

E Pluribus Unum: Out of Many Campuses, One Public University **CUNY Matters, December 2006**

Without much fanfare, a handful of graduate students from John Jay College last fall boarded the A train at Columbus Circle, a few steps from their midtown campus, for the express ride to Harlem and the City College dormitory to eat, study and sleep in the new student residence hall.

Elsewhere, thousands of web-savvy students clicked their way to the CUNY portal for details on hundreds of courses and equivalencies from across the system. Many applied for course permits online and enrolled in classes at CUNY campuses away from their home colleges.



Lehman College Professor Robert Whittaker, left, speaks with Hostos Community College Professor Linda Hirsch, as they walk the halls of Lehman College, in the Bronx. They are co-directors of the Bridging the Colleges Seminar, a forum for Lehman, Hostos and Bronx Community College professors to share ideas on their academic programs.

And — perhaps most significant — faculty from every college are actively engaging in University-wide conversations to forge new partnerships, and redefine the concept of "general education" across the campuses for the new century. These are facets of the "integrated university." The phrase does not refer to CUNY's ethnic diversity; rather, the integrated university, as first expressed by Chancellor Matthew Goldstein in 2000, seeks to leverage CUNY's natural advantages as a unique system of closely situated colleges to create educational opportunities system-wide.

Clearly, technology is a driving force behind the integrated university. A major investment in online resources has connected the campuses in ways unimaginable 20 years

back, creating virtual steps up ladders of learning and research. Millions more dollars will be invested in the coming years to modernize registration, enrollment, course planning, purchasing, communications and a variety of academic functions.

Other innovations may be less obvious. The advent of 30-day, unlimited-ride MetroCards, introduced in 1997, gave students affordable transportation alternatives, and mobility increased. Between 2000 and 2005, "permit" students who attend class beyond their home campus jumped 35 percent. In the Fall of 2006 more than 2,600 permit requests were approved. These days the colleges are even closer than geography suggests.

For the faculty, the integrated university has its advantages. "It provides the opportunities the academic community needs to do distinguished work," Chancellor Goldstein said. And It "enables us to capitalize most effectively on the remarkable wealth of resources at the City University."

Many faculty members have taken up the call and are plunging into collaborative relationships beyond their traditional campus borders. Two recent examples: Baruch College has joined with all of the community colleges and New York City College of Technology to dovetail their business programs. And John Jay College is partnering with community colleges to start forensics and criminal justice programs while moving to expand its baccalaureate offerings. Faculty are also searching for common ground beyond the traditional notions of "articulation" agreements and the age-old issue of course equivalencies between community colleges and senior colleges. For the agreements to work smoothly, for students to use the University's

resources to the fullest — picking courses that fit their interests, schedules and budgets — there has to be wider agreement on fundamentals. That's one reason why campuses are re-examining the common ground spelled out in general education curricula.

The problems of achieving integration in the academic sense are grounded in the concept of general education, those common requirements for the liberal arts and sciences that all students must take, apart from their major. The State Board of Regents requires such courses to be "of a general or theoretical nature that are designed to develop judgment and understanding about human beings' relationship to the social, cultural, and natural facets of their total environment." They may not be "directed toward particular career or specific professional objectives."

Forced to sandwich classes between obligations to family and work, some CUNY students see general education as disconnected hurdles, rather than as a foundation, said Judith Summerfield, University Dean for Undergraduate Education. One reason is that "general education" has meant different things on different campuses. A key goal of Summerfield's is to "integrate" those different interpretations.



Soon after assuming her post in 2003, Summerfield convened a University-wide panel of faculty and administrators to consider the issue. Participants were far from being on the same page, Summerfield noted.

"An intense clash between two world views, of the community and senior colleges, surfaced almost immediately — and still persists — as we dig deeper into the differences between the two institutional structures, cultures, functions — and our expectations of students," she said. (The conflicts and common ground of CUNY's General Education project are examined in a forthcoming volume, entitled: "On Liberal Education: Claiming the Public University in the New Millennium," which Peter Lang is to publish this spring. Contributing writers include Summerfield and members of the panel.)

Community colleges stress vocational skills. Because students need to meet all requirements within a 60-credit associate degree, community colleges usually see general education as proficiencies that span curricula (like writing, math, reading, information literacy and oral communication).

Senior colleges, having more time, take a more traditional liberal arts approach and usually allow students to spread general education credits over four years. Mean-while, the comprehensive colleges — New York City College of Technology, the College of Staten Island (CSI), John Jay and Medgar Evers — need to do it all because they grant both associate and baccalaureate degrees.

When it comes to transferring, students who earn an AA or AS degree (but not an AAS, or Associate in Applied Science) usually are deemed to have met their general education requirements. However, senior colleges may also have other requirements, such as writing, math or foreign languages, which frequently are not considered part of general education. "So students get caught, unfortunately, with requirements that are 'extra gen ed,'" Summerfield said. "That is why all parts of a college degree need to be coordinated and made transparent to students — and to faculty."

That's also one reason why in the past year Brooklyn, City and Queens Colleges revamped their general education curricula for the first time in decades. Generally speaking, the changes modernize the coursework, increase coherence among the required areas of study and encourage professors to create interesting and relevant courses.

To help students cope with the changing University, CUNY has been investing in technology to make course and program selection easier. An online academic advisement system, along with a list of every University course, lets students see how to meet requirements at their own college or another. And now students can apply online to take a course at another school. [The Transfer Information and Program Planning (TIPPS) University Course Guide — <http://tipps.cuny.edu/evaluate/abtcourseguide.html> — lists a mind-boggling 36,000 course equivalencies.]

One of the bridge builders between the "liberal" and "applied" concepts is Robert Whittaker, Lehman College's General Education Coordinator and a Professor in the Department of Journalism, Communication and Theatre. Whittaker teaches Russian literature, life and history, and last year he began an ongoing seminar for a dozen professors each from Lehman and nearby Bronx and Hostos Community Colleges; all were teachers of general education courses.

"The students are adept at moving across the bridge [from community to senior college], but the faculty sitting at both ends of the bridge have never crossed it and often have little or no contact with the colleges on the receiving or the sending side," Whittaker said.

The professors asked, "What is it that happens at Bronx and Hostos that's useful for Lehman to know about? And conversely, what are the expectations at Lehman that are good for the Bronx and Hostos faculty to know about? This sounds very basic — like well, duh — but the thing that's most astounding is that these conversations have no institutional place."

Exploring faculty expectations about research papers, the professors found that "research at community colleges is more guided, the questions are posed more narrowly, and the sources are set out for them"; in contrast, Lehman expects "more free-ranging, individually defined research topics" that use multiple sources and the library, rather than just the Internet. Knowing that, Hostos and BCC professors can better prepare students for what lies ahead and the Lehman faculty will be more understanding when transfer students tackle their first assignment.

Lehman is far from alone in reaching out to community colleges. In perhaps the most extensive partnership, Baruch College spent three years coordinating its business program with those at all six community colleges and New York City College of Technology.

"Their students had not taken the courses that Baruch required, which lengthened the time and cost needed to graduate" with a respected Baruch bachelor's degree, said Michael Zavelle, Vice Chancellor for Academic Administration and Planning.

Now AA or AS students who follow the Pathways Agreement receive preference in admission to Baruch, begin as juniors and lose few, if any, credits.

John Jay College of Criminal Justice is pushing bridge-building even further. In May its College Council voted without opposition to phase out its associate-degree programs over the next four years; in November it voted to raise its baccalaureate standards to top-tier status.

But students seeking an associate-level entrée into criminal justice won't be left out — not by a long shot. President Jeremy Travis said, in a Dec. 11 speech to the Citizens Crime Commission, that by teaming up with community colleges, John Jay will foster "a major expansion of the city's educational offerings in criminal justice, forensic science and related fields."

John Jay is working with Queensborough and Manhattan Community Colleges on a joint degree program in forensic science, and it is partnering with LaGuardia and Bronx Community Colleges on a criminal justice program. Travis anticipates similar partnerships with Kingsborough and Hostos Community Colleges and with CSI, York and Medgar Evers Colleges.

"We expect to secure approval of these joint degree programs next year, advertise them to prospective students the following year and admit our first classes...in Fall 2009," he told the commission.

Borrowing from the concept of momentum, it might be said that CUNY is an object in motion and that, being so, other such leaps towards "integration" will continue, and perhaps even pick up speed, in the months and years to come.

http://www1.cuny.edu/academics/academic-programs/programs-of-note/asap/cm_february_2007.pdf