Young Scientists Follow in Footsteps of Jonas Salk

Two developing medical scientists — one from York College, the other from Hunter — recently completed internships that will surely be high points of their promising careers.

Fiona Smith, a 2005 graduate of York College, and Jena Chakhoitdounov, an ’05 graduate of the Honors College at Hunter College, worked this past summer at one of the most prestigious research facilities in the nation — the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California. For Chakhoitdounov, who came to the United States from Russia, the opportunity to intern there represented one more step — admittedly a big one — toward her goal of becoming a physician and researcher.

She said her training at Hunter gave her confidence as she went about her projects at the Salk Institute, where five scientists have received the Nobel Prize, and where six others who trained there also went on to receive the coveted award.

“As far as my experience goes, I felt very prepared from my classes at Hunter,” said Chakhoitdounov, the daughter of two physicians. “There was nothing I was exposed to there (at the Salk Institute) that I wasn’t prepared for at Hunter.”

The days were spent not only doing work in the laboratories, but also in meeting scientists from around the world who served as mentors and role models.

Of the many hours that these interns spent at Chakhoitdounov said, “I got broader, better techniques.” The overall experience “broadened” her and will help as she makes future choices about courses and research projects in medical school, she said.

Chakhoitdounov began medical studies this fall at Weill Medical College of Cornell University.

Chakhoitdounov and Smith were among eight CUNY Salk Scholars, who last spring received $6,000 scholarships from the CUNY Board of Trustees toward medical school. The scholarships, given out annually over the past 50 years, are named after the late Dr. Jonas Salk, who developed the vaccine that stopped the crippling and deadly polio epidemic of the mid-1960s.

Salk was an alumnus of City College.

This year was the first time Salk Scholars — of whom there have been a total of 400 since 1955 — interned at La Jolla.

York College alumnus Smith, who came to the United States in 2003 from Guyana, shared Chakhoitdounov’s enthusiasm about the summer experience, and said her recent good fortune only confirmed that she made the right decision in attending York.

“People want to go to big name colleges,” said Smith, reflecting on her choice of where to pursue her pre-med studies. “I was worried that I wouldn’t be able to get into medical school. That no one would know anything about York College. But it was better for me. You have more contacts with your professors. They are very welcoming, and you get to work in their labs and they can recommend you for medical school because they know you much better. They know your name, your work, your personality and your face.”

Smith began her medical studies this fall at Pennsylvania State College of Medicine.

Dr. Gerard McNiel, who was Smith’s York College mentor and who guided her as she did lab work dissecting insect ovaries, praised his former student for her determination.

“She knows how to work independently and always went beyond the assignment,” McNiel said.

“This (Smith’s scholarship) is good for Fiona, good for York and it’s good for CUNY,” Dr. Jack Schlem (Smith’s advisor in her major) does a wonderful job preparing students for medical school.”

At La Jolla, Smith said she worked with scholars “from all over the world.” In the future, after she has completed medical school, Smith said she just may return to Guyana, the South American country of her birth, and help raise the quality of medical care there.

Last spring, Salk Institute President Richard A. Murphy spoke by way of a video message to score of CUNY officials, students and guests, as the University celebrated the 50th anniversary of the polio vaccine.

Murphy said he looked forward to having CUNY students come to work at his research facility, calling it “a wonderful opportunity to deepen their own knowledge of biology and human diseases.”

The institute’s purpose, according to Murphy, is to “better the human condition through basic research.”

Council Rescues Imperiled Vallone Scholarships

The Vallone Scholarship program, which has helped 28,000 CUNY students pay for college since 1989, got a reviving shot in the arm in the 2005-06 budget, as the City Council came up with a total of $11.3 million in funding.

That represents a 63 percent increase — or an additional $4.3 million — from the amount allocated last year, and guaranteed the near-term survival of the merit-based program named after former City Council Speaker Peter F. Vallone Sr.

“We obtained from the City of New York restoration of all our key budget programs” — and more, Chancellor Matthew Goldin said in a message this summer to the CUNY Board of Trustees and college presidents.

There had been particular concern about the Vallone Scholarship program when it was deleted in the earlier executive budget.

Now hundreds of students who might have been forced to drop out of college will be able to remain and receive at least $1,000 annually.

The scholarship program is a source of pride for many city officials.

“The Vallone Scholarship makes a college education possible for students who otherwise may not be able to afford it, and is absolutely indispensable to building a long-term foundation for economic growth in our City,” City Council Speaker Curtis Gólden said, when it was feared the program might be slashed in prior years.

Charles Baron, who is chair of the City Council Higher Education Committee and is a graduate of both City Tech and Hunter College — has said the Vallone Scholarships are critical for “working class young adults.”

Baron said the scholarship program is “not a right, it is a necessity.”

Students receiving Vallone awards must maintain at least a B average. If a student maintains at least that grade, he or she will receive $1,000 for each of four years of study at a four-year college.

At community colleges, scholarship winners can receive $1,000 a year for two years. To learn more, visit www.cuny.edu and follow the “financial aid” link.

In November, the campuses sponsor events that disseminate the imagination and inform the mind, from lectures by famous writers to college open houses.

“Open the doors to all — let the children of the rich and the poor take their seats together and know of no distinction save that of industry, good conduct, and intellect.”

— Townsend Harris, founder
I am delighted to welcome back CUNY faculty, staff, and students to their campus-es for the 2005-06 academic year. Our city is back with full school indicators neighborhoods no longer empty-on the weekends, subways and buses again filled with students, and signs and historical sites shepherding large groups of young visitors through their spaces. Still, I know that a welcome back in the fall implies a leave during the summer—and that for many in our University community, summer is yet another busy season of work.

This summer, CUNY students took classes and completed internships, and public school students attended CUNY summer immersion programs. Faculty traveled abroad and across our nation to do research, and staff members planned for programs and events in the fall.

Throughout the University, the summer was an active time.

In June, William P. Kelly was named president of The Graduate School and University Center. Dr. Kelly, an American literature scholar and an expert on the works of James Fenimore Cooper, had been serving as provost and senior vice president of The Graduate Center since 1998 and has been an educator at CUNY for almost 30 years. I am pleased to welcome him to his new post. A search is now underway for a new dean of the CUNY School of Law.

Dean Stephen Shepard of CUNY's new Graduate School of Journalism has been working throughout the summer to build the school, developing his ideas for the curriculum—from basic tracks to individual courses—the faculty, and student programming, including internships and a student-run wire service. The school is scheduled to welcome its first class in the fall of 2006.

The City of New York City adopted its 2005-06 budget over the summer, and there was much good news for CUNY, including unprecedented capital allocations that, when combined with state allocations, represent the largest level of funded commitments in the University's history. The budget also offered an increase in funding for the Peter F. Vallone Academic Scholarship Program and new funding for the CUNY Preparatory Transitional High School—or CUNY Prep—and other programs and initiatives. We are grateful to all our elected officials for their recognition of our students' needs and the dedicated efforts of our faculty and staff to meet those needs.

During the summer months, one of the programs in our Master Plan, the Initiative on the Black Male in Education, was given particular attention. A task force has been working diligently on a report that will recommend projects to improve the University's recruitment and retention of black men. The University will begin acting on those recommendations this academic year. This is a subject of critical importance at CUNY and throughout the nation, and the University must aggressively address a complex set of challenges in order to enact real change.

The period ahead will surely be a pivotal one for New York State, with mayoral and gubernatorial races as well as statewide offices and state legislative seats to be decided. These elections, regardless of their outcomes, will affect the University, and it is an important time for aspiring leaders to understand CUNY's unique mission within the city and the state. Over the next few months, it will be unfolding a new approach to securing funding for the University, and I will be communicating with you as it takes shape.

Any consideration of the University's future must account for the great strides our students have made over the last six or seven years. We now have data that tracks student progress over the last six years, and the results show demonstrable improvements. From 1998 to 2004, graduation rates improved, and the 2004 SAT scores exceed those from the city's top public high schools were enrolled at CUNY, and the number of minority students increased.

It is largely because of your efforts and your commitment that we are seeing such improvements and that so many CUNY students, particularly over the last year, have been recognized for their academic achievements. I am deeply grateful to the entire CUNY community for your dedication to our students' success. We are continuing to work to obtain a new contract to help move our great University forward.

No matter how you spent your summer, I hope it was a time of renewal and recommitment to the valuable work you do. I look forward to working with all of you on a productive 2005-06 academic year. Thank you again, and welcome back.

Peter Jennings Had a Special

When the death of ABC News anchorman Peter Jennings made headlines in August, the tributes came pouring in. He was remembered as a voice of the world, an intrepid and consummate broadcast journalist.

He was also known as a special friend to CUNY.

Jennings had been the keynote speaker at 2003 and 2004 ceremonies honoring students who had earned high school equivalency degrees and received CUNY scholarships. He also was an informal advisor to CUNY’s Graduate School of Journalism, set to open in fall 2006, and in 2003 he was awarded the Chancellor’s Medal, CUNY’s highest honor, for outstanding service.

“We deeply mourn his passing,” said Chancellor Matthew Goldstein. “We are comforted in knowing that his uncompromising professional standards, his uncommon and inspiring personal decency and his profound impact on the communication of world news are his lasting legacy.”

Throughout his career, Jennings, who died of lung cancer at age 67, had always placed a high priority on higher education, never failing to tell students that his deepest regret was dropping out of high school.

At the CUNY CED scholarship ceremony in 2003, Jennings spoke to graduates in a tone of striking honesty and humility. He said:

“This is the second time in my late adult life that I have been reminded of my inadequacies. I was asked some years ago to give the graduation speech at my daughter’s high school, and halfway through the speech, at which I had worked very hard, I suddenly stopped. I looked out at my daughter; even the memory is quite emotional, and I realized that she, and subsequently my son, in graduating from high school, had gone further in school than I had. And here I am today to realize that you, with your not quite so newly minted GEDs, given that you’ve gone on to college, in so many cases, you have accomplished more than I have. And so I come today, as much as anything, slightly envious and, God knows, admiring.”

Education, he told the graduates, meant freedom.

“You are now so much better prepared to go off in search of America to see today that the ideas of the founding fathers, those 18th-century white men, are as alive and well in the country . . . and that liberty means something and freedom means something else . . . democracy means some-
Second Chance to Ambitious Teens

Bond with the University

thing only if you make it work. So you have indelibly today taken a huge and magnificent step forward. I am so glad I was here to share it with you.”

In 2004, the CUNY GED Scholarship recipients wrote essays to Jennings about their lives and struggles to learn. Jennings took the time to address each of them during the ceremony, referring to their lives as described in their essays.

Ruth Adams, one of the graduates, did not expect such personal attention.

“When he said to me, ‘Ruth, your house must have been very crowded,’ I was really shocked that he had really read my essay. When I heard him say, ‘Don’t give up; those were miracle words for me. The thought which comes to mind when I think of Peter Jennings is that he is a man who walked with a kind but didn’t lose the common touch.’

William Kelly is New Grad Center President

William P. Kelly, a distinguished American literature scholar and expert on James Fenimore Cooper, is now ensonced in his work as new president of The Graduate School and University Center, the Ph.D. granting institution of the University.

The appointment of Kelly was called another huge step in the University’s march to academic excellence and recognition. Kelly replaced Frances H. Horwitz, who was honored by the University in June for her fourteen years of exemplary service.

"De Kelly will provide inspired leadership that will enhance and strengthen the Graduate Center as a major part of the ongoing renewal of our University,” said Board of Trustees Chairman Benno C. Schmidt, Jr.

More Elite High School Students Choosing CUNY

New enrollment figures show that highly prepared students from New York City’s select public high schools are coming to CUNY at a rate that’s more than doubled in the last decade.

The creation of the Honors College — along with sticker admissions and graduation requirements, and the hiring of more full-time faculty — together have been attracting students who are turning down big-name private colleges.

“I think CUNY gives a great education,” said Winifred Halley, the Parent Coordinator at Townsend Harris High School, the public school located on the campus of Queens College and named after the 19th century founder of the University.

Halley’s son Matthew is a 2004 graduate of Townsend Harris and had the chance to go to Georgetown, George Washington and Boston University. But he chose the CUNY Honors College at Hunter College.

“The reputation is coming back,” Winifred Halley said of CUNY. “When you read the books, the best-buy-for-colleges type books, the CUNY schools are in there more and more. As tuition goes up at the private colleges, people are looking to get something more for their dollar.”

The latest statistics document what Halley said — that more and more high-achieving students are picking CUNY colleges.

Enrollment from eight selective public high schools increased by 117 percent for the academic years 1995 through 2004. Hunter College High School in Manhattan led the pack, with a 300 percent increase. Staten Island Technical High School came in second with 220 percent. Brooklyn Technical High increased by 113.7 percent, Stuyvesant High in Manhattan by 103.3 percent; and Bronx High School of Science by 90.5 percent. CUNY officials say that, when final enrollment figures for fall 2005 are tabulated next month, they expect the number to continue upwards.

Central to this development has been the Honors College, created by Chancellor Matthew Goldstein four years ago to lead the University as a whole toward recognition in the nationwide community of scholars.

A high point came earlier this year, when 2005 Intel Science Talent Search winner David Bauer, a graduate of Hunter College High School, announced he would attend the CUNY Honors College at College. David could have attended any recognized college in the country.

“Students like David and their families understand the value of a CUNY education,” Goldstein said. “They join Rhodes Scholars, Truman and Goldwater (scholarship) winners and other CUNY stars who see the University as their ladder to success.”

As for Matthew Halley, he is happy with his choice of the CUNY Honors College at Hunter “He has challenging classes, he has professors he really likes, he’s a lot of nice people and he’s on Hunter’s Senate,” his mother said in a phone interview from Townsend Harris High School.

CUNY Matters — Fall 2005 [3]
Women Prof Lead Groups

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, distinguished professor of sociology at the Graduate Center, spent her career studying gender inequality in the workplace. So she takes special note of the fact that four female professors at The Grad Center have broken through the glass ceiling, by being named to lead some of the nation’s most prestigious scholarly associations. Epstein, only the seventh female presi- dent of the American Sociological Association in its 100-year history, isn’t surprised at the announcements because “City University, which has had a tradi- tion of openness, was more open to hiring women and recognizing their accomplishments at a time when other institutions weren’t.”

Donna Stenton, distinguished profes- sor of French and president of the Modern Language Association, commented, “The Graduate Center attracts scholars who have seniority in their professions, and public institutions like CUNY historically are more open to promoting women.”

Although the accomplishments are a CUNY coup, Epstein says women still have a long way to go. “In academe, most professional associations reflect the fact that women were not promoted to faculty positions for many, many years,” she said. “There’s still a glass ceiling for women moving up the ladder.”

Stenton points out that during the 121-year history of the Modern Language Association, only 18 other women, including Mary Ann Caws, distinguished pro- fessor of comparative literature, English and French at the Graduate Center, have held the top position. In 2006, Frances Fox Piven, profes- sor of sociology and political science, will succeed Epstein as president of the American Sociological Association.

Setha M. Low, professor of environ- mental psychology, will become presi- dent of the American Anthropological Association in 2007. “Two other Graduate Center faculty members, males, have been elected to head prestigious professional organiza- tions,” Jean Battle, associate professor of sociology at the Graduate Center and Hunter College, is a president-elect of the Association of Black Sociologists, and Phillip Kasnitz, executive officer of the doctoral programs in sociology at the Graduate Center and a member of the Hunter faculty, is president-elect of the Eastern Sociological Society, the largest regional association of sociologists.

Career Award for Kornblum

William Kornblum, professor of soci- ology at the Grad Center, has won the Distinguished Career Award of the American Sociological Association.

As a scholar Kornblum has focused on a wide variety of pressing issues, including public housing, disadvantaged youth, neighborhood redevelopment, and human interaction with the natural environment, as well as on the is-

Books Say NYC is Wounded but Resilient After 9/11

The book has great relevance to CUNY because it tells of the painful calculations and lasting scars in neighbor- hoods where students live — and in industries where many students, and their relatives, work,” Pinner said, comment- ing on Wounded City.

In addition to adding to our knowledge about the city’s recovery from 9/11, the books are collec- tive reminders of the tremendous scholarly resources within the University, and how these resources can be used to the benefit of New York City.

“The books,” Mollendorf says, “we’re as a key resource for scholars everywhere and future students of this period. They reflect the deep involvement that CUNY scholars have had in all facets of the city’s life.”

CUNY, Too, was Wounded on 9/11

A death mined around them on Sept. 11, 2001, Ron Spalter and others — including a number of police officers — sought refuge in Fitzerman Hall, the building at Borough of Manhattan Community College. Spalter, Deputy Chief Operating Officer of the University, recalled, “[T]here were people jumping out of windows I got d美誉ed by the gust cloud, and I ran like I never ran in my life and grabbed my way to the hall’s ceiling, where Felson was clear.”

Later in the day, Spalter moved about in the unfolding confusion and then watched in horror as Fitzerman Hall was damaged beyond repair, as World Trade Center collapsed on it. Now, four years after the attacks, Fitzerman Hall is slated for demolition. A new building will be con- structed on the site, according to plans. And, as for Spalter, a self-described action punkie who raced to the scene of the 1993 WTC bombing, 9/11 made a lasting impres- sion on him. He, like others, has been recovering from the trauma.

Neither he, nor his city, is the same. “I’m not nearly as bold as I used to be,” he said: “I tend not to rush to the center. But if something happened, I’d run down to see how I could help.”

PASSINGS

Two faculty members and an administra- tor passed away in the past couple of months. More recently, a Hunter graduate who worked in the Office of University Relations died in a tragic accident.

Luis Jorge DeGraff, professor at the City University of New York School of Law, died suddenly on August 8. He was 56 years old and had spent the day teach- ing at Third World Orientation, an aca- demic skills program he founded for students of color.

DeGraff joined the faculty in 1984 and was known through the Latinos com- munity for his work with the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, where in the early 1980s he had been educa- tion director.

Michael Ribando, University Dean and former chief technology officer, died on Aug. 7 at the age of 56. He was remembered as an innovative, intelligent and good-humored administrator who, among other things, worked to bring accessible technology to disabled students, faculty and staff.

Philly V. Cunningham, a widely recog- nized authority on the Italian-American experience and history of modern Italy, died on May 28 at age 62. A Distinguished Professor of Italian American Studies at Queens College and at The Graduate Center, he was director of Italian American Studies at Queens and editor-in-
Selling and Making Money To Expand Services

Under a major new Productivity Initiative, more than $24 million has been reinvested into academic and student support services throughout the University during 2003 and 2004.

Much of that amount came from such standard measures as the streamlining of purchases, but some black ink was added to the ledgers from ideas that were as interesting as, say, a good show.

CUNY-TV, for one, generated $1.8 mil lion by soliciting sponsorships for its pro gramming. And Lehman and John Jay Colleges have had close-ups of their campuses on a variety of TV shows and movies, including "The Pink Panther," "The Manchurian Candidate," and "Law & Order." Renting out campuses as film locations has garnered more than $22 million since 2003.

Some initiatives have been downbeat stimulating. The College of Staten Island brought in $5,000 from its Cyber Café that features Starbucks coffee among its items. "We are well on our way to re-engineering CUNY’s administrative services so that we can plow back money to where it is most needed—to help our students get the best education we can provide at an affordable price," says Allan Dobrin, senior vice chancellor and chief operating officer of the University.

“Our priorities also are on hiring new faculty and support staff. The Productivity Initiative was developed by Dobrin with two basic goals: achieving the same or greater work productivity, and generating new revenues."

Trying to Attract Women To Cell Research

Zahra Zakari, a Queens College professor of biology and professor and cell leader in death research, wants to see more women doing her kind of work.

"To that end, she has established a network for women and is setting up a chapter of Women in Science at Queens College. "I want to get women to be recognized for their work in this field," she says, adding that she is seeking funding for her new cell death research. "At a recent meeting on the subject in Europe, there were more than 30 speakers and only two were women." 

Zakari spends countless hours in her research and collecting data. But if much of her work is micro in its detail, her ambitions are macro—nothing less than helping to stop killer diseases in their tracks. She said understanding how and why cells die is key to halting the progress of cancer, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and AIDS.

"If we understand the underlying mechanisms of how cells die, then we can manipulate the system at will, perhaps to kill cancer cells with a chemical intervention when they do not want to die or to prevent brain cells from dying in the case of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's," said Zakari, who is president of the Queens College-based International Cell Death Society.

"We still have a lot to find out. There are different types of cell death; they're dying by different ways, it's not just one path." 

At York College, Youngsters Learn: Yes, They Can Become Rocket Scientists

Since 1999, York College’s Science Engineering Mathematics Aerospace Academy has launched more than 6,000 youngsters from southeastern Queens on exciting journeys into the study of science.

The SEEMAA academy is one of 23 in the country designed to get under-represented students interested enough in engineering, math, technology and other sciences, so they might consider careers in those fields.

There is also a program at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn. "We've had kids win science fairs, and we've had kids go into science schools," says Jack Schlein, the York academy program director and York biology professor. "One day this summer at York College found the young ione at their tasks. A chart of '5, 4, 3, 2, 1...' was heard. Then there was a tug on a rope. A homemade rocket, propelled by carbon monoxide, hurtled into the sky above the college. "It's a blast!" yelled 10-year-old Stephen Tyson of P.S. 101, as the plastic and paper creation, spitting and hissing water, came crashing back to earth.

"Here, I have fun doing science and math," Stephen said.

Stephen’s enthusiasm was shared by Robert Federici, who sat at the controls of a Brecoraft Kind Air B200, skillfully maneuvering the plane to a perfect three-point landing, via a sensor-equipped flight simulator.

Nearby, Nadia Bahadar, a 10-year-old student at P.S. 161, of the rockets, "It is amazing that these can be made with products that are found around the house. This has made me realize how things work."

SEEMAA is funded primarily by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and by grants from local businesses, including Citigroup, Computer Associates and Goldman Sachs.

York’s academy, which holds three free weekend summer sessions and eight Saturday sessions in the spring and fall, takes a hands-on approach. Fourth-graders made colorful paper kites, paper airplanes and parachutes, learning the four forces of flight. Fifth-graders crawled through the inflatable Starlab planetarium.

Robert said he sees science in his future. "I want to major in science, probably forensic science," he said as he stepped out of the cockpit of the simulator.

Composer John Corigliano Raises Scholarship Money for Lehman Students

He’s won a Pulitzer Prize, an Oscar and five Grammys, and now John Corigliano is raising money to assure generations after him also have the chance to reach musical heights.

Corigliano, one of the best known classical composers of this era and a Distinguished Professor at Lehman College, is spearheading a drive to raise money for scholarships in his name. At a pre-summer event at Lincoln Center, Corigliano joined a rosyfaced of admirers to launch the Corigliano Music Scholarships. He spoke of his affection for the Bronx institution where he teaches.

“I’ve watched Lehman grow from a wonderful school that nobody knew about to a school that now everyone is talking about,” he said.

He added, “One feels a sense of real growth, and if you haven’t been to Lehman, I suggest you go to the Bronx and see something that is really extraordinary.”

Corigliano wrote the opera to “The Ghosts of Versailles” and won an Oscar for the score to “The Red Violin.”

An official at Lehman said the college is already close to its fundraising goal for the Corigliano Music Scholarships. The awards will go to music students at Lehman.

Quoted a year ago in The New York Times about his teaching duties, Corigliano said, “I think my teaching has kept music clearer.” He added, “I like teaching. I really like it. It is as simple as that.”

Vice Chancellor Hill Retires After 35 Years of Service

Capping a 35-year career with the University — the last five as Vice Chancellor for Student Development and Enrollment Management — Dr. Otis Hill announced his retirement, effective August 19.

Many thousands of students owe a debt of gratitude to Hill for his commitment to improving the quality of student life.

At a sweetly sad farewell gathering, held at the Central Office, administrators and staff spoke of how much Hill meant to them.

“I just want to say how deeply I grew as a chancellor by having an association with you,” Chancellor Matthew Goldstein said in announcing Hill’s retirement.

Goldstein said he hoped and expected Hill would become active again with the University, in some yet undetermined capacity.

For his part, Hill expressed great fondness for the University that had been his life for so long, and wished it great success in the coming years.

Harry L. Franky, former University Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, said, “Otis has been a tremendous advocate for the student.”

We will miss you, Otis,” he added.

Hill also called a strong advocate of the University’s athletic program. “We have grown by leaps and bounds because of Otis’s work, because he sees the benefits that come with a [strong] athletic program,” said Zak Koviciel, director of the University’s athletic conference, said.

Prior to his appointment as Vice Chancellor, Dr. Hill held teaching and administrative positions at Kingsborough Community College, including Vice President for Student Development, Chairperson of the Department of Student Development, and Dean of Students.

He is widely acknowledged for his student retention research and initiatives to improve student retention.

CUNY Matters — Fall 2005
At 40 Years of Age, SEEK Boasts Thousands of Members

By Curtis Stephen

B orn and raised in the South Bronx, Latonia Wilkins grew up as her mother struggled to support the household by working two jobs. When she graduated high school, Wilkins had no aspirations for college.

“I was supposed to be a clerical worker,” she recalls.

But after a futile job search, Wilkins took the advice of her brother’s girlfriend and decided to apply to City College through a program called SEEK. It was a decision, she says, that not only saved her life, but took her to heights she once did not believe possible.

Wilkins is today a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, one of thousands of men and women who once thought college was beyond their dreams but who went on to attain degrees through the SEEK program.

“I think it’s remarkable that SEEK has helped us to even be worth it at all, since many of us came from nothing,” SEEK taught me a simple, but true lesson that has served me well throughout my entire life — that through hard work, I could achieve rewards,”

This academic year, SEEK will be celebrating its 40th year of assisting New Yorkers whose academic and social backgrounds had once — in the view of many — labeled them unfit for success in higher education or in professions like law and medicine.

Indeed, CUNY Matters reached out and found an impressive number of graduates whose careers we have dashed them and their families years ago, if they could have looked into a crystal ball. Their ranks include physicians, attorneys, politicians, social activists and college administrators.

SEEK Has Survived

SEEK’s continuing survival is a source of pride to thousands of former and current students and administrators. Among the president is Julia C. Edelstein, now 93 years old. He is considered one of the founders of the program.

Edelstein — a former CUNY vice chairman as well as a former adviser to Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Sen. Herbert Lehman and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt — said in a brief phone interview from his Manhattan home that there is still a strong need for SEEK. He believes the program was built on a strong foundation and that it will survive indefinitely.

“It was designed to last,” he says.

As Edelstein himself pointed out, SEEK is these days reflecting the demographic and other changes that have reshaped New York City and institutions in it over the past generation.

Once primarily an educational opportunity program catering to the city’s disadvantaged black and Puerto Rican youth, it has grown increasingly diverse in recent years.

“We’re seeing an explosion in the number of Latino, Asian and Eastern European students in the program, and we’re certainly pleased with that,” says Dr. Cheryl Williams, acting assistant dean for special programs.

There are currently 9,477 students enrolled in SEEK, which is only available at CUNY’s senior colleges, and 2,549 in College Discovery (the SEEK counterpart at the community colleges).

The latest available statistics show the following ethnic breakdown for SEEK students: 40.0 percent Hispanic, 28.6 percent Black, 18.4 percent Asian, and 12.8 percent White.

No such breakdowns were recorded before 1993. In the early years of the program, it was known that the vast majority of its students were black and Puerto Rican.

SEEK, an acronym for Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge, was born in the civil rights era, when New York and other cities and states were trying to correct serious racial imbalances in public schools and in higher education.

In May 1964, the Board of Higher Education and the state Board of Regents earmarked $500,000 for an experimental program at CUNY to attract high school students whose low grade point averages at schools in impoverished neighborhoods would have barred their admission to college.

The movement to place poor students into colleges with high standards was being advanced by activists and community groups through protests. Edelstein was among the strong proponents within CUNY, working closely with then Chancellor Albert H. Bowker.

The ambitious plan quickly won strong support among black and Latino members of the NY State Assembly, including Percy Sutton of Harlem and Shirley Chisholm of Brooklyn, who battled with the legislature to ensure the creation of SEEK in 1966.

Open to any poor student younger than 30 who had never attended college, SEEK offered counseling, tutoring and remedial coursework in addition to supplying free books, a weekly stipend (then as much as $50), and a range of other services.

Aiming for Diversity

In the early 1970s, Debrah Fraser-Howeze was a teenage parent with two daughters. She entered Hunter College through its SEEK program. The experience was difficult but character building, she says.

“Hunter wasn’t very diverse at that point and there was a perception that the SEEK student was less than adequate,” Fraser-Howeze says. At Hunter, Fraser-Howeze became a spokesperson for the SEEK students, joining forces with another Hunter SEEK student, Charles Barron.

The two activists started a SEEK magazine and held conferences to which they invited city leaders to talk about social issues of the day.

“We had to demand our fair share of the funding and resources Fraser-Howeze says.

After graduating from Hunter with a bachelor’s degree in 1978, Fraser-Howeze went on to become a fighter in the AIDS advocacy movement, drawing attention to the disease that has been decimating African-American communities across the nation.

In June of 1995, President Bill Clinton appointed her to serve on his Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Prior to that, she advised Mayor David Dinkins on HIV policy and was Vice Chair of the HIV Human Services Planning Council.

Of course, Charles Barron, the SEEK student who worked along with Fraser-Howeze during their Hunter years, went on to become one of the best known elected officials in New York City.

Today he is chair of the Higher Education Committee of the City Council.

Barron says he developed his political skills while at Hunter, as president of the SEEK Students Association.

He believes SEEK is as needed in the early 21st century, as it was a generation ago.

“SEEK is an invaluable opportunity that gives blacks and Latinos and working class families in general an opportunity to have a college education and pursue excellence,” he says.

In those early years when Barron and Fraser-Howeze were part of it, SEEK was swathed in controversy, largely having to do with the racial tensions of the time.

Dr. James Malone, who served as a SEEK director at City College in 1970, remembered ever-present racial tension around the University. Malone said tensions were especially high in those years at John Jay College.

“You had cops taking cases, in some cases

What SEEK Means to Them: A Doctor, an Executive, a Harvard Law Grad

Dr. Linda Galloway graduated City College in 1975 and then received her M.D. from Boston University School of Medicine. She is an obstetrician/gynecologist at the Osceola County Health Department in Kissimmee, Florida. Originally from Brooklyn, she says SEEK rescued her from poverty, and won: Her mother had schizophrenia and her father wasn’t around. “There will always be a need for SEEK,” she says.

John Sepuldveda is a 1977 Hunter College graduate. Today he is chief executive officer of the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals While at Hunter, he was co-president of the SEEK student organization and was valedictorian at graduation. “I don’t need to be convinced of the program’s relevance. It works,” he says.

Carlos Ortiz graduated Lehman College with a degree in accounting in 1979, then earned his law degree from Brooklyn Law School. He is now General Counsel for Goya Food, the largest such Latino company in the United States. “If it weren’t for SEEK, many of us would not have been able to lead good, productive lives,” he says.

Deborah Peterson Small graduated City College in 1983 and then earned her law degree from Harvard Law School. She is founder and executive director of Break the Chains, a group calling for prison reforms.

“With the Class of 2000, City College, I was 25 and a single parent … on welfare,” she says, adding that SEEK was her ticket to a more meaningful life.

Lovely Warren graduated John Jay with a bachelor’s in government in 2000 and...
Alumni, Including Many Who Reached the Top

Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge
SEEK offers instructional, financial and counselling services. It is for students who, because of personal, academic, emotional or financial hardship, would otherwise not attend college.

To qualify, students must: Be a legal resident of New York State; Be a citizen or permanent resident; Have a gross family income below the state guideline of $20,950 for a family of four; and be a first-time freshman or be previously enrolled in SEEK or a similar program.

a Political Adviser, a Banker, a College Official, an Immigrant with Dreams

Dr. Paul Thompson says his counsellor lifted him up in many ways.

Latonya Sasser graduated from Huntsville High School in 2019 and is now attending the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

William Anthony Rogers graduated with a degree in philosophy from City College 30 years ago. He then earned a master's in urban affairs from Hunter College. Rogers is now director of Urban and Governmental Affairs at City College. He's also a co-founder of the popular annual event known as Harlem Week. Of his youth he says, "I didn't have college in mind, I wanted to be a numbers-runner." After serving in the U.S. military, he became a father and decided he needed an education. SEEK allowed me to find an education. I didn't think I would be able to do that. SEEK was a gift.

Sergio Reyes, SEEK student at CUNY, wants to write a book about the program.

Making Do With Less
Some administrators have said that the SEEK stipends of late have not kept pace with increased cost of living.

To cover the difference, many of our students work nights," said Dr. Mandella Brownlow, City College's SEEK director. "It's a major challenge. SEEK officials have had to think outside the box to maintain the program's relevance, going beyond the basics of writing, literature and science. Often their focus is to try to keep their students afloat, psychologically and financially, as well as academically.

Last April, there was a joint SEEK and College Discovery student leadership retreat in Glen Cove, Long Island. Among the topics addressed at the two-day conference were: job interviewing techniques and networking; Interpersonal skills and coping in a high-stress society were also part of the agenda.

"A lot of our students are already struggling with serious psychological, social and economic issues, but we're also trying to teach them the critical skills they'll need after they graduate college," says Schoenfield, director of SEEK at John Jay. "With the proper instruction, our students often prove that they're survivors."

From C's to A's
Sergio Reyes knows something about surviving — and striving to succeed.

Born in the Dominican Republic, Reyes, 45, entered the City College SEEK program as a psychology major in 2003.

"I was divorced and the kids were young, and I just decided that I had to do this for me," yet Reyes faced a significant hurdle. "When I got to college, I didn't know how to write."

On his first paper, he received a C+. But after his counselor intervened, Reyes adopted better study habits and honed his skills, displaying rapid progress. "By the time I started my next year, I was getting As and papers," he says.

Reyes would like someday to write a book someday about his experiences in SEEK, titled Making It.

From GED to Ph.D.
"I want people to see my growth," Reyes says with a laugh. "I'm living proof of all the wonderful things SEEK can do."

CUNY MATTERS — Full 2005
"If she's not an inspiration, then you can't be inspired." — Dr. Todd R. Clear, Executive Director of the Doctoral Program at John Jay College

Blinded in a Gun Attack, Victim Now Pursues Doctorate in Criminal Justice

Stories of inspiration like this don’t come very often. Sunshine Lawson was blinded in a criminal assault in the Bronx a decade ago, and lived for a time as a homeless shelter with her three children. But the single mother has become an inspiration for aspiring scholars from here to California, as she begins doctoral studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

“If she’s not an inspiration, then you can’t be inspired,” said Dr. Todd R. Clear, executive director of the doctoral program at John Jay. She is an unimaginable success story. She graduated [from college in California] at the top of her class, completing with students who have full time and full support. And she raised children while doing it.”

After the assault in the Bronx, Lawson moved to California and enrolled at Cal State Fullerton, where she graduated summa cum laude in 2003. Lawson said that her goal is to earn her doctorate and work with crime victims, as she also attempts to call attention to issues like racial injustice.

“I want to work in human rights and civil rights and anything having to do with people who are victims,” she said.

In a recent telephone chat, Lawson spoke with giddy joy about the courses she is taking: a survey of policy and practices in the criminal justice system, research methods in criminal justice, statistics, and a survey of the philosophical issues in the criminal justice system. Her most recent job has been working to “read” difficult chapters from her statistics text book. At the Grad Center, technical scans chapters of books into a computer and then she uses a special program that “reads” the material to her.

At Cal State, Lawson, a native of Puerto Rico, had a double major in criminal justice and ethnic studies. She had a 4.0 GPA and was a student commencement speaker. Cal State criminal justice professor James Lasley said of Lawson that she was “the best student I’ve had in 15 years of teaching.”

Two of Mr. Lawson’s children have accompanied her to New York, her daughter, Statisty, 18, who graduated high school in June, and her son, Maurice, 16, who is a high school junior. Her oldest son, Messiah Inzyari, 20, is serving in Kuwait with an Army reserve unit.

At Cal State, Lawson received a scholarship through the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program, named for the astronaut who perished in the 1986 Challenger Shuttle disaster. While Lawson’s scholarship at John Jay is not through the McNair program, she is expected to spend time in the college’s McNair office.

Ernest Lee, assistant director of the McNair program at John Jay, said he was very much looking forward to having Lawson on campus, in large part because she will be a morale boost to students. “Beyond her intellectual gifts, it’s her personality and her outlook on life,” Lee said. “It’s the mentoring and motivational impact she will have on others.”

In addition to a John Jay scholarship, Lawson is receiving financial aid from the Jewish Foundation for the Education of Women. Describing the assault of a decade ago, the aspiring criminal justice export said she was shot “at point blank range” in the temple. “It was someone I was going to sublease my apartment to, and they decided to rob me instead,” she said, referring to the couple, a male and a female, who attacked her. It was the male who shot her, Lawson said, with what appeared to be a fluffy toy that otherwise not damaging her brain. “My youngest son — he was a toddler at the time — he was pulling on my assailant’s pants’ leg and yelling at him to let me go, the guy was just at my temple,” she recalled.

The attackers were never apprehended.

Lawson, like her children, was severely traumatized by the shooting but she gradually recovered her emotional stability. She went on to learn how to use the special computer software that converts text into audio, allowing her not only to “read” textbooks but also to have email exchanges with faculty and friends.

“I can do the same thing that a seeing person can do,” she said with pride, but then acknowledged that it generally takes her much longer than a seeing person to absorb a given text. “It’s very laborious and tedious,” she said. “I’m learning different ways to do things, more efficiently now, but there’s too much to read, so much to do,” she added.

At Cal State, Lawson sometimes had her children read books to her. To write papers, she would use the voice-recognition software, speaking as the computer converts the spoken word into text. After moving from Puerto Rico to New York City at age 10, Lawson got married at age 16. She later divorced and raised her children by herself. Several years after the attack, she moved to Fullerton and attended college using funds from the New York State Crime Victims Board, which compensates crime victims.

“I’m going to try to say I don’t miss my sight,” Lawson said, “but I’m not going to have a pity party about it.”

Lawson and her family are happy to be back in New York City. She’ll get around town with the help of friends and her seeing-eye dog “My nickname for her is Pound Punny, because I get her from a pound,” Lawson said.

Lawson did not want to disclose her birth name. She changed her name legally after the assault, saying she was inspired to do so, in part, by her experience at the Bronx homeless shelter where she and her children lived. She explained that while she was at the shelter, a worker there, who was also blind, befriended her. “The worker taught her how to use a cane and began calling her Sunshine. She embraced the new name.”

Some think it’s amazingly appropriate. “The name suits it all,” said John Jay’s McNair program official, Lee, commenting on the college’s new student.
Picking Up the Pieces of a Broken FBI

By Gary Schmidgall

Early last June, the New York Times ran a political cartoon apropos the revelation that Deep Throat of Watergate fame in the early 1970s was the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s second in command. Astonished kid at his parent’s at the breakfast table: “You mean the FBI used to know stuff?”

That angle point is vigorously seconded in the most recent book by Richard Gid Powers, one of the nation’s leading scholars of the FBI and a historian at the College of Staten Island and the Graduate Center. The title of the book, which is filled with gender-eyed skepticism, says it all: Broken: The Troubled Past and Uncertain Future of the FBI (Free Press).

If there is hard-hitting worthy of a G-man and not a pulled punch in sight, it is because Powers obviously feels great respect for the FBI as an institution in principle; it’s the reality of a long history of fascism, petty corruption, incompetence, and politicization that makes him so upset.

Powers became familiar with the more ancient FBI troubles in the course of writing three books: Secret and Power, The Life of J. Edgar Hoover, G-Man; Hoover’s FBI in American Popular Culture; and a study of anti-communism in America. But the real impetus for Broken is the author’s conviction (and most everyone else’s) that the reputation of the FBI “lay in smoke and rubble” after 9/11. Appropriately, the book’s dedication is “To the Victims of 9/11.”

Powers’ plan was to “go right back to the beginning” of the FBI’s history and keep a close eye out for institutional dysfunctions. What he has in fact produced, in about 450 pages of text, is a compact and fascinating history of the FBI. The story begins, according to Powers, in 1902 with some dubious strawberry fields located in Townsend 11-7 on the high slopes of Oregon’s Mount Jefferson. An elaborate scheme to defend the federal government as it purchased land for the Cascade National Forest Reserve was uncovered. A successful investigation and countless convictions, which rocked the Oregon Republican Party, demonstrated the need for a permanent investigative office.

In due course, in 1908, amid trawling between Theodore Roosevelt and his political enemies, a “Special Agent Force” within the Justice Department was established. The next year President Taft’s Attorney General formally designated a “Bureau of Investigation of the Justice Department.”


Ruckelshaus, he writes, “suspected that Felt was leaking information to the press that would reflect well on his own candidacy for the directorship.”

“Approaching more closely the present-day FBI, Powers praises Louis F. Freeh for introducing strong doses of credibility into the FBI training curriculum and for strengthening ties with foreign police and security agencies. But he calls the Freeh FBI of 1993-2001 “a strange place,” with a radical disconnect between impressive appearances and disastrous performances.” This period, he adds, produced “a numberingly depressing series of mistakes and scans-dah, some of which were exacerbated by Freeh’s penchant for micromanaging. For example,” Freeh personally turned the FBI’s investigation of the July 27, 1996, bombing in Atlanta during the Olympics into another mess for the Bureau.”

In an afterward that focuses on the current Robert Mueller directorship, Powers sees some reassuring signs. For one, “the FBI today is a lot less brawn and a lot more bruiser. Its new face is “the analyst, the translator, the computer expert, the special agent retained as intelligence specialist. The G in ‘G-man’ now stands for ‘go.”’

But, fittingly, given the title of his other work (“Word or Menace?”), Powers chooses to conclude on an uncertain note of quandary about the nation’s confidence in its domestic surveillance agency and even its very commitment to being surveilled.

Powers aces cause for concerns in what he judges the “disproportionate and indiscriminate) crime against the Patriot Act,” as well as the possibility of failure to achieve the ideal of domestic surveillance that is presently unpoliticized.

And so Powers ends his book with two questions: “What should we choose—the FBI we know, or something else, some new agency whose chief virtue is that we know nothing about it?” The FBI has changed enough to deserve a second chance. But have we?”

For decades, the FBI had been telling Americans that the agency was well-equipped to protect the United States from all internal threats, an attitude reflected in the cover of this magazine from the 1930s.

The Comic World of Updike

Professor Brian Keenan of Trinity College, Dublin, believes critics have failed to recognize the extent of comedy in John Updike’s work.

Keenan has penned a 148-page book titled John Updike’s Human Comedy: Comic Modernity in The Centaur and The Rabbit Novels. The chair of the English Department at Trinity College, Dublin says the work of the Nobel laureate is not just about the “Centaur” and the Rabbit series — it’s about the moral of an essentially “comic” hero.

According to Keenan, George Caldwell of The Centaur is Updike’s paragon, while William Angstrom — of Rabbit, Run and the other Rabbit books — embodies the comic hero who, through trial and error, finally matures.

“You manage to combine a close reading of my text with a lot of humour theory, and it all worked very well for me,” Updike himself wrote in a July, 2003 letter to Keenan.

A Great Gatsby Controversy

In September, The Tragic Black Duck: Racial Masquerading in the American Literary Imagination, Medgar Evers College English Professor Cady V. Thompson puts forth the argument that the once common practice of blacks “passing” or “crossing the color line” is very much present in literature, though sometimes hidden.

According to Thompson, literature is fraught with references to characters passing as white when in fact their roots are in the black community. Thompson caught the attention — and ire of F. Scott Fitzgerald scholar with his contention that Jay Gatsby (of Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby) was a “passing” black man. Matthew J. Bruccoli, a Fitzgerald scholar at the University of South Carolina, has been quoted as commenting about Thompson’s thesis, “That Gatsby is black is utterly implausible.”

Thompson has held fast to his argu-
Medgar Evers College Has Been a Gathering Place

By Marcia Moxam Conrie

There was a time, not long ago, when the terms “black authors” and “major publishing houses” would have been oxymoronic. But because of a few breakout writers, and one CUNY campus, that is all changing.

Thanks in no small measure to the National Black Writers Conferences that have been hosted by Medgar Evers College. African American writers are getting published in unprecedented numbers by major publishing houses.

The Black Writers Conference, launched in 1986 by Medgar Evers English Professor Elizabeth Nunez, has been giving much credit for the currently strong interest in black literature and the large roles also have been a couple of noteworthy developments, including the Pulitzer prizes won by poet Derek Walcott and novelist Toni Morrison respectively in the early 1990s.

Also, of course, the enormous popularity of Terry McMillan’s novels — Writing to Exhale and How Stella Got Her Groove Back — helped change the nature of the black book market in a positive way.

According to Walter Mosley, author of several best-selling novels, including the "Easy Rawlins" series — which includes Devil In A Blue Dress — the conference and the college have been part of this literary revival. Indeed the two have become virtual household names among the black literati.

Mosley attended that very first gathering in 1986, and believes he and the Writers Conferences have grown together along parallel, upward trajectories.

"The Medgar Evers Writers Conference was a wonderful idea," says Mosley. "When I was there in [’86] there were no black writers being published in America. There were lots of black writers writing books, poetry, essays...but they weren’t getting published."

The situation is today so different that scholars have referred to the last decade as a kind of second black renaissance, harking back to the romantic era of the so-called Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and ’30s, when thinkers and writers like Alain Locke and Langston Hughes were famous.

Professor Brenda Greene, who through the college’s Center for Black Literature hosts an annual writers retreat at SUNY Plattsburgh, is the current organizer of the Writers Conferences, having succeeded Nunez.

"The National Black Writers Conference was convened to bring black writers, scholars, publishers, booksellers, editors, agents and the general public together to discuss the issues that impact on black literature," Greene said.

According to Greene, the last conference was held last year and the next is scheduled for March 30 through April 2, 2000. However, if organizers had the budget for it, they would be even more frequent.

"Although we would love to hold a conference bi-annually, we have had difficulty doing so because of the funding," she said. Conference themes, according to Greene, have ranged from the impact of black literature on society, the politics of black literature, the new black literary renaissance as defined by [Harvard Professor Henry Louis] Gates, to the notion of "literature as access."

Among other giants who have made the trek over the years to the Crossing Heights campus have been Alice Walker, Octavia Butler and Gwendolyn Brooks (now deceased), who made monetary donations to the event and started a similar one in Chicago with her protegé, Haki R. Madhubuti.

Queens College Counts the Ways It Loves Walt Whitman,

By Stephen Stephanich

On a sunny, windy morning this summer near a patch of lilacs, members of the Queens community held a ceremony commemorating a happy connection to a giant of 19th century American literature.

The Central Queens Historical Society had recently revealed that Walt Whitman had once taught in a one-room schoolhouse on what is now the campus of Queens College.

"I am delighted to be dedicating the Walt Whitman Garden here, 166 years after he taught here in a one-room schoolhouse..." said Queens College President James L. Muykens.

"It is incredibly fitting that the schoolhouse where Whitman taught is now our Student Union."

According to Jeff Gottlieb, president of the Historical Society and a 1964 graduate of Queens, Whitman was the lone teacher at the school known as “The Jamaica Academy” between 1839 and 1840.

Noting that the ceremony was being held 150 years to the month after publication of Whitman’s signature book of poetry — Leaves of Grass — Muykens unveiled a plaque dedicating a new “Walt Whitman Garden."

Muykens noted the links between Whitman and Queens College go beyond the old, demolished one-room schoolhouse.

For instance, when Queens College opened in 1937, the very first English Department chair was Emory Holloway, who ten years earlier had won the Pulitzer Prize for his biography of Whitman — the very first Pulitzer awarded for a biography of an American literary figure.

"The book was titled Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative," Holloway, who died in 1977, would go on to produce two more notable works on his favorite subject, Free and Magnificent Heart and Portrait of a Poet.

The tie, figurative and literal, between Whitman and Queens College go on and on.

A building on the campus was named Whitman Hall early in the college’s history, and for a time, according to Muykens, there was an informal muse-
Poet of Queens, Poet of Brooklyn, Poet of Us All

A prime mover in organizing the first Black Writers Conference, according to Nunez, a Distinguished Professor, was her former colleague, the late John Oliver Killens, who was a Medgar Evers Writer in Residence. Killens had previously put together similar, smaller conferences at Fisk and at Howard University. Excited about the idea of one at Medgar, Nunez — then chair of the college’s Humanities Division — submitted a proposal for funding to the National Endowment for the Humanities, and she was successful. Hosted in the campus’ athletic facility, Nunez and the others expected perhaps 100 people to attend. But 1,000 showed up.

“It filled the need and made people sit up and take notice,” said Nunez. “The New York Times gave it the full front cover, and CNN sent over a van. It was the first sort of gathering where writers, critics and readers came together.”

According to Nunez, not even Maya Angelou, the keynote speaker at that first conference, was as successful then as she subsequently became. And while not taking credit for their success, Nunez also noted that Derek Walcott and Arnold Rampersad also addressed the conference before winning their Pulitzer prizes (in literature).

As the youngest of CUNY’s senior colleagues, Medgar Evers, which only this past year established an independent English Department, has focused on building a supportive environment for its students, most of whom are from central Brooklyn.

“The great thing about Medgar Evers College is [that] it’s very small and very intimate,” said April Mosley, who received an AA degree in English from the college and then graduated in June with a BA in English. “The professors and students know each other. They (MEC) shaped me.”

Mosley, a high school dropout who learned to read as a GED, added, “The Black Writers Conference is what drew me to Medgar. I went there as a spectator and ended up a student. I made all the difference in my life.”

Mosley said she hopes to publish some of her writings with the help of Professor Greene.

“Anondelle Austin is our student majoring in English,” echoes Mosley’s sentiment about the college.

“It’s an excellent atmosphere,” said Austin whose concentration is in Creative Writing and who has published articles in the New York Post. “It is small, hence students have more access to faculty. It’s perfect for writers.”

But if the college is indeed a small place, it has been large in what it represents to people of color as Brooklyn, and beyond. Asked how he saw MEC’s role in the world of Black literature, Mosley was emphatic.

“It’s an extraordinary institution,” said Mosley, Bill Clinton’s avowed favorite mystery writer. “It’s very important to have a place for our culture. Black culture has to be pushed to the fore.”

Mosley, who studied creative writing at City College, said, speaking of the early years of the Black Writers Conference, “It was a wonderful place to be, and the only place to be if you were a black writer. It helped give me hope and confidence.”

For information on the upcoming Writers Conference or the writers’ retreat through the Center for Black Literature, contact Professor Greene at 718-270-6976.

Conference Leads to TV Series

The National Black Writers Conference at Medgar Evers spawned not only a generation of great writers, but also an Emmy-nominated TV series. “Black Writers in America,” a CUNY-TV series, was conceived by Medgar Evers Professor Elizabeth Nunez, as yet another way to promote authors of color who often get ignored in the mainstream media.

“We are trying to encourage public appreciation and thus demand for quality books by Black writers,” Nunez said in an interview.

The eight-part TV series features two writers per half-hour, presenting such writers as Walter Mosley (who studied at City College), Terry McMillan, Sonia Sanchez (who studied at Hunter), Bebe Moore Campbell, Janot Diaz, Ismail Reed and Jeffrey Renard Allen.

Sanchez discusses the stories behind some of her poems, including “Keeping Company with the Layaway Man,” and she shares interesting nuggets from her personal life. She mentions, for instance, that after she taught a class at San Francisco State College — in which she mentioned black radicals like Marcus Garvey, Paul Robeson and WEB DuBois — the FBI paid her an unannounced visit at her apartment.

“They pointed at me and told my lord, ‘You should put her out,’” Sanchez says.

“Black Writers in America” was first shown on CUNY-TV in the spring of 2003. It will be shown on about 200 Public Television stations nationwide later this year. The series is dedicated to Osaze Davis, the beloved actor who died earlier this year.

from Whitman’s “Song of Myself”

Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself (I am large; I contain multitudes).

— Walt Whitman

Muykens went on to say the poet might well have been describing a certain college that would open a century later in Queens.

“Queens College is a large, contradicto-

ry, multitudinous community of great spirit and open mindedness. I think what Walt Whitman would have enjoyed,” the president said.

(Right) Walt Whitman. (Below) is recently unveiled plaque commemorat-

ing Whitman’s newly discovered link to Queens College, and the 150th anniver-

sary of publication of Leaves of Grass.

CUNY MATTERS — Fall | 11
# CUNY Month is a Promising Feast for the Mind and Spirit

Singing Mozart’s Requiem. Wade into the contemporary complexities of music life-shaping or urban food systems. Hear literary giants read their works.

These exciting events are but a taste of CUNY Month, the University’s annual November feast of programs academic, cultural and practical showcasing the 19 colleges and the breadth of their offerings. CUNY Month, which runs from Nov. 1 to 30 on all campuses, is the University’s most sweeping outreach program, delivering several hundred activities spotlighting its academic, faculty, recreational and cultural gems. From campus open houses to jazz concerts, business workshops and financial advice; this celebration of the nation’s leading public university system offers something for everyone—prospective and current CUNY students, their parents, New Yorkers of all ages and intellectual tastes.

Information about CUNY’s 1,200 degree programs, the acclaimed Honors College, scholarships, affordable tuition and weekend college will also be provided, along with career sessions and programs targeted to special audiences such as adult students.

“CUNY Month is the perfect way to discover the wealth of academic and cultural offerings at the University’s campuses,” said Chancellor Matthew Goldstein. “I invite the entire community to visit the colleges and enjoy the performances, exhibits, workshops, sporting events and campus tours that are part of this great New York City tradition.”

The month’s schedule of events can be searched at www.cuny.edu/cunymonth. Counselors at 1-800-CUNY-YES are available to answer questions about the colleges’ highly ranked undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

CUNY Month’s offerings sweep from the practical to the poetic. “Kingsborough for a Day” at Kingsborough Community College on Nov. 13 is one of many University-wide opportunities for prospective students to tour campuses and chat with faculty members. At the City College on Nov. 5, one can take in a stimulating lecture on “Architecture and the Politics of Design” by internationally noted architect Jacques T. Robertson. And on Nov. 7 at Brooklyn College, book lovers can enjoy an evening reading series called “Brooklyn on My Mind,” featuring acclaimed writers Susan Choi, Jonathan Safran Foer and Pete Hamill.

Literary lights will also glitter at the Queen College Evening Readings series. The series will mark its 30th anniversary season with Booker Prize-winning novelist Salman Rushdie on Nov. 1, and poets Glyn Maxwell and Nobel Prize-winner Derek Walcott on Nov. 22.


For policy wonks, former U.S. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt presents “An Evening With Bruce Babbitt: A New Vision for Land in America,” Nov. 29 at the Graduate Center. The center also offers “The Future of Music and Video: Part 1 and 2” on Nov. 9 and 16, and “Beyond Farmer’s Markets: Putting Food Systems on the Urban Map,” a series starting Nov. 9.

At John Jay College of Criminal Justice, there’s an undergraduate open house on Nov. 13, and a Nov. 20 author series featuring Professor Lydia Segal, author of Battling Corruption in America’s Schools.

Musically, CUNY Month is a savory melange, from “Momk in Motion: The Next Face of Jazz,” a concert series starting Nov. 8 at Borough of Manhattan Community College featuring cutting-edge jazz guitarists. On November 12 will be “In Remembrance of President John F. Kennedy: Mozzart’s Requiem,” at the Graduate Center, where the audience is invited to bring their scores and join the artists in singing the choirst. Mix in “A Klezmer Nutcracker” a Chanukah-themed children’s ballet blending Tchaikovsky with Jewish klezmer music. And ratchet up the heat at Lehman College’s “A Non-Stop Menorah Party” featuring Dominican stars.

Professors’ concerts, theater performances and explorations of the visual arts are also on tap. As for children, they and their parents should delight in “City That Drinks The Mountain Sky,” an epic story of New York City’s water supply, from Catkis watersheds to city faucets, told by the Arm of the Sea’s richly colorful Mask and Poppet Theater. Two morning shows are scheduled for Nov. 17, at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

## November

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1</td>
<td>Queens College Evening Readings: Salman Rushdie, Music Building, PM 3100</td>
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<td>Nov. 3</td>
<td>Lehman College Non-Stop Menorah Party, PM 2511</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 4</td>
<td>Lehigh College Community College: Open House (Evening)</td>
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<td>Nov. 5</td>
<td>Queens College Evening Readings: Glyn Maxwell, PM 2213</td>
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<td>Nov. 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 9</td>
<td>Brooklyn College: Open House for prospective students, PM 11:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 10</td>
<td>CUNY College of Staten Island: The Show Must Go On: The Queen’s Sophisticated Band, PM 6:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 13</td>
<td>Kingsborough Community College: A Non-Stop Menorah Party, PM 11:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 15</td>
<td>Queensborough Community College: A Klezmer Nutcracker, PM 8:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 17</td>
<td>Queensborough Community College: A Klezmer Nutcracker, PM 8:30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 19</td>
<td>Queensborough Community College: A Klezmer Nutcracker, PM 8:30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**FOR MORE LISTINGS:** [www.cuny.edu/cunymonth](http://www.cuny.edu/cunymonth)