Great Teachers

With games and outside-the-box methods, profs inspire students – and win awards

Page 26

A Student Battles Back from the Legacy of Violence

Page 10

P-TECH Shines in State of the Union Address · Page 4
MOST OF US gratefully remember a special teacher whose skill in the classroom transformed our learning experience, making complex or unfamiliar material accessible, relevant, and compelling, and igniting our curiosity. At The City University of New York, we are fortunate to have many faculty whose expertise and creativity have enriched student proficiency in demonstrable ways. I am delighted that this issue of Salute to Scholars recognizes some of the exceptional faculty whose teaching has garnered awards and acclaim. I commend all of our faculty for their efforts to improve student progress through innovative, dedicated instruction.

CUNY is just as committed to enhancing the learning of K-12 students through effective teaching. Our teacher-leader education programs have led the way in developing and implementing initiatives to enhance the quality of teacher-leader preparation across the University. These include high admission standards for all our graduate education programs; expanding professional development opportunities for University faculty, particularly the training of CUNY field supervisors, through a grant from the State Education Department; enhancing accountability and program effectiveness by tracking the performance of University graduates working in the New York City Department of Education as teachers and principals; and establishing clinically rich graduate-level teacher preparation pilot programs.

In addition, we continue to strengthen our partnerships with organizations dedicated to improving K-12 teaching. CUNY has an exclusive relationship with Math for America in New York City to support effective preparation of middle and high school mathematics teachers. The first cohort began at City College last summer. Our long-standing partnership with the Lincoln Center Institute to introduce its approach to fostering imaginative learning capacities is now focused on researching the impact of the institute’s experiences on our teacher candidates.

Much of the University’s work has informed the recommendations of the New NY Education Reform Commission, Governor Cuomo’s statewide initiative to review the state of public education and develop actionable reforms. As a governor-appointed member of the commission and its working group on teachers and leaders, I have worked closely with Joan Lucariello, the University’s dean for education, to inform and expand commission discussions and determine best practices in K-12 education and higher education in collaboration with leaders from across the state. The commission, which is addressing student learning performance, evaluation of in-service teachers and leaders, and teacher and principal preparation and pipeline, issued its preliminary recommendations in December: http://www.governor.ny.gov/assets/documents/education-reform-commission-report.pdf. Members will continue to explore ways to improve student achievement and will issue a second action plan this fall. I am proud of the pioneering campus-based efforts across the University to prepare skilled teachers and leaders, which continue to serve as statewide models.

Our focus on strengthening the quality of teaching at every level is a reminder of the importance of maintaining a robust full-time faculty corps across the University. Student progress depends on the presence of talented, creative teacher-scholars whose outstanding knowledge of their disciplinary field is matched by their ingenuity in transmitting that knowledge to students. That’s why increasing the number of full-time faculty is a top priority. True education reform is only possible through dedicated faculty determined to transform student learning and student lives.

— Matthew Goldstein, Chancellor
For a Strong Beginning, Count on CUNY Start

By Margaret Ramirez

AFTER BEING ACCEPTED to Kingsborough Community College in 2011, Mushfica Masud was depressed to receive a class schedule filled with remedial courses.

But two years later, Masud boasted a 4.0 GPA, made the dean’s list, and was recently awarded a scholarship for academic excellence.

In between her studies, Masud now squeezes in time for her show at the campus radio station where she is known as “DJ M+M.”

Masud credits her success to CUNY Start, an academic preparation program for students who have been accepted to college but need additional instruction in writing, reading and/or math.

“When I entered college, I was so afraid. I thought, ‘I’m going to fail each and every class,’” says Masud, 26, who is majoring in Media Technology and Management, “so I took CUNY Start. I think that was one of the best decisions I ever made.”

Since 2009, when CUNY Start began, nearly 2,000 students have enrolled in the program, which provides new University students with an intensive semester of reading, writing and math to prepare for college-level coursework. CUNY Start serves as an alternative to traditional remedial courses usually taken in combination with college-credit courses.

The unique program is designed for underprepared high school and GED graduates who have been admitted to a CUNY college, yet scored poorly on CUNY Assessment Tests. Learning from an innovative curriculum and dedicated instructors, CUNY Start students showed significant academic improvement and increased confidence.

Upon entering the program, about 61 percent of CUNY Start full-time students required remedial instruction in reading, writing and math. By the end of the program, some 46 percent were proficient in all three subjects.

After CUNY Start ended and students matriculated in college, they continued to excel, earning more credits and higher GPAs than other students who required remediation.

Because of the program’s dramatic success, plans are under way to expand CUNY Start from 1,900 students this year to 4,000 students by June 2014.

CUNY Start’s growth comes as educators across the nation grapple with the rising number of college students requiring remedial or developmental education. Currently, half of all undergraduates and 70 percent of community college students take at least one remedial course, according to a report by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

More troubling is growing evidence that shows traditional remedial college courses are ineffective in meeting the needs of unprepared college students. A 2009 report on developmental education found that only a quarter of community college students who took a remedial course graduated within eight years.

Mia Simon, University director of CUNY Start, attributed the success of the program to its intensive approach that requires 25 hours a week of study. A part-time CUNY Start program with 12 hours a week of afternoon and evening classes is also offered at LaGuardia Community College, Borough of Manhattan Community College and Hostos Community College.

“In one semester, students in CUNY Start are able to address multiple remedial needs, which could take years to complete if they were to enter a traditional remedial track,” Simon says.

Another essential part of CUNY Start is the advisement component where students meet weekly to talk about progress and other issues.

“The advisement component supports students’ abilities to better manage their time, understand the expectations in college, choose courses ... and overall be better prepared for what they will need to do and prepare for once in college,” she says.

Masud was so grateful for the help she received from CUNY Start that she began volunteering for the program by leading campus tours during student orientation.

“It feels great. Getting the scholarship, the honors,” Masud says. “Definitely, CUNY Start prepared me for all this.”

“When I entered college, I was so afraid. I thought, ‘I’m going to fail each and every class.’”

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NEWBEGINNINGS

About CUNY

• The City University of New York is the nation’s leading urban public university.
• Founded in NYC in 1847, the University has 24 institutions: 11 senior colleges, 7 community colleges, the William E. Macaulay Honors College at CUNY, the Graduate School and University Center, the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, the CUNY School of Law, the CUNY School of Professional Studies and the CUNY School of Public Health.

270,000 degree-credit students and 218,083 adult, continuing and professional education students.

• College Now, the University’s academic enrichment program, is offered at CUNY campuses and more than 300 high schools throughout the five boroughs of New York City.
• The University offers online baccalaureate degrees through the School of Professional Studies and an individualized baccalaureate through the CUNY Baccalaureate Degree.
• Nearly 3 million visitors and 9 million page views each month at www.cuny.edu the University’s website.

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At CUNY J-School, a New Model for Publishing

The university is now in the book business with the launch of the CUNY Journalism Press. The academic press housed at the Graduate School of Journalism will use a new publishing model to produce books related to the craft.

There are a lot of worthy books about the journalism field that wouldn’t be published nowadays because of changes in the business. Changes in technology are also presenting us with a lot more opportunity to be innovative and to get books published that might not otherwise see the light of day,” says the editor of the new imprint, Tim Harper.

Titles will include how-to books, anthologies, critical histories, memoirs and more. The press will publish about five books a year. The first book, which came out in January, was Distant Witness: Social Media, the Arab Spring and a Journalism Revolution, authored by National Public Radio senior strategist Andy Carvin. “There has always been a huge interest in books about the media and the future of journalism — we would not have gone into this if we didn’t think that this would be a sustainable enterprise for us,” says Harper, who is also a visiting professor and writing coach at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism and a veteran publishing consultant.

The CUNY Journalism Press will operate in partnership with OR Books, an independent publisher based in New York City. The partners are pioneering a unique, “co-publishing” arrangement with authors. OR Books will provide back-of-the-shop services like cover design and printing.

“Authors are asked to be more involved in the marketing of their books than typically required at traditional publishing houses. It’s a winning strategy because...

P-TECH Shines in State of the Union

T’s NOT EVERY DAY that the president of the United States mentions The City University of New York. But during February’s State of the Union address, Barack Obama highlighted a University program that prepares high school students for technical careers called Pathways in Technology Early College High School.

“Let’s make sure that a high school diploma puts our kids on a path to a good job,” said President Obama, urging the creation of more schools like P-TECH that better equip graduates for the demands of a high-tech economy.

“We’ll reward schools that develop new partnerships with colleges and employers and create classes that focus on science, technology, engineering and math — the skills today’s employers are looking for to fill jobs right now and in the future,” he added.

A six-year high school, P-TECH is a public-private collaboration of CUNY, the New York City Department of Education and corporate partner IBM that opened in 2011. Students can earn associate degrees from New York City College of Technology.

The school focuses on information technology, computer science, math and science. And IBM provides students with mentors and internships.

“It’s more of a challenging economic situation … this is one way to make sure students have the credentials to enter the job market,” says P-TECH founding principal Rashid Ferrod Davis, who didn’t know the school would be mentioned in the State of the Union address. “I wasn’t even watching it. I got all these text messages about it and then I started getting calls from reporters — I didn’t get off the phone until 2 a.m.,” joked Davis, who wasn’t surprised by the attention the program has received.

“Look at the conversation surrounding the U.S. slipping in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. To continue to be competitive, [programs like P-TECH] are one way to ensure more Americans are hired for tech jobs,” says Davis who added that he would like to see CUNY expand its
INSPIRED BY HER FATHER AND GRANDFATHER, who both served in the military in Taiwan, Baruch College freshman Rose Lee made up her mind in the second grade to become an officer in the U.S. Army.

So she was thrilled when last fall York College started offering the Army Reserve Officers’ Training Corps — a college-based, four-year program to prepare commissioned officers to serve in the U.S. armed forces. The program at York is open to all students no matter which University college they attend.

Students who finish the program are committed to join the Army after graduation, entering the service as second lieutenants, the same rank as graduates of elite military schools such as West Point, according to Lt. Col. Juan Howie, director of the Army ROTC at CUNY.

“The Army is committed to filling the field-grade rank lieutenant colonel and above with the kind of officers that reflect our diverse population,” says Howie. “We want to offer New York City residents the same opportunities that are being afforded to suburban students.”

Students can also join ROTC at Medgar Evers College, while City College and the College of Staten Island plan to offer the program in the future.

“I want to be someone who can lead many people and serve all,” says Lee, 18. “I’m looking forward to becoming a military intelligence officer. New opportunities are opening up to women in the military and I’d definitely want to work my way up to chief of staff, so I could be challenged physically and mentally.”

Lee, from Great Neck, L.I., doesn’t mind taking business management courses at Baruch then heading to York to complete the program’s 24-credit military science track. The program, which includes leadership, map-reading and problem-solving training, fits right into her schedule, she says. There’s also a grueling physical-fitness program. To get commissioned as second lieutenants, for instance, cadets have to pass combat water-survival training, which is a simulation of a helicopter crashing into the water with soldiers on board. Soldiers have to swim to the surface despite being weighed down by gear.

“It’s a great program and everything you learn in the classroom from day one is applicable to life,” says Lee. “The program at York is small; we’re small in size but we’re large in heart and all are my buddies — I’d gladly go to battle with them.”

The idea to bring the program back was first raised by former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell back in 2003. Powell graduated from CCNY at the top of his ROTC class in 1958, with the rank of cadet colonel. He was dismayed to learn that ROTC no longer existed at CUNY. Dinello says Powell lobbied officials at the University to reinstate it.

At York, there are 10 students, including two women in the program. For the first two years, there’s no commitment to the Army. The military science classes provide general leadership training, which appeals to business and health professions, says Dinello. By the third year, the Army asks students to join or opt out of the program.

“Sometimes students are just interested in the Army because they have a certain perception about it and they want to figure out if it’s true,” says Howie. “Others want to gain the leadership skills that will help them in the private sector or in the academia.”

P-TECH

early college initiative to more NYC high schools.

“It’s great to have CUNY recognized as a leader for new models in education and I think the president mentioned P-TECH because of its high potential,” says Cass Conrad, executive director of the Early College Initiative, School Support and Development at CUNY.

“There is a lot of promise in these programs — the idea of working with local employers to make sure our degree program is in line with growing fields ultimately strengthens our connection to the workforce,” says Conrad, who also was speaking on the importance of developing more programs like P-TECH at CUNY.

In the fall of 2013, CUNY intends to open two more early-college high schools with business partners to prepare students for technical careers with a third scheduled to open in 2014. The schools slated to open in the fall are Energy Tech High School, founded in partnership with LaGuardia Community College and Con Edison/National Grid; and HERO — Health, Education, Research Occupations High School, in collaboration with Hostos Community College and a local Bronx hospital.

While P-TECH is the first school in the nation that connects high school, college and the world of work through public-private partnership, it isn’t the first early-college program at CUNY, says Conrad. The Early College Initiative is a partnership of NYC public schools and colleges within the CUNY system in which high school students can earn college credit. There are 12 of such early colleges at CUNY, including programs at Brooklyn College Academy, Manhattan Hunter Science High School and the City College Academy of Arts.
‘BACH TO SCHOOL’ Brings Classical to the Kids

Maxine Fisher, far left, and the Saxophone Quartet

Amxine Fisher may have retired but in her life the band — or better said, the chamber ensemble — plays on. All for the benefit of children. As she left her long-term position as a Queens College administrator, Fisher envisaged and created a new program, one that fills an educational and cultural gap by bringing classical music to elementary schools throughout the borough.

By May, “Bach to School,” which began last year with a grant from the Queens College Foundation will have presented chamber concerts performed by advanced-level Queens college music students in 11 schools. The grant pays for the musicians’ honorariums and transportation. So far the ensembles have included the Queens College Baroque Trio, Saxophone Quartet and Percussion Ensemble.

They have played for elementary school students in communities such as Corona, East Elmhurst, Flushings, Maspeth, Middle Village, Richmond Hill and Woodside. Fisher, a CUNY-educated anthropologist who still teaches English as an adjunct, retired as director of the college’s exchange program with the University of Paris, a position she held since 1982.

She loves that “Bach to School” is also an exchange of sorts. What she and the musicians get in return for their efforts are accolades from their unlikely audiences: First through sixth graders.

“I used to think the only thing a violin was good for was to hurt a person’s ears with its loud screeching. But I really enjoyed your playing,” said one sent to the Baroque Trio.

Fisher is not a musician herself. But she is a life-long aficionado of classical music. As a child, her mother brought her to many concerts. But, as her retirement approached, she began to notice that children were not at the concerts she attended. Perhaps, never having been exposed to this music, they simply did not want to come. Or perhaps their parents could not afford to take them.

So, it seems, are the musicians. For example, Erik Forde’s P.S. 56, for example, is among Title One schools visited by the musicians — schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families.

“Most of the parents are working, Forde says. “They might not have the means or the time to take their children to performances.” Most of the schools also do not have performance classes.

If the students were not coming to hear the music, Fisher wondered if she should bring the music to them.

So she went to see Edward Smaldone, director of the college’s Aaron Copland School of Music. “In my mind it was very theoretical,” Fisher says. “But he said, ‘Let’s do it! Do you have contacts in the schools?’” She did. About Smaldone, Fisher says: “He is a force of nature.”

What the musicians get in return for their efforts are accolades from their unlikely audiences: First through sixth graders.

The biggest threat to the Lesula is hunters who kill them for food for the local population.

A New Monkey

A new species of monkey found in the Democratic Republic of Congo may help conservation efforts in the African bush, says Hunter College anthropology professor Christopher Gilbert. A paper on the discovery of the Cercopithecus lomamiensis, known locally as the “Lesula,” co-authored by Gilbert made news headlines last fall.

“The Lesula helps to highlight the region and the publicity of a new primate helps to emphasize the importance of the (Congo) for conservation,” says Gilbert, who added that the discovery would put pressure on local authorities to protect “their new famous species,” found deep in the Lomami forest basin of central DRC.

While the discovery puts a focus on conservation, it also demonstrates that there are still parts of the world that are relatively unknown, says Gilbert, who collaborated with scientists from the Lukuru Foundation, and Columbia and Yale — among other universities — to determine the uniqueness of the Lesula.

“My role was to perform the anatomical analysis demonstrating that this animal was in fact distinct from any monkey we already knew about,” says Gilbert, who did the research with Eric Sargis while Gilbert was a postdoctoral fellow at Yale and contributed to the writing and submission of the paper for publication in PLOS ONE, a peer-review journal, once he was at Hunter.

The Lesula is a small-to-medium-sized animal whose closest relative is the owl-faced monkey. The analysis, based on measurements from “a handful of skulls and skin,” demonstrated a statistical difference between the new species and its nearest relative, says Gilbert. The Lesula, as described in the research paper, have big eyes that are...
THE COLLEGE SEARCH PROCESS is now easier for students — and their parents — with the help of a new website. “We want this to be the online ‘311’ for college information in NYC because there is a real need for reliable information that is accessible to everyone,” says Lisa Castillo Richmond, the director of Graduate NYC!, a city program devoted to increasing college readiness and completion among NYC students.

The website called NYC College Line, launched in February 2013, is an online directory of NYC programs and other Web-based resources. NYC College Line directs students on everything from admissions and application procedures to financial aid and testing information. The site was created by Graduate NYC! in conjunction with the City University of New York, the NYC Department of Education, and the Options Center of Goddard Riverside.

“There is a focus on college readiness for students but it’s not enough to simply get them to the gates of college — we have to help them graduate as well,” says Castillo Richmond. So in addition to assistance with college applications, the College Line is also a resource that supports students once in college. Current college students can use the site’s “Ask an Advisor” function for academic advice and receive a reply within 48 hours. There is also a page dedicated to FAQs that answers frequently asked questions such as “How can I raise my GPA?” or “What happens if I just stop going to class?” and “Do I really need to read the syllabus my professor gave me?”

While there are other websites designed to help students navigate the higher education system, NYC College Line is the first of its kind that offers resources and academic counseling of this scope, Castillo Richmond says. “[NYC College Line] is interactive … and it has some of the access features of Yelp and other online communities.”

This site is not intended to replace one-on-one sessions with high school guidance counselors but rather to “bridge the gap between the information available to students at their schools and the information available to parents,” she says.

The NYC College Line is a good resource for parents who are uninformed and may feel intimidated by the college process, says Castillo Richmond. “The idea is to democratize the information … to make sure everyone has it. Some parents have never been [to college] or they’re immigrants and don’t speak the language,” says Castillo Richmond, who adds that the website is available in nine languages, including Spanish, Mandarin and Haitian Creole.

Discovered in the Congo

of large mammals of this landscape in the Congo.

The biggest threat to the Lesula are hunters who kill them for food for the local population. In fact, the first Lesula discovered by one of the lead researchers at the Lukuru Foundation and kept as a pet, mysteriously disappeared. “Most likely it ended up in somebody’s cooking pot,” says Gilbert. “This is why the whole area needs to be protected with real enforcement against hunters and poachers.”

While research continues on the newly discovered Lesula monkey, Gilbert also works at Hunter on other aspects of monkey evolution. His most recent article in the Journal of Human Evolution names a new fossil genus closely related to modern mandrills and drills, which are baboon-like animals with brightly colored red or blue faces.

SPRING 2013 7
I was drawn to the image of the “Topsy-Turvy doll” because that’s how I see myself versus how people see me. I’ve always identified as a black woman — my mother is black. But my dad is white.
Artist and York College professor of painting Nina Buxenbaum grew up in a multiracial, politically active family in Brooklyn. Early on, her work centered on black collectible imagery — Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben and Mammy — that Buxenbaum found “disturbing.” Later, it became more personal as she developed her own identity as a biracial African-American woman. Then, Buxenbaum, who landed a teaching position at York in 2003, began using the “Topsy-Turvy doll” in her paintings. The flip doll, whose name stems from the character of Topsy in the Harriet Beecher Stowe novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, looks like a Southern belle on one side but her dress hides a black girl underneath. Recently Buxenbaum, whose work has been exhibited at the Studio Museum of Harlem in New York City, Samson Projects in Boston, and the Ingalls Gallery in Miami, talked about how her work has evolved, challenges she has faced teaching at York, and what she’s currently painting in her studio at her Connecticut home.

**Can you explain what the “Topsy-Turvy doll” means to you?**
I was drawn to that image because that’s how I see myself versus how people see me. I’ve always identified as a black woman — my mother is black. But my dad is white. I’m light skinned, my hair is curly but kind of a looser curl so people would always question what I was. So I thought of the dress on the Topsy-Turvy doll as a metaphor for that veil guarding what’s your interior self versus what’s the exterior self.

**How has growing up in a politically active household influenced you as an artist?**
I didn’t understand people who didn’t have conversations about politics around the dinner table when they were kids. My mom was part of this group called WREE, Women for Racial and Economic Equality, that held meetings in our living room. And at 8 and 9 years old I would sit myself down in the middle and listen and put in my two cents. My dad was very big into union politics and he pushed me to be very political in my artwork.

**In college your work became more personal. What triggered that transition?**
I was 22. I had just graduated from college and went to Paris on a scholarship. The French would say, “Nina, why are you painting all these black people, you’re not black, you’re white.” I said, I might be white here, but in the U.S. people don’t necessarily see me that way. The French equate black with African and I certainly didn’t look like the African women who were living in France. So it made me really think, was I being really honest about who I am, if I’m not saying yes, I’m also biracial.

**You have also focused on the lack of representation of African-American women in Western art. Are you on a mission to amend that?**
My dad and I would travel to museums a lot and one of the things that struck me was the paintings. They’re beautiful and I kind of wished there were people in the paintings that looked like me or looked like someone I knew. I did a painting, “Subject,” in 2007, a collaborative piece with my friend Zoë Charlton, a drawing professor at American University, and she had this fascination with the Blond Odalisque by Francois Boucher. And so I said wouldn’t it be great if we made you in place of the Blond Odalisque. I’ll remake that painting. I’ve always wanted to do a series of those where I would take paintings by artists I really admired and loved and put black women I knew into them.

**When did you first pick up a paintbrush?**
I was painting as early as first grade — nothing great, just playing in paint. And I’ve always kept a sketchbook.... I wanted to be a veterinarian, but I had a horrible experience with math [in high school] and I thought what else can I do? I liked drawing so I started putting together a portfolio.

**With the Internet, and specifically social media, is the world of art sales opening up to artists?**
I’ve been looking into these online websites: ArtSlant, for example, where you can post your work and submit into shows. I haven’t had any sales through it, but I feel like when people see your work and there’s visual recognition of it, that really helps. Curators look at these sites, gallery owners look at these sites. Hopefully it will expand my audience. But right now, it’s tough to sell work.... People don’t have disposable income to buy paintings.

**What challenges did you face when you first started teaching at York?**
Being young and a woman. In 2003, we had more students who were coming back to school later in life; they were often older than me. Now we have a younger population. But at the time people really questioned, not my knowledge base, but my authority to be giving them grades on art and that it’s not possible to grade these things or art isn’t a subject to be taken seriously. They were taking it to relax and have fun. Because I demanded a very professional demeanor in the studio, and I expected them to learn techniques as if they are going to become artists, that was a challenge for them because they didn’t expect that kind of academic rigor.
A STUDENT’S JOURNEY
LaGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

FIGHTING BACK

By Margaret Ramirez

As her fellow art students set up their easels in a painting studio at LaGuardia Community College, Vada Vasquez takes out her iPhone and taps on the screen to bring up a gallery of images that have come to define her. There are vibrant paintings of red lotus flowers and a series of still-life sketches in charcoal. But a finger swipe past her artwork is a sequence of horrific images — photographs of Vasquez herself. One startling photo shows a close-up of the left side of her shaved head, sliced open, sewn back together, leaving a jagged, bloodied seam of 73 stitches. It was taken soon after the day in 2009 that she was struck in the head by a stray bullet and nearly killed, at age 15.

Vasquez describes the photo as both disturbing and inspiring. More than three years after the shooting, she still grapples with migraines, speech difficulties and panic attacks — daily reminders of the enduring physical and emotional impact that a single bullet can inflict on a victim of gun violence. “People say you can forget things, but you don’t,” Vasquez says. “It stays with you for the rest of your life.”

But she says she keeps the haunting portrait close to remind her of how far she’s come since that day. She survived against all odds and spent months in rehabilitation. She returned to school, graduated on time, and enrolled at LaGuardia last fall as a fine arts student. There are days when just getting to school is a challenge. But sometimes when Vasquez looks at that picture, the painful sight of the cross-stitching running across her head motivates her to keep going. In some ways, she says, the shooting has given her a resolve she never felt, and direction to her life.

“Before, I really didn’t care about much,” she says. “It was all routine for me. I didn’t find anything important. . . . Before the accident, I would have days when I felt really down. When I have those stressful . . .

The shooting sparked widespread outrage in the city, and only weeks after she left the hospital Mayor Michael Bloomberg invited Vasquez to his annual interfaith breakfast to discuss with religious leaders ways to curb gun trafficking.
days now, I look at those pictures and find a way to keep going, you know, keep the ball rolling. I know I have some purpose.”

On Nov. 16, 2009, Vasquez, dressed in her Bronx Latin School uniform, was waiting for her bus home from school when she was hit by a stray bullet in a gang-related shooting. The bullet shattered the left part of her skull but miraculously passed through her brain without killing her. Doctors performed life-saving surgery to remove the bullet fragments, but privately gave her only a 5 percent chance of surviving. A week later, Vasquez emerged from her coma and began the difficult road to recovery.

Three months after the shooting, doctors re-grafted her skull and covered the missing section with a metal plate that remains hidden under her dark brown hair. She had to learn to walk and speak again. One of the things she spoke about was gun violence. The shooting sparked widespread outrage in the city, and only weeks after she left the hospital Mayor Michael Bloomberg invited Vasquez to his annual interfaith breakfast to discuss with religious leaders ways to curb gun trafficking. She later appeared with Mayor Bloomberg at an event to call for changes in background checks.

Last year, after another innocent child, 8-year-old Armando Bigo, barely survived a random gunshot by a 15-year-old gang member in a Bronx bodega, Vasquez wrote an article for the opinion section of the Daily News. “So many innocent people, young and old, are affected by gun violence day by day,” she wrote. “But now, it has passed its limit. Children are going through

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unnecessary pain. Gun violence can change the life of an individual instantly. A good example is me.” She directed her thoughts to Armando: “Don’t give up. Just keep on.”

The issue of guns in America has only grown more intense, of course. But as lawmakers and lobbyists debate tougher gun-control measures in the wake of the slaughter of children in Connecticut and other mass shootings, Vasquez is focused on her own private struggles with the consequences of that single moment more than three years ago. Aside from the migraines and panic attacks, extreme temperatures in winter or summer can make the metal plate in her head excruciatingly painful. And her lingering speech problems make her self-conscious in class.

Still, Vasquez feels a strong desire to continue speaking out, and she is determined to make her most difficult public appearance of all later this year — at the trial of the five men charged in her shooting. She says her mother doesn’t want her to go but she’s set on it. She wants people to know how the shooting has changed her, and what her life is like today. “In order to move on, I have to let stuff go,” she says. “I have to let people know exactly how I felt, the way everything worked out, and how I go through life day by day.”

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Like many young, artistic people, Vasquez has a distinct personal style. It is a mix of artsy fashion, heavy metal and touches of goth. She wears a black wool coat covered with silver zippers and studs, and black leather combat boots laced loose on her feet. She’s usually seen in one of her collection of T-shirts declaring her love for the heavy metal band Slipknot, and adorns
On weekday mornings, Vasquez wakes early, just after 6, so she can make it to LaGuardia’s campus in Long Island City in time for her 10 o’clock class.

It isn’t her attention to dressing that requires the extra time. Because of the injuries to her brain, she is afraid she will get lost on her way to school.

her ears with tiny smiling skulls, the face of Jack Skellington, the animated star of her favorite movie, “The Nightmare Before Christmas.”

On weekday mornings, Vasquez wakes early, just after 6, so she can make it to LaGuardia’s campus in Long Island City in time for her 10 o’clock class. It isn’t her attention to dressing that requires the extra time. Because of the injuries to her brain, she is afraid she will get lost on her way to school. Riding the subway from the Bronx to Queens, she takes note of where the conductor is — just in case, she says, she forgets her stop and needs to ask directions to get back.

“There are two things in life that scare me: spiders and getting lost,” she says with a laugh. “I’m finally starting to manage the ‘getting lost’ thing.”

Less easy to control are the panic attacks. They strike every time an ambulance roars by, siren blaring. “It’s a trigger,” says Vasquez. “Mentally and physically, I feel weak and sick. It makes me bring up everything.” It happened once as she stood outside the college waiting for a traffic light to change. Her throat closed up, making it hard to breathe. She started to sweat and became frozen in place. She handled it the way she has taught herself. She convinced herself that the person inside was going to be all right, and the feeling went away.

Vasquez has always loved art and showed talent from an early age. But after the shooting, she discovered it could also be a kind of therapy. In the early months of her rehabilitation, before she recovered her ability to speak, she used her sketchbook to help release her anger and frustration. “It made me love art more than I did before,” she says. “Instead of doing something negative, I can do something positive when I get stressed out. I look at my art when I’m done and I’m like, ‘Wow, I created this because I was so stressed out.’”

In painting class, Vasquez is known for her warm smile and bold use of color. Dahlia Elsayed, an assistant professor of fine arts who taught Vasquez last fall, says that she has an artistic maturity not often seen in beginning students. “Often, when given an open assignment students say, ‘I don’t know what to paint’ but Vada has never had that issue.” In November, when students were asked to select a topic for their final project, Vasquez painted a series of masks. She said they illustrated the two sides of her personality: The tough survivor portrayed on television and in newspapers, and the young woman, hidden from public view, trying to find purpose in her life. “She is serious about art,” says Elsayed. “She seems determined.”

Vasquez finds self-expression in painting, but speech is a lingering difficulty. LaShonda Allen, her speech therapist at Lincoln Hospital for two years, says Vasquez has made remarkable progress since the shooting. She has gone from not being able to speak at all to carrying on most conversations with relative ease. But sometimes she hesitates, unable to recall a specific word to express a thought. She might use a word that sounds similar, or use many words to express the word she has forgotten. “She might say, ‘I’m going to go take the transit system that’s available underground today,’” says Allen, “as opposed to saying, ‘I’m going to take the subway today.’”

Vasquez gets upset when she makes mistakes and sometimes seems overcome by embarrassment, even shame, about how the shooting damaged her brain. Vasquez’s mother, Gemma, recalls sitting in a parking lot with her daughter recently, deciding on a place to eat. “Instead of saying ‘Panera,’ Vada said ‘pandora,’” her mother explained, referring to the chain restaurant. “When she realized the mistake, she sat in the car and started to cry and she’s like, ‘Look at me, I’m 18 years old and making mistakes with words like this.’”

Some of her difficulty with speech might be exacerbated by the challenging transition from high school to college work, says Allen. “She is at a very different level of education, so her brain is having to go from something that she has recently mastered to a new level,” says Allen. “I can see how she might be having some difficulty.”

At their home in the Soundview neighborhood of the Bronx, Gemma Vasquez prepares for the upcoming trial of the men charged in the shooting of her daughter. Prosecutors from the Bronx district attorney’s office call often to update mother and daughter on what to expect in court. Gemma emigrated from Trinidad in the 1980s, a single mother with four daughters. Vada was born a few years later. Asked about the day her daughter was shot, Gemma becomes quiet and tears begin to stream down her face. “For me, it hurt a lot and it still hurts up to this day,” she says. To strangers, her daughter “looks great and she’s smart and she’s doing all these things,” says Vasquez. “But you don’t live

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Vada's bedroom is her sanctuary and art studio. It was painted red, her favorite color, by one of her sisters while she lay in a coma in the days after the shooting. One day recently, she sat in the bedroom and reflected on her first semester of college. She's thinking about adding psychology to her major, she said, and maybe one day combine it with art to help others recover from the emotional trauma of gun violence.

She says she will continue to speak out in favor of stricter gun laws, and she wants the chance to speak about her life when the men charged in her shooting are tried. But she doesn't want to be labeled a victim.

“Saying I'm a victim of crime,” she says, “it's like I'm trying to get sympathy, and I don't want sympathy... I found a value for myself. I have a reason that I want to keep on going.”
ANDREW SHIVA is the scion of a family intrinsically linked to the culture of America — and New York City. His grandfather started MCA Records, his mother was on Broadway, his father, a producer, was the founding general manager of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company and a trustee of the Public Theater, and that is only a sampling.

In yet another realm, Shiva, 42, was chief psychologist of the Division of Forensic Psychiatry at NYU-Bellevue Hospital. Now, though, he devotes most of his time to studying the art and history of antique United States paper currency, partially as a research associate at the Smithsonian Institution.

With a gift of $5 million earmarked for the Clinical Psychology Program at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Shiva and his wife Anya, also recently became the largest donors in the nearly five-decade history of the college.

Giving to John Jay, he says, “feels right.” That may be because he has done it before. It was during the 1990s, as an unlikely but ultimately stellar John Jay student, that Shiva first became a donor. “Yes, I started a small research institute,” Shiva (’97) says unassumingly: “Almost no one knew.”

The gifts he made as a student paid for psychology students to do research, which he says was almost nonexistent. The money came from a family foundation. In the beginning there were only a handful of small grants, but now about 25 are given each year, with awards as high as $10,000.

Shiva left John Jay having earned undergraduate and master’s degrees. Back then the college did not have a doctoral program in psychology, so he earned his Ph.D. from Teachers College at Columbia University. (The doctoral program at John Jay, which began about eight years ago, now has 45 students.)

By his own account, Shiva’s entry into John Jay was inauspicious. He grew up in Manhattan, attended private, tony schools: St. Bernard’s and Trinity School. Then he floundered. He spent a semester at UCLA, another at Vassar. John Jay was not on his radar. Not consciously anyway. The truth is he had been connected to the school since childhood.

When he was in fourth grade his mother died from cancer. Later a woman named Patricia Maull — the mother of a high school friend — became what he calls “a second mother.” “Patsy,” as she was known, was also the longtime Special Assistant to former John Jay President Gerald Lynch.

According to Shiva, one day when his college career wasn’t going so well, “She said in a very dry way, ‘Shiva, why don’t you just come to John Jay?’” “I said ‘John Jay?’ Let me speak candidly here. I went to small private schools … Literally, I am thinking that’s the cop school.”

But at John Jay his professors took an interest in his education, unlike others at schools he attended earlier. His transformation did not happen immediately — he was also running a dance company and organized a nationwide collegiate a cappella competition, with the finals held at Carnegie Hall. But ultimately, he says, his professors at the college opened his eyes to psychology and forensics.

About Patsy Maull, who passed away about a year ago, Shiva adds, “If it wasn’t for her I wouldn’t have graduated from college and I certainly wouldn’t have graduated from John Jay, and I wouldn’t have made any gifts to the school. She is the cornerstone.”

Although his current gift is for forensic psychology, Shiva emphasizes that it “will embellish the current program not change it.” He describes clinical and forensic psychology as intertwined — adding that forensic psychologists should be able to treat patients in the general population as well. The gift will fund continuing research, the professional development of students and junior faculty and the further development of collegial relations between faculty and students. Shiva also envisions that “very far into the
future,” the psychology program will run a community clinic for those who cannot pay for such services.

John Jay President Jeremy Travis describes Shiva’s gift as a “transformative” one, fitting perhaps for someone who was, himself, transformed at the college. Michele Galietta, director of clinical training for the doctoral programs, emphasizes that the gift will have a major impact on the program and that Shiva’s support for the past decade “has literally allowed the program to develop quickly into an outstanding one. His strategic decisions about funding have spawned research and enriched the program more than I can say.”

Despite these accolades and his background, Shiva’s demeanor is down to earth, transparent and quietly earnest. As a John Jay adjunct professor, he teaches the one course he loves, a clinical practicum, which, he says, helps students to function in the real world of psychology.

Shiva now spends much of his time with the National Currency Foundation, which he founded, and at the National Numismatic Collection at the Smithsonian Institution where he had been digitizing the bank notes collection of the United States Treasury Department, United States Bureau of Engraving and Printing and the Chase Manhattan Money Museum. In turn, he has permission to use these scans to curate virtual exhibits on a website that can be used to educate about the history of currency — and on the art of it as well.

“I have a note from a territorial bank — from the Deseret National Bank of Salt Lake City, Utah territory,” says Shiva. “You look at the president’s signature and it’s hand signed by Brigham Young. I’ve got a note from a Los Angeles bank and it’s one of a sheet of four notes signed by Cecil B. DeMille. I have Civil War generals, industrialist bankers, railroad tycoons. Engravers are some of the most accomplished artists ever… You can take the engraving off of money and put it on another piece of paper and it still would be beautiful. What is amazing is that a monetary instrument could simultaneously be a work of art, that is what captivated my attention.”

It’s Shiva’s interest in art that compelled him to select the 4,050-square-foot art gallery to be named after him and his wife to commemorate their donation. Of the naming of the gallery, John Jay President Travis says that part of the transformation of John Jay is “the integration of the arts, humanities, and performing arts into the life of the college, so it’s appropriate this space is devoted to art.”

With joy and pride, Shiva walks around, showing off the gallery, delighted that its space can accommodate large installations. “If not for John Jay,” says Shiva, “where would I be? John Jay helped give me direction when I didn’t have any.”
Making Storm Warnings
A More Exact Science

By Richard Firstman

New Yorkers are famous for being unflappable, but in the fall of 2011 William Fritz was worried that the city had taken Hurricane Irene a little too much in stride. Like other climate concerned scientists, Fritz, a geologist at the College of Staten Island, considered Irene a precursor of more powerful and frequent storms in coming years. But where he saw a heads-up, others saw a worst-case scenario that wasn’t so bad.

“Many people thought Irene was as bad a hurricane as we could get in New York,” says Fritz. “But it wasn’t. We really dodged a bullet.”

A Montana native who has since become CSI’s interim president, Fritz has spent most of his career specializing in volcanic eruptions and other geological hazards. But in recent years he’s turned his attention to idiosyncratic coastlines, like Staten Island’s, and what happens when prehistoric geology meets 21st-century climate change. Irene, he says, was “mostly a rain event”— absent the atmospheric conditions that create the real worst-case scenario: a storm surge powerful enough to overwhelm low-lying and minimally protected coastal areas. If New York dodged a bullet with Irene, it could be said that Staten Island dodged a missile.

If you look at a map and imagine a hurricane coming off the ocean, it might seem that the island’s broad Atlantic shoreline is like a protected harbor tucked between the shores of Brooklyn and New Jersey. In fact, it’s the opposite: the geography creates a funnel effect. And the sea floor near shore is pitched like a ramp that accelerates a storm surge. Staten Island’s shorefront communities are like the crumple zone of a car in a head-on collision.

“We don’t get hit as often as people in the South,” Fritz says, “but when we do get hit we’re probably more vulnerable than any place on the entire Eastern seaboard.”

As Fritz saw it, CSI was in a unique position to show how much worse storms of the future could be — and to lead the way in making Staten Island a little less vulnerable by making it a bit more prepared. CSI is the home of one of the most powerful mainframe computer systems in the country, an outgrowth of CUNY’s Decade of Science initiative. Fritz and two colleagues — fellow geologist Alan Benimoff and Michael Kress, a computer scientist who is also the college’s vice president for information technology — set out to use that computing horsepower to generate scientific data hard enough to make the warnings something more than abstract.

“For people to believe it, we wanted to do a computer simulation to show what could happen if a storm hit with just the right eye track, with the right winds and tides all coinciding at the same time,” Fritz says. The goal was precision: a computer model that would project just where the water would go, and how high — neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block — in a storm surge of 12 feet.

Over the next nine months, the CSI scientists fed millions of data points into the supercomputers, turning an admixture of geology, oceanography, climatology and land surveys into a set of highly specific projections. They were invited to present their findings to the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America in North Carolina in November.

And then — just a week before the meeting — Sandy hit. It was the superstorm, the one that put Staten Island on the map of hurricane catastrophes. Twenty-three people died on Staten Island, all but three of them by drowning, the most of any borough. Thousands lost their homes, many CSI students, faculty and staff among them — devastation comparable to Katrina. It was the real worst-case scenario, at least for now.

The day after the storm, Alan Benimoff went out to a low-lying neighborhood just south of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge to look for the highest point of the surge and see how close the CSI computer model came to projecting it. “I went from house to house to see where the debris field stopped,” he says. “The highest was at the house at 256 Sand Lane. FEMA came out later with a map that showed the top surge going right through that house.” Most remarkable, though, was how close CSI’s computer modeling came to the actual height of the surge at that house — and at many others. On street after street, the computer model predicted flooding to within a foot of the actual surge — far more accurate than previous estimates with less sophisticated methods.

The CSI team was the buzz of the geological meeting. But to Fritz and his colleagues, the study could go only so far on its own. For it to be more than a scientific triumph, they had to turn the results into practical, actionable information for residents in the surge zones. And they had to make the results mean something to the overarching reality of climate change and the question it begs: Sea levels are rising — what do we do about it?

In the wake of Sandy, Fritz, now as CSI’s interim president, saw a way for the college to take a critical leadership role in that question, on Staten Island and maybe beyond. It could be a laboratory of sorts, perhaps an exemplar, for the region and even the nation. By making storm surge flooding a little less unpredictable, the study could inform the complicated decisions facing public officials at every level. In that way, Fritz sees the computer modeling as a starting point for much larger discussion. In the months after Sandy, he assembled a diverse team of faculty that extended...
far beyond science to consider Sandy’s impact from many angles. The objective is ambitious if not daunting — to find ways to avoid or mitigate the effects of future storms. It runs the gamut, from rebuilding and engineering decisions to coping with the devastation, physical and emotional. Several CSI faculty members in psychology and social work are carving out a new area of study — natural-disaster recovery on the most personal level.

In March, the college hosted a daylong forum — “Superstorm Sandy: A Serious Conversation About the Future of Staten Island” — where faculty experts were joined by an array of public officials and civic leaders, people with economic interests and ordinary citizens. One of the participants was John Arena, an assistant professor of sociology, anthropology and social work who had lived through Hurricane Katrina when he was at Tulane University. Having studied the toll of the two most devastating storms of recent decades in the United States, Arena has found that weather is beyond human control but the impact isn’t. “Our mantra is there’s no such thing as a natural disaster,” he says. “At every stage from causes to reconstruction there’s a social calculus: Who lives and who dies, who gets to come back and who doesn’t, who benefits and who’s better off.”

Fritz’s evolution as a geologist with a broad, humanistic view of the world can be traced to his experience as a leading authority on geological hazards. He worked with governments in the aftermath of the eruptions of Mount St. Helens and volcanos in Colombia. “I found that geologists talk about hazards and then no one listens. It doesn’t get any traction. It’s the interdisciplinary part that makes the difference.” When it comes to rising sea levels, he says, “You have to understand the science of why New York is vulnerable and how surges work, but then you need to include social scientists, mental health counselors, politicians, developers and economists to have a holistic view and make something happen.”

Fritz has opened the conversation himself with what he calls a five-point plan — an outline of ways that government can protect Staten Island from future surges. First, protect the existing natural barriers — the beaches and dunes. Second, build them higher. Third, rezone in the flood zone and buy up as many properties as possible in low-lying areas, turning them into parkland.

Fourth, be very careful about engineering solutions such as sea barriers because they will not only be expensive but necessarily protect one area at the expense of another. (A sea gate being discussed to protect lower Manhattan would probably be bad for Staten Island.) And fifth, educate the people: As obvious as it might seem, many people don’t know to go up, not down, in a storm surge. And if they evacuate to safety, they might not know where safety is. That’s where the computer models come in.

“There was no reason people should have died in Sandy,” Fritz says. “We’re using the computers to produce a graphic that’s hard to ignore. It’s not abstract contours on a map. It lets people really visualize what’s going to happen.”
By Lenina Mortimer

A STUDENT during her undergraduate days, Elana Cooper struggled academically. Today she’s a first-year Ph.D. student at one of the top engineering schools in the country, and she is more surprised than anyone.

“I didn’t see this as a possibility. I was always tentative about approaching Ph.D. programs because of my academic background. But I received encouragement from my mentor,” says Cooper, who studied engineering at the University of Pennsylvania and later earned a master’s from City College. She had planned to become an architect but her academic and professional career took a different turn when she participated in a summer research mentorship program in the lab of then UPenn biomedical engineering professor Steven Nicoll.

Today Nicoll, an NSF CAREER Award winner, continues his mentorship program at CUNY. Nicoll joined the City College Biomedical Engineering Department in the fall of 2009 and established a research lab soon after. His research, that Nicoll refers to as tissue engineering, focuses on developing new materials to serve as soft tissue fillers for plastic surgery and as scaffolds to direct stem cells differentiation. His lab also develops materials that would help regenerate musculoskeletal tissue damaged by injury or disease.

Nicoll hired Cooper as a research engineer to help get his City College lab started. “I was familiar with all of the lab protocols. I came along to help teach the graduate students how to do different experiments and analyses,” says Cooper who worked in Nicoll’s UPenn lab for three years.

Reflecting on her fortuitous move from Philadelphia to New York, Cooper credits many of her academic accomplishments to Nicoll’s mentorship. “At the time, I didn’t have the foresight, but Dr. Nicoll did. I was just going along for the ride. But it was a great setup. I was able to get a master’s and that set me up in the position that I am now,” says Cooper, who earned a Master of Science in biomedical engineering at City College in 2012. She is currently enrolled in an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program at the Georgia Institute of Technology in the Mechanical Engineering School and Bioengineering School.

“I wouldn’t have brought her with me if I didn’t believe in her and by the same token, if she didn’t have a good experience with me at UPenn, she wouldn’t have come,” says Nicoll, who has run mentoring programs in his research labs for 10 years.

Nicoll’s mentorship program goes beyond guiding students with lab research. “I’ve edited applications for graduate schools. And in terms of career development, I help students apply for fellowships. Whatever it takes to get them where they need to be. That’s always been my philosophy,” says Nicoll, speaking of the assistance he’s given a current CCNY undergraduate student, Aniqua Rahman.

 “[Nicoll] spent a lot of time with me going over colleges and where to apply and helped me with every step of the application process,” says the biomedical engineering major. “I got into Cornell because of him. He wrote me a recommendation letter, went over my resume and my personal statement,” says Rahman, a graduating senior who applied to 14 Ph.D. programs.

Rahman describes her experience in the lab as “lucky” because “not everyone is comfortable with allowing undergraduates to work in their labs because we don’t know that much. Dr. Nicoll thought that I should learn these skills if I wanted to go to grad school,” says Rahman, who was a co-author on an abstract focusing on injectable filler materials, a product of the research she performed in the lab.

Nicoll was inspired to run an internship program because he had a positive experience working in a research lab as an undergraduate student. “The hope is that students develop a passion and appreciation for doing research. And working with me, I try my best to provide the skill set they are going to need whether they work in the industry or go on to graduate school,” says Nicoll.

“I’ve seen students who haven’t had a good experience in the lab who weren’t mentored properly. And one thing I’ve learned is that everyone needs to be mentored differently. I always say, ‘It takes time to care.’ So I’ve always made it a point to keep a close eye on undergraduates and spend time with them.”
SINGER, SONGWRITER, ACTOR, SCHOLAR — and More

By Cathy Rainone

OLIVER HOUSER would be the first to admit that his childhood on the Upper West Side of Manhattan wasn’t exactly conventional. How else to explain the home videos of Houser at 6 years old, playing the part of Gwen Verdon, running around the family apartment belting out “Whatever Lola Wants” from the musical comedy “Damn Yankees.”

“It was a free-for-all, be-yourself kind of mentality,” says Houser, of the family dynamics, “which I can’t thank my parents enough for.”

As a sophomore in the Macaulay Honors College at Hunter, Houser is majoring in music and hopes to be a composer, but he doesn’t plan to give up acting and singing. He envisions a career similar to Tim Minchin’s that would combine all of his talents.

“Minchin is a musical comedian and he just wrote a Broadway musical, ‘Matilda: The Musical,’ and he wanted to be an actor and now he plays piano and sings funny songs and he’s genius,” says Houser. “He also appeared on an episode of Showtime’s ‘Californication.’ His career path is the perfect one for me — being able to explore all these aspects of creativity.”

Houser has been following a similar path. He recently wrote a 10-minute play, “Preschool: The Musical,” that examines contrasting philosophies of child-raising “when Teacher Turner, an unsympathetic woman with a no-pain-no-gain approach is brought in to teach alongside the pampering, loving Ms. White.” He staged and filmed it at Hunter, and in February it was selected as a finalist at the Festival of New American musicals in California.

He’s currently working on a musical about the Model UN, “a popular extracurricular activity in high school and college in which students compete as they simulate what goes on at the United Nations.”

His piano teacher at Hunter, music professor Steven Graff, says Houser composes high-caliber Broadway-sounding melodies and does it very quickly. Graff first met Houser in the Arts in New York City seminar at Macaulay, where he had his students write a musical. It was an ambitious project, Graff says, and Houser wrote most of the music for the performance — about a cow that couldn’t moo.

“I don’t think it would have happened if it wasn’t because of him,” says Graff. “It’s extremely unusual to have a student who can just come up with one song after another. He did it very fast. He’s very talented and very gifted.”

Houser had quit piano lessons in ninth grade, but his passion for music and composition was reawakened when he met Graff at Macaulay.

After that seminar, Houser decided to major in music, but he has been acting professionally since his sophomore year at the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts where he played Iago in “Othello” and Wilbur in the musical “Hairspray.” He has appeared on ABC’s “What Would You Do?” Spike’s “Phowned” and Oxygen’s “Life on the Line,” and he has sung in the Children’s Chorus in four performances for the New York City Opera and was a writer for the MTV series “Skins.”

A big acting role came last summer when Houser played Melchior Gabor in the “Spring Awakening” musical at the Virginia Repertory Theater in Richmond, Va.

“I usually play character roles, but Melchior was an intellectual thinker. [The role] made me a better performer. I’ve gotten terrific auditions because of that,” Houser says that recently he’s been pouring a lot of energy into both acting and composing. “I love writing music for myself to perform,” says Houser. “I can create and perform so I get to act, act things out through music.”

Houser, who has a 3.8 GPA, may not have to choose between acting, singing or composing. “He’s so versatile, he’s a kind of guy that can do it all,” says Graff. “I don’t want to narrow his dreams because he’s a very talented actor, and he’s a great composer and a great performer. He’s so passionate about all of it.”
A COLLEGE PRESIDENT, Scott Evenbeck is far from alone when it comes to being “new on campus.” His school, its students, faculty and staff are all new as well, participants in a bold experiment in education. As the first community college to open in the city in 40 years, the aptly named and much-publicized New Community College will be under the microscope of educators and media for years to come. Nationwide, community colleges have been an abysmal failure at teaching and retaining the very students who need them. NCC aims to turn this around. Its curriculum is issue-based and uses the city as a learning laboratory. Students are vigorously supported by professors, peer mentors and student success advocates. It is not easy to drop a course. Dropping out altogether is heartily discouraged. Those who want to leave are challenged to substantiate what they will do instead.

Will it work? For a college president, this could be a terrifying appointment. But Evenbeck speaks with calm confidence about a school he believes will triumph. He also has first semester data to back up his vision of student success: a student fall-to-spring retention rate of about 90 percent. “On a national scale, this retention rate is very high and I wish it were higher. We hope to document exact circumstances with each student not here,” he says.

The University, in anticipation of more students, plans to eventually move the Manhattan college out of a building across from Bryant Park to a larger one at John Jay. This fall, NCC also received a three-year accreditation from New York State. An accreditation assessment from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is next. Evenbeck is optimistic about this, too. A psychologist, his assurance is bolstered by his national renown as an expert on at-risk students — and perhaps because he is a proverbial even-keeled Midwesterner, albeit one who loves the frenetic pace and diversity of New York.

Q. So, what is the secret formula for community colleges?
A. First, we all know why we are here at New Community College. It’s such a singular mission: Student success and learning. And we work as a team. Also, in cognitive psychology we believe it is key to attach new learning to “old” learning. We have a curriculum that is based on New York City. Our students are New Yorkers. They are in — and of — the city and they bring their own learning here; their own commitments to the city. They do field research. They are not memorizing things they will then forget. They are attaching what they learn here to what they already know. And what they learn is also connected to their future because so many of them want to stay in the city.

Q. As New Yorkers, what grabs their attention?
A. On the first day of a biology class, I saw students heading out to Bryant Park — we have started to call the park our “quadrangle” — with measuring instruments. One young man told me they would measure the carbon dioxide content of the air as well as the temperature. As we know, there is a linear relationship between the two and it is related to global warming and sustainability, which they are studying. They went back to their classroom to graph it. In statistics course they were asked to use that linear data. In another assignment — and I thought this was also very creative on the part of the faculty — they counted what kinds of businesses there were in different neighborhoods. How many groceries, retail shops, lawyer offices. And then, as they graphed the mix of businesses in those neighborhoods they saw what the different economies were like. In the long term what we want them to be able to do is to articulate what they have learned and to think critically.

Q. What else will help them to do that?
A. The students have electronic portfolios so we — and they — can track their progress. And we have some national leaders on our faculty. Laura Gambino is a national leader in regard to assessment and Rebecca Walker has done some really important work with students who are studying math.

Q. Are there other pieces to this puzzle?
A. Yes. Service learning. For example, there is a national organization called mobilize.org, which enables students who are ‘millennials’ to explore solutions to social problems. Eight of our students, including our student government president Stephen Icaza, are involved. They have such strong representation from this tiny college.

Q. What will happen to these students after they graduate?
A. Our majors need to be consistent with what is available in the city jobwise and I think they are. We also have to look at how the city’s economy grows and changes. Also, one of the significant things CUNY talks about is the importance of education on the master’s level. At some point we might want to think about what
Q. At a fall symposium held by the Association of Community College Trustees, CUNY's Senior Vice Chancellor Jay Hershenson spoke glowingly about NCC's prospects but also about his own experience as a “solitary” community college student decades ago. He noted, “The only one who said anything when I missed a couple of nights in a row was the Q27 bus driver.” How do you know students here don’t feel alone?

A. Everyone knows everyone on campus. It's small. For example, the woman who runs the security unit knows many of the students’ names and she has developed good camaraderie. Students just like to be here. They stay into the evening in the Information Commons. We get a lot of calls from parents and I really celebrate that they are interested. The day after Hurricane Sandy I was downstairs to greet students at 7 a.m. — classes start at 8 a.m. — and one student said, “I am so glad to be back in a safe place. My house is filled with water and this is a safe place for me.” We had a couple of town halls and “safe” was a word that was repeated a lot.

Q. Is this the culmination of the work you did with at-risk, four-year college students in Indiana. Is this your dream job?

A. Yes. These are the students with whom I want to work. First-generation, diverse students who are in many ways the future of New York.

Q. And when you take time off?

A. I try to learn something new about New York every week. For example, I went on a harbor cruise. There are these two artificial islands off of Staten Island that used to have hospitals on them. Now if you go out there you can see harbor seals. When we got back I went to Fraunces Tavern. I had not been there since I got back to New York to take this position. Washington gave his farewell address there. New York is such a wonderful place to learn.
HEAD OF THE CLASS
COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND

On the Tail of a

Charles Liu
Giant, Cosmic Collision of Galaxies

By Cathy Rainone

FOR ALL THE YEARS he’s been an astronomer, Charles Liu has examined thousands upon thousands of galaxies — 80,000 alone in a recent project, some as far as 7 billion light-years from Earth. He’s measured how quickly galaxies form stars and determined their age and luminosity. But one galaxy has captivated him more than all the others: J152426.55+080907, or as it’s more commonly known, Flagellan.

Flagellan, he says, is likely the best example of a nearly completed collision of two Milky Way-size galaxies in the nearby universe, or less than 1.5 billion light-years from Earth. “By studying the light emitted by the stars in Flagellan, we have been able to map the changes in its rate of star birth since the collision first began one billion years ago,” says Liu. “It’s a perfect system to study the effects of major collisions on the evolution of galaxies — and it looks really cool, too!”

Indeed, Flagellan was named by a colleague of Liu’s who thought the galaxy resembles a microorganism that moves around using a whip-like tail called a flagellum.

Liu, as astrophysics professor at the College of Staten Island, has been studying the stars as part of NASA’s Cosmos Hubble Space Telescope Program — an ongoing survey of nearly 2 million distant galaxies aimed at mapping the evolution of the universe.

Flagellan’s also captivating because there is strong evidence that a hidden, supermassive black hole is lurking at its center. The strength of radio wave emission from the center has fluctuated dramatically over these past two decades — a telltale sign of a supermassive black hole.

“This is why I keep coming back to Flagellan and making new measurements — there’s a lot going on in this distant, enigmatic object,” says Liu, who is also an associate of the Hayden Planetarium and Department of Astrophysics with the American Museum of Natural History.

Liu and his colleagues have traveled to Arizona, California, New Mexico, Chile and elsewhere around the world to look at Flagellan through ground-based and radio-based telescopes. But when he’s not gazing at faraway galaxies, he teaches at CSI and runs both the Verrazano School honors program and The Macaulay Honors College at CSI.

“I’m enabling students to reach their highest potential, that’s the reward of being an administrator,” says Liu, who earned degrees from Harvard University and the University of Arizona, and held postdoctoral positions at the Kitt Peak National Observatory and at Columbia University.

“But I don’t do it alone. I have wonderful staff at both programs who work hard to make sure the students get the best education.”

Liu knew he wanted to be a scientist and professor since his senior year in high school. Even before joining the CUNY faculty, as a full-time scientist at the American Museum of Natural History he helped develop public lecture series, educational exhibits and teacher education programs. At CSI he tries to make astrophysics fun for the students.

“Every once in a while I’ll break out in a song, ‘Black holes don’t suck but if you fall in one, that’s your new home,’ or rap ‘I like Big Bang and I cannot lie, astronomers can’t deny!‘ When do you learn best? When you have fun! I feel that teaching is an extension of who I am as scholar and a human being,” says Liu.

“If in real life I love my work and love bringing that knowledge to people, it’s going to come out in a classroom. I’m happy to jump up and down in a classroom. I want students to be engaged.”

When Liu arrived at CSI 10 years ago, he decided to help develop graduate- and doctoral-level courses in astrophysics at CUNY, which had none at the time. He felt the University wouldn’t be complete without them.

“So for the first two years that CUNY offered graduate astrophysics classes through the CUNY Graduate Center, Liu was the only professor teaching them. Now there’s an astrophysics group within the CUNY physics doctoral program with 10 full-time faculty members from various CUNY schools.

And Liu’s graduate student Stephanie Fiorenza, the University’s first doctoral student in astrophysics in decades, is now part of a growing number of like-minded young scientists in the program. “I’m very committed to making the program better for other students,” says Fiorenza, who has made the most of her time as a University doctoral student. Fiorenza has been awarded grants from the National Science Foundation to conduct astrophysics research in India and Japan, and this spring she studied at Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona.

“We have developed programs to help

Galaxies change on timescales of many millions of years. So our effort to study changes in a galaxy like Flagellan is akin to a mayfly studying the aging process of a tortoise!”

— Charles Liu

CUNY students study astrophysics from undergrad all the way to Ph.D. level,” says Liu. “I wanted CUNY to make that contribution. I didn’t do it alone. We had a lot of people involved. We’re expanding, we’re moving forward.”

Liu does the bulk of his own research on galaxies in the summer, when he runs a joint CUNY-AMNH program through a grant from the National Science Foundation. Flagellan and other galaxies are out there in the universe, waiting for him to notice any changes that may have occurred when he wasn’t looking — too busy grading papers and helping honors students get research opportunities.

“Galaxies change on timescales of many millions of years,” Liu says. “So our effort to study changes in a galaxy like Flagellan is akin to a mayfly studying the aging process of a tortoise!” That said, my colleagues and I have indeed observed changes. It’s tremendously exciting and rewarding to watch the universe evolving right before our eyes.”
Great Teaching is at the heart of a great university. Nine University professors featured here have received special acclaim for their instructional acumen from Carnegie Foundation, Presidential and Chancellor awards to recognition by The Princeton Review. Their classroom magic inspires students and prepares them for the future.

By Neill Rosenfeld

TEAM GRANOLA’S GAME was preparing for Hurricane Rees, soon to whip through town with terrifying force. The object: Move around the board, gathering the essentials — food, fuel, medical supplies and hardware, plywood and tools — needed to survive the big blow. The team — Jose Carillo, Jessica Jeffers and Matthew Soto — presented their concept to their beginning game-design class in November with PowerPoint, a hand-drawn board and task cards (safeguard a business, arrange for education, secure a house, etc.). Hurricane Sandy, then fresh in the news, had inspired their response to the assignment: Devise a game to promote social good.

Naming the hurricane after their teacher, assistant professor Rees Shad, was a given, considering his whirlwind
Designing and playing games about real problems to enhance learning.

classroom approach.

“You need a symmetrical board to give everyone a fair shot,” Shad said, amid a flurry of suggestions and questions. “Your design suggests two teams, not four players. Which is it? ... You limit play to 30 minutes, so what about creating a 30-minute soundtrack that could say, ‘You have 15 minutes until the storm hits’ ... You mentioned heuristics and said 75 to 80 percent of players liked the game, Continued on next page

Learning How — Not What — to Think

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HEN SHE WAS JUST 4 years old, Queens College associate professor Susan Croll announced that she would be a medical researcher. As a youngster, she was fascinated by her father’s psychology lectures at SUNY Broome Community College and helped him grade the bubble exams, “but not the essay questions.” Now The Princeton Review has recognized this neuropsychologist for her own teaching abilities.

“Two things are the most important in teaching,” she says. “The first is not to be a slave to the information; the concepts and what you do with the information are more important. Facts flitter away at the end of the semester, but ways of analyzing things stay with you forever. The second is to be very accepting of students and open to them. If you’re not in tune with them, they won’t feel supported and won’t have a sense of community.”

The results show up in 100-level classes like “Contemporary Issues in Science” where Croll has the opportunity “to teach entry-level students who are learning how to think.” Students consider the science and ethics of top-ics like cloning, stem cell research and how society might change if people embedded memory chips in their brains. “It doesn’t make a difference what position students take, as long as they provide rational arguments.”

Doctoral candidate Henry Ruiz finds Croll an inspiration. She has mentored him throughout his studies (Queens College B.A. in neuroscience and psychology, minors in biology and philosophy, 2008; M.A. in behavioral neuroscience, 2010; CUNY Ph.D. in neuropsychology expected fall 2013). “I started in her lab as an undergraduate, looking at differences in the brain cells of animals with autism-like disorders,” Ruiz says. He now probes the relationship between the central nervous system (primarily the brain) — or what is called the neuroimmune system — and autoimmune diseases like lupus, scleroderma and inflammatory bowel disease. “Once we block a specific neuropeptide pathway, we see a decrease in inflammation,” he says, pointing toward possible therapeutic agents.

Ruiz also has taught at Queens as an adjunct instructor since 2008. “A lot of my teaching style comes from my mentors, Susan Croll and [neurobiology professor] Joshua Brumberg. I aim to teach just like them.”

Croll’s research focuses on protein-based disease treatments. On campus, she targets protein factors in neurological conditions including epilepsy, depression and Alzheimer’s disease. “I specialize in the hippocampus, a part of the brain that’s involved in a number of neurological diseases. In Alzheimer’s, we’re trying to figure out how to modulate the immune system, so it doesn’t attack and damage cells in the brain.”

She is currently on academic leave at Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc., where she has long consulted. She helped in the early stages of developing the drug Eylea, which the Food and Drug Administration recently approved to treat neovascular (wet) age-related macular degeneration, a major cause of blindness. Eylea inhibits the growth of leaky blood vessels in the eye by blocking the vascular endothelial growth factor protein.
IT’S GAME TIME

Continued from previous page

but how many tested it? That number is important... What if someone steals the last hammer from you at the hardware store?"

Lively classes are one reason why the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) named Shad the 2012 New York State professor of the year — one of only 31 cited nationwide from among 300 nominees.

Shad also nailed down a three-year, $610,000 National Science Foundation (NSF) advanced technology education grant for Hostos’ Game-Framed Mathematics and Science Initiative. He and assistant professor Catherine Lewis are collaborating with math, physics, natural science and education faculty on six new courses that will use games to involve students in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

Students begin with role-playing or “analog” board games, which provide “a foundation for programming-centric courses” and the skills “to pursue careers in game design as well as interactive media,” according to the NSF abstract. The interactive part includes A.A.S. degrees in digital music and digital design.

"We were seeing an awful lot of students repeating remedial math courses. Students who eat up their tuition-aid dollars on remedial courses may not finish their associate degrees and, if they do, may not have aid available for bachelor’s degrees."

— Rees Shad

Continued on page 30

How to Face the Big Fear — Public Speaking

ARA BYRNE, an associate professor of communication and theatre arts at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, says her "favorite place is in a class with freshmen, because I enjoy helping them see what the higher education environment can do for them."

And she teaches just the course — the one they don’t want to take.

“Most people hate the idea of public speaking,” says Byrne, who also directs the William E. Macaulay Honors College at John Jay. “They dread being in front of an audience. All your insecurities come up. You’re exposed, you’re vulnerable, your thoughts about com-
petency are the elephant in the room. It’s a great class to have right out of high school.”

Public speaking is part of John Jay’s First Year Experience. She grounds discussion and research in issues that directly affect students, giving them a forum to explore topics in front of their peers.

Byrne asks students to combine aspects of ancient Greek rhetorical practice – the Western standard – with contemporary communication techniques. Emphasizing public speaking as a means to civic engagement, she tells students that if their ideas can improve society, they have a responsibility to present them effectively to others, which takes practice and skill. “It isn’t what you say to people, it’s what they hear, so you need to think about your audience. I see this course as a learn-to-teach model,” she says.

Students write speeches, read famous speeches, watch TED Talks and study research on student engagement. They learn to rewrite and take a different approach if a rhetorical stratagem isn’t working.

She has a clever way to help her students to start self-assessing their work. She gives them speeches from prior classes – some As, some Fs, some in between – for them to “grade” before they write their own. They discuss the mechanics of grading, her assessment rubric and college standards, so there won’t be surprises when they are evaluated. Afterward, she says, students are less likely to hand in subpar assignments. Instead, “They’ll say, ‘I didn’t get it done and won’t insult you with an excuse.’”

Freshmen need such an introduction to college-level learning to succeed socially and academically, she says.

Junior psychology major Radhalisa Zarzuela says Byrne’s public-speaking course was far from easy. “When we’d give a speech, if we didn’t have enough eye contact, she’d tell us to calm down and relax, try to engage and have a conversation,” she says. “I’d look at her and learn how to look at others. She taught us how to get people’s attention.”

Preparing for doctoral studies via the federal Ronald E. McNair undergraduate program, Zarzuela conducts research with assistant professor Maureen Allwood on how home violence relates to jealousy and aggression. She also tutors public-speaking students who are in the SEEK Program for high-potential, low-income students.

Byrne edited several books in Black Issues in Higher Education’s Landmarks in Civil Rights History series, including The Unfinished Agenda of Brown v. Board of Education. She looked at race, ethnicity and learning on social networking sites for the MacArthur Foundation’s book series on youth, digital media and learning.

She also recently co-authored a paper on cyber-bullying with senior John Cusick, who intends to enter a J.D./Ph.D. program. Cusick says Byrne’s public-speaking course “played a major role in my intellectual development.” Calling Byrne “a support system,” he adds that she was readily available to help with work and consider graduate programs and fellowships. “Every time I speak with her, I learn something new about myself,” he says.
IT’S GAME TIME

Continued from page 28

knowledge needed to pursue technology-based careers.

Weak high school preparation thwarts many students. In 2010, only 22 percent of incoming Hostos freshmen passed the CUNY Skills Test in math, including just 41 percent of digital media students.

“We were seeing an awful lot of students repeating remedial math courses,” says Shad. “Students who eat up their tuition-aid dollars on remedial courses may not finish their associate degrees and, if they do, may not have aid available for bachelor’s degrees.”

Enter what he calls “game-framing,” a logic-based endeavor that requires students to understand content in order to convey it to others through systems of play. “If you have to teach a concept, you’re engaging a different part of the brain and have a different motivation than pure study provides,” he says.

In the second phase of the NSF grant, Hostos will offer a Summer Games Institute for secondary school students in 2014. It is likely to include design and animation students from Bronx High School for the Visual Arts and digital music students from Crotona Academy High School. Shad played a key role in arranging those alliances. Graduating seniors from those schools who enroll at Hostos and demonstrate mastery of digital basics will be admitted to higher-level courses, offering a faster path to an A.A.S. degree.

The third phase, set for winter 2015, features professional development workshops for college and secondary school educators in game-framed education. They will feature assessment materials collected during the previous year’s work with college and high school students.

Taken as a whole, the NSF grant will build a pipeline into Hostos’ programs and digital careers, which can be pursued at the bachelor’s level at other CUNY colleges.

“It’s a provost’s dream to have this kind of activity going on across those areas and very much embraced by those departments,” says Hostos Provost Carmen Coballes-Vega, who nominated Shad for the teacher of the year award.

“I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone quite like him — distinguished in his field and committed to disseminating his skills so community college students can graduate with something cutting-edge. This has become one of our fastest-growing majors.”

Coballes-Vega says the NSF grant will finance a game-design lab to accompany the sound studio and computer-intensive graphics program previously funded by CUNY, the mayor’s office and the Bronx borough president’s office.

She added that Shad “has surrounded himself with two exceptional colleagues,” Lewis and assistant professor Sarah Sandman. “Their energy and vision is contagious. This man is so humble, yet he does so much. His influence is enormous, both with faculty and students and other staff, and in the community as well.”

Shad knows what it’s like to be what he, himself, once was: “a troubled kid.” As a teen on the East Side of Manhattan, “I started getting into serious trouble and my folks and grandmother sent me off to a tiny little prep school called the Gunnery [Mr. Gunn’s School in Washington, Conn.], which changed my life in many ways.”

As he recently wrote for his alumni magazine, he arrived there “dealing with loads of confusing and conflicting feelings, struggling to recognize anything of worth in myself, barely holding on to a GPA that could keep me at Gunnery.” But he encountered English teacher Pam Taylor and math teacher Ed Small. “Ed was a man who scared the hell out of me, and who struggled to get me engaged in mathematics, but who somehow taught me how to apply...”

Continued on page 32 ➤

Understand the Concept

Tom offers to sell his jacket to Sally for $50. Simple, right? But what if Ellen offers Tom more after Sally says OK? What if Tom changes his mind? Does it matter that nothing is in writing? What if Tom lied about the jacket’s material?

Hypotheticals are one way that professor Avi O. Liveson makes his Hunter College contract law class entertaining for sophomores. “Business law may sound boring, but it’s fun to teach,” he says.

So is tax law. Well, he admits, “I don’t know if it’s fun for the entire world, but it has principles and is supposed to hang together. You place the student in a situation. Say you found $50 on the sidewalk, or Uncle Harry gave you a $500 gift. Are they taxable? One is and one isn’t, but why? If the doctor tells you to eat organic food because of allergies, is your grocery bill deductible? If some results seem illogical or unfair, I tell students to blame Congress, not me.”

Most juniors and seniors taking his tax law class are preparing for government or business jobs or the certified public accountant (CPA) licensing exam. “At the college level you don’t get into technical detail,” he says. “You can spend more time on the fun parts.”

Liveson earned a University of Pennsylvania law degree after a Brandeis University bachelor’s. “I found courses like constitutional law murky, but tax law was clear, though it can be complex and certain areas can drive you insane.”

He practiced tax law for a few years, edited at the Journal of Taxation and then got his break — adjudicating at Hunter. He asked the since-retired program director to consider him if a full-time slot opened up “and got lucky” in 1986.
ANTHONY CARPI, professor of environmental toxicology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, hasn’t been teaching much since he was tapped to be the Interim Associate Provost for the Advancement of Research last year, but he finds other ways to work with students.

“I’m really enjoying the position, enjoying helping build research infrastructure for students and faculty and getting grants and producing scholarship,” says Carpi.

He’s also mentoring three undergraduate students who are part of PRISM (Program for Research Initiatives for Science Majors) at John Jay, which helps all students, particularly underrepresented minorities and women, work toward careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

Carpi has been co-director of PRISM since it began in 2006. As a result of the program, several students a year now move on to graduate-level programs – five times the number who were doing so in the 1990s.

In 2011, Carpi was one of only 11 people in the United States to win the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring. Other than making Carpi a campus celebrity, the award brought prestige to PRISM.

“The award made me more conscious of the significance of the work we’re doing at PRISM,” says Carpi, who met President Barack Obama at the White House and received a $10,000 grant for student stipends for undergraduate research. “I always thought that we were doing good work preparing students for graduate school, expanding the population of minorities getting Ph.D.s, but the award also helped other schools recognize our program.”

Since receiving the award, Carpi and colleagues have reached out to graduate schools at NYU, Harvard and Columbia to facilitate application and admission for John Jay students.

“The relationship we’re developing with Harvard, specifically, is based on the fact that I won the award and that the chair of the department of epidemiology in the School of Public Health also won the award,” says Carpi.

“Hopefully John Jay will be a major feeder school to their program.”

– Cathy Rainone
myself and ignore imagined limitations....
This old New Englander helped me
develop a work ethic that I struggle to
translate to my students on a daily basis.”
Taylor’s “writing courses were the
toughest I ever
experienced....
Her techniques
and fearsome
attitude only par-
tially hid the
warmest, most
student-invested
teacher I have
ever known.
These are things
that I consciously
work to emulate in my teaching,” Shad
wrote.

Shad earned a B.A. in English litera-
ture and English history at Skidmore
College; a M.S. in technical communica-
tion with a focus on human-computer
interaction and a certificate in graphics
at Renssalaer Polytechnic Institute; and
an MFA at Parsons, the New School for
Design. And that was after 15 years as a
world-traveling singer/songwriter, musi-
cian (guitar, piano and a bit of trumpet)
and recording engineer (he built his first
studio at 18).

What he liked most about the record-
ing industry was “mentoring college and
high school interns, sharing with them the
magic of what I loved. I recognized that
what I really wanted to do was teach.”

Hostos had reached out to Shad’s
mentor at Parsons, Morry Galonoy, look-
ing for someone to develop a graphic
design program. Galonoy suggested Shad,
who at his interview suggested that “just
graphic design was calling it short. It
should be mul-
timedia. The
school asked
for a proposal.”
He wrote it
and they bit.

Hostos launched digital
graphic
design and
animation in
2008, digital
music and audio production in 2010 and
game design in January 2012. “This tri-
pod of disciplines provides for a wealth of
collaboration between students, which is
probably the most important skill set
they can have to prepare for careers in
multimedia,” he says. The 265 majors
“have risen to the program’s challenges.”

“I got to design these programs class
Continued on page 34

Biology Inspired
With Touches of Theater

As a teenager on the brink of college,
Jennifer Basil faced a big decision —
theater or biology. At 17 she’d appren-
ticed at the New York State School of
Performing Arts at the Circle Repertory Company in
New York City. But at age 9 — “after watching every-
thing on PBS about animals and fish” — she had
written to the renowned Woods Hole Marine Biological
Laboratory on Cape Cod, looking for work.

She opted for biology. Earning her Ph.D. at the Uni-
versity of Massachusetts in Amherst, she studied
learning and navigation in the Clark’s nutcracker, a
bird that excels at remembering locations. A Woods
Hole researcher then offered her a postdoctoral position to study spatial navigation in lobsters. Although lobsters navigate by smell while nutcrackers use sight, Basil couldn’t resist. And during six years at Woods Hole, she co-founded and acted in a theater company there.

Now — as associate professor of biology at Brooklyn College, acting chair of the Ecology, Evolutionary Biology and Behavior Ph.D. Program at the CUNY Graduate Center and improv group member — Basil melds her passions in the classroom. “I teach kinesthetically; I try to be as animated as possible. I use storytelling — for example, this Brooklyn squirrel that lives in my backyard. I go over concepts in as many ways as possible to reach as many students as possible,” she says.

Her sophomore zoology students go to the Prospect Park Zoo and report in scientific style for her writing-intensive course. “You can see animals weighing costs and benefits by doing point-sampling every few minutes and recording what they are doing. Students can measure how much time is spent foraging for food; if an animal is foraging, he can’t be looking for predators, and if he’s interacting with a flock member, he can’t be eating. Students go to the zoo in snow and rain because they’re having so much fun.”

Benelita Tina Elie (Brooklyn College, B.S. in biology, 2008) says Basil “treats students as intellectual equals. She’s very patient, very thorough. There’s no dumb question. She feels a moral imperative to grant the public access to the science she does. It’s why she’s teaching at a public college and is eager to introduce her work to high school students and the public in general.”

Two years of undergraduate research in Basil’s lab inspired Elie to pursue biology over law or medicine. She looked at how crayfish explore their environment with antennae and bristles and how artificial estrogens in water affect aggression in stickleback fish. Now a research assistant in cancer genetics and biology at Sloan-Kettering Institute, Elie is applying to neuroscience Ph.D. programs.

Basil studies cephalopods, which are mollusks like the octopus, squid and chambered nautilus. “Octopuses have very large brains relative to their bodies. These are complex brains, with long-term memory, spatial memory and the ability to watch another octopus doing something new and then do it themselves. Brains are very hard to make and maintain, so what were the evolutionary pressures that, in natural selection, resulted in this huge investment in brains?”

Even more curious is that octopus nerve cells differ electrically from those in human brains, though they function together in the same way. “So are there rules about how to put a big brain together?”

But the brains Basil is most concerned with are those of her students. “I go into a classroom exhausted and come out energized,” she says. “Teaching at CUNY makes it easy, because these are the best students I’ve ever taught.”
IT’S GAME TIME

Continued from page 32

by class, to select the faculty and to design our labs and recording studio,” says Shad. “I’ve built houses, been a carpenter, been a graphic designer and filmmaker, all at the same time. I like having 18 balls in the air. This is the perfect atmosphere to work in.”

Shad wants students to be realistic. “I have friends who dropped out of high school and won Grammies, but competition makes that less likely every year. Someone coming out of high school today will change careers six times. Whatever software you’re good at, it will eventually change. So what kind of tools can we give them that go beyond an associate degree? Higher degrees, certainly. Beyond that, communications, confident self-learning and a collaborative skill set.”

Shad says that winning the professor of the year award “is an honor, it’s wonderful, but I don’t hold a candle to my colleagues who have been at Hostos since they were teaching in windowless rooms, with no heating. What am I to that?”

“Life for me is play, and people look at me and say you’re not taking life seriously, but I am. But I’m handling it like a game because of the level of engagement and play. In the classroom I’m having a blast, and when I do, my students have a blast.”

“Life for me is play, and people look at me and say you’re not taking life seriously, but I am. In the classroom I’m having a blast, and when I do, my students have a blast.” — Rees Shad

Happy Is Good, Ethical Is Necessary

KIMORA – SHE USES only one name – has taken on what may seem a quixotic mission: to encourage students who intend to become police, corrections or probation officers to be ethical — if not happy — in their work. She sets the same goal for the teenage prisoners with whom she works.

“I find a lot of misery in the criminal justice field — policing, the courts and corrections,” says this adjunct associate professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, who also is an ordained minister. “Many don’t like their jobs, and no one wakes up wanting to get arrested and have people yell at them. I’m for justice, a set of ethics and a humane way of treating people that can lead to joy and a more productive life.”

Other countries take a different approach than the United States. In Slovenia and Kingston, Ontario, for example, correction officers may hug prisoners who are upset. Some use neutral terminology to refer to prisoners, such as “participant” instead of “inmate.” And then there are changes in routine that, Kimora says, need to be made to encourage respect by everyone inside a prison.

“When I walk down the halls of jails and prisons in New York, Utah and California, participants are supposed to turn their backs and put their hands on the wall. There is shaming constantly, which tears apart what we’re trying to do in the classroom” to get the teenagers and adults to reduce violence, change their lives and not return to jail or prison.

The Princeton Review sums up Kimora’s approach — at John Jay or in treatment programs in and out of jails and prisons through work at the Osborne Association, the state’s oldest offender-aid organization — with this quote: “Unless we question what we are learning, we are capable of becoming an uncritical thinker who could learn to victimize others.”

Could the road to workplace contentment — if not joy — for John Jay alumni and prisoners start with critical thinking?

Cognitive skills development is indeed a key facet of the program that Kimora promotes as education director for treatment and prevention services at Osborne’s El Rio substance abuse treatment program.

In prisons and jails, where she spends a third of her work time, Kimora leads Osborne’s facilitators. “Much can be done if people view one another in a different way. Our participants will say, I’m a criminal. They’re 16 to 18 years old and think their lives are over. I say, ‘You’re not a criminal now. You’re looking at me now and I need you to be a leader in your community.’”

At John Jay, which she represents on the University Faculty Senate, Kimora’s courses include “Treatment of the Offender,” “Corrections and the Media” and “Administration of Juvenile Justice.”

Senior Popy Begum took Kimora’s comparative “International Penal Systems” class and now interns at Osborne. “She’s very interested in seeing students excel academically,” says Begum. “If you have a different idea, she respects it. She uses current events to critique what’s happening now. She asks students not to single out any group of people,” but to look at offenders as individuals.

Begum is seeking both Ph.D. and J.D. degrees, hoping to become a criminologist focusing on gender. She also intends to work with and study street children and female offenders in Bangladesh, from where her family emigrated to Astoria when she was 8 months old.

“I want students to know that people don’t inherently want to be evil,” Kimora says. “They become whatever they become because of circumstances, but that’s not who they are or have to be.”
B ILL WILLIAMS jokes that what led him to collaborate with Sandra Clarkson was the constant refrain at cocktail parties: “Oh, you teach statistics? I hated statistics!”

The former Bell Labs research statistician understands why: “You’d be floored if you looked at a first-year statistics textbook and got out the very first one written by George Snedecor in the 1930s. They looked the same, the chapter titles were the same and the teaching of statistics hadn’t changed. Sandi and I set out to do something different.”

The software-based, graphics-heavy solution devised by these two Hunter College professors since the 1990s has made “Elementary Probability and Statistics” amazingly popular. It’s grown from 13 or 14 sections a semester a dozen years ago to about 35 in fall and spring and 15 in the summer.

For masterminding this transformation, in 2012 the University awarded mathematics educator Clarkson and statistician Williams the third annual Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Mathematics Instruction. The Office of Academic Affairs administers the award on behalf of Chancellor Goldstein, who earned a Ph.D. in statistics. The awards panel unanimously said these members of Hunter’s Department of Mathematics and Statistics stood out among the nominees for their long-term collaborative effort, innovation and emphasis on evidence-based instruction.

Today, the use of statistics is exploding in fields as diverse as nursing, psychology, sociology and political science, not to mention the media. “We, as citizens, are asked to make decisions based on them,” Clarkson says. Think of the last presidential election, with its dazzling graphics and dizzying polls. (This is a sweet spot for Williams, who formerly headed operations at the Louis Harris Associates polling firm.)

The professors began revising Statistics 113 by team teaching. Clarkson put students in groups, but they needed a spark.

In 1999, they found an early release of ActivStats multimedia software, written by Paul Velleman and distributed by Pearson. “There were videos on the disk. Students could read about some technique and press a button, start the [included] DataDesk software and analyze data using that technique,” Williams says.

“Students need to be active learners,” Clarkson says, and even the most brilliant lecturer has a hard time — especially these days, when students may text or do unrelated homework on their laptops on class time. Besides, she adds, students assume that “learning has to wait to take place until they go home and review their class notes.”

She recalled her days running Hunter’s remedial math program. She would look over students’ shoulders, correcting mistakes and explaining as they worked. “Students learned material more thoroughly and were more prepared for tests and didn’t feel we had any wasted time.”

So around 2003 or 2004, they broke with routine and shuttled students between a lecture hall and computer classrooms. “We wanted to make them more active participants and give them help when they ran into problems,” she says.

A year later, the professors did something radical. “Students did not want to give up their textbook, so we took it away from them,” Williams says.

With college funding, Clarkson and Williams stepped back from teaching the course to become orchestra conductors. They trained a cadre of part-time instructors for what by then were 700 students to be classroom helpers, rather than lecturers. At least 60 percent of today’s statistics instructors have been at Hunter for three or four years, while some have taught there 10 years or more.

“We have instructors showing students how to work software and do data analysis,” Williams says. “We started early on emphasizing the graphical side, for a picture is worth a thousand words,” both for understanding and conveying information.

The typical Statistics 113 student has completed a college algebra class or the equivalent, and English 120, the first writing course. Before class, students usually review a chapter in the software, looking at videos or models.

This year, each student has an individual, semester-long project based on a common set of some 6,000 data points. “They look at a variable and see if the data is skewed or normal and what the summary statistics are,” Clarkson says. After completing ongoing assignments, “at the end of the semester they write recommendations geared to someone who does not know statistics. They have to take something very technical and communicate it in a nontechnical way.”

The professors never stop refining the course, most recently by putting homework and the midterm exam online with the help of Pearson’s software and technical team. Since 2006, they’ve also used a uniform final for all sections that examines success in 10 learning outcomes. This way instructors don’t have to create or mark exams, freeing all classroom time for instruction.

So do students learn better this way? The pass-rate percentages “are in the upper 80s,” Clarkson says. “The students who don’t pass are those who don’t finish the course, but there are not that many of them.”
VEN AT 101 YEARS OLD, Bel Kaufman is still fashionable — sporting oversized Gucci shades and a matching scarf at her Park Avenue apartment one late fall afternoon.

“If I don’t look put together at my age, when will I ever,” Kaufman quips.

She is the granddaughter of a celebrated Yiddish storyteller — Sholem Aleichem — whose anecdotes inspired the Broadway musical “Fiddler on the Roof.”

But the 1934 Hunter College graduate is best known for her 1965 novel, *Up the Down Staircase*, which spent 64 weeks on The New York Times’ best-seller list.

The book, inspired by Kaufman’s years as a New York City public schoolteacher, chronicles the career of Sylvia Barrett, a young teacher struggling with a byzantine school administration. Much of the book provides a humorous portrait of the relationships between the English teacher and the students in her inner-city school.

Kaufman retired from the school system more than half a century ago, but she never stopped teaching. A book tour launched her second career as a public speaker and being in front of an audience, Kaufman says, “is also teaching.”

As recently as 2011, Kaufman taught a seminar on Jewish humor at Hunter College. When she met her eight students she decided to make the class informal. She threw out her notes, arranged seats in a semicircle and they all simply talked.

“It was like coming home,” says Kaufman. “We discussed why so many American humorists and comics are Jewish. We had a lot of laughs. Students brought examples of Jewish humor, and we talked about why they’re funny and what makes them Jewish.”

Kaufman’s former high school students still visit her. They come with their grandchildren and remind her of what she was like as an English teacher. They remember the poetry she taught them, her clothes and especially the clicking of her stilettos as she ran up and down the school staircase.

“You never know students’ memories of you,” says Kaufman. “It’s a kind of immortality. I was a great teacher and I say it without any false modesty.”

Kaufman decided to become a teacher during college when a friend invited her to visit her class at the Hunter elementary school. Kaufman remembers the class being full of 6- and 7-year-olds with their eyes fixed on her.

“They were waiting for something important that would make a difference in their lives, that they would never forget,” she says. “That was a moment I knew I wanted to be a teacher.”

Kaufman was born in Berlin and grew up in Odessa and Moscow during the Russian Revolution. “Bullets were flying everywhere,” she says of her childhood. “We were stepping over frozen dead bodies, but you know, a child has no basis for comparison — doesn’t every child step over dead bodies? So it didn’t bother me, that’s how life was.”

Her family left the Soviet Union for New York when she was 12. She couldn’t speak English, so she started out in first grade. But she quickly caught up, graduating magna cum laude from Hunter and completing a master’s degree in literature at Columbia University with high honors.

“Being a student at Hunter College was sheer heaven,” Kaufman recalls in her study surrounded by books and photos of her beloved grandfather and family. “Our teachers were important scholars who had written books on their subjects. And I had the most fabulous education. I learned Anglo-Saxon, Middle English poetry. I learned so much there, that when I went to Columbia for my master’s degree, it was like lower grade.”

But getting certified for teaching by the city’s Board of Education wasn’t easy. Kaufman passed the written exams, but...
failed the oral portion for “foreign melody.” She took speech classes to get rid of her Russian accent, but flunked the test again when an examiner decided that she gave “a poor interpretation” of a sonnet by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Angry this time, Kaufman wrote to the poet asking her to evaluate the interpretation.

“I got a three-and-a-half page letter from her saying … ‘surely it’s a clerical error … I myself could not have explained my poem so well,’” Kaufman recalls. She sent a copy of Millay’s letter to the Board but they held firm. “It was a face-saving move,” Kaufman says. “I took the exam again the following year and I’ve been teaching ever since.”

Over the years Kaufman has written many essays and short stories. Recently they were collected for the first time and are now available as eBooks, This and That: Random Thoughts and Recollections, and LaTigresse: and Other Short Stories.

Up the Down Staircase began as a short story, published in The Saturday Review in 1962. An editor at the publishing house Prentice Hall asked Kaufman to expand it into a book. Kaufman was 54 when it was published. It was an immediate success.

“I always thought I would be a writer, a journalist possibly, but I didn’t dare to compare myself to Sholem Aleichem,” says Kaufman. “It was only after I published Up the Down Staircase and critics said I wore the mantle well, with the same humor and compassion as Sholem Aleichem, that it was as if I was given permission to be a writer, too.” She also wrote another novel, Love, Etc.

Kaufman is thinking about writing a memoir in letter form to her grandfather, who died when she was 5 years old. But for now, she’s enjoying being 101.

“For the first time I don’t have to do anything, nothing is expected of me,” she says. “If I don’t want to go someplace all I have to say is, ‘No thank you, I’m 101 years old!’ Terrific excuse. It’s such a liberating experience to say no thank you.”
A SWEET COLLECTION

Anthony Cucchiara inside Hank Kaplan’s giant collection of boxing memorabilia at Brooklyn College.
The collection contained material dated to 1814 and includes information on little known local boxers and international boxing stars. Some standout pieces include Muhammad Ali’s punching bag and a 75-pound book, *GOAT: A Tribute to Muhammad Ali*, filled with 3,000 images of the champ. The collection, which is open to the public, also includes 2,600 books and 500,000 photos, newspaper clippings, artwork and scrapbooks.

Kaplan, born in 1919, grew up in the Hebrew American orphanage in Brooklyn, and joined the military before becoming a scientist for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Miami until his retirement at age 65. “Hank just had a passion for this sport,” says Cucchiara. “He was a collector — you know how people collect mayonnaise jars or paper clips? Well, he just wanted to document the sport.” An avid boxer himself and now retired, Cucchiara played a pivotal role in bringing Kaplan’s collection to the college.

While his own boxing career was short-lived — he won his one and only match — Kaplan was most concerned that unknown local boxers would be lost to history. “So he was committed to making sure they would not be,” says Cucchiara. Over the years, Kaplan’s collection grew with the help of friends in the boxing community, including trainer Angelo Dundee and boxers Muhammad Ali and Sonny Liston. Kaplan also spent many hours in secondhand stores. “He would come up to NYC with his son and they would scour used bookstores, picking up magazines, brochures, programs, memorabilia — anything related to boxing,” Cucchiara says.

“Pure coincidence” is what Cucchiara calls the circumstances surrounding his introduction to Kaplan. “I didn’t know Hank and it was Kaplan’s friend, [sportswriter] David Margolick, who finally put us in touch,” says Cucchiara. David Smith, the supervising librarian at the New York Public Library, who works regularly with authors, learned of Kaplan’s collection through Margolick. The two met while Margolick was doing research on his book, *Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling*, and Smith reached out to Cucchiara to inform him about Kaplan’s collection.

Cucchiara first set eyes on the collection in 2006, when he visited Kaplan at his Kendall, Fla., home. “It was just overwhelming to say the least, every nook and cranny of the house was filled with boxing material,” says Cucchiara.

“He took me through the living room and dining room, which he called the processing center, where he prepped material for archiving,” says Cucchiara. “The dining room table was covered with clippings and photos. He also had boxes of stuff stacked floor to ceiling in the closets of two bedrooms. And another bedroom was converted into a library with floor-to-ceiling shelving crammed with books and magazines about boxing, and that was only the beginning of it.”

Kaplan led Cucchiara through an alleyway that led to a 1,500-square-foot, two-car garage where 40 to 50 tall file cabinets were organized into rows and floor-to-ceiling shelving filled with material. Billboard-sized posters were stashed on the back porch.

Cucchiara credits divine intervention and Kaplan’s dedication with the preservation of the collection. “He was a natural born archivist, but it was a miracle that this collection survived with very little damage,” he says.

“He was really fearful that with one storm, a lifetime of work could be wiped away. So it was his dream to have his collection available to everybody in a major research institution,” says Cucchiara.

At the time, Kaplan was willing to part with the collection for $300,000 even though it was later appraised at $2.94 million. “He wasn’t interested in the real value, he just wanted to recover some of the cost he put into it,” says Cucchiara.

After the initial visit Cucchiara began raising money to pay for the collection. Two years later, Kaplan became ill and two weeks before his death, willed the collection to the college.

In 2008, about 2,000 cartons were removed from Kaplan’s home and brought to Brooklyn. It took more than two days and a tractor-trailer truck to empty out the house. And with the help of a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, the collection was made available to the public in 2010.

Since then, the boxing collection has become a magnet for archives of other collectors, including Rocky Marciano’s trainer Freddie Brown. It has also drawn interest from researchers around the world. “We’ve had scholarly researchers come in because they’re writing books, but then we’ve had the more offbeat requests, like one to do research for a boxing video game,” says Chief Archivist Marianne LaBatto.
SCIENTISTS ESTIMATE that there are 300 to 400 different species of terebrid snails — a type of venomous marine snail — that live in tropical environments around the globe. So far, only 150 species have been identified from DNA analysis. Some terebrids are equipped with a venom apparatus that produces compounds that could be used for drug development. Hunter College chemistry professor Mandë Holford spent a month in the fall in Papua New Guinea searching for new species of the snails for molecular analysis. The expedition was in collaboration with the Paris Museum of Natural History.

Holford and her research partners are working on building a family tree of marine snails, which could be used as a road map to identify lineages that produce toxins. They had found 30 new terebrid snail species for molecular analysis on another expedition to Mozambique in 2009.

“With the family tree on an expedition as a road map to try to target the specific snails that we need,” says Holford, a York College graduate who has a doctorate in synthetic protein chemistry from Rockefeller University.

In Papua New Guinea, Holford dived, snorkeled and dredged the waters to discover 17 new species for molecular analysis. But to find which of the terebrids had venom, Holford had to crack open the shell of each one, searching for a venom gland. Of the new species, she found eight that had a gland to produce peptide toxins.

“We had to sacrifice them all because they were new species and we didn’t know which ones are toxic,” says Holford, also a research scientist at the American Museum of Natural History. “But that’s good progress for our research. We’re getting closer to total representation of the 400 estimated species in our snail family tree.”

The Papua New Guinea expedition was part of a larger, “Our Planet Reviewed” project, partly funded by Prince Albert II of Monaco, who visited with the 120 scientists who participated in the latest expedition.
At left, banana boats filled with scientists ready to go into the field; center, the laboratory at the Divine Word University where specimens collected in the field are analyzed daily; at right, Holford shows Prince Albert II of Monaco, a funder of the expedition, how venom is extracted from a snail’s glands with the aid of a microscope.
BEFORE historian David Nasaw agreed to write the biography of Joseph P. Kennedy, he says he warned Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith and the late Senator Edward Kennedy, who asked him to do it, that “I’m a crazy researcher and I’m going to find stuff about your father that’s going to make the family unhappy.”

The patriarch of America’s first family, Kennedy, was a complex figure involved in major events of the 20th century. He was a Hollywood movie producer, made millions during the 1920s stock-market boom, campaigned for Franklin Roosevelt, served as U.S. ambassador to London before WWII, then returned to the United States to take part in the debate over the Cold War. He was the father of a president.

But there were also stories and rumors that he made his fortune as a bootlegger and that he was anti-Semitic and a Nazi sympathizer.

Still, the Kennedys wanted Nasaw, the Arthur Schlesinger Jr. Professor of History at the Graduate Center, to write the book. They placed no restrictions on him and provided Nasaw with unfettered access to Kennedy’s papers in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, previously closed to researchers.

Nasaw says the Kennedys trusted him because he had already written a biography of another controversial 20th-century figure, the powerful newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst. It also helped that Nasaw was a colleague of Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a historian who served in the Kennedy White House.

“Someone in the family read it and discovered that my biography of Hearst was a warts-and-all biography, but in the end it was fair and you got to know a man in all his complexities and contradictions,” says Nasaw.

It took more than a year to get a final agreement from the family.

“To this day I don’t know what took so long,” says Nasaw, whose book, The Patriarch: the Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P. Kennedy, hit the shelves right before the 2012 presidential election. “It may have been someone close to the family who was wary about opening this material.”


Nasaw spent six years in libraries and private homes studying thousands of documents, unpublished diaries, telephone transcripts, financial records and even the secret British Foreign Office “Kennedyiana” files. He reviewed Kennedy’s correspondence with every major figure of the 20th century from Winston Churchill and Neville Chamberlain to popes and Galeazzo Ciano, an Italian minister of foreign affairs.

He read letters written by Kennedy to his nine children, which is how Kennedy kept involved with them while away for long periods of time.

“Once I got full access I knew I had a treasure trove,” says Nasaw of the papers, stored in multiple cartons at the library. “My initial reaction was awe and fear. Because I’m the first historian to write about Joe P. Kennedy, I felt I had to get it right. I owed it to them. They took a chance on me.”

Despite long-standing rumors that Kennedy was a bootlegger, Nasaw was surprised to learn he was not. He went through every book that claimed otherwise and checked their sources.

“Some of these stories were ridiculous,” says Nasaw. For one of the writers, “his major source for the allegations that Joe was a bootlegger was an interview with Al Capone’s piano tuner, who claimed he had overheard a conversation between Capone and Kennedy. It’s nuts.”

Nasaw discovered Kennedy was a cautious man and would not have risked his fortune, which he made on the New York Stock Exchange, and his family’s reputation on any illegal operation.

“Part of the reason why everyone thought he was a bootlegger is because they couldn’t understand how he was able to make this much money,” says Nasaw. “Because I had access to his financial records and stock market records and accounts, I could see how he made that money.”

What did shock Nasaw was Kennedy’s anti-Semitic rhetoric and behavior. As the U.S. ambassador to London before WWII,
Kennedy violated State Department orders and took it upon himself to try to keep America out of the war. He wanted to negotiate with Hitler and accused Jews of being selfish and unpatriotic.

“I think some of the members of the family might be disturbed at the anti-Semitic stuff I found in some of the letters and diaries,” says Nasaw. “Some of it is vile, callous, cold — it’s stupid. Kennedy at a point in his life buys into all sorts of anti-Semitism. He is concerned that Jews are trying to push America into the war with Hitler.”

But, Nasaw says, despite his anti-Semitic attitude, Kennedy wasn’t a Nazi sympathizer. He was convinced that if America went to war, depression would return and it would take a century to recover from the loss of lives and resources. He wanted to prevent another war at all cost, even if it meant negotiating with Hitler.

“The fact that he doesn’t want to go to war with Hitler doesn’t mean he respects him,” says Nasaw. “He doesn’t. His mistake is not seeing that Hitler is a madman.”

The Kennedy family never tried to withhold information or censor Nasaw’s book. And while doing his research, Nasaw never told family members what he had discovered about the extent of Kennedy’s anti-Semitism.

However, Nasaw would call Edward Kennedy whenever he had a question or visit him in Hyannis Port or Washington. He also talked with Jean Kennedy Smith, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, and their children and cousins.

In the end, Nasaw had so much material he had to cut out 100,000 words. The biography is still a hefty 800 pages, but he isn’t worried that its length will discourage buyers. He knows there are readers who still crave long, detailed biographies.

“It’s a way to learn history and it’s also a way to see how individuals contributed to the making of history,” he says.

The Kennedy book is Nasaw’s third biography — besides his work on Hearst, he also wrote a biography of Andrew Carnegie. At present, he has no plans to write another. And writing a biography of a living person is out of the question, he says.

“I don’t want to deal with living people’s biographies. It was hard enough to know that Ted Kennedy and Jean Kennedy were going to read this book,” says Nasaw. “When you write about a living person it’s much harder to let it all hang out when you know that the living person is going to read it.”

Although Edward Kennedy had to persuade Nasaw to write The Patriarch, Nasaw admits that “as a historian he was intrigued, fascinated about the idea of writing an alternative history of the 20th century from the perspective of Joseph P. Kennedy’s life.”

Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Edward Kennedy died before the book was published and never got a chance to read it. He did hear from Jean Kennedy Smith, the only surviving child of Kennedy’s nine children. “She congratulated me,” says Nasaw. “She didn’t go into specifics but she congratulated me. And I was delighted. Haven’t heard from anybody else.”
“We are not about to turn around. We are on the move now.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.
STEPHEN SOMERSTEIN was a 24-year-old physics student in City College's night school when he traveled to Alabama to photograph the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery Civil Rights March. As a Managing/Picture Editor of “Main Events,” the student newspaper, he felt he had to document “what was going to be a historic event.” He tagged along with the marchers and gained unfettered access to everyone from Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks to James Baldwin and Bayard Rustin.

“I had five cameras slung around my neck. I was from New York, so there wasn’t the slightest bit of difficulty getting access,” says Somerstein. “When I saw a photographic opportunity, I immediately seized on it. They knew this was a remarkable event and they wanted reporters to cover it.”

Over the five-day, 54-mile march, Somerstein shot about 400 photographs. He sold a few to The New York Times Magazine, Public Television and photography collectors, but didn’t showcase any until 2010, when he participated in a civil rights exhibit at the San Francisco Art Exchange. After City College, Somerstein chose a career in physics over photojournalism, building space satellites at the Harvard-Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory and at Lockheed Martin Co.

Somerstein retired from science in 2008, and the first thing he did was revisit the Selma photographs. “I wanted to have exhibitions of my work and I realized that I had numerous iconic as well as historic photographs,” says Somerstein, who is talking to galleries about his work. He also photographed New York’s Greenwich Village cultural scene and the Vietnam antiwar movement in Berkeley, Calif. “I felt that my photographs melded strong artistic and journalistic elements to tell a very interesting story.”

At right. 1. White hecklers yelling at marchers 2. Front, left: James Baldwin, author, with sunglasses; front, right: Bayard Rustin, march coordinator, writing 3. Alabama state troopers and officials on the steps of the state house in Montgomery. 4. Selma to Montgomery marchers.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaking to civil rights marchers in Montgomery, Ala., on March 26, 1965

Civil Rights Images From Selma to Montgomery
The New Cultural Capital of Queens

By Lenina Mortimer

There is a surprising amount of cultural capital to be gained in Bayside, Queens. The residential northeast corner of Queens — far from the trendy Chelsea galleries, Museum Mile and the famed Great White Way — is home to Queensborough Community College where there are three acclaimed cultural centers.

The highly celebrated campus centers include the Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Resource Center & Archives, the QCC Art Gallery and the Queensborough Performing Arts Center.

Cultural sophistication aside, the campus has an interesting blend of academics and history. The community college offers transfer and career degree programs through 17 academic departments, with associate degrees in the arts, sciences and applied sciences.

The College also has several dual/joint degree programs with its sister CUNY institutions: nursing with Hunter College and York College; biotechnology with York College; criminal justice and forensic accounting with John Jay College of Criminal Justice; and education with Queens College.

The campus area was once a playground for well-heeled New Yorkers. The sprawling 37-acre campus was the site the Oakland Country Club and Golf Course until QCC opened on the site in 1960. The oldest structure on campus — the QCC Art Gallery — is housed in the historic 1920s Oakland Building, the former clubhouse of the country club.

The gallery offers museum quality exhibits and a highly regarded permanent African art collection. A second permanent grouping, “The Jaime Andrade Pre-Columbian Art Collection,” is currently in its installation phase, and the gallery team is now focusing efforts on building a permanent collection of Asian art.

The Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Resource Center & Archives is the latest addition and the most striking structure on campus. A glass-ensconced steel building, its modern geometric architecture stands prominently amongst neighboring brick buildings.

The KHRCA, which has been at QCC for 25 years, was previously housed in the basement of the library and displayed its exhibitions at the Student Union Building. It was moved into its $5.5 million space in the fall of 2009 and opened to favorable reviews from The New York Times among other publications.

The center’s 2,000-square-foot gallery holds a permanent multimedia exhibition on the history of Jewish people during the Nazi era that includes photographs projected onto walls, video footage of Holocaust survivor testimonial and other artifacts. The center also houses a 10,000-book circulating library.

Quick Facts About QCC
- Established in 1960 on the former site of the Oakland Country Club and Golf Course.
- 17 academic programs offer associate degrees and certificate courses.
- 54% Female, 46% Male; comprises nearly equal populations of African-Americans, Asians, Caucasians, and Latinos, representing 129 nations.
- Alumni: Over 55,000 alumni since its doors opened in 1960.
- Accessibility: Queens bus lines Q27 and Q30.

The college’s other prized cultural center is the Queensborough Performing Arts Center. The cornerstone of the QPAC is the annual Professional Performing Arts Series that attracts world-class entertainers to the Bayside community. Its 875-seat theater has recently featured such legendary performance artists as Dionne Warwick, Tony Orlando and Rob Schneider. The key to the mission of QPAC is offering affordable multicultural entertainment that mirrors the diversity of the borough.

THE HOTSPOTS AT QCC

1. The QCC Art Gallery in the Oakland Building offers visitors access to museum-quality exhibits. Includes state-of-the-art lighting, security and environmental controls, a theater, and an art research library.
2. Queensborough Performing Arts Center’s 875-seat theater brings world-class entertainment to the community.
3. Robert F. Kennedy Hall houses the fitness center and Olympic-size aquatic center.
4. Academic Computing Center with a student lab and multimedia classroom.
5. Starbucks Coffee Café in the library.
Great Teachers

With games and outside-the-box methods, profs inspire students – and win awards

Carnegie Foundation Award Winner Assistant Professor Rees Shad with students

A Student Battles Back from the Legacy of Violence

Page 26

P-TECH Shines in State of the Union Address · Page 4

Shermal Dewsbury, 14, takes a math class at P-TECH high school in Brooklyn. P-TECH is part of a University program that prepares high school students for technical careers.