It gives me great pleasure to announce the re-launching of SOAR, the newsletter of the CUNY Office of Special Programs (OSP). The OSP is most known as the home of the Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program and the College Discovery (CD) Program. The re-launching comes at an auspicious time in the histories of the OSP, CUNY, and New York City.

SEEK and CD will each be celebrating their 50th anniversary—CD in 2014 and SEEK in 2016. It is remarkable that over the course of 50 years the SEEK and CD programs have withstood such challenges as shifting city and state political environments, budget cuts, and changes in University policies and administrations. Through it all, SEEK and CD have not only survived, but flourished. Our student persistence and graduation rates have steadily increased, and our alumni have distinguished themselves in a diversity of fields.

Changes in leadership are the order of the day for both the City and University. After 14 years of distinguished service, Matthew Goldstein retired last June, naming William Kelly, President of the CUNY Graduate Center, as Interim Chancellor. In one of his first communiqués, Kelly articulated his strong support for access to a college degree for all students, and particularly those minorities who are underrepresented in higher education, Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans. This is also an exciting time in our city as we look forward to welcoming a new mayor, Bill de Blasio, and applaud him for promoting inclusiveness in education, government, and civic activities.

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I am also excited to welcome CUNY’s TRIO and Single Stop programs into the OSP portfolio. TRIO includes federally-funded opportunity programs that assist low income, first-generation students and students with disabilities. The TRIO programs administered throughout CUNY include: Upward Bound; Veterans Upward Bound; Talent Search; Ronald McNair Scholars; Student Support Services, and the Manhattan Educational Opportunity Center. The Single Stop offices connect students and their families to public benefits and provide no-cost tax preparation, legal and financial counseling to students at CUNY’s community Colleges.

I invite you to look for news of all of these outstanding programs in future issues of SOAR. I am grateful to Dr. Shelley Ast, the Director of the Office of Special Programs, for taking on the challenge of re-launching SOAR.

SEEK STUDY ABROAD LUNCHEON

The Office of Special Programs’ commemorative luncheon for the 25 SEEK students who participated in summer 2013 study abroad was held on November 21st at John Jay College and it was a resounding success. Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Frank Sanchez and Dean Cheryl Williams greeted the students and congratulated them on their worldly adventures. Dr. Kim Holland, CUNY’s International Education Manager, also spoke at the event and urged students to reach out to at least five other students and talk about the advantages of participating in study abroad. Gloria Garcia, SEEK Director at the College of Staten Island (CSI), chaired the OSP Study Abroad Planning Committee and welcomed the students to the event. Also on the event program were Mr. Ralph Pagan, academic support coordinator at CSI-SEEK, and Dr. Marie Nazon, SEEK counselor at CCNY-SEEK. A highlight of the event was the inspirational singing of “I Believe I Can Fly” by CSI SEEK student Troy Weekes, Jr.

A stunning slideshow of student photographs was displayed and many students shared their journal entries and talked about their travel experiences. Their narratives were inspirational and they all agreed that their study abroad involvement was transformative. The students in the audience who are interested in future study abroad activities were demonstratively moved by hearing the stories shared by our world travelers, as were the many SEEK and CD Program directors, counselors, and academic support faculty and staff who were present to honor the students and welcome them home!
As we introduce the first issue of the OSP Newsletter, Dorie Clay (SEEK Director at NYCCT SEEK and Co-Chair of the Council of SEEK Program Directors) and I thought about the many successful initiatives started in the SEEK and CD Programs that are now accepted as best practices on a national level. Summer programs were an integral component of the SEEK Program when it was introduced in 1966. Recognizing that students who were not college ready required a structured environment in which to address their remedial needs, summer programs were a means to prepare students to take college level courses and succeed academically. Today, higher education professionals still recognize the importance of addressing “disparities generated in primary education and secondary schooling, to develop the minimum skills deemed necessary for functional participation in the economy and the democracy, and to acquire the prerequisite competencies that are crucial for negotiating college-level coursework” (Bahr, 2008).

The City University of New York places great faith in the power of summer programs to improve academic outcomes for students arriving at college with remedial needs. Paul Attewell (2013) and a team of researchers found that students who participated in CUNY’s University Summer Immersion Program (USIP) had slightly higher retention and accumulated more college credits than those who did not participate. These findings are consistent with the outcomes achieved by SEEK students who participate in the mandatory SEEK summer program.

To date, thousands of SEEK students have enrolled in summer programs, exiting remedial courses, improving their college readiness, and learning about college policies and procedures to smooth their transition into college. Thousands of students have graduated and are now contributing members of society. As higher education strives to address the needs of a significantly underprepared student population, the SEEK and CD programs continue to serve as models for how to improve academic outcomes for students who otherwise would not have been admitted to college.

On behalf of the College Discovery Program Directors and Cynthia Suarez Espinal (CD Director at Bronx Community College and Co-Chair of the Council of CD Program Directors) I welcome this opportunity to share the stories and accomplishments of our students and staff. This newsletter will help showcase how the services we provide are helping students stay in school and graduate. There is a College Discovery Program in each of the six CUNY community colleges: Borough of Manhattan (BMCC), Bronx (BCC), Hostos (HCC), Kingsborough (KCC), LaGuardia (LAGCC), and Queensborough (QCC) Community Colleges.

College Discovery Programs provide three primary services: personal counseling, academic support through tutoring, and financial assistance through a book stipend. These services have been a staple of College Discovery since its inception 50 years ago. Students entering college for the first time who have the potential to excel but need additional academic and financial support can gain access to higher education through these opportunity
programs. Through our intensive summer program we prepare students for their transition from high school to college and support them throughout their academic journey towards graduation.

In a competitive funding environment, the vision for College Discovery is to remain on the cutting edge of best practices that continue to retain and graduate our students, and maintain positive program outcomes to secure continued funding. We are proud that for the last decade, our students are retained, and graduate at a higher rate than regularly admitted students. To that end, we strive to cultivate a family environment that supports and nurtures the potential in them.

Bronx Community College’s CD Director Serves on Assessment Panel

At John Jay College on October 18th, the CUNY Assessment Council held its largest seminar to date, “Advising and Assessment.” The plenary speaker and discussion panel of four were made up of advisors and counselors from across CUNY. The organizers suspected that the attendance would be high because of the many forms and configurations of advising across the community, four-year, and comprehensive colleges, the great majority of which have never been assessed. However, they were pleasantly surprised as the number of attendees reached close to a hundred. Cynthia Suarez-Espinal, Director of College Discovery at BCC, served on the panel. The Assessment Council is hoping to have more seminars in the future on student services and student life.

Second Chances: The CUNY SEEK and College Discovery Story

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOgSZ7lbkg0

A Tragic Loss to the SEEK/CD Community: We Mourn the Passing of Oscar Hijuelos

The Office of Special Programs was saddened to learn that Oscar Hijuelos, the first Latino to win a Pulitzer Prize for fiction, died on October 12th, 2013 at the age of 62. Mr. Hijuelos won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990 for his book, “The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love”.

Oscar was born in New York and was of Cuban-American descent. He loved living in New York City and loved being a member of the CUNY family of students. He graduated from the CCNY SEEK Program with a Bachelor’s Degree in 1975, and then went on to earn the Masters Degree in 1976. He was one of the most illustrious and successful graduates in the history of the SEEK Program.

Over the years Mr. Hijuelos always remembered his roots in SEEK. He generously gave of his time and energy and provided much appreciated support to program events and activities both at City College and at the University level. He was an inspiration to all students who knew him or knew of him. The CUNY SEEK community has most certainly lost a much beloved man of exceptional talent. He will be greatly missed.

Did you know . . .

President Ronald Reagan declared December 11, 1986 as National SEEK and College Discovery Day.
Established in fall, 2012 with the express purpose of increasing positive student connections within each CUNY campus, the Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program and College Discovery Program United Leaders of CUNY (ULC) has championed its mission in providing and promoting holistic, comprehensive and innovative strategies to engage students at the university level. Through integrated, student-centered activities, not only those hosted by ULC but also by individual SEEK/CD student clubs on each campus, we aim to increase the career and personal development of all students. Among our main goals we also aim to give students the opportunity to participate in the wider domain of public advocacy.

The ULC continues to network and establish partnerships CUNY-wide to meet its objectives. This past year, the ULC has hosted as well as co-sponsored a number of events, including a Hurricane Sandy relief effort in November, 2012; a job fair which included employer recruiting as well as workshops on interview techniques and resume building; and PSC (Professional Staff Congress) forums and city council hearings on civil rights and higher education, where students testified about how the SEEK and CD Programs have paved a path to opportunity and success and why continued budgetary support for the Programs is essential. The ULC also participated in CUNY’s vote rally for upcoming elections and in community events and dialogues in Harlem and across the tri-state area highlighting the importance of higher education and the existence and continuation of SEEK and CD Programs.

Some of the exciting upcoming events include a ULC Awards Ceremony to honor graduates, student leaders and founding ULC members; another job fair tailored to meet a wide-range of students' interests; a GRE, MCAT, GMAT & LSAT prep course series; a ULC-hosted SEEK and CD Field Day; and other community events to continue raising the awareness of opportunities that CUNY and the SEEK and CD Programs have to offer. As opportunity programs that serve the "underprivileged" in CUNY it is critical that the primary stakeholders, students, have the opportunity to take part in the dialogue that preserves the financial survival of not only CUNY but also SEEK and CD. It is for this reason that the ULC is such a fundamental asset to the much-valued mission of the Programs that helped create it.

Philip Gordon, Research & Evaluation Associate, Joins the OSP Team

Phil earned his Master of Public Policy (MPP) degree with a focus on social and urban policy from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from Tufts University, where he graduated Magna Cum Laude. He previously worked with Abt Associates as a Deputy Project Director, co-wrote successful funding proposals there, and is the second author of Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni. More recently, Phil worked with Single Stop USA (SSUSA) as a Senior Program Officer. While with SSUSA, he established several new community college partnerships in Boston, Philadelphia, and Westchester. His work at SSUSA has given him a comprehensive understanding of the financial, social, and academic barriers facing college students today and the challenges that students must overcome in order to persist in college and ultimately graduate. Phil is a friendly, warm and energetic professional who will be a tremendous asset to the Office of Special Programs as he tackles the important work of assessment and evaluation.
Chun Biao Wang
The City College - SEEK Student

Chun Biao Wang emigrated from China in 2009. As soon as he arrived, he began his search for opportunities to adapt to his new life in America. As he eagerly waited for his college acceptance letter, he spent his time in search for employment. In fall 2010, he enrolled at The City College. Excited by the long-awaited opportunity, he successfully completed his first academic year with straight A’s.

As a mathematics major with a GPA of 3.8, he was awarded the SEEK Freshman Scholastic Achievement Award and shortly afterwards secured a position as a SEEK tutor. He participated in the prestigious Mathematics Biostatistics Boot Camp at Johns Hopkins University and volunteered at Gouverneur Healthcare. Though one of his goals had been to graduate from New York University, where he was accepted with a scholarship, he decided to continue his studies at The City College. Connecting with staff and faculty, making friends, and contributing to this community contributed to his decision: “I love my SEEK family!” Since making the decision to stay at City College, Chun Biao worked as a research assistant with Dr. Sandra Hayes of the CCNY Math Department reviewing historical examples of stock price models. This past summer he secured a competitive position at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center as a research assistant where he is collecting and analyzing the data from cancer patients.

"SEEK is our starting point, but our connection will not end here."

Janil Elizabeth Espinal
Queensborough CC - CD Student

My name is Janil Elizabeth Espinal. I am 19 years old and the daughter of Dominican Republic immigrants and a first generation college student. Going to college was a dream come true for me. All my life my parents taught me that education is powerful and it will lead me to a better life. Being a student at Queensborough Community College and being part of the QCC College Discovery Program has helped me grow as a person and has directed me in the right path towards my goal in becoming a pediatrician. The CD Program has helped me to become a better person and a better student. With the help of the counselors, tutors and all the academic support that I received, CD has shown me that there are people who believe in me and want me to succeed in everything that I do. Thanks to all of their support, I won the CD Academic Achievement Award and the CD Leadership Award. I also became the Senator of the College Discovery Club and soon will become the President for the Spring 2014 semester. Being a part of CD has given me the skills to be more confident and to reach out and become part of many other activities. I am a volunteer at Long Island Jewish Medical Center and at New York Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children’s Hospital. I was nominated to participate in the June 2013 SEEK/CD Student Leadership Conference and the Student Government Leadership Weekend Conference in October 2013. I also took part in the College Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP). The CD Program has led me to many opportunities that I wouldn’t think were possible growing up. I now believe that the possibilities are endless.
When 17 year old Britna Bennett entered the Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Summer Immersion Program, she was faced with a difficult decision: to separate from her family or not attend college. Months before Britna received her acceptance into SEEK at Lehman College, her family was forced to relocate to North Carolina due to financial challenges. With no other family in New York or financial support, Britna decided that her dream to obtain a degree was not only important for her but her family. She asked the parents of her best friend from high school if she could live with them so that she could attend Lehman College. Fortunately, they said yes.

A few weeks into the summer program, Britna’s mother had a stroke. Britna traveled back and forth to check on her mom. Despite the hardship, by the end of the fall semester she earned 18 credits and a 4.0 GPA, and was a Presidential Scholar. In the spring 2011, she received a New York Needs You (NYNY) Fellowship; she was 1 out of 100 students selected out of 650 who applied. Again, she ended the spring semester as a Presidential Scholar. In the summer of 2013, Britna interned with MACY’s Corporate Office, Marketing Department, a NYNY corporate partner and B.R.A.G. (Black Retail Action Group) where she successfully competed for a B.R.A.G scholarship and a permanent position with MACY’s. Britna was 1 of 2 CUNY students of the 107 interning at MACY’s. Britna won the scholarship (1 of 2 of the highest offered by FOSSIL) and received an offer for full-time employment at MACY’s Marketing Department upon completion of her degree.

I’m John Galen, a student in the College Discovery Program at Queensborough Community College. I am pursuing an associate’s degree in Business Administration to pursue a career in Investment Banking, and I am specifically interested in working on mergers and acquisitions. As President of the CD Club and member of Phi Theta Kappa, I have demonstrated my leadership skills in a plethora of ways. I was selected for the prestigious New York Needs You fellowship, which is a career development and mentorship program for high achieving first generation college students that helps fellows select, secure, and succeed in their respective careers and internships. I have received awards for leadership, academic excellence, and Deans List recognition for my success in college and as a CD student. I am a highly quantitative individual with a diverse background in leadership, teamwork, a strong work ethic, and I have the interpersonal skills to communicate my ideas.

As an undergraduate lead research analyst, I conducted a study with a team of three other students regarding the growth of the U.S national debt. My goal was to project the growth 20 years into the future using mathematical knowledge obtained through calculus. I had to analyze data going back to the start of the U.S debt and use linear approximation and exponential growth functions on Microsoft Office. I used tools such as PowerPoint and Excel to create a presentation for the QCC Honors Conference. I also have experience in politics through my participation in the CUNY Model Senate Project 2013 which puts a select few students from each CUNY campus through intense workshops culminating with students arguing the passage of a minimum wage bill in the senate chamber located in Albany, NY. I hope I can set an example which would erase the stigma that comes with attending community college.
From Sunday, July 14th to Sunday July 21st, 2013, Sachiel Mondesir, counselor for College Discovery at Bronx Community College was one of two members of the CUNY community and the first member of Bronx Community College’s CD program to be selected as a fellow for the Salzburg Global Seminar – Global Citizenship Program (GCP). The goal of the GCP Program is to explore the factors that could either support or restrain a comprehensive approach to global education within a community college. The GCP has three main areas of focus: institutional policies; curriculum enhancement; and faculty development.

BCC has participated in the Global Citizenship Program for many years now. Every year, around April, BCC’s Global Initiative Program under the auspices of the National Center for Educational Alliances sends a call for nomination for candidates to attend the GCP seminar in July. The candidates are nominated by the chair of their respective departments. After being nominated, each candidate writes an essay to the Global Initiative Steering Committee, detailing what he/she would like to do in order to promote global education on the BCC campus. The purpose of attending the seminar is to provide candidates with knowledge and tools they could use in their work at BCC to help promote global education. Seeing the lack of global awareness among his students in the CD program, Sachiel Mondesir wanted to attend the GCP to learn more about global citizenship in an education context, and learn about strategies that he could implement to promote global citizenship among his students.

The Salzburg Global Seminar was started in 1947 in Salzburg, Austria by several Harvard students who wanted to establish an American seminar in Europe. One of the first faculty members to lecture at the seminar was anthropologist Margaret Mead. The Global Citizenship Program is one of several topics hosted by the Salzburg Seminar every year.