

**Stephanie Curenton  
leads antibias  
initiatives for early  
childhood educators**

## **EMPOWERING BLACK CHILDREN TO SUCCEED**

- + ADVICE FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY
- + THE SCIENCE OF EXCELLENCE
- + TEACHING DIVERSE LITERATURE



**Dean**  
David J. Chard

**Assistant dean of development & alumni relations**  
Maureen M. Mollahan

**Director of marketing and communications**  
Sofia Romero

**Communications specialist**  
Carolyn Barrett

**Editor**  
Mara Sassoon

**Senior graphic designer**  
Raquel Schott

**Contributing writers**  
Marc Chalufour, Art Jahnke, Louise Kennedy, Sara Rimer, Corinne Steinbrenner ('06), Andrew Thurston

**Photo editor**  
Cherryl Hanson-Bull

**Cover photo**  
Ciara Crocker

**Produced by Boston University Marketing & Communications and published by Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development**

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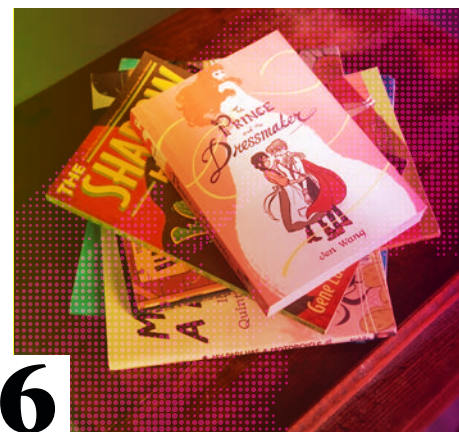
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**DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS**



Over the past two years, we have faced a combination of challenges that have also tested our college and university community—COVID-19, a tumultuous presidential election, a deadly attack on the US Capitol, and the ongoing struggle for racial, economic, and environmental justice. And, of course, many members of our BU Wheelock community have suffered tragic losses of family and friends—we grieve with them. What we've been living through—and continue to live through—is unprecedented.

Some of the ways the past two years impacted and changed us are obvious—like the need to be routinely tested for COVID-19 and to wear masks. Others we may not know or understand for months or years to come.

We learned new ways of being, such as how to greet each other with an elbow bump instead of a handshake. We got used to learning, teaching, and working remotely.

New words and expressions quickly became part of our daily lexicon, such as “stop the spread,” “lockdown,” and “Zoom,” to name a few. One of these terms was “social distancing.” Our campus had to be “de-densified,” requiring us to move furniture to storage, and many signs were installed to remind us to stay six feet apart or which direction we should walk. All of these measures were designed to keep our community safe.

While we did our best to remain physically distant, there was nothing socially distant about our community last year. Our social interactions continued, whether you were a student attending classes, a faculty member delivering a lecture, or a staff person joining a meeting. In an odd way, we were social and isolated simultaneously.

Despite these challenges and the isolation we have all felt, we have continued to work together and made tremendous progress toward the goals we had set for ourselves in the strategic plan we finalized just as the events of 2020 began to unfold (you can read that plan at [bu.edu/wheelock/strategic-planning](http://bu.edu/wheelock/strategic-planning)). We are thrilled to report that enrollments are up significantly for our undergraduate and graduate academic programs, our research productivity has hit new heights, we are launching new academic degree programs and developing exciting new partnerships in Boston and beyond, and we have welcomed an exciting new group of faculty and staff members.

**In March 2021, I was honored to be named the permanent dean of BU Wheelock. It is my distinct pleasure to be able to continue to both serve and lead the college as we make our way forward.** One of our overarching objectives for the next year will be to measure our progress against the strategic goals we developed for the college before the pandemic struck. In the coming years, we will be sharing our progress with all of you through our website ([bu.edu/wheelock](http://bu.edu/wheelock)), social media (there's a list of ways to follow us on the back cover), and our regular alumni communications.

As COVID-19 remains a part of our reality, the return to campus this fall is not without complications. However, we are clearly better equipped to face the virus this year—with vaccines, regular testing, and yes, continued masking. Whether the events of 2020 remain unprecedented is yet to be determined. What is not debatable is the incredible commitment, strength, and heart of the BU Wheelock community—and all of BU—in rallying together at this time. I am proud of the way our community has supported its members in learning, teaching, and all that we do.

Sincerely,  
  
**David J. Chard**  
Dean

Cydney Scott





## A HUB FOR POLICYMAKERS

### Wheelock Educational Policy Center works to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students

When Dean David J. Chard considered the full impact that the new BU Wheelock could make after the 2018 merger of Wheelock and BU, “it became clear that we needed to think beyond the local, beyond the preparation of teachers and counselors, and to the policies and system changes that impact public schools more broadly and more permanently,” he says.

That thinking has resulted in the creation of the new Wheelock Educational Policy Center (WEPC), an interdisciplinary hub for research that aims to drive national conversations and policy decisions that influence educational results for historically marginalized students.

“Our aspirations to have a significant and positive impact on these outcomes, combined with our hiring a team of methodological experts and seasoned policy scholars, have made the creation of this center essential,” says Chard.

Meagan Comb, the former director of educator effectiveness at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, is WEPC’s executive director. She says the center’s research focuses on rethinking the policies that have contributed to inequities within the education system for many student groups, including students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners.

At the top of the center’s agenda, says Comb, is engaging in research alongside policymakers who can put what is learned into action. “We are hoping to start our research with a conversation with policymakers and carry on that conversation through the research. We want to help inform the decisions they know they need to make rather than try to sell them on the findings on the back end.”

Since the center launched in spring 2021, WEPC’s leadership and

affiliated faculty—including professors from across BU and Brown University—have produced multiple impactful studies, including a working paper by Olivia Chi, an assistant professor of educational leadership and policy studies, on how having a same-race classroom observer could have implications for updating teacher evaluation practices. Nathan Jones, an associate professor of special education, and Marcus A. Winters, an associate professor of educational leadership and policy studies, as well as WEPC’s faculty director, coauthored a paper on the effects of coteaching, which presented Massachusetts education leaders with the pros and cons of having two teachers, rather than one, in the classroom supporting students with and without disabilities.

“There was a case to be made that a private research university like BU had the kind of multidisciplinary expertise that you could really leverage in ways that would impact policy,” says Winters, also the educational leadership and policy studies department chair. “So while the center is called the Wheelock Educational Policy Center, it is not exclusive to Wheelock faculty.”

He points out that education policy is particularly well suited to input from other disciplines. Economics, for example, is a powerful driver of education policy, as is sociology and political science. Winters also envisions much collaboration with data scientists and BU’s Initiative on Cities.

“There are many people across the campus who are doing work that the center could support, either directly as part of the center’s work or just sharing ideas,” Winters says. “And I think there will be a lot of opportunities for students in other departments to work with us.” *Art Jahnke*

## 5 DISCOVERIES

### What our research has taught us

**1.** New York City’s stop and frisk policy is detrimental to students’ educational attainment. Exposure to increased police stops has negative effects on high school graduation, college enrollment, and college persistence. These negative effects are concentrated among Black students, the racial group overwhelmingly stopped by police. *Assistant Professor Andrew Bacher-Hicks*

**2.** Beginner second language learners acquire better implicit knowledge of syntax and grammar—that is, being able to use a second language spontaneously and intuitively—through seeing written materials, rather than through aural instruction. *Clinical Assistant Professor Kathy Kim*

**3.** Depression can lead men to adopt fewer heart-healthy behaviors. *Research Scientist Jacqueline Sims*

**4.** A lack of air-conditioning inhibits student learning, particularly among Black and Hispanic students who tend to live in parts of the country that experience more days of extreme heat and who are less likely to attend schools or live at homes with adequate air-conditioning. *Associate Professor Joshua Goodman*

**5.** Special educators who teach students with emotional and behavioral disorders in self-contained classrooms provide stronger instruction when they colead their program with another educator. *Assistant Professor Elizabeth Bettini*

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Gagliardi Photography/Shutterstock

## NEW UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM EMPHASIZES EQUITY

### Overhauled experience uses an interdisciplinary approach

How could BU Wheelock reimagine its programs to help address some of the most pressing issues in education—and attract more students? After examining that question for the past two years, a BU Wheelock task force has hit upon at least one major change for the college: an overhaul of its undergraduate program, highlighted by a new BS in education and human development that began this fall.

“We really focused on equity across the education, legal, and healthcare systems,” says Linda Banks-Santilli, associate dean for academic affairs. “‘System changers’ is the term we’ve been using: We’re trying to prepare a different type of professional who recognizes structural inequities and how they’re affecting children and families, and works to eliminate them.”

The new program replaces all 10 of the college’s prior undergraduate offerings (only two of the previous programs, math education and science education, will continue to support minors in partnership with the College of Arts & Sciences). Undergraduates in their first two years will now balance core courses, like Intro to Human Development and Anti-Oppressive Practices: Education & Applied Psychology, with interdisciplinary signature courses, like Introduction to Justice Based Education. Then they’ll choose one of five pathways: Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Deaf Studies, Educational Design for Transformative Social Futures, Teaching & Learning, or Youth Development & Justice. Students interested in additional teacher education and licensure can earn a fifth-year master’s degree.

“I was a teacher for 12 years in Boston, but I didn’t have the opportunity in my teacher preparation program, at the time, to take a course in how systems designed to help youth—educational, legal, economic, health—sometimes work against them,” Banks-Santilli says. “This program provides a broader education for professionals so they can begin to think and act in new ways.” *Marc Chalufour*

**“We’re trying to prepare a different type of professional who recognizes structural inequities and how they’re affecting children and families, and works to eliminate them.”**

*Linda Banks-Santilli*







# MOST POPULAR: 2021

## Five stories we don't want you to miss

**Albert Jimenez (CGS'16, CAS'18, Wheelock'21) codeveloped RefEd, an app designed to improve access to education for refugee children by curating animated content specifically for various resettlement camps.** Jimenez and cocreators Yasmin Morais (CAS'18) and Abhishek Valivarthi (Sargent'21), above, left to right, won the first-place Social Impact Prize at Innovate@BU's 2021 New Venture Competition, an annual contest that recognizes early-stage BU entrepreneurs who are working to make a difference in society. "Long term, we hope to have RefEd available to any refugee student anywhere in the world," Jimenez says.

**Eve Manz, assistant professor of science education, led a research team that won two awards at the 2021 International Society of the Learning Sciences Annual Meeting.** Manz and postdoctoral researcher Chris Georgen won the Best Paper (Overall) award for their paper on ways to connect science investigations and scientific modeling in elementary classrooms. PhD students Betsy Beckert and Annabel Stoler won third prize in the Best Poster category for their poster on designing home-based science learning during the pandemic.

**Zachary Rossetti, associate professor of special education, was awarded a Large Education Research Grant from the Spencer Foundation** to bolster parent/caregiver and student participation in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization. IDEA mandates individualized special education and related services for all eligible students with disabilities. The \$500,000 grant is funding Rossetti's study on enhancing the civic engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families of students with disabilities.

**BU Upward Bound, the college preparatory program that is a part of BU Wheelock's College Access and Student Success office, celebrated its 30th anniversary.** Upward Bound is a federally funded program that provides outreach and student services to low-income and first-generation college students. Since it began at BU, Upward Bound has helped more than 2,000 students.

**Nathan Jones, an associate professor of special education, was appointed to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Committee on the Future of Education Research.** He will help inform the Institute of Education Sciences—the statistics, research, and evaluation arm of the US Department of Education—on how it can improve its current research activities and plan for the future.

# 5 IMPACTS

## The ways we've helped make a difference

**1.** Kaylene Stevens, a lecturer and program director for social studies education, coauthored *Teaching History for Justice* (Teachers College Press, 2020), which outlines how to support classroom teaching centered on justice and equity and foster students' engagement as citizens.

**2.** BU Wheelock partnered with the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education to develop a database comparing school district teaching and learning plans during disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. The database has been used to inform discussions about how to best keep students on track during turbulent times.

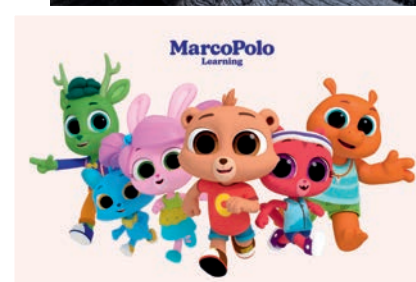
**3.** The Education for Equity and Democracy Symposium, hosted by BU Wheelock, explored the systemic inequities that threaten our democratic ideals and changes that are needed, covering topics such as combating structural racism and child poverty. Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins was a keynote speaker.

**4.** Jonathan F. Zaff, a research professor in applied human development and the director of BU Wheelock's CERES Institute for Children and Youth, and Yasuko Kanno, an associate professor and chair of the language and literacy education department, are conducting a study that explores the lived experiences of Black and Latinx high school students and English learners in Boston who stopped attending school regularly during the pandemic. They will use their findings to brief the city's education leaders.

**5.** Melissa Holt, associate dean for faculty affairs and an associate professor of counseling psychology, received a National Institute of Justice grant to study bias-based harassment among adolescents. Her goal is to educate schools and districts around the country on how to design school safety programs that are tailored to addressing bias-based harassment.

# AN APP THAT BOLSTERS SCHOOLS' LESSONS

Nermeen Dashoush leads curriculum design for educational media company MarcoPolo Learning



The learning app MarcoPolo World School will now be used in schools around the country thanks to a partnership between the app's parent company and the early childhood education support company Teaching Strategies.

In the early childhood learning app MarcoPolo World School, a group of cartoon animal friends called the Polos don space suits, hop on a rocket ship, and jet off into space to give a tour of the planets in the solar system, teaching their order from the Sun and their characteristics along the way. This is just one of more than 500 video lessons—coupled with thousands of accompanying learning games—in the app geared toward students ages three to seven.

The mastermind behind the app's lessons is BU Wheelock's Nermeen Dashoush, a clinical assistant professor of early childhood education. Dashoush, whose work focuses on STEAM

education for young children, has been the chief curriculum officer for the app's parent company, MarcoPolo Learning, since 2013; she leads the curriculum design for all of the

**"This exciting partnership will enable us to reach even more children than before."**

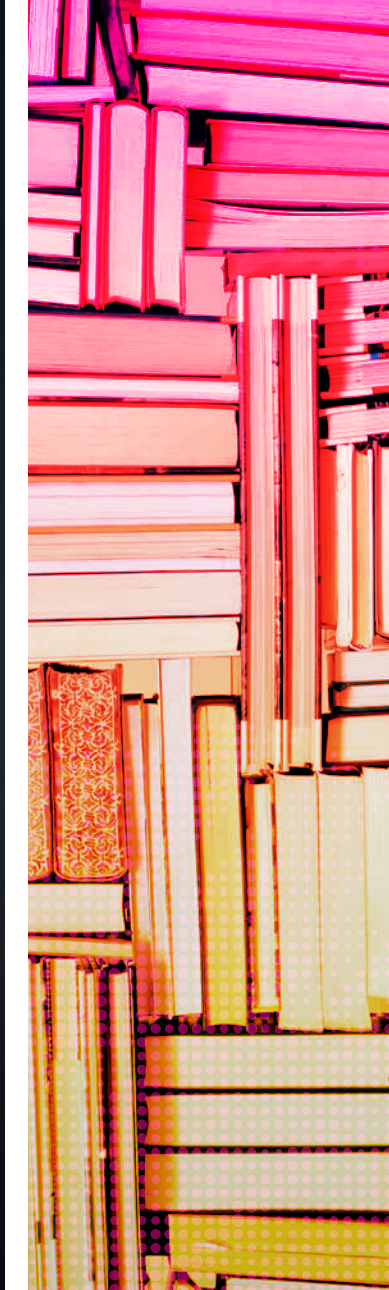
company's lessons, learning games, and even its television series, *The Polos*. In 2019, the app was nominated for an International Emmy in the Kids: Digital category.

After the pandemic highlighted gaps in at-home learning provision, MarcoPolo Learning

and the early childhood education support company Teaching Strategies announced a partnership to bring a version of the app, MarcoPolo School Edition, to schools around the country. They hope to eventually reach 5 million children nationwide. The app will be used to enhance both in-classroom and at-home learning.

"I went into science education to be able to provide quality science access to young children after recognizing major disparities in who gets access to STEAM education," says Dashoush. "This exciting partnership will enable us to reach even more children than before."





# Literature That Reflects the World



**Laura Jiménez** is working to disrupt the traditional primary and secondary school reading curriculum, "one teacher at a time"

BY SARA RIMER / PHOTOS BY DANA SMITH



When Laura M. Jiménez finally learned to read at age 11—she'd been held back by dyslexia—she was smitten. She devoured Judy Blume, the Hardy Boys, and Nancy Drew, who “was always getting conked on the head,” as Jiménez recalls. “I worried she was going to get a concussion.”

“I had a not great childhood,” says Jiménez, who is Latinx and a lesbian and grew up in Long Beach, Calif. “Reading was an escape, a place to hide. I read more than I did homework. I hardly ever read what was assigned in school.”

What was missing from the books she was assigned in school, such as *The Great Gatsby* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, was anyone who looked like her, or shared any part of her identity. Instead, says Jiménez, there were soul-crushing negative stereotypes—drug lords, prostitutes, wacky Speedy Gonzales characters, closeted gay people. “The message is that your story isn’t valued, that you don’t belong in school,” Jiménez says. “I learned that school was not my place.”

And yet, as Jiménez would discover later, school *was* her place. Now, as a senior lecturer and scholar of literacy and children’s literature, Jiménez is a leader in a growing movement to bring more diverse writers, as well as books and stories about complex characters who are Black, Indigenous, people of color, LGBTQIA+, and from other marginalized and underrepresented groups, into the nation’s elementary and secondary school classrooms.

**“If you’re still focused on *Tuck Everlasting*—or on Shakespeare or Steinbeck—you’re sending the message that marginalized voices, marginalized history, and marginalized stories aren’t important.”**

“We need to have a literature that reflects the world,” says Jiménez, who has a PhD in educational technology and educational psychology from Michigan State University and also serves as BU Wheelock’s associate dean for equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The nation’s demographics are changing rapidly, and a majority of public school students are now nonwhite. And yet the standardized English Language Arts curriculum that teachers are expected to follow in schools across the country still relies heavily on white authors writing about white people, say Jiménez and other educators and scholars.

“If you’re still focused on *Tuck Everlasting*—or on Shakespeare or Steinbeck—you’re sending the message that marginalized voices, marginalized history, and marginalized stories aren’t important,” Jiménez says.

She and other educators aren’t suggesting that the classics be discarded: “We’re saying there are other great books.”



**“Because readers bring their identities and life experiences into their transactions with texts, a book can be a window for one reader and a mirror for another.”**

Jiménez cites research showing that kids who are given a choice of books tend to read more—and read more carefully. That was certainly true for her. She waxes rhapsodic about the card catalogue in her old branch library in Long Beach. “I loved, loved, loved the card catalogue, because you could browse,” she says.

### A BOOK IS A WINDOW, OR A MIRROR

Jiménez teaches literacy and children’s literature to undergraduate and graduate students who are aspiring teachers, or teacher candidates, as they’re called, and classroom teachers who come to BU Wheelock for additional training and certification. She approaches teaching—and her critical analysis of literacy and children’s literature—through what she and other educators describe as an intersectional social justice lens.

Explaining how the term applies to elementary and secondary school classrooms, Jiménez writes in a January 2021 article for *Language Arts Lessons*, the journal for the National Council of Teachers of English, “Teacher candidates must learn to recognize, appreciate and celebrate identities that are different from their own across multiple matrices of race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, ability, religion and class.”

“Intersectionality—the term was coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw—recognizes that we all have multiple facets to our identities,” she writes.

Books that authentically represent diverse characters are valuable for all young readers, says Jiménez, and can teach white children about people who are different from them. In her article, Jiménez cites the work of Rudine Sims Bishop, an Ohio State University professor emerita, who, in a 1990 article about the lack of authentic representation of African Americans in children’s literature, suggested that books can be windows for readers into real or imagined worlds, sliding doors allowing readers to visit those worlds, or mirrors reflecting the reader’s world. “Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation,” Bishop wrote.

The metaphor is more relevant than ever today, says Jiménez. “Because readers bring their identities and life experiences into their transactions with texts,” she writes, “a book can be a window for one reader and a mirror for another.” It follows, she adds, that “teachers’ expertise and understanding of the students and the literature is essential.”

Jiménez teaches and recommends children’s books referred to as #OwnVoices, which was developed on Twitter and promotes kidlit by authors from marginalized or underrepresented groups writing about people like themselves. Such books include *The Parker Inheritance* by Varian Johnson and *Ivy Aberdeen’s Letter to the World* by Ashley Herring Blake.

Jiménez has her own requirements for these books: They must show “marginalized individuals as whole people, leading complex lives that do not adhere to the dominant white narrative,” she writes in her article. They must also push back against biased narratives about

marginalized communities, be relevant to the students reading them, promote deep engagement, and address literacy skills and standards.

It’s a lot to ask from a book, says Jiménez. However, when she brings a book into the classroom, she writes, “I’m using the most precious resource there is in education—time,” and she wants to be sure the book is worthy of everyone’s time.

### DISRUPTING THE READING CURRICULUM

The nation’s teachers are 80 percent white and, says Jiménez, the majority of her BU Wheelock students are white, middle-class women. “These are people who want to be teachers because they loved school,” she says. “The system is literally made for them. How do I convince them that this thing that was really good for them needs to change, and that they’re the ones who have to change it?”

Her students, especially the millennials, end up embracing the literature she introduces to them. “They’ve grown up in a world where, although they were not taught in school about oppressive systems, they’ve lived through it,” she says. “They grew up with Ferguson. They saw it on social media.”

Jiménez wants to disrupt the traditional whiteness-centered reading curriculum “teacher by teacher. We’re asking them to teach anti-oppression in the classroom,” she says. “It’s a really scary time for teachers to be doing that.”

She is referring to the latest culture wars playing out in Texas, Virginia, Washington, D.C., New Hampshire, and other states





Students at 826 Boston, a widely admired nonprofit youth writing program in Roxbury, Mass., show off their projects. Jiménez and other Wheelock faculty members are exploring a partnership with the organization. “They teach writing like nobody’s business,” says Jiménez. The idea is for BU Wheelock students to learn from 826 Boston about teaching creative writing, and for 826 Boston to learn more about reading children’s literature.

across the country, with conservative Republicans at the national, state, and local levels taking steps to block curriculums in primary and secondary schools that emphasize systemic racism. Their targets include books and teaching they deem focused on identity, and the nation’s racist history.

“We’re trying to figure out if these things go through, how can teachers work around them,” Jiménez says.

Changing or even just expanding the reading curriculum has long been an uphill battle. When her students enter their own classrooms, they often experience pushback from the school bureaucracy, Jiménez says. “They’ll say they don’t have time for new books—that if you’re going to add something, then you have to give something up,” she says. But teachers have some autonomy in individual classrooms, and Jiménez sees part of her role as helping her former students navigate bureaucracies and avoid “getting swallowed up by a system that doesn’t support their ideas.”

For Jiménez, some of the opposition has become personal. She analyzes and recommends graphic novels for children on her blog, *Booktoss*. Her followers include teachers, children’s librarians, and other scholars. Writing about being a Latinx lesbian who wants to disrupt the status quo, she has grown accustomed to getting bashed and bullied on social media. But in 2018, after she criticized a new graphic novel for being overtly racist and Islamophobic—the publisher subsequently pulled the book amid

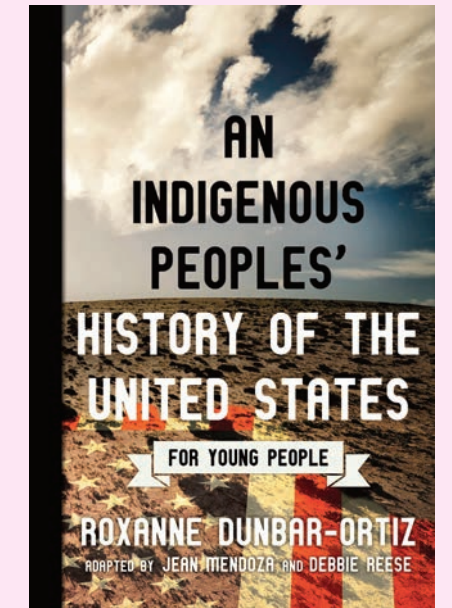
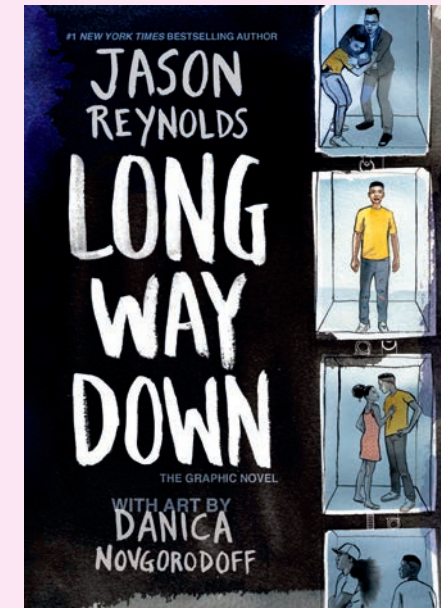
the loud outcry—a letter loaded with obscene, hate-filled death threats against her arrived via snail mail in her BU mailbox. BU administrators and security officials responded immediately, says Jiménez, and went to great lengths to ensure her safety.

Jiménez shut down her blog for almost six months, but eventually decided she was not going to be silenced. “You can just say, ‘Fine, it’s not worth it, I’m going away,’ or you can take all the precautions you need and keep moving forward,” she says, adding that she has been strongly supported by her colleagues, other scholars, and teachers, as well as her family.

Among several other projects, Jiménez and other BU Wheelock faculty members are exploring a partnership with 826 Boston, a widely admired nonprofit youth writing program in Roxbury, Mass. “They teach writing like nobody’s business,” says Jiménez. The idea is for BU Wheelock students to learn from 826 Boston about teaching creative writing, and for 826 Boston to learn more about reading children’s literature.

It fits with Jiménez’s mission, for kids from marginalized and underrepresented groups to have access to the literature she believes they deserve: high-quality books that will help them become lifelong readers, like her. Kids might love a book because it surprises them, Jiménez writes on *Booktoss*, “or because it reflects them in ways that they have never seen before, provides them respite from their everyday lives, or shows them things they never knew or imagined.”

Courtesy of 826 Boston



# JIMÉNEZ’S PICKS

SIX BOOKS THAT AUTHENTICALLY REPRESENT DIVERSE CHARACTERS



1. *Green Lantern: Legacy* by Minh Lê, illustrated by Andie Tong (Elementary/Middle Grade)
2. *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds (Elementary/Middle Grade)
3. *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States for Young People* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, adapted by Jean Mendoza and Debbie Reese (Young Adult)
4. *When the Moon Was Ours* by Anna-Marie McLemore (Young Adult)
5. *With the Fire on High* by Elizabeth Acevedo (Young Adult)
6. *Akata Witch series* by Nnedi Okorafor (Young Adult)





# NEW BEGINNINGS

For 43 years, **Gilda Nardone** has helped Maine residents manage life changes, from navigating divorce to switching careers

BY CORINNE STEINBRENNER / PHOTOS BY ERIC MORAN

**The American divorce rate rose dramatically during the 1970s, leaving many women financially insecure, especially those who'd never done paid work outside the home.** In 1975, a pair of California activists—57-year-old divorcee Tish Sommers and 55-year-old widow Laurie Shields—formed the Alliance for Displaced Homemakers to advocate for the needs of such women, taking up the motto “Don’t Agonize, Organize.” They lobbied for state and federal programs to help former homemakers successfully enter the workforce.

In Maine, two freshman female lawmakers took up the cause, sponsoring a bill to establish a Displaced Homemakers Program for their state. The bill passed in 1977 with an appropriation of \$10,000. Within a year, the program had an advisory council and an ambitious young executive director, Gilda Nardone.

Nardone (79) applied for the job as she was finishing the final credits for her master’s degree in educational administration from Wheelock College. A former childcare worker, Nardone had developed an interest in adult education during her time at Wheelock, and she felt strongly about supporting women through transitions. She had recently become divorced, and both her mother and grandmother had been young widows, forcing a transformation from homemaker to breadwinner.

Nardone began her work by organizing support groups for displaced homemakers in Maine. Soon, women in the groups began identifying what else they needed for training and support. “They were the ones who said, we need to learn how to write a résumé, how to interview, how to decide what a good job might be for me at this point in my life,” says Nardone. She listened to their requests and began building a curriculum.

For the next 43 years, Nardone led her organization through transitions of its own. In 1994, the Displaced Homemakers Program changed its name to the Maine Center for Women, Work, and Community. “We had broadened our audience,” says Nardone, “and we wanted a name that gave a sense of women moving forward.” What had begun as an underfunded effort to help mid-life and older women build confidence and transfer homemaking skills to the workplace had become a statewide organization teaching women of all ages business and entrepreneurship skills and advocating for women’s economic interests on the state and national levels.

Gilda Nardone is the executive director of New Ventures Maine, an organization that helps Maine residents of all socioeconomic backgrounds find a job, launch a small business, start or return to college, or get a handle on their finances.



In 2015, the organization renamed itself New Ventures Maine to reflect further expansion in its services and target population. It had begun coordinating conferences to introduce girls to careers in trade and technical fields, expanded its training and support for entrepreneurs, and added financial literacy courses. While the organization retained its focus on empowering women, its services became available to all Maine residents.

Today, New Ventures Maine (NVME) has 19 staff members, 17 locations throughout the state, and a budget of nearly \$2 million. It's supported by state and federal funds, and by private grants and donors. Through free classes and individual coaching, NVME helps Maine residents of all socioeconomic backgrounds find a job, start or return to college, launch a small business, or get a handle on their finances. The organization provides intensive services to more than 1,400 people each year and reaches thousands more through conferences and financial coaching. As the pandemic has pushed so many people—particularly women—into unexpected life and career adjustments, there has been a renewed emphasis on the importance of NVME's services.

### CONFRONTING CHANGE

Nardone says there are at least two keys to successfully navigating transition: be patient with the process, and listen to as many guiding voices as you can.

"Sometimes change happens to people. Sometimes people want to make it happen," Nardone says. Either way, it's common for people facing change to be confused about what their next steps should be. "And people who aren't comfortable sitting with the unknown can move too quickly," she says, "making a decision without having thoroughly thought it through or done the research."

True transformation takes time, Nardone says, which is why many of NVME's programs are multiweek courses rather than one-session workshops. The organization's popular career-planning programs use a framework to guide students along. "First you have to explore—you explore the external environment, and you explore your own internal environment, assessing your skills and interests. Then you begin to identify some areas of focus. You do more research on those and test them out," Nardone explains. "It's a cyclical process, rather than a straight line. You're assessing, reflecting, integrating information, making decisions—and then, often, starting that process again at a different level."



**"Sometimes change happens to people. Sometimes people want to make it happen," says Gilda Nardone. There are at least two keys to successfully navigating transition: be patient with the process, and listen to as many guiding voices as you can.**

Working with instructors—and with classmates from a wide range of backgrounds—also provides people a sounding board for their ideas and helps them see their situation from different perspectives. For Ellen Thayer, a graduate of NVME's "Venturing Forth" program, those perspectives were invaluable.

Thayer enrolled in the entrepreneurship program in 2011 after having been laid off from her job as a television meteorologist. "I was ready to say goodbye to this business of TV weather," she says, "because the whole industry was changing and salaries were coming down." An oil painter with many artistic interests, Thayer wanted to try making a living as a creative entrepreneur.

Nardone, pictured here on the University of Maine at Augusta campus, is proud to have helped so many people set and achieve their goals, "whether it's graduating from college, landing a good job with benefits, starting and growing a successful small business, or managing their money and beginning to build assets."

Through the program, Thayer met a lawyer who discussed various business structures, an accountant who talked about business taxes, an expert in trade shows, a representative of Maine's Small Business Administration, and fellow entrepreneurs with great ideas of their own. Many relationships Thayer developed during the program continue to this day.

Today, Thayer owns the business Love Rocks Me. She creates artistic designs using heart-shaped rocks gathered from Maine beaches, photographs the designs, and then prints them on posters, cards, magnets, and mugs. Her products are in more than 250 stores around the country.

### THE NEXT STEP

For the past year, Nardone has been carefully planning for another major transition—her own retirement, which becomes effective December 31, 2021. True to form, Nardone took time to map out a plan and listened to many voices during the process. She hired a consultant to teach NVME's management team about building strategic relationships and asked each of her direct reports what they needed from her before her departure.

Looking back over her career, Nardone says she's proud to have helped so many people set and achieve their goals, "whether it's graduating from college, landing a good job with benefits, starting and growing a successful small business, or managing their money and beginning to build assets." She's also proud of the positive changes she's overseen at NVME, expanding programs, building partnerships, and influencing policy decisions that have improved the economic security of women and families. There's more to do, she adds: before her retirement, she began exploring NVME's potential role in protecting the environment and supporting racial equity, and the coronavirus pandemic made it clear that women need more support in balancing employment with caregiving.

Nardone is frequently asked how she remained in the same role for more than four decades. "I've never been bored," she says, because the job provided constant opportunities to learn and grow. She's also relished being in a position to advance gender equity in Maine. After years as a volunteer in the women's movement in the 1970s (producing newsletters, facilitating consciousness-raising groups, staffing a rape crisis line), she feels honored and grateful to have made a career helping people—and especially women—move their lives forward. **W**



# THE SCIENCE OF EXCELLENCE

What makes some people standouts—  
and what the rest of us can learn from them

BY ANDREW THURSTON

**M**ore than 15 million people play baseball in America, from tiny T-ballers to rusty weekend warriors. Plenty harbor dreams of hitting a World Series home run, but with only around 1,000 spots on big league rosters, they have a better chance of winning an Academy Award—a one in 11,500 shot, according to *Forbes*—than swinging a bat at Fenway Park.

Edson Filho is interested in what separates those who make it to the top from the rest of us: how pro players and teams not only excel, but keep pulling out game-winning performances.

An associate professor of sports psychology and counseling, he's looked at the traits shared by the best of the best, from Olympic athletes to virtuoso musicians to leading circus acts.

"There is a science behind excellence," says Filho, a certified mental performance consultant and member of the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee's sport psychology registry. "To be there at the top of the pyramid, you need a large base: mental skills, a learning approach, a strength-based approach. You really have to practice your mental game and make it a priority. Instead of worrying about what you're lacking, look at how you can grow."

By using statistical modeling, biofeedback, and brain imaging, he can see what's happening in elite performers' brains as they prepare for games, recover from setbacks, and cope with stress. He's examined how top teams come together for a greater goal, studying team dynamics theory and what he calls shared zones of optimal functioning.

Filho talked with *BU Wheelock* about what he's learned from studying performance optimization and how educators and others can apply his findings in their lives and work.

**BU Wheelock: What are the common traits of people who excel all the time—and what can we learn from them?**

**Filho:** A lot of things separate high-performing individuals from low-performing individuals. And it is in terms of how they think, how they feel, and how they behave: We call it the cognitive-affective-behavioral link. It is also their ability to self-regulate. The psychology of the self is pretty big: there's self-concept, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy or task-specific confidence, self-compassion. High-performing individuals always practice to improve, they're always working on their potential. We know they tend to appraise a situation as a challenge rather than a threat. The other element is the environment. We know from research that if you have a good coach, that helps a lot—and the right coach at the right time. If you start practicing with the best clubs, you get the best environment to develop.

**You play soccer. Has studying psychology improved your game?**

Yes, because not only have I studied it, I've internalized it. For instance, one of the most studied things in sport psychology is anxiety. Performers get anxious because of essentially two things: preparation and how important the event is. If you have a math test tomorrow and you prepare, you get less anxious. For something important, you're always going to be a little anxious; you cannot lie to yourself. High-performing people, like [Olympic sprinter] Usain Bolt, love the pressure, embrace that pressure. If you are well prepared and mindful about it, it makes you function better.

**How can teachers use your research to help the kids in their classrooms excel?**

You need to know the mental skills or the coping skills that are important. In England now, most big soccer clubs have sport psychologists, so the kids are learning those things from people with expertise. That should be for everybody. Imagine a kid going to the top soccer clubs in England, learning from experts about visualization, gratitude, resilience, mental toughness, self-confidence from an early age. You need a curriculum, just like you need a curriculum for math or languages. Psychological skills training could be, and should be, taught from an early age.

**At work, most of us are part of a team. What separates the winning teams from the losing ones?**

High-performing teams have high task cohesion: everybody knows what they should do, everybody has a unique value contribution. If a player thinks they're not contributing, cohesion is going to drop. And social cohesion, whether they like each other, makes a difference. The other one is leadership. What's the best leadership model? Sometimes you have to make the decision, sometimes you have to



**"Most successful people are task-oriented—they want to improve their performance in the task instead of comparing themselves with others all the time. There's always somebody better than you, there's always somebody faster than you, and if you compare yourself all the time, you'll burn out and eventually quit."**—EDSON FILHO

be democratic, sometimes you have to be a transactional or transformational leader. But that all varies with the situation. A team might lose because, for a given situation, the coach had to be democratic and chose to be autocratic, or task cohesion was high, but social cohesion was low, or the team has a lot of shared knowledge but no people with complementary skills. It's complex.

**It seems like a lot has to go right to succeed.**

Most successful people are task-oriented—they want to improve their performance in the task instead of comparing themselves with others all the time. There's always somebody better than you, there's always somebody faster than you, and if you compare yourself all the time, you'll burn out and eventually quit. Excellence is a multilayered process. A lot of people don't know what to change at the individual level, don't know how to make positive changes at the group level, and don't know how to change the structures. But nobody reaches higher levels of performance and stays there without social support. I haven't seen one single expert who reached the top alone. There are parents or a coach, there's a partner, there's government funding—somebody believed in you. **W**

*This interview was edited and condensed for clarity.*



# EMPOWERING BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**Stephanie Curenton** leads antibias education initiatives  
at the Center on the Ecology of Early Development

BY MARA SASSOON / PHOTO BY CIARA CROCKER





**E**ven before the murder of George Floyd and the debates over how to teach race in the classroom, Stephanie M. Curenton and her colleagues were on a mission to promote antibias education.

Now, as Florida, Arkansas, Idaho, Oklahoma, and other states are passing legislation limiting what their public schools can teach about race, racism, and so-called “divisive concepts,” the team’s work has taken on added urgency, says Curenton, an associate professor of education leadership and policy studies and applied human development.

Curenton is executive director of BU Wheelock’s Center on the Ecology of Early Development (CEED), a research hub launched in fall 2020 that is dedicated to studying ways early childhood educators can empower and advocate for Black children and their families. This includes providing training and professional development plans centered around equity and antiracist practices in both community settings and classrooms. They also offer guidance that informs policies and programs aimed at the success of racially and ethnically diverse learners.

Antibias teaching—using a diverse, inclusive curriculum that addresses and draws attention to the negative impact of stereotypes and biases—begins with our youngest students, says Curenton.



“In the wake of these ‘twin pandemics’—of COVID and racism—I think that many people have been sort of ripped open and are seeing that they do not want to live like this any longer,” she says. “They are even more open to thinking about how we can change as adults, but also how we can change for future generations as well. That has also re-emphasized the importance of early childhood education in general.”

She says CEED is one of the key players at the forefront of antibias and antiracist work in the early childhood education field: “And there is a lot of work to be done.”

### MAKING THE WORK ACCESSIBLE

At CEED, Curenton is promoting research that has a far-reaching impact on policies that affect Black children’s lives. Along with Iheoma Iruka, a CEED advisory board member and research professor of public policy at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, she created the Researchers Investigating Sociocultural Equity and Race (RISER) Network, a group of scholars who study Black children’s positive development. In February 2021, Iruka, Curenton, and the research group published a report, “Black Parent Voices: Resilience in the Face of the Two Pandemics—COVID-19 and Racism,” which explores how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Black families, including their experiences with discrimination, mental health, and childcare and education options. The report includes several policy recommendations, such as calling for extended paid sick and personal leave, as well as more flexible schedules for parents who are the sole providers for their children.

“People really understand now more than ever how important childcare is,” Curenton says. The report also recommends that telehealth and other alternative models of healthcare services use “antiracist and culturally appropriate strategies that promote radical healing,” including using a faith-based approach in certain cases.

The “Black Parent Voices” report is available for free on CEED’s website (bu-ceed.org); after it was published, Curenton and Iruka hosted a webinar for organizations, educators, and other researchers to go over its key findings. Curenton wants to make much of CEED’s work accessible to a broad audience. “We’re trying to lead in the academic and scholarly space, but we’re also trying to lead in this policy, practice, public-facing space as well around these issues of racial equity.”

### “CHANGING THE FUTURE”

Curenton is trying to reach early childhood educators in other ways. As the COVID-19 pandemic began to further spread across the United

States in April 2020, she published the book *Don’t Look Away: Embracing Anti-Bias Classrooms* (Gryphon House) with Iruka and scholars from Georgia State University and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. “Early childhood educators have a pivotal role in changing the future, because the early years of life, birth to age eight, are the most critical time period in our human development,” the coauthors write in the introduction. They draw on the work of Louise Derman-Sparks, a key scholar of antibias education, describing strategies for early childhood educators to recognize and minimize bias in classrooms and schools, incorporate culturally responsive experiences for students, and ultimately create an equitable setting for learning.

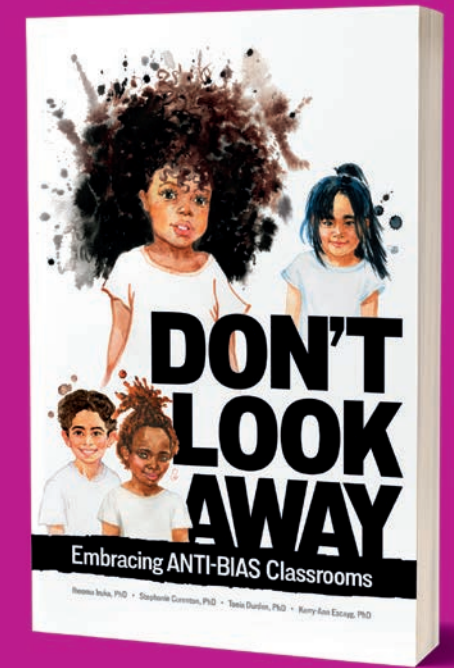
They advise teachers to reflect on their own biases and bring that awareness into the classroom. Curenton and her coauthors also encourage educators to consider the lived experiences of their students and base classroom lessons, activities, and conversations in these experiences. To support this kind of teaching method, they should create a classroom environment that incorporates imagery portraying diverse people, including people with disabilities. The authors also recommend books in the classroom showcase diversity.



**I REALIZED THAT WE DIDN’T REALLY HAVE A MEASURE OF CLASSROOM DISCOURSE THAT TOOK INTO CONSIDERATION THE DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERIENCES AND SKILLS OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE LEARNERS.**

Curenton is working with CEED researchers to help schools assess their reading lists. They have created a series of racially affirming book lists, including one for Black children and one for Asian American and Pacific Islander children, with recommendations from infancy to grade 6. Curenton is creating a list for Latinx children, as well. “I believe books can be part of this racial healing,” she says, and she is working on an intervention model that can guide educators, clinicians, and parents on how to use books to do this (you can also find advice on selecting diverse books for the classroom on page 6).

Curenton has found that in order to improve Black children’s education experiences, more research needs to be conducted on two fronts: how to best implement antiracist professional development for educators and practitioners, and how nontraditional education models are related to their school success. A key component to promoting inclusive and supportive teaching practices, she says, has



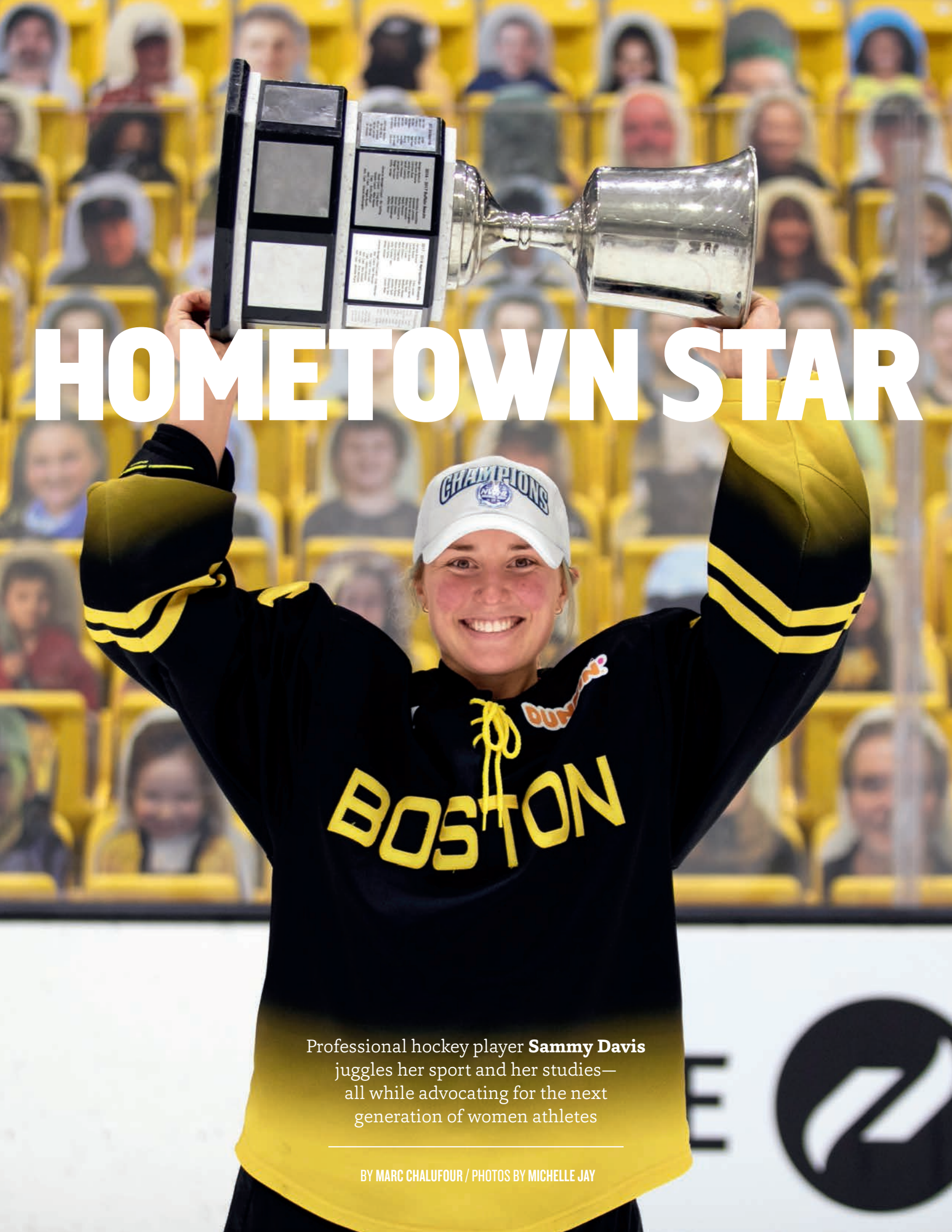
Curenton coauthored *Don’t Look Away: Embracing Anti-Bias Classrooms* (Gryphon House, 2020), which describes strategies for early childhood educators to recognize and minimize bias in classrooms and create equitable settings for learning.

been developing practical tools and resources that teachers can use in their own classrooms. Curenton, who has focused part of her own research on the social and language development of low-income and minority children, has built a tool, the Conversation Compass Communication Screener-Revised, to help teachers analyze their students’ communication skills and facilitate high-quality conversation in the classroom. The screener, used for students on an individual basis, consists of more than three dozen assessment items—such as “understands that drawings, letters, or icons have meaning” and “can describe the thoughts or feelings of a story character”—that teachers rate on a scale of “hardly ever,” “most times,” or “always.” Together, the ratings provide a picture of their students’ communication skills.

“I realized that we didn’t really have a measure of classroom discourse that took into consideration the developmental experiences and skills of culturally and linguistically diverse learners,” says Curenton. “It’s important to have one because our conversation skills are pretty much the foundation of all of our learning.”

She’s also developed another measure to promote equitable classroom instruction. The Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale, an observation tool for early childhood teachers to measure equitable sociocultural interactions in their classrooms, fills a gap in early childhood education, Curenton says. “We didn’t have a tool to look at classroom quality from a racial equity standpoint. Other measures were considered to be race neutral, but those measures did not take into consideration how an experience for children of color in the classroom might be different from an experience of a white student. It’s crucial that we don’t overlook that anymore.”





# HOMETOWN STAR

Professional hockey player **Sammy Davis** juggles her sport and her studies—all while advocating for the next generation of women athletes

BY MARC CHALUFOUR / PHOTOS BY MICHELLE JAY



## BOSTON HAS A LONG LINE OF PROFESSIONAL SPORTS ROYALTY.

Rarely, though, do athletes have as strong a connection to the city as hockey star **Sammy Davis**. **Tom Brady** was from California, **David Ortiz** (Hon.'17) from the Dominican Republic, and **Bill Russell** (Hon.'02) from Louisiana. Davis (CGS'17, Sargent'19, Wheelock'20) grew up in suburban Pembroke, Mass. She played high school hockey at Tabor Academy in Marion, Mass., just like Travis Roy (COM'00, Hon.'16). Then she starred at BU for four seasons. On April 28, 2020, the Boston Pride selected the hometown star with the first overall pick in the National Women's Hockey League (NWHL) draft—and less than a year later they won the league title.

It's not just her local roots that differentiate Davis from Boston's sporting elite. There's also a mammoth salary gap; even the best women pro athletes can rarely count on their paycheck to make a living. As she competes at the highest level, Davis is also pursuing her doctorate in occupational therapy at the MGH Institute of Health Professions. And she's advocating for women athletes so future generations won't have to make the same sacrifices.

Davis and her siblings played a lot of sports growing up—she competed in soccer, field hockey, and softball—but ice hockey quickly became her favorite. "I love the camaraderie and the team atmosphere," she says. "Knowing that you have 20 friends, 20 people that care about you—it's a family." Her father took her to see the Terriers play at Walter Brown Arena—even though he's a Northeastern alum—and she attended hockey camp at BU. "It was always BU," she says.

Davis made an immediate impact in her first collegiate season, earning a spot on the Hockey East all-rookie team. By the time she graduated, she was the program's sixth-highest scorer of all time. And no goal was bigger than the one she scored during overtime of the 2019 Beanpot to beat Harvard and give the Terriers their first title since 1981. Her BU experience extended into the classroom—Davis was a four-time Hockey East All-Academic Team selection.

A misfortune on the ice during a sophomore season practice set her OT career in motion. A flying puck fractured the tip of her pinkie despite the padded hockey glove she wore. After surgery, Davis worked briefly with an occupational therapist. She was already planning to enter Sargent College as a junior, but the experience focused her interest. "I just fell in love with the profession," she says. She began talking to OTs about their careers and shadowed one who worked with preschoolers.

It was another injury that led her to BU Wheelock. After missing her junior season following double hip surgery, Davis decided to

stay at BU for a fifth year to complete her athletic eligibility. That gave her time to earn a master's in special education, which she hopes will help her if she ends up working in a school setting.

As she neared graduation, Davis knew two things: she wanted to continue studying occupational therapy and she wasn't ready to walk away from hockey. She considered playing professionally in Europe, but, she says, "I'm a Boston girl through and through." So, after she was drafted by the Pride, Davis enrolled in the MGH Institute of Health Professions.

Balancing school and hockey necessitates a grueling routine, but Davis makes it work. "Sports have always been such a big part of my life," she says. "And I've found that playing hockey makes me a better person in other areas." She's out of bed at 6 am for her daily morning workout in the summer. Then it's off to class all day, and, finally, Pride practice at about 8:30 pm—a concession to the fact that the women on the team all need to maintain second careers to support themselves. "I get home at 11, go to bed, and then the next day it's the same thing again," Davis says.

It's not exactly a formula for peak athletic performance—and the gender disparities are not lost on Davis. "When I was younger, I used to say, 'I want to play in the NHL,'" she says. "Now that there is a league that girls can look up to, it's amazing. But we still have a long way to go. I would love to get to decide to be an OT or a professional athlete. You don't get to choose right now, because you can't make a living being a professional athlete."

Davis is keenly aware of her role as an advocate for women's sports. "Using our voices and our platform is so important. We keep asking and pushing for more, and showing people that we deserve the same as anybody else," she says. "I really hope that future generations will benefit from everything that we're trying to do."

The NWHL, which in September rebranded itself as the Premier Hockey Federation, recently announced one small step forward: the league doubled the salary cap for each team to \$300,000 for the 2021–2022 season. Averaged out, that's \$15,000 per player on any team that spends the maximum. By comparison, the *minimum* NHL player's salary is \$750,000, and the stars earn millions.

For women athletes, the low salaries can mean retiring before they're ready. "I would love to play another year of professional hockey," says Davis, who is 24. "Because we're working two jobs, our energies are divided. My goal for the sport is that we get to choose—that we get to pick one." **W**





# INSPIRATION FOR CHANGE

**K**enann McKenzie was seven years old when she immigrated to the United States from Guyana. She enjoyed learning. So did her mother, who was working toward an undergraduate degree. But when McKenzie tried to enroll in a New York City public school, she was told she'd be held back a grade.

It had nothing to do with how smart she was, how eager she was to learn. McKenzie was a Caribbean immigrant and, she was told, those were just the rules for people like her.

"Coming from what people call a third world country, coming out of a situation where we materially didn't have a lot, people make assumptions about what you have and what you're capable of," says McKenzie, whose mother ended up enrolling her in a private school for her first years in the States—a "telling sacrifice"—to ensure she was treated with fairness. "I just loved school and that continued throughout my life. Even when I started to encounter racism that was blatant as I was older, it didn't shake my feeling about who I was."

She calls that early school experience her "biggest why"—the reason she became an educator. It's also why she's so focused on giving others the resources and training they need to ensure "all children are cherished and encouraged to be the best they could be."

McKenzie is director of the Aspire Institute, a BU Wheelock-based nonprofit that provides professional development for teachers and administrators, project and training support for schools, districts, and states, and access to mentors for newly qualified teachers. A longtime K-12 and higher education administrator and researcher, McKenzie was formerly executive director of the National Board of Education Sciences. "I want to help disabuse people of this idea that they can look at somebody and write them off."

Founded in 2007 as part of the former Wheelock College, the Aspire Institute has a mission "to advance knowledge and solutions in response to social and educational challenges." Recent projects have included hosting monthly self-care groups for educators, seminars on school reopenings and equity, and a forum on trauma and resilience.

Much of the institute's work, which is funded by grants, philanthropic support, and project revenues, is centered on Boston.

Advice from **Kenann McKenzie**, director of the Aspire Institute, a BU Wheelock-based professional development nonprofit, on building community, supporting teacher well-being, and tackling racism

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BY ANDREW THURSTON / PHOTO BY CIARA CROCKER





**“Many schools make a good effort, but it’s not just about your effort, it’s about knowing the right strategies for your school community,” says McKenzie. “And that takes getting to know the community, building relationships.”**

“We are in an interplay of support with our community,” says McKenzie. “At BU Wheelock, we’re collectively looking at how to make education a transformative space, and I do not think you can do that unless you’re in the community itself.”

While the Aspire Institute acts as a venue for sharing BU expertise with the city, it also serves as a conduit for local knowledge.

“When I’m spending time with principals, in schools, and with teachers, there’s so much that I am learning,” says McKenzie, an adjunct assistant professor. “We need the input to know what really matters to people around us—what do they know, what do they have to teach us? We can’t know that if we’re in a bubble.”

“When I’m teaching my students, I’m giving them real-world examples that are timely, current, and place-based. I can say, ‘I’m in schools, this is what I’m seeing.’”

In the past year, many of the requests to the institute for support have been tied to the pandemic and social and political events: about building community, fighting racism, and promoting student and teacher well-being. *BU Wheelock* asked McKenzie to share some Aspire Institute-inspired lessons and advice:

## 1 GET TO KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY

Like many other educators, McKenzie always believed that schools had a role in fostering community—within their walls and beyond—but she says the pandemic underlined its importance.

“What we have learned about our places of learning is that they are a community for children, and we know children value connecting with other adults and children,” she says. “Building a sense of community is urgent and necessary—something to really spend time on.”

But she admits it’s difficult to start engaging in that work if staff are already overloaded or if a school doesn’t fully understand the needs and issues of its children and neighbors.

“Many schools make a good effort, but it’s not just about your effort, it’s about knowing the right strategies for your school community,” says McKenzie. “And that takes getting to know the community, building relationships.”

She says formal surveys and informal conversations with residents can be a good way to figure out local interests and needs—and ways the school might be able to help. At one high school she worked at, McKenzie and other administrators opened a food pantry on parent-teacher conference days in response to neighborhood food scarcity. “Engaging families on-site,” she says, “also helps to better understand the context within which students are seeking to thrive.”

## 2 PARTNER WITH FAMILIES

According to multiple studies, involving parents in their kids’ education has a cascading effect beyond building community: children do better at school and at home, teacher morale goes up, school academic and social ratings improve.

But, in a 2020 survey of teachers and parents, the Center for American Progress found that while many schools do a good job of working with parents, the connection often drops during middle school. Many families also said schools weren’t communicating frequently or consistently enough.

McKenzie recommends not only personalizing messages, communicating in languages parents speak, and showing how feedback has led to changes, but also thinking beyond the standard emails and newsletters.

“We have to be creative about how we reach out to families,” she says.

During her time teaching in Washington, D.C., McKenzie prompted family engagement in important events by mixing in student-led displays and entertainment. “Whenever we had students centered in the activity, parents showed up.” A community forum on equity, for example, featured the marching band and cheerleading squad. “We had a full gym. Part of that is just understanding what parents value. You can incorporate other things they need to know within that setting.”

## 3 HAVE A NORTH STAR

Everyone has a bad day—perhaps more than one or two in the last year or so. To counteract the tough moments, McKenzie recommends teachers “find the North Star that wakes them up every day, that helps them refocus their attention on why they went into the profession.” She says journaling can be a way to affirm that: marking the positive interactions, the inspirational lessons.

Although educators worry about the mental health of their students, McKenzie says too few take care of their own well-being.

“As we practice that for ourselves and model it, then we are able to be better at sharing it with other people,” she says. “We need as much encouragement and reinforcement of positive things. And it always helps to reflect on whether there’s something you’re going to do differently tomorrow.”

## 4 CHECK YOUR BIASES

“Had somebody shared the demographics of my birth,” says McKenzie, “the predictors would have been all negative—they would have said all sorts of things weren’t going to be possible. We need to work toward a future where your zip code or skin color or language should not be such a great predictor of your life chances.”

Since the murder of George Floyd, many institutions have stepped up their efforts to tackle racism and make themselves more equitable—and plenty have turned to the Aspire Institute for help finding their blind spots or building inclusive policies. While

McKenzie lauds those schools that have started antiracism work alone, she says bringing in outside experts can allow for deeper—and more necessarily critical—conversations.

“The sharing isn’t quite the same when your school leader is asking you,” she says. “The power dynamics that existed in the building could impact the way people share and how comfortable they feel divulging their concerns.”

It also prevents the work, which McKenzie says shouldn’t just be a one-off workshop, becoming a burden or an add-on that keeps getting postponed.

“We have to keep being self-aware of how our actions and our thinking could be limiting what it is we’re giving to children,” she says. “We have to be able to peel away those layers of the biases we hold.”

Schools can do all kinds of work to direct resources to give all children what they need to be successful, she says, but “we have to start off believing they can be successful.”

## 5 LET KIDS BE KIDS

A global pandemic, systemic racism, fractured politics. “Our children have been surrounded by a lot of social upheaval,” says McKenzie. And while she wants educators to engage children in these big topics in age-appropriate ways, McKenzie also hopes they’ll remember to give kids a chance to be, well, kids.

“Our best moment is when we can see children for who they are and that we appreciate that childhood is not something to race through, not a bump in the road to adulthood,” says McKenzie. Children love to play, explore their curiosity. “Childhood has to be celebrated and honored.”

**To find out how you can partner with—or support—the Aspire Institute, visit [bu.edu/wheelock/aspire-institute](http://bu.edu/wheelock/aspire-institute).**



# COMMUNITY: ALUMNI

## NOTES AND NEWS FROM YOU



Vicky Gall (Sargent'73, Wheelock'83) organized a fundraiser to purchase gravestones for Rebecca Lee Crumpler (MED 1864), the first Black woman to graduate from medical school in the United States, and Crumpler's husband Arthur.



Connie Lanseigne-Case ('56,'67) illustrated the book *When a Woman Takes a Walk*, including this colored pencil piece depicting a scene from her travels to Nepal.



Michael Chen ('06,'13) is principal of Pacific Bay Christian School in Pacifica, Calif. He was featured in an August 26, 2020, article on ESPN's *The Undeclared* about his efforts to bring antiracist teachings to the school.

### Honoring a Trailblazing Alum

Vicky Gall (Sargent'73, Wheelock'83) is the president of the Friends of the Hyde Park Branch of the Boston Public Library. Gall, a history lover, came across the name of Rebecca Lee Crumpler (MED 1864), the first Black woman to graduate from medical school in the United States, while reading a list of Hyde Park residents on Wikipedia, according to the *Boston Globe*. When she learned Crumpler and her husband, Arthur, were buried in unmarked graves at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park, Gall and the Friends group started a fundraiser to purchase gravestones, securing donations from the four Massachusetts medical schools (including BU), a recruiting class from the Boston Police Academy, and private donors across 21 states. "I just felt

that something needed to be done," Gall told the *Globe*. The Crumplers' granite gravestones were dedicated at a ceremony on July 16, 2020.

### Art Meets Poetry

Connie Lanseigne-Case ('56,'67) has been creating art based on her journeys and travels since 1980. She has traveled to more than 50 different countries since the summer of 1954, and once taught in Gabon for Crossroads Africa. Her illustrations, based on scenes from her journeys around the world, accompany the poems of Patricia Maurice in the book *When a Woman Takes a Walk* (Lulu, 2020). Lanseigne-Case notes that the book's postscript reads, "Two women world travelers separated by nearly

three decades and half a continent come together through art and poetry."

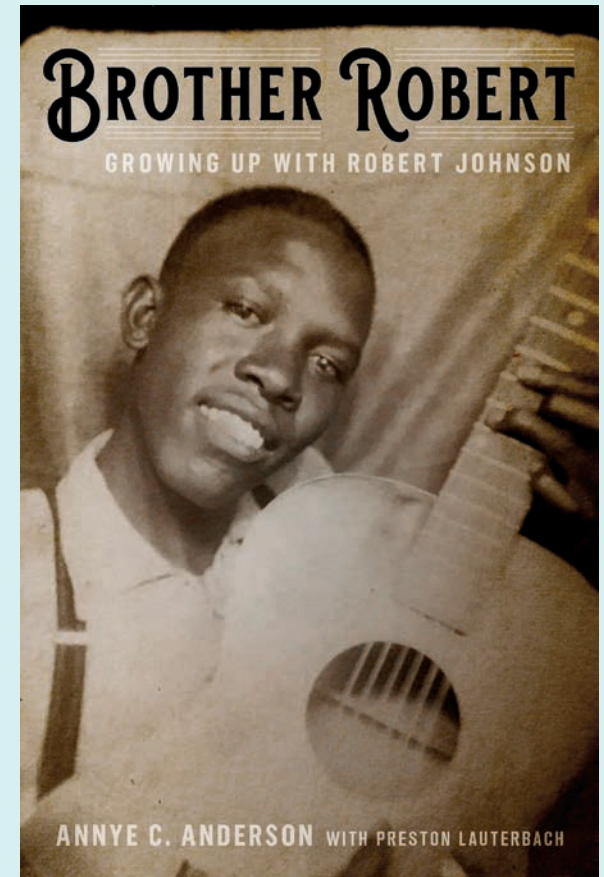
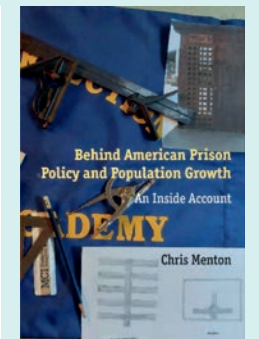
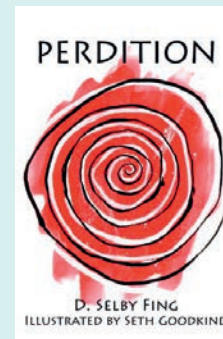
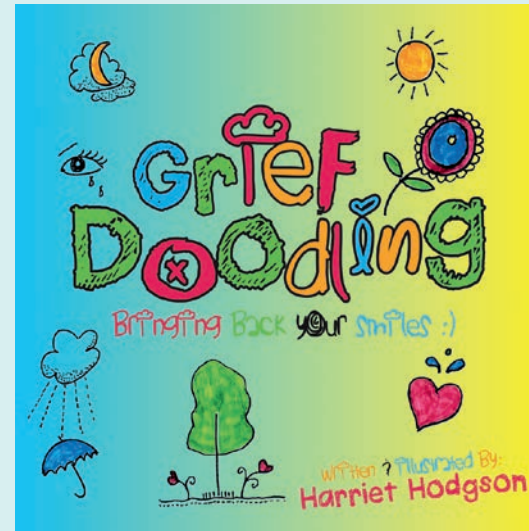
### Teaching Antiracism

Michael Chen ('06,'13), principal of Pacific Bay Christian School in Pacifica, Calif., was featured in an August 26, 2020, article on ESPN's *The Undeclared* about his efforts to bring antiracist teachings to the school. Chen was hired as the school's first principal of color in late 2017. According to the article, Chen accepted the position under the condition that the school change its name from Alma Heights Christian Academy (named after a woman with known ties to the Ku Klux Klan) and allow him to overhaul the school's culture, including its hiring practices and curriculum, to promote diversity.

Cydney Scott; Paul Yem Photography; Connie Lanseigne-Case

# PUBLISHED

BU Wheelock alums in print



**Harriet Hodgson ('57)** *Grief Doodling: Bringing Back Your Smiles* (Boutique of Quality Books, 2021), which won first place in the self-help category of the Firebird Book Awards. "This book builds on my BS in early childhood education from Wheelock College and my MA in art education from the University of Minnesota. It is the first book I have written and illustrated," she writes.

**Annye C. Anderson ('73)** *Brother Robert: Growing Up with Robert Johnson* (Hachette, 2020), a memoir about her life as a family member of the celebrated blues musician.

**Chris Menton ('77,'98)** *Behind American Prison Policy and Population Growth: An Inside Account* (Peter Lang Inc., 2020), about the factors that have led to a nationwide prison boom since the end of the 20th century.

**Martha Reed ('80)** *Love Power* (Buccaneer, 2020), the first in her new New Orleans-based mystery series.

**Barry Blocher (CGS'79, Wheelock'81)** *The Watchmaker* (Emerald City Press, 2020) and *The Silver Orchid* (Emerald City Press, 2020), under B. L. Blocher. "Remember, characters and incidents are the

product of the author's imagination and not to be construed as real...even if they do resemble some of the kids on my dorm floors," he writes.

**Robert Tobin ('83)** *No Regrets: How to Kickstart Your Career AND Your Life* (Discover 21, 2020), a book for people in their 20s and 30s "who are looking to kickstart their careers and live their dream life."

**William Pittman ('87)** *Perdition* (New Academia Publishing/Scarith Books, 2020), the first part of a three-part epic poem, written under the nom de plume D. Selby Fing.





## BU WHELOCK ALUMNI AWARDEES

BU Wheelock honored exceptional graduates at its annual Alumni Awardees Ceremony on September 30. This year's winners were:



**Reggie Jean (CAS'95, Wheelock'05)**, director of the BU Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math Science programs at BU Wheelock, received the Lucy Wheelock Award



**Shannon J. Fairley-Pittman ('08)**, associate director of the University Honors Program at Northeastern University, was given the Distinguished Contribution to Alma Mater & Alumni recognition



**Natalia Mercado Violand ('14, LAW'18)**, an associate in the litigation and enforcement practice group at the Boston-based law firm Ropes & Gray, won the Global Impact Award



**Sarah Besse ('17)**, cofounder and executive director of the Boston Outdoor Preschool Network, received a Young Alumni Award



**Shela Sinelien ('19)**, who cofounded the Boston Outdoor Preschool Network with Besse, also received a Young Alumni Award



**Nelly Ossia ('20)**, a world language educator who has taught both high school and college students, won the Trailblazer Award

## IN MEMORIAM

**Gaylen B. Kelley ('54,'59)**  
*Middleton, Mass.*

**Paula Menyuk ('55,'61)**, professor emerita of education and applied linguistics  
*Brookline, Mass.*

**Elizabeth Hoskins ('56)**  
*Vineyard Haven, Mass.*

**Roselmina "Lee" Indrisano ('56,'63)**, professor emerita of literacy education  
*Bethesda, Md.*

**Joan Snook Timm ('56)**  
*Sturgeon Bay, Wisc.*

**Sara Sibley Lenhart ('57)**  
*Chester, Conn.*

Visit [bu.edu/wheelock/in-memorial](https://bu.edu/wheelock/in-memorial) to see full In Memoriam list and read obituaries.



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BU Wheelock (Jean): Schmidt St. Fleur (Fairley-Pittman); Ropes & Gray (Mercado Violand); Sarah Besse; Shela Sinelien; Nelly Ossia

## WHY I GIVE



### HONORING MENTORS, PAST AND FUTURE

Born in mainland China, Elizabeth Fung ('61) grew up in Taiwan and came to Wheelock College at 16. "I was not fluent in English," she says, "but I did know some because my parents were in diplomatic service." Still, she struggled in literature classes—particularly with Shakespeare.

So Professor S. Wilcox Harvey, who was teaching English at Wheelock, started tutoring her every Saturday morning. "He did it for my whole freshman year," marvels Fung. "He was a very understanding and supportive person."

Fung has endowed the S. Wilcox Harvey Faculty Mentorship Fund to encourage BU Wheelock faculty to follow Harvey's example. The fund will support training resources, workshops, conferences, and other professional development related to mentoring students.

Fung chose to honor her professor, she says, "because Dr. Harvey was so consistent and dependable, and he made me feel very hopeful that things would work out." She credits that early support for her successful career in social work and adds, "Now that I have retired, I can understand more the kindness he showed by taking time every Saturday morning."

"That sounds so much like him. He was one of those people who always found time for you," says the professor's great-nephew, Steve Harvey. "When I heard about the gift, I was just thrilled, because he's one of the most special people in my life."

Thanks to Fung, he'll be remembered as a special person at BU Wheelock too.

—Louise Kennedy

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER McINTOSH



Mass General Brigham



BY CORINNE STEINBRENNER / PHOTO BY MICHAEL D. SPENCER

## TAYLOR GOYETTE-FRECHETTE ON WORKING TO DISMANTLE SYSTEMIC RACISM

**D**uring her final year in the Bachelor of Social Work program at the former Wheelock College, Taylor Goyette-Frechette interned at the Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center, where she taught high school students about racial justice. “It was there,” she says, “that I discovered the power of social work and the racial justice movement.”

Today, Goyette-Frechette ('17, SSW'20) is a trainer and project coordinator for Mass General Brigham in Boston, developing and delivering racial equity training for the 80,000 employees of a healthcare system that includes Brigham & Women's and Mass General, two of the world's most prestigious teaching hospitals.

Goyette-Frechette's work is inspired by the African philosophy Ubuntu, which roughly translates to “I am because we are” and emphasizes the power of community and the connectedness of people. She believes that our daily actions and decisions have the power to reinforce or to dismantle the culture of racism.

For those who want to help undo systemic racism, Goyette-Frechette offers these suggestions:

**START WITH YOURSELF.** A racist system hurts everyone, and it's important to recognize how structural racism makes you feel and how it negatively affects your life. “Don't only do this work on behalf of other people,” says Goyette-Frechette. “Do this work on behalf of yourself, your communities, and your children. We all have something to gain when we work to create a world centered on liberation.”

**TALK ABOUT IT.** If you don't know how to start a conversation about racism, begin by expressing your personal feelings. “Instead of trying to come up with the right words and the right language, lead with how you feel.”

**ADDRESS THE INEQUITIES AROUND YOU.** Look at your workplace, your neighborhood, and other spaces where you have power to make change. Challenge the policies and practices—written or unwritten—that result in injustice and inequity there.

**FIND YOUR PEOPLE.** “This is hard work, and you can't do it alone,” says Goyette-Frechette, so look for others to join you on the journey.

**KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE DESTINATION.** “We're so focused on getting away from racism that we forget to think about what we want to move toward. What does that new world look like? A space without racism should feel liberating, and liberation feels good. Focus on creating a world that feels good. Let's all get free.” **W**





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