Arts & Humanities

32 Movie and TV Stars who Graduated from Columbia

By
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Collage by Len Small

These actors, comedians, and TV personalities have all called Morningside Heights home.



Amir Arison in "The Blacklist." (Will Hart ©2018 NBCUniversal Media, LLC)

Amir Arison

Best known for playing an FBI agent in the crime-thriller series *The Blacklist*, Amir Arison ’00CC also had recurring roles on *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Homeland*, *Girls*, and other TV shows.



Kelly Killoren Bensimon. (Lev Radin / Shutterstock)

Kelly Killoren Bensimon

Kelly Killoren Bensimon ’98GS, a socialite, author, entrepreneur, and — as of recently — real-estate agent, has been in the public eye since her days as a teenage model. From 2009 to 2011 she was a full-time cast member on the reality series *The Real Housewives of New York City*.



Pat Boone.

Pat Boone

Known for his pop recordings and his foray into Christian conservative political commentary, Pat Boone ’58GS has also acted in numerous films since the 1950s, including *April Love*, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and, more recently, *God’s Not Dead 2* and *A Cowgirl’s Story*.



Jesse Bradford in "Bring it On." (©2000 Universal Studios)

Jesse Bradford

Jesse Bradford ’02CC started out as a child actor in films such as the 1993 Steven Soderbergh drama *King of the Hill* and 1995’s *Far from Home: The Adventures of Yellow Dog*. As a young adult, he starred in the 2000 teen cheerleading classic *Bring It On* and in Clint Eastwood’s 2006 World War II drama *Flags of Our Fathers*, among other movies.



Spencer Treat Clark in "The Last House on the Left." (imdb.com)

Spencer Treat Clark

Spencer Treat Clark ’10CC has played supporting roles in dozens of films and TV series, including *Gladiator*, *Mystic River*, and the 2009 remake of *The Last House on the Left*. He was a regular cast member on the crime drama *Animal Kingdom* from 2016 to 2019.



Brian Dennehy in "The Blacklist." ©2018 NBCUniversal Media, LLC

Brian Dennehy

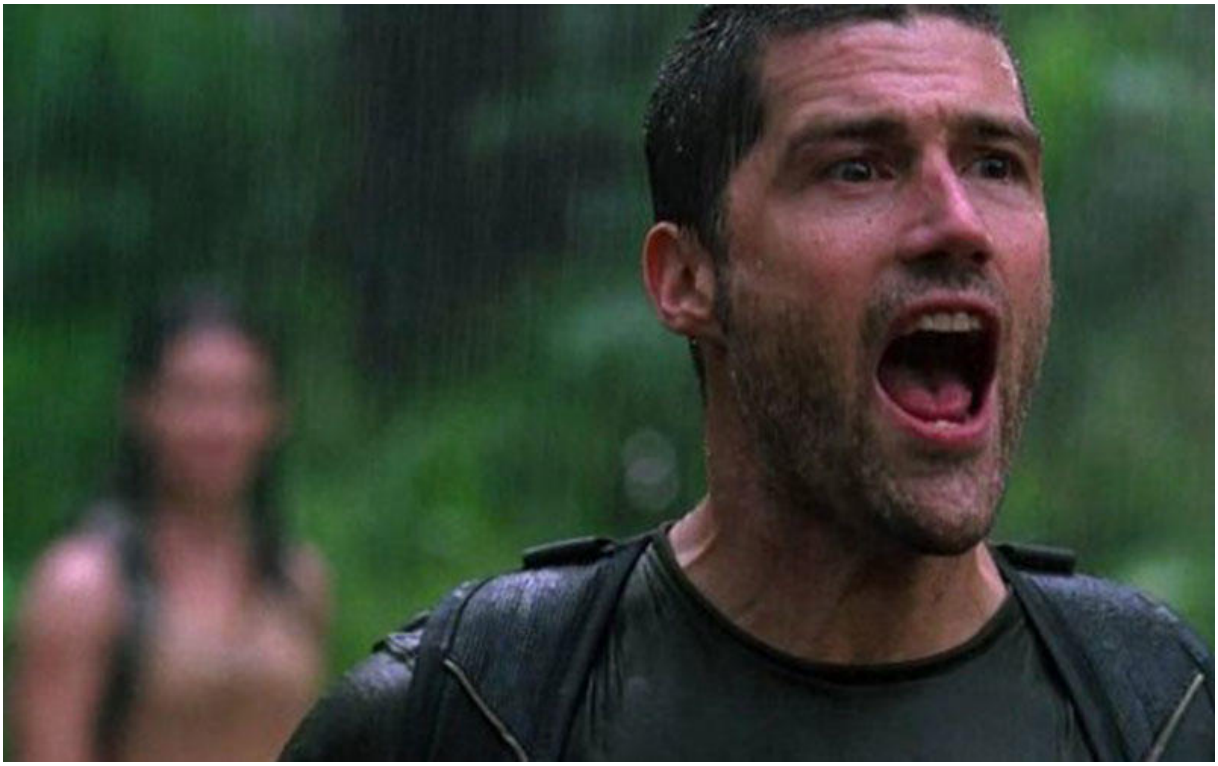
A prolific stage and screen actor celebrated for his performances in Eugene O’Neill plays, Brian Dennehy ’60CC appeared in hundreds of films and TV series between 1977 and 2020, when he died at age 81.



Brandon Victor Dixon in "Jesus Christ Superstar." (©2018 NBCUniversal Media, LLC)

Brandon Victor Dixon

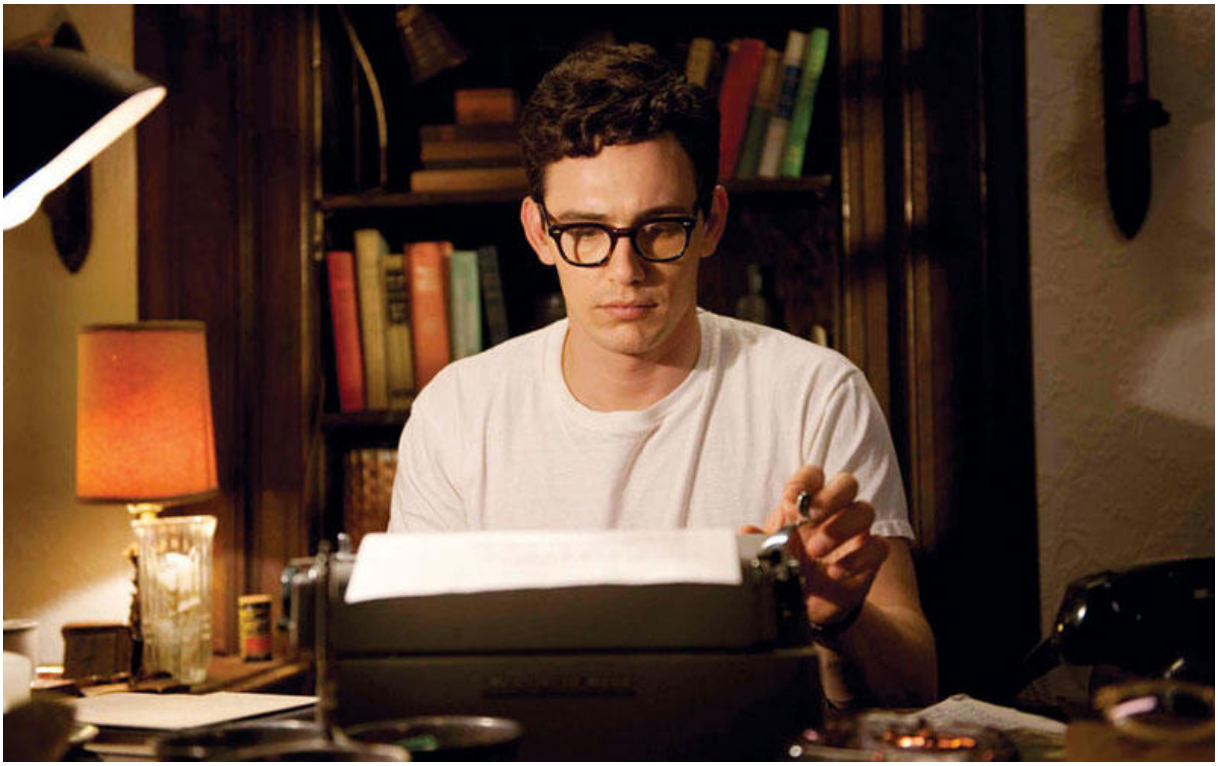
Brandon Victor Dixon ’07CC is best known for starring in Broadway musicals like *The Color Purple*, *Motown: The Musical*, and *Hamilton*. In 2018, he appeared in the televised live-concert version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and received an Emmy nomination for his portrayal of Judas Iscariot. He has also acted in episodes of *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, *The Good Wife*, *Power*, and *She’s Gotta Have It*.



Matthew Fox in "Lost." (imdb.com)

Matthew Fox

After studying economics at Columbia, Matthew Fox ’89CC starred in the family drama *Party of Five* from 1994 to 2000, followed by the supernatural thriller *Lost* from 2004 to 2010. In 2007, the actor returned to Morningside campus to give the Columbia College Class Day speech.



James Franco as Allen Ginsberg in "Howl." (Courtesy of Oscilloscope Laboratories)

James Franco

James Franco ’11SOA, an actor and filmmaker known for his performances in the *Spider-Man* series, *Milk*, *127 Hours*, and other movies, was already a celebrity when he attended Columbia’s fiction-writing MFA program. It was around that time Franco also portrayed beat writer and fellow Columbian Allen Ginsberg ’48CC in the 2010 indie drama *Howl*.



Dan Futterman with Amy Brenneman in "Judging Amy." (CBS Photo Archive - ©2006 CBS Worldwide Inc.)

Dan Futterman

Although Dan Futterman ’89CC has mostly worked as a producer and screenwriter in recent years, he was a star of the legal drama *Judging Amy* from 1999 to 2005. He also had prominent roles in films such as *The Birdcage* and *A Mighty Heart* and appeared in episodes of *Sex and the City* and *Will & Grace*.



Greg Giraldo. (Comedy Central)

Greg Giraldo

Before his 2010 death of a prescription-drug overdose at the age of forty-four, Greg Giraldo ’87CC was a stand-up comedian and Comedy Central star who participated in many of the network’s famous celebrity roasts. He was also a frequent guest on late-night talk shows and served as a judge on *Last Comic Standing*.



Asher Grodman (Theo Fridlizius / IMDb)

Asher Grodman

Columbia College alum Asher Grodman ’10CC has appeared in episodes of popular shows including *Succession*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, and *Chicago Med*. He is a regular cast member on the CBS sitcom *Ghosts.*



Maggie Gyllenhaal in "The Deuce." (imdb.com)

Maggie Gyllenhaal

Maggie Gyllenhaal ’99CC burst onto the scene in 2002 with the offbeat black comedy *Secretary* after appearing the year before in a supporting role in the cult classic *Donnie Darko*. The latter film starred her younger brother, Jake, who also attended Columbia but didn’t graduate. Since then, Gyllenhaal has made many notable films, including *Sherrybaby*, *The Dark Knight*, and *Crazy Heart*, for which she was nominated for an Oscar, as well as the TV series *The Deuce* alongside fellow Columbian James Franco ’11SOA.



Julia Jones with Taylor Lautner in "The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1." (Andrew Cooper, SMPSP – ©2011 Summit Entertainment, LLC)

Julia Jones

Julia Jones ’05CC had recurring roles on *ER*, *Longmire*, *Westworld*, and *Goliath*, and has appeared in films such as the last three installments of *The Twilight Saga*, *Wind River*, and *Cold Pursuit*.



Judy Joo. (Food Network)

Judy Joo

A finance professional turned celebrity chef and restaurateur, Judy Joo ’97SEAS hosted the Cooking Channel series *Korean Food Made Simple* from 2014 to 2016 and appeared as one of the four “iron chefs” on *Iron Chef UK* in 2010.



Jean Louisa Kelly (top) with the cast of "Uncle Buck": Macaulay Culkin, John Candy, and Gaby Hoffman. (©Universal, imdb.com)

Jean Louisa Kelly

Jean Louisa Kelly '94CC made her film debut in the 1989 comedy *Uncle Buck* before going on to act in a number of movies, including *The Fantasticks* and *Mr. Holland's Opus*. She was a star of the sitcom *Yes, Dear* and appeared in episodes of *Mad about You*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *CSI*, and other TV shows.



Robinne Lee

Robinne Lee

Robinne Lee '00LAW has appeared in a variety of films and television series since the late 1990s, including *Hitch*, *House of Payne*, and both of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* sequels. Lee is also the author of the 2017 novel *The Idea of You*.



Meghan McCain

Meghan McCain

A political columnist and TV personality, Meghan McCain ’07CC, daughter of the late senator John McCain, co-hosted the Fox News program *Outnumbered* before joining the cast of ABC’s *The View* as a permanent co-host in 2017.



Kate McKinnon as Hillary Clinton on "Saturday Night Live." (imdb.com)

Kate McKinnon

A comedian and actress known for her impersonations of political figures and celebrities including Hillary Clinton, Ruth Bader Ginsburg ’59LAW, ’94HON, and Justin Bieber, Kate McKinnon ’06CC has won two Emmy Awards for her work on *Saturday Night Live*. She has recently taken on more film roles, appearing in *Ghostbusters*, *The Spy Who Dumped Me*, and *Bombshell*, among other movies.



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Hari Nef

Since her breakthrough role in the 2014–2019 Amazon show *Transparent*, model and actress Hari Nef ’15CC has appeared in a variety of productions such as the series *You* and *The Idol*. In 2023, she appeared as "Doctor Barbie" in *Barbie,* cowritten and directed by Greta Gerwig '06BC.



Amanda Peet in "Dirty John." (USA Network)

Amanda Peet

Amanda Peet ’94CC had a streak of supporting and lead roles in the 1990s and 2000s in such films as *The Whole Nine Yards*, *Something’s Gotta Give*, and *Syriana*. More recently she starred in the TV series *Togetherness* and in season two of *Dirty John*.



Jacques Pépin

Jacques Pépin

One of the world’s original celebrity chefs, Jacques Pépin ’70GS, ’72GSAS, ’17HON has been a fixture on food TV since *Today's Gourmet* premiered in 1990 and is the author of more than thirty cookbooks.



James Rebhorn in "Scent of a Woman." (imdb.com)

James Rebhorn

James Rebhorn ’72SOA, who died in 2014, was a longtime character actor who appeared in a wide range of movies, including *Scent of a Woman* and *Meet the Parents*, and had recurring roles on TV shows such as *White Collar*, *Homeland*, and *Enlightened*.



Emily Robinson in the short film "Intervene." (imdb.com)

Emily Robinson

Emily Robinson ’21CC started out as a child actor and model, appearing in TV shows such as *Transparent* and *Saturday Night Live* and films like *Once Upon a Time in Venice* and *Eighth Grade*. The former Columbia creative-writing major recently started writing and directing her own work.



Amanda Seales (right) with Natasha Rothwell in "Insecure." (imdb.com)

Amanda Seales

Amanda Seales ’05GSAS, an actress, comedian, musician, and television personality, is a costar of the TV series *Insecure* and the host of the comedy-competition show *Bring the Funny*. In 2020 she joined the cast of the syndicated daytime talk show *The Real.*



George Segal in "The Goldbergs." (Nicole Wilder/ABC - © 2016 American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.)

George Segal

Actor and musician George Segal ’55CC, who died in March 2021 at age 87, led a prolific screen career from the time he broke into Hollywood in the early 1960s. Notable works include the films *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *A Touch of Class* and the sitcoms *Just Shoot Me!* and *The Goldbergs*.



Jenny Slate with Harry Winkler in "Parks and Recreation." ©2013 NBCUniversal Media, LLC

Jenny Slate

Since graduating from Columbia, actress and comedian Jenny Slate ’04CC, who was a cast member of *Saturday Night Live* for the 2009–2010 season, has appeared in numerous film and television comedies for adults and children — *Parks and Recreation*, *Bob’s Burgers*, and *Zootopia*, to name just a few.



Sarah Steele. (CBS)

Sarah Steele

Sarah Steele ’11CC made her screen debut in the 2004 comedy-drama *Spanglish* alongside Adam Sandler. She is best known for her recurring role on the drama *The Good Wife*, which turned into a main role on its spinoff, *The Good Fight*.



Julia Stiles in "10 Things I Hate about You." (©1999 Touchstone Pictures)

Julia Stiles

Best known for her lead roles in Y2K-era teen films like *10 Things I Hate about You* and *Save the Last Dance*, Julia Stiles ’05CC was also a star of the 2019 blockbuster *Hustlers* and has appeared on TV shows such as *Dexter* and *The Mindy Project*.



Rider Strong in "Boy Meets World." (imdb.com)

Rider Strong

Rider Strong ’04CC starred as Shawn Hunter in the family sitcom *Boy Meets World* from 1993 to 2000 before enrolling at Columbia. More than a decade later, he returned for the show’s sequel, *Girl Meets World*, for which he also served as a director.



Preslaysa Williams (E.A. Hendryx Photography ©2015)

Preslaysa Williams

A Columbia College graduate, Preslaysa Williams (formerly Edwards) '03CC played Cindi Ornette in the children's series *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo*, which aired on Nickelodeon from 1996–1998. Williams has also authored several books, including the 2021 romance novel *A Lowcountry Bride*.



Robert Wisdom in "The Alienist" (2018).

Robert Wisdom

A former star sprinter on the Columbia track team, Robert Wisdom '76CC is best known for his supporting roles in popular crime shows, including *The Wire*, *Prison Break*, and *The Alienist*. He has also appeared in movies such as *Ray*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, and *Motherless Brooklyn*.

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