Macaulay Gives $30 Million to Honors College, Says He Was Inspired by CUNY’s ‘Turnaround’

In a September the University received the largest donation of its history, a $30 million gift from financier William E. Macaulay, who said he wanted to ‘help ensure that young people today can get a high quality education just as I received at CUNY some four decades ago.’

Macaulay added, ‘The turnaround at CUNY over the past several years under Matt Goldstein has given me the confidence and inspiration to help support the University through this gift.’

The generous grant will go largely toward the purchase of a building on Manhattan’s Upper West Side that will become the permanent home of the Honors College.

Chancellor Goldstein expressed deep appreciation, noting the Honors College ‘has become a magnet for the city’s finest students.’

Board of Trustees Chair Benno C. Schmidt, Jr. said: ‘Mr. Macaulay’s generosity comes at a time when the University is seeing record enrollments and highly accomplished students.’

Macaulay is a 1966 Honors graduate of City College, having majored in economics at the Baruch School of Business, which was part of City College.

This is indeed a time of expansion and of great achievements at the University.

According to preliminary figures, 226,213 students were enrolled in CUNY degree programs at the beginning of this semester, making it the largest student body in 31 years. And increasingly they are transferring to our colleges from others.

Thousands, having heard about the successes of CUNY students and graduates in recent years, apply from out of state. (See article on page 7.)

Especially worthy of mention is the experience of the Honors College, where applications soared nearly 40 percent, to 3,186, compared to last year. Those seeking admission were facing some of the stiffest competition around, with the applicants from some of the best high schools in the region, applying for roughly 320 seats. The acceptance rate of 25 percent was on par with that of the most competitive private colleges in the nation.

Chancellor Goldstein proudly noted also that this academic year marks the beginning of three highly significant new programs at the University, a Graduate School of Journalism, a Teacher Academy specializing in math and science, and an Online Baccalaureate program.

T he journalism school — the only such graduate program at a public college in the Northeast — is historic in more ways than one, being located in the hallowed former headquarters of the late, great Herald Tribune newspaper in midtown.

The class of 57 students, selected from among 216 applicants, constitutes the most diverse student body of any graduate school of journalism in the country.

David Chiu, 32, of Brooklyn, said he was pleased by his decision to enroll.

‘The professors I’ve had are experienced and the students are bright and full of energy,’ he said. Chiu, who worked as a freelance contributor for such publications as The New York Times and Rolling Stone, added: ‘I’m totally learning a lot here.’

The last student to register, Zayed A., an Iraqi dentist who chronicled daily life under siege in Baghdad over the past two years in his blog, which he called ‘Healing Iraq,’ said he had been in Jordan for three months awaiting an American visa.

The 27-year-old Zayed (who for his own protection did not use his last name) will study interactive media with Professor Jeff Jarvis, whose own blog inspired Zayed’s efforts. Zayed’s reports from Iraq have been featured by The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Guardian, among other major news outlets.

The new Teacher Academy, which has 107 students in its inaugural class but hopes to reach 300 students in its second academic year, is located on seven CUNY campuses — Brooklyn College, The City College, College of Staten Island, Hunter College, Lehman College, Queens College and York College. Its purpose is to ‘prepare a new generation of exceptional teachers to produce high levels of student achievement and to inspire middle and high school students’ interest in mathematics and science.’

A great incentive for applying to the Teacher Academy is that, like the Honors College, students receive free tuition and stipends for their four years. The Academy is a partnership between CUNY and the New York City Department of Education.

This summer, a student in the incoming first class of the Academy, Steven Herbst, addressed a gathering of other students, professors and CUNY administrators at The CUNY Graduate Center.

‘The real reward of the Teacher Academy is not only the full tuition scholarship we have all received, nor is it only the dedicated faculty we are privileged to work with,’ Herbst said.

The real reward, explained Herbst, who will be based at Hunter College and is a graduate of James Madison High School in Brooklyn, is the joy of helping others to succeed in life.

‘New York City will have a new generation of math and science teachers to teach the future of New York City,’ he said. ‘And I am proud to be a part of it.’

Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Selma Botman said: ‘The Teacher Academy is a place for aspiring teachers to blossom.’

As for the new CUNY Online Baccalaureate, it is designed for working students who have great difficulty attending classes and can benefit from ‘distance learning.’

If you are looking for a flexible way to gain a high quality bachelor’s degree while balancing career and family obligations, the Online Baccalaureate is for you,” the program beckons on its website. There are about 250 students registered now in the Online program.

The College Library

The role of the college librarian has changed significantly in recent years, especially since the birth of the Internet. The craf is an increasingly complex discipline, and librarians are now more teachers than they are facilitators. See page 4.

The College Recruiting

As an Art

Colleges are aggressively marketing themselves to prospective students, trying to tell the stories of success that make others say, ‘I want to go there!’ Hearing the news, thousands of out-of-state residents are applying to CUNY and attending CUNY colleges. See pages 6 and 7.

CUNY Month

All around the University during November, CUNY Month, campuses sponsor conferences on topics of interdisciplinary interest, they hold open houses, and they otherwise show how exciting college life can be. See page 12.
THE CHANCELLOR’S DESK

The Expanding University

In August, a New York Times article noted the sharp increase of people in the New York metropolitan area who had at least a bachelor’s degree. One of the reasons given for this growing concentration of highly educated people in our area is the increase of residents obtaining degrees—as a result of enrollment growth at CUNY.

The University’s enrollment figures, reflected in the number of students it attracts (with freshman applications increasing by more than 5 percent this year) and in the educational experiences it offers. As we welcome the growing interest in CUNY by students of all backgrounds, including more high-achieving high school graduates, we are creating innovative new ways to respond to the needs of individual learners, the community, and the market. We are very proud that this fall marks the launch of some brand-new ways that CUNY will help New Yorkers advance their academic aspirations.

The Graduate School of Journalism greeted its inaugural class in September. Led by founding dean Stephen Sheperd, for editors and journalists, Work, the school is the only public graduate school of journalism in the Northeast. That fall the college welcomed school students with high ambition and limited means who now have access to a top-quality, intensive learning experience in the heart of the media capital of the world. The first cohort of 60 students is meeting a faculty comprising veteran journalists and industry professionals and participating in print, broadcast, or interactive tracks, a community news service, and a research lab. The college is housed in the former headquarters of the New York Herald Tribune, a truly historic setting updated with a state-of-the-art newsroom and wireless classrooms.

Students in the new CUNY Teacher Academy also began their innovative academic program this fall. Responding to the need for more high-quality math and science teachers in the New York City schools, CUNY, in partnership with the Department of Education and New York University, has developed a new approach to teacher education. Combining a rigorous program in math, biology, chemistry, or earth science and a strong liberal arts curriculum with early, hands-on experiences in New York City public schools, the Academy prepares students for long careers in urban education. The selective program, based at Brooklyn, City, Hunter, Lehman, and Queens colleges and the College of Staten Island, offers four years of free tuition and stipends for internships. Drawing the best students to this noble profession is a critical goal of the Academy.

We know how important increased K-12 participation and proficiency in math and science are—and we also know that excellent teachers are the key to meeting those objectives.

This fall, our new Online Baccalaureate is opening up new opportunities for those whose work demands, family responsibilities, or physical disabilities have made a traditional “bricks and mortar” education difficult to complete. The online degree program is designed specifically for busy adults who have already made significant progress toward a baccalaureate degree and now want to finish it. The 300 students who have already been admitted are finding an answer to their need for a flexible and convenient program that maintains a rigorous curriculum taught by experienced faculty. I am very pleased that the University has developed this online degree option to help New Yorkers continue to achieve their academic and professional goals.

An essential component of an advanced education is confrontation of our civic responsibilities, and another new initiative this fall expands CUNY’s long-time work to help new immigrants, and all students, participate fully as citizens. Voter Registration Month runs from September 13 to October 13, and its intent, according to Carlos Sierra, chairperson of the University Student Senate and a key organizer, is nothing less than to “turn CUNY into a ‘house of voters’.” The University is partnering with other city organizations to increase the number of registered voters in New York City by sponsoring registration drives, helping students to serve as poll workers on election days, and working to maximize voter turnout by disabled students. The effort is a natural extension of CUNY’s citizenship efforts, which include this year’s “Nation of Immigrants” Calendar, developed by the Office of University Relations and the LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, in partnership with The New York Times, JP Morgan Chase, and TIAA-CREF. I encourage CUNY staff and faculty to participate in Voter Registration Month on their campuses and within their communities and, of course, to register to vote and exercise that important privilege.

On behalf of the University, thank you for your important role in helping more and more CUNY students advance their education. I hope you enjoy a productive and successful 2006-07 academic year.

Enrolled at Medgar Evers, He

by Curtis Stephen

A n Alan Newton, 45, had long dreamed of going to college. When he graduated from Dewitt Clinton High School in the Bronx in 1979, he entered the workforce and took jobs at a local bank and a telephone company in the World Trade Center to pay his way through school.

“I didn’t want to take out a big loan,” he recalled. “I wanted to use the company’s college program to get some assistance.”

But in June 1984, those plans came to an abrupt and terrifying halt.

He was arrested for the rape of a 25-year-old woman inside an abandoned building in the Bronx after the victim identified him in two separate lineups. At his 1985 trial, Newton was convicted of rape and assault charges and was sentenced to up to 40 years in prison.

Now, after a judge recently determined on the basis of DNA evidence that he had not committed the crime, Newton is going to live out his dream of attaining a bachelor’s degree. This semester, having been awarded a full scholarship, he is enrolled as a student at Medgar Evers College, where he plans to take courses that will prepare him for a career as a lawyer.

If Newton was happy as he walked through the halls of his new college, the joy was magnified by the fact that, a mere two months before, he was standing anxiously in the halls of justice.

On July 6, after more than two decades of incarceration, Newton had appeared in a crowded Bronx courtroom before Judge John Byrne, who granted a motion to overturn the conviction as DNA evidence proved what Newton had adamantly maintained all along—that he was innocent. “I always believed that the truth would come out. I didn’t give up, though, because I knew that I had to keep fighting,” said Newton, who was born in Manhattan and raised in the Bronx.

Since being exonerated, Newton has shared the details of his ordeal on several national news programs and media outlets, including an appearance on the long-running WABC-TV public affairs show, “Like It.” He also gave a well-received address during the Board of Directors dinner at the NAACP’s annual convention in Washington D.C.

“I never thought I would be there,” said a still-surprised Newton. “It was just an honor to be around people that you only read about.”

Yet the same could also be said of Newton himself—that he is being read and talked about quite a bit. He’s been fielding phone calls from a number of public figures, including Carl Banks, the former New York Giants linebacker and Eric Adams, co-founder of the Brooklyn-based advocacy group 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement.

But nothing prepared Newton for the call he received one afternoon from Noel Hankin, a marketing executive at Metrowest Henniker, who is also vice chairman on the Board of Directors for the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Foundation. The purpose of the call was to achieve his lifelong goal of earning a bachelor’s degree.

Established in 1987, the scholarship supports students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) nationwide. Among the participating institutions are CUNY’s York College and Medgar Evers College, where Newton has decided to enroll. Additionally, Medgar Evers President Edison O. Jackson gave Newton a job with the college’s Male Development and Empowerment Center as well as additional scholarship money and a laptop. Newton is now fully covered for his $2,200 in tuition for the semester, as well as other expenses.

“This is incredible on so many levels, especially when you consider that Alan was sitting in a prison cell just three months ago,” said Vanessa Potkin, who represents Newton and serves as a staff attorney at the Innocence Project, a non-profit in New York. “Earning a college degree is seen by many politicians as a luxury that they can afford for some of what we see has happened in the University,” Goldstein told Schmitt, a former President of Yale University.

New Trustee Berry, who is the Vice President of Global Workplace Initiatives and Corporate Officer for Colgate-Palmolive Corp., a $12 billion global consumer products company, said he wants “to continue to build on the innovations that have taken place and bring more perspectives from the world of work and from the world of business.”

Berry is a Trustee of the CUNY Construction Fund and a member of CUNY’s Business and Economic Development Council. He also sits on the Mayor’s Educational Priorities Panel.

A graduate of both Manhattan Community College and Queens College (with an MBA from Xavier University and an MSW from Columbia University),

erry and Foster-Tolbert Are
Hopes to Retrieve Years Lost While Wrongfully Imprisoned

experts as the best way to overcome the extraordinarily difficult obstacles facing those who have done time in prison, even those who were wrongfully convicted, reinte-
grating them back into society with steady employment and stable housing.

For decades, CUNY has been deeply engaged in this issue through a number of initiatives designed to increase the chances that the formerly incarcerated will lead productive lives. In 1991, LaGuardia Community College developed CUNY Catch, an early-intervention program that offers career development, academic counseling and vocational training to at-risk adoles-
cents who are either on probation or detained in Rikers Island jails. And last year the Prisoner Re-Entry Institute, which pro-
vides academic opportunities and support to individuals with criminal records, was established at John Jay College.

The Institute, which receives some fund-
ing from the Black Male Initiative launched by Chancellor Matthew Goldstein earlier this year, also regularly convenes workshops and panels with policymakers, researchers and criminal justice advocates to explore re-entry issues and solutions to the broader dilemma.

“Education is the bridge to help people who have come out of prison and other-
wise would have a barrier to getting back into the job market. It helps them get back

on the train,” said Debbie Mukamal, director
of the Institute, which aided about 130 CUNY students last year as family members filed an online application with the Innocence Project, which has helped to exonerate 183 falsely imprisoned men nationwide through DNA evidence since it was founded in 1992.

Newton had initially petitioned the court for DNA testing of the rape kit in 1994, but was denied since that evidence could not be found in the Queens ware-
house where the New York City Police Department had stored it.

But after a direct appeal from the
Innocence Project in 2005, Bronx Assistant District Attorney Elisa Koehneman made a personal request for a thorough search of the facility, which led to the discovery of the evidence. “Had this evidence not turned up, Alan would still be in prison right now,” said Potkin, the Innocence Project staff lawyer who represents Newton.

To date, the real perpetrator has yet to be found. And it’s a fact that continues to rankle Newton.

“The way the system is designed, it usu-
ally means justice for the victim,” he said.

unjust conviction denied the victim justice
because the person who did this is still out there. So who received justice in this case he asked “I received a lot of time wrong-
fully and the victim didn’t receive any jus-
tice because the person who assaulted her is still free. Justice for all doesn’t mean jus-
tice for one person.”

Newton, who began taking classes at Medgar Evers College in late August, plans to use his own experiences in the criminal jus-
tice system as part of his long-term goal of becoming an attorney and creating an organ-
ization that can make a difference in the lives of other formerly incarcerated individuals.

“There’s a lot of other groups out there, but having somebody who was actually inside is different,” he said.

One lesson Newton will be sure to impart is the sheer importance that educa-
tion can have in one’s life. “That’s one thing that no one can ever take from you,” he explained. “They can take your freedom and black out whatever you couldn’t take the knowledge that you possess.”

New Trustees, Kirschner is New Honors Dean

Berry has been tire-
lessly active as an alumnus of those institutions.

“We’ve shown we can produce quality students,” Berry said of CUNY. “The teaching faculty at the City University of New York, I would stack against
any scholars in the world. What we have to continue to offer is a world-class education — so that students can function not just in the City of New York, or the State of New York, or just in the United States, but any-
where in the world.”

Foster-Tolbert, Deputy Director of the Governor’s Office of Community Affairs and a former Assistant to the Governor for African-American Affairs, has a bachelor’s degree from Hofstra University and a mas-
ter’s from University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

During the mid-1990s Foster-Tolbert
worked at Borough of Manhattan Community College as Human Resources Administration Liaison and as a recruiter for CPEP (College Opportunity to Prepare for Employment), advocating for students on public assistance who were attempting to further their education.

“I became completely sold on the idea that it is education that can transform a city, the state, the world,” Foster-
Tolbert said of her experiences working at CUNY.

Berry and Foster-Tolbert replace former Trustees Nilda Soto Ruiz and John J. Calandra. Kirschner, an English scholar, innova-
tive administrator, and pioneer in the use of digital media, said she is honored to be the new dean of CUNY Honors College.

“I am delighted to be working

with the tremendously talented students, faculty, and staff of the CUNY Honors College,” Kirschner said after her appoint-
ment by the Board of Trustees this summer. Selma Botman, executive vice chancellor for academic affairs, said that the feelings of appreciation were mutual.

Kirschner “will apply her considerable talents to advancing the CUNY Honors College, a program that has a proven record of recruiting accomplished students, engag-
ing dedicated faculty, and creat-
ing exciting academic programming,” Botman said.

An honors graduate of the State University of New York at Buffalo and holder of a Ph.D. in English from Princeton, Kirschner “brings fresh ideas, energy, and a deep respect for the students and faculty connected with the Honors College,” Botman added.

Before coming to CUNY, Honors Dean Kirschner was instrumental in developing Columbia University’s overall strategy for technol-
ogy and learning, which led to the creation of Fathom, the first online knowledge network. Fathom was created in association with the London School of Economics, the New York Public Library, and other institutions in the United States and United Kingdom.

Opening doors of opportunity — for immigrants and others striving to succeed in New York and in the global economy — is what motivates Kirschner. “As a kid growing up in New York City, and a child of Holocaust survivors, I never doubted that public education was my front door to opportunity,” Kirschner said in a late August interview with the journal Inside Higher Ed.
Role of Librarian Undergoes Great Changes

The Internet has had an impact on virtually everyone in American higher education. But even in that vast expanse, the librarian stands out as one whose work has undergone a sea change.

CUNY’s campus libraries — there are 20 of them now — were once considered to be largely support systems for classroom instruction. But in an age of high technology and information profession — in which information literacy is a hallmark of a strong education — librarians have taken on a much more critical role.

“The fact that so much information is out there makes... librarians even more important,” said George Otte, CUNY’s Director of Instructional Technology and a member of the doctoral faculty at the Graduate Center.

“How do you get [information] and authenticate it and know that it’s good? You go to librarians. Who knows better? They have a huge role to play.”

About 12 million people enter CUNY libraries every year to make use of the university’s collections, which include more than 7.5 million books, 300,000 periodicals, and thousands of microforms, music scores, slides, tapes and videos. Millions more access the libraries online, searching data bases and reading books, monographs and journals that have been put into digital formats.

Students have access to and borrowing privileges at all CUNY libraries; alumni have privileges at colleges they attended. The libraries are still evolving places, and digitization projects — in which documents “migrate” into digital files — have been launched at several campuses.

At John Jay College, for example, the “Crime in New York, 1800-1950” project includes the digitizing of all the transcripts from the trials of the Court of General Sessions from 1883 to 1927. “Murder, grand larceny, assault, every type of crime in New York is covered,” said Larry Sullivan, chief librarian at John Jay, noting the project included the colorful 1904 trial of the notorious gangster, Monk Eastman, one of the characters in the movie “Gangs of New York.”

The goal is to make such information “accessible, with the intent of being search-able on the Web,” Sullivan said.

The Web, indeed, has become an abiding feature of the modern library, said Assistant Professor Lisa Fader, Serials Librarian at the Hunter College Library.

At Hunter, the library’s Home Web page features links to almost 200 data bases, dozens of electronic journals and electronic reserves (accessible from students’ home computers, without a card)...

But if a college library is to offer a dizzying array of resources, it must also ensure that students and faculty are trained to use them.

And, in fact, there has been in recent years a major effort to bring library instruction closer to the heart of the university’s educational mission, said Assistant Professor LaRoi Lawton, director of the Gerald S. Lieblich Learning Resources Center at Bronx Community College.

“A lot of us are very, very proactive when it comes to teaching,” said Lawton, who is also president of LACUNY, the Library Association of the City University of New York.

“We’re always in the classroom.”

At Baruch, too, there is a sharp focus on “tying the library into the curriculum,” said Arthur Downing, chief librarian and Vice President for Information Technology “We spend a lot of time strategizing how to inactivate ourselves into people’s courses,” said Downing with a smile.

One salient example: the partnership between the library staff and the marketing department to develop the Direct and Interactive Marketing Resource Center. Working with marketing professor Harvey Markovitz, the library two years ago designed the center as a “laboratory” for students to learn how to create marketing campaigns, using sophisticated information resources obtained by the library, such as proprietary data bases.

Last year, a survey of more than 7,000 CUNY students and faculty across CUNY campuses found that users placed a high value on their library’s facilities.

“One of the most surprising findings was how important the library is as a physical place,” said University Librarian Curtis L. Kendrick. “They like being in that space when they’re not in class.”

At some colleges, like Hunter, libraries are unveiling a “browser’s lounge” where students can gather and pursue books and journals. Brooklyn College’s new library, completed in 2002, offers an “information commons” — including distinctive study and reference areas, each with dozens of PCs.

Barbara Huggins, chief, Librarian and Executive Director of Academic Information Technologies, said that a principal goal is to make Brooklyn College’s library a “comfortable place.” We give many options as to spaces to do work: more formal settings, alone or in groups, quiet or noisy,” Huggins said.

One of the main challenges facing the University broadly is to make its various library resources available throughout the system, Kendrick said. He foresees a number of “growth areas,” including the creation of a “digital repository” that would “serve as a home for documenting the scholarship and creative activity of CUNY faculty.” Of course, a major consideration, as always, is money. Kendrick said that the will is there, and the will leads the way.

The College Library as a Music Lover’s Realm


Of course, Kendrick had a day job, too, as an assistant in the Brown Library.

So when the band broke up, the Long Island native headed off to Simmons Graduate School of Library and Information Science in Boston.

He then launched a peripatetic career at a string of prominent academic libraries: Oberlin College, followed by State University at Stony Brook (then back to graduate school for an MBA at Emory), then Harvard and then Columbia.

In the fall of 2004, Kendrick was appointed University Librarian at CUNY, a new position created within the Office of Academic Affairs “to reflect the close relationship between the libraries and the University’s core mission,” Kendrick said.

“The role of librarians has become increasingly critical, he said. “They act as go-betweens, and in an era of specialization, the need for go-betweens has become more pronounced.”

Kendrick said that one of the most compelling challenges at CUNY is making disparate parts work together as a whole.

Using a metaphor from his music days, he added, “In the end, you realize that the group only sounds as good as the whole group together.”
Gearing Up to Get Low-Income Students into College

CUNY GEAR-UP has one of the most important jobs in town. It starts working with youngsters in middle schools, and then stays with those students through high school, giving them a rigorous academic program that includes college courses.

More than 2,000 students, mostly African-Americans and Latinos, have gone through the program over the past several years. Recently the University received an $800,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to help GEAR-UP continue its mission of helping low-income public school students enter and succeed in college. It is anticipated that the grant—which will fund GEAR-UP’s Middle Grades Initiative (MGI)—will continue for six years, at $800,000 annually, for a total of $4.8 million.

Dona Linderman, the Project Director, said that CUNY GEAR-UP has developed “a comprehensive strategy for success.” It has successfully worked with 2,200 mostly minority students from 2000 to 2005, she said.

The Middle Grades Initiative has strong relationships with 13 New York City public schools and features math, reading and writing programs, along with outreach to parents and early counseling about college.

Study of Hebrew Making a Revival at Lehman College

After a decade-long absence, the study of Hebrew is making a comeback at Lehman College, thanks to Professor Zehda Kahan Newman, an expert in Hebrew and Judaic Studies, and a growing group of interested students.

With the success last year of its first Hebrew course in ten years, the College’s Department of Languages and Literature is offering two additional courses this fall that will provide more advanced language instruction as well as study of the modern Hebrew novel.

In the first-year course, Hebrew 101, students learn to read, write, and speak modern Israeli Hebrew. Students also learn to understand various levels of Hebrew, from formal language to slang. Second-year students will have the opportunity to further explore the language.

Ida Pilch, the former language editor for the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities Publishing House, will teach the first-year course. Pilch, who received the Gimpass award for excellence in teaching, also teaches at Queens College.

Professor Newman will teach the second-year course, and, as with Hebrew 101, she plans to incorporate song into the curriculum. In both courses, we learn songs as we learn grammatical concepts,” she explained. In addition, Newman will teach “Hebrew 327: The Modern Hebrew Novel.” This third-year-level course will focus on the novels of Chaim Potok, who won the Sopher Prize in literature for his novel about the Yom Kippur War as seen through the eyes of a young soldier.

Classes for Hebrew 201 and 327 will meet online, as well as on the Lehman campus.

Hall of Fame Offers Insights About the New New York

The Hall of Fame of Great Americans, which honors prominent people who are considered great symbols of American culture, is located on the Bronx Community College campus.

In June, this classical landmark, designed by Stanford White, was host to a two-week seminar for Lehman, Hostos and BCC College professors, who met to develop insights into how the old figures in the Hall of Fame could be made relevant to a demographically-changed Bronx.

Thanks to a $75,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant to BCC’s Center for Teaching Excellence, the professors explored how the historical figures Walter Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, George Washington, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin can be connected to Americans coming from countries and cultures different from that of early USA.

The bronze busts of three Great Americans, along with 92 others, make up the landmarked Hall of Fame of Great Americans. It is a 630-foot, open-air colonnade that connects four buildings, including the Gould Memorial Library.

“Through course assignments and projects or just by walking through the verandah of the Hall of Fame of Great Americans colonnade, and contemplating the bronze busts and their inscriptions, son and daughters of new immigrants and those of working-class parents have the opportunity to contemplate the role they wish to play in the future,” stated Dr. Harriet Shenkman, project director and Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence.

(’The Hall of Fame of Great Americans is open free to the public daily. For more information, please call (718) 289-5161.)

Honor College Students Visit Pentagon

Trustee Kathleen M. Pease took 18 CUNY Honor College students on a trip to the Pentagon recently where they met with Assistant Secretary of the Navy Richard Greco, Jr.

Greco is the comptroller of the Navy, the person responsible for its finances, and Pease thought that it was important for students to meet him and “broaden their horizons,” to show that finances play a major role in education and the military, and to “look at the field of finance from different perspectives.”

“People think of the Pentagon as an industrial complex, but if you don’t have money, nothing gets done,” said Pease.

Students said they learned a fact of public life that has perhaps eluded many young people: that there are plenty of job opportunities at the Pentagon, which, after all, is run by civilians.

“It was mind-opening,” said Christina Corrella, an honor College student interested in public service career. Corrella said that she was especially impressed with the dedication of the public servants she met.

“I feel people who work there are dedicated to the American people. That quality stood out,” Corrella said.

Pease said she would like to create opportunities for Honor College students to win White House Fellowships, the prestigious program in which Fellows work as paid assistants to top government officials in Washington.

Assistant Secretary Greco started his career as a White House Fellow. Former Secretary of State and

Athletic Programs Using Web for Continual Updates

CUNY athletic programs increasingly are using the Web to provide extensive information about the teams to sports loving students and faculty, as well as to outsiders.

The enhanced use of the Internet is being done in conjunction with Internet Consulting Services (ICS), a 10-year-old company that has been servicing a growing number of athletic websites.

“With college athletics have just exploded in the last decade,” said Dand Gansell, assistant director of the CUNY Athletic Conference.

At CUNY: “We are catching on to the importance of having a really professional website,” Gansell added.

The College of Staten Island recently announced it was the latest CUNY college to come on board with ICS, using it to publicize its 12 varsity teams. “The new site (at www.csidolphins.com) offers a total multimedia experience for fans of CSI athletics,” the college announced.

“We got the ball rolling,” with regard to using ICS, said Gansell. Barrick College soon joined the team, Gansell said, followed lately by the College of Staten Island.

Among the features are: players of the week, updated scores and statistics, news stories and photos of players.

“They may make it easy to update your website,” Gansell said of ICS.

As Gansell spoke, the CUNY Athletic Conference website (cunyanthetics.com) was featuring photos of soccer players who had just returned from their summer Goodwill visit to South Africa.

College of Staten Island administrators are happy with their new site. "Our partnership with ICS means that visitors to our site will now have a wealth of information at their fingertips, complete with a sleek design and user-friendly interface," said Jason Pen, Acting Director of Athletics at the college.

Website photo of CUNY soccer players in front of Nelson Mandela statue in South Africa this summer.

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In a New and Competitive Environment, Colleges

On a fine day last spring, Charles DeCicco, City College Class of ’67, was in the Bronx doing what he loves — sitting at Yankee Stadium, preparing to cheer his Yankees when suddenly his attention was drawn to the huge centerfield screen.

DeCicco, who has spent his professional life telling the outside world about the virtues and triumphs of the University, saw something that left him uncharacteristically drop-jawed.

There on the screen was Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, who began to announce that CUNY’s own “Superstar Team” had staked out positions on the academic field of dreams. Goldstein’s remarks were accompanied by a huge image of nine students from across the University who had won prestigious awards and honors, including David Bauer, 2005 winner of the Intel Science competition. Bauer chose to attend CUNY Honors College at City College, though he could have attended virtually any private college in the country.

In DeCicco’s recollection of that superstar day, which he recalled in a touching first-person account published in City College’s alumni magazine, Goldstein told the sellout crowd of 55,000 “If by more and more New Yorkers are discovering, today’s superstars high school students are choosing to study with the champions at the City University of New York.”

With the fast-spreading awareness, locally and around the globe, of the importance of higher education, universities have been energetically striving to inform target audiences of the good being done within their hallowed halls. Marketing has become a tool not only of growth but of survival for colleges and universities big and small.

The video produced by CUNY-TV and shown at Yankee Stadium was a marketer’s dream. But throughout the city and, in fact, throughout the region — on city subway cars, at city bus stops, at Long Island Railroad stations and elsewhere — there are countless colorful posters bearing similar messages of success about CUNY to men and women pondering their futures in an ever-changing and global economy, where a college degree has become all but essential.

“This is a sea change,” said Jay Hershenson, Vice Chancellor for University Relations and Secretary of the Board of Trustees, speaking of the long reach of CUNY’s message machine.

“We now have a presence showcasing what I would call the art of the possible at CUNY, where students of limited means, economically, can win top competitive awards and become great success stories through hard work.”

At York College, a spokesman for President Marcia V. Keizs said the message about CUNY students of modest means catapulting to heights of success has been extraordinarily effective: The spokesman referred specifically to a new “Back2Back Winner/CUNY” poster featuring the late City College alumnus and Nobel Prize-winning scientist Jonas Salk, who is pictured side-by-side with York alumna Fiona Smith, an ’05 York grad and CUNY Salk Scholar now attending Penn State University School of Medicine; and Max H. Suarez, an ’06 York graduate and honorary Salk Scholar now attending the University of Virginia School of Medicine.

The spokesman said, “When you pair Fiona with Jonas Salk, it says right away that York is an institution that produces students at the high end of academic achievement who go on to the most competitive research programs and graduate and professional schools.”

He added, “The image of Fiona stops you because she has an earnest face and people say, ‘That could be me.’ Commuters have also been drawn to bus stop ads featuring another charming pair of back-to-back winners, recipients of the highly prestigious Truman Scholarships. First was Claudia Simpkins, who recently graduated from the Honors College at City College and is now at Harvard Law School, and then Ryan Merola, an Honors College at Brooklyn College senior majoring in political science and philosophy.

“Riding these waves of recruiting/marketing successes, CUNY’s colleges across the board have been stepping up their efforts. Historically, CUNY’s recruitment programs have been modest when compared to those of private institutions, but that has been changing.

“New York City is one of the most competitive higher education markets in the nation,” said Richard P. Alvarez, University Director of Admission at CUNY for the past four-and-one-half years. “The tri-state area has one of the nation’s greatest concentrations of colleges and universities,” he added,

New Dorm Opens Doors at CCNY

The image of CUNY as Commuter U is being altered somewhat by the new City College dormitory complex accommodating 600 students and faculty members — The Towers at The City College of New York, which opened this semester. Some of the residents are from out-of-state, although there are many students in the New York metropolitan area who want to avoid long commutes and who, in the words of City College President Gregory H. Williams, desire “residential college experience.” Pictured here in dorm apartment are (left to right) David Wilcox and Charles Cloud.

An aid showcasing the successes of York College grad Fiona Smith and Max Suarez
Must Market Themselves to Prospective Students

As an affordable public University located in the most cosmopolitan city in the world, CUNY has understand-ably drawn many thousands of foreign-born New Yorkers into its student roster. But in recent years the University has also been drawing students from other states, ambitious young men and women from the West Coast, the Mid-West and elsewhere, who are attracted to the prospects of CUNY’s achievements and New York City’s cultural vitality.

According to the most recent figures, slightly more than 5,000 students last year had out-of-state addresses and paid the out-of-state tuition. Many, of course, hail from nearby New Jersey and Connecticut, but others come from Alaska and Arizona, Kentucky and Kansas, and points in between.

While out-of-state students pay more than double what New York State residents pay, their tuition is still half to a third of what other public institutions charge their out-of-state students.

Alaskan Finds Gold in Brooklyn

Eyeri Kreibis, a native of Alaska, went to high school two blocks from the University of Anchorage. But when college time came, he decided to travel 3,400 miles to attend Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn. He liked the idea of being in a place that was like a microcosm of the whole world.

"New York’s a place where you’re still in America, but at the same time it has the rest of the world in it. I’m learning a lot and not just in the classroom," he said.

Kreibis realizes he stands out, and he seems to like that. "When my friends hear Medgar Evers is they say, ‘Are you crazy? You’re a white kid?’" Kreibis recalled with a laugh.

He is a music major, a drummer and a member of the college’s jazz ensemble, and he believes there’s no better place for a musician than New York. "You can’t get your name out when you live in a state that is separated by another country," he said, referring to Canada.

Already, he’s landed a paying gig (through one of his professors) and feels he’s being exposed to musical traditions and skills that he couldn’t have found anywhere else, certainly not in Alaska.

Kreibis, who said he’s benefiting from a full scholarship through the college’s music department, lives in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn.

Leaving Kentucky for Harlem

Cindy Carter of Lexington, Kentucky, was so happy about her decision to attend City College she wrote an article about it in her hometown paper, the Lexington Herald Leader, where she worked this past summer as an intern.

Most people who ask me about my college decision continue to question why I want to go so far away," Carter wrote in the article published in the May 31, 2006, issue of the newspaper. "I proudly and con- fidently let them know that I’m ready for a change, and that I’m ready for something new...It has always been in my blood to blaze my own trail and do something different.

From A(zriona) to W(yoming) They Love New York

Carter applied to the University of South Carolina, Fordham, St. Peter’s College (in New Jersey), CCNY and Brooklyn College. She had her pick, and her parents wanted her to attend the University of South Carolina, which was closer to home.

"But I liked the location of City College, and I liked Harlem," said Carter. "I really want to get out for City’s basketball team. She says she’ll rent a room from a family she found through the classifieds (‘For at least one semester’) and plans to work at least 15 hours per week to supplement loans that her parents plan to take out on her behalf.

Full-time out-of-state students take between 12 to 16 credits at a CUNY senior college pay between $4,520 and $5,760 for a semester. After living in New York for a year and establishing residence here, out-of-state students are eligible for the lower-in-state tuition rates.

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment says that, over the past six years, CUNY colleges have drawn stu-dents from every state in the nation.

Some admit they are wandering. Michele Sutherland came from Arizona to attend BMCC. Sutherland, 33, spent much of the last decade touring the United States as a guitarist in a rock band. But she recently graduated with her associate’s degree and is off again, now to attend Stanford University, where she plans to study philosophy.

Sutherland, who was a liberal arts major, feels BMCC taught her about life and literature. Determined to again spread her wings, she applied not only to Stanford, but to Yale, Smith, Brown and Mount Holyoke, and was accepted at all.

She is particularly pleased to have chosen the city and to have chosen the city and...
Professor Recalls Creating Forerunner to Internet

In the spring of 1981, Ira Fuchs and Greydon Freeman sat down at a conference for computing professionals in St. Louis and began hatching a bold new idea: a computer network that could connect faculty at colleges and universities nationwide— even worldwide.

“We wanted to connect every scholar at every university,” said Fuchs, who at the time was Vice Chancellor for University Systems at CUNY, responsible for technology at the university’s campuses.

Freeman, who was then director of computing at Yale University, said they had the software they needed and the required IBM hardware was already in-house (many universities already were using IBM mainframes).

“We thought, ‘All the pieces are here, why not do it?’” Freeman recalled in a telephone conversation from his home in Woodbridge, Conn. “We decided to order it up.”

So the two administrators did just that, linking up the Yale computer center with CUNY’s computer center at 555 West 57th Street. Six months after their meeting in St. Louis, Fuchs sent his first e-mail message to Freeman over a collaborative university network they called BITNET.

“It was probably, ‘Watson, come here, I need you,’” said Fuchs with a laugh, echoing the famous words of Alexander Graham Bell as he intoned the world’s first telephone message to his assistant.

“I thank—I sent him a bottle of champagne, too,” said Fuchs, now vice president for research in information technology at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Fuchs’ message, delivered 25 years ago this month, highlights the important historical role CUNY played in establishing a worldwide communications network for research and educational institutions—as well as helping to lay the groundwork that eventually created the Internet.

“BITNET had people in universities all over the world,” wrote Mark Humphreys, author of The Internet in the 1980s: “It had workable e-mail, it had real-time interactive chat... The whole thing [BITNET plus connected network] was an embryonic Internet.”

In the beginning, however, the primary goal of Fuchs and Freeman was to focus on serving the needs of university communities.

“We were tool makers,” Freeman said. “We delivered very good tools to the faculty to make exciting things happen. BITNET was one of them.”

Fuchs, a Forest Hills native, came to CUNY in 1973 at age 24 to become founding director of the university’s computer center. “There wasn’t anyone in the world that I knew who was more qualified, who knew more, who had more energy, or was more intelligent,” recalled Kenneth King, the former dean of computing systems at CUNY, in a published report several years ago.

When Fuchs and Freeman started BITNET, they split the costs between Yale and CUNY. Yale paid for the leased lines from New Haven to Manhattan, probably about $200 a month, Fuchs said. CUNY paid about $10,000 for the two modems, which weighed about 70 pounds each and were the size of piza boxes, he said.

Originally, BITNET stood for, “Because It’s There Network”—as in, “Why do people climb Mt. Everest? Because it’s there.” Freeman said. But that apellation seemed “a little too flip,” Fuchs said, so it became, “Because It’s Time Network.”

Whatever its name, once the mechanism for the network was set up, “it started to spread epidemiologically,” Freeman said. It was inexpensive and efficient, a “point-to-point” network where e-mail messages and files were transmitted from one server to the next until reaching their destination. Anyone who had an account on a mainframe could send instant messages and files.

“There was no charge,” Freeman explained. “You couldn’t charge anyone on campus other than for timesharing. That was very important.”

Fuchs first approached 34 universities in the Northeast, asking whether they were interested in participating. Within a few years, the network had spread to California, then Canada, Europe and Japan. In 1986, Fuchs got permission from the U.S. Department of Commerce to allow Russia to connect to the network.

By 1988, more than 1,400 universities, several research laboratories and government agencies in 32 countries had signed onto BITNET, according to John S. Quarterman’s 1990 book, The Matrix: Computer Networks and Conforming Systems Worldwide. Even IBM asked to connect its VNET system to BITNET.

“We both took the attitude, ‘Proselytize, proselytize, proselytize,’ ” Freeman said. “Proselytize everywhere you went.” Fuchs had buttons made up “Byte into BITNET.”

In 1987 BITNET merged with CSNET (Computer-Science Network), creating a larger network managed by the new Corporation for Research and Educational Networking, or CREN. By then, Fuchs had left CUNY to become Princeton University’s computer czar, where he stayed for 15 years before joining the Mellon Foundation. Around the same time, Freeman left Yale for Gartner, a technology-related consulting company based in Stamford, Conn., where he held several senior positions until leaving last year.

For several years, BITNET was the largest academic network in the world for computer-based communications. It also developed the concept of the e-mail list service (tools such as LISTSERV) by which a user could send e-mail to a broad group. But by the mid-1990s, it became clear that the Internet was providing various capabilities that BITNET offered, and the network slowly faded away.

Still, Fuchs notes, the network that he and Freeman launched “because it’s time” has secured its place in our language, as well our technological history. “It’s a little-known fact,” he said. “BITNET is a word in the Oxford English Dictionary. You can look it up.”
Encountering Quixote on His 400th Anniversary

By Gary Schmidgall

It is today the most widely read literary masterpiece in world literature, and yet the 400th anniversary of its first publication in 2005 saw little fanfare, except in its native land, Spain. For many in the non-Spanish-speaking world, mention its title and one immediately begins humming the tune of that Ricocante of show-stopping warhorse anthems, “The Impossible Dream.”

Filled with celebratory energy up to a quintessential, co-authors Pay Rogg, professor of Spanish at Brooklyn College and Manhattan Community College, and Manuel Durán, Yale professor emeritus of Spanish literature, have produced a book-length homage intended to remind one and all of the enormous after-preSENse, in later centuries and in the literatures of other nations, of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s Don Quixote de la Mancha. Fighting Windmills: Encounters with Don Quixote (Yale University Press), the authors say, attempts to answer the question: How is Don Quixote and Sancho Panza captured us? How does the work penetrate and play on the modern mind?

Rogg notes that Harold Bloom, the author (among countless other books) of The Anxiety of Influence, played a role in sparking the project to life, and one could well call Fighting Windmills a virtuoso demonstration of the pleasures of finding literary influence.

Before embarking on their search for Don Quixote’s literary DNA in masterpieces of the last four centuries, Rogg and Durán (Rogg’s mentor during her graduate studies at Yale) devote four chapters to Part One as an overview of Cervantes’ life and personality, his intellectual milieu, the creation of what many consider the finest aristo of all novelists, and some of the author’s 48-Franklin stylistic fables.

Like his contemporary Shakespeare (they both died in 1616), Cervantes left hardly a clue about his inner life. There is no correspondence, no personal diary, and only a few references to himself in the preludes to his works. Also like Shakespeare, this very well-read author never darkened a university’s door. Cervantes “outlier” life is summarized by the authors as “intense, adventurous, and varied.”

Notably, it involved much traveling around Europe, though he was no expert to head for the New World was turned down. Among his high points were participation in the Holy League’s defeat of the Turks at Lepanto in 1571 and the instant popularity of Part One of Don Quixote. It was a long time coming, though. He was 38 at the time. As Don Quixote’s hero, disappointments were mostly his lot, not least the mutilation of his left hand in battle; five years’ service as a Muslim prisoner in Algiers, and his disgrace and punishment, as a minor official, for losing government money in a bank failure.

Part Two of Fighting Windmills offers a remarkable tour — and critical tour de force — revealing the kind of La Mancha’s pop-up appearances in masterpieces of world literature.

Voltaire’s Candide, for example. The authors concede the obvious difference: Candide is a simply short, brilliant masterpiece, a sort of Dada egg, whereas Don Quixote is more like a huge countryside house, full of corridors, secret passages, spacious halls, and nurseries. But these works, the authors counter, are “travel books” not only in the geographical but also the philosophical sense: “both works announce the triumph of a pragmatic attitude, finally free from idealization.” After all, they produced the near-synonymous quixotic and picaresque. Its rich vein of parody and Cervantes’ willingness to go outside the novel’s own narrative, the authors suggest, ties its story to the novels of Henry Fielding (both Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones) and Laurence Sterne’s garroid narrative sleight in Tristram Shandy. Sterne’s immeasurable eccentricity, Uncle Toby (oddly referred to here as Tobias) and his servant Toby, are plausibly likened to Don Quixote and Sancho. Likewise, in the next century, in Dickens’ Thromomous Papers of the Pickwick Club, “Mr. Pickwick, a new Don Quixote, found his Sancho, his servant Sam Weller.”

Cervantes’ strong vein of realism and disenchanted with the politics and societY of his day are the ties that bind Quixote to Stendhal’s The Red and the Black. Then Flasher’s Madison Bawsey is convincingly cast as a female Quixote.

Turning to Roosevelt, the authors note that a friend of Nicolai Gogol wrote in 1835 that “Pushkin spent four hours at Gogol’s place and gave him the subject for a novel which, like Don Quixote, will be divided into cantos.” The hero will travel all over the provinces.” The result was Gogol’s comic epic, Dead Souls. Titles are made to the novels of Turgeniev and a lecture of his, “Hans and the Don Quixote,” which appears to be divided among both types. In War and Peace Tolstoy is credited with two Quixotes (the erstwhile world-changers Prince Andrew and Bezukhov) and one Dalmaign (Natasha Rostova). Turning to the New World, Rogg and Durán mount a comparison of the Don with Melville’s whaling captain-errant Ahab. They note that Melville’s copy of Quixote is filled with pertinent marginalia and cite critic Harry Levin’s view that “No American author...can be more felicitously compared with Cervantes than Herman Melville.”

Among “sightings of Cervantes” in the 20th century is Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby “just as Alomos Quijano requires a new name for his new personality. James Gatz will morph into Jay Gatsby.” Kafka’s key short story “The Truth About Sancho Panza” is cited, as well as Graham Greene’s 1982 novel Missoug Quixote. The many meta-literary midgames of Borges, the Argentinean librarian and fabulist, are thor- oughly Cervantesian. Check out his “Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote.”

Even Woody Allen makes a cameo appearance in Fighting Windmills, thanks to his 1985 film The Purple Rose of Cairo. Allen’s Mia Farrow character escapes the dreaminess of the Depression in a movie house, just as the Don avoids the dreaminess of La Mancha in his library, and both characters are eventually thrust by their creators into an exciting imagined parallel universe. By the way, Mesa de La Mancha, which was based not on the novel but a prior television play, gets short shrift: “too many liberties.”

My favorite fast-flying pop culture tie-in to Don Quixote is when Rogg and Durán observe of the Don, “No matter how much he suffers and falls down, he always picks himself up and continues his quest.” They then point to that cartoon character famed for his impossible avoidable obstacles. younger readers may be reminded of another courageous character, also familiar with adversity and misadventure, Willy E. Coyote.”

Two Gents of Modern Literature

M iguel de Cervantes and William Shakespeare are the “founts from which all modernish literary life,” the authors summarize, “the foundations upon which countless future authors constructed their own great works.”

Thinkers have pointed that the former’s Quixote and the latter’s Hamlet are polar opposites of human existence — the optimistic sally-forth spirit and the pessimistic self-doubt overwhelmed by dark musings. It is notable, even poignant, that Cervantes and Shakespeare were born in the same year and died in the same year — within days of each other, in fact — though they never met.

In 1979, a new Don Quixote, found his Sancho, his servant Sam Weller.”

Cervantes’ strong vein of realism and disenchanted with the politics and societY of his day are the ties that bind Quixote to Stendhal’s The Red and the Black. Then Flasher’s Madison Bawsey is convincingly cast as a female Quixote.

Men in the Movies

In his book, Mandy Arts, David A. Gerstein, Associate Professor of Cinema Studies at the College of Staten Island, reveals the crucial role that cinematic media plays in consolidating an American masculine ideal. Gerstein describes how cinema came to be considered the art form of the New World, and shows how its experimental qualities mixed with other art forms (such as European painting, literature and photography) to create a brush, new American form.

“Manly Arts: Masculinity and Nation in Early American Cinema was published by Duke University Press Reading New York City

The Place Where We Dwel Spanks many disciplines, including his- tory, literature and ethnic studies, as it offers fine examples of good writing about New York City. The Place Where We Dwel spans many disciplines, including history, literature and ethnic studies, as it offers fine examples of good writing about New York City.

Italian-American Roots

Abridged Caesars takes a comprehensive look at Italian-American writing as it explores connections between Italian-American language and culture. The author, Robert Visca, a Professor of English at Brooklyn College, argues that many Italian immigrants considered English a dialect of Italian, and they attempted to create an American English iden- tifiable by their cultural roots. Abridged Caesars and Other Stories of Italian-American Restaurants, published by the State University of New York.

Revolutionary Mothers

In Revolutionary Mothers, Carol Berkin, Professor of History at Barnard and The Graduate Center, shows how women played a pivotal role throughout the American Revolution.

The women organized boycotts of British goods, raised funds, and managed family businesses. They also fired weapons. Berkin tells about Margaret Corbin, who was crippled for life when she took her husband’s place beside a cannon at Fort Monmouth.

Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence, published by Alfred A. Knopf in paperback earlier this year, illuminates a fascinating and unknown side of the struggle for American independence.

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Up From The Streets: The Life and Times of A Beloved Professor

By Neill S. Rosenfeld

Peter J. Rondinone, a teenager forged by the projects, toughened by a street gang, hardened by an abusive father, was on the fast track to self-destruction circa 1970. “The fact is, I didn’t learn much in high school,” he wrote. “I spent my time on the front steps of the building smoking grass with the dudes from the dean’s squad. For kicks we’d grab a freshman, tell him we were undercover cops, handcuff him to a banister and take his money. Then we’d go to the back of the building, cop some ‘downs,’ and nod away the day behind the steps in the lobby.”

In this drug-induced haze, Rondinone might have predicted that his life would end as, at last did, in alcohol, despair and suicide. He could not see a second pathway, one that would lead him to become an author of fiction, a writer of screenplays, with advance degrees from City College and New York University, a beloved professor of English at LaGuardia Community College, and a mentor to a new generation of rough-and-tumble students like him in need of structure, self-discipline and basic academic skills.

To survive his youth, Rondinone had recast himself into a drug. Gone was the sensitive first violinist in his junior high school orchestra, the chess champion and the voracious reader. At times on welfare, he was one of last white families remaining as the South Bronx imploded in violence, fire and decay. For years, his father, an alcoholic Italian immigrant, was too sick to work. His mother, a Russian Jew who had survived a Nazi work camp during World War II, barely spoke English. By night, smashed on pills and beer, he passed out in a gutter and was carried home by friends. His brother, furious, shoved him down a flight of stairs. “My skull hit the edge of a marble step… There I was: a high school graduate, a failure, cuffed in a ball in a pool of blood. I knew I had to do something… Pills and violence didn’t promise much of a future. I went back to a high school counselor for advice. He suggested I go to college.”

It was an era of turmoil and social ferment, fueled by Vietnam, civil rights and black power, roiled by the murder of Martin Luther King Jr., inflamed by the city’s racial convulsion over the 1969 education. In 1969, 200 students had taken over City College, demanding that more black and Hispanic students be admitted to what was then a mostly white school.

Moved by this tide, the University opened the senior colleges to virtually all city high school graduates, expanding the unrestricted admissions policy that had long been the province of five community colleges So despite its 65 1/2- acre general — not academic — diploma from DeWitt Clinton High School, Rondinone chose City College and enrolled in 1972, taking remedial classes in writing and math, as well as college study skills.

“I couldn’t write a coherent sentence or construct a paragraph,” he later recalled. So his Basic Writing Instructor, Regina Sackman, made an offer: “I’d write an essay in addition to my regular class work. Also, I’d do a few term papers. She had this idea that learning to write was like learning to play a musical instrument — it takes practice, everyday practice.” Practice he did, including writing for The Campus newspaper and, later, The Observation Post, both student-run newspapers. When he finished his first newspaper story, the editor-in-chief said, “This isn’t even English. Yet they turned it over to a rewrite man and the story appeared with my byline. Seeing my name in print was like seeing it in lights.”

In November 1976, when the University raised the minimum standard of a high school average of 80 for admission to the senior colleges, Rondinone vividly sketched his life story in a New York Times op-ed article. “I am one of those few individuals who was given a chance during a unique period in the history of American education to get a college education, and I did.”

Soon after the op-ed appeared, Rondinone met classmate and aspiring film-maker Jeffrey Wisotsky, who is now an associate professor at Bronx Community College and coordinates its media-technology program. Plying him into a writing partnership that would last 26 years, they expanded the op-ed article into a $10,000, 20-minute film, “The Subway Fantasy,” two biting scenes from Rondinone’s life stand out. The father disparages the protagonist’s quest for education while insisting that he take out the garbage. And a film producer (in the op-ed and reality, a TV reporter) calls the open admission students at the campus Writing Center “animals.”

In succeeding years Rondinone and Wisotsky produced two other films, “Housing Project, USA” and “A Block in the Bronx.” In these and in other scripts the young writers drew on their Bronx experiences. After graduating in 1977, Rondinone was guest editing an issue of City Magazine when he met Katherine Jaison, then a Spanish translator and now a professor at Nassau Community College. They married at Hunter College, eventually married and had a daughter, Nicole (who has just graduated from high school).

Rondinone published short stories, wrote nonfictionally for various magazines and worked on a novel. “He was very driven,” Jason remembered.

Some of his work got noticed, notably the script that he and Wisotsky wrote for “Yo! No Land,” a tale about love, the mob, rooftop golf and a gay golf course in the Bronx. It was a finalist in both the 1996 Sundance Institute’s Screenwriters Lab and the 1997 Herbert Bregel Screenwriting Award competition.

“You should have seen him network,” Wisotsky said. “Every year we’d go to the Independent Feature Film Market at the Angelika theater in SoHo. We’d have a work in progress, a feature film or a screenplay. That was a tough week. You realized you had good stuff but didn’t know the right people. I miss that. After Peter passed away in 2002, I never went back, it’s too hard.”

Rondinone earned a master’s in creative writing from City College in 1987 and a Ph.D. from New York University in 1992. He taught for two years at Bronx Community College, and in 1996 joined the English Department at LaGuardia, at both schools teaching the basic writing skills he’d learned at City College.

At LaGuardia, Rondinone focused on journalism, mentoring students and, again taking a chapter from his City College experience, working with the student newspaper, The Bridge.

“Peter’s students absolutely loved him, and his colleagues had great respect for him as a teacher and as a faculty adviser to the newspaper,” said Dr. Sandra Stelles Hansen, LaGuardia’s English Department chair. “His students really, really connected with him.”

One was an immigrant from Guyana. “Peter was central in my way of looking at the world and figuring out who I was,” said Brian Vinrasami, who took Rondinone’s Journalism 101 class, discovered a career and now reports for Newsday. Their friendship continued after Vinrasami graduated from LaGuardia, went on to Hunter College and later earned a master’s at BCC.

“Peter inspired students to pursue their careers. This award honos his legacy,” he says.

In a way, the award also pays tribute to the University’s historic mission of access and two of the generations of students who benefited. Rondinone wrote extensively of how his remedial coursework helped him climb from the tough street environment of his youth and obtain his degree at City College.

Similarly, Soman arrived to the University Heights campus in the Bronx in need of basic academic skills. “After being out of school for four or five years, I was rusty,” Soman says. “After taking the placement exam I was very surprised, but I’m grateful that I took remedials in math and English, because it sharpened my skills and helped me do well in my major.”

In 1994 Soman transferred to Brooklyn College to pursue his bachelor’s degree. Today, tens of thousands of students who otherwise might not have had a shot at college degrees are earning them at CUNY’s six community colleges, and at

Bom and schooled in Trinidad, Robby Soman spent several years in motion picture production in the Virgin Islands, enjoying the dynamic, ever-changing rhythm of work. Yet he realized that he could advance his career with a college degree — and New York City, hub of the media world, was the place to earn one. A CUNY brochure led him to the media technology program at Bronx Community College. In 2004 he enrolled in Professor Jeffrey Wisotsky’s Beginning Film and Video Production class, which introduces students to the technical side of production, from camera work to lighting to sound. With classmates as his crew, he directed a five-minute film that was shot in March, edited in April and finished in May.

At BCC’s annual Film and Video Festival that year, the Peter J. Rondinone Memorial Award, which Wisotsky created after the death of his classmate and co-working partner, a City College Alumnus and LaGuardia Community College professor who previously had taught at BCC.

A Memorial Award that Bridges Twn
Who Never Left the Neighborhood

Columbia Journalism School.

Rondoninne had a way with students from the inner-city streets he knew so well. “Peter was very good at seducing very tough kids and talking their language,” Jason said. “He could get them to believe in their own experience, in their own voices, and he could speak their language.”

Rondoninne also learned from his students. “He’d ask them what the street talk was and encourage that talk in his classroom. From his students he’d get a connection to that world he knew,” she said. He channelled their 1990s street lingo, gangsta rap and a hip-hop beat into his history and imagination, producing an edgy volume of short stories called The Digital Hood (Picador, 1998). In bleak scenes, his mostly black and Latino protagonists speak in code, the language vigorous, slangy and misogynistic, the tone often bitterly humorous.

In the title story set during the crack epidemic — a rant that echoes his own childhood — a black South Bronx computer geek urges the Glöck-Tring, drug-dealing gangbangers who knock off his glasses to become cybergangstas like him: “All I need is one headlining rollercoaster ride on a program that makes me a money-lauder — one cyber-cleaning megabucks on-line cash transfer to my own convoluted electronic credit slot in a Zurich bank, the Cynical alphametics reeling down my monitor, the zeroes multiplying until my final quart transmission cuts behind the core command to gobble up the bank’s glitch systems, the distress calls. Then I’m rich, yo turkeys.”

Newspaper interviews followed publication. The national rap magazine The Source said the book “exposes the heart of the South Bronx neon wilderness without fear.” Barnes & Noble picked The Digital Hood for its “Discover Great New Writers” series, putting it in storefronts across the country. Rondoninne and Wistrotyp pitched its stories for film adaptation.

And then something went wrong. In remarks read at Rondoninne’s memorial service at LaGuardia in 2003, Jason said it could have been “what Tennessee Williams once called ‘a catastrophe of success.’ Maybe the success wasn’t as grand as he’d imagined it or it came too late, with his father, his judge, now gone; maybe it didn’t begin to ansage his ambitions or injures; or maybe he didn’t feel deserving.”

Maybe Rondoninne couldn’t escape his past. Even taking the subway to and from LaGuardia, his hand was always near an X-acto knife tucked between student papers in his briefcase.

In his doctoral dissertation, a memoir which he was submitting to publishers when he died, Rondoninne wrote: ‘I would loathe socializing with those who haven’t become as educated as I have, or those from my old community who reflect the values and ways that I’ve worked so hard to reject. But [these people are part of my family]... And I don’t want to suggest that even after my ‘transformation’ (so to speak) that I reject everything from my former social group. I do retain some values from my old community/family that make me sometimes feel equally an outsider to my new social group...’

Jason said: “Of course... I knew that his past self lived uncomfortably in the present... But Peter... was also a consummate dissembler. To give voice to these conflicts would have been to disclose his own uncertainty about a divided self” where he grew up, “If you’re uncertain, you’re a target, a posy and a dupe.”

After The Digital Hood was accepted for publication, Rondoninne began drinking. His marriage deteriorated. Yet Jason stood by him, as in, the summer of 2002, they began an infatuation and ultimately futile search for help. A detox program rejected him because he had quit drinking a week before. ‘He couldn’t get into a hospital because of limited insurance. At an outpa
tient program, he encountered street kids and crack addicts, along with professionals. ‘Ultimately,’ she said, ‘He’d gone back to the Bronx.’

In October he tried to hang himself with his bathtub belt. “It was almost with a sense of relief that I called 911 and reported a suicide attempt,” Jason said at the memorial. Finally he could get into a hospital, but his insurance ran out after just 13 days. “Never mind that only days before Peter had told our friend Rebecca that if he decided to hang himself again, he would succeed. Never mind that he wanted more interaction with the staff, more therapy.”

Home, Rondoninne refused to take an antipsychotic medicine because in it he felt grandiose, as he had when he was drinking. He attended only one out-patient visit. Two weeks after his release, he hanged himself.

Katherine Jason ended her memorial remarks by quoting from his last story: “This is going to sound mad crazy. But I had to arrest myself. Let me say that one more time just in case you missed it. I HAD TO ARREST MYSELF.”

Crossing the Border with Mexico, Then Climbing the Ladder of Success

Pedro Rojas still remembers 1993 like it was yesterday. That’s when he arrived in the United States from his native Ecuador, hungry for educational opportunity and the chance of a better life. Like thousands of other Latino immigrants, he crossed the border between Mexico and the United States.

Today Rojas is a story of glowing achievement, living proof that higher education is the sure route to personal and professional success.

Rojas today holds associate’s and bachelor’s degrees from CityTech and a master’s degree in electrical engineering from City College.

And this past June he started working with Science Systems and Applications, Inc (SSAI), a firm under contract to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA’s) Goddard Space Flight Center Greenbelt, Maryland.

‘A lot of people helped me along the way,’ he said, reflecting on his life over the past 13 years, ‘from my parents who trusted me and my employers who gave me flexible work schedules as I could go to college, to my professors at City Tech and City College, who always went the extra mile to help me excel in my studies.

After crossing the border in 1993 and arriving in New York City, Rojas found a job as a busboy. He mastered the English language within a year, but it became increasingly clear to him that higher education would be a key to success.

The year 2001 brought him his first college degree — an associate’s in telecommunications technology from City Tech. He went on to earn a bachelor’s degree summa cum laude in the same field from the college in 2004, and he completed his master’s in electrical engineering with a concentration in photonics at City College this past spring.

The next step in Rojas’ plan is to continue studies towards a PhD degree, but that effort is being delayed briefly as he begins his new job in Maryland.

Rojas squeezed enough from his earnings over the years to help all seven of his siblings back in Ecuador complete their high school education, and help put one sister through college. He is now a naturalized U.S. citizen.

It goes without saying that his family is very proud of him and of what he has accomplished, "although what I am doing in my research and related work is very difficult for them to understand."
November is CUNY Month, the time when the colleges open their doors to students, alumni and the general public, putting on display an exciting variety of events and ideas.

Among the offerings: “Romeo and Juliet” can be seen at Queensborough Community College for the pittance price of a dollar. The life and work of Enrico Caruso will be explored at LaGuardia Community College.

Also, conferences of great intellectual value are being held. For instance, Hostos Community College and Medgar Evers College, in conjunction with other CUNY campuses, are sponsoring a conference spanning several days on “The African Presence and Influence on the Cultures of the Americas.”

Enjoy!

(For more details, see calendar or visit www.cuny.edu.)