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## York College Hosts New York African Studies Association (NYASA) Conference

By **KESI GORDON**



On April 12th and 13th, 2019, York College's Department of History, Philosophy and Anthropology (HPA) hosted the 44th annual conference of the New York African Studies Association. NYASA, as its members call it, provides an opportunity for intellectuals from across the globe and from multiple disciplines to gather and present their research about the lives, histories, writings, and health of people of African descent.

One panel on "Black Studies and Systematic Globalization" included Dr. George White, Jr., professor and chair of the HPA department at York College, Dr. Amadu Kaba, of Seton Hall University, and Dr. Jessie Benjamin of Kennesaw State University.

Dr. White led the discussion with his study of "Black Wall Street: Why 'Buy Black' is Not Enough." Black Wall Street was a community of Black individuals who collaborated to create a unified city

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## Deadline!

All items for the **Fall 2019** issue of **Academic Affairs Update** should be submitted to Marcia Moxam Comrie (mcomrie@york.cuny.edu) by **September 9, 2019**. Text should be sent in MS Word. Photos should be sent as separate hi-res files (preferably not less than 1MB).



*Left to Right:* Conference Host and Associate Professor George White, Chair of History, Philosophy and Anthropology at York College; Higher Ed Assistant and Conference Organizer Extraordinaire at York College Erzulie Mars; President of York College Marcia V. Keizs; NYASA Treasurer Richard Severin of York College; NYASA President Kevin Hickey; and former NYASA President Seifudein Adem of Doshisha University Japan (Photo: Roger Gocking).

# NYASA Conference

Continued from previous page

where Black people were the owners, producers, and consumers of businesses.

Yet Dr. White said that “buying Black would not be enough to eradicate the disparities of wealth and income that exist in the Black community.” Dr. White claimed that reparations would be the only way to begin to close the significant wealth and income gap. He calls it a “necessity” of moral and ethical justice.

According to Dr. White, the responsibility of the Black community is to resist the factors of individualism and take up the spirit of “ubuntu,” a Zulu term for which one translation is “I am because we are.” Dr. White used the term to communicate “that a key to wealth building in Black communities will be to abandon traditional consumerist approaches to purchases, savings, and investing; instead of focusing on individual gain, we need to prioritize group success.”

Dr. Kaba, in his presentation, “Sierra Leone as a Cultural Capital of Pan Africanism,” discussed significant Black nations such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana (the first sub-Saharan country to gain independence), Tanzania, Haiti (the first Black republic in the Caribbean), and Sierra Leone, and their relationship to what he called “cultural capital” in reference to race, knowledge, religion, and language.

Dr. Kaba explained that although the people who settled in Sierra Leone were from different countries, they were able to connect and share ideas. The people of Sierra Leone created a language, a form of Creole, understandable by all. By doing this, Sierra Leone became home to Black people from many different areas.

Dr. Kaba grew emotional at the opportunity to share the often neglected significance of Sierra Leone to the Black Diaspora. According to Dr. Kaba, Sierra Leone is a cultural capital of Pan Africanism because its inhabitants left an impact on the continent and beyond.

During another presentation, Dr. Oumar Diop (Kennesaw State University), discussed “An Exploration of Structures of Silence in Selected African



“Black Studies and Systematic Globalism”  
Panel *Left to Right Back*: Dr. Jessie Benjamin of Kennesaw State University, Dr. George White of York (CUNY) and Dr. Shereen Inayatulla.  
*Left to Right Front*: Emmanuela Oppong of Union College, and Amadu Kaba of Seton Hall University (Photo: Roger Gocking)

Novels.” Dr. Diop argued that people of the African Diaspora must decode the voices that over time have been silenced. Much of the history of early African societies is in oral traditions. For that reason, for many years, African history was “silenced.” Africana Studies began to be taught only 50 years ago.

Conferences like NYASA celebrate de-silencing as people learn and share their knowledge.

One of the final presentations was “Expanding Migrations,” moderated



Dr. George White receiving a proclamation from the New York State Senate honoring the NYASA Conference *Left to Right*: Lynette Shelborne-Barfield, Director of Special Projects for New York State Senator Leroy Comrie of District 14; Conference Host George White; NYASA President Kevin Hickey (Photo: Roger Gocking)

by Dr. Kevin Hickey of Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. Dr. Hickey’s presentation addressed prejudice from the perspective of blindness. He analyzed Teju Cole’s work, *Blind Spot*, which illustrates how prejudices often come from an individual’s ignorance and are perpetuated when people refuse to educate themselves. Cole took a picture of a young boy in the Congo River, and at first he wrote that the boy’s eyes “disappear”. However, when he adjusted the picture, the face and eyes of the boy became visible.

This experience from Cole speaks to the idea that individual prejudices are the fault of the individual and not those the individual projects them onto. Due to the darkness surrounding the boy, Cole was unable to see his face and features, and so Cole assumed that the boy was missing features. However, the light from the filter allowed him to see the boy’s face and features. Cole’s experience speaks to the fact that getting past prejudices requires adjusting the way individuals see the world. As Cole wrote, “Darkness is not empty; it is information at rest.”

Hosting the NYASA conference at York offered many benefits to the students. The weekend of scholarship helped members of the York College community see their school transformed into an environment filled with intellectual engagement and activity. This is not to say that York’s regular courses and events are not intellectually challenging; however, if classes are the food, conferences like NYASA are the necessary supplements to the meal.

The presence of distinguished guests from SUNY Cortland, Columbia University, University of Buffalo, Union College, other universities, and countries such as France, Jamaica, West Indies and several African Countries contributed to the atmosphere. Hearing many engage in conversation in their native tongue made members of the college community feel like they had been transported out of their regular college environment.

The symbol for this year’s conference was the Sankofa bird, which looks back toward the rear of its body to “go back and get that which was forgotten.” The

conference was filled with scholars who find significance in History and are dedicated to bringing back and using knowledge of that past to invest in the future.

For some York History majors at the conference, it was an awakening that the major is viable and valuable. Being surrounded by other people who are

living examples of who and what York's History majors aspire to be provided well-needed inspiration. ■

# Tenth Annual Undergraduate Research Day

**U**ndergraduate Research Day took center stage at York for the tenth year, showcasing student research and faculty mentorship, and bringing sleep researcher Dr. Sara C. Mednick to campus to offer insight into the importance of sleep.

The May 9th event featured research posters across the disciplines with students and mentors drawn from the Departments of Fine Arts, Nursing, Biology, Chemistry, Business/Aviation, Pharmaceutical Science, and others. For his commitment to the program, Dr. Deb Chakravarti (Chemistry), who had the largest cohort of students presenting, was given the President's Award.

Topics such as "The Correlation Between Gout and Kidney Disease," by nursing students, S. Begum, T. Deonarine, K. Francis, M. Frimpong, M. Ferdous, with mentors, Dr. Margaret Alexandre and Dr. Magalie Alcindor (Nursing) and "Systemic Lupus Erythematosus in Young Adults," by Mahnoor Hussain, Shanz Islam, Trisha Ghosh, Emani Gilkes, and Devi Hariprashad, were front and center in the atrium of the Academic Core Building during the event.

One fascinating poster asked: "Can Amazon Keep Its Leadership Position in

the e-commerce Industry?" The poster was submitted by Bilkis Akter, under the mentorship of Dr. Chris Hsu, director of the CUNY Aviation Institute at York College and an expert in the area of finance. Another of Hsu's students, Tina Hussain, presented on "The Effects of Interest Rates on the Stock Market."

Biology student Ayodelle Tyndall and mentor, Dr. Gerard McNeil (Biology), displayed their research, "Sequence Finishing of *Drosophila biarmipes* Dot Chromosomes using Consed." Also on hand were Dr. Jong Ill Lee (Chemistry) with students, who presented on research conducted in part in Niagara, New York.

Fine Arts impressed with topics such as "Sculpting with Wax and Casting with Bronze," by Coleen Efono and Dee Weatherly, students from the Department of Performing and Fine Arts. It was a visual reminder that the arts are valued at York.



The poster for the 10th Annual Undergraduate Research Day features a vibrant, abstract background of red and orange flames. At the top right is the York College logo. The main text reads "10th Annual Undergraduate Research Day" in large, bold letters. Below this, it says "May 9, 2019 10am to 3pm Academic Core Building". A section titled "KEYNOTE ADDRESS" lists "12:55pm | AC-2D01" and "KEYNOTE SPEAKER Dr. Sara Mednick". A small image of Dr. Sara Mednick is shown next to her name, with her title "Author and Associate Professor, Department of Cognitive Sciences at University of California, Irvine" below it. At the bottom left, there is a small image of a book cover titled "Take a Nap! Change your life." by Sara C. Mednick, Ph.D.

The lunchtime portion of the day featured keynote speaker Dr. Sara C. Mednick, associate professor in the Department of Cognitive Sciences at the University of California, Irvine and author of the book, *Take a Nap! Change Your Life*. Mednick, a native New Yorker, discussed the importance of sleep for cognitive health.

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Nursing students with their research posters

# Research Day

Continued from previous page

Her discussion, “How Sleep Benefits Cognition,” was insightful and led some audience members to rethink their own sleeping habits. Dr. Mednick, a former actress and dancer, outlined the stages of sleep, explaining that “about 60% of sleep is stage two, known as NREM (non-rapid eye movement) and is considered “the dream stage.” She pointed out that during REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, the body is paralyzed, “so we can’t act out our crazy dreams.”

She revealed that stage three sleep is a slow wave sleep, whereby the heart slows down, the neurons are communicating and the body goes into a mild hibernation. Mednick said that her research proves that even a daily nap, preferably lasting at least an hour, is beneficial.

“Sleep is not going to solve all your problems,” Mednick explained, “but it will enhance perceptual skills, memory, and motor skills, such as riding a bike, performing surgery or gymnastics. Naps also enhance verbal memory.”



Student research posters displayed in the Artium

The cognitive scientist also said people who slept longer during one of her tests had “way stronger memory of the gist and the actual information.”

Dr. Ratan Dhar, director of Undergraduate Research and a professor of Environmental Science, was pleased with Dr. Mednick’s presentation.

“I think the topic of the talk itself was very attractive and timely, particularly for urban dwellers like New York City’s

sleep deprived residents where the “city never sleeps,” said Dr. Dhar. “Moreover, [she] was great to discuss her challenges and successes on her journey.”

According to Dhar, students’ research outcomes were also selected for presenting in the National Council on Undergraduate Research Conference in Atlanta this year at Kennesaw State University in Georgia. The Undergraduate Research program supports their travels, he said. ■

## Women’s Center Hosts #MeToo Founder for Women’s History Month

By **ASAR JOHN**

Tarana Burke, the founder of the #MeToo movement visited York as part of the Women’s Center’s annual Women’s History Month Colloquium. Ebonie Jackson, the director of the center headed the discussion.

#MeToo was originally started to uplift the survivors of sexual violence within communities of color, Burke said in an introductory clip at the event. However, in the recent years it has expanded to include adults and people of all races and genders.

“This is a movement about giving people access to healing, to make sure the most marginalized amongst us have an opportunity to start a pathway of healing from the trauma of sexual violence,” Burke explained.

Burke said she is survivor of sexual abuse as a child and sexual harassment as an adult.

“As a young person who did not know how to navigate that experience, it became very important to me to have something that existed in the world that could change the trajectory of a young black girl’s life,” Burke said.

The term #MeToo, which was coined by Burke in 2006, years before the movement gained international attention 11 years later when actor Alyssa Milano tweeted about sexual assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein.

“It was Alyssa who tweeted it, but it was also Alyssa who brought me on Good Morning America,” said Burke. “She then came back and said, we would not be here if it were not for Tarana Burke.”



Ebonie Jackson (right), Manager, The York College Women’s Center, moderates the discussion with Tarana Burke

Burke went on to explain the movement and its growth throughout a decade.

“What I would add to that is, we realized last year that the other part of our work is shifting the narrative,” said Burke. “We have to insert ourselves into pop cul-



Ms. Burke (L) and Ms. Jackson (R)

ture, people are watching television and movies that give a very finite view of what survivors are supposed to look like, and so it is up to us to change that.”

Jackson, the Women’s Center director, said Burke was chosen as the keynote speaker for the colloquium because she believes that her message should be brought to the college.

“I saw Tarana Burke speak at a conference last year and she was phenomenal,” said Jackson. “She started a movement by and for women of color, and we have tons of that here.”

Samantha Jones, a student at York, mentioned a quote that Burke used with a colleague, (in terms of social work dealing with victims of sexual violence), which Jones believed made an impact.

“She said, ‘we go to the work because we are the work,’ so I think that’s something that is going to stick with me,” said Jones, a MSW student. “As a social work student it gave me an outlook in terms of getting into the workforce and dealing with clients.”

Before stepping up stage to share her story about the #MeToo movement, Burke spoke to *Pandora’s Box*, York College’s student newspaper, about what she hopes to accomplish in the discussion.

“My goal is the same everywhere I go, which is to make sure people understand that the movement is not necessarily what they see in the media, and that everyone has a role to play,” said Burke. ■

*This article originally appeared in Pandora’s Box, March 20, 2019.*

## Maya Angelou Remembered with Women’s History Month Tribute

By **JOSHELLE JAMES**,  
Student Journalist

In Honor of Black History Month this February, the Women’s Center hosted a screening of, *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise*, a documentary of the life of Maya Angelou (1928-2014), one of the 20th century’s most iconic memoirists and poets.

Angelou, born Marguerite Johnson, is known internationally for her Pulitzer Prize-nominated autobiography, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, as well as for her inspiring poetry, including “Still I Rise,” from which the documentary takes its name. In addition to her writing, Angelou was also an actress, dancer, director, professor at Wakefield University; and a noted civil rights activist who once lived and studied in Egypt.

The film shows Angelou’s incredible journey, making it clear why she is revered in the African-American community. Rare photographs and videos, her own words, and never before seen footage highlight untold aspects of her life. The documentary shows scenes from her growing up in the Depres-

sion-era South; her early performing career, her work with Malcolm-X in Ghana; her original poem for President Bill Clinton’s first inauguration in 1993; as well as many other important moments throughout her life.

Her mother abandoned Angelou as well as her beloved older brother at the ages of three and four, respectively, sending them from Los Angeles to live in Stamp, Arkansas with their grandmother.

When they returned to live with their mother, Angelou was raped at the age of seven by her mother’s boyfriend. She thought her voice killed, because when she spoke about the rape, the man was killed. This led to a self-imposed five-year silence for the young girl, who felt that because she had spoken of her sexual abuse, someone had been murdered. She turned to reading after a neighbor, trying to pull her out of the silence, read aloud to her from Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*.

When Maya Angelou decided to speak, she had a lot to say. As President Clinton stated, “She was big and had the voice of God.”

Angelou’s life was often a roller coaster. Pregnant at 16, she gave birth to her only child, a son she named Guy Johnson, whom she almost lost later due to a catastrophic car accident. When she married his father, a white man, it caused a lot of controversy between Angelou and her in-laws, who detested their son’s interracial marriage.

Eboni Jackson, Director of the Women’s Center, stated, “She lived life to the fullest, and that this is a very excellent film. Her life was far from perfect, she moved a lot, lived through many tragedies; but she kept rising. She ‘kept faith,’ and her story is very inspiring. A lot of people know her poems and of her, but don’t really know about her life.”

Women’s Center Assistant, Cassita Charles, was also inspired. “So many things happened in her life that I had no idea about,” she said. “This film taught me a lot about Maya Angelou. She was an amazing and strong woman.” ■



# Retired Art Professor Donates Large Collection to York

By **ASHLEIGH BROWN**,  
Student Reporter

York College Professor Emerita Elena Borstein has donated 19 paintings to the York College Department of Art, where she taught for many years. Borstein's interest in structure and architecture has been a constant theme in her work, inspired by the various places she has visited. The York College Fine Art Gallery showcased these works in a Spring 2019



Dr. Margaret Vendryes, Professor Elena Borstein, and Dr. Marcia V. Keizs

exhibit dubbed "The Gift of Art: The Paintings of Elena Borstein 1985-2015."

In a well-attended artist talk on the opening day of the exhibit, Professor Borstein retraced her art career.

Professor Borstein explained that since the mid-1980s, her work has focused on the architecture as well as the lines and shapes of the land in different areas of the Mediterranean. She uses both pastels in these works and acrylic paints, for which she developed an air-brush technique, laying down hundreds of thin layers to create luminosity in the painted surfaces.

Tyriece Simon, a York journalism major, compared some of Borstein's artwork to his childhood. "One of my favorite paintings was the one of the bodega," he said. "It's honestly one of the best and relates to me in so many ways. It's my favorite piece of artwork here."

Dr. Greet Van Belle, Director of the Center for Teaching, Learning and Education Technologies at York College, explained that she was introduced to Borstein's pieces by seeing them around campus. "I've seen her pieces in the provost's office," Dr. Van Belle said, "They're beautiful. I never knew who did them. It's nice to see that it was someone from York."

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Borstein received her BS from Skidmore

College and her MFA from the University of Pennsylvania. Her work is included in numerous major collections across the nation, including the Museum of Modern Art, MIT and the Neuberger Museum. She taught in York College's Department of Art for 32 years and is one of the founding members and designers of the department. Her work has also been featured at JP Morgan/Chase Bank in New York City as well as Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.

Borstein recalled that the architect Louis Kahn inspired her with his "poetic musings about the meaning of architectural spaces and their effects on the human psyche." But it wasn't just the Mediterranean and Saratoga Springs that inspired Borstein's artistry. Havana, Cuba and even a train station in the Bronx, New York have been fair game for her canvases.

Dr. Marcia V. Keizs, president of York College, was in attendance at the opening reception for the stunning exhibit and was impressed not just with the gift and the lecture, but with the design of the exhibit space as well.

"We are so proud of the work that the gallery does," said Keizs. "And we are thrilled to have [Prof.] Borstein work with us again with this generous gift and delightful lecture." ■

## Kudos!

The York College Big Band (YCBB), under the leadership of Professor Thomas Zlabinger (Performing and Fine Arts), recently performed at the famed Flushing Town Hall as part of the Queens Jazz OverGround Festival (<http://queensjazz.org/>)!

"We have performed at the festival annually for several years and it was a thrill to return to premier our tribute to Woodstock," said Dr. Zlabinger. "In celebration of the rock festival's gold anniversary, we performed the music of the Beatles, Richie Havens, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Santana."





## Physics Major is Class of 2019 Valedictorian

The Physics Department at York College, CUNY is having a moment. For the first time in twenty years, an exemplary student from their department, Tawhid Pranto, has been selected as the valedictorian of the Class of 2019.

Pranto, an immigrant from Bangladesh, completed his BS in Physics in three and a half years of study and earned acceptance to the CUNY Graduate School's PhD program in Condensed Matter Physics. He did all this while building an impressive CV to include working in York's Men's Center, tutoring in the Physics and Mathematics Learning Center, helping students study for the MCAT and GRE Exams, helping under-represented community residents study for their GED exams, and gaining experience as an adjunct lecturer in physics.

As if that weren't enough, Pranto also worked with Dr. James Popp during his freshmen and sophomore years to help build lab protocols for synthesis and to test parts of the electron tracking detector built in collaboration with the Mu2e experiment. As a junior and senior, Pranto worked with Dr. Kevin Lynch on developing a threat assessment system to detect contraband.

Pranto is also a member of the college's Honors Program and part of the Astrobotics team, which has taken him to a NASA Robotics Mining competition in Florida. He also presented a poster in Buffalo, New York this April. The busy scholar is also a Dr. Eugene Levin Scholar (named for a beloved, now retired-founding physics professor at York).

As an immigrant just moving to Jamaica, Queens in 2014 after finishing high school at Rajuk College, Bangladesh, Pranto asked relatives living in his neighborhood for their opinion on local colleges. York came out on top and he visited the campus a few times, read the school newspaper, *Pandora's Box*, and

with the encouragement of his parents, made his decision.

"My parents are very supportive," he says of his mother, a nursing instructor at Dhaka Nursing College, and father, an officer of Janata Bank, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Pranto, who is fluent in four languages—Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English—has impressed his professors and appreciates their dedication to their students.

"I always wanted to do physics or engineering," he recalled.

"The faculty here helped me and gave me research opportunities. Professors Popp and Lynch have mentored me and Professor Paglione has guided me throughout the selection of courses as well."

In his reference letter for Pranto's graduate school application, Dr. Timothy Paglione, the chair of the Department of Earth and Physical Sciences at York, rates his student as one of the best he has ever taught, not only at York, but also at the CUNY Graduate Center, where he also has an appointment.

"Pranto stands out as one of the strongest graduate school candidates York has produced," said Paglione, who has taught him in several advanced courses. "In his company are several CUNY students I worked directly with not only here, but also at American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), who successfully completed the Columbia Bridge to the PhD Program, as well as those in Physics PhD programs around the country. So I know Pranto is of the caliber of student that can thrive and succeed in grad school. I advocated for him strongly for a number of fellowships and internships at York, which he well deserved. I similarly recommended him as an adjunct in his off-semester, and as chair, had no hesitation in hiring him."

According to Paglione, in his nearly 20 years teaching at York, Pranto is the



first physics major to be selected valedictorian. "The major, at York is small as it is throughout CUNY and the country," Paglione explained.

Asked what is special about Pranto as a student, Dr. James Popp, one of Pranto's dedicated mentors was quick with an answer.

"Pranto has all the right qualities for academic success," said Popp. "He has excellent study habits – he reads all the time. He has a natural knack for reading and understanding technical material in math, physics, and engineering. Tawhid is naturally curious about everything. It doesn't matter what subject. He reminds me or me when I was his age. He is resourceful in and out of the lab and he likes a challenge."

According to Dr. Popp, Pranto will master the PhD program with aplomb.

"He should have no trouble taking the usual preparatory courses for passing his qualifying exams," said Popp. "He has the advantage of having Dr. Lynch and myself, as continued friends that can advise him on his selection of an advisor for his dissertation, as well as on other graduate school matters."

And since it "takes a village to raise a scholar," there were faculty members in other departments who were also instrumental in Pranto's success. He spent many hours in the Mathematics and Computer Science department being mentored by scholars such Dr. Radoslaw Wojciechowski and Dr. Rishi Nath, who also provided a letter of reference to graduate school, as well as other dedicated faculty members.

In the meantime, Pranto may not be the only member of his family to attend York when all is said and done. A younger brother has already participated in the college's summer research program and York is on his list for enrollment as a first-year college student in Fall 2019. Their mother is also considering coming to York to get certified as a nurse in the United States, following her son's graduation in May.

York's 48th Commencement Exercises will take place on the campus' athletic field on May 31. ■

# Physics Majors Score National Laboratory Internships

Two outstanding York physics students working in Professor James Popp's lab have been awarded prestigious summer internships at Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) on Long Island. Siedah Hall and David Buitrago, undergraduate physics majors, will spend summer 2019 working in high energy physics with researchers at Brookhaven.

Their success is a testament to their hard work and to the encouragement and standards of their mentor, Professor Popp (Earth and Physical Sciences). Professor Popp has helped David and Siedah cultivate and broaden their particular talents through work in his lab on the Mu2e Tracker construction project, leading-edge research supported at York by a grant from the US Department of Energy.

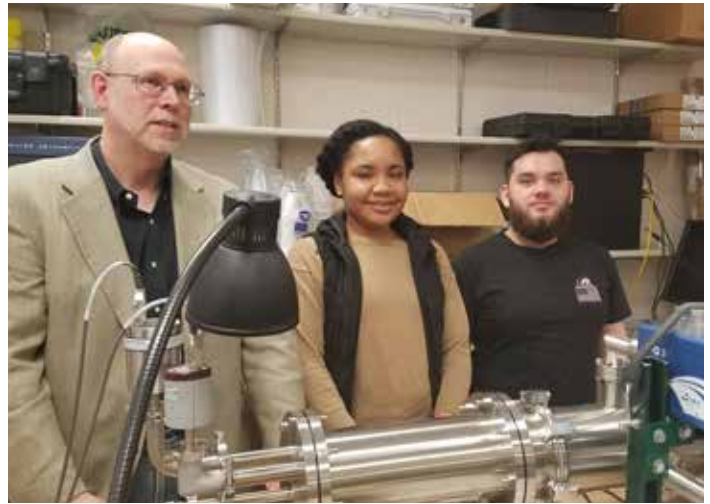
The project here at York is part of the larger Mu2e Experiment at Fermilab, which searches for direct evidence that a muon (an unstable elementary particle) can decay into an electron without the pair of neutrinos that usually accompany this decay process. Such a discovery would bolster new theories about how particles interact, identify which theories are more likely, and could even lead to a revision of the Standard Model of Elementary Particle Physics.

As Professor Popp explains, he first met Siedah Hall when she came to be advised. Impressed with her grades and her level of interest in physics, he offered her a job working on the project. She struck him, he says, as "a very happy self-confident physics major."

At the same time, he met David Buitrago at a physics symposium at Queensborough Community College. David was already interested in working on data acquisition for a cosmic ray muon project Professor Popp had been involved with off and on for almost the past decade. David was enthusiastic about computing and moving to York to study physics in earnest. "When David transferred to York officially," Professor Popp notes, "I immediately put him to work on the same Mu2e Tracker construction project as Siedah."

Over the summer of 2018, Professor Popp set David loose in the high energy physics laboratory at York. David was asked to setup a small computing network within the lab using rack-mountable computers that are typically used to act as servers for a network node such as our own college. As Dr. Popp sees it, David "took to this job like a fish to water." Together David and Professor Popp set up a small cluster of high energy physics computing machines for simulating the Mu2e Experiment at Fermilab.

Meanwhile, Siedah, in her work on the project, proved to be what Professor Popp calls "a natural experimenter." Skillful in the lab, she showed she could build and manage any project given her. She took over most of the management and training of other students to push to completion a project to assemble 50,000 precision parts for supporting, delivering gas, and extracting signals from the particle detectors. These three-foot



*Left to Right:* Professor James Popp, Siedah Hall and David Buitrago

long and narrow, about the diameter of a pencil, "drift chamber detectors" form the heart of a one-of-a-kind ultra-thin material (15 micron thick walls) system 22,000 of particle detectors to track low-energy electrons in the Mu2e Experiment.

The entire experiment must be performed under vacuum to ensure minimal scattering and energy loss of the crucial signal electrons. Siedah became skilled at testing randomly selected samples of the 50,000 parts, using high vacuum equipment to test the ultrathin detector tubes for gas leaks.

Professor Popp was so pleased with the progress the two students had made that he recommended them to the Science Undergraduate Laboratory Internship program (SULI), sponsored by the US Department of Energy's Office of Science. After a highly competitive and selective process, both won internships to work at Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL), out on Long Island.

The SULI program covers room and board for the entire 10 week summer session and provides a stipend so students can focus on their learning and research. The summer program will also prepare them to rise to the challenge of how to use their college education most effectively, regardless of the path they choose to follow: graduate study or competing in the job market.

Siedah will be working on developing a novel solid-state "soft" (low-energy) X-ray detector with applications ranging from satellite observatories to dentistry. David will work with a team to implement and network an array of cosmic ray detectors spanning sites here in Queens out to Suffolk County for monitoring giant cosmic ray showers.

Professor Popp notes that he is "especially proud of my two students and know they will succeed this summer." He stresses that their excellent grades were only one important reason Siedah and David were awarded the prestigious internships:



equally important was the fact that the students “could demonstrate that they knew how to apply what they learned in the class room and the lab. I’ve trained them well and I am certain they will perform outstandingly.”

Dr. Popp believes Siedah and David’s advancement is beneficial to their classmates as well: “They are not the only win-

ners, because the students around them learn more and apply themselves more earnestly. The benefits of this behavior is obvious. I am proud of all my students who study under my guidance: in the classroom, as well as who work on my research projects.” ■

*James Popp, PhD*

## Distinguished Physics Scholar Presents at York

Professor Martin Spergel may have retired from York many years ago, but his legacy and love for the college, whose Physics major he helped found at the dawn of the college’s history, lives on not just in the students he mentored, but in the lecture series named in his honor.

In March, the Professor Martin Spergel Lecture Series sponsored a talk by Dr. Elena Aprile, a physics professor at Columbia University, who specializes in experimental particle physics and is founder and spokesperson for the XENON Dark Matter Search project at the Italian Gran Sasso National Lab.

Her talk, “The XENON Project: At the Forefront of Dark Matter Direct Detection,” focused on the search for direct evidence of dark matter, an elusive and not-yet well understood form of matter that makes up a significant portion of our universe.

“Dark Matter is the glue that keeps the universe together,” said Aprile, who earned her PhD from the University of Geneva and did a post-doctorate at

Harvard University. “95 percent of the universe is made of stuff we really don’t know.” While 5% of the energy density of the universe is made up of normal matter that we can detect, the other 95% is made up of energy and matter that have yet to be directly measured or characterized. Roughly a quarter is dark matter, while dark energy accounts for the rest.

According to the professor, the XENON project, which she proposed, started with 10 scientists and now involves 170 collaborators. The project uses liquid xenon, one of the noble gases, as a medium to detect dark matter particles.

Dr. Timothy Paglione, who personally invited Dr. Aprile to York, explained that the XENON project “aims to make the first direct detection of dark matter.” He added that dark matter particles have only ever been detected indirectly, but are known to exist through their gravitational dominance in the universe, which forces the initial formation of large-scale structure and galaxies. Right now they are still hypothetical, so everyone’s fa-

vorite pet model for what they are is still valid.

“Once they’re detected, that should eliminate all but a few models,” said Paglione. “And [it should] surely earn the team a Nobel Prize.”

Paglione, whose expertise includes Astronomy, Astrophysics and Space Science, remarked that Dr. Aprile’s talk was “engaging and exciting.” And that the reach of the collaboration across the continents and down to a mile below the Earth’s surface is “astounding, and the precision and sensitivity they have achieved is notable.”

Asked how he thinks the lecture benefited students in the audience, Paglione noted that his students had a “real vision for a career arc such as hers, which is important for budding scientists.”

Among the special guests at the March 21 event were Dr. Martin Spergel, his wife Shelly, who was at one time an adjunct at York, and their son, Dr. David Spergel, a physics professor at Princeton University.

“Marty was my mentor and it’s always good to have him and any of the founding faculty back on campus,” said Paglione. “They gave so much to York and really shaped its legacy.”

Paglione added that the department is “really grateful [for] David Spergel’s support of the College as well.”

“He has always kept York in mind no matter where he’s gone in his great career and has been a huge advocate for us and our programs,” said Paglione.

For his part, David Spergel recalled for the audience the day his father got the job at York College. He was still a small child and the family celebrated his father’s success with ice cream. ■



*Left to Right:* Dr. Timothy Paglione, Dr. David Spergel, Dr. Elena Aprile, Dr. Martin Spergel, Mrs. Shelly Spergel, Esq; and Dr. James Popp.

## Professor's Installation Spotlights the Unseen

In his sculpture, Professor Carlos Sandoval de León (Fine and Performing Arts) selects and reshapes everyday objects, showcasing their complexity. The latest installation of his work, *From from*, was on exhibit this spring (March 23-May 5) at Cindy Rucker Gallery in downtown New York.

*From from* features everyday objects, chosen, reworked, and arranged on custom-built shelving. Laces dangle down from a pair of sneakers pointed towards the viewer; a basketball sheds one of its

panels like an orange might shed its peel. Other objects found in Brooklyn—bricks, a plexiglass window, have been altered and remade.

As Cindy Rucker explains, the works spark an experience in the viewer who aims to “determine the position and meaning of these objects in an ever-changing economic and political landscape, only to find that they are unstable.

Sandoval de León works with artisans and friends to create his installations and objects, bringing together both raw and

manufactured materials to explore how objects are shaped by time and our interactions with them.

Sandoval de León explains that he draws inspiration “from my immediate environment and daily experiences.”

Seeking to draw out of the objects he works with some of their cultural and sociopolitical history, he views his art as investigating both the poetics and politics of space.

The next iteration of Sandoval de León's project will be the subject of a solo exhibition at Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Miami, Florida in November 2019. ■



Professor Sandoval de León installs artwork



*From from* at the Cindy Rucker Gallery

## York Scholars Inspired by Women in Aviation Conference

By **SUJAYA ROY**, President  
York College Chapter of Women in  
Aviation

The 30th Annual Women in Aviation International Conference was held at the Long Beach Convention Center in Long Beach, California on March 14-16, 2019, and 12 students and Dr. John

Kolmos from the CUNY Aviation Institute at York College were in attendance representing the college. This annual event attracts students and aviation professionals from across the nation. The students were members of the York College student chapter of Women in Aviation.

The conference accomplished its goal to “Connect, Engage and Inspire” aviation heroes with future aviators and aviation business leaders. Approximately 5,000 people from diverse backgrounds were in attendance. Students were able to meet with astronauts, corporate pilots, maintenance technicians, air traf-



Women in Aviation International Conference attendees from York College. *Left to Right:* Taslima Sarmin, Sujaya Roy, Abdukodir Nurmakhamator, Oluwabunmi Karunwi, Dr. John Kolmos, Nelly Castro, Amandeep Kaur, Sifan Pan, Yichun Jiang, Li Li, Stephanie Vasconez, Balwant Rampersaud

fic controllers, business owners, educators, journalists, flight attendants, high school and university students, and airport managers. The exhibit hall featured representatives from 170 companies and organizations, representing all aspects

of the aviation community. Moreover, numerous scholarships were distributed to the youth aviators for their academic endeavors and career path in aviation.

The conference provided a great opportunity for networking with experi-

enced aviation professionals who could guide students through the requirements of one day working for a major airline. During the workshops, they were fascinated to learn the history of women in the field of aviation, and they aspired to emulate the achievements of past women aviators, who have now become their role models.

One student remarked, “Now we have an outline to pursue our career aspiration. Attending the conference has molded our leadership skills and enhanced our perspective towards the co-curricular activities such as volunteering in the airport exercise or participating in Foreign Object Debris (FOD) removal project under Port Authority of New York & New Jersey.”

The York students said they intend to share the experiences and information they acquired with all the aviation students at York College.

The students also thank Jet Blue Airways for providing tickets for their flight; and Volunteer Services for Children, for funding their registration. ■

## Middle States Accreditation Update



The Middle States visiting team returned to York College on March 19- 20, 2019, to meet with a cross-section of the College community and verify the progress the College has made to address the concerns cited in the report the Middle States Commission issued in June 2018.

The activities the College has undertaken and will continue to undertake to address the Commission’s concerns and action of last summer were contained in the Monitoring Report the College submitted on February 26, 2019 to the Commission.

At the exit meeting following the March site visit, the team reviewed the next steps, the timeline and presented some preliminary observations.

According to the timeline for future action, the team submitted a response to the college a week after their visit and the College had until April 4, 2019, to reply. Those materials were then given to a committee at the Middle States Commission on Higher Education for review, which, in turn, will make its recommendations to the Commission. The Commission meets in June and a final report will come to the College by July 4, 2019.

According to the team’s preliminary observation, it appears the College meets the Standards to remain accredited, specifically Requirements of Affiliation 8 and 10 and Standard V.

The team commended:

1. The engaged faculty and staff who served on the various committees that were established;
2. The students for the strength of their commitment to York College;
3. The development of a robust, inclusive assessment process;
4. The President and Provost for their leadership of the process;
5. The broad engagement of the primary stakeholders in the process;
6. The clarity of communications to both internal and external stakeholders.

The following recommendations were made by the team:

1. The commitment of resources to continue to support the work accomplished in the last year so that it will be sustained into the future;
2. The assessment structure established must itself be assessed to determine its effectiveness;
3. The results of the work must be documented and shared.

“I would, once more, like to thank the entire York College community and especially the members of the Monitoring Report Committee, for contributing to the achievement of this important milestone,” said Dr. Marcia V. Keizs, president of York College. ■

# Production of *Ruined* Focuses on Realities of War and Resilience

By **ASHLEIGH BROWN**,  
Student Journalist

As part of a year-long focus on theatre from a woman's perspective that features modern women playwrights, The York College PFA Theatre Department mounted a production of *Ruined* by Lynn Nottage over the first two weekends in May, 2019.

Taking place in a small mining town in the Republic of Congo on the edge of the rainforest, the play presents a graphic portrait of women as the victims of war.

The story follows businesswoman, Mama Nadi, who tries to keep her business afloat while surviving the ongoing civil war. Christian, a salesman played by journalism major, Keshaun Luckie, has just returned from a road trip of supplies for Mama Nadi, played by Nicosie Christophe, a graduating Speech Communications and Theatre Arts major. Mama Nadi takes in two young girls who have been damaged by soldiers in their country and has them working in her bar to protect them from the war as well as to help her business profit.

Among Mama Nadi's workers are: Josephine, played by freshman at York, Omoniyi Sulu; Salima, played by senior Starshima Trent; and Sophie, played by sophomore Janine Jarvis. Most of the workers are prisoners of war and victims of sexual violence.

According to playwright and original director, Lynn Nottage, *Ruined* was inspired by her trip to East Africa to collect the narratives of Congolese women to fully hear their unheard stories. Her goal was to paint a three dimensional portrait of women who were caught between the conflict and understanding who they were before they became victims.

The director of York's production, Dr. Janice Capuana (Fine and Performing Arts) said she hoped "people get to feel the real and raw feelings during this time in Africa."

In addition to Dr. Capuana, the production drew on the talents of many students and faculty from the York Fine and Performing Arts community. The finely detailed set, which included two staircases leading up to a second-floor bedroom



Cast and Director of *Ruined*

complete with thatched roof, was designed by Professor David T. Jones. A dozen students built the complex set from scratch under the skilled leadership of CLT Joshua Warner. Alumnus Randy Houston costumed the show, using traditional dress and confident colors to suggest a triumph over the broken realities of war.

Professor Thomas Marion (Fine and Performing Arts) thought Dr. Capuana

was the perfect choice to direct the play. Dr. Capuana, an Adjunct Associate Professor, had first recommended the play for York.

"She did an outstanding job of balancing the pathos, humor and danger of the play," he said, noting that the production was a challenging one. "Besides a large cast, the play calls for a complicated interplay between intricate theatrical elements—stage combat, dance, singing,



Cast on the set of *Ruined*

sound effects, Congolese accents and scenes of deeply felt emotional moments.”

Dr. Capuana described herself as “thrilled to be directing this very talented group of actors from this remarkable play.”

*Ruined* shows the hope and also the immeasurable loss and hopelessness of war. It provides a tribute to human endurance and offers a real depiction of what people are prepared to do in order to survive in a world torn apart by a civil war.

Jabari Bruce, 22, journalism major said, “I like the play, it really showed how the country was in that time period. It’s crazy how parts of the world are still like that today.”

Professor Marion hoped the audience came away with a sense of Nottage’s themes, but, he said, “I’ll be happy if they walked away with an understanding of the nuance, love, and commitment offered by the over twenty students who were able to make the world of her play out of whole cloth and fortitude.” ■

## Kudos!

To Professor **Stephen Fearnley** (Chemistry) on his successful mentoring of a graduate student in his lab at York! The now-Dr. Robert C. Lapo defended his dissertation, “Novel Heterocyclic Methodology for the Construction of Natural Products” at York College in early April.

Lapo was a PhD student at the CUNY Graduate Center, but conducted his research under the mentorship of Dr. Fearnley. Lapo is one of several CUNY graduate students who have done PhD studies under York faculty in their labs at the college.



Robert C. Lapo (left) with Professor Stephen Fearnley (right)

# York Adjunct Professor Addresses State of Journalism in New Book & Seminar

By **JOSHELLE JAMES**,  
Student Journalist

The York College Journalism program recently hosted one of its own, Professor Joe Strupp, as the presenter at the latest installment of the Journalism Enrichment Seminars.

Joe Strupp is a freelance writer and an award winning journalist with almost 30 years of experience in newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the internet. He has experience in nearly all beats, from the environment to sports, but focuses more on the media. Currently an adjunct professor of Journalism at York, Strupp is no stranger to the City University. He is a graduate of Brooklyn College, where he majored in Broadcast Journalism, minored in business, and wrote for the school newspaper.

Strupp’s presentation on March 14 shared the same title as his new book, *Killing Journalism: How Greed, Laziness (and Donald Trump) Are Destroying News and How We Can Save It*. The event offered a look at the problems Strupp sees with the media today. During his talk, Strupp introduced his book and engaged in a Q&A with the audience in addition to signing copies of *Killing Journalism*.

The book covers different topics from staff cutbacks, to reduced advertising revenue, less support for press legal defense, the impact of President Donald Trump’s constant war on the press, “fake news,” and more.

“Breaking news always gets attention, and anything with President Trump gets attention,” said Strupp. “That is why he is on the cover of the book.”

Strupp implies that the real problem with journalism is that there are fewer

journalists who want to go in-depth with their reporting and that “we have a President who attacks the press every day.”

The veteran journalist told the journalism students that to be a good journalist, “you should always question your

sources, make sure they are credible, original, and find out ‘who, what, when, where, why and how,’ always.”

In response to a student question about the traits a good reporter needed, he suggested that “a good reporter should be nosy and curious. If you are not nosy and curious, you should not get into news.”

Strupp explained that the internet creates prob-

lems for reliability because anyone can create a website and add false information, so readers should support the credible news sources not the misleading ones. He also said, a lot of people don’t expect the media to do well, so they give up.

Yet during the Q&A session, he suggested he was still optimistic about the future of newspapers. “No, I never thought newspapers were dead. The only difference is that radio, television, and Internet [stories] are updated frequently, which once the newspapers are published, you cannot edit or make any changes.”

Asked what benefits he thought students would gain from the inspiring presentation, Journalism Professor Bill Hughes, who moderated the event, had a positive take.

“I think the students who attended got a fascinating look into the back-story of one of the most remarkable times in the history of American journalism and politics,” said Hughes. “Strupp’s assertion that what journalism students learn now will be vital to the future of this nation is not an overstatement.” ■



# NY State Senator Visits York to Discuss the State Budget

By **ASHLEIGH BROWN**,  
Journalism Student

The Department of Behavioral Sciences, Honors Program and Political Science Club recently combined efforts to invite New York State Senator Leroy Comrie to visit York college and update them on the recently-passed state budget and other matters impacting New York City and York College.

Senator Comrie discussed various topics including higher education funding and affordable housing and how it affects people with disabilities.

Comrie explained that the New York State Department of Higher Education increased its budget by \$500 million dollars. TAP, PELL and the Excelsior scholarship programs will continue, but the TAP gap was unfortunately not fixed because of the lack of additional funding. They are also looking to eliminate unnecessary programs to be able to transfer money into other new programs.

The May 2, 2019 event, held in a social sciences classroom of the Academic Core Building, engaged students in the conversation and Comrie was encouraging.

Shenike Hayes, an occupational therapy major, was interested in housing for those with physical special needs.



Selfies with Senator Comrie

“They should have universal designs for houses for people with special disabilities,” Hayes said. “It’s just not functional for them.”

Comrie agreed it would be a great idea to include some of those ideas in his next meeting on the topic.

Ignited by the political discussion, students also asked how they get more involved with making changes to York and their communities

“Sometimes, it’s frustrating, aggravating even,” Comrie said. “For people to listen, you’ve got to keep pushing the idea...multiple times. Just come to

our office and say you want to volunteer. We’ll teach you about our services no experience needed. I encourage everyone to come out, and I love helping people.”

Journalism professor Thomas Moore asked if SUNY receives more opportunities than CUNY does.

“We’re not [just] pro-SUNY,” said Comrie. “SUNY is having the same struggles. It’s an even playing field. They ask for better maintenance, research money, etc., it’s the same on every level.”

Hearing about the event afterwards, Student Government President, Danielle

## Spotlight on Math and Computer Science

Congratulations to the faculty of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science on winning five PSC-CUNY grants for Cycle 50 totaling over \$17,000:

- **Dr. Rishi Nath:** “Simultaneous core partitions and lattice paths with common divisor.”
- **Dr. Virginia Thompson:** “Exploring open education resources in pre-calculus.”
- **Dr. Thitima Srivatankul:** “Research on client-side XSS defense mechanisms.”
- **Dr. Vivien Wang:** “The bursting oscillations and their mechanism in a dynamical system with double Hopf bifurcations.”
- **Dr. Radoslaw Wojciechowski:** “Graph coverings, amenability and the bottom of the spectrum.”

Recent publications from Mathematics and Computer Science faculty:

An, G., Levitan, R. (2018). Lexical and acoustic deep learning model for personality recognition.” Proceedings from Interspeech 2018, 1761-1765. doi: 10.21437/Interspeech.2018-2263.

An, G., Levitan, S.I., Hirschberg, J., & Levitan, R. (2018). Deep personality recognition for deception detection. Proceedings from Interspeech 2018, 421-425. doi: 10.21437/Interspeech.2018-2269.

Gonzalez, L. (2018). Between paralysis and empowerment: Action in mathematics for social justice work. *New England Mathematics Journal*, LI(2), 33-40.

Qu, R., Wang, Y., Wu, G., Zhang, Z., & Bi, Q. (2018). Bursting oscillations and the mechanism with sliding bifurcations in a Filippov dynamical system. *International Journal of Bifurcation and Chaos*, 28(12) 11.

Thompson, V. & McDowell, Y. (2019). A case study comparing student experiences and success in an undergraduate mathematics course taught online, blended, and face-to-face. *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology*, 7(2), 116-136.

Zhang, D., Ma, H., & Pan, L. (2019). A Gamma-signal-regulated connected components labeling algorithm. *Pattern Recognition*, 91, 281-290 ■

James, a Business Management major, who was unable to make the event due to a time conflict, said she was pleased to hear York students took advantage of Senator Comrie's visit.

"I'm really happy that York students spoke up about their concerns because I know they feel like sometimes this school is overlooked," said James, a graduating senior.

Dr. Jacob Apkarian (Behavioral Sciences), who reached out to the senator through his own connections, was gratified by the turnout.

"Our programs, sociology and political science, were very happy with student turnout," he remarked. "At least 40 students were in attendance and they were all actively engaged."

According to Apkarian, students were grateful for the opportunity.

"Students were thanking us after the event for bringing the Senator to campus and asked if he would come back again in the future," said Apkarian. "[They] were happy to not only learn about the current state of affairs in the



Students gather with Comrie after the class discussion.

state senate, but to have their concerns heard by someone in a position to make change at the state level. Another faculty member that was present (Greet Van Belle) told me afterward that she enjoyed when the Senator polled the room for opinions on the legalization of rec-

reational marijuana and the discussion that it started."

Professor Apkarian added that they were "very grateful that Senator Comrie took the time out of his busy schedule while the legislature is in session to make time for the York community." ■

## Kudos!



Congratulations to Professor **Harrynauth Persaud** (Health Professions) on the successful defense of his oral dissertation at SUNY Downstate School of Public Health. His dissertation is titled: "Healthcare Decisions Among Indo-Guyanese Immigrant Men in the United States: Behaviors, Barriers and Cultural Influences." Dr. Shawn

Williams, chair of the Department of Health Professions, noted that Persaud's work "will surely have a positive contribution to a larger scholarly conversation."



Kudos to Dr. **Dawn Roberts-Semple** (Earth and Physical Sciences) who shared her expertise as an environmental scientist with the local Queens community at a public talk on March 14 at the Queens Library, South Hollis branch. Her discussion highlighted the importance of environmental science research in local communities, with specific

reference to air quality issues in Queens.



Congratulations to **Dr. Linda Grasso** (English) who published an article in *American Journalism* in a special issue devoted to "Women Suffrage and the Media."

Linda M. Grasso, "Differently Radical: Suffrage Issues and Feminist Ideas in the Crisis and the Masses," *American Journalism: A Journal of Media History* 36.1 (Winter 2019): 71-98.

Congratulations to Professor **Maki Hajikano** (Performing and Fine Arts) whose work was selected for the National Juried Exhibition, "Abstractly Speaking," at the Woman Made Gallery in Chicago. The exhibit, jurored by Melanee Cooper, a curator and



gallery owner, focused on non-representational art that "rel[ies] on the visual language of form, color, line, texture, mark-making and process, as a means to an end," according to the Woman Made

Gallery. Professor Hajikano's work was on display from April 5 to April 27, 2019.

<http://www.york.cuny.edu/academics/academic-affairs>

## President Keizs Honored at Event



**Dr. Marcia V. Keizs**, president of York College, was an honoree at the Fourth Annual Healthfirst's 2019 Women's History Month Awards celebration! Dr. Keizs and 10 other professional women were feted at the March 28 event in Bronx, New York.

"They are wonderful role models for our young women and men as well," said Pat Wang, president and CEO of Healthfirst. "As a company that is rooted firmly in New York City and the surrounding areas, we are pleased to play a role in honoring these community leaders."

President Keizs, for her part, was delighted to salute the management of Health First and her fellow-honorees.

"Thank you, Health First, for all you do in our communities to assure women and their families can thrive through access to affordable, reliable and good healthcare," said Dr. Keizs. "At York College, where I serve as president, we certainly appreciate your outreach to our students." ■