When Lesley Davenport examines the knot-like structures in DNA at the ends of chromosomes, she sees a potential weapon against cancer. In the toxic venom of marine organisms, Mande Holford sees future disease-fighting drugs. And Myraam Sarachik, known for years of work in condensed matter physics, continues to break ground, studying molecular nano-magnets and two-dimensional electron systems.

Explore the pioneering work of Davenport, Holford, Sarachik and the many other women scientists striving for and making breakthrough discoveries in CUNY labs, and glimpse the future. These chemists, physicists, biologists and other scientists include the world-renowned and those just beginning their brilliant careers.

Nearly a half-century ago when Sarachik, of City College, was starting her, science overwhelmingly was the province of men and rife with old-school attitudes about women’s suitability and competence. To see CUNY’s glowing — and growing — roster of distinguished female researchers is to know how far we’ve come.

The inspiration they provide to the University, with its 60 percent female student body, is clear. In an effort to spread the word about these faculty members and their ongoing, important work in labs and with accomplished students year-round at all CUNY colleges, the University is spotlighting its women scientists on its web pages and on posters headlined “Breaking Boundaries in Science Research.”

“Distinguished women scientists are breaking boundaries at The City University of New York with pioneering research in fields that are critical to our nation’s future,” said Chancellor Matthew Goldstein. “Through CUNY’s ‘Decade of Science,’ they are teaching and working in theoretical chemical physics, examines time-dependent density functional theory (TDDFT), a method used to describe electronic dynamics in atomic, molecular and chemical systems and solids. TDDFT has been applied to expanded areas in condensed matter physics, quantum chemistry, and quantum biology.

To view a fuller list of CUNY’s Women in Science, visit the University’s Decade of Science web page at http://www.cuny.edu/ site/science.html and click the Women in Science link.
2010: Year of the Community College

More Students

President Obama has said that community colleges are an under-valued asset in our country. Not only is that not right, it’s not smart. He’s correct. If you want to get a leg on the future of our country — its workforce, its social and economic development, its capacity to compete globally — you have to understand what’s happening at our community colleges, the largest and fastest-growing sector of higher education. They enroll almost half of all community college students, they are the focal point of national and state economic recovery efforts; they provide affordable degree and training programs for the country’s skilled workforce.

CUNY’s six community colleges serve more than 88,000 degree-seeking students. Over the last decade, we have seen enrollment increase by an astounding 45 percent at our community colleges. CUNY is not alone. In 2008, the share of young people attending college in the United States hit an all-time high. And it’s an increase that took place entirely at community colleges. More and more students, especially in this economy, understand the incredible value that a community college education offers: quality plus accessibility.

Who goes to community colleges? At CUNY, three out of five students are women. Students can trace their ancestry to well over 150 countries. About 46 percent say that their native language is not English. And three-quarters come from families earning $40,000 or less.

They need, and deserve, the best education we can offer. We need their skills and talents. As the nation’s economy continues to become one requiring more sophisticated skills, advanced degrees are increasingly necessary. A new report indicates that jobs for those with associate degrees are expected to grow twice as fast as the national average.

The federal American Graduation Initiative, announced last summer, has a goal of graduating an additional five million Americans from two-year colleges by 2020 (although Congressional approval is far from assured). Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s Gateway to the Middle Class initiative pledges $50 million over the next four years to CUNY and the community colleges to increase the city’s skilled labor force. The goal is to graduate 120,000 New Yorkers by 2020.

These are promising and welcome initiatives. But it’s not enough to talk about access to college; it is attainment of a college degree that will most help students — and our country. Today, the national three-year graduation rate for urban public community colleges is about 16 percent. What’s more, poorer students and students of color are not only under-represented in higher education nationally, but are less likely to graduate with a degree.

Why don’t more students graduate? Financial pressures, family obligations, work schedules and even a lack of information are factors for many students. A significant reason is the disconnect between students’ skill levels and what is expected of them in college. This is why improving students’ preparedness for college is so important. And success in college doesn’t start the first day of your freshman year. It starts long before that. Almost 70 percent of CUNY enrollees come from New York City public schools. So it’s imperative that we work closely with the schools to ensure that students are prepared. CUNY has in place several collaborative programs with the Department of Education to encourage college readiness and participation. These include College Now, a dual-enrollment program that serves about 20,000 public high school students, as well as a middle-grades initiative and 11 early-college schools.

The ASAP initiative — which stands for the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs — was created with the support of Mayor Bloomberg, in partnership with the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity and the New York City Council to help community-college students graduate in a timely way and gain employment. It began with just over 1,000 students and is now under way at all six CUNY community colleges. Eligible ASAP students receive financial incentives such as tuition waivers and free monthly MetroCards and use of textbooks. They agree to attend full-time but take small classes in convenient scheduling blocks in order to better concentrate their time, develop a support network and complete their assignments. All receive comprehensive academic, advisement and career development services to help maintain their focus.

Our most recent data show that 46 percent of ASAP students are projected to graduate in just two-and-a-half years. Based on all predictions, we expect a three-year graduation rate of 60 percent for our ASAP students. What’s more, almost two-thirds of ASAP’s two-year graduates have enrolled in a CUNY four-year college in order to continue their studies. We celebrate that as significant progress.

In addition, newly expanded summer and winter sessions are seeing 15- to 20-percent increases as students seek to stay on track academically. Since 1999, senior college enrollment overall has risen 28 percent and community college enrollment is up 45 percent. Fall 2009’s record 259,507 shattered previous records of the late-1960s Open Admissions era.

Transfer students from private colleges are coming in highest numbers from St. John’s University, Touro College, New York University, Monroe College, Bard College, Pace University, New York Institute of Technology and ASA Institute. The transfer applications from students at community colleges are coming in highest numbers from Nassau Community College, Suffolk County Community College, Westchester Community College, Rockland Community College and Orange County Community College. Suburban applications are up, with the highest increases from suburban community colleges, followed closely by SUNY Stony Brook.

With so many students racing to CUNY,
Means New Challenges

Queensborough Chemistry Department chair Paris Svoronos, a member of the CUNY Pipeline Steering Committee, said, “A lot of community college students are immigrants, so their English is poor, but their science knowledge is excellent. So they can do all this work in chemistry, math and physics. “You don’t want to lose these students when they graduate, for instance, from Queensborough,” professor Svoronos said. “We lose a lot of students to Stony Brook, Binghamton, to Buffalo. There is no reason why they should go there; and not come to CUNY, get their bachelor’s at Hunter or Queens College or Staten Island, and then eventually continue with a master’s and Ph.D."

The University is also focusing on ways to better prepare future students. The number of first-time freshmen enrolling in CUNY schools from New York City public high schools rose sharply during the seven-year period from 2002 to 2009 — an increase of 9.4 percent in the community colleges, 36.4 percent in the senior colleges and 57.1 percent in total. Now, CUNY and the New York City Department of Education are engaged in an ongoing partnership to align the two public systems so that city public school students are not only better prepared for college but capable of succeeding once they get there.

The University’s College Now program already has some 20,000 city high school students taking college-level courses. But with the DOE graduating more high school students, the two education systems are sharing information about the city high schools’ curricula, student test scores and other data. The idea of this partnership, the College Readiness Program, is to make sure high school students get there. The University’s College Now program already has some 20,000 city high school students taking college-level courses. But with the DOE graduating more high school students, the two education systems are sharing information about the city high schools’ curricula, student test scores and other data. The idea of this partnership, the College Readiness Program, is to make sure high school students get there.

Continued on next page

The University is also focusing on ways to better prepare future students.

and all other trends pointing to a continuation of rising enrollments, the University is also turning its attention to the flip side of success: making sure that campus resources are not strained by the explosion of students and that academic quality is maintained.

Chancellor Goldstein welcomed the record enrollment, which he attributed largely to the burnishing of the University’s reputation among colleges and universities, as well as to “people coming to shore up their skills in a very, very difficult economy.” But in remarks to the Trustees on Feb. 23, he expressed concern that “we will be able to maintain the level of academic experience our students deserve to receive.” His administration, he said, was “monitoring our campus activities very closely,” working with the college presidents on enrollment and hiring decisions to make sure academic resources and student services are maintained.

“We want to make sure that we make this University available to students who want to learn, but we don’t want to dilute the experience,” Goldstein said. “It’s a delicate task. . . . but one that we will continue to take, obviously, very seriously.”

That balancing act is likely to continue as more students flock to CUNY’s doors, more surge through and more stay in the system. Interest in the community colleges, already stretching to their limits to accommodate their highest enrollments in history, is up dramatically. The number of students whose first choice is a community college soared 75 percent compared with the same point last year, according to the latest data.

Retention of motivated, high-achieving community college students is very much on the University’s agenda, and there have been moves to identify such students and offer more opportunities for them at CUNY. An example is the CUNY Pipeline program, which encourages and prepares research-oriented students for graduate school. The program’s conference in February included, for the first time, selected community college students who presented and discussed their own sophisticated research projects and attended a variety of workshops concerned with preparing and acclimating them to graduate school.

CUNY Pipeline Coordinator Brenda Henry-Offer noted that on a visit to Queensborough Community College last year, “I was surprised to see the level of [student] research. It was just astounding. . . . These students can go on to graduate programs and be anything they want.”

The University is also focusing on ways to better prepare future students.
Haiti Crumbles, CUNY Helps, Rebuilding To Come

WHEN THE OBAMA administration announced it would provide temporary protective status for 18 months to undocumented Haitians who were in the U.S. when the earthquake devastated the country, CUNY’s Citizenship Now! was ready to spring into action.

In fact, Citizenship Now! had anticipated Washington’s move just after the Jan. 12 quake, and had already begun to gear up to help Haitians apply for TPS, said Citizenship Now! director and Baruch professor Allan Wernick, who founded the project 13 years ago to provide free citizenship and immigration law services to CUNY students, staff and other New Yorkers. Just a week after the quake, a webinar was held to train hundreds of volunteers to help Haitians fill out the federal forms at three, full-day CUNY-sponsored assisted events in January and February.

Some 800 Haitians were helped at the three events — two in Brooklyn, one in Queens — co-sponsored by the Mayor’s office and overseen by Wernick. Of those people, 500 of varying ages and education levels, including undocumented immigrants and some on student visas, left with TPS applications completed with the aid of several hundred volunteers — attorneys, CUNY students, community residents and others, Wernick said. As of mid-March, 100 additional TPS applications were being processed at CUNY’s on-campus Immigration Law Centers, with more to come. A fourth, day-long assistance session is planned for June 26 in anticipation of the July 20 application deadline.

“It was very exciting,” said Wernick of the help sessions, which were also co-sponsored by local elected officials and the Legal Aid Society. “There was just such a high spirit of contribution and assistance and help and doing something for people,” Wernick said, noting that filing fees were waived for those unable to pay, and free photos provided. “People were helping, giving money, time and knowledge.”

I attended all three TPS Assistance events held at Medgar Evers College, York College, and a public school in Brooklyn,” said Jay Hershenson, senior vice chancellor for university relations and secretary of the Board of Trustees. “We met many hundreds of Haitian immigrants pursuing employment-related credentials and who were subsequently helped by the most dedicated of volunteers. They left knowing that CUNY is very much a university of the people — all of the people.

International students are eligible for TPS and should check with their college’s International Student Advisor for details. TPS can benefit F-1 students with work authorization and a reduction in their course load. Students are still required to enter the U.S. with valid documents including the F-1 visa. Each CUNY campus has various types of assistance for Haitian students and Haiti relief efforts, including financial, counseling, fundraising and visa and immigration support.

The University is uniquely qualified to help. Citizenship Now! — whose volunteers staff an annual weekend call-in, co-sponsored by the Daily News, to dispense immigration advice to New Yorkers — is perhaps the largest immigration aid organization in the city, Wernick noted. “There’s no institution in the city that has helped more Haitians,” he said.

reason it might mobilize quickly in response to the quake was its database of 1,500 volunteers, including Creole speakers. Those interested in volunteering to staff this year’s Citizenship Now! call-in, to be held April 26-30, can attend a training session April 8. Details are available at http://www1.cuny.edu/about/resources/citizenship-news-events/callannouncements.html.

With some 6,000 students of Haitian descent studying at CUNY, the earthquake — which killed an estimated 200,000 people and left more than 1 million homeless — struck close to home. New York City’s Haitian community is America’s largest.

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein quickly designated Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Peter Jerdonek to lead a University-wide effort to encourage contributions to assist the Haitian people through relief agencies designated by the city or state of New York.

In addition, clothing, medicine and other supplies — as well as financial contributions — were collected at CUNY campuses for survivors in Haiti. The University was also exploring an initiative to give students from Haiti a chance to continue their education at CUNY community colleges, with a focus on knowledge and skills that can help rebuild the country.

“Rebuilding is an enormous task,” Chancellor Goldstein said in announcing a task force of six community college presidents, led by Kingsborough President Regina Peruggi, to develop the initiative. “What I asked them to do,” Goldstein told the CUNY Board of Trustees, “was imagine a program that could be scaled up beyond CUNY, but that CUNY would take the lead. … to look at what the needs are today and in the immediate future to help rebuild this important country.”

The more recent 8.8 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Chile on Feb. 27, though stronger than the 7.0 Haiti quake, reportedly caused less destruction. CUNY and New York are home to fewer Chileans than Haitians but the Chancellor expressed solidarity “with all Chileans everywhere” and set up a process to coordinate assistance requests. A “Time of Reflection, Remembrance and Restoration” embracing both disasters was held at CUNY’s Central Office in March.

Port-au-Prince native Regine Latortue, a professor of comparative black literature and Haitian studies at Brooklyn College, has been advising the college’s Office of Student Affairs and Haitian-American Student Association in an effort to raise funds and other support for Haiti.

“It’s going to be very hard, but we’re strong and resilient people,” she said.

Mark Schuller, a York College assistant professor of African-American Studies and anthropology who co-directed and co-produced the 2009 documentary "Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy," returned to Haiti eight days after the quake, traveling with a medical team. In a recent lecture, he said he found the Haitian people traumatized but was “impressed, emboldened and inspired at how Haitians have managed to survive.”

To find out more about University relief efforts, go to http://www1.cuny.edu/mu/helphaiti/
A Textbook Example Of CUNY Helping Students

The $2 million CUNY textbook initiative has helped thousands of undergraduate students to access to expensive textbooks this school year, and the University’s print and electronic offerings will keep growing.

A year’s worth of textbooks typically costs $700 to $1,000 — about 22 percent of tuition at the University’s senior colleges and about 32 percent of tuition at its community colleges, according to University Librarian Curtis L. Kendrick. He notes that the price of books is particularly burdensome to CUNY students; 38 percent of whom come from families with household income of less than $20,000.

Students have praised the program: “If these books were not here, I would fail my class,” one student at Hostos Community College wrote, referring to books including a $191 anatomy text. “I cannot afford to buy the textbooks this year.”

John Jay senior Constanza Castillo wrote that the addition of 800 new textbooks last semester, including a $150 psychotherapy textbook that she was assigned, “was a great help to the students, not only because it saved them money but because there were more books available for loan … and they were the newest editions required by professors.”

“College textbooks have become unaffordable,” wrote Dennis Kim of Lehman College. “The recession has only exacerbated the difficulty of students’ access to their course textbooks and some even go without to their detriment.”

As part of CUNY’s $10 million Student Financial Aid Initiative prepared by Chancellor Matthew Goldstein and approved by the CUNY Board of Trustees, the University targeted $2 million for campuses to buy textbooks. Much of the coordination was initiated by the late Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance Ernesto Malave. The goal was to help offset the modest rise in tuition voted by the Legislature. In 2009, the almost 5,300 books that were purchased under this initiative had circulated 87,741 times.

The funds came with guidelines, encouraging college libraries to:

• Put titles on reserve or make them available as “reference materials.”
• Purchase multiple copies as warranted.
• Consider rental options.
• Consider e-textbooks.
• Work collaboratively to investigate systemwide licensing opportunities.

Kendrick said the books span the full range of disciplines and tend to be multiple copies of standard textbooks, copies of all readings required for general education classes and readings required for selected upper-division courses.

Looking to the future, Kendrick said that in addition to purchasing print textbooks, the University is exploring electronic book options. That could make tens of thousands of electronic books available to students and faculty on campus, as well as from their homes and office. He noted that the New York State Textbook Access Act, which took effect on July 1, 2009, requires colleges to adopt policies that encourage faculty members to place their book orders early enough to enable bookstores to obtain the requested materials in used or digital formats, if available. At the federal level, a provision of the Higher Education Opportunity Act taking effect on July 1, 2010, requires that colleges disclose online ISBN and retail price information, CUNY is moving toward compliance.

CUNY Nobel Challenge

More than 100 CUNY undergraduates wrote essays to explain the science behind one of this year’s Nobel Prizes in a way that the general public could understand. Vice Chancellor for Research Gillian Small launched what is expected to be an annual competition to expand scientific literacy. The first-place winners are: for chemistry, Hyonondo “Luke” Hwang, freshman at City College (biochemistry); for economics, Kimberly Thompson, sophomore at Borough of Manhattan Community College (science); for physics, Rakefet Ben-Ari, a junior at Hunter College (physics); for physiology or medicine, Angela Preda, a senior at Hunter College (biology). An outside panel chose Thompson as grand prize winner.

New President for Baruch

The CUNY Board of Trustees has appointed Mitchell B. Wallerstein as Baruch College’s new president for a term starting Aug. 2. He is dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. As deputy executive officer of the National Research Council, Wallerstein directed studies on science-technology and national security. From 1993-1997, he was deputy assistant secretary of defense for (nuclear) counter-proliferation policy and senior defense representative for trade security policy. He taught international studies at MIT, Holy Cross College, George Washington University, Georgetown University and Johns Hopkins University. Board of Trustees Chairperson Bennno Schmidt and Chancellor Matthew Goldstein said Wallerstein brings “exceptional administrative, academic and governmental experience together with outstanding public service, scholarly accomplishment, a strong commitment to students, and a deep belief in the mission of Baruch College.”
A Facebook for Faculty

By Ron Roel

OME CALL IT “a hive.” Others describe it as a “Facebook for Faculty.” Whatever metaphor you use, the University’s new Academic Commons website is offering faculty, administrators and graduate students a fresh and sometimes surprising approach to solving problems, collaborating on projects and advancing scholarship — centered on the latest social networking tools.

The Commons — a major initiative of the University’s Committee on Academic Technology — offers blogs, wikis, groups, forums and “twire” (think Facebook’s “Wall”) that are specifically designed to promote a free-flowing exchange of knowledge among colleagues across the University.

“It’s a very democratic, non-hierarchical environment,” says George Otto, who chairs the committee and is also University Director of Academic Technology. “It’s a gathering place for academics to get out of their ‘silos’ and talk to each other.”

The Commons (http://commons.gc.cuny.edu) is among a host of social media websites that have proliferated in recent years, led by mega-sites like Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter. But there are several aspects that distinguish the Commons from other sites, notes Matthew Gold, who serves as director of the Academic Commons and is assistant professor of English at New York City College of Technology.

“When you do work on the commons, you are doing work within the University community,” says Gold. “It provides an easy way to let people know what you’re doing and be connected in ways that you’re not in other places, like random blogs.” When members of the site list their academic interests on their profile, adds Gold, they can find other members who have similar interests — and reach out to them as “friends.”

This “serendipitous” quality to the site can lead to useful, albeit unexpected, connections, Gold and others say. Any member can form a networking group around a project, event or interest, so the Commons’ roughly 90 groups range widely: everything from the University Women’s Councils and ePortfolios, to digital media studies and Hispanic/Hispanic literature.

There are more than a dozen groups focusing on different components of the New Community College Initiative — even a group called CUNY Pie, for “CUNYites who love pizza” and want to join colleagues in pizza-of-month excursions around the city.

Unlike many networking websites, the Commons also is designed to be “organic,” says Gold, using an “open source platform that enables people to shape their needs. We’re trying to empower members of the site to create what they want to create.”

“We’ve tried to build a site so its uses were not predetermined,” adds Boone Gorges, an instructional technologist at Queens College and the lead technical expert for the Academic Commons. At the same time, this brand of social networking focuses on offering a “multifaceted approach to community-building” at CUNY, Gold says. There’s almost an interactive 3-D quality to the site, like a beehive that provides many ways of entering and connecting. The results, says Otto: “You get activity and honey.”

While the Academic Commons began as a twindle in the Committee on Academic Technology’s eye several years ago, it is part of a growing trend of academic collaboration. For example, the new Advanced Science Research Center, a high-end facility at the City College campus, has been designed to spur both formal and informal collaboration among researchers in multidisciplinary areas such as nanotechnology and neurosciences. And at the University’s supercomputing facilities at the College of Staten Island and several other campuses, teams of scientists are sharing two National Science Foundation grants to create new computer architectural designs such as fine-scale graphic models of the heart, aimed at solving complex research problems.

“Collaboration has taken off,” says Michael Kress, vice president for Technology Systems at the College of Staten Island. Scientists also use a technical wiki to share expertise about using the computers, says Kress, and occasionally get together for face-to-face sessions.

Teleporting With Student Avatars

O ver the last few years, millions of college undergraduates have signed up for Facebook and MySpace, the popular social media websites. But like many Web phenomena, large online networks often splinter into local groups that serve the needs of more specific communities.

At CUNY, for example, a group of students at City College recently launched a social-networking site called InYourClass.com. Founded by Arber Paaswell, currently has more than 300 members.

“The Academic Commons has spread to share documents and participate in research projects,” says Michael Kress, who sees social networking as a great tool for modeling 3-D environments, and a multifaceted approach to community-building.

In addition, Kress has seen nursing doctoral faculty use groups in the Academic Commons to share documents and participate in research projects. “I was impressed with the user-friendliness of it,” he says.

At other campuses, too, faculty are using online tools to pursue scholarship. Wabash College in Indiana, for instance, also has created a community known as the college’s Academic Commons, composed of faculty, librarians, technologists and administrators. The Commons (http://www.academiccommons.org) is a web-based resource as well as a public design to share knowledge and disseminate innovative digital tools that can improve, even transform, the teaching and learning of liberal arts education.

But at CUNY, the Commons is not simply focused on discussions of how technology can advance educational practices. The Academic Commons itself is experimenting with the use of tools of social media to spur teaching and learning that might not occur without it.

“What’s special about the Commons is...
that it has the potential for relationships to be used for scholarship," says Gorges, who is also a philosophy graduate student at Queens College. It allows for more casual, informal ways to find out about each other: "It's like unbuttoning your top button" at a social gathering.

Indeed, the CUNY Commons was recently cited by digital humanities scholar Dan Cohen at George Mason University as an example of a leading wave of academic social networking websites. In a presentation at the University of Mary Washington entitled the "Future of the Digital University," Cohen noted the signature elements of websites like the Commons: "openness, do-it-yourself culture, decentralization and collaboration." So far, the CUNY Academic Commons, which officially launched late last year, has about 700 members. (To become a member, faculty, administrators and graduate students need a CUNY.edu log-in. The site can't currently support undergraduate membership.) When you sign up, the first thing you do is create your own profile. Then you can find out what other members are from your campus and start connecting with others as "friends," similar to the way people connect on Facebook.

Gold acknowledges that some faculty have been hesitant to embrace social networking and "friend" their colleagues. With people making connections in multiple social-media sites, they say, what does "friendship" actually mean these days?

"Some people may not want to add 'friends,' but they want connections," Gold says. "Maybe friendship will start a connection that will lead to working on something together."

Other people have raised issues about "the privacy of conversations among members or groups. "We're open by default," Gold says, "but there are various levels of privacy." There are five levels of privacy for blogs and three levels of privacy for groups, including "hidden," which means they're not listed publicly anywhere on the site. The wikis, however, remain public.

Essentially, the Commons is intended to be a public space, Gold says. "It's very much in line with the goals of the University. We're conducting public education publicly."

Right now, the primary form of collaboration on the site is through its groups. For example, "New Community College Initiative" has a private group that is working on a model for the Center for College Effectiveness. "We're rethinking the way community college students are taught," says Toni Gifford, coadministrator of the group. "The Commons is a new way for people to build on each other's ideas. The chair [of an online meeting] poses a question; people post their comments; then you have a dialogue. It becomes a means of moving forward. You can't accomplish that with only real-time meetings."

In the CUNY-wide Composition and Rhetoric groups, faculty and graduate students engage in "reflective discussions" about how writing is taught and learned, says Benjamin Miller, co-administrator of the graduate student group. "It's been an area of study since the 1960s," Miller says, and while people have long been keeping track of scholarship in that field, the group has created an online annotated bibliography. "The list was being compiled before the Commons existed, but now we have a URL," he says. "This is something happening at the University and it can be used as a promotional and recruitment tool."

As social-media sites evolve, the Academic Commons also is expected to adapt to new applications and needs of CUNY users, Gold and others say. The University has been in the forefront of using "pretty young" open-source social-networking software, known as BuddyPress, Gold says. That has provided many opportunities to develop customized features for the Commons which, in turn, have been freely shared with the digital world outside the University. "We've become known as an active development hub for open-source software," Gold says.

The Academic Commons will never replace face-to-face relationships, but it is "an added tissue of connection," says Otte. Eventually, he sees the Commons being adapted for more "campus-specific" purposes. "The CUNY Academic Commons," he says, "may become the mother ship for campuses to create their own commons."
Documenting the Odyssey

Focusing on one ethnic group's U.S. climb from persecution to prominence, a film by two more-recent immigrants reveals struggles and paradoxes of newcomers everywhere.

Perhaps only an immigrant can give full voice to what other immigrants have experienced — even if the immigrant is from India by way of Ethiopia and her tale concerns Italians who came in waves to America after 1880.

Suma Kurien, who in 2001 founded LaGuardia Community College's Center for Immigration Education and Training, teamed up with her Italian-born husband, film director Gianfranco Norelli, to make an award-winning documentary, "Pane Amaro." (Bitter Bread).

It is believed to be the first comprehensive depiction on film of the early Italian-American experience. "Pane Amaro" premiered in 2007 in Italy, as anti-immigrant sentiment heated up there over an influx of often illegal newcomers, mainly from North Africa and Eastern Europe. An English-language DVD was released in spring 2009.

Kurien, the film's co-writer and co-producer, approached the project with a broad perspective drawn from years of working with the ethnically diverse Queens community. She founded the center at LaGuardia to provide comprehensive educational services for low-income residents of the city's economic and social life. Funded with city, state, federal and private funds, it now serves about 600 people a year.

Many immigrants have to overcome multiple barriers in order to become part of the society, she said. It's an attempt to make that process smoother for themselves and their families. I came as a more privileged immigrant, knowing English and the culture," she said. "I learned English from her parents, who taught in India and Ethiopia. After immigrating in 1978, she earned an Ed.D in curriculum and teaching at Columbia University Teacher's College and got her first job in the United States as an English as a second language instructor at LaGuardia.

Her husband suggested doing the film to highlight the parallels between the plight of 19th century Italian immigrants in the United States and the hostility with which Italy has greeted recent immigrants. "There is language in the newspapers that is disturbing," said Norelli. "There are people who say racist things that go unchallenged."

A noted producer of documentaries for American and European television networks who emigrated from Rome in 1979, Norelli made a proposal to RAI, Italy's national television network. The result was this 103-minute documentary. "We thought it was ironic," said Kurien, "that Italians who traveled to other parts of the world to make a living would find it hard to accept immigrants in their own midst." Italians — many fleeing extreme poverty — started coming to the U.S. in the 1880s in large numbers.

After the Civil War, Southern companies recruited Sicilians to replace formerly enslaved African-Americans on sugar and cotton plantations. In 1910, Books T. Washington, the famed African-American leader, humanist and former slave, traveled to the south of Italy to encounter child slavery in Sicily. He witnessed a people "so wretchedly poor in every way... else, they are nevertheless unusually rich in chil-dren..."

Healthy young males were especially valued by the Sicilian mining industry and routinely traded for cash. "From this slavery there is no hope of freedom," wrote Washington. "Neither the parents nor the child will ever have sufficient money to repay the original loan. Strange and terrible stories are told about the way in which these boy slaves have been treated by their masters... one sees processions of halff-naked boys, their bodies bowed under the heavy weight of the loads they carried, groaning and cursing as they made their way up out of the hot and sulphurous holes in the earth."  

Kurien and Norelli conducted four years of research in the United States and Italy. "We proposed [the film] to counter the stereotypes and the oversimplification that the Italians who came here had an easy life and that Americans welcomed them with open arms," said Norelli. They pieced together personal accounts by community members, commentary by scholars, and historical photographs and footage. It traces the history of Italians in the U.S. from 1880 to 1950, "from being outsiders and unwanted to becoming part of the American society with political and economic power," Kurien said.

The documentary also depicts events like the growth of the Italian Harlem, the largest Little Italy in North America, the settlement houses and the process of Americanization; the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City, in which dozens of Italian women were among the 146 workers who died; the role of Italian-American workers in the American labor movement; and internment of Italian-American civilians who were declared "enemy aliens" during World War II.

"We talk about political involvement, fighting for better working conditions, the anarchists and also terrorists," Kurien said. "The goal was a nuanced picture of the history, not simply a celebratory one."

The film also features the rise of Italian-American leaders, among them three-term Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia (1934-1945), of Italian and Jewish heritage, after whom the community college and the airport are named.

While RAI funded the Italian version of the documentary, Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Italian American Foundation contributed to make the English-language version for use in American schools. "People from other immigrant origins talk to us about how relevant it is to them," said Norelli. "Many professors want to incorporate it in their curriculum. Kurien and Norelli are screening the film at colleges in the U.S. and Canada, and for Italian-American organizations. The title "Pane Amaro" comes from a popular Neapolitan song of the early 1900s about the emi-gration of Italian women's pain at being separated from home and family. For Kurien and Norelli, the theme is a universal one. "The film is about the immigrant experi-ence in general, not just the Italian," Kurien said.
Three Notable Lives of Civil War Wives

By Gary Schmidgal

T HREE FASCINATING 19th century women with famous husbands are the focus of Carol Berkin’s new Civil War Wives: The Lives and Times of Angelina Grimké Weld, Varina Howell Davis & Julia Dent Grant (Knopf). And the best part of it is that the most tireless and over-documented Civil War wife — Mary Todd Lincoln — makes just one tiny (but nasty) appearance in Berkin’s pages: snubbing Julia, the wife of Ulysses S. Grant, on his triumphant entry into Washington after Appomattox.

Berkin has taught for more than a quarter-century at the Graduate Center and at Baruch College, where she is now Presidential Professor of History. Civil War Wives is an obvious pendant to two of her several prior books, First Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence (2009) and Founding Mothers: Women in the Legacy of Revolutionary America (2004). Berkin’s three novella-length biographies of these women — the wives, respectively, of Theodore Weld (a leading abolitionist orator), Jefferson Davis (first and last president of the Confederacy) and Grant (Union general and two-term president) — shed new light on the rousing history that unfolded around them. They are a decidedly unmatched set, as Berkin sums up in her preface: “Angelina’s bravery won my respect, Varina’s brilliance won my admiration, and Julia’s contentment won my envy.” Though they were all born into slave-holding families and ended up residing in the abolitionist Northeast (Julia is entertainment next to her husband on the Upper West Side), their personalities are rich in contrasts.

Easily the most courageous and iron-willed is Angelina (1820-1879), the 14th child in an upper-crust planter family in Charleston, Deeply repelled by the slave culture of South Carolina, she, along with her like-minded older sister Sarah, heard for envious of Quaker Philadelphia, where she soon became an ardent abolitionist. She met her future husband at a training session of the N.Y. Anti-Slavery Association. The marriage was decidedly one of like-minded activists. Weld wrote to Angelina, “We marry ... not merely or mainly ... to enjoy, but together to do and dare, together to toil and to testify” (They also had three children.)

By the mid-1830s Angelina was also getting in on the ground floor of the push for women’s rights, “a contest for the rights of woman as a moral, intelligent and responsible being,” she wrote. Amid the political jockeying when her two reform movements collided, Angelina became a left and articulate public speaker. In 1838 she and Sarah became the first women to address a U.S. law-making body when the Massachusetts Legislature invited them to speak about slavery.

Her pertinacious advocacy attracted barbs from enemies like her brother, Lewis (who called her “the Devilina”) and Miss Grimke “Miss Grimalkin.” The two sisters became ferocious researchers, reading thousands of newspaper accounts of slavery around the nation. The result was Theodore Weld’s Slavery as It Is, which appeared in 1839 and sold 100,000 copies. A decade later Harriet Beecher Stowe depended heavily on it as she wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin. After the war, both sisters pressed on indefatigably (Sarah lived with the Welds all these years). And all three became teachers in Massachusetts. Angelina taught the history of slavery, while raising funds for the emancipated. A few years after the sisters were buried (next to each other; they died six years apart), an 1885 book with this title honored them: The Grimké Sisters ... the First especially hard on her, as was the death at young ages of all four of her sons. “Nineteenth-century American family cemeteries were filled with tiny coffins,” Berkin notes. The collapse of her four-year stint as first lady in Richmond was particularly dreadful, she fleeing with four children southward in mud and miasma (shades of Marie Antoinette), then being put under house arrest in Georgia. Union soldiers amused themselves teaching her 3-year-old son the song “We’re Goin’ to the Apple Tree.” Her husband was declared an accomplice to Lincoln’s murder and after capture was imprisoned for two years at Ft. Monroe in Virginia. Months of relentless and articulate badgering of everyone up to President Johnson finally got him free. Then followed a dismal decade of nomadism in search of a job to support her husband and children.

After her death in 1889 Varina dusted herself off and spunkily turned a new leaf, infusing unconstructed southerner to moving by New York City, establishing a lively salon and becoming a journalist for Pulitzer. Berkin calls this “merry widow” period Varina’s “years of independence.” Her bluffed deathbed advice to her daughter was firmly in character: “Don’t wear black. It is bad for your health, and will depress your husband.”

Julia Dent Grant (1826-1906) enjoyed a much more comfortable, less driven life devoted to wisely support and motherhood (her four children all survived to adulthood). As Berkin sums up wryly, “She sat candelah in the maelstrom of history, a model of genteel domesticity — and a reminder of the rewards of the unexamined life.”

Julia’s youth was idyllic and cuddled, being the favorite daughter of a “Colonel” Dent who made his fortune as a merchant in St. Louis and retired early to an 800-acre plantation complete with slaves. It was named after his wife, Julia, “White Haven.” But marriage to Grant was quite a letdown: Ten years into it, in 1858, her husband was in his mid-30s, he had no prospects (having resigned from the army), and their fourth child had just arrived. Grant’s sudden return to the military and rise to command is well-known, but the story Berkin tells of his efforts to keep his wife near for support during the war is not.

Once enunciated as first lady, Julia thrived on being the hostess with the mostest and seeing that White House staff was impeccable (was she reliving the plantation life of her youth?). She liked the entertaining life so much that, after a grand 18-month round-the-world tour with Ulysses, she begged him to run for a third term. “Julia, I am amazed at you,” was his final pitch.

Julia’s 17-year widowhood was quieter than Varina’s, but Berkin does tell of their poignant happenstance meeting at a Hudson Valley grand hotel in 1885. Julia was very cordial. Pulitzer’s Sunday World headline hailed the report of their shaking hands as another sign of a healed nation: “Eternal Peace Now.”

B E R K I N ’ S C a t c h -2 2

As cities have gentrified, educated urbanites have come to prize what they regard as “authentic” urban life: a mix of old buildings and family-owned shops, small boutiques, galleries, upscale food markets, funky ethnic restaurants. But as Brooklyn College sociology professor Sharon Zukin shows in Talking Points: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places (Oxford University Press), the demand for authenticity has been fueled by the real estate and helped drive out the people who first lent a neighborhood its authentic aura: immigrants, the working class and artists.

Viva Mexican Muralism

The art of muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros emerged after the violence of the Mexican Revolution and was introduced to the United States in the 1920s and ’30s. In Their Work without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940 (University of Pittsburgh Press), Ana Indych-Lopez, associate professor of art at City College and the Graduate Center, analyzes the presentation of works by Los Tres Grandes in three influential exhibitions of the 1930s.

Endpapers

Final Acts: Death, Dying, and the Choices We Make (Rutgers University Press), edited by Nan Bauer-Maglin and Donna Perry, explores how we can make informed and caring end-of-life choices for ourselves and for those we love — and what can happen without such planning. As cities have gentrified, educated urbanites have come to prize what they regard as “authentic” urban life: a mix of old buildings and family-owned shops, small boutiques, galleries, upscale food markets, funky ethnic restaurants. But as Brooklyn College sociology professor Sharon Zukin shows in Talking Points: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places (Oxford University Press), the demand for authenticity has been fueled by the real estate and helped drive out the people who first lent a neighborhood its authentic aura: immigrants, the working class and artists.

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After surviving three tours and 19 months in Iraq and Afghanistan, combat-tested Marine Lance Cpl. Joseph Barrios returned home and almost died on the Brooklyn campus of Kingsborough Community College in May of 2009.

Feeling lightheaded, he fell down a flight of steps on his way to the Marine and Academics Building in the middle of the afternoon. “The next thing I knew, I was on the floor, and I was having trouble breathing. Everything was blurry,” said Barrios, who suffers from asthma.

No one was in sight, but there was an emergency button located low on the wall. He crawled and pressed it to summon help from the college’s public safety office.

“I was able to say I was having trouble breathing. Right after that I collapsed and stopped breathing,” he said. “The last thing I remember before I went unconscious was seeing two campus officers flying down the stairs to my rescue. They were assisting me with breathing, speaking with me, trying to keep me awake.”

Campus Peace Officers Elaine Lopez, 38, and Amna Ahmed, 23, both also emergency medical technicians, administered oxygen and Albuterol to keep his lungs open. They kept Barrios stable until the FDNY Emergency Medical Service arrived.

“They were extremely prepared, very ready, very calm and professional,” said Barrios, 23, a criminal justice major who intends to become an FBI agent. “What these officers did for me that day was nothing short of heroic. I owe them my life.”

Barrios returned home and to his country. She told Ahmed, “He just came short of heroic. I owe them my life.”

“Because such valiant actions often go unsung, the CUNY Department of Public Safety honored Ahmed, Lopez and 39 other officers in its University-wide force of 650 peace officers in a ceremony at the Graduate Center on January 29. Amid colleagues, family members and CUNY administrators, the men and women in blue uniforms received citations and medals for their life-saving rescues and other interventions. They had shown extraordinary bravery, saved life at personal risk, used exceptional good judgment and exceeded the job’s requirements during 2009.

Such recognition “gives them more pride in their job and creates better morale,” said William Barry, a retired FBI special agent who is director of CUNY’s Public Safety Department. “All the individuals presented awards have risen above the crowd. I felt it was time to go back to a recognition program for the entire University.” Previously, individual campus officers have honored their own heroes.

Barry described one “act of bravery and quick thinking” last July 3, when a fire erupted near midnight in a high-rise apartment building on Convent Avenue, opposite City College’s Baskerville Hall.

Before police and firefighters arrived, Campus Peace Officers Orlando Quinones, Desiree Joyner, Jacqueline Delarosa and Sgt. Celisha Copeland rushed into the building, started evacuating residents and cordoned off the surrounding streets.

“We split up to knock on doors,” said Sgt. Copeland. “We made sure people came out of their apartments. Some were very resistant, some were frantic, running back and forth. They slammed doors in our faces, but we still went on. We gave first aid to those with smoke inhalation. One young lady was having an asthma attack. We kept them in a spot off the street where they could cool down, and we spent more than an hour with them.”

Other officers at Bronx, Hostos and Borough of Manhattan Community Colleges, as well as Brooklyn College and New York City College of Technology, were recognized for averting suicides, reviving an unconscious professor, assisting a student who was having a seizure and helping police apprehend suspects in off-campus incidents in which college personnel were victims.

There were unit citations recognizing exceptional service to the campus and community by the volunteers, 10-member EMT unit at Brooklyn College, and for dedication, motivation and resourcefulness by the six EMTs at Baruch College. The six-member staff of the Public Safety Training Academy was cited for expanding the training curriculum from 165 to 380 hours.

In-service training and remuneration of college security assistant to campus peace officers to “rise to the top,” Barry said. For example, Cpl. John McWilliams, 34, of City Tech, an EMT honored for performing life-saving CPR on an elderly man who went into cardiac arrest, is among those who rose through the ranks. He moved up from college security assistant to campus peace officer, EMT, and his current status.

Barry said the University began the process of professionalizing its security force in the aftermath of a 1991 tragedy when an outside promoter overbooked a weekend concert at City College and nine concertgoers died in a stampede. Twenty years later, he affirmed last March, Nancy Oley, a psychology professor at Medgar Evers College, began to choke on a peanut butter sandwich in her office during a classroom break. “I was in a rush. I took a really big bite, and I realized very quickly that it was
Kingsborough student Joseph Barrios credits Peace Officers Ahmed, left, and Lopez with saving his life after he collapsed on these stairs from an asthma attack.

She ran to the security desk at the building’s entrance, hands crossed at her neck to signify choking. Campus Peace Officer Minnie Thigpen was on duty.

“She mouthed the word ‘peanut butter,’” Oley related. “I knew they had training to keep us safe every day.”

Thigpen, a former police officer assigned to the city’s Human Resources Administration, said, “I just thank God for using me as an instrument to save someone’s life.”

Like his colleagues, McWilliams is proud of being part of CUNY’s Public Safety system. “We do our jobs so well,” he remarked, although “a lot of people don’t know what we really do.”
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<td>Brooklyn College</td>
<td>The University</td>
<td>Lehman College</td>
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<td>Trio Con Brio Copenhagen</td>
<td>Book Talk with Fred Strubing</td>
<td>“Conceptualizing Immigration Cinema” lecture</td>
<td>Annual Wellness Festival</td>
<td>President’s Concert</td>
<td>Snakes Can’t Run: A Mystery</td>
<td>Quinn Lembly &quot;Gotta Get a Gimmick&quot; Burlesque to Broadway</td>
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<td>2:45 p.m.; $30; students, seniors $34</td>
<td>6-8 p.m. Free</td>
<td>12:30-1:30 p.m. Free</td>
<td>10 a.m.-4 p.m. Free</td>
<td>4:30 p.m. Free</td>
<td>6-8 p.m. Free</td>
<td>8 p.m. $25</td>
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<td>Dirty Sock Funtime Band</td>
<td>Klezmer Conservatory Band</td>
<td>Seclusions From the Permanent Art Collection</td>
<td>Communication is the Key to Success</td>
<td>Dance Spectacular/ Electroacoustic Music Fest.</td>
<td>3 Mo’ Divas</td>
<td>3 Me’ Divas</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-9 p.m.</td>
<td>3 p.m.</td>
<td>Until May 12</td>
<td>Until April 24</td>
<td>2-3 p.m.</td>
<td>9-10 p.m. $38 and $40; $2 discount for UC alumni</td>
<td>8-9 p.m.</td>
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<td>7 p.m. Free</td>
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<td>6-8 p.m. Free</td>
<td>8-9 p.m. $40-$55</td>
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<td>3-4 p.m.</td>
<td>7-9 p.m.</td>
<td>Until April 24</td>
<td>7:30-9 p.m. $14, $12 students, seniors, UC alumni, QCID</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
<td>6-8 p.m. Free</td>
<td>8-9 p.m. $40-$55</td>
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<td>Lehman College</td>
<td>University of the Arts</td>
<td>Hunter College</td>
<td>&quot;Erosomena: A Contemporary Dance&quot;</td>
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<td>The University</td>
<td>Lehman College</td>
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<td>4 p.m.</td>
<td>7-9 p.m.</td>
<td>Until April 24</td>
<td>7:30-9 p.m. $14, $12 students, seniors, UC alumni, QCID</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
<td>6-8 p.m. Free</td>
<td>8-9 p.m. $40-$55</td>
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