VICE DEAN’S LETTER

What an extraordinary year it has been! Here are some of the many highlights: in January, CAS hosted a three-day celebration of the life and works of Elie Wiesel, culminating with a conversation with Miriam Adler, a Holocaust survivor—a memorable evening of profound humanity, and, ultimately, of hope. Later, in March, CAS invited General John Allen, who spoke about the strategic role of the United States in the years to come, and the important role that our graduates will play in creating that future world.

In quieter ways as well, throughout the year, we’ve addressed several important issues that affect us all. For instance, we engaged in an ongoing conversation concerning the essential importance of free speech in the intellectual life of the College, including a session for our Upstander Dialogue series. More than once we stood beside our Muslim community in the face of bigotry and hostility, affirming our respect for all of our students, faculty, and staff. We asked our faculty to reconsider their courses, majors and minors from the point of view of diversity: are all voices represented? And during this year CAS established a vital new program pairing international students with upperclassmen mentors.

Most recently, we had the bittersweet joy of launching the graduating class at our gala 2017 baccalaureate at Radio City Music Hall. Part of what made baccalaureate bittersweet, of course, is that we bid adieu not only to our graduating seniors, but also to Dean Gabi Starr, who left to take up her duties as the 10th president of Pomona College. Her wisdom and prudence has guided the College from strength to strength. She had the highest expectations from us as scholars and as citizens, and she inspired us to exceed all expectations.

As hard as it was to say goodbye to Gabi, we are excited to welcome our next dean, Professor Gene Jarrett.

As hard as it was to say goodbye to Gabi, we are excited to welcome our next dean, Professor Gene Jarrett. Dean Jarrett comes to us from Boston University. In addition to his extensive experience in university administration, he is an eminent scholar with expertise in African American literary history. He will arrive in CAS at the end of August, so we’ll all be warmly welcoming him to the CAS family at the same time we’ll be welcoming the incoming class of 2021. The class of 2021, by the way, is shaping up to be one of the most diverse and impressive classes CAS has ever seen. Following tradition, they’ll all be participating the First-Year Dialogue, where they’ll discuss *Americanah*, by MacArthur Fellow Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This National Book Critics Circle award-winning novel is a powerful personal story with themes of race, identity, gender, and migration.

On a personal note, this will be my last letter as your Vice Dean, though I’ll continue to be an active part of the life of the College. Working on behalf of CAS students was exhilarating and tremendously satisfying. My heartfelt thanks to all of my CAS colleagues, and my very best wishes to Dean Jarrett, the incoming class of 2021, and all CAS students and alumni!

Chris Barker
chris.barker@nyu.edu

As hard as it was to say goodbye to Gabi, we are excited to welcome our next dean, Professor Gene Jarrett.
The NYU community warmly welcomes Gene Andrew Jarrett as the new Seryl Kushner Dean of NYU’s College of Arts and Science, effective September 1, 2017.

Dr. Jarrett comes to NYU from Boston University, where he was Associate Dean of the Faculty (Humanities Division) and Professor of English and African American Studies.

President Andrew Hamilton said, “Gene Jarrett is a distinguished scholar with a deep commitment to undergraduate liberal arts education, an enthusiasm for teaching and mentoring students, and seasoned leadership at both the college level and university-wide across schools and disciplines. His experience at Boston University—another large, complex urban research university—and dedication to undergraduate education convinced us that he is just the right person for the deanship of the College. We are very pleased to welcome him to the NYU community, and look forward to his leadership of the College.

“The Search Committee, chaired by Jim Canary, Chair and Professor of Chemistry in the Faculty of Arts and Science, did outstanding work. They demonstrated great dedication to this important task and brought us exceptional candidates. We are grateful to them.”

Dr. Jarrett was named Associate Dean at BU in 2014; he joined the faculty there in 2007. At BU, he co-chaired the 2016 University Task Force on Faculty Diversity and Inclusion, and previously served as Chair of the English Department and Acting Director of the Program in African American Studies.


Among his many honors and achievements, Dr. Jarrett received the Walter Jackson Bate Fellowship in English Literature at Harvard University’s Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in 2010 and an ACLS Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies in 2014.

Dr. Jarrett attended Stuyvesant High School in New York City, earned his A.B. in English from Princeton University, and received his A.M. and Ph.D. in English from Brown University.
You have heard a lot of academic talk over the last 4 years. You can use a break today. I will break with tradition and share some life experiences with you to exhort you to be persistent while you are stepping on the first rung of a lofty post-graduation ladder at this promising age.

When I was a young man your age donkey’s years ago, my Baccalaureate speaker at Baghdad University was then Vice President of Iraq, Gen. Har-dan al-Tikriti. The country’s other VP at that time was Saddam Hussein. I don’t remember a word of what the general said. This puts me at ease now in case I baffle on because you won’t remember all the “malarkey.” (This is a word I have learned from VP Joe Biden). What I do remember is that a couple of years after my graduation from Baghdad U, my Baccalaureate speaker, General Hardan was gunned down in broad daylight in Kuwait.

Saddam Hussein had him assassinated! I hope that a couple of years from now, my own fate will be less dramatic!

You should think big and dream big. I did not do either. I could not! You ought to persist as well. I did and I survived against some overwhelming odds. As an ethnic Kurd in Iraq, my prospects were by no means auspicious. What could I dream of? How could I let my aspirations loose? But you can. You now have the New York City spirit inculcated in you and the new NYU caliber to steer you. Back to the latter in a minute.

Resilience is the hallmark of the New York City spirit. According to radio show host Garrison Keillor, New Yorkers don’t die young; they just live fast. Well, in the midst of this fast life, there is enormous resilience. Other hallmarks are diversity and accepting one another as well as every “other.” Over 200 languages are spoken in NYC. How many accents? When you speak English with a foreign accent as I do, you prove, according to Gerhard Nickle, Prof. of Applied Linguistics in Germany that you have the privilege of speaking another language better. He was commenting on profuse mono-lingualism in the US. To extend this privilege to all of its students, CAS has a Language Requirement in place.

The new NYU caliber has been ratcheting up over the last two decades. I have always admired the level of our NYU students but over the last two decades I have seen a steady uptick in quality. My impression is buttressed by my first-hand experience teaching at six US universities including two Ivy League schools. Now to some NYU statistics: You know what the French are saying about statistics. They are showing everything except the essentials! The most recent NYU statistics dated April 10, 2017 do show the essentials. Let me quote here: “The acceptance rate at NYU’s New York campus—27% —is the lowest in at least 16 years (five years ago, NYU’s acceptance rate was 35%).” Immersed in both (NY spirit and NYU education), you can now tackle a myriad of challenges considered insurmountable by many.

For about three decades, Iraq was a brutal police state. Everyone suffered except the ruling kleptocracy and their lackeys. For the Kurds, it was far worse. It was a double-whammy!

On the orders of President Saddam Hussein’s first cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majeed better known as Chemical Ali, sarin and nerve gas were dropped on the Kurdish town of Halabja in March 1988, culminating in the annihilation of more than 4,000 women, children and old men. Young men were in the mountains fighting the repressive regime. Try to remember Chemical Ali, to whom I will return in a minute.

Given such a backdrop of Kurds’ affliction and tribulation and the repression that pervaded every aspect of life where I was living, it never crossed my mind for a second that a day would come when I repeatedly find myself at the White House sitting next to US Presidents and facilitate their communication with heads of state for a decade and a half during which I also flew with the affable and gracious Joe Biden on Air Force 2. I enjoyed his kindness, and unparalleled modesty in Lebanon, Germany, Iraq and finally in Davos in Switzerland this past January just 3 days before he left office on Inauguration Day.

My first meeting with Obama: In spring 2010, I was a teaching graduate course about the Kurds at the American University in Washington, D.C. The course met only once a week and I was given the title “Global Scholar,” whatever that might mean. I was asked to go to the Oval Office again but for my first meeting with Obama, who had been in office for less than a year. I was introduced to him, we shook hands and I was seated right next to him for one full hour. This was January 25, 2010 (try to remember this date). Obama did not have one single grey hair then. Look at him now. Mind you, this was a highly disciplined White House. Ever wondered what might happen in the next 100 days to orange hair?

Remember Chemical Ali? When Obama was listening to the President of the KRG at the Oval Office speaking in Kurdish, something happened in Baghdad on that same day, Monday, January 25, 2010. After a long trial, Chemical Ali was hanged. Call this a highly disciplined White House.

CONTINUED
Learning is a life-long process that pervades every aspect. It is does not cease upon graduation. In Arabic, the maxim "ثو للا يلإ دهملا نم ملعلا" translates to: “Thou should seek knowledge from cradle to grave.” Learning is a continuum. Your latest school was NYU but your very first school was your mother. The cultures of the Middle East, like many other cultures, abound with maxims and aphorism about mothers as educators. The great Arab poet Ahmed Shawqi, who took pride in his Kurdish roots, said: "قارعألا بيط ابعش تددعأ اهتددعأ اذإ ةسردم مألا " The gist of the verse is that a mother is a school; nurturing her is tantamount to cultivating a savory nation!

The Kurds say, “If you are a child and you lose your father, you are not an orphan. But when you lose your mother you certainly are! Sorry, fathers! After splurging on gifts for Mothers’ Day this past Sunday, your children may still have a little money left for gifts for June 18, Fathers’ Day!

My stoic brave mother, whose life was an incessant story of torment and hardship, frequently said, “If you are not grateful for small things, you won’t be grateful for big things, either.” When we complained about the lack of something, she would say, “You are ingrates.” She taught us to count our blessings instead of grumbling querulously.

The new book “Option B: Facing Adversity” by the recently-widowed mother of two young children Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, basically said the same thing about gratitude for small things in life. So when two mothers: a highly educated, highly successful American businesswoman and an illiterate but stoic & dignified Kurdish lady from the Middle East agree on one piece of advice, you should heed their acumen.

The hardship, agony, toil and strife that so many endure in life just to get some basic things that we take for granted should inspire us to do a lot more with what we have and soldier on undeterred. Be grateful for electricity 24/7, a clean shower, the freedom to speak your mind and similar ‘luxuries’ so many millions are denied in this world.

The accolade lavished on mothers does not always extend to mothers-in-law. Some fathers allege that the difference between a disaster and a catastrophe is the following: when your mother-in-law falls into a lake, it is a disaster but it is a catastrophe when someone rescues her! I beg to differ with this analogy. I have always liked and respected my mother-in-law. My wife was at grade school when she and her young siblings lost their only bread winner, a father who had been brutally tortured in Ba’athist prisons for years for his [left-leaning] ideology. Thanks to the devotion of her mother, a devoted altruistic woman, my wife went on to obtain a PhD degree in the history of the Kurds in the Seljuk period. I equally salute all mothers and fathers. They are equally and overwhelmingly proud of your achievement. We are, too.

In sum, you can think big, dream big and also persist. Opportunities abound for everyone regardless of skin color, race, ethnic background, religion, and yes regardless of whether you are citizens or legal immigrants. In this Land of opportunity, this Land of Plenty, the sky is the limit indeed. You are privileged. So, when you make it big, please do not forget the underprivileged. Congratulations to you and to your proud parents and loved ones. Good luck to you all!

Ahmed Ferhadi is Clinical Professor of Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies at NYU Arts and Science
The College prides itself not only on the high quality research of its world-renowned faculty but also for the impact those instructors have on students in the classroom. Each year, CAS recognizes outstanding instructors from departments and disciplines across the College for their exceptional contributions. Twelve full-time faculty receive Golden Dozen Teaching Awards selected through nominations submitted by students and faculty, and a similar number of adjunct faculty receive the Outstanding Teaching Award. The Teach/Tech Award recognizes faculty who develop innovative technological solutions to enhance student learning in the classroom.

CAS TEACHING AWARDS
Recognizing Excellence in the Classroom

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Golden Dozen Award
Chiye Aoki, Neural Science
Helena Hansen, Anthropology
Amani Hassan, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
Elizabeth McHenry, English
Michele Mitchell, History
Ann Morning, Sociology
Gerard O'Donoghue, Expository Writing
Debraj Ray, Economics
Katie Schneider Paolantonio, Biology
Stephen Small, Biology
Petra Tosovska, Chemistry
Daniel Turner, Chemistry

Outstanding Teaching Award
Alexander Andia, Chemistry
Celia Campbell, Classics
Alexandra Grote, Biology
Francisco Marguch, Spanish and Portuguese
Chadwick Smith, German
Irina Troconis, Spanish and Portuguese
James Wagner, German

Teach/Tech Award
Andre Adler, Physics
Elizabeth Augspach, Spanish and Portuguese

Selected photos of recipients receiving their awards on stage during the 2017 CAS Baccalaureate Ceremony at Radio City Music Hall.
We caught up with blogger and travel expert Tausha Cowan (CAS ’07) to discover her tips for planning vacations, booking summer travel, and balancing globetrotting adventures with a full-time job. She works in the Travel & Lifestyle Services department at American Express and has visited more than two dozen countries since she graduated from NYU.

**What did you study at NYU?**
I majored in Journalism with minors in French and Africana Studies. I also participated in the CAS Presidential Scholars program, which was a great experience. When I found out about the program during a prospective student campus visit I knew that NYU was where I wanted to go. Some of my fondest memories of NYU are from the CAS Presidential Scholars trips and my study abroad experiences. I traveled to Florence my freshman year and to Prague my sophomore year. I also studied abroad in Paris for a summer and spent a semester in Ghana. I think very highly of the Scholars program, and I am still friends with several of my former classmates. I was also very involved in extracurriculars at NYU, especially the Academic Achievement Program.

**What inspired you to create your travel blog?**
“The Globe Getter” is technically my third blog. I started my first blog when I was an NYU student studying in Ghana, as a way to stay in touch with family and friends during my semester abroad. Then, a year after I graduated, I started a food blog. I was interested in trying out new recipes and writing reviews of restaurants I visited during my trips. In 2014, I wanted to start a new blog and I had been traveling quite a lot, so it felt like a natural fit to do something related to travel. At the same time, I kept seeing articles about people who quit their jobs to travel the world. While that is a great opportunity for some, it is not realistic for most people. I believe that you don’t have to quit your job to see the world. You can work full-time and still travel. So, I launched The Globe Getter in 2015 to show ways to do this.

**What are some of your favorite destinations?**
South Africa is one of my favorite countries to visit. When I visited in 2014, I went on a safari, visited the Blyde River Canyon (the world’s third largest canyon), and spent some time in Johannesburg and Cape Town. I also love cities, especially London where I got to live for a year, as well as Hong Kong, Paris, and Montreal.

**Are there any places that are still on your list?**
I am going to Japan this year, which has been at the top of my list. I have also never been to South America, although I am hoping to visit the Patagonia region of Chile later this year or next. And I would love to visit more U.S. national parks, particularly Zion National Park in Utah.

**Can you tell us about your position at American Express?**
I work in the Travel & Lifestyle Services department in the Consumer Services division. We focus primarily on our Centurion and Platinum card members. Our department has more than 4,000 travel consultants in 22 markets around the world who book flights, hotels, tours and cruises, and arrange restaurant reservations and concert tickets. As Senior Manager of Global Communications in Travel & Lifestyle Services, I focus on internal communications, mainly to our travel consultants—covering everything from card member benefits and program updates, to process changes, to new product launches. I also provide executive communications support for the department’s leadership team, including the Executive Vice President and General Manager of American Express Travel.

Prior to joining American Express, I started my career at NBCUniversal shortly after graduating from NYU. I learned a lot while there but I also had relatively limited vacation time. So, while pursuing my master’s degree from the London School of Economics, I traveled extensively and visited more than ten countries throughout my studies, which cemented my love of travel. Following graduate school, I worked in communications for Columbia Business School, acting as a liaison for students, faculty and staff.
One of the wonderful Cohort Program traditions that continued this year was the second annual CAS Career Conversations Networking Mixer, held on April 28, 2017. This event brought together 30 CAS alumni and 80 CAS students and provided participants with the opportunity to practice their networking skills, build relationships, and expand their CAS community.

The Career Conversations Networking Mixer was organized by the CAS Sophomore Class Board. This board represents the sophomore class on CAS Student Council and organizes programs that are tailored to the needs of CAS sophomores. Their programs revolve around the three pillars of the Cohort Program: College Life, Academic Inquiry, and Service. Career Conversations was a pivotal academic inquiry event for the sophomore student leaders who participated in the year-long CAS Leadership Development Series, and acted as a culminating event for the Alumni Mentor Program which is part of the series.

The CAS Sophomore Cohort Presidents and Sophomore Class Board members, who were elected at the end of their freshman year, were paired with a mentor from the CAS Alumni Network, and participated in the Leadership Development Series to improve their professional and leadership skills. Through this experience, sophomore students developed tools such as how to expand their professional network, and how to present themselves during informational interviews and networking events. The Networking Mixer served as an opportunity for these students to put the skills they acquired throughout the year to the test.

The event featured a panel of five alumni—Christina Bonne-Annee (CAS ’05), Luke Gerber (CAS ’12), Elizabeth Pimentel (ARTS ’71), Nora Rawn (CAS ’05), and Vinoo Varghese (CAS ’96)—and a keynote speaker, Jessica Felix (CAS ’07). Jessica kicked off the event by delivering an address about the importance of building relationships, achieving goals, and giving back to the community. Her message was supported by the panelists who offered insights on how networking has impacted their careers at every level, as well as key tips and tools when building relationships at a networking event and beyond.

Their testimonies sparked conversation among students and alumni as they mingled throughout the two hour event. Overall, the event received overwhelmingly positive feedback from both student and alumni communities, and we plan to continue and expand upon this tradition in the following years.
The World Changers program is one of the many offered through NYU’s Academic Achievement Program (AAP). World Changers is a collaboration between the Bronx Lighthouse Charter School and AAP that matches 25 NYU student mentors with 9th through 12th graders from the high school. The program's mentors and mentees meet on a bi-weekly basis, alternating between the Bronx and NYU campus, from September through May. Upon visiting the NYU campus, World Changers offers these 25 high school students a glimpse of what college life is really like. This program is coordinated by the AAP Community Service co-chairs as well as staff from the Bronx Lighthouse Charter School. With the guidance of their mentors, four of this year’s World Changers seniors—Uchenna Ijomah, Mary Morel, Vivian Michel, Nyad Adinda—were accepted to be part of NYU’s Class of 2021! We hope to make it so that even more students are accepted each year. Through AAP, a direct pipeline has been created for Black and Latino high school students through the Bronx Lighthouse Academy. This past May, as a result of hard work, the World Changers Program received a Presidential Service award for the fifth year in a row. We are proud to house a program as impactful as World Changers and look forward to creating an impact on the next class of World Changers.

**IMPORTANT DATES**

- **Monday, September 4**
  - Labor Day (NYU holiday)
- **Tuesday, September 5**
  - Fall classes begin
- **Monday, September 18**
  - Last day to add a class; waitlists expire. Last day to drop a class without a "W"
- **Monday, October 9**
  - No classes scheduled (Fall Break)
- **Monday, November 6**
  - Last day to elect or revoke Pass/Fail option. Last day to Withdraw from a course with a "W"
- **Mid-November (dates TBA)**
  - Registration for Spring 2018 courses begins
- **Wednesday-Friday, November 22–24**
  - Thanksgiving Recess
- **Tuesday, December 12**
  - Legislative Day (all classes meet on Monday Schedule)
- **Friday, December 15**
  - Last day of classes
- **Monday, December 18–Friday, December 22**
  - Examination period

**CONNECT WITH CAS**

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- nyucas
My name is Genesis Bellot (CAS ’18) and I am excited to serve as the CAS Student Council President for the 2017-2018 academic year. While it is bittersweet to see some of our Student Council members move on as they graduate and take on new adventures, we are also excited to work with a new team and plan events for the CAS community.

CAS Student Council has been working hard all summer long to kick off the fall 2017 semester. We have been focusing on a welcoming event for the CAS Class of 2021 and all incoming transfer students. We hope to host a game night that will allow students to get to know each other, while enjoying their favorite childhood games and learning more about how to get involved in student government.

Class Presidents, Sana Husain (CAS ’18), Nicole Sunderlin (CAS ‘19), Emma Patton (CAS ‘20), and their respective class boards have also been planning their own kickoff events to welcome back students. These events include a trip down memory lane for the Class of 2018, a relaxing movie night for the Class of 2019, and a Culture Carnival that aims to celebrate the diverse identity of the Class of 2020.

Vice President, Lauren Nazarieh (CAS ’18) is working on an election timeline for the fall semester to fill our vacant seats, which include Alternate Senator and First-Year Class President. She will continue to work closely with the Class Presidents and Class Boards to ensure a successful partnership between Student Council and the College Cohort Program.

Senator, Max Pau (CAS ’19) will serve as the official voice for CAS within the University Senate and will continue to update us on relevant matters happening across the University. Advocacy Chair, Allie Monck (CAS ’20) is planning a Meet and Greet that will give students the opportunity to meet the new CAS Dean, Gene Andrew Jarrett, and the new Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Lisa M. Coleman. This event comes at a crucial time for the future of CAS concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Club Council Chair, Jahnavi Singh (CAS ’20) and Treasurer, Esme Brooker (CAS ’19) will be working closely to allocate the CAS club budgets and student council committee budgets as the new academic year approaches.

Our Secretary, Jay Gupta (CAS ’18), is planning to revive the Student Council tradition of Bagel Fest. This is a time where students can grab a bagel, some coffee or tea, and learn more about our upcoming events and initiatives.

Our Public Relations Chair, Lizzie Voigt (CAS ’20) is hoping to revamp our social media presence through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. She also plans to further establish the CAS Student Council brand through the launch of our new website in the beginning of the fall semester.

Our Curriculum Chair, Jay Ganesh (CAS ’19) is planning the annual Student-Faculty Banquet that will be held in November, while Alumni Relations Chair, Mihir Punji (CAS ’19) is beginning to plan the annual Student-Alumni Banquet that will be held in February 2018. These events aim to create a welcoming space for students to interact with faculty and alumni.

We are all looking forward to the upcoming year and hope to uphold all Student Council traditions while at the same time create new ones. Our goal as a Council is to find unity within the diversity of the College. We hope you will join us in all our efforts, whether it be through joining us at our weekly General Assembly meetings, our kickoffs and other events, or supporting us through the alumni network. Follow us on Facebook at NYU CAS Student Council, for more information on our upcoming events and initiatives.
The CAS Advising International Team welcomes all new and returning international students to campus for the 2017–18 academic year. We look forward to another active and exciting year serving our international student community. Along with weekly CAS International Coffee Hour sessions, the team will host a monthly outing in New York City: On September 28 we will go to a New York Yankees baseball game; on October 13 we will picnic in Central Park and visit the Metropolitan (MET) Museum; On November 9 we will attend the MET Opera performance of *Madama Butterfly*. See the weekly ‘International Edition’ newsletter for information about these events. The team is also focused on coordinating another successful year of the CAS International Student Mentor Program, which pairs new international students in the College with returning international students to help new students transition to life at NYU and in NYC.

After a competitive election, we salute the 2017–18 Elected Board of the CAS International Student Club (ISC): President Olivia Le Menestrel; Vice President Gayatri Choudhury; Treasurer Aditya Khosia; Secretary Gabby Assuncao; Director of Public Relations Max Heng; Director of Events Roshy Chhillar; Director of Service Ragini Sethi; Director of Community Outreach Yihan Lou.

The ISC is poised to have another year filled with meaningful accomplishments in CAS and around campus. We encourage all interested students to attend an ISC event this fall!

CAS staff members voted this past spring to select winners of the 2017 CAS International Photo Contest. It was a difficult process considering the high quality of the submissions we received. Winning photographs have been enlarged and framed for display on the walls of the Class of ’29 Lounge (Silver Center, 907). We encourage students to drop by and take a look at these extraordinary global images.

### Student Winners (in alphabetical order):
- Brittany Cho, *The Key in the Hand*. Venice, Italy.
- Ashwini Nagappan, *Nostalgia*. Nice, France [top].
- Emma Schumann, *Oddly Shaped Pines*. Huangshan, China [bottom left].

### CAS Staff Winner:
After a day of college students and recent graduates pitching their startups, Anthony Oganov (CAS ‘17) and Amar Seoparson (Tandon ‘17) of Levitas Technologies won the fourth annual NYU-Yale Summer Accelerator Pitchoff. As part of each school’s Summer Entrepreneurship programs, both New York University and Yale University sent three startups to pitch to members of the venture capital community on July 13. This is the second win for NYU out of the four annual events.

Oganov and Seoparson met at another NYU Entrepreneur event, the Healthcare Makerthon, aimed at addressing issues in the healthcare system.

“As one of the winning teams at the Makerthon Weekend, Levitas has leveraged their interdisciplinary background and access to diverse entrepreneurial resources available at NYU to understand their customer and develop their innovative solution,” said Frank Rimalovski, executive director of the NYU Entrepreneurial Institute.

A 2013 study from the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses showed that approximately 400 alarms per bed are triggered each day in hospitals, leading to tremendous fatigue on the attending nurses. CDC Research also suggests that costs to Medicare from falls hit $31 billion in 2015 with a projected doubling by 2020. Levitas decided to do something about that.

“The more we talked to people, the more we found out that there was a big problem with falls,” Oganov said. “The thing with wearables is that you don’t see them a lot in healthcare. A lot of people think this is the right time for that.”

Levitas makes a wearable, wireless monitor that alerts nurses only when a fall risk patient is getting out of bed as detected by an algorithm, cutting out as many false alarms as possible. According to the American Hospital Association, most falls in hospitals occur when a patient overestimates their strength and tries to get out of bed.

“We plan to spend the coming months piloting and testing our product with hospitals and long-term care facilities to help them ensure the safety of their patients,” said Seoparson, a computer and electrical engineer with artificial intelligence experience.

The NYU-Yale Pitchoff is part of the NYU Summer Launchpad program where startups from around the NYU Community receive funding, coaching, and other perks to help their startups grow.

Oganov knew that being a part of Summer Launchpad meant he would have to learn to pitch Levitas. They were selected, alongside TABu and ShopDrop, by the other companies in the program to pitch against Yale. “The day of was a little nerve wracking, but it all kind of worked out in the end. We were happy we were able to represent NYU.”

Going forward, Oganov and Seoparson’s priority is refining and making a great product before going into customer acquisition with nursing homes and, eventually, hospitals. “Falls are a humongous problem,” Oganov said, “and it’s a really important thing that we think we can help.”

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