

ENACT Research and Advocacy Fellows

Cohort #1

July 2025

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What is the ENACT Research and Advocacy Fellowship?

The ENACT Research and Advocacy Fellowship officially began during the 2024-2025 academic year. Fellows conducted original research under the mentorship of ENACT Assistant Director of Research, Charlotte Powley, in the fall of 2024 and implemented a change project on campus linked to their research findings in the spring of 2025. The Fellowship is an innovative initiative expected to actively involve students in research and advocacy.

The Research and Advocacy Fellowship affords students the opportunity to collaborate with a group of their peers on a shared skill building and change making mission. Together, the cohort explored the issue of access to basic needs, specifically menstrual products, and ultimately created events and awareness raising efforts to enact data driven change in the Brandeis community and beyond. Fellows learned about state level policy and ways in which they can advocate for state, local, and institutional policy change.

Who are the 2024-2025 Research and Advocacy Fellows?

Ten Brandeis students were selected in April of 2024 to serve as the inaugural cohort for the ENACT Research and Advocacy Fellowship for the 2024-2025 academic year. Fellows included: Maria Antonio '26, Jovita Bell '25, Happy Emmanuel '27, Rachel Gao '25, Alyssa Golden '26, Aviva Gornick '25, Vickie Hsieh '25, Melora Hutcheson '25, Gerardo Enrique Rios Ramirez '27, and Lev Sewald '26. See Appendix below for photos and biographies of each student.

Fellowship Timeline

Fellowship Selection

The Fellows were selected in the Spring of 2024 by a two person selection committee. The application process consisted of a written application and an approximately 30 minute interview with the selection committee.

CITI Training, Research Methods, and Their Own Student Survey

One of the first deliverables for the Fellows was the completion of CITI training in June of 2024, which allowed them to participate in human subjects research and join the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. Under the mentorship of the Assistant Director of Research, Charlotte Powley, the cohort decided to conduct a study exploring menstrual equity at Brandeis. Inspired by Massachusetts



state level legislative efforts and an existing body of basic needs research, the Fellows embarked upon an examination of menstrual equity by launching their own campus survey. In order to begin the survey in the fall, an IRB application was submitted during the summer of 2024.

Throughout the fall semester, the Fellows gained an understanding of fundamental research methods and study designs. There was no prerequisite for research knowledge or experience to participate in the Fellowship; therefore, all students were offered an overview of research methodologies through the completion of both asynchronous and in person workshops. Fellows independently completed asynchronous work each week and gathered as a cohort once per week alongside their ENACT staff/faculty mentor to review and discuss the research methods content. Fellows explored case studies of violations of ethical human subjects research including the Tuskegee Study and the story of Henrietta Lacks.

The Fellows' Menstrual Product Access Survey was finalized and launched in September of 2024 and closed in November of 2024. Throughout December and January, the Fellows engaged in both quantitative and qualitative data analysis using Excel. The Fellows finalized their research report in January 2025 and utilized their findings to enact data driven change both on campus and beyond the Brandeis community throughout the spring 2025 semester. See Fellowship Highlights and Fellowship Outcomes below to learn more about the Fellows' change efforts and successes on and off campus.

Fellowship Highlights

On Campus

During the spring 2025 semester, the Fellows hosted events, presented their research findings

to student groups, faculty and staff members, and others in leadership in order to enact data driven change on campus. Highlights included:

- 1. Menstrual Equity Trivia Night
- 2. Period Product Packaging Pizza Party
- 3. Screening of the 2023 film "Periodical"
- Screening of the 2018 documentary short "Period. End of Sentence"
- Menstrual Equity Panel featuring industry experts and Massachusetts State Representative Natalie Blais (See appendix for the flyer)
- 6. Presented report results to:
 - a. Department of Community Living (DCL)
 - b. Facilities
 - c. The Math Department
 - d. Academic Support and Advising
 - e. The Office of Health Promotion and Wellness Initiatives



- f. The Women and Gender Studies Department
- g. Brandeis Student Union
- h. Brandeis Classes (Ex: CAST-160A: Provocative Art)

Off Campus

Fellows engaged in numerous advocacy efforts and learning experiences off campus, extending their work beyond the Brandeis community. For example, Fellows attended the annual Menstrual Equity Summit, hosted by Mass NOW at Suffolk University in Boston. They also attended Mass NOW's virtual Advocacy Day, where they heard from legislators and other panelists. They were also given a chance to meet



with legislators and their aides. Fellows used their original research from the survey in their discussions with the state legislators. Each Fellow also wrote a personalized letter of advocacy to their Massachusetts state representative and/or senator in support of at least one of three menstrual equity bills currently in the Massachusetts State House.

Fellows also presented their report results to:

- 1. Alliance for Period Supplies
- 2. Tufts University School of Medicine
- 3. PERIOD.org
- 4. The Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women (Mass NOW)

Fellowship Learning Objectives

The Research and Advocacy Fellowship sought to achieve the following five learning objectives:

- 1. To understand how a research study is constructed including research question(s), literature review, methods, findings, discussions, and limitations.
- 2. To be able to articulate the importance of ethical guidelines in research and to understand the IRB approval process.
- 3. To conduct quantitative and qualitative data collection and understand how to analyze that data.
- 4. To be able to describe (both written and verbally) the findings of qualitative and quantitative data and report conclusions to stakeholders.
- 5. To grow civic engagement skills and expertise with the democratic process.

Following the Fellowship experience, Fellows reflected on the extent to which they feel they achieved the ENACT learning objectives (outlined above). The survey allowed Fellows to respond to each objective on a one through five scale rating with one being "developing competence" and five being "full mastery".

- 100% of Fellows on the post survey reported a four or higher in response to objective #1 regarding their understanding of how a research study is conducted.
- 90% of Fellows on the post survey reported a four or higher in response to objective #2
 which highlights their understanding of the importance of ethical guidelines in
 research.
- 100% of Fellows on the post survey reported a four or higher in response to objective #3 and #4, expressing confidence in their ability to collect, analyze, and describe both qualitative and quantitative data.
- 80% of Fellows on the post survey reported a four or higher in response to objective #5
 regarding the growth of their civic engagement skills and expertise with the
 democratic process.

Evaluation of Fellows' Growth

Fellows completed a "baseline" survey at the start of their Fellowship experience. The survey collected information about students' civic engagement practices as well as their political attitudes, knowledge, behaviors and political efficacy. The survey also collected baseline data regarding Fellows' research knowledge. At the end of their Fellowship experience, Fellows completed a nearly identical "post" survey. The following section details Fellow's growth based on the "baseline" and "post" survey (See Appendix for both baseline and post survey questions).

Empowering Change Makers

ENACT identifies college students as being uniquely positioned to be powerful agents of policy change. As emerging leaders with fresh perspectives, lived experiences, and a deep stake in the future, students bring critical energy and insight to today's most pressing social, economic, and environmental policy challenges. Establishing college students as policy change makers is essential not only for fostering a more inclusive and representative policymaking process but also for cultivating a generation equipped to lead with knowledge, cooperation, justice, and integrity (per ENACT's mission). Through open-ended questions on the post survey, Fellows shared the ways in which the ENACT Research and Advocacy Fellowship empowered them to find their voice. One Fellow reflected that,

Being an ENACT Fellow has been one of the most transformative experiences of my college journey. It gave me the opportunity not only to learn how policy is made but to actively take part in shaping it. The biggest lesson I've taken away from this program is that my voice has power. Before joining ENACT, I often felt like change was something only lawmakers or people with high-level connections could create. I didn't realize how much potential I had to be part of the process. ENACT taught me that change begins with the people who care enough to speak up.

Another Fellow shared the way in which the Fellowship helped challenge their previous notions about political systems and their own civic engagement:

One of the biggest lessons I learned from my ENACT Fellowship is that civic engagement isn't just for people in power or wealth. As a first-generation student of color in college, I am used to feeling like the political system wasn't made for people like me. It often felt distant, complicated, and overwhelming. But ENACT helped break that wall down. It taught me that my voice matters.

Fellows consistently emphasized that the ENACT Research and Advocacy Fellowship empowered them to recognize the value of their voices and their ability to create meaningful change.

Relationship Building

As Fellows developed their identities as empowered change makers, they were also encouraged to cultivate and expand their networks in both their immediate Brandeis community and beyond. Civic engagement thrives on collaboration, diverse perspectives, and shared resources, all of which become more accessible through intentional relationship-building efforts. Fellows had the opportunity to learn from experienced advocates, including members of Mass NOW, and connect with peers and offices on campus who share their passion for social and policy change. Fellows also had the opportunity to attend an ENACT Alumni Networking Night as well as the ENACT Student Summit.

As mentioned above, Fellows shared the results of their research report across campus, including presentations to the Department of Community Living, Facilities, Academic Support and Advising, The Office of Health Promotion and Wellness Initiatives, the Women and Gender Studies Department, the Brandeis Student Union, and to their peers through class and student club presentations. One Fellow shared that,

"Personal connections really matter in terms of trying to advocate for policy and should therefore be cultivated. Being friendly, informative and involved with the other stakeholders we interact with can lead to stronger inter-program connections and a bigger impact from our research."

Building these connections and relationships helped grow students' confidence, according to one Fellow:

"During the second semester, I really felt that I was able to leverage the confidence and growth I experienced through this learning opportunity to

better engage with students, faculty, and staff regarding menstrual equity on campus. I was delivering presentations and facilitating critical conversations with several head administrators who were in positions to move our work forward and set in motion a sustainable solution to the access issue we clearly identified in our research. This was an empowering experience. Not only was I proving to myself that there was no need to be nervous in delivering information such as that of our project, but also that I held power as a student to demand a level of engagement and support for this issue. I could carry myself in a conversation, ask and answer questions, and most importantly, critically engage my audience.

Research Skills & Knowledge

A central goal of the ENACT Research and Advocacy Fellowship is to grow college students' research skills and knowledge. Increasing students' fluency in research terminology and their overall understanding of the research process is key to helping them decipher and advocate for evidence-based policies. As mentioned above, 100% of Fellows on the post survey reported a four or higher in response to the objective surrounding research skills: "To understand how a research study is constructed including research questions, literature review, findings, discussions, and limitations." This self reported sense of understanding was reinforced by the findings from the research content questions on the baseline and post surveys, which included a total of twenty research content questions, evaluating Fellows' research fluency. Fellows were asked about cross sectional and longitudinal study designs, categorical and binary variables, and other research key terms. (See Appendix for full list of research content questions on the baseline and post survey). The average score on the research questions on the baseline survey was 87% (with all 10 Fellows having completed the survey). The average post score was 93.5% (again with all 10 Fellows completing the survey). These findings were complemented by Fellows open ended responses on the post survey. One Fellow shared,

"The research phase of the Fellowship was a fascinating experience. We designed a survey, distributed it across campus, and analyzed the results to develop our final report. I never realized that conducting a survey could be such an effective way to understand a college community and identify ways to improve the lives of those within it."

Involving students in the research process is a unique feature of the Research and Advocacy

Fellowship. Encouraging students to advocate for evidence based policy change is notably more powerful when they have been a part of collecting the evidence itself. The Fellowship could certainly be considered a form of "Participatory Action Research," a research method which puts the subjects of a research project at the center of the research process itself. Allowing college students to not only collect data from their peers but deliver it back to the community to which they are a part appeared to be particularly meaningful for students. Furthermore, Fellows appeared to appreciate the experience of learning how to analyze data and summarize the findings in an accessible report:

"I learned how important the practical skill of analyzing data is. While I came into the Fellowship with some experience collecting data, I had not ever worked to put this data in a "professional" report before. This was a very informative experience, and it was incredibly useful to learn the best practices for presenting data in a written form."

Students also reflected upon the importance of conducting ethical research and involving the Institutional Review Board:

"Another essential aspect of research that surprised me was how ethical oversight, like getting IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, plays a critical role. Civic-minded students may not always think about research ethics when starting a project, but it's crucial to protect participants and ensure the research is conducted responsibly. Learning how to navigate this process made me more thoughtful about the responsibilities that come with collecting personal or sensitive information."

In a landscape often shaped by opinion, partisanship, and misinformation, the Research and Advocacy Fellowship sought to equip Fellows with the tools to advocate for data-driven change responsibly and persuasively. By valuing research as a foundation for action, Fellows demonstrated commendable growth throughout the Fellowship.

Fellows' Growth in Political Interest, Engagement & Efficacy

The pre and post survey results indicate a notable increase in Fellows' political engagement and efficacy following the Fellowship. For example, 50% of Fellows reported being

"strongly interested" in participating in politics¹ on the pre survey; that number rose to 70% on the post survey. Self-identification as "politically active" also increased, from 60% strongly or somewhat agreeing to 80%. Upon completing their Fellowship experience, Fellows were also more willing to express their political views publicly: the number who reported posting about politics on social media more than doubled, from 20% to 50%. Additionally, Fellows' confidence in their political knowledge improved, with all Fellows (100%) expressing some level of agreement (strongly agree or somewhat agree) with the statement "I know enough to participate in politics" on the post survey. These shifts suggest the Fellowship played a meaningful role in empowering students to engage more actively and confidently in the political process.

Increase in Interest in Becoming a Community Leader

Based on results from the pre and post survey, the Research and Advocacy Fellowship had an impact on Fellows' aspirations toward community leadership. Prior to the start of the Fellowship, 70% of Fellows considered "becoming a community leader" to be either essential or very important. By the end of the Fellowship, that number rose to 100%, indicating a deepened commitment among all participants to take on leadership roles within their communities.

Fellowship Impact on Campus

Women and Gender Studies mini grant: \$1000!

Under the leadership of ENACT Fellow, Maria Antonio, the cohort applied for the Women and Gender Studies Hinda Marcus Micro Grants for Social Change, Social Justice, and Healing. The \$1000 grant allowed for the expansion of access to menstrual products on campus, specifically two additional dispensers in upperclassmen dorms and additional pads.

Menstrual Education and Product Access Added to Orientation Modules

Armed with the data of their report findings, Fellows reached out to multiple stakeholders on campus throughout the spring semester. One stakeholder was the Director of Orientation and

¹ The full survey statement read: "Given the current state of politics today, what is your interest level in participating in politics (as a voter or otherwise)?" and Fellows were given the opportunity to select from the following options: "Strongly interested," "interested," "neutral," "disinterested," or "strongly disinterested."

First Year Experience who agreed to add two questions to the Orientation Modules², which will allow new students at Brandeis to have a better understanding of 1) menstrual product access on campus and 2) the menstrual cycle itself and how it can impact their experience as a student. See below for the full questions.

1. True/False: Menstrual products are available on campus.

True! Brandeis launched a pilot in 2023 to make menstrual products (from Aunt Flow) available in all first year residence halls. Since then, Brandeis has been working to expand access. You may also access products in other locations around lower and upper campus! (See map). If you are interested in menstrual equity efforts on campus, feel free to contact Dr. Charlotte Powley: cpowley@brandeis.edu.

2. True/False: The menstrual cycle includes three different phases.

False! The menstrual cycle includes **four** different phases including 1) the follicular phase, 2) the ovulation phase, 3) the luteal phase, and 4) menstruation itself. During these different phases, one's energy, need for rest, and nutritional needs may vary! Keep this in mind as you balance your own workload and/or as you support friends who menstruate! For more information visit:

Increase in Access to Products on Campus

https://ourbodiesourselves.org/subject-area/menstrual-cycle

Throughout the spring 2025 semester, the Fellows engaged in menstrual product restocking efforts on campus and also advocated for the expansion of product access. After seeing their infographics posted around campus, the Math Department contacted the Fellows and requested that their offices be a point of product access on campus.

As mentioned above, Fellows were also able to work in collaboration with the Student Union, the Department of Community Living, and Facilities to expand access to upperclassmen dorms (prior to their work, products were only available in first year dorms; and availability was limited due to instability and unpredictability in restocking efforts). Fellows are continuing to work with Facilities, the Department of Community Living, the Student Union, Period Activists at Deis, and the Women and Gender Studies Department to draft a Memorandum of Agreement

² The two questions were added to the "What Would Brandeis Do?" module, which is the prerequisite for the *Navigating Health and Safety* course that all new students take in their first semester at Brandeis.

for the next five years to better systemize Brandeis' commitment to menstrual product availability on campus.

Lessons Learned & Next Steps

The 2024-2025 Research and Advocacy Fellows comprised the inaugural cohort of the Research and Advocacy Fellowship. The first cohort revealed two important lessons to consider as the Fellowship continues to grow:

- 1) The value of demystifying state-level policy making through direct experience and engagement with legislators. Due to weather restrictions, the 2024-2025 Fellows did not have a chance to visit the state house in person as intended (they instead attended an advocacy day with legislators remotely). Next year, we hope to host a variety of in person experiences to further demystify the state level policy making process. For example, we plan to visit the Massachusetts State House, which will include a guided tour led by a state representative. This in-person experience is critical for helping students see themselves as active participants in the legislative process. We also plan to 1) speak with legislators and their aides, 2) meet with priority bills' sponsors, and 3) attend committee hearings. These are key activities that Fellows can engage in to build their confidence, civic knowledge, and political efficacy.
- 2) Another key lesson is the need for **more hands-on advocacy training**. This past year, the Fellows were introduced to Mass NOW and the Mass NOW Menstrual Equity Coalition. Fellows attended Mass NOW's Advocacy Day, the Mass NOW Menstrual Equity Summit, and were encouraged to attend at least one Menstrual Equity Coalition meeting. Looking forward, it may be beneficial to future Fellows to have more small group trainings with Mass NOW, or other organizations and coalitions, in order to better understand the practical steps involved in legislative advocacy. From identifying a bill to organizing a meeting with a legislator or giving testimony, the Fellows would benefit from explicit guidance through these steps from multiple parties (ex: ENACT, Mass NOW, community organizers, legislators themselves, etc.). We hope that experiential training will build the confidence, language, and strategic skills needed to move from policy interest to policy

impact. As ENACT empowers students to be active participants in democratic processes, it is crucial that they have both the knowledge and confidence to advocate for data driven change.

Appendix

A. Research Report

See full report <u>here</u>.

B. Baseline Survey

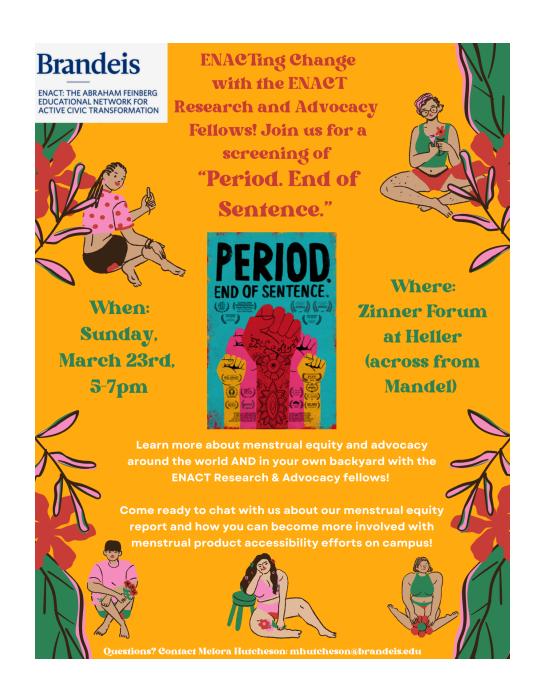
See full baseline survey <u>here</u>.

C. Post Survey

See full post survey <u>here</u>.

D. Flyers

See Flyers below; they include infographics, event flyers, and other promotional materials.









What in the WORLD is in our period products?!



Join ENACT for a Menstrual Equity Panel!

April 8th: 2:30-3:30pm Location: International Lounge (Usdan)

ENACT is hosting a menstrual equity panel including state legislators and industry executives.

This event is open to anyone with a Brandeis ID

This panel will discuss:

- The Menstrual Product Ingredient Disclosure Bill
- The I AM Bill, which seeks to increase access to products for students, people in homeless shelters, and people who are incarcerated
- The successes and challenges of passing and **implementing** menstrual equity legislation as well as the intricacies of industry innovation.

QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT CHARLOTTE POWLEY AT CPOWLEY@BRANDEIS.EDU

ENACT RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY FELLOWS PRESENT...

BREAKING THE CYCLE: MENSTRUAL EQUITY TRIVIA NIGHT

DATE: THURSDAY, MARCH 13TH, 2025 7:30 PM- 9:00 PM LOCATION: MANDEL FORUM





SNACK & PRIZES

PLAY TRIVIA WITH FRIENDS WHILE LEARNING ABOUT MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL EQUITY POLICIES IN A FUN AND INTERACTIVE WAY! LEARN ABOUT THE FINDINGS FROM THE ENACT RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY FELLOWS' 2025 REPORT ON MENSTRUAL PRODUCT ACCESS AT BRANDEIS.



MENSTRUAL
HYGIENE IS A
HUMAN RIGHT

RSVP USING THE QR CODE ABOVE WALK INS ALSO WELCOME!





ENACT: THE ABRAHAM FEINBERG EDUCATIONAL NETWORK FOR ACTIVE CIVIC TRANSFORMATION

QUESTIONS? CONTACT JOVITA BELL AT JOVITABELL@BRANDEIS.EDU

Brandeis | ENACT: THE ABRAHAM FEINBERG EDUCATIONAL NETWORK FOR ACTIVE CIVIC TRANSFORMATION



In the fall of 2024, a survey was conducted by the Brandeis ENACT Research and Advocacy Fellows in collaboration with Period Activists at 'Deis (PAD).

The survey consists of 37 questions, including both open ended qualitative questions and closed ended quantitative questions. The survey received 191 responses. Now, we want to share the results with you!

Why is toilet paper free, but pads and tampons

aren't?

reported **missing** "1-2 classes" while another 7% Use of alternative methods of students

Students resorted to using toilet paper or other makeshift products when they could not access menstrual products.



Insecurity & Anxiety

Students reported feeling insecure and anxious when they lack access to menstrual products and/or fear bleeding through.

34% of students reported **difficulty ACCESSING** menstrual products

24% reported difficulty **AFFORDING** menstrual products.

Questions? Email Charlotte Powley: cpowley@brandeis.edu Flyer by Rachel Gao, Vickie Hsieh, & Gerardo Rios

While there are **paid** dispensers available on campus, 97% of respondents shared that they are **not using** these dispensers.

~45% of respondents noted that they have **bled through** their clothes during their period so far this semester.

Read the full report:





27% of respondents

reported missing

"3-4 classes" so

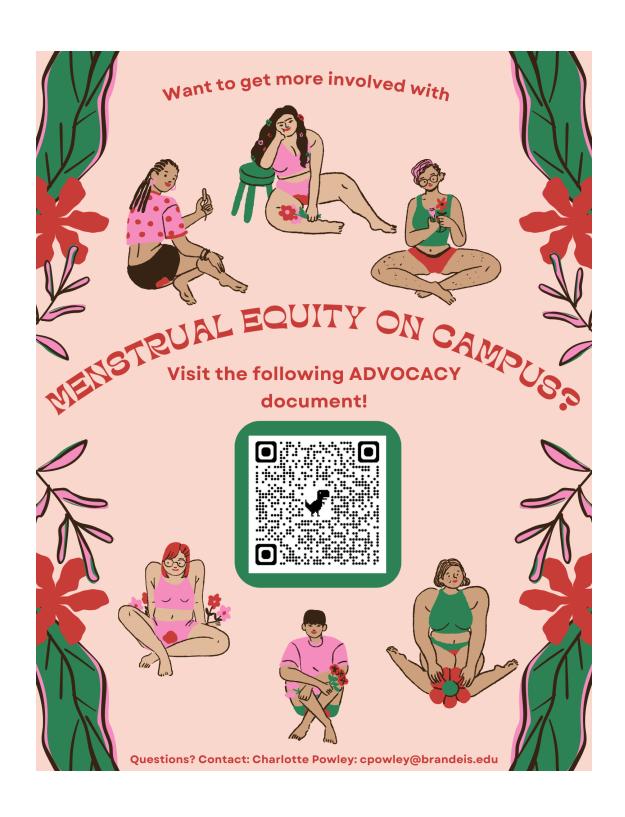
far this

semester



of respondents indicated that the lack of access to menstrual products "has an impact on their daily lives."

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E. Fellows Bios & Photos



Maria Antonio '26

Maria Antonio is an Economics, International Global Studies, and French major. Maria is a member of the class of 2026. Maria is an international student from Brazil who moved to the U.S. to finish high school and pursue her undergraduate education. She is very involved on campus, and has worked as an Editor at the Brandeis Law Journal, a Treasurer at the Brazilian Students Association (BRASA), Community Advisor at Massell, and ESL Volunteer at the Language Empowering Action Project (LEAP).



Jovita Bell '25

Jovita Bell is a Neuroscience major, and a member of the class of 2025. She is from Decatur, Georgia. Jovita has served as a Segal Fellow and has also worked in numerous positions on campus, including at PARC.



Happy Emmanuel '27

Happy Emmanuel, a prospective double major in Economics and IGS (International and Global Studies), with a minor in Legal Studies, is expecting to graduate in 2027. Happy is originally from Atlanta, Georgia.



Rachel Gao '25

Rachel Gao is from Queens, New York. She is a member of the class of 2025 and double majored in Politics and Anthropology, and minored in Legal Studies, International and Global Studies (IGS), and Social Justice and Social Policy (SJSP).



Alyssa Golden '26

Alyssa Golden hails from Southern California and plans to eventually attend law school.

Alyssa is a member of the class of 2026, majoring in Anthropology with minors in Legal Studies and Hispanic Studies.



Aviva Gornick '25

Aviva is from Los Angeles, California. She is a member of the class of 2025 and a sociology and politics major with a minor in business. Aviva is passionate about policy research that focuses on providing actionable insights within a designated community.



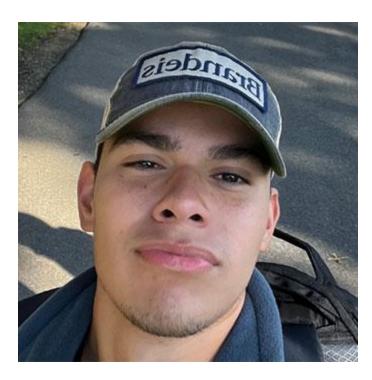
Vickie Hsieh '25

Vickie Hsieh is from Taipei, Taiwan. She is a member of the class of 2025 and a Health, Science, Society, and Politics and Anthropology double major.



Melora Hutcheson '25

Melora Hutcheson is from Daytona Beach, FL, and Tucson, AZ. She is a member of the class of 2025, and a major in Sociology with a minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.



Gerardo Enrique Rios Ramirez '27

Gerardo Enrique Rios Ramirez is a member of the class of 2027. Gerardo is majoring in Business with a minor in Psychology.



Lev Sewald '26

Lev Sewald is a member of the class of 2026 and is a History and NEJS major and a Russian minor. Lev is originally from Seattle.

F. Report Slide Deck: <u>Slide Deck</u>