

# NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

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TESTIMONY TO THE COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES  
& INTERNATIONAL INTERGROUP RELATIONS

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2021

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Dear Members of the Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Intergroup Relations:

Thank you for your continued service to education and the arts in New York City, particularly during these challenging times, and thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the New-York Historical Society. For over 200 years, New-York Historical has told the story of our nation's founding and history, using our vast collections to highlight under-told stories and diverse perspectives throughout that history. New-York Historical's mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret, for the broadest possible public, material relevant to U.S. history in general, and of this state and city in particular.

Education is the cornerstone of our mission: each year, we serve 250,000 students and educators through our robust slate of K-12 and higher education initiatives. Through these initiatives, New-York Historical aims to be an active, accessible community resource for audiences historically underrepresented by textbooks or cultural institutions, with programming that reflects the rich cultural fabric of our city and nation.

## **DIVERSIFYING NYC'S CULTURAL WORKFORCE**

In line with our mission, New-York Historical has worked to ensure that our museum professionals hail from a wide range of backgrounds so that we can create exhibitions and programming that highlight under-told stories, challenge hegemonic historical narratives, and enrich public understanding of our shared past. We prioritize inclusion of women and minority leaders across all levels of our staff to help address the pervasive lack of diversity in American museum collections and leadership and to ensure social equity in our programming. To address these needs on a larger scale, we developed a **Master of Arts in Museum Studies** degree program offered through **City University of New York's School of Professional Studies** (CUNY SPS) in an effort to generate an equitable cultural workforce that reflects the cultural fabric of our city. Its launch in fall of 2019 was the most successful roll out of a CUNY SPS MA program in the history of the school and welcomed a student body of which 39% identified as

coming from non-white backgrounds, including Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Native Indian.

The program leverages New-York Historical's world-class museum and library collections, as well as our curatorial and educational expertise, to prepare participants for meaningful careers in New York City and State's thriving arts and culture economy. By blending online programs with a hands-on practicum component at New-York Historical, it offers flexible scheduling and onsite experience, providing museum career education and experience to individuals from marginalized communities. Students are eligible to apply for scholarships which are underwritten by private donors. Since the launch of the Museum Studies scholarship, we have received 53 applications and we have awarded 20 Museum Studies scholars.

### **WORKING WITH CUNY CULTURAL CORPS**

To further assist students in our MA program, we have started to work with CUNY Cultural Corps to find new ways for our students to participate. Many CUNY SPS students are working adults who may not have the time to participate in museum internships. Given this barrier to entry, our program manager is working to find ways for SPS students in our MA program to gain access to CUNY Cultural Corps opportunities.

Despite these challenges, we are pleased to report that two students have participated in a CUNY Cultural Corps program at MoMA. Through a MoMA/CUNY collaboration, these students worked to develop a lecture, "Shifting Perspectives: New York Stories," during which 2021 CUNY Student Ambassadors facilitated conversations about their experiences finding personal connections with artwork in MoMA's collection.

### **CONCLUSION**

The New-York Historical Society remains deeply grateful for the important programmatic and capital funds from New York City that have allowed us to expand our resources and reach and adapt to the needs of our local community. In particular, New-York Historical is grateful for capital funds received in Fiscal Years 2020, 2021, and 2022 towards our major building expansion project, which will also create new gallery and collection spaces to accommodate students in our CUNY SPS MA program. These funds are essential to our institutional goals and mission and we thank you and your fellow City Council Members for your exceptional service.



Dear Members of the Committees on Higher Education and Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Intergroup Relations,

Thank you, Chairs Barron and Van Bramer, for hosting today's hearing on the CUNY Cultural Corps and Service Corps.

My name is Elyse Buxbaum. I am honored to testify today as a former CUNY employee and now as Executive Vice President of The Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage is committed to the crucial mission of educating diverse visitors about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust and the lessons about what hate can do. We are dedicated to education and remembrance.

The Museum became a partner organization with the CUNY Cultural Corps program in 2018. Since then, more than a dozen students have interned with us, growing their skill sets in departments across the Museum. For example, last year, in the midst of the pandemic, we hosted four CUNY interns within our Collections, Education, and Development teams. Following all safety protocols, they worked both remotely and in the office to give a more hands on experience. And now, I am excited to share that Denisse—a first generation nursing student with a Mexican background from the Bronx—started with my team just yesterday.

Cultural Corps students receive real work experience on projects that help advance the Museum's mission. In addition, they participate in our educational programming, including engaging with a Holocaust Survivor to hear personal stories of trauma, hope, and resiliency. Last year, Alistair, a finance student, helped research possible education program funders, a number of which are now Museum supporters. And, Lauren, a film major, worked on migrating recorded historical testimonies so that generations to come can access survivor stories. After the CUNY program, she applied for a general internship and stayed with the Museum through the summer.

The Museum is committed to helping former CUNY Cultural Corp members stay connected to the institution and each other. We always encourage the students to apply for additional internships with us and positions once they have graduated. We also open doors to other institutions across New York City and provide professional references. We deeply believe that helping students realize different career paths through nonprofit experience is critical to diversifying the City workforce. Further, their varied life experiences enhance the Museum's ongoing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts by ensuring a wide range of perspectives are represented in our Museum.

At a time when culturals are really suffering, we are grateful for the opportunity to host these interns and bring future-focused and positive perspectives into our space. Reciprocally, the CUNY students lost a year during the pandemic; they need this paid work experience. We deeply appreciate the hard work of the Cultural Corps team, who ensured safe procedures to continue the partnership. They adeptly pivoted to host a virtual matching fair, which made the recruiting much process easier.

CUNY Cultural Corps allows NYC institutions such as ours to host committed people who are ready to serve organizations that pledge to give back to their communities. The Museum of Jewish Heritage looks forward to continuing this relationship in the current academic year and for years to come.

Thank you again to the Council. I urge your continued support of the CUNY Cultural Corps and Service Corps program.

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October 6, 2021

The Staten Island Museum (SIM) has partnered with the CUNY Cultural Corps since its start in 2016 to offer internships at the museum to CUNY students at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Each year SIM's archives hosts 2-3 students from the Cultural Corps. Student interns majoring in the Arts, Social Sciences and/or Humanities gain hands on experience with archival research and processing. Under the supervision of the Archives Manager, students interact with researchers and collections and assess whether they wish to pursue a career in Museums and/or Archives.

The dedicated effort of Cultural Corps interns helps the Staten Island Museum serve our community. Interns have worked on major collections initiatives and exhibition research, including for *Women of the Nation Arise! Staten Islanders in the Fight for Women's Right to Vote*, a major museum research initiative that resulted in an exhibition marking the Centennial of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Cultural Corps interns help the archives to keep up with demand for research appointments and requests for information.

The Cultural Corps alumni who have interned at the Staten Island Museum have pursued further education and careers in arts and culture. One has gone on to work for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. Another went on to receive a Master of Arts in History from the CUNY Graduate Center. Two more are pursuing degrees in Fine Arts.

The Staten Island Museum views participation in the CUNY Cultural Corps as a vital means of contributing to diversity and equity of the workforce in arts and culture by providing a robust, paid, resume-building experience for students in the field. It would be difficult for SIM to provide the same number of paid opportunities for interns without the support of the CUNY Cultural Corps. We thank City Council for continued support.

Respectfully submitted,

Gabriella Leone, Archives Manager  
Staten Island Museum

Art

Natural Science

History



Testimony to New York City Council

Re: CUNY Cultural Corps

Wednesday, October 5, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony. My name is Lisa Gold and I am the Executive Director of the Asian American Arts Alliance (A4). We are a 38-year old service organization representing a diverse coalition of artists, arts organizations, and arts supporters. We are dedicated to ensuring greater representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian American artists and arts organizations, as well as providing a critical voice for this community.

Last year, A4 participated in the Cultural Corps program for the first time and yesterday, we welcomed our second intern. I cannot speak highly enough about its importance to the cultural ecosystem of New York City and its role in advancing equity in the field.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers<sup>1</sup> [found](#) an average of seven in ten employers want their new hires to have work experience and more than half wanted that experience to come from internships. For many students, mostly white and wealthy, that experience is attained through *unpaid* internships. Needless to say, unpaid internships prevent low- and moderate-income people of color from gaining this experience and hinder their already disadvantaged economic mobility. Additionally, the ability to work in and learn first-hand about this city's great cultural institutions has traditionally been afforded to wealthy, well-connected students.

The program also benefits small organizations and organizations with meager budgets like A4 which does not offer unpaid internships, but does not have the resources to fully fund

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internship programs. The CUNY program is a “win-win” in this situation, providing cultural organizations the opportunity to help young New Yorkers gain a foothold in the cultural arena and learn from them in return.

It is critical that the city invests in students of color so that they have the opportunity to participate in the larger cultural discourse. They are our future and will ensure that cultural organizations remain relevant and serve our communities.

Our current intern, Katrynna Jackowicz, states, “The CUNY Cultural Corps is an amazing program that speaks to the resources CUNY is able to offer. As a participant, I have been exposed to organizations that I would have never known about. Getting matched with an organization for a year-long internship provides us with the experience that a lot of college students don’t get. The Cultural Corps even goes so far as to hold valuable workshops that cover a range of topics like resume building, equity and inclusion, and excel training. I am so thankful for the opportunity that I have been granted by the Cultural Corps and think that it is a valuable opportunity for any student in the CUNY system looking to expand into the arts and culture sector of NYC.”

CUNY’s Cultural Corps is only one of many programs and policy changes needed to level the playing field to ensure that ALL New Yorkers can benefit from and contribute to our city’s cultural resources and economy. We at A4 are grateful to be a part of the program.

Thank you.

Lisa Gold  
Executive Director  
Asian American Arts Alliance

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- 1) “Employers Prefer Candidates with Prior Work Experience,” National Association of Colleges and Employers (naceweb.org): April 5, 2017  
<https://www.naceweb.org/talent-acquisition/candidate-selection/employers-prefer-candidates-with-work-experience/>

Good morning. My name is Alejandra Martinez, and I am a recent graduate from John Jay College where I double-majored in Sociology and Criminal justice. I am also a newly hired Outreach specialist for Young Invincibles. I want to thank the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education LIBRARIES for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing.

Today I am here to testify on behalf of CUNY Service Corp and speak upon its importance in CUNY colleges. As a newly transferred student from BMCC I was looking for an opportunity to grow professionally while also staying on track of my upcoming graduation date. As a CUNY student I was constantly surrounded by young ambitious students who wanted to succeed in the real world and to no surprise internships and fellowships were seen as valuable tools to get there. I made sure that throughout my college career I kept my grades up while also doing internships and building real-life connections.

In my Senior year at John Jay I was made aware of CUNY Service Corps and their message of creating a healthier, more Resilient and better educated city. As a young woman of color I felt connected by CUNY Service Corps mission of representing both opportunity and need through the means of service. After being notified of my acceptance, CUNY Service corp lined me up with an organization that met my views and whose values I felt gravitated towards. This organization was Young Invincibles, whose mission is to amplify the voices of young adults in the political process.

As a sociology major I felt in place with an organization who values the voices of my generation especially when it comes to social aspects that affect our futures such as education, healthcare and workforces. I spend a semester getting to work on data projects, outreach engagement projects and writing formal reports of my findings. Towards the end of service I can attest that CUNY Service Corps has rewarded me by



allowing me to make a meaningful difference through service while gaining valuable real-world work experience, earning a wage and receiving college credit. As a CUNY Service Corps alumni and recent graduate I can happily say that I have been employed by my community-based organization that I had the opportunity to serve with. I urge the educational committee today to continue to invest and support CUNY Service Corps and other programs alike that allow CUNY students to network, gain professionalism, gain workplace experience and most importantly serve their city. Thank you.