

2022 Faculty Convocation

Sept. 15, 2022

Thank you, Linda, for that very kind introduction, and good afternoon, everyone. I am thrilled that we are able to host this special event in person this year. It has been wonderful to mingle around and talk with so many of you “in real life,” instead of on a Zoom screen. It’s a whole different level of energy and excitement, and something I will never get tired of or take for granted.

I couldn’t agree more with Linda’s endorsement and praise for Baruch’s faculty. A dynamic community of scholar-educators is essential to our mission—you motivate and elevate one another, and support and challenge our students. By collaborating and working together, you allow us to reinforce our core academic strengths while expanding our knowledge and expertise in high-impact, interdisciplinary areas that give our students an edge when they go out into the world. I am a firm believer that the faculty is the intellectual core of the institution, and cultivating that intellectual vibrancy is key for our institutional health.

In that spirit, it is my honor to recognize the outstanding achievements of the 2022 Presidential Excellence Award recipients for teaching, service, and scholarship. The honorees were nominated by their peers to celebrate their dedication to their careers.

We begin with the **Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Scholarship**, which goes to **Deborah Balk**, Professor in the Austin W. Marxe School of Public and International Affairs and Director of the CUNY Climate Institute for Demographic Research.

Deborah Balk is widely recognized for her groundbreaking work that examines the impact of climate change on rapidly growing urban populations in low-lying coastal areas. Collaborating frequently with graduate students and junior scholars, Deborah’s research includes questions surrounding urbanization, climate, and COVID.

In the last three years, she has published more than 21 papers—18 in peer-reviewed outlets—and four data sets. Also during this period, Professor Balk has been awarded five external grants totaling over \$1 million. In addition to her renowned scholarship, Deborah is engaged in public professional service and is currently serving on the New York City Panel on Climate Change, the New York State Climate Assessment, the

Society and Economy Working Group, and the Census Scientific Advisory Committee of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Congratulations, Deborah, on earning this year's **Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Scholarship**.

It is now my honor to introduce **Lisa Blankenship**, Associate Professor in the Department of English at the George and Mildred Weissman School of Arts and Sciences. Professor Blankenship has earned the **Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Service**.

For the past seven years, Lisa Blankenship has served as Director of First-Year Writing, a role that oversees Writing I and Writing II, which comprise a significant portion of the General Education program for Baruch. She plans for more than 200 sections a year and serves an annual enrollment of more than 4,000 students.

Her numerous innovations have greatly benefitted the program. She developed an online resource guide for faculty called "A Teacher's Guide to First-Year Writing," and she launched and continuously revises *Join the Conversation*, a rhetoric and common reader with essays by Baruch faculty and students. Lisa is active in Writing Across the Curriculum and on the CUNY Writing Discipline Council. Nationally, she serves as Associate Editor for the *Journal of Basic Writing*. During the remote-learning era of the pandemic, she worked with instructors on adopting digital platforms that supported student engagement and writing progress.

Congratulations, Lisa, on earning the **Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Service**.

I am now pleased to introduce **Hagop Sarkissian**, Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the Weissman School, who has earned the **Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Teaching (Full-time)**.

A passionate philosopher, Professor Sarkissian has tailored his pedagogical approach to suit Baruch students and meet their needs. Within his undergraduate courses in Chinese philosophy, experimental philosophy, and philosophy of religion, Hagop animates the class with student-centered learning opportunities and develops

assignments and syllabi that stimulate students' philosophical imaginations and promote shared ownership of the course.

Professor Sarkissian is an innate innovator who developed an online asynchronous course that was so successful and popular with students during the pandemic, it became a model for other courses around the College. To share this important work, he launched a website that details how to build a top-notch asynchronous course. Doing so came naturally to him, as he has long integrated technology in his courses. He is even credited as the first faculty member in all of CUNY to use Microsoft Teams in a classroom. In this way, Hagop helps our students develop hands-on skills that will benefit them in other classes and in the real world.

Congratulations, Professor Sarkissian, for earning **Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Teaching (Full-time)**.

Our honoree for the **Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Teaching (Adjunct)**, is **Heather Schultz Gittens**, adjunct lecturer in the Department of Communication Studies at the Weissman School.

A Baruch alumnus, Heather Gittens has a unique awareness of our students' sense of belonging in the college classroom environment, and how some feel a sense of dis-belonging in a range of ways. Teaching primarily first- and second-year students, Lecturer Gittens connects with them by sharing her own experiences as a Baruch undergraduate and graduate student, as well as her career path after graduation. She reinforces how this journey is one they, too, can achieve. She gains students' trust and helps them understand their larger place in an academic setting and future professional environment.

Heather is also a ready innovator who understands teaching as an ever-evolving practice, one that she actively contributes to and propels forward. Motivated by this understanding, she has advanced her own pedagogy through the Center for Teaching and Learning and departmental mentorship opportunities.

Heather Schultz Gittens, congratulations on earning the **Presidential Excellence Award for Distinguished Teaching (Adjunct)**.

Linda, back over to you!

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