

getting it write

Brooklyn College freshman channels rocky past into play

BY ASHLEY SCHWARTZ

Eighteen-year-old David Zheng likes attention.

So it's no surprise that the Brooklyn College freshman plans to take over the stage when he joins the school's theater program next year.

"I'm a full-blown theater addict," he says. "I don't see myself in anything else besides theater, playwriting and acting."

Zheng has been seizing every opportunity he can since graduating from DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx.

As a member of SEEK, a program designed to give students equal educational opportunities, he receives the extra tutoring, counseling and financial help he needs to pursue his college degree and theater dreams.

Life on campus has given Zheng a clean break from the negative influences of his past. Before diving into writing and acting, Zheng got into trouble for another art — drawing.

During high school, his love of doodling sent him hanging with the wrong crowd. "I started doing graffiti in books," he says. "I found other kids that did graffiti in my school, so sophomore year we made a graffiti crew."

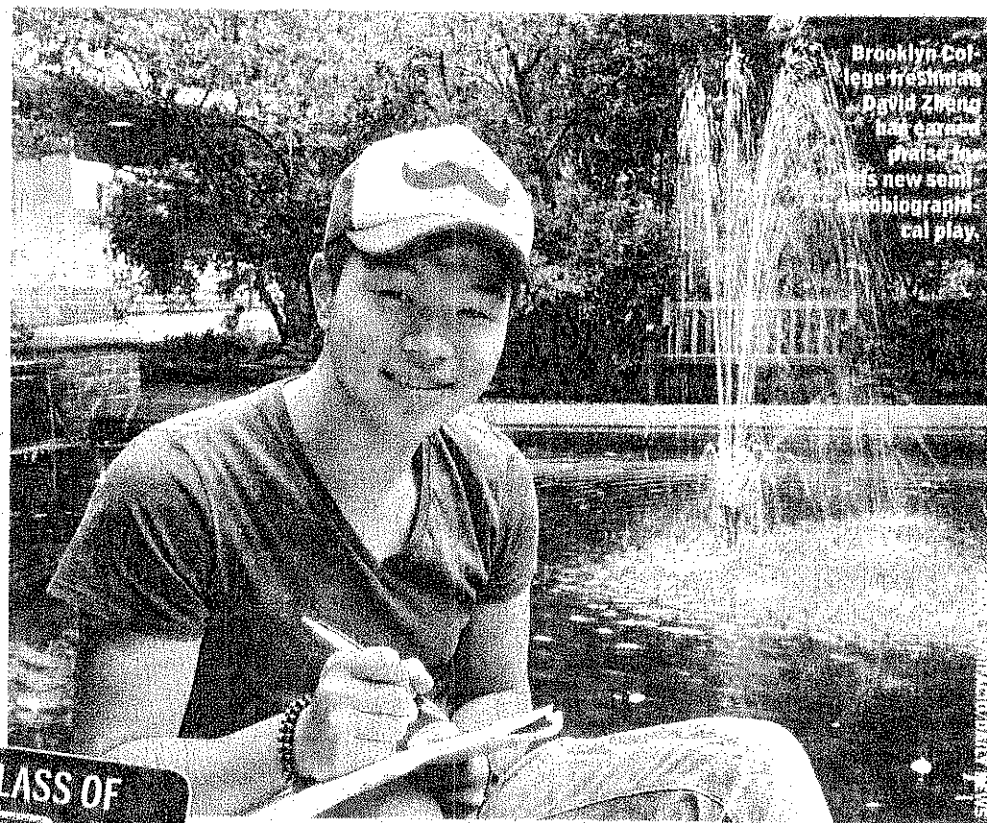
It wasn't long before he was arrested.

"I was 14 or 15 and in booking. I was there for about eight or nine hours handcuffed to a bar."

He received two months' probation, but still fell back into his old ways. When he was caught again, in violation of his probation, his sentence was increased to six months.

By junior year, Zheng was ready for a change, and a school adviser tried to find an arts program that suited his interests. After several attempts and no matches, Zheng turned to another art: acting.

He auditioned for the Manhattan Class Company's



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Theater Youth Company and landed a spot after per-

forming a monologue injected with his Bronx vernacular.

Over the summer, during MCC's FreshPlay Festival, Zheng also became interested in playwriting. In addition to producing a full play, he had to attend SEEK summer courses at Brooklyn College.

"I had to take a two-hour train ride every day, so I would spend my train ride writing new

scenes," he says.

By the end of the season, he wrapped up "I Pissed on Your Vegetables," a play loosely based on his life. MCC plans to stage the piece next spring.

The child of Chinese immigrants who run a restaurant in the Bronx, Zheng calls an argument with his dad one of his biggest eye-openers.

"He was telling me about how he got here to America, how my family worked so hard for me to be here. I was kind of moved," Zheng says. "I didn't actually think of that. I was being selfish, so I started taking in a lot of what he said."

The former class clown now spends his time focusing on his undergraduate studies and love of theater. The diversity of the campus paired with the school's mini-conservatory help keep the freshman stimulated.

"They have a great theater program here. That's why I chose this."

Zheng believes that his hard work will pay off.

"Five years from now," he says, "I see me and my friends having a good time at a bar discussing our life in theater. I see myself as an actor. In five years, I see myself grounded."