THE FACES OF KINGSBOROUGH’s COLLEGE NOW

Scouting City High Schools
For Major-League Students

By Robert Singer
Associate Professor of English,
Kingsborough Community College

We all recently learned about the problems Edmund Morris encountered writing Dutch, his long-awaited biography of Ronald Reagan. Morris’s subject seemed so remote and unengaging at other times, affable, humorous, even charismatic. Yet this biographer had to discover, to some degree, who was this person?—what was the explanation for his undeniable success as a politician and President? Considering all his puzzle pieces, Morris perhaps should have called his book Double Dutch, since the phrase once meant “unintelligible language, gibberish.”

Luckily, I had none of Morris’s problems with this assignment, which is to profile interesting students. No crippeling writer’s block, no far-flung legwork needed, and—best of all—in stead of one (by many accounts mysterious) personality to deal with. I had multip le personalities to choose from, all willing to tell their story: those of hardworking College Now instructors and their ambitious students. Double Dutch might have made a good title for me, too, but strictly—with a bow to a familiar sight on New York City playgrounds—as a metaphor for agility, energy, and high-stepping collaboration.

This program, supervised by Dr. Rachelle Goldsmith, trains high school instructors to teach a variety of specialized college-level courses to high school seniors. Since its inception, we estimate that College Now has served 60,000 students—more than enough to fill Yankee measures designed to strengthen academic standards at the University. The policy was recommended by the Board’s Committee on Academic Policy, Program and Research (CAPPR). It’s chair, Dr. Nilda Soto Ruiz commented that it “moves the University one step closer to the ultimate goal of the Chancellor’s plan: to ensure that students are accurately placed in college level or remedial work.” Implementation of the policy will begin next spring.

As a first step toward establishing appropriate exit-from-remediation measures, Chancellor Goldstein convened an advisory committee comprised of faculty and student representatives and administrators involved in the University’s testing program. This committee, which has been working with the Office of Academic Affairs, recommended a contractor for a new examination in reading and writing early in November. The examination will serve to place students in remedial course work, as well as determine readiness for exit. It will include a 45-minute essay to be graded by trained faculty. The CUNY Math Assessment Test will continue to be used for both placement into and exit from remedial instruction in mathematics.

Determining when students are ready for college-level work is an integral part of CUNY’s program to raise admissions standards at its senior colleges. Refinement of this process will reinforce the University’s determination to begin phasing out remediation in baccalaureate programs by January, 2000.

During discussion of the new policy on exit from remediation, Chancellor Goldstein submitted plans to require applicants to CUNY’s senior colleges to take standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test or the American College Test. Applicants who score below a prescribed threshold on the SAT, ACT, or Regents examinations will be required to take CUNY’s own nationally-normed assessment tests. If they pass all tests, they will be admitted to senior colleges.

During discussion of exit-from-remediation policy, Goldstein said that it has always been his belief that “one indicator of college readiness is insufficient.” For September 2000, he has proposed that students applying to CUNY’s baccalaureate programs be judged in several respects...

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CUNY Matters
A Newsletter for The City University of New York  •  Fall 1999

2000-2001 Budget Request Highlights

The draft 2000-2001 University Budget Request of the Board of Trustees will be considered at its November 22 meeting. The draft Request, which was discussed at a public hearing on October 18, totals $1.4 billion.

Five areas critical to strengthening CUNY’s role in the City and State are emphasized. First, the Request proposes a strategy “for building national prominence by drawing on the resources available to the system as a whole—the creation of a flagship environment.” The combined effect of a flagship environment and a steady rise in admissions criteria will promote a clearer identity for CUNY’s top-tier colleges. Two important components of this initiative are “replenishing full-time faculty at the colleges, a sine qua non of any first-rate institution, and a strategic effort to bring to the University significant clusters of new faculty in particular areas.”

Related to the “flagship” strategy is current planning for a University-wide Honors Academy. Drawing on faculty from undergraduate, graduate, and professional schools, the Academy will provide honors students special opportunities to benefit from expertise across the University’s campuses. This approach builds on the recommendations of the recent report of the Mayor’s Task Force on CUNY.

A second focus of the Request is support of academic achievement through further investment in pre-collegiate and collegiate academic advising, counseling, and tutoring—notably by expansion of the College Now program (see story below). The $9 million in new funding represents a significant increase and will enhance counseling for approximately 36,000 students and expand tutoring for a similar number of students. The ultimate goal is to provide an environment in which all students can make the necessary adjustments to college life and work.

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During discussion of the new policy on exit from remediation, Chancellor Goldstein submitted plans to require applicants to CUNY’s senior colleges to take standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test or the American College Test in order to be considered for admission. The SAT is already offered free of charge to potential applicants at five CUNY campuses. Applicants who score below a prescribed threshold on the SAT, ACT, or Regents examinations will be required to take CUNY’s own nationally-normed assessment tests. If they pass all tests, they will be admitted to senior colleges.

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IN THIS ISSUE

The two famed authors at left differed over how to drive—a narrative, that is— at the most recent Queens College Evening Reading (see page 5). The very first Evening Reader, 24 years ago and Queens professor emerita, at right, won the National Book Critics Award for her poetry this year. Learn more about her on page 9.
briefly last summer, the historic New York question “Where were you when the lights went out?” was supplanted by “How did you make it to work in the deluge?” Metropolitan-area commuters will long remember August 26th, when torrential rains flooded all forms of local transportation. Metro-North stopped running completely. In Manhattan, FDR Drive was closed, and play was halted on the West Side’s Joe DiMaggio Highway. All Central Park transverses were flooded, and bus schedules went on hiatus. Taxis? — don’t ask! Those commuters who managed to arrive at work were in time for lunch. Meanwhile, on the John Jay College campus, the meteorological anomaly was whipping up a minor educational disaster. For August 26th was the opening day of a first-ever two-day summer institute planned by the leaders of CUNY’s Writing Across the Curriculum initiative, whose objective is to enhance discipline-specific writing skills on all CUNY campuses. The institute had been designed to provide an essential opportunity for disciplinary and cross-disciplinary exchange. As well, it had been hoped the seminars would encourage faculty and members of the nearby established Writing Fellows Program with the basic concepts of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)—and also give the members of campus teams formed to implement the policies and practices of WAC on each campus the chance to get acquainted.

Would these best-laid plans go the way of Johnstown or, to think of more recent events, the historic floods, North Carolina and Mexico?

APRÈS LE DELUGE— WAC

Afloat at a John Jay Conference: Improved Writing in the Disciplines

By Dolores Straker
CUNY Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Writing Across the Curriculum has grown out of the Board of Trustees’ January 1999 mandate to assure that CUNY graduates bring fully-developed communication skills into the workplace and into graduate and professional schools. This can only be accomplished through the promotion of extensive writing practice within each discipline, which has been taking place at some of our campuses since the 1970s. WAC, however, is the first University-wide initiative.

A unique complement to WAC is the Writing Fellows Program, which will initially deploy 85 specially trained CUNY doctoral students from 31 disciplines. They have been selected and matched with programs on all 17 campuses. These Fellows will assist in a variety of capacities to support intensive writing instruction, and they will be monitored by full-time faculty coordinators, who will work with them closely throughout the academic year.

During the past 20 years, tens of thousands of faculty, students and administrators at hundreds of institutions have been exposed to the writing-across-the-curriculum movement, which is founded on two assumptions. The first is cognitively based and suggests that writing is a unique mode of thinking and learning in all disciplines. The other assumption is rhetorically based and focuses on introducing students to the distinctive conventions and modes of discourse in their chosen discipline.

The WAC mission has been to reform pedagogy rather than curriculum. Its emphasis has thus been on thinking-and-learning and on attempts to bring about changes in teaching as well as enhanced writing skills. WAC theorists have concluded that successful programs in the field must meet certain criteria: (1) they must address all levels of the curriculum, from basic through advanced writing courses; (2) faculty development must be an integral component of such initiatives; (3) students must be allowed a broad range of audiences with which to communicate; and (4) the entire faculty must recognize—and act to reap—the benefits of academic literacy.

During the spring 1999 semester, the University-wide WAC task force compiled a summary of current and prior campus-level initiatives in this area. The following goals guiding our efforts at CUNY are extrapolated from practices observed within the University and at other institutions:

• An expanded articulation of the central importance that writing development has in the entire undergraduate experience
• An acknowledgment of the significance of a given college’s mission for the development of its writing policy
• Experimentation with—and subsequent adoption of—promising new practices
• The development of clearly stated goals, well described methods, provisions for extensive faculty development and student support, and evaluation plans for all WAC programs.

A few words should be added about the Writing Fellows Program, which is linked to the WAC initiative and represents a commitment to CUNY students at two levels: it advances the professional training of graduate students, who in turn assist in improving the writing skills of undergraduates. Advanced doctoral students will participate in a variety of teaching, educational, and administrative activities designed to enhance undergraduate learning and, at the same time, to broaden their own professional experience.

Picture, now, the organizers who had trudged in early through the downpour on August 26th to greet the 180 participants scheduled to appear. A literary soul might have looked out onto Tenth Avenue and thought of Shakespeare’s Lear in his big storm: “Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never Remember to have heard…”

− the storm scene in King Lear

Budget Highlights, continued from page 1

Third, the Request commits the University to improving the undergraduate experience by investing in the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative begun this year (an article on it begins above on this page). A valuable new resource now available to students is the CUNY Transfer and Information Program and Planning System (CUNY TIPS), a website that assists them in planning course work and transferring between CUNY campuses.

The fourth focus of the Request is on a comprehensive University economic development plan that will embrace and nurture a number of targeted initiatives such as the CUNY Institute for Software Design and Development, a Photonics Compact Device Center, a Small Business Support and Incubator Program, and expansion of the University’s workforce development programs.

Finally, the Budget Request supports the upgrading of the University’s technology and data management. CUNY was recently ranked fourth in the nation in a PC Week survey. Building on this success, the University hopes to continue improving its local and wide-area network infrastructure, the digital resources of its libraries, and distance learning opportunities. Revamping of CUNY’s major administrative manage-
$2.5M U.S. Grant Opens Horizon For Minority Research Scientists

For this column, which will appear as an occasional feature in future issues of CUNY•Matters, Dr. Leslie S. Jacobson, Acting Vice President for Research Development at the CUNY Research Foundation, has adapted material from the NSF grant proposal of Dr. Gail Smith, P.I., to support the Minority Graduate Education Program.

A n alarming tactic for the university world is that, while the population of the U.S. is increasingly multi-ethnic, the academy’s Ph.D. candidates remains nearly homogeneous—that is, white and male. According to the National Research Council’s study of the total population of science and engineering doctorates (1998), the population is “64% white, 12% Asian, 2% black, 2% Native American, and less than 1% Hispanic.” The inevitable result of so few doctorates is that there are few minority faculty.

The City University is in a unique position to assist in remedying these distressingly low minority percentages. The Graduate School and University Center already produces African American and Hispanic Ph.D.s at twice the national rate, and this stellar record will be further enhanced by a grant to support the Minority Graduate Education Program (MGEP), a collaboration between the National Science Foundation and CUNY.

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One of the University’s major disabilities initiatives has been the collaboration of the CUNY Consortium for the Study of Disabilities with Reaching Up, the foundation established by the late John F. Kennedy, J.r. Many of those associated with both organizations were present at a memorial service held in the 1199 MEHS Union’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Labor Center on October 22. Among the musicians who performed during the event was pop singer Nona Hendryx; she is seen here with Reaching Up Vice President (now Acting President) Jeffrey Sachs. In the rear, from the Consortium, are Jason Chapin, left, and its director, Bill Ebenstein. Photo, André Beckles.

Elebash Hall in the New Graduate School

A handsome new Midtown cultural venue soon to open is the Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall in the Graduate Center on Fifth Avenue. Seen here in a rendering by the Gwathmey & Siegel firm, it honors two devoted New York music lovers, Mr. and Mrs. Elebash. Morgan Guaranty Trust Company, Trustees of the Elebash Fund, has granted the Graduate Center $1.5 million to support musical programming and dissertation work on music related to New York City. The Hall’s inaugural event next spring will be a symposium on the life and music of early jazz great W.C. Handy. Full coverage of the new GSUC home in the former B. Altman building will appear in the next issue of CUNY•Matters.
Of Cyclos, Pho, & Monkey Bridges: Notes from Ho Chi Minh City

Since the CUNY-Vietnam Projects program was initiated in 1997 by the College of Staten Island, 12 CUNY faculty from six campuses have visited Vietnam for two to three weeks to share their expertise as teachers of English as a Second Language. In return, CUNY has hosted several Vietnamese colleagues for professional visits to New York. The exchange, coordinated by Ann Helm, the director of CSI’s Center for International Service, has produced some notable advances. For example, the Vietnamese-USA Society’s English Language Programs have begun to differentiate courses for a range of learners, from adults to children. CUNY ESL faculty have observed classrooms, helped select engaging materials, provided new tools for assessment, and have introduced such innovative modes of learning and teaching as student-centered classrooms and the Silent Way methodology. They have also worked to enhance Vietnamese integration into the international ESL and linguistics community.

These visits have also helped our faculty to understand better the needs of Vietnamese students at CUNY campuses, which may include focused attention to pronunciation and speaking skills, academic writing, and American English. The CUNY faculty have enjoyed meeting their Vietnamese peers, and there is hope that longer assignments, of a semester or year, will be possible in the future.

Teamed with Susan Price of Borough of Manhattan Community College, Judy Gex, an ESL teacher at LaGuardia Community College since 1979, made her first trip to Asia as part of the program this last June. Previously, she has done extensive teacher training in Benin, West Africa, as a Senior Fulbright Fellow. Gex kept a journal from which the following excerpts are taken.

Moving Soup Kitchens, Greenery

Sometimes you hear the clinking of spoons of the little boys announcing soup for sale. If you stop them, they’ll run back and get you a bowl. Sometimes the vendors carry it all, the serving bowls and utensils in big pots slung from a pole which they walk with a lifting step which, I’m told, makes it easier to carry heavy weights. Greengy sellers put boxes of flowers and plants on the back of their bicycles. They pedal these little gardens through the streets.

Hailing a Cyclo

My favorite way to get through HCMC traffic is breezy and thrilling. If you’ve seen the movie Three Seasons, you’ve seen a cyclo, a three-wheeled contraption with the passenger seat in front. It’s the Vietnamese version of a roller coaster. You don’t quite see how you are going to avoid hitting or being hit, but you do. In order to prevent arguments at the end of the ride, I negotiate a price for it before starting. I also wear a dress with pockets for money, after seeing Susan hurt when two people on a motorcycle reached over and tried to grab her backpack while she was in a cyclo.

Good Morning Vietnam

Sun up at 5:30, and the park across the street is crowded with walkers, joggers, and people playing a kind of soccer game with an elongated shuttlecock. Breakfast in Vietnam is pho. That’s a big bowl of noodle soup served with basil, mint, bean sprouts, red pepper, and nuoc maam (pronounced “nook mom”), a very strong and yummy fish sauce. Fruit sellers come by with many fruits I’ve never seen: dragon fruit (a bright red and green fruit with gills—the inside, white with tiny black seeds, is delicious), fresh lichees, mango, sweet green bananas, and durian (a popular, large, bumpy fruit that smells a little like shellac).

“Life’s Dust”

In the more elegant tourist areas of town, you can be approached by small children begging in English or young women carrying drugged babies to appeal to sympathetic visitors. People call them “life’s dust.” In less chi-chie areas, you don’t see them.

Respect Your Parents... Or Don’t!

Today a group from our newly organized English Club—150 students strong, ranging in age from 10 to 75—made an excursion to the Ho Chi Minh City tunnels. The tour took us through the tunnels with two young women. One, Lam, who means “Beautiful Resilience,” was born just months after the war ended in 1975. The other, “Autumn Season,” is the daughter of a soldier who fought for North Vietnam in both the French and the American Wars. She expressed sorrow about the lonely American mothers who lost sons here too.

Teaching Tourists

Native speakers of English from America, England, Ireland, Canada, and Australia who teach here are mostly young professionals in their own countries (law, teaching). They teach English as they travel around seeing the world to make their living. Several of them have stopped here for several years. It’s a sweet life: a good salary, no taxes, low expenses, a warm climate.

“Beautiful Resilience” in the Tunnels

The last war site I visited was the Cu Chi Tunnels, about two hours north of the city. Beneath the lush green rice paddies and lounging water buffalos is this large complex built on three levels over thirty years and housing 16,000 people. I traveled to the tunnels with two young women. One, whose name means “Beautiful Resilience,” was born just months after the war ended in 1975. The other, “Autumn Season,” is the daughter of a soldier who fought for North Vietnam in both the French and the American Wars. She expressed sorrow about the lonely American mothers who lost sons here too.

Homework for a Visit to Vietnam

Here are some movies I enjoyed as I prepared for the trip: Scent of Green Papaya, Three Seasons, Heaven and Earth, Regret to Inform. And readings, too: Lady Bor- ton’s After Sorrow, Duong Elliott’s The Sacred Willow, Four Generations of a Vietnamese Family, Duong Thu Huong’s Paradise of the Blind, Graham Green’s The Quiet American, Lan Cao’s Monkey Bridge, Lai Thai’s The Earth, The River, Thich Nhat Hanh’s Our Appointment with Life, Peace in Every Step, The Stone Boy and Other Stories.

The Tale of Kieu

This is the title of a 17th-century epic poem. One of my colleagues, who had served as a military advisor here in the 60s, said I should read it, and so many Vietnamese quoted from it and I would understand a lot more about their philosophy of life, too. He said he doubted if we would have gotten heavily involved in Vietnam if more people in our government had read this poem. One saying from Kieu I often heard was, “Women are like raindrops. Their life depends on where they land.” Intelligent women students and a successful Vietnamese businesswoman I met have the same questions women in the U.S. have. Women who are not married by the age of 30 have enormous problems both in their lives and in society. They are subject to culture norms commonly repeated saying from Kieu: “If heaven forces us to live a life of hardship, then we must live like that. If heaven allows us to live a life of ease, only then can we live like that.” Many people in Vietnam believe that heaven and earth change places in 30-year cycles.

Monkey Bridge

My ESL students at CUNY will get a taste of Vietnam, too. I plan to use Lan Cao’s Monkey Bridge in class. A monkey bridge is a long throw across the stream as a footpath, with two smaller branches added as handrails. Lan Cao says moving from one culture to another is like walking on a monkey bridge.

What are you learning?

Making this trip has been a big privilege: the Vietnamese have been very kind to us. And the ones we’ve met seem to love to learn. An Australian lawyer who is teaching here told me they are always asking each other what they are studying now. “They find it strange if you say you are studying nothing.”

Exit-From-Remediation, continued from page 1

pects, including high school grades in specific academic subjects, the number of academic courses taken, and scores on nationally- or state-standardized exams.

The Chancellor has also instructed senior college presidents to engage faculty bodies on their campuses in establishing specific admissions criteria for their colleges and to convene an admissions review board charged with considering students in special circumstances. In discussing the comprehensive proposal for senior college admissions, Goldstein told the Trustees, “Universities are always challenged on how to best assess student preparation. I am persuaded that there is a need to take a fresh look at the process.”
A columnist for the Queens Times/Ledger wondered aloud recently, "How does he do it?" This Joe Cuomo guy. Does he know where the bodies are buried, have the negatives of the pictures, or what?" He was wondering how the founder of the Queens College Evening Readings (and professor of English) managed to lure so many luminous scribes to his long-running series of readings, discussions, and roundtables on the art of writing.

The question was particularly apt on October 13, when a pride of literary lions—E.L. Doctorow, Arthur Miller, and Joyce Carol Oates—appeared for a lively discussion moderated by Cuomo that opened the 24th season. He believes the audience must have set a Readings record, for not only was the College's Concert Hall SRO but the sound had to be piped into the nearby Choral Room, also full, to accommodate the overflow.

All three authors agreed that the writing process is mysterious. "Books for me begin quite irrationally," said Doctorow. "When I first started out, I always had plans for books. I had outlines, I did research, I had all these high intentions, and the books would never get written. It was only when I learned to trust the act of writing that I got going. That is to say...writing to find out what I was writing." While she agreed that the sources of creative work are

mysterious, Oates saw her self as a "contrary example" from Doctorow: "Ed said that for him writing a novel was like starting out on a journey in a car at night. And it was enough for him to have the headlights on...he doesn't know his destination inevitably, but he trusts in the journey to get him there. Now I can't write that way. I have to know my destination... have to have a map...As a writer, I always know the structure of my novels before I start. I know the ending, the final scene, the last sentence."

"Of course, I have a slightly different approach," said the author of Death of a Salesman, "because, in some part of my mind, I have to see the stage rather objectively. A novelist can bring on 35 people at a party, and it doesn't cost him anything!" Still, the mystery of the process is undeniable: "It's a bit like trying to cross the crevasse." Miller also suggested that dreams are a source for him. "I dream of things on the stage. I even have spotlights in my dreams, especially on people who are dead." He added, "I think we're all trying to say that anything is possible. How to get down to where you yourself are involved that way is, I guess, the trick."

"Not only do you drive along the road and only see as far as your headlights," Doctorow observed, "but you are surprised by the point. If you are really lucky, you go off the road entirely!"

For information on other Queens College Readings through next spring, call 718-997-4646.

Authors Joyce Carol Oates, E. L. Doctorow, Arthur Miller, and moderator Joe Cuomo during a lighter moment of a roundtable on the art of writing.

**Whimsy for the Old Millennium**

He is one scenario for the closing moments of the current millennium, courtesy of CUNY poet Billy Collins. It comes from the first of the Lehman College professor's three collections published by the University of Pittsburgh Press, The Art of Drowning (1993). Summer before last CUNY-Matters published his poem “Morning” from Picnic, Lightning (1998), and Questions About Angels appeared this year.

Dancing Toward Bethlehem

If there is only enough time in the final minutes of the 20th century for one last dance, I would like to be dancing slowly with you, say, in the ballroom of a seaside hotel. My palm would press into the small of your back as the past hundred years collapsed into a pile of mirrors or buttons or frivolous shoes, just as the floor of the 19th century gave way and disappeared in a red cloud of brick dust. There will be no time to order another drink or worry about what was never said, not with the orchestra sliding into the sea and all our attention devoted to humming whatever it was they were playing.

**LANGUAGE SKILLS WITH FRIES**

**Did Somebody Say BMCCDonald's?**

As part of a pilot program that is planned for replication nationwide, Borough of Manhattan Community College has been taking ESL training to the Golden Arches. BMC C's collaboration with the corporate food-service giant is one of six around the country designed to assist employees in developing their language skills.

Classes have been conducted this semester by Steve Gilhooley at a McDonald's training room in Manhattan 1-1/2 hours two days each week. According to Dean of Adult and Continuing Education Acte Maldonado, Gilhooley "has been innovative in incorporating oral presentations and McDonald's literature into the classes."

Shown here is the special badge that student-employees wear at their job sites. This encourages their fellow employees to use "English only" on the job, which complements their ESL classwork. Materials for these classes have been supplied free of charge by the Steck-Vaughn Company, one of the world's leading educational publishers.

BMCC President Antonio Pérez considers the collaboration an ideal example of the College reaching into the community and opening educational horizons: "Because of the training we are providing, these employees are better able to perform their jobs...and they may also choose to pursue further educational opportunities at BMCC."
J
By Jennifer Goldsmith and Annmarie Teulin Director and Associate Director of the Center for NYC TECH's Intergenerational Reading Center

The children's literature, I found, was also a great way to introduce them to the concept of diversity, and the importance of open-mindedness to new ideas and people. For the children, the idea of learning was easier and more engaging. They were also more likely to express their own thoughts and feelings, and to be more creative and innovative in their ideas.

In addition, the children's literature that we used was also a great way to introduce them to the concept of diversity, and the importance of open-mindedness to new ideas and people. Furthermore, it was also a great way to introduce them to the concept of diversity, and the importance of open-mindedness to new ideas and people. For the children, the idea of learning was easier and more engaging.

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What started as an intellectual excursion to Russia became a spiritual journey also," recalls Dr. Andrée Nicola McLaughlin, Medgar Evers College professor of literature and language and interdisciplinary studies. "As we began to appreciate the magnitude of Aleksandr Pushkin's talent, courage and impact, we connected with humanity's great potential to excel creatively, to tackle adversity, to envision a blissful world."

McLaughlin's inspiring memory is of the Pushkin Bicentennial Symposium & Study Tour—of which Medgar Evers was one of several international co-sponsors—that took place last June in Moscow and St. Petersburg. (She was also program coordinator for the International Pushkin Bicentennial Committee.) Coinciding with official observances by UNESCO and Russia, the event commemorated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin (1799-1837), world-esteemed African-Russian poet, father of Russian literature, and pioneer of Russian as a literary language.

Participating artists, writers, intellectuals, educators, students, elected officials and other interested parties comprised a delegation from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and the Pacific Islands. The group joined hundreds of thousands of revellers who traveled from abroad to partake in Russia's nationwide festivities honoring Pushkin's life and legacy.

The Interdisciplinary Studies Department at MEC co-sponsored the symposium and study tour in collaboration with the Institute of Asian and African Studies of Moscow State University, among other institutions and organizations of Canada, South Africa, the UK, as well as the USA. In addition to McLaughlin, three other MEC faculty served on the Bicentennial Committee: Dr. Clinton Crawford (Mass Communications & Art), Dr. Tatyana Flesher (Mathematics), and Prof. Leonid Knizhnik (Academic Computing).

Pushkin is credited with single-handedly giving birth to modern Russian literature by both his inventive virtuosity in a remarkable variety of literary genres and his employment of the native vernacular (French having been up to his time the language of the cultural elite). Pushkin is also hailed as an important literary innovator and a drum major for justice and liberty.

"With Freedom's Seed"

"Behold, a sower went forth to sow."

With freedom's seed the desert sowing,
I walked before the morning star;
From pure and guiltless fingers throwing—
The fecund seed, the procreator; Where slavish plows had left a scar—
Graze if you will, you peaceful nations,
With freedom's seed the desert sowing,
Fighting.

The famed Russian poet performing two crucial functions, hailing and popping, at the "Champagne for Pushkin" celebration. Reciting Pushkin's poems with him were Queens drama students Natasha Scott and Dike Matthew. Photos, Karen Leon.

And see page 5 for a Y2K poem by CUNY poet Billy Collins.

Yevtushenko Leads Pushkin Fête at Queens

On October 28, Queens College's professor of European languages and literature Yevgeny Yevtushenko, led an elaborately orchestrated salute to Aleksandr Pushkin at LeFrak Hall on campus that offered a performance of Pushkin's Mozart and Salieri (the basis for the play and movie Amadeus), Russian songs on Pushkin texts, a balletic version of Tatyana's Letter Scene from Eugene Onegin, and then the ideally exhilarating climax: the Coronation Scene from Mussorgsky's opera based on Pushkin's Boris Godunov—the music performed by soloists and the Queens College Orchestra, conducted by Maurice Peress.

Prior to these artistic fireworks, Russia's elder poet-statesman, who has called Pushkin "the first multicolored and multicultural poet," opened with a personal tribute in which he likened Pushkin, as a national icon, with Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe, adding that he was also something of a Thomas Jefferson and Tom Paine as well.

Then read a new poem of his own to mark the occasion. Titled "Paul Robeson and Pushkin," the seven-minute work superimposed on Yevtushenko's life-long impressions of Pushkin's multicolored Europe and Russia's iconoclastic African American singer when he gave a concert in Moscow in 1949.

Yevtushenko remembers Robeson being asked by an interviewer how he could sing Russian folk songs with such feeling, to which Pushkin experienced censorship, exile, surveillance and travel restrictions for the remainder of his life. (See the small ode to liberty in the sidebar, an excerpt from a 1823 poem from his exile.)

Among Pushkin's most acclaimed writings are his poems, "Ode to Liberty" and "Russian and Lyudmila"; a novel in verse, Eugene Onegin (famously transformed into an opera by Russia's most eminent composer, Tchaikovsky), the story "The Queen of Spades," a prose collection, Tales of Belkin, and the historical drama Boris Godunov. In 1831, Pushkin married Natalia Goncharova, a high society beauty. By all accounts, her social ambitions put him in excruciating debt, and her rumored flirtations were a source of scandal. Although debate persists about a conspiracy behind his death, history records that Pushkin fought a duel to defend Natalia's reputation and was mortally wounded. Thousaneds appeared at his Moika home in St. Petersburg to bid farewell to their beloved poet, dead at only 37. To the present day, Pushkin remains the most widely read and quoted Russian writer.

The Pushkin Symposium, held at Moscow State University, included scholarly presentations on several topics related to Pushkin's ethnic identity (African Origins of Pushkin, the African Presence in Early Europe, Russia's Historical Relations with Africa), as well as recitations of Pushkin's writings and recitals featuring songs and operatic arias inspired by his life. McLaughlin and other

Continued on page 10
A Poet in the Classroom: Marie Ponsot Reminiscences

By Rita Rodin

AWARD-WINNING QUEENS COLLEGE VETERAN

By Rita Rodin

1981 and The Green Dark (1988), as well as the latest book, were all published by Knopf. Poet and publisher Lawrence Ferlinghetti, whom she met on a crossing to Paris soon after World War II, published her debut volume, True Minds (1957), when he started City Lights Books in San Francisco. Dinitia Smith, her interviewer for the New York Times, said of her work “A Marie Ponsot poem is a little like a jeweled bracelet, carefully carved, with small, firm stones embedded in it.”

In addition to many poems about domestic life, friendship, and marriage, Ponsot touches sometimes on death—notably in The Bird Catcher. The poem quoted here is dedicated to a Queens professor of comparative literature who was a good friend and who vanished mysteriously while on vacation in Indonesia and to a father who suffered a heart attack and drowned while swimming in the ocean with his young sons.

She hadn’t intended death as a theme in the book, she said, but “when you are 78, you have seen a lot of close people die and realize that it is a popular human hobby, something we all do sooner or later. As Wittgenstein said, ‘You don’t have to think about it. Nobody lives through it.’”

But Ponsot does think about it, “They are very poor, but they learned how lots of them did learn to listen—and to go on living, certainly auspicious: Marie Ponsot.”

Marie Ponsot (photo, Rosemary Deen). The image featured on the jacket below is a detail from a fresco in The Stag Room of the Palais des papes in Avignon, France.

The Bird Catcher

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The Bird Catcher
From the website of the school:

**BEAUX-ARTS COURTHOUSE TRANSFORMED**

**Newman Real Estate Facility Inaugurated at Baruch College**

New York City's premier facility for real estate education and public policy, Steven L. Newman Hall at Baruch College, was inaugurated at ceremonies on October 21. The neoclassic building, designed in the beaux-arts style, dates from 1915, and was for many years the City of New York's Children's Court. Subsequently, the landmark, at 137 East 22nd Street, served as the College's Student Center. The building will provide faculty offices for the school of Public Affairs and meeting and conference rooms. It will also be the home of the Steven L. Newman Real Estate Institute at the College. Architect for the project was Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates.

Applauding the opening on a campus he knows well, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein praised Newman Hall as perfectly exemplifying the observation of Pulitzer Prize-winning architectural critic (and Hunter College alumna) Ada Louise Huxtable: "the past lives only as part of the present."

"Weaving the old and new involves not only economic and functional considerations, but aesthetic ones as well," Goldstein added. "This beautifully restored building fulfills both sets of concerns in breath-taking fashion. . . . The renovation has retained and revitalized all of the original period elements, while also supporting the needs and tastes of contemporary users."

Thanking Baruch College's benefactor, Goldstein acknowledged, "The Institute would not exist today were it not for the generosity and vision of Bill Newman, who has infused his personal values in it."

"Crucial policy questions regarding real estate, land development, and management in the City are being debated," Goldstein added, "and CUNY's energetic minds should have a strong, clear voice in that debate."

Janus-Faced—But in a Nice Sense: New ‘Looking Both Ways’ Publication

Looking both ways:

- A not exactly ecumenical colleague: "He talked to me at club one day concerning Cathline's conspiracy—so I withdrew my attention, and thought about Tom Thumb."

- When a meeting goes nowhere: "We had talk enough, but no conversation; there was nothing discussed."

A perfect squelch for an academic rival: "I am to make her ridiculous is like blackening the chimney."

A not exactly ecumenical colleague: "We have a mind as narrow as the neck of a vinegar cruet."

Some Academic Table Talk from Samuel Johnson

How Johnson dressed with a boring colleague: "He talked to me at club one day concerning Cathline's conspiracy—so I withdrew my attention, and thought about Tom Thumb."

When a meeting goes nowhere: "We had talk enough, but no conversation; there was nothing discussed."

A perfect squelch for an academic rival: "I am to make her ridiculous is like blackening the chimney."

A not exactly ecumenical colleague: "We have a mind as narrow as the neck of a vinegar cruet."

How to unwind from a hard day on campus: "A tavern chair is the throne of human felicity."

Tony Randall, Seven Alumni Honored by CCNY

At its 119th Alumni Dinner in Midtown on Nov. 5, the City College Alumni Association bestowed its highest awards on actor and ubiquitous New York City cultural figure Tony Randall and seven distinguished graduates.

Randall was the 52nd recipient of the John H. Finley Award for service to the City of New York, which is named after CCNY’s third President, who went on to become editor of the New York Times. Randall was honored for his long local stage and television career (his debut on Broadway was in 1941), his leadership of the National Actors Theatre, and his charity work, notably with the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation.

The Townsend Harris Medal, established in 1933 and named after CCNY’s founder, recognizes outstanding postgraduate achievements. The seven winners this year represent, as usual, a striking variety of careers. Robert Catelli ('58ME, '64MEE), who joined Brooklyn Union as an engineer just after graduation and worked his way to CEO, is now Chair and CEO of Keyspan Energy. Among the current crop of recipients, architect Joseph L. Fleischer (166Artch) is the Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock; he has designed many cultural edifices across the country. Charlotte Frank (’62), a pioneer in education reform, is now Vice President with McGraw-Hill’s educational division.

Robert T. Johnson (’72) has been elected to the Board of Directors representing the Bronx District Attorney. New York Times Washington bureau chief and Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Oreskes (’75) began his career, aptly enough, as editor of The Campus. Lillias White (’78) garnered a 1997 Tony for Best Featured Actress, for The Life and will be, with Jim Carrey, in the forthcoming film How the Grinch Stole Christmas. Arthur Zeikel (’54B) was for 20 years president of Merrill Lynch’s prosperous Assets Management Group, which he built into the third largest such firm in the world, building client assets from $300 million to $3 billion.

Pushkin, continued from page 8

literary scholars spoke of Pushkin as "Shakespeare's peer."

One American participant had especially pertinent ties to the Pushkin Symposium: Dr. Lily Golden, the author of Africans in Russia and a distinguished scholar in residence at Chicago State University. Golden, who was a visiting scholar during the inauguration of the Shabazz Chair at Medgar Evers College earlier this year, is herself of Russian-African ancestry. Born in Uzbekistan to an American aristocrat who had studied under George Washington Carver at the Tuskegee Institute, Golden was the first black student to earn a Ph.D. at Moscow State University. She offered a political analysis of Pushkin, comparing his influence and fate to that of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Another highlight of the Pushkin Symposium entailed a meeting in Moscow with members of the African-Russian community, who shared their struggles for economic development and care for black orphans, as well as their concerns about racism and racial violence in post-Soviet Russia. (Russia’s black population is estimated to be approximately 14,000 in a nation of 149 million.)

Discussing her awareness of Pushkin’s African heritage and the Afro-European contribution to literature, McLaughlin saluted the late writer Tom Johnson. "Killers" for his early articles in the now-defunct journal Black World. "Killers' book on Pushkin, published posthumously, is a treasure for those wanting to examine Pushkin from a black literary perspective."

Members of the MEC delegation also had opportunity to visit the cities Pushkin loved most, Moscow and St. Petersburg, sites of two major Pushkin museums, his lyceum, and his last home of residence. Some traveled to Pushkin’s estate in Pskov (then Mikhailovskoe), where he was exiled and where he is buried next to his mother at Svyatogorsk monastery.

Looking back on the study tour, McLaughlin fondly recalls, "We witnessed a sea of faces, diverse representatives of the global community, all united by the simple act of paying homage to the genius of Pushkin. Indeed, even with a full schedule of activities, we were energized by our observations and exchanges. We came away renewed by our knowledge of the commonality of the human soul which this illustrious ancestor continues to touch."

In the U.S., a ground-breaking ceremony was held on June 4 at George Washington University in the capital for a Pushkin statue to mark his bicentennial. The Bicentennial Committee plans a forthcoming anniversary exhibition and lectures on Pushkin in the USA and elsewhere. Dr. Crawford, the Committee’s chair, is confident “Medgar Evers College can be one of the places where people will come to study Pushkin, the writer and the African-Russian. For information about another Pushkin study tour next May 25-27 June 7, contact Dr. Isa J. Jeanette Blyden—a Symposium speaker and the grand-daughter of Edward Wilmot Blyden, “Father of African Nationalism”—at Wilmotina24@yahoo.com.

**New 'Looking Both Ways' Publication**

The Looking Both Ways Project will be its initial publication: Looking Both Ways: High School and College Teachers Talk About Language & Learning. The Project is an initiative designed to encourage high school and college-level writings teachers to share pedagogical strategies and experience. It is a joint undertaking of the Office of Academic Affairs, the N.Y.C. Writing Project at Lehman College, and the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors—in cooperation with the City’s Board of Education.

The Project brought together more than 60 high school and CUNY college teachers in seminars that met throughout last spring term to discuss common issues related to writing instruction. The book, authored by the eight seminar leaders with additional contributions from the Project’s directors, highlights the seminars’ most productive explorations, some of the issues that proved particularly stubborn, and some of the common understandings that emerged from thinking about high school and college writing together.

Throughout Looking Both Ways, ideas and words of the participants give fascinating glimpses into the ways teachers look at their work and strive to improve it. For copies, contact Glenda Phipps at 212-541-0375.

Tony Randall, Seven Alumni Honored by CCNY
Open Admissions Comes to the Bronx

Fortunately for Bronx Community College, Morton Rosenstock's institutional memory about the campus goes back to the very beginning. The emeritus professor of history—his specialty is American Jewish history—taught there from 1958 until his retirement in 1995, and he was also Acting President during the unenviable budget crisis year of 1976-77. The Bronx native and graduate of its James Monroe High School still vividly recalls being "present at the creation," which took place on February 2, 1959. On that day, Rosenstock was among the twelve original faculty members on stage with the College's first president, Morris Meister, in Hunter College's huge Assembly Hall (the College's first campus from 1959 to 1973, the former Bronx High School of Science on West 184th Street, was not yet ready for occupancy). In the audience were the College's first 123 students. Rosenstock's interest in the campus has continued during retirement. He has just published a substantial history of BCC, Four Decades of Achievement. Following here is an excerpt adapted from the volume that describes the impact of open admissions, which occurred during the 1966-76 tenure of BCC's second president, James A. Colston. Colston, the son of a poor Florida farmer who rose to become the president of Knoxville College, was the first black president of a predominantly white institution of higher learning in New York State.

President Colston's arrival on the New York educational scene coincided with a period of intense pressure by the minority communities on the city fathers to open the gates of higher education to all high school graduates. In the late 1960s, there was continual controversy between City College and its surrounding community in Harlem, which felt excluded from the benefits of higher education. The University's Chancellor then, Albert H. Bowker, and the Board of Higher Education responded to these pressures and to their own good-faith desire to improve the socioeconomic status of New York's black and Hispanic youth.

In 1968, the Board approved a plan promising admission to a tuition-free college education for every high school graduate by 1975. A $600 million building program was launched and by the early 1970s the City University had expanded to 17 colleges.

In 1969, the Board of Higher Education, influenced by continuing community and student protests, revisé its timetable and adopted a proposal by Bowker to implement the open admissions plan five years sooner than originally projected. For Fall 1970, the Board approved a plan under which students who were in the top half of their high school graduating class or who had an 80% average would be guaranteed admission to a senior college. All other high school graduates would be admitted to one of the community colleges, regardless of high school average or course preparation.

The Bronx Community College's enrollment had been expanding slowly during 1966-69, and the student body's ethnic composition was shifting. After the University's adoption of the open admissions program, the College could no longer screen candidates for admission; it had to accept full matriculated status all high school graduates who applied. With better students promised automatic acceptance to the senior colleges, the community colleges were faced with the task of educating students whose high school records put them in the lower half or even in the lowest quartile. The impact on Bronx Community College was dramatic and immediate. For Fall 1970 admission, 4,000 students were invited to attend, twice the previous year's acceptances. Enrollment climbed steeply, from 8,865 in 1970 to 11,756 in 1971 to 13,668 in 1974. By 1975, the College was serving more than 14,000 students, double the number when Colston arrived.

To handle this influx, staffs had to be expanded, new quarters sought, budgets obtained. In 1970, for example, 116 new faculty members were engaged at BCC, including eighteen new counselors. More important than the logistics, a wholesale shift in educational philosophy was required. Well over 50% of the newly admitted students required remedial aid in reading, mathematics or writing. It was easy to blame these problems on the poor preparation students received in the city's high schools, but the fact remained that the colleges had to develop programs, and...
grade teacher at P.S. 207. “I never saw one class pay so much attention to another class presentation.”

Her students’ play, “Come Over to My House,” told the story of an alien visit. It grew out of a study of homes around the world, which introduced poetry, art, music and folk dances from Mexico, Russia, Greece, and countries in Africa. “The lyrics were poems we put to music,” she explained, “and we wrote the dialogue together. When the children performed, they were proud, excited, and confident.”

The morning after the performance, one of her students used poetry to express how he had changed from the start of the project to its culmination: “We had our show. I was so shy—I felt like I could fly.”

Shevey believes in the power of this transformation. With an extensive background in theater that ranges from the New York Shakespeare Festival to international productions, she looks back at the project as a “lesson in exchange—the exchange of our experts’ skills for the pleasure of watching young students walk onto a professional stage for the first time.” Preconceptions were also exchanged, she says: “We reached a new understanding of how much we have in common—how we all want to transcend our limitations and find ways to shape our expression so that others will listen.”

And, most importantly, the students exchanged their hard work for the appreciation of their parents and peers for their own pride and self-respect. Geri Hayes in District 10 agrees. “The students will remember this event for years.”

Another group of Bronx students will enjoy this same opportunity next spring, as the Second Annual Young Playwrights Festival expands and is presented at the Lovinger Theatre in June 2000. For more information, contact Betsy Shevey (718-960-7830 or bshevey@lehman.cuny.edu).

A Trumped-Up “Carol” for Bronx Public Schools

Picture this: wealthy businessman Ebenezer Scrooge is a Bronx native, but he now resides at 725 Fifth Avenue (a.k.a. Trump Tower). His latest project is buying up Times Square, closing homeless shelters, and making Christmas an illegal holiday. The Bob Cratchit family is still living in the Bronx, and it’s the last holiday season of the millennium.

Thus will Charles Dickens’ humane tale of redemption unfold later this fall as part of the continuing outreach of the Lovinger Theatre at Lehman College to the Bronx public schools. Under the direction of the Lovinger’s producer, Professor Betsy Shevey, Lehman’s Department of Speech and Theatre will present a series of school matinees of A New York Christmas Carol. Like the Bronx Young Playwrights Festival, this educational outreach has been designed to expand literacy and creative self-expression through the arts.

Students from the Bronx High School of Science, De Witt Clinton High School, and middle schools throughout Community School District 10 will have a chance to see the production as well as attend workshops in their schools in which Shevey will share techniques for adapting stories for performance. Students will read the original version of A Christmas Carol and explore the process of re-envisioning a classic in their own cultural terms. The cast will include current Lehman College students, alumni who are working as professional actors, and, as Timmy Cratchit, a 12-year old actor from Middle School 141.

The real coup de théâtre will be Scrooge’s dream-time. Multi-media effects will show the audience a visual montage of New York City from the 1940’s to the 21st century as they follow Scrooge’s journey from selfish greed to loving acceptance of himself and others. The ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future will appear to Scrooge as Ozz Dorothy, Cher, and Madonna. Also featured in the dream is an organ harvesting in which Scrooge is found to have no... well, you know.

In addition to the school matinees, performances for the Bronx community will be given at the newly-renovated 500-seat Lovinger on December 8 (3:30 p.m.), December 9, 10, and 11 (8 p.m.), and December 12 (3 p.m.). Tickets are $5 for adults, $4 for seniors and children; they can be reserved by calling 718-960-8134.

CUNY in the Public Schools—Young Playwrights, continued from page 7

Letters or suggestions for future articles on topics of general interest to the CUNY community should be addressed to:

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New York, NY 10021

CUNY Matters is available on the CUNY home page at http://www.cuny.edu.

Dispute Resolution Institutes at John Jay

The CUNY Dispute Resolution Consortium, based at John Jay College, is offering three advanced Institutes in the near future designed for mediators with at least two years of experience and a minimum of 25 hours of mediation training:

Work Place 101: Labor & Employment Basics for Mediators
(Dec. 6, from 9 to 5)

Sexual Harassment Mediation
(jan. 12, from 1 to 5)

Americans with Disabilities Act Employment Mediation
(jan. 13 & 14, 9 to 5; jan. 15, 9 to 1)

All will take place at John Jay College, 899 Tenth Avenue at 59th St. For more information call Julie Ratcliff at 212-237-8692 or email dispute@jay.cuny.edu

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John Jay Conference, continued from page 2

to be from Brooklyn. The longest commuting time recorded among this hearty group was five hours. Apparently, passengers were encouraged to take alternate subway lines, but when they were taken to these recommended lines by shuttle buses, the trains were not running either.

In the end, there were more participants on hand than had been expected! And they were unbelievably cheerful, enthusiastic and eager to get on with WAC business. The first three days’ sessions were: Introductions: Beliefs, Assumptions, Learning, and Language: Responding to Readings; and Using Writing-to-Learn Strategies in the Classroom. The next day’s sessions included examining and responding to student writing and creating assignments. Participant evaluations of the seminar were high, and three more are anticipated for the 1999-2000 academic year. August 26th was truly an auspicious and fitting beginning for an initiative that has been so eagerly awaited and welcomed. The Office of Academic Affairs owes a debt of thanks to the coordinators and facilitators who made it possible—and to all the participants, whose commitment to Writing Across the Curriculum was not dampened by the torrent.

P.S./M.S. 37 second-grader Iean Carlos Rodriguez rehearses a royal request to his daughter, played by Sierra Paige, to turn off the tube in “The Princess and the TV.”


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