

**Brooklyn Public Library and Prospect Park Alliance Announce
Professors and Line-Up of Free Courses for the Inaugural Semester of Immigrant-Taught
University Open Air**

*Registration now open for free courses in the sciences and humanities,
taught by scholars from Tunisia, Iran, Colombia, Pakistan, Ghana, and more, in
Prospect Park June 11 – 30, offering an open and welcoming space for
learning and civic engagement to all New York residents*

May 15, 2019 – **Brooklyn Public Library** (BPL) and **Prospect Park Alliance** (PPA) announced today the professors selected for the inaugural semester of **University Open Air**, a “pop-up” university taking place June 11 through June 30 in Prospect Park’s former Rose Garden. An open call for professors, researchers, and academics who were trained outside of the U.S. and no longer able to teach in their respective fields due to their citizenship, visa status, or other constraints, brought in more than double the expected number of qualified candidates. University Open Air will welcome mathematicians, social scientists, urban planners, an actor, and historians from more than 15 countries across the globe who will offer courses in the heart of Brooklyn. An expansion of BPL’s mission to promote civic literacy, in addition to the Library’s immigration service offerings such as programs in 14 different languages, free financial counseling and citizenship application assistance, and an extension of Prospect Park Alliance’s mission to engage the diverse communities that consider the park “Brooklyn’s Backyard,” all courses at University Open Air are free and open to the public, offering a platform for immigrants from around New York to share their knowledge with and strengthen the fabric of the community.

Lead by an Iranian social scientist, Nigerian engineer, Ghanaian data scientist, and a Russian philosopher (full list of professor and courses found below), **University Open Air** will provide courses and workshops focused on urban anthropology, Islamic history, gender equality, data science research, LGBTQI and gender studies, linguistic preservation in Tajikistan, and more. Courses will take place on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, expanding BPL’s role as a catalyst for civic engagement for the borough’s 2.6 million residents, and PPA’s core value to provide innovative opportunities in the park for its more than 10 million annual patrons of all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

For a full schedule of courses and to register, please visit www.bklynlibrary.org/university-open-air. Courses will be accessible and open to all levels of knowledge. Please check the website for the most current schedule. Walk-ins will be welcome.

“The group of professors that BPL and Prospect Park Alliance have brought together for our inaugural semester of University Open Air is a perfect example of the diverse fabric that makes up the Brooklyn community,” said **László Jakab Orsós, BPL’s Vice President of Arts and Culture**. “We are inviting remarkable minds, many who had to leave their entire lives behind to teach us a variety of interesting subjects, not to mention showing us what an immense talent is hidden here in our city.”

“Prospect Park’s former Rose Garden is the next area of focus for Prospect Park Alliance in terms of our mission to restore the park and provide spaces where the public can interact and enjoy nature,” said **Maria Carrasco, Vice President of Programs at Prospect Park Alliance**. “University Open Air directly

addresses many of the qualities that the public has voiced for public programming through our community outreach efforts. We serve so many immigrant communities in the park, so to bring together such a diverse roster of faculty makes this program quite special; while the areas of focus are ambitious, the courses will be accessible to all members of our community no matter their level of knowledge on the topic at hand, so we welcome everyone to register and enjoy.”

The program will take place in the former [Rose Garden](#), located in the northeast corner of Prospect Park, an area that has been the focus of community visioning sessions as part of Prospect Park Alliance’s plans for restoration of this area of the park. A temporary outdoor library will be on site, and a meeting area for staff and students of University Open Air will be provided, as well as a mini café to purchase coffee and snacks. All participants will be invited to a commencement celebration on June 30 in Prospect Park, with complete details to be announced.

Following the open call, BPL and PPA worked closely with the Library’s robust immigration and outreach services team, along with Upwardly Global, Emma’s Torch, and World Education Services, to bring together a diverse range of professorial candidates. In advance of the lectures, professors will participate in a teacher’s training session to help structure the classes. All professors will be compensated for their work. University Open Air will continue with an indoor winter semester and will return to Prospect Park again for a summer semester in 2020, expanding the opportunities for potential professors to share their knowledge with the New York Community. Following last summer’s Democracy Lab, BPL’s continued partnership with Prospect Park Alliance broadens both organizations outreach to engage with citizens, as well as serve as a vital resource for Brooklyn’s diverse immigrant communities.

ABOUT THE PROFESSORS AND COURSES

Marcelo Arroyave (Colombia) will present a workshop on **understanding the mutation of “traditional” graffiti** and how it has been used as a tool to rapidly gentrify NYC. Participants will explore the story of graffiti in the city and find links between street art and gentrification in different neighborhoods. Arroyave will offer a second course on the different techniques **urban anthropology** can offer to qualitative research in an urban environment. Arroyave is a researcher and counselor who has worked in postsecondary and K-12 education, with a focus on economically disadvantaged youth.

Baraktullo Ashurov (Tajikistan) will give an introductory lecture focused on the **linguistic diversity of Tajikistan**, and how the country is home to several ‘remnant’ Iranian languages which are designated after the geographical zones where the speakers of the languages live. Ashurov is a researcher focused on the languages and religions of Central Asia, with an emphasis on ancient Sogdiana and its Iranian and Chinese geopolitical settings. Ashurov is a Visiting Scholar in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University.

Nadia Bokhari (Pakistan) will offer a course on **Lady Fatima: The Most Courageous Lady**, focused on Fatima, the daughter of the holy prophet Muhammad, and her impact on Islamic history. Bokhari is a journalist focused on social justice, who currently conducts tours at the Museum of the Moving Image in Queens. She is also a Health Reporter Fellow at CUNY through the Center for Community and Ethnic Media.

Kenrick Demesvar (Haiti) will lead a course in **Heritage Interpretation** which will focus on monuments considered historical symbols of the Haitian identity. He was an adjunct professor at the State University

of Haiti and has a master's degree in in history, focused on the management of cultural heritage. He currently serves as a substitute teacher in New York City.

Ajibola Fatokun (Nigeria) will lead the course "**Sustainable Housing Provision: Challenges and Opportunities in a Metro City.**" The course will evaluate the various types of housing provisions and approaches used in creating housing unit. Fatokun is a former professor with experience as a construction professional and lecturer with a focus on construction engineering management. He is currently receiving advanced degrees from the Cooper Union Albert Nerken School of Engineering in New York City.

Roberto Garay (El Salvador) will lead two lectures in **Immigration Policy: The Central America Caravans and Latin American Ideologies.** He has a PhD in political science and administration and was an assistant professor at Tamkang University in Taiwan for three years. He currently works in IT support with Southern Telecom, Inc. and works part-time as a training specialist for the U.S. Marine Corps.

Lyosha Gorshkov (Russia) will lead two lectures, "**The Twilight Zone**": **LGBTIQ Politics in Russia and Its Impact on the Global Queer Agenda,** and "**Exiled, Lost, But Hopeful: LGBTIQ Immigration and Queer Politics in the US.**" The discussions will focus on Russian President Putin's legislation and how it has led millions of Russians to become targeted by the State. Gorshkov has served as an associate professor and deputy dean at the Perm State University in Russia, and currently is a care coordinator at The Alliance for Positive Change in New York City.

Pavel Ilin (Russia) will lead a lecture in **Transhumanism: Endless Evolution of the End of Humanity.** He holds a master's degree in Philosophy of Culture and was enrolled in a PhD program before leaving Russia. He is currently a volunteer at Refugee and Immigrants Fund in New York City.

Igor Kazachkov (Ukraine) will offer courses on **Four Things You Need to Start Your Own Business** and **The Way Wrong Politics Can Kill Economy.** He is a business intelligence analyst with over seven years of experience in the field. He currently works for First Beam, Inc. a company that works with FedEx.

Dr. Chok Tenzin Monlam (India) will offer **mindfulness meditation sessions** daily, before courses begin throughout the run of University Open Air. Dr. Monlam has spent over 10 years traveling and teaching Tibetan yoga and meditation methods.

Eugene Opoku-Mensah (Ghana) will share his knowledge in a course structured to develop participants **data science skills.** Opoku-Mensah is a computer science educator and researcher with experience working in higher education in both China and Ghana. He currently works as an assistant teacher at a public school in the Bronx.

Nazia Roushan (Bangladesh) will lead an **urban architecture** course designed for participants to discuss, discover, and improve various aspects of their localities, with an aim to build more robust and resilient local communities. Roushan is an urbanist with experience in community outreach and social media management. She recently served as a research assistant in Dhaka and New York City for a transit-oriented development plan.

Asma Thabet (Tunisia) will be teaching a workshop on **creative fantasy,** where students will use memory and imagination through games based on living experiences, and a workshop focused on utilizing vocal and physical techniques as a means of **self-discovery.** Thabet is a theater teacher, psycho-dramatist,

professional actor and contemporary dancer with six years of experience in teaching at public and private high schools and art center, and she currently working in food services.

Ayoub Zareie (Iran) will present a course on **the meaning of self-blogging**, and why female Iranian's use blogging even though they have access to other social media platforms. Zareie is a social scientist who has extensive experience working with policy, research, and planning agencies in Iran and New York.

ABOUT BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) is an independent library system for the 2.5 million residents of Brooklyn. It is the fifth largest library system in the United States with 60 neighborhood libraries located throughout the borough. BPL offers free programs and services for all ages and stages of life, including a large selection of books in more than 30 languages, author talks, literacy programs and public computers. BPL's eResources, such as eBooks and eVideos, catalog information and free homework help, are available to customers of all ages 24 hours a day at our website.

ABOUT PROSPECT PARK ALLIANCE

Prospect Park Alliance is the non-profit organization that sustains, restores, and advances Prospect Park, Brooklyn's Backyard, in partnership with the City. The Alliance provides critical staff and resources that keep the Park green and vibrant for the diverse communities that call Brooklyn home. Learn more at www.prospectpark.org.

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