

HEARING OF THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE,
THE HONORABLE CHARLES BARRON, CHAIRPERSON

FUNDING FOR THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK BLACK MALE INITIATIVE FOR THE
2007-2008 ACADEMIC YEAR (FY2008)
June 7, 2007

Thank you, Council Member Barron and other members of the New York City Council Higher Education Committee, for this opportunity to participate in this hearing on New York City Council funded diversity initiatives that: (1) support students from populations that are severely underrepresented in higher education, (2) sponsor research on the history, culture and politics of diverse communities that continue to make significant contributions to our city and nation, and (3) coordinate academic programming that contributes to the free exchange of ideas and information at the University.

It is my great pleasure to participate in this hearing with my CUNY colleagues Dr. Ramona Hernandez, Director of the Dominican Studies Institute at The City College of New York, and Dr. Anthony De Jesus, Director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College. From our testimony, I think that you will be able to discern our shared commitment to promoting diversity and opportunity at The City University of New York and making certain that the University remains a place where New Yorkers from diverse backgrounds can find realistic access to higher education. Our programs have common interests and objectives and we plan to cosponsor academic programs in the near future.

I am also pleased that I am able to introduce myself to you today as the new University Director of the City University of New York Black Male Initiative. I began working in the CUNY Central Office as the CUNY BMI Director on December 11, 2006. In the next few weeks, my office will move to

the campus of The City College of New York where we will establish a research institute that will explore issues related to social and educational equity for underrepresented students, particularly black males. Over the course of the last six months, at our monthly BMI funded projects meetings in the Central Office and during numerous campus visits, I have had the pleasure of meeting and working with all of the CUNY BMI campus project directors who are implementing programs throughout the University that are having a positive impact on the educational experience of CUNY students. After five years of teaching in the African American Studies Department at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice from 1998 to 2003, a short time as a public high school social studies teacher and two years working on diversity issues as an Assistant Dean of Multicultural Affairs at the Hofstra University School of Law, I am grateful to return to CUNY to work as the central administrator of this important University-wide program that we expect will raise the enrollment, retention and graduation rates of students from groups that are severely underrepresented in higher education, particularly African American, Caribbean and Latino males.

In this statement, I intend to give a brief status report and share with you some of the work that has been done by the talented administrators, faculty members and students throughout the CUNY system whose dedication and commitment has resulted in the creation of programs that we believe will provide additional levels of guidance, direction and support to students from underrepresented populations who are often the first in their families to go to college.

Based on promising models developed at Medgar Evers College under the leadership of President Edison O. Jackson, and upon the recommendation of a University-wide CUNY BMI Task Force convened in 2004, the University created the BMI program in 2005 that funds projects throughout the CUNY system that are designed to increase the enrollment and retention of students from

groups that are severely underrepresented in higher education, particularly black males. During the 2005-06 (FY 2006) and 2006-07 (FY 2007) academic years, through the generous support of the New York City Council, the University distributed funds to various CUNY campuses to develop demonstration projects designed to improve the enrollment and graduation rates of underrepresented students, particularly African American, Caribbean and Latino males.

The initial grant from the New York City Council was used to initiate fifteen (15) projects at eleven (11) CUNY sites during the 2005-2006 academic year. A second consecutive grant allowed the University to expand the program during the 2006-2007 academic year to twenty-one (21) projects on seventeen campuses as well as at the Graduate School and University Center. Despite a decrease in funding from the New York City Council from FY2006 to FY2007, the University has made every effort to expand and enhance CUNY BMI during the program's second year of operation.

Increased funding from the New York City Council will allow CUNY BMI to award larger grants to the campuses to support and expand the campus-based BMI enrollment, diversity recruitment, mentorship and student development projects. We will also continue to enhance and expand our efforts to develop the potential of prospective students without a high school diploma who want to enroll in General Educational Development (GED) courses and apply to college. This includes formerly incarcerated individuals as well as the unemployed and underemployed who want access to trade and construction industry jobs that require them to go through a union application process.

Ultimately, additional funds from the New York City Council would allow CUNY BMI to support projects at CUNY sites that would greatly benefit potential students from underrepresented groups

who come to the University from the traditional education pipeline as well as those individuals within the targeted populations who would not be reached by our more traditional diversity recruitment efforts and academic support measures.

With this in mind, as I provide a brief overview of CUNY BMI's program activity over the course of the last two years, FY 2006 and FY 2007, I would like to separate CUNY BMI's significant program activity into two general areas. The first general area involves CUNY BMI campus-based projects that are designed to increase enrollment and raise academic achievement levels, retention and graduation rates. The second general area involves CUNY BMI campus-based projects that identify and serve potential students who are not reached through traditional recruitment efforts and academic support measures. Both areas are important. Given our review of current high school non-completion rates, particularly the high school non-completion rates for black male students, CUNY BMI recognizes the importance of providing support for potential college students who have fallen out of the traditional K-12 pipeline to higher education.

Nevertheless, I would like to begin by describing our program activity that is designed to promote underrepresented students', particularly African American male students', access to higher education by strengthening the K-12 education pipeline to college and providing support for new students once they enroll at a CUNY college. Throughout the CUNY system, BMI administrators, faculty supporters and student participants understand that mentorship is essential to promoting academic success and excellence at CUNY, particularly for first generational students. In creating structured mentorship programs at CUNY that are geared towards underrepresented students, particularly black males, CUNY BMI administrators demonstrate that they understand the social science research and best practices models that support the position that the development of

strong academic learning communities are essential in giving students the support, guidance and direction that they deserve in order to succeed in higher education.

Most of the initial BMI funded campus-based projects focused on providing direct services to underrepresented students and creating academic learning communities that promote higher academic achievement levels, higher retention rates and increased student success. Several of the mentorship and student development programs implemented during the initial grant period also have partnerships with area middle schools and high schools that are designed to strengthen the education pipeline to college, particularly for students coming from populations that are severely underrepresented in higher education. Projects have been implemented on all CUNY campuses that collectively serve students from every borough of New York City.

Some of the mentorship, student development and attendant pipeline programs that were implemented during the first year of the program in FY 2006 and continued during FY 2007 include: (1) the *Empowering, Recruiting, Investing and Supporting* (ERIS) Scholars program at Brooklyn College; (2) the *Black Male Leadership and Mentoring Project* (BMLMP) at the City College of New York; (3) the *College Success Initiative: Learning by Teaching* at the College of Staten Island; (4) *Brothers on a New Direction* at Hostos Community College; (5) the *Innovative Strategies to Increase Black Male Enrollment and Success* projects at Hunter College; (6) the *Bridging the Gap* diversity recruitment and *Connections for Success* mentorship projects at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice; (7) the *Increasing the Enrollment and Success in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics of African American Males* program at the New York City College of Technology; (8) the *Men Achieving and Leading in Excellence and Success* project at the

Queensborough Community College and (9) *the Male Initiative* program at the York College Men's Center.

Additionally, brand new BMI-funded mentorship, student development and attendant pipeline projects were developed during the past year such as: (1) the *Urban Male Leadership Academy* at the Borough of Manhattan Community College; (2) the *Men 2 Men Committee – a Proposal to Increase African American Male Enrollment* at the Bronx Community College; (3) the *Student Leadership Initiative* at Kingsborough Community College ; (4) the *Empowerment and Success Program for Underrepresented Students* at the LaGuardia Community College; (5) the *Urban Male Leadership Collective* at Lehman College; and (6) the *Excellence Based on Equity and Inclusion Black Male Initiative* program at Queens College. These new projects began program activity during the current semester and we expect to report demonstrable results next year.

In particular, the Urban Male Leadership Academy run by Vice President for Student Affairs Michael Haynes and BMI Project Director Professor Kenneth Anderson has already enrolled thirty (30) student participants. Additionally, Professor Anderson has partnered with the BMCC Student Government Association that implemented its own Black Male Initiative program with the cooperation of the BMCC Honor Society of Black Student Scholars. In this innovative student-run part of the CUNY BMI program, high achieving members of the BMCC Honor Society of Black Student Scholars demonstrate leadership by providing individualized tutoring and mentorship to incoming students as well as first year students on academic probation. I would like to acknowledge BMCC recent graduate Michelle Pierre and the current BMCC Student Government Association President Curtis Browne for their hard work in creating a student-run BMI program through the BMCC Student Government Association and the BMCC Honor Society of Black

Student Scholars. Additionally, Professors James Blake and Audrey Bynoe, who are dedicated faculty advisors to the BMCC Honor Society of Black Student Scholars, should also be commended for the guidance and direction that they provide to this group of socially responsible students.

All of these mentorship and student development programs are fully described in the supporting materials as well as in the chart summaries of program activity during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 academic years that I am submitting with this testimony, as well as in our *Final Report to the New York City Council on the Initial Grant to the City University of New York for the Black Male Initiative*.

Although our mentorship, student development and attendant pipeline programs implemented during the inaugural year of the program are only two years old, they have begun to produce demonstrable results already. For the purposes of this hearing and in the interest of time, I will provide some highlights of only four programs that are designed to strengthen the traditional K-12 pipeline to higher education at Brooklyn College, the College of Staten Island, Hostos Community College and Hunter College.

At Brooklyn College, the BMI-funded ERIS mentorship program achieved a 94% retention rate as sixteen (16) of seventeen (17) of the ERIS college scholars who formally participated in the project's activities during the spring 2006 semester registered for classes and enrolled in Brooklyn College for the fall 2006 semester. Additionally, to support Brooklyn College's diversity recruitment efforts, the ERIS program established relationships and partnerships with administrators and teachers in high schools throughout East New York, Brooklyn and hosted East New York High

School Summits for prospective students for the last two years during the spring 2006 and spring 2007 semesters.

At the College of Staten Island, the BMI-funded *College Success Initiative: Learning By Teaching* mentorship project, led by BMI Project Director Debra Evans-Greene, provided an opportunity for college students, particularly eight (8) black male Teaching Scholar college students to demonstrate leadership and service to the community by providing academic tutoring, in preparation for the New York State Mathematics A Regents examination, to cohorts of high school students, particularly black males, at Curtis and Port Richmond High Schools. The high school students who were tutored by the College of Staten Island Teaching Scholars program passed the NYS Math A Regents in much higher rates than the rest of the Curtis and Port Richmond student populations.

At Hostos Community College, all thirteen (13) of the first year college student participants (mentees) in the original cohort of the BMI –funded mentorship program *Brothers on a New Direction* (BOND) who entered the program in spring 2006 were academically successful. The average grade point average (GPA) for participants rose from 2.97 in fall 2005 to 3.04 in spring 2006. Every student met with an academic advisor at least once. HCC administrators report that the average GPA for all African American and Latino male students at HCC is 2.64. Every student in the structured mentorship program successfully completed the spring semester. One participant graduated from HCC and the remaining twelve (12) participated in the program's summer activities and registered for the fall 2006 semester. With a program name that was selected by the student participants, Hostos' *Brothers on a New Direction* or BOND program is a comprehensive male mentoring that brings together college, high school and junior high school students to discuss

issues that are relevant to them. Under the guidance of BMI Project Director Daniel Voloch and BOND coordinator, Alejandro Carrion, BOND has sponsored discussions on gender construction, stereotypes, the influence of the media, and setting goals. During this past semester, Hostos Community College started a comparable mentorship program called FOND or *Females on a New Direction*.

Although the Hostos Community College program involves cohorts of students at the middle school, high school and college levels, this BMI-funded project has also provided an opportunity for CUNY graduate students to serve as positive role models. For example, Alejandro Carrion, a third year doctoral student in the Urban Education program at the CUNY Graduate Center, serves as a project coordinator of the BMI-funded BOND program at Hostos. A graduate of New York City public schools, and a long-time resident of the Bronx, Mr. Carrion earned his Master's in Urban Affairs at Hunter College before entering the Urban Education doctoral program at the CUNY Graduate Center. His guidance has impacted several Hostos Community College BOND participants who recently graduated and will be attending CUNY senior colleges. Further, he has assisted a number of recent graduates in BOND's high school cohort who will be attending higher education institutions such as the The City College of New York (CCNY), the University of Pennsylvania, Syracuse University, Fordham University, and the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

At Hunter College, BMI administrators on that campus with the cooperation of the central CUNY BMI program cosponsored the second lecture in the CUNY BMI Distinguished Speaker Series featuring the noted Urban Education Analyst Dr. Pedro Noguera, a professor at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and human Development at New York University. The event was well-attended and sparked increased interest in the Hunter College Black Male Initiative program

that is coordinated by the Chairperson of the Hunter College BMI Steering Committee Associate Dean Marcia Cantarella and BMI Project Director Joseph Nelson. Like Alejandro Carrion, Joseph Nelson is also a doctoral student in the Urban Education program at the CUNY Graduate Center and teaches graduate level classes in the Sociology Department at Hunter College. Since assuming his position as the Hunter College BMI Project Director, Mr. Nelson has organized events and provided guidance and direction to over thirty (30) BMI participants. Additionally, he works closely with Hunter College students, particularly black male students who serve as official Hunter College BMI mentors and recruiters.

Several students who participated in the Hunter College BMI program from its inception have experienced great success. In particular, we are proud of the participation of Hunter College rising senior Israel Burns and Hunter College senior James Dickson. Before coming to Hunter College, Israel Burns describes himself as "a troubled youth who later became a ward of the state." After graduating from South Shore High School and attending several colleges, he came to Hunter College and, after a few semesters, became involved with Hunter College BMI from the program's inception. Through Hunter College BMI, Israel Burns received pre-law counseling and with the assistance of the Hunter College Pre-Law Adviser secured an internship with a major New York City law firm. He is now preparing to take the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) and plans to apply to law schools early in his senior year.

Harlem resident, James Dickson, has also been part of the Hunter College BMI program from the beginning. As an older student, he demonstrates leadership by recruiting his fellow students to participate in the Hunter College BMI program. As an official recruiter for the Hunter College BMI program, Mr. Dickson discovered that he enjoyed helping students succeed and now wants to

pursue a career in social services. Mr. Dickson's work experience until now has been administrative and clerical. However, he will soon graduate from Hunter College with a high grade point average and an undergraduate degree in English and History. At present, he is applying to social work graduate programs and hopes to dedicate his career to working with youth.

Finally, Hunter College graduate student Christopher Blackwood has made great contributions to CUNY BMI as the Recruitment Coordinator for the Hunter College BMI program. He has also participated in the Hunter College BMI program since its inception. A graduate of Clark Atlanta University who recently received his Masters degree in Biochemistry from Hunter College, Mr. Blackwood will be entering the Ph.D. program in Pharmacology at Cornell University in the fall.

As for the second general area of program activity, several of our campus-based CUNY BMI projects are designed to identify and serve potential students who are not reached through traditional recruitment efforts or academic support measures. These important CUNY BMI-funded projects are so essential because they reach potential students who have fallen out of the traditional educational pipeline to college. Because so many capable young African American men are not making it through the traditional educational pipeline to college, the University, through its BMI program, remains committed to ensuring that those who have fallen out of the traditional educational pipeline can find their way back to the path towards higher education and stable employment through their participation in one of the following BMI-sponsored programs.

Some of the projects that CUNY BMI has sponsored that provide services and support to prospective students who are not within the traditional high school to college education pipeline include several GED programs such as the CUNY Prep @ Night program, the *African American*

Male Educational Ladders Initiative GED program at Medgar Evers College and the CUNY Adult Literacy/GED Mentoring Project.

Implemented for the first time during the initial grant period (2005-2006), CUNY Prep @ Night is a new CUNY GED initiative that enrolls young adult students (19-25) in an intensive evening GED/College Prep program. This instructional program was based on the University's other adult literacy programs, particularly the CUNY Prep day program which serves 16 to 18 year olds. While preparing for the GED examination, students are assisted in submitting college and financial aid applications. Moreover, through existing relationships at CUNY colleges, appropriate assistance and advisement are available to CUNY Prep @ Night participants during their first semester of college. CUNY Prep is led by its dynamic principal, Derrick Griffith, and the BMI-funded CUNY Prep @ Night program is coordinated by a dedicated and talented teacher and administrator, Jamal Mantin.

At Medgar Evers College, another BMI funded project implemented during the initial grant period, the *African American Male Educational Ladders Initiative*, was designed to develop an educational pathway for underrepresented students, particularly African, African American, Caribbean and Latino males. Because a number of these students arrive with academic deficits, significant classroom time and sustained individualized attention are required to prepare them to pass the GED and enroll in higher education. A second project at Medgar Evers College, The Black Male Construction Workforce Development Initiative, was created to develop a comprehensive programmatic model for addressing the issue of unemployment and underemployment that impacts the social and systemic problems confronting black males in New York City. CUNY BMI funds were used to fund large cycles of the *Educational Ladders Initiative* to develop a pool of qualified

students interested in securing employment in the construction industry through the targeted support that they would receive through the Medgar Evers College workforce development program. Under the leadership of BMI project coordinator Andre Lake, CUNY BMI has supported the work of dedicated and talented GED program administrators and instructors including Ella Russell and Larry Martin, who is also an administrator of the Medgar Evers Male Development and Empowerment Center.

The CUNY Adult Literacy/GED Mentoring Project was added as another BMI funded program during the current academic year. In its BMI-funded component, the CUNY Adult Literacy/GED project involves three campus-based adult literacy programs, at Brooklyn College, Bronx Community College and Lehman College, that will employ structures and processes designed to recruit and support students with college potential who are at risk of dropping out of CUNY GED programs. In order to increase the number of students from underrepresented groups, particularly African American, Caribbean and Latino males, who complete the course of study in these programs, receive their GED diplomas, and continue their education at CUNY, the project has begun to implement targeted mentorship groups in each of the three (3) GED programs that are designed to increase retention and completion. Additional funds from the New York City Council will be used to strengthen mentoring projects for GED students, particularly African American and Latino males, at Lehman, Brooklyn, and Bronx Community Colleges.

CUNY BMI has also supported efforts to serve prospective and enrolled students within the targeted populations who are arguably the most difficult to reach including individuals who have been incarcerated, persons on probation and youthful offenders. The Prisoner Reentry Institute at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and its institutional partner, the College Initiative,

developed concrete strategies that are designed to facilitate the transition of formerly incarcerated persons to higher education. Additionally, the College Initiative, through its *Bridge to College* and *College Prep* programs, encourages formerly incarcerated persons to continue their education and develops strategies to increase access to CUNY for students with criminal records. Celebrating its fifth year of program activity, the College Initiative was developed under the auspices of Episcopal Social Services and became a part of John Jay College's Prisoner Reentry Institute last year. As this new program develops under the leadership of College Initiative Director Benay Rubenstein, and with support from CUNY BMI, the College Initiative's program services will also target first-time offenders and youthful offenders who have not yet served prison time.

Finally, CUNY BMI supports academic programming and outreach programs that are designed to raise awareness of the challenges that African American males and other underrepresented students face as they attempt to make their way through K-12 systems and into higher education. Recently, under the leadership of John Jay College Assistant Vice President Rubie Malone, BMI Project Director Inez Brown and the members of the John Jay College BMI Steering Committee, the BMI-funded project at John Jay College sponsored its second annual day-long Youth Education Summit – Say YES to Education program. This year, approximately two hundred and twenty five (225) high school students attended the program including many African American and Latino male students. BMI Project Director Inez Brown also coordinates the John Jay College BMI mentorship program that serves forty-nine (49) mostly African American and Latino male students and twelve (12) female students.

The BMI program at the Bronx Community College also raised awareness of the enormous challenges facing young people today in its second annual BMI conference that was held two

weeks ago on Friday, May 25, 2007. Organized by Bronx Community College President Dr. Carolyn G. Williams and BCC BMI Project Directors Dean Bernard Gantt and Clifford Marshall, the theme of this year's BCC BMI conference was *RECLAIMING OUR LEGACY: Understanding The Roles of Men And Women in the Building of Successful Black & Latino Men*. Like the John Jay College event, many high school students attended the BMI BCC conference which featured a keynote address by the noted economist and professor at the Columbia University School of Social Work, Dr. Ronald Mincy, editor of the recent book *Black Males Left Behind*. The central administration of the CUNY BMI program has also contributed to this academic and consciousness-raising programming by sponsoring the CUNY BMI Distinguished Lecture Series, the annual CUNY BMI conference which will take place this year on Friday, October 5, 2007 at The City College and CUNY BMI panel discussions such as our recent program *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics at CUNY: An Open Discussion with African American and Latino Faculty* featuring Dr. Reginald Blake, Dr. Chantale Damas, Dr. Godfrey Gumbs, Dr. Maribel Vazquez and Dr. Ardie Walser.

In closing, I would like to once again thank the New York City Council, particularly the Higher Education Committee, for your interest in and commitment to The City University of New York Black Male Initiative. As our program grows, and we diversify our funding sources, we hope that we will continue to receive support from the New York City Council. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,

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The City University of New York Black Male Initiative