (PEF)

Wayne Spence, President

(alt. Bruce Giddings, Vice President)

Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), Region 2

Lester Crockett, President

(alt. Matthew D'Amico, Political Action Coordinator)

Local 237, International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)

Gregory Floyd, President

(alt. Shanell Grayson, Director of Education)

Consortium for Worker Education (CWE)

Marco Carrión, President

(alt. Deborah Buxton, Deputy Director of Education)

Local 32BJ, Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Manny Pastreich, President

(alt. Lenore Friedlaender, Assistant to the President)

(alt. Linda Nelson, Director, Thomas Shortman, Training Fund)

New York State Nurses Association

Nancy Hagans, President

Transportation Workers Union (TWU) Local 100

[Vacant]

(alt. Charles Jenkins, Director, Training and Upgrading Fund)

Local 94, International Union of Operating Engineers

Kuba Brown, Business Manager/Financial Secretary

(alt. David Hakins, Director of Training)

Professional Staff Congress (PSC)

James Davis, President

Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE)

Sam Wheller, Executive Director

Region 9A, United Auto Workers (UAW)

Brandon Mancilla, Director

(alt. Ken Lang, Director of Higher Ed Sector Organizing)

Local 371, Social Service Employees Union (SSEU)

Anthony Wells, President

(alt. Denise Bar, Associate Administrator)

District 1, Communications Workers of America (CWA)

Dennis G. Trainor, Vice President, CWA District 1

(alt. vacant)

The NewsGuild of New York-CWA

Susan DeCarava, President

Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union

Stuart Applebaum, President

New York Committee on Occupational Safety and Health

Charlene Obernauer, Executive Director

Community Voices Heard

Juanita Lewis, Executive Director

New York Immigration Coalition

Murad Awawdeh, Executive Director

State & Broadway, Inc.

Richard Winsten, Esq

New York State Nurses Association

Nancy Hagans, President

Transportation Workers Union (TWU) Local 100

[Vacant]

(alt. Charles Jenkins, Director, Training and Upgrading Fund)

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\* Chair of the Advisory Board, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies



## MESSAGE FROM THE LABOR AND COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR



Congratulations, Graduates!

I have been privileged to serve as Chair of the Advisory Board of CUNY's School of Labor and Urban Studies since SLU was established in 2018. The Board, which is comprised of the leaders of 27 labor unions and community organizations, has partnered with University leaders and distinguished scholars to create a unique School with a unique mission.

Working women and men are the lifeblood of our city and nation. SLU is a reflection of that essential truth. Our goal has always been to expand educational opportunities for workers and working-class communities, and to provide education for social justice and social change. Over the years, the organizations represented on our Board have provided the resources that make it possible for union members and activists to achieve their dreams of completing an education.

We are here today to celebrate the Class of 2025 and to thank all those who have supported you over the last several years. The global pandemic that wreaked havoc on our city and our country did not stop you from achieving your goals. You found the strength and resilience to persevere, even though the learning community was fractured, and classes were remote. The majority of you also managed to work and care for your families at the same time. Some of you even lost loved ones. I and the entire Advisory Board salute your determination and fortitude along with your academic achievements.

We are very proud that you chose SLU. It says that you want to make a difference — you want a better world for yourself and your family; better working conditions for you and your colleagues; and an end to the racism and economic inequality that plague our society. Armed with the degrees and certificates you have earned, you have an opportunity to become leaders in your unions and community organizations and to participate more fully in the political process. We urge you on! Making your contribution to social justice is the ultimate way to give back to the School of Labor and Urban Studies.

Again, congratulations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arthur Cheliotis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Arthur" written in a smaller, more compact script and the last name "Cheliotis" in a larger, more prominent script.

Arthur Cheliotis,  
Advisory Board Chair



# **COMMENCEMENT 2025**

## **ORDER OF CEREMONY**

**Rose Imperato**  
*Commencement Master of Ceremonies*

### **PROCESSIONAL**

**Ellen Dichner**  
*Commencement Grand Marshal*

### **ANTHEMS**

**The Star-Spangled Banner**  
*United States Marine Band*

**Solidarity Forever**  
*Nicole Alifante, vocals*  
*Karry Faselt Hopwood, vocals and guitar*  
*Al Hemberger, The Loft Recording Studios*

### **MOMENT OF SILENCE**

### **PRESIDING**

**Gregory Mantsios**  
*Founding Dean*

### **GREETINGS FROM THE CUNY TRUSTEES AND CHANCELLERY**

**Michael Arvanites**  
*Trustee, City University of New York*

**Félix V. Matos Rodríguez**  
*Chancellor, City University of New York*

### **VALEDICTORIAN ADDRESS**

**Joseph Newswander**  
*Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies*

**COMMENCEMENT 2025**  
**ORDER OF CEREMONY (CONT'D)**

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**MESSAGE TO GRADUATES**

**Kaarthika Thakker**  
*Graduate Student Speaker*

**CONFERRING OF THE HONORARY DEGREE**

**Gregory Mantsios**  
*Founding Dean*

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND  
HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENT**

**Erica Smiley**  
*Executive Director*  
*Jobs With Justice*

**PASSING OF THE TORCH**

**Walter Romney**  
*Receptionist; Author, "Passing the Torch"*

**Cory Rohr**  
*Executive Assistant, Office of Academic Affairs*

**Latoya Fisher**  
*Bachelor of Arts in Urban and Community Studies*

**Katrina Gray**  
*Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies*

**COMMENCEMENT 2025**  
**ORDER OF CEREMONY (CONT'D)**

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**PRESENTATION OF THE GRADUATES AND  
CONFERRAL OF DEGREES**

**Gregory Mantsios**  
*Founding Dean*

**Elizabeth Sergile**  
*Interim Associate Dean of Academic Affairs*

**Rose Imperato**  
*Commencement Master of Ceremonies*

**CLOSING REMARKS**

**Ellen Dichner**  
*Commencement Grand Marshal*

**RECESSIONAL**

## **COMMENCEMENT 2025 SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



### **CUNY BOARD OF TRUSTEES Michael Arvanites**

MICHAEL ARVANITES, B.A., a native Staten Islander, serves as Staten Island's Trustee to the City University of New York; having been unanimously approved by the State Senate and appointed by Mayor Bill DeBlasio, effective July 1, 2017, for a term that ends in 2024.

The Board of Trustees provides oversight for a quarter-million students and thousands of faculty and staff at 25 campuses. Michael has served as a top advisor to State Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano, City Councilmember Michael McMahon, Councilmember Kamillah Hanks and State Senator Diane Savino, as well as Liaison to City Council Speaker Christine Quinn. He also served as surveyor to the Board of Elections, and has worked on many campaigns.

When working for private industry he provided safety, training and advocacy to the transportation and construction industries, serving as VP of Operations for the Black Car Fund, representing 25,000 drivers; and representing 2,500 safety professionals as the CEO of the Safety Professional Association.

Michael, an Eagle Scout, started volunteering very early in life, for On Your Mark INC, and the Eden II School for the Disabled, where his brother Steven is a participant and lives with autism. Advocacy for those with disabilities drove Michael into politics, advocating for group homes at civic meetings beginning at the age of seven years old.

He is the Vice Chair Eden II Programs for the Disabled. Michael Arvanites lives in the Castleton Corners neighborhood of Staten Island.

Michael serves as Chair of the Board's Student Life Committee, and is a member of the Executive Committee and the Committee on Facilities Planning and Management.

## **COMMENCEMENT 2025 SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



### **CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK CHANCELLOR FÉLIX V. MATOS RODRÍGUEZ**

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez is the eighth Chancellor of The City University of New York (CUNY), and the first educator of color and the first Latino to lead the nation's largest urban public university, which serves 240,000 degree-seeking students across 25 New York City campuses.

An accomplished and award-winning historian who worked at three CUNY campuses before his appointment as chancellor on May 1, 2019, Matos Rodríguez is driven by his belief in CUNY's unparalleled effectiveness in propelling students up the economic ladder, along with the interconnected role the University plays in lifting New York.

To build on CUNY's unrivaled role as an engine of economic mobility, Matos Rodríguez has focused on removing barriers to students' success. The Chancellor has redoubled CUNY's emphasis on the career outcomes of its graduates, developing a series of public-private partnerships with some of New York's largest employers and new pipelines for students to enter the workforce.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic during the first year of his tenure, the Chancellor oversaw the system's swift pivot to remote learning and worked to guide the University through the many challenges that emerged. The Chancellor's Emergency Relief Fund, launched in April 2020, provided grants to thousands of CUNY students, including undocumented students who were excluded from financial relief by the federal government. Using federal Higher Education Emergency Relief funds, CUNY erased more than \$100 million in unpaid tuition and fees for more than 57,000 students and ended the practice of holding transcripts of students with outstanding balances.

Driven by a deeply held commitment to accessibility, inclusion and excellence in higher education, Matos Rodríguez has built a diverse team of tested leaders to serve on his cabinet and has appointed a diverse, highly accomplished group of 14 college presidents and deans.

A historian, he has served the University for nearly 25 years as a member of the faculty at Hunter College and director of Hunter's Center for Puerto Rican Studies (CENTRO), and as president of Hostos Community College and Queens College. He left CUNY for several years in 2005, returning to his native Puerto Rico to serve as an adviser to the governor and, later, as Secretary of the Department of Family Services. Matos Rodríguez holds a B.A. from Yale University and a doctorate in history from Columbia University.

## COMMENCEMENT 2025

### NOTABLE GUEST



### **VICE CHANCELLOR FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS DENISE B. MAYBANK**

Denise B. Maybank is the vice chancellor for student affairs at The City University of New York. In this role, she assumes responsibility for coordinating the functions of the University's Central Office to guide the work of supporting student development from recruitment to completion. Under her leadership, Student Affairs facilitates the academic progress and success of students through holistic approaches to engagement beyond the classroom, addressing areas such as health and wellbeing, essential needs, student government and leadership development.

Prior to joining CUNY, Maybank served as the vice president and associate provost for student affairs and services at Michigan State University. During her 15-year tenure there, she served in progressive leadership roles beginning as an associate vice president in 2005. Maybank contributed to significant initiatives structuring the undergraduate experience; developed partnerships with the Graduate School and colleges to initiate the Graduate Student Life and Wellness emphasis; and conceived and implemented lasting innovative programs and services.

Throughout her career, she has been a member of professional associations representing the disciplines and contexts in which she serves. She is a member of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) Board of Directors, representing the Council on Student Affairs; she values the opportunities to have her voice and expertise included in national initiatives on higher education. As an active member of the communities in which she lives, she has served on various boards of directors for civic and social service organizations, often being elected to leadership positions. She is also an active member of her church community and sorority.

A lifelong learner, Maybank has earned additional credentials as an educational leader through the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the Harvard Institute for Educational Management. She holds a doctorate in counseling psychology from Michigan State University and a Master of Arts in educational administration from Teachers College, Columbia University. Maybank is a proud CUNY alumna, having earned a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education from Brooklyn College.

## **COMMENCEMENT 2025 SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



### **VALEDICTORIAN Joseph Newswander**

Joseph is a graduating senior in the Labor Studies B.A. program. His journey has been advocacy and activism-driven since he co-organized a walkout demonstration at his Utah high school in response to school shootings. Since then, he has advocated for students, retirees, patients, and coworkers in various roles, such as service advocate and learning coordinator, focusing on equity-driven education policy, social determinants of health, and systemic change.

He transferred to SLU in 2022 from SUNY Old Westbury. Here at SLU, Joseph currently serves in Student Union leadership as a Steering Committee Member and student technology fee delegate. In October 2024, Joseph was elected Vice Chair for Senior Colleges in the CUNY University Student Senate, where he advocates for student voices and higher education funding across administrative and political mediums, as through his representative membership in the Research and Innovation subcommittee of the Board of Trustees. He is also a Union Semester alumnus and currently works full time at 1199SEIU Training and Employment Funds addressing workforce shortages and occupational segregation in New York's healthcare sector through research and program implementation.

After graduation, he's focusing on his role at 1199SEIU Training Funds, passing the torch to succeeding student leaders, working on his Spanish, preparing for the LSAT, and becoming more involved in the community through continued activism and service.



## **COMMENCEMENT 2025 SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



### **SALUTATORIAN Latoya Fisher**

Latoya Fisher has been employed by the City of New York for the past 16 years, serving in a myriad of roles that have been both challenging and rewarding. A proud union member of CWA-1180, Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Latoya brings a commitment to service to her work.

Her daughter, Malaika, has been the most influential force in Latoya's educational journey. Inspired by Malaika, Latoya pursued her B.A. in Urban and Community Studies at SLU and remains driven by the desire to be the best version of herself. Through her own journey, she hopes to set an example for Malaika, demonstrating that with perseverance, anything is achievable, regardless of the stage of life one is in.

Having witnessed firsthand the injustices faced by students and parents in the New York City Department of Education system — particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds — Latoya is passionate about advocating for change. She is focused on addressing the complexities within current education policies that affect grading, promotion, transfers, and graduation. Rather than seeking to be the face of change, Latoya aspires to be the person behind the scenes, writing and overseeing policy changes that will foster a more equitable education system for all students.

## **COMMENCEMENT 2025 SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



### **GRADUATE STUDENT SPEAKER Karthika Thakker**

Karthika is an immigrant and organizer based in Brooklyn. She organizes tech workers and most recently has been supporting the Federal Unionist Network as an organizer.

Her capstone is about organizing around layoffs in the tech industry. She is the former co-chair of the NYC Democratic Socialists of America, a 7,000-person volunteer organization that believes working people should run society, not billionaires. She has been involved in running electoral campaigns for candidates who focus on working-class issues and do not accept any corporate or special-interest money.

In 2021, while working for State Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani, she was heavily involved in the taxi drivers' hunger strike that won millions in debt relief for drivers, as well as the fight to stop a polluting fracked gas power plant in Astoria. She has organized community support for Amazon and Starbucks workers in fights for their first contracts, especially during a historic strike this winter.

After graduation, she's going to attend UC Berkeley Law School to become a labor lawyer.

## COMMENCEMENT 2025

### SPEAKERS AND HONOREES



### KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENT Erica Smiley

Erica Smiley is the Executive Director of Jobs With Justice. A long-time organizer and movement leader, Smiley has been spearheading strategic organizing and policy interventions for Jobs With Justice for nearly 15 years. Prior to taking up her current position with the organization, Smiley served as organizing director for Jobs With Justice, developing campaigns that resulted in transformative changes to how working people organize and are civically engaged at their workplaces and in their communities. During her tenure at Jobs With Justice, Smiley has served in numerous leadership capacities

including as organizing director and as senior field organizer for the southern region.

Serving as one of the lead architects, Smiley has been instrumental in developing the strategic vision of Jobs With Justice to build power for impacted working people through expanding their collective bargaining power as one way to redefine and claim their democracy, while addressing issues of inequality and poverty. This includes founding the Advancing Black Strategists Initiative and co-convening a national strategy for essential workers.

She co-authored [\*The Future We Need: Organizing for Economic Democracy in the Twenty First Century\*](#), a book on collective bargaining and democracy with Sarita Gupta, released in April 2022. She has also authored several related articles in the New Labor Forum, Dissent Magazine, the Journal on Class, Race and Corporate Power, The Labor Education and Research Association (LERA), and other publications lifting strategic organizing, movement building, direct action, and discourse as core strategies for advancing work in this arena. In 2025, Smiley was awarded an honorary doctoral degree from the School of Labor and Urban Studies (SLU) and the City University of New York (CUNY). She was previously awarded a Bellagio Fellowship and Residency from the Rockefeller Foundation in 2023.

As one of the few queer black women leaders in the labor movement, Smiley has helped to seed numerous initiatives that position and prioritize the demands and voices of vulnerable working people in socio-economic and political decisions that directly and indirectly impact their individual lives, families, and communities. As a seasoned organizer, she has been a vocal advocate for mobilizing our movements to be aligned around a common agenda for working families.

Prior to joining Jobs With Justice, Smiley organized with community groups and unions such as the Tenants and Workers Support Committee (now Tenants and Workers United) in Virginia and SEIU Local 500 in Baltimore. Her career in social and economic justice began in the reproductive justice field, serving as national field director for Choice USA (now United for Reproductive and Gender Equity—URGE) where she received the Young Women of Achievement Award in 2004.

Her passion for advancing innovations that prioritize the South is evident on the boards she serves on today and in the past, which includes the board of the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee, a catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South, and the leadership council of the Workers Defense Project based in Texas. Additionally, she is on the board of the SEIU Education and Support Fund, the Workers Lab, and she participates in the Bargaining for the Common Good advisory committee. In 2021, she was appointed by the Board of Governors at Rutgers University to sit on the State Advisory Committee for the School of Management and Labor Relations.

Smiley is originally from Greensboro, N.C. where she is a proud product of public schools—ultimately graduating from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She currently resides in New Jersey.

## **NAMES OF GRADUATES AND CANDIDATES**

*Note: As this program is printed in advance, the lists of certificate and degree candidates are tentative. A student's transcript is the official record of the School.*

## COMMENCEMENT 2025

### CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

#### DEPARTMENT OF URBAN STUDIES

##### CERTIFICATES IN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

###### *Fall 2024 Graduates*

###### CERTIFICATE

Leonardo Cepeda  
Lu'Keus Isler  
Sekou Shakur

###### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Isabella Barbuto  
Alessandra Hawkins Ortega  
Alessia Milstein

###### *Spring 2025 Candidates*

###### CERTIFICATE

Dikens Bolisca  
Vidal Cintron  
Damian Myrick  
Skylynn Rodriguez

###### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Esteban Coleman  
Pharaoh King Gonder  
Edward-Richard Hinds  
Lesly Linares  
Crystal Moore  
Amy Musham  
Ashley Palumbo  
Moriah Rastegar  
Anela Toskic  
Rich Verdi  
Crystal Quiles

##### CERTIFICATES IN HEALTHCARE ADVOCACY

###### *Fall 2025 Graduate*

###### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Emmanuella Joseph

###### *Spring 2025 Candidates*

###### CERTIFICATE

Tracey Deyro Kreidler

###### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Tracey Capers  
Evelyn Giwa  
Colette Smith

##### CERTIFICATES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

###### *Fall 2024 Graduates*

###### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Daniel Flamhaft  
Erin Hughes  
Jillian Naveh

###### *Spring 2025 Candidates*

###### CERTIFICATE

Ian O'Hara

###### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Desmond Henry  
Sean Lamble  
Samantha Skaller

##### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE IN WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY AND COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

###### *Fall 2024 Graduates*

###### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Aryana Anderson  
David Cihelna  
Nicolas Savvides

###### *Spring 2025 Candidates*

###### ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Simarjot Dhaliwal  
Lydia Hatfield  
Haley Stanko

## COMMENCEMENT 2025

### CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

#### CERTIFICATE IN THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

##### *Summer 2025 Candidates*

##### *CHALLENGE HIGH SCHOOL*

Faith Adeniyi  
Djamilatou Barry  
Joshua Bassey  
Nia Blackman  
Emily Brown-Graham  
Destiny Garcia  
Bethany Gumbs  
Ryan Jolly  
Amouni Kenon  
Kendra Komeng  
Margnelle Lazare  
Gianna Martinez  
Lyric Murray  
Aniya Stanley  
Kayla Seide  
Alexis Weston  
Infiniti Dunbar

##### *CLARA BARTON HIGH SCHOOL*

Munachimso Tobenna Ezinwa  
Keyonie Grey  
Stephanie Hernandez  
Damirlene Joseph  
Lauryn Rihanna Lashley  
Malaika Halle Morris  
Daphka Jull Nogauss  
Kayla Odom  
Kelecia Pullock  
Song Kaiesi Samuel-Holmes  
Jiada Tranchant  
Destiny Volcy  
Rihanna Wallace  
Sani Celeste Watson

##### *EAGLE ACADEMY*

Khalil Alaby  
Asad Rana  
Wahab Rana  
Kyle Richardson

##### *JOHN ADAMS HIGH SCHOOL*

Nicholas Michael Boodoo  
Jose M. Cespedes  
Jasmin N. Flores  
Elilyan C. Harris  
Ayomide C. Israel  
Nandina Jaman  
Georgina N. Martinez  
Dionely Mercado  
Star Mitchell  
Conwede W. Nunu  
Temi S. Peters  
Nailan M. Ramnarine  
Lizianna Sahadeo  
Maxwell Patrick Wenger

## COMMENCEMENT 2025

### CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

#### DEPARTMENT OF LABOR STUDIES

##### CERTIFICATES IN LABOR RELATIONS

###### *Fall 2024 Graduates*

###### *ADVANCED CERTIFICATE*

Honda Wang

###### *Spring 2025 Candidates*

###### *CERTIFICATE*

Auslyn Benjamin

###### *ADVANCED CERTIFICATE*

Luciana Bell

Margo Cohen Ristorucci

Yina Ke

Jordan Pecora

Mohd Farith Zainudin

Min Zhao

##### CERTIFICATES IN LABOR STUDIES

###### *Fall 2024 Graduates*

###### *ADVANCED CERTIFICATE*

Justine Berfond

Maia Bruno-Basaing

Trevor Clarke

Julia Everson

Sophie McClain

Afia Osei Boahen

Joshua Soffler

Casey Williams

###### *Spring 2025 Candidates*

###### *CERTIFICATE*

Edgardo Betegon Pomare

Rina Cummings

Jowanda Mclean

###### *ADVANCED CERTIFICATE*

Samuel Beesley Shanahan

Barbara Burgos Juarez

Sebastian Cadiz Garcia

Clara Coyote

Adin Feder

Paula Husiatynski

Elana Sklar

Gabriel Slidders

Hannah Vauters

Gisanna Wilson



## COMMENCEMENT 2025

### DEGREE PROGRAMS

#### **BACHELOR OF ARTS IN LABOR STUDIES**

*Fall 2024 Graduate*  
Tameka Staples

*Spring 2025 Candidates*  
Katrina Gray  
Joseph Newswander

*Summer 2025 Candidates*  
Ranjee Rajkumar

#### **BACHELOR OF ARTS IN URBAN AND COMMUNITY STUDIES**

*Fall 2024 Graduates*  
Samantha Conzo  
Anna Tresvalles  
Raymond Wray

*Spring 2025 Candidates*  
Cristina Diaz  
Rashaun Donovan\*  
Dionne Ellis  
Latoya Fisher\*  
Theresa Mitchell  
Herby Phanord\*  
Naima Rock

*Summer 2025 Candidates*  
Garrett Gebhardt

#### **MASTER OF ARTS IN LABOR STUDIES**

*Fall 2024 Graduates*  
Michael Fewx  
Lakesha Foster  
Cherita Lynch  
Harry Mikkleson  
Arielle Newton  
Latisha Richardson  
Justin Russell  
Kevin Wilson

*Spring 2025 Candidates*  
Matthew Brunner  
Melissa Charley  
David Diaz  
Hannah Faris\*  
Lucia Gomez\*  
Prarthana Gurung  
Jennifer Halpern  
Yendi King  
Paulo Lellis  
Kathryn Levitt  
Patrick McCann  
Francisca Montana  
Julia Smith  
Kaarthika Thakker  
Charlie Uruchima

#### **MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN STUDIES**

*Fall 2024 Graduates*  
Gilda Gillim  
Evelyn Giwa  
Perrian Glasby  
Wendy James  
Mariame Kante  
Anastasiia Kartsev

*Spring 2025 Candidates*  
Conor Anstett  
Cheryl Apicella  
Natasha Bartley  
Luciana Bell  
Dejanira Budansingh  
Dennis Dias  
Alon Fouks  
Amy French  
N.m.esa Khan  
Myra Machado  
Deepti Panuganti  
Tessa Richardson-Jones

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\* Joseph S. Murphy Scholarship for Diversity in Labor

# COMMENCEMENT TRADITIONS AND SYMBOLS

## ACADEMIC REGALIA

The academic regalia dates back to the Middle Ages, when learned persons at the time wore long hooded cloaks to fend off the cold within rock castle walls. The traditional attire was transported to this world when Kings College, Columbia University, first began using it for its commencement ceremony. This practice was codified in 1895 by the National Conference on Academic Costume and Ceremony and a plan known initially as the “Intercollegiate System” was formally adopted. Today, commencement exercises across American universities all carry on the traditional costume and conduct the ceremony with three essential elements: the academic procession, the conferring of degrees, and the Commencement address.

Those with doctoral degrees wear the longest hood. The intermediate length designates a master’s degree and a shorter length, a bachelor’s degree. Medieval practice associated certain colors with specific academic pursuits. The silk-lined hoods represent a specific field of study with an official color trim (Citron: Labor and Urban Studies).

## THE SCHOOL SEAL

The School seal is in a circular shape with silver and warm red hues. The School name circles around the logo, and inside the seal is an open book, with the left page portraying a gear, and the right page, urban life. These symbols represent the core values of the School: access to education, diversity at every level, social justice, and equality for all.

## THE MACE

The Mace, carried by the Grand Marshall, dates back to 12,000 B.C., when it was used as a weapon during battle. Today, the mace is carried at all academic ceremonies and is used to represent the responsibility to protect our education institutions and often times represents the core values of an institution. The Grand Marshal, carrying the Mace at Commencement and Convocation, heralds the arrival of the academic procession and concludes the ceremony.

## GRAND MARSHAL

The Grand Marshal is the faculty member who leads the processional and recessional, bears the School's Mace, and calls the Commencement ceremonies to order.

# MUSICAL LYRICS

## THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER

*Lyrics by Francis Scott Key (1814), Music by John Stafford Smith (c. 1773)*

O say can you see by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,  
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.  
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

## SOLIDARITY FOREVER

*Lyrics by Ralph Chaplin (c. 1915)*

*Sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"*

When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run,  
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun;  
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one,  
But the union makes us strong.

Solidarity forever,  
Solidarity forever,  
Solidarity forever,  
For the union makes us strong.

Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite,  
Who would lash us into serfdom and would crush us with his might?  
Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight?  
For the union makes us strong.

It is we who plowed the prairies; built the cities where they trade;  
Dug the mines and built the workshops, endless miles of railroad laid;  
Now we stand outcast and starving midst the wonders we have made;  
But the union makes us strong.

All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone.  
We have laid the wide foundations; built it skyward stone by stone.  
It is ours, not to slave in, but to master and to own.  
While the union makes us strong.

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn,  
But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn.  
We can break their haughty power, gain our freedom when we learn  
That the union makes us strong.

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold,  
Greater than the might of armies, magnified a thousand-fold.  
We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old.  
For the union makes us strong.

# **SPECIAL THANKS**

## **SLU STUDENT UNION**

**Shirley Rollins**

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies, Co-Chair

**Myra Machado**

Master of Arts in Urban Studies, Co-Chair

**Kanema Varner**

Master of Arts in Labor Studies, Treasurer

**Oliver Compton**

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies, Treasurer

**William Cintula**

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies, Secretary

**Rhonda Joseph**

Master of Arts in Labor Studies, Steering Committee

**Joseph Newswander**

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies, Steering Committee

## **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES ON THE ACADEMIC GOVERNING COUNCIL**

**Tania Caldwell**

Master of Arts in Urban Studies

**Anna Tresvalles**

Bachelor of Arts in Urban and Community Studies

**Shirley Rollins**

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies

**Kevin Wilson**

Master of Arts in Labor Studies

# **SPECIAL THANKS**

## **COMMENCEMENT MARSHALS**

Dorothy Benson  
Siddarth Bhagirath  
Brian Bones  
Rukiya Brown  
Evelyn Castillo  
Shannon Clarke  
Suzette Ellington  
Doral Elvy  
Michael Gilbert  
Michael Giliberti  
Zenzile Greene  
Steve Greenfeld  
Yessenia Gutierrez-Symby  
Kelvin Huang  
Antoinette Isable-Jones  
Mowmita Jabir  
Cody Kalina  
Tarik Kamel  
Lindsay Kazi  
Maureen LaMar  
Aaron Lenchner  
Karen Loew  
Zussy Lopez  
Joanne Mason  
Guillermo Meneses  
Pablo Perez  
Chris Policano  
Lindsey McCormack  
Marie Romani  
Walter Romney  
Michael Rymer  
Jonathan Rubin  
Kevin Simmons  
Shawn Sukhu  
Yorselin Tovar  
Mejbah Uddin  
Micah Uetrict  
Chris Washington  
Sarah Watson  
Cheneyere Williamson  
Anna Zak

# **SPECIAL THANKS**

## **COMMENCEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Rochel Pinder, Co-Chair**

Director of Student and Community Affairs

**Meghan Moore-Wilk, Co-Chair**

Interim Assistant Dean for Strategic Initiatives and Chief of Staff

**Burton Sacks**

Associate Dean of Operations

**Nelly Benavides**

Deputy to Associate Dean

**Xalya Branch**

Marketing and Communication Associate

**Irene Garcia-Mathes**

Senior Academic Advisor

**Laurie Grimes**

Enrollment Registrar Director

**Rose Imperato**

Academic Scholarship and Awards Coordinator

**Laura Meltzer**

Alumni Coordinator

**Padraig O'Donoghue**

Student Services Manager

**Samina Shahidi**

Senior Academic Advisor

**and the SLU staff and faculty, family and friends  
who supported our graduates along the way.**

**CONGRATULATIONS,  
CLASS OF 2025!**

Show off your graduation on social media! Tag us at [#CUNYSLUgrad25](#)