



COMMENCEMENT

CELEBRATING OUR 2026 GRADUATES

Thursday, May 28, 2026, at 4:00 P.M.

**The Town Hall
123 W. 43rd St, New York, NY 10036**

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 1,700 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies	1
CUNY Board of Trustees and Chancellery	3
CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies Faculty and Administration.....	4
Message From the Founding Dean.....	5
CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies Labor and Community Advisory Board	6
Message From the Labor and Community Advisory Board Chair.....	7
Order of Ceremony.....	8
Commencement Speakers and Honorees.....	11
CUNY Board of Trustees Member	11
City University of New York Chancellor.....	12
Vice Chancellor for Government Affairs	13
Valedictorian.....	14
Salutatorian.....	15
Graduate Student Speaker	16
Keynote Speaker and Honorary Degree Recipient.....	17
Distinguished Alumni Recipient Speaker	18
Names of Graduates and Candidates.....	19
Certificates in Community Leadership.....	20
Certificates in Healthcare Advocacy.....	20
Certificates in Public Administration and Public Policy	20
Advanced Certificate in Workplace Democracy and Community Ownership.....	21
Certificates in Transportation Workers Leadership.....	21
Certificates in the Urban Experience.....	22
Certificates in Labor Relations.....	23
Certificates in Labor Studies.....	23
Bachelor of Arts in Urban and Community Studies.....	24
Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies	24
Master of Arts in Urban Studies	24
Master of Arts in Labor Studies	24
Commencement Traditions and Symbols	25
Musical Lyrics.....	26
Special Thanks	27

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

William C. Thompson, Jr., B.A.
Chairperson

Sandra Wilkin, B.S., B.S.,
Vice Chairperson

Michael Arvanites, B.A.

Henry T. Berger, B.S., J.D.

Una S. T-Clarke, B.S., M.S., C.D.

Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, B.A., M.P.A.

Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel, Ph.D.

Mayra Linares-Garcia, B.A.

Robert F. Mujica, B.A., M.G.A., J.D.

Brian D. Oberfell, B.S., J.D.

Jill O'Donnell-Tormey, B.S. Ph.D.

Herminia Palacio, B.A., M.D., M.P.H.

Rossana Rosado B.A., M.A.

Ken Sunshine, B.S.

Angelo Vivolo, B.S.

John Verzani, Ph.D.

Ex-Officio - Chair of the University Faculty Senate

Akkeem Polack

Ex-Officio – Chair of the University Student Senate

CHANCELLERY

Chancellor

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez

Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost

Alicia M. Alvero

Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer, Acting Senior Vice Chancellor for University Human Resources

Hector Batista

Senior Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs and General Counsel

Derek Davis

Senior Vice Chancellor for Communications and Marketing

Maite Junco

Senior Vice Chancellor for Strategy and Policy Implementation

Sascha Owen

Senior Vice Chancellor for Budget, Finance and Labor Relations, and Chief Financial Officer

Kenneth Godiner

Vice Chancellor for Career Engagement and Industry Partnerships

Lauren Andersen

Vice Chancellor for Facilities Planning, Construction and Management

Mohamed Attalla

Vice Chancellor for Information Technology and University Chief Information Officer

Eusebio Formoso

Vice Chancellor for University Advancement

Todd Michael Galitz

Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic and Faculty Affairs

Ann Lopes

Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

Denise B. Maybank

Vice Chancellor for Government Affairs

Dermot Smyth

Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management

Reine T. Sarmiento

Associate Vice Chancellor and University Vice Provost for Research

Rosemarie D. Wesson

Chief Transformation Officer

Rachel Stephenson

Chancellor's Chief of Staff and Associate Vice Chancellor for the Executive Office

Dolly Martínez

Secretary of the Board of Trustees

Anne M. Fenton

CUNY SCHOOL OF LABOR AND URBAN STUDIES FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION

Gregory Manstios, Ph.D.
Founding Dean

Rita “Kiki” Edozie, Ph.D.
Senior Associate Dean and Chief 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

Samantha Agarwal, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Urban Studies

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

Kafui Attoh, 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.
Distinguished Lecturer in Urban Studies

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

Puya Gerami
Distinguished Lecturer in Urban Studies

Lauren Hudson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Urban Studies

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

Cody Kalina
Literacy Lecturer in Urban Studies

Penelope Lewis, Ph.D.
Professor of Labor Studies

Ruth Milkman, Ph.D.
Distinguished Professor of Sociology

James Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Urban Studies

Samir Sonti, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Labor Studies

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

ADMINISTRATION

Nelly Benavides, M.A.
Deputy to Associate Dean of Finance, Administration, & Operations and Director of Facilities Planning & Operations

Dorothy Benson, B.A.
Director of Finance and Business Affairs

Violet Bube, MSILR
Human Resources Manager

Shannon Clarke, M.A.
Director of Enrollment

Maryam (Sara) Esfarayeni, Ed.D.
Director, Worker Education and Workforce Development

Michael Giliberti, M.P.A.
Director, Bursar and Scholarships

Stephen Greenfeld, Ph.D.
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, Ed.D.
Director of Student and Community Affairs

Chris Policano
Director of External Relations

Jeff Rickman
Chief Information Officer

Elizabeth Sergile, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate
Director of Institutional Research and Assessment

MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDING DEAN



Dear SLU Graduates, Class of 2026:

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; joining the Alumni Association; 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 black ink that reads "Gregory Mantsios". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

Brendan Griffith, President

Local 1180, Communications Workers of America (CWA)

* Gloria Middleton, President
(alt. Robin Blair-Batte, Secretary Treasurer)

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

Henry Garrido, Executive Director
(alt. Jeremy John, Associate Director)
(alt. Barbara Ingram-Edmonds, Dir. of Field Operations)
(alt. Stephen Johnson, Administrator, Education Fund)

Local 1549, NYC Clerical-Administrative Employees

Anthony Lackhan, President
Elson Primus, Officer-At-Large

Workers United (SEIU)

Edgar Romney, Secretary-Treasurer

1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East

Yvonne Armstrong, President
(alt. Danielle Copeland, Director Education/Leadership Dev)

1199SEIU Training and Upgrading Fund

Daniel Bustillo, 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)

Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE)

Sam Wheeler, Executive Director

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)

Local 94, International Union of Operating Engineers

Raymond Macco, Business Manager/Financial Secretary
(alt David Hakins, Director of Training)

Region 9A, United Auto Workers (UAW)

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

Transportation Workers Union (TWU) Local 100

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

Professional Staff Congress (PSC)

James Davis, President

Local 371, Social Service Employees Union (SSEU)

Anthony Wells, President
(alt Denise Barr, 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 Appelbaum, President

New York Committee on Occupational Safety and Health

Charlene Obernauer, Executive Director

New York State Nurses Association

Nancy Hagans, President

Community Voices Heard

Juanita Lewis, Executive Director

New York Immigration Coalition

Murad Awawdeh, Executive Director

State & Broadway, Inc.

Richard Winsten, Esq.

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

MESSAGE FROM THE LABOR AND COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR



Congratulations, Graduates!

It has been a privilege to serve as Chair of the Advisory Board of CUNY's School for Labor and Urban Studies for the last six months. SLU was built through the dedication of this Board working alongside University leaders and distinguished scholars. Now in its eighth year, the School is already living out a bold, purposeful mission grounded in justice, collaboration, and the collective power of people whose labor shapes our society.

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 2026 and to thank all those who have supported you over the last several years. Your achievement today carries a special kind of weight and meaning. You have persevered through a moment in America defined by division, uncertainty, and profound challenges, yet you refused to let those pressures dim your ambition or weaken your resolve. Instead, you showed resilience, compassion, and a willingness to keep learning even when the world felt unsettled. That strength is not just admirable—it's a testament to the kind of leaders, creators, and citizens you are becoming. As you step forward, know that you've already proven your ability to rise above difficult times and shape a better future with clarity and courage. 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 yourself 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.

Gloria Middleton
Advisory Board Chair

COMMENCEMENT 2026
ORDER OF CEREMONY

Rose Imperato
Commencement Master of Ceremonies

PROCESSIONAL

Steven London
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

Christine Clemmings
Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
ORDER OF CEREMONY (CONT'D)**

MESSAGE TO GRADUATES

Tanesha Alexander
Graduate Student Speaker

CONFERRING OF THE HONORARY DEGREE

Gregory Mantsios
Founding Dean

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND
HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENT**

Gwynne A. Wilcox

**DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI
AWARD RECIPIENT**

Melanie Kruvelis

PASSING OF THE TORCH

Walter Romney
Receptionist; Author, "Passing the Torch"

Cory Rohr
Executive Assistant, Office of Academic Affairs

Kanema Varner
Master of Arts in Labor Studies

Donald Chapman
Certificate in Labor Relations

COMMENCEMENT 2026
ORDER OF CEREMONY (CONT'D)

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

Gregory Mantsios
Founding Dean

Rita “Kiki” Edozie
Senior Associate Dean and Chief of Academic Affairs

Rose Imperato
Commencement Master of Ceremonies

CLOSING REMARKS

Steven London
Commencement Grand Marshal

RECESSIONAL

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
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.

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.

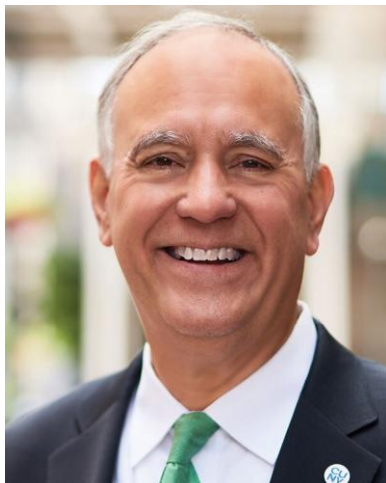
When working for private industry he provided safety, training and advocacy to the transportation and construction industries, serving as VP of Operations for the Black Car Fund, representing 25,000 drivers; and representing 2,500 safety professionals as the CEO of the Safety Professional Association.

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 living 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 of 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 2026 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 247,000 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 2026
NOTABLE GUEST**



**VICE CHANCELLOR
FOR GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
Dermot Smyth**

Dermot Smyth serves as vice chancellor for government affairs at The City University of New York, a role he assumed in February 2026. He brings more than 15 years of experience in political strategy, government relations and policy advocacy in New York City. A two-time Queens College graduate, he leads the University’s engagement with city, state and federal partners, and advances CUNY’s legislative and budgetary priorities in support of its 26 colleges and more than 400,000 degree-seeking and continuing education students.

Smyth joined CUNY after a 16-year tenure with the United Federation of Teachers, where he served as political action coordinator and the union’s principal liaison to elected officials and government agencies. Representing one of the nation’s largest local teachers’ unions, he directed political engagement strategies, advised executive leadership on emerging policy and political trends, and coordinated large-scale grassroots mobilization efforts that strengthened civic participation among nearly 200,000 members. His work contributed to significant policy outcomes including reforms to mayoral control of the public schools, enhanced school funding, class-size initiatives, improvements to teacher pensions and expanded support for school- and community-based programs. He also oversaw the union’s candidate endorsement process and represented the UFT in broad coalitions with labor, community and advocacy organizations.

Earlier in his career, Smyth spent nearly a decade teaching social studies at a public intermediate school in Elmhurst, Queens. As a UFT chapter leader, he represented educators in contract enforcement and professional development, experience that continues to shape his commitment to public education, labor advocacy and student success.

Born in New York and raised in Ireland, Smyth returned to the city to pursue higher education at Queens College, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in history and a master’s degree in education.

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



**VALEDICTORIAN
Christine Clemmings**

Christine Clemmings has worked for the City of New York for seven years and has been in city procurement for the last four years. Throughout her coursework at CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies she has learned that we can create a livable city if we prioritize people, not just commerce. She hopes to one day contribute to the development of more local public spaces in underserved communities, particularly in Upper Manhattan.

Christine is one of eight children. She grew up in Kingston, Jamaica; where she ran track and discovered her love of literature. She earned her Associate Degree in Communications from Union County College in New Jersey, and will be graduating from CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies with a Bachelor's Degree in Urban and Community Studies. Christine reads and writes fiction in her free time, and for the last several years, has self-published her work.

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



**SALUTATORIAN
Toni Charlton**

Toni Charlton has dedicated more than a decade to serving New York City's communities through public health, social services, and nonprofit work. Since 2010, she has held roles including Administrative Assistant, Community Outreach Worker, and Assistant Care Manager at Village Care; Community Liaison Worker with NYC Health + Hospitals; and Public Health Advisor and Community Health Worker with the Test & Trace Corps during the COVID-19 pandemic. She currently serves as a Harm Reduction Case Manager at Housing Works and is an active member of RWDSU Local 262.

Toni's journey to getting her BA in Urban Studies has been shaped by her supportive family. She is the mother of three children—David, a SUNY Albany graduate, and twins Bailey and Cleveland, both college sophomores. She is also part of a large global family with siblings in the United States, London, and South Africa.

A committed advocate for workers' rights and community empowerment, Toni serves on the Bargaining, Organizing, and Labor Management Committee for Local 262 and is a shop steward. She is passionate about mentorship, youth advocacy, and ensuring that underserved communities have access to resources and opportunities. Toni is proud to have earned two college degrees from CUNY despite significant obstacles.

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



**GRADUATE STUDENT
SPEAKER
Tenesha Alexander**

I am a wife, mother, public servant, and proud graduate of SLU with a MA in Urban Studies. For more than 20 years, I have worked in city government contracts and now serve in a senior leadership role, where I am committed to public service, accountability, and creating opportunity, especially for small businesses.

I am also the proud mother of four children, including two younger children I am still raising, ages 6 and 16. My family is at the center of everything I do, and they continue to inspire me to keep growing.

I came to SLU after a conversation with my husband that made me reflect on my own growth. I asked him whether he felt challenged or settled, and whether the conversations in his daily life still sparked curiosity and learning. In that moment, I realized my own mind had started to feel settled. I wanted more. I wanted to be challenged, to think more deeply, and to grow in a new way. That is what brought me to SLU.

This degree represents growth, renewal, and a new chapter for me. I plan to use it to continue advancing in my career, strengthen my leadership, and better support small businesses and the communities they serve.

COMMENCEMENT 2026 SPEAKERS AND HONOREES



KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENT **Gwynne A. Wilcox**

Gwynne A. Wilcox was renominated by President Joseph R. Biden and reconfirmed by the Senate on September 6, 2023 to serve a second term as a Board Member of the National Labor Relations Board ending August 27, 2028. Ms. Wilcox previously served as a Member of the Board from August 4, 2021 until August 27, 2023, and she served as Chair of the Board from December 17, 2024 to January 20, 2025. Ms.

Wilcox is the first Black woman to serve on the Board since its inception in 1935, and is also the first Black woman to serve as Chair of the NLRB.

On January 27, 2025, President Donald J. Trump removed Ms. Wilcox from the Board prior to her term's expiration in 2028. Ms. Wilcox was the first Board Member to have been removed in 90 years, since the Board's inception in 1935. Ms. Wilcox filed a lawsuit in federal court against President Trump, challenging her unprecedented and unlawful termination based upon current statutory law and well-established Supreme Court precedent. The case is still pending.

Previous to her appointment to the Board, Wilcox was a senior partner at Levy Ratner, P.C., a New York City labor and employment law firm. While there, she served as Associate General Counsel of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East and as a labor representative to the NYC Office of Collective Bargaining. Prior to joining Levy Ratner, she worked as a Field Attorney at Region 2 of the NLRB in Manhattan.

Ms. Wilcox is a Fellow in the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers. She is the recipient of numerous awards. Most recently in 2025, Ms. Wilcox received a Certificate of Honor from the Rutgers University School-Newark Law School's Minority Student Program, the Association of Black Law Students, Phi Alpha Delta Fraternity, Inc.- Jackson Chapter, the American Constitutional Society and Student Bar Association, celebrating a "trailblazer whose dedication and leadership have elevated the distinction of Rutgers Law School [and] ..honors an unwavering commitment to service, impactful contributions and a role as a guiding force and inspiration for future generations." In the same year, she was the recipient of the Rutgers University School of Law-Newark Alumni Association's Fannie Bear Besser Award for Public Service and was honored by the Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice in Detroit, MI.

Prior to joining the Board, Ms. Wilcox was a board member of numerous organizations. She recently was invited to rejoin Cornell University's Scheinman Institute Board of Advisors. Ms. Wilcox has made numerous presentations concerning Board law at many bar associations and other organizations.

Ms. Wilcox holds a J.D. from Rutgers University School of Law-Newark and a B.A. from Syracuse University.

Ms. Wilcox is honored to be your commencement speaker this year and wishes all of the graduates continued success.

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
SPEAKERS AND HONOREES**



**DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI
AWARD RECIPIENT
Melanie Kruvelis**

Melanie Kruvelis has spent a decade organizing campaigns to expand childcare, curb student debt, and invest in mental health services across New York City. Currently, Melanie serves as Senior Policy Director for New York City Council Member Alexa Avilés. She also works as a trainer with the Advocacy Institute, where she leads workshops on leading legislative campaigns for social-justice organizations in New York. Melanie was a fellow at the Mariam K. Chamberlain Fellowship in Women and Public Policy at the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, and a mayoral appointee to the NYC Youth Board.

Melanie earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a master’s degree in Labor Studies from CUNY’s School of Labor and Urban Studies in the class of 2023; her thesis won the New Generation Award from the United Association for Labor Education.

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 2026
CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS**

DEPARTMENT OF URBAN STUDIES

**CERTIFICATES IN
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

Fall 2025 Graduates

CERTIFICATE

Breannah Cave
Alainx Dessources
Julian Vasquez

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Zoe Benjamin
Michael Mauch

Spring 2026 Candidates

CERTIFICATE

Myeisha Rogers

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Meghan Chadonic
Candace Coleman
Laurel Fisher
Karen Galvan
Matthew Levy
Cynthia Mafla
Gary Meyers
Irma Rucker

**CERTIFICATES IN
HEALTHCARE ADVOCACY**

Fall 2025 Graduates

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Samantha Conzo

Spring 2026 Candidates

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Jane Chavez Guerrero

Summer 2026 Candidates**

CERTIFICATE

Leah I Adebayo
Oluwapelumi O Afuwape
Elizabeth T Ajeleti
Bria Joesph Gulliaume
Taniya M Littles
Yasdnil Norlean
Bianca A Worrell
Israh Zahir

**CERTIFICATES IN PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC POLICY**

Fall 2025 Graduates

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Jinnette Grullon
Terrance Ratliff
Sophia Webster
Carmen Wolcott

Spring 2026 Candidates

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Michelle Andry
Jason Cuculo
Connor Fite
Reba Landers
Robyn Siegel
Tameka Staples
John Ward

**Challenge High School

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS**

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

Fall 2025 Graduates

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Caroline Fitzgerald

Spring 2026 Candidates

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Stephen Colon
Daniel Fitzgerald
Corbin Laedlein
Rawnak Zaman

**TRANSPORTATION WORKERS
LEADERSHIP**

Spring 2026 Candidates

CERTIFICATE

Isaiah Alford
Mark Evans
Shelly-Ann Green
Shaneta Hawes
Symphoni Johnson
Philipp Kozko
Elvina Mclean
Fidel Molina
Kenneth Reape
Francis Sekey
John Zivojinovic

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS**

**CERTIFICATE IN THE URBAN
EXPERIENCE**

Summer 2026 Candidates

CHALLENGE HIGH SCHOOL

Best Adenyi
Hanna Amusa Ajayi
Rhoda O Awolusi
Vivian Olamide Balogun I
Oluwafisayo Stephen Fasola
Jomayleen Ferreira
Joshua D Fleuristil
Esther Judith Glasper
Chisom Francisca Ideh
Aiden J Irizarry Jr.
Ruth Tolu Oni
Chelsea A Thomas
Alyssa Patricia Wiggins

CLARA BARTON HIGH SCHOOL

Kemyah Anderson
Joey Nicholson Brioche
Olivia Bullock
Neviyah J Copes
Jahsaan Dennis
Brianna Eugene
Kennysha Shenelle Bianca Fortune
Aldane Grubb
Aliah K Isaac
Braindon Laguerre
Llory Mompont
Eden Mongouge
Laksmi Louisa Pascal- Brathwaite
Genesis Ariana Pavon-Velasquez
Christie Saint-Amour

EAGLE ACADEMY

Gideon Osarenoma Amos
Elijah Aaron Antoine
Jaheim Damani Campbell I
Zyaire Jarell Dessaint

Charles Anthony Harris IV
Nicholas Noel Holm
Jahmir Elijah Lopez
Jayden James Medley
Emmanuel Okurenjoku
Oluwalotobijobalo Samuel Pitan
Brison Joseph Simpson
Carson Joshua Simpson

FREDRICK DOUGLAS ACADEMY

Jada Cabral
Ada Castro
Emani Chatto
Nariah Irene Gaither
Nathaniel Joshua Hamilton
Jean-Pierre Jabe Jamil Joseph
Mariah Cecelia Kingston
Nikcarsia Tshay Lewis Jr
Brent Veekai Maraj
Kaylei Jessel Ramirez
David Ramos
Cody West

JOHN ADAMS HIGH SCHOOL

Heidi Chamorro
Ashley B Dalloo
Emmanuel O Ebegbe
Hope J Espinal
Labiba Fairouz
Ava A Imamudin
Emily R Imamudin
Christian Jorgge
Parminder Kaur
Areefa Khaleel
Stephani Pacheco
Amy Persaud
Diana D Randhir
Kaviri Dhar Roy
Parshdeep Singh
Nesha S Sumrah

**COMMENCEMENT 2026
CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS**

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR STUDIES

CERTIFICATES IN LABOR RELATIONS

Fall 2025 Graduates

CERTIFICATE

Donald Chapman

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Maria Gangemi
Claire Iannuzzi

Spring 2026 Candidates

CERTIFICATE

Julie Figueroa
Andrew Samberg

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Hiba Imad

CERTIFICATES IN LABOR STUDIES

Fall 2025 Graduates

CERTIFICATE

Ilana Lucas

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Bonnie Evans
Dan Gray
Isabella Lucas
Collin McDonald
Alex Pellitteri
Emory Reichmann-Crowley
Micah Sander
Jacob Wartel

Spring 2026 Candidates

ADVANCED CERTIFICATE

Phoebe Boatwright
Jose Cabrera
Julia Cordova
Ariana Gonzalez
Mai Nguyen
Emerald O'Brien
Andrew Schumann

COMMENCEMENT 2026

DEGREE PROGRAMS

BACHELOR OF ARTS IN URBAN AND COMMUNITY STUDIES

Fall 2025 Graduates

Dajon Griffin
Nelly Rodriguez

Spring 2026 Candidates

Grace Acevedo
Toni Charlton
Natainya Curry
Emily Downing
Kendra Jones
Nerisie Lewis
Stevie Saunders
Keanu Soto
Syreeta Thomas
Valery Zorrilla

Summer 2026 Candidates

Christine Clemmings
Cynthia Johnson

BACHELOR OF ARTS IN LABOR STUDIES

Fall 2025 Graduates

Liam Russertt

Spring 2026 Candidates

Michael Guevarez
Marie Jadotte
Latisha Mcneill
Alexander Patterson

Summer 2026 Candidates

Marcia Matheson

MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN STUDIES

Fall 2025 Graduates

Sonia Clarke
Jackson Fischer-Ward
Bria Joseph Guillaume
Carla Kay
Terrance Ratliff
David Tenenbaum

Spring 2026 Candidates

Tanesha Alexander
Monique Blount
Tania Caldwell
Anil Chandrakumar
Jason Cuculo
Daniel Flamhaft
Kerri Grinage
Desmond Henry
Jacqueline Johnson
Caressa Ogletree
Miguel Pena
Shiba Perry
Maura Schlagel
Diamond Shammgod

MASTER OF ARTS IN LABOR STUDIES

Fall 2025 Graduates

Lisa Pinkard*
Rudolph Rodriguez Quamina*
Pawel Szostak
Kanema Varner

Spring 2026 Candidates

Alejandro Cantagallo
Trevor Clarke
Olivia DeStefano
Gina Etienne
Natrell Fisher
Marie Francois
Aaron Jimenez
Juley Laisey
Aidan Majewski
Gabriel Meiri
Bre Merritt
Francisca Montana
Martin Nolan
Matthew Powers
Camelle Reyes
Joshua Soffler
Izabela Tringali
Sarah Wells

*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 Marshal, 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.

THE TOWN HALL

The Town Hall - Originally founded in 1921, by suffragists, this national landmark has played host to countless cultural and musical milestones. Its vibrant, progressive, and diverse programming has solidified its status as an iconic New York City institution.

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

Abbie Harper

Master of Arts in Urban Studies, Co-Chair

Shavelle Knox

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies, Treasurer

Kanema Varner

Master of Arts in Labor Studies, Treasurer

Carmen Wolcott

Master of Arts in Urban Studies, Secretary

Sonia Rodriguez

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies, Steering Committee

Bri Merritt

Master of Arts in Labor Studies, Steering Committee

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES ON THE ACADEMIC GOVERNING COUNCIL

Chai Leffler

Master of Arts in Urban Studies

Abbie Harper

Master of Arts in Urban Studies

Shirley Rollins

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies

Carmen Wolcott

Master of Arts in Urban Studies

Shavelle Knox

Bachelor of Arts in Labor Studies

SPECIAL THANKS

COMMENCEMENT MARSHALS

Matthews Barton
Dorothy Benson
Brian Bones
Laura Brett
Rukiya Brown
Violet Bube
Evelyn Castillo
Jessica DePasquale
Suzette Ellington
Michael Gilbert
Zenzile Greene
Stephen Greenfeld
Yessenia Gutierrez-Symby
Kelvin Huang
Latoya Huntley
Rose Imperato
Antoinette Isable-Jones
Mowmita Jabir
Cody Kalina
Michael Lalan
Maureen LaMar
Aaron Lenchner
Karen Loew
Martha Luna
Annie Lydgate
Chris Maisano
Lindsey McCormack

Laura Meltzer
Guillermo Meneses
Iva Moore
Liz Naiden
Nikki Neysmith
Pablo Perez
Herby Phanord
Chris Policano
Cassandra Quayson
Nadhia Rahman
Jeff Rickman
Keysha Rodriguez
Marie Romani
Walter Romney
Ticey Rosario
Artie Rothschild
Jonathan Rubin
Michael Rymer
Kevin Simmons
Shawn Sukhu
Yorselin Tovar
Ralph Tricoche
Chris Washington
Liza Weisstuch
Cheneyere Williamson
Hiyuma Withanachchi
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

Rita “Kiki” Edozie

Senior Associate Dean and Chief of Academic Affairs

Burton Sacks

Associate Dean of Operations

Nana Ama Ampah

Administrative Executive Assistant

Nelly Benavides

Deputy to Associate Dean of Finance, Administration, & Operations and
Director of Facilities Planning & Operations

Xalya Branch

Marketing and Communication Manager

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

Cory Rohr

Executive Assistant

Samina Shahidi

Senior Academic Advisor

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

**CONGRATULATIONS,
CLASS OF 2026!**

Show off your graduation on social media! Tag us at [#CUNYSLUgrad26](#)