



CUNY SEEKS TO ADOPT INVASIVE PROCTORING SOFTWARE

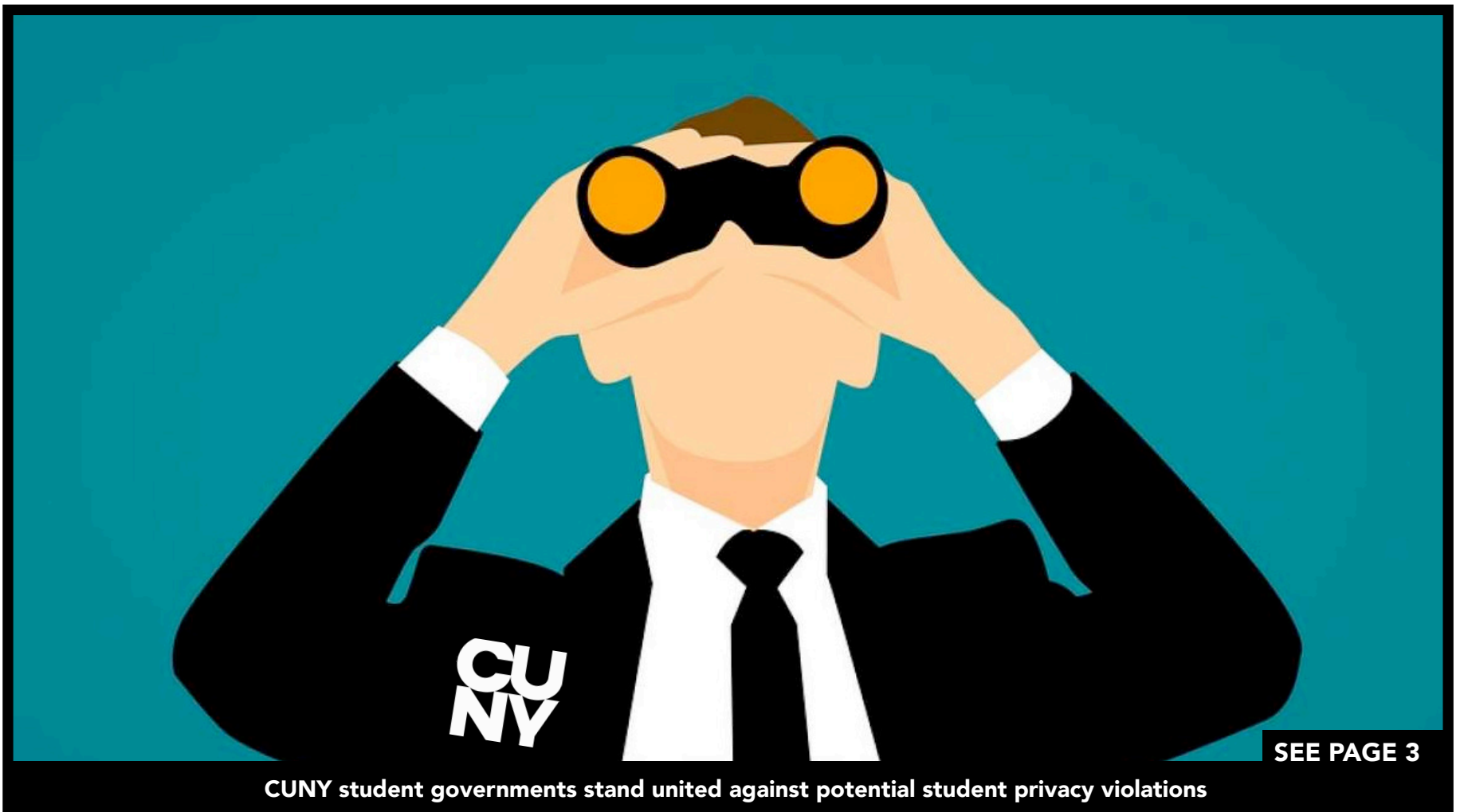


Photo by piqsels.com

CUNY SLAMMED OVER CARES ACT

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Congressional Reps condemn CUNY over misuse of CARES Act funding

PSC SUES CUNY OVER LAYOFFS

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Professional Staff Congress fights back against CUNY in ensuing legal battle

OWS: THE RACE FOR A VACCINE

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When can the world expect a COVID-19 Vaccine & return to normal?

OP-ED

Are student activity and technology fees necessary for an online semester?

Shawn Brown
Staff Writer

As fall began to roll around, it was clear to students that classes this semester were going to look extremely different. On July 22, 2020, Queens College announced on its Instagram account that courses would be primarily held online. This caused many students to double-check their financial aid and delve into their tuition breakdown, revealing that students were still being charged \$162.40 in student activity fees and \$125 in technology fees. Now this raises the question: Since students are not physically present to utilize these services, why are certain fees not being waived? Considering the unique nature of this semester, all extra fees, if any are to be required at all, should be technology focused. The student activity fee should be waived while the technology fee should stay intact (contingent upon the latter going towards creating an easy and accessible online-learning environment).

After speaking to a few different QC representatives, I was finally able to get in contact with someone from the Bursar's office, who explained that CUNY has not told them what exactly the fees are being used for; this presents another hurdle: CUNY's lack of transparency. If students knew for certain that their money was being utilized properly, there would be less outrage over the charges.

Upon conducting an investigation, the QC Student Services Corporation, which is an administrative board that governs the student activity fee, accumulated \$2,762,051 in fees, (according to a public report for fiscal year 2018). It also seems that the student activity fee primarily finances the office of student development and leadership, clubs on campus and the Student Association. The aforementioned uses of the student activity fee are governed by a different board, called the Queens College Association.

Timothy Boyce, a sophomore at QC, shared his concerns about these extra fees. "The student activity fees should be waived since we're not having any activities as of right now. We're online, so the technology fees are probably important as long as it's going to the right place," said Boyce.

QC did announce that laptops are available on loan for students, but is that all they're offering regarding technology coverage? If CUNY is going to make these fees a requirement, it should be required that the money be used to

do more than just provide laptops. Fees should be used to make online materials free of charge, purchase subscriptions for students utilizing other platforms for additional help, or make upgrades on a universal learning platform so that students don't have to keep track of multiple platforms for each class. The money should be utilized to alleviate the stress of attempting to learn through a pandemic.

Much of CUNY's attraction stems from its affordable price tag when compared to a SUNY or an out-of-state university. Uneasiness over tuition costs is not as common as it is at other institutions, but, in a pandemic, it's imperative that students feel secure. It's not a difficult task for CUNY to be clear about fund allocation and reassure its students that they are still getting a quality education for their money.

A brief conversation with Professor Leventhal from the Business and Liberal Arts (BALA) department revealed his take on CUNY's decision to still implement these fees. Leventhal believed the bigger picture should be considered: the government must invest more money into CUNY to reduce costs for students.

Whereas student leaders on campus may argue that the student activity fee is necessary, even in the middle of a pandemic, it ultimately would be more beneficial to tuition payers if they could save those funds to support themselves. One can be confident that students would gladly prefer to save \$162.40, as opposed to virtual programming that you can't exactly engage in.

Speaking as a student myself, it would address most of our concerns and demystify whether or not we are getting our money's worth if CUNY were clear about where fees are being implemented. There is no transparent reason for the current student activity fee and it lacks the importance of the technology fee. With classes primarily online, technology is at the forefront of everyone's mind. It's vital that all additional funds be used to make the semester as accessible as possible. There is no excuse as to why any student should feel as though they are not being completely supported by their school. Just as students and faculty were forced to adapt to these educational changes, CUNY must as well. If the purpose of these fees has altered to reflect the new educational needs then by all means keep the money, but it would be great if the school did so with much more transparency.

A message from the Editor in Chief:

Dear Readers,

I hope you all enjoy the September issue of The Knight News. The staff has been working tirelessly amidst the start of the fall semester to make sure all members of the QC community stay informed.

In other news, I'm pleased to welcome Samantha Galvez-Montiel & Serene Klapper to the editing staff. Samantha is a senior media studies major who's had a longstanding interest in journalism. She's written for the past few issues about pressing issues facing our nation, particularly by writing first hand news coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests in NYC. Serene is a junior majoring in mathematics, and is joining our staff after writing hard-hitting pieces about pressing issues on our campus. Her work has been on the front cover of our past two issues, specifically the coverage of the English Language Institute closing, and the fight to keep journalism alive at QC.

I'd like to note that The Knight News is still accepting applications for anyone interested to be a staff writer. There's no experience required and just a minimum commitment of writing for us once per issue for a semester. Students applying now will be expected to write for October, November and December.

A special thank you to Executive Editor Veronica Kordmany, the editors and copy editors for all their contributions to this issue. Additionally, on behalf of The Knight News, we'd like to thank the PSC delegates at Queens College, notably David Gerwin and Jane Guskin, for working hard to advocate for the needs of the faculty (and ergo the students).

Sincerely,
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CUNY seeks to implement invasive test proctoring software

Veronica Kordmany
Executive Editor

Since the world became introduced to online education, college students all over the world quickly downloaded platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Blackboard Collaborate Ultra for their synchronous classes. Naturally, everyone became suspicious about the ulterior motives of these platforms, as it is a common belief that many of these companies secretly record meetings that take place online. Recently, new evidence has been brought to light that unfortunately proves that the wild conspiracy theory is, in fact, the truth.

According to an online petition created by the Brooklyn College Student Government, The City University of New York (CUNY) was recently exposed for teaming up with McGraw Hill Publishing to implement a new online education tool, named Proctorio, with the intention of spying on students without consent. The petition, which has over 26,000 signatures since its conception in the beginning of the fall, calls out the CUNY system with a specific list of violations, including but not limited to, “Monitors and stores KEYSTROKE movements while using the computer, Captures ALL SCREEN CONTENT on the student’s computer, Manages and CHANGES any downloads on the student’s computer, Identifies ALL devices connected to a student’s computer, [and] Monitors EYE MOVEMENTS via webcam and saves all recordings.”

According to Aharon Grama, the Chief of Staff of the Undergraduate Student Government at Brooklyn College, the issue was initially brought to his attention by a student at Baruch College. After confirming this information, the BC Student Government created the petition. Grama also noted that a third party sent CUNY an email, to which no response was given:

The Brooklyn Student Government is currently awaiting a statement from CUNY regarding their intentions for exam proctoring software

A subsequent petition entitled “CUNY Update & Open Letter” further attacked the partnership between CUNY and McGraw Hill for this notorious matter. “...it is imperative that CUNY administrators notify departments and employees from every college that they cannot force students to use proctoring software. Additionally, administrators must explicitly ask staff to shut off required proctoring software from already integrated programs, such as Proctorio on McGraw Hill’s Connect.”

An additional update, this one entitled “USS Remote Proctoring Statement,” was delivered by University State Senate Vice Chair for Technology, Kesi Gordon. While addressing the high level of fear and frustration by the CUNY student community, Gordon put them to rest, sharing, “The committee stressed that remote proctoring will not be mandatory but should be used on a need basis. The committee is aware that remote proctoring may be necessary for specialized, licensure or certificate programs, however, we urge instructors to consider using traditional means of testing if possible.”

Grama shared that the Brooklyn College Student Government has taken next steps to further the fight. “...we are working on passing a joint resolution calling on our President to tell each department to avoid using proctoring software. We are hoping each Student [Government] will follow through as well to demand each college administration to reach out to their academic departments and make sure students being tested are opting in rather than opting out.”

Rising junior Alexander Kestenbaum, who is majoring in Jewish studies and minoring in Russian here at Queens College (QC), brought the matter to the student government’s attention at QC. As a senator of both the Academic Senate and (by default) the Student Senate, Kestenbaum was alarmed when his fellow QC students brought this matter to his attention in the beginning of September. Kestenbaum presented a resolution to the Student Senate and rallied his fellow Senators to stand in solidarity against exam proctoring software that could potentially invade students’ privacy. Kestenbaum noted, “We [the Student Senate] are not going against CUNY. We’re not against the board of trustees and the administration. No, we want to work hand in hand with them, because, as I said before, this is a new learning experience.” The Knight News confirmed that the Queens College Student Senate passed the resolution against exam proctoring software, with the majority vote being in favor, and with two abstaining votes.

As of right now, the future of online education is unclear. What is clear, however, is the mission statement that students have adopted: that CUNY has no right to impose privacy violations, such as proctoring software or monitoring movement, on them without consent.

The Andrew Mellon Foundation awards CUNY \$10 million

Jessica Alexander
Staff Writer

“The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity. We believe that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom to be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive”. This is the official mission statement of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Founded in 1969 New York, The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Foundation (MMUF) works to fund organizations rooted in higher learning, arts and culture, public knowledge, and the humanities. In August, CUNY received a \$10 million gift from them to help serve 25 campuses and further spread MMUF’s message.

\$10 million is the largest donation CUNY has received in the 45 years it has worked with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The funds will be allocated to help support the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Foundation, which provides scholarships to historically underrepresented students in order to help advance their unique research interests in the humanities, as well as to obtain PhDs. Vallarie Wallace, the former Editor in Chief of The Knight News and Valedictorian of the class of 2020 was a proud Mellon Mays fellow. MMUF gave her the resources she needed to have a successful undergraduate experience and led her to receiving a full scholarship to the University of Virginia where she is currently pursuing a doctorate in English. The \$10 million donation will also contribute to the Chancellor’s Emergency Relief Fund. The Chancellor’s Emergency Relief Fund was formed this year to help students experiencing financial difficulties during the pandemic.

Emily Ram, a senior English major and MMUF Fellow at Queens College (QC), said: “The Mellon Mays Foundation at Queens College aids students through their original developed research projects while preparing students for graduate school. The Mellon Mays Foundation has given me the chance, as an English major, to develop my own research in young adult contemporary literature.” In regards to the award that CUNY got from the Mellon foundation she stated that “With the funds that the

Andrew Mellon Foundation is providing, I can extend my research by expanding my scope with multidisciplinary theories in order to provide an more in-depth research project that thinks outside of close reading solely. I will also get to use these funds to visit other states with exclusive databases that have books I am not allowed to order online. By being able to use the funds to extend my research, I can provide an elaborated project which will not only enhance the project itself but also help me get into graduate school”.

Professor Barbara Simerka, QC’s MMUF coordinator was “relieved that the Mellon funds allowed CUNY to mitigate some of the most dire impacts of COVID related state and city budget cuts. I anticipate that the initiatives for reimagining teaching in the Humanities and for rethinking area studies and ethnic studies programs will support the goal of further diversifying our curricula across departments. QC’s course offerings are fairly robust in that area, but new lines of inquiry are always emerging and these initiatives will help QC and CUNY to continue to serve as national leaders in education for social justice. The grant announcement specifically mentions support for future hiring in Black and ethnic studies. Tenure track positions have consistently decreased over my 18 years at CUNY. This has impacted MMUF students, whose program of preparation requires working with full time faculty mentors who are actively engaged in research in fields related to diversity and social justice. I hope that this grant will provide all future QC students with more opportunities to interact with and be inspired by faculty in area and ethnic studies, and that Mellon fellows will have a larger pool of mentors to draw from”.

Chancellor Matos Rodríguez recently sent out an email to all CUNY students about a town hall meeting on September 17th to share ideas for a \$3 million initiative to reimagine and further develop CUNY programs in Black, race and ethnic studies, a key aspect of the University’s commitment to inclusion”. He further shared that “the Mellon Foundation grant will provide funding for a planning period that will be (driven) by a commission of internal and external experts, who will assess current program offerings and recommend innovations that build on them”.



Photo: CUNY

Members of Congress condemn CUNY over use of CARES Act funding

Siddharth Malviya & Veronica Kordmany
Editor in Chief, Executive Editor

The City University of New York (CUNY) has received funding via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, a federal bill that allocates billions of dollars to higher-learning institutions. It should be very helpful in the necessary transition to a new normal, but the big question is: Where is that money going towards, if not the students and faculty?

According to a press release on the CUNY website, the CARES Act gets its financing from numerous sources, including “the Governor’s Emergency Relief Fund, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, and the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF).”

The Act’s funding is dispersed in two ways: “\$12.56 billion will be distributed to institutions using a formula based on student enrollment,” the press release explains. “Of the amount allocated to each institution under this formula, at least fifty (50) percent must be reserved to provide students with emergency financial aid grants to help cover expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to the coronavirus pandemic.”

In simpler terms, the money is intended for the betterment of students’ quality of life by providing housing, technological resources, health care and/or accessing living essentials (i.e. food, water, child healthcare products, etc.)

But here at Queens College, in the span of time from school abruptly ending in mid-March to the beginning of the fall semester this September, faculty and students hardly knew of the Act’s existence, much less where its cash strayed on the way from CUNY to them. One of the groups on campus most in need of aid are adjunct professors, who have recently taken to protesting the budget cuts disarranging their academic lives.

English Associate Professor Karen Weingarten, an outspoken advocate for QC’s adjunct professors, commented on her experience regarding the pandemic’s effect on classes. “I find it appalling that CUNY received \$132 million that has mostly not yet been spent when our class sizes at Queens College have increased, and The Hub and IT could also so clearly use extra staffing as well,” she stated. “I’ve received numerous complaints from students about how difficult it has been to reach people in both those offices at a time when their assistance is needed more than ever.”

One of the most prominent voices condemning the Act is Congress itself. In a letter directed to CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez and Board Chairperson of the CUNY Board of Trustees William C. Thompson Jr., Congress called the pair out for the unfortunate fact that CUNY has, amidst the pandemic, laid off nearly 3,000 employees: “Hundreds of employees who received health insurance through their CUNY employment will lose health coverage, which is especially egregious during a pandemic,” the

letter grimly states. “We are deeply concerned that CUNY is conducting mass layoffs when so much federal funding was allocated to avoid loss of employment and subsequent loss of healthcare insurance for hundreds of our constituents.”

Signed by eight members of the House of Representatives, the letter reprimands CUNY for not taking better care of its employees and students, taking special note to emphasize the aforementioned predicament that adjunct professors currently find themselves in, with hopes for a better future: “New York will need CUNY more than ever as we seek to rebuild the economy and create a more just world.” They also mention that “reduced course offerings, fewer faculty and over-sized classes will leave CUNY under-prepared to support the students whose need for support is greatest.”

The letter also stresses CUNY’s role in the ongoing push for racial equality: “A strong and fully staffed CUNY is a unique and essential resource for New York’s recovery and an essential part of addressing systemic racism.”

With thousands of adjunct faculty laid off, it begs the question: Why was CARES Act funding not allocated to save adjuncts? David Gerwin, professor in secondary education and chair of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) chapter at Queens College spoke to The Knight News to explain the complexities of the issue at hand.

“There are not enough full time faculty at CUNY. Period. If you had more full time faculty all of the things that we do besides teaching, running pro-

grams, departments, developing curriculum, would be done by more people.” Gerwin also questioned CUNY’s public statement regarding the adjunct layoffs, claiming that “we can do more with less” in response to a lawsuit filed by the PSC earlier this summer.

Jane Guskin, adjunct professor in urban studies and PSC delegate agreed with Gerwin. “I think it’s inexcusable to lay off anyone at CUNY, especially when enrollment is not decreasing. Summer enrollment was up 30% at Queens College, freshman enrollment is up, and graduate enrollment is up.”

Guskin has also told The Knight News that “retention has taken a hit, but half of the CARES Act money was earmarked for direct aid to students, so the administration could have addressed retention head-on by directing some of the money to support students at risk of dropping out because they can no longer afford to attend, or providing free housing at the Summit for those who need it.

“There should have been broad consultation with students, staff, and faculty about how to use the funds. Then the money could have been used swiftly to ensure that students get what they need. That includes expanding instructional and support staff to help students navigate academic, financial aid, and housing bureaucracies,” Guskin added, calling out CUNY for its lack of transparency with its community.

PSC-CUNY sues Chancellor Matos over adjunct layoffs

Siddharth Malviya
Editor in Chief

Since the pandemic’s start, the catastrophic effects of the budget cuts against the City University of New York (CUNY) have trickled down to all corners of the community. Recently, CUNY laid off approximately 3,000 adjunct faculty members. This left many without financial stability and healthcare, among other basic needs. It’s worth noting that CUNY received \$251 million from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES). The CARES Act is a \$2.2 trillion stimulus bill that was passed as a result of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CUNY Professional Staff Congress (PSC) filed a lawsuit against the university’s upper-level administration, arguing that funds from the CARES Act should’ve been utilized to save adjunct

faculty. The lawsuit’s primary argument was that the CARES Act mandated that CUNY “to the extent practicable, continue to pay its employees and contractors”.

On July 27th, 2020, New York Attorney General Letitia James filed a request to strike down the lawsuit in its preliminary stages. A few weeks later, on August 12th, Judge Jed Rakoff sided with Attorney General James and struck down PSC’s injunction against CUNY.

David Gerwin, Chair of the Queens College PSC chapter, spoke to The Knight News about his take on the lawsuit. “I understand that, according to Judge Rakoff, CUNY was within its legal right not to spend the money on retaining adjuncts. But that does not mean it was actually what the Act wanted them to do. I know that CUNY and Judge Rakoff read this more loosely but the phrase an institution receiving funds ‘shall to the greatest extent practicable, continue to

pay its employees and contractors during the period of any disruptions or closures related to coronavirus’ seems like a strong direction to keep paying those adjuncts”.

Felix V. Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor for CUNY, and William Thompson Jr., Chairperson for the CUNY Board of Trustees, published a press release on August 31st in response to the lawsuit, condemning the administration over adjunct layoffs. According to the press release, Rodríguez and Thompson are proud that CUNY is doing “more with less.” In regards to the CARES Act funding, they believe CUNY “submitted a plan to the State that prioritized student support and mental health services, reimbursements to campuses for COVID 19-related costs such as refunds, and investments in online infrastructure and training. The plan has been approved by the State, but we [CUNY] decided to hold back the use of the majority of these funds until we conclude our budget process. We are currently releasing some of the funds to reimburse campuses for COVID-19 related expenses”.

Jane Guskin, PSC delegate for QC and adjunct faculty member, warned us about the consequences of Judge Rakoff’s

ruling. “Obviously, the faculty who get laid off are hurt, and so are those of us who remain—larger class sizes increase our workload and reduce our pay—but students are the real victims of CUNY’s destructive decisions. More students in each class mean faculty have less time to help each student. Students are already stressed out by online classes; it’s hard to follow and keep up, especially since faculty are using multiple virtual platforms. Students need more individualized support from professors, not less. CARES Act funding should have gone to decreasing class sizes—best practices suggest no more than 12–15 students in each online class—and increasing class offerings to improve retention and keep students on the path to graduation. That requires more faculty, not less.”

Every member of the CUNY community should be gravely concerned about the fate of the university in light of budgetary constraints. It’s important now, more than ever, to support the efforts of lobbying groups such as PSC and Free CUNY. Together, we can save our colleges and ensure higher education is accessible to all.

QC Students talk in-person class experience during pandemic

Nika Nuñez
Reporter

The 2020 Fall semester is in full swing! Despite its historically unprecedented online instruction, Queens College faculty and staff are tirelessly working to ensure that students receive a quality education. With more students being infected by COVID-19 on college campuses across the nation, the fear of a local spike in cases still remains prevalent amongst members of the community. The majority of students are receiving synchronous, asynchronous, or a combination of both lecture types through diverse platforms such as CUNY Blackboard Collaborative Ultra, Zoom, Google Meets, Slack, Dropbox and others. But what happens to those students and professors who need access to science laboratories as per their major or minor requirements?

QC's Chemistry and Biochemistry departments are committed to a safe and adeptly restrictive laboratory instruction. The Official Queens College Chemistry department website cited that certain classes, including those requiring the lab, were carried out remotely up until September 4, 2020. Following this date, in-person lab activities as well as individual research projects will take place on campus.

The Knight News spoke with Dr. Seogjoo Jang, professor and chair to the department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Queens College, to confer and further comprehend the college's efforts to safeguard its students as well as to meet the necessary needs of its students. Some of the main points of discussion included the transition plans from remote instruction to in-person laboratory activities, the implementation of social distancing and potential, and the preparation for foreseeable problems. "The whole class is divided into two to three groups, offering an in-person laboratory for one group, while offering asynchronous online laboratories for others," revealed

Dr. Jang. Ideally, all in-person laboratory activities will be completed prior to the Thanksgiving holiday so that subsequent lab activities can resume online. As per a thorough inspection and examination of the lab facilities by QC administrators, they determined that the maximum number of students allowed per each laboratory is 9. The general number of students present at one time is about 18-24 students. Thus, hosting only 9 students is a significant reduction. Another safety precaution QC labs is taking is offering free masks and gloves to all students. For those individuals who need to wait outside the lab facilities, there are marked socially distant spaces for students to stand on. Dr. Jang also assured The Knight News that although QC is fully equipped to face every possible scenario thought of, an issue of noncompliance may arise if students do not adhere to the rules set by laboratory instructors.

To gauge how students are feeling, I spoke with sophomore chemistry student, Maria Mahmood, to hear her perspective about the class environment and the virtual to in-person instruction transition: "During the first couple of days of instruction, there was a lot of miscommunication between CUNY, the chemistry department, professors and students because our plans were constantly changing." The miscommunication catalyzed frustration and uncertainty, as some students were under the impression that students will attend in-person laboratories every other week, some only five times in the semester, and others only three. Since then, the outlook has changed; the solidified plan includes rotative groups to minimize the amount of people in one facility.

Even though 1% of classes are online, it's important that we all be mindful of our actions during this pandemic. Please make sure to stay socially distanced from others when outside, and to always wear a mask to protect yourself and prevent the spread of coronavirus.

What have QC students been up to this summer?

Chloe Sweeney
Editor/Reporter

When COVID-19 locked the entirety of New York indoors this past March, there wasn't much optimism regarding what the upcoming months would hold. With internships, job opportunities and vacation plans going down the drain, the rapidly approaching summer seemed hopeless. However, with the school break now behind us, it seems that many Queens College students still found ways to make the best of this unpredictable situation and gain professional experience both virtually and in-person.

Anlisa Outar, a QC junior majoring in urban studies, spent the summer participating in CUNY's virtual Summer Intensive for Public Policy (CUNY SIPP). This program helps CUNY students through the process of policy formation by allowing them to come up with their own policies to perfect and present. The program was four days of training led by three CUNY professors, each in charge of one group. The group Outar was placed into focused on public safety.

The policy that Outar's group agreed upon was the reallocation of funds within the NYC budget. They specifically suggested that the funds be redistributed from the NYPD to other sectors within the city. "One of the reasons for the revision of the budget was because the NYPD focuses on criminalization instead of community building. We want to promote community-based organizations and social services over the NYPD," Outar stated. On the day of presentations, each group presented to one public policy professional who were all women of color, something that she appreciated greatly.

One facet of the program that really stood out to Outar was the sense of community and CUNY pride shared by students and staff. The enthusiasm and drive each student showed for their projects shone through, even with cameras off and no in-person interaction. A lot of the students even exchanged social media and continue to talk. "Even though we can't see each other and everything is distance learning, the program still made me feel really good about starting school."

Yvonne Scorcia, another QC junior majoring in urban studies, had the opportunity to partake in a virtual internship through the Jeannette

K. Watson Foundation. This prestigious program offers undergraduates across NYC the opportunity to experience three years' worth of internships.

This summer, Scorcia chose to intern with the Department of City Planning in Pittsburgh. Their project focused on sustainability and food security in the Steel City. Under a 10-week time constraint, Scorcia and four other interns began interviewing city leaders, activists and everyday residents in Pittsburgh. This allowed the group to learn more about food security initiatives within the city and what support they could provide to both city-wide organizations and individuals in the neighborhood. "It's not my place to tell them what they should do, but rather they gave us ideas and tips, and we started to implement them and tell their stories and really amplify their voices."

Being able to communicate with organizers and activists within the Pittsburgh community was a huge highlight for Scorcia. "We were hundreds of miles apart and I've never met any of them in person, but I did feel a sense of connectivity when we talked." Scorcia admired their passion and drive to gain equity and security for their city, no matter how big the obstacles ahead may seem. "They have the whole world stacked against them and they're still not giving up hope. They're saying, 'We can make a change. Where do you need me? How can I help?'"

While others were being virtually productive, I found myself back on campus beginning in late July. It was at this point in the summer that laboratories were reopening at QC, so I was able to return to my research after four months of inactivity. It felt great to weigh powders and swirl beakers again, but it felt even better to walk across the Quad for the first time since March. There was a sense of serenity to it, considering the fact that campus was completely deserted. A ghost town, almost. Still, the campus breeze on my back and the distant city skyline gave me a feeling of normalcy. I look forward to the day that I can walk onto campus and be greeted by chatting, music and laughter at every angle again. But if this past summer taught QC students anything, it's that online education can still lead to amazing learning experiences and the blossoming of new friendships. So, here's to a great Fall semester!

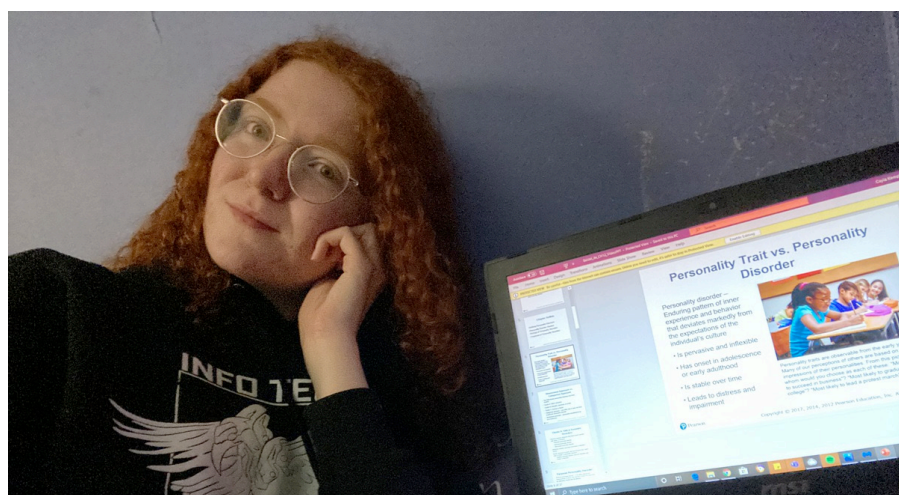


Photo: Cayla Kempf

Junior Psychology major Cayla Kempf keeps up with classes over the summer

The road towards reopening NYC public schools

Samantha Galvez-Montiel
Editor/ Reporter

As we begin our school year, Mayor Bill de Blasio has announced that the city's 1.1 million schoolchildren will now start both remote and in-person classes on Sept. 21, 10 days later than originally scheduled.

The original date for public schools to open was September 10th, but the teachers' union threatened to go on strike until they were ensured that full safety precautions would be put into place. "For the nation's largest school system to come together in unity and say, 'we are going to get it right, and it won't always be easy and there'll be tough moments along the way, but we're going to get it right'—that's a statement," Mr. De Blasio said during a morning news conference.

The New York Times reports that "after agreeing to the unions' demand, Mr. de Blasio said that the city will require monthly, random testing between 10 and 20 percent of students and staff in all city school buildings starting in October, with results ready within 48 hours."

Peter Kwon is an alumnus of the year 2003 with a BA in English Literature and a MA in English Education in 2008 from Teachers College. He has been an English high school teacher for almost nine years. "There are many precautions and protocols that have been made aware and implemented, but there is one that concerns me: commuting and public transportation. I wish there were a protocol put into place in creating more bus stops and maintaining social distancing on the bus line. Even though schools—I'm not sure if all schools—have created a new schedule to allow for social distancing in the classroom which then limits the number of students traveling to and from home and school, I am certain that come the first week of school, there will be an uncomfortable number of people lining up for buses in the morning," said Kwon.

The mayor's insistence that schools would be ready to reopen as initially scheduled on Sept. 10 frustrated many teachers and principals, who said they did not believe Mr. de Blasio understood the depth of the challenges they faced on the ground. Officials have said that they will be able to distribute four million face masks, 3.5 million bottles of hand sanitizer, and 80,000 containers of disinfectant wipes. More than 3,500 electrostatic sprayers — special equipment that has been used on the subway — are being

deployed to disinfect surfaces. But getting personal protective gear and sufficient soap and hand sanitizer into the city's public school buildings is only a first step.

ABC7 News has also reported that ventilation issues are delaying teachers' return to teaching in school. Kwon points out that "aside from checking ventilation, schools have tried to limit the number of students allowed in a classroom and, therefore, created a schedule in which one class is split into four groups, and each group would attend schools once a week. This allows a much smaller number of students (i.e., approx. 8) to sit comfortably in a classroom while practicing social distancing. Moreover, students do not leave to go to the class when the period is over; instead, teachers rotate. This new method significantly limits foot traffic and discourages close contact in tight spaces, such as staircases, narrow hallways, and bathrooms."

Many schools have implemented a hybrid system for teaching that allows students to either go fully remote or to come in to attend in-class sessions for parts of the month. "One challenge all students will face will be remaining motivated throughout the school year. So many students love the social aspect of school because maintaining friendships and a sense of community outside of their homes is important. What occurred during the quarantine back in March through June was that many students (some who were even high performing) drastically produced low-quality work or no work at all," Kwon commented.

However, we have seen the number of people that are politicizing masks rather than seeing the point in how it is more of a safety precaution. Not an infringement on our rights as Americans. "Furthermore, if students refuse to practice social distancing, what protocols will be in place for them? Do we, as educators, then report home and tell their parents? Do we restrict them from coming back into the building and switch them to remote learning only? But what if by doing so those students react negatively to such a "punishment"—as they might see it—and as a result no longer keep up with school work? I haven't personally heard for situations such as this that I just mentioned, but I do wonder about the major challenge in creating an environment of caution that all students can learn to respect during this time," Kwon mentions.

Yale University accused of discriminating against Asian-American applicants

Arwa Ali
Editor/ Reporter

On August 13th, the Justice Department made a bold claim that Yale University has been discriminating against its Asian-American and White applicants. This came at the heels of a two-year-long investigation against the school, which began shortly after Harvard was accused of committing the very same crime.

If this allegation is in fact true, Yale would be violating Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Acts, which prohibits any school from turning away potential candidates purely on the basis of race, sex, or national origin. Last October, Harvard's trial came to a close as the school was found innocent, but next month, arguments are set to be heard for the prosecutor's appeal of the case.

The Justice Department's accusations against both Yale and Harvard were in response to a formal complaint made by the Asian American Coalition for Education (AACE) in May of 2016 along with the solidarity of over 60 Asian American organizations. AACE is a non-profit committed to promoting equal educational opportunities for Asian-Americans. For the past several years, the organization has made it its priority to end racial quotas in higher education, as they believe it is at the expense of Asian-American students.

The Justice Department's decision could gravely hurt Yale's ongoing legal battle for preserving affirmative action, a policy that favors socioeconomically disadvantaged candidates who have been historically barred from attending prestigious schools. It is practiced by many universities with the intent of making reparations in higher education.

Fizza Abbas, a QC senior majoring in Sociology believes that affirmative action is greatly misrepresented in the media. "People have the misconception that affirmative action is something that victimizes Asians and Whites. For a long time, conservatives

have rallied behind this message to use Asians as a tool for dividing minorities and serving their own political agenda."

Malaika Var, a QC junior majoring in Political Science feels similarly. She even adds that "the Black and Hispanic community have always faced a disadvantage as a result of systemic racism. Affirmative action provides them a better chance at attaining the higher education they wouldn't otherwise have".

Eric S. Dreiband, the assistant attorney general for the civil rights division, is not a proponent of affirmative action. In defense of the Justice Department's opposition against Yale's admission practices, he has stated that "there is no such thing as a nice form of race discrimination." He then proceeded that the "investigation indicates that Yale's diversity goals appear to be vague, elusory and amorphous. While some applicants — mainly African-American and Hispanic students — were favored by Yale because of their race and ethnicity, others were disfavored".

According to The New York Times, the Justice Department has "directed Yale to suspend the consideration of race or national origin in admissions for one year, at which time the university would need to seek clearance from the government to begin using race as a factor again." Yale's president Peter Salovey is adamant that the department's allegations are "baseless." He claims that "at this unique moment in our history, when so much attention properly is being paid to issues of race, Yale will not waver in its commitment to educating a student body whose diversity is a mark of its excellence."

Yale has made it evident that it will fight against the Justice Department's orders and continue following its normal admission procedure. If Yale fails to comply, the department will file a lawsuit in favor of cutting government funding toward the university as a consequence of the Title VI violation.



Photo: Yale University

USPS under siege by Trump administration to suppress voters

Victoria Young
Editor/ Reporter

Following the appointment of Louis DeJoy as the new postmaster general this past May, you've likely noticed some changes regarding the delivery of your mail. Many towns, counties and states as a whole have reported that their mail is delayed or sometimes not coming at all for days or weeks at a time. This should not come as a surprise as there have been many cutbacks within the U.S. Postal Service system causing delays that seem to be getting increasingly worse. With the upcoming election and on-going pandemic, the U.S. Postal Service is even more essential right now than it has ever been and it is possible that these delays may cause many voters to lose their voice.

Although DeJoy's background and political affiliations may not seem of any importance, there is much to be questioned in regards to what he is doing with the power he has and what this means for our upcoming election. A New York native and North Carolina businessman, DeJoy has made very generous donations to the Republican Party as well as to the Trump Administration, having contributed \$1.2 million to the Trump Victory Fund. He's been in charge of fundraising for the Republican National Convention and has donated millions to Republican organizations and candidates. DeJoy has implemented "money-saving" tactics such as having employees come in later than usual, making post offices close for lunch and even the elimination of overtime. These delays will potentially sabotage our election in November, a claim backed by the U.S. Postal Service Agency, which has informed voters that their ballots may not meet the deadline unless they are mailed in three to four weeks before election day. DeJoy stated that he is "asking elected officials and voters to realistically consider how the mail works, and be mindful of our delivery standards, in order to provide voters ample time to cast

ballots through the mail," in a warning letter reported by The Washington Post.

Trump has not been silent about his utter distaste for voting by mail, stating that he believes it is fraudulent and will benefit the Democrats. In a tweet from July 30, President Trump stated that "With Universal Mail-In Voting (not Absentee Voting, which is good), 2020 will be the most INACCURATE & FRAUDULENT Election in history. It will be a great embarrassment to the USA." He even suggested delaying the election until people can "properly, securely and safely vote." It is because of this personal opinion that he opposed new postal funding and has risked millions of Americans to be disenfranchised in the upcoming election. Many lawmakers within the Democratic Party have accused Trump and his administration of purposely sabotaging the U.S. Postal Service to suppress voters in the election. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam believes that this is troubling, to say the least, and "is becoming a clear pattern of attempted voter suppression by the Trump administration," as said in a statement. Multiple investigations have been opened and an inquiry regarding DeJoy's actions has received a response from the postal service's inspector general.

In order to avoid voter suppression and possible disenfranchisement at the polls, it is recommended that you find out where your nearest polling location is and if you choose to vote by mail, make sure your state allows it. This information is crucial to accessing the polling stations, so it is important that you find out this information ahead of time in order to prepare accordingly. Be prepared to wait in line and keep a safe distance from others, and come equipped with hand sanitizer and a mask. Keep in mind that if you are in line and your station closes, you are still entitled to a vote and they cannot turn you away. Come prepared to use your voice to advocate for others if necessary and good luck at the polls!

The political saga continues: An insight of the DNC & RNC highlights

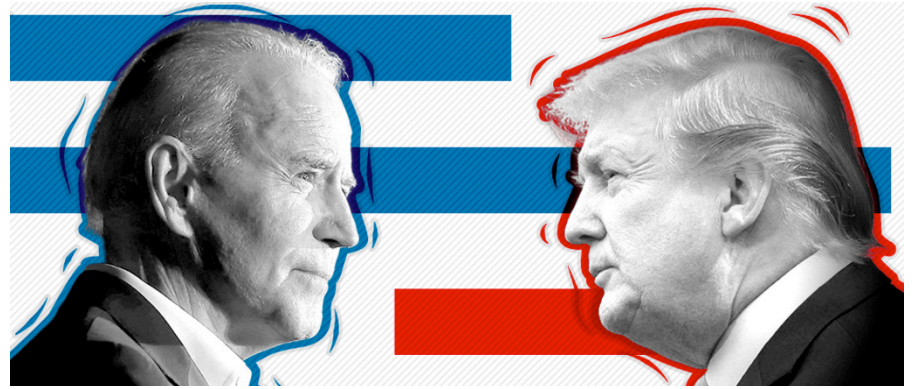
Nika Nuñez
Reporter

With just 52 days until the presidential election, millions of Americans tuned in live during the Democratic Convention and the Republican National Convention, respectively. The Democratic Nation-

al Convention (DNC), a four day event hosted by Milwaukee, Wisconsin was a complete departure from the Republican National Convention that featured no social distancing and wearing of masks.

The DNC covered a wide array of topics that reached and thus empathized with the demands of many American

Photo: BBC news



groups- the working class, middle class, the wealthy, young voters, students, families, and the many racial groups that make up this country. While attacks towards President Trump were not omitted, the criticism was certainly conveyed in a sensible and professional manner.

From August 17, 2020 to August 20, 2020, emotions ran high as key speakers such as former President Barack Obama and former First Lady Michelle Obama kicked-off day one of the convention with reflecting upon their time in the White House with Joe Biden, commending his character and leadership style. Both acknowledged the imminent racial tensions and injustices.

Another major point of emphasis was the importance of voting, not only to merely exercise one's civic duties, but to vote for sensible candidates driven by fact, intellect and experience. Other speakers that night included Senator for Minnesota Amy Klobuchar, Vermont's favorite Senator, Bernie Sanders, and our very own Governor Andrew Cuomo. Many of these speakers contended that the Biden-Harris team is crucial to the unification of our country.

Governor Cuomo once again took the opportunity to infamously attack President Donald Trump and his administration, calling him "incompetent" on multiple occasions for the mishandling of the Coronavirus due to his willful ignorance and blind-eye towards the crisis as well as for promoting division between Americans. He took pride in conveying the message that we are all "New York Strong" and noted the importance of community and altruism between one another.

The following three nights featured Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Former South Bend Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg who praised Joe Biden for being an ally to the LGBTQ community. Other individuals that made headlines were Former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton as well as Former First Ladies Rosalynn Carter and Hillary Clinton. These former presidents sought out a less prevalent role during the convention, but nevertheless urged the American people to vote for Joe Biden, for he is the democratic choice to defeat President Donald Trump.

The fourth and final night included Joe Biden accepting the nomination for the official Democratic Presidential nominee in which he articulated his journey both as a long-standing politician as well as his journey of many losses including the death of his son Beau Biden in 2015.

This final day was meant to commemorate his son and speak candidly about his views, perceptions and life lessons

The Republican National Convention, however, was conducted with an emphasis on blatant attacks towards from his father. His acceptance brings forth a much more humble upbringing than his opponent, President Trump. Joe Biden in which the President often falsely accused Joe Biden of wanting to "defund the police" and supporting "anarchist rioters," which Biden himself has denounced on multiple occasions.

The main focus of all four nights which began August 24, 2020 and ended on August 27, 2020 was how President Trump did a tremendous job in improving the economy. Major speakers from this convention were Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Ivanka Trump, First Lady Melania Trump, and Kellyanne Conway.

Vice President Mike Pence's speech featured the headline comment that "Joe Biden's America is unsafe." He then proceeded to praise President Trump for his effective and energetic leadership, claims that many Democratic leaders contest with. There were mentions of gratitude towards U.S. soldiers and Revolutionary war leaders.

White House counselor Kellyanne Conway and the President's daughter Ivanka Trump recalled the unfair and erroneous portrayal of the President in the media. This was a major point throughout the four nights as well.

President Trump made it a point in his acceptance speech to mention America's founding fathers. He claimed that Joe Biden is the antithesis of American values and thus will destroy the country. Some of his audience members were yawning throughout his hour long speech, showing disinterest and disengagement. However, the speeches failed to mention new goals that they'd like to accomplish in the coming election year but instead make claims against the opposing side.

Perhaps the greatest highlight of President Trump's speech was the fact that the audience congregated in the White House lawn were not wearing masks or practicing social distancing, making it seem as though the COVID-19 pandemic was a crisis long gone and eradicated.

Whether or not you affiliate yourself with a certain political party, it's important to vote for leaders that will enact positive social change on November 3rd, 2020. Vote for leaders that align with your concerns, not what the media glorifies or demystifies a candidate for.

Kamala Harris-Joe Biden's right-hand woman: A spotlight on democratic VP choice

Nika Nuñez
Reporter

On August 11, 2020, US Senator for California, Kamala Harris made national headlines when Joe Biden announced her as his running mate. From former rivals to aspiring President and Vice President duo, Kamala Harris soon became an indelible force to America as a whole.

Kamala Harris's headlining fierce attack on Joe Biden's previous stance on busing during a 2019 Democratic debate is long gone. Now, Ms. Harris, 55, is setting a new precedent; she is the first bi-racial and bi-ethnic woman of color to be selected as a fellow companion to an aspiring president for the Democratic national ticket. She gives hope to a wide array of angsty Americans both young and old who seek sound leadership that has the potential to dynamically address issues of higher education, healthcare, the economy, climate change, and the current global health crisis. She also holds the potential to help mitigate current racial tension between White and Black communities and instigate a shift in hostile attitudes.

Being of both African-American (Jamaican) and South-Asian (Indian) descent, Harris is no stranger to the trials low income and middle class folks are all too familiar with. Kamala was born and raised in Oakland, California by immigrant parents- economics professor Donald Harris and cancer researcher

Shyamala Gopalan. Ms. Harris gained her volatile, assertive, and well-collected demeanor from her mother. She often acknowledges her mother as a predominant source of inspiration to lead by example and provide a voice to the voiceless. Following her graduation from Howard University in 1986, she proceeded to obtain a law degree from The University of California, Hastings College of Law in 1989. She is more famously known as being a criminal prosecutor for San Diego, attorney general for California, and US Senator for California.

I caught up with Queens College's Political Science Professor Alexander Reichl for an expert input on what Biden's choice of Kamala Harris means for the imminent future of our nation, as well as the ways in which her criminal justice background may impact her role as Vice President. Professor Reichl affirms that "naming Harris, a successful woman of color, as the VP nominee gives Biden some advantages in his campaign, as she clicks with many core constituencies of the Democrats. A Democratic victory would have enormous implications even if it did no more than halt and roll back President Trump's agenda." Professor Reichl's claims adeptly summarize Ms. Harris's energetic and promising future to sway disgruntled and hesitant Bernie Sanders supporters. Her experience as a former prosecutor "provides some reassurance to moderates, including



Photo: NBC News

coveted suburbanites, who may lean left but fear Trump's menacing 'far-left'."

Often, Kamala Harris is cited as an emphatic centrist. Professor Reichl defines someone who is centrist as "neither too far left (liberal) nor too far right (conservative)." A centrist like Ms. Harris can be also referred to as a moderate. In more pragmatic terms pertaining to policies, being a centrist Democrat means that she "likely supports greater access to healthcare and higher education, as well as efforts to combat climate change and promote economic opportunity for disadvantaged populations." Ms. Harris's centrist ideals should not be confused with self-proclaimed 'Dem-

ocratic-socialists' such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria-Ocasio Cortez.

Ms. Harris's prosecuting experience, consolidated with Joe Biden's "tough-on crime" persona in the 1980s-1990s, will dispel the widespread erroneous perception that some Democrats are on the wrong side of the law. As Professor Reichl contends, "Harris will likely continue supporting some criminal justice reforms, while holding the line against more extreme proposals like defunding the police." Therefore, Harris's background in criminal justice and abrasive prosecutor reputation will quell anxieties of Americans who fear a nationwide defunding of police.

Elijah McClain: "A beautiful soul"

Victoria Young
Editor/ Reporter

On Aug 24th, 2019, Colorado police responded to a call from a resident living in the city of Aurora who spotted a "sketchy" man. The man in question was Elijah McClain, a 23 year old professional massage therapist and self taught violinist. McClain was on his way home from the convenience store after buying an iced tea while wearing a ski mask. What police didn't know is that McClain suffered from anemia and wore the mask as a protective covering in order to keep his face from getting cold. Shortly after police arrived on the scene, they approached and accosted McClain before pinning him down on the ground for eighteen minutes. Fifteen of those minutes were spent in handcuffs.

Both body camera footage and news reports indicate that immediately after appearing on the scene, police acted aggressively with McClain who became tense as officers grabbed and restrained

him. It is clear in the body camera footage that the view of the altercation was deliberately obstructed while the officers placed McClain in a carotid hold which, according to a letter from the Adams County District Attorney, restricts blood flow to the brain. The officers are even heard threatening McClain with a police dog and taser. McClain showed clear signs of distress and even threw up during the arrest as he shouted for help and tried explaining that he meant no harm.

When paramedics arrived on the scene, they shot him with 500 milligrams of the sedative ketamine. Ketamine is known as a dissociative anesthetic that is often used in anesthesia in both hospital and veterinary settings. The average dose of this specific sedative should be between 75 to 125 milligrams on average, but McClain received approximately four times the average dose. McClain fell into cardiac arrest on the way to the hospital as a result of this careless action made by the paramedics on the scene. He was pronounced brain dead only three short days

later and was then taken off of life support.

The three officers involved in McClain's death: Nathan Woodyard, Jason Rosenblatt, and Randy Roedema were all reassigned the second week of June, almost an entire year after the incident occurred. District Attorney Dave Young wrote in a November 2019 letter that his office couldn't find any evidence that the officers violated any of Colorado's laws nor did they use excessive force. Four additional officers are facing backlash for photos taken last October, only three months after McClain's death, that consisted of them mocking the chokehold used on McClain right in front of his memorial. Officers Kyle Dittrich, Erica Morrera, and Jason Rosenblatt were fired and Jaron Jones resigned.

The family of Elijah McClain has filed a civil rights lawsuit against the city of Aurora naming multiple officers of the police department as well as members of Aurora Fire Rescue. The nine claims in the suit include negligence led death, denial of equal protection, excessive force, failure to ensure basic safety, failure to provide adequate medical care, substantive due process, deprivation of liberty, forcible administration of medication, and battery causing wrongful death.

The lawsuit against the city of Aurora stated that "Elijah's family and communi-



Photo: Angie Jones

Portrait of Elijah McClain

ty remember him for his outsized kindness and grace, his desire to help and heal, and his thoughtful, spiritual approach to life".

Elijah McClain fell victim to yet another unfortunate situation caused by law enforcement and a broken justice system. McClain has been described by coworkers, friends, and family as a "beautiful soul". We must capture Elijah's spirit in the fight for justice in order to do right by the victims' families and all others who are faced with these horrific circumstances.

Israel and the United Arab Emirates agree to a historic normalization accord

Serene Klapper
Editor, Reporter

On August 31, at 11:14 a.m. local time, a large El Al Boeing 737 aircraft departed from Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv to make the first direct commercial flight from Israel to the United Arab Emirates. The flight, which carried both U.S. and Israeli political figures, such as Jared Kushner, senior advisor to the President of the United States, and Meir Ben Shabbat, Israel's advisor of national security, marked the easing of a half-century of tensions between Israel and the United Arab Emirates through a recent peace agreement.

The Abraham Accord, agreed to by leaders of the two countries less than three weeks before the historic flight departed and announced by U.S. President Donald Trump on August 13, has both of the Middle East countries agreeing to a "full normalization of relations." As per the terms of the agreement, the UAE has ended its boycott of Israel, which has been in place since 1972. In exchange, Israel has agreed to abandon its plans from earlier this year to annex parts of the West Bank, home to both Israeli settlers and Palestinian Arabs.

This normalization agreement is anticipated to be economically beneficial for both countries as trade will now be open between the prosperous and oil-endowed UAE and the entrepreneurial and innovative state of Israel. The latter is anticipated to provide investment and expansion opportunities in the form of tech start-ups and pharmaceutical companies for the wealthy UAE, which in turn is expected to profit by channeling its vast economy and resources towards many of these efforts. Delegates from both countries, led by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, will be attending a White House signing ceremony on September 15, during which the finer points



Photo: The Conversation

of the agreement—such as issues regarding technology, healthcare, environment and embassies—will also be discussed.

This accord has been marked as truly historic because of the long and complicated history between the two countries. Even before Israel and the UAE were established (in 1948 and 1971 respectively), the region of the UAE was involved in the Arab League's 1945 boycott of the Jewish community of Palestine. The first president of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, referred to Israel as "the enemy" from the very formation of the UAE. However, despite years of animosity, both countries have been willing to broker this accord, risking the anger of neighboring Palestinian groups who view agreeing to peace with Israel as betrayal in light of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There have been calls from such groups for the Arab League to denounce

the deal. However, the League, which suspended Egypt from its ranks in 1979 for making a very similar agreement with Israel, has rejected all such calls, signifying a definite shift in the interests of the region.

According to Kushner, this elusive peace has been obtained by aiming to "unite people focusing on common interest as opposed to common grievances" to "advance the region and advance the world." True to these words, as part of the joint statement released by the United States, UAE, and Israel, both Middle East countries have agreed to combine and expand their efforts towards the mutually beneficial pursuit of a vaccine for the coronavirus to "help save Muslim, Jewish, and Christian lives throughout the region."

Thus far, the results of this agreement are considered hopeful by many who are looking toward a peaceful future in the Middle East. Less than 30 days after the agreement was first an-

nounced, yet another country in the region, Bahrain, followed in striking a similar peace deal with Israel. The two recent accords have served to double the number of Arab countries that have formally recognized Israel, with Egypt and Jordan being the only other two to make peace with the tiny state. The affluent UAE has a great deal of influence in the region and is considered a tastemaker in that part of the world, which could mean other nations will follow suit. Furthermore, both the UAE and Israel have expressed their interest in utilizing their newfound collaboration to find a proper and just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is a hope retained by many that these newly cooperating countries will pave the road to the ever-so-coveted harmony in the Middle East.



We're looking to feature faculty members in our upcoming issues!

If you have any suggestions, email info@theknightnews.com

Please mention what department the faculty/staff member is from and a brief explanation about why we should write a feature about them.

QC student rallies for Uyghur rights

Amna Noor & Serene Klapper
Staff Writer, Editor/ Reporter

On Sunday, August 30th at 1:00 p.m., a group rallying for Uyghur rights—led by Queens College junior Alexander “Shabbos” Kestenbaum—positioned itself in front of the Isiah wall directly in front of the United Nations. The group included members of the Jewish community, as well as prominent Rabbis, political refugees of China, and Holocaust survivors, and they all gathered to express their solidarity and support for the Uyghur Muslims currently facing persecution in China.

The Uyghurs, an ethnic Muslim minority that mostly live in northwest China, have faced discrimination from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for decades. The situation escalated dramatically in 2014, when the Chinese government, under General Secretary Xi Jinping, announced a “people’s war on terror.” Over the next three years, the CCP constructed some 1,300 “re-education camps,” to which as many as a million Uyghurs and other Muslims were sent and confined for the purpose of being indoctrinated and forced to abide by the Chinese Communist ideology. Over the past year, awareness of the Uyghurs’ situation has been rising rapidly in communities in the United States. This rise in awareness has been evident among both college

students and the Jewish community. “We couldn’t just do nothing,” said Kestenbaum, who is majoring in Jewish Studies and Russian at QC, and an active member of the Jewish community. Kestenbaum’s passion for spiritual activism and his shock upon discovering the conditions the Uyghurs currently face in China ultimately motivated him to organize the rally with the goal of demonstrating Jewish solidarity with the Uyghurs as well as promoting awareness of the situation.

A series of speakers presented at the rally, each discussing a different aspect of the issue. Among them were journalist and spiritual activist Rabbi Hody Nemes, Tibetan refugee and activist Dorjee Tseten, political refugee and Uyghur activist Tahir Imin Uighurian, and motivational speaker and Holocaust survivor Sami Steigmann. Each speaker helped bring awareness of the crisis abroad through a different lens, depending on their personal experiences and expertise. As a result of a great many parallels drawn between the current concentration and indoctrination of Uyghurs and the concentration camps that many Jews were forced into during the Holocaust, many among the Jewish community have been particularly responsive toward the Uyghur situation, and the rally contained mainly members of the Jewish community.

“What’s happening now with the Uy-



Photo: Lev Raslin

ghur Muslim ethnicity in China is not a comparison to the Holocaust, but there are some eerie similarities of having forced labor camps,” Kestenbaum said. “The number one most important issue at this time is awareness. I don’t think enough people really understand what’s going on or know what’s going on. So number one is getting the word out there.”

Kestenbaum has not been the only Jewish voice clamoring for community recognition regarding the religious oppression of Uyghurs in China. On August 3, 2020, Rabbi Avi Shafran, the Director of Public Affairs of Agudath Israel of America, published an article titled “My fellow Orthodox Jews: Start fighting for the Uyghurs” was published by. The article called for the Jewish community to promote awareness of the treatment of Uyghurs in China, stating that “the image of millions of innocent people being concentrated against their will in camps is one that a people characterized by the Talmud as “merciful, modest and charitable” (Yevamot, 79a) cannot ignore.”

True to Shafran’s words, the Chinese

Uyghur population has been living in challenging, inhumane conditions during recent years. This issue is both current and alarming, and it is indeed crucial for the details of this situation to be more widespread in order to affect change.

“This is not a Uyghur issue. This is a global issue!” speaker Tahir Iman emphasized at the rally. “If you want to live a member of the free world you should stand up!”

College students certainly have a reputation of “standing up” regarding social inequality, and many, like Alexander, have been searching for ways to promote this issue in order to ensure a safer future for the Uyghurs in China. Those looking for ways for students to get involved in advancing awareness of the Uyghur situation are encouraged to join the Uyghur Human Rights Project’s Uyghur Lobby Days supporting the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, endorse the global campaign for fashion brands to end complicity with Uyghur forced labor, and reach out to their local political leaders in support of the Uyghur cause.

Southeast Asia Faces Severe Consequences of Climate Change

Samantha Galvez-Montiel
Editor/ Reporter

Amid the pandemic, we’ve had the opportunity to observe the beauty of nature while staying at home, going for walks and maybe spending a bit more time out in the sun for a change of scenery. Luckily, we are fortunate enough to live in a place where there is less pollution, but that is not the case for other countries. Southeast Asia is reported to be facing more severe consequences of climate change than the rest of the world, according to the business and economic research arm of the consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

“Asia faces climate hazards with potentially severe socioeconomic impacts and thus has a keen interest in playing a front-line role in addressing the challenges,” Jonathan Woetzel, a director at McKinsey Global Institute, said.

It is estimated that by 2050, between

\$2.8 trillion and \$4.7 trillion of gross domestic product in Asia will be at risk every year from a loss of effective outdoor working hours due to higher temperatures and humidity, according to the report.

Asian countries with lower levels of per capita gross domestic product would be the most at risk with their population facing the brunt of it, the McKinsey report said. This is because they are more exposed to extreme climates than the wealthy, relying more on outdoor work and natural capital, and may have fewer financial means to adapt.

Chuixiang Yi, professor at Queens College for the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences commented on the correlation between the economic success and the environment from the McKinsey report. “Simple relationship between the economy and environment is inversional, one becomes worse and the other is better,” said Yi. McKinsey also highlighted some

of the potential climate hazards that countries in Southeast Asia face. They were referred to as “Emerging Asia” in the report, and consist of Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Countries in the region are set to experience an increase in heat and humidity. By 2050, in an average year, anywhere between 8% and 13% of GDP could be at risk in those countries due to rising heat and humidity.

Chances of extreme precipitation could increase three to four-fold by 2050 in Indonesia.

While flooding is a common occurrence in Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh City, resulting in infrastructure damage could mount up to between \$500 million and \$1 billion by 2050, with knock-on costs ranging between \$1.5 billion and \$8.5 billion.

The Center For Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) has an article that addresses the concerns the McKinsey report points called “Southeast Asia’s Coming Climate Crisis” by David Dennis. “By 2050, daily high tides will flood the areas where over 48 million people in Southeast Asia now live, while predicted average annual flood levels would inun-

date the homes of over 79 million. At the same time, the direct threats of sea-level rise and superstorms will compound food and water insecurity throughout the region. All of these impacts, which will disproportionately affect the poorest and most marginalized communities, will contribute to political instability and damage local and national economies.”

However, Asia is still a developing country and its infrastructure as well as its urban areas are still under heavy construction. With that being said, they may be able to build infrastructure that can withstand the extreme climate changes and severe events.

“Physically, a warming climate would make the air hold more moisture and hence theoretically, storm systems like hurricanes would become stronger. Extreme weather would become frequent with ongoing climate change,” said Yi in relation to why climate change would be a critical challenge for Southeast Asia.

If you can, please donate to the following organizations to help.

[Climate Network](#)
[Earth Rights](#)
[wri.org](#)

Operation Warp Speed: The Race for a Vaccine

Gloria Stoyanova
Columnist

With the coronavirus pandemic at its peak in the United States, the Trump Administration announced, “Operation Warp Speed.” Its goal is to produce 300 million doses of a coronavirus vaccine by January 2021. According to Health and Human Services, Johnson & Johnson, Moderna, and AstraZeneca have already received multi-billion dollar investments in their manufacturing capabilities.

One may begin to wonder, how is the coronavirus vaccine being made? The answer lies behind the science of it all. Viruses are some of the simplest organisms known to man. They lack basic machinery to replicate themselves. For this reason, they use a host, like a human cell. The lack of essential cellular processes makes viruses a poor target for existing therapies like antibiotics. On the other hand, vaccines are simple treatments; they contain pieces of a virus. Delivery of a controlled portion allows the immune system to react. Next, production of memory cells is stimulated. In the event that an individual is reinfected with the same virus, the immune system remembers and responds more effectively than the initial immune response.

The vaccine development process traditionally takes anywhere from 5 to 15 years. The coronavirus vaccine is expected to be approved in 12-18 months. The search starts in a research lab called the preclinical phase. In this phase, researchers test the efficacy of their vaccine on simple animal models or cells. Afterwards, Phase I clinical trials test the vaccine in a small number of healthy people to determine the proper dosage. Phase II tests the treatment in special groups like the elderly to ensure no side effects. Phase III tests tens of thousands of participants. This phase is most likely to provide information about long-term side effects. The final step involves approval of the vaccine. As of September 10, there are 170 vaccine candidates in development worldwide, including 9 candidates in phase III trials.

It’s worth understanding the approaches to develop a vaccine under Operation Warp Speed. For example, Moderna’s vaccine contains Ribonucleic Acid (RNA). RNA can be made into protein, and that’s exactly how the vaccine works. The coronavirus spike protein is synthe-

sized inside the cell. The body can produce antibodies against it to protect from a potential infection. Moderna describes it as the body making its own vaccine.

Another common approach to vaccines is the use of viral vectors; a method being employed by AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. The same way that mosquitoes are vectors which carry viruses between people and animals, viral vectors are designed to carry pieces of other viruses. One such vector is the adenovirus. The adenovirus causes common colds and can be weakened to prevent this. The AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccine candidates use adenoviruses. This particular style of vaccine enters the cell and causes an immune response without being lethal like the coronavirus. The immune system will then work to produce antibodies, which is a defense mechanism against pathogens like viruses.

The Knight News sat down with Dr. Dennehy, a professor of Biology at Queens College. Dennehy also doubles as a researcher in the biology department, whose very own lab is studying the coronavirus. According to Dennehy, he anticipates that the vaccine will be widely available in mid-2021.

When asking Dennehy about some of the challenges vaccine researchers face, he explained, “First is safety. It is not simply a matter of dosing patients,” adding, “these patients need to be monitored for some time to ensure that there are no adverse events and that the vaccine is effective in protecting patients. After safety comes logistics and successfully distributing the vaccine to those who need it most.”

Plans are being made to distribute the vaccine to the highest risk people first, including healthcare workers. The real question is, how long will the vaccine provide immunity? There have been two reports of people being reinfected by different coronavirus strains.

Vaccinations offer indirect protection for the immunocompromised. If about 70% of the population has immunity, it is unlikely that an immunocompromised individual will be infected by the virus. Until a vaccine is discovered, the best way to protect yourself and your fellow Americans is to maintain six feet in physical distance from others, wash your hands often, wear a mask, and avoid large gatherings of people.

Gender and racial disparities in COVID-19

Gloria Stoyanova
Columnist

Certain groups of people are predisposed to having a severe infection. Children and the elderly come to mind, as both populations have immune systems that are not as developed. Those with pre-existing conditions like asthma, diabetes, and hypertension are also at higher risk. Looking at the mortality data, there is evidence to suggest that minorities are disproportionately affected by severe COVID-19.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) readily addresses disparities in those affected by COVID-19, specifically when it comes to race and socioeconomic circumstances of patients. According to the CDC’s public report, “a total of 205 counties in 33 states were identified as hotspots. These counties have a combined total population of 93.5 million persons, and approximately 535,000 cumulative probable and confirmed COVID-19 cases.” The report further discusses that “disparities among Hispanic populations were identified in approximately three quarters of hotspot counties (59 of 79, 74.7%) with approximately 3.5 million Hispanic residents. Approximately 2.0 million black persons reside in 22 (27.8%) hotspot counties where black residents were disproportionately affected by COVID-19.”

According to Johns Hopkins University, the current mortality rate in the U.S. is 3%. As a whole, Louisiana reported black people make up 59% of the coronavirus deaths, while accounting for 33% of the state population. The numbers vary even more by county. One study published in the New England Journal of Medicine surveyed a Louisiana health system. They were interested in the difference in mortality among black and white patients. They found that black patients comprised 77% of all coronavirus admissions and 70.6% of

all deaths. This is strangely disproportionate as the black population makes up 31% of the health-system population. The authors noted that the black patients had higher levels of hypertension, obesity and diabetes. A third of all the patients in the study were in the intensive care unit. Of that subset, 80.2% were black. From patients who were put onto ventilators, 81.6% were black. The researchers suggested the disparities are caused by people of color having more exposure due to type of work and waiting longer before hospital admission.

It’s worth noting that black patients are more likely to be residing with several members of their family at once. This sort of dynamic isn’t necessarily prevalent amongst white families. However, even if the study did not account for it (as the authors do not seem to directly address this), it negates the notion that black and minority communities have statistically higher data due to their residential dynamics. The study primarily focused on the intake and treatment of black patients in the hospital setting, with respect to white patients.

From another standpoint, gender can play a big role in mortality. Another study published in *Frontiers in Public Health*, analyzed the gender differences in a small group in China. They found that men and women had the same occurrence of the disease, but men were 2.4 times as likely to die from COVID-19, across all age groups. Another study found that men were 1.3 times more likely to develop a severe infection.

People have implicit characteristics that cannot be changed; some of these can increase the risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Ethnicity is often considered a risk factor for certain conditions, but gender even less so. It is important to take note of these differences to protect one another.

The true monsters of “Lovecraft Country”

Ralph Matamoros
Staff Writer

On August 16th HBO released the first episode of its latest original, “Lovecraft Country”, an American supernatural drama depicting veteran Atticus Freeman’s journey from Chicago to Massachusetts in search of his father. Joined by his uncle George Freeman and childhood friend Letitia “Leti” Lewis, Atticus follows a lead which causes the trio to search for Ardam, a town that disappeared from the map 200 years prior. As they progress in their search, the three travelers battle a series of horrifying “Lovecraftian” monsters, while simultaneously enduring discrimination from their white peers and the police. The first episode, in particular, balances writing, cinematography, visual effects and music to create a breathtaking introduction to one of HBO’s most popular series.

The first scene of the series opens on the protagonist, Atticus Freeman, fighting in the trenches against an unseen enemy. An abrupt explosion transforms the visual from black and white to color, and the cameras zoom out dizzily to display the full scale of the battlefield and reveal the fantastical enemy: UFOs, winged beasts, giants. The visuals of the

scene are an ode to old-school science fiction, with red and green lasers lighting the battlefield and monsters at times taking up the full focus of the camera. The monsters are so realistic that it seems as though they were present in the physical shooting of the scene. By beginning with such an alarmingly realistic, supernatural scene, it is immediately established that the show is set in an alternate America in which monsters are very, very real.

The strategic combination of writing and music choices implemented throughout the episode play an integral role in conveying the message of the pilot by drawing a parallel between the brutality of the Lovecraftian monsters to that of the everyday racism the characters experience. Most of the show’s background music is 1950’s jazz and blues, but during a sequence in which Atticus walks around his old town, the 2019 song “CLONES” by Tierra Whack plays. As the song plays, the camera shifts from a police officer harassing a group of black children to a military recruiter trying to recruit young city boys. The harsh lyrics of the song not only accentuate the brutality that the show critiques but also bring a modern edge to this scene, implying that, even now, both police brutality and targeted military recruitment — often directed at

young Black Americans — are still issues.

The themes of police brutality and abuse of power are present in other scenes in the show as well. Constant parallels are drawn between members of law enforcement and the deadly Lovecraftian monsters. While Atticus, George and Leti travel through Devon County in search of Atticus’ father, they confront both hostile monsters and law enforcement, with the uncertain nature of their journey often blurring the lines between the two. The show draws similarities between the local police and the brutal monsters that hide in the surrounding wood by closely tying the fight scenes with the monsters and the police. By making both police and monsters fight only at night — the monsters due to their light sensitivity, and the police because they enforce the laws of a “sundown county,” or a place that black travelers must leave before sunset in order to avoid racist violence — the show further blurs the line between its villains. Later in the pilot, the two threats symbolically merge as the local Sheriff Hunt transforms into a monster and proceeds to attack his own men, completely dissolving the separation between the two horrors and merging them into one terrifying entity.

Ultimately, the pilot for “Lovecraft Country” and its message are as timely as



Photo: imdb

they are spectacular. By closely comparing monstrous violence to racially motivated violence, the show explores themes of anger, hatred, discrimination and corruption that are relatable to every viewer. The first four episodes of the series are currently available on HBO Max and HBO Now, with new episodes released each Sunday. Fans of drama, science fiction or supernatural horror should be sure to check out HBO’s newest original series.

Stunning Visuals and a Touching Story in *The One and Only Ivan*

Ralph Matamoros
Staff Writer

This past August, *The One and Only Ivan*, was released on the streaming platform, Disney Plus. An adaptation of the novel by the same title, the movie follows the character of Ivan, a silverback gorilla. He lives at the Big Top Mall, where he and his friends have to perform tricks in order to make money for the ringleader, Mack. After Mack brings a baby elephant named Ruby to the mall in order to attract more people, Ivan is faced with the task of bringing Ruby and the other animals to the wild where they belong.

I hadn’t seen any promotional material before seeing the movie, but having read the book when I was younger, I was initially worried that the movie wouldn’t be a fair adaptation of the story. Similarly, after Disney rebooted *The Lion*

King, I was concerned that *The One and Only Ivan* would make the same mistake of prioritizing how photorealistic the animals look over how expressive they were. That worrying feeling went away after watching for a few minutes, but I still needed some time to adjust.

The movie opens with a close-up shot of Ivan breaking the fourth wall and introducing himself, and while Ivan looks photorealistic, his face doesn’t feel as expressive as it should be. The opening scene of the movie is Ivan introducing us to the rest of the circus animals as they do tricks during the show, and the scene had a similar issue where it didn’t feel like the voice actors were connected to their animal characters. This issue goes away when Stella, an elephant, steps into the circus ring and performs. Stella and the other animals look photorealistic, but Angelina Jolie’s performance blends into the

visual effects, making Stella feel alive.

The animators for *The One and Only Ivan* were tasked with creating photorealistic, yet expressive, CGI animals, and they were able to do that by studying how real animals behave and applying that to their characters. For example, whenever the stray dog Bob sees Ivan, he wags his tail and tilts his head like an actual dog, and when the animals briefly escape the mall, the rabbit Murphy twists his body when he hops. That specific type of movement is called a “binky”, and rabbits do that to show they feel happy and safe. Similarly, Ruby’s ears move as she talks, which shows that she’s energetic and childlike.

Ultimately, the story is simple with some room for thought, which is why this movie can be enjoyed by all audiences. The story starts to move forward when Stella has Ivan promise that Ruby won’t grow up the same way Stella did, and that he’ll free the animals from the mall. At the same time, the Big Top Mall is losing money because people are bored of the repetitive show, which prompts Mack to change Ivan’s show from “The Mighty Silverback” to “The Artistic Ape”. Ivan uses his talent in the show, painting a mural of the wild in order to show the humans that he wishes to be free. The movie ends

on a positive note, with Ivan and Ruby being moved to the same zoo, able to spend the rest of their lives in the “wild”.

An interesting camera choice during the ending scene is that the bars that keep the animals in their enclosures are always visible in the background of each shot, which almost suggests that Ivan has traded his old cage for a larger one. Similarly, the internal conflict that Ivan faces in which he has to choose between acting like an angry gorilla for the sake of the show or embracing his artistic talents is also interesting. Based on Ivan’s actions throughout the movie, he is more comfortable drawing, but when Mack sees Ivan’s passion and tries to monetize it, Ivan stops making art out of protest. Although the story is told with children in mind, older viewers can look at the choices made by the director to ask questions, like how does looking at the animals from a money-making standpoint affect them, and if the animals are ever truly free, even after leaving the mall.

With beautiful visuals, talented actors, and a touching story based on real life events, *The One and Only Ivan* is the perfect movie to see if you have younger siblings, you enjoyed the novel, or if you’re just looking for something cute to watch during quarantine.



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