

## Press Release – 2022 Undergraduate Commencement

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### **Ramapo College Class of 2022 Equipped to Serve & Empowered to Lead**

Ramapo College of New Jersey (RCNJ) celebrated its Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony on May 12, 2022 at Prudential Center in Newark, NJ. The **RCNJ Class of 2022** includes **1,164 graduates** who now enter the next chapter of their lives well-equipped to innovate, problem solve, serve, and succeed as Ramapo College Alumni. During the ceremony, the College honored the graduates, bestowed an honorary degree on Dr. Kori Schake, presented the Alumni Award of Merit to Keith Dawkins '94, and heard from graduate Jackie Pascale on behalf of the Class of 2022.

Among the 1164 graduates is Patrick Centeno, Steven Fiumefreddo, Elizabeth Kazandjian, Jordan Meredith, Jackie Pascale, Jessica Sanchez, and Mellanie Trenado:

- **Fellowship recipient Patrick Centeno**, of Cresskill, graduated with a degree in International Studies and a minor in Anthropology. Centeno is the first Ramapo College student to be awarded the prestigious Boren Fellowship from the Defense Language and National Security Education Office. Centeno will travel to Indonesia to study the language and culture. During his time with Ramapo, Centeno represented Ramapo College as a delegate at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Student Conference on U.S. Affairs (SCUSA 72) held at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and completed an internship with the Near East South Asia (NESAs) Center at the U.S. Department of Defense. He also enjoyed membership in Alpha Kappa Delta and Sigma Iota Rho honor societies.
- **Student-athlete and scholar Steven Fiumefreddo**, of Oakland, graduated with a degree in Accounting. He has broken multiple school records, earned All-American honors, and alongside his teammates, represented Ramapo in more track and cross-country events than any other Ramapo athlete in College history. In addition, Fiumefreddo was a member of Beta Gamma Sigma and Chi Alpha Epsilon honor societies, and he joined his teammates in service opportunities that raised funds for victims of the 2021 floods in Manville, NJ. Fiumefreddo has been recruited by Withum Advisory Tax and Audit Services.
- **Cancer survivor and biologist Elizabeth Kazandjian**, of Maywood, graduated with a degree in Biology. Kazandjian battled breast cancer while an undergraduate student with Ramapo, but she still made time to volunteer at an Obstetric, Gynecology, and Infertility office in Elmwood Park, be an active member of the Educational Opportunity Fund Program, and graduate in four years. Kazandjian has been accepted to five schools of

pharmacy and plans to pursue graduate studies at South College School of Pharmacy in Tennessee.

- **Peer leader and mentor Jordan Meredith**, of Eatontown, graduated with a degree in Social Work. Jordan is a first-generation graduate and, throughout her undergraduate career she also served as caretaker for her mother. Alongside managing her personal responsibilities, Jordan managed to lead and inspire her peers. Her leadership on campus included service as President of Ebony Women for Social Change and as a Peer Facilitator and Orientation Leader. She is a member of Alpha Lambda Delta honor society and performed community service work with Teaneck Tutoring, Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organizations, and Pony Power. Additionally, she spent her final semester as a Social Work Intern with the College's First Generation Student Initiatives. Jordan plans to pursue a career in higher education and will be enrolling in Ramapo's Master of Educational Leadership program.
- **Author and educator Jacqueline "Jackie" Pascale**, of Parsippany, graduated with a degree in Literature and her Secondary Education Teacher Certification and delivered the graduate address at the ceremony. During her time with Ramapo, Pascale served as a Resident Assistant, as President of Sigma Tau Delta, and as the New Member Educator of Alpha Phi Omega, the on-campus community service fraternity. She is a member of Rho Alpha Sigma honor society, was awarded the Best Prose Piece Award by *Trillium*, the College's literary magazine, and her undergraduate research on international poetry was selected as a poster presentation in Ramapo's Annual Scholars' Day. She will continue her academic career with Ramapo as she pursues her Master of Arts in Special Education in the College's 4+1 program.
- **Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Scholar Jessica Sanchez**, of Passaic, graduated with a Political Science degree and minors in Public Policy and Latinx American Studies. She interned with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE), earned the Outstanding Academic Achievement Award and the EOF Outstanding Achievement Award for exemplifying the spirit and intent of the EOF program. During her studies with Ramapo, Sanchez also served as student speaker of the College's EOF Awareness Month Ceremony, as President of the Association of Latinos Moving Ahead, and she held several roles including service as a member of the Student Government Association and Dean's Advisory Council, as well as Peer Facilitator and EOF Success Mentor. Post-Ramapo, Jessica will continue her public policy work with OSHE.
- **Award winning graphic designer Mellanie Trenado**, of Bergenfield, graduated with a degree in Visual Communications Design. Trenado was awarded a prestigious Gilman Scholarship from the U.S. Department of State to travel to Japan for an internship with the country's largest English language magazine, *Metropolis Japan*. Trenado interned in the College's Marketing and Communications Office, and served on the College's Yearbook Club and Literary Magazine, *Trillium*, while a student.

These impressive graduates, their peers, and their families enjoyed a keynote address by foreign policy scholar, author, and adviser, **Dr. Kori Schake**, who was also awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the College. Dr. Schake is currently a senior fellow and the director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. She has also served as the Deputy Director-General for the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

In her address to the graduates, Schake self-deprecatingly described herself as a “successful failure”, sharing a series of personal and historic examples of how failing is actually learning to succeed. “Learning how to fail is not only strengthening for us as individuals, it has an important social purpose, as well,” Schake said, adding later, “Be successful failures, my friends. The country needs you. It needs what you can contribute as well-equipped Ramapo College alumni.” Dr. Schake’s career has also included service at the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the National Security Council at the White House. In addition, she has enjoyed roles as professor at Stanford, West Point, the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, National Defense University, and the University of Maryland. She is the author of several books, most recently *America vs the West: Can the Liberal World Order Be Preserved?*

In addition to honoring the 1,164 graduates and Dr. Kori Schake, Ramapo College’s ceremony also took time to recognize **Mr. Keith Dawkins ’94**. Dawkins, of Ridgewood, was awarded the President’s Alumni Award of Merit in recognition of his service-oriented leadership and continued advocacy of the College. Dawkins told the graduates that Ramapo gave him two very profound things for which he is eternally grateful for: his wife and his career. “I would say that’s a pretty good return on my college investment,” Dawkins said smiling. Dawkins, a strategic, creative, award winning Chief Executive Officer with 25+ years of experience in the media/entertainment, professional sports, and philanthropic industries, recently became President of the Harlem Globetrotters and Herschend Entertainment Studios. Dawkins has led by making diversity, equity, and inclusion a vital part of all of his business dealings and his community engagement including leadership of First Tee, and service on the Ramapo College Board of Governors, and the NY chapter of Reach Out and Read.

Presiding over the ceremony was Ramapo’s new President, **Dr. Cindy Jebb**, and Associate Professor **Jackie Skrzynski** served as Grand Marshal. Jebb became the College’s fifth president on July 6, 2021. She retired from the U.S. military after 39 years of service at the rank of Brigadier General, Professor Emerita, and as the first woman Dean of the Academic Board at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In her address to the graduates Jebb shared, “I imagine whatever uncertainty you felt about graduating pales in comparison to the uncertainty you might be feeling on what comes next. No worries—embrace uncertainty—it is a space in which you have proven to thrive and will in the future,” adding “The future is bright because you are the ethical leaders who will serve as change agents to advance our democratic society, our industries, and our communities both here and beyond.”

Skrzynski joined Ramapo College in 2009. She is the 2022 recipient of the Fred and Florence Thomases Award which recognizes a faculty member who demonstrates significant and ongoing contributions to the development of the college through teaching, scholarship, service to committees and outstanding fulfillment of professional responsibility. As Associate Professor of Art (Drawing & Painting), Skrzynski’s development of a Digital Drawing course, her impactful teaching and mentoring practices, and her service at the All-College level were commended. Her drawings have recently been exhibited at Theo Ganz Studio in Beacon, NY, Morehead State University in Kentucky, the Arc Gallery in San Francisco, Les Abattoirs d’Avallon in France and Tribes Gallery in New York City.

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*Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state's premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. The comprehensive college is situated among the beautiful Ramapo Mountains, is within commuting distance to New York City, was named one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America by CondeNast Traveler, and boasts the best on-campus housing in New Jersey per Niche.com.*

*Ramapo College provides its students with individualized attention, mentorship, and supports; hands-on learning; and a range of opportunities for service and leadership development. Its graduation and retention rates exceed national averages and it places approximately 1,000 students per year in internships in New York City. The College is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by College Choice; is recognized as the state's top college on the list of Best Disability Schools by Great Value Colleges; is designated a "Military Friendly College" in Victoria Media's Guide to Military Friendly Schools; and is recognized as a top college by U.S. News & World Report, Kiplinger's, Princeton Review and Money magazine, among others.*

*Ramapo College's over 40,000 alumni are the confident, intellectually curious, self-aware, and humble people who are highly sought after and who make a positive impact at local, national, and global levels. Ramapo College is distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by CollegesofDistinction.com. Every student at Ramapo is enrolled in its unique and award winning Pathways Program which equips and empowers students, across the continuum of their academic career, to secure internships, pursue graduate/professional school, and/or enter the job market.*

*Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master's degrees in Accounting, Applied Mathematics, Business Administration, Contemporary Instructional Design, Computer Science, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a Doctor of Nursing Practice.*