CUNY Dance Initiative Sets Fall 2015 Events

by
Dance News Desk
August 12


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Eleven CUNY colleges in all five boroughs have been hosting residencies since January 2015, and the residency artists and their projects represent a wide-range of ideas and styles that reflect the diversity of the CUNY communities. CDI directly assists colleges with artist fees, rehearsal expenses, and marketing efforts.
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Artists are selected through an annual open application process and each campus chooses its residency companies. The application for 2016 residencies will open September 10 at 10am and close October 1 at 11:59pm. More information can be found at www.cuny.edu/danceinitiative.

Fall 2015 Schedule of Events:

Mark Gindick

Gerald W. Lynch Theater at John Jay College
Open rehearsal: September 25, time TBA

FREE / www.ijay.cuny.edu/gerald-w-lynch-theater

A professional actor, dancer, writer and clown, Mark Gindick has performed with Ringling Bros. and the Big Apple Circus, and was featured in the PBS award-winning documentary CIRCUS! He also dances with Doug Elkins. For this open rehearsal, Gindick will show excerpts from his show Wing-Man, a laugh-out-loud, hilarious, and surprisingly poignant "one-clown" physical comedy show that explores our obsession with social media.

From The Horse's Mouth: A Celebration of the Legacy of Clark Center

City College Center for the Arts

Performances: October 1-2 at 7pm

Theater B at Aaron Davis Hall

$20; $10 students & seniors

Tickets: www.citycollegecenterforthearts.org

This residency and performance by From the Horse's Mouth celebrates The Clark Center for the Performing Arts, an organization created by Alvin Ailey in 1959 as a multi-racial, multi-ethnic arts community in New York City. The Clark Center was a special place, open to everyone at a time when that was the exception, providing a diverse array of dancers and choreographers with opportunities to study and hone their craft. Created by Tina Croll and Jamie Cunningham, From the Horse's Mouth is a celebratory dance/theater production that has received standing ovations and rave reviews for its captivating story-telling and exceptional dancing. This project is dedicated to Thelma Hill, an inspiring teacher and mentor who was instrumental in starting the Clark Center for the Performing Arts as well as the dance program at City College.

The Clark Center Story: The House that Alley Built

Part of From The Horse's Mouth: A Celebration of the Legacy of Clark Center

September 28 at 6pm

Theater B at Aaron Davis Hall

FREE / www.citycollegecenterforthearts.org

Celia Iplotis -- creator, producer, and moderator of the nationally recognized culture series
EYE ON DANCE -- moderates a panel about the history and impact of the Clark Center for the Performing Arts. Panelists include Ella Thompson Moore (former dancer for Alvin Ailey, Director of the Charles Moore Dance Company and teacher at The Clark Center), Anna Kisselgoff (former Dance Critic at The New York Times), and additional guests.

Decadancetheatre

Baruch Performing Arts Center at Baruch College

Workshop Performances: October 173 at 8pm

Rose Nagelberg Theater

$30; $15 students & seniors

Tickets: 646-312-5073 or www.baruch.cuny.edu/bpac/


Broken Box Mime Theater (BKBX)

City College Center for the Arts

Performance: October 28 at 7pm

Theater B at Aaron Davis Hall

$20 in advance/$25 at the door; $10 students & seniors

Tickets: www.citycollegecenterforthearts.org

Broken Box Mime Theater (BKBX) tells original stories entirely through movement. Using dance and mime techniques, the company’s pieces range from realistic to metaphorical, heart-wrenching to hilarious, cinematic to intimate, and everything in between. BKBX’s work aims to unplug audiences from their screen-crowded lives and reignite the power of their own imagination.

Dance in the Making: KineticArchitecture Dance Theatre & Dance to the People
College of Staten Island
Performance: November 6 at 8pm
Williamson Theater
$10 / $5 students

Tickets: 718.982.ARTS / www.cfashows.com

A shared program of new work by 2015 CUNY Dance Initiative resident companies.

KineticArchitecture Dance Theatre cultivates work that is artistically progressive, socially relevant, and insanely irreverent in nature. The company will present an excerpt from its new work NO SAFE WORD, which explores the need for connection based upon Director Arrie Davidson's experiences as a professional Dominatrix, plus Cries Real Tears and Davidson's take on Scheherazade.

Dance To The People, an open collective of dancers looking to generate opportunities for dance training, movement research, and choreography, has been in residence at the College of Staten Island since fall 2014. During this time, Maira Duarte, working with students at CSI, has developed Narrentanz (Dance of Fools), a dance-theater piece based on images of madness evoked by Michel Foucault's Madness and Civilization. This new work will be presented on November 6.

Matychak Dance

Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College

Open rehearsal: December 4 at 3pm

West Quad Building, Room 204

FREE / www.brooklyn.cuny.edu

Matychak will begin working on their second evening length work, The Body Keeps the Score. Taken from the choreographer's personal journey in dancing with chronic illness, The Body Keeps the Score is a vulnerable, yet non-apologetic exploration of how limitation can be our best asset. While in residence at Brooklyn College, the company will also work on movement vocabulary for a commission by LaGuardia Arts High School and further develop Lacuna, a work first created through Devices: Choreographic Intensive, a mentoring program of Doug Varone and Dancers. Founded in 2011, Matychak is a project-based contemporary dance company that bridges the divide between the uptown and downtown modern dance worlds, as seen through the eyes of artistic director Nathalie Matychak.

Other residencies this fall include: Eva Dean Dance at Baruch College, Tree House Shakers at Borough of Manhattan Community College, Ephrat Asherie at Lehman College Department
of Dance and Theatre, Jenny Rocha at Lehman College Department of Dance and Theatre, Gabrielle Lamb at Queens College, Dante Brown I Warehouse Dance at Queensborough College, Department of Dance and Physical Education, and Tiffany Mills Company at Queensborough College, Department of Dance and Physical Education. In addition to rehearsing on campus, these artists are presenting lecture-demonstrations and workshops for CUNY students.

The CUNY Dance Initiative is supported by The New York Community Trust, with additional funding from the Mertz Gilmore Foundation, The Howard Gilman Foundation, The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Harkness Foundation for Dance.
Bill before Cuomo seeks more state aid for public colleges

August 12, 2015 by MICHAEL GORMLEY / michael.gormley@newsday.com

ALBANY — A bill before Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo represents the opening punch in a fight that will determine how much tuition will increase for 700,000 public college students and their families in coming years.

The bill demands that the Cuomo administration keep increases in state aid in closer pace with annual tuition hikes, which have jumped 30 percent in the past five years at the State University of New York and City University of New York. While state aid increased far more in those years compared with the preceding era of flat and reduced funding, it still grew at less than half the rate of tuition.

The bill overwhelmingly passed by the State Legislature would require the state to cover inflationary and mandated costs at the State University of New York and City University of New York, such as utility bills, building rentals and salaries and benefits. It also would require the state budget to cover mandated costs for programs and equipment at SUNY's three teaching hospitals in Stony Brook, Brooklyn and Syracuse.

Legislators seek to require a greater state commitment than is in the 2011 law that created the "rational tuition" plan of annual increases. The plan was created to better fund the systems, after state aid cuts, to hire and retain professors to raise academic performance, and to avoid unpredictable spikes in tuition forced by crises.

The public universities were hit with deeper cuts than many state programs in the state fiscal crisis of 2008-2011.

In that 2011 law, the Cuomo administration agreed to a "maintenance of effort" in state aid. That law only required that the state not cut
SUNY and CUNY aid from 2011 to 2016.

"The maintenance of effort was maintenance-of-effort-light," said Assembly Higher Education Committee chairwoman Deborah Glick (D-Manhattan), the bill's co-sponsor.

That tuition plan, however, sunsets next year. Cuomo, SUNY and CUNY are expected to ask the legislature to extend it in what will be one of the major initiatives of the 2016 legislative session.

"We are looking at what is actually needed to maintain a level of support," Glick said, a level "that ensures that the promise to students that, if they pay more -- and it's a big jump -- that the state will ensure the promise of more full-time faculty and additional sections of course work to make it easier to complete your degree in four years."

Now, as Cuomo begins preparing his 2016-17 budget, the pending bill is the legislature's signal that it will seek far more state aid if there is any extension of annual tuition increases next year, which is a legislative election year.

"The students have upheld their end of the bargain, the state has done a better job by not decreasing their investment, but the state has not made investments commensurate with those of the students," said Senate Higher Education Committee chairman Kenneth LaValle (R-Port Jefferson).

In 2011, annual tuition was $4,970 at SUNY and $4,830 at CUNY for an in-state undergraduate student. SUNY tuition is now $6,470 a year and CUNY's is $6,330. Fees and room and board drive the total cost to more than $20,000 a year.

Yet SUNY and CUNY tuition remains among the lower costs of public systems nationwide as student loan debt becomes a growing burden. Even as tuition increased, enrollment grew to nearly 460,000 students at SUNY's 64 campuses and to more than 274,000 students at CUNY's 23 campuses, an all-time high for the system in New York City.

Cuomo is considering the bill and had no comment on it. But his Division of Budget presents an argument that state aid to SUNY rose more than 10 percent in five years while rising over 16 percent for CUNY. That's significantly more than before Cuomo took office.

But the Senate and Assembly higher education committees, labor unions and the student-backed New York Public Interest Research Group said a 2 percent increase in state aid each year isn't enough to cover the fast-rising costs of higher education.

The rational tuition plan is supported by SUNY and CUNY administrations, but they also have sought increases in state aid to cover rising operational and labor costs.

"These costs limit the amount of rational tuition revenue that can be reinvested in student success by our state-operated institutions," SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher told lawmakers in state budget hearings in February. "While we have seen great results under the rational tuition plan, I know we could have reached greater success and aided more students if these centrally negotiated costs had been covered."
Elia said that federal government officials are looking at the possibility of withholding millions of dollars in federal aid to school districts that abet student opt-out from testing. She promised the state would do everything it can to encourage testing.

"We will be taking action in New York," she said.

As for complaints that the tests and questions are too difficult for students to comprehend, Elia said the opposite is true.

"I think the expectations for our children need to be really raised so that in fact they can perform ... we have to raise the standards and help our students get there, but I have every anticipation that the students and kids generally can do a whole lot more (and) that we need to help them to get there so that they can be successful."

SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher commended the push for assessment tests and improved standards.

"These assessments are a critical tool as we aim to strengthen New York’s education pipeline and ensure a higher degree of success for all students, from cradle to career," she said. "On behalf of all students and their families, it is important that we remain committed to higher standards and that we use this data not only for accountability but for the improved delivery of education in New York State."

SUNY and CUNY have had to spend millions in recent years on remedial courses for incoming freshmen so they can handle college-level work.

A summary of the test results as well as individual school and district results are available at:


An online database of every Upstate school is available at www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/news/2015/08/12/heres-a-database-of-grade-3-8-test-results-for-450.html

Read other stories involving the Common Core curriculum: www.ondemanddispatch.com/topics/CommonCore
Students do poorly on NY Common Core tests

By Kyle Hughes, NYSNYS News

Posted: 06/12/15, 4:13 PM EDT | Updated: 14 hrs ago

0 Comments

ALBANY, N.Y. >> State education officials painted a grim picture of public schools Wednesday, saying the vast majority of students in grades 3-8 are failing to meet minimum literacy standards in math and English.

The Education Department cited “incremental progress” since testing began in 2013, but said just 31 percent of students in grades 3-8 scored at a proficient level in English. In math, 38 percent of those tested scored at a proficient level.

“We basically had some slight improvement, but it certainly is not what we would like it to be,” said Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia. “But I anticipate that as we move forward and we use the data that we have from the 900,000 students that sat for this test, we can determine what areas we need to really target and improve.”

She said educators “really need to make sure that the students who walk away with a diploma in New York state are ready to be successful and we’ve given them the tools that they need.”

The report on the latest round of state assessment tests said 200,000 students refused to take the tests given to measure overall student achievement on a school-by-school basis. That’s about 20 percent of a total student testing population of 1.1 million.

Elia said the tests are valuable tools to raise student achievement, and parents should not “opt out” and deny permission for their kids to be tested.

“I would suggest to you that 900,000 student test scores shouldn’t be discounted, they should be used,” she said. “I think it’s really probably disingenuous to just say automatically these tests aren’t worth anything.”

About 98 percent of charter school students take the assessment tests, compared to 80 percent in public schools, the Northeast Charter Schools Network said in a statement issued Wednesday.

The tests don’t count against a student’s academic record, but they have proven to be a lightning rod for opponents of the Common Core curriculum and the push to put in place performance reviews of teachers and principals.

Elia, who was hired this year to head the state’s education bureaucracy after a stint as a highly regarded administrator in Florida, spoke in response to a question about criticism from NYSUT, the teachers union that has encouraged the opt-out movement and has sharply criticized standardized testing and using classroom results to pass judgment on both student achievement and teacher competency.

“It would be a huge mistake to read anything into these test results,” NYSUT president Karen Magee said in a press release emailed to reporters while Elia’s briefing was under way. “Whether they’re up or down, they tell us virtually nothing meaningful about students or their teachers. Student test scores based on poorly written, developmentally inappropriate Pearson tests, in a year in which record numbers of parents repudiated the state’s standardized testing program by ‘opting out,’ aren’t worth the paper they are printed on.”
What is Flanagan Looking for From De Blasio on Mayoral Control?

Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan has made it no secret that he lacks confidence in Mayor Bill de Blasio’s handling of the New York City schools. Made clear when the state recently extended de Blasio’s control of city schools for just one year, on Monday in a New York Post op-ed (http://nypost.com/2015/08/09/bill-de-blasios-sorry-stewardship-makes-the-case-against-mayoral-control-the-schools/) Flanagan sent another shot across de Blasio’s bow.

Seizing on The Post’s reporting (http://nypost.com/2015/03/23/high-school-accused-of-massive-grade-fixing-scheme/) about grade fixing in city schools, Flanagan reminded de Blasio that he not only expects the mayor to make himself available for hearings, but wants to see major improvements in the education system before he considers renewing mayoral control again next year.

"There are still unanswered questions about de Blasio’s plan to fix New York City’s 91 failing schools and the city’s commitment — both financial and otherwise — to the students who attend those schools," wrote (http://nypost.com/2015/08/09/bill-de-blasios-sorry-stewardship-makes-the-case-against-mayoral-control-the-schools/) Flanagan. "Before we move forward, the mayor and chancellor must agree to hearings so we can examine this grade-fixing scandal and mayoral control...[R]eal reforms must be enacted before mayoral control can be extended any further."

Flanagan, a Republican from Long Island and former chair of the Senate education committee, published his column in the middle of an escalating feud between Gov. Andrew Cuomo and de Blasio and months before the start of next Albany legislative session, which is sure to be dominated by political posturing in preparation for the 2016 elections when the entire legislature will be on the ballot.

Last year, rather than renewing mayoral control for multiple years as it had under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Senate Republicans teamed with Cuomo to limit the extension to just one year. Though Cuomo and de Blasio are both Democrats, they have differing philosophies on education, with Cuomo supporting the so-called education reform movement and supporting the expansion of charter schools.

Both Flanagan and Cuomo have indicated they want to see significant improvements from city schools under de Blasio. "Next year we can come back, and if he does a good job, then we can say he should have more control," Cuomo said (http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/city-hall/2015/07/8571579/cuomo-says-de-blasio-must-earn-mayoral-control) of de Blasio and mayoral control of schools at a press conference in July. The Cuomo administration did not return requests for comment for this story.
The posturing by Cuomo, Flanagan, and others begs questions: How much improvement can possibly be seen in one year? And exactly what kind of data points would demonstrate it?

When asked what would constitute significant improvements for Flanagan, spokesman Scott Reif, of the Senate’s Republican Majority, referred Gotham Gazette back to the op-ed. Reif also said he expected the Senate’s education committee to get deeper into the details in the next session.

Reif stressed that de Blasio must make himself and city education chancellor Carmen Farina available for hearings. Flanagan wrote in his op-ed that de Blasio only agreed to make Farina available for an hour last year. Leading up to the one-year extension, the de Blasio administration said (http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/city-hall/2015/07/8571636/flanagan-says-mayor-didnt-lobby-hard-enough) that Flanagan failed to return the mayor’s calls and was combative.

De Blasio administration officials stress that they think mayoral control should be judged over the long haul as a governmental system, not on incremental progress over a short period of time made by one mayor or the other. Administration officials say Flanagan’s office has not communicated any specific concerns they want addressed, or benchmarks they want hit.

Senate Republicans did propose a host of changes to the system in bills last year, including one that would have given the legislature the ability to approve the city DOE budget. That measure is totally unacceptable to the de Blasio administration and did not fly with Assembly Democrats, who are more aligned with the mayor.

The administration clearly views Flanagan’s position on mayoral control as designed to hurt the mayor rather than to boost the city’s educational system. They point to a week’s worth of New York Post articles attacking the DOE and Flanagan’s op-ed as a strategy designed to blunt the good news contained in the test scores revealed this week.

On Wednesday, de Blasio and Farina announced (http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2015-2016/ContinuedGains-for-State-English-and-Math-Exams.htm) that the city’s students in grades 3-8 have made improvement on Common Core-aligned English and math tests. In touting mostly across-the-board gains, they also noted that 41 of the city’s 63 struggling “Renewal Schools” saw an increase in their English scores and 36 saw an increase in math. These schools, identified by the state as the most unsuccessful, will likely be at the center of what de Blasio must answer for when he faces state lawmakers next year.
De Blasio said Wednesday that the city’s test scores beat out increases seen in the state’s other “Big 5” urban school districts and stressed that the city is closing its performance gap with schools across the state in general. "We now have the smallest-ever gap between New York City's scores and the rest of the state's scores," said de Blasio. "It's less than a one percentage point difference, and we intend to close that gap. This is an indication of how quickly things are changing in our schools."

An administration press release (http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations /NewsandSpeeches/2015-2016/(Continued+Gains+for+State+English+and+Math+Exams.htm) on the scores said that they demonstrate "the effectiveness" of the "Mayoral Control system and strategies to raise achievement."

Still, de Blasio downplayed the importance of "high-stakes testing" during the press conference, stressing instead the need to make sure children receive a practical education. "Our schools must deliver real preparation for the real world," he said. "Education determines economic destiny." De Blasio is likely to make his community schools push, whereby schools become hubs that provide social and medical services, central to his case for renewing mayoral control.

Jasmine Gripper of the Alliance for Quality Education, a union-supported group with close ties to the mayor, said that test scores shouldn't be used as a measuring stick on de Blasio's success with mayoral control. "The data points shouldn't be test scores but parent engagement, the amount of [student] suspensions, and the improvements made at struggling schools."

Gripper said AQE is paying attention to whether community schools are looking after the overall wellbeing of their students, examining the plans they submit to make sure students are getting eye exams and have access to guidance counselors and psychiatrists. "One year is just not enough time to see significant gains," said Gripper. "Three to four years would be more like it."

But de Blasio doesn't have three or four years. Instead, he faces the potential political embarrassment of having mayoral control stripped away by his enemies, which could leave him extremely vulnerable during the next mayoral election, in 2017. That's why many Democrats and education advocates see the one-year extension as a political move that serves both as retribution for de Blasio's attempts to win the state Senate for Democrats in 2014 and to prevent him from getting openly involved in the 2016 legislative elections.

Flanagan and Cuomo also both appear to be interested in quieting de Blasio's criticism of charter schools. "The grade-fixing scandal, along with the earlier attacks on charter schools, show exactly why we took such a cautious approach to mayoral control,"
But mayoral control isn’t as simple as one side against the other. Many Democrats in both the Assembly and Senate, who rallied to de Blasio’s side last year to support a minimum three-year extension of mayoral control, do harbor major concerns about the system. Some of them are concerned about creating more checks and balances on the city Department of Education’s spending, while others want to increase parental involvement while weakening the mayor’s ability to make appointments to the Panel for Educational Policy.

Sen. Diane Savino, of the Independent Democratic Conference, said she felt one year to show improvement in mayoral control is “reasonable.”

“It shouldn’t be that hard,” said Savino. “Since the inception of mayoral control we’ve had a host of issues raised every year by just about all the major Democrats, including the mayor himself. Just pick some of them and get to work.”

Savino, who said she hadn’t read Flanagan’s op-ed, said she wants de Blasio to get to work dealing with the grade-fixing scandal that sparked Flanagan’s column. “What is a diploma worth when no employers take it seriously?” asked Savino. “We need to take action quickly against anyone who is rigging grades and we need to figure out what we are doing that leaves students without enough credits to graduate.”

The mayor and his schools chancellor responded to new grade-fixing allegations by creating a new task force within the DOE to investigate and uphold academic integrity. Supporters of de Blasio note that credit-recovery problems have been at play in city schools for years, if not decades, and that there are a relatively small number of students involved. Regardless, anything happening with city education is de Blasio’s responsibility now. And the mayor has repeatedly argued that mayoral control makes clear that he is ultimately accountable for the city’s schools, and that voters will hold him so come 2017.

Savino and Flanagan both point to the fact that 77 percent of city high school students entering CUNY need remedial math or English. Savino said she’d like to bring CUNY officials to hearings on mayoral control to get their take on what kind of education city students are getting. “Test scores are just a piece of this,” Savino told Gotham Gazette. “We need to involve CUNY because they are the best judge at whether we are providing our students with a sound education that holds up once send them out into the world.”

During Wednesday’s press conference de Blasio was asked whether he felt pressure to accelerate improvements given that he will have to go back and face the legislature to win renewal in less than a year. The mayor responded that “since day one” he felt the pressure to improve the city’s schools regardless of Albany.

“So, no,” de Blasio said. “The pressure I feel as the person accountable for our schools is to make sure our kids are getting what they need, and I’m accountable to their parents. That’s my focus.”
Gillibrand’s betrayal

Junior New York Senator Kristen Gillibrand’s August 6 announcement supporting President Barack Obama’s Iran nuclear deal should not go unpunished.

Kirsten Gillibrand. (photo credit: ASTRID RIECKEN / GETTY IMAGES NORTH AMERICA / AFP)

Junior New York Senator Kristen Gillibrand’s August 6 announcement supporting President Barack Obama’s Iran nuclear deal should not go unpunished, both in view of the demographics of the state she represents and the unprecedented presidential incitement against Jews and the State of Israel.

For Israel, the stakes in the outcome of this deal could not be higher. While Secretary of State John Kerry dismissively argues that although Iran has a "fundamental ideological confrontation" with Israel, it has not yet taken active steps toward Israel’s annihilation. But Jews with sensitive antennas understand better.
While the danger Iran's nukes pose to the world is profound, special disaster awaits Israel. John Podhoretz put it starkly in Commentary (May, 2015): “[S]hould a pact with Iran be signed, Barack Obama will be complicit in the act of casting a nuclear shadow over the future of the people, whose continued existence on earth could not survive a mushroom cloud over Tel Aviv — which would constitute a second Holocaust within living memory of the first.”

The dissonance between this nuclear deal and the well-being of Israel so glaring, would it have been asking too much for a senator from the state with the nation's largest Jewish population to have stood up to the president? New York’s Jewish population numbers nine percent of the total, and Jews comprise some one-fourth of the total vote, not all Jews and likewise not all New Yorkers oppose this deal. But polls indicate that more Americans, and inly more Jews, recognize that signing this deal would make the world a far more dangerous place, and Israel far more existentially threatened.

Gargedly, Senator Gillibrand's endorsement, coming a day before Senator Charles Schumer's disavowal of the deal, is the pundits off guard. Predictions were that Senator Schumer's courageous opposition would bring in tow this ocratic Party junior senator whose bona fides regarding Israel are more comparable to a legislator from a state as perhaps Montana or Alabama.

Over, Senator Gillibrand's boiler-plate acquiescence to the deal reads like a paraphrase of Team Obama's talking points.

Conceding that the agreement is "imperfect," she claims that "if we reject this deal, we do not have a viable alternative for preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons." Should the Islamic Republic be in non-compliance, Senator Gillibrand assures us of the possibility of "snap back" sanctions and says that the "military option will be on the table."

By contrast, Senator Schumer, less willing to gamble on the possibility of millions of deaths stemming from this chimerical vision, bases his rejection on the argument that Iran "will not change and under this agreement it will be able to achieve its dual goals of eliminating sanctions while ultimately retaining its nuclear and non-nuclear power."

Even though Senator Gillibrand professes great love for the Jewish state, her party's White House standard bearer sounds more and more like a Norwegian anti-Israel activist. Never has a president challenged and insulted Jews to the extent of this incumbent.

Jew-baiting and insinuations of dual Jewish loyalties are basic to his agenda of rounding up support for this Iranian deal.

President Obama talks about foreign influence, the shady role of billionaire donors, lobbyists, Israel as an aberration in opposing this high-minded pact. No doubt the president knows that such incitement spurs anti-Semitism.

Since the agreement so strongly tries to appease Iran, most likely more flaws such as secret deals and loopholes, as well as more Iranian condescension to a desperate Washington administration, will emerge between now and the September congressional vote. Jews will be increasingly singled out. In these confrontations, the absence of a senator committed to her Jewish constituents will stand out.

As of this writing, five of the 18-member New York State House of Representatives Democratic delegation have deserted the president on this deal. Hopefully, more of this number could be convinced to join the ranks of their colleagues in opposition. Would it be in order to call Senator Gillibrand to task in the media, perhaps by comparing her glibly written opinion in support of the deal with Senator Schumer's responsible reasoning? She needs to recognize her responsibilities to her constituents in the face of possible future confrontations between President Obama and Israel.

The author is a professor of political science at New York's CUNY. Author most recently of A Jewish Professor's Political Punditry (Syracuse University Press, 2013).
THE COMMODIFICATION OF NEWS

Amid Constant Layoffs, Journalists Should Stop Parroting Each Other

Ever dwindling numbers of journalism professionals must provide unique value, not the 101st take

By Jeff Jarvis | 08/12/15 1:20pm


Journalists, understandably, will tell you there are too few of their kind left in the world. But considering how much they repeat each others' work, perhaps the truth is that we have too many of them.

Every day on Google News, you can find hundreds, often thousands of versions of the same news, sometimes when it's not even new. Why did the world need countless reports on the recent blue moon when the event—merely a calendrical oddity—is perfectly
well-explained on Wikipedia? Did every media outlet on earth really have to write its own version of the story of that mysteriously colored dress? Editors send 15,000 journalists to each of the political conventions where nothing unexpected happens (well, unless Donald Trump shows up).

After newspaper newsrooms shrank by another 10.4 percent last year over the year before—the total workforce cratering to 32,900 from a 1990 high of 56,900—how can we still afford such inefficiency? Why does the industry produce so much duplication?

The answer, of course, is economic. The problem is the old, mass-media business model, which still sells advertisers volume: a thousand pairs of eyes at a time. As a result, every news organization thinks it needs its own take on any story so it can fill its own page and have a place for its own ad and get its own page view and earn its own pennies for each one.

That model worked fine when there was a scarcity of publications, content, pages, and ads; the only place you could reach a critical mass of audience was with a small set of publishers and broadcasters, who had pricing power. It also worked well because of the myth of old, mass media: that all readers see all ads, so we charge all advertisers for all readers. Online, we know better.

At every opportunity, the net replaces scarcity with abundance. We know what happens to the price of a commodity in abundance: it falls toward zero. How do media organizations still relying on that old, mass business model adapt to losing money? As the joke

How do they manufacture volume of content and traffic? Cats are one answer. The other is cheap rewrites of others’ stories about blue moons, oddly hued dresses, and political horse races.
says, they make it up on volume. How do they manufacture volume of content and traffic? Cats are one answer. The other is cheap rewrites of others’ stories about blue moons, oddly hued dresses, and political horse races. And another is tacky tricks like telling you to click on this headline to change your life (spoiler: it never will).

The commodification of news and the devaluing of the volume-based advertising that supports it are made only worse with the introduction of new advertising technology. First, programmatic ads, which are bought and sold on algorithmically ruled digital exchanges, bring transparency and thus still lower prices to the ad market. Second, so-called retargeting advertising values data about individual consumers (when you look at a pair of Nikes on Amazon, have you noticed how they follow you around the web for weeks?) rather than the context that content provides. The net result of all this is lower and lower revenue for news media.

What to do? Close up shop and fire the journalists who are left? Of course, not. We do indeed need more journalists, not fewer. If I didn’t believe that, I’d be a fraud teaching journalism school. But we don’t need them to go out and copy each others’ stories. We don’t need them to convince themselves that the world is waiting for their “takes” on news we already know. (I will leave it to you to judge whether I am guilty here of just adding my take on others’ takes.) We don’t need them to go work for local TV and cover fires and flackery, or for cable news and repeat themselves 24 hours a day. We don’t need to become curators of cats.

We do need to shift news from a news business based on volume to one based on value: unique value to the people and communities it serves. The salvation of this profession that I hold dear and necessary can come only from a flight to quality: doing the reporting that no one else is doing; serving people’s needs with substance rather than momentary distraction; helping to improve our lives and communities; surprising, engaging, enlightening, and educating the public. We will measure our worth not with old, mass-media metrics that count pageviews, unique users, and eyeballs by the ton. It will come with measurements of impact and value.
It's true that one measure of that value is what some people are willing to pay journalists. I do take heart that my profession's pinnacle, The New York Times, now has 1 million digital subscribers and that the Financial Times—now supported in substantial proportion by its readers—is worth $1.3 billion. But these are the grand exceptions to all rules. Most publications simply aren't good enough to pay for and they provide too much that is repeated just a click away.

Media must still depend on advertising. To convince advertisers that news outlets are worth a premium over the commodity placements they can buy at ever-lower prices, media must provide an environment that brings unique quality, relevance, and utility to the public it serves. And that public must recognize media's value with its attention, engagement, loyalty—with a true relationship of mutual respect. Sustainability for news media cannot be built on copy cats. It must be built on quality.

Jeff Jarvis, a professor at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, is a blogger at Buzzmachine.com and the author of the books Geeks Bearing Gifts: Imagining New Futures for News, What Would Google Do?, and Public Parts: How Sharing in the Digital Age Improves the Way We Work and Live. He is cohost of the podcast This Week in Google. He was a creator and founding managing editor of Entertainment Weekly magazine and on the staff of TV Guide, People, the San Francisco Examiner, the Chicago Tribune, and the New York Daily News.
A Generational Change in Attitude Is Essential to driving Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

The General Assembly Hall was filled with more than 600 young delegates with multifaceted experiences and from diverse backgrounds. Alongside the young leaders of today were United Nations Ambassadors, Activists, Civil Society leaders and High-level Officials including H.E. Ambassador Federico A. Gonzalez, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the United Nations; H.E. Ambassador Henry Mac-Donald; Amina J. Mohammed, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning; Lance Gould, Executive Special Project Editor, The Huffington Post; Ravi Karkera, Strategic Partnership Adviser, Office of the Assistant Secretary-General; Deputy Executive at UN Women; Lauren Brown, Representative for UN Women; Oliver Libby, Chair & Co-Founder, The Resolution Project; Lilian O. Ajayi, Founder & Executive Director, Global Connections for Women Foundation (GC4W) Andrew Rabens, Special Adviser, Global Youth Issues, U.S. Department of State, amongst others. Patrick Sciaratta YA @UN Project Director and Executive Director of Friendship Ambassadors Foundation, and Jolly Amatya, Co-Chair Youth Assembly organized the UN Youth Assembly.
"It is not enough to be compassionate, you must ACT," said Jolly Amaty, in her opening remarks. The energy of the General Assembly hall was one of gratitude, compassion, leadership and courage - for they realized after heartfelt key remarks, what it meant to participate at the Youth Assembly at the United Nations. An opportunity which Amina J. Mohammed, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's stated, "Now you have a real chance to make a tremendous impact in the world - as the chosen few." The echo of her message and the rest of the speakers at the opening session filled the General Assembly Hall, opening the hearts and minds of the young delegates, presiding over their interactions all throughout the sessions.

THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

These young delegates were champions and strong advocates of the new Global Goals for Sustainable Development - delegates from the Middle East championed the "Peace and Justice" goal as they aim to correct the unsafe impression of being in Pataki and are advocates for women in the rural communities. "I want to be an Ambassador for the rural people in Pataki, because I realized how blessed I am and I want a chance to make a difference in Pataki and the rest of the world" said Arafat Rasheed, Youth Delegate.

The delegates from Asia championed "Reduce Inequalities" goal while I watched a presentation by a youth delegate on providing services in Thailand for children with mental disability and another approached me about her plans to spread more awareness on the LGBT communities in China.

"I want to create an online platform at the SUNY and CUNY schools, where young people can learn more about Global Development Matters..."
The delegates from Africa champion "No Hunger" - "More actions are required to address the needs of those in Africa, who live on less than $1 a day - for more people in Africa die everyday from extreme hunger than any other diseases" said Mohammed Buhari.

"Being here at the UN Youth Assembly with inspiring students from around the world reminds us that many of the solutions to the world's pressing problems are in the hands of young people today, if we only listen and give them a chance to start now. If they are empowered to take action early in their lives, then that very experience will make them into the generation of socially-responsible, effective leaders we so clearly need." said Oliver Libby, Chair & Co-Founder of The Resolution Project and Speaker and Partner at the UN Youth Assembly.

"I want to give kids in my country access to technology so that they can expand their imagination beyond their villages" said Cretu Veaceslav, youth delegate from Eastern Europe and The Resolution Project Social Venture Challenge Winner. Cretu grew up in a village with limited access to technology and the challenges he faced growing up poor led him to create "DigiKidz" - using digital technology to improve the educational system in high schools from rural areas in the Republic of Moldova. Cretu like many others in the Eastern Europe delegation champion the "Innovation and Infrastructure" of the Global Goals.

As a millennial with a 501c3 not-for-profit-organization called the Global Connections for Women Foundation, one of the leading international non-profits of the millennium - in the areas of gender equality, women empowerment and youth empowerment. This paradigm shift in behavior is one I call "a new generational change in attitude towards global development matters."

Additionally, as the Founder and Executive Director of the Global Connections for Women Foundation, I felt truly honored to play a critical part in broadening the understanding of the youth at the UN Youth Assembly, on where we are in the fight for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment.
During the global development workshop at the UN Youth Assembly on "The Status of Women and Girls in Africa and the rest of the World," I challenged the youth delegates in my session to Lean in, take action and join the global efforts in reversing the remaining threats to Gender Equality in their country and the rest of the world.

"We must use our God given talents to change the world" said Duchess Rosie-Martinez, Youth Environmental Activists and Director of Earth Guardians - in his closing remarks on the first day of the session.

This generational change in attitude is critical to meeting the global development agenda post 2015, and it extends beyond the compounds of the Youth Assembly at the United Nations - as more youth in different parts of the world continue to play a critical role in challenging the status quo. In particular, Denise Molokai Ajavi-Williams from Nigeria - created the first African superhero story "Akiti The Hunter" and runs a working mom in 1920s, a site that is redefining feminism for the millennial generation.

Alexander "Lexistalking" Ore from Nigeria, created and produced Africa's first Afro beat dance film, The Dance Music Project (TDMP). His film depicts some of the challenges that the youth population face in Nigeria - when their passion is to dance, an unpopular profession in most countries in Africa, all while drawing a closer attention to one of the most deadly disease in Africa, Diabetes. There are an estimated number of 70 million people in Africa who are living with this disease and are undiagnosed.

Jenish Amatya and Kanchan Amatya from Nepal started a fish farming empowerment program in Nepal, which is now assisting over 500 farmers in Nepal with their micro financing, training and local business development. They also raised $30,000 to support the Nepal disaster relief efforts during the earthquake that affected and displaced thousands in Nepal.
One of the final lessons came from Lance Gould, Executive Special Project Editor of The Huffington Post, who advised the UN Youth Assembly delegation on the importance of partnerships, "Partnership is the Key to Global Development."

We must continue to invest in the talents and capacity of the youth in order to successfully meet the challenges in our world TODAY. The youth must remain motivated as they tackle some of the biggest challenges facing their generation.

"This is most empowered generation the world has ever seen" said Andrew Rabens, US State Department at the closing session of the UN Youth Assembly.

Lilian O. Ajayi is the Founder and Executive Director of the Global Connections for Women Foundation, headquartered in New York and with programs in 3 continents including the United States, Europe and Africa. The organization currently launched the Give $25 campaign to bring an education and clean water to the Disabled Girls in the City of Karamajji (Nigeria) by 2016.

Follow Lilian O. Ajayi on Twitter: www.twitter.com/lilianajayi
The Perils of Ever-Changing Work Schedules Extend to Children’s Well-Being

By NOAM SCHEIBER  AUG. 12, 2015

WASHINGTON — Abercrombie & Fitch announced last week that it would stop requiring workers to be on call for shifts that could be canceled with little notice, making it the latest retailer to pull back from such scheduling practices.

Williams-Sonoma ended on-call shifts in the last several months, while Gap has scaled back the practice ahead of a study it has commissioned on scheduling. Last year, Starbucks announced that it was bringing more “stability and consistency” to its employees’ hours after an article in The New York Times highlighted the company’s habit of giving workers little advance notice on their schedules and requiring some to close and open stores in consecutive shifts, known as “clopening.”

Although the workers directly affected by unpredictable schedules are the most obvious winners, the biggest beneficiaries of a change in the practice could be their children.

A growing body of research suggests that children’s language and problem-solving skills may suffer as a result of their parents’ problematic schedules, and that they may be more likely than other children to smoke and drink when they are older.

“Young children and adolescents of parents working unpredictable schedules or outside standard daytime working hours are more likely to have inferior cognitive and behavioral outcomes,” the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal advocacy group, said last week in a report.
Last year, two Democratic representatives introduced the Schedules That Work Act, which would require employers to give workers more say about their hours and provide them with incentives to encourage more stable schedules.

"We are all talking about this today," said Representative Rosa DeLauro, Democrat of Connecticut, who is one of the bill's lead sponsors. "Five years ago, it was an issue people would have brushed to the corner." The bill has 69 co-sponsors; two Democrats also introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

Among the needs that policy makers and activists working on the issue identify is finding stable, professional child care on a schedule that shifts from week to week.

"The arrangements families put together are usually ad hoc," Ms. DeLauro said. "They have to rely on other family members, friends. If something breaks down in that chain, they have a problem."

While all shifting schedules pose a challenge in this regard, on-call work may be unique in the way it complicates child care arrangements.

Kris Buchmann of Albuquerque worked a retail job at a local mall when her son, now 3½, was about 1 year old. She said she was frequently scheduled for on-call shifts that never materialized or that lasted less than an hour when they did.

"I still had to pay a babysitter," said Ms. Buchmann, who is active in a New Mexico organizing group called Organizers in the Land of Enchantment, or OLÉ. "Sometimes I would have to go pick her up, take her back to my house because she didn't have transportation, drive to work, get sent home, still have to pay her, and drive her home."

When Ms. Buchmann demanded a more stable schedule, her employer refused, an experience that is not uncommon. After that, she left the job.

As practices like unpredictable scheduling have proliferated in recent years, fed by a shift toward lean staffing models made possible by sophisticated software, they have attracted public criticism.

In a nationwide New York Times/CBS News poll in May, 72 percent of
stress on the part of the parents.

"Parents try their best to attend to their children in a sensitive and warm manner, but the physical and emotional exhaustion from nonstandard schedules makes it difficult," Professor Han said in an interview. "With young children, if they're crying, asking for food, asking for something, it's all about how you interact with them."

Another key issue, she found, was access to quality child care. Children whose mothers worked nonstandard schedules during their first year of life were significantly less likely to be enrolled in professional day care centers throughout early childhood. This type of child care setting, she noted in the paper, tends to be associated with better cognitive development than informal arrangements like relying on extended family members, a frequent alternative.

As for adolescents, Professor Han and two colleagues published a second paper, in the journal Developmental Psychology in 2010, which said that the longer mothers worked odd hours, the more likely their children were to smoke, drink, act out and engage in sexual activity.

The specific effect of on-call work and other frequently changing schedules — as opposed to work hours that fall outside the traditional workday — is only beginning to be studied, but social scientists worry that it has similar implications for children.

In a study of female workers at a large clothing retailer published last year in the Industrial & Labor Relations Review, Julia R. Henly and Susan J. Lambert of the University of Chicago found that the unpredictability of the workers' schedules was related to higher stress and difficulties juggling work and family demands.

While the study did not examine the way this affected children, Dr. Henly suggested that the challenges posed by unpredictable work hours could take a toll on children as well. She also predicted that mothers with constantly changing work schedules would be less likely to enroll their children in preschool and other high-quality child care facilities.

"Some amount of early childhood education is important," she said. "But it's impossible to take advantage of those opportunities if you have a schedule that
Americans favored requiring chain stores to provide at least two weeks' notice for any change in schedule, or else compensate workers with extra pay.

Regulators have also taken notice. In April, the office of the New York State attorney general sent letters to 13 retailers, questioning their use of on-call shifts. The letters, which were first reported by The Wall Street Journal, said retailers were providing workers with “too little time to make arrangements for family needs, let alone to find an alternative source of income to compensate for the lost pay.”

Several companies that received letters from the New York attorney general have denied that they use on-call scheduling for low-wage workers, or that it is common in their stores. Some retailers say that only a small fraction of their workers who have been on unpredictable schedules care for children.

“Very few of our store associates are working parents,” said Michael Scheiner, a spokesman for Abercrombie & Fitch, which was among the letter’s recipients.

But the problem appears to be widespread. A 2012 study of nonfood retail workers in New York City by Stephanie Luce of the City University of New York and by the Retail Action Project, a workers' advocacy group, found that more than half of the surveyed workers who cared for others, like children or elderly family members, had to make themselves available for last-minute shifts.

Because the practice is relatively new, however, scholars must infer its likely impact from research over the last decade showing the effects on children of parents working nonstandard hours, including night shifts, that have been more common for years.

In one of the most respected studies, published in 2005 in the journal Child Development, Prof. Wen-Jui Han of New York University looked at children during their first three years of life, controlling for such demographic variables as their mothers’ income, education, and race and ethnicity.

Professor Han, who was then at Columbia University, found that children of mothers who worked nonstandard schedules performed lower on problem-solving, verbal comprehension and spoken language tests than children of mothers who worked traditional schedules. Part of the explanation, she concluded, was increased
doesn't allow you to get your kid there."

According to Carrie Gleason of the Center for Popular Democracy, a nonprofit organization that helps community groups organize, such complications may explain why there appear to be fewer parents who work on-call shifts.

"A lot of times we find that they don't last very long," she said. "It's absolutely impossible for working parents to meet their responsibilities to their families and hold down a job at a company with on-call shifts."

Still, even parents who don't work on-call jobs often have little advance notice of their schedules. In many companies that officially promise to make schedules available in advance, Ms. Gleason said, "managers edit the schedule up until the hours someone is supposed to come in."

**Correction: August 12, 2015**

Because of an editing error, an earlier version of this article rendered incorrectly the name of a group in which Kris Buchmann is active. It is Organizers in the Land of Enchantment, not Organizers in the Land of Enrichment.

A version of this article appears in print on August 13, 2015, on page B1 of the New York edition with the headline: When Shifting Work Schedules Hurt Children's Well-Being.
Target's en Vogue marketing

Vogue's fall issue, like this one from 2013, are packed with advertising.

by Gigi Doudan (/people/gigi-doudan)
Wednesday, August 12, 2015 - 16:00

Vogue's much-awaited September issue -- its Fall Fashion Blockbuster -- comes out soon. Readers can always count on plenty of ads. But this time look for an unlikely partnership: the magazine will feature ads from Target. Target is trying to distance itself from discount retailing (see Lilly Pulitzer craze). And Vogue is following the money, tapping into a new demographic. Both get the golden ticket in advertising: mounds and mounds of customer data.

When was the last time you picked up a copy of Vogue? Simon Ungless, executive director of the fashion school at Academy of Art University (http://www.academyart.edu/academics/fashion), says it was probably the last time a copy happened to be in front of you.

"Really, the biggest percentage of the people that look at it are everyday regular people going to the doctor, and there's a copy of it there in the doctor's waiting room," he says.

Vogue does publish more than a million copies. (http://www.condenast.com/brands/vogue/mediakit/print) But magazines in general (http://www.adweek.com/news/press/celebrity-weeklies-fashion-magazines-continue-struggle-newsstand-155527) have been hurting. So Ungless says it makes sense that a consumer-driven publication with hundreds of pages of ads to fill would look to Target. Elizabeth Wissinger teaches fashion studies at the City University of New York graduate center. She says the Target-Vogue deal
is not that weird.

"The dividing lines between how we're going to get high-end luxury goods versus mass-produced items is blurred," she says.

Technology makes the connection between Vogue and Target very direct. Readers can scan a code on the ad page and go right to a "buy now" button. Ari Lightman, who teaches digital media and marketing at Carnegie Mellon University, says that's gold.

"Target's a very voracious consumer of data," he says.

Also, Target wants to reach into Vogue readers' deeper pockets. And Vogue gets to say to advertisers, "Hey, look, people aren't just seeing your ads — they're buying stuff." To understand how big that is, Lightman says look no farther than his 14-year-old daughter. She bought a fashion magazine during a recent vacation.

"She's reading the magazine with her phone in her hand," he says.

Now consumers who are all about instant gratification can go from seeing something to owning it a lot faster.

Now top US official 'says he wants to release' last Briton left in Guantanamo: Defence secretary is 'prioritising' case

- US defence secretary Ashton Carter 'inclined' to release father-of-four
- Shaker Aamer has been in camp without trial for more than 13 years
- Supporters cautiously optimistic and insist on his immediate release
- He has been twice cleared for release from notorious prison in Cuba

By JACK DOYLE and DANIEL BATES FOR THE DAILY MAIL
PUBLISHED: 19:12 EST, 12 August 2015 | UPDATED: 23:53 EST, 12 August 2015

Hopes were raised last night that Shaker Aamer could be released from Guantanamo Bay after a senior US government official said he was treating the case as 'a priority'.

Defence secretary Ashton Carter is said to be 'inclined' to release the father-of-four, who has languished in the controversial camp without trial for more than 13 years.

Supporters of the last British detainee greeted the words with cautious optimism, and insisted he should be released immediately.

Mr Aamer, whose wife and children live in Battersea, south London, has been twice cleared for release from the notorious military prison in Cuba - by George W Bush in 2007 and Barack Obama in 2009.

But despite pressure from British ministers, he remains behind bars. Only last week, the US Justice Department denied independent doctors access to his cell.

It also described the 48-year-old as an 'enemy combatant' in an apparent hardening of rhetoric.

This week, the Washington Post reported that the Department of Defense - which is ultimately responsible for handling the release of prisoners - had discussed the case.

It reported a meeting last month in which Mr Carter, who was appointed only six months ago, indicated he was 'inclined' to release Mr Aamer, who has legal residence in Britain.

Yesterday the Department of Defense said it had made the case a 'priority' in a significant shift of tone. The language echoes that used by President Obama in January after talks with David Cameron.
A spokesman for the defence department also referred to the UK as ‘our British allies’ in a further indication of an apparent willingness to push ahead with the case.

In a statement to the Daily Mail, the spokesman said: ‘I do not have a timeline on when particular detainees will be transferred from Guantanamo.

‘However, the Defense Department is committed to reducing the detainee population and to closing the detention facility.

‘We recognize the importance that our British allies have placed on resolving this case, and accordingly, we have made this case a priority.’

Youngest Guantanamo prisoner speaks after release in Canada

Considerations: Defence secretary Ashton Carter (left) is said to be ‘inclined’ to release father-of-four Mr Aamer (right, pictured with his daughter Josphate and son Michael)

Statements from the department only last month did not include the word ‘priority’.

Clive Stafford Smith, director of Reprieve and Mr Aamer’s US lawyer, demanded the American government set a ‘firm date’ for release.

He said: ‘It is good that Secretary Carter is inclined to let Shaker go, but he should disseminate rather more swiftly than he has to date.

‘After all, Shaker has been languishing in detention without trial for more than 13 years, and the US government is even now fighting to prevent us from getting him an independent health evaluation.

‘Shaker’s ongoing detention – despite having long been cleared for release – is a scandal. We’d like to think that these comments are a sign that an end to his ordeal may now be in sight, but we need a firm date, and soon.’

As Secretary of Defense, Mr Carter has the ultimate say on who is freed from Guantanamo – and personally signs the release papers.

The comments provided a strong response from Ramzi Kassem, a law professor at the City
University of New York who represents Mr Aamer, he said: 'Actions speak louder than words.'


'It's high time for Carter to sign the paperwork so Shaker can finally return to his family in London.' Last week it emerged officials were blocking access to Mr Aamer by an independent medical team.

Saudi-born Mr Aamer, who moved to south London almost 20 years ago, was detained in Afghanistan in 2001 while doing voluntary work, his supporters say.

He was tortured at a secret 'black site' prison before arriving at Guantanamo in 2002.

The US has alleged he was a close associate of Osama bin Laden.

Last month he was given fresh hope when the White House said it was in the 'final stages' of drafting a plan to close Guantanamo.

But even if this goes ahead, there is no guarantee he will be returned to the UK.

'Thinking of you': MPs - including Jeremy Corbyn (back right) - delivered a birthday card for Mr Aamer and a petition to 10 Downing Street last year.
Bizarrely Social and Crafty Octopus Stuns Scientists

BY DOUGLAS MAIN 8/12/15 AT 2:18PM

Panamanian biologist Armando Rodriguez first submitted a scientific description of a bizarre creature called the larger Pacific striped octopus in the 1960s. The animals, which he raised in a large saltwater pool, didn’t behave like any other known octopus. They appeared to be relatively social, with males and females sometimes living together in the same den and even sharing food, while also exhibiting other traits unheard of among octopuses and other cephalopods: a group of invertebrates that includes squid and cuttlefish.

But his study was rejected. “Everything Rodriguez was saying about these octopuses was contradicted by the prevailing wisdom of the day,” says Roy Caldwell, a biologist at the University of California, Berkeley. “The consensus among cephalopod scientists was that the animals were solitary, with no social behavior that you can think of.”

Work on the animal dried up. It’s a rarely seen species, found in rubbly mudflats off the coast of Nicaragua, and no scientists care around for decades. Then, in 2012, along with a biologist at the California Academy of Sciences named Richard Ross, Caldwell tracked down a reputable collector in Nicaragua who had found a few of the animals, which the two scientists took home and raised separately. They then studied their behavior for the next few years and got an additional shipment of the animals in 2013.

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Today, the duo, along with Rodriguez and his fourth colleague, Christa Hauser, have validated the Panamanian’s original work in a study published in PLOS ONE, and the larger Pacific striped octopus does not disappoint. It is a most unusual octopus in several ways.

First of all, it is much more social than any other of its ilk. Males and females sometimes cohabitate and eat together, and also mate back to back, all things that are unknown in the octopus world. During copulation, the female appears to nearly envelope the male but doesn’t eat him afterward, as is often the case in other species.

As far as social behavior, most octopuses appear limited to “copulation or cannibalism,” says Janet Voight, a cephalopod expert and associate curator at the Field Museum in Chicago, who wasn’t involved in the study. “And after copulation, cannibalism is back on the table.” But not so with these animals.

Female Pacific striped octopuses will also mate with many males, and sometimes eject the sperm afterward. “They’re like, ‘Yeah, I was just teasing. I’m not using your sperm,’” Voight says. This is the first time this sperm-flushing has been definitely observed in octopuses that Voight knows of.

Aggregations of as many as 40 of the animals have been found in the wild. It’s unclear if this means they like to be social or that their specific habitat requirements force them to be together. Regardless, this isn’t been seen with any other octopus, which tend to be loners, Caldwell says.

Its appearance is also quite striking, with flashy brown stripes and polka dots. But it can also change appearance suddenly, switching from dark red to black to white.

Females of this species live for months after they begin laying eggs. All other known octopus species rapidly begin to die once they breed. But these females continue to live, eat, hunt and mate for months. They also live for a year or two in captivity, longer than most tropical species.

The animal also has some unusual ways of hunting. “They seem to be very diverse in their tactics—they drill holes into sand, spy on crabs, probe rocks and crannies with an arm tip to get crabs and other prey,” Caldwell says. It pulls off the stilt-drilling trick with a hard, ribbon-like appendage called a radula.

When they spot shrimp, though, they have an even more unusual method. They extend a tentacle upward and above a shrimp, before tapping it on the back. The shrimp then tries to escape, right into the octopuses’ waiting arms, Caldwell says.

“They track it, they stalk it, like a tiger in the grass,” he adds. That’s not typical octopus behavior, which usually involves a single pounce as opposed to a stalk-and-stare approach.

Caldwell and Ross no longer have the animals in their tanks; their captives all died, and nobody has figured out how to raise the larvae. Caldwell found out he could keep the proto-octopuses alive longer by feeding them larval mantis shrimp but couldn’t get them to reach adulthood. The two are hoping their collector will find new specimens soon.

While this species’ behavior appears unusual, it’s possible that other octopuses act similarly, but we just don’t know, Caldwell says. “Most of these 300 or so species of octopus have never been seen alive by a biologist or other human, and we don’t know anything about their behavior,” he notes. He and his colleagues hope this study will help prompt more research in the area.

Frank W. Graziano, a comparative psychologist at Brooklyn College with an interest in cephalopods, says that fact that this species is social could potentially help explain its intelligence and perhaps that of other cephalopods (sociality is thought to be a necessary foundation for intelligence). These social characteristics “might not be unique and might be representative of evolutionary trends that have been suppressed by mainstream science,” Graziano says. Are many octopuses more social than we think? It’s quite possible, he says.

Jennifer Basil, a biologist who studies chambered nautilus (another type of cephalopod) at Brooklyn College, says that this “beautifully descriptive work” is a “huge argument for why we need basic research like this. We know so little about what’s going on in our oceans, and this is just one example of how one species could have huge implications for understanding the evolution of intelligence.”
Former Met Museum Official to Lead Roosevelt House

By JAMES BARRON  AUG. 12, 2015

The question for Harold Holzer — former government official, former Metropolitan Museum of Art official — was: Aren’t you about to follow in the footsteps of men like, oh, maybe, Ulysses S. Grant?

That is, men who did something later in life, after they did the thing for which they became famous. Grant was a Union general in the Civil War, then president from 1869 to 1877. Mr. Holzer, who retired as senior vice president for public affairs of the Met last month, has been appointed to lead the Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College.

Mr. Holzer, 66, knows about the later careers of men like Grant because he is the author, co-author or editor of more than 50 books about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. As for Grant, he said: “That’s a pretty heavy comparison. I don’t want to compare myself to the commanding general of the Union Army, and he also wrote a book that sold more than my 50 books, times 10.”

He suggested John Hay instead.

“Lincoln had some pretty good staff publicists, although they weren’t called that,” Mr. Holzer said. “John Hay, he was really the de facto press secretary, but they didn’t call it that. Some people say I was the de facto press secretary at the Met. Hay went on to write books and to return to government as secretary of state under McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt.”
Hay was Lincoln's private secretary. He went on to serve as the ambassador to Britain before President William McKinley named him secretary of state.

Mr. Holzer paused.

"That is a straw-grasping comparison on many levels," he said.

But there were other straws to be grasped. Like Mr. Holzer, Hay wrote about Lincoln. "Abraham Lincoln: A History" was a 10-volume work. Hay wrote it with Lincoln's other secretary, John Nicolay.

And here is another straw. Mr. Holzer began as a newspaper reporter and was eventually promoted to editor of The Manhattan Tribune, a weekly newspaper distributed on the Upper West Side and in Harlem. Hay was an assistant editor and, briefly, acting editor of The New-York Tribune, though later in his career. He had already worked for Lincoln when he tried journalism. And the two Tribunes have nothing in common, except their names and being defunct.

Mr. Holzer went from journalism to politics, as press secretary to Representative Bella S. Abzug from 1975 to 1977. Later he worked for WNET-TV before joining the New York State Urban Development Corporation under Gov. Mario M. Cuomo. He joined the Met in 1992.

Ms. Abzug was a Hunter alumna, having graduated in 1942, and Mr. Holzer remembered Ms. Abzug's pride in a photograph of Eleanor Roosevelt addressing the graduates. As president of the student body, Ms. Abzug was on the dais.

Roosevelt House, on East 65th Street, was where Eleanor and Franklin D. Roosevelt lived until they moved to the White House in 1933 (and where Franklin's mother, Sara, lived until her death in 1941). The Roosevelts sold the house, and it was turned over to Hunter, which completed a $24.5 million renovation several years ago.

Since then, it has become a center for public policy and human rights leaders. For five years, it was led by Jonathan F. Fanton, the former president of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and of the New School. He left in 2014 to become president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Jack Rosenthal, a former New York Times reporter and editor, was the interim director for the last year.
“Harold Holzer is an incredible scholar and quintessentially New York,” Jennifer J. Raab, the president of Hunter, said. “He understands the mission of Roosevelt House. It’s a place of great ideas influencing the next generation. There’s a public policy program, there’s a human rights program, and there are opportunities for students to meet great thinkers — and he understands what a public college can do for the next generation.”

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