



VIRTUAL REALITY TRAINING COHORTS

Where are they now?

Lehman College is the first CUNY College to launch a Virtual & Augmented Reality Academy and Development Lab for students and NYC residents. The 10-month applied course in animation, 3D graphics, and web design changed the lives of many of the graduates of the first two cohorts, opening up remarkable employment opportunities and possibilities for personal creativity. These are the stories of 13 of the graduates.





Michael Brenner, Cohort 1.

Michael Brenner was born a fourth generation American and grew up with his family in the Bronx's Crotona Park. His mother is a prominent art-therapist and his father is a lawyer. Michael's interest in people led to his bachelor's degree in psychology from SUNY Binghamton, and, inspired by his father, he graduated from New York Law School. He also has a grounding in graphics and creative technology from the Fashion Institute of Technology where he obtained a bachelor of fine arts in advertising design. Many of his paintings have been shown publicly in art galleries. As a creative individual, he considers his life and career goals to be parallel and complementary.

Prior to taking the Virtual and Augmented Reality program at Lehman, Brenner's sole experience of VR was owning a virtual reality headset from Samsung. He participated in an NYVR Meetup, an event where he experimented with Google's platform, Cardboard. But he wanted to learn more about virtual reality, and thanks to his mother who told him about Lehman's program, he was able to enroll. Aside from his passion for the subject, he attributes his motivation to complete the program to his classmates, a very diverse group with different career backgrounds with whom he learnt, worked on projects and eventually became friends.

After completing the program last year, Brenner partnered with a fellow student who also has a background in legal education, with the goal of combining law with virtual reality. They were both given \$10,000 to take an accelerated three-month virtual and extended reality (XR) program at the Brooklyn Navy Art of NYC Media Lab. The program was sponsored by the Mayors' Office of Media and Entertainment. By the end of November, they pitched ideas on how to use legal applications, case-investigations and other tools, using a cellphone application. When completed, this project will allow lawyers to recreate crime-scenes and prepare their case theories before going to court. Networking with other legal experts is also a great benefit; many lawyers are supporting this legal technology movement. Brenner hopes to finalize this project shortly.

"Virtual and Augmented Reality is a new and challenging experience that feels like daydreaming and allows you to create a whole world. It's a lot of fun working with this tool. When 5G internet becomes available, it will be even better.



Aaron Holness, Cohort 1.

Aaron Holness was born in the Bronx where he grew up until he was 12. He now lives in New Rochelle with his 4 beautiful children. After graduating from Fordham Preparatory School, he attended Lehman College and obtained his bachelor degree in political science in 1993. Later in 1996 he graduated from Pace University with a masters in law. He also became a licensed realtor since a year later. Since then, he has worked with his parents in their real estate business, and in construction with his father who is an electrical contractor.

Virtual reality for Holness was more of a hobby at first, although he always had an inclination for mobile applications and programming. At his job he is responsible for all computer-related tasks which usually includes managing the websites. After seeing an advertisement for Lehman's Virtual Reality course, he was attracted by its inexpensive tuition cost and decided to enroll. Despite this being his first

experience in the subject, he started to learn 3-Dimensional animations and applications quickly using both EON and Unity platforms.

Shortly after obtaining his certificate in Virtual and Augmented Reality, Holness and one of his classmates, Michael Brenner, started exploring different possibilities of combining both law and technology. Their ideas then became an actual business they opened which they are still working on. They attended an event in NYC Media Lab to present business proposal and were granted \$10,000 dollars by the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment. In the future, he also plans combining law with real estate and construction. Currently, he is working on finalizing a separate project that utilizes Virtual and Augmented Reality for social media platforms such as Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram; Holness' goal is to convert this businesses into full time jobs.

"I had an amazing group of classmates to work with and all instructors were great; they all motivated me. I have no regrets about taking this course, I was always interested, and I learned a lot. It was definitely a very good experience."



Vincent Navarro, Cohort 1.

A Bronx resident of Ecuadorian descent, Vincent Navarro, came to the United States when he was only 5 years old. He graduated from Lehman in 1996 with a Bachelors in Computer Science. Once he graduated from Lehman, he was able to land a job at Cornell Medical College, who later paid for him to take a Master's degree in any major he wanted, something he accomplished in 2003. His wife also graduated from Lehman with a Bachelors in psychology and childhood education, as did his brother. His son is also a part of the Lehman family, currently majoring in Chemistry. For the past 25 years, Navarro has worked in science research, concentrating a great part of that time specifically in software development. His current career requires for him to look at cells using a computer. His love for science, chemistry and computer science all began when he was a child, and he believes all of these fit in Virtual Reality. He immediately became interested in this technology field, certain that it would make his career perfect.

Lehman's Virtual and Augmented Reality training was Navarro's first experience, which he claims, surpassed 3-Dimension. His first reaction to the program was of complete surprise, he had no idea it existed in the Bronx. The two phase training that he participated in lasted 11 months and 6 days. For him, the first few months were very difficult considering he had a full time job and a family. Sundays were Navarro's only day off in the week. After he finished the program, he wondered how he had managed the pressure! The support of his family was definitely a motivation. One of the instructors who is a 3D artist and developer of famous games was also a great inspiration for him as well.

Navarro is also a businessman and entrepreneur. About 10 years ago, he incorporated a business in software development where he builds websites, working for different clients. He attended a Tech Day on May 2nd at Jacob Javits Convention Center, where he exhibited some of his development work. His goal is to utilize Virtual and Augmented Reality to expand his business to countries with limitations and create educational and scientific programs that can better train students. As part of this objective, he has already established a contact with Lehman's Chemistry department to work on incorporating Virtual Reality in their curriculum.

“Continue to grow my business, that's where I see my future, in terms of business expansion and having a big impact on education. Lehman has been part of my life and success. This program was amazing; instructors were great, and the material was incredible. I'm still seeing rewards from this experience.”



Cecile Ragot, Cohort 1.

Cecile Ragot has a background in filmmaking and became interested in Virtual and Augmented Reality after participating in different film festivals where she discovered how essential both of these forms of reality are in storytelling. Her initial goal was to learn the basic skills that will equip her to develop new projects in her current field. She began to train first with the Unity platform, which was her first hands-on experience, after which she enrolled in Lehman's Virtual and Augmented Reality program.

Inspired by her classmates who were engaged and passionate, Ragot was encouraged to complete this program. The EON instructors also played an important role in her motivation. She began a freelance career utilizing both Virtual and Augmented Reality after graduating from Cohort 1 in fall of 2018.

Ragot was featured in [Lehman News](#) for one of her most notable projects named "IslandAR", which consisted of Augmented Reality for children visiting Governors Island and New York Harbor. The venture allowed users to interact with pieces of a puzzle by scanning them in a smart phone, enabling visual images and stories to be uploaded using augmented mobile reality and geolocation applications. Both Havas New York and [NYC Media Lab](#) sponsored her project by giving her a fellowship prize to create this interactive and immersive encounter. The immediate success of her project propelled her career forward.

"I learned a lot from the different parts of the training. The instructors were very knowledgeable, and I'm definitely glad I completed this program."



The 27-year-old multi-talented professional, James Sutton, is a stand-up comedian who works both at a furniture store and as a writer and animator. He’s passionate about new and innovative technology. His interest in Virtual Reality came about through the idea of applying Virtual Reality to the different fields he works in.

Sutton then enrolled in the Virtual and Augmented Reality training program at Lehman College. He had some knowledge about these technologies through video games, but this course allowed him to actually experiment and create new projects with these tools. His passion for the subject made him strive through the entire course right through to the end. After the completion of the training, Sutton began to incorporate most of what he learned into his current fields.

James Sutton, Cohort 1.

Sutton was able to apply different parts of his training to all three jobs and as a result he became proficient in Photoshop, and basic coding for animations. He also promotes his work on 3-D max object modeling through his website, suttoncomedy.com, where he has shared over 6 modeling projects already among other talents. His successful comedy career gave him the opportunity to perform on the Tonight Show and be cast by Marvel Studios. Sutton’s main goal is to innovate stand-up comedy, children’s programming and storytelling by integrating it with Virtual and Augmented Reality technology.

“It was great that I had interesting fellow students and great instructors who made it fun to come to class every day. Nothing worth accomplishing is ever easy; but I can say my future is wide open.”



Anthony Martinez, Cohort 2.

Anthony Martinez is a first generation American of Dominican parents, born the youngest of five brothers. He is now father of a 9-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl. He attended Manhattan College where he majored in chemistry engineering but did not graduate. For the past 16 years, he has dedicated his professional life to graphics and photographs, advertising for well-known clients like Macy's, Steve Madden, Neiman Marcus and Elle magazine.

Martinez's always had a passion for 3D modeling and his dream job is to work for Weta Digital, a visual effects company based in New Zealand and responsible for special effects in *The Lord of The Rings*, *The Hobbit*, and many other movies. One of his brothers invited him to an open house at Lehman's Virtual/Augmented Reality Training Academy & Development Lab; he enrolled in the program, but his brother did not. His experience with virtual reality prior to the Lehman's VR program was a Nintendo game. Martinez

claims the support of his family motivated him to finish the program. His classmates, who he describes as amazing people, made taking the training every day worthwhile. Obtaining certification in something he loves was also an inspiration for him.

After completing the program, Martinez has pursued better opportunities for his career. Recently, he also contacted the vice president of the company Sumerian, the virtual and augmented reality platform of Amazon with whom he might initiate a new project. With the plan of solidifying all his business projects in one, he applied for Entrepreneurs' Roundtable Accelerators, New York's largest accelerating mentorship program for business prospects. Accepted applicants may be granted \$100,000 to start their own business. He attended an event where he networked with many mentors and where only 12 out of 1,000 applicants were accepted. Martinez's goals are utilize the skills he acquired at the program to support some of the causes he believes in including autism and gender equality, by becoming a virtual reality developer.

"My experience with Virtual and Augmented Reality at Lehman was complete and fascinating; it surpassed my career goals in 3D modeling."



Branden Baskin, Cohort 2.

The 32-year-old artist, actor, writer and film director, Branden Baskin, was born in Akron, Ohio where he lived until graduating high school. He then moved to New York to pursue his career in arts and entertainment, and after participating in an Off-Broadway theatre job, he worked on TV in roles ranging from commercials to extra parts in movies like *American Gangster* and *I'm Legend*. These careers woke his dreams of creating science and regular fictional stories. He found a connection between film and technology fused with virtual reality, which to him is a powerful tool and the future of media.

Baskin experienced virtual reality for the first time when he enrolled in Lehman's Virtual and Augmented Reality program. He felt challenged but once he got started, his excitement was immediate and with every class he found new skills and capabilities to retain information that he could combine with his background in film. At this time, he was financially stable which helped him gain confidence and to remain focused on his career future and personal growth.

Upon completion of the program, Baskin started a filming, arts and animation business called *Vivid Imagination*. His goal is to present it in Y-Combinator, the most popular tech incubator company based in San Francisco. Meanwhile he will be promoting his company at a CUNY Startups incubator in the fall of 2019. He also participated at the Jacob Javits Center's Tech-day event where he presented a demo to an audience of 5,000 people, including businessmen and investors. He plans to further his skills in virtual reality. At the moment, he teaches film and technology to students in an after-school program; Baskin believes technology should be accessible everyone.

"I felt like the program chose me; it was exciting, like going back to high school. I was able to learn every day, taking images and applying them until creating a product. I thank God for this opportunity, I want to use this experience and bring it to different communities."



Bruce Koken, Cohort 2.

Bruce Koken, born and raised in Montreal, Canada, graduated with a bachelor's degree in business and marketing from Concordia University. Shortly after completing his education, he started working for a TV company in Toronto for a total of 15 years. But looking for broader opportunities, he obtained an American green card, and left his home and moved to the United States where he has worked for the past 20 years as an actor. He currently lives in Westchester, New York with his wife and his two children.

After so many years in the same business, Koken started considering other career options, this time in the field of technology, particularly in TV. Driven by his new goals, he started exploring different institutions that offered this type of training. His search ended when he enrolled in Lehman's Virtual and Augmented Reality program right after seeing their advertisement; he claims their good prices and innovative curriculum caught his attention the most. This was his first time experimenting with Virtual Reality, everything went smoothly, he didn't feel any challenges nor did he feel intimidated with the new concepts he was learning. The classes for him were great and interesting and he enjoyed his classmates and instructors.

Aside from the certification he obtained after the program, one of the biggest accomplishments for Koken has been networking, which he views as key to growth in any career. Meeting with a group of outstanding classmates led to him starting a new business. The project is still in progress and will consist of using Virtual Reality to provide clients with different employee trainings including safety guidelines, or even corporate applications. The main idea is to be creative. He will continue to work with his colleagues in order to make the business grow. Networking is very important for him as he is aware that businesses need contacts in order to be able to expand. Most jobs in Virtual Reality companies require prior experience, and he noted appreciatively that Lehman assisted him with his job-search and EON wrote a recommendation letter for him. Koken is solely focusing on this project where he will fully invest his energy in the hope of furthering his knowledge and expertise.

“Doing anything for the first time, either you like it, or you don't. I liked the program from the first day and that's why I finished it. Virtual Reality will not always be about people wearing big goggles; in five years from now, things will advance even more, and I want to be there when that happens. I think that will be my future.”



Christy Smith, Cohort 2.

Christy Smith is a business developer originally from Greenville, South Carolina. In 1999, she went to Notre Dame College where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in film production and French literature. Recognizing that the biggest opportunities in her field were in New York at the time, she moved to Staten Island and traveled to the city where she immersed herself in the industry working in web casting for television company; later she was promoted to the business development department where she still works today.

In 2015, Smith participated in the Tribeca Film Festival, where she tried Virtual Reality for the first time. Her mind was blown away by this new immersive, story-telling media experience that was similar to Disney Land or a theater, which she has always liked. Following the event, she tried out a Virtual Reality headset of the famous brand, HTC, and waited months to finally receive it. But she wanted to know

more about how to work with Virtual Reality and do a training herself, so she conducted a thorough search online. She found, that there were many places in New York that offered graduate programs related to game development or immersive new media engineering. She preferred Lehman's Virtual and Augmented Reality out of all the programs she researched because of the great price and the intensive curriculum that allowed her to learn so much in such a short time. She enjoyed dedicating herself passionately to the training.

After her graduation and following a well-deserved vacation, Smith started working on a new business with her classmates. The long-term project that is still in the beginning stage, will focus on using 3D modeling and coding to serve a medical-communications company and will be their first paid-professional job in the field that will add to their portfolio. She is also working on a personal goal, which is to attend a VR historical-tour in downtown Manhattan, concentrating on the story-telling and entertainment aspect of Virtual Reality. For now, Smith is dedicating some time to her husband Mark and her 2-year-old daughter Emily, who was only one year old when she joined the program.

“The program was practical and included the technical aspects I was looking for. If I had tried to learn by myself at home which many people try to do, it wouldn't have been the same. All the instructors were great, and my classmates were just as passionate as I as; very motivating. I can see an amazing future ahead.”



Joseph Barmore, Cohort 2.

Joseph Barmore is a 34-year-old whose passion for technology began at an early age. He was born and raised in the Bronx, but moved to New Jersey where he obtained his bachelor's degree in communications at William Patterson University in 2008. Shortly after graduating, he started a career as a technical operations specialist for a TV broadcasting company working with cameras, audio and lights for their news and sports station. His strong skills with cameras helped him get side jobs as photographer and videographer for different events. Recently, he and his wife, a nursing graduate whom he married a year ago have been dedicating their time to building a new home.

Barmore became interested in Virtual Reality after an old friend engaged him in a game-developing business. With no experience in the subject, he began looking for training opportunities and found Lehman's Virtual and Augmented Reality program. Despite his intense schedule with both the TV station and photography jobs, he was able to enroll and stick to the course. It was his first time experimenting with the equipment used at Lehman and he enjoyed extending his knowledge with class projects and assignments. During the second section of the program he struggled with attendance, but no difficulties ever discouraged him, instead every class motivated him and his passion for virtual reality grew even more.

After completing the program, Barmore continued to work with his friend in expanding their game-developing project; they were able to find another partner. Part of his future plan is to have children, which is why his goal is to grow financially as a professional game developer, where he can utilize the skills he learned and eventually work from home to spend more time with his family.

“When I saw the commercial about Lehman's Virtual Reality program, I thought it was a sign for me to go after my goals. No other place offered such training for such a good price and everyone in my class was so talented; it was a great experience.”



Miguel Brador, Cohort 2.

The fine-arts professional, Miguel Brador, is a painter who resides in Washington Heights. His area of expertise is painting landscapes with oil and acrylics; his style is Impressionistic. During the 90's, he earned two associates degree, one in electronics and the other in computer science. In 2011, he obtained a bachelor's in media arts and animations. Deeply interested in 3-D modeling, a year later he joined a quick-starter training at Oculus Rift, a Virtual Reality platform that allowed him to create room interiors and story characters. Virtual Reality was just being introduced in America for the first time in that year.

Brador had some knowledge of modeling, texturing, job script, web development and some of the subjects taught in the first section of Lehman's Virtual and Augmented Reality program; but looking for a different, broader experience he decided to enroll. It was his first time working with the EON platform, which gave him a firm foundation, and he also learned Unity and Unreal Engines that have more advanced graphics and a more realistic Virtual Reality immersion. He didn't have a full time job at the time he enrolled, but his classmates did, and their hard work served as a motivation for him. As part of the curriculum, he was able to create cam-labs and most of the particle effects, which he felt was an accomplishment.

Because Virtual Reality is still new to the country compare to other technologies, Brador decided to wait until there are more job demands in that field. Meanwhile, he keeps contact with some of his classmates after graduation, who know more business aspect of Virtual Reality. Other projects he is working on are developing and managing website animations, and creating architectural experiences using Virtual Reality.

“Those ten months for me didn't meant work, I really enjoyed the experience and the learning process. My classmates were amazing people, it was great to network with different talents and background.”



Ni Ni Than, Cohort 2.

Born in Myanmar, Ni Ni Than is a curious individual who is great at design and loves technology. She completed her bachelors in fashion design at Florida International but after two years of working in fashion shows in France, Los Angeles and Las Vegas as part of her job at a swimwear company, she realized fashion was not her dream field. She then graduated with a masters from New York University as a design and arts director, often spending hours studying in a room with no time for the social activities that many of her roommates often enjoyed.

Aside from some background in 3-Dimensional development, Than's first experience with virtual reality was at a Samsung store and at the Tribeca Film Festival where she used headsets. But she wanted a more complete experience, so she enrolled in Lehman's Virtual and Augmented Reality program immediately after seeing a commercial about it on CUNY TV. Her classes started one week later, but not having a job while taking classes

facilitated her learning process. She was certain this experience would allow her to combine Virtual Reality with her field of work and find new ways of creating design. As part of the curriculum, she took cinema in 4-Dimension, created sets and in vector works and converted 3-Dimensional stets, models and some of her designs into Virtual Reality utilizing EON for the first section of the training and then a platform called Unity. She describes this training as immersive, fast and quickly evolving as it allows you to make a dream an actual experience.

After graduating from the AR/VR Training, Than has joined groups and is keeping up with technology and taking more tutorials. She believes that because a Virtual Reality project needs animation, shades, lighting, character developing and coding, it is important to work with a team. She sees EON as a good introductory platform, and Unity and Unreal as more readily accessible. She notes that companies such as Amazon, Apple and Facebook are using this platform; some of her goals include creating applications where she has a place to display her art and also support other artists who showcase their artistic pieces. She also plans to take this experience back to her country and others where knowledge of Virtual Reality if not yet accessible.

"I knew there was a future in this training, this experience was amazing, and it will never go away. I can always grow, and express myself artistically."



Pablo Alvarez, Cohort 2.

Pablo Alvarez grew up in Jackson Heights, Queens and later moved to Westchester where he met his wife, now the mother of their beautiful 4-year-old daughter. He began a career as a project manager in Local 1 BAC International, a construction company where he worked for about 15 years. Some of his most memorable works were the reconstruction of the Second-Avenue-subway-station, and the remodeling of the United Nations in New York. In 2013 he had an unfortunate accident which required surgery; with additional therapies, it took him a period of five years to fully recover. After the incident he wanted to change careers, but ended up obtaining an 18-month-certification in construction project management at Baruch College, which brought him back to the field he was trying to get away from. He went back to work in construction but the constant exposure to danger brought back painful memories and led him to quit definitively.

A friend of Pablo's bought a restaurant and showed him how to use 3-D modeling technology to place and arrange appliances around the kitchen with easy-traffic aisles before remodeling. They downloaded software to work on this project and as he was pushing aggressively to find a new career, he became interested in technology. His wife who knew of his interest saw an advertisement at the Virtual and Augmented Reality program at Lehman. She encouraged him to participate in the open house back in February 2019 and after trying EON's demo-presentations he enrolled blindfolded in the program. He developed a habit of arriving early at his classes in order to focus on the areas he needed to reinforce. The key motivating factors for him were his talent and the support of his family.

Having successfully graduated from the program, Alvarez started his own business called VR-Stratagem, where he combines construction with virtual reality. The job consists in creating 3-Dimensional environments for clients to see the property they want to own before purchasing. His clientele vary from architects, who have a project, to home or property buyers. He also partnered with several of his classmates in a project that will provide virtual reality training to other companies. Both projects are still in their beginning stages; Alvarez remains focused on his new career and expanding his businesses.

"I was happy when I got in. I really liked the EON program. I'm glad I traveled from White Plains to work with amazing people who supported me and actually carried me through."

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