

SEEK/CD Mission

The SEEK/College Discovery Mission is to increase the level of education, social mobility, and vocational capability in NYC and NYS by providing access to higher education to students who are:

- *Educationally disadvantaged*
(as defined by CUNY)
- *Economically disadvantaged*
(as defined by NYS)

To provide comprehensive services in:

- *Academic support*
- *Counseling*
- *Financial Aid*

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Baruch's Urban Male
Leadership Academy**

City College of New York SEEK Counselor Awarded Fulbright

City College SEEK counselor Marie Nazon has been awarded a Fulbright Scholar Grant, which is enabling her to conduct research in Dakar on a project entitled, "Women Helping Women: Understanding the Role of Empowerment in Women Self-Help Groups in Senegal."

Dr. Marie Nazon, who received her Ph.D. from the City University Graduate Center in the spring of 2010, is one of approximately 1,100 U.S. faculty and professionals traveling abroad through the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program in 2010-2011.

"The goal of my study is to develop an understanding and awareness of women's experiences with empowerment in self-help groups in Senegal," Dr. Nazon said. "The purpose of the research is to explore what empowerment means to Senegalese women who participate in self-help groups and how empowerment is implemented with their participation. The study will also examine the way in which women in self-help groups associate empowerment with changes in women's social, economic, and psychological conditions after their involvement. The study is based on the assumption that women in self-help groups gain social transformation through enhanced agency."

Dr. Nazon was born in Haiti and immigrated to the United States when she was 10 years old. She entered the Peace Corps after graduating from Fordham University, and earned a master's degree in Social Work from Columbia University. The title of her doctoral research is, "A Quantitative Study on the Predictors of College Completion Among SEEK Immigrant Students."

Dr. Nazon said she is an avid proponent of study abroad and encourages her students to take advantage of travel opportunities. For this reason, she is staying connected with students in the City College SEEK program while she is in Senegal and sharing her experiences with them via a blog and Facebook.



Dr. Marie Nazon.

Dr. Nazon explained that as a former Peace Corps volunteer and international traveler, she believes cross-cultural understanding and exchange are important.

"As a proponent of study abroad programs, I have encouraged our SEEK students to take advantage of study abroad opportunities," she said. "Over the years the number of CCNY SEEK students in study abroad and service learning programs has been growing. My experience in Senegal will be an opportunity for SEEK students to connect and learn about Africa in a personal way. My sincere hope is that they will see how people on the other side of the world are more similar than different."

Meet the New Directors

This academic year the Office of Special Programs welcomed new SEEK and College Discovery (CD) directors at Bronx Community College, Brooklyn College, York College, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and LaGuardia Community College.



Cynthia Suarez-Espinal

Cynthia Suarez-Espinal

Bronx Community College

Cynthia Suarez-Espinal has been named interim director of the College Discovery program at Bronx Community College. She was previously the CD coordinator of Academic Support Services at Bronx Community College, a post she had held since 2007.

Mrs. Suarez-Espinal has worked in higher education in various capacities for over 10 years, and brings a wealth of creativity, imagination, and innovation to the profession, as an educator, manager, and leader.

A native of the Bronx, Mrs. Suarez-Espinal attended Saint Bonaventure University in upstate New York, where she received her bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Counseling Education.

As a Higher Education Opportunity Program alumna, Mrs. Suarez-Espinal followed her passion to help students and became a counselor and, shortly thereafter, associate director/adviser for the Higher Education Opportunity Program at Barnard College, where she served for eight years.

She is a founding member of the Gamma Rho Chapter of the Chi Alpha Epsilon National Honor Society at Bronx Community College.



Dear Readers:

In the quest for better schools, a major take-away from the controversial documentary *Waiting for Superman* is the importance of the classroom teacher. While this might seem a no-brainer in a national conversation that has focused largely on standardized test performance, the attention to pedagogy is a welcome insertion.

A parallel can be found in listening to discussions that examine factors that create success for opportunity program students. The relative effectiveness of pre-freshman "boot camps," required attendance in developmental courses, and freshman learning communities is widely debated. Academics instinctively look to academic innovations when assigning credit for positive student outcomes. In fact, since 1996, by Board mandate, the majority of the Special Programs budget must be used for academic support. However, despite the emphasis on academic support initiatives, when students are asked which program feature is most helpful, usually they credit an individual, typically a counselor, but sometimes a director, tutoring coordinator, or financial aid advisor.

In this edition of SOAR, I'm happy to share the profiles of a few of the SEEK and College Discovery professionals who help ease our students' transitions from high school to college and beyond. This year we have been joined by five new directors, each of whom brings fresh ideas, energy, and commitment. You'll also get a glimpse at the caliber of our counselors as you read about two of our superstars – one a recent hire who has already undertaken a promising pilot to assist black and Latino males, the other a Fulbright Fellow currently blogging from Senegal.

I hope you will enjoy meeting each of these outstanding individuals who, in the tradition of SEEK and CD professionals, we know will help our students soar.

Sincerely,

Cheryl N. Williams

University Associate Dean of Special Programs



Sharona Levy

Brooklyn College

Sharona Levy

Sharona Levy has been named director of the SEEK program at Brooklyn College, succeeding the late Martha J. Bell. Before joining Brooklyn College, Dr. Levy served at several CUNY institutions: Borough of Manhattan Community College, Baruch College, York College, and Kingsborough Community College.

She earned a Ph.D. in Language and Literature, English, and a master's degree in 19th Century English Literature, both from Oxford University, and a bachelor's degree in Linguistics and English from Brooklyn College.

Dr. Levy's research interests include teaching and learning with technology, and developing the language, literacy, critical thinking, world literature, and academic reading skills of nontraditional students.



Jeffrey M. Collins

LaGuardia Community College

Jeffrey M. Collins

Jeffrey M. Collins has been named director of the College Discovery program at LaGuardia Community College. He was previously the director of the Teacher Academy program at Queens College.

Before joining Queens College, Mr. Collins served as a member of the senior management team for the Division of Student Affairs at Hunter College. Also while at Hunter, he was director of the Sylvia E. Fishman Student Center and Peer Leadership Programs and an adjunct instructor in the SEEK Department.

He holds a bachelor's in Sociology and Psychology and a master's of education in Counseling and Human Services and Vocational Rehabilitation, both from the University of Idaho. He is currently pursuing a dual Ph.D. in Administration and Supervision and Organizational Communication from New York University.

Mr. Collins is an All-American in Track and Field NCAA Division I; he represented Trinidad and Tobago in the 1994 Bobsleigh Olympics. He is a veteran of the U.S. Army. As a resident of New York City, he is active in the Harlem community and serves as a coach for youth sports.



Thomas Jordan

York College

Thomas Jordan

Thomas Jordan has been named director of the SEEK program at York College. He previously served as director of Assessments & Affiliations at Hunter, where he was responsible for managing over 700 clinical affiliation agreements for the School of Nursing and the School of Health Sciences. He also provided assessment data for accreditation purposes.

Mr. Jordan has worked in higher education since 1994. He was the program director for the Quantum Opportunity Program (Q.O.P.) at Learning, Earning, and Parenting, academic advisor at Parsons The New School for Design, and Program (LEAP) administrator and advisor at New York University.

He received a bachelor's degree *cum laude* in Sociology from Hunter College, a master's degree in Higher Education Administration from New York University, and a master's degree in Philosophy from the Graduate Center, CUNY. He recently completed a doctorate in Sociology at the Graduate Center, CUNY.



Dara N. Byrne

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Dara N. Byrne

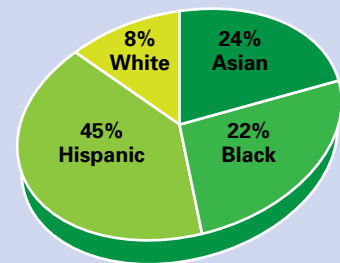
Dara N. Byrne was named interim director of the SEEK program at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She formerly served as an assistant professor in the Department of Communication and Theater Arts at John Jay.

Dr. Byrne holds a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Intercultural Communication from Howard University in Washington, D.C. She is a specialist in critical language studies, intercultural communication, and digital media.

Her publications include contributions to volumes such as: *Brown v. Board of Education: Its Impact on Public Education 1954-2004*; *HBCUs Models for Success: Supporting Achievement and Retention of Black Males*; *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*; *The Unfinished Agenda of Brown v. Board of Education*; and *The Unfinished Agenda of the Selma-Montgomery Voting Rights March*, among others. Dr. Byrne's current research project examines vigilante justice in online social-networking sites.

Did you know?

- SEEK enrollment is 8,192
- College Discovery enrollment is 2,434.
- 78% of College Discovery students have a GPA \geq 2.0.
- The latest SEEK/CD CPE* pass rate is 93%.
- SEEK/CD CPE pass rates were \geq *regular admits'* at 13 of 17 colleges.
- The City Council and NYS Assembly include members who are SEEK and CD alumni.
- Governor Cuomo's FY 2012 budget includes an increase for SEEK.
- SEEK/College Discovery Student Profile: Fall 2010 Race/Ethnicity



* CUNY Proficiency Exam

SEEK/College Discovery

535 East 80th St.
New York, NY 10075
Phone: 212-794-5713

**Office of Special Programs
The City University
of New York**

Cheryl N. Williams
University Associate Dean
of Special Programs

Dr. Shelley Ast
Director of the Office
of Special Programs

Frances Kingston
Program Assistant

Gail M. Donovan
Editor, Donovan Communications

Kevin Gatta
Designer, Gatta Design & Co., Inc.

**SEEK/College Discovery
on the Web**

View the SEEK 40th Anniversary
Video on You Tube at:
www.youtube.com

Keywords: "SEEK history"

New Counselor Heading Baruch's Urban Male Leadership Academy

Ask **Kristy Clementina Perez** her goals for the 20 young black and Latino men accepted to the Baruch SEEK program's new Urban Male Leadership Academy (UMLA), and she'll answer: helping them complete college and developing them into young leaders who will give back to their communities.

Ms. Perez, the program director for the UMLA, said the pilot program is designed to give black and Latino men in the SEEK program's freshman class the tools they need to succeed in college and after. The objective is to increase the enrollment of black and Latino young men into the SEEK program and Baruch College.

"All of them are excited to be here," said Ms. Perez, who also serves as a SEEK counselor. "They're sharing more; they refer to each other as brothers, and they even study together. Their confidence has developed and academically they all did pretty well the first semester."

A poet, writer, educator, and community organizer, Ms. Perez graduated from Rutgers University's Douglass Residential College. After graduation, she taught high school English for six years to black and Latino students in her hometown of Perth Amboy, NJ, where her grandfather finally settled after emigrating from the Dominican Republic in the 1960s.

"I chose to teach in my community because I wanted to co-create an inclusive environment with Latino and black students and reconnect them to the power of their individual and collective voices," Ms. Perez said. "While teaching I began to understand that there was just so much you could do in the classroom and decided to make the transition to social work."

Her journey led her to the Hunter School of Social Work, where she earned a master's degree in Community Organization, Planning & Development. Her graduate school performance was so impressive that she was named the school's Student of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers. Ms. Perez joined the SEEK program at Baruch as an intern before becoming a full-time member of the staff in the summer of 2010.

Ms. Perez said the Urban Male Leadership Academy addresses factors that cause young black and Latino men to drop out of college. Among them are balancing the competing pressures of work and school and struggling to catch up academically after attending low-performing high schools.



Kristy Clementina Perez.

Based on her experience in the classroom and as a social worker, Ms. Perez observed that often curriculums aren't culturally based or designed with young men of color in mind. She stated further that there isn't enough training and development for teachers about how to reach boys and young men. "Males and females learn differently, Males need more hands-on activities. What may appear to be misbehavior is actually boredom."

Because of a negative experience with authority, many young men of color view school as hostile and uninviting. "Peer pressure also plays a part. It's not cool for young boys to be smart," Ms. Perez said.

Ms. Perez has three peer mentors to assist her with students in the Urban Male Leadership Academy. During SEEK's six-week summer seminar at Baruch (which provided workshops and supplemental academic support to help students transition from high school to college) members of the Urban Male Leadership Academy met an extra day for special workshops, trainings, and cultural events. The workshop topics included: "Transitions: What Does It Mean to Be a Responsible Man of Color?" and "Understanding Institutionalized Racism and Oppression." Activities included banner making and writing and recording a song with well-known composer Jim Papoulis, entitled "In My Heart."

During the fall term, on Saturdays participants attended all-male rap sessions facilitated by Maurice Lacey, LMSW, M.S. Ed. and Andrew Lawton, LMSW, who discussed such topics as "Masculinity & Identity," "Character Building & Value Development," and "Social Action & Contribution." Other UMLA requirements include maintaining a minimum GPA of 3.0, pursuing two community service projects, attending the annual Black Male Initiative conference, taking a weekly two-credit leadership course and a three-credit black & Hispanic studies course, and visiting a high school to share their college experience.