To Retain Community College Students, CUNY Postpones Enrollment
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Khary Douglas (left) and Lesleyann Roman in a remedial English class at the CUNY Start program at Hostos Community College
(Beth Fertig / WNYC)
Remedial classes, while routine at U.S. community colleges, often undermine students' ability or desire to stay in school, defeating their purpose of guiding students towards a college degree. In response to this dilemma, the City University of New York community college system, has developed a program that is showing some promise.

First, the problem: nearly 80 percent of CUNY students needed at least one catch-up course because they failed a placement test in math or English. Those courses were expensive and often dull.

"They would be using their financial aid or paying out of pocket for those classes," said Donna Linderman, a CUNY dean. "They may fail a class and have to take it a second time. So this could become a very expensive endeavor for a student."

But what if incoming students could get those classes out of the way, before paying full tuition? That's the premise behind CUNY Start which Linderman oversees. For $75, students take only remedial classes, instead of spending 24-hundred dollars for a semester (or $4800 <http://www.cuny.edu/admissions/tuition-fees.html> per year) to take regular courses along with remedial ones.

The program started in 2009 with just a few hundred students who needed at least two remedial classes. Linderman said they did so well, it's now being offered at all nine CUNY campuses that grant associate degrees, and was on track to serve about 4,000 students.

As of 2014, 51 percent of the students who went through CUNY Start didn't need any more remedial classes after one semester. CUNY said that's a greater success rate than four-year college students who also needed to pass at least two remedial classes. And it is a percentage rate that captured the attention of community colleges around the country.

"These are students that if they were put right into college-level classes would most likely fail and not come back to college," said Karen Stout, a former Pennsylvania
community college president who now runs Achieving the Dream <http://achievingthedream.org/> , which works to help the community colleges raise their completion rates. "So this is very impressive work."

Jessica Mingus, a CUNY Start advisor at Hostos Community College, with Gimy Arzu, an alum who's now taking regular college courses. (Beth Fertig/WNYC)

What those involved in CUNY Start said set it apart from other support programs were the schedule and cost, condensing the remedial work into one $75 semester. Also, the faculty and staff. The program has about 200 of its own teachers, administrators and advisors who also developed a specialized curriculum.

Twenty year-old Gimy Arzu is now enrolled full-time at Hostos after completing CUNY Start. He said the extra support made all the difference.

"They had my back 24/7," he said. "No matter how stressed I am, no matter how tired I am, no matter how hungry I am. They just help me a whole lot. And that's why I'm able
to pass my writing and my math and I thank God for that."

Despite the program's strong track record, Stout said it would be difficult for other colleges to replicate.

"What they wouldn't be able to do is figure out a way to charge $75 and make it sustainable," she said.

She said New York State was unusual because it had a continuing education fund, separate from regular college aid, which enabled CUNY to recover most of the costs. The actual cost per student was about $2100, nowhere near $75.

Still, CUNY Start is undergoing a rigorous study by outside experts looking for ways to emulate its success.
The shape and polarization of a conventional laser beam from a laser pointer mimics quantum entanglement when the laser beam has a polarization dependent shape. This can be used to encode twice as many bits of information as when the laser beam is "separable."

**CREDIT:** Giovanni Millone

**Abstract:**

In a classic eureka moment, a team of physicists led by The City College of New York and including Herriot-Watt University and Corning Incorporated is showing how beams from ordinary laser pointers mimic quantum entanglement with the potential of doubling the data speed of laser communication.

**Physicists mimic quantum entanglement with laser pointer to double data speeds**

New York, NY | Posted on October 30th, 2015

Quantum entanglement is a phrase more likely to be heard on popular sci-fi television shows such as "Fringe" and "Doctor Who." Described by Albert Einstein as "spooky action at a distance," when two quantum things are entangled, if one is 'touched' the other will 'feel it,' even if separated by a great distance.

"At the heart of quantum entanglement is 'nonseparability' - two entangled things are described by an unfactorizable equation," said City College PhD student Giovanni Millone. "Interestingly, a conventional laser beam (a laser pointer)'s shape and polarization can also be nonseparable."

To make the laser beam's shape and polarization nonseparable, the researchers transformed it into what Millone refers to as a vector beam - a polarization dependent shape. Then using off-the-shelf components to 'touch' only its polarization, they showed it could be encoded as two bits of information. Surprisingly, this was twice as much information that could be encoded as when the laser beam was separable.

"In principal, this could be used to double the data speed of laser communication," said CCNY Distinguished Professor of Physics Robert Alfano. "While there's no 'spooky action at a distance,' it's amazing that quantum entanglement aspects can be mimicked by something that simple."

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An article on the experiment appears in the latest issue of the journal "Optics Letters" and was supported in part by the Army Research Office.
DEC revises projections for rise in sea level

by SCOTT WALDMAN  5:16 p.m. Oct 30, 2015

ALBANY — The state is revising its sea level projections.

By 2100, the state Department of Environmental Conservation predicts an increase in sea level of at least 15 inches in the New York City and Lower Hudson Valley area. The model shows the sea could rise by as much as about 6 feet, or 75 inches. Such a rise could have a devastating affect on certain parts of New York City, as well as parts of Long Island and communities along the Hudson River.

“The sea-level rise projections DEC is proposing reflect the best science available and are critical to Governor Cuomo’s vision of a more resilient New York in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, which devastated whole communities that are still rebuilding,” acting DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said in a statement. “Sea level projections will help state agencies, developers, planners and engineers to reduce risks posed by rising seas and coastal storms over the next several decades.”

The projections are required under the Community Risk and Resiliency Act, which requires the consideration of increases in sea-level in some permitting and funding programs. State agencies will use the seal-level projections in “project design, and routine permit and funding decision making,” according to the DEC. The projections are based on peer-reviewed research by scientists at Columbia University, Cornell University and Hunter College.

The resiliency act passed in the GOP-controlled Senate, where top officials question the reality of human-caused climate change. The Senate is willing to acknowledge the risks of “short- and long-term risks and challenges,” Senate environmental conservation Chair Tom O’Mara said.

O’Mara did not mention climate change in a press release announcing the new projections.
DIBLASIO DELIVERS CUNY FATHERHOOD ACADEMY A $1.1M CHECK AT LAGUARDIA CC

A press conference at LaGuardia Community College to mark the expansion of the CUNY Fatherhood Academy was attended by (from left to right): Valerie Westphal, CUNY University Director of Continuing Education and Workforce Programs; Alan S. Farrell, NYC Assistant Deputy Commissioner, Human Resources Administration; Dr. David Gómez, President of Hostos Community College; W. Cyrus Garrett, Executive Director, Mayor's Young Men's Initiative; Farley Herzek, President of Kingsborough Community College.
College; Jesus Benitez, CUNY Fatherhood Academy at LaGuardia alum; James Bell, CUNY Fatherhood Academy at LaGuardia alum; Richard Buery, NYC Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives; and Dr. Gail O. Mellow, President of LaGuardia Community College. Photo credit: LaGuardia Community College.

At a press conference today, LaGuardia Community College President Dr. Gail O. Mellow, joined by Hostos Community College President David Gomez, and Kingsborough Community College President Farley Herzek, thanked New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and the NYC Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) for $2.1 million in total funding for the CUNY Fatherhood Academy, a highly successful program that seeks to help young fathers continue with their schooling and learn essential parenting skills.

“Today we are announcing that we are doubling down once again,” said Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives Richard Buery. “We are investing an additional $1 million to expand the CUNY Fatherhood Academy to Kingsborough Community College and Hostos Community College through the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative. As the son of a loving father and the father of two sons myself, I know how much a father's love affects a child's self-esteem, independence, emotional responsiveness, and more. CUNY Fatherhood Academy is one of the most important investments we can make as a City. By investing in our fathers, we are investing in our future.”

“We are grateful to Mayor Bill de Blasio and Deputy Mayor Buery for supporting the CUNY Fatherhood Academy; the increased funding will enable this model program to serve more of New York's young fathers, leading to
tangible improvements in the lives of families across our city,” said President Mellow. “By providing parenting guidance, as well as mentorship and other support to complete high school and pursue a college degree that leads to a career, the Fatherhood Academy helps young fathers achieve economic stability for themselves and their families through education, employment, and personal development.

The funding includes $1.1 million from the Mayor’s budget to help sustain the program at LaGuardia, where the city’s first-ever Fatherhood Academy began in 2012. YMI has provided $1 million to expand the program to two additional CUNY community colleges, Hostos in the South Bronx and Kingsborough in Brooklyn. The three sites aim to work with more than 200 fathers over the next year.

The CUNY Fatherhood Academy serves fathers ages 18 to 24 living in New York City. The program promotes responsible parenting, college readiness, and work among unemployed and underemployed fathers. Participants are offered parenting and health workshops, high school equivalency test preparation, academic tutoring, job readiness workshops, work experience through part-time jobs or internships, and personal and career counseling, all free of charge to program participants.

Outcomes of the CUNY Fatherhood Academy at LaGuardia have demonstrated its benefits for participants. Out of the initial 136 graduates, 65 percent of those who took the high school equivalency exam received their diploma; as well, 80 fathers found employment, and 21 students have enrolled in college. Three of those students have graduated with an associate’s degree from LaGuardia Community College, and several others are currently
enrolled at LaGuardia.

Additionally, a 2014 qualitative evaluation by the Urban Institute found that the program helps participants change their lives for the better through high school equivalency attainment, while developing a community of support through peer interaction. The report found that situating the program on a college campus boosted the self-confidence of fathers, motivated them more to succeed, and enhanced resources available to the program. Click here to read the report.

Student Stories

Jesus Benitez (pictured, right) is one of the nearly 200 young fathers who have benefited from the CUNY Fatherhood Academy at LaGuardia. After becoming a father at 17 he dropped out of high school, and spent the next four years working full-time as a cashier to support himself and his son, Mason.

“I didn’t want to keep working for a $200 check,” said the Bronx resident who is raising his son on his own, “and I wanted more for my son.”

Jesus decided to finish high school and enrolled in the CUNY Fatherhood Academy at LaGuardia, through which he earned his high school equivalency diploma and enrolled in LaGuardia’s College Discovery program. Now 23, he will soon graduate from LaGuardia with
an associate's degree in philosophy, which he plans to ultimately pursue with a Doctor of Philosophy. His career goal is to teach and mentor children in underserved communities—using literature to spark discussions about bravery, morality, and other philosophical topics.

"Being in the Fatherhood Academy showed me that I have the drive to work towards a better life for me and my son," said Jesus. "I want to break patterns and expose my son to music, foreign languages, and other subjects that can broaden his horizons and give him tools to his future success."

Jesus's friend and fellow CUNY Fatherhood Academy graduate, James Bell (pictured, left), echoed his thoughts.

"When my daughter, Janila, was born when I was 21, I had been out of school for several years and I was scared to go back to school," said James, a Brooklyn native who, now at 24, is majoring in Human Services and Mental Health at LaGuardia and plans to pursue a career where he can help the less fortunate. "Thankfully, I learned about the Fatherhood Academy, applied and got accepted into it. The program gave me tutoring that helped me earn my high school equivalency degree and provided me with employment assistance. It also gave me the opportunity to collaborate with other fathers on school projects. We've even had playdates together for our children."
NYPD Undercover "Converted" To Islam To Spy On Brooklyn College Students

by Aviva Stahl in News on Oct 29, 2015 2:58 pm

Muslim women participate in the 2nd annual New Horizons gathering on June 5, 2011 in Brooklyn (Getty Images)

On the leafy Midwood campus of Brooklyn College, a lecture at the school’s Islamic Society had just ended when a woman stood up and asked to take the Shahada, the Muslim testimony of faith.

Nobody knew the woman with light skin and dark hair, who appeared to be in her twenties. In a voice that lifted up at the end of each sentence, she began professing her new beliefs. “Melike Ser” or “Mel,” was not a student and had no apparent connections to the school, but the students embraced her anyway, excited about her conversion.

This past April, four years after Mel’s public act of faith, two Queens residents, Noelle Velentzas and Asia Siddiqui, were arrested and charged with allegedly planning to build a bomb. The US Justice Department issued a release stating that the women were linked to members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State, and revealed that a Detective from the NYPD’s Intelligence Bureau was heavily involved in bringing the women to justice.

Among the ISO members, some of whom ran in the same social circles as Velentzas and Siddiqui, the arrests set off a chain of frantic text messages, phone calls, and Facebook posts: “Mel” wasn’t “Mel.” She was an undercover cop.

Three Brooklyn College graduates who had been close to the undercover officer told Gothamist of the intimate ties she developed with Muslim students, her presence during some of the most private moments of their lives, and the fear they endured when they learned her true identity.

“I felt violated,” said Jehan, 30, who met Mel years ago in the Brooklyn College ISO prayer room. (At
their request, Gothamist has used pseudonyms for all the women interviewed.)

“You trust someone, you talk to them. And they were just gathering information about your community.”

While little is known about the case against Velentzas and Siddiqui, including how and why the NYPD came to involve an undercover officer in the alleged plot, it appears that Mel made an aggressive effort to befriend and surveil law-abiding Muslims years before she ever met her alleged targets, and did so at least up until December of 2014, eight months after the de Blasio administration pledged to stop the NYPD’s blanket surveillance of innocent Muslims.

“Muslim New Yorkers are still fighting for basic human rights,” the Mayor said at a Ramadan dinner at Gracie Mansion in July of last year. “We recently shut down the Demographics Unit at NYPD, which conducted surveillance on Muslim New Yorkers. Because it’s unfair to single out people on the sole basis of their religion.”

Two individuals with close knowledge of Velentzas and Siddiqui’s case confirmed that Mel is the undercover officer identified in the criminal complaint.

Ramzi Kassem is a professor at CUNY School of Law and also directs the school’s Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility (CLEAR) project, which provides legal advice to New Yorkers affected by counterterrorism practices.

“For an undercover to be seeded in a community for that long without a specific target raises some deeply troubling questions about the direction of policing in our city,” he said. “Casting blanket suspicion on entire communities does not square with most New Yorkers’ understanding of the police’s role in our democratic and open society.”

Jehan has lived in New York City for 25 years. “I grew up here. To have this happen because of your religion, or your political views, it's scary. You feel alienated. And you don’t feel like this is your home.”
At first, Mel seemed warm and friendly, if a bit eager. "She was very nice, very charming," said Shereen, who studied psychology at Brooklyn College and now works as a psychotherapist. "She wanted to do everything with us."

Mel told the ISO women that she was a recent Rutgers College graduate who had grown up in Queens. She said that she was of Turkish descent and had been born into a Muslim but non-practicing family.

The women active in Brooklyn College's Islamic Society were diverse. They majored in women's studies, psychology, pre-med and political science, hung out with friends, crushed on boys, and nurtured their newfound political consciousness. They were coming of age in a city scarred by 9/11, and although their Muslim identity did not define them, it shaped their everyday lives.

But they knew their behavior was being scrutinized by the authorities. After 9/11, both the NYPD and the FBI revamped their approach to terrorism investigations and began operating under a policy of preventive prosecution [PDF]. In an internal document from 2007 [PDF], the NYPD identified particular indicators of radicalization—"wearing traditional Islamic clothing," giving up drinking or smoking, and "becoming involved in social activism." In the NYPD's model of measuring threats, which have since been broadly criticized, young people were a key target.

Shereen, then 25, and a close friend, Faizah, were responsible for introducing new converts like Mel to the basic tenets of Islam. One day in early April 2011, Mel asked Faizah to meet her on campus. "Faizah told me afterward that Mel asked her some strange questions, like, 'What is all this about jihad?'" Shereen recalled. "And asking about people who do suicide bombing."
For Shereen and Faizah, Mel’s questions were a red flag. They suspected she was digging for information on the political beliefs of ISO members, possibly even pressuring them to make incriminating statements.

At the time, Brooklyn College’s ISO was known for adhering to a particularly conservative interpretation of Islam. The group was segregated on the basis of gender, and the men and women did not spend time together socially. Mel was surrounding herself with women who covered their faces and wore long robes, but she did not even wear a hijab. Her religious practices did not seem to change, at least in the initial years the women knew her, and Mel never mentioned struggling with her new dual identity, a common experience for converts of any faith.

It was as though Mel’s decision to take the shahada, and the time she spent amongst much more observant Muslim women, had no effect on her or her religious practice. Soon some ISO members began to doubt that her conversion was genuine.

Mel was also always available to attend events and social gatherings, regardless of the time of day or the day of the week. “She would mention how she works full time,” said Rumaysa, 24, “and so then it got me thinking, is she working at these events?”

In August 2011, about half a year after Mel appeared at Brooklyn College, the AP began publishing a series of Pulitzer Prize-winning articles documenting the NYPD’s spying in Muslim communities.

One month later, NYPD Confidential reported that an undercover cop had been sent to spy on Muslim students at Brooklyn College, despite a 1992 memorandum of understanding [PDF] that barred New York City police from entering CUNY campuses without permission.

After the NYPD Confidential story broke, Brooklyn College President Karen Gould denied that the administration had known about the undercover officer [PDF], and condemned “the alleged intrusion of the NYPD into campus life.”

Muslim students continued to believe they were being watched. They decided to seek legal advice to discuss their concerns about Mel. In October, Shereen and another student approached Diala Shamas, who at the time was a lawyer at the CLEAR project at CUNY Law. The organization had recently facilitated a workshop for the Brooklyn College Muslim group about informants.

"Women at Brooklyn College shared their suspicions with us," Shamas recalled. "Unfortunately, this happens a lot. CLEAR receives concerns about potential informants or undercovers, and we can rarely help definitively confirm their suspicions. We do advise people to stay away from someone who makes them feel uncomfortable."

The students also tried to do their own digging. In February 2012, Rumaysa searched online to try to find out if Melike Ser was who she said she was.

“I tried Googling any combination [of her name] that could possibly bring up even a picture of her,” she said. “But nothing showed up, absolutely nothing.”

Without a way to corroborate their suspicions, the women decided to stay silent. “We just said, no, maybe that’s just how [Mel] is,” recalled Shereen. “Maybe we’re just too paranoid.”

It was also a question of faith. Backbiting without proof is strongly frowned upon in Islam, as is
shunning a convert.

Mel continued to immerse herself in the student community, attending Islamic education classes, social gatherings, and trips to museums and the aquarium.

Shereen says Mel attending at least two bridal showers for ISO women, one of which was held in a Brooklyn College event space: "Mel shows up with this huge cake that she carried on the train."

In time, she was privy to some of the most intimate moments of the women’s lives, once even attending a wedding as a bridesmaid of a fellow ISO member.

By 2014, the Brooklyn College women had graduated, but the former students still encountered Mel around the city — at NYU, John Jay College, the MAS Youth Center, the Muslim Community Center in Sunset Park, Masjid Al-Parooq on Atlantic Avenue, and the Brooklyn Islamic Center in Mapleton, where Mel was last seen on December 30 of last year. When the women saw Mel, they generally tried to avoid her.

Noelle Velentzas (left) and Asia Siddiqui flanked by their attorneys in Brooklyn federal court in April (Jane Rosenberg / AP)

Just a few months later, Velentzas and Siddiqui were arrested. The NYPD and FBI were broadly praised for their apparent success in foiling a homegrown terrorist plot. In an interview on FOX’s “The Kelly File,” New York Congressman Peter King called on Americans to “wake up and realize that we have to put political correctness aside ... there are ... too many people like this across the country.”
“These were two very, very dangerous individuals, these two women,” King said.

Four propane gas tanks, as well as instructions for how to turn them into explosive devices, are said to have been found in Siddiqui’s home, and according to the criminal complaint, the two women had in-depth conversations with the undercover officer about their violent aspirations.

The complaint details how the women read up on and took notes on various different ways to build bombs, and browsed Home Depot for potential ingredients. Velentzas allegedly openly praised the 9/11 attacks and had a photograph of Bin Laden as the background on her phone; Asia Siddiqui, meanwhile, was supposedly “close” with Samir Khan, the Pakistani-American editor of al-Qaeda’s English-language Inspire magazine.

“The way to read an indictment like the one in this case, is with a great deal of skepticism,” says attorney Gideon Orion Oliver.

Oliver was co-counsel for Ahmed Ferhani, who was also prosecuted for terrorism after an NYPD undercover sting. In December 2012, Ferhani pled guilty to five-terrorism related offenses and one hate crime charge, and is currently serving ten years in prison.

According to Oliver, in the Ferhani case and many others, the undercover officers develop “really profound and predatory” relationships with their targets, building emotionally intimate and even familial ties over the course of many months or years.

“The government and the undercover officers have significant roles in manufacturing what they then characterize as the defendants’ plots,” he said.

The case of the Newburgh Four—one of the most commonly cited examples of “entrapment” in the War on Terror—underscores the manipulative tactics sometimes used by informants and undercover cops to secure arrests. David Williams, one of the Newburgh Four co-defendants, said the FBI informant promised him the money he needed to pay for his younger brother’s liver transplant if Williams participated in the plot.

Jose Pimentel was accused to trying to build a pipe bomb in 2011, and repeatedly smoked marijuana with his government informant, who was with him “virtually every step of the plot.” The federal government, citing Pimentel’s mental state (he had allegedly tried to circumcise himself) and the NYPD undercover’s involvement declined to pursue charges against Pimentel.

According to a 2014 Human Rights Watch report that documented patterns of rights violations in terrorism prosecutions, “the government—often acting through informants—is actively involved in developing [terrorism plots], persuading and sometimes pressuring the target to participate, and providing the resources to carry it out.”

In Velentzas and Siddiqui’s case, the undercover officer established a friendship with at least one of the women as early as 2013, according to the criminal complaint.

The two women are not alleged to have been in the process of planning a specific attack, and according to the criminal complaint, Velentzas repeatedly stated she would not want to harm any “regular” people, instead targeting police or military personnel.

The NYPD undercover allegedly observed Velentzas pull a knife from her bra to demonstrate to Siddiqui
how to stab people, then remarked, "Why can’t be [sic] some real bad bitches?"

Velentzas later said, according to the complaint, "if [the government] was to put all the information about the three of us together, we legitimately, to these people, look like a cell."

At one point, the complaint states that the undercover officer downloaded and printed out The Anarchist Cookbook for the two women, even bookmarking the section that outlined how to build fertilizer bombs.

NYU students attend a town hall to discuss the NYPD's surveillance of Muslim communities on February 29, 2012 (Getty Images)

Within a few days of the arrests, Shereen and other Brooklyn College graduates—who said they ran the same social circles as Velentzas and Siddiqi but did not know them personally—learned the name of the officer in the case and realized their longstanding suspicions about Mel were correct.

Neither Velentzas nor Siddiqi attended Brooklyn College. None of the women interviewed knew how or when the pair had met Mel.

A protective order in place since July prohibits the defendants’ legal team from releasing the officer’s assumed name. The protective order also covers any discovery in the case, which may leave the public in the dark about the undercover’s role in the alleged offenses and her apparent infiltration of Muslim communities.

Lawyers for Velentzas and Siddiqi declined to comment for this story, citing "the existing protective order and other constraints."

For Shereen, finding out induced a kind of trauma, and it changed her. "For three days I couldn’t eat,
sleep," Shereen told Gothamist. "I covered all the cameras on my phone."

Assistant Vice President Jason Carey said that Brooklyn College had not been notified of any undercover activity on campus.

"Our number one priority is the security of our campus and we do not condone any activity that could harm our students and faculty," he said in an email. According to the communications office, however, Brooklyn College has never asked the NYPD for more details on the alleged placement of cops on campus or demanded an end to the practice.

A set of rules called the Handschu Guidelines prohibit the NYPD from spying on political or religious organizations without specific information linking the group to a crime.

"There is no doubt that the NYPD's Intelligence Division, Counterterrorism Bureau, and other aspects are engaging in sweeping investigations at unprecedented levels of communities ‘demographically’ targeted by the NYPD through its ‘Muslim Surveillance’ and other similar programs," Oliver said.

He added, "What practical constraints Handschu imposes on the NYPD in any of those investigations is a very big open question given the NYPD's total lack of transparency about the lengths its agents go to in these cases."

Martin Stolar is one of the original plaintiffs' attorneys in the ongoing Handschu v. Special Services Division lawsuit, which challenges the city's surveillance of and investigations into political and religious groups.

Stolar says that the NYPD's spying on Brooklyn College students was only legal under Handschu if there was reasonable suspicion that a member had intent to commit a crime. If a participant in the ISO had sent an email expressing their desires to plan an attack, for example, and infiltrating the ISO was the best way to investigate the individual's potential criminal behavior, Handschu would permit the placement of an undercover inside the group.

"If there was no criminal predicate but just curiosity or a desire to scout out Muslim students, there is a violation," he said.

In addition to facing ongoing lawsuits for violating Handschu during counter-terrorism investigations, the NYPD was also questioned for its potentially illegal surveillance of Black Lives Matters protesters.

The NYPD's press office did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Mel appeared at Brooklyn College before the extent of the NYPD's surveillance of Muslims was revealed, and remained a constant presence at least until the beginning of this year—so the revelations about her identity also suggest that little has changed on the ground when it comes to the policing of Muslim communities, despite promises by the new administration to the contrary.

Karen Hinton, a spokesperson for the Mayor's Office, wrote in an email that "The NYPD only carries out terrorism investigations into specific individuals or suspected terrorist organization—not communities, not religions.

"These investigations into specific individuals are carried out under a layered oversight regimen. Investigations by the NYPD Intelligence Bureau follow the Handschu guidelines in accordance with a
federal court ruling. Both the Mayor and Commissioner Bratton are committed to keeping crime low, preventing terrorism and hate crimes. With that comes the obligation to police fairly and constitutionally. We will never waiver from that commitment."

A 2011 Mother Jones investigation established that in addition to the undercover police or FBI officers assigned to infiltrate Muslim communities, there are about 15,000 FBI informants planted around the US, many of whom have the same task. In some sense, what makes the experiences of the Brooklyn College students most unusual is not that they were spied on, but that they found out about it—that their paranoia was warranted.

"There are a few of us who trust each other, and that’s good that we have each other—some don’t even have that," said Shereen. "But in the back of all our minds, there’s always that suspicion, that either, you are [a spy], or you think I’m one.

"We’re acting like criminals, even though we haven’t done anything."

Aviva Staht is a Brooklyn-based journalist who primarily writes about prisons, especially the experiences of terrorism suspects and LGBTQ people behind bars. Follow her @stahlidarity.
Meeting Set on Pay Increases for Judges, Lawmakers

Joel Stashenko, New York Law Journal

November 2, 2015

With Gov. Andrew Cuomo and state Senate Republicans filling the last openings on a commission to study pay raises for state commissioners, legislators and judges, the panel has scheduled an organizational meeting for this week.

The meeting is open to the public but is not a public hearing. The commission will hold a public hearing in the coming weeks.

The Special Commission on Legislative, Judicial and Executive Compensation will meet Tuesday at 9 a.m. at the New York City Bar Association at 42 W. 44th St. in Manhattan.

The panel is an expanded version of a commission that was formed in 2010 to recommend pay increases only for state-paid judges. The commission ended up recommending three years' worth of pay raises for judges averaging 27 percent between April 2012 and April 2014.

The Legislature and Cuomo expanded the commission's purview to include the pay of commissioners and state legislators, who have not seen increases since 1999 (NYLJ, April 2).

The three members of the commission appointed by Cuomo are: Mitra Hormozi, general counsel of the Revlon Corporation; Gary Johnson, executive legal counsel at Medgar Evers College; and Fran Reiter, partner at the Reiter Giuliani Group.

Senate Republicans have selected James Lack, a former Court of Claims judge and former state senator.

Previously, Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman had announced his selections to the commission as Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan partner Sheila Birnbaum and Assembly Democrats appointed former Assembly Ways and Means Committee Secretary Roman Hedges (NYLJ, July 1).

Birnbaum will chair the panel, which is scheduled to propose new pay levels by Dec. 31, 2015.
The Debt Burden of Law School Graduates

NOV. 2, 2015

To the Editor:

Re “The Law School Debt Crisis” (editorial, Oct. 25):

The New York Times fails to make its case on law school debt. Law students borrow more than undergrads, but most are able to repay, and do. The graduate student default rate is 7 percent versus 22 percent for undergrads.

Many law schools are downsizing to maintain standards. Since 2010, first-year enrollment has dropped from 52,500 to 37,900, a level last seen in 1973 — much smaller and the rule of law may begin to fray. Our country needs lawyers, prosecutors, defenders and judges, not only lawyers in big cities and big law firms.

Capping graduate federal loans as the editors suggest would fall hardest on students from modest circumstances who will not be able to attend law school or will need to resort to private loans, which are typically more expensive, and repayment is not income-contingent.

Finally, the editorial recommends that law student loan money be redirected to legal services. More money is certainly needed for legal services, but taking loan money from law students is both bad economics and bad policy.
The New York Times

BLAKE MORANT

KELLYE TESTY

JUDITH AREEN

Washington

The writers are, respectively, president, president-elect and executive director of the Association of American Law Schools. Mr. Morant is dean of George Washington University Law School, and Ms. Testy is dean of the University of Washington School of Law.

To the Editor:

Your editorial referring to Florida Coastal School of Law paints a picture that is not supported by the facts.

The majority of our students pass the bar, and the vast majority of our alumni have successful careers in law. In February 2015 we had a 75 percent first-time bar pass rate, third best out of 11 law schools in the state, and an institutional ultimate pass rate of 87 percent.

You are right that Florida Coastal is a for-profit law school. But you are wrong to imply that for-profit is inherently bad. Sometimes it takes a for-profit entity to right a wrong — in this case the lack of diversity in law schools. At Florida Coastal 44.8 percent of the student body are members of minority groups.

You are also right that our students have a higher debt load than we would like. That is an area we take very seriously. But if you want to diversify the profession, then you will have to admit students who do not have the same resources as students at “elite” law schools.

In such a context, it is improper to judge schools on the size of student debt rather than on how well students repay their debt. Our alumni repay their loans at a higher rate than many “elite” universities; only about 1.1 percent of alumni at Florida Coastal are in default.
SCOTT DeVITO

Jacksonville, Fla.

The writer is dean of Florida Coastal School of Law.

To the Editor:

"The Law School Debt Crisis" raises an important social justice issue — the burden of great debt for many law school graduates.

But another social justice issue relates to law school debt. For many students, high debt drives legal employment preferences and decisions — in exactly the wrong direction. Being deeply in debt at graduation drives young lawyers away from crucial but less highly compensated public interest practice, which leaves low-income and moderate-income communities chronically underrepresented.

Law schools have a responsibility to provide an excellent education at an affordable price. High debt cannot be allowed to coerce young attorneys toward only the most remunerative legal practice.

As we have seen with so many graduates of CUNY School of Law, serving low- and moderate-income individuals can form the basis of a deeply rewarding career and a meaningful life.

MICHELLE J. ANDERSON

New York

The writer is dean at CUNY School of Law.
University Faculty: Don't Let Undercover NYPD Officers Spy On Our Muslim Students

"To be surveilled by police in this way, it's very disturbing."

Christopher Mathias
National Reporter, The Huffington Post

Over 100 faculty members of the City University of New York have signed a petition calling on the school's chancellor to oppose surveillance of Muslim students by undercover New York City police officers.

"Such surveillance chills the atmosphere of free speech and open dialogue that educational institutions require, and it violates constitutional protections that require specific search warrants," reads the petition, written in the form of a letter to CUNY Chancellor James B. Milliken.

"You must formally state your opposition to these operations and work actively to stop them," it continues. "Their continuation will be a great stain on the university."

The petition comes a day after Gothamist published an investigative report by Aviva Stahl that
revealed that an undercover NYPD officer who went by the name "Melike Ser" staged a conversion to Islam in 2011 at Brooklyn College, a CUNY school, in order to befriend and spy on law-abiding students in the school's Islamic Society. For years afterwards, Ser frequented the group's activities, and grew intimate with the members -- in one case even being a bridesmaid at a student's wedding -- all while trying to elicit incriminating comments from the students in support of terrorism.

Earlier this year, an undercover investigation by Ser led to the arrest of two Queens women on terror charges. It's unclear how the two women came into contact with Ser, or what role Ser played in the pair's alleged plot to build a bomb.

It's also unclear why Ser would need to spy on law-abiding CUNY students for two years in order to arrest the two Queens women, neither of whom matriculated at a CUNY school.

Gothamist's report raises concerns that the NYPD may have violated what's known as the Handschu agreement, which stipulates that police can spy on constitutionally protected activity -- such as Brooklyn College's Islamic Society meetings -- only when there is credible information of criminal activity, and only after its surveillance plan is approved by an overseer called the Handschu authority.

Karen Hinton, a spokeswoman for Mayor Bill de Blasio, told Gothamist in a statement that "Investigations by the NYPD Intelligence Bureau follow the Handschu guidelines in accordance with a federal court ruling."

"Both the Mayor and [NYPD] Commissioner Bratton are committed to keeping crime low, preventing terrorism and hate crimes," Hinton continued. "With that comes the obligation to police fairly and constitutionally. We will never waiver from that commitment."

In 2013, at the beginning of his term as mayor, de Blasio pledged to end the blanket surveillance of Muslim communities in New York and New Jersey that had been uncovered by a Pulitzer-Prize winning Associated Press investigation.
The NYPD may have also breached a 1992 Memorandum of Understanding it made with CUNY, which allowed police to enter CUNY campuses in non-emergency circumstances only after getting the permission of CUNY officials.

It's not clear if the CUNY administration permitted or had knowledge of the NYPD's most recent undercover exploits. Chancellor Milliken didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

In 2011, a report by veteran NYPD reporter Len Levitt, published in The Huffington Post, revealed that between 2003 and 2006, the department had used undercover officers to monitor Muslim student groups at Brooklyn College. Levitt wrote that NYPD documents he uncovered did "not make clear whether the police had evidence or suspicions of criminality to justify" the spying.

After that episode, Karen Gould, Brooklyn College's president at the time, denied knowing about the undercover officers and condemned "the alleged intrusion of the NYPD into campus life."

"It's troubling," Anna Law, the Herbert Kurz Chair of Constitutional Rights at Brooklyn College, and a signee of Friday's petition, told The Huffington Post. A college campus, she said, is "where students are supposed to have a safe environment and explore ideas and their identities. To be surveilled by police in this way, it's very disturbing."

Another signee, Corey Robin, a political science professor at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center, urged his fellow faculty members to sign the petition Friday.

"Tolerating, actively or passively, undercover officers of the state on our campus, allowing them to spy on our students, to report back to the state what our students say, as they meet with their friends to share in their studies, swap their stories, figure out their faith, shoot the shit, or whatever it is that students do when they believe themselves to be among friends, is a betrayal. Of the worst sort," he wrote in a blog post.

The petition comes one week after the federal Third Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated a lawsuit against the NYPD over its surveillance of Muslim communities since Sept. 11.

"We have been down similar roads before," the court wrote in its decision. "Jewish-Americans during the Red Scare, African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement, and Japanese-Americans during World War II."

"We are left to wonder why we cannot see with foresight what we see so clearly with hindsight — that 'loyalty is a matter of the heart and mind, not race, creed, or color,' " the court added.

MORE: NYPD, Nypd Muslim Surveillance, Muslim Surveillance, Islam, Brooklyn College