

Kiev Davis and Elena Tenchikova look forward to graduation.

(Stevens for News)



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On Thursday, [Leonard Lopate](#), the brilliant [Brooklyn](#)-born WNYC radio host will deliver the commencement speech to 3,400 graduates of [Brooklyn College](#).

Perfect choice.

It will take a man like Lopate, who can literally talk about anything, to connect with these grads who come from all over the world to this magical land called Brooklyn because they know anything is possible here.

And a lot of those immigrants, or their kids, wind up going to Brooklyn College.

Two in the audience will be [Elena Tenchikova](#), 23, from [St. Petersburg, Russia](#), and [Kiev Davis](#), 25 from St. Vincent.

Tenchikova pushes a yellow cab to help pay her way through college and will graduate with a double major in political science and business management.

Davis, of [St. Vincent and the Grenadines](#), who ran the campus volunteer center, will be getting his degree in biology.

These are the kinds of people who will carry Brooklyn on their shoulders deep into the new century, continuing the tradition of making this a place where an immigrant's American Dream comes true.

"My parents came here from St. Petersburg, Russia, not [Florida](#), when I was 9 and settled in [Bensonhurst](#)," says Tenchikova. "My father, Anatoli, earned two master's degrees in Russia and drives a taxi here in [New York](#). My mother, Liodmila, has a formal college education in chorus, and she's a home attendant. It's a typical immigration story."

What's also typical is that her parents worked their butts off to give their daughter a better life in [America](#).

"My mother dreamed that I could live in a country where there was no sexual harassment in the workplace," she says. "She wanted that for me. A country where I would be respected for my intelligence and talent. My parents wanted me to get a great education. After graduating [James Madison](#) High's law program, I had a choice between Hunter, [John Jay](#) or Brooklyn College. I chose Brooklyn because of the gorgeous campus, the faculty, and the commute."

Elena qualified for financial aid through the Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge program (SEEK), worked on campus, and to help pay her way through college she took an afterschool office job in her father's boss' taxi garage, G Management on McDonald Ave. Then she started pushing a hack on weekends.

"Driving a cab in New York is like another education," she says. "I had two scary situations in three years but I've met the most amazingly diverse and interesting collection of people one could imagine. Meanwhile, at Brooklyn College I had teachers you couldn't get in an [Ivy League](#) university. [Archie Rand](#), the accomplished artist, is the presidential professor of art at Brooklyn. He taught me fine arts. Prof. [Myles] Bassell, who runs his own marketing firm, taught me marketing. Brilliant teachers."

Kiev Davis heard about Brooklyn College while living in St. Vincent. "I was told that Brooklyn College was an excellent and affordable school," he says. "I started out planning to be a doctor. But along the way I changed my career goal. I want to go on to graduate school, and take my science foundation into government, to try to help change the health care system in this country."

About 45% of Davis' college tuition was paid for by scholarships.

"When I immigrated, I stayed with relatives in [Canarsie](#)," he says. "But I soon took a job on campus as the coordinator of SERVA [Students Engaged in Responsible Volunteer Action]. Then I was able to get my own place."

Was Brooklyn College everything he's been told?

"What they didn't tell me was the amount of work it would be," he laughs. "I'm in the Brooklyn College Scholars Program, so I take higher-level courses than the average student here. And I work full-time. So it has been rigorous."

Davis says Brooklyn College changed him forever.

"I received an amazing education at Brooklyn," he says. "But it has been so much more than that. I learned so much about life and myself here, making so many great friends who share the same struggles. I also met my beautiful wife-to-be, Kerry-Ann, here. So I think I got more than my money's worth."

Here on this splendid campus in the heart of storied Brooklyn, you might not find as many trust fund babies as you find at the brand name universities, but you will find working-class natives and self-made immigrants who know about things like struggle, dreams, and hard work, the things that made Brooklyn, well, Brooklyn.

"I have three finals and a big paper all due this week and I'm still driving the taxi," says Tenchikova, laughing with exhaustion. "So my immediate career goal is five straight days of sleep. Then I'll decide what I'll do for the rest of my life."

In Brooklyn, where anything is possible.