

BUFFALO STATE UNIVERSITY

# SCHOOL of ARTS and SCIENCES

Spring 2026

## LETTER from the DEAN



### DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES,

Welcome to our latest School of Arts and Sciences newsletter. This issue is filled with the kind of news that reminds me why I am so proud to serve this community—stories of faculty excellence, student achievement, and the meaningful connections we are building both on campus and beyond.

I am pleased to congratulate the faculty members who received well-deserved promotions this year. Their dedication to teaching, scholarship, and service exemplifies the best of what our school has to offer. Equally exciting is the recognition our students continue to earn. The 2026 undergraduate President's Medal recipients and SUNY Chancellor's Award nominees have distinguished themselves across disciplines, and we celebrate each of them.

This newsletter covers events that demonstrate how the energy in our school extends well beyond the classroom. Our Africana Studies program partnered with the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor for a powerful community event that deepened ties between campus and one of Buffalo's most historically significant cultural institutions. On a different creative stage, a senior Art and Design student's short film was selected for an international animation festival—an extraordinary honor that speaks to the talent being cultivated right here by our faculty. Faculty, staff, and students from several of our departments, including Theater and Music, contributed to the production of DREAMGIRLS, which 30 Theater students attended at Buffalo's annual Curtain Up! celebration. Buffalo State's Mock Trial Team also made us proud, bringing home the spirit award at their competition and demonstrating the kind of teamwork and commitment that defines Buffalo State students.

We also hosted events on campus that speak to our commitment to recruitment and retention. The Geosciences Department hosted an alumni networking event, reconnecting graduates with one another and with current students. These relationships are invaluable, and we look forward to deepening them. Finally, I am excited about the steps we are taking to strengthen undergraduate recruitment in programs like Television and Film Arts—ensuring that talented students know about the exceptional opportunities waiting for them here.

Thank you for your continued support of the School of Arts and Sciences.

Sincerely,  
Kelly M. Frothingham, Ph.D.  
Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences



### ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

Anthropology  
Art and Design  
Art Conservation  
Biology  
Chemistry  
Communication  
English  
Geosciences  
Government, Planning, and  
Philosophy  
History and Social Studies  
Education  
Mathematics  
Modern and Classical  
Languages  
Music  
Physics  
Psychology  
Sociology  
Theater

### CENTERS AND INTERDISCIPLINARY UNITS

Africana Studies  
Arts and Letters Program  
Great Lakes Center  
Television and Film Arts  
Women, Gender, and  
Sexuality Studies



**BUFFALO STATE**  
The State University of New York



## FACULTY PROMOTIONS

The School of Arts and Sciences proudly recognizes the following faculty members on their recent promotions. These achievements reflect excellence in teaching, scholarship, creative activity, and service to the university and broader community.

Naila A C Catilo, M.A.,  
*Associate Professor, Theater*

Victoria J. Furby, Ph.D.,  
*Professor, Music*

Jeffrey N. Hirschberg, M.A.,  
*Professor, Television and Film Arts*

Mehwish Sarwari, Ph.D.,  
*Associate Professor, Government,  
Planning and Philosophy*

Dana F. Serure, Ed.D.,  
*Associate Professor, History and Social  
Studies Education*

John R. Torrey, Ph.D.,  
*Associate Professor, Government,  
Planning & Philosophy*

Mark K. Warford, Ph.D.,  
*Professor, Modern and Classical  
Languages*

Kevin K. Williams, Ph.D.,  
*Professor, Geosciences*

*We congratulate these faculty members on this significant milestone in their academic careers and thank them for their continued dedication to our students and disciplines.*

### 2026 UNDERGRADUATE PRESIDENT'S MEDAL AND SUNY CHANCELLOR'S AWARD

The School of Arts and Sciences proudly recognizes the following students for their outstanding academic achievement and leadership:

#### Undergraduate President's Medal Recipient

Asher Freudenhammer-Glass,  
*Dual Major, B.A. in Art and Art History;  
Minor in Chemistry*

#### SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence

Joyce Assaf, *B.A. in Biology*  
Madison Sierra, *B.A. in Political Science*

*These honors reflect the exceptional scholarship, commitment, and impact of our students across disciplines.*



[AFRICANA STUDIES]

## “ANANSI AND THE SECRETS OF BLACK WELL-BEING” BRINGS CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER

On November 5, 2025, the Africana Studies Interdisciplinary Unit partnered with the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor (MSAAHC) to host “Anansi and the Secrets of Black Well-Being” at the Heritage Corridor Visitors Center in downtown Buffalo.

The event developed from Dr. Marcus Watson’s Black psychology course, AAS 343: Why Africa Matters, in which students created original Anansi stories inspired by the Akan storytelling tradition of Ghana. Traditionally, Anansi tales use the trickster spider to pass moral wisdom from elders to youth. Students reimagined these stories to reflect contemporary challenges and explore the theme of Black self-care.

The program alternated between student story recitations and panel discussions led by students, faculty, MSAAHC staff, and community members. Guiding questions focused on what Black well-being means, barriers to collective healing, and how institutions and communities can partner more effectively.

The event served a threefold purpose: to strengthen mutually beneficial relationships between the MSAAHC and Buffalo State’s Africana Studies Interdisciplinary Unit; to deepen connections with the broader Buffalo community; and to bring the MSAAHC, and by extension Buffalo’s East Side, into closer partnership with the university. Faculty, students, and community leaders engaged in a robust and purposeful discussion centered on culture, wellness, and collaboration.



Photo: RaeAnna Gott

“  
Students reimagined  
these stories to reflect  
contemporary challenges  
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Black self-care.  
”

[ART AND DESIGN]

## STUDENT FILM SELECTED FOR INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL

**Rebecca Hanson Czerny**, a senior art and design major with a concentration in graphic design, earned international recognition when her short film *Headspace* was selected for screening at the Suzanne Animation Festival during the annual Blender Conference in Amsterdam. Her work was one of just 20 films accepted worldwide and was screened before hundreds of industry professionals and thousands of online viewers.

Associate Professor Brent Patterson encouraged Hanson Czerny to submit the project, which she created in DES 379: Animation Using Blender. Blender is the free, open-source 3D modeling and animation software widely used across the creative industries.

“This isn’t a student festival,” Patterson noted. “She was competing against industry professionals.”

Patterson has been teaching Blender for two decades, making Buffalo State one of the few institutions in North America where students gain deep experience with the software. Used in major films and award-winning animation, Blender gives students access to industry-level tools without financial barriers.

Hanson Czerny credits the program for expanding her creative and technical skills. “Knowing motion design and animation is a must-have skill,” she said. “Blender is a powerful tool where the possibilities for creativity are endless.”

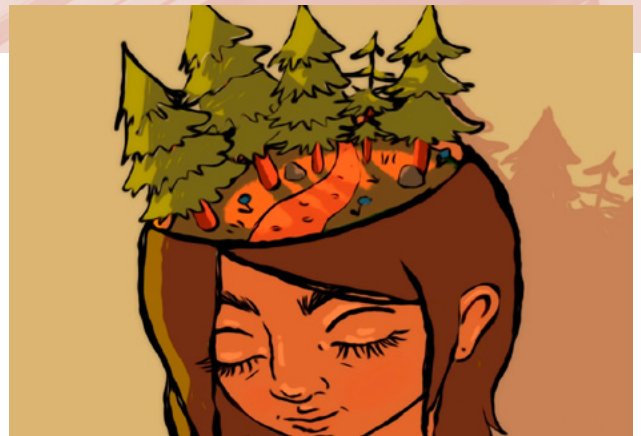
## MILLER FEATURED IN LUXURY ABODE MAGAZINE



Joseph A. Miller, *After II*, 2017, Oil over acrylic on paper attached to panel, 12.75 x 14.75 in.

Associate Professor Joseph A. Miller was recently featured in *Luxury Abode* magazine for his figurative painting, *After II*. The article highlights Miller’s ability to infuse memory, light, and psychological depth into the human form.

Miller, who has taught at Buffalo State since 1997, is recognized nationally and internationally for his award-winning work and continued contributions to figurative painting.



## O’LEARY-SOUDANT SPEAKS AT BUFFALO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL

Assistant Professor Shasti O’Leary-Soudant was invited to present “Every Rodeo Is My First Rodeo” at the 2025 Buffalo Humanities Festival, contributing to a citywide dialogue on art, identity, and cultural expression.

## MAWER TO PUBLISH CHAPTER AND SECURES NIH CONTRACT

Assistant Professor David Mawer’s textbook chapter proposal was accepted for publication in *Critical Thinking Through Interdisciplinary Digital Pedagogies*, featuring his research on teaching programming in media arts classrooms. He also received a consulting contract for graphic design and identity work with the National Cancer Institute under the National Institutes of Health.

## TOLEDANO’S WORK ACQUIRED BY EVERSON MUSEUM



The Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse acquired Associate Professor Colleen Toledano’s ceramic work, *Ripe*, which was on view in the exhibition “Nancy Friedemann-Sánchez: Dream Map and Cornucopia” until October 19, 2025.

## [CHEMISTRY]

## ALUMNI PUBLISH IN AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL



Two Buffalo State chemistry alumni, Carleigh Cimmerer, B.S. '20, M.S. '22, and Daniel Weglarski, M.S. '23, recently published a research article as co-first authors in *Langmuir*, a journal of the American Chemical Society. The project began as Cimmerer's undergraduate summer research at Buffalo State and was completed through both students' master's thesis work under the mentorship of Dr. Jin Heo and Dr. Sujit Suwal, who served as faculty co-corresponding authors on the publication. Both alumni are now professionally employed, with Cimmerer at the Monroe County Medical Examiner's Office and Weglarski at Curia Global, a pharmaceutical company in Albany.

## [ENGLISH]

## MOCK TRIAL TEAM EARNS SPIRIT AWARD

The Buffalo State Mock Trial Team returned from the 14th annual Friar Faceoff Tournament at St. Bonaventure University with the tournament's Spirit Award, recognizing the team that best exemplifies the ideals of civility, justice, and fair play. The honor reflects the team's commitment to strong legal argumentation and professionalism in competition.

Composed entirely of first-time competitors, the team also earned individual distinctions. Co-captain Julia Lynch, a sophomore television and film arts major, received an Outstanding Witness award, and Michael Helfrich, a junior economics major, earned an Outstanding Attorney award. The team won a ballot against St. Bonaventure, tied SUNY Fredonia, and narrowly lost by just two points to eventual champion University at Buffalo.

"The work that the team put into their practice throughout the semester has been incredible," said David Ben-Merre, professor of English and faculty advisor. "Across all four trials, they shined."

Mock Trial teams compete through the American Mock Trial Association (AMTA), which includes more than 700 teams nationwide. Students prepare extensively, working through more than 200 pages of case materials and arguing simulated trials based on the Federal Rules of Evidence before panels of practicing attorneys and judges. This year's fictional case involved a criminal charge stemming from a reality television competition.

Lynch reflected on the experience: "The team has learned so much from this competition, and we're all ready to take the reins and become better."

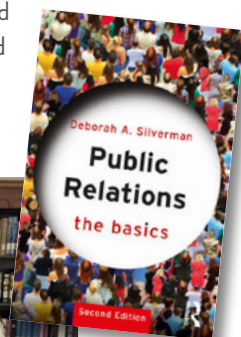
The successful weekend highlighted the students' preparation, resilience, and leadership in the courtroom. Buffalo State also competed in an AMTA Regional Tournament during the spring 2026 season as part of the national competition pathway.



## [COMMUNICATION]

## SILVERMAN PUBLISHES THIRD BOOK WITH ROUTLEDGE

Chair and Professor Deborah Silverman has published the second edition of *Public Relations: The Basics with Routledge*, marking her third book with the publisher. Designed for Principles of Public Relations courses, high school students, and general readers, the text provides an accessible introduction to the field. She is currently working on her fourth book with Routledge, the eighth edition of *Strategic Planning for Public Relations*. In addition, Silverman will serve in 2026 and 2027 as co-chair, representing public relations educators, of the national Commission on Public Relations Education, which develops research-based recommendations for undergraduate and graduate public relations curricula in the United States and globally.



[GEOSCIENCES]

## ALUMNI-STUDENT NETWORKING EVENT STRENGTHENS CAREER CONNECTIONS

On December 1, 2025, the Geosciences Department hosted its annual Alumni-Student Networking event in the Science and Mathematics Complex atrium. Twenty-eight alumni returned to campus to share their professional experiences with current students in earth sciences, geography, and geology.

Represented fields included national, state, and local government; energy-sector science and engineering; professional geology and environmental services; secondary science education; and graduate study in geology and science education.

The event continues to provide meaningful connections between past and present Bengals. Several students have already secured paid internships through relationships formed during the networking session. The department looks forward to hosting the next event in November 2026, with alumni also participating in seminars and USG club programs throughout the year.

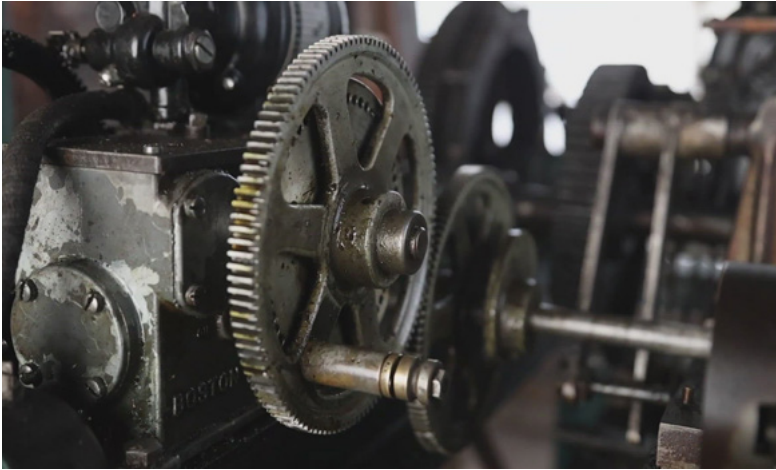
Geosciences alumni are also inspiring the broader Buffalo State community. Samantha Kaufman '25, who earned her B.S. in earth sciences in May and is now pursuing her master's degree at Buffalo



State, addressed the incoming Class of 2029 at First-Year Convocation. Reflecting on her own journey, she shared, "Somewhere along the way, I realized that the most important parts of my college experience weren't always the things I had planned for—they were the unexpected moments where I pushed myself out of my comfort zone." Kaufman credited her involvement in the Astronomy and Geology Club and field experiences across multiple states for shaping her confidence, leadership, and lasting friendships.



Samantha Kaufman, '25, welcomed the Class of 2029 at First-Year Convocation.



[HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION]

## EDERER IN THE NEWS

Associate Professor Martin Ederer was recently featured in local news for his longtime stewardship of the historic clocks at Buffalo’s Corpus Christi Church. For more than two decades, Ederer has manually adjusted the church’s late-1940s electric tower clocks for daylight saving time—climbing both towers each season to ensure they remain perfectly synchronized.

For Ederer, the work is about more than mechanics. “It’s our history. It’s our heritage,” he noted in the interview. By keeping the clocks and bells functioning, he helps preserve a visible and living piece of Buffalo’s East Side history.

[PSYCHOLOGY]

## HENNESSY FEATURED ON BBC RADIO

Chair and Professor Dwight Hennessy was featured on the BBC Radio program *All in the Mind*, discussing driving behavior and psychological research.



[MATHEMATICS]

## CUSHMAN RECEIVES DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Chair and Associate Professor Jane Cushman was honored with the Distinguished Service Award from the Association of Mathematics Teachers of New York State.



## MCMILLEN TO BE INDUCTED INTO HALL OF FAME

Professor Susan McMillen was inducted into the Association of Mathematics Teachers of New York State Hall of Fame at its annual conference.

[TELEVISION AND FILM ARTS]

# ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT AND INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT FUEL PROGRAM MOMENTUM

The television and film arts (TFA) program continues to strengthen recruitment and visibility through alumni engagement, student experiences, and industry recognition.

Professor Jeffrey Hirschberg, in collaboration with Mark Norris of the Marketing and Communications Office, has expanded alumni outreach by featuring graduates working across the entertainment industry on the TFA website. The growing alumni showcase highlights career pathways for current and prospective students and serves as an ongoing recruitment resource.

Among recent alumni achievements, Robin Lazzara, '18, program manager of Buffalo State's Post Production Diversity Initiative (PPDI), was named the New York State Small Business

Development Center's Young Entrepreneur of the Year, one of just 14 entrepreneurs selected statewide from a pool of more than 30,000. Lazzara was recognized for her production company, Glow Video LLC, which she launched with support from the Buffalo State Small Business Development Center. In 2020, she co-founded the Film Neighbor Network, an initiative created to diversify the film workforce in Western New York by making education in industry practices free and easily accessible. Through her leadership of PPDI, Lazzara continues to broaden inclusive production pathways.



## OTHER ALUMNI CONTINUE TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT INDUSTRY IMPACT:

**Taylor Stuewe, '16,**

began her career through TFA's Semester in New York internship program and went on to work for Josh Gad's Angry Child Productions, where she rose to creative



executive and helped spearhead development in film and television. She executive produced Gad's YouTube series Reunited Apart, which raised more than \$2 million for charity, and most recently served as associate producer on *Spaceballs 2*, slated for release in 2027.

**Michael Esposito, '14,** an award-winning senior writer/producer at Paramount, oversees creative for Nickelodeon's brand voice and leads multimillion-dollar campaigns across television, digital, and theatrical platforms. His work includes writing and directing three *SpongeBob SquarePants* specials.



Experiential learning remains central to the program's success. This past fall, Hirschberg led 20 students on TFA's 16th annual trip to the Toronto International Film Festival, providing direct exposure to the industry and reinforcing one of the program's strongest recruitment and retention initiatives.

With early action interest strong and admissions increasing for fall 2026, TFA's emphasis on alumni success, professional preparation, and real-world experience continues to position students for competitive creative careers.

Additional alumni stories and career highlights can be found on the TFA website at [buffalostate.edu/programs/television-and-film-arts](https://buffalostate.edu/programs/television-and-film-arts).

[THEATER]

## FACULTY AND STUDENTS SHINE AT CURTAIN UP!

This past fall, Professor Carol Beckley brought 30 theater students to Buffalo's annual *Curtain Up!* celebration to attend *Dreamgirls*, a co-production between Shea's Performing Arts Center and AnsariSaxon Productions.

Co-founded by Buffalo State faculty members Naila Ansari Carbonell Catilo, associate professor of theater and Africana Studies, and Karen Saxon '03, lecturer of music, AnsariSaxon Productions brought the iconic musical to a sold-out audience at the newly renovated Shea's 710 Theatre.

Inspired by Motown and R&B legends of the 1960s and 1970s, *Dreamgirls* follows the Dreamettes as they navigate ambition,

betrayal, joy, and liberation. The production showcased the depth of Buffalo State talent,

with numerous faculty and staff members, alumni, current students, and community members contributing onstage and behind the scenes.

"*Dreamgirls* is not only an iconic musical—it is an extremely demanding show," said Ansari Carbonell Catilo. "Our faculty, staff, alums, and students, rose to that challenge, showing how Buffalo State's training translates into excellence on stage."



"We are grateful to our Buffalo State community for supporting this journey," Saxon added, "and proud that so many people were able to witness the brilliance, resilience, and artistry that define Buffalo State."

The collaboration highlights the Theater Department's strong ties to Buffalo's professional arts community and provides students with valuable exposure to high-level production work.



Buffalo State theater students attended *Curtain Up!* and *Dreamgirls* at Shea's Performing Arts Center in Buffalo.

[DEAN'S OFFICE]

## DEAN'S STUDENT COUNCIL STUDENT SUPPORT INITIATIVES

The School of Arts and Sciences Dean's Student Council continues to support students through service initiatives and community engagement across the school.

In collaboration with the Dean's Office, the council is helping promote the SAS Care Closet, an initiative developed by Associate Dean Ceesay. Located in the Dean's Office, the Care Closet provides professional attire and hygiene products for students preparing for interviews, internships, student teaching, and other academic- or career-related opportunities. Students are welcome to visit the office and browse the available items.

The council also has supported campus service efforts, including participation in a food drive for Milligan's Food Pantry, which saw strong involvement from students across the school and contributed to the university's broader effort to address food insecurity.

Looking ahead, the Dean's Student Council will host its End-of-Year Picnic on May 7 from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in front of Rockwell Hall. This casual, come-and-go event celebrates SAS students and their hard work throughout the 2025-2026 academic year, offering a chance to relax before finals, connect with classmates and faculty, and enjoy snacks, games, a basket raffle, and student performances.



### CONTACT US:

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