

# GW

THE GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY  
MAGAZINE  
SUMMER 2022



## LEADING GW

The university's new president and provost  
on the rewards of their roles, the resilience of  
the GW community and how a scientist and a  
lawyer can partner to head a university.









University community members gather at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's spectacular Temple of Dendur for a GW + You Opens Doors reception in New York City in March.

BEN SOLOMON

# GW MAGAZINE SUMMER 2022

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

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ON THE COVER **President Mark S. Wrighton** (RIGHT) and **Provost Christopher Alan Bracey** on Kogan Plaza. Photo by William Atkins.





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**EDITOR** // Rachel Muir

**UNIVERSITY PHOTOGRAPHER** // William Atkins

**DESIGN** // GW Office of Communications & Marketing

**ART DIRECTOR** // Dominic N. Abbate, B.A. '09, M.B.A. '15

**ART DIRECTOR** // John McGlasson, B.A. '00, M.F.A. '03

**CONTRIBUTOR** // John DiConsiglio, Columbian College of Arts and Sciences

**CONTRIBUTOR** // Nick Erickson, GW Today

**CONTRIBUTOR** // Kristen Mitchell, GW Today

**CONTRIBUTOR** // B.L. Wilson, GW Today

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**Mark S. Wrighton**

**PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY**

**Donna Arbide**

**VICE PRESIDENT FOR DEVELOPMENT  
AND ALUMNI RELATIONS**

**Stacey DiLorenzo**

**INTERIM VICE PRESIDENT  
FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING**

**Michelle Stone, M.B.A. '10**

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**Patty Carocci**

**ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT OF  
ALUMNI RELATIONS AND ANNUAL GIVING**

**Rachel Muir**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
FOR EDITORIAL SERVICES**

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# Prelude

NEWS AND INSIGHTS FROM CAMPUS AND BEYOND







**Alumna Elana Meyers Taylor touched on her successes, failures—and the power of Taylor Swift—in her Commencement address.**

#### COMMENCEMENT

# Olympian Elana Meyers Taylor Inspires Graduates to Create ‘Medal-Worthy Moments’

**The pioneering GW alumna and athlete headlined the Commencement ceremony for the Class of 2022 on the National Mall on May 15.**

**BY JOHN DICONSIGLIO**

**Olympic bobsled champion and George Washington University Athletic Hall of Famer Elana Meyers Taylor, B.S. '06, M.T.A.**

**'11, HON '18**, drew on her own triumphs over adversity, failure and discrimination along her path to becoming the most decorated Black athlete in Winter Olympics history in her address to the Class of 2022 on May 15.

With the Capitol as a backdrop, Meyers Taylor lifted the two medals she won at the 2022 Olympic Games in Beijing, China, and inspired the estimated 31,000 graduates and guests to prevail over future challenges with a “recipe of resilience, of the ability to get back up, dust yourself off and find another way.” Meyers Taylor, who has won a total of five Olympic medals over the course of her storied career, called GW graduates “already among the most resilient people in the history of education” as she encouraged them to “create your own medal-worthy moments.”

Meyers Taylor headlined the first in-person GW Commencement held in its traditional time slot at the end of the academic year since 2019.

WILLIAM ATKINS



**“YOU MAY FACE RACISM, SEXISM OR COUNTLESS OTHER PERMUTATIONS OF IGNORANCE. WHEN THAT HAPPENS, LISTEN TO TAYLOR, SHAKE IT OFF AND CHOOSE TO DRIVE DOWN WHATEVER PATH INSPIRES YOU.”**

ELANA MEYERS TAYLOR



GW is the only university that holds its graduation ceremony on the National Mall, but the tradition was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ceremonies for the Classes of 2020 and 2021 were moved online before a joint in-person Commencement was held on the Mall in October 2021.

A pioneer for women in sports, Meyers Taylor, who earned a master's in sports management in 2011 and a B.S. in exercise science in 2006, was the GW softball program's first recruit. She graduated as the team's all-time leader in nearly every offensive category, and her No. 24 jersey was retired in 2014. Among her numerous personal and professional accolades, Meyers Taylor was selected as one of the university's Monumental Alumni as part of GW's bicentennial celebration last year.

But in her remarks, Meyers Taylor stressed that her setbacks were as important in defining her character as her many victories. She framed her address around three stories of adversity that she said played a role in her journey to the podium.

“The first is about failure,” she said as she recounted her crushing disappointment over not making the U.S. Olympic softball team in 2008 after what she described as “the worst tryout in the history of tryouts.” Instead of giving up on her Olympic dreams, however, she switched course, devoting her energy to becoming a champion bobsledder.

“Had I not failed on that day, it's a virtual certainty that this girl, who was born in California, raised and still lives in Atlanta, would have never found the inside of a bobsled,” she said, adding that graduates may find failing at a goal to be “the best thing that ever happens to you.”

Her second story—a tale of “women drivers and Taylor Swift,” she said—recalled her campaign to allow women to compete in the four-man bobsled event. After successfully fighting to change her sport's rules, Meyers Taylor said she faced taunts and abuse on race days. “I heard some of the most vile, racist and sexist comments you can ever imagine,” she said. She blocked out the insults by blasting Taylor Swift's

empowerment song “Shake It Off” over her headphones as she approached each starting line—becoming the first woman to make the U.S. men's national team.

“Haters gonna hate,” she told graduates. “You may face racism, sexism or countless other permutations of ignorance. When that happens, listen to Taylor, shake it off and choose to drive down whatever path inspires you.”

Her last story involved “acceptance and control,” as she described testing positive for COVID-19 just days after arriving in Beijing last winter and facing the prospect of her Olympic hopes shattering so close to the finish line. Isolated from her team and her infant son, Meyers Taylor was determined to control her situation. She turned her hotel room into a makeshift gym and threw herself into rigorous physical training, eventually winning a silver and a bronze medal at the games.

“There will be times in your life when it seems like everything is out of control, but that is never truly the case,” she told

graduates. “There are often times when you cannot control what happens to you, but you always get to choose how you react to whatever comes your way.”

President Mark S. Wrighton then awarded the GW President's Medal, the highest honor the university's president can bestow, to Meyers Taylor, who previously received an honorary Doctor of Public Service during the 2018 GW Commencement ceremony.

At this year's Commencement ceremony, Wrighton also conferred honorary Doctor of Public Service degrees on two alumni who are exceptional journalists: CNN anchor and chief political correspondent Dana Bash, B.A. '93, and Chuck Todd, ATT '90 to '94, the moderator of NBC News' “Meet the Press.” Both Bash and Todd were named Monumental Alumni during the university's bicentennial celebration in 2021.

In her remarks, Bash, who has covered elections and Congress and served as a White House correspondent, noted the value of understanding different perspectives and viewpoints.



She said a crucial part of her career has been traveling throughout the country—from farms and rural towns to big cities—and listening to people with a range of life experiences. She implored graduates to break through political polarization by “opening up your mind and your heart to people and places you aren’t familiar with.”

“There is a whole world out there for each of you,” she said. “Take advantage of it, be excited about it and take risks.”

Todd, who spearheads NBC News’ political coverage, credited much of his personal success to coming to GW—“the single most important decision I ever made.” Studying in Washington, D.C., he said, allowed a “wannabe 19-year-old political junkie” to immerse himself in the political landscape.

Noting current national crises from threats to democracy to eroding trust in institutions, Todd said he was nevertheless convinced that GW graduates would lead the country “out of this darkness” to become the next “greatest generation” and provide badly needed new leadership and new ways of thinking.

“You need to take on this challenge,” he said. “To paraphrase someone who was very influential to me, Princess Leia: Help us, Class of 2022, you’re our only hope!”

At the ceremony, Board of Trustees Chair Grace Speights, J.D. ’82, also expressed confidence that the graduates would emerge as leaders in their career paths, destined to exert a positive influence on the world. At the same time, she stressed, they will always be supported by a robust GW community.

“Please remember that you are not alone in this journey. You have the support of your mentors, your friends, your families and, of course, our alumni community and the George Washington University Alumni Association,” she said.

“The road to accomplishment is unique for everyone, but it is not unique for GW to be part of the journey for so many.”

Provost Christopher Alan Bracey noted the contributions of alumni and donors who funded scholarship opportunities. Stressing the transformational power of education, he encouraged graduates to join a legacy of GW scholars who harnessed their knowledge and passion into fighting for societal change. He emphasized that the graduates were inheriting a responsibility to “continue stepping up when facing the world’s difficult challenges.”

“I know the fire in you will never go out,” he said. “You must continue to let that fire fuel you into action as a transformative-change agent determined to make society better for the public good.”

In her remarks, Christine Brown-Quinn, M.B.A. ’92, president of the GW Alumni Association, welcomed graduates to a community of more than 310,000 alumni from around the world. She recognized the

extraordinary accomplishments of GW alumni—from business leaders founding unicorn companies to NASA astronauts exploring the frontiers of space—and assured graduates that they too had the potential to make lasting impacts.

“Your purpose will unfold as your life unfolds, and your GW degree will not only serve as a steppingstone but also as a foundation and resource to leverage throughout your career,” she said.

As the proud moment for the Class of 2022 finally arrived, friends and family looked on as the graduates received their degrees. In his charge, Wrighton complimented the graduates as “an exceptional group of motivated, bright individuals” and congratulated them on their intellectual achievements and their resilience in the face of challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

He urged graduates to devote themselves to a lifetime of learning and to seek out diverse experiences while pursuing a life of meaning and purpose.

“At the George Washington University, you received an education designed to prepare you as leaders. Now you are those leaders, equipped with knowledge, skills and resources to help solve the world’s most pressing challenges, both today and tomorrow,” Wrighton said.

“Every member of the Class of 2022 can use what you have learned at the George Washington University to uplift communities and serve the public good.”



**Dana Bash, B.A. '93, (TOP LEFT) and Chuck Todd, ATT'90 to '94, (TOP RIGHT) receive honorary degrees, while members of the Class of 2022 celebrate their big day.**



AWARDS

# Eleven Members of the GW Community Awarded Pulitzer Prizes

**The deputy director of the Program on Extremism, a Corcoran faculty member and nine alumni from CCAS, Corcoran and SMPA were recognized for their excellence in journalism. By B.L. Wilson**

**ELEVEN** members of the George Washington University community were awarded Pulitzer Prizes—the highest national honor in journalism and the arts—on May 9 for their work in journalism covering the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and examining fatal shootings by law enforcement during traffic stops in the United States.

Seamus Hughes, deputy director of GW's Program on Extremism, was among a team of journalists whose work for "The New York Times" scrutinizing fatal shootings by law enforcement during traffic stops was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting.

Astrid Riecken, a professorial lecturer in photojournalism at the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences (CCAS) Corcoran School of the Arts and Design, was among a team of journalists at "The Washington Post" who received the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for coverage of the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol.

Also sharing in "The Washington Post" team award that went to writers, photographers, videographers, graphic designers and editors were: Sarah Cahlan, B.A. '13; Craig Hudson, B.F.A. '16; Nick Kirkpatrick, B.F.A. '10; Whitney Leaming, M.A. '13; Zoeann Murphy, M.A. '14; Marianna Sotomayor, B.A. '16, M.A. '16; Rachel Weiner, B.A. '07; and Joy Sharon Yi, M.A. '17.

In addition, Corcoran alumnus Sam Corum, B.F.A. '12, was awarded a Pulitzer in the Breaking News category for his work

with a team of photographers covering the Jan. 6 insurrection for Getty Images.

"It's quite simply surreal to me," Hughes said. "I was fortunate to play a small part of helping a team of top-rate journalists weave disparate streams of information into a compelling series of stories that had immediate and lasting impact."

The announcement by the Pulitzer board said that "The New York Times" was recognized "for an ambitious project that quantified a disturbing pattern of fatal traffic stops by police, illustrating how hundreds of deaths could have been avoided and how officers typically avoided punishment."

"The New York Times" reporting project

disclosed the killing by police of more than 400 unarmed drivers and passengers over a five-year period from 2016 to 2021 during traffic stops in which no criminal act by the shooting victims was involved. According to the story, out of hundreds of cases, only five officers have been charged in the shootings and convicted of crimes related to the shootings. Local governments paid at least \$125 million in wrongful death lawsuits to estates of the shooting victims.

As part of the reporting effort, Hughes pulled more than 15,000 pages of filings in criminal and civil federal courts related to the 400 cases, called court clerk offices around the country and pored over transcripts, court exhibits and civil settlement letters to get a better sense of what happened in those cases. Reporters cross-referenced the documents with interviews, local news reporting and video recordings of the police incidents to find out why so many police traffic stops escalate into fatal encounters.

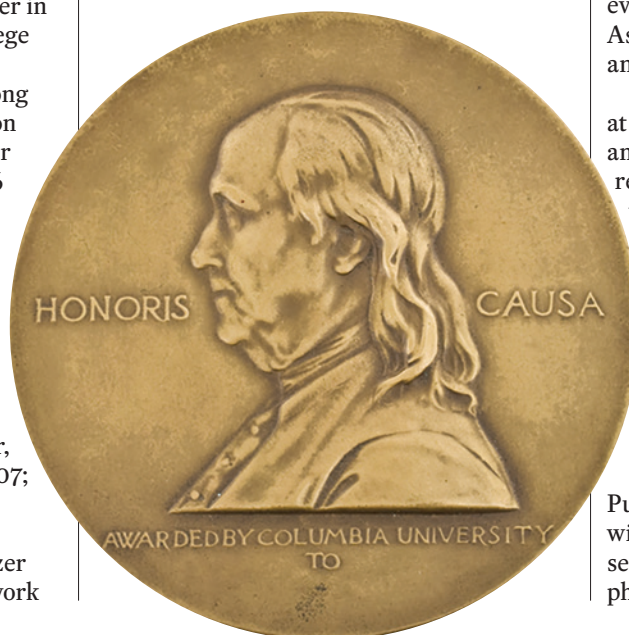
"I've been on contract with 'The New York Times' for nearly two years, helping out journalists throughout the organization discover hard-to-find court records or file breaking news," Hughes said. "I work closely with the D.C. [bureau], investigative and national desks."

Hughes said that the GW Program on Extremism has had a long history of doing investigative research on arrests of alleged terrorists using court records. "Using the lessons from that process, I've been helping journalists around the country with understanding the federal court system," he said. "I've provided bureau trainings to every major media organization, from the Associated Press, Reuters, CBS News, NBC and 'The Washington Post.'"

Riecken, who has taught photojournalism at the Corcoran School since 2016, was among "The Washington Post" team of reporters and photographers recognized for their coverage of the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

A statement from the Pulitzer jurors said the coverage was a compellingly told and vividly presented account of the assault on Washington, providing the public with a thorough and unflinching understanding of one of the nation's darkest days.

"I am particularly proud to win a Pulitzer in this category because I believe with all of me that the work we do is public service, just like teaching young aspiring photojournalists at GW who want to follow





in my footsteps is public service for me,” Riecken said. “A free press is essential to maintain a democracy. This is why I do what I do.”

Corum, a U.S. Marine combat veteran who served two tours in Iraq, joined four other photographers from Getty Images to win the Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Photography for comprehensive and consistently riveting photos of the attack on the U.S. Capitol.

“I’m still in a bit of shock that we won because there were so many incredible photographs from fantastic photographers that day,” Corum said. “Every journalist who risked their


**“A free press  
is essential  
to maintain  
a democracy.  
This is why I  
do what I do.”**

Astrid Riecken

safety on Jan. 6 deserves to be recognized.”

Corum said he recalls saying the day after the insurrection that a Pulitzer-winning photograph had been taken during that melee, but none of those working that day knew by whom. “I had no idea that two of the photographs to win a Pulitzer would be mine,” he said.

“The fact that Getty won it as a team shows how important it is to include multiple perspectives in journalism,” Corum said.

“There are many other photographers and editors who were pivotal to our coverage, and I wish their names could also be included on the Pulitzer.” 



## We Want to Hear from You

What do you like, not like or want to see more of in “GW Magazine”?



Take our new reader survey, and let us know what you think:

[magazine.gwu.edu/survey](https://magazine.gwu.edu/survey)



### THE ARTS

More than 700 people gathered to celebrate graduating students at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design during its NEXT thesis show opening night on April 28. Held in the historic Flagg Building, the show included over 70 installations and more than 100 pieces. [next.corcoran.gwu.edu](https://next.corcoran.gwu.edu)





# Jung Yun Draws on Her Experience and Nose for Storytelling—Not Biography—to Craft ‘O Beautiful’

Many presume erroneously that Assistant Professor of English Jung Yun’s novels are autobiographical. “I get that question at least once a week,” she tells “GW Magazine.” “At least my parents aren’t implicated this time!”

The Seoul-born and Fargo, N.D.-raised author was mortified that many assumed her first novel, “Shelter,” whose protagonist is a Korean American man with elderly, abusive parents, was about her family. “It felt like I had indicted my parents in something they weren’t involved in, simply by writing a work of fiction,” she says.

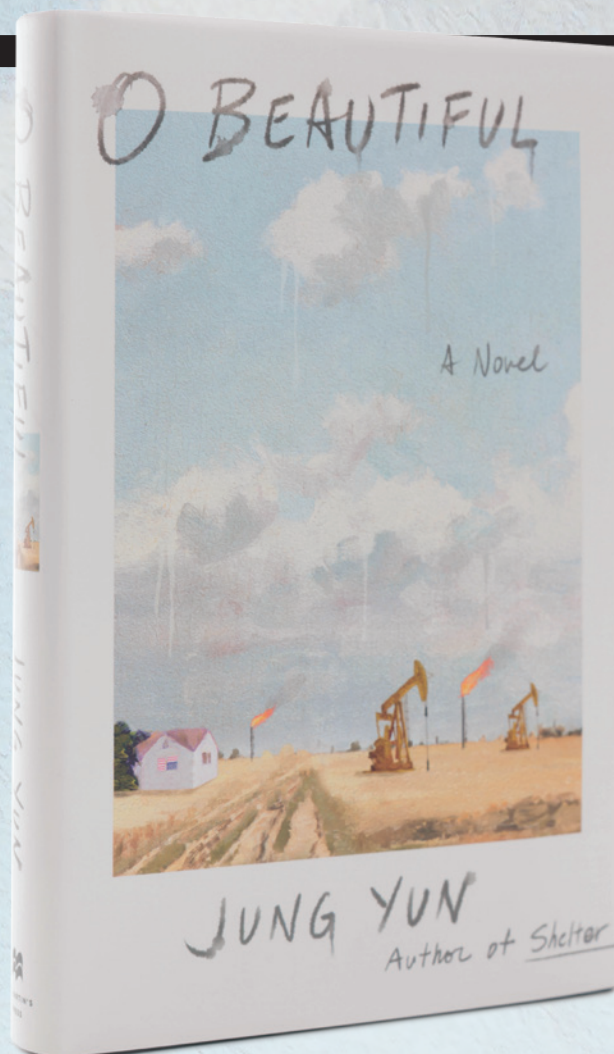
In her new novel, “O Beautiful” (St. Martin’s Press, 2021)—the protagonist was raised in North Dakota by an American father who met her Korean mother while he was stationed overseas—some readers have tried to connect dots between the main character and Yun. “But that’s all they really are. Tiny dots.”

The author does draw from her experience when crafting fictional characters, whose contours she delineates beautifully. One is “short and snowman-like, composed mostly of circles.” Another sits in his office as if “he’s trying to wall himself in behind a fortress of folders and envelopes and boxes.”

“Something I always tell my students is that writers notice. We observe,” Yun says. “We’re constantly expanding our catalog of ideas and images and descriptions, hoping for the next opportunity to put some of them into play.” She maintains and draws upon a “mental inventory,” and somewhere, she is sure, she observed a man who seemed composed of circles.

“I’ve long since forgotten who that man was and where I saw him, but I’ve never forgotten that particular physical quality,” she says.

In between gripping character details is a sobering and difficult yet ultimately uplifting story of a 40-something model turned writer, Elinor, who tries to find her place in a hostile world of men who either want something from her or to erase her or both. A freelance assignment from a “New Yorker”-like magazine in hand, Elinor tries to understand what is happening in Avery, N.D., which is experiencing an oil boom-fueled economic transformation. She finds scoops and unexpected wrinkles not only in the story she pursues but also in her life and even in the plum assignment.



**O Beautiful (St. Martin's Press, 2021)**

**By Jung Yun, assistant professor of English**

In some ways, Elinor has a very well-honed moral compass, but she is also flawed and in need of her own redemption, which comes just in the nick of time, it seems.

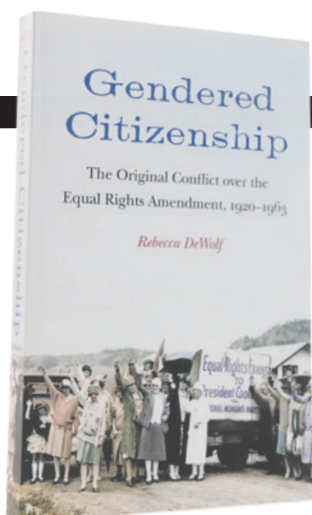
Yun stresses that she is not penning didactic fiction, nor can she control readers’ reactions to her work, but she also would not mind if readers take lessons of empathy and tolerance away from her novel.

“The best and most I can do is craft a life that feels real and full on the page, and then hope that a stranger might be inspired to an emotion or an action as a result,” she says. “Introspection, empathy, reexamination of past events and past behaviors—these are all the things that Elinor does as a result of her time in the oil fields. If a reader is inclined to do the same, then that’s wonderful but not my goal.”

One of the gripping aspects of this novel is its own journey. Initially, Yun had a collection of interconnected short stories in mind. After completing seven, each with a male protagonist, she was sure she was headed in the wrong direction. “That’s a really terrible sign—when the writer isn’t even interested,” she says.

Visiting her parents in North Dakota and talking to people at oil fields, she was drawn to women’s stories and grew convinced she needed a woman at the center of her book. She plucked Elinor from what would have been the eighth story and moved her to center stage. Without spoiling “O Beautiful,” suffice it to say that in this sense, form follows content. — **Menachem Wecker, M.A. ’09**





📖 **"Gendered Citizenship: The Original Conflict Over the Equal Rights Amendment" (University of Nebraska Press, 2021)**

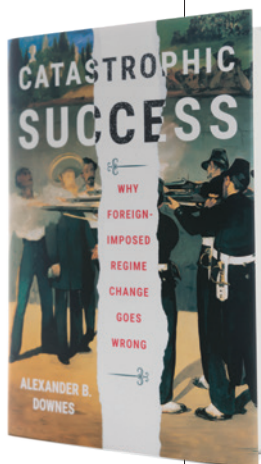
**By Rebecca DeWolf, B.A. '04, M.A. '08**

The 99-year-old Equal Rights Amendment has seemed, at times, poised to persist, but it remains a proposal. This book notes Equal Rights "emancipationism" and "protectionism" did not separate along political divides from 1920 to the 1960s. It was only after 1970, when many differentiated between gender and sex, that it followed partisan contours. To the author, the amendment's original conflict laid the groundwork for ensuing decades by questioning the nature of U.S. citizenship. Protectionists sought to afford women special rights, which they believed provided extra protection, while emancipationists argued for equal treatment in all regards for men and women. "The original era conflict is best understood as a battle between competing civic ideologies and not mainly as a struggle between divergent feminist ideologies," the author writes.

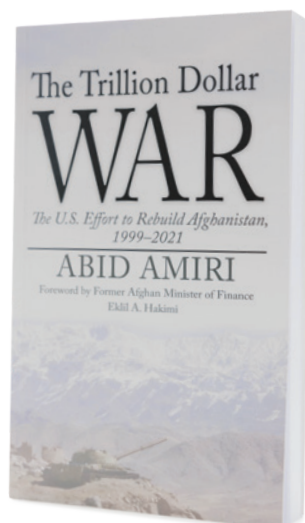
📖 **"Catastrophic Success: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Goes Wrong" (Cornell University Press, 2021)** 📖

**By Alexander B. Downes, associate professor of political science and international affairs**

Many powerful leaders who try to replace a rival government with a puppet or other aligned leadership find their efforts frustrated. Regime change, according to this book, tends to trigger further conflict—both internally in the overthrown country and between the new leadership and the intervener. It



notes the 2001 toppling of the Taliban was Afghanistan's sixth regime since 1839, which made it second only to Honduras, which had the unenviable distinction of eight foreign-imposed regime changes in 200 years. Would-be interveners are better off "not owning the problem," per this book. "Regime change may appear to be a quick and easy solution, but over the longer term it turns out to be neither easy nor a solution." That strategy should be reserved for very rare and exceptional cases, the author writes.

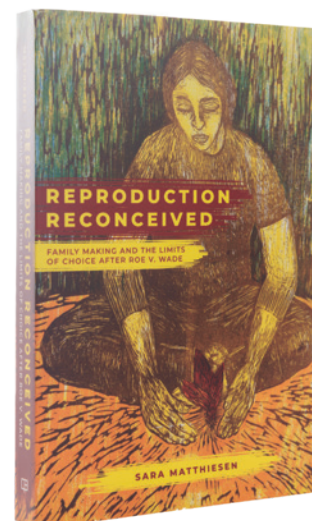


📖 **"The Trillion Dollar War: The U.S. Effort to Rebuild Afghanistan" (Marine Corps University Press, 2021)**

**By Abid Amiri, M.A. '15**

Despite hundreds of billions of dollars in U.S. aid flowing to Afghanistan, studies show the latter is rife with corruption, unemployment and violence. (One data set found the total bribes paid in Afghanistan in 2018, \$1.65 billion, represented 9 percent of its gross domestic product.) The author, whose family fled violence in Afghanistan for Pakistan, worked at the Afghan Embassy in Washington before obtaining his master's in international development at GW. Supplies branded with U.S. aid institutions' logos remain fresh in his mind (as do experiences with Taliban brutality), which informs his argument that Afghanistan needs to help itself. "The main reason I

am so passionate about getting development aid right is that development aid is so very personal to me," he writes, "as I have come out of the conflict zone successfully due to the help I received from aid agencies."



📖 **"Reproduction Reconceived, Family Making and the Limits of Choice after Roe v. Wade" (University of California Press, 2021)**

**By Sara Matthiesen, assistant professor of history and women's, gender, and sexuality studies**

To most people, the term "reproductive politics" refers to abortion, but this book argues motherhood ("family making") requires close examination for its unpaid labor ("labor of love") undergirding the economy. After Roe v. Wade in 1973, newly empowered mothers also bore motherhood's responsibilities and costs. "Having a family has become harder and costlier since the 1970s—especially for those who built families on the economic, racial, and sexual margins of society," the author writes. Factors to blame include disease, mass incarceration and discrimination, which collectively, to the author, "debunks the myth of choice inaugurated by Roe."

— **Menachem Wecker, M.A. '09**







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# THE SCIENTIST AND THE LAWYER

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From chemistry labs to courthouses to classrooms,  
GW President **Mark S. Wrighton** and Provost **Christopher Alan Bracey**  
have made a lasting impact at every step of their careers. Now they're  
teaming up in new roles with a new mission—leading GW into its third century.

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BY JOHN DiCONSIGLIO



**FOR A TIME IN HIS LIFE,** George Washington University President Mark S. Wrighton felt most at home in a laboratory.

From his undergraduate days as a Florida State University chemistry student through his Ph.D. work at the California Institute of Technology to his tenure as head of the chemistry department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Wrighton could happily lose himself among vials and beakers. “By education, I’m a scientist,” he says, “and doing science is much more interesting than reading about it.”

Wrighton once imagined a contented career for himself in a lab coat and goggles. In the 1980s, his work in fields like solar energy and photosynthesis was cited in “Fortune,” “U.S. News & World Report” and “Esquire.” In 1984, “Science Digest” called him one of America’s brightest scientists. “I thought all along,” he says, “that being a scientist would be a rewarding and satisfying

life.”

GW Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Christopher Alan Bracey has had a lifelong love affair with the law.

As an editor of the “Law Review” at Harvard Law School and a clerk for a U.S. District Court judge in Washington, D.C., Bracey fell under the spell of legal writs and reasoning. In the courtroom, he argued cases on telecommunication, antitrust and criminal law. He challenged segregation in the Baltimore public housing system. Burrowed deep in law library stacks, Bracey dissected precedents from *Plessy v. Ferguson* to the *Dred Scott* decision until he’d established himself as an author, lecturer and leading legal expert on race and the law.

Like a scientist, “lawyers think in terms of facts and evidence and looking for proofs,” Bracey said. “We use different skills and approaches, but we go after the same targets.”

Now the chemist who once considered dedicating his life to research and the legal scholar who can quote chapter and verse of constitutional law are stepping into key new roles at GW. As president and provost, Wrighton and Bracey are partnering atop the university leadership rung, taking the reins of an institution that weathered the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and guiding it into the dawn of its third century.

The pair bring a wealth of experience to their new positions. Wrighton, 72, served as chancellor and chief executive officer of Washington University in St. Louis for nearly 24 years before being named as the next GW interim president in September. (He started his tenure Jan. 1 and is expected to serve for up to 18 months while the university embarks on a search for a permanent president.) He also spent five years as the provost at MIT. Bracey, 51, has held a number of leadership positions since joining the GW faculty in 2008, including vice provost for faculty affairs. At GW Law, he’s served as both interim dean and senior associate dean for academic affairs. Bracey was named GW’s permanent provost in February after serving as interim provost since June 2021.

In their short time as GW president and provost, they have faced a packed agenda of major university initiatives. Much of Wrighton’s early days in office were focused on leading the university’s pandemic response. He’s introduced himself to the community and immersed himself in campus life, attending basketball games and gymnastics meets, appearing at employee appreciation events for safety and facilities workers and visiting faculty, staff and students across schools.

Bracey, meanwhile, has already launched

task forces to address topics like diversity and inclusion and shared governance. Their multiple priorities also include strengthening GW’s interdisciplinary projects, enhancing research across all fields and overseeing the effort to expand the university’s financial aid resources and commitment to greater access to higher education. At the top of their list, they agree, is sustaining a foundation of world-class faculty and students—the cornerstone, they say, of GW’s academic reputation.

“We are here for the students and the faculty. We serve them,” Wrighton says. “Our objective must be to help our students and faculty realize their maximum potential with a minimum of difficulty. We have the responsibility to explore what we can do to make their future brighter.”

Indeed, while Wrighton and Bracey first made their marks in disparate settings—the lab and the law—both have firm roots in the classroom. They even continued teaching after taking on leadership responsibilities. Crediting his parents with fostering his passion for higher education despite never attending college themselves, Wrighton returned to teaching chemistry classes after completing his Washington University chancellorship. “I didn’t ‘step down’ from being chancellor,” he says. “I ‘stepped up’ to a faculty position.”

Bracey was in Paris cheering on his wife in a marathon when then GW Provost Forrest Maltzman called him in 2016 and asked him to become a vice provost. Like Wrighton, Bracey had one request: He wanted to continue teaching.

“It was Paris in the springtime, I was in a good mood,” Bracey laughs. “I probably didn’t know what I was getting into.”

Wrighton and Bracey share other passions, including their pets. (Wrighton has a dog named Spike and a cat called Purrfeffor; Bracey and his wife are longtime pug owners.) Still, the two believe their differences will also contribute to making them an effective team. Wrighton lauds Bracey’s institutional knowledge of the GW community. “I’m brand new, and [Chris] has history here and understands the culture and traditions,” he says. At the same time, Bracey praises the new president’s fresh vision and extensive leadership track record. “Mark’s arrival signals an important transition in the trajectory of the university. His energy and experience bring something new that we really needed. It is a very exciting time to be part of the administration.”

In a conversation with “GW Magazine,” the leadership duo talk about the rewards of their new roles, the resilience of the GW community and how a scientist and a lawyer can partner to lead a university.





Bracey and Wrighton walk through Kogan Plaza on an early spring day.





# THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**GW Magazine:** You're both stepping into new leadership positions after successful careers in other roles. Why take on these new challenges now?

**Wrighton:** I wasn't looking for a university presidency when I wrapped up my chancellorship at Washington University in 2019. I was happy to assume a full-time faculty position. But then, in the spring of 2020, the world went into lockdown, and my wife and I suddenly found ourselves homebound. I spent more time with my wife in six months than we had in the preceding 20 years. And we discovered—happily—that we were each other's best friend.

But I started thinking there must be something beyond walking my dog and catching up on television for the first time in my life. I felt energetic and refreshed. I was receptive to taking on something meaningful. Of course, GW has a high reputation—mostly because of its students, its faculty, alumni and staff. Coming to GW held out the opportunity to work with outstanding academic leaders and talented individuals like Chris. And the capstone was that we have a daughter [a GW School of Business alumna] and grandchildren in the area who we hadn't seen very much in the last few years.

**Bracey:** One of the things I've learned about being in the provost office—and this is true of other offices as well—is that we are in the people business. University leadership at any level is all about connecting with and helping others. It's become a passion of mine to take on the challenges of enabling our community—deans, program directors, department chairs, faculty—to aspire to excellence and succeed in all areas of their life cycle. And I've found I enjoy basking in the reflected glow of others. With Mark's arrival, I'm lucky to be in a position where I can watch him, learn from him and witness the highest levels of leadership in very close proximity.

**GW Magazine:** Chris, you're learning from Mark's experience. You've been a fixture at GW for nearly 15 years. What can you teach him about this community?

**Bracey:** Mark's been meeting folks here on campus—faculty, students, staff. So he's already getting a sense of what makes our community distinctive.

One thing that I would want to share with him is that our community members really care about each other—about the people and the institution. The bonds they've forged in their schools and departments

are enduring and robust. The faculty care about the staff and their well-being; the staff care about the students; the students are interested in knowing how the faculty and the administrators are doing.

The folks who work for GW would do anything for it. And that's what I think allows us to pull together in tough times—like our pandemic response. As a result of the faculty pulling together with the staff, we were able to migrate much of our coursework online in a week's time. And the students were accommodating. They understood that these were challenging circumstances that would require everybody to work collectively.

**GW Magazine:** Speaking of the pandemic, this community has been through a lot. What message do you have for them after a wearying few years?

**Wrighton:** The pandemic has been a huge challenge, of course. I'm grateful that Chris and many others here created a great infrastructure to deal with the pandemic problems. But I understand how hard it's been. For some, it's been the most difficult years of their lives. Younger people have been disappointed with respect to dashed dreams. Many people have changed their outlook on the future.





I would say I admire people who have shown resilience and a sense of optimism. There is much to be optimistic about.

An academic institution provides a great setting to learn from the past and respond to the challenges of the present. What I've seen here at GW are people who are ready to focus on what we learned through the course of the pandemic and eager to press on, to strengthen the institution. I sensed that when I watched the double Commencement ceremony in October. I saw the evidence of pride and enthusiasm when you celebrated 200 years of existence as an academic institution. I also have experienced firsthand the excitement of our community of alumni, families, donors and friends, and the commitment they demonstrate to our university—whether they are in California, London or New York City.

Moving forward, we all have the responsibility to take what we've learned in these challenging times and make this an inflection period. To me, there's no question about whether GW will survive. The question is, are we going to thrive in the future? I think we are already seeing that.

**GW Magazine:** Can both of you talk about your priorities? How do you envision GW's direction under your leadership team?

**Wrighton addresses alumni and friends at the GW + You Opens Doors New York City reception, held March 28 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.**

**Wrighton:** I like to refer to a pair of words—distinguished and distinguishable. We must be both.

We're not striving to be a Xerox copy of any other academic institution. We can develop programs of real significance that contribute to society; we can strengthen the student experience, expand research opportunities, encourage interdisciplinary work. And we can do that by building on the strengths that we already have—the many distinguished and distinguishable aspects that make GW unique.

The Elliott School of International Affairs, for example, is not an academic area that many other institutions have. It is one of the most outstanding programs in the country, and it is right down the street from the Capitol and the White House and the State Department, where policies relating to international affairs are formulated and

adopted.

Another example is the great Milken Institute School of Public Health. It is providing guidance, education and scholarly work that is extremely important in these times. The era ahead is very promising for such a school. Every school across the institution can be on a path to becoming stronger and higher in impact.

**Bracey:** I would just add that the foundation for everything that the president is talking about is students and faculty. That means our aspiration has to be recruiting the most qualified set of students—really smart people who are genuinely curious about exploring the world of ideas. At the same time, we want to recruit the world-class faculty that will produce and disseminate research that can transform the world.

Mark talked about making an impact. That's why people come to GW—they want to be impactful. Students come to GW because they want to have an impact on the world. And you can see the impact they have by looking to the long list of accomplishments of our distinguished alumni. Our faculty come to GW because they want to be impactful instructors and researchers. People don't come to GW to be passengers. They come here because they want to drive. **GW**



An isometric illustration of a city scene. A black steam locomotive is pulling a train of colorful freight cars (red, yellow, green, blue) along a track that runs diagonally across the frame. The city is composed of various houses in different colors (red, green, orange, blue) and styles, some with smoke coming from their chimneys. There are also larger industrial buildings, one of which has a tall smokestack emitting a thick plume of black smoke. The ground is a patchwork of green and yellow squares, suggesting different types of terrain or grass. The overall style is a clean, modern isometric aesthetic.

# AIR EQUALITY



An isometric illustration of a cityscape. The buildings are rendered in shades of gray and black, with some emitting thick black smoke. In the center, a small red house with a chimney is situated on a patch of green grass. The word "FOR ALL" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image, with the red house positioned between the words.

# FOR ALL

**The most polluted neighborhoods  
in the United States are also the  
most disadvantaged. Research at  
GW aims to shine a light on this  
inequity—and effect policy change.**

**Story // Sarah C.P. Williams**

**Illustration // Raúl Arias**









On a sweltering morning last July, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments issued a Code Orange alert for the D.C. metro area. The heat, topping 90 degrees most days that week, was reacting with pollutants to make the air particularly smoggy. At the same time, wildfire smoke from thousands of miles west was blowing into the city. On the morning news, reporters cautioned people with asthma or heart disease to limit their time outside.

In five spots across the city, air quality monitoring stations took hourly measurements of man-made gases and particles circulating in the air. On that day—like many others—a sensor in the eastern corner of the city, along the busy Anacostia Freeway, registered the highest levels of fine particle pollution in D.C. Here, residents of Ward 7, more than 90 percent of whom are Black, are exposed to some of the worst quality air in the region, and July 21 was no exception.

In Ward 7 and other D.C. neighborhoods, poor air quality is not just a nuisance—it has implications for the health of its residents. Susan Anenberg, an associate professor of environmental and occupational health and of global health at GW's Milken Institute School of Public Health, has been using data from NASA satellites to examine air pollution in cities. In D.C., she has found that the ZIP codes with the highest levels of fine particle pollution in the air were also the neighborhoods with the highest levels of asthma, lung disease and stroke.

Indeed, D.C.'s Ward 7, along with neighboring Ward 8, has 23 times the rate of emergency room visits for asthma than Ward 3, which stretches between the relatively affluent and white neighborhoods

of Georgetown and Chevy Chase. Anenberg's data suggest that high levels of air pollution in the most disadvantaged urban neighborhoods across the country are intrinsically linked to poor health, even when sociodemographic variables such as education, employment and poverty rates are controlled for.

"Higher pollution-related health risks often line up with spatial patterns of racial segregation in D.C. and many other cities," says Anenberg.

Over the last 50 years, air quality across the United States as a whole has improved, mostly thanks to the Clean Air Act and related legislation passed by Congress in the 1970s and 1990s, which empowered the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to regulate the emissions of pollutants. But not everyone has had the same access to that cleaner air—air pollution is still worse for communities of color and those with lower income levels and educational attainment.

"The Clean Air Act and amendments that followed it have been very effective at bringing down air pollution in most places," says Anenberg. "But it hasn't brought down air pollution equitably."

Until recently, this inequity was mostly anecdotal, or measured only in health outcomes—researchers could cite the higher asthma rates in Black urban neighborhoods, for instance, but it was difficult to pin the degree to which pollution impacted that difference. Now, Anenberg and her colleagues are using spatially complete satellite data—rather than scattered ground monitors—to paint a neighborhood-by-neighborhood picture of air pollution, revealing the disparities in clean air. Their data can also, for the first time, offer policymakers the quantitative evidence they need to start closing the clean air gap.



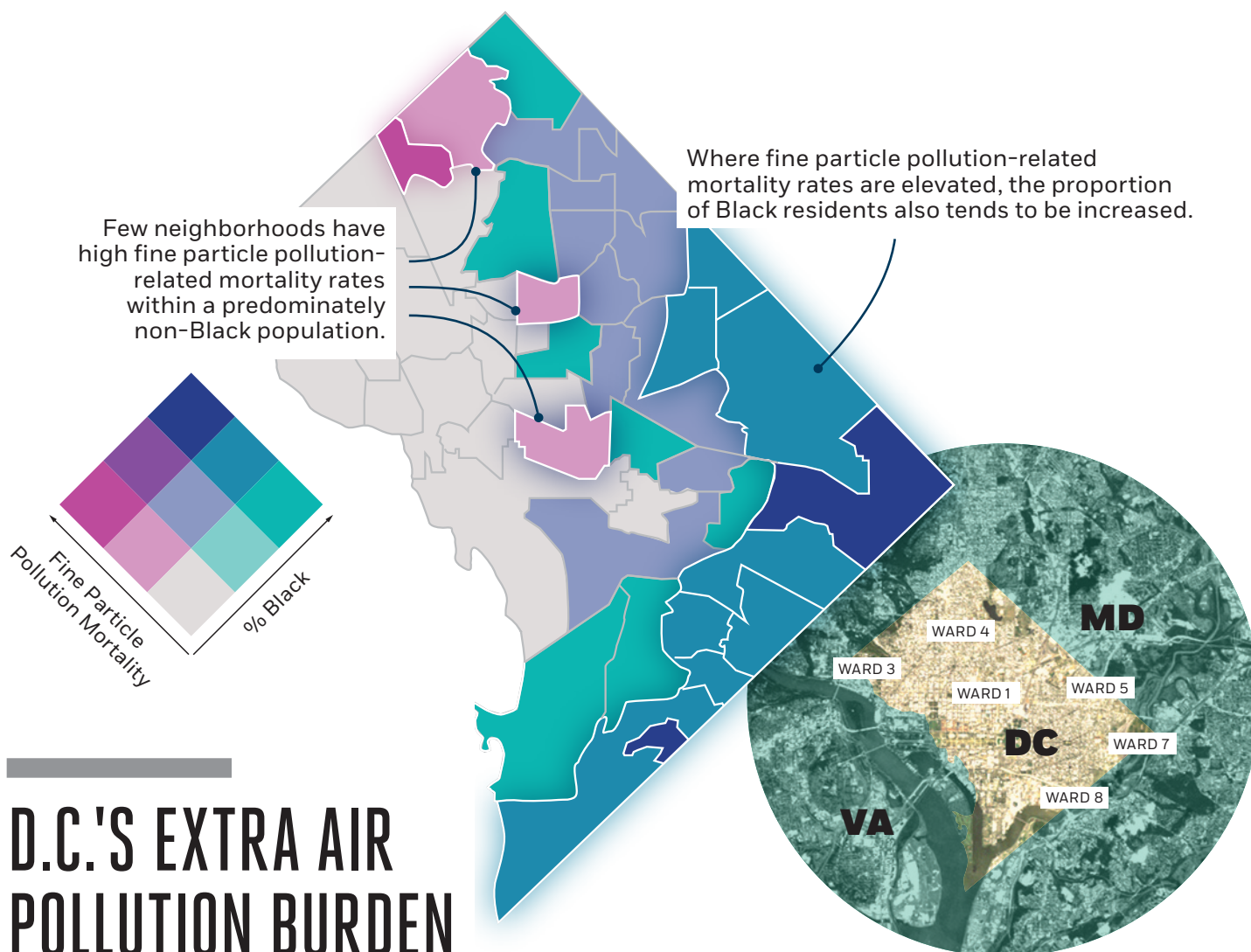
**"HIGHER POLLUTION-RELATED HEALTH RISKS OFTEN LINE UP WITH SPATIAL PATTERNS OF RACIAL SEGREGATION IN D.C. AND MANY OTHER CITIES."**

SUSAN ANENBERG

**23x**

THE RATE OF EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS FOR ASTHMA IN D.C. WARDS 7 AND 8 VERSUS THE MORE AFFLUENT WARD 3.





Anenberg has always wanted to make the world a healthier place. As a college student, she wanted to be a doctor. But when she started working in an emergency room, she saw the same patients show up with the same problems, again and again. She knew there must be a way to prevent their health problems outside of the hospital. She shifted focus from medicine to public health—and then discovered environmental health.

“It sounds cheesy, but I really wanted to know how I could have the largest impact on the health of the most people possible,” says Anenberg. “I realized that environmental risk factors and climate-related risk factors have this huge effect on people’s health all around the world.”

Climate change impacts health in diverse ways, and air pollution, which is tightly coupled with climate change, compounds the health impact. The greenhouse gases in pollution trap heat in the Earth’s atmosphere, making temperatures rise. In turn, the warming climate causes shifts in both natural weather patterns and human

behavior—from more forest fires and longer pollen seasons to increased use of air conditioners—that boost pollution.

As an air quality specialist at the Environmental Protection Agency during and after graduate school, Anenberg helped analyze the regulations set forth by the government to mitigate climate change and air pollution. But often, she says, there were holes in the data needed to back up policy change. Everyone knew that breathing air pollution was generally bad for health in all sorts of ways, for instance, but few studies had quantified the link between climate change and human health. That meant the cost-benefit analyses of new—often expensive—greenhouse gas-mitigation efforts overlooked a key variable in the equation: the health benefit.

“I began to recognize that there were major gaps in the evidence base, particularly when it came to the health outcomes of climate change, including its effects on air pollution, and these gaps were actually limiting our ability to implement policy

change measures,” says Anenberg.

Those gaps led Anenberg to join the GW faculty in 2017. Rather than investigate air quality and climate change in an academic silo, her goal was—and still is—to involve stakeholders, such as local and national decision-makers and international think tanks, in every step of her research. Before she begins a new study, she wants to know that the results will be useful in effecting change.

At GW, Anenberg has not only launched numerous informal collaborations with researchers and clinicians across disciplines, but she has also spearheaded the formation of the GW Climate & Health Institute (CHI), which she now co-directs with other public health and medicine faculty members. Today, the chartered institute includes 36 faculty members from 10 GW schools. Their expertise ranges from law, public policy and engineering to public health and medicine. The institute’s mission echoes Anenberg’s own: to conduct policy-relevant and community-oriented research on climate



change, human health and equity.

"We're really trying hard to extend our reach beyond just research and make sure what we do actually informs policy decisions," says Anenberg.



Every day, NASA satellites pointed at our own planet produce tens of terabytes of data on Earth's conditions. The satellites not only see clouds, fires and changing land patterns but can visualize pollution by measuring how much light is reflected from Earth. Since many cities only have a handful of on-the-ground pollution monitors, satellites help provide a more complete picture of how pollution varies across a region. Together, NASA's satellites give snapshots of pollution levels within 1-kilometer-by-1-kilometer squares—a smaller area than the National Mall.

While NASA doesn't use its data directly to inform policy, it does offer the data open access, and it works with policy-oriented researchers like Anenberg, who has received more than \$2 million from NASA since 2017.

"We actually require our grantees to be working with partners to assimilate their observations into decision-making systems and policy," says John Haynes, the program manager of air quality at NASA.

The NASA satellites, of course, can't precisely measure every component of air pollution that's hovering at the level people breathe. But they give accurate enough estimates of the major pollutants that come from vehicles, power plants and fires—the gases nitrogen dioxide, ozone, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide and the microscopic dust particles known as fine particle pollution.

Last summer, Dan Goldberg, an assistant research professor in the environmental and occupational health department, and Gaige Kerr, a research scientist in Anenberg's group, led a study that used NASA satellite data to track how levels of nitrogen dioxide changed due to COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. Up to 80 percent of the nitrogen dioxide in urban air comes from vehicle traffic, and the researchers suspected that, with fewer cars on the road, levels of nitrogen dioxide would decrease. Indeed, in the 15 major cities studied, nitrogen dioxide plummeted in early 2020. But, as Anenberg has seen in other contexts, the improvements were uneven across neighborhoods.

During the pandemic shutdowns, the least white urban communities, and those with lower income and education, still had higher pollution levels than the average white communities had experienced pre-

**"WE'RE REALLY TRYING HARD  
TO EXTEND OUR REACH BEYOND  
JUST RESEARCH AND MAKE  
SURE WHAT WE DO ACTUALLY  
INFORMS POLICY DECISIONS."**

**SUSAN ANENBERG**



**THE GW CLIMATE &  
HEALTH INSTITUTE**

**36**

**FACULTY MEMBERS**

**10**

**GW SCHOOLS**

**WITH EXPERTISE FROM  
LAW, PUBLIC POLICY,  
ENGINEERING, PUBLIC  
HEALTH AND MEDICINE,  
AMONG OTHER AREAS**

pandemic. The researchers' explanation: Major roads are disproportionately located in marginalized neighborhoods, and although passenger traffic decreased with stay-at-home orders, heavy-duty trucking continued mostly unabated.

This inequity in air quality could even explain disparities in COVID-19 outcomes, says one of Anenberg's CHI colleagues, Anjeni Keswani, an associate professor of medicine at the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences and director of the GW Allergy & Sinus Center. Keswani published a study last year that found one reason COVID-19 severity and death rates were higher in minority communities across the U.S. was that these communities are exposed to more air pollution. Breathing dirty air for

many years, she says, can predispose people to lung inflammation. When these same people are then infected with COVID-19, their respiratory systems are more vulnerable. Just an increase of 1 microgram of fine particle pollution per cubic meter of air was correlated with an 11 percent increase in the COVID-19 death rate, Keswani found. (Last July 21, the difference in fine particle pollution between Ward 7 near the Anacostia Freeway and some other monitoring sites in the D.C. area was more than 5 micrograms per cubic meter of air.) The results held true in not just the United States but in Italy and China as well.

For individuals who live in polluted, disadvantaged neighborhoods, can anything—short of moving to a new house—be done to quell the risk of allergies, asthma and other respiratory illnesses? Keswani says people with allergies and asthma can keep closer tabs on pollution levels, even on days that aren't Code Orange.

"A lot of my patients are great at checking pollen counts and using that data to inform their activities for the day," she says. "But we still don't see a lot of people doing the same things for overall air quality measures."

To that end, Anenberg and Keswani are collaborating on a new air pollution guide for physicians. They present data linking air pollution to poor health; not just respiratory diseases but cancer, cardiovascular disease, skin conditions and psychological disorders have been associated with pollutant levels. They also offer guidance on how primary care physicians can talk to their patients in routine clinic appointments about how air pollution might be affecting their health and what to do about it.

These kinds of efforts may seem small, but their effect shouldn't be understated, says Anenberg. Anything that helps decouple pollution rates from health effects can save lives. Closing the clean air gap, however, relies on larger collective action at the local, national and global levels. This January, Anenberg and her colleagues published new data that used satellite data to correlate nitrogen dioxide exposure with rates of childhood asthma. Worldwide, about 1.85 million new cases of childhood asthma could be attributed to nitrogen dioxide in 2019, her team calculated. The surprising part of the results: Pollution-associated asthma rates were estimated to be just as high in wealthy cities in North America and Europe as they were in more polluted cities in the developing world.

"We need both national-level policies and local action that result in less fossil-fuel combustion," says Anenberg. "The good news is that a lot of these interventions ▶





► not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality but improve human health, save money and create jobs.”

📍 In D.C., the Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE) has welcomed Anenberg’s collaboration to help guide its interventions against pollution. A November 2020 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that, across the country, air monitoring agencies are currently underfunded, with budgets decreasing by 20 percent since 2004 despite increasing demands for air quality monitoring. DOEE is no exception in this belt tightening, with a 22 percent decrease in its overall budget just from 2020 to 2021. So academic research that helps supplement its own research and policy is a big boon for the department.

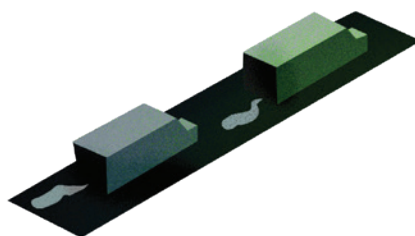
“We’ve been very focused on supporting projects that are policy relevant,” says Kelly Crawford, associate director of air quality for DOEE. “It’s very intentional that we pull academic researchers in who can fill gaps in our own expertise and data.”

In one study, Anenberg and Maria Castillo, the study’s lead author and a former research associate of Anenberg’s, worked closely with Crawford’s team to carry out the analysis of how pollution varied across D.C. ZIP codes. Crawford says that before the collaboration with Anenberg and her team, she and her colleagues were familiar with which areas of D.C. were plagued with poor air quality—their on-the-ground monitors, health data and reports from community members gave them an idea of the disparities that existed. But the resolution from this

**LEFT TO RIGHT Susan Anenberg, associate professor of environmental and occupational health and of global health; Kelly Crawford, associate director of air quality for D.C. Department of Energy & Environment; Catherine O'Donnell, M.P.H. candidate in global environmental health; and Anjeni Keswani, associate professor of medicine and director of the GW Allergy & Sinus Center.**

**"WE'VE BEEN VERY FOCUSED ON SUPPORTING PROJECTS THAT ARE POLICY RELEVANT... IT'S VERY INTENTIONAL THAT WE PULL ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS IN WHO CAN FILL GAPS IN OUR OWN EXPERTISE AND DATA."**

**KELLY CRAWFORD**



information wasn’t good enough to pinpoint small sections of neighborhoods that were at most risk of health complications from pollution.

“If you think about the thermostat in your house, it gives you a general sense of how warm it is, but everyone knows that some rooms will be much warmer or colder than the thermostat says, and the thermostat doesn’t have the resolution to tell you, for example, whether one of your children has a fever,” Crawford says.

Teaming up with the GW research team to analyze NASA satellite data on D.C. pollution gave the DOEE a new higher-resolution picture of which D.C. neighborhoods had the highest levels of pollution.

“The results weren’t necessarily surprising for those of us who have lived in D.C. for decades, but they gave us a much better tool to communicate with stakeholders,” she says. “Until now, it was always anecdotal. Now, we can point to real numbers.”

For instance, in 2016, the U.S. Justice Department sued German automaker Volkswagen for using emissions-cheating software in its vehicles and withholding documents from investigators. Eventually, Volkswagen was ordered to pay billions of dollars in settlement money to car owners, environmental mitigation and clean-emissions infrastructure across the country. More than \$8 million of the settlement money was directed to D.C., with DOEE in charge of using the money to reduce nitrogen dioxide levels in the District.

“Even then, our plan for these funds prioritized equity and environmental justice by enhancing benefits for projects in historically overburdened communities,”



Crawford says. She notes that the bulk of the settlement will be used to replace old diesel engines in Ward 5's Ivy City, resulting in a 1 percent reduction in nitrogen oxide across the District.

"When developing the VW plan, we mostly used health data and demographic data to choose neighborhoods where we needed to reduce emissions the most. D.C. continues to be racially segregated, with communities of color concentrated in Wards 5, 7 and 8," she says. "This is also where we see the highest instances of asthma and other health effects associated with poor air quality."

Incorporating the satellite data helped them identify new neighborhoods (including those outside of Wards 5, 7 and 8) that wouldn't have otherwise been included in the program. This allowed DOEE to tailor its work to a more granular level.

Other projects include funding electric street sweepers and buses; those vehicles will initially follow only routes in Wards 5, 7 and 8, where air quality disparities are greatest. They're also working on a home asthma intervention that provides families of children with asthma with digital devices, educational materials, cleaning supplies and air filters to help mitigate the effects of pollution.

"The data let us make our interventions much more focused," says Crawford. "We know that we are targeting our efforts to the most vulnerable communities, which is something we couldn't have said for sure even two years ago."

The satellite data also underscored the need to continue tracking pollution at a higher resolution, to test whether disparities in clean air begin to close as interventions are rolled out. Crawford says her team is actively trying to increase the number of ground monitors across D.C., with the hope of eventually getting block-by-block information that beats even the satellite data. They started piloting this "hyper-local monitoring" project in three neighborhoods in spring.



Catherine O'Donnell, a Master of Public Health candidate in global environmental health at GW, was also inspired by Anenberg's data on air quality disparities. She and two other graduate students, Perrin Krisko and Elizabeth Mason, wanted to help minority youth in D.C. collect and analyze their own air quality data—to not only pique their interest about how air quality might be impacting their own neighborhoods but empower them to lobby for change.

"We felt that involving young community members in monitoring air quality could help bring about locally relevant solutions," says O'Donnell.

The trio won a Knapp Fellowship from GW's Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service to support this idea, and their project launched this spring as a partnership with the Latin American Youth Center River Corps Program, which aims to engage D.C. young adults in environmental stewardship.

While Anenberg's studies have revealed just how unequal air pollution can be between neighborhoods, O'Donnell says, scientists still don't have good data on the public's awareness of these disparities. That's why her Knapp Fellowship project includes not only training for the River Corps youth but also interviews with the participants about their views on air pollution.

"There's this gap in measuring people's perception in this area," says O'Donnell. "But if we can conceptualize how people are thinking about air quality and about their own exposure, I think we can spur education and action."



For Anenberg and her colleagues at GW, their own stomping ground in D.C. is as good a place as any to test how their pollution research can help shape local regulations and initiatives, highlight disparities, change perceptions and help close the gaps in clean air. But their sights are set higher. Anenberg is working with the C40 network, a group of mayors in nearly 100 cities around the globe who share best practices when it comes to cutting emissions and curbing climate change. Based in part on her work in D.C., Anenberg and a large international team of

**"IT CAN BE FRUSTRATING TO SEE A LACK OF ACTION, BUT IT REALLY JUST DOUBLES MY MOTIVATION TO IMPROVE THE EVIDENCE BASE AND ENSURE I'M COMMUNICATING WIDELY TO PEOPLE SO THAT EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS THE MASSIVE IMPROVEMENT IN PUBLIC HEALTH THAT COULD COME FROM LESS FOSSIL-FUEL COMBUSTION."**

**SUSAN ANENBERG**

researchers have developed models for the C40 cities to use to integrate air pollution data—from both satellites and ground sensors—into their planning.

The models and data help city leaders see that investing in carbon-neutral and energy-efficient technologies, public transportation and bike paths, and educational outreach not only reduces pollution but also has health and economic benefits. In the past year, several cities—including Accra, Addis Ababa, Buenos Aires, Guadalajara, Johannesburg and Lima—have used the team's toolkit to incorporate air quality into their climate action plans.

In the end, Anenberg's message for everyone—mayors and citizens alike—is that we need to burn less fuel. On the surface, that sounds simple. But in practice, it's more difficult. At least in the U.S., 50 years of air pollution policies have already curbed the biggest emissions sources. That means what is left will be harder, smaller cuts. It's a challenge that Crawford and her colleagues in D.C. understand well.

"If you're morbidly obese, it's easy to get dramatic weight loss right off the bat by cutting the biggest culprits in your diet," she says. "Maybe you replace soda with water; that's simple, cheap and easy. But when you only have a few pounds left to lose, all of the choices tend to be much harder. You don't have those big things left to cut."

In Ward 7—and other similarly disadvantaged communities across the United States—changes to air pollution are bound to be slow; traffic along the Anacostia Freeway won't suddenly disappear or stop emitting fumes. But electric buses and street sweepers and tougher standards for vehicles can, over time, help. And education and interventions that reduce the health risks of pollution can boost a community's well-being even when air remains dirty.

For her part, Anenberg remains positive. She thinks her work, both analyzing pollution data and her efforts to communicate it, can make a difference.

"It can be frustrating to see a lack of action, but it really just doubles my motivation to improve the evidence base and ensure I'm communicating widely to people so that everyone understands the massive improvement in public health that could come from less fossil-fuel combustion."



**Scan to hear more from Susan Anenberg and Kelly Crawford about the importance of community collaboration in research.**

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# Alumni Profiles

FROM HAVING A  
FINGER ON THE PULSE  
OF CAPITOL HILL TO  
NAVIGATING OUTER  
SPACE, OUR ALUMNI  
THRIVE ACROSS THE  
WORLD—AND BEYOND.

HERE ARE SOME OF  
THEIR STORIES.







# GW ALUMNUS **SIDNEY CHU** DESCRIBES 'INCREDIBLE' OLYMPIC EXPERIENCE

*THE SHORT-TRACK SPEED SKATER  
REPRESENTED HONG KONG AT THE 2022  
BEIJING OLYMPICS AND SERVED AS  
FLAG BEARER DURING THE OPENING  
CEREMONY.*

by KRISTEN MITCHELL

George Washington University alumnus and short-track speed skater Sidney Chu, B.S. '21, fulfilled his lifelong dream of competing on Olympic ice in February. In the days following the race, Chu says his experience representing Hong Kong still felt like a dream.

"It was surreal to see the Olympic rings everywhere in every corner of the stadium and the village; the Olympic rings would even be on every single food packaging too," he says. "It was awesome to meet other athletes from other nations, and I still can't believe I'm an Olympian now." (For a story on GW's other Winter Olympics competitor, bobsledder, five-time medalist and this year's Commencement speaker Elana Meyers Taylor, see page 4.)

Chu was the first athlete to represent Hong Kong in the 500 short-track speed skating, where he finished 24th. The 22-year-old represented Hong Kong alongside two alpine skiers. When his teammates had to quarantine due to COVID-19 safety precautions, Chu had the "surreal" experience of walking in the 2022 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony as Hong Kong's flag bearer.

"I felt a little disheartened that, due to COVID precautions, they weren't allowed to take part in the opening ceremony. It would have been nice to show the world that a small city with a tropical climate was presenting its biggest Winter Olympic delegation in history," he says. "Nevertheless, it was heartwarming to see the cheerful and happy



faces of the volunteers walking into the stadium, and it was an incredible experience that I'll never forget."

Chu's race didn't go as planned. He clipped blades with an opponent from the Netherlands during the start, which impacted his ability to get a good grip on the ice, he says. Despite not making it to the quarterfinals, he's happy with his result. Being on the starting line alongside world record holder and Olympic champion Wu Dajing from China was an incredible honor, he says.

Chu, who majored in biology and public health, trained at the Potomac Speedskating Club throughout his time at GW. The Washington, D.C., region has become a hotspot for speed skating athletes over the past few decades, and the opportunity to train with elite coaches and athletes was a driving factor in Chu's decision to come to the university.

Chu grew up in Los Angeles and began training with the Hong Kong national team when he relocated to the city during high school. He hoped to make it to the 2018 Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, but was sidelined with an injury three months before Olympic trials.

Chu represented GW and Hong Kong in the 2019 International Sports Federation World Winter University Games, and since graduating last year, he increased his training time from four to five hours a day to up to 10.

Chu and his teammates competed on the World Cup circuit to secure a spot for Hong Kong at the Olympic Games. Chu crossed the globe over the past few months in pursuit of his goal, racing in China, Japan, Hungary, France and the Netherlands, where he gained much needed international competition experience that was impossible during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chu was selected by the Hong Kong national team to fill that spot, punching his ticket for Olympic competition.

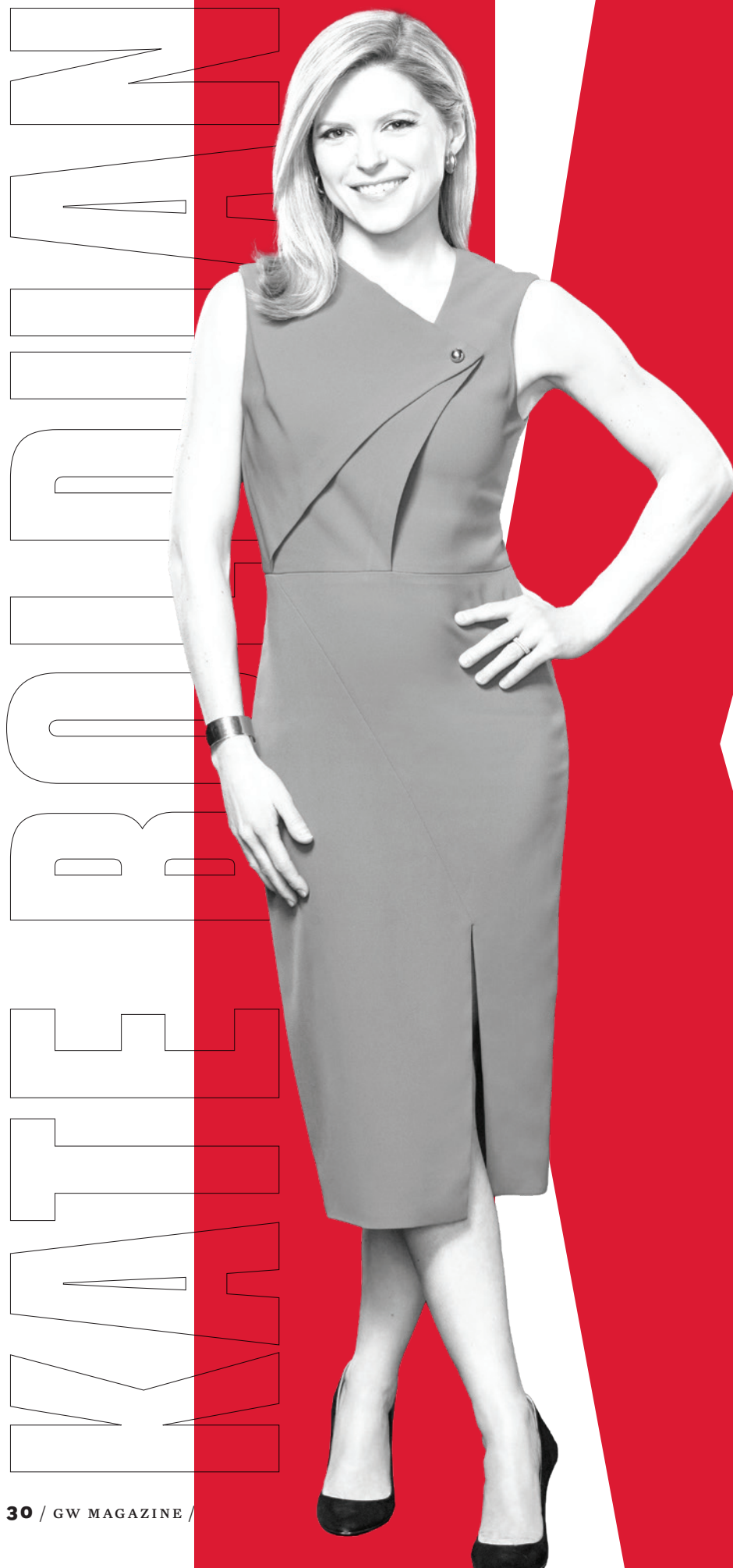
He hopes his appearance at the Olympics generates excitement for the sport and encourages more youth in Hong Kong to pursue speed skating.

Chu described a sense of "togetherness and friendliness" that accompanied his Olympic experience. Athletes from countries that might otherwise have a tense relationship outside the world of sports are able to trade pins and make friends within the Olympic village, he says.

"Everyone, including the volunteers, were incredibly friendly and supportive," Chu says. "Although we were all wearing our team uniforms, inside the village, there didn't seem to be any boundaries between teams. The Olympic spirit seems to be real."







# AFTER THE FACTS

*FOR CNN  
JOURNALIST AND  
ALUMNA  
**KATE BOLDUAN,**  
THE PROFESSIONAL  
IS PERSONAL.*

by CAITE HAMILTON

**YOU CAN FIND ANYTHING** on the internet these days: an article that supports your idea, an article that contradicts it. Self-help groups. Parenting advice. Whole swaths of people touting the benefits of Ivermectin as a cure for COVID.

And there are a lot of things on the internet about Kate Bolduan, B.A. '05, CNN's "At This Hour" host too: clippings on her success from her hometown newspaper, a video of Kate McKinnon parodying her for an "SNL" cold open, a Wikipedia entry that claims she loves ketchup (true) and can water ski barefoot (also true), plus sound bites from recent interviews with politicians, military personnel and even the occasional celebrity.

Most of the time Bolduan, who stands at 5'4", remains stoic during these one-on-ones, her mezzo-soprano lilt cutting through the noise of a guest's meandering or even misleading responses. But then there are the clickbait clips of her on YouTube, tearing up with Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.) as they discuss Sen. Joni Ernst's (R-Iowa) announcement that she was raped in college, or deftly chipping away at the



untruths of an of-the-moment political figure. Those clips in particular are too often viewed as a kind of gotcha from media skeptics, evidence of Bolduan as the sort of partisan journalist that should make us stop believing in the news. Instead, they establish her as an empath. A human.

"I have always said that the moment I stopped feeling for the story—the moment I stopped having an emotional connection—is the day I should leave the business," Bolduan says. "People want that connection and they want you to be impacted by it as much as they are at home."

But disinformation is rampant and at the center of an international story that reached a fever pitch four days before our interview, when Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a large-scale invasion across Ukraine. CNN's coverage was, as it tends to be with breaking news, all-encompassing, with correspondents both on the ground in Ukraine and at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. "At This Hour" spent its 11 a.m. time slot answering as many questions about the situation as possible.

Meanwhile, disinformation about the war—and Russia's role in it—abounded, mainly from inside the Kremlin itself. It comes as no surprise to anyone following the news; soft power is routinely used during wartime to influence outcomes. But the difference this go-round? The internet.

"Disinformation, particularly Russian disinformation, is aiming to create as much chaos and disorder as possible," said disinformation expert Nina Jankowicz during a Wilson Center panel Bolduan moderated in 2019. "That's a theme that goes from Estonia right through to Georgia, Poland, Czech Republic and Ukraine certainly. Especially in Ukraine, in fact, it's trying to inspire a sense of distrust in the democratic system so that people don't go out and invest in that budding new democracy."

A free press is a crucial tenet in the democratic system to which Jankowicz refers, and like many journalists, Bolduan asserts that her profession has been more closely scrutinized since 2016 as a direct result of disinformation.

"The job of journalism came under attack in a way that it had never been in my lifetime, with the way that Donald Trump spoke about CNN [and] spoke about journalists," Bolduan says. In fact, in 2018, Bolduan recalls running down many flights of stairs to evacuate CNN's New York studio, an active bomb threat underway. "There was this question in the moment of, am I literally in my workplace now under threat because of a lie someone is believing about the motivations of my network?"

Moments like that one rock her,

certainly—she placed a frantic call to her nanny that day to make sure her two daughters, now 7 and 4 years old, were safe. After all, she's only human. But moments like that one motivate her too.

"The more the world feels out of control, I actually feel like the more the world demands good journalists," Bolduan says. "We need more good journalists to be able to make sense of the chaos."

And good journalism—at least, her particular brand of it—includes getting personal, by way of just being herself. "I feel the story as well as report on the story," she says. "That's how I've always been."

Bolduan was born in 1983 in Goshen, Indiana, a small town in Mennonite country about 45 minutes south of Notre Dame. Her mother, Nadine, was a nurse, and her father, Jeffrey, was (and still is) a practicing urologist. People even call him "Doc," if that gives you a picture of Goshen's small-town ethos (its population hadn't yet crested 20,000 by the 1980 census).

The third of four girls, Bolduan was in many ways a typical Midwestern teenager—attending the public high school, playing on its volleyball team and performing in its musicals. But she was also a bit of an overachiever, becoming editor of the high school newspaper and earning the title of salutatorian for her graduation in 2001 (she reports that she would have been valedictorian were it not for a C- in calculus that still haunts her). She owes her drive, she says, to her parents.

"It was never like they said, 'You must do this, you must do that,'" Bolduan says. "But we traveled a lot, and that kind of helped open our eyes to the world." In particular, the family repeatedly went to Mexico, where both her parents had lived before having children and where her dad had attended medical school. "I see that as kind of the beginning of me caring about the world."

Those high-achieving impulses rubbed off on all of the girls. Bolduan's sisters each have successful careers—the eldest is a clinical psychologist, the second is an import/export attorney, and "the baby" ("we love to call her that," Bolduan says) is an ENT on the cusp of opening her own practice.

"I'm probably on the lower end of the

achieving scale," Bolduan jokes. With two parents in the medical field, she did, at one point, have her sights set on a similar path, but things changed after she took a theater class in high school. She got involved in musicals and eventually enrolled at the George Washington University to study musical theater.

Soon after arriving, though, feeling the common pressure of all undergrads to declare a major and decide on her future, she visited her academic adviser, Mark Feldstein. He suggested she combine everything she had found passion in—the high school newspaper, the musicals, traveling—to pursue broadcast journalism.

"It was never anything I had really ever considered," Bolduan says. "But I jumped into [Feldstein's introductory broadcast news class] and that's where it all started for me." She includes Feldstein; Steven Roberts, GW's Shapiro Professor of Media and Public Affairs; and Professor Emeritus Carl Stern among the professors who had the greatest influence on her experience at GW—and her career.

"[It was] not only what they taught me in the classroom but the advice outside of the classroom," she says. "You need to do [journalism] in practice, and these professors—now friends—showed me how."

Feldstein, currently the Richard Eaton Chair of Broadcast Journalism at the University of Maryland, says he knew right away Bolduan was made for television







journalism.

“She clearly had potential to make it big—smarts, curiosity, ambition, people skills, and a great broadcast voice and presence,” he says. “She struggled a bit at first, as all students do, to learn to write broadcast news scripts, which is different from the style used to write for newspapers—broadcasters write for the ear rather than eye—but she picked it up quickly and showed real enthusiasm.”

She took an internship at Dateline NBC, then landed a job at NBC’s D.C. affiliate, News4, where she spent her time “following around [local news icon] Pat Collins” and learning how to do the job of being a reporter. Then, working as a desk assistant without any on-air time, she put together a demo reel—a piece about a panda at the National Zoo, another about distracted driving that she had worked on with Collins and retold in her own words—and sent out 150 VHS tapes to news stations around the country. She heard back from two, one of which was WTVD in Raleigh, North Carolina, an ABC affiliate where Feldstein had once worked as an on-air investigative correspondent.

Bolduan considers that gig her first big break. Her second was the call from CNN

Newssource, an affiliate service that she often calls “a bootcamp for correspondents.” She spent her first day on the job, for instance, shooting dozens of live shots on the 2007 Minneapolis bridge collapse. From there, she worked as a congressional correspondent and co-anchored “The Situation Room” with Wolf Blitzer. Six years into her tenure at CNN, she was invited to the big show: a hosting gig launching CNN’s morning show “New Day” from the station’s New York studio. She was 29 years old at the time, breaking a record as the news channel’s youngest morning show host.

“Kate always sparkled. She had a special gift that few have—a natural rapport with a camera and an audience,” says Roberts. “It’s deeply gratifying to see a former student like Kate become so successful, because I know how hard she’s worked to achieve this level of success.”

Currently the sole host of CNN’s “At This Hour” after co-host John Berman left to join “CNN Newsroom,” Bolduan tries to stay open to what comes next. On a macro level, she concedes that the unknown “next” is part of

the fun: “The strange, circuitous, cumulative experiences that we have as journalists make us what we are, make us the unique journalists that we become.

“For two years, stories one through five were the pandemic and out of necessity, that’s what it was,” she says. But there’s more out there. There are so many more stories to be told.”

And Bolduan wants to tell them all. She’s interviewed families in Newtown following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, conducted the first TV interview with then presidential candidate South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg and his husband, Chasten, and covered the O.J. Simpson armed robbery case. When asked what her dream interview would be, she doesn’t hesitate.

“You’re always thankful to interview the president of the United States,” she says. “But the most important interviews—I truly mean this—the most memorable interviews that I’ve ever done are everyday people who we come across in the most extraordinary moment of their lives and they allow you in. If I flip it forward, my dream interview is truly just another, the next person I get to interview who lets me into their lives in an extraordinary moment to tell their story.”



LIZ O'DONNELL

# THE MAKINGS OF A MOTHER

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*THROUGH AALIYAH IN ACTION, ALUMNA  
LIZ O'DONNELL BUILDS A LEGACY FOR  
HER STILLBORN DAUGHTER.*

by CAITE HAMILTON



Liz O'Donnell, B.A. '12, M.Ed. '14, had, by all accounts, a perfect pregnancy. The founder of nonprofit Aaliyah in Action never had any morning sickness, always felt healthy, and doctors confirmed her weight gain and energy levels were all on track. When it came time for a baby shower, she was ready to party. She and her mom went all out with the planning, holding a big, blow-out occasion at District Winery in honor of her daughter-to-be, Aaliyah.

"All of our friends and family kept asking if it was a wedding," O'Donnell says. "I'm not really the marriage type, so my mom spent all her money on a baby shower." In retrospect, she is happy it was so over the top. "That was Aaliyah's only party," she says.

At 31 weeks, after returning from her hometown in New Jersey where she'd been for Thanksgiving, and spending the day at home in D.C. decorating her house for Christmas, O'Donnell realized: "I hadn't really felt her move all day."

O'Donnell Googled, ate a piece of candy, drank a few sips of soda, but still she felt nothing. A quick call to her doula convinced her to go in to see her midwives. When she arrived, the nurse remained optimistic, suggesting that maybe the monitor wasn't working properly.

"Stupid me. I was like, 'Oh, OK!' Now that I look back, I can see the exact facial expression she made." The nurse couldn't find a heartbeat. Aaliyah, which means "rising" in Hebrew, had died in the womb.

O'Donnell remembers remaining relatively calm. A resolute and practical person by nature, she thought to herself, "OK, well, this is what is happening. Now you have to just get out of this hospital."

Forty-eight hours later, on Dec. 1, 2020, Aaliyah Denise was stillborn. She was 4 pounds. She had a full head of hair. O'Donnell and Aaliyah's father spent two hours with her before O'Donnell went back into surgery for complications related to the placenta. "I was still determined to leave the hospital that day," she says. "[Aaliyah's dad] was helping me move around the room to work off the epidural. I just wanted to get out."

But being home wasn't easy either. Having set up all the gifts from the baby shower just a few weeks before, there were constant reminders everywhere of the life they'd prepared for but wouldn't see come to fruition. To add insult to injury, O'Donnell was about to enter a second life-altering fight—over paid family leave.

"This should be the last thing on anybody's mind, but I just kept saying, 'Oh my God, I have to tell work,'" she says. A math and science teacher at Watkins



Elementary School in D.C., O'Donnell quickly emailed her principal: She wouldn't need to take the rest of the school year, as planned; she'd only need the eight weeks her doctor had prescribed for her physical recovery. The response from District of Columbia Public Schools HR? She was no longer eligible for any leave. Because she had not left the hospital with a baby, didn't have a birth certificate for her daughter, and thus was only "caring for herself," the school district determined she didn't qualify. She was enraged.

"It made it sound like she wasn't even a real person," O'Donnell says. "I held her. She was 4 pounds. I went through treacherous labor. She was really here." She took to Instagram to post a photo of her holding Aaliyah and detail the difficult labor, during which she lost nearly a liter and a half of blood and afterward endured constant pain following an epidural that aggravated scar tissue from a previous injury.

She returned to work after taking unpaid leave through the Family Medical

Leave Act. But, by Christmas, a friend at GW Law, Paulina Vera, B.A. '12, J.D. '15, had connected her with an employment attorney, and she had attracted the attention of news outlets, D.C. Council members and Mayor Muriel Bowser, who introduced the expansion of a D.C. law to include paid leave for public employees who lose a child under the age of 21. The expansion went into effect in March 2021.

O'Donnell is pleased there has been some progress—particularly because the bill expansion covers families who lose their children to gun violence, which she notes is prevalent in D.C.—but says the bill misses the point she was trying to make. O'Donnell had read (and reread) the school district's paid leave policy and noticed that, while it used the phrase "birth of a child," it failed to specify whether that child had to be living. The ambiguity, to her mind, meant that her situation still counted. She should have been granted leave.

"There is no definition of 'birth of a child,'" O'Donnell says. "Maybe it's too hard



to define it. Do you want to include the birth of a child to be a child that is not breathing? Or do you want to make the definition a child that is breathing and then cast [those who experience stillbirth] out? That's fine, if that's how we define the birth of a child. Just define it somehow."

Beyond the grief, which she anticipated would continue on some level for the rest of her life, O'Donnell needed time to physically recover. She hadn't taken a baby home from the hospital, but she had delivered her vaginally and suffered a hemorrhage following labor. Getting paid leave wasn't only about emotional recovery. It was about recuperating physically.

In May 2021, she gave notice to her school's principal that she wouldn't be returning in the fall. She would continue to do private tutoring for her former students, but she had already come up with a new plan, a way to channel her grief into something positive, to honor her daughter and help other families experiencing the same kind of devastating loss she'd endured.

O'Donnell was on I-95, driving to Costco, when the phrase "Aaliyah in Action" popped into her head. She rolled with it, meditating on what "action" might mean in this context. She'd never been a fan of support groups, so she didn't want to go that route. But she remembered her friends' kindness after Aaliyah died. Knowing her fondness for beauty products, they had sent her boatloads of self-care items to try. And she did, one each day throughout those early days of grief.

It occurred to her that not everyone is privileged enough to have such an incredible support system, so she settled on creating a kind of self-care box that she could distribute to grieving families. Then she took the thought a step further: "Wouldn't it be great if a family was able to leave the hospital with something like this so they could immediately have it?"

She revisited her Facebook grief groups and posed a question: What tangible object would have helped provide a little relief during the grieving process?

"Fuzzy socks was the number one answer," O'Donnell says. "So that was the first thing to go in the package." From there, she filled the box with a face mask, shower steamer, recovery tea, an aromatherapy candle, and what O'Donnell calls a "self-care choice board," an idea from a woman who had messaged her on Facebook, which lists one thing to do each day—take a shower, drink some water. A step toward feeling accomplished.

In total, the Aaliyah in Action self-care

package contains six items, 80 percent of which are from women- or Black-owned local businesses that O'Donnell has personally reached out to, plus a book tailored to the recipients' specific situation, be it miscarriage, stillbirth or infant loss. There are books from the perspective of fathers and siblings and, for D.C. locals, a list of resources too.

O'Donnell is able to ship the packages nationwide free of charge (or for a small donation) thanks to a generous donor base, but her main focus is working with local hospitals to get the boxes into the hands of families in the immediate aftermath of their loss. The organization's first partner was George Washington University Hospital, and it has since signed on nine more in and around D.C. O'Donnell's ultimate goal is to be in every hospital nationwide.

"I know that sounds crazy—very ambitious—but I think I can do it," she says. Though she has never run an organization like Aaliyah in Action, she volunteered and interned with nonprofits throughout her time at GW. "Also just being very blunt with people and saying, 'Yes, I am making this huge transition. And no, I don't have any business experience, but I am very capable. I went to GW! It's a really good school!' Being a student [there] molded me to, yes, be a teacher, but also to do 25 other things at the same time."

She says she thinks her organization is successful for two main reasons: First, she provides tangible objects that focus on the mother.

"I don't necessarily want to open something and be reminded with a little crocheted hat or a bear or blanket," she says. "It's OK to want it to be about yourself, because we're the ones who have to still be on this planet thinking, 'How do I survive every day?'" O'Donnell knows firsthand what it feels like to lose a child, which only amplifies how meaningful the boxes are to recipients. And that's the organization's second superpower.

"It's not about what is in the package," she says. "It's, 'Oh my gosh. This person has this set up so that I get this package right after I experienced exactly what she did. And she lives right around here.' It's that closeness that has been encouraging."

O'Donnell notes that having the boxes immediately available has been helpful even in unexpected ways: They take the pressure off of nursing staff who can't personally relate. ("Instead of trying to do the talking and comforting themselves, they can say, 'Here's this package from someone that knows exactly what you are going through,'" she says.) And, in one instance, the contents helped calm a mother during an active

stillbirth delivery.

In the United States, 23,000 babies are stillborn every year—that is 65 babies per day. O'Donnell replenishes the hospitals' supply of boxes every two months, but she hopes that eventually the frequency of stillbirths will diminish so much she'll have to rethink the mission of Aaliyah in Action. To help on that front, around the time her own nonprofit was coming to fruition, she became a founding member of PUSH for Empowered Pregnancy. The aim of PUSH is to "cut the U.S. stillbirth rate by 20 percent by the end of 2030, in half by 2050, and in time, eradicate all preventable stillbirths."

At least 25 percent of stillbirths are preventable, including her own.

"Aaliyah was big, and my placenta was small," O'Donnell says. "[The doctor] said she just ran out of gas." In other words, Aaliyah wasn't getting the nutrients she needed to grow. Had O'Donnell's placenta been measured—currently not a standard practice in obstetric care—or monitored throughout her pregnancy, perhaps there would have been a different outcome. But her doctors didn't suggest it, and she didn't know to ask.

"I wear two hats: my PUSH Pregnancy hat, where we're being proactive so that we are teaching expectant people and families how to advocate for themselves, what to look for and pushing doctors to try new things," she says. "Then I have my reactive hat with Aaliyah in Action, where, when it's too late to be able to save a family, I provide this tangible bereavement support for them."

It sounds like a lot to keep up with for someone who is still grieving, and O'Donnell admits that her commitments have been a welcome distraction. But they've also been a way to honor her daughter and, as she sees it, to parent her.

"Big plans were laid out—these grandiose plans were laid out for her. And then this happened," O'Donnell says. "I was like, well, now what do I do?" There were two choices: She could either stay in bed and never come out, or she could take all of the things she'd read about parenting and the ideas she had about the kind of mother she wanted to be, and morph them into something new.

"I would be running around, chasing a toddler, staying up all night, worrying about something ridiculous," she says. "And I'm doing that now with Aaliyah in Action, with trying to help people advocate for paid leave, with PUSH Pregnancy. So it looks different, but I can promise that there is just as much love being poured into it. There is just as much worry, sleepless nights, anxiety over needing to change plans for certain things—all of which would also happen if she were actually here."





# THE FUNDRAISERS OF FULBRIGHT HALL

*THREE ALUMNI WHO CREATED THE FIRST FREE END-TO-END FUNDRAISING PLATFORM WHILE AT GW NEVER LOST SIGHT OF THE END GOAL. THEIR COMPANY, **GIVEBUTTER**, HELPS CHARITIES RAISE \$150 MILLION EACH YEAR AND LANDED THEM ON “FORBES”’ 30 UNDER 30 LIST.*

by NICK ERICKSON

While George Washington University alumni Liran Cohen, B.S. '18, M.S. '19; Max Friedman, B.S. '17; and Ari Krasner, B.A. '18, were the star subjects of their “Forbes” profile naming them to its annual 30 under 30 list for social impact, it was their startup company’s mascot that perhaps had the best photo of the shoot. Mr. Butter, resembling a slice of his namesake and measuring the size of a bed pillow, was propped up on a high-top chair with a backrest that read, “Failure is an option.”

Mr. Butter and the company he represents exist because his creators took on that mentality.

Cohen, Friedman and Krasner started Givebutter, the world’s first free end-to-end fundraising platform, as GW students in 2016. The story seems too good to be true. The three met in college, concocted the business idea while living together in a residence hall and turned it into a company that now helps raise \$150 million for charities each year. While all of that is indeed factual, achieving success was far from a linear process.

“I think a lot of our relationship was built on failure and seeing how we behave and respond to that failure and learn from it,” says Friedman, a GW School of Business computer science and finance graduate. “Co-founding a business, everyone always says, is a lot like dating. The relationship

between founders is just so important, and I really value the time that we had to learn and become closer.”

The founding trio can probably relate—on a smaller scale—to Thomas Edison, whose first 1,000 ideas to create a light bulb didn’t come to fruition. But like Edison, all it took was for one idea to stick. Because of that fortitude, they changed the fundraising game just as Edison did the scope of electric power, and it all happened within the confines of Foggy Bottom.

The first domino fell when Friedman, then a sophomore, formed a startup club on campus. “A very meta thing to do as a future entrepreneur,” he jokes. Cohen, a computer science major, was one of the first attendees. Soon after, Friedman hatched an idea for an event discovery app. Cohen built the website as Friedman went to work on the app itself.

Later that school year, Friedman went to a Chabad GW event. While there, Cohen raced up to him and said, “You’ve got to meet this guy!” That was when Krasner entered the picture, and a duo became a trio.

“It was one of those things where we met each other, and then I think we basically just pulled our chairs aside and talked for hours, and we were fast friends,” Friedman says.

The universe seemed to confirm this quickly. Friedman had two roommates at an apartment on M Street, but they both went to study abroad for the year. Before spring

semester, Cohen and Krasner, who were living together in a triple room in Fulbright Hall, suddenly had an opening. Friedman moved in, and the residence hall on H Street became an incubator for their project not quite finalized.

Along with the event discovery app, they tried their hands at other projects, including a viral charity sweepstakes, that just didn’t have the staying power. No matter what ultimately got them to the finish line, as far away as it may have seemed at times, they never wavered on their commitment to create something with a built-in social contract that helped make the world a better place.

“Giving back was a huge part of all of our lives growing up in the communities that we came from, and it was truly instilled in all of us from an early age,” says Krasner, an international affairs graduate from the Elliott School. “We were really excited about what we were building, and we really wanted to do something great with those values in mind.” Krasner hails from San Diego, while Cohen and Friedman grew up in New Jersey and New Hampshire, respectively.

When a January 2016 blizzard blanketed D.C. with nearly 20 inches of snow, the trio used the canceled classes to hunker down in their Fulbright Hall room and work on the project. They credit that storm as a breakthrough period.

“We wanted it to keep snowing out there,” says Friedman, who more than likely differed in opinion from other D.C. residents at the time.

Soon after, they got a call from a friend who needed help raising \$13,000 to launch a food truck. In their market research, they studied how different nonprofits handled their donation forms and were disappointed in both the lack of engagement and hidden fees they were finding.

They found that millennials were active in volunteering but lacked representation when it came to donating online. They concluded that the giving experience was too transactional and not enough companies were transparent with fees, thus discouraging would-be donors from lending their financial support to worthy causes.

Then, it was time for their “light bulb” moment as the trio’s work from the previous two years all culminated.

They created an interactive experience with no contracts, subscriptions or hidden fees, essentially individualizing the giving process. The platform launched later that spring, with the final piece being a whiteboard naming session that lasted into the late hours of the night at the Science and Engineering Hall. Givebutter ultimately stuck, both the product and the name (butter was a more fun way to say better, they

thought), and it incorporated ideas from other startups the three worked on that didn't make it as far.

Oh, and their friend with aspirations of launching the nonprofit food truck? Thanks to Givebutter, he was able to raise that \$13,000—in one day.

"Giving should be fun no matter how you do it, and when giving is fun, you want to keep doing it," Friedman says. "Sometimes it's not all about the data. It's just about people helping people and having a good experience doing that. And that's what we're all about."

Word got out—"The Washington Post" even gave them some ink—and Givebutter kept stacking successful campaigns on top of another. But in spring 2017, they wheeled over a nail in the road that could have deflated the newfound company's momentum.

At the time of the GW New Venture Competition (NVC), they had a refined product and felt confident going into the Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship's (OIE) crowning event. Here was a chance, they thought, to win valuable prize money and add another arrow in the arsenal of credibility by claiming the top prize at what has become the top university entrepreneurship competition in the country. Instead, they learned they would not be one of the four teams advancing to the finals. But once again, the trio used a setback as a springboard.

"We actually took that as another thing for us to prove everyone wrong," Friedman says.

While the prize money for finalists escaped them, the Givebutter team cashed in on non-monetary benefits of the NVC and used the designated working space offered to build an even better Givebutter. It was especially helpful because, by that point, Friedman and Krasner were living with two other roommates in a studio apartment. Needless to say, having the open space in the WeWork Lab was much welcomed.

Friedman noted that finding mentors and maintaining relationships played huge roles in growing Givebutter, specifically shouting out Lex McCusker, a former OIE staff member who also served as the director of the GW Business Plan Competition. In addition to providing feedback, McCusker became one of the startup company's biggest supporters, not to mention treating the trio to Bobby's Burger Palace after work sessions.

"I think having people like that, who are lending an ear and really trying to connect you with valuable people and ultimately believe in you when you are nothing yet and trying to make it, is so important—particularly for aspiring entrepreneurs,"

Friedman says.

The trio continued refining Givebutter while stockpiling both a network of resources and additional campaigns. Not only did GW bring them and their idea together, but they all stayed with it after graduation and have built it into one of the world's most legitimate fundraising websites while creating a strong company culture.

Givebutter now employs 30 full-time people working remotely throughout the country—Friedman is based out of Boston, Cohen is in New York City and Krasner is in Los Angeles. The company recently launched the world's first free donor-management solution with email and text messaging capabilities, and they have grown to a point where they are able to translate customer feedback into the product faster than ever before.

And most of all, hundreds of millions of dollars have landed in the hands of noteworthy causes such as Habitat for Humanity, Feed America, Special Olympics and thousands of other grassroots undertakings that distribute to those in need. All of that would have never happened had the Givebutter trio given up the first time something didn't work or after a pitch contest didn't turn out the way they hoped.

So, yes, Mr. Butter paid his dues and deserved his chance in the spotlight.





# GW ALUMNUS ANDRE DOUGLAS IS NASA ASTRONAUT CANDIDATE

*THE VIRGINIA NATIVE SHARPENED HIS RESEARCH SKILLS STUDYING SYSTEMS ENGINEERING AT THE GW SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND APPLIED SCIENCE.*

by KRISTEN MITCHELL

George Washington University alumnus Andre Douglas, Ph.D. '21, was selected to join NASA's 2021 astronaut candidate class in December, the first new class of astronauts announced in four years.

Douglas is one of 10 new astronaut candidates from a field of more than 12,000 applicants to represent the United States and work for humanity's benefit in space, NASA announced. The Virginia native earned a doctorate in systems engineering from the GW School of Engineering and Applied Science (SEAS). The research skills he honed as a doctoral student have been helpful as he's advanced his career, he says.

"The Ph.D. program taught me some very valuable research skills," he says. "I was working full time and was able to use the theoretical knowledge from the Ph.D. program and integrate that back into what I was doing in my daily activities as a professional, and at the same time, the stuff from my professional career at Johns Hopkins also fed into the work that I was doing at GW."

Douglas most recently worked as a senior staff member at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab, focusing on maritime robotics, planetary defense and space exploration missions for NASA. He reported for duty in

*"MY WHOLE HOPE IS THAT SPACE REMINDS US THAT THERE IS HOPE OUT THERE FOR HUMANITY EVEN WITH ALL THE THINGS GOING ON HERE ON EARTH."*

January to complete two years of initial astronaut training as a NASA astronaut candidate.

SEAS professor Thomas Mazzuchi, who served as an adviser to Douglas alongside professor Shahram Sarkani, says they are "quite proud of his accomplishments."

"Andre was an excellent student who brought a lot of practical experience to the table," Mazzuchi says. "He worked hard with us to make his Ph.D. research both theoretically sound and at the same time practical and meaningful for future end users."

Douglas earned a bachelor's degree


in mechanical engineering from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, a master's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Michigan, a master's degree in naval architecture and marine engineering from the University of Michigan, and a master's degree in electrical and computer engineering from Johns Hopkins University.

He served in the U.S. Coast Guard as a naval architect, salvage engineer, damage control assistant and officer of the deck. Ocean and space exploration might seem very different, but they present similar challenges with communication and operating vehicles, he says.

Douglas says he has wanted to be involved in space exploration for decades and becoming an astronaut candidate has been a "lifelong journey." Being selected for this role at a time when there is renewed interest in space exploration is "the ultimate combination of my dreams coming true," he says.

"My whole hope is that space reminds us that there is hope out there for humanity, even with all the things going on here on Earth," he says.

Douglas encourages GW students to "go with your gut and find what it is that excites you" while in school. A STEM education is an important step toward becoming an astronaut, but there are many different ways to be involved in space exploration.

"Your passion is what's going to drive you to be the best that you can be and to reach your potential," he says. 



# IMPACT OF PHILANTHROPY



LEFT TO RIGHT  
Peter Morin, B.A. '81; Kevin  
Crilly, B.A. '81; and Leon  
Rosenman, B.B.A. '81,  
at their 35th reunion in  
October 2016.

GIVING BACK

## New Thurston Hall Terrace Named for Beloved Alumnus

**Friends of Leon Rosenman, B.B.A. '81, are raising funds to honor a remarkable memory.** By Ruth Steinhardt

When Peter Morin arrived at the George Washington University as a first-year student in the late 1970s, enrolled in a Politics and Values residential program in Thurston Hall, he met all but one of his suitemates. The late arrival finally appeared, vanished into the last available room and didn't emerge for "a day and a half," remembered Morin, B.A. '81.

The suitemate's name was Leon Rosenman, and the first impression Morin jokingly recounts was completely uncharacteristic of the person who would

be Morin's best friend for more than four decades. (It turned out Rosenman had pulled a multiday shift at McDonald's shortly before arriving at GW, Morin said.)

Other first impressions were more on the mark, like the friend who first remembers seeing Rosenman perched on a fellow student's shoulders, wearing—for unknown reasons—a headlamp. As a student, Rosenman led Halloween expeditions trick or treating at the Watergate Hotel, ventured into Washington, D.C., for underground

punk concerts and organized 2 a.m. tea parties. His friends describe him as an understated social star, witty, kind and energetic, around whom groups orbited without seeming to realize they were doing so.

"He was a force of nature," Morin said. "It was like a magnetic thing. He pulled us all together, and we were just in his orbit."

Rosenman and his circle of GW friends remained close in the decades after they graduated in 1981, even holding regular Friday video calls during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rosenman maintained a database of his friends' and loved ones' birthdays, reaching out every year and—subtly, nonjudgmentally, by apparent accident—getting others to do the same. That emphasis on connection went beyond birthdays, especially for mutual friends going through hard times.

"He was a caretaker, and he had this high level of awareness when other people were suffering—and he was really good at making strategic emotional links, like, 'OK, you're the best person to help so-and-so with this,'" said Rose Hayden, B.A. '81. Like Morin and Rosenman, Hayden spent her first year of college in Thurston and still maintains the friendships she made there. "He was such an important part of the tapestry of our lives."

So when Rosenman died unexpectedly last October, Morin, Hayden and several other GW friends found themselves searching for ways to channel their grief and honor someone irreplaceable. They found an opportunity that brought them full circle: the renovation of Thurston Hall, scheduled to be ready for move-in by August 2022. Why not name a space for Rosenman in the building where so many of them met him and each other for the first time—somewhere similarly lasting friendships could potentially begin and grow?

Kevin Crilly, B.A. '81, who has a background in fundraising, took on the work of organizing the outreach process among Rosenman's GW friends. Crilly's first memory of Rosenman also took place at Thurston: As a first-year student, Crilly worked dull shifts at the residence hall's front desk, opening mail, answering phones



and fielding student questions.

On Friday afternoons, he remembers, a raucous group of students from the Politics and Values program would

“come barreling out the doors of the first floor,” heading to happy hour (legal at the time for 18-year-olds). One of those students noticed Crilly and began chatting with him at the desk, gradually roping Crilly into the social whirl. The student was, of course, Leon Rosenman.

“That’s the kind of guy he was,” Crilly said.

Hayden said the naming opportunities created by the Thurston renovation felt like



**Longtime friends Peter Morin, Kevin Crilly and Leon Rosenman met in Thurston Hall in 1977.**

it because we all lived in this crazy dorm,” she said.

Given Rosenman’s influence on so many lives, his friends seem almost unsurprised

by the meteoric way the fundraising campaign took off. A relatively small group of about 40 alumni have now raised more than \$200,000, enough not only to name Thurston’s seventh-floor courtyard terrace in honor of Rosenman but also to support students transitioning to college and establish a named scholarship to make his

“the perfect storm” to pay tribute both to Rosenman and to the place where their group originally connected.

“We had this great thing, and we had

legacy last at GW. Through these gifts, the group hopes to materially impact the lives of GW students, just as Rosenman impacted theirs.

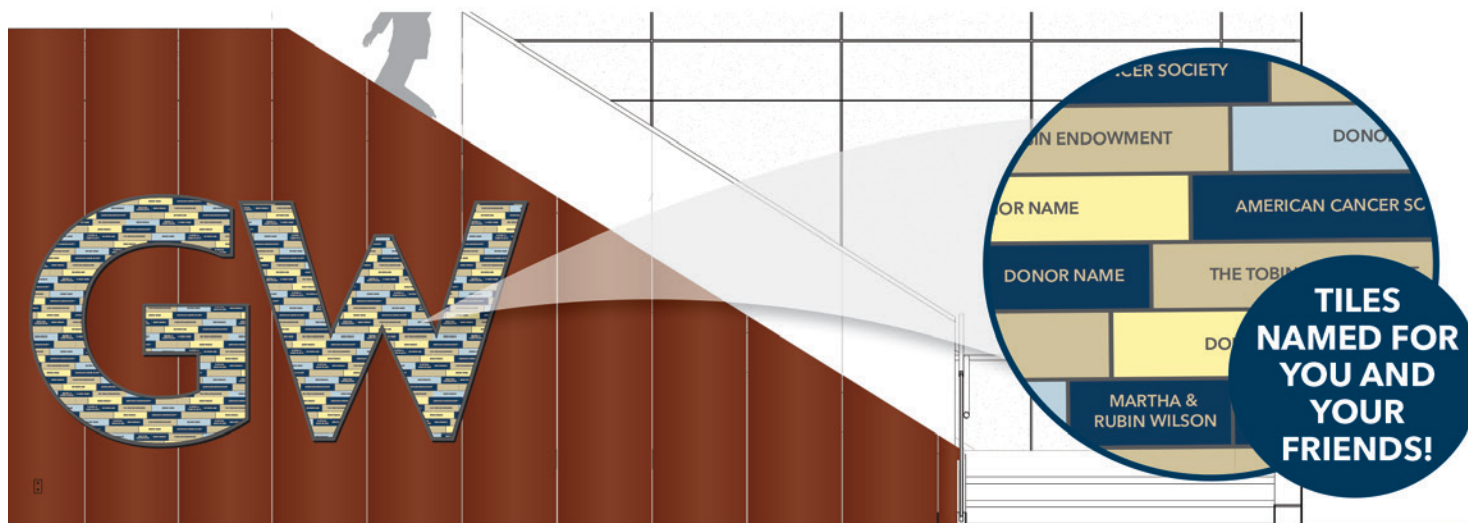
“It’s always inspiring to see a group of friends come together to honor a cherished classmate through philanthropy, and the Class of 1981 has outdone itself with this tremendous effort,” said Donna Arbide, GW’s vice president for development and alumni relations. “They established a permanent legacy for Leon that will live on in the very place where so many of his enduring friendships began decades ago. GW is so grateful for this touching tribute that will have lasting impact for countless students who will call Thurston home and is a heartwarming testament to the generosity of our community.”



**The GW community is invited to join in the effort to give back in Leon Rosenman’s memory at [go.gwu.edu/rosenman](https://go.gwu.edu/rosenman)**

## BE A PART OF THE THURSTON MOSAIC

THE GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC



Bearing names of GW alumni from all generations, the one-of-a-kind mosaic will celebrate Thurston’s lifelong community and give back to the students who will call the reimaged residence hall home.

**CLAIM YOUR TILE**  
[GO.GWU.EDU/MOSAIC](https://go.gwu.edu/mosaic)





## #GWGivingDay Raises More than \$1.6 Million

Funds raised from almost 2,500 donors will go toward student aid, university infrastructure and other areas of need.

GW raised \$1,607,819 from 2,485 donors during its second annual Giving Day on April 6, surpassing its \$1 million goal by more than 60 percent. Donations rolled in from alumni, students, faculty and staff, parents and friends of GW in 46 states and 15 countries.

More than 50 GW community members made matching commitments in advance to support teaching, learning and living at GW, while still more created matching challenges on the day itself. The university's lead matching donation of \$350,000 from trustee and longtime GW supporter Ave Tucker, B.B.A. '77, met its goal by 1 p.m.

Eight GW schools and units exceeded

their goals, with the GW School of Business raising the largest amount at \$228,783. For the second year in a row, GW Athletics had the largest number of individual donors. More than 300 people passed through an in-person Giving Day event in Kogan Plaza featuring GW-branded prizes, flowers and snacks. A total of 384 donors are current GW students.

"We are thrilled with the turnout," said Patty Carocci, associate vice president of alumni relations and annual giving. "It shows how enthusiastic and dedicated the

**\$1,607,819**  
raised

**2,485**  
donors  
**384 current**  
students

**46** states  
**15** countries


**\$350,000**  
top matching  
donation

**\$228,783**  
largest amount  
raised for single  
unit/school  
(GWSB)

GW community is about coming together to support student aid."

Student scholarships and support under Open Doors: The Centuries Initiative for Scholarships & Fellowships received a significant percentage of support, including funds from the Tucker challenge. Other funds will go to university initiatives and areas of need for individual schools and units.

"Giving Day had an amazing debut during our bicentennial year in 2021, and this year surpassed our already high expectations," Carocci said.

 Learn more about how GW is expanding opportunity for the next generation of leaders at [go.gwu.edu/opendoors](https://go.gwu.edu/opendoors)



# Opening the Door to a World-Class Education in the Nation's Capital

George is a hypothetical student, but his story is typical of many GW undergraduates.

George is the valedictorian of his Ohio high school and an incoming Columbian College of Arts and Sciences first-year student. He is excited to study political science in the heart of D.C., but he faces an annual gap of nearly \$6,000 after family contributions, scholarships, loans and financial aid. (See graphic at right.)

GW is committed to attracting and retaining academically talented students, and we know affordability is a critical factor in whether or not students attend GW.

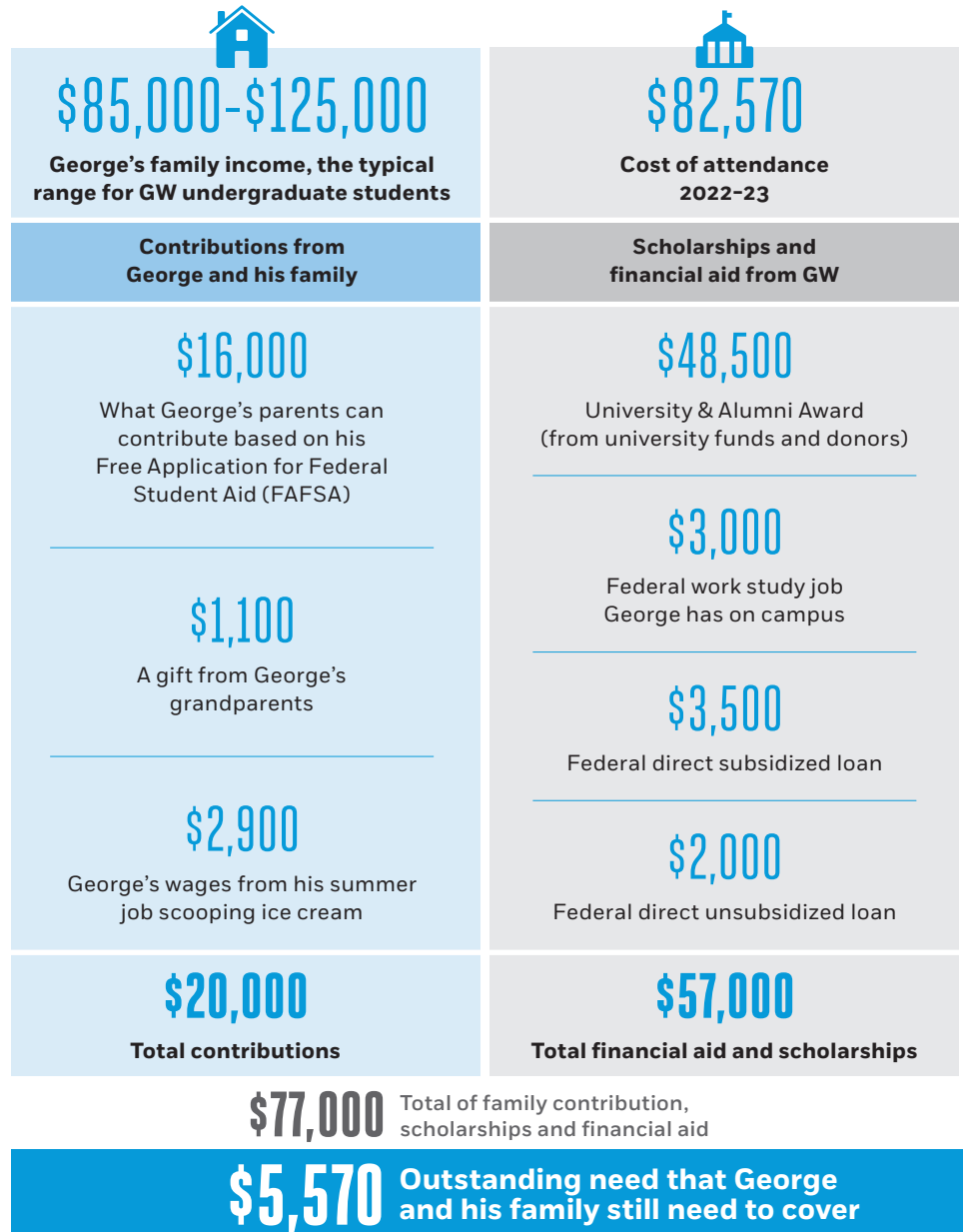
We will continue to offer a competitive mix of scholarships and aid, but many GW students still face an annual gap of \$3,000 to \$6,000 to achieve their academic ambitions.

George is not alone. That's why GW has launched its third century with Open Doors: The Centuries Initiative for Scholarships & Fellowships.

Join us in making the transformative power of a GW education possible for more students and families.

**Let's open doors together**  
[go.gwu.edu/opendoors](https://go.gwu.edu/opendoors)

## GEORGE & GW WORK TO OPEN THE DOOR TO HIS FUTURE



**“My family was not going to be able to take out loans. So when I found out about the scholarship and realized I didn't have to worry about the financial burden, I could focus on my studies and my career instead of trying to juggle that with working multiple part-time jobs. It opened up so many options for me.”**

**Jasmine Vicencio, B.S. '16, M.P.H. '20**, Stephen Joel Trachtenberg scholar currently working at the World Bank

# CLASS NOTES

## // '50s

**James Rudin, B.A. '55**, published "The People in the Room: Rabbis, Nuns, Pastors, Popes and Presidents" (iPub Global Connection, 2022). Rudin, a rabbi, takes readers inside the Vatican, Camp David, churches, synagogues and other spots across the globe in his quest to forge interreligious relationships.

## // '60s

**Judith Benderson, B.A. '67, M.F.A. '70, CERT '04**, was one of the artists included in an exhibition at the Friendship Gallery in Chevy Chase, Md., for International Women's Month.

**Janetta Rebold Benton, M.A. '69**, published her ninth book, "How to Understand Art" (Thames & Hudson, 2021), in the Art Essentials series. The book provides a clear and concise overview of the fundamentals shared by visual arts across the globe.

## // '70s

**Ralph Pezzullo, B.A. '73, M.A. '75**, published the book, "Saigon" (Atmosphere Press, 2021), a coming-of-age story based on his experiences as an adolescent living in Vietnam from 1963 to 1965.

## // '80s

**Lisa Brahin, B.A. '84**, authored "Tears Over Russia: A Search for Family and the Legacy of Ukraine's Pogroms" (Pegasus Books, 2022), which documents the story of her grandmother's escape from Ukraine in the early 20th century.

**Kathy Harmon-Luber, CERT '84**, has published a book, "Suffering to Thriving: Your Toolkit for Navigating Your Healing Journey," drawing on her experiences with debilitating illnesses and injuries.

**Rachel Nugent, M.Phil. '87, Ph.D. '94**, vice president and director for the Center for Global Noncommunicable Diseases at

RTI International, was awarded the Luminary Leader Award in the inaugural Global Health Impact Awards presented by the Washington Global Health Alliance.

**Larry A. Olson, M.F.S. '83**, authored a chapter, "The Examination of Cut, Torn, Perforated, and Shredded Documents," in "Forensic Document Examination in the 21st Century" (CRC Press, 2021), which also includes chapters on handwriting complexity, computer-generated documents and electronic signatures.

**David Poyer, M.A. '86**, has published "Arctic Sea" (St. Martin's Press, 2021), the 21st book in his popular future-war series featuring Captain Dan Lenson.

**Sarah Schneiderman, B.F.A. '80**, was selected as one of the artists included in the UNDERCURRENTS exhibition at the Ely Center of Contemporary Art in New Haven, Conn. She also was invited to participate in the online exhibition, "We Who Dream No Know Borders," hosted by the Women's Caucus for Art of Greater Washington, D.C., and the exhibition "The Best of Women" at Stola Contemporary Art in Chicago.

**Leslie Whipkey, M.A. '88**, has earned a spot on the "Forbes Magazine" 2022 list of best-in-state women wealth advisors. Whipkey works at Bank of America in Vienna, Va.

## // '90s

**Elizabeth L. Block, B.A. '94**, has published the book, "Dressing Up: The Women Who Influenced French Fashion" (MIT Press, 2021), examining how wealthy American women—as consumers and as influencers—helped shape French couture of the late 19th century.

**Holly T. Brigham, M.F.A. '94**, investigated the life and work of pre-Raphaelite artist, model and muse Elizabeth Siddal in "I Wake Again," a solo show at the Delaware Art Museum.

**Marisa F. Capone, B.A. '97**, joined Goodell, DeVries, Leech & Dann LLP in Baltimore as an associate in its medical malpractice practice group.

**Charlie Galligan, B.A. '90**, is a member of the Essential Caregiver Movement, an advocacy group pushing for state laws and now a federal law, HR 3733, designed to preserve the rights of nursing home residents to have access to visitors.

**Karen Knudsen, B.A. '91**, is the first female chief executive officer of the American Cancer Society. A National Cancer Institute-funded researcher, Knudsen previously served as executive vice president of oncology services and enterprise director for the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center at Jefferson Health.

**Matt Kreutzer, J.D. '98**, an attorney with law firm Howard & Howard's Las Vegas office, has been selected to the Class of 2022 Legal Eagles Hall of Fame by "Franchise Times" magazine.

**Yahia Lababidi, B.A. '96**, has authored "Learning to Pray: A Book of Longing" (Kelsey Books, 2021), a collection of literary hymns.

**Diane Lebson, B.A. '92**, published a book, titled "For a Good Cause: A Practical Guide to Giving Generously" (She Writes Press, 2021), a manual for how to "do" philanthropy, including researching organizations, the roles and responsibilities of board service, and how to raise funds when you hate asking for money.

**Harlan Sands, M.B.A. '90**, is the president of Cleveland State University and was named one of the newsmakers of the year for 2021 by Crain's Cleveland Business. He was recognized for sponsoring Ohio's largest vaccination site, growing the university around its mission of access and affordability, and partnering to develop a new Cleveland Innovation District.

**Sandi (Rudenstein) Schwartz, B.A. '99**, has written "Finding Ecohappiness: Fun Nature Activities to Help Your Kids Feel Happier and Calmer" (Quill Driver Book, 2002) to guide families on how to use nature to reduce stress and boost spirits.

**Kevin Simpson, B.B.A. '92**, has published "Walk Toward Wealth" (Merack Publishing, 2022), which shares proven strategies that portfolio managers use to grow wealth. He is donating 100 percent of the profits from book sales to charity.

**Danielle (Tumolo) Smereczynski, B.A. '99**, was named chief philanthropy officer for the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia.

**Burke E. Strunsky, B.A. '96**, is running for Riverside County, Calif., district attorney. A judge, Strunsky was elected to the bench in 2016, and prior to that was a deputy D.A. for 15 years.

**Rhea Wessel, B.A. '91**, has written a book, titled "Write Like a Thought Leader: How to Find a Constant Stream of Story Ideas to Position Yourself as the Go-To Expert in Your Niche," that shows subject-matter experts of all types how to find and frame stories.

**Linda Fisher Thornton, M.A. '94**, was awarded the Itzkowitz Family Distinguished Adjunct Faculty Award by the University of Richmond School of Professional and Continued Studies and was the faculty speaker at the school's 2022 Commencement.

## // '00s

**Brian Dean Abramson, LLM '09**, has added new content to the second edition of his legal treatise, "Vaccine, Vaccination, and Immunization Law" (BNA Books, 2022). The updated content covers COVID-19 vaccines, pandemic response and other pandemic-related materials; employer/employee vaccination mandates; international vaccine law; and legal responses to anti-vaccine activism.

**Anthony M. Avellino, M.B.A. '08**, published the book, "Finding Purpose: A Neurosurgeon's Journey of Hope and Healing," detailing his lifelong battle with mental illness and how he overcame it.

**Julia Barnes, B.A. '05**, was named CEO of the Movement Cooperative, a network of electoral and advocacy organizations working together to advance the progressive movement through shared





data and tech infrastructure. She founded her own electoral consulting firm, JPKB, in 2017.

**Glynnis Breen, B.A. '01**, was named chief marketing and communications officer at the American Forest Foundation. Prior to joining the foundation, she worked at the National Geographic Society, where she spearheaded global outreach initiatives, secured international partnerships and oversaw engagement for National Geographic Explorers.

**Charles C. Calloway Jr., B.B.A. '06, J.D. '12**, was promoted to partner of Chapman and Cutler LLP and recognized by Crain's Chicago Business as a 2021 notable nonprofit board leader for his work as vice chair of the national board of Spark Inc. and as vice chair of the Finance and Audit Committee and treasurer of the Chicago Humanities Festival.

**Josh Denney, M.A. '02**, has joined Western Alliance Bank as director and head of government relations. Denney previously was head of federal government affairs at BBVA USA and vice president of public policy at the Mortgage Bankers Association.

**Jonathan Doh, Ph.D. '01**, is the 2022 recipient of the University at Albany Alumni Association's Excellence in Education Award. Doh is associate dean of research and global engagement, Rammrath Chair in International Business, co-faculty director of the Center for Global Leadership, and professor of management and operations at Villanova University School of Business.

**Iris Drayton-Spann, M.A. '09**, serves as a director at Stanton Chase in Washington, D.C. She is also the current chair for New Endeavors by Women, a volunteer member of Streetwise Partners DC and part of their Employer Advisory Board, and a member of Mercer/Marsh Women's Executive Leadership Group. In 2019 and 2021, DCA Live honored her as one of the 25 HR Leaders of the Year in the region, and she was recently named to Mogul's Top 100 DEI Leaders.

**Pamela Ehrenberg, M.Ed. '03**, co-authored with Tracy López "Detour Ahead" (PJ Publishing, 2022), a middle-grade novel depicting the friendship between

a Jewish girl preparing for her bat mitzvah and a Salvadoran American boy who is new to Washington, D.C.

**Jared Fishman, J.D. '04**, founded and is executive director of Justice Innovation Lab, a nonprofit that builds data-informed and community-rooted solutions for a more equitable, effective and fair justice system.

**Isaac Fitzgerald, B.A. '05**, has a new book coming out in July, "Dirtbag Massachusetts: A Confessional" (Bloomsbury, 2022), a memoir in essays that begins with Fitzgerald's early years growing up in Boston.

**Margaret Giles, M.A. '09**, joined the Institute for Defense Analyses as a research associate in the Cost Analysis and Research Division of IDA's Systems and Analyses Center.

**Peter Glessing, B.A. '08**, married Pari Cariaga at the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis on Oct. 23, 2021. Alumnus Patrick Stadelhofer, B.B.A. '08, was the best man, and alumni Brandon Hines, B.B.A. '10, and Ryan DeWerd, B.B.A. '10, served as ushers.

**Adam Goldstein, B.A. '04**, has been working in an Israeli field hospital in the western Ukraine town of Mostyska as part of a team of 80 doctors and nurses providing support to the local Ukrainian hospital. Goldstein is the director of trauma surgery at Wolfson Medical Center in Holon, Israel.

**Maura Judkis, B.A. '07**, and **Scott Gilmore, J.D. '12**, welcomed their daughter, Margalit Ruby Judkis-Gilmore, on March 10. Judkis is a reporter for "The Washington Post," and Gilmore is an attorney at Hausfeld LLP and an adjunct professor at Georgetown Law.

**Dionna Latimer-Hearn, M.A. '02**, was named clinician of the year by the National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing. She is the founder and education director of REACT Initiative Inc., a nonprofit that promotes equity in education.

**Benjamin M. Mastaitis, B.A. '00**, is now an assistant attorney general in the Public

Integrity Bureau of the New York State Attorney General's Office.

**Stephen Ryan, B.A. '07**, was promoted to director and chief systems engineer of advanced programs for Northrop Grumman's Strategic Space Systems Division in Redondo Beach, Calif.

**Emily K. Wilson, M.A. '08**, authored the book, "Mildred Trotter and the Invisible Histories of Physical and Forensic Anthropology" (CRC Press, 2022), the first biography of the acclaimed anatomist and anthropologist.

## // '10s

**Sevan Araz, B.A. '18**, joined the Institute for Defense Analyses as a research associate in the Joint Advanced Warfighting Division of the Systems and Analysis Center.

**Kristi Beroldi, Master in Clinical Mental Health Counseling '15**, is a licensed professional counselor with Thriveworks Reston, specializing in depression, life transitions, anxiety and self-esteem issues.

**Susie Dumond, M.A. '16**, authored "Queerly Beloved" (Dial Press/Random House, 2022), an LGBTQ+ romantic comedy set in Tulsa, where Amy, a baker/bartender turned bridesmaid-for-hire, falls for the cute new lesbian in town.

**Nicole Hoyt, B.A. '10**, founded a company called Somethingood, which launched a financial newsletter, "Money Side Up," to empower women, minorities and others who have been historically underrepresented in traditional finance.

**Najma Khorrami, M.P.H. '12**, published two books: "A Spoonful of Gratitude: Tips to Reduce Stress and Enjoy Life to the Fullest" (Mascot Books, 2022), a collection of 68 articles published over five years revealing why gratitude is the foundation of self-growth; and "Self Care with Ted and Friends" (Mascot Books, 2022), a children's book.

**Kate Pena, B.B.A. '14**, has been promoted to a new position of senior manager, brand management at Hilton Honors. In her new role, Pena will help develop the overarching brand

strategy and operationalize global initiatives for the DoubleTree by Hilton and Hilton Grand Vacations brands.

**Rudy A. Rodas, B.B.A. '11**, was recently named the 2021 Hermano of the Year by La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity Inc.

**Miguel Rondon Segura, B.A. '12**, published "The Climate Crisis: A Moderate Approach to the Energy Debate" (Mars Publishing, 2021), the only book written by a millennial who works in oil and gas arguing for moderation.

**Courtney Coyne Simchak, Ed.D. '18**, has been appointed assistant head of school for student and academic affairs at Beauvoir, the National Cathedral Elementary School.

**Chloe Sorvino, B.A. '15**, will publish later this year the book, "Raw Deal: Hidden Corruption, Corporate Greed, and the Fight for the Future of Meat" (Simon & Schuster, 2022), an exposé of the U.S. meat industry, the failures of the country's food system and the growing disappointment of alternative meat producers.

**Geovanny Vicente-Romero, M.P.S. '19**, was recently recognized for his column on CNN en Español, which was named "Political Column of the Year" by the Napolitan Victory Awards. Vicente-Romero serves as an associate professor at Columbia University's School of Professional Studies and was named chief communications officer for the Inter-American Institute on Justice and Sustainability, an international organization based in Washington, D.C.

**Bri Whitfield, B.S. '18**, is one of 12 recipients of a grant from Generation Hope, a nonprofit that provides parenting students with mentoring and financial and childcare assistance so they can graduate from college.



# IN MEMORIAM



**Artist and alumna Clarice Smith (RIGHT) during a 2013 exhibition of her paintings at the Luther W. Brady Art Gallery. Ms. Smith died on Dec. 9.**

## Clarice Smith, B.A. '76, M.F.A. '79

**An acclaimed painter, philanthropist and mentor, Smith left a legacy to span generations at GW.**

Clarice Smith, B.A. '76, M.F.A. '79, honorary Doctor of Fine Arts '12, was a nationally renowned artist, former GW faculty member and generous philanthropist who, along with her late husband, Robert H. Smith, named the Robert H. and Clarice Smith Hall of Art at GW and, with her family, was an ardent supporter of the university and the D.C. community. Her father-in-law endowed GW's Charles E. Smith Athletic Center, which hosts myriad athletic and other events each year and is at the heart of the university student experience. Smith was named a Monumental Alumna during GW's bicentennial celebration. She died on Dec. 9, 2021, at age 88.

A renowned painter and portraitist, Smith's work was featured in solo exhibitions in prestigious galleries in cities throughout the United States and internationally, including London, Paris, Zurich, Maastricht and Jerusalem. Her museum exhibitions included solo shows at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the New-York Historical Society and the Kreeger Museum in Washington, D.C. One of her paintings, "Big Race" (2001), is in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Smith was a member of the GW faculty from 1980

to 1987, teaching watercolor and portrait painting in the Department of Fine Arts and Art History. In 2012, she received an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from GW.

"I was privileged to have known her as an artist, wise mentor and curatorial collaborator throughout my GW career," said Lenore D. Miller, M.F.A. '72, who retired as GW's director of university art galleries and chief curator in 2020. "She was a remarkable traditional painter whose training at GW enabled her to capture the pure joy she experienced in the visual world. I will be forever grateful to Clarice for sharing her grace, elegance and accomplishments with so many friends and colleagues."

Smith was best known in the art world as a traditional painter, trained through life drawing and works in oil. Her works include portraits, florals, landscapes, still lifes and scenes of horses and sport. She expanded her artistic endeavors to include working with stained glass and was commissioned by the New-York Historical Society to create a stained glass window for an oculus in its Grand Hall. Recently, she added book illustrator to her list of credits, working with her son David Bruce Smith, B.A. '79, a former member of GW's Board of Trustees, on a well-received

series of historical books for children.

Smith cited inspiration from painters like James McNeil Whistler, Edouard Manet and John Singer Sargent, and many of her compositions depicted the people and places around her. "I paint the scenes of my life," she told "GW Today" in 2013 at the opening of her "Clarice Smith: Captured Moments" exhibition at the Luther W. Brady Art Gallery. "I'm not interested in just painting a pretty flower—I want to invoke a memory or a feeling."

In addition to naming the Smith Hall of Art, Smith and her family have been generous benefactors to GW and other institutions. Their support spanned numerous areas of the university, including student aid, arts-related initiatives, and Jewish academic and cultural programs as well as the Charles E. Smith Athletic Center.

The family's connections span several generations at GW. In addition to her son David Bruce Smith, her late son Steven Craig Smith, B.B.A. '79, and her granddaughter Alexandra M. Lipp, B.A. '15, are both GW alumni. Smith's sister-in-law Arlene R. Kogod, whose husband is Robert P. Kogod, also attended GW.

"Clarice's passing is a huge loss for the entire D.C.-area community," said Donna Arbide, GW's vice president for development and alumni relations. "The family has an incredible legacy of giving and leadership in D.C. that spans generations, and she will be greatly missed at GW."



## Harry Reid, J.D. '64

**The former Senate majority leader devoted his life to public service.**

Harry Reid, who served as Senate majority leader from 2007 to 2015 and had a long relationship with George Washington University, died Dec. 28, 2021. He was 82.

Reid, who earned his J.D. from GW Law in 1964 and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws in 2005, was also named a GW Monumental Alumnus during GW's bicentennial celebration for his leadership skills that took him from being a city attorney in Henderson, Nevada, to Washington, D.C., where he served as a leader in the Senate through the George W. Bush and the Barack Obama administrations. Reid also was elected to the Nevada State Assembly, as Nevada's lieutenant governor and to the U.S. House of Representatives.

"Senator Reid recognized the great power of using education and knowledge to improve the lives of others," former GW President Thomas LeBlanc said. "Throughout his extraordinary career in public service, Senator Reid demonstrated the strong work ethic and political and legal convictions of a leader committed to his constituents and the future of our country. We are honored to consider him among our most distinguished alumni."

Reid, a Democrat, was an advocate of land conservation, especially for his home state of Nevada. He received a lifetime achievement award from the League of Conservation Voters. The Conservation Lands Foundation recognized him for "historic contributions to conservation."

He played a key role in gaining Senate passage of Obama's most important pieces of legislation: the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Dodd-Frank Act and the Affordable Care Act.

The former Senate leader was known as a tough negotiator who was a master of the Senate's sometimes arcane rules of operation. He liked to describe himself as "more of a dancer than a fighter."

Reid was elected to the Senate in 1986. He served as Senate minority leader from 2005 to 2006 and 2015 through 2016. In all, he was the leader of Senate Democrats for 12 years.

In a 2005 interview with "GW Law Magazine," Reid said he hadn't set out to become a leader in national politics. "I'd love to give you some great philosophical reason about why I entered public service, but the fact is that I had no political aspirations," he said.

The son of a miner, Reid was raised in the small town of Searchlight, Nevada, in a cabin without indoor plumbing and began his education in a two-room schoolhouse. He moved with his wife, Landra, and a young child to Washington, D.C., in 1961 to attend GW Law. While there, Reid worked

nights as a Capitol police officer to support his family.

"The GW Law community mourns the passing of Senator Reid. He was a hard-working and determined law student who served six days per week as an officer with the U.S. Capitol Police while studying law full time to earn his J.D.," said GW Law Dean Dayna Bowen Matthew. "He bore the unmistakable hallmark of a GW Law graduate who used the education he received from the oldest law school in Washington, D.C., to help reshape a nation."

Reid spoke to GW Law graduates in 2005, telling the students they were fortunate to have the benefits of a superior education from one of the world's finest law schools. He advised the graduates to "each use your education to stand for the rule of law. Play the game hard, but play by the rules. If the game goes against you, work harder, train harder and play again."

"And whatever you do, don't quit."

“  
And  
whatever  
you do,  
don't quit.”

**HARRY REID, former Senate majority leader, advising GW Law students.**



## REMEMBERING

**Mars M. Adkins, M.A. '65 (May 11, 2022, 91)**, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps, served as one of the earliest engineer advisers to the Vietnamese Marine Brigade during the Vietnam War. His efforts starting in 1965 were instrumental in developing the Vietnamese Marines, and he received numerous awards and citations for his service in Vietnam, including the Bronze Star for his role in five major combat operations. A true warrior poet, while serving in the field in Vietnam, Adkins found solace in writing his thesis for his M.A. in governmental administration from GW. After retiring from the military, Adkins went on to a second career in the private sector, spending 15 years in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, as engineer facilities manager with the Arabian American Oil Company, now known as Saudi ARAMCO. Adkins is survived by his wife, three daughters and four grandchildren.

**Saul Stuart Gelter, LL.M. '72 (Oct. 23, 2021, 82)**, served as an independent attorney, U.S. diplomat and consultant specializing in

international affairs during his 50-year career. He was a member of the D.C. Bar Association and was accredited to the Board of Immigration Appeals. Gelter was also fluent in Portuguese, a professor of English and an accomplished foreign-language translator. He worked for Voice of America, the United States Information Agency and at the American Embassy in Brasilia, among others. His overseas assignments included Brazil, Cuba and the former Soviet Union. Gelter was a 33rd-degree Mason and an ardent biblical scholar and educator. He is survived by his wife, three children, four grandchildren and brother.

**Warren Gould, A.A. '50, B.A. '51, M.A. '55 (April 11, 2022, 93)**, dedicated his career to raising funds for prominent nonprofit institutions across the United States. He was the former president of the American Alumni Council, now known as the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. He also established seven endowments for education and served in several capacities at GW in the 1950s and 1960s, including as director of alumni relations, associate director

of development and vice president of development. Gould's wife, Catherine Gould, died in 2002, and his son, Jim Gould, passed away in 2019.

**David Lloyd Hooker, B.A. '88, M.S. '07, (May 12, 2020, 55)**, was a well-respected software engineer for the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, D.C. He also was the president of his own company, Mountain View Software Inc. Hooker was a talented and self-taught artist who also enjoyed cooking, chess, philosophy and literature. He is survived by his parents and brother as well as aunts, uncles and many cousins. A celebration of his life was held May 28 at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston.

**Sandy Schreiber Jousse, B.A. '98 (Oct. 27, 2021, 46)**, fought a two-year battle against glioblastoma, an aggressive brain cancer. She lived her life every day according to the following mantra: "Positive attitudes only—negativity is not welcome here!" While at GW, she was an active and well-loved member in one of the first classes of the Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity. She

relocated to Armonk, N.Y., with her husband, Jerome (whom she met while at GW), and began a successful 15-year career with Citi, during which she touched the lives of many colleagues and friends. She passed away peacefully with her husband and two sons, Cyrille and Severin, at her side. A ceremony celebrating her life, held in November, brought friends and family together from around the world.

**James Loudermilk II, Applied Science in Communications Engineering '79, (Feb. 26, 2022, 74)**, was an expert in the field of biometrics, holding many positions within the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the private sector, including chief engineer and deputy program manager for development of the Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System. A retired lieutenant colonel of the U.S. Army Reserve and an active and longtime Scottish Rite Mason (who achieved the distinction of a 33-degree wise master), he was a loving husband and devoted father of three. ☐

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

GW's multimedia team is working on a "study spots and memories" feature, and we'd love to hear from YOU.

What were your favorite study spots and memories? Maybe it was a late night in Gelman or a picture-perfect day of reading on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Share your story with us!



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