

# The Viking News

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## Bye-Bye Blackboard...

## Hello Brightspace

By Liam Murphy

The widely used learning management system (LMS) Blackboard, which has been in use at WCC for years, is scheduled to be replaced by another LMS called Brightspace. The replacement will take place throughout nearly all of the 64 col-



### Blackboard

leges that comprise the State University of New York. SUNY recently made the news public, following weeks of advising colleges that such a change might be coming.

Although Blackboard had been the primary system already, it became even more important in the academic life of WCC following the COVID-mandated transition to remote learning in early 2020. Students use Blackboard to look up assignments; to take tests, submit essays and other assignments; to collaborate with other students; to communicate with professors; and to receive announcements. Teachers use Blackboard to conduct these same activities from the other side of the desk, as well as to store grades

and for other purposes. The replacement system, Brightspace, is manufactured by D2L (formerly Desire2Learn), a global software company founded in 1999. Brightspace is an LMS that attempts to coordinate all aspects of a training or learning experience. It is being used in K-12 schools, colleges and universities, and in corporate settings.

Besides being already in use within the SUNY system in SUNY/Sullivan and SUNY/Binghamton, Brightspace has been adopted by the University of Maine, Vanderbilt University, Bard College, and New York University (NYU), among many other institutions of higher learning.

Adoption of Brightspace will not be immediate. Expectations call for Brightspace to be in use SUNY-wide (with a few exceptions) by the Fall of 2023 and "likely sooner," according to Prof. Sean Simpson of

the math department, who represents the WCC Faculty Senate in a statewide SUNY organization and often functions as a conduit of in-

formation to the Senate from SUNY. Look for additional coverage of this story in the next issue of *The Viking News*.



## Tuition-Free Community College Is Out

By Liam Murphy



Photo Credit: Moravian University education in the huge social spending bill. The announcement was made on Oct 28 along with huge cuts that reduced the bill that was announced in August by approximately half.

In another development, as reported on Forbes.com on Oct 29, Democratic Party plans to double Pell Grants, the federal aid awards given

to students in financial need, were also abandoned, although increases are currently still scheduled. The maximum award for Pell Grants is currently penciled in to be raised by \$550 from \$6,495 for those receiving them, which includes many WCC students.

These cuts follow the previous dropping of plans to discuss expanded relief for student loan forgiveness.

Approximately \$40 billion is earmarked for education in the new bill, Forbes reports. Unspecified amounts are due to be given to minority-serving schools, including historically black colleges (HBCs) and tribal colleges. As a reminder, WCC has been designated a Hispanic-servicing institution.

In addition to this potential consolidation, workforce develop-



Photo credit: abcnews.com

ment, an important component of the WCC mission, is scheduled for increased assistance. "According to a White House statement," says Forbes, "the framework will also increase the Labor department's annual spending on workforce development at the community-college level, currently about \$150 million, by 50% for each of the next five years."

Hopes for historic levels of financial help to college students in the multi-trillion dollar bill currently being debated in Congress have begun to diminish following disappointing reductions in the size of potential awards. Leading the list of disappointments is the Administration's decision not to pursue tuition-free community college

# State Senator Harckham Pays Visit to Poli Sci Class on Campus

By Jason Tamay

State Senator Peter Harckham, a Democrat representing New York State's District 40, and former majority leader of the Westchester Board of Legislators, recently visited a political science class taught by WCC Prof. George Ketekuto to discuss his activities as an elected official. Following the class, Senator Harckham agreed to answer questions put to him by this Viking News reporter.

VN: What is your favorite part of representing Westchester County?

SENATOR HARCKHAM: The ability to help people. During the pandemic there was a thousand unemployment cases, people have lost their jobs and received no money. For them to be able to say I've got my first check means a lot.

VN: What types of issues are being addressed in the senate?

SENATOR HARCKHAM: We have been address-

VN: What is your vision of community colleges in general? Are community colleges being addressed?

SENATOR HARCKHAM: Community colleges are an amazing resource; they're a terrific economic engine that provides a great value to the students. What we did in New York was we froze tuition for 3 years. We increased the TAP award by \$500 and we put a floor on the amount of aid. We prevented the loss of aid to community colleges because they

were losing students during the pandemic, but we've got to do more. We've got to invest more resources going forward for long term sustainability of our community colleges.

VN: What comes to mind when you think of Westchester Community College?

SENATOR HARCKHAM: When I think of Westchester Community College, I think of the great diversity of Westchester. I think of the opportunity for young

people, and I think that it is really a gem that we need to support, to support our young people. This is a steppingstone to a better life for so many of our residents and so many first-generation Americans. Three of my four grandparents were immigrants and they didn't have the opportunity for community college back then, so a great way for students, first or second generation, to get on track for the American dream, is through community college.

VN: Will you run for governor of

ing a broad range of issues dealing with social equity, education, voting rights, substance use disorder, and climate change. My first year in the senate we passed over 900 bills, so we have a very energetic democratic conference under great leadership. And we work on a broad variety of issues and because of my committee work I spend a lot of time on environmental issues and substance use disorders and the opioid crisis.

SENATOR'S AIDE: We could also tell you how much work they did during the pandemic, it was almost like all hands-on deck. And that was helping with the populace to protect themselves and also helping them economically.

SENATOR HARCKHAM: We did a lot of PPE drop offs, food drives—we've got our tenth food drive coming up—and we worked on unemployment. We were very busy during the pandemic.

SENATOR HARCKHAM: My message to Westchester Community College students is to get involved in whatever issue you are passionate about but get involved! This is your world and you're the ones who are going to have to live in it, and quite frankly on some of these issues, some people in my generation have done a really crappy job on handing the planet to you in better shape than we found it. And so young people can and should change the world, so get involved!



Photo Credit: PeteforNy Twitter

## News Briefs

### Curtain Comes Down on SmartArts

By Viking News Staff

The SmartArts program, which for years brought professional troupes and production companies to campus, has been discontinued. According to a source close to the Faculty/Student Association (FSA), which oversaw the program, it was a victim of insufficient box office returns and low student interest. The source further tells The Viking News that the decision was made in order to strengthen the arts programs here at the school, including performance groups and publications. Consequently, student artists and writers can expect their organizations to receive more FSA support than in the past. These groups include, among others, Viking Theatricals, Musicology, Dance Collaborative, and the school publications International Voices, INK, Verdandi, and The Viking News.

### Thanksgiving Dinner Give-away Scheduled

By Max Gruenbaum

The Thanksgiving Dinner giveaway is back this year, hosted by the Department of Student Support Services with support from the WCC Foundation, Department of Student Involvement, Security, and FSA Dining. Staff will be providing drive-thru and walk-up pick-up options at the Main campus and at all four extension sites: Mount Vernon, Ossining, Yonkers, and Peekskill. The first 275 students to apply will be provided with a ShopRite gift card for a whole turkey and sides. All pick-ups will take place on Nov 22 from 9:00am-3:00pm. Registration is required. Please include your full name, student ID, location of pick-up, phone number, and email when registering through the form located on the events calendar. Students are urged to register now to take advantage of this once-a-year offer.

### WCC Exceeds NYS in COVID Stats

By Elma Pejcinovic

On Oct 18, the college issued the news that its strict pandemic health procedures are paying off. Among employees and students, WCC has attained a 97% vaccination rate and a near-zero incidence of COVID positivity. According to the announcement, "the COVID positivity rate at WCC has remained at or below 0.5% during the fall semester, well below the state average range of 2.4% to 3.3% during the same period."

Scott Sullivan, head of security at the College and a leader of the Pandemic Response Team (PRT), credits the collaboration between PRT and the college's Health Office for implementing the strict safety procedures that contributed to a high vaccination rate and low number of positive test results. Students and school personnel were required to either get vaccinated or to test weekly at Westchester Medical Center. Exemptions for health or religious reasons were granted for vaccination but not for weekly testing for unvaccinated people. All in-person students, regardless of vaccination status, are obliged to wear masks indoors and to maintain social distancing. Students had mixed views on vaccination protocols but the great majority were willing to comply with the College's standards on COVID safety. "I was somewhat hesitant with going back onto campus in the beginning. I didn't know what it was going to be like or what safety protocols would be in place due to the pandemic," said WCC student Melissa Brown. "I have been back on campus since the very beginning of the semester and am pleasantly surprised with how everything is being run," she said. "The classes are much smaller, but the learning I am able to obtain is much greater." An expanded number of live courses is planned for the Spring. Anecdotal reports indicate the pace of enrollment for next semester is brisk.

# The Viking News

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Weekly meetings are open to all students on Mondays at 4 p.m.

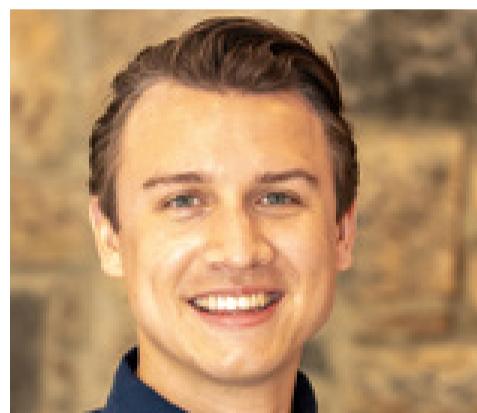
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## Importance of Mental Health at WCC Stressed by Name Change

By Liam Murphy

Personal Counseling has changed their name to the Department of Mental Health & Counseling Services and has added two new professionals to their staff, says Kristy Robinson, the acting director for the Department and the co-chair of the Mental Health Task Force.



Kristy Robinson, LCSW



have hit the ground running with presentations, facilitating workshops, and of course, providing individual mental health services to WCC students. We are so grateful to have them on our team."

Asked what message she has for students who may be struggling with mental health issues, the newly hired Andrea Bliss said, "I would like students to know that, even though dealing with mental health concerns can feel very isolating, they are not alone. I want them to know it is very brave to reach out and seek help.... I want them to know prioritizing mental health is just as important as prioritizing physical health."

Bliss listed some of the problems college students face: "Academic stress, anxiety, depression, family and relationship issues, and coping skills." She also sees COVID as a special problem for today's students. "I think that COVID has increased the struggles many people were already dealing with on a daily basis," she says, "whether increasing anxiety, feeling more isolated from friends and family, increasing depression, and decreasing trust in other people that they are making the same choices you are."

Jemair Lewis shared some of her background training with

the Viking News, saying "Before working at WCC, I was a Mental Health Counselor at a community mental health agency in the Bronx. I worked with formerly homeless HIV afflicted individuals at a Transitional Residence, some of whom were struggling with mental health disorders and substance abuse issues. It



Walesca Marmolejos, LMSW

made all the difference to be able to bond on an interpersonal level with my clients who were dealing with daily stigma. I hope to bring that urge to help destigmatize mental health within the college community and students of color. I believe representation matters, so as a Black woman I look forward to being a part of the Department of Mental Health and Counseling Services and offering my services to the students at WCC."

Bliss and Lewis are currently working on a project to highlight the effects that alcohol and substance abuse can have on mental health.

The two new adjunct counselors complete the Department roster consisting of Acting Director Kristy Robinson, full-time staff member Patrick Sheehan, adjunct staff member Walesca Marmolejos, and Office Coordinator Jade Watts.



Jade Watts (Office Coordinator)



Andrea Bliss, LMHC



Jemair Lewis, MHC-LP

# FEATURES

## Faculty Spotlight : Maria Riley

By Liam Murphy



Prof. Maria Riley

Can passion stay alive in a relationship after nearly twenty years? It can if the relationship is between a teacher and her students. Just ask Adjunct Prof. Maria Riley, who has been a professor of Spanish at Westchester Community College since 2002. "I really feel a passion as a teacher," she says. "I really feel like I want to help others."

Prof. Riley is from the Dominican Republic and came to America in 1991, but not for the reason most Dominican immigrants arrive on these shores: In her case, she was sent here by her employers. "I came here to learn the language," she explains, "because I was practicing law in the Dominican Republic, and the law firm sent me here to learn English because they wanted to open a tourist office in the Dominican Republic."

The original plan was for Riley to be the person in charge of that office, but things changed when she met her future husband. "He was the reason why I stayed here. I really fell in love with my husband." Riley is not reticent about the reason: "I found he was a really honest person, and he was loyal."

Like many immigrants before and since, Riley came to America without knowing any English at all. She quickly began learning the new language and eventually found work as a Spanish instructor. Her first job was teaching Spanish at Iona College.

In 2002 she applied for a teaching job at WCC and was hired. She started teaching here the same year and says that she has felt fulfilled ever since. Riley says her true passion has always been teaching. Before coming to the United States, Riley was a professor of International Law in the Dominican Republic.

"I really want to help young people," she says, "because when we are young, we make a lot of mistakes. It's fulfilling for me when I can help others." This enthusiastic professor's favorite teaching moment is when she "feels that someone is really learning. When I am teaching and someone says, 'Professor I am learning so much Spanish from you.' That is amazing to me."

## Advice From Alumnus

By: Marygrace Orfanella

College is no easy road for any student, as recent WCC graduate Itzak Rowland can tell you. When he first came here, he had no idea what major to choose, while soon after his first semester, his academic career was interrupted by COVID and the forced transition to online learning. But by taking advantage of the services offered by the school, he earned his Associate's Degree in Psychology in Spring 2021 and transferred to prestigious SUNY/Binghamton. Now he has agreed to share his tips, tricks, and reflections for making it through WCC and into a four year university.

Rowland praises the school for offering guidance to undecided students. "I have to give a lot of credit to WCC for restarting my path when I didn't know where to go," he says. The learning opportunity that Rowland attributes most of his success to is WCC's Success Coaching. He claims that it helped him learn to be efficient, manage his time, and stay organized. He recommends that students engage in multiple sessions with Success Coaching

in order to reinforce the lessons learned.

Another resource that Rowland enthusiastically advises current WCC students to utilize is the Career Services program. In fact, he wishes he had used this tool sooner in order to "learn how to communicate with future employers, find internships, research opportunities, and design resumes, because it [entering the work force] will creep up on you." One of Rowland's biggest takeaways from Success Coaching and Career Services was the way that he learned to communicate with his professors, a skill that can be applied to any type of professional or academic communication. He offers these tips for successful communication: "Double check your emails and don't include really long explanations unless you need to; try to get your main points out quickly; be polite, brief, and check your spelling and grammar."

Rowland benefited from WCC not only academically, but socially as well. As a self proclaimed socially awkward child,

Rowland had trouble connecting with his peers for most of his academic career, until he decided to join one of the many clubs offered at WCC. After starting out as a member of the Gaming Guild he found himself immersed in a group of like-minded peers. This led to his joining more clubs and eventually taking on leadership roles. Among these roles was Vice President of the Creative Writing Club, a position he held up to graduation. Joining these groups gave Rowland a place to belong among his classmates and helped him create what will hopefully prove to be lasting relationships. The experience that he gained in making connections has only served him positively so far in helping him make new connections at Binghamton.

Doubtless, few would argue that Rowland's example shows us once again that the best way to learn is the way he did, through good old-fashioned experience.



Itzak Rowland

# FEATURES

## WCC's Young Entrepreneurs Work Hard for Their Dreams

By Marygrace Orfanella



Entrepreneur Zach Sweetland

Entrepreneurship is thriving at Westchester Community College with many students owning their own businesses already and many others planning to start one (or more!). Being an entrepreneur is not easy and it doesn't help to be inexperienced, as most students are. Clearly, opening a business is risky, but entrepreneurs know that without risks there are no rewards. Many of the entrepreneurs at WCC have said that the experience of being a business owner has changed their lives for the better. First-hand knowledge of ownership responsibilities, they say, has changed their perspective.

One such student is Zach Sweetland. For the last four months Zach has been working day and night to bolster his fledgling business, Negasi. Negasi is a clothing company specializing in athletic wear that fuses Zach's love for the history of African

royalty with his passion for exercise. Though centered on African history Zach is not limiting his clientele to the African community. Rather, he wants everyone to learn about and experience the beauty of the traditional patterns and feeling of these "royal" clothes.

In addition to bringing history and culture together, Zach plans to make his business size-inclusive. In Zach's opinion most athletic brands aren't made for those who want to get into shape, but for those who already are in shape. By branching into an untapped market Zach hopes he has set his business up for success. He already has a slogan for his brand that sums up its purpose in one sentence: "Fitness wear that's inspired by African royalty, designed to empower and encourage."

Although he has lofty dreams

Zach still has his fashionably shod feet firmly on the ground and knows the challenges ahead. According to Zach his business as with any job is time-consuming and costs him time usually devoted to family and friends, school, and the job that is his biggest source of income. But he knows that "There's always gonna be a hurdle when you're an entrepreneur, there's always gonna be some challenge, that's just the way it goes." Zach is willing to make the sacrifice.

Zach is not the only ambitious WCC entrepreneurial student. For example, student Serge Tarina plans one day to open an international night club in Africa. Another such student is Tomas Lee. Lee, with the help of his brother, is far along with his business plan. "I wanted to start up a lead generating company where companies pay me to generate working leads for

their business, whether it be their construction company or any company they have going. Tomas has bright visions of the future. "We already have clients. We have four or five clients. What we are on now is to market and grow."

Westchester Community College offers a class on entrepreneurship in the Business Department taught by Professor Phyllis Fein. Many of her current and former students have successfully launched their own businesses and have gone on to do very well.

"College is the ideal time to pursue entrepreneurial dreams," says Fein. Our WCC students come to my entrepreneurship class with amazing skills and business concepts, some even already having started their own ventures as a side gig."

Fein is aware of the problems that can beset a beginner. She encourages students

Photo credit: Fran Maestre

like Zach, Serge, and Tomas to follow their dreams but within realistic parameters. "Developing a pitch and financial forecasting can be intimidating," she says. "So I introduced LivePlan business modeling software into my Entrepreneurship curriculum three semesters ago. The LivePlan business planning process is easily grasped by my students of all skill levels, and they can successfully navigate their dreams into real business plans; they can practice business planning in and outside of the classroom."

With the help of aids like LivePlan, increasing numbers of WCC students are venturing into the world of entrepreneurship. "For many," says Fein, completing a business plan for her course "turned out to be not just a classroom project but planning for their futures."

# FEATURES

## Student Spotlight

### Paulina Jaskiewicz, Rising Film Maker, Champion Athlete, and More!

By: Elma Pejcinovic

WCC film major Paulina Jaskiewicz has been collecting honors recently for a film she directed called "Wide Open Dreams." She also co-produced the film, along with Matt Lestrane, another WCC film student. "Wide Open Dreams" was selected for the Oscar-qualifying HollyShorts Film Festival and has won the Special Jury Prize Global Impact Award by SCAD Savannah Film Festival, an honor bestowed by the prestigious Savannah College of Art & Design (SCAD). Closer to home, it has also been accepted by the YoFi Yonkers Film Festival, where it will be shown later this month.

Paulina traveled to Hollywood for the HollyShorts festival and to Savannah for the SCAD award, but her focus remains on WCC, where she is an international student. At WCC, she aims to help others through her involvement on campus and by reaching a wider audience through her

"Wide Open Dreams" gave

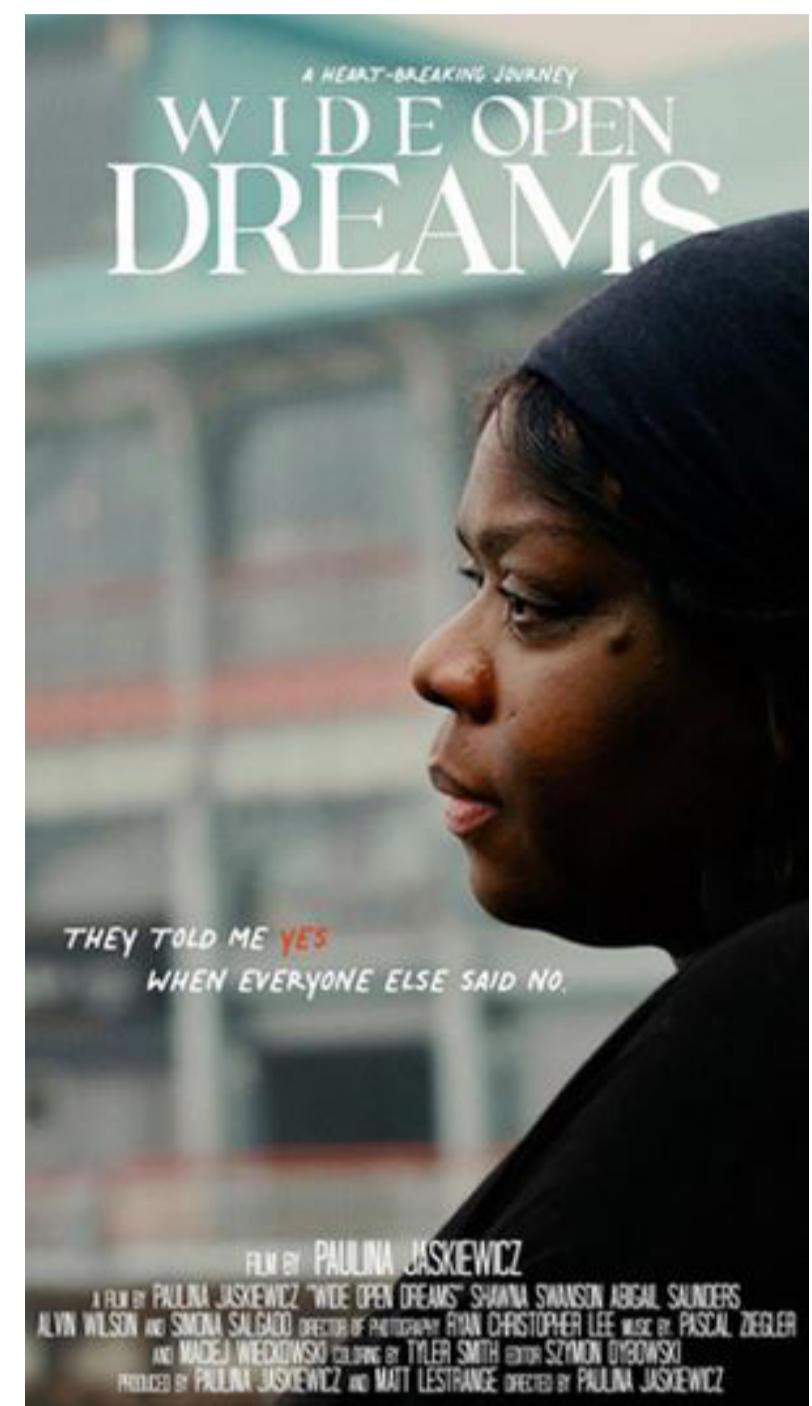
filmmaking. At 19 years old, Paulina immigrated to the U.S. with high expectations of becoming a filmmaker, taking courses at the University of Hawaii in Manoa, UCLA Extension, and at the Hollywood Film Academy. Besides working on many film projects, she also worked in theater, working as a stage manager in Hawaii. She enrolled at WCC during the pandemic.

"During COVID, I started looking for schools around Westchester instead of returning to the Film School in Poland...I was on an exchange program still in the USA and I decided that maybe I should just apply for a new visa and come back to study here. I did my research, I heard many good opinions about WCC and here I am." She says she is happy to learn from top professors and continue her interests here, which include social issues.

"Wide Open Dreams" gave

Paulina the opportunity to explore employment and poverty, which she thinks need more attention. The film centers on a single mom named Shawna and her experience working in Greyston Bakery in Yonkers, N.Y. Shawna was unable to find work and was desperate until Greyston gave her a chance. During Paulina's research, she was very surprised to learn that Greyston provides employment opportunities using the Open Hiring Model, which means work applicants who might have a previous record of some sort are not denied jobs -- something she originally had no clue about. Greyston boxes carry the slogan "Eat Brownies, Change Lives."

"In Greyston we got to meet many bakers," says Paulina. "They all have different stories, different pasts but the same thing led them to the bakery--the lack of a chance. They may go down the wrong path at some point in their life, but they want to



Paulina Jaskiewicz, director of Wide Open Dreams



change, they want to work and be able to provide for themselves."

Paulina was pleased to bring Greyston's open hiring practice to the public's attention. "We very often don't know about the local places that in silence are changing people's lives for the better," she says. "Everyone deserves a chance, and that is the message of the film."

Paulina has received support

from two celebrities: Ben Stiller and Hugh Jackman. Stiller's production company has offered to underwrite the cost of submitting "Wide Open Dreams" to film festivals, while Jackman has visited Greyston to learn more about the firm's Open Hiring Model for possible adoption by one of his own companies.

Filmmaker is not her only title. She also participates in sports. At age 15, Paulina became a professional hand-ball player in Poland and is a three-time champion in that sport. She is also active on campus. She is the president of the Film Club and the Vice-President for Communication and Public Relations of Phi Theta Kappa (PTK), the honors society for high achieving associate degree students.

To Paulina, anything is possible. Her film was a low-budget production and student-funded film that has gained considerable success. She believes that anyone can achieve their dreams as she has and she offers this advice: "Believe in yourself and your potential because everything is possible when you work hard. Try to be surrounded by people who believe in you and support you. It all takes time but don't give up... Never take no for an answer! You can always find a way to do what you are really passionate about. And plan, plan, and plan! Good organization is key. There can never be too much planning when doing work on your film. Create, inspire, and be inspired."

She is proud that her hard efforts paid off for her first film and hopes to create more projects in the future. "Wide Open Dreams" will be screened during the YoFi Yonkers Film Festival on Saturday, Nov. 13 at 1 pm at the Riverfront Theater.



All photos courtesy of wideopendreamsfilm.com



Photo credit: NHL.com

## After Disappointments in Baseball and Football the Pressure Is on for Basketball and Hockey

By: Liam Murphy

Let's face it: It's been a bad year for New York sports fans. Baseball fans were left disappointed when the Yankees frustrated their loyal followers in the playoffs, losing to the Boston Red Sox, while the Mets did not even make the postseason. Football is not looking much better, with the Jets and the Giants both two and five so far. So it looks like New York fans must look to the Knicks, Rangers, and Nets this season for their happiness. Will the home teams live up to these expectations, or will they also disappoint? Hopes are high, but will team standings also be by season's end?

So far, the greatest promise is being shown by the New York Knicks. The Knicks, Nets, and Rangers recently began their 2021-22 season and of all New York teams, the Knicks are off to the best start, being one of five teams to start the season 5-1. WCC student Stephen Qumburji is optimistic, saying the Knicks are "looking to have a promising season." He is excited about having "rising stars like Immanuel Quickley surrounded by experienced guards such as D-Rose, Kemba Walker, and even Evan Fournier. "This year's backcourt is looking great," he says. Among potential stars of the future, RJ Barret is quickly rising. During the win over the New Orleans Pelicans, Barret scored a career high of 35 points, helping the Knicks win 123-117. Tom Thibodeau, who is in his second year as head coach of the Knicks, says Barret "knows he's good. He never questions himself. He's playing an all-around game... I think people don't realize how big and strong he is. He can take contact and so he's getting more comfortable with it. You can't say enough about him."

Qumburji is outspoken about the rest of the Knicks team also, saying "Our front court is nothing to sleep on either. We have another rising star in Obi Toppin coupled with the likes of Julius Randle and Mitchell Robinson." Like Qumburji's, the spirits of Knicks fans remain high this season for an ease to the pain associated with the disappointing baseball season. Among the most hopeful is Qumburji, who says, "This seems like it could be New York's year to make a deep run into the playoffs. In recent memory the New York Knicks have not been able to make a significant playoff push, [but] this will all change this year and New York will once again be victorious!"

Is the bright NBA picture for New Yorkers matched by its NHL prospects for success? So far the Rangers season has been disappointing—Disappointing for the opposing teams' fans, that is! The Rangers have begun their season with five straight wins on the road! As the Rangers continue to pick up wins away from home, fans hope that the Rangers can replicate the magic at home. Among away game wins, the Rangers beat Seattle Kraken, a new franchise, by a score of 3-1.

With a middling start of four and three, the Nets are still on the undecided list. Fans have expressed anger over the team's refusing to allow the unvaccinated Kyrie Irving to play, but both player and management remain adamant in their positions. Clearly any future decision on the matter will have a big impact on the Nets' prospects. Next year will mark the tenth anniversary of the team's name change to the Brooklyn Nets. A championship would be a great way to mark the occasion. Fans can but hope.

So yes, the pressure is on the New York teams that are still in contention in 2021. Besides the usual competitive forces that drive professional sports, the Knicks, Rangers, and Nets carry an additional burden this year: to keep Gotham's face from getting any redder than it already is.



Kyrie Irving, point guard for Brooklyn Nets

Photo credit: USA Today



Photo credit: stadiumjourney.com



Photo Credit: FAVPNG.com

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