



AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Hofstra's new academic programs are keeping the University at the forefront of higher education by promoting leading research, recruiting top students, and enhancing community engagement.

By Danna Lorch

Institutions of higher education are being forced to exhibit a level of agility unlike ever before. Job sectors that existed for generations are shrinking, while careers that did not even exist just 10 years ago are on the rise. Simultaneously, every class of first-year students is faced with its own set of challenges, interests, and goals.

So, amid constant change (and competition), how does a university continually attract students, provide them with a top-rated education, and send them into the workforce as highly skilled employees? By offering unique and innovative academic programs that attract top minds, from near and far, keeping it ahead of the higher education curve. The following academic programs are examples of Hofstra's blueprint for success.

RENEE McLEOD-SORDJAN



BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING



HOFSTRA NORTHWELL
SCHOOL of NURSING
AND
PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDIES

“This generation has taught me that traditional lectures, textbooks, and written assignments aren’t enough. To connect with students, you need to offer real-world experiences. That’s why I’m grateful for our new Science & Innovation Center, a realistic simulated hospital.”

– Renee McLeod-Sordjan
Dean of the Hofstra Northwell School of Nursing and Physician Assistant Studies

Renee McLeod-Sordjan, DNP, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, acute care and palliative care NP-BC and dean of the Hofstra Northwell School of Nursing and Physician Assistant Studies, has spent nearly 40 years working in the medical field. Of all her accomplishments, however, “The thing I’m proudest of in my career is getting to be one of the inaugural architects of Hofstra’s undergraduate nursing program,” she said. Understandably so. The work of McLeod-Sordjan and her colleagues in establishing a much-needed nursing program under difficult circumstances was one for the books.

According to New York’s Department of Health, the state could face a shortage of nearly 40,000 nurses by 2030. The need for nurses is dire, yet until recently, undergrads looking to pursue a nursing career had to look at schools other than Hofstra. Recognizing the degree program gap and the academic infrastructure already in place (Hofstra already offered a graduate nursing degree), the University launched a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in 2020.

In 2019, even before COVID-19 dramatically altered the healthcare landscape, McLeod-Sordjan and the University administration were hard at work developing the nursing curriculum. When the program received certification from New York state in 2020 and launched soon after, students were chomping at the bit to get started and immediately jumped into action by volunteering at on-campus vaccination sites.

Not wasting time could be an unofficial motto of the nursing program. From day one, students are inspired to think of themselves as nurses, courtesy of a professional nursing seminar taken during their first semester. They also complete chemistry, biology, and psychology courses in year one to gain the base knowledge for future advanced nursing courses. To promote first-year success, the program recently instituted a peer-mentoring initiative that allows new students the opportunity to learn studying and time management tips from their advanced peers.

Hofstra’s undergraduate nursing program, which earned accreditation from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education in the spring of 2023, reached a milestone late last year when it launched its first clinical rotations. Students left the classroom to gain hands-on experience caring for geriatric patients at local Northwell Health facilities, where all Hofstra nursing students are guaranteed clinical placement. This past spring, their rotations broadened to include pediatrics, women’s health, and pre- and post-operative wards.

These students are well-prepared to enter medical facilities thanks to Hofstra’s investment in state-of-the-art laboratories. “This generation has taught me that traditional lectures, textbooks, and written assignments aren’t enough,” McLeod-Sordjan said. “To connect with students, you need to offer real-world experiences. That’s why I’m grateful for our new Science & Innovation Center, a realistic simulated hospital.”

In the 75,000-square-foot building, the largest academic structure on campus, nursing students learn how to care for patients in real time; they are not merely reading about it in a textbook and jotting down notes on index cards. As McLeod-Sordjan emphasized, “We take three things seriously here at the School of Nursing: scholarship, research, and, most of all, practice. Graduates will leave Hofstra ready to take care of a diverse community with a complexity of medical and health problems.”



BRIAN McFADDEN



THE HOFSTRA UNIONDALE PATHWAY PROGRAM

Every Monday afternoon during the spring 2024 semester, 15 talented high school juniors take a bus to the Hofstra campus, head up to a third-floor classroom in the Lawrence Herbert School of Communication, and settle into their seats. Although younger than the typical Hofstra undergrad, these enthusiastic students are on campus for the same reason: to learn. Together, they form the inaugural class of scholars in the Hofstra Uniondale Pathway Program (HUPP).

“Many of them aren’t yet old enough to be registered to vote and haven’t yet thought about civics and the role that journalism plays in democracy. I saw the potential for a lot of lightbulb moments to turn into great conversations in class.”

– Brian McFadden
Assistant Professor of Journalism, Media Studies, and Public Relations

This brand-new initiative is the result of a multiyear effort by a dedicated group of Hofstra administrators. Leading the way was Mario A. Murillo, longtime professor and vice dean of the Herbert School of Communication. Since 2022, Murillo and Dean Mark Lukasiewicz have worked side by side with the Office of Equity and Inclusion and the New Opportunities at Hofstra Program to create a program that would increase community engagement and improve student body diversity.

HUPP offers high-achieving teens from nearby Uniondale High School the opportunity to take college-level courses in a college setting. After an application process last fall, the inaugural class started at Hofstra on the first day of the spring semester. Their intro to college learning was Media Literacy: Criticism & Analysis, taught by Brian McFadden, assistant professor of journalism, media studies, and public relations.

The Herbert School's 2023 Teacher of the Year has led this course since 2015 and jumped at the chance to present it to the HUPP scholars because he strongly believes that media literacy is a skill set that high schoolers need. "Many of them aren't yet old enough to be registered to vote and haven't yet thought about civics and the role that journalism plays in democracy," McFadden said. "I saw the potential for a lot of lightbulb moments to turn into great conversations in class." He didn't have to wait long. By their second meeting, students who passionately consume music raised their hands to speak with authority about inequity and racial bias in music awards shows like the Grammys. "I learned from my students, and hopefully they learned from me too."

Scholars will take a total of two communication courses at Hofstra – one in the spring of their junior year and another in the fall of their senior year. They will receive high school and six transferable college credits, the latter of which would typically cost thousands of dollars. In the fall, this inaugural class will return to campus as the next group of scholars is being recruited.

While Murillo and his colleagues hope the program attracts top students to Hofstra, HUPP is primarily an introduction to higher education. After all, many of the scholars will be first-generation college students. To that effect, McFadden planned out what he would say on the last day of class months in advance: "You each belong in a place like this. You did work at a college level, and you passed. Guess what? You can do it again as many times as you need to until you receive your degree."



"At Hofstra, we have undergraduates doing phenomenal research, but it's generally contained within one discipline. In this program, students would have the space to collaborate across programs and areas of study in new ways."

– Paul Fritz
Associate Professor of Political Science

One of the most effective ways Hofstra faculty stay ahead of the curve is by examining and engaging with new technologies. Recently, that technology has been artificial intelligence, which is disrupting the status quo across all industries, including higher education. Last fall, Hofstra dedicated its three-day Presidential Symposium to the topic of "Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Friend or Foe?"

Naturally, the University's curriculum is evolving to respond. Paul Fritz, associate professor of political science, chairs an interdisciplinary faculty committee working to launch a new undergraduate degree program that combines computer science and social sciences. This innovative major will enable students to master new technologies and simultaneously gain a critical understanding of their larger social, political, and economic implications.

"In social science students' future careers, they will be reliant on new technologies that will require them to find novel ways to understand and address social issues," Fritz said. "Computer scientists need to understand how the technology they're rolling out affects society and politics."

This new program will be on the forefront of preparing students to meet unique future demands – and pave the way for graduates to be highly employable in specialized careers. "We will build flexibility into the curriculum to tailor to individual students' interests. That goes hand in hand with what I believe is the hallmark of Hofstra – offering students opportunities to work closely alongside faculty," Fritz explained.

Although detailed program requirements are still being finalized, Fritz said that the major will begin with a foundational seminar focused on issues related to "AI, different ways to handle data, various data structures, and related societal issues." To ensure the seminar is truly interdisciplinary, it will be co-taught by computer science and social science faculty and feature guest lecturers from different disciplines.

During their coursework, students will learn how to code and program through the Computer Science Department, where they will have access to the University's state-of-the-art facilities in the new Science & Innovation Center, the most technologically advanced building on campus. It houses cutting-edge labs focused on robotics, computer architecture, UNIX systems and graphics, virtual reality, and related fields.

When it comes to fulfilling the major's social sciences requirement, students will have flexibility in selecting courses that fit their interests in departments such as Economics, Political Science, Public Policy, Public Service, History, Anthropology, Religion, Philosophy, Sociology, Criminology, and Global Studies and Geography. Fritz is hopeful that the academic cross-pollination will lead students and faculty alike to pursue research from a fresh angle. "At Hofstra, we have undergraduates doing phenomenal research, but it's generally contained within one discipline. In this program, students would have the space to collaborate across programs and areas of study in new ways."

The program will be structured to include a required co-op or internship experience to give students invaluable work experience before graduation. Upon entering the workforce, Hofstra graduates will be prepared for computer science careers in the public sector, at private firms, and at tech companies that require knowledge and understanding of different societal, economic, or political factors. Others may opt for careers in politics, where they can help manage campaigns or work on the public policy side. Students could even apply these skills toward economic problems, work in museums and libraries digitizing collections, or help non-profits use new tools to better fulfill their missions. "The applications for this degree and the direction students can take in their future careers are limitless," Fritz said.

