



COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES  
& SOCIAL SCIENCES

# STUDENTS OF *Distinction*



# 2025

## AWARDS BANQUET

# Program

Dean's Welcome

Student Presentations

Dinner

Student Presentations (continued)

Closing Remarks

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## Dean's Message

Dear Student of Distinction,

It is with great pride that I extend my heartfelt congratulations to every one of you for being recognized as Students of Distinction. Your journey through academia has been marked by exceptional dedication, perseverance, and a commitment to excellence.



Whether through your outstanding academic achievements or your remarkable contributions to extracurricular activities, you have left an enduring mark on your institution and shown a passion for making a difference in the world around you. Your accomplishments inspire your fellow students and bring joy to your professors, your families, and your loved ones.

As some of you go on to the next chapter of your life, I am confident you will continue to make meaningful contributions to your chosen fields and communities.

Once again, congratulations on this remarkable achievement. May your future be filled with continued success, fulfillment, and endless possibilities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nawal Ammar'.

Nawal Ammar, Professor and Dean

## DEPARTMENT CHAIRS & PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Nathan Bauer, Ph.D.	<i>Chair, Philosophy &amp; World Religions Dept.</i>
Emily Blanck, Ph.D.	<i>Executive Director, Center for Interdisciplinary Studies</i>
Kelly Duke Bryant, Ph.D.	<i>Coordinator, B.A. in International Studies</i>
Bill Carrigan, Ph.D.	<i>Coordinator, M.A. in History</i>
Danielle Gougon, Ph.D.	<i>Coordinator, Bachelor of General Studies</i>
Janet Lindman, Ph.D.	<i>Chair, History Dept.</i>
Marilyn Manley, Ph.D.	<i>Chair, World Languages Dept.</i>
Lawrence Markowitz, Ph.D.	<i>Chair, Political Science &amp; Economics Dept.</i>
Sharon McCann, Ed.D.	<i>Coordinator, B.A. in Human Services</i>
DeMond Miller, Ph.D.	<i>Coordinator, B.A. in Disaster Preparedness &amp; Emergency Management, M.S. in Emergency &amp; Threat Response Management</i>
Jennifer Rich, Ph.D.	<i>Chair, Sociology &amp; Anthropology Dept., Coordinator, M.A. in Holocaust &amp; Genocide Education</i>
Natalie Schell-Busey, Ph.D.	<i>Coordinator, M.A. in Criminal Justice</i>
Marquita Smith, Ph.D.	<i>Coordinator, B.A. in Africana Studies</i>
Nadine Sullivan, Ph.D.	<i>Coordinator, M.A. in Diversity &amp; Inclusion</i>
Tiffany Tillman	<i>Coordinator, B.A. in Liberal Studies</i>
Mary Kay Tuohy, DSW	<i>Coordinator, Master of Social Work (M.S.W.)</i>
Michael Weiss, Ph.D.	<i>Chair, Law &amp; Justice Studies Dept.</i>
Catherine Wilcoxson, Ph.D.	<i>Chair, English Dept.</i>
Elaine Zundl	<i>Coordinator, Master of Public Policy</i>



**JACQUELINE ACCARDI**

and dedication have earned her recognition as the Chamberlain Student Center's Building Manager of the Year and the Law & Justice Studies Spring 2024 Senior of Distinction. Jacqueline is also a member of three prestigious honor societies. With a strong passion for the legal field, she aspires to work within the court system and teach as an adjunct professor.

Jacqueline Accardi is currently pursuing her master's degree through the Law & Justice Studies Accelerated Dual Degree Program at Rowan University. Since Fall 2024, she has served as a Graduate Assistant, providing valuable support to Law & Justice faculty with their research. In addition, she interned with the New Jersey Court System, focusing on re-entry services for individuals transitioning from incarceration. Jacqueline has been actively involved on campus, serving as the Secretary of the Law & Justice Debate Team, a Senator for the Psychology and Law Club, and participating in the Criminal Justice Preparation Club. Her hard work



## M.A. in Diversity & Inclusion

Karen Dessables is set to graduate with a Master's in Diversity and Inclusion in May 2025. Alongside her academic achievements, she has excelled in her professional role as a Clinical Practice Manager at Rowan-Virtua School of Osteopathic Medicine's Department of Psychiatry, where she oversees operations that support mental health and patient advocacy. Throughout her time in the program, Ms. Dessables completed a significant research project on the effects of intergenerational adversity, exploring how societal expectations of masculinity, trauma, and marginalization uniquely impact Black men. Ms. Dessables plans to pursue a Ph.D.

in Mental Healthcare Leadership, aiming for a career in advocacy with a focus on African American men's mental health. Her compassion and kindness have been of great benefit to both her peers and faculty. Her scholarship is worthy of honor and encouragement and will serve as inspiration for future scholars and advocates.



**KAREN DESSABLES**

## M.S. in Emergency & Threat Response Management



Sean Carpenter will graduate with a Bachelor's degree in Disaster Preparedness & Emergency Management (Summa Cum Laude) and a Master's in Emergency & Threat Response Management. He currently works with the New Jersey State Police as a Public Safety Telecommunicator First Responder dispatching state troopers. He is also a member of the National Honor Society in Emergency Management Epsilon Pi Phi. Mr. Carpenter is steadfast in his efforts to contribute to the future of emergency managers by dedicating his graduate capstone research to examining the curriculum and training for future emergency managers. His

strategies utilize unique applied experiences that lead to clearer career opportunities for life-saving assistance within academia or the public and private sectors. He plans to continue his career in the public service sector, protecting our communities from any future events that arise.

## M.A. in History

Steve Henderson is very deserving of recognition as the Department of History Graduate Student of Distinction. A veteran of the armed services who served multiple tours in the Middle East, he is noteworthy for his intellectual curiosity, careful thinking, and commitment to improving his already strong research and writing skills. He demonstrates leadership in every class he is in and commands the respect of his fellow students and professors alike. This past year, he completed a major digital humanities project, a timeline of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and he is currently at work on a new digital project on the Battle of Red Bank. This summer, he will be completing a thesis on the era of Reconstruction in New Jersey, a step which will prepare him for doctoral studies in United States history. Steve's dedication to excellence, passion for all sorts of history, and work ethic all make him a model graduate student.





**GIANNA LEONEN**

Gianna Leonen is graduating with her MA in Holocaust & Genocide Education, a member of Phi Alpha Theta, and was honored to be a 2024 Dr. Mian A. Jan Fellow at the Chester County History Center while working in Visitor Services at The National Liberty Museum. She won the 2024 David Applebaum Prize for Best Non-Traditional Research Project for her work on “Scenes from Goodbye, Antoura” and you may have even seen her on stage in numerous local theater productions. Analyzing the role of music in the Holocaust, Leonen’s Capstone culminated in a digital humanities project entitled “Hymnals of Hell: Digital Exhibition

Guide”. She has travelled throughout Europe with the 2022 Nazi Germany and the Holocaust Study Abroad before serving as a Graduate Assistant for RCHGHR. Leonen looks forward to working within the fields of Museum Education or Public Programs that provide accessible education.



After completing her BA in Political Science and Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management with a Minor in Women’s and Gender Studies in 2023, Brenna decided to continue her studies in the newly created Master of Public Policy. During her time in the program, we watched her hone her skills in critical thinking, policy writing, and research. Brenna specialized in health policy, taking inspiration from her mother, a nurse in South Jersey, who struggled to persevere through the challenges of the pandemic. Currently she is completing her policy internship at Virtua’s Office of Health Equity where she researches community-

based health projects and emerging regulations with an eye toward their impact on different communities in New Jersey. After graduation, she plans to continue in the field of women’s rights and reproductive health policy. Brenna exemplifies the meaning of public service, and we are proud to have had her in the program.



**BRENNA MCDEVITT**





**ALEJANDRO VELASQUEZ**

Alejandro Velasquez graduated summa cum laude with a degree in psychology from Rowan University in 2023 prior to joining the inaugural M.S.W. cohort. He continued working in the psychology department while pursuing his M.S.W. and remains active in honor societies and Social Work clubs. Alejandro also serves as the Event Coordinator for the Rowan Disability Student Union and is a member of the National Association of Social Workers. His M.S.W. internships with the Autism PATH program exemplified his leadership and innovation, leaving a lasting impact. Alejandro demonstrated a profound understanding of

the challenges faced by marginalized communities. His willingness to go above and beyond shone while collaborating with the Center for Neurodiversity on a Grand Canyon trip for neurodivergent students. A bilingual, bicultural first-generation college student from Honduras, Alejandro credits his success to his family's support. He is unanimously honored as the first M.S.W. Student of Distinction by faculty and looks forward to working with neurodiverse and Latinx communities post-graduation.

## ● ● ● B.A. in Africana Studies

Ciera Thomas is a graduating senior with a double major in History and Subject Matter Education (with an endorsement as a Teacher of Students with Disabilities), and minors in Psychology and Africana Studies. Her dedication to inclusive education led her to become the first student to earn a Certificate of Undergraduate Studies (CUGS) in NJ Amistad Law: African American Studies for Future Educators. Beyond the classroom, Ciera has worked as an ambassador and student intern for Rowan's Establishing a Black Humanities in Education Initiative Through History and Culture and its associated Dec. 2024 Amistad conference, a project funded by the National



**CIERA THOMAS**

Endowment for the Humanities. Ciera has earned recognition for her academic excellence, including the Gary Hunter Memorial Scholarship and placements on the Dean's List and the President's List. These accomplishments are just the beginning for her as she pursues her goal to become a secondary history teacher and, one day, open her own school.



**WILLIAM SCHNEIDER**

William Schneider is a senior Anthropology student at Rowan University, preparing to graduate this May. William enrolled at Rowan University in 2022. During his time at Rowan, William has presented at various professional conferences, worked as a research assistant at the Museum of Anthropology at Rowan University (MARU), and worked internationally as an aspiring bioarchaeologist where he has accomplished research at the Museo Arqueológico de La Serena, Chile. Through his work at MARU in exhibit development and installation, and artifact curation, William has integrated the MARU collections into a database, combining the use

of 3-D scanning and printing into MARU's toolkit, establishing lasting research relationships between Anthropology and other departments. He hopes to continue his experience in exhibit development and collections curation by working in a museum where he can pursue research of his own.



Jared is a graduating senior at Rowan University, majoring in Disaster Preparedness & Emergency Management, Geographic Information Science, and Geography, with a minor in Geoscience. During his internship at the Lunar and Planetary Institute and NASA Johnson Space Center, Jared researched the morphometric characteristics of lunar landing sites. He presented his findings to an international audience of scholars and scientists at the prestigious Lunar and Planetary Science Conference in Spring 2024. In addition to this, Jared served as a Research Assistant, contributing to mapping projects as part of the New Jersey Energy Grid grant. On campus, Jared has demonstrated strong leadership and dedication, serving as the President of the DPEM Club, Ambassador for the Disaster Science & Emergency Management Program, and GIS Mentor. He has also been the Men's Ultimate Frisbee Risk Manager, a Community Assistant, an Energy Security Research Assistant, and Treasurer for Profecy A Cappella.



**JARED MCCALLION**

the DPEM Club, Ambassador for the Disaster Science & Emergency Management Program, and GIS Mentor. He has also been the Men's Ultimate Frisbee Risk Manager, a Community Assistant, an Energy Security Research Assistant, and Treasurer for Profecy A Cappella.





**CARTER JONES**

Carter Jones played four years of ACHA Division 2 ice hockey for the Profs, serving as team captain during his senior year. Additionally, he held executive board positions for the hockey program: first as Secretary in his junior year, and then as President in his senior year. His responsibilities included managing a six-figure budget covering all team expenses, including practice facilities, travel logistics, and operational costs. While maintaining consistently high grades and helping manage Rowan's hockey team, Carter also served as an ice hockey official sanctioned by USA Hockey. Currently, Carter is an intern at a healthcare advisory firm specializing in

self-insured companies, where he assists in optimizing health outcomes through vendor, carrier, and administrative service strategies. Working directly with the company's Chief External Operations Manager, Carter handles high-level data analysis that aids in strategic decision-making for a variety of health care organizations.



Nia McCombs is a double major in English and Africana Studies with a Minor in Psychology. She has earned recognition for her academic excellence, winning the 2024 Carb Prize in the English Department and the 2024 Medallion in the Africana Studies Department. Nia is also the President of The Women of Color Alliance (WOCA) and a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, Theta Chi Chapter. In addition, she serves as Co-Director of the New Life Ministry Dance Team. Nia has further demonstrated her academic engagement working as a student research assistant for Dr. John Shjarback on the EMBEHD (Effective Mental and Behavioral Health Emergency Diversion) Project. Currently, she is interning with the New Jersey Courts in their Intensive Supervision (ISP) program. Nia has recently been accepted into law school and plans to pursue a career in Civil Rights and Racial Justice Law.



**NIA MCCOMBS**

## Bachelor of General Studies



**JOE MOHMOD**

Joe Mohmod is a devoted leader, scholar, and family man who embodies perseverance and commitment in both his military and academic pursuits. A 40-year-old father of three, he has served in the New Jersey Army National Guard (NJARNG) for 18 years and is a full-time member of the Active Guard/Reserve (AGR) program. While deployed to Syria as a Company First Sergeant (1SG) in 2024, Joe earned his Bachelor's degree in General Studies from Rowan University. Balancing the demands of leading 147 soldiers with his academic goals, he completed coursework each night, demonstrating remarkable discipline and resilience. As

he prepares for retirement, Joe is pursuing an MBA and a master's in finance to ensure a successful transition to civilian life. His ranking as the top candidate for promotion in New Jersey and selection for the prestigious Sergeants Major Academy reflect his dedication to continuous learning.



## B.A. in History

Abbie Ealer is a history major in the 4+1 graduate program at Rowan University with minors in Sociology and Anthropology and Certificates in Public History and Foundations of Literature. A member of the Martinson Honors College, Abbie has excelled academically, earning recognition on the President's Scholars of Excellence List and the History Department's Chair's List. She has received several scholarships, including the Study Abroad Scholarship and the Marius Livingston Scholarship for Outstanding History Majors. Abbie is passionate about university service, shown through her leadership in Phi Alpha Theta (History Honors Society) and the Student History Association. She has completed prestigious internships, including at Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church through the UPenn McNeil Center's C. Dallett Hemphill Internship Program, and currently serves on the executive committee of Project Uganda Renewed. Abbie was recently awarded the Edward W. Pell Graduate Fellowship at Fort Ticonderoga and will intern there this summer.



**ABBIGAIL EALER**



**LAUREN O'MALLEY**

Lauren O'Malley is a senior in the Human Services program at Rowan University graduating in May. Through this program, she has met individuals from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds. She has always found great joy in connecting with others and has a deep passion for helping people achieve their goals and reach their full potential.

Her pursuit of a career in human services was influenced by her personal challenges within the education system, being held back in grade school and frequently removed from classrooms for testing and additional support. With a strong support system, she was able to navigate these obstacles without being left

behind. Recognizing the crucial role that support systems play in success, she aspires to be an advocate for individuals who lack that support. Lauren intends to further her education to become a school social worker and is eager to serve others. This nomination is a testament to her belief that with the right support and determination, anything is possible.

## ● ● ● B.A. in International Studies

Razan Elzain will graduate this spring with a B.A. in International Studies, a Minor in Sociology, and Certificates of Undergraduate Study in Chinese and in Social Justice and Social Change. A truly extraordinary student, Razan has pursued a wide range of interests at Rowan and has developed impressive research skills, which she is putting to good use this spring in the International Studies capstone seminar. In this course, she is analyzing the involvement of the United Arab Emirates in the ongoing conflict in Sudan. Selected for a spring 2024 course on the African Union, she represented Rowan at the Model AU simulation hosted by Howard University, and she has continued to engage with these sorts of simulations by participating in Rowan's

Model Diplomacy Club. After graduation, she wants to pursue a career in the nonprofit sector, leveraging her knowledge of international affairs to make a difference in the world.



**RAZAN ELZAIN**

## B.A. in Law & Justice Studies



**JAY DEMATTEO**

The Department of Law & Justice Studies is proud to recognize Jay DeMatteo as its 2025 Student of Distinction. Jay is an inspiration to the Rowan community and beyond, excelling academically despite facing what many would consider insurmountable challenges. After experiencing a traumatic brain injury at a young age and spending many years in the foster care system, Jay has proven to be an outstanding student. What is most admirable, however, is his unwavering commitment to others. Jay is deeply involved in mentorship and volunteering, contributing his time to youth sports organizations, the Special Olympics, social groups for individuals with

autism, helping the homeless, and mentoring youth in foster care. Jay will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Law & Justice and a minor in Psychology. He is passionate about advocating for foster care system reform and plans to pursue a career working with at-risk youth. We are incredibly proud of Jay's achievements and service to others!



## B.A. in Liberal Studies

Liberal Studies is proud to recognize Patricia Joslin-Grady as its 2025 Student of Distinction. Patricia's journey to completing her degree has spanned 27 years, and it is a journey we are honored to celebrate with her. Along the way, Patricia became a mother to three children, a stepmother to six, a grandmother, and a full-time employee at Rowan University. Despite these responsibilities, Patricia has persevered, demonstrating incredible resilience and determination. She is graduating magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies, having completed sequences in Law & Justice and Sociology, along with a minor in Psychology. Patricia's story serves as a

powerful reminder to us all of the importance of never giving up on a dream, no matter what. Congratulations, Patricia! We are immensely proud to have you as part of the Rowan community and celebrate your remarkable accomplishments.



**PATRICIA JOSLIN-GRADY**





**DAVID DOAN**

David Doan is a graduating senior majoring in Philosophy, with a minor in Music. During his time at Rowan, David has excelled in philosophy, consistently impressing his professors with the quality and the sheer thoughtfulness of his work. He is the previous recipient of multiple department awards and scholarships: a multi-year department entrance scholarship (starting 2019-20), the Charles W. Fu Memorial Endowed Scholarship in World Philosophy and Religion (2023), and the Excellence in Philosophy Award (2024). When he is not philosophizing, David is a passionate and skilled musician, serving as a member of Collegium Musicum, Rowan's

early music ensemble. He is also Music Director at the Catholic Community of Christ our Light in Cherry Hill. Upon completing his BA at Rowan, David intends to continue studying music at the graduate level, with the goal of a career teaching and performing in this field.



Celena Estok, a first-generation college student from Burlington County, excels in academics, the arts, and advocacy. While homeschooling and training as a professional ballerina, she earned an Associate's degree in Pre-Law Studies from Rowan College of South Jersey - Gloucester before transferring to Rowan University, where she is pursuing a Bachelor's in Political Science and researching gendered media framing in U.S. gubernatorial politics. Her academic achievements have earned her recognition as a President's Scholar of Excellence and membership in four honor societies, including Pi Sigma Alpha and Golden Key International. Outside of academics, Celena is a candidate for Miss New Jersey 2025 and leads "Thrive for Life," a project advocating for women's reproductive education and supporting young mothers. Her dedication to philanthropy includes a scholarship-winning initiative addressing food insecurity. This fall, Celena will attend law school to focus on business and entrepreneurship, continuing her mission to empower others.



**CELENA ESTOK**



## B.A. in Sociology



After graduating from high school in 2019, Connor Seredvick began attending The County College of Morris for computer science. However, in the wake of the COVID pandemic, Connor changed their major to Sociology. Throughout community college, Connor had many personal and mental health struggles, which hurt their academics. However, through studying sociology, Connor made many breakthroughs in their mental health. After 4 years of community college, Connor transferred to Rowan University. At Rowan, Connor reignited their passion for fencing and volleyball and met many respected peers and mentors through the Sociology

department and the Sociology and Anthropology Club. After 6 years of undergraduate study. After graduating in May, Connor hopes to pursue a career in social work, gaining work experience and taking a break from academics for a year before pursuing a Master's in Social Work.



## B.A. in Spanish

Matthew Conway graduates this semester with both a B.A. in Spanish and a B.S. in Chemical Engineering. Additionally, he will complete an International Studies Minor, a Chemistry Minor, and the Bantivoglio Honors Concentration. At Rowan, he worked as an Undergraduate Research Assistant and Chemistry Intern, and he won the Irene Elizabeth Tracey Medallion for Excellence in Engineering. He has been active as a leader on campus, serving as both Treasurer and Senator of Sigma Delta Pi National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society, as both President and Treasurer of Rowan's chapter of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and as Captain for Rowan Men's Cross Country and Track and Field. He is also a Barry Goldwater Scholar and volunteered with South Jersey Mutual Aid in Pennsauken. After graduation, he will pursue a Ph.D. in Chemistry or Chemical Engineering at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, pending a possible Fulbright in a Spanish-speaking country.



**MATTHEW CONWAY**



**TYLER HOILIEN**

Tyler Hoilien is a senior double majoring in World Religions and Africana Studies, and he will also be part of the first cohort of students graduating with a Certificate in Queer Theory. In the summer of 2024, Tyler gained valuable experience through an internship with the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma. At Rowan, he has been an active leader, serving as the vice-president and avid member of the Rock-Climbing Club, and co-president of the newly organized Religion & Spirituality Club. For the past year, Tyler has also worked as a student assistant in the Department of Philosophy & World Religions, where he has supported professors with their research. Next week,

Tyler will be attending the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Denver. A passionate nature-lover, he plans to spend time after graduation traveling through National Parks, exploring the natural world.

## SEE YOU AT COMMENCEMENT!

We are looking forward to celebrating your accomplishments at our upcoming Commencement Ceremony.

**Tuesday, May 13th**  
**2pm**  
**Richard Wacker Stadium**





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& SOCIAL SCIENCES

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