

"Juno was the wife of Jupiter and Queen of the Gods. Iris, The Goddess of the Rainbow, was her attendant and messenger." – Thomas Bulfinch



IRIS



**HAPPENINGS IN THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
AT CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY**

IMPORTANT DATES & EVENTS!

- **June 17 5-7pm** - *Scholars for Life*: The 43rd Infantry Division in WW II (Hilltop Cafe)
- **June 19** - Juneteenth, Campus Closed & No Classes
- **June 23 5-7pm** - Opening Reception of the Japan Foundation's Special Traveling Exhibit "Yokai Parade: Supernatural Monsters from Japan" (second floor of Elihu Burritt Library)

FAREWELL FROM THE DEAN'S DESK

Dr. Gilbert Gigliotti

At the start of his 1976 recording, "Summer, Highland Falls," Billy Joel sings:

They say that these are not the best of times,
but they're the only times I've ever known.
And I believe there is a time for meditation
In cathedrals of our own.

At Central, that time and that cathedral is Spring Commencement on Arute Field (my favorite single event of the academic year). It's the time to look back at the accomplishments of the graduates, not to mention their faculty and families, since first joining the Central family. It's a time of joy and nostalgia, of eagerness and apprehension, of sadness and hope, of traditional regalia and often wackily-personalized caps.

We will inevitably miss those moving on but, almost immediately, welcome a new wave of first-year and transfer students keen to begin their journeys with us. Ah, the circle of (academic) life!

To our new alumni, please stay in touch. We look forward to learning where your path leads. Remember, as Joel sings in the second verse, "we are always what our situations hand us," but, fear not, your hard work and focus at Central has prepared you for almost anything. Do well, and do good!

Finally, it's been an honor serving as the interim dean of CLASS this past year. Thanks to all who made the work a little lighter. Please know that I'll not be far away: back in the classroom teaching early American literature and Latin or back in my English Department office, Willard 401-29. Come visit!



Photo credit: Jaclyn Dahn



INTERESTED IN GIVING TO CLASS?

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Your donations support students' attendance to various conferences and events, fund scholarships, and supports classroom equipment needs. We are grateful for your support!

2026 STUDENT AWARD RECIPIENTS!

Henry Barnard Distinguished Student Awards:

Aaliyah Brown, B.A. Criminology

Aaliyah Brown made a conscious decision to make the most of her college experience, and her academic journey proves her dedication to this goal. She started by joining the Black Student Union and getting elected as a Community Engagement Coordinator and later as the President. These roles allowed her to form connections with other organizations and cultivate her leadership skills by providing a safe space for other students. She worked with the Office of New Student Programs as an Orientation Leader, joined the First-Year Experience program as a Peer Mentor, and served as a Camp Counselor for Camp Central. Her commitment extends off campus under her roles as a Corps Member for the AmeriCorps Jumpstart Program, volunteer work for United Way's Read Across America event, and position as an Intern for the Connecticut Judicial Branch in the Hartford Juvenile Residential Services. With a 3.70 GPA and as a member of the Zeta Kappa Criminal Justice Honor Society, she looks forward to defending her master's thesis next year.

Gabriel Garcia, B.A. Philosophy & Physics

Throughout his academic journey, Gabe Garcia acquired many achievements. He earned a 3.89 GPA and joined an undergraduate research team that demanded rigorous work but cumulated into multiple presentations at meetings like American Physical Society and American Association for the Advancement of Science among others. He cites his experience in the STORM Research Experience for Undergraduates as informative as it introduced him to the field of metrology. He balanced these research initiatives with a commitment to Central. He served as the Vice President in the Physics and Philosophy clubs and as the treasurer to both the Society of Mathematics and Table Tennis Club. He helped facilitate an active community in these clubs and planned several events like the Breast Cancer Awareness fundraiser, "Physics Day," Integration Bee, and more. He plans to continue his studies in atmospheric physics as well as any other subfields that interest him.

Presidential Citation Award for Student Success:

Aaliyah Brown, B.A. Criminology

In addition to her academic pursuits, Aaliyah Brown dedicated her time at Central helping people on- and off-campus. She provided support to first- and second-year students by coaching them on academic tips and goal setting as a Peer Mentor for Success Central. Aaliyah also volunteered in a fourth-grade classroom as part of United Way's Read Across America and was a counselor for students at Camp Central. She cultivated leadership skills first as Community Engagement Coordinator and then as President of Central's Black Student Union where she participated in outreach activities and collaborated with various organizations. Aaliyah graduates as a member of the Zeta Kappa Criminal Justice Honor Society and continues her Central journey this fall in the Accelerate Central Criminal Justice program working toward her master's degree.

Montgomery Rios, B.A. Strategic Communication

In a recommendation, Montgomery is described as a positive influence and committed to uplifting others. Her passion and pride for Central can be seen in everything she does. As the Cheer Captain, she was recognized by her team members for the welcoming personality and upbeat presence as she led them through Nationals on Central's first co-ed team. This passion is also present in her work as an Orientation Leader where she fostered a welcoming atmosphere to help transition new students into Central for three years. She was also one of the first Commuter Assistants where she established programs and initiatives focused towards supporting commuters. In addition to her talent for connecting with students, Montgomery remained committed to her academic journey receiving a 3.87 GPA and making the Dean's List for five years.

Presidential Citation Award for Leadership:

Logan Palardy, B.A. Economics

Logan demonstrates an outstanding commitment to improving the community around him and leading by example. He started by joining the Student Government Association as a Senator and worked his way up to be elected as the Treasurer and President. As the Treasurer, he ran several budgeting information sessions organized several charity events as the President. Logan's work to support the community extends in other areas as well, such as his time as a Resident Assistant, where he held study sessions and LinkedIn workshops for his residents. He made improvements in his work at Campus Recreation where he was promoted to the Area Supervisor of Membership and established a new and more efficient Lost and Found system. Even with his dedication to supporting and building the community, Logan continued to receive high academic marks achieving a 3.90 GPA making the Dean's and President's List.

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

ART & DESIGN: Vivien Schwartz

COMMUNICATION: Austin Beaulieu

CRIMINOLOGY & CRIMINAL JUSTICE: Aaliyah Brown

ECONOMICS: Logan Palardy

ENGLISH: Maryam El Khalfi

GEOGRAPHY, ANTHROPOLOGY, & TOURISM: Adrienne Owen

HISTORY: Elizabeth Carrol

JOURNALISM: Kyle Zarnoch

MUSIC: Ezequiel Zurita

PHILOSOPHY: Gabriel Garcia

POLITICAL SCIENCE: Danielle Colbath

PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE: Emilia Perrone

SOCIOLOGY: Kayla Beaulieu

THEATRE: Rocky Ross

WORLD LANGUAGES, LITERATURES, & CULTURES: Marissa Vicente

CONGRATULATIONS, CENTRAL CLASS OF 2026!



DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT: ART & DESIGN

The **Department of Art & Design** continues its dedicated mission of engaging students with visual language across fine arts, art education, and design. Offering three undergraduate degrees—including a B.A. in Art, a B.A. in Information/Graphic Design, and a B.S. in Art Education—as well as an M.S. in Art Education, the department remains a cornerstone of creative professional preparation. Here are some of the incredible achievements of our faculty, students, and alumni over the past year:

Faculty and Alumni Excellence

Our faculty are not only committed educators but also recognized, practicing artists whose work is showcased locally in Connecticut, as well as both nationally and internationally. This dedication to excellence is mirrored in our remarkable alumni network:

- **Fall 2025 CAEA Conference Highlights:** The 2025 Connecticut Art Educators Association (CAEA) Conference was hosted on the CCSU campus for the first time, featuring a keynote address by our own Professor Craig Frederick.
- **Alumni Accolades:** Three Art Education alumni were highly recognized at the 2025 conference:
 - **Jessica Fallis** was named the *CT Secondary Educator of the Year*.
 - **Ben Cegelka** was named the *CT New Professional Art Educator of the Year*.
 - **Andy Simoes** was awarded the *2025 CAEA Scholarship*.
- **High-Profile Collaborations:** Former M.S. Art Education alumna **Justice Michelle Thomas** was recognized for her significant work as Kara Walker's assistant with her work on a sculpture in the highly successful *Monuments* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The New York Times writes "As part of the group exhibition 'Monuments', the artist took a Stonewall Jackson bronze and transformed it into a radically new, unsettled thing."
- **Local Art Scene:** In May 2026, several former ceramics students participated in the Connecticut Clay Crawl, an event showcasing 14 local pottery studios, including the studio of Professor Emeritus Vicente Garcia.
- **International Art Scene:** In March 2026, three professors brought a series of new personal artworks along with a selection of student artworks for exhibition at the Spiazzi Venezia Gallery in Venice, where CCSU has maintained an exhibition relationship over the past five years. This tradition will continue into spring 2027 offering outstanding exhibition opportunities for select students to show in a gallery that also annually features works for the Venice Biennale.

Celebrating Student Work

The culmination of our current students' hard work took center stage this May:

- The **B.A. Art Capstone Exhibition** filled the CCSU Gallery with stunning student creations that showcased a wide variety of media including ceramics, painting, digital prints, sculpture and video. The exhibition was juried by Lisa Hayes Williams, Curator and Head of Exhibitions at the New Britain Museum of American Art. Dr. Williams chose the work of three students for prize recognition, including First Place winner Audrey Adams whose video work will be exhibited at the NBMAA this summer.
- The **Information/Graphic Design Capstone Exhibition** showcased innovative design solutions in Vance Memorial Hall featuring highlights from student portfolios.
- Our student Tom Zaccheo created a life size paper clay sculpture of a figure placed in front of Maloney Hall with the question "What Will Become of Me?" The work has elicited nearly a hundred student responses to the work and the question on a web site set up for the comments. A recent naming contest provided the sculpture with it's new name, Bonie Jonie. The artwork is designed to disintegrate with time, revealing it's skeletal structure below and challenging students to consider the role of art, education and choices in their futures.

Deepening Community Connections

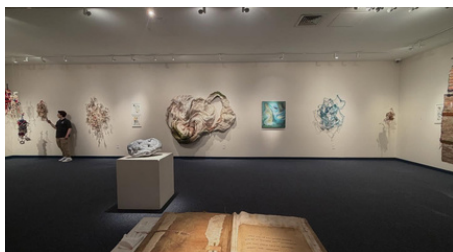
Community outreach remains a vital pillar of the department's curriculum, providing students with invaluable real-world experience:

- **Saturday Arts Workshop:** For 16 weeks this spring, our Art Education students spent their Saturday mornings teaching art to 80 youth (ages 5–18) from New Britain and surrounding areas. The program culminated in a special exhibition of the youth artwork in the CCSU Gallery.
- **Public Art:** Professor Ted Efremoff and his *Art in Community* class have partnered with the New Britain Art Commission to complete a massive, 172-foot mural detailing the history of New Britain.
- **State Partnerships:** Our Design faculty have forged strong community engagement links with Connecticut Technical High Schools (such as Wilcox Technical High School) and have initiated collaborations with the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

Looking Ahead to 2027

As Chair of the Art & Design Department, I have been privileged to work with such dedicated students, artists and art historians, helping to continue building programs that prepare students for professional roles as designers, artists, curators, and teachers. To keep pace with contemporary trends in the visual arts, faculty are continuously developing forward-thinking classes that incorporate new media and technologies such as 3D Printing, Digital Video, and A.I. interfaces. We look forward to welcoming students back in Fall 2026 with an exciting lineup of new programs including a newly incorporated orientation seminar for BA Art students, new courses such as 3D Illustration, Mixed Media and Fibers, and Color Theory and opportunities for exhibitions and internships beyond the CCSU campus at venues such as I-Park in East Haddam, The Hillstead Museum and the New Britain Museum of American Art.

In a world that uses visual communication more than at any point in human history, we strive to serve our students with programs and opportunities that provide them first-hand experience with understanding how visual language works and how best to use those skills in developing their own creativity.



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EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD

FULL TIME FACULTY: DIANA COHEN

"There are moments in life that are so profound that you remember exactly where you were when you received certain news. For me, one of those moments came when I received a call from Dr. Paul Petterson, then Chair of the Department of Political Science, offering me a tenure-track position at Central. At the time, I was serving as a Visiting Professor of Government and Law at Lafayette College. Standing in the hallway outside the room that I was renting in a shared home in Easton, Pennsylvania, I knew that my life was about to change in incredible ways. Seventeen academic years later, I am proud to say that vision has become a reality.

During my time at Central, I have had the joy of teaching a wide range of courses in American Politics. Some of these classes include Introduction to American Government & Politics, Internet and Media Politics, Approaches to Political Science (a 200-level research methods class), Advanced Research Methods (a 400-level offering), and the Politics of Sport. One of my favorite aspects of teaching in my discipline is helping students recognize how politics intersects with their everyday lives. It is not uncommon for students to tell me that they "don't do politics." In reality, we are all political beings living in an increasingly fast-paced political world. My classes aim to create space for students to pause and reflect on their beliefs and sense of self. Part of this process involves examining how power dynamics shape our daily experiences and learning how to navigate these realities while living as authentically as possible.

Receiving the Excellence in Teaching Award is one of the greatest honors of my life. I feel an overwhelming mixture of gratitude, humility, and disbelief. There are so many colleagues on this campus whom I deeply admire, several of them within the Carol A. Ammon College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. To be recognized among such an accomplished group of faculty is profoundly humbling, and I will cherish this honor for years to come.

Looking ahead, I am excited to continue building bridges between Central students and meaningful community engagement opportunities. Connecting teaching with collaborations involving external community partners has been among the most rewarding work of my career. For example, this fall, students in my Advanced Research Methods course will be collaborating with the Connecticut Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB), a state agency that serves Connecticut residents who are legally blind or visually impaired. Students will be assisting BESB with its Vocational Rehabilitation Program Consumer Satisfaction Survey, with the goal of identifying ways to strengthen the program moving forward. Through collaborations such as this, students deepen their learning by better understanding the lived experiences of the individuals that our community partners serve. In the years ahead, I look forward to expanding the reach and impact of these opportunities for our students."

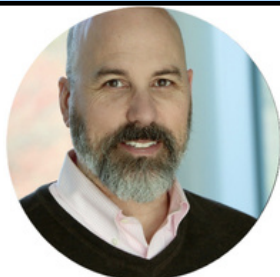
- Professor Diana Cohen



Congratulations, Professor Cohen, on this incredible achievement! We are proud to have you a part of CLASS!

MEET THE CLASS ADVISORY BOARD

One of the most significant developments in the Dean's office this year was the creation of the College's first Advisory Board, which aspires to be "a catalyst for innovation, opportunity, and excellence—ensuring CLASS remains a cornerstone of intellectual and cultural leadership within the university and beyond." The Board's first accomplishment was the "From Project to Profession" reverse interview event that happened in early May. We are very grateful to all of them who agreed to serve this year, and proud of what they accomplished.



PRESIDENT: SETH BREWER

Seth Brewer, Advisory Board President, is an art school graduate who became a designer who then became a marketing leader. Throughout his career he built teams and initiatives that introduced digital technologies to improve the process and practice of design and marketing. Now engaged in supporting other stuff that does good in the world, Seth tries to focus on those that are specifically not digital. Seth and his wife are long-time residents of New Britain where they raised their two daughters.



VICE PRESIDENT: DR. KATE MCGRATH

Dr. Kate McGrath, Board Vice President, is the Associate Dean of CLASS and a professor of History. Her research focuses on Northern France and Anglo-Norman territories in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In 2014, she won the Regents Teaching Award.



DR. CALEB BRAGG

Dr. Caleb Bragg is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychological Science. An industrial-organizational psychologist, his work focuses on career readiness and the college-to-career transition, including how thoughtfully designed XR and AI support human learning, judgment, and the articulation of skills through mentored experiential learning in the Career Readiness Pathway framework that he authored. A Bay-area native, he is very happy living here in Connecticut with his wife and three kids.



TESS CRYSTAL

Tess Crystal is a graduate student of Nonprofit Management and Community Engagement at Merrimack College. The majority of her professional experience is rooted in the arts and community outreach. Previously, she graduated from Central with a B.S. in Psychological Sciences and a minor in Community Engagement.



PROF. SHERI FAFUNWA NDIBE

Prof. Sheri Fafunwa Ndibe is an art educator and artist. She has twice served as Chair of the Department of Art, as well as Director and Co-Director of the Center for Africana Studies. She is a recipient of the Fulbright Program Scholar Award for research and lecturing at University of Lagos. She also co-directed the Travel Abroad Passport to Global Citizenship Program to Ghana. Her public scholarship includes African art and design workshops, gallery talks, and lectures presented at schools, museums, and universities.

MEET THE CLASS ADVISORY BOARD



PATRICK J. FLAHERTY

Patrick J. Flaherty is the Director of the Office of Research and Information at the Connecticut Department of Labor, Connecticut's Labor Market Information shop and the Data Integration Hub for DataLinkCT (formerly P20-WIN), Connecticut's State Longitudinal Data System. He is also Adjunct Faculty at UConn where he teaches Principles of Microeconomics at UConn/Hartford. Patrick is the Labor Commissioner's designee on the Connecticut Retirement Security Program (MyCTSavings) and is the New England representative on the Local Employment Dynamics Steering Committee.



JEN KENDRIGAN

Jen Kendrigan is a Talent Acquisition Specialist at General Dynamics Electric Boat where she runs the University Relations program. Jen graduated in 2000 from Providence College with a Bachelor's degree in Humanities and in 2004 from Lesley University with a Master's degree in Education.



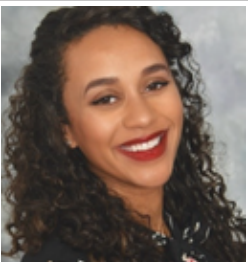
DR. ERIC LEONIDAS

Dr. Eric Leonidas has been a professor at Central for over 20 years. Although he specializes in early modern literature, including Shakespeare and Milton, his teaching spans classical to contemporary works, while his own research and writing focus on literary knowledge and the construction of social authority in the 16th and 17th centuries.



KASSONDRA MANGIONE

Kassondra Mangione is a manager of media relations at Travelers. A published poet, Kassondra also has two poetry collections, *Poemspartum* and *Coffee Mug Rings*. She lives in Simsbury with her husband, children, and many, many bookshelves. She graduated from Central in 2014 with a bachelor's in journalism and in 2021 with a master's in English.



KAYLAH MILLIGAN

Kaylah Milligan is the President and CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain. A proud alumna of Central, Kaylah gained early nonprofit experience in the Dean's Office and with the Alumni Association while earning her BA in Anthropology and an Interuniversity Spanish degree from the University of Salamanca. She later earned her Master of Public Administration from Marist College with a concentration in Nonprofit Management.



MARY BETH PAPALLO

Mary Beth Papallo is the Associate Director of Leadership Giving for Central's Office of Institutional Advancement. She has been with the university for ten years raising funds to support the success of Central's students. She is a 1990 CLAS alum from UConn with a degree in interpersonal communications. Mary Beth has three amazing adult children; two are in college and live with her, her husband, and their beloved fur babies in Meriden. The third has graduated and is grown and flown and living her best life in Boston.



AARON SCOTT

Aaron Scott is a senior Graphic/Information Design Major. He is a DJ and head of the Electronic Department at WFCS-The Edge, Central's radio station. He performs as part of the musical duo Paaaron.

Here's to another great year!

