Looking Who’s Teaching at CUNY!

CUNY is training the key players in a global economy that demands increasing numbers of degree holders.

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein initiated a multiyear program to showcase Rhodes, Truman and Goldwater scholars and other outstanding student stars. Chancellor Matthew Goldstein has announced the next phase of The City University of New York’s outreach efforts—a comprehensive program to spotlight CUNY’s faculty.

The new campaign, “Look Who’s Teaching at CUNY!” features faculty who are winners of the most prestigious prizes in academia and the arts, the National Medal of Science, the American Physical Society, the Pulitzer Prize, the Academy Award, the National Arts Medal and the Bancroft Prize, among others.

They are among the more than 1,000 new faculty who have come to teach at CUNY in the last seven years. “When you start digging deep and looking at the faculties that we have across this University, you are absolutely stunned by the depth of talent,” said Chancellor Goldstein.

“We want to get that talent to be better known in the marketplace. This is going to be a multifaceted approach at multiple levels of teaching and scholarship at this University.”

The Chancellor noted that the faculty program is designed to build upon the success of outreach efforts. “We spend time rigorously, candidly, openly talking about our very successful students,” he said. “We talked about Truman Scholars and Goldwater Scholars and Rhodes Scholars and some of our students going on to the most coveted Ph.D. programs and the best medical schools and law schools and business schools and the great jobs that they are getting and we will continue to do that as more and more CUNY students win highly competitive awards. “Now, what we really want to do is to celebrate the extraordinary work of a very dedicated faculty,” he said.

Detailed information and sample television and newspaper announcements about CUNY’s outstanding faculty is available at www.cuny.edu/lookwhoisteaching.

“While CUNY is rich in scholar talent in many fields, the Chancellor noted, “of particular note are the scientific scientists, mathematicians, and engineering faculty that now are teaching at CUNY during what we have called The Decade of Science.”

Chairman of Kingsborough Community College is conducting research to develop a miniature electromagnetic radiation detector, Daniel Akins, Distinguished Service Professor of Physical Chemistry and Professor of Chemical Engineering at CCNY and the CUNY Graduate Center; leads the Center for Analysis of Structures and Interfaces; Hunter’s Jill Bargone, Professor of Biological Sciences, and Derrick Brazill, Associate Professor of Biology, both won the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers. Carmen Roldos, Distinguished Lecturer in Foreign Languages and Literatures at CCNY, was honored for the best novel in Mexico in 2005, for Reforma; Distinguished Professor of Music John Corigliano of Lehman College and the Graduate Center won the Pulitzer Prize for his Second Symphony, and an Academy Award for Best Score for The Red Violin; Roy deCarava, Distinguished Professor of Art at Hunter, and Gregory Rabassa, Distinguished Professor of Hispanic Languages and Literatures at Queens and the Graduate Center, were both honored in the 2007 National Medal of Arts; Distinguished Professor of Humanities Isaac Goldberg of Hostos Community College is Director of the Latin American Writers Institute and an internationally renowned Latino poet, playwright and fiction writer, Michael Wallace; Distinguished Professor of History at John Jay College and the Graduate Center, was co-winner of the Pulitzer Prize for History at John Jay College and the Graduate Center, was co-winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898, David Nissim, Distinguished Professor of History and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Chair in American History at the CUNY Graduate Center, is author of the acclaimed new biography, Andrew Carnegie, novelist Elizabeth Nunez, Distinguished Professor of English at Medgar Evers, won the American Book Award for Braided Hiloves; Jane O’Neill, the Wollman Distinguished Professor of Economics at Barnard’s Zicklin School of Business and the Graduate Center, is former Director of the Congressional Budget Office; David S. Reynolds, Distinguished Professor of English and American Studies at Barnard and the Graduate Center, won the Bancroft Prize for Mark Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography.

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein’s initiative to strengthen science education and research is in full swing, with professors carrying out projects that could save lives.
L

at month I traveled to Albany to tes-

ify on the State Education Budget at a

joint hearing of the New York State Assembly Ways and Means and Senate

Finance committees.

There I spoke about

many CUNY initiatives and

programs currently under

way, and emphasized how much we rely on the

State to fund our efforts in order to recruit additional full-time faculty and

provide the student services required to max-

imize their effectiveness.

Part of my testimony (available in its

entirety at www.cuny.edu/statefinmatters07) focused on our “Decade of Science” at

CUNY. It’s no secret that our country’s strength, security, and advancement depend

on scientific literacy. An acknowledged

strength, security, and advancement depend

on our “Decade of Science” at

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professor at City College and received his Ph.D. from Harvard University.

• Professor EB Worton, a researcher on

provincial A carnitine betaoxidation in

cerebral cortex, was elected a Fellow of the American Association for

the Advancement of Science in 2006. She is Professor of Biology at Lehman College.

• Professor Cathy Savage-Dunn, a

member of the Hispanic/Latino and Asian

guest scientist at Brookhaven National

Laboratory, is recognized for his work on non-

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New Yorkers are the Key Players, and CUNY is the Big Training Ground

Helen Marshall, Borough President of Queens and a 1972 graduate of City College, sponsored the program ASAP, which placed CUNY on Wheels, an Internet-equipped bus that will travel throughout the impoverished Rockaway Peninsula, encouraging residents to seek degrees at LaGuardia Community College and other CUNY institutions.

Changing Labor Force

The evolution of an increasingly educated labor force has profound implications for New York City. It’s an old story that manufacturing jobs are vanishing, having plummeted by 40 percent between 1990 and 2005, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Low visible are changes in white-collar jobs that require education—the nine percent shrinkage in the FIRE (finance, insurance and real estate) and the 17 percent surge in the ICT (information, culture, and educational fields).

Terrence Martell, director of the Baruch College’s Weissman Center for International Business, said the loss of FIRE jobs reflects consolidation among financial institutions and outsourcing of back-office operations. “Look across the Hudson,” he said. “There are 20 buildings filled to a large degree with financial services people who historically would have worked in Manhattan. As for ICT, Martell cites new jobs in areas like biomedicine, as well as routine expansion as New York has ‘become a more desirable place to work.’

Why Such Brain Power in NYC?

But why do college-educated people concentrate in certain cities? The answer is not obvious, but one of the most sensible comes from Thuston Domin, who received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Irvine. “In the early 1970s, when the CUNY Graduate Center last year, is now doing research at Princeton and next fall will teach at the University of California at Irvine.

When you put smart people together, they bounce ideas off one another. They get better at doing whatever they do,” Domin said. In short, smart people want to be with smart people and that breeds creativity. Educated people earn more than those around them do, too, he said, thanks to “a multiplier effect. High school graduates who live in places with a lot of college graduates earn more than those who live in areas without a lot of college graduates.” College grads spend more on services that employ those less well educated, and “the work that is available tends to be better educated,” and “the work that is available tends to be better educated,” and “the work that is available tends to be better educated.”

Future Generations

Graduate Center sociologists Paul Attewell and David Lavin have found that when college education is easily available, it is at CUNY, it pays off in the lives of underprivileged students—and their children. In April the Russell Sage Foundation is releasing their latest research, “Passing the Torch: Does Higher Education for the Disadvantaged Pay Off Across the Generations?” Two former doctoral students share authorship, Domino and Margaret Anzules. The first person on either side of her family to go to college, she attended community colleges in Connecticut and New Jersey. As her Ph.D. student, she served as president of community colleges in Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey and Iowa. She is now an assistant professor at York College. For thirty years Lavin followed the first three classes of CUNY’s “open admissions” freshmen, who started between 1970 and 1972. In the year 2000, the researchers interviewed 2,000 women drawn from those 100,000 students.

Although there was a lot of controversy about the terrible, low graduate rates of open admission students, who were not thought of as college material, in fact their graduation rates were as high as they were nationally—if you follow them for more than eight years, Lavin said. The women graduates were more likely to raise their children in stable two-parent households and to earn more, which are both factors in increasing their children’s educational success. Moreover, college graduation “changed the way they behaved as parents,” Lavin said. They tended to spend more time on literacy, reading to kids, taking them to cultural events in the city. They were better able to be advocates for their children, feeling comfortable going into school to deal with issues that may have come up. Their children did better in high school and had higher rates of college enrollment.

And that, he says, also helps explain why New York City is getting smarter.
Loving What You Do, and Making Money from It, Too

When Anthony Volodkin was in his early teens, he would often listen to music on college radio stations. Music moved him, in ways that felt good.

“They used to have cool stuff in the mornings, mostly metal, and interesting specialty shows, all kinds of genres in the evenings,” said Volodkin.

Most recently, after his family got a high-speed Internet connection, Volodkin began looking for his favorite pieces on the Web, so he could download them. And he soon began taking note of a new way of connecting to music, and to other music lovers.

He discovered music bloggers pop up across the Web, with sites like Music for Robots, Roblox and Stereogum. He was fascinated by them.

“These were people who aren’t making money,” said Volodkin, now 21 and a senior at Hunter College.

“They only wrote about these songs because they loved them.”

Through such blogs, Volodkin discovered jazz greats like Nina Simone, folk rockers like Arthur Lee, and an eclectic array of contemporary groups, including Metronomy, Kurt Loco, RBKD and Cat Power. This explosion was so intense, Volodkin said, that “I realized I had to share my experience with others.”

So in March 2005, he launched The Hype Machine, a Website (http://hypeom.com) that now aggregates more than 10,000 blogs, blots, personal-ized, Web-based pages on which creators share interests with others far and wide—attracting about 50,000 visits a day.

“I love it. I use it all the time,” said Fred Wilson, a partner of Union Square Ventures, a Manhattan-based venture capital firm.

“He’s one of the best music discovery sites I’ve seen,” said Wilson, one of several venture capitalists tracking Volodkin’s work. “I think what he’s done is fantastic.”

About 75 percent of the site’s traffic—more than 37 million page views a month—comes from the United States, the Lets Win a Queens–Town company that provides a wide range of computer systems consulting services.

“Anthony has done an amazing amount of stuff for me,” said Raj Goel, Brainlink’s chief technology officer. Volodkin has worked on “several large-scale projects, everything from network administration to disaster-recovery scenarios,” Goel said.

When Volodkin walks into a meeting with people “twice his age,” Goel added, he knows how to speak appropriately and intelligently. Within an hour, age is no longer a factor in his peer group.

A few months ago, Volodkin presented The Hype Machine at a “Mashup Camp” in Boston, attended by about 250 software developers, programmers, technology providers and venture capitalists.

“Mashups” are applications that combine software or content from several sources in creative and useful ways.

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The camp was designed as an “un-conference,” an informal program of discussions and events focusing on the topic at hand. Many students who attended a chance to briefly pitch their work to small groups of others, and competitors who pleased their audiences received a wooden nickel as a sign of approval, and the one with the most nickels won. That was The Hype Machine, chosen for “Best of Camp.”

About 75 percent of the site’s traffic—includes “lots of visitors” from universities, the rest from Western Europe, Volodkin says.

Though he has received copious praise, Volodkin acknowledges that not all of the early blog about his blog was laudatory. Some complained that the design of Volodkin’s site was marginalizing their work—making users to easily download songs from their sites without bothering to read what they had to say about the music. But others jumped in to defend—and applaud—Volodkin’s creation.

“I see it as a free hype, and I appreciate it,” wrote blogger nuclearbeef.com. Another said all music bloggers should be happy because “HM [The Hype Machine] is bringing them traffic to read (their) arti-cles.” The only person not happy, according to that blogger, is his wife, for “spending all this money on records.”

The Hype Machine has created a kind of online community in which music lovers shop, chat and buy. And it’s the kind of mall that expands without zoning approval from local authorities. So Volodkin knows there a good future in it. It’s difficult to monitor materials offered on the MPR blogs listed on his own site, he concedes. And whether record companies will eventually choose to make an issue of illegal downloading of tracks from such sites remains unclear.

“I hope people recognize it for what it is—a really great music discovery site…a great way for bands to be discovered,” said venture capitalist Wilson.

As for Volodkin, it’s about music more than money.

Recently, he spent a few hours in the cold, trying to get into sold-out performances by The Arcade Fire, the indie rock band, at Bowery Memorial (Church at Manhattan’s Greenwhich Village.

“I was successful, and the shows blew my mind,” he said.

For that last song on a Thursday night, the band “got off the stage with their gear and played right in the center of the crowd.”

Now that was worth a million bucks.

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Huntington student Anthony Volodkin, who’s become a blogging star of sorts with his Hype Machine, a compilation of blogs that also directs visitors to official music downloading sites.
Hostos Library: Top of the Shelf

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has selected the library at Hostos Community College to receive the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award. How impressive is that? Well, said Hostos’ librarian, Dr. Lucinda Zee, “In the library world, this high honor is the equivalent of winning an Oscar or the World Series.”

The organization snagged out Hostos for putting the “community” into community college, for its commitment to preserving unique collections about Eugenio Maria de Hostos, and for creating and preserving records about the founding of the college. Frances Maloy, chair of the 2007 Excellence in Academic Libraries Selection Committee and Division Leader of Access Services at Emory University, said, “The Hostos Library staff demonstrate[s] exemplary partnership and leadership with faculty in developing new curricular design and revitalization through the development of new courses designed to teach information literacy, critical thinking, computer literacy, and also by creating bilingual online learning environments.”

“The library staff has absorbed the meaning of the life of the person for whom the institution is named through their bilingual, multilevel, and curriculum integrated information literacy program. Their efforts to produce the bilingual student literary and art magazine, Escrito/Write!, and to create an inviting and bilingual student-focused environment in the library are also noteworthy,” Maloy said.

Each year ACRL presents these awards to outstanding libraries at a community college, a senior college, and a university; thereby honoring the accomplishments of librarians and library staffs as members of a team that supports the mission of their institution. The awards are sponsored by Bowker’s Book Services, consists of $3,000 and a plaque, to be presented at a ceremony on campus. The library will also receive special recognition at the ACRL President’s Program during the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in June.

Lehman Finds Asthma and Dirty Air Links in NYC

The Bronx has one of the highest hospitalization rates for asthma in the United States and contains many of New York City’s major air pollution sources, including truck routes, highways and seven facilities that use, store and emit toxic materials.

Dr. Juliana Maantay, lead investigator for Lehman College’s Geographic Information Sciences program, has led by Dr. Juliana Maantay, have used computer modeling and data analysis to show a definite link between asthma hospitalizations and air pollution in the Bronx.

Bronx children with asthma have hospitalization rates that are up to 50 percent higher than in the city as a whole and 700 percent higher than the rest of the state (excluding the city), the City Tech Department said. The asthma death rate in the Bronx (6 per 100,000) is double that of the city.

Based on analyses of asthma hospitalizations in the Bronx between 1995 and 1999, Lehman’s team found that people living in close proximity to a major pollution source were 25 percent more likely, overall, to be hospitalized for asthma than those living elsewhere. For those living near two or more major pollution sources, the increased risk of hospitalization jumped to 25 from 34 percent. The affected area varied with the source of the pollution and the likely distance the pollutants would travel.

“Regardless of whether the high asthma hospitalization rates are primarily due to environmental causes or also result from the effects of poverty and other socio-demographic factors,” Maantay said, “the findings point to a health and environment justice crisis.”

At Buzzer, York Snares Men’s Hoops Title, Upsetting College of Staten Island

York College senior guard Terron Simpson etched his name into the annals of CUNY Athletic Conference history as his long-three-pointer at the final buzzer gave the top-seeded Cardinals a dramatic 56-54 victory in the title game of the 2007 CUNY-AC/Con Edison Men’s Basketball Championship.

The Cardinals had taken a 49-48 lead with 2:56 to go after a free throw by senior forward Dennis Echols, but the Staten Island Dolphins tied it up, 49-49, when senior guard Mike Jones hit a free throw with 1:01 on the clock. York regained the advantage, 50-49, nine seconds later when senior forward Jeffrey Boe won a free throw. Then Staten Island freshman guard Kyle Vocum split the defense for a layup, free throw, and 52-30 advantage with 31 seconds remaining.

Boe nailed one free throw to cut York’s deficit to one point, 52-51, with 15 seconds left, but the Dolphins inched further ahead as sophomore center Sean Weimuller put down two free throws for a 54-51 lead a second later. Echols pulled the Cardinals to 54-53 with a foul shot off the glass but six seconds. Staten Island junior guard Robert Mosujaz missed two free throw opportunities, then came Simpson’s shining moment.

“We gave the game back to CSI at the 30-second mark,” said York bench boss Donald St. John, who in his 19th season was named CUNYAC Coach of the Year. “But like every battle with Tony Petosa’s Staten Island teams, it came down to the last second.”

This year York made its fifth NCAA Tournament appearance. Simpson earned CUNYAC Tournament MVP honors thanks to his game-winning shot. Echols led all players with 21 points and 11 rebounds to join Simpson on the CUNYAC All-Tournament Team, along with Weimuller, Mosujaz and two players from semifinalist teams, Phil Schatz and Taleek Norman of Baruch and City Colleges.

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Dr. Gwen Cohen-Brown, City Tech Assistant Professor of Dental Hygiene

City Tech Prof Says: Hygienists Save Lives

We might not think of dentists and dental hygienists as saving lives, but Dr. Gwen Cohen-Brown would beg to differ.

An assistant professor of dental hygiene at New York City College of Technology (City Tech), she is on a mission to educate her students and health providers about the need to conduct periodic evaluations and screenings for oral cancer and diseases.

“The mouth is the portal to the body and a reflection of general health,” she said.

“We as health providers need to be able to recognize things like a yeast infection that doesn’t go away or specific tumors and be able to bring up such subjects with our patients.”

Since joining the City Tech faculty in 2004, Dr. Cohen-Brown has been teaching the College’s dental hygiene students to handle tricky situations.

“We’ve had cases where we picked up on medical or dental problems that other places didn’t,” she explained.

She said students have uncovered situations that merited biopsies or high blood pressure medication, and oral and cancers and other tumors. Hygienists can’t make diagnoses, but they need to know how diagnoses are arrived at for their licencing, she added.

And since City Tech students routinely pass their licencing exams, their patients are getting the best care, she said.

According to the American Dental Association, only about seven percent of dentists offer the mouth and neck exams they should. Dr. Cohen-Brown says this must change.

City Tech has launched The Campaign to Stop Diabetes to confront a rising epidemic, CUNY’s enormous presence and positive impact in New York City is a big plus for us,” she said.

As part of CUNY’s campaign, student volunteers with special training will form a Diabetes Awareness Corps, which will reach out to other students and community members to help develop community-based patient support and self-management programs.

CUNY Tackling Diabetes Confronting a rising epidemic, CUNY launched “The Campaign to Stop Diabetes,” a disease that affects 500,000 New Yorkers, 300,000 more who don’t know they have it and another million who are at risk. Diabetes and the related problems of obesity can cause heart disease and blindness, and lead to amputation, particularly of feet and legs. As the largest urban public university in America, we hope to work against these factors, and treatment of diabetes—e-mail blasts to students, faculty and staff, a special Web site: www.cuny.edu/stopdiabetes, and an upcoming television program that will be webcast on the site, shown on CUNY TV75, and shared with all CUNY campuses.

CUNY Matters — Spring 2007 15
F or decades now, William Hallett Greene has existed as a distant figure in CUNY’s history, with that quality of distance pertaining not only to the passing of time, but also to the inaccessibility of the photo gracing his comely image in photos taken for his graduation more than a century ago.

They were eyes that suggested a certain tenacity, even as they conveyed a sadness that was perhaps appropriate for a man lost in the depths of time.

Greene received his bachelor of science degree along with other members of his graduating class on the evening of June 26, 1884, at the Academy of Music, not far from their beloved City College, then located at Lexington Avenue and 23rd Street.

An article in the following day’s New York Times noted the presence of Greene, remarking that he was “the first colored boy who has ever graduated from the college” and that he “made a good record” while a student.

“The audience applauded him liberally last night,” the Times wrote.

It was a day of triumph for Greene, as it was for other members of his class, who, like him, were men of great promise, schooled in a strict, classical way of study that left them with feelings of camaraderie and high ambitions.

Known affectionately as “Greeny,” Greene was popular and highly respected. He had been voted recording secretary of his class and he was a cabinet member of the literary society known as Phrenocosmia.

But many months of research—including searching of records in the National Archives, old city directories, ancestry websites, and old newspaper articles—have led to a conclusion that Greene was, at the moment of his graduation, like a flashing star approaching its apex.

By all accounts uncovered so far, Greene soon fell victim to the racism that was so prevalent in his day, even as he, perhaps, also fell to inner demons that often gripped young men, then, as now.

He certainly could be said to be a 19th-century foreshadowing of what today has been termed the Flight of the Black Male.

Breaking Barriers

Greene, slight of build, standing five-foot-seven and weighing only 132 pounds, according to a June 1884 issue of The College Mercury campus newspaper, had long wanted to be in the U.S. Signal Corps.

In The Mercury, he listed his favorite person as “Uncle Sam” and his favorite course of study as astronomy.

And so two months before his graduation, Greene, just 19 years old, applied to become the first black member of the U.S. Signal Corps, the highly competitive U.S. Army unit that tracked weather patterns and was the precursor to the National Weather Service.

The Signal Corps required that applicants pass written examinations, and in Webb, a former army general who had been a hero at the Battle of Gettysburg, responded right away.

He dashed off a letter to Secretary of War Robert Todd Lincoln (son of assassinated President Abraham Lincoln), writing: “This young man is the first colored student who has ever passed beyond the sophomore class of this college. He is the first colored graduate and is, by election, the secretary of his class, composed of some of the finest young men of this city.”

Webb said he believed Hazen was erred in his interpretation of the Army Reorganization Act.

Lincoln not only agreed but in harsh terms ordered Hazen to accept Greene or any other black person who met the qualifications for the position.

Thus Greene effectively wrote his name on a bit of military history. He went on to attend the Signal Corps training camp at Fort Myers in Virginia, where newcomers were instructed in the specialized skills of the Corps, which in those days had to do with telegraph communications and the tracking of cloud and wind patterns.

Greene must have felt well prepared for the tasks at hand, given his background at City College.

Sure enough, he received the second highest grade in his class of eight trainees (two of whom were dropped for poor performance), and he was soon sent to head up the Signal Corps station in Pensacola, Florida.

In his 1974 book Blacks and the Military in American History, (published by Praeger), historian Jack D. Foner wrote that Greene had the way for the acceptance of a handful of black enlisted men into other technical branches, such as the Hospital Corps, the Ordnance Corps, and the Quartermaster and Commissary departments.

But Greene’s story did not end with that happy achievement. Perhaps he might have sensed a hint of lingering ill feelings right on his enlistment papers, where it said, near the section “Scars and Marks found upon the person,” the notation “A colored man, Enlisted for the Signal Corps, U.S. Army by order of the Secretary of War.”

The papers were signed by both L.B. M. Purcell, a recruiting officer who had strongly disapproved of Greene’s enlistment.

Sure enough, soon after his posting in Pensacola, there came a series of demotions and transfers that ended two years later, in June of 1887, when he was dishonorably dismissed from the Signal Corps and the army.

His superior charged that Greene gambled, faked reports and was in debt.

A Target

But a close reading of scores of documents at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. suggests that a number of white Corporals had targeted Greene, and did so with impunity following a key transitional event in the nation.

In March of 1885, the Republican administration of Chester Arthur turned over the presidency to Democrat Grover Cleveland. Gone now were two men—President Arthur and ex-Secretary of War Lincoln—who were among the nation’s strongest supporters of civil rights for blacks. Not only had Lincoln proven himself a believer, like his father before him, in extending rights to people of color, but Chester Arthur had a record on that issue surpassing any president before him, perhaps excluding Lincoln.

It was Arthur who in 1854 represented a Manhattan black school teacher, Elizabeth Jennings, after she was forcibly ejected from a “whites only” omnibus (horse drawn public coach) near the current police headquarters building. The case, which Jennings and Arthur won, was considered by many to be the first one overturning “Jim Crow” transportation practices.

And so, a number of African Americans expected changes for the worse in March of 1885, as the Republican Party of Lincoln handed over the reins of government to the Democrats, who, in turn, continued on page 11

William H. Greene was the First Black CUNY Graduate and
Decade of Science

SO IMPORTANT IS SCIENCE and academic research to the society in which we live that we have declared 2005-2015 the “Decade of Science” at CUNY. We have affirmed our commitment to opening the pathways for serious advancement in the areas of science, mathematics, technology, and engineering—training students to teach in these areas, and encouraging young people, particularly women and people of color, to study these disciplines.

Our country’s strength, security, and advancement depend on scientific literacy. The decline in student participation and proficiency in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields imperils this country’s competitive advantage in science and technology. Our Decade of Science initiative could not come at a better time.

The Business Roundtable recently led a call to double the number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics graduates by 2015. The National Academies convened a panel of experts that recently made an urgent plea to increase this country’s scientific competitiveness.

The New York State Business Council has called for an increase in students receiving postsecondary education in science, math, and engineering, as well as the education of new, highly qualified teachers of math and science.

Governor Spitzer has emphasized the importance of investing in the high-tech, high-wage, strategic industries that will create the jobs and businesses of tomorrow in order to revitalize New York State’s economy. In focusing on the need for a concentration on math and science, Governor Spitzer has stressed that from grammar school to our universities, we must all do a better job at preparing our young people for the 21st Century economy and workforce.

Over the next decade, the University will invest in science in several ways. We will expend about $1 billion across the University on the construction and modernization of science facilities, most notably the CUNY-wide Advanced Science Research Center—which will concentrate on emerging disciplines such as nanotechnology, biosensing and remote sensing, structural biology and macromolecular assemblies, and neuroscience—and science facilities at Brooklyn, City, Hunter, Lehman, and Queens colleges.

We will revitalize our Ph.D. programs in the laboratory sciences, leading to new investments in graduate student support for highly competitive students. Ph.D. degree-granting authority for selected campuses, and an expansion of master’s programs.

We will encourage enrollment in CUNY’s math, science, and engineering degree programs, which over the last five years, has increased by 26 percent (compared to total enrollment growth of 12 percent) and included more than 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students in Fall 2005.

We will continue to run summer science programs and expand summer programs in mathematics through CUNY’s extensive College Now program, which prepares students in the public schools for college enrollment. As part of the College Now program, the University is also introducing a new “Science Now” program for middle and high school students. CUNY will work with the New York Academy of Sciences and New York City’s Department of Education to foster interest in the sciences through after-school and summer courses and workshops; an annual science competition that extends existing competition models to students who have not traditionally participated in such contests; and an interactive television program featuring science activities and innovations.

As this special section of CUNY Matters, “The Decade of Science” demonstrates, science is not made in a laboratory; it is made when a young person gets that initial spark of inspiration, that flash of exhilaration. Through the University’s Decade of Science, we hope to encourage and sustain that sense of excitement and curiosity, whether in budding scientists or seasoned researchers.

Tracking Mosquitoes
And Preventing Epidemics

EVEN AS the mosquito flies, it’s a long way from CUNY to Chittagong. Yet this Bangladeshi commercial and manufacturing center was the subject of malaria-mapping research at City College, supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Cooperative Remote Sensing Science and Technology Center Chittagong, which borders the infamous Chittagong, which borders the infamous...
fever—increasingly have become global public-health concerns. “We studied malaria, the most widely spread, which is coming back in a lot of poor countries,” Rahaman says. “But our technique may be used on the others.”

Roytman and Rahaman focused on the western third of Chittagong, where the population is most dense, because 60 to 80 percent of Bangladesh’s malaria cases occur there. “The people who live there are indigenous tribal peoples,” Rahaman says. “They are in rural areas, where they are most susceptible to mosquitoes, and they are not very educated.”

Through the federal agency, Roytman and Rahman had access to two decades’ worth of remote data measured by its earth orbiting satellite. The satellite reports information in grids of 4 kilometers by 4 kilometers, about the size of a Bangladesh village, and highlights areas of lush vegetation by detecting chlorophyll in leaves and reflecting their images. “We also had people on the ground reporting on the quality of vegetation so we could come up with a model,” Roytman says.

Since mosquitoes feed on vegetation, “In the areas where there is less vegetation, there are fewer mosquitoes and fewer cases of malaria. We also could measure the temperature from the reflection.”

Thanks to Rahman, they also had malaria statistics collected from the Directorate General of Health of the Bangladesh Ministry. “I’m an engineer, and I know the son of the director because we were in the same professional organization,” Rahman says. “It was he who helped us get this data. It would have been difficult if not impossible for us to do this study without the help of the government.”

This ground data, says Felix Kogan, a physical scientist at the U.S. agency, who is collaborating with Roytman and Rahman, was crucial to the study’s success. “The satellite data is remote—not direct—and has to be verified from the ground. With the data Rahman collected, we found correlations and developed a methodology. Without the ground data, we could not say anything about the malaria.”

Abdur Rahman Khan, chief of Bangladesh’s health department, calls the study “a valuable contribution,” adding that it “will be helpful in monitoring malaria epidemics” and in prevention and control.

Because Bangladesh experienced an increase in malaria cases in the 1990s, the researchers looked at the data and then targeted certain years in that time frame. “We chose the years 1997 and 1998 because they represented extremes,” Rahman says. “The smallest percentage of cases—18 percent—occurred in 1997 and the largest percentage—24 percent—occurred the year after.”

Roytman and Rahman correlated epidemiological and environmental data of Bangladesh malaria cases with the satel-
lute-based vegetation health indices—vegetation condition index, temperature condition index, and vegetation health index—to make reasonable forecasts.

“I wanted to do this research because I wanted to try to save people’s lives,” Rahman says, adding that the data can be used to help other countries with other problems. “In addition to malaria, we could predict floods and droughts and air pollution,” he says. Although Rahman says they have applied for grants to conduct a more extensive malaria study on Bangladesh and the World Bank has contacted the ocean and atmospheric agency to possibly do a similar study for the South American nation of Colónia.

The ultimate goal for Rahman, who is a research associate for the agency and an engineering consultant for a private U.S. company, is to set up a CUNY/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrative office in Bangladesh as a joint operation with the University of Dhaka.

“The center would be a great advantage for CUNY,” Royzman says. “Because the global economies are so interwoven, it is important for us as a university to give our students exposure and skills to deal with an international market. A center like this would be invaluable. It would be a win-win situation for us.”

Practical Applications Of Nanoparticles

C UNY MATTERS — Spring 2007

NANOPARTICLES

Dr. George John, professor of Chemistry at City College, seen here with a rotary evaporator, hopes to use hydroparticle like industrial waste as an alternate final stock for organic synthesis.

Virtual ‘Shepard’

Hunter College Associate Professor Ioannis Stamou, left, and City College Professor George Wolberg with their 3D Lens HiDS 2100 camera that scanned Shepard Hall (in background).

Walking, Virtually, Through Shepard Hall

LET’S SAY you’re going to a Yankees game. But you want to sit on the seat and the view it will provide before you buy the ticket. What do you do? If City College Professor George Wolberg and Hunter College Associate Professor Ioannis Stamou have anything to say about it, you will simply enter the Stadium’s website and click on the seat to obtain a virtual 360-degree 3-D view of where you’ll be rooting for the home team while eating your peanuts and Cracker Jacks.

Using multiview geometry, coupled with digital photos and data from laser range scanners, Wolberg, in a joint effort with Stamou, is working on an automatic system that will create photorealistic 3-D models of buildings like the Stadium.

“You can do this manually now, but it’s very labor intensive,” Wolberg says. “And even when it is done, you sacrifice details. Right now, this work would take a week; with this system, it would be a matter of minutes.”

As Wolberg and Stamou envision it, the automatic modeling system—which would be a boon to architects, urban and military planners, designers of 3-D-car-navigation systems, video-game makers and even Hollywood movie-makers—would be much more efficient than previous methods.

To illustrate the process, Wolberg and Stamou chose Shepard Hall, the 1907 neo-Gothic historic landmark that has become City College’s hallmark. They and their team spent a day taking 24 3-D laser range scans of its rich architecture, which includes pairs of iconic gargoyles, and then spent a few minutes shooting 24 2-D digital photos of the building.

“The laser scanner, which weighs about 80 pounds, is on a tripod,” Wolberg says. “With the current technology, it takes about 5 to 15 minutes to get each scan.”

The 2-D images or textures were automatically mapped and registered with the 3-D scans and projected onto a pair of models, a process Wolberg likens to drawing wallpaper. “We are in the age of 3-D models of the scene,” he says. The result is a Shepard Hall visible in all its glory, right down to the detailed marking of every stone and the eye of each looming gargoyle. His complete explanation of the complex process is available by going to Google video and typing, “City College Shepard Hall.”

“There will come a time when there will be 3-D digital cameras,” Wolberg says. “And laser range scanners will get even faster, and someday soon we will be able to get the dense 3-D images in the time it takes to walk around the building.”

Or the time it takes to select the best seat in Yankee Stadium.

prof. john’s recent research: synthesizing gold nanoparticles in a urea-based gel, made the cover of the may 24 edition of the royal society of chemistry journal chemcomm.

Chemists have long been interested in developing ways to create nanoscale solid or semi-solid gels from liquids so that they can be used as templates for drug delivery, cosmetics, separations and biometrics, but there have been few studies on functional use.

John and postdoctoral fellow Praveen Kumar Verma wanted to know how the gold nanoparticles would arrange themselves in the gel and how stable they would be.

“We wanted to answer these questions. Are they dis- tributed all over the gel? Or are they aligned in a particu- lar orientation along with the gel microstructures? This is especially interesting in building aligned arrays of gold nanoparticles for possible application in optical devices,” John says.

From June to December 2005, he synthesized various mono-substituted urea derivatives, and the study showed that the amphiphiles—so-called because they have both a hydrophilic and hydrophobic nature—were efficient gela- tors for water and various organic sol- vents and carry a free terminal amine group that may reduce the gold to form the nanoparticles.

As is often the case, the details of the scientific research that he carried out might cause a certain numbness in the eye and mind of a casual reader, but John says that there are very practical, and he would dare say, hoped-for results from this tinkering with amphiphiles and creating of nanoparticles.

“The most important thing,” John says, “is that after the nanoparticles are reduced, they retain their gelatin proper- ties and trap the gold nanoparticles in the supramolecular assemblies. These gels should help us develop nanostruc- tured-advanced materials from the gels and metal nanoparticles, which may be used in the promising field of supramolecular devices.”

Ultimately, John hopes to use hydroparticle like industrial waste as an alternate final stock for organic synthesis.

“My basic interest is the design and synthesis of amphiphilic molecules from bio-based materials,” he says. “That way, we can make the amphiphilic and assemble them so we can make what we need in a bottom-up fashion.”

But this, he says, “is still only a dream.”

/ S P E C I A L  S E C T I O N /
Global Warming: A City Under Water?

LONG BEFORE Al Gore’s “Inconvenient Truth” made global warming such a hot topic, CUNY researchers were taking the temperature of the New York metro area to try to forecast the phenomenon’s effect on the climate.

Hunter College Professor Bill Solecki, interim director of the CUNY Institute for Sustainable Cities, is using the city as a lab for his research, and Queens College Assistant Prof Stephen Pekar is studying historical salinity changes in the Hudson River due to melted ice sheets from precipitation to throw light on the dynamics of Antarctica ice sheets. According to Solecki, the city is a perfect lab for understanding how urban environments can respond to and mitigate climate change. “CUNY, as an urban university, is doing some important work, and its role will grow.” There are few examples of large, extended metro areas, and New York is one.

Global warming, both researchers say, ultimately may be linked to a variety of changes, including stronger storms, flooding, intense heat waves, increased air pollution and even an influx of asthma attacks.

“There have been significant changes in climate throughout history,” says Solecki. “But the rate of change in terms of the water in New York City that same day, and the extent of the current change over a short period of time are unparalleled in earth history.”

In and of themselves the changes that occur during global warming may not seem catastrophic, Pekar says, but their effects can be wide ranging. “Sea surface temperatures increase, and the magic number for hurricanes is 80 degrees. By August 7, 2006, for example, there had been three Category 5 hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, and the temperature in the water in New York City that same day was high—78 degrees.”

Likewise, in the next century, the global sea level is likely to rise three feet. “This means the shoreline will retreat significantly.” Pekar says. “And it means the coastal communities will be more susceptible to flooding.”

According to Pekar’s local research, which looks at climate data in New York City for the last 6,000 years, warmer may also mean drier. “My studies suggest that the last time it was warmer, which was 5,000 years ago, the salinity was much higher than today, which means that there was less discharge and less precipitation.”

Pekar’s research on the Antarctica ice sheets offers further suggestions regarding New York City’s future. “The ice sheets are much more susceptible to climate change than we thought,” he says. “If the vast and wetter ice sheets melt, sea level will rise 210 feet, and if the ice sheets in Greenland melt, it will raise sea level 230 ft. At 210 feet, you would have beachfront property in Pennsylvania and every coastal city in the world would be under water. And at 230 feet, the Statue of Liberty would be under water almost up to her shoulder. Even 40 feet destroys every coastal city, and Queens and Brooklyn would be under water and Manhattan would be tiny islands.”

The changes that global warming will bring should be viewed as challenges and opportunities, Solecki says, adding that there will be tradeoffs. “There will be less ice to shovel off the sidewalks,” he says. “The energy demand in the winter will decrease, but it will be offset by the increase in electricity demand in the summer. The use of more food fuels will send up more pollutants and will increase summer asthma attacks. Some parts of the world, like Canada, will benefit agriculturally because of longer growing seasons.”

The bottom line, Pekar and Solecki say, is that global warming is a part of the future. “We will be forced to reevaluate societal structure,” Solecki says. “We need to adapt to these new realities, and what we do will make society more resilient.”

Hurricanes, The Bernoulli Effect, and Other Killers

WHILE KATRINA has focused the eyes of forecasters on the future, Queens College Geology Professor Nicholas K. Coch has put himself in the eye of the hurricane by peering into the past.

The self-described forensic hurricaneologist is studying historic hurricanes, and he says that if history repeats itself, New York City, which was hit in 1821, 1893 and 1938, will really find itself struggling when the next one hits. “No major hurricane has hit a major coastal city except for New York in 1938,” he says. “When a hurricane hits a city, it’s a whole other ballgame because the suburban infrastructure, including the subway system, will be affected.”

Northern hurricanes are “uniquely dangerous,” he says, “because they are infrequent and more two times as fast as in Southerners and the wind field enlarges.”

He points to the hurricane of 1893, which made a direct hit on New York City. “This was the first record of a hurricane’s hitting skyscrapers,” he says. “When the wind goes between two skyscrapers, it will suck the windows out, and when it gets to the end of the corridor they form, the Bernoulli Effect occurs, and the window speed and the windows will be knocked inward.”

The city’s unique geographical position makes it particular- ly vulnerable to damage. “There are only three coasts that have right angles in the United States,” Coch says. “The Florida Panhandle, Mississippi, and the area of New York and New Jersey. A right angle is a killer situation for a hurricane, and the right angle formed by New York and New Jersey is the most dangerous in the country.”

No matter where the hurricane hits, New York City gets flooded because we’re the right angle.”

By studying hurricanes of the past, Coch says, it’s possible to predict the course of future storms. “Coch, for instance, recently was able to chart a deadly colonial hurricane of 1635, supplying extensive data so a computer model could be made. “None of this is hypothesis; all of this is record,” he says, adding that he hopes his research saves lives.
Nov. 14, 1885, there came a special order very unhappy with Greene's being placed under a white corpsman who, like Greene, was a First Class Private. Following that order, Greene was transferred to a new Signal Corps inspector, a man named Beall, who was Greene's immediate supervisor, and placing Greene in charge, and placing him under a white corpsman who, like Greene, was a First Class Private. A newspaper article from those days noted that whites in Pincawka had been very unhappy with Greene's being placed there. Soon after the October demotion, on Nov. 14, 1885, there came a special order telling Greene to proceed to Rochester, New York, to report for duty as an assistant to Sgt. Edward W. McGann, who was in charge of that station.

A Strange Accusation

Greene's most difficult period would come in the ensuing months, through 1886 and 1887, as he worked there in Rochester. One claim against Greene seems especially unlikely, given that he had excelled in the militaristic environment of City College decades earlier. In successfully recommending Greene's enlistment in the first place, Hazen feared that any recommendation which he makes in this case cannot be considered as emanating from an officer prejudiced against the color race. Greene's race may have been a factor.

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White House, Gracie Mansion Chefs Praise City Tech Program

In its six-decade history, the hospitality management department of New York City College of Technology has earned a reputation for producing chefs for some of the world’s greatest restaurants, but 2007 will go down in the review books as a five-star year.

That’s because a pair of chefs with City Tech credentials—one an alumna, one still a student—are working in two of the most famous kitchens in the country—at the White House and at Gracie Mansion.

Bill Yosses, who graduated in 1982 with an associate’s degree, got the secret job in January when First Lady Laura Bush asked him to step in as the presidential pastry chef. The news hit the national wires, serving up scoops of culinary-culled headlines like “Pastry Chef Joining the Upper Crust.”

That same month Feliberto Estevez— who has four more classes to complete before earning his associate’s degree—also found himself in the spotlight. Mayor Michael Bloomberg appeared at City Tech for his annual State of the City Address, and His Honor never allows it to be known that City Tech is close to his heart; that, as is to say, his stomach.

Bloomberg told the gathering that student Estevez was top chef at Gracie Mansion, and he furthermore remarked that City Tech “has one of the finest hospitality management programs in the nation.”

The Mayor said, “One of City Tech’s current students happens to be the most important man at Gracie Mansion, the executive chef, Feliberto Estevez.” Then Bloomberg quipped, “I think I get to eat his final exam, so I hope he does well.”

Estevez has been cooking for mayoral events ever since Bloomberg was elected in 2002.

The recipe for the successes of Yosses and Estevez? Each gives copious credit to an essential ingredient: City Tech.

Changing Careers, Sweetly

For Yosses, City Tech offered a chance to change careers in mid-life and, along the way, land a dream job. He came to love the place.

“Four years later, I was working for Manhattan’s most famous kitchens at some of the world’s most famous restaurants, and now I’m happy to stay as long as they want me.”

He left the White House and at Gracie Mansion.

“Pastry Chef Joining the Upper Crust.”

While visiting City Tech recently, Mayor Michael Bloomberg proudly let it be known that his top chef at Gracie Mansion, Feliberto Estevez, was a City Tech student.

Citarella, Bouley and Tavern on the Green.

And then earlier this year—in mid-life—he reached a career pinnacle of sorts, as he was appointed chef at the White House.

Yosses says the presidential palate runs toward healthy fruit and fruit-based desserts, although “the Bushes both love chocolate. Mrs. Bush loves food and loves talking about menus. She has lots of ideas and is always looking for things that are original, healthy and tasty. What Yosses especially enjoys about his work is the act of creating. I enjoy making pastries because it is precise and it has an architectural aspect,” he said.

To the (Gracie) Mansion Born

Estevez, who is from the Dominican Republic, got his first culinary crash courses in his early teens as he helped his mother make family meals. “She was a schoolteacher,” he said, “and she came home every day during the siesta period, from noon to 2, to put the finishing touches on the beans and rice, and I would chop things and add garlic and spices to the dishes,” he recalled fondly.

He eventually immigrated to the United States, settling in New York. Along the way he began working at jobs that very much suited his tastes. Estevez was promoted from cook to banquet chef at the Four Seasons in only eight years, and was the executive chef for Manhattan’s Chou Lou before he went to Gracie

Mansions.

But school always seemed forbidding to him. “I never was a good student,” said the 42-year-old Estevez. Eventually, he concluded that if he wanted to continue climbing the culinary ladder, a degree would give him a helpful boost. Besides, he’s recently harbored thoughts of teaching the culinary arts someday.

So he enrolled at City Tech, where his long-held fears were put to rest, and his dreams were encouraged.

The courses there, Estevez says, are a combination of practical training and liberated instruction, a blend that he finds pleasing. “I’m taking math, English and accounting along with the food and wine classes,” he said.

The City Tech classes have helped him deal more efficiently with his current duties, which include planning, purchasing and preparing, Estevez says. At Gracie Mansion, where the mayor often hosts ethnic-themed events, Estevez and his staff of four cooks are called upon to create a variety of melting-pot dishes that celebrate the diversity of the Big Apple’s culinary culture.

“It’s a unique opportunity to work with so many different cuisines,” he said, adding that “we reach out to community chefs, and they help us. Every week is different. We do Irish breakfasts, Italian foods, and during the summertime, we have barbecues. Every week is different.”

Now Hoping to Teach

Yosses and Estevez are looking forward to many more dinners in their respective, famous kitchens. “This is something I have wanted all my life,” Yosses said.

“I’ve reached my goal, and I’m happy to stay as long as they want me.”

Estevez can’t wait to get his degree, which is his hope to earn in a year.

“I wish I could take a full load of classes in each semester, but it’s not possible. I’m too busy in the kitchen,” he said. “One day, I would love to teach cooking, and for that you need credibility. That’s why I want to finish the degree. I want to be prepared for the future.”
Back to the Future: Milton Regained
By Gary Schmidgall

A Joseph Wittreich, distinguished professor of English at the Graduate Center and Hunter College, approaches the fresh woods and pastures of retirement, he has chosen to answer a simple but large question about the most complex, radical, and political (also politicized) figure in the English literary pantheon: John Milton.

Consisting of just three long, densely end-noted chapters, Why Milton Matters: A New Preface to His Writings (Palgrave) has a passionate, valedictory this “book” quality, capping a long career dedicated to the poet. If one begins the book dubious of Wittreich’s view that “most of us agree” Milton (1608-1674) really matters in 2007, by the end one is certainly convinced he should.

Wittreich also mounts a vigorous case for the surprising assertion that Milton is “an ‘emotionally American’ poet.” His quoted phrase is from the pioneer 19th-century feminist Margaret Fuller, and her praise of Milton is key to Wittreich’s own view of the poet: “He understood the nature of liberty; justice,” she wrote. “He is one of the Fathers of the Age, of that new idea which agitates the sleep of Europe.” (a reference to the libertarian revolutions of 1848).

Arguing that “it is high time to say that Milton is back in season,” Wittreich notes that Heil’s Angels have ridden their heat with text from Paradisus Lost in their pockets, that Malcolm X was ushered into his discovery of the Muslim religion by reading the epic poem while in prison, and that novels like Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man and Tom Morrison’s Paradise Regained are a potent Miltonic context.

And there was the sudden celebrity after 9/11 of Milton’s valiantary poem, Samson Agonistes. Samson Agonistes: Wittreich notes there were in 2003-4 no fewer than six New York City public readings of the 1,800-line “dramatic poem” based on the Bible’s Book of Judges. Why? Wittreich suggests the root reason is that Samson perfectly epitomizes Milton’s supreme gift as a poet and polemicist: the ability to tempt readers into mutually contradictory interpretations of the characters he creates, most famously his Adam, Eve, Satan, and Samson.

For a world now chaotic in Gaza (and the whole fractured Middle East), Milton’s Samson, “cyclus in Gaza,” presents two huge either-or questions. Does his destruction of the Philistine temple represent the noble “victory of logic and self-repression—the Divine overcoming of evil with good” (as another critic argues)? Or does Samson, by burning humans into a human WMD, figure all those people in history who “relentlessly override ethical objectives” and take upon themselves the office of scourge of God (as another critic argues)? Or scourge of Allah (Samus or Shait Allah)—and so when perhaps the office of scourge of God (as another critic argues)? Or scourge of Allah (Samus or Shait Allah)—and so when perhaps the office of scourge of God (as another critic argues)? Or scourge of Allah (Samus or Shait Allah)—and so when perhaps the office of scourge of God (as another critic argues)? Or scourge of Allah (Samus or Shait Allah)—and so when perhaps the office of scourge of God (as another critic argues)?

But what really matters here is whether the latest round went to Rosie or Donald agnostic, Pan’s Miltonian global positioning, which basketball teams will make the Final Four, who will be left standing in “Survivor” F 9999. Wittreich notes “realities” to be: “the ‘Old World Empire is back’” and “more than four million links.” What matters is stuff that doesn’t matter one tiny bit. Why Milton Matters: Wittreich is unlikely to make it into Oprah’s book club. The author’s deep immersion in Milton’s works and 250 years of critical hair and cry will most delight his fellow Miltonians—and doubtless provoke them to debate.

Wittreich says several times, because they were written “in the future.” Back in the real America, I worry. What really matters here is whether the latest round went to Rosie or Donald agnostic, Pan’s Miltonian global positioning, which basketball teams will make the Final Four, who will be left standing in “Survivor” F 9999. Wittreich notes “realities” to be: “the ‘Old World Empire is back’” and “more than four million links.” What matters is stuff that doesn’t matter one tiny bit. Why Milton Matters: Wittreich is unlikely to make it into Oprah’s book club. The author’s deep immersion in Milton’s works and 250 years of critical hair and cry will most delight his fellow Miltonians—and doubtless provoke them to debate.

The real lesson of Samson for Wittreich is that “blood spilled in violence begets more violence.”
A Room With Purviews
Blasting, Billowing, Bursting Forth with Knowledge, Quietly

I

N THE SILENT sound-proofed room, knowledge speaks softly. It is in this room that you may see a spark of a new theory on the origins of life, feel the rhythms of a jazz composition, imagine the swoosh of an exotic fish or perhaps shed a tear for the measured cry of a reformer seeking justice in post-apartheid South Africa. The volumes that line the walls of the Dissertation Reading Room, a library-within-a-library tucked inside CUNY’s Graduate Center, are where the expanse of human experience lies: biology to music, languages to zoology—hundreds of pages for each dissertation, more than 1.3 million pages in all.

Fundamentally, the dissertation reading room honors scholarship. “By locating it on the first floor, in an elegant room, we pay tribute to the life of the mind,” said President William P. Kelly. “This room reminds current doctoral students of their primary responsibility, to produce new knowledge.”

A professorial space, the dissertation room is unlike so much of the outside world that has become democratized beyond recognition in an emerging digital age. “The tradition we extend has its origins in the monastic creation of manuscripts,” President Kelly said. “Like those scholars, we are intimately involved in the preservation and generation of knowledge. A room such as this speaks to that genesis, to the title professor—someone who shares his knowledge with others. It’s the determining activity of the doctoral enterprise.”

This storehouse of doctoral enterprises also has practical value; it is the first space, Kelly says, to which he takes potential supporters of the Graduate Center. “It is an objective correlative of what we do so well here,” he said. It is also the embodiment of the University’s most advanced learning, the pursuit of the doctorate, a somewhat recent phenomenon in the history of public higher education in New York City. The University awarded its first Ph.D.s in 1965, four years after the Graduate Center was created by an act of the State Legislature and more than a century after the Free Academy, the forerunner of today’s University, was chartered.

The dissertation room’s contents represent the growth of the Graduate Center itself. More than 648 linear feet of blond wood enshrine the most recent of more than 6,600 dissertations—those written since 1989. The balance is in the regular volumes, snaking through the library’s second floor, stacking, snaking through the library’s second stacks, making through the library’s second floor. All but three of 31 disciplines are represented in the dissertation room.

Business dissertations are at City College, and criminal justice projects are at John Jay College.

In the last four years alone, the increase in the number of doctoral students, and the number of completed dissertations, has risen dramatically. Two hundred and four dissertations were deposited in the library during the 2002-2003 academic year. By 2004-2005, the number jumped to 285. And in 2005-2006, the library received 334, according to chief librarian Julie Egan.

The dissertations, organized by year of completion and then alphabetized by author, create a candy box of reds (math and political science) greens (anthropology, chemistry, earth and environmental sciences), blues (music, classics, comparative literature, urban education), browns (history and speech), blacks (art history and engineering) and oranges (economics). Each colored spine represents an academic discipline. Blue hinders deposited last year mark the first dissertations in urban education, and the newest of the Graduate Centers offerings.

Dissertations line two tiers of walls in the reading room set on a ground floor adorns shelves wrapped around conventional library study tables, and a set above fills shelves on a walk-around mezzanine reached by a vintage Victorian staircase saved from the century-old site, formerly the B Altman Department Store building.

The works are the product of years, perhaps lifetimes, of study and reflection by doctoral candidates. They have inquired into mice and humans, water and earth, and uncovered some new facet of learning for the world to consider. Read their pages, study their compositions, peruse their photographs, and be reminded that these are also testimonials of late-night toiling, from the young composers and authors to the up-from-the-outer-borough master’s students seeking greater understanding into the social fabric of New York City.

In 1998, Adam Habib, a South African political scientist who had withdrawn imprisonment for his opposition to apartheid, wrote of the rigors of the dissertation process in his preface to Structural Constraints, Resources and Decision-Making: A Study of South Africa’s Transition to Democracy. “Had it not been for the late night doles he imposed on me in the first 14 months of his life, he wrote, it would have been impossible to completely as it was.”

While many of the topics on the
The Dissertation Assistant
Who Eases the Pain

Y
ou've completed your coursework, chosen a dissertation topic and gotten it approved. You've researched it, written it and defended it before a faculty committee. But, whether you're a chemist, a classicist or scholar, whether in any of 30 or so other disciplines, you've got one more huge hurdle on the road to your Ph.D. You must deposit your dissertation with Judy Waldman at CUNY's Graduate Center, in the stacks in the library's second floor. "They tell me about their families, their jobs, their children. It's really a mixed group of people." In her 39 years as dissertation assistant, she's never had a student who decided to go to law school, a musician and singer who returned to music. And she earned a Ph.D. in biology and is now an adjunct college professor, a former Concentration survivor "who worked in a shop downtown and many thousands of Jews who got the Ph.D. was what he really wanted to do," and a U.S. Army colonel stationed in Israel, who earned a doctorate in business and hopes to teach at her alma mater, New York University. "I've seen students ranging from their 30s to their 70s who decided to go back to school for a Ph.D." Waldman said, the age spread being the notoriel difference between the graduate and undergraduate experiences, she said. "You go to an undergraduate graduate and students bring their parents and grandparents. But at the graduate level, it's the reverse. They bring their children and grandchildren."
The City University of New York may be the biggest stage in the country, if not the world, with musical performances, dramatic performances, lectures and conferences being offered year-round on its 23 campuses. Topics at the conferences can be of the light-hearted variety, but often they explore topics more typically associated with academic journals. As an example of the latter, take the symposium scheduled for April 17 at Hostos Community College in the Bronx. The college’s Division of Academic Affairs and its Latin American Writers Institute are co-sponsoring the “Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Scholars, artists and writers from across the United States and Latin America will present and debate the topic in round-table discussions and plenary sessions.

In the past, Hostos has stood out among U.S. colleges for its explorations of the African presence in Latin America, particularly in the Dominican Republic.

Serious pursuits, yes. But those of you who want your hearts unburdened should be of good cheer.

On April 23 and 27, at 7 p.m., the Alexander String Quartet is showing off its talent at the Baruch Performing Arts Center, with admission at $25 for the general public, and discounts available for those with CUNY IDs.

On May 6, at 3 p.m., Queensborough Community College is presenting the musical revue “Five Guys Named Moe,” with ticket prices beginning at $35. And on May 7, at 7 p.m., vibraphonist Bill Jacobs is performing at York College. Admission is free.

But back to the serious happenings. Those interested in topics ranging from terrorism to racial profiling can consider lectures and conferences being organized by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

On May 18, for example, the college’s Prisoner Reentry Institute will have an expert discussing “The Cleveland, Criminal Background Checks and the Racial Hiring Practices of Employers.”

There’s much more to hear and see at CUNY’s colleges in all boroughs, much of it free of charge. Activities and performances can be found by going to CUNY’s home page, www.cuny.edu, and clicking the “events” link.