Established December 23, 1858,
The Beta Chapter of New York, at New York University

The Phi Beta Kappa Society is the Nation’s oldest and most prestigious academic honor society, founded December 5, 1776. Initiation into this honor society is a high honor and a celebration of a student’s outstanding and distinguished program of study in the liberal arts and sciences. Election to the Beta Chapter of New York signifies that an undergraduate’s course of study is distinguished by excellence, research, originality, and rigor.

Being elected to Phi Beta Kappa connects diverse, accomplished individuals in nearly every career field and lasts a lifetime. Regardless of discipline, all Phi Beta Kappa members represent superior achievement and a commitment to the spirit of learning. The original society adopted a Greek motto, Φιλοσοφία Βίου Κυβερνήτης (Philosophia Bion Kybernetes), “the love for knowledge is the guide of life,” the initials of which furnished the name Phi Beta Kappa.
History of Phi Beta Kappa

Phi Beta Kappa was founded at the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg, Virginia on December 5, 1776. This was the first college society to have a Greek name and in its first three years it introduced the essential characteristics of all Greek-letter societies to follow: mottoes in Greek or Latin, a key or badge, an initiation, and a special handshake. The original chapter carried on an active existence for a little more than four years before the conflict of the American revolutionary war forced professors and students at the College to leave Williamsburg putting that Phi Beta chapter out of operation until reactivated in 1851. Those four years, however, did provide a firm foundation of organization and activity that would be followed elsewhere. Broad subjects and general principles were favorite topics of argumentation, most appropriate for the newly formed “Societas Philosophiae”, or as one historian has translated the Latin, a “Society of Lovers of Learning.” And many of the original members distinguished themselves in public life – not the least of which was John Marshall, who served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1801 to 1835.

Before the demise of the William and Mary chapter, that original society elected to honorary membership a former Yale student, Elisha Parmalee, who later graduated from Harvard, and commissioned him to establish chapters at the colleges at Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at New Haven, Connecticut. Mr. Parmalee delivered charters to Yale in 1780 and to Harvard in 1781. The new chapters were called “alphas” in their respective states.

NYU might have been eighth in order if a petition dated 1836, urging membership for the “University of the City of New York”, as NYU was known at that time, had been fully implemented. However, by 1857, another petition about an NYU chapter was addressed directly to the Alpha of New York at Union College. With the sanction from Union, along with the approval of the Alphas of Massachusetts and Connecticut the Beta of New York was formed. Since 1858, the Beta Chapter of New York has flourished.

Counting among the members of Phi Beta Kappa are 17 U.S. Presidents, 38 U.S. Supreme Court Justices, more than 130 Nobel Laureates, noted scientists and researchers, business and civic leaders, artists and athletes.

Some include:
Jeff Bezos, Amazon.com founder
Wes Moore, Author
Peyton Manning, Athlete
Lisa Randall, Theoretical Physicist
Bill Clinton, 42nd President
Kerry Washington, Actor and activist
John Roberts, Chief Justice of the United States
W.E.B. Du Bois, NAACP co-founder
Julie Taymor, Theatrical director and designer
Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State
Christiane Amanpour, News anchor and journalist
Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd President
Sonia Sotomayor, Supreme Court Justice
A Liberal Arts Education at NYU

The liberal arts curriculum of NYU’s College of Arts and Science seeks to educate students in the range of human experience and achievement and to provide them with the skills and breadth of perspective needed to become leaders in their professional lives and active participants in the communities in which they live.

To this end, the curriculum is designed to give students a rigorous general education in the arts and sciences as well as the benefit of doing specialized research in a single area chosen for its intellectual appeal. These complementary ideals find their expression in the College Core Curriculum, which forms the foundation of the College’s liberal arts curriculum, and in a student’s choice of a major course of study. The Core provides a foundation for both future undergraduate work and postgraduate pursuits by fostering intellectual curiosity, critical and analytic thinking, receptiveness to artistic expression, understanding of cultural differences, and the ability to communicate orally and in writing with clarity and forcefulness. In the major, students will gain the experience of thoroughly investigating a single area of academic inquiry that is of particular interest to them. They will learn how scholars work to collect, organize, and interpret information to create new knowledge. They will acquire the skills and background to confront the limits of current understanding in their major field and be able to engage in research to explore those boundaries.

By focusing on the acquisition of skills and the cultivation of enduring habits of mind, students’ undergraduate education in the College seeks to prepare them for a future in which they will need continually to learn, grow, and adapt to a rapidly changing world. The pleasure of study undertaken for its own sake should not be underestimated; however, the practical goal of the liberal arts education they will pursue at NYU is to equip them for success in their subsequent lives and professions.

A Perspective on the Liberal Arts Education

What is a liberal arts education? It is the mix of topics that constitute the curriculum of NYU’s College of Arts and Science, Columbia College, Harvard College, College of William and Mary and 279 other outstanding colleges that host chapters of the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society.

Liberal Arts Curricula include training in the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and mathematics. The liberal arts also includes graphic representation, and philosophical discourse on freedom and political structure. In addition humor, irony, skepticism, theology and live performance of tragic and uplifting themes are a part of a liberal arts education. Special value is given to languages, the languages of mathematics, poetry, political discourse and the languages spoken in countries around the world. Graduates with liberal arts degrees know how to communicate, and communication is what makes humanity expand knowledge, solve problems, share joy, share sorrow and avoid conflict.

Although some parts of society recoil at being called “liberal”, those who are trained in liberal arts know that communication and analysis of any value system are enhanced by their broad
education. George H. Bush and Bill Clinton are both members of Phi Beta Kappa, as are John Roberts and Sonia Sotomayor, and also Ted Cruz and Janet Yellen. If you agree with one of these you probably do not agree with others, but all articulate interesting and valuable perspectives.

The philosophy of a liberal education promoted by Phi Beta Kappa encourages students to pursue a breadth of intellectual perspective, critical reflection of one’s own self and the world around them. The benefits of an excellent liberal arts education are experienced over the life course as openness, intellectual flexibility, ability to communicate and engagement in the full range of life experiences.
Beta Chapter of New York Eligibility and Requirements

The following stipulations concerning eligibility for membership in course were adopted by vote of the chapters and certified by the National Phi Beta Kappa Executive Committee on behalf of the PBK Senate on June 1, 2011.

Eligibility for election to membership in course shall be contingent upon fulfillment of the following minimum requirements.

1. Eligible students shall be candidates for a bachelor’s degree. The student’s record shall include coursework in the liberal arts and sciences equivalent to at least three-quarters of the credits ordinarily required for a bachelor’s degree in these fields (e.g., not less than 90 semester hours of work if 120 hours are normally required for such a degree). The liberal arts and sciences encompass the traditional disciplines of the natural sciences,* mathematics, social sciences, and humanities. Select courses in other programs of study may be included only if they unambiguously embody the liberal arts and sciences.

Because Phi Beta Kappa honors excellence in the liberal arts and sciences, applied or pre-professional coursework shall not be considered in determining eligibility. This stipulation excludes professionally focused courses and courses devoted to the acquisition of practical skills.

2. Weight shall be given to the breadth and depth of study in liberal arts and sciences, taking into account the number, variety, and level of courses taken outside the requirements of the major, and the proportion of the candidate’s overall program those courses constitute. Consideration shall also be given to the number of elective courses taken above the introductory, or general education, level.

3. Candidates shall have demonstrated, by successful work in high school or college, or in the two together, a knowledge of a second or non-native language at least minimally appropriate for a liberal education. In no case shall this mean less than the completion of the intermediate college level in a second, or non-native, language, or its equivalent.

4. The candidate's undergraduate record shall include at least one course in college-level mathematics, logic, or statistics, with content appropriate to a liberal arts and sciences curriculum. The course should introduce the student to mathematical ideas, abstract thinking, proofs, and the axiomatic method.

5. In keeping with the Founders’ interest in fostering not only academic excellence but also friendship and morality, invitation to Phi Beta Kappa should be extended only to persons of good moral character.

*The Beta Chapter of NY requires two natural sciences classes. One science course must have a laboratory component.
A candidate for election to PBK must have never failed a course, and have never been found responsible by the Committee on Academic Standards of an offense of academic dishonesty. Those eligible for each election are as follows:

**Seniors.** Members of the Senior Class who have completed four years of undergraduate study at New York University. Transfer students who came to NYU are eligible. Students who will be graduating from NYU in May, or who have graduated in the preceding December or January are eligible.

**Juniors.** Members of the Junior Class who have completed two and a half years of undergraduate study at New York University. Students who are studying away in the current term are eligible.
Election
To be elected to the Beta Chapter of New York at New York University, a student must possess a record of outstanding scholarly achievement, showing both depth of study and breadth of intellectual interest.

Undergraduates are elected to the Beta Chapter of New York at NYU once a year in the Spring semester. The elections take place during the meeting of the Faculty Committee who carefully consider transcripts. The Committee is composed of NYU faculty and senior staff who are members of Phi Beta Kappa. While each Phi Beta Kappa chapter may elect the highest 10% of its graduating class, the Beta Chapter of NY determines specific requirements including those for a limited number of juniors who are elected in the Spring.

After the election meeting in April, students are informed of the Chapter’s decision by email. Those who are elected and accept membership in Beta of NY will be inducted at a ceremony in May. New members are asked to pay a registration fee of $90, which covers the cost of the certificate of membership, Beta of NY dues, and lifetime membership in the National Phi Beta Kappa Society.
Initiation Ceremony

The initiation ceremony is held each May. All members-elect who have completed the registration process will be inducted at the ceremony. They will receive an official invitation via e-mail in April before the ceremony and are required to attend.

Recent NYU Beta of NY Induction Ceremony Speakers
Faculty Address:
2016  Lynne Haney, Professor of Sociology
2015  Stephen D. Solomon, Marjorie Dean Professor of Financial Journalism, Associate Director, NYU Arthur Carter Journalism Institute
2014  Carol H. Krinsky, Professor of Art History
2013  Don Garrett, Professor of Philosophy, Chair of Department
2012  Thomas Bender, University Professor of the Humanities and Professor of History
2011  Elizabeth Phelps, Silver Professor of Psychology and Neural Science
2010  G. Gabrielle Starr, Seryl Kushner Dean of the College of Arts and Science, Professor of English

Student Remarks:
2016  Nicholas Sachs, Biochemistry
2015  Kayla W. Tunnell, Neural Science
2014  Aaron T. Lynch-Miller, Philosophy and Anthropology
2013  Brooke Wade Murphy, English and American Literature
2012  Bethany L.M. Schiffman, French/Anthropology
2011  Areeba Sadiq, Neural Science
2010  Alexander B. Kauffman, Art History
Frequently Asked Questions

What is Phi Beta Kappa (PBK)? How is it different from other honors societies?
PBK is the oldest and most prestigious collegiate honor society in the U.S. Originally founded in 1776, at the College of William and Mary as a society of scholars and letters, it focuses on honoring students with a traditional liberal education—a broad core curriculum in the arts and sciences. PBK is among the most competitive honor societies in that it has some of the highest academic standards.

Can you tell me if I am eligible for membership?
Students can only be notified of eligibility by receiving an invitation. Students may evaluate for themselves whether they think they meet the eligibility requirements.

When are elections held?
Elections for Phi Beta Kappa are held once a year in the spring semester by the Faculty Committee.

How am I notified that I have been elected?
Students who have been elected to join will receive a notice to their NYU email address. To ensure that you receive notification, please make sure your contact information is current on Albert.

I am currently studying away. Can I still be elected?
Yes. Students who are studying away may still join by following the instructions provided with their invitation letter. Members studying away who are unable to attend and collect their membership certificate and materials will be notified by email about how to obtain them.

Can I apply to join?
No. Membership to Phi Beta Kappa is by invitation only.

How much does membership cost?
Membership in Phi Beta Kappa is $90. This is a one-time membership fee and covers all national and local chapter dues.

Do I have to attend the induction ceremony?
Yes. Attendance is required.
Links
National Phi Beta Kappa Society homepage
www.pbk.org

The Key Reporter, Phi Beta Kappa’s publication for news and alumni relations
www.keyreporter.org

Phi Beta Kappa Association of New York
www.pbkny.org

CONTACT
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