C chancellor Proposes New Academic Initiatives

In a keynote speech to the Center for Educational Innovation — Public Education Association at the Harvard Club, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein set forth a wide-ranging array of proposals for enhancing both University academic offerings and financial support, while meeting new fiscal challenges and building on past successes. “Our challenge now is to maintain momentum — and it’s a very big challenge,” said Goldstein to a large audience of educators, business, civic, and community leaders. “The City and State of New York are facing the most serious financial crisis in recent memory.” Among the proposals were:

- Strengthening CUNY’s academic environment by renewing and rebuilding full-time faculty.
- Indexing tuition to economic indicators while protecting financial aid to help the University and its students plan intelligently to meet the costs of higher education.
- Integrating University-wide resources to create new schools of journalism and professional studies, a new scientific research facility and a computer simulation center on Governors Island.
- Centralizing administrative functions such as purchasing, contracting and human resources, while generating revenue through entrepreneurial activities and fund-raising.
- Leveraging capital funds by working, where appropriate, with private developers to create mixed academic-commercial facilities.

Underscoring the strides made in the last three years when freshmen enrollment increased 10.5% as higher admissions standards were implemented, Goldstein noted that “the University now systematically reaches into high school,” notably with the College Now program and competitive high schools sited on several CUNY campuses. This, Goldstein said, “gives students a running jump to clear the University’s higher academic bar.” College Now, which permits high school seniors to take college courses, has almost quadrupled its enrollment, from 11,000 students in 1999 to 40,000 in 2002. “Prospective CUNY students are well aware that we now expect more from them,” said Goldstein. “They also know we have more to give.” He cited the Honors College, now entering its third year, as an example. This year, 2,500 applied for admission to its 340 spots, compared to 1,400 last year. He noted also that the U.S. News SAT score for successful applicants was 1340.

The Chancellor invited both the old and the new in speaking of the University’s relationships with the private sector. Referring to a long-standing collaboration, he pointed to CUNY’s “close relationship with the New York City Central Labor Council, which helps tailor CUNY programs for working students.”

Highlights from Analysis of State, City Budgets

On January 30, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein presented a preliminary analysis of the 2003-2004 proposed State and City budgets to the Board of Trustees and college presidents. As widely expected, the proposed budgets call for reduced funding in several areas. On February 11, the Chancellor testified in Albany on the impact of the State Budget before a joint hearing of the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee.

Senior Colleges. For the University’s senior colleges, the State Executive Budget recommends a total of $1.203 billion, an increase of $31 million over the current year. However, this figure includes a reduction in State aid from $663 million to $581 million (a decrease of more than 12%) and a proposed rise in revenue from student tuition, from $392 million to $505 million (a rise of nearly 29%). The Executive Budget also projects a $7.3 million decrease in SEEK student financial aid and a $1 million decrease in funding for new faculty.

The Executive Budget also recommends amending the State Education Law to allow the University to impose differential tuition rates for graduate and professional programs. The Budget will also permit the University’s Board of Trustees to adopt annual incremental adjustments to tuition.

Community Colleges. State funding for CUNY’s community colleges will be subjected to a $23 million reduction (nearly 18%) in several areas (enrollment calculations are being reviewed by the State, which may decrease the size of this reduction). Child care funding remains unchanged. The City’s Preliminary Budget for fiscal year 2003 rises by $1.3 million because of pension costs, but the fiscal year 2004 budget recommends a net decrease of $5.6 million, mainly with the loss of $5.5 million in funding for Vallone Scholarships. City support remains the same as last year, at $124 million.

Capital Budget. The State’s capital budget calls for a total multi-year capital investment program of $1.03 billion for CUNY. Reappropriation of $172 million for prior years’ funding, noted the Chancellor, would bring the capital budget to a total of $1.203 billion. When the City matches State support for the community colleges and Medgar Evers College, the total five-year capital plan would reach a record sum of $1.328 billion. As the University proceeds with initiatives to monetize the real estate values of its portfolio through public-private collaboration (realizing the entire construction costs of some projects), the total five-year capital plan increases to $1.58 billion. The Executive Budget allocates $568 million for the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). It also recommends significant restructuring of TAP, notably separating TAP awards into two components — a “base” award equal to two-thirds of the current award and a “performance” award of one-third, payable upon attainment of a degree. Students will be expected to finance study prior to receiving the performance award through Federal loan programs to be administered by the Higher Education Services Corporation.

For an array of budget data, testimony, and analysis visit www.cuny.edu and click on News or CUNY Budget Watch.
Emcee for Economic Development & CUNY Alumnus

A adapted and expanded here is a story from a new second-season edition of "Study With The Best," a regularly scheduled 30-minute TV news magazine highlighting CUNY's wide array of outstanding faculty, remarkable students and alumni, and major University academic initiatives. The lively, fast-paced series (CUNY-TV Channel 75, Sundays at 8) is aimed particularly at prospective CUNY students in local high schools.

If you live in Brooklyn, Queens or Staten Island, you're doubtlessly familiar with KeySpan Corporation. The company is the largest distributor of natural gas in the Northeast, serving 2.5 million customers in those boroughs, on Long Island, in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Robert Catell is the chairman and chief executive officer of KeySpan, formerly Brooklyn Union. In addition, Catell's extensive palette of extracurricular activities could well qualify him as a master of ceremonies for economic development in New York City.

He is one of the most active and supportive CUNY alumni. As the Class of 1958 yearbook Mr. Crocomos shows, Catell was in the same City College class as Secretary of State Colin Powell, and he joined Brooklyn Union the same year he received his Bachelor's in Mechanical Engineering. He subsequently earned an M.M.E. at CCNY as well. "A Brooklyn kid, I had the benefit of an excellent elementary and high school education," Catell recalls, "and I was fortunate to be able to get into City College. That educational foundation was really what gave me the ability to achieve what I have in the business world."

Catell's experience at a public college clearly gave him a taste for vigorous and wide-ranging public service. He is not only the former chairman of the New York City Partnership and Chamber of Commerce, but is now chairman of the Business Council of New York State. He has also served as a director of the N.Y.C. Investment Fund and is a founding member of the NYC Public-Private Partnership.

Catell received his bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering from City College. How did he get from City to the top of the corporate ladder? "It is really important to support City College, because this is the major educational institution in which our city's young people can get the kind of education that I think will be essential to their future. If we alumni can be helpful in moving them forward, then I for one am very grateful to be a part of the effort."

"Public education and community service has been the theme of Catell's tenure at KeySpan. "Much of what Brooklyn Union, then KeySpan, has been able to achieve is due to the fact that we get a lot of support from the community we serve. So we truly believe in giving something back. Everything I have achieved has been due to a wonderful education, and I think young people today should have the same resources I had. It's a more complicated, more competitive world today, so it's probably even more important for them."

Summing up, Catell alludes to the post-Enron crisis of confidence in corporate America: "I think the most important message I would convey to young people entering college today is that there are many, many more people in the business community who do have integrity, high ethical standards and values. That has made them successful. And I attribute much of my success to having those attributes."

"To the best of my own strong commitment to education prevails, Catell admits to optimism, "I am a person who looks at the glass as half full. I see young people who are growing up today and the educational opportunities we afford them, and I think that's going to be the answer. I think finely educated graduates who can contribute to society are the future of this country — and the world." If we keep our eye on this particular prize, Catell (the father of five) predicts, the city will be "a wonderful place for my grandchildren to grow up in."

Spreading the Knowledge about Paying for College

In New York State and across the nation, we are facing the most serious financial crisis in recent memory. During this time of personal and collective belt-tightening, it is more important than ever to ensure continued access to a top-quality higher education. Colleges and universities offer opportunities for education, job training and retraining that make students competitive. In return, students become wage-earners and taxpayers who contribute to the economic vitality of our communities.

We in the City University are more committed than ever to help our current and prospective students find out how they can afford to pay for college. Financial aid and student jobs are two key resources for students and families who are seeking to meet the costs of a college education.

February was Financial Aid Awareness Month at the campuses of the City University. Throughout the month, the University sponsored free financial aid seminars in every borough, open to the public (including students deciding whether to apply to college). Current and prospective students were welcome to learn about, and take advantage of the wide range of city, state, federal and private financial assistance programs and scholarships available to them. Parents and students obtained advice and assistance from experts in the CUNY Office of Financial Aid on topics ranging from completing financial aid applications to monitoring the status of their application after submission. Many seminars were offered in Spanish, Chinese and Russian, in addition to English. Students unable to attend who would like further information may visit the CUNY web site at www.cuny.edu/financialaid or call 1-800-CUNY-YES.

Student employment is another important strategy in paying for college tuition. CUNY is putting technology to work as part of our ongoing effort to alert our students about employment opportunities. As the center of this effort, we are establishing a central, one-stop web site on the CUNY home page (www.cuny.edu) where current and prospective students can obtain a comprehensive description of jobs and internships available at individual campuses and elsewhere in the University. The web site will feature links to information on State Department of Labor offices throughout the City, College Work-Study, and CUNY job fairs (including the CUNY Big Apple Job Fair, and on-campus Career Days). Students will be able to access information on programs for public assistance recipients, career services offices at specific colleges, opportunities for employment as a police worker in City elections, valuable internship programs such as the Edward T. Rogowski Internship Program in Government and Public Affairs, and services for students with disabilities.

I urge students enrolled at one of our colleges, or just interested in pursuing higher education opportunities, to find out what programs and opportunities are available. The time and effort they invest can pay valuable dividends in meeting the cost of a college education.

FROM THE CHANCELLOR'S DESK

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Catell adds, "From a business standpoint, it's really important to support City College and the City University, because this is the major educational institution in which our city's young people can get the kind of education that I think will be essential to their future."
April—the Kindest Month for City Poetry Lovers

T.S. Eliot famously observed in the opening line of The Waste Land that “April is the cruellest month,” but in 2003 this month is shaping up to be extraordinarily kind, at least for New Yorkers who are into metaphors and similes, vers libre and villanelles, caesuras and slant rhymes. April, after all, is National Poetry Month.

Poets and poems will be as ubiquitous as the yellow and white daffodils of spring, to judge from plans being made by Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Louise Mirrer and her colleagues: “April is the Kindest Month for City Poetry Lovers.” Seeking to emphasize the importance of poetry in the life of the city, CUNY is Reading…“will say goodbye to March with a pride of poetic lions at a festive reading at the Bowery Poetry Club on April 1 (308 Bowery). The nine CUNY poets who have promised to read their poems are Julie Agoss (Brooklyn College), Louis Asekoff (Brooklyn), Elena Georgiu (Hunter), Isaac Goldberg (Hostos), Kimiko Hahn (Queens), Donna Masini (Hunter), Grace Schulman (Baruch), Tracy Smith (Medgar Evers), and Barry Wallenstein (City). Given the day, with any luck the audience will hear some poems on the theme announced by Shakespeare’s Puck: “Lord, what fools these mortals be!”

Later in the month, a unique special event will capture the poetical attention of the entire city, “A Poem in Your Pocket.” The idea for this city-wide initiative, in which Mayor Michael Bloomberg has agreed to be a leading participant, was sparked last fall when, in an October review of Nine Horses, Billy Collins’s latest collection, in the New York Times, Mary Jo Salter remarked that “Thousands of Americans are walking around right now with Billy Collins poems in their heads.” Planners in the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs wondered: Why not put those poems in our pockets, so that we can take them out and read them to someone with whom we want to share a special moment?

Why not take the advice of John Adams, who wrote in 1781 to his 14-year-old son John Q. Uincy, “You will never be alone, with a Poet in your Pocket. You will never have an idle Hour”? And why not expand the possibilities to all poets writing now or who have ever written? After all, there is the same breadth of choice in Poet Laureate Collins’s Library of Congress “Poetry 180” web site, which offers a new poem for every day of the school year.

Inspired by Collins’s assertion that “poetry belongs to everybody,” the City University community of poets and poetry-lovers will join Mayor Bloomberg on April 14 to encourage New Yorkers to carry in their pockets or purses, books, bags or briefcases, a poem that carries special meaning or gives unique pleasure for them. They will then be asked, at some time during the day, to take it out and share it with another—someone in the office, on the school playground, perhaps a stranger on the street or in the subway. You might get lucky and hear the Mayor recite his poem on his subway commute to City Hall.

When word of “A Poem in Your Pocket” began to spread, the City’s Department of Education eagerly joined the initiative with plans for formal participation by students in the public schools.

All the lambs, trochees, and dactyls of April will not be settled for long, either. On May 13 comes the 31st annual Spring Poetry Festival at City College, masterminded by CUNY’s panjandrum of poetry, Barry Wallenstein. Seen here is the cover of Poetry in Performance, which contains a hefty 225 pages of poems performed at last year’s gala 30th-anniversary Festival by public school students from ages 6 to 18, CUNY students, faculty and alumni, and Featured Guests Marilyn Hacker and Philip Levine. Last there be doubt about the keen interest in poetry in the city, there were 3,000 entries in the competition to be chosen to read at the Festival’s full day of poetry reading.

For more information on the April 1 reading, contact Brenda Vercesi, 212-794-5481; for more information on CUNY’s Spring Poetry Festival, contact Prof. Wallenstein, 212-650-6343.

Sharks at the New York Aquarium

Suddenly drawn through the thick glass plate A nd swimming among them, I imagine M yself as, briefly, part of the pattern Traced in the water as they circulate Incendently obeying the few laws That thread the needle of their simple lives: O ne moment in a cabinet of knives, O ld-fashioned razors and electric saws A nd then the sudden, steep, sidewinding pass: Old-fashioned razors and electric saws. One moment in a cabinet of knives, That thread the needle of their simple lives:

—Charles Martin, Queensborough Community College. From his Starting from Sleep (2002).
Business Leadership Council Looks to the Future

The business of education and the education of business was on the agenda when CUNY’s Business Leadership Council met on January 15. The Council, established by Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, brings together captains of commerce and top executives of the University.

Under discussion were the possible effects of a weak economy and fiscal crises at the state and city level. The principal focus, however, was on opportunities for campus-driven economic development in the metropolitan area. Among the ideas considered was the establishment of campus training programs to help private-sector managers work with diverse workforces, the development of a database to help firms tap into CUNY’s richly diverse student body, and the creation of corporate internships for soon-to-be-graduating Honors College students.

Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Louise Mirrer noted that some such internships have already been set up, adding that CUNY might also provide focus groups from the student body to assist the private sector in evaluating new products and marketing campaigns. Vice Chancellor for Facilities, Construction and Planning Emma Macari addressed the possibilities of public-private development on sites in the University’s real estate portfolio.

The Council’s committee on business incubators also reported progress in setting up space for new businesses at three community colleges—Borough of Manhattan, H, and La Guardia. Business members of the Council are working to assist in identifying worthy companies for the incubators, and are establishing a network of experts to advise and guide these start-up ventures.

Chancellor Goldstein indicated the next Council meeting would focus on the development of Governors Island.

Business Leaders with CUNY Degrees Rank First in Standard and Poor’s

The City University continues to be the leading producer of undergraduates whose success in business has brought them into the executive suites of the nation’s major corporations.

A recent analysis of the October 2002 Standard and Poor’s Register of Corporations, Executives and Directors, which is published quarterly, has revealed that well over 1,000 CUNY graduates currently hold top-level corporate positions, including numerous CEO’s, COO’s, Chairmen, Presidents, CFO’s, Senior and Executive and Group Vice Presidents, Directors, Treasurers, and Controllers.

Ranking first in the nation, CUNY boasts 917 holders of undergraduate degrees who now hold business leadership posts. This compares with totals of 72 for Harvard, 667 for Yale, 560 for Princeton, and 490 for Stanford.

In addition to the 917 CUNY undergraduate alumni, there are 170 holders of CUNY graduate degrees listed in Standard and Poor's. Among this cohort are 72 “two-fers”—executives who earned both their undergraduate and graduate degrees at colleges within the University. The most productive campus has been City College (276 undergraduates; 30 graduates; 16 two-fers), followed by Brooklyn College (206; 10; 6), Baruch College (136; 84; 34), Queens College (129; 5; 3), and Hunter College (62; 4; 4). A bout 10% of the executives listed in the Register did not specify their CUNY alma mater.

The most striking revelation of the analysis, in terms of local economic impact, is the fact that, though they have risen high, these CUNY grads have not traveled far. An overwhelming majority of them—71%—can be found in corporate headquarters in the tri-state area. Almost half of them work in the five boroughs or Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Thirty-one percent are located in Manhattan. Their contribution to the workforce and the tax base is direct and very strong within close proximity to the city.

A tiny sampling gives a sense of the influence CUNY graduates have on the business and corporate life in the metropolitan area: Frank Borelli, Senior VP, CFO, and Director at Marsh & McLennan; Leonard Yablon, Executive VP and CFO at Forbes Inc.; Rosanne Klein, VP, and Chief Counsel at TIAA-CREF; William Feresa, Executive VP at Keypay; Karen Figliis, West Coast Manager at Condé Nast; Donald Marron, Chairman at UBS PainWebber Inc.; Matthew Blank, Chairman and CEO at Showtime; Richard Kasser, COO at Chick Full O’Nuts Corp.; Linda Livornese, Managing Director at N.Y. Life Investment Mgt. G. Co.; Richard Randall, CFO at Coach, Inc. And oh yes, Arnold Kaufman, VP and Publisher (of Outlook) at Standard and Poor’s.

SPOTLIGHT on FACULTY

Physics Up Close and Personal - From a Distance

Unexpectedly asked to take over a SUNY-Stony Brook physics class of 70 upperclassmen, David Lieberman almost instantly learned something “teaching is fun.” The Queensborough Community College professor of physics was a mere 20 years old when he experienced that pedagogical epiphany. Since then, he has achieved renown for making sure the fun rolls on even when teacher and students are not in the same room.

Students from anywhere in the world are now able to conduct experiments in laser and fiber-optic technology through remote control, thanks to Lieberman’s pioneering development of virtual and distance learning laboratories. His expertise in the field has garnered more than $800,000 in National Science Foundation grants for the College, one for “Advanced Technological Education” and three for “Improvements in Laboratory Instrumentation.”

The Queensborough physics department is now nationally recognized as a pioneer in distance laboratory instruction, which allows students to perform experiments from remote sites. Students from all over the world also have access to the College’s labs in remote experiments, apparatus is controlled and data are collected and interpreted via phone-linked computers. Among experiments already in operation are Michelson interferometry, Fabry Perot interferometry, an experiment on polarization, and one on electro-optic modulation. Work is in progress on optical time domain reflectometry.

Lieberman particularly enjoys the reward of teaching community college students “It is a wonderful thing to be able to teach Physics 201 to students who don’t think they have a chance to succeed,” he says, adding that success in physics also gives students “tremendous self-confidence.”

The O.C.C. Laser and Fiber Optics program, with $1 million in state-of-the-art equipment at the students’ disposal, prepares graduates for jobs in such diverse industries as telecommunications, computer networking, laser manufacturing, medical technology, aerospace, and optics manufacturing. Each course includes a laboratory component in which students in small groups learn to build and operate optical instruments, lasers, and fiber-optic networks. Lieberman and his colleagues also reach out to local high schools with a Laser Academy.
University Counsel Honored by PILA

Frederick P. Schaffer, CUNY general counsel and vice chancellor for legal affairs, will receive the Public Interest Achievement Award given by the Public Interest Law Association (PILA) at the Association's 10th annual auction, to be held March 6 at Baruch College.

The award honors Schaffer for his "commitment to public service and the CUNY community." Prior recipients include former Mayor David Dinkins and Ira Glasser, former executive director of the ACLU. Schaffer was elected a year ago to a two-year term as chairman of the Legal Aid Society. He is a former chief litigating assistant corporation counsel of New York City and a former partner of the law firm of Schiff Ruth & Zabel LLP.

CUNY's PILA, based at the School of Law at Queens College, is a chapter of Equal Justice Works, a national group founded in 1986 by law students "dedicated to surmounting barriers to equal justice that affect millions of low-income individuals and families." 

Schomburg Trove Honors Hostos Teacher

English professor Vernell Blanding, a specialist in reading at Hostos Community College, has good reason to smile when the NYPL's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is mentioned. This fall John Scarry, her colleague of more than 25 years, donated to the Harlem research facility in her honor several remarkable items associated with giants of 20th-century African-American literature — James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Langston Hughes.

Notable among these treasures new to the Center's holdings was an autographed copy of Baldwin's Just Above My Head, a postcard obtained in Austria of Lorraine Hansberry, and Langston Hughes. The American literature — James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Langston Hughes. The American literature — James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Langston Hughes. Among the items is a signed, autographed program for a production of Baldwin's Blues for Mister Charlie.

Particularly striking are some publicity stills for Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, the first play by an African American produced on Broadway. The one seen here carries the autographs of two members of the memorable first cast, Claudia McNeil, top, and Ruby Dee.

Professor Scarry, whose specialty is James Joyce and Irish literature, is also a particular admirer of Baldwin, always including him in his syllabus. Of his esteemed colleague, Scarry says: "I have learned much from Vernell Blanding, and this is my way of thanking her for sharing her deep understanding of the African-American experience. By donation, my donation is also a tribute to the other black faculty at Hostos who have been so helpful to me over so many years."

Governors Island: In a New York State of Mind

"Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg have shared with me their vision of a Governors Island dedicated to public and civic purposes. New York's stewardship of the island, combined with the National Park Service's management of the National Monument, will lead to development of an outstanding resource for the people of New York."

With those words spoken on January 31, President George W. Bush formally returned the 172-acre island — for about 200 years accessible only to military or government personnel — to the public domain. In addition to the 22-acre National Monument, notably including Castle Williams and Fort Jay, Mayor Bloomberg said in a speech delivered in the Oval Office that there would be about 40 acres of public parkland with spectacular views of the city, the Statue of Liberty, and the harbor.

But the Mayor's main emphasis was on the educational future of the island, in which the City University will play a major role. "President Bush... has changed the future of our city's youth. Our plan will include turning Governors Island into a thriving campus, a place where our city's youth can study the sciences, or the arts in an environment usually out of reach to them."

Underscoring the significance of education in Governors Island’s future, Governor Pataki said, "With our City University, one of the finest urban systems in the nation, we will train the next generation of teachers for the 21st century. This will be the premier urban teacher training center," he predicted.

Under the terms of transfer, responsibility for developing and managing the island will lie in a new State-City public entity, the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation (GIPEC). The initial chair of its 12-member board will be N.Y. Secretary of State Randy Daniels; the vice chair will be Daniel Doctoroff, N.Y. Deputy Mayor for Economic Development.

In addition to a core educational mission, the economic viability of Governors Island will involve a mix of public-benefit uses. These may include entertainment, cultural and arts facilities, hospitality venues such as hotels, conference and banquet centers, and an array of retail, service, dining, or health care facilities.

It is expected that limited sponsored tours and special events on the island will begin this summer. Greater access will follow the next summer; ultimately, ferry service will provide regular access.

LaGuardia C.C. Signs on for Sign Language

LaGuardia Community College recently arrived at an articulation agreement with SUNY/ Empire State to establish the tri-state area's first-ever Bachelor of Arts in cultural Studies in ASL/English Interpretation.

The program will train those already fluent in ASL who desire to gain expertise in the art and science of interpretation, filling a long-standing need. Jo Ann Krans, project director of LaGuardia's nationally recognized Interpreter Education Program, observes that “the city's large deaf community has had to deal with a shortage of qualified interpreters for too long.”

Krans adds, “Since legislation has codified the rights of deaf and hard-of-hearing people to qualified interpreters, and deaf people have moved into all fields of endeavor, the demands for more highly educated interpreters has increased exponentially.”

And the field is also becoming more and more sophisticated. The field is recognizing, and research shows that interpreters “need to have a keen understanding of interpretation theory and the cultural and linguistic dynamics between English and ASL,” says Krans.

Students wishing to gain entry into the program must pass a rigorous admission process. At LaGuardia, their 37-credit concentration will consist of courses in ASL discourse, how languages function, personal and professional ethics of interpreting theory and practice. This will be followed by fieldwork internships.

Planning for the program and creation of a state-of-the-art, 12-station interpreting lab has taken eight years, this gestation period being supported by nearly $1 million from the U.S. and N.Y. Departments of Education.

Then (as seen here) he cycled through the lava fields of the big Hawaiian island in weather that reached into the 90s. Then came the marathon. Garro's times (1:22, 6:34, 5:17) gave him a top-10 showing of the 40 early sixtysomethings. He placed the 9th-year- old Lim in front of Kona, on Hawaii's big island. Garro faced a swim course that, according to observers, was the most toughest in the Ironman's 25-year history by torrential rain and wave swells. "The swells were so high that with every stroke you took, you faced a wall of water," he recalls.

Lehman Provost — and Ironman

If your notion of recreation doesn't extend to 2.4-mile swims, 112-mile bike rides, and 26-mile marathons—all on the same day—hanging out with Anthony Garro wouldn't be a good idea. The Lehman College microbiologist, who is also the College's provost, has been competing as a triathlete for 20 years and last fall he faced one of the ultimate challenges in extreme sport, the Ironman World Triathlon Championships.

Having made the cut in his age group (60-64) at a preliminary competition at Lake Placid, Garro headed for the October 19 final round at Kona, on Hawaii's big island. Garro faced a swim course that, according to observers, was the most toughest in the Ironman's 25-year history by torrential rain and wave swells. "The swells were so high that with every stroke you took, you faced a wall of water," he recalls.

Statin Fetchit (Lincoln Perry), a rare article by Hughes that appeared in Woman's Home Companion in 1934, and an autographed program for a production of Baldwin's Blues for Mister Charlie. Particularly striking are some publicity stills for Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, the first play by an African American produced on Broadway. The one seen here carries the autographs of two members of the memorable first cast, Claudia McNeil, top, and Ruby Dee.

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Engineering the Talent for Biomedical Research

by Drew Featherston

T he keenest professional pleasure for Sheldon Weinbaum, Distinguished Professor of Mechanical and Biomedical Engineering at City College, comes from the successes of his students. “You know you’re in the right profession if you find the greatest satisfaction in seeing a student achieve,” he says. “Not only are they working with you, but after they’ve left — for me, that has become more and more important.”

Weinbaum has a refined professional palate; he has tasted most of the satisfactions that academia offers: a Guggenheim Fellowship, a string of distinguished awards and grants, membership in a trio of National Academies — Science, Engineering and Medicine (a rare honor currently held by just seven living persons). He’s a founding director of the New York City Biomedical Engineering and soon-to-be chair of City College’s new Department of Biomedical Engineering, the first new City College engineering department since 1937. Several of his insights have led to scientific breakthroughs.

Weinbaum is also proud of his success as a recruiter. He points in particular to Anand Acivos, now the Albert Einstein Professor of Science and Engineering at City College, whom he recruited from Stanford. “The reason I recruited him was that he made a tremendous impression on me in the close relationship he had with his Ph.D. students,” Weinbaum said. “I’d go to chemical engineering meetings and I would see entire rooms filled with his graduate students, his former Ph.D. students or his post-docs.”

But none of these honors and accomplishments pleases him more than good opinion of his own former teachers, expressed in brief notes that arrive from time to time, and the successes of his former students, such as Mia Mia Thi. The two met in an undergraduate course, Cell and Trause Transport, that Weinbaum was teaching, “I just intuitively sensed that this was a gifted person,” he recalls. “She was the top student in my class, and I told her she should really think about going on for a Ph.D.”

At the time, Thi was far off the path that would lead to a biomedical doctorate. She was well along in training to be an electrical engineer, a result of an interest in circuitry awakened in a high school physics class. “I’m originally from Burma,” she says. “I started there as a pre-engineering student, but I really wanted to go to medical school over there.”

Thi came to the U.S. in 1990 when political troubles in her homeland disrupted the universities. She was sponsored by her aunt and uncle, a professor at Columbia University. Because her father would have to pay for her education, she chose CUNY, a semester at Hunter College before City College’s distinguished engineering faculty lured her north. Like many newly-immigrated CUNY students, Thi arrived with imperfect English. “I could read it and watch movies, but I couldn’t speak it well at all,” she recalls. “I found that watching television was good for understanding.”

In 1994, Thi learned the then-new Center for Biomedical Engineering was recruiting students. “From the beginning, I was interested in medicine and biology, but I had no exposure to it,” she recalls. “I stopped by the Center, and they said, ‘Right now we have five courses, and if you take them you can earn a biomedical engineering minor.’” Her decision to do that brought her into Weinbaum’s class.

“I first recommended her to the

Discovering a Snake, H honoring a Mentor

Little did College of Staten Island biologist Frank Burburink know that, on the morning of 9/11, a personal calamity was transpiring half-way around the world. In the mountains of Myanmar, former Burma, his good friend and renowned herpetological mentor Joseph Slowinski had been bitten by a kratt, one of the world’s most venomous snakes. The next day the curator of the California Academy of Sciences and editor of Contemporary Herpetology was dead at 38.

Burburink fondly recalls his association with Slowinski at Louisiana State University, where he earned his Ph.D. in zoology — especially their nocturnal expeditions in Louisiana and Mississippi, listening to the music of Chuck Berry and now and then having to convince suspicious rural sheriffs they were on official herpetological business. Bagging a rattler from the bed of their truck, however, usually did the trick.

Recently, when Burburink achieved a zoologist’s dream of discovering a new species, he exercised his right to name it and honored his teacher, who himself had discovered 18 species of snakes and amphibians with Ethel Slowinskiski, or Slowinski’s corn snake, the number of known snake species in the U.S. jumped from 140 to 141. Burburink discovered the unique species of corn snake (there had been two others) by examining its DNA and estimating the evolutionary patterns of corn snakes as a group. Its range is eastern Texas and western Louisiana.

Burburink’s research involves molecular phylogenetics and the evolution of vertebrates. He is planning a vertebrate zoology course at CSI this year that will look into the evolutionary history of Staten Island’s reptiles and amphibians. Who knows? Maybe a salamander burburinkii lurks in the borough. Islands, after all, are noted for their remarkable biological diversity.

A frequent denizen of Manhattan music venues, Burburink is also a serious student of early 20th-century popular music. In fact, he is planning a book, its working title aptly Darwinian: “The Evolution of American Music.” It will call on his expertise in spotting the organic divergence and convergence of musical species. He won’t have to go far to do his research: his personal collection has about 8,000 albums, many rare and almost all recorded before 1965.
cells that live in bone, osteocytes, sense when a bone is being subjected to strain,” Weinbaum explains.

Weinbaum reasons that osteocytes are held in position by filaments, as cables, that hold the roadway of a suspension bridge, and that the filaments play a role in detecting the slight bone deformations caused by strain. Thí’s research is examining how shear stress is communicated between cells.

When Weinbaum did his undergraduate work at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, there was one woman in his class of 870 students, a ratio that remained common across science for years afterwards. “I’m embarrassed to tell you that, for my first 20 years here, I did not have a woman or a minority doctoral student. It was very hard to find women working in these fields.” As the husband and father of professional women, Weinbaum has worked hard to change that balance, with considerable success. “I have, you know, a very strong sensitivity toward minority students and women,” he said. “For the last 15 years, I have just seen it to that half my Ph.D. students are women.”

A good number of those are Asian women from cultures where, Weinbaum said, “women’s liberation has not been very strong. ’When such students, he said, “I do try to give them confidence, and I usually have arranged for them to talk to women faculty, with women who are further along on the career path.””

Thí is proud and pleased that his own field has shown a powerful shift away from the old all-male, no-minority model. “One of the most appealing aspects of biomedical engineering is that it’s really traveling a course of its own,” Weinbaum says. “It is the first engineering discipline in which the percentage of women students is approaching that of men.” Thí says. “I will still do research.”

Either way, Mia Mia Thí’s career will have at least one thoroughly riveted spectator — one poised, if need be, to shoot off notes of praise to her for major scientific breakthroughs.

Hospital for Special Surgery, where she worked for two years,” Weinbaum said. This hospital is one of six major metropolitan medical research facilities comprising the New York Center for Biomedical Engineering consortium, which is linked with City College and the Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center. The others are Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center, Sloan-Kettering, and Einstein, Mt. Sinai, Cornell’s Weill Graduate Center.

A bout Thí’s lab skills Weinbaum notes, “She was very gifted with her hands, a natural experimentalist, working with very small-scale preparations. To be able to look through a microscope and move specimens is a gift, and she’s got it.” The mentor’s support was also appreciated. “From the beginning he seemed like a very generous person,” says Thí. “He’s always concerned about the student.”

In switching from electrical engineering to the new field of biomedical engineering, Thí was paralleling Weinbaum’s own career. Though trained as an engineer — his advanced degrees from Harvard University are in applied physics and engineering — much of his ground-breaking work has been in biology, working on such puzzles as the mechanics by which cholesterol molecules enter arterial walls, how heat is transferred in the body, and the processes of bone growth and red blood cell circulation.

In fact, Weinbaum has no formal training in biology. “I’m sort of professionally like a person without a home,” he says with a laugh. He often relies on collaborators whom he carefully credits, to perform the biology-based research to prove his intuitive solutions.

His Ph.D. students too, carry his ideas into the lab. Thí is currently working with Albert Einstein professor of neuroscience Dr. David Spray on experiments that spring from Weinbaum’s ideas about the mechanics of bone growth. Bones sense and react to strain, even though the movement is minute. Without strain, bones deteriorate — weightlessness can cost an astronaut as much as a 20% loss in bone mass. “The real mystery is how the

**Fighting AIDS/HIV in South Africa**

Only recently have leaders of the world’s developed nations begun to acknowledge how short the fuse now is on the time bomb that is HIV/AIDS in Africa, especially the Sub-Saharan nations of Namibia and Botswana. President Bush highlighted this new resolve in his State of the Union speech.

But strategies for responding to the threat of massive decimation of peoples across the subcontinent have been on the research radar of Ida Susser for a good 10 years. The Hunter College and Graduate Center anthropologist and native of South Africa, a leading student of urban issues and cultural diversity in the U.S., was last year awarded a research and writing grant from the MacArthur Foundation as part of its program in Global Security and Sustainability.

Susser’s project is titled “Spaces for Autonomy: Defining Sustainable Strategies to Combat HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa,” and the grant will allow her to document how the women of Namibia — where she has been observing since the 1980s — negotiate their strategies for safer sex; she will also study the effectiveness of various modes of disseminating information about the disease and its treatment regimens. Susser will share the MacArthur grant with Hunter College film and media studies professor Peter Paris (who is also Susser’s husband).

Susser was raised mainly in Britain, after her parents (both doctors) were driven from Europe in the 1930s. She holds the Ph.D. from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. In 1969, Susser moved to Botswana, where she conducted research on the Bushmen, an isolated people of massive decimation of peoples across the subcontinent. She was named the 2003 J.I. Staley Book Prize winner for her study of village of Dobe in Botswana’s Kalahari Desert. Photo, R.B. Lee
BOOK TALK

OF THE CITY

Offering an Islamic Perspective on the Great African Diaspora

Omar Al-Islam

T he first plane to strike the World Trade Center flew over Omar Al-Islam’s Greenwich Village apartment. “I heard it fly over,” said Al-Islam, a recent addition to the M. Edgar Evers College faculty. “I saw people running. It was really a traumatic experience” — particularly traumatic for an orthodox Muslim like Al-Islam, who has spent years working for peace as an administrator in various non-governmental organizations, many under U.N. auspices. He recalled a Vatican peace meeting three years ago: “I had a chance to say a few words and I observed, ‘If we can just get the religious community to stop killing each other in the name of the Lord, I think half the world’s problems would be solved.’” He added, “The people who purport to be sincere followers of their religion often are the people who create the most conflict. That’s a paradox, but it is also a reality.”

Al-Islam, whose research focuses on the African diaspora, sees the University as a place to build bridges and understanding through scholarship: “We’re looking at the role that people of African ancestry played in the making of the modern world,” he said. “This is what I’m bringing to the classroom at M. Edgar Evers.”

Understanding the diaspora requires knowledge spanning all cultural boundaries. “I want to include Western, Islamic, and African philosophy,” said Al-Islam, the native of Chattanooga pointed out, “It is one of the fastest-growing religions in the country. It’s here to stay. If we are going to build a society in America, we’ve got to accept the reality that we live in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic time. We really need to grapple with that.”

Preparing for the 21st century requires academic and intellectual rigor, he noted. In a competitive edge. This, Al-Islam noted, is a heavy demand on most students, who must work to support their education. “I tell them, ‘Wear your struggle as a badge of honor.’”

But Al-Islam also emphasized that education is not merely a tool for carving out a career niche. “We often have students who are so ensnored in mapping their education around a career that they really miss the richness of the intellectual experience.”

Max Beerbohm by Max Beerbohm” by N. John Hall

H e was elected governor of New York four times; he supervised the largest international relief effort in history during and after WWII; next he served for seven years in the U.S. Senate. Disillusioned by his laurels in retirement, he then worked with Eleanor Roosevelt and others to drive the bosses of Tammany Hall out of the state’s Democratic party. A decade later, in 1968, Herbert H. Lehman became a college.

Thirty-five years ago, when the Bronx campus of Hunter College became an independent senior college within the City University, several names were suggested for the new campus. As Lehman College’s current president, Ricardo Fernandez, has written in an op-ed piece that appeared in several Bronx and Westchester County papers, “Herbert Lehman was chosen because of what he represented: integrity in public service, international idealism, love of country, commitment to equal opportunity for all Americans and a willingness to work hard. Citizens of the world — including the 10,000 students of Lehman College who include immigrants from 90 countries — are inspired by the Lehman legacy.”

This spring the College is mounting a semester-long series of events celebrat- ing the 125th anniversary of its name-sake’s birth and its 35th anniversary. A highlight will be a stellar symposium, “Herbert Lehman: A Historical Perspective,” on February 25. The speakers on Lehman the Family Man, Senator, Humanitarian, Governor, and Reformer will be June Bingham Birge, Julius C.C. Edelstein, William vanden Heuvel, Henry Morgenbesser III, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Everyone on the panel personally knew Lehman, who died in 1963.

One of Lehman’s political stands as a U.S. senator made him a perfect choice for a campus of a University not noted for serving immigrants. As Fernandez noted, Lehman “voted in 1950 against the McCarran Walter Act, which raised barriers not only against immigrants but also against writers, scientists and students from abroad who might have expressed liberal thoughts or ideas.” He also was one of few in the Senate who, at the risk of his office, stood up to McCarthyism: “I will not compromise with my conscience. I will vote to protect the liberties of our people.” New York’s voters returned him to office the next three times.

The man captured by President Fernandez personifies not only the spirit of the Bronx campus but all of CUNY: “Herbert H. Lehman believed the role and responsibility of government is to look after those who desperately need help and cannot help themselves: the poor, the handicapped, children, the elderly and victims of discrimination and oppression. He was a humble, uncharismatic leader who knew how to define and approach problems in all their complexity.”

For more information on the anniversary celebrations on the Bronx campus, visit the Lehman web site (www.lehman.cuny.edu).
John Jay Hosts Criminal Justice Job Fair

In the hurly-burly of Graduate and Professional Day, as recruiters and job-hunting students fished the North Hall lobby and cafeteria at John Jay College of Criminal Justice for talent, Quintian greeted an old acquaintance from the U.S. Navy’s criminal investigative service. “You’re getting a little grey,” she said with a smile. “I ought to be,” was the reply. “This is the first year I’ve been here for this fair.”

Quintian, associate director of career advisement and pre-law adviser at John Jay, has been running these job fairs for 19 years. The two-day career and professional gathering takes place in December; a job fair follows in April.

The December gathering is casual and open to all; several East Coast colleges brought busloads of their students to the fair and many CUNY campuses were represented in the crowd. The April fair is for John Jay students and alumni only, and jobseekers must wear business attire and bring copies of a professional resume.

“They’ve grown a lot, by word of mouth,” Quintian said of the police departments. “They’ve found out this is a good place to recruit. We have recruiters here from as far away as Los Angeles and Las Vegas.”

For recruiters, the career days offered a chance to fish in a teeming pool of qualified candidates. “My human resources person was here yesterday and she was stunned,” said Rafael J. Heredia, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs police. “We’ve taken over a hundred applications and resumes.”

Although some agencies are operating under temporary job freezes, others were ready to hire. Barbara Bertorelli, assistant district manager of the Social Security Administration’s Manhattan office, noted that she was expecting a wave of retirements. “We’ll be doing a tremendous amount of hiring of people with management potential,” she predicted.

Recruiters and school officials stressed that the fair wasn’t only about hiring. “The agencies here may not only be seeking applications, but also explaining their job requirements,” said Richard Saulnier, Dean for Admissions and Registration at John Jay. “Students get some timely reality checks — like, for example, the specific requirements to be an FBI agent.”

Some students knew exactly what they needed to reach what they wanted in a career. “My plan is to study forensic psychology,” said Uniquik Bostic, who lives in East New York, as she filled out an application for the Suffolk County, NY police department. “I want to join a police department and continue my studies.”

Other students use the day to winnow down their options. “It’s very informative,” said Saul Reyes of Riverdale. “You can see what the same job offers in different states.”

After looking into police departments in several states and into several federal agencies, Reyes thought that the Fort Lauderdale police force looked like a good fit.

Sometimes an interview turns into a job offer. John Jay family business, Steven Buntler, a May 2002 graduate, says he was greeted by recruiter Gregory Tranchina, a 1992 graduate now in IRS criminal investigation. “I push John Jay every chance I get. I want to make sure students who graduate from CUNY get jobs in the courts.”

CUNY CHANCELLOR PROPOSES ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

Continued from page 1

Chancellor Proposes Academic Initiatives

Chancellor Proposes Academic Initiatives

The businessmen and women of CUNY’s Business Leadership Council identify workforce trends and opportunities for the University. (For more on the Council see story on page 4.)

CUNY is also adopting new business practices to “work smarter and use shared strategies to reduce administrative costs,” Goldstein said, adding that such measures are already “achieving millions of dollars in savings” on several campuses. Further, “CUNY should be working, where appropriate, with private developers to more effectively use our existing physical assets, and seek to build new mixed-use facilities, as we leverage up the capital budget the state provides.”

Chancellor Goldstein speaking at the Harvard Club.

“Since New York is a media center, CUNY is beginning to plan a new School of Journalism with a special focus on urban studies.”

This, Goldstein believes, will “utilize the extraordinary resource of CUNY-TV and the University’s other Internet-based technologies.”

Concluding his speech, Goldstein said, “we are changing the conversation about CUNY. Today, this University is rightly perceived by stakeholders as being in the mainstream of higher education practice...a media challenge now is to maintain our momentum here in New York City through these times of extraordinary financial crisis. I pledge you...we will meet the challenge. We will stay the course.”

The Chancellor's full speech can be accessed on the University website. www.cuny.edu.

Everybody Loves Riemann

Rafael Herrera, a native of Mexico, has won a prize for the highest GPA among 130,000 students at the National University of Mexico. Dr. Herrera was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2002 for the study of a classification problem in Riemannian geometry.

Flat or not, the geometry came first, with Euclid. The study of curves (like those of a sphere or a doughnut) flowered in the late 19th century, thanks notably to the German mathematicians Johann Gaus and Georg Riemann. Their revolutionary ideas created the field of differential geometry and led to the study of abstract multi-dimensional spaces, a.k.a., n-dimensional Riemannian manifolds. (Riemann’s advances also helped lay the foundation for Einstein’s development of the theory of relativistic) Herrera’s Guggenheim project will involve classifying a family of Riemannian manifolds, which are spaces that appear in models of theoretical physics.

After earning his Ph.D. on a full scholarship at Oxford University, Herrera was appointed to a Junior Research Fellowship at Oxford’s Worcester College. Later, he taught and performed research at Yale and at U.C. Riverside in the areas of combinatorics, algebraic geometry, and differential calculus, linear algebra, differential equations, and differential geometry.

Herrera has also descended from high theoretical altitudes to address issues of elementary school mathematics education. While at Riverside, he directed a Mathematics Institute in the Coachella Valley Unified School District, a state-funded K-12 project aimed at raising the educational standards among public school math teachers.

His work was part of a larger state-wide initiative to involve university educators in improving elementary mathematics curriculum.
From Flinging Pizza to Neuroscience, Thanks to a BC C

In the seven years since he arrived in New York from his native Dominican Republic, Leonardo Santana has flung pizza, attended a parking lot, sold food from a street cart, and toiled in a grocery. Now he can be found in a laboratory, conducting research in neuroscience.

This remarkable segue was made possible by Bronx Community College’s long-standing Minority Biomedical Research Support Program (MBRS), which has served about 300 BCC students like Santana. The program is one of several sponsored by the National Institutes of Health to increase the participation of minorities in medical and scientific research. There are close to 100 MBRS programs on campuses across the country—including five at four-year CUNY colleges—but the Bronx program is one of only a handful in the nation at two-year community colleges.

Professor John Davis—the chairman of BCC’s biology and medical laboratory technology departments and the director for the last decade—said the program was one of only four community college endeavors in the nation when BCC began funding nearly a quarter century ago.

The reason, Davis explained, is that MBRS, which then required faculty to be conducting research in which students would participate, came along at a time when academic jobs were hard to find. Historically, community colleges did not have a research focus, Davis said. “The focus was instructional. But there were a lot of individuals in the sciences, back in the 1970s and 1980s, who got Ph.D.’s and were looking for teaching positions.” Many wound up taking jobs with community colleges. “They were eager to do research.”

They were encouraged in this by a climate at CUNY that treated community college faculty “as equivalent to four-year college faculty,” Davis added. “Faculty have to publish if they’re going to get reappointed and get tenure here.”

Under the MBRS program, “faculty members who applied were expected to establish a research project on campus or at a research institution nearby that the students could collaborate on,” Davis said. “You were expected to bring students—minority students—into your lab and train them.”

These students eventually attend national scientific meetings, at first as observers and later as participants presenting their own research findings.

About ten years ago, the scientists at BCC realized their students had to overcome an additional barrier: inadequate communication skills. Some students from Africa and the Caribbean were well-prepared in mathematics and science, but had trouble with the language.

“So we developed an enrichment program, which we call REAP,” Davis said. “The Research Enrichment Activities Project offers students two extra courses in scientific communication and laboratory research. REAP students get 300 hours of paid summer work, assisting in lab research off-campus.”

The REAP/MBRS program, which we call REAP, Davis said. The Research Enrichment Activities Project offers students two extra courses in scientific communication and laboratory research. REAP students get 300 hours of paid summer work, assisting in lab research off-campus. Leonardo Santana is an example of what the REAP/MBRS program can accomplish. He came to the United States at age 17, just after completing high school. “I didn’t speak English. I couldn’t go to college,” Santana recalls. He spent a whole year out of school studying English on his own. I learned a little enough to take the entrance exam. I got in, but I didn’t do well. I had to take...

Stringing Along the Universe

Nobody can accuse Michio Kaku of thinking inside the box. Four-dimensional space-time is not capacious enough for his ideas. Ten dimensions might do—why not eleven? Kaku, who holds the Henry Semat Professorship in Theoretical Physics at City College and the Graduate Center, nonetheless has an ambition to create something very small: “My goal,” he said, “is to find an equation—one inch long, perhaps—that summarizes everything.”

By everything, mind you, he means everything. The universe, with all its history, contains laws and destiny. Kaku thinks he has co-invented a tool to bring everything that was, is and shall be into a single short equation. This is what is called “string theory,” an arcane but elegant construct that one observer has described as “21st-century physics which deals in part with the concept of time travel—required reading among a lot of screenwriters” at the film studio.

He has sharply criticized what he sees as the excess of failures of string theory—putting nuclear power plants in orbiting spacecraft and the inability to address global warming. But he retains a vision of an improved human civilization that can appreciate science, such as putting nuclear power plants in orbiting spacecraft and the inability to address global warming.

Kaku, a Harvard summa cum laude in 1968, received his Ph.D. at the U.C. Berkeley’s Radiation Lab in 1972. Two of his nine books, Hyperspace and Visions, have become best-sellers in several languages. An executive at Miramax told Kaku that the former—which deals in part with the concept of time travel—is “required reading among a lot of screenwriters” at the film studio.

He has sharply criticized what he sees as the excess of failures of string theory—putting nuclear power plants in orbiting spacecraft and the inability to address global warming. But he retains a vision of an improved human civilization that can appreciate science, such as putting nuclear power plants in orbiting spacecraft and the inability to address global warming. But he retains a vision of an improved human civilization that can appreciate science, such as...
Biomedical Program

a lot of remedial classes.”

He had vague thoughts of going into medicine, but in his first days at BCC it seemed an impossible dream. “I had no experience in science, no idea of laboratory procedures,” he remembers. “When I was a freshman, I had a lot of difficulty with the language. I was kind of lost, no hope of going to a four-year college.” He pauses. “And, of course, before I got into the [MBRS] program, I had to work full-time to go to school.”

Santana found his way into the REAP program. “It put me in contact with people who could guide me. It also taught me how to think like a researcher, how to understand a scientific paper, then how to write one.”

After their work in the Bronx program, most students continue their studies toward a Bachelor’s degree, often at the other CUNY campuses with MBRS or related government programs for minorities. (There are MBRS programs at City, York, Hunter, and Lehman Colleges and NYU College of Technology.) “I think four-year schools are always calling and asking about our graduating students,” Davis said. “Our students have a good reputation, and one reason is their special communication skills.”

Leonardo Santana worked under Dr. Martin Gluck, an M.D./Ph.D., who is an assistant professor of neurology at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, an associate professor of chemistry at BCC, and an attending neuropsychologist at the U.S. Veterans Affairs Hospital in the Bronx. His research work at the hospital has been examining how the death of brain cells contributes to the development of degenerative conditions such as Parkinson’s Disease.

“I have six or seven students from the program,” Dr. Gluck said. “They were excellent — very motivated and very dedicated. They tend not to just come in for the summer and then leave; these are people who are basically part of my lab and get paid for it, at a student rate.” He added that Santana “presented our lab work at a Society for Neuroscience meeting in Florida last fall. This is the major international meeting for neuroscience, and it was a very prestigious achievement to have presented there.”

Santana, now 24, sees his goal within reach. “I want to be in medical research. I want to apply to the M.D./Ph.D. programs at Albert Einstein, Mt. Sinai, and Rutgers University. Since I’ve been working with Dr. Gluck, I meet people from these places and work with them. So the program has been a great networking opportunity too.” But first things first: a Lehman College bachelor’s degree. “This semester, thank God!” he says with a laugh.

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Picture This: Fuel Cells Driven by Algae

Juergen Polle, a new assistant professor in Brooklyn College’s biology department, began his career as a tax-law expert for the German equivalent of the IRS. A year working in that field inspired a remarkable educational U-turn: he decided to go into the field of biology, Polle said. “In Germany, you have to study all over again. So I did another five years of undergrad work.”

He finished his doctoral work in 1997 and began postdoctoral work at the University of California at Berkeley with Chlamydomonas reinhardtii, a humble alga that may one day change the world in significant ways.

“Why work with algae?” I was always interested in biochemistry,” Polle said. “But I didn’t want to do experimental work with animals, fascinating though it is.” Some key retirements in that research program left Polle looking for another position, preferably in this country. “I heard about Brooklyn College,” he said. “I like teaching, and I heard that it had a high teaching load. And I heard from colleagues that the students were very good.”

Brooklyn College’s Aquatic Research and Environmental Assessment Center — AREAEC — “was a major factor in my decision to come here,” Polle said. “I work with marine algae, so I can very conveniently use their facilities.”

His research may one day help light the world or provide to the multitudes beta carotene (which the human body processes into vitamin A): certain Chlamydomonas reinhardtii may one day be able to create enough hydrogen to operate fuel cells big enough to power a household; some mutant algae of the genus Dunaliella already produce harvestable quantities of beta carotene. Polle has begun research in the well-equipped laboratory the College provided him, and expects to start teaching in the fall. He has nonetheless had enough contact with students to form a favorable impression. “The students, too,” he said, “are above my expectations.”

Brooklyn College’s Man of “The Hours”

It is hard for Michael Cunningham, Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at Brooklyn College, to rest on his laurels. They keep piling up. In 1999 he won the Pulitzer Prize and the PEN Faulkner Award for The Hours, a brilliant novelistic riff on Virginia Woolf, and now the former NEA and Guggenheim Fellow is enjoying the ultimate cinematic accolade: a rapturously received film version of the novel. Cunningham, who taught for six years in Columbia’s M.F.A. program, turned down offers from Princeton and NYU to accept a position at Brooklyn College just days before the Academy Awards nominations were announced ("The Hours" received nine nominations, including best adaptation of an original work), CUNY Matters’ Rita Rodin talked with him about his writing and teaching.

Cunningham: You always have a greater book in your mind than what you try to get down on paper, even if what you get down on paper turns out pretty well. It’s part of the human dilemma — we can imagine greater things than we can accomplish. And one of the difficulties to me in being a writer is living in some kind of peace with the gap between what I felt I was going to do and what I was actually able to do. Some people can’t stand it.

Q: Do you think of the reader when you write?

Cunningham: I do, I do. I think there is a subtle but important difference between working with the reader and trying to please the reader, which leads to pandering. And that leads to the terrible desire to be loved at all costs, which is not a good thing for a writer. I think of any writing as something that actually transpires between a writer and a reader. One of the things I love about Virginia Woolf — and something that doesn’t seem to get talked about at all that much — is this: as far as I can tell, she was one of the first writers, certainly one of the first great writers, to rethink the relationship between a novelist and a reader.

Q: Can you recall the moment “the light went on” about presenting your special take on her Mrs. Dalloway?

Cunningham: A whole row of maybe seven light bulbs went on! This book was especially difficult to write just because it’s unconventionally structured. It was hard to keep my faith in it, it was hard to believe every single day that it was actually shaping up and turning into anything. I’ve never worked on a book that felt so continually close to just falling apart and disappearing on me.

Q: What qualities of Woolf lured you into the project?

Cunningham: Her insistence on writing about the outwardly ordinary. Her characters are always very regular people. They are wealthy; she was upper-class and she wrote about the upper class. We may doubt whether you can be rich and regular, but we will just have to give it to her that she succeeded.

Q: Why do you think The Hours has struck such a chord at this historic moment?

Cunningham: I honestly couldn’t tell you. Everything about the life of the book, including its extended life as a movie, has been a huge surprise. I thought, when I was writing it, “Well, this is going to be myarty little book, and it will sell a few thousand copies.” And I think my agent and my editor were right there with me, thinking the same thing!

Q: You turned down Princeton to come to Brooklyn.

Cunningham: I love Brooklyn College. Ellen Tremper, chair of the English department, approached me about the job a couple of years ago, and I went out and did a reading at the College, met some of the students, and just felt immediately like this was a place I wanted to be. The students were among the most diverse, interesting, and interestingly talented people I had seen in one place. I loved the idea that these people were getting M.F.A. degrees without having to go into debt for the rest of their lives. And I just had a great feeling about the place — and continue to.

Q: And enrollment has increased in the M.F.A. writing program since you arrived?

Cunningham: I wouldn’t say! And if they don’t come I call them, I write to them. I won’t take no for an answer!

For much more from this conversation visit cuny.edu/news.
Lisa Amowitz remembers September 11, 2001. She had just begun teaching a new course at Bronx Community College and felt the class was coming together nicely. “I remember the blue sky of that day,” she recalled, “I just looked up at it and thought: What a beautiful day. I was in the best possible mood.”

Within moments, that sunny mood was crushed by first word of the World Trade Center attack. Amowitz, an assistant professor of advertising art and computer graphics, turned to her métier to deal with the horror. “I was freaked out, frozen, numb,” she said. “The only way to get the juices flowing again was to do something. So I did a poster.”

That poster, with an image of the Statue of Liberty as a “silent witness” to the attack, will shortly become part of a more elaborate Amowitz project, a web site that has become part of a more elaborate “silent witness” to the attack, will be a “create a unique and last- ing tribute to those who were lost and to the spirit of renewal that sustains those who survive.”

A web site seemed appropriate, said Louise M. Irier, executive vice chancellor for academic affairs. “The University wanted something that would transcend college boundaries, but that would allow each college to do what it wished,” she said. “It seemed obvious to use technology to link all of our campuses in this.”

The competition drew about 50 entries from CUNY faculty, students and staff. The panel of judges included prominent artists, web and graphic designers, civic leaders and relatives of those at CUNY who died in the attack. Amowitz’s site will allow visitors to post or view written or multimedia notices honoring them.

The memorial site is viewable at cuny.edu/911memorial. It opens with a sky-blue background upon which a pair of blood-red towers appear. The towers descend into place in a Manhattan skyline as the sky turns dark, then black. The time elapsing between the two moments of impact is counted down in a corner of the screen.

Moving from the home page, visitors can read about CUNY’s losses and its role in the aftermath. They can also append either written or multimedia memorials of their own. Amowitz found music for the site on the web and purchased the rights; it is called “Ethereal” and is, she said, “hopeful but solemn.”

Indeed, after the somber introduction, the site leads into “a more hopeful opening page which highlights the spirit of giving and patriotism that followed the attack,” Amowitz explains. “Never did I more clearly understand what this country is about and what CUNY represents.”

Lisa Amowitz

Two Architects with CUNY Ties on WTC Finalist THINK Team

When the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation winnowed design proposals down to just two in early February, one was the “World Culture” center conceived by the THINK team, which includes two architects with City University ties Rafael Viñoly, of Rafael Viñoly Architects PC, has designed several major projects on CUNY campuses, beginning with Haaren Hall at John Jay College, a major multiple-use edifice that opened in 1988. Often referred to on campus as the Thenth Avenue Building, it houses administrative offices, the college library, a performing arts theater, classrooms, and a complete physical education/sports facility.

Also by Viñoly is the soaring stainless-steel Apex sports complex at Lehman College, which New York Times architecture critic Herbert Muschamp hailed as “exhilarating.” Its façade, Muschamp observed, “recedes toward the horizon with the graceful curve of a discus—or better yet, a Frisbee—hurled through space.” The Apex opened in 1994.

Viñoly also has devised the transformation of City College’s former library building into the new home for CUNY’s School of Architecture, and he is also at work planning the West Quad Building, a major multiple-use structure at Brooklyn College.

Focusing on the landscape architecture component of the THINK plan is Ken Smith, since 1992 a full-time and, most recently, an adjunct professor in the CUNY School of Architecture. His stake in the project is not only professional but personal: both his home and his landscape architecture firm are within six blocks of Ground Zero.

Smith, whose graduate training was at Harvard, has previously worked on the reconstruction of the Harlem Gateway project on 110th Street and designed its Malcolm X. Plaza. Smith finds the public’s interest in the design challenges impressive. “At the display of all the design proposals at the Winter Garden, he recalls, “I saw a whole troop of firemen debating about urban design.” He adds that his email from kibitzers has seriously increased.

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