April 2021

Remembering Soléi

The Baruch Weissman community is devastated by the heartbreaking loss of Soléi Spears. Soléi was a beloved student and scholar, a gifted poet and artist, and an activist on social justice issues. Soléi didn’t just aspire to make a difference. She was already a force for change who had touched many lives at Baruch and beyond when she lost her life on April 5, at age 20, to gun violence.

Soléi was a leader in Baruch’s Black Student Union, a member of the 2019 CUNY Service Corps hurricane relief trip to Puerto Rico, and an intern at Elloree Talent Strategies, a company dedicated to improving corporate diversity. She was “committed to the advocacy of Black lives in the CUNY community and around the world,” tweeted Juvanie Piquant, chairwoman of CUNY’s University Student Senate. Soléi was also part of a team revising course syllabi in her major, political science, to better reflect diverse voices and perspectives.

But these many accomplishments don’t begin to capture the impact that Soléi had on everyone she met. Her very name evoked the sun, and those who knew her were struck by her intensity, her compassion, and her commitment. “Social justice was not just talk for Soléi, it was her walk,” wrote Baruch’s Political Science Department. “Soléi served as a true agent of change and compassion for the world she wished to see and live in.”

A Healing Circle organized by Baruch’s Counseling Center included a reading of Soléi’s extraordinary poem, “Homegoing,” which reads, in part: “So if I can’t touch you, can’t see you, can’t hear you, can’t hold you, what are you to me? Faced with loss I must try to comprehend, adjust, and mend with the thought: ‘People are not meant to be possessed but experienced.’” You can see more of Soléi’s writing along with her art in this online memorial created by her high school, Millennium Brooklyn.

A second Healing Circle is planned for Tuesday, April 20, 12:45 p.m.-2:15 p.m. (Zoom link here. Meeting ID: 890 8181 5673; Passcode: 533104; One tap mobile +16465588656.)

Baruch students, staff, and faculty are also planning a Zoom memorial service in Soléi’s honor to take place Tuesday, April 27, 6 p.m.; details to come.

Baruch students who need support in coping with this loss or any other concerns may access free, confidential counseling services by appointment. CUNY students in crisis can also text CUNY to 741741 for immediate free, 24/7 support from a trained counselor.

$25K Gift for Black and Latino Studies

Weissman’s Department of Black and Latino Studies has received a $25,000 gift from an anonymous donor. Interim Department Chair Professor Shelly Eversley said the gift will help build “a 21st century program that empowers our students to practice...
ethics and a commitment to social and racial justice in their intellectual pursuits and to leverage those skills once they enter the workforce.”

The department is in the process of creating a bonafide major and has added two full-time faculty members in the past year. Meanwhile students can pursue BLS as an ad-hoc major with a recommended sequence of courses.

Faculty Achievements

Professor Johanna Fernandez has won four awards for her brilliant book *The Young Lords: A Radical History*. These honors include the highly prestigious Frederick Jackson Turner Award, given by the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to the author of a first scholarly book dealing with some aspect of U.S. history.

In addition to the Turner Award, OAH also honored Fernandez with the Merle Curti Social History Award and the Liberty Legacy Foundation Award. All three prizes were announced Friday at OAH’s annual meeting.

Fernandez also won a New York City Book Award, bestowed by The New York Society Library to honor books of literary quality or historical importance that evoke the spirit or enhance appreciation of New York City.

This is the second year in a row that a faculty member from Weissman’s History Department has won the illustrious Turner Award. Professor Vincent DiGirolamo was honored last year for his book, *Crying the News: A History of America’s Newsboys*.

*The Young Lords* details the history of the legendary Puerto Rican activist group that shook up Chicago and New York in the late 1960s and early ’70s with protests, community organizing, and media campaigns. Their efforts to support communities of color and rectify social inequities ranged from a hospital takeover in the Bronx to a "garbage offensive" to clean up East Harlem and improve city services.

The Young Lords “spoke and amplified and explained the problems of their generation,” Fernandez said in a podcast for CUNY’s Book Beat. “They are the equivalent of black Twitter then, but they did it in the streets.”

Student and Alumni Highlights

Weissman’s *Dollars & Sense magazine* was named the best affiliated college journalism website in the Northeast by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), journalism’s leading professional organization. One of the judges praised D&S for its “diversity of multimedia and the high quality achieved by them all.” In winning the top spot, *D&S* beat out the runner-up, *The Harvard Crimson*.

*D&S* is a student-run online news magazine published by the Department of Journalism and the Writing Professions. Professors Vera Haller, Emily Johnson, and Gisele Regatao serve as faculty advisors.

“This award means that we are successfully telling the stories of voices that need to be heard,” said *D&S* editors-in-chief Yasmeen Alia Persaud and Jose Nieves Herrera, and managing editor Brenika Banks, all Weissman students. “It shows that we are making an impact and pushing the boundaries of student journalism.”

Weissman student Joel De La Cruz (’22) is one of three Baruch undergraduates selected as Spring 2021 Gilman International Scholars. The scholarship, sponsored by the U.S. State Department, gives students of limited financial means $5,000 toward studying or
Winners can defer travel for now because of the pandemic. Joel, an economics major who is also minoring in history, plans to study abroad in Japan.

Weissman’s Master of Financial Engineering program has had a record recruiting season. All December 2020 and May 2021 graduates have accepted full-time employment offers in the financial industry and 92% of current students have already accepted summer internship offers.

Average first-year salary plus sign-on bonus for December 2020 graduates rose to $150,000, with students heading to institutions like Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan, Bank of America, and Barclays. Most students will stay in New York, with 11% elsewhere in the U.S. and 4% accepting jobs in Asia.

Meeckel Beecher, MA, Corporate Communication, ‘15, is the new global head of diversity, equity and inclusion at Shutterstock, and Iyvon Edebiri, MA, Arts Administration, ‘17, is now director of artistic programs at the award-winning off-Broadway Signature Theater.

Upcoming Events

**April 20, 8:30 p.m.- 9:45 p.m. - New Media Artspace** will livestream a lecture by visiting artist Prajakta Potnis. (No registration necessary; you can watch it on YouTube.) New Media Artspace is also presenting the solo exhibition *Prajakta Potnis: The Slow Burn* online through May 7.

**April 22, beginning at 12:50 p.m. - 2021 Harman Writing Fellow Daphne Palasi Andreades** (WSAS ’15) will read from her debut novel *Brown Girls* on Thursday, April 22. (Zoom registration here). The book, due out in January from Random House, is about a group of young women of color from Queens and their immigrant families. Daphne will be in conversation with Professor Grace Schulman.

**April 22, 1 p.m. - Mishkin Gallery** film screening of *Americium*, about the Yucca Mountain nuclear storage facility, with filmmakers Lisa Rave and Erik Blinderman in conversation with Professor Alison Griffiths. (Zoom registration here.)

**April 22, 5 p.m.-6 p.m.: In honor of Earth Day,** Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean. Sponsored by Weissman’s Initiative for the Study of Latin America (ISLA) in partnership with the Environmental Science faculty in Weissman’s Department of Natural Sciences. Speakers include students from Baruch’s Climate Scholars Program in conversation with Professor Chester Zarnoch and Stephen Gosnell. (Zoom registration here.)

**April 29, 1 p.m. - Mishkin Gallery** film screening of *Cactus River (Khong Lang Nam)* with filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with Mishkin Gallery Director/Curator Alaina Claire Feldman. The short film is about a river changed by dam construction, with a parallel story of a woman changed by her marriage to a retired U.S. soldier. Baruch students may submit questions for the artist ahead of time, to be answered in a pre-recorded interview. Zoom registration here.
Weissman has a new communications manager, **Beth Harpaz**. Beth had a long career with The Associated Press as a reporter and editor before joining CUNY in 2018 to run the SUM website, an online showcase for CUNY research. Beth is looking to beef up Weissman’s social media accounts, so she invites you to follow Weissman on Twitter and Instagram, “like” the school's Facebook page, and tag Weissman in any school-related posts. Got news? Email beth.harpaz@baruch.cuny.edu.

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