Puerto Rico: Giving Enriches the Lives of CUNY Students

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Puerto Rico: Giving Enriches the Lives of CUNY Students

Jose Figueroa went to hurricane-devastated Puerto Rico over the summer, knowing the work would be hard. But what he didn’t realize was that the experience would evoke emotions he’d never forget.

“Puerto Rico didn’t need me as much as I needed Puerto Rico,” said the Hunter College Health Psychology major, who hopes to become a nurse practitioner. “Our labor focused on rebuilding and repairing homes, but I realized we were also restoring faith, hope and happiness in the midst of the chaos some of our homeowners had dealt with since that day of the storm.”

Figueroa, who has paternal roots in Puerto Rico, was among 155 CUNY students and three members of the University’s Board of Trustees who went to the island to rebuild homes still seriously damaged from Hurricane Maria in September 2017. Students described the work, in sweltering heat, as grueling but also said it was the most rewarding experience of their young lives. They spoke of the gratitude — and also the many meals they received from people who had lost almost everything. One example: A man who didn’t have a kitchen cooked for students in a neighbor’s house.

“Our training helped build our team, equip us with skills on situational awareness and psychological variables we could encounter,” said Figueroa, whose second visit to storm-torn Puerto Rico took him inside these devastated homes. “What it didn’t prepare me for was the lifelong relationships I crafted, the sense of purpose and value I never realized was missing and, most importantly, the emotions I felt from seeing the hope and happiness that filled each homeowner’s eyes each morning as we arrived in our groups to start this work.”

Hurricane Maria, the worst ever recorded in this American territory, killed about 3,000 people during and after the storm, according to official estimates. Included among them was the grandmother of one student volunteer, Myra Rosa of City College. The CUNY students were part of the New York Stands with Puerto Rico Recovery and Rebuilding Initiative deployed by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo.

About 650 students from CUNY and SUNY accompanied skilled labor and aid volunteers in eight separate two-week cohorts. The volunteers put in almost 41,000 hours as they cleaned, restored and rebuilt 178 homes.

In September, Gov. Cuomo announced an expansion of the initiative and committed to deploy 500 additional CUNY and SUNY volunteers, beginning as early as winter break. Students will continue to work on homes while faculty and graduate students work in partnership with UNICEF USA and local nonprofits to help those still traumatized by Maria. The CUNY School of Public Health and Health Policy will join this effort.

CUNY Interim Chancellor Vita G. Rabinowitz has called the initiative “a resounding success” and said the rebuilding effort in Puerto Rico “has been a transformative experience for our students. The new collaboration with UNICEF USA gives them another way to aid thousands of U.S. citizens who are still coping with the emotional aftermath and trauma.”

Three CUNY trustees who traveled to Puerto Rico, Lorraine A. Cortés-Vázquez, Michael Arvanites and Kevin D. Kim, echoed the emotions of the students with whom they worked in August in “Vietnam,” a barrio on the coast of Guaynabo and Catoira, that is home to many veterans and widows, and later in the mountainous inland municipality of Barranquilla. The trustees scraped floors, painted homes.

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Top, Aliyah Rose Meyer, Hunter College, working on building a house, along with other CUNY students from Cohort No. 1.

Far left, Jeffrey Gyembi, City College, in La Playita, Santurce.

Left, Sharjeel Khan, Baruch College, removing deteriorated metal thin sheets.

Above, CUNY students work on a wood-frame roof for a house in La Playita, Santurce.

Photographs by Livia Nieves.
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Kim, who immigrated to New York City with his family when he was a child, said he wanted to see the initiative firsthand so he could pursue similar opportunities for CUNY students to partner with aid organizations. “What really got to me was seeing from the plane all the blue FEMA tarps instead of roofs, as we descended into San Juan,” Kim said. He explained that this led him to the shocking realization that there was so much more work to be done.

York College student Marie Ange Richard had similar thoughts, but added that “after Puerto Rico, I felt powerful because I was able to put a roof over a family’s house.”

Rosa, the student who lost a grandmother in the storm and still has family members on the island who were severely affected by Maria, said that on her return to the island she worked “on deconstructing and reconstructing roofs.” She added: “I was a translator between the volunteers and the residents, I spoke with families about their experiences during the hurricane and offered them emotional support.” Rosa also surveyed “completed” houses to see if more work was needed; electricity is still unreliable and they helped to hurricane-proof student living quarters.

Other students said that after they realized the strenuous work they had to do, they did not think they could go on with the trip. But they did. Many said they were unprepared when they saw the devastation that remained, and would never forget the lessons they learned by helping people in dire need, who expressed their gratitude and friendship in any way they could.

The CUNY Service Corps, led by the Office of Workforce Development & Continuing Education in the Office of Academic Affairs, developed the requirements for the CUNY students, who attend 18 of the University’s colleges and two of its graduate schools. Each student received a $500 stipend, which many spent on provisions for the families they helped. Students could earn academic credit by taking a service-learning course, designed at Lehman College in conjunction with the curriculum committee of the Department of Latin American and Latino Studies, said associate professor Teresita Levy. A special topics class for students going to Puerto Rico was also offered by New York City College of Technology.

Nearly 2,800 CUNY students applied to participate. Among the chaperones who accompanied those selected was Livia Nieves, a Lehman College adjunct professor and University marketing designer whose family remains in Puerto Rico. “I decided to go to break out of the breathtaking feeling that I have not done enough to help my people,” she said, echoing a sentiment expressed by others who joined the initiative.

Some students described the connections they forged in spite of cultural differences. Ashley Mock Chu of Queens College, who is of Chinese descent, asked if she needed to take off her shoes before coming inside to eat at the home of a woman whose roof she had repaired. She was told, with great warmth, to leave them on. Another student, Nigina Ortikova, is from Uzbekistan. She is vice president of an international honor society at LaGuardia Community College and would like to pursue a career as a human rights advocate. Lehman College student Mharielys Rodriguez noted that the experience inspired her to apply to a service program in Peru.

The tale of Hurricane Maria is also a story of assistance offered in conjunction with the curriculum committee of the Department of Development & Continuing Education in the Office of Academic Affairs, developed the requirements for the CUNY students, who attend 18 of the University’s colleges and two of its graduate schools. Each student received a $500 stipend, which many spent on provisions for the families they helped. Students could earn academic credit by taking a service-learning course, designed at Lehman College in conjunction with the curriculum committee of the Department of Latin American and Latino Studies, said associate professor Teresita Levy. A special topics class for students going to Puerto Rico was also offered by New York City College of Technology.

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Wide Spectrum of Awards for CUNY Professors, Researchers
From Cancer Education for Immigrant Women to Recreating a Model of Hurricane Maria

**JIN YOUNG SEO**

**HUNTER COLLEGE**

**$245K FROM MY STATE FOR BREAST CANCER EDUCATION TO AID KOREAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN**

Jin Young Seo, a professor at Hunter College School of Nursing, has been awarded a $245,000 grant from New York State to develop a breast cancer risk-reduction education program that focuses on Korean immigrant women – for whom the disease is the leading cause of death. The grant was among $3 million in awards announced by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo for nine research and education projects across New York State that will delve into breast cancer causes, prevention, detection, screening, treatment and new educational strategies.

The project, to be conducted in collaboration with Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York Inc., will develop a “culturally tailored” educational intervention – the Korean Breast Cancer Risk Reduction Program, which will set four goals for participating women: healthy weight, physically active lifestyle, healthy diet with limited alcohol consumption, and breast cancer screening and adherence.

Low screening rates, health-related beliefs, lack of awareness of breast cancer screening and lack of a primary care physician are all likely causes of an increase in Korean-American breast cancer rates.

**BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**$5M FROM NSF STEM SCHOLARSHIPS**

Bronx Community College will receive one of the largest grants ever awarded to a community college by the National Science Foundation — $5 million — to fund scholarships for traditionally underrepresented students in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and math. The NSF’s “S-STEM” grant will fund a collaboration between Bronx Community and Lehman College to help support scholarships for 575 talented, low-income CUNY students. The program will provide students with paid research opportunities, internships and faculty mentoring as they earn associate’s degrees at BCC. Students in the program can transfer to Lehman and continue their scholarships and work with new mentors, earn bachelor’s degrees and prepare for STEM careers. The S-STEM scholarships will supplement the students’ existing Pell Grants.

**CUNY**

**$3.9M FROM NSF MINORITY PARTICIPATION IN STEM**

The National Science Foundation has awarded a five-year, $3.97 million grant to 13 CUNY institutions to increase the number of underrepresented minority students graduating with degrees in the STEM fields — science, technology, mathematics and engineering. The funding will support the efforts of the New York City Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (NYC-LSAMP) to provide training and academic support to STEM majors and prepare students for graduate school and STEM careers. The grant will also be used to broaden minority student recruitment into STEM fields and encourage faculty collaboration across the colleges participating in the initiative. Since its inception at CUNY, the LSAMP program has provided scholarships to more than 3,000 students.

**MITCHELL B. SCHAFFLER**

**CITY COLLEGE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING $3.2M FROM NIH**

Mitchell B. Schaffler, a Distinguished Professor of Biomedical Engineering at The City College of New York’s Grove School of Engineering, was awarded a five-year, $3.2 million grant from The National Institute of Arthritis, Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health. Schaffler is researching the biomechanical and molecular mechanisms by which skeletal tissue, such as bones, grows strong or decays as people grow older. This new grant will fund his research into determining how changes in osteocytes — the cells that reside inside bones — contribute to the development of osteoporosis and bone fragility. Osteoporosis and resulting bone fragility are a major public health threat affecting more than 40 million people in the United States. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, fractures resulting from osteoporosis are both dangerous to individuals — 25 percent of hip-fracture patients age 50 and over die in the year following the fracture — and costly to our health care system ($19 billion annually in the U.S. alone).

**DAVID JERUZALMI**

**CITY COLLEGE $945K NSF AWARD**

As scientists have learned from working on diseases like HIV and tuberculosis, sometimes the best way to develop a new therapy is to think about how it might work in combination with other therapies. To do that it’s important to identify, visualize and modify new targets so a disease can be attacked from multiple vantage points.

David Jeruzalmi, professor of chemistry and biochemistry in The City College of New York’s Center for Discovery and Innovation, and his team have identified and visualized a three-dimensional model of a new target and a helicase protein that can modify it — opening and closing it (like a vault) at the origin of DNA replication. The National Science Foundation has issued a $945,000 grant to fund the project as well as four years of follow-on studies related to the helicase protein. The project is entitled “Molecular Mechanisms of Bacterial Helicase Assembly and Activation at a Replication Origin.”

**CUNY, UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO $2M FROM NSF IMPACT OF HURRICANE MARIA**

As part of the $2 million grant from the National Science Foundation, the City College of New York and the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez will virtually recreate Hurricane Maria and its impact on Puerto Rico. The virtual creation of the hurricane will enable research focusing on the critical infrastructure that left the island and its people without power and water for months. According to principal investigator Jorge E. Gonzalez of the Grove School of Engineering, there is an urgent need for a better understanding of the future risks and expected damage due to extreme climate and catastrophic events that will most likely occur with more frequency and intensity, affecting most coastal tropical regions such as Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

“Our research will integrate cutting-edge weather forecast models, data driven identification and characterization of damage to the physical infrastructure,” said Gonzalez.

**ROBERT SMITH**

**BARUCH COLLEGE $600K TO RESEARCH ‘DREAMERS,’ DACA STUDENTS**

Robert Smith, a professor at Baruch College’s Austin W. Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, was awarded a $600,000 grant from the William T. Grant Foundation to study how recent immigration policies affect education, labor and family welfare outcomes of undocumented youth such as DREAMers and DACA recipients. The Grant Foundation funding supports Smith’s research through 2021. Begun in 2015, Smith’s work investigates how having, lacking, gaining or losing legal status impacts young people and their families, and the life choices they make. Smith’s project screened over 1,700 young people across New York State for Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and follows a subset of them over time. Long-term undocumented status has been a key driver of inequality for America’s roughly 11 million undocu...
XI CHEN
CITY COLLEGE GROVE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
$558K NAVAL RESEARCH GRANT

Xi Chen, an assistant professor of chemical engineering at The City College of New York’s Grove School of Engineering and a researcher in the Nanoscience Initiative at the Graduate Center’s Advanced Science Research Center, was awarded a three-year, $558,000 grant from the U.S. Office of Naval Research. Chen’s research project will focus on gaining a fundamental understanding of how water-responsive materials react through studies on nanoscale levels. Understanding the scientific reasons for how these materials respond to water or humidity levels will lay the foundation for developing new hybrid and synthetic materials with potentially broad applications for underwater robotics, artificial muscles and their evaporation energy harvesting techniques.

ELIZABETH J. BIDDINGER
CITY COLLEGE GROVE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
$750K DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY EARLY CAREER AWARD

Elizabeth J. Biddinger, a chemical engineer at The City College of New York, has won a U.S. Department of Energy Early Career Award that will support her research investigating innovative methods of converting chemicals obtained from plant and food matter into renewable fuels and chemicals. Biddinger, an assistant professor in CCNY’s Grove School of Engineering, is one of just 84 recipients nationwide to receive the honor, worth $750,000 over five years. Her research focuses on the emerging field of biomass electroreduction — processes that use electricity to transform organic substances into fuels and chemicals. The findings Biddinger will obtain from her Department of Energy project will contribute to the development of small scale, on-site equipment, known as biomass upgrading depots (BUDs).

Nurturing Interest

But it is his noted efforts to interest City University of New York students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, and the many programs he oversees through which they are mentored and nurtured, that could one day be Blake’s most lasting legacy.

His mantra is drawn from an African-American spiritual: “If I can help somebody as I travel along this way, then my living shall not have been in vain.” Blake says the maxim perfectly captures his point of view. “It’s all about giving back and helping somebody,” he adds. “That’s the challenge that human beings face: how best to care for each other.”

The professor has found many ways to fulfill that mission at City Tech. Since 2005, Blake has directed City Tech’s STEM-oriented Black Male Initiative (BMI), perfecting mentoring strategies that have been replicated across CUNY and beyond.

“The goal is to meet them where they are and then elevate them to heights they’ve never dreamed,” says Blake, who grew up on the island of Jamaica before earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees at CUNY’s City College and a Ph.D. from the CUNY Graduate Center. His Ph.D. dissertation was done at NASA GISS and Columbia University. “It is all about access and opportunity, and once you get them on the road they can blossom.”

He has thousands of students under his wing, exposing them to STEM-related career paths, meaningful research experience, academic conferences and graduate-level educational opportunities. With National Science Foundation funding, he’s built programs that have been heralded by the NSF as national models for increasing diversity in the sciences. He’s drawn recognition for City Tech from the Institute for Higher Education Policy, a nonprofit organization for education policy. One of his programs, Safe in My Brother’s Arms, provides college prep and academic support to hundreds of high school students who live in city homeless shelters.

“I couldn’t be prouder of Professor Blake and his accomplishments,” said Interim Chancellor Vita C. Rabinowitz. “His record transcends the contributions he has made as a scientist, and his reach extends far beyond the lab. His efforts to encourage thousands of students in the STEM fields, nurturing them and providing the tools and supports for their success, are emblematic of what makes CUNY an important driver of educational attainment and socioeconomic ascent.”

The fruits of Blake’s work are readily observed in his former students, and not only in the success they have had after CUNY. They’re also quick to articulate Blake’s pay-it-forward philosophy.

Francois Mertil, a student in electrical and computer engineering, has already earned a master’s degree at Cornell since his graduation from City Tech in 2016, and has moved on to Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh as a Ph.D. student. He met Blake at a City Tech BMI meeting during his freshman orientation, and he says the professor’s involvement shaped nearly every aspect of his undergraduate experience, from internships and research opportunities to encouragement and assistance in applying to graduate school.

Mertil has helped launch an organization, EMO Haiti, to increase the technological capacity in the country where he was born and spent most of his childhood. He considers that work, in which he’s applying technical concepts he mastered in school to real-world needs, as an opportunity to “give back” and very much in keeping with the lessons he learned from Blake.

“Whatever you get here, it’s good to return it,” says Mertil, recalling a message he frequently heard from Blake. “You have to help others, too. You have to have the same kind of passion.”
MORE THAN 80 PERCENT of community college freshmen in the United States hope to eventually earn a bachelor’s degree, research shows, but fewer than one in five reach that goal within six years. Why that is — and what can be done to help more students graduate with bachelor’s degrees — are questions CUNY researchers hope to answer with a $1.4 million grant from the federal Institute of Education Sciences.

The four-year study will focus on community college students, who represent nearly a third of the nation’s post-secondary students, and the extent to which the college transfer process might hinder their momentum toward earning bachelor’s degrees. Community colleges have long been plagued by extremely low graduation rates, but education researchers and advocates have focused mostly on associate-degree graduation.

“CUNY is at the forefront of a national effort to improve associate degree completion for community college students,” said Interim Chancellor Vita C. Rabinowitz. “This research addresses the next critical step for the success of many of these students: transferring and completing a bachelor’s degree. The grant awarded to professor Alexandra Logue and her colleagues will yield insights and generate strategies for colleges across the country to improve transfers and address one of the most vexing problems in higher education.”

Keep on Track

“There’s a huge drop-off of students who transfer or plan to transfer from a community college to a bachelor’s-degree college. There is some evidence that it’s not necessarily the students themselves but the nature of the college transfer process and the obstacles that are put in their way. That’s what we need to find out about.”

— Alexandra Logue

Research professor at the Center for Advanced Study in Education at CUNY’s Graduate Center

“What we know is that equivalent students who start at bachelor’s degree programs have a much better chance of getting a degree than students who start at a community college,” Logue said. “We want to come up with a list of what our funders at the Department of Education call ‘malleable factors’ — things that we think we can change in order to help these students get through this leaky pipeline better.”

Logue added that the study identifies several “drop-off points” and that “there are students who go to community college, get good GPAs but never apply to bachelor’s degree colleges. There are also hints that some students are accepted for transfer but never show up at the new college. We want to explore the reasons. Another thing we will look at is the problem of credit transfer: General education credits transfer very well, but credits in majors do not and that’s a big issue. And finally, we will look at ‘transfer shock.’ Transfer students often show a temporary decline in GPA for one or two semesters, and that’s where we believe the bachelor’s degree programs may have some responsibility. Colleges have orientations and all kinds of programs to help high school students transition to college, but there’s often less for transfer students. They have to orient themselves, and if they’re coming from a community college it can be intimidating.”

To explore the issue, Logue and her colleagues will survey students and staff and analyze data from across CUNY and conduct focus groups at three of its senior colleges (Brooklyn, Queens and Lehman) and three community colleges (Bronx, Hostos and Guttman). “We’re using CUNY as a laboratory,” Logue said. “We will produce data and identify principles that would apply not only to this university but to post-secondary institutions across the country.”

Logue is the author of Pathways to Reform: Credits and Conflict at The City University of New York, a book about the college transfer issue published in 2017. “In previous generations,” Logue said, “people tended to go to one college and graduate from there. Students today transfer a lot more. More than half of students who graduate with a bachelor’s degree have credits from somewhere else. At CUNY, more than half of the graduates do not start out at that college. But for too many students, transfer seems to inhibit graduation. That’s why it’s so important for us to understand the factors responsible for the leaky pipeline.”
As CUNY campuses marked the 30th annual Hispanic Heritage Month — from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 — with exhibits, talks and other events, the institutes were also engaged in, and initiating, long-term scholarship and public-facing projects aimed at deepening knowledge and illuminating the critical and rich experiences and contributions of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Puerto Rico, and at finding solutions to problems.

Each institute has an extensive array of projects. Highlights include:

The 26-year-old CUNY Dominican Studies Institute (CUNY DSI), based at City College, has won a three-year “Digital Projects for the Public” grant of $100,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities for A History of Dominican Music in the U.S. The three-year research project will create an interactive, online multimedia platform narrating nearly 100 years of Dominican music in the U.S. from the 1920s to the present. It draws from extensive archival documents and audiovisual material owned by CUNY DSI, which has also secured rights to include long-forgotten historic TV footage “that will astonish those interacting with the website,” said Institute Director Ramona Hernandez. “We’ve got footage where Ed Sullivan comes out and announces the appearance on his show of three Dominican women sisters — singers and dancers,” said Hernandez. “You go crazy when you see this.”

CUNY DSI and Queens College also announced in September the QC/CUNY DSI Dominican Studies Scholars Initiative and the appointment of Sandy Placido as its first Dominican Studies Scholar. This fall Placido is working with Hernandez and Diogenes Cespedes on a co-authored book about overlooked Dominican women. In the spring, she will begin as a tenure-track professor in Queen’s history department, where her teaching will include a new course, Activist-Intellectuals of the Caribbean Diaspora.

The collaboration aims to recruit stellar candidates to increase faculty engaged in Dominican Studies scholarship at Queens, City College and CUNY; faculty from underrepresented groups, and young scholars in cutting-edge research. The Dominican Studies Scholars will split time between research at CUNY DSI and teaching at Queens for three years.

Placido, born in the Bronx to working-class migrants from the Dominican Republic, was inspired to research 20th century Dominican history by conversations with her parents about why they emigrated. As a Yale undergraduate her research on Dominican feminism and migration brought her to CUNY DSI. She received her Ph.D. in American Studies from Harvard in 2017. “It is an exceptional honor to return to the place where I began my career as a scholar educator,” she said.

The Jaime Lucero Mexican Studies Institute at CUNY, founded in 2012, signed early this year unprecedented agreements with eight of Mexico’s top public universities to strengthen cooperation and promote mutual understanding; the agreements are expected to lead to student and faculty exchange opportunities and bilateral research projects.

Celebrating that development and leading into Hispanic Heritage Month, a major, six-week exhibition of 20th-century Mexican painting masterpieces was presented at Lehman, said Deputy Director José Higuera López. The exhibit, “Pitando: Colors of Education,” featured more than three dozen paintings...
Focus on Latin America

by renowned Mexican artists, depicting Mexico’s national heroes, landscapes and symbolic images. The institute is also a supporter of the Celebrate Mexico Now Festival this fall, which in its 15 years has showcased more than 300 contemporary Mexican artists in 97 venues across New York.

The institute, with Lehman’s Department of Latin American and Latino Studies, has also announced an intensive winter study abroad course in Mexico focused on Mexican migration. From Jan. 8-20, 2019, led by Higuera, Lehman associate professor Alyshia Galvez, and Emilio Maceda, Ph.D. candidate in Regional Development, Universidad Autonoma de Tlaxcala. Students will visit three regions in Mexico to learn about the dynamics of migration by interacting with civic and academic institutions and families whose members have migrated to the U.S. Spanning themes ranging from migration and culture to health, food and trade, the course includes a home stay with a family, lectures and visits to educational, cultural and historic sites.

The 45-year-old Center for Puerto Rican Studies, at Hunter College (Centro), has been monitoring the outmigration of Puerto Ricans in the 12 months since Hurricane Maria devastated the island. Centro announced in September that an estimated 159,000 residents, but possibly up to 176,000, have left the Caribbean island for the U.S., primarily for Miami and New York as the pace of recovery and reconstruction languished. “This rate of emigration from Puerto Rico is unlike anything in Puerto Rican history,” said Edwin Meléndez, director of the center and professor of Urban Affairs and Planning at Hunter College. The figures were calculated by Centro.

In response to the hurricane catastrophe, Centro and the University of Puerto Rico’s School of Planning, partnering with other organizations, launched the Rebuild Puerto Rico Initiative, including a series of Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans Diaspora Summits to connect organizations and persons in Puerto Rico with diaspora Puerto Ricans who want to join efforts to rebuild. Centro, along with CUNY DSI and the Mexican Studies Institute, have also organized a series of conferences under the banner Summit on Latinos (SoL-NYC), to convene broad segments of the Hispanic community in New York City “to craft an action agenda that may lead to its implementation in public policy to address and rectify the inequalities Hispanics in the city face,” said Carlos Vargas-Ramos of Centro.

Prime Role for CUNY in Cyber NYC

University Is a Partner in Bid to Make the City a Hub of Learning, Innovation in Cybersecurity

The City University of New York will play a major role in the implementation of Cyber NYC, a $30 million initiative announced by the New York City Economic Development Corp. (NYCEDC) to transform New York into a worldwide hub for cybersecurity innovation. CUNY, part of a consortium of academic institutions that also includes Columbia, NYU and Cornell Tech, will take the lead in designing a multifaceted cybersecurity learning initiative, pairing academic and industry leaders and exposing students to a vital and rapidly emerging field that will count an estimated 3.5 million unfilled jobs by 2021, according to Cybersecurity Ventures. The effort will include the development of industry-informed curricula and new instructional vehicles for their delivery, a Tech-in-Residence program that will pair students with top leaders from the tech sector, providing the tools to apply academic lessons to real-life industry needs, a citywide forum that brings academic and industry leaders together for a two-way conversation and the creation of a regional cybersecurity conference; and the development of a graduate program in Cybersecurity Studies at the Grove School of Engineering/City College of New York.

The benefits of our participation in this crucial citywide effort will be felt on campuses across the University,” said Interim Chancellor Vita C. Rabinowitz. “The applied cybersecurity learning initiative will bring industry professionals into classrooms to give our students a real-life perspective. It will foster needed discourse, and engage our academic peers in vital discussion. Cyber NYC enables CUNY to expand offerings for adult learners and add learning opportunities, including a master’s degree program, equipping our diverse student population to work in this burgeoning field.”

Bridges to Industry

The first component of CUNY’s involvement will focus on the development of specialized educational units called stackable credentials. The courses, to be developed in partnership with NYU Tandon School of Engineering, will be self-standing modules that can provide continuing education for professionals and, potentially, be combined to form credit-bearing credentials toward a certification or degree. The courses’ scaled delivery, across multiple universities via global learning platform edX, will enable industry professionals in finance, health care, retail and media to keep abreast of rapidly changing cybersecurity hazards and practices.

Adding to a grant obtained last year from the New York City Department of Small Business Services, CUNY will enlist cybersecurity professionals to serve as adjuncts in an expanded Tech-in-Residence program, Tech-In-Residence Cyber Corps, bringing an array of courses that stress job-skills acquisition and deliver educational lessons within a real-life context. The program’s reach will be University-wide, but adjuncts will initially be deployed to campuses that provide cybersecurity courses including John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City College, New York City College of Technology, Queensborough Community College and Hunter College. LaGuardia Community College will partner with software development school Fullstack Academy to lead an intensive cybersecurity boot camp. LaGuardia and its faculty will host a six-week preparatory course for adults who have limited exposure to information technology (IT), teaching the basics of industry software and terminology in preparation for the boot camp. The boot camps will arm New Yorkers with industry-targeted skills, and will aim to place more than 1,000 students in jobs over the first three years. Cyber NYC is expected to help spawn 10,000 good-paying jobs in the coming decade, providing an influx to many New Yorkers from non-traditional backgrounds, particularly those from low-income families or who are otherwise disadvantaged.

The NYCEDC funds will seed the development of a new graduate studies program in cybersecurity, to be housed at the CUNY Grove School of Engineering (GSE). The master’s degree program will be launched as a five-year extension of the school’s existing B.S. in Computer Science and later grown into a stand-alone yearlong program, building on GSE’s record of providing industry-informed graduate studies such as its Masters in Translational Medicine program. Facebook, already an engaged GSE collaborator, has agreed to assist in the development of this valuable addition.

Finally, CUNY will create a citywide Cybersecurity Discipline Council, a new vehicle through which to address pressing issues and needs. The forum, which is expected to culminate in a full-scale, regional cybersecurity conference, will be another needed bridge provided by Cyber NYC to connect the academic and private sectors.

Other key objectives to be pursued in the NYCEDC cybersecurity initiative involve the creation of a cybersecurity-focused innovation center, Hub.NYC. In collaboration with tech start-ups, an initiative that will be coordinated by the Israeli firm, Jerusalem Venture Partners (JVP); a Global Cyber Center for industry collaborators, to be opened in Chelsea and coordinated by Israeli firm 305A; and a cyber risk assessment component, to be overseen by Columbia University, which will harness emerging technologies in the pursuit of cybersecurity measures and, by connecting the creators with experienced entrepreneurs, help shepherd the resulting properties to the private sector.
The City University of New York now does business with a record number of state-certified minority and women-owned firms. CUNY’s “utilization rate” of these businesses was 32.75 percent for fiscal year 2017-2018. This is up sharply from 4.94 percent, when the program began several years ago. The state’s utilization rate for the fiscal year is also at its highest ever — and the highest of any state in the nation at 28.62 percent.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo announced the top-scoring state number at a major Albany forum focused on the successes and needs of Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (MWBE).

In regard to the University, CUNY’s Senior Vice Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer Matthew Sapienza noted: “We’ve made outstanding progress but recognize we have a lot more to do in this area.” Three members of the University’s Board of Trustees were also at the Albany conference. Chairperson William C. Thompson Jr., who delivered remarks to attendees, and trustees Michael Arvanites and Sandra Wilkin.

Earlier this year CUNY held a related – and equally celebratory – event which exemplified networking at its finest.

The University’s 10th annual conference for MWBE and service-disabled veteran business owners (SDVOB) was held on August 8 with more than 70 exhibitors and more than 650 attendees. As in the past, business owners had ample opportunity to meet with the University’s procurement and contract experts.

The City University Construction Fund, (CUCF) CUNY’s public benefit construction corporation, also hosted. The program included five panel sessions, boot-camp intensives, business meet-ups and a marketplace with CUNY, CUCF and its contractors and suppliers.

One attendee, Jennifer Fountaine, of Edge Electronics, which sells lighting, laboratory, athletic, janitorial and other equipment to all CUNY campuses, said: “Having the top procurement heads from all the campuses in one location enabled us to interact directly with them. Within 20 minutes you can speak with each one.”

Another attendee, Caroline Doherty, an account executive at GED National, a firm that provides various forms of information technology consulting services, added that the conference enabled her and others to learn about “industry trends and challenges, within the MWBE community.”

Alphonso B. David, Counsel to Gov. Cuomo, attended the conference and emphasized that “the governor has long held the belief … that our economy is strongest when it is inclusive. We seek to empower people who wish to participate, but who also qualify to participate. There is this really absurd concept that diversity and inclusion ignore expertise … and qualifications. We often hear people say, ‘Well, you are looking to make this space more diverse. You are looking to hire more black and brown people. You are looking to hire women. Are they qualified?’” He added that this misguided notion is one “we have to actively target and challenge.”

Also speaking was Chairperson Thompson, who noted: “When MWBE and SDVOB do well, all of New York does well. And the people that we care so much about, our students, have the opportunity to benefit.”

In regard to this, Fountaine noted that the money her company earned from the University enabled her to hire another woman to work on CUNY campuses — Nancy Delgadillo, a City College alumna and an Army veteran.

For more information, please visit http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/selltocuny and cuny.edu/cunybuilds.
INSPIRATIONAL. Skills-enhancing. Difficult conversations. For the CUNY administrators who attended Harvard University professional development programs this summer as part of an initiative to diversify CUNY’s academic leadership, the experience was invaluable – personally and for their colleges.

For two weeks in June and July each of nine administrators who made up the 2018-2019 inaugural cohort of the program, “Diversifying CUNY’s Leadership: A CUNY-Harvard Consortium,” attended one of three renowned certificate-granting leadership programs at Harvard’s School of Education. The intensive programs, tailored to different experience levels, were paid for through a CUNY-Harvard partnership; a Harvard Club of New York Foundation grant covered one-third of the cost and CUNY covered the rest, said Annemarie Nicols-Grinenko, University associate dean for faculty affairs.

Interim Chancellor Vita C. Rabinowitz said: “The knowledge and resources this diverse group of administrators have gained through the new CUNY-Harvard Consortium initiative will benefit the University now and in the future. The nine

A SK JEMIA BENNETT, Lucie Bernheim and Tamara Tondreau what they learned from a new program to introduce high school students to the music industry and increase female representation in the field, and the words pour out: “You have to put yourself out there.” “It helped me face my fears.” “Thirty-nine amazing women.”

The girls participated this summer in Sound Thinking NYC, a new education and career-path program primarily for young women in New York City high schools. Launched by The City University of New York’s Creative Arts Team (CAT) and the Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment (MOME) in partnership with NY is Music, the free, three-week summer program exposes the teens to industry skills, technology, opportunities and mentors with the aim of creating a pipeline into the music field, where women are underrepresented.

The 40 students, entering 11th and 12th grades, learned about audio technology, engineering, and recording and music production, took field trips to studios, and had discussions with women in the profession. They also learned time management, self-care and leadership skills, said Jeanne Houck, executive director of CAT, an arts and education division under CUNY’s K-through-16 initiative that teaches tools for college success. The girls can participate in workshops this year and apply for paid summer internships. Boys can also apply for the Sound Thinking program.

“The music industry is not just music. It’s finance, it’s writing; there are multiple things you can do,” said Tamara Tondreau, a Bronx 11th grader. She learned audio technology to create “the soundtrack of my life” – a medley of sounds a city child might hear such as “traffic, footsteps, a door closing.” Another highlight: her first time “actually singing into a microphone inside a studio.”

‘Being My Best Self’

Bennett, also from the Bronx, said she was drawn to Sound Thinking “because of the message they were bringing – gender equity.” She, too, performed during the program, with a friend: “We went up there and sang ‘Feeling Good’ by Nina Simone.” She said she learned the importance of “how people present themselves, being my best self, showing respect so I can have that opportunity.”

For Bernheim, of Manhattan, who wants to be a professional songwriter, one highlight was “getting to know everyone else in the program – 39 amazing women.” There was also personal growth: “I have major stage fright, but part of being a songwriter is you have to sing your songs. The program has really helped me to face my fears head on.”

“There’s so much work behind the scenes,” said Tondreau. “I’m keeping an open mind. I really do like songwriting. I might go on the producing side. I want to learn more before deciding what path to take.”
Diversifying Academic Leadership at CUNY

Leaders participating this year will bring new ideas and skills to the important work that we do—providing a world-class education while broadening access to the University for students and staff. Diversifying CUNY’s academic leadership ranks is a critical part of our mission.

The administrators, of diverse races, ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations, joined other higher education leaders attending the programs from more than 31 states and 11 countries. This academic year they will also shadow and meet with CUNY leaders, all part of an effort to increase academic administrator diversity throughout the University. They will also work on a diversity-focused project to benefit their campuses.

“CUNY’s leadership at the vice presidential level and above is not nearly as diverse as our faculty, and our faculty are not nearly as diverse as our students,” said Nicolás-Grinenko. “We’re looking to make our leadership more closely reflect the diversity of our student body, and of New York City in general.”

Speakers, Workshops

Kingsborough Community College President Claudia Schrader, who mentored the other eight CUNY participants before she attended Harvard’s Institute for Educational Management in July, said: “I often find myself in a constant state of getting things done. So, it was refreshing that the IEM curricula, guest speakers and workshop facilitators provided a framework for thinking about what I do and how I do it. I found the exercises related to being an authentic leader and transitioning to more demanding leadership positions particularly poignant.”

The CUNY participants, selected from 72 applicants, also included Dr. Stanley Banie, dean of students, Lehman College; Dr. Derrick Brazill, professor and chair, Biological Sciences, Hunter College; Dr. Dara Byrne, associate provost for undergraduate retention and dean of undergraduate studies, John Jay College of Criminal Justice; Jane Cho, director of administration, Aaron Copland School of Music, Queens College; Danielle Dimitrov, interim executive director of student services, College of Staten Island; Dr. Shelly Eversley, associate professor, English, Baruch College, and director of faculty fellowship; Dr. Shu-Ping (Sandie) Han, professor and chair, Mathematics, New York City College of Technology; and Dr. Ted Ingram, professor of general counseling, Bronx Community College. At Harvard, they attended either the Management Development Program (MDP) or the more advanced Institute for Management and Leadership in Education (IEMLE), in June.

Participants said the programs intellectually enriched, challenged and inspired them, got them to focus on professional goals, and sent them back to CUNY with new skills.

“It was a phenomenal experience,” said Bazile, who called the instruction by experts and scholars and the exchange of ideas with 110 other educators in his MLE program “incredibly” beneficial. “That was the beauty of having this diverse group together—to get different perspectives,” he said. “Folks from Australia could say, ‘Here’s what we’re doing hands on the lawn singing ‘Kumbaya.’ People were able to be in a room together and agree, agree to disagree, and not have it be contentious.”

Session topics ranged “from financial administration, to difficult conversations in the workplace, to diversity, to the current state of higher education,” and “at the end of the day you had an enormous amount of reading,” he said. Cho said her Harvard program gave her “a new lens through which to view issues and problems that I face every day.” She and her colleagues returned “eager to bring new perspectives, ideas, tools and skills back to our CUNY campuses and contributing our collective efforts to furthering CUNY’s diversity mission.”

Schrader said the program, “well curated with every detail thought out to help us be better learners,” offered “a great lesson to help our students. It just hit home how much they were trying to support us as human beings.

“What I got out of the program was clarity about my continued work in higher education. What I’d like to do more of as chief diversity officer, Title IX coordinator, another role someday, is about student success: How do we define it, how do we work toward it?” At Harvard, “it was amazing to meet scholars whose work I read in graduate school,” said Ingram. “One of them was Dr. Freeman Hrabowski, University of Maryland—Baltimore County’s president.” When Ingram was going for his master’s, he said, there was limited research on black men in college, with most “written from a deficit model — high attrition, low graduation rates.” Hrabowski’s text, Beating the Odds, changed the narrative, “highlighting black men’s successful experiences in school.

“From reading his text, I wrote my thesis and future scholarship from an antideficit perspective,” said Ingram. “Most recently, I completed my own book, Engaging African American Males in Community College, and I shared with Hrabowski how his text inspired me, and gave him a copy of my book.”

CUNY Has Child Care Services To Help Students Who Are Parents

It is difficult to be both a student and a parent. The City University of New York understands this, and—to promote student success—it offers a selection of child care services on 16 of its campuses. These include infant and toddler programs, traditional programs for children from 3 to 6 years old, universal pre-kindergarten programs, weekend and evening child care programs, school age programs, and others. Some campuses also offer educational programs for parents. Since services vary from campus to campus, interested students should visit CUNY’s Child Care Services listing to find contact information for each child care center.

http://www2.cuny.edu/current-students/student-affairs/student-services/child-care/campus-centers
Beyond ‘Chalk and Talk’
CUNY Start Excels, Surpassing Standard Remediation in Preparing Students for College

THE pioneering CUNY Start program is significantly more effective than standard remedial education in preparing students who arrive at CUNY needing to master basic skills before they are ready for college-level courses, according to results from an assessment of the nine-year-old program.

“CUNY Start is a vital part of our broad and ongoing remediation reforms because it targets students with the most significant needs,” said Interim Chancellor Vita C. Rabinowitz. “The program is unique in its approach and a model for the country. The results of this study are very exciting. They confirm that CUNY Start is very effective in raising these students’ chances of staying and succeeding in college.”

The newly published study — a federally funded partnership between CUNY, the MDRC social policy research organization and the Community College Research Center at Columbia University — compared the progress of 3,835 randomly assigned community college freshmen whose scores on CUNY’s math, reading and writing assessment tests weren’t high enough to qualify them to take college-credit courses. Students were assigned either to CUNY Start, a pre-matriculation program that employs intensive instruction, support, and carefully designed curricula, or to the standard remediation reforms of CUNY Start.

Unique, Intensive Program
Michael Weiss, one of the MDRC researchers who authored the report, said that CUNY Start is unique in several ways: “The main target is students who have needs in all three subject areas. It’s time intensive. In the full-time program, it’s 12 hours a week of math and 12 hours of reading and writing instruction. And it really tries to tackle teaching methods. A lot of remedial education is traditional ‘chalk and talk’ and teacher lectures. CUNY Start is more discussion, student questioning and more active involvement in learning. What makes it work is having the extra time that makes it implementable, and the very robust system CUNY has of hiring teachers who are willing and comfortable enacting the CUNY Start approach.”

Math Readiness
After one semester, higher percentages of the students in CUNY Start were ready to take courses required for associate degrees. The results were especially pronounced in math: About 57 percent of students qualified to take college-credit courses after completing their CUNY Start semester, compared with 25 percent of those who took traditional developmental education courses. There was a 9 percent difference between the two groups in writing proficiency, and 8 percent in reading.

A second report, due out in 2020, will track the students’ long-term progress and achievement. But the interim report, which employed the gold-standard research method of random assignment of participants, enrollment and succeed in college-level courses. CUNY Start is a one-semester program that targets students with significant remedial needs. It delays enrollment in a degree program and provides, instead, intensive instruction that uses a more student-centered teaching method and carefully designed curricula delivered by trained teachers. It also integrates advising, tutoring and a weekly seminar that teaches students skills they need to succeed in college. Students pay only $75 for the program, which fully preserves financial aid for credit coursework.

“Our offer to students is: Give us one semester and let us help you not just pass your skills assessment tests, but also become ready for your college coursework so you’re on more solid ground,” said Donna Linderman, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. “We are the only university in the country implementing a program this comprehensive in the pre-matriculation space. It’s exciting and very important to have good solid data to strongly affirm that our model is highly effective.”
Graffiti Illuminates the Lives of Jews of Antiquity

KAREN STERN, an associate professor of history at Brooklyn College, has spent the past several years exploring writings and drawings that have been found on the walls of ancient sites in Israel and other places in the Mideast, Europe and North Africa. Her new book, Writing on the Wall: Graffiti and the Forgotten Jews of Antiquity, reveals new clues about the lives of ordinary Jews nearly 2,000 years ago.

Where does this adventure begin?

I did my Ph.D. in religious studies after studying classics and archaeology as an undergraduate. I spent my summers excavating in Israel, Greece and Jordan, and did my dissertation and wrote my first book on Jews in Roman North Africa. That research brought me into catacombs in Tunisia and Morocco. About nine years ago, I became fascinated by an important ancient necropolis in Israel called Beit She’arim, where Jews in the second through sixth centuries C.E. buried their dead. When I read through published excavation reports from the site, I was shocked to learn that archaeologists had once found ancient graffiti throughout the caves. When I traveled to Israel and finally saw the graffiti in person, I realized how important they were as pieces of historical information produced by everyday people in the ancient world. Today if you saw graffiti in a cemetery you’d consider it disrespectful and horrible. But in the ancient world people, including Jews, wrote graffiti around tombs reverentially, as a form of respect for the dead. Sometimes they would write curses to prevent people from robbing tombs or to try to comfort the dead: one person at Beit She’arim carved a message around a tomb entrance: “Good luck on your resurrection!” Studying these led me to do field research in burial caves elsewhere in Israel, where I found several examples of graffiti that had never been published before.

How did your visits to that burial site lead to a book that shines a light more broadly on what you call “the forgotten Jews of antiquity”?

When I began the project, I thought I was going to just write an article about the graffiti from Beit She’arim. But I had also been doing research on this amazing synagogue in the town of Dura Europos in Roman Syria.

The synagogue is famous in scholarly circles. Archaeologists discovered it in the 1930s and it was preserved to a remarkable degree. I realized that there were graffiti in that building too, though they hadn’t received a lot of attention. Sometimes when you notice a phenomenon you realize it’s much more pervasive than you thought. It became clearer to me that many Jews, and also their neighbors, drew thousands of graffiti everywhere in the ancient world — inside peoples’ homes, burial sites, pagan shrines, synagogues, and around travel routes and theaters. But many were ignored because some archaeologists considered them to be sort of slapdash and incidental; they compared them to modern graffiti to denigrate them and cast them aside. But graffiti show how ancient Jews interacted with the spaces around them and used them in ways that we would otherwise have no information about.

What struck you as most significant about the graffiti you found?

Historians of Jews in antiquity traditionally rely heavily on literary sources written by the elites of their societies. But the records of these ancient authors cannot fairly represent how their non-elite contemporaries lived. It would be as if the one percent of today were responsible for setting down the information that subsequent generations would use to write the history of our time. Writing graffiti was really commonplace in antiquity and has something important to say about the lives of ordinary ancient Jews — how they lived their daily lives and what they believed — in regions that had been conquered by Hellenistic kings and were regulated by Roman emperors. Graffiti document the lives of the undocumented and studying it helps identify ancient behaviors, customs and beliefs that authors never mention.

Some examples?

One thing that fascinates me is how some graffiti preserve important information about the relations between Jews and their neighbors, in ways that sometimes contradict literary records. For example, ancient Jewish texts prohibit Jews from praying inside pagan or Christian spaces for worship. But some pagan sanctuaries and shrines, including those from Egypt and Israel, include prayer graffiti written by Jews beside their pagan and Christian neighbors. These types of graffiti demonstrate that Jews were making their mark in places where their neighbors were also worshiping their gods and that it was okay to them. People who study inscriptions have paid attention to these graffiti but historians have not. These are some of the ways that studying them has the power to change our understanding of how the Jews of antiquity behaved and lived.

What’s next for you — is there more to find?

There are reported but very poorly published graffiti from a large complex of Jewish catacombs in Rome — underneath Mussolini’s old villa. They closed the catacombs right when I was starting this project and wouldn’t let anyone visit them. That’s the first place I will visit when they open them up again.

NEW TITLES / CUNY AUTHORS

After the Education Wars: How Smart Schools Undid the Business of Reform, Andrea Gabor, the Bloomberg chair of journalism at Baruch, argues that what is needed is not more grand ideas, but practical and informed ways to expand the best ones that are already transforming schools. Gabor critiques the top-down approach of popular education reforms and profiles the unexpected success of schools embracing a more democratic approach.

The Secrets Of Smart Schools And Life-Affirming Insight

Human Anatomy And Its Glitches

How Hitler Seized Power

Botany, Medicine And Early NYC

A Scholar’s Secret Police File In My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File, Katherine Verdery, a Graduate Center Distinguished Professor of anthropology, presents a revealing account of her time doing doctoral fieldwork in Romania while under the communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. Written from her perspective, as well as from her huge “file,” penned by informants, Verdery examines the double life she was supposedly living, and how her research was shaped without her realizing it.
PHOTO FINISH

CUNY Interim Chancellor Vita C. Rabinowitz with University students at the CUNY Service Corps and CUNY Cultural Corps launch for Fall 2018

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FOR DETAILS, SEE PAGE 14