



Spring 2022 at DDC!

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1. From Biology Lab to Catwalk

1) Modern Genetics: Science, History, Ethics

The cost of genome sequencing – the decoding of an individual’s genetic material – has gone down dramatically over the past decade, points out Dennis Zhang, instructor for “Modern Genetics: Science, History, Ethics.” If the price of a 2013 Ferrari 458 Spider had dropped at the same rate, the \$400,000 car would now cost around \$0.01. Dennis is pursuing a dual-degree in Biology and History at Columbia College and his research focuses on gene-editing technology and bioethics in medicine.

Fast and cheap sequencing means that genetic data is now easily accessible, he explains. In addition, recent gene-editing technologies can now target and snip specific genes to

modify an organism's DNA. These recent developments have led to enormous ethical challenges at the societal level. Should we edit out our so-called genetic imperfections – from disabilities to diseases to physical appearances – to produce “designer babies”? Who would have access to these procedures and who would have to give consent? Who should regulate the field – international organizations? Governments? Religious or cultural entities?

It is very important that students fully understand these challenges as they take control of their health and sense of personal identity, which are both affected by factors like genetics and ancestry, says Dennis. There is no stopping the genetic revolution, the field will only grow more complex, impactful, and exciting. These questions do not have clear-cut answers, but I want my students to acquire a good understanding of the key issues as they prepare to navigate this new age independently, he adds.

Students should have these conversations in high school to hone their ability to critically think, argue, ask, and explain, says Dennis. Accepting information passively is not an option: it leads to poor choices and negative outcomes. Critical thinking – the ability to analyze an issue and make logical and informed decisions – is a crucial life skill. The best training grounds for developing critical skills are discussions about intricate, multi-faceted issues that take collaboration, nuance, and patience to tackle. Modern genetics fit this description, says Dennis.

The class equips students to make the most of their college years. During this incredibly formative period, they are exposed to many different fields and ideas. They need strong critical thinking skills to navigate the new challenges. *We constantly re-think, share, and re-evaluate, and in the process, students learn to break down complex scientific, historical, and ethical case studies to formulate pertinent arguments and questions, says Dennis. Then in turn, they are able to communicate these same concepts to a lay audience like their peers, friends, and family.*

2) We Are The Art: Wearable Art & Fashion

I want to inspire students to explore and strengthen their creativity, be themselves and celebrate their difference so they are self-confident and proud of their cultural heritage, says Imani Lia Whyte-Anigboro, Master of Art and Art Education program from Teachers College at Columbia and Bachelor of Art in Fashion & Garment Construction from Savannah College of Art and Design. When students feel valuable, they are empowered to resist the constant pressure at school to follow popular peers and conform to the standards of the leaders, adds Imani. This learning experience also helps them further define their interests and tailor their education to their passion. I did just that at Teachers College: I studied art and art education but fashion is my specialty and my love, so I tailored my curriculum to integrate fashion into art.

As students learn the rich history of black fashion and create their own clothing accessories, they build up their self-expression skills and develop their creative thinking and problem-solving muscles. Creativity – the ability to bring into existence new and

valuable ideas – gives rise to innovative approaches and conjures up solutions to problems.

People of color have been at the forefront of fashion and innovation for longer than they get credit for, says Imani. Black designers have changed the fashion world for ever as their techniques have become standard and their designs are now worn by celebrities in the United States and Europe, she adds. I introduce students to the work of influential black designers such as Dapper Dan, Pyer Moss, Tracy Reese and Willi Smith.

- Dapper Dan, the Harlem-based godfather of hip-hop fashion, turns luxury items and designer logos into streetwear, remixing Vuitton and Gucci garment bags into jackets. In 2020, he was named as one of *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People. He now designs his collection of apparel, footwear and accessories in partnership with Gucci.
- Pyer Moss, founded by Jean-Raymond Kerby in 2013, combines fashion with political conscience and celebrates black culture. In 2021, he presented a haute couture collection during Paris Couture Week, a first for a Black American designer. Kamala Harris sported a Pyer Moss coat at the COVID-19 Memorial on the eve of Joe Biden's inauguration.
- Tracy Reese launched her women's ready-to-wear label in New York City in 1998. She is known for her intricate prints, patterns and bright florals, and her celebrity clients include Michelle Obama, Sarah Jessica Parker and Oprah.
- Willi Smith was one of the most successful African-American fashion designers. His label, WilliWear Limited, launched in 1976, grossed over \$25 million in sales in 1986. He designed stylish clothing for women and men and worked across architecture and film, collaborating with Spike Lee's 1988 musical comedy drama *School Daze* and Jeanne-Claude and Christo's environmental artwork *Pont Neuf Wrapped* (1985) in Paris.

I design my own [clothing line](#), explains Imani. I am donating fabric and supplies to the class so students create their own accessories – jewelry, clothing patches – to express their personality and stand out from the crowd. I tailor the wearable art projects to their requests, they are the inspiration. It is important that students make things they want to make, not what I think they want to make!

2. All Things ALUMNI

Hello Alumni! I hope you have all had an amazing start to the new year. Here are some updates and opportunities from the DDC office:

Graduate School Test Prep:

We have been able to grant Graduate School Test Prep services to 15 alumni! Thanks to those who filled out our surveys and responded to my emails! I will continue to advocate for more spots for those who are still interested and waiting!

Victory Group International (VGI)

VGI is a growing Sports Marketing Agency working with athletes and brands across all sports. They are interested in hiring interns. If interested please contact J Lynch Managing

Partner lynch@vgiconsulting.com

INTERESTED IN THE SPORTS INDUSTRY?



VGI is a growing Sports Marketing Agency working with athletes and brands across all sports. Internship Roles are open but not limited to:

Social Media
Branding/Marketing
Public Relations
Videography
Sports Writing
Graphic Design

If interested send resume to Nate Robinson
natearobinson90@gmail.com

Freedom and Citizenship

Freedom & Citizenship at Columbia University is seeking undergraduate teaching assistants for its 2022 - 2023 year. It is a nonprofit community engagement program that teaches college preparedness, political philosophy, and civic engagement to low-income NYC high school students. This year they are looking to hire 13 paid Teacher's Assistants who will guide students in making the difficult transition from high school to college-level work in the humanities. The deadline to apply is March 8.

You can learn more about the job, compensation, and the program at <http://freedomandcitizenship.columbia.edu/jobs> or contact them at freedomandcitizenship@columbia.edu with any questions.

Reducetarian Foundation

The [Reducetarian Fellowship](#) is a brand new program for exceptional New York City-area undergraduate students who are eager to create a more sustainable, healthy, and compassionate world. The one-year experience includes both a curricular component as well as a summer internship with one of many exciting and impactful [partner organizations](#). Each fellow receives a \$7,500 stipend to support their participation in the program and one-on-one mentorship throughout the year. [Applications](#) close April 15!

For any other alumni related questions, please email [Yarisell Hernandez](#)

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