



**Winter 2008**

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Warmest wishes for a Happy New Year! This year's seniors have completed applications to graduate schools and are poised to receive many attractive offers from top universities around the country. In preparing their applications for national grants and PhD programs, they drew on the support of faculty mentors and assessed not just their own academic accomplishments, but also the opportunities they have had at CCNY to grow as aspiring scholars. I admire their determination and intelligence and look forward to celebrating their successes. Year after year, helping the Fellows to achieve their goals provides me with tremendous satisfaction and optimism.

We also celebrate the admission of four outstanding new Fellows to the program and look forward to their contributions to our community. Welcome!

The Fellowships Program incurs many debts every semester. Last fall, we were honored and privileged to welcome Professor Ronald Koder (Physics) to address the fellows in our "Forum: On Research." His description of his work as a "bio-physicist" in developing synthetic cells to use in chemotherapy treatments was fascinating, as were his predictions of stunning advancements in the not-so-distant future through cross-disciplinary collaborations between physicists and biologists. Many Fellows also appreciated that he revealed his own circuitous route to academia through previous careers in dance and industry. I believe we were all convinced by his argument that the government, not private corporations, should fund (and oversee) this kind of research. To CCNY graduate Vincent Grady, I owe thanks for helping me to lead the important fall workshop on writing the personal statement. In discussing how he arrived (after many, many drafts) at his excellent personal statement, he provided astute advice and encouragement that enabled Fellows to produce their own excellent personal statements. Finally, all of our Fellows work with faculty mentors, whose support and advice are the underpinnings of our program. Thanks to them is never enough.

Please note on your calendars that our annual research conference will be held on Friday, May 2. All students, faculty, family members, and friends are welcome and encouraged to attend and learn about the wide-ranging research the Fellows have done. I hope to see you there!

Susan Besse

## New Fellows

It is with great pleasure that we announce and welcome our new Fellows. From a most competitive pool of applications, 4 new Fellows have been selected to join the City College Fellowships Program in the spring semester, 2008.

The new City College Fellowship Fellows are:

<b>Mr. Codanda Appachu</b>	Computer Science
<b>Mr. Tajar Paul Eisen</b>	History
<b>Ms. Maya Perl-Kot</b>	Economics/PolSci
<b>Ms. Natasha Walker</b>	Art History

**APRIL 15, 2008**

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE

Proposals for funding for summer research are due in the office on Tuesday, April 15<sup>th</sup>. For instructions, please read the CC Fellowships Program *Guide: "Funding for Research, Training, Travel: Guidelines for Requesting and Using Research Monies."*

## Research Reports: Summer 2007

During summer 2007, City College Fellows and Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellows received funding to pursue a variety of projects, including: independent research under the guidance of a faculty mentor; participation in structured summer research programs; work in science laboratories; foreign language study; professional internships; and attendance of professional conferences. Below are excerpts from some of their journals, reporting and reflecting on their experiences.

**Angela Perez** (History) won a Galbraith Scholarship to participate in Harvard University's Inequality and Social Policy Summer Program at the Kennedy School.

For a week, I lived with thirteen brilliant students who were mostly Black and from Ivy League schools. In fact, I was the only first generation immigrant along with a Filipina. We all engaged in thought-provoking conversations about immigration, welfare, and race. We participated in graduate-style seminars led by Harvard faculty members who presented their latest research and discussed careers in academia and public policy. The program also included presentations on graduate school by graduate students as well as representatives of Harvard Graduate School. Among the graduate students was a CUNY alum, Tran Van. He was incredibly happy when he learned I was a CUNY student and shared many of his experiences as well as tips with me. I definitely enjoyed my time there!

**Justino Rodriguez** (History) returned to Bolivia for the second summer of independent research on the historical roots of the social movements that have transformed the politics of this country over the last decade.

My summer research can best be characterized as one of academic, intellectual, and personal growth, as well as a crucial step in my preparation for graduate studies. I was initially nervous about returning to Bolivia. Yet, as I entered the city of La Paz, memories of my engagement with the historical threads of the country's contemporary indigenous and labor movements began to flood back. I struck up a conversation with the taxi driver who, like most Bolivians, was closely following developments in the Constituent Assembly, and in particular, debate over the historically contentious issues regarding sovereignty over Bolivia's natural resources, political and regional autonomy, and indigenous rights to self-determination. I realized that this summer's research in Bolivia, informed by the

research I had completed over the year, would be a drastically different experience.

After settling into my small studio in La Paz, I began reconnecting with old contacts including Mexican journalist Luis Gomez and NYU professor Sinclair Thomson. They helped me clarify my research focus, referred me to useful bibliography, and provided essential contacts among activists and archivists. In addition, I attended two important academic conferences: "The State of the State in Latin America," sponsored by San Andres University, and "Race as a Social Construct in Bolivia: Past and Present," sponsored by the University of the Cordillera. At both conferences, I broadened my knowledge and made important contacts.

I decided to focus on broadening my understanding of the historiography of indigenous rebellions as well as labor struggles, especially in the mining industry, to better understand the nexus between the two. Much relevant literature is not published in English and is difficult to get outside Bolivia. I benefited from working at the national archive and at the Xavier Albo Foundation, where the archivist assisted me in procuring relevant books that were long out of print. The archivists have extensive knowledge not just of the collections in the archives, but also of economic, cultural, and political issues in Bolivia. They posed some stimulating questions about my research, which proved quite useful. Upon returning, I faced the challenge of incorporating new research into my analysis (and into my writing sample for graduate school applications), especially the ways in which Bolivian miners' historical memory and experience in past struggles has shaped contemporary popular movements.

**Je Hi An** (Biomedical Engineering) participated in the Summer Research Internship in Neural Engineering (SINE), sponsored by the federally-funded Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) at the Rehabilitation Institute of Northwestern University in Chicago.

I had one of the best summers of my life participating in SINE in Chicago. The people I worked with were incredibly kind, and definitely more relaxed than here (reinforcing the stereotype of busy New Yorkers). On the one hand, I was impressed with the amount of resources this institution has. For example, each lab has a research engineer, compared to one or two technicians per department at CCNY. Northwestern students are allowed to access the machine shop at their will. In addition, they have their own beach with crystal-clear water! On the other hand, the quality of students was not so different. My fellow interns were from different backgrounds, some of them coming from prestigious schools. In the beginning, I felt intimidated and I unconsciously expected them to "blow my mind" with their intelligence. However, I quickly realized that the "name" of their schools did not determine their ability to think critically or their work ethic. At CCNY, I had already had a lot of research experience before starting the internship, and I felt confident and proud of my education.

**Felicity Tsikiwa** (Art History) spent her summer interning at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and studying French in Quebec.

My summer was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my undergraduate career so far, and I feel that I am now on my way to becoming a strong applicant for a graduate program in art history specializing in African art.

At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I served as an intern to Dr. Alisa La Gamma, Curator in the Department of Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. I worked eight hours a day for four weeks assisting Dr. La Gamma to prepare the gallery for her upcoming exhibit entitled "Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary." I was assigned to make sure the three binders filled with details of the gallery layout were uniform and easily understood. In addition, I contributed to the creation of the "Eternal Ancestors" catalogue, which will be used by scholars all over the world as a reference. My task was to confirm the sizes of all the objects featured in the show by using multiple volumes of art history journals, books, and catalogues. Since many of the volumes of books required to conduct this research were in French, this initially daunting assignment led me to understand how integral the French language is to African art history. After I completed this internship, I traveled to Quebec for a month-long French language immersion program.

**Micah Wittmer** (Music) attended the University of Chicago's Summer Research Training Program for MMUF and McNair Undergraduate Fellows.

At the University of Chicago, I continued my research under the guidance of ethnomusicologist (and former MMUF) Professor Travis

Jackson. In addition to working on our individual research projects, we took two classes: "Writing for Research" and "Engaged Scholarship," which covered the history and philosophies of the left from Marx to Foucault. When I arrived at the University of Chicago, I was filled with excitement, anticipation, and anxiety. I was excited to be going to an elite university where I would finally have the opportunity to devote all my concentration to my research project and where I would have a mentor who was knowledgeable about my field. However, I was anxious because I did not have a clear focus for my research on Negro spirituals. Two weeks before going to Chicago, I diligently went to the library and devoured any piece of literature related to my topic, from articles to dissertations. When I boarded the plane, I had plenty of notes, some vague ideas, and a lot of questions.

From the very beginning, I knew that this was going to be an intense summer! Somehow, I managed to read all the assignments for the Engaged Scholarship class and also take advantage of mentoring by Professor Jackson to make progress with my research. The Engaged Scholarship class challenged me to be more than just a music historian: to somehow use my scholarship to bring changes to our country. I also learned why and how to write an annotated bibliography and research proposal before plunging into writing. My approach to research had been slightly haphazard before this summer, but now I am confident that I will have the skills to carry out research and write a PhD dissertation. Professor Jackson's encouragement, support, and knowledge were indispensable, and I gained confidence since he was pleased with my work.

It was wonderful to be in an environment that's so conducive to studying. I didn't have to work (for money) or to cook, and I lived in a dorm right next to the library and gym. It was like heaven! My peers were from elite colleges and universities and were passionate about their research projects. I cannot stress enough how inspiring it is to be surrounded by scholars in an intellectually stimulating environment!

## EXCERPTS FROM FELLOWS' JOURNALS

Each semester, the Fellowships Program invites a professor to speak at our "Forum: On Research." This semester, many Fellows raved about the talk given by Professor Ronald Koder (Physics), and they took away a great variety of insights from his presentation and informal comments.

**By Rosa Mino** (Neurogenetics): Professor Koder's talk on his research on the frontiers of knowledge between biology and physics was the best yet! What draws me to the sciences is the collaborative effort to understand how things work. This forum made me think further. It is true that sometimes specialists from one field are able to think creatively about a problem set from another field because of their different training. The research of a Fellow who graduated [James Faghmous], which used computer science to solve problems in neuroscience, made me think about this issue. But Professor Koder convinced me completely of the necessity of new interdisciplinary approaches. I left with a feeling of hope about becoming part of this evolving scientific community. And I have become motivated to begin to look further afield for methodologies that could be useful to address my own scientific interests.

**By Justino Rodriguez** (History): While the speaker was a professor from the hard sciences, the trend toward cross-disciplinary application of research and methods that he discussed is also present within the humanities. It was interesting to have this topic presented by someone whose research differs so vastly from my own. However, the presentation helped me to think of ways in which I could move beyond the disciplinary boundaries of history and incorporate other methodologies that might enrich my own work. I also drew a lot from his comments on how he infuses his research into his teaching. However, as a research professor he teaches one course per year, which is not comparable to what awaits me in the humanities. I will more than likely teach several classes a semester, necessitating a slightly different relationship between my own teaching and research.

**By Ria Julien** (English/Philosophy): The fellowship event that most stands out in my mind was a talk by Professor Koder. I found his talk fascinating, so much so that I told others about his research. It was also interesting for me to see the role indirection played in his career, as he first "failed" as a dancer before deciding he wanted to work as a scientist.

To see him describe his transition from a person who was unsure of what path he wanted to follow, to a person who completely lives and breathes the path he's chosen gave me a bit of perspective on what I hope will be my situation. More broadly, the ease with which he translated complex subjects into something we could all understand and find relevant seemed to me a model of how academics can bring their ideas to a popular audience.

**Kenya Mitchell** (English) spent her final semester in Mali. She gained hands-on experience assisting leading South African conservationists who are working to preserve historical archives in Timbuktu. And she also engaged in research on folklore in preparation for writing a book for adolescent readers.

The time I scheduled to visit the Ahmed Baba Institute, the leading center for manuscript restoration in Timbuktu, could not have been more opportune. Researchers from South Africa were there preparing some of the strongest manuscripts for a traveling exhibition in South Africa's national museums. Leading the conservation team was Alexio Motsi, Head of Preservation for South Africa's National Archives. Dr. Graham Dominy, Chief Director of South Africa's National Archives was also there overseeing the preparations for manuscript transport. Alexio explained to me that South Africa was taking a hands-on approach to working with the manuscripts because sending funding to the various libraries proved ineffective in the past. Before the arrival of the South African researchers, families who held the manuscripts in private collections had had no sense of accountability and didn't completely understand that their collections are of importance to scholars the world over, not just Islamic scholars.

The conservators wasted no time in demonstrating to me the methods of repair, and they allowed me to handle manuscripts and assist them in any small way I could. The workers walk a fine line between trying to limit the amount of interaction with the pages to avoid shock

and manipulating the pages to stabilize them. ... We had engaging conversations about whether the standardized methods for preserving books were the right methods for the manuscripts. Alexio doubted that air conditioning and special display lights would be good for the texts. All of the texts had survived in dry, dark, hot environments. Introducing them to a new environment could prove to be a shock to the texts, furthering their decomposition.

Right now, the South African government is building a facility next to the University of Sankore that will expand the Ahmed Baba Institute and guarantee professional care for the different family manuscript collections. Alexio extended an invitation to me to attend the opening convention to celebrate the new facility, at which conservators and librarians from all over the world will convene to discuss the best methods of protecting the collections, while making them accessible to scholars for research. Alexio is looking to build a team of researchers to work with on a regular basis. He says he hopes that I am one of them. ...

Among the most interesting experiences I had was the field-work I did to learn about religious lifestyles. For the storyline I created [for my book] about becoming an animist priest, I visited one to watch the process of sand divination. The only way one can meet a priest of this nature is by having a reading. The priest I visited, Bimba, was the apprentice of [my mentor] Sekou's father, Seydou. Seydou Camara, a Malian bard whose songs were documented by scholars Charles Bird and David Conrad, played a critical role in sharing more obscure Mande folklore with the west. In quieter circles, Seydou is considered a powerful Blacksmith priest, so Bimba was the preferred priest to visit in Bamako. I had to wait for many weeks before I actually got to meet Bimba, who was more elusive than I can be. When I finally got my chance, I talked to Bimba through a translator even though he and I communicated mostly with our eyes. I could understand some of his Bamana and he my French. I watched him make elaborate ripple patterns in the sand. I didn't give

## SPRING 2008 SCHEDULE

(The Forum and all Meetings are in NAC 6/316)

<b>Tu., January 29</b>	<b>12:15 - 2 PM</b>
Orientation for ALL New Fellows	
<b>Th., January 31</b>	<b>12:15 - 2 PM</b>
Welcoming Party & Planning Meeting for Fellow-Directed Lunches	
<b>Th., February 21</b>	<b>12:15 - 2 PM</b>
Workshop: On Mentoring	
<b>Th., February 28</b>	<b>12:15 - 2 PM</b>
Fellow-Directed Luncheon	
<b>Th., February 28</b>	<b>12:30 - 2 PM</b>
Recruitment meeting: MMUF	
<b>Sat., March 1</b>	<b>10 AM - 3 PM</b>
MMUF Conference at Yale	
<b>Th., March 13</b>	<b>12:15 - 2 PM</b>
Forum: On Research. Speaker: Professor Gregory Downs (History)	
<b>Mo., March 17</b>	<b>DUE: MMUF Applications</b>
<b>Th., March 27</b>	<b>12:15 - 2 PM</b>
Fellow-Directed Luncheon	
<b>Th., April 10</b>	<b>12:15 - 2 PM</b>
Workshop: Applying to Graduate School	
<b>Fr., April 11</b>	<b>9 AM - 7 PM</b>
MMUF NY Regional Conference at Queens College	

**Tu., Apr 15 DUE: Applications for Summer Research Funding**

**Th., Apr 17 12:15 - 2 PM**  
Recruitment meeting: City College Fellowship

**Th., Apr 17 12:15 - 2 PM**  
Fellow-Directed Luncheon

**Th., May 1 DUE: Applications for City College Fellowships**

**Fri May 2 9 AM - 5 PM**  
City College Fellowships Program Annual Research Conference

**Fri May 16 MMUF Annual Dinner**

## GRE PREP COURSE

To attend the spring (schedule below) or summer GRE Prep course, contact Prof. Pilette: primeprep@onebox.com or 212/237-8989, or visit: <http://www.primeprep.com>. Remember the Fellowships Program will pay the course fee.

### Spring 2007 Schedule

Wednesdays 6 - 9:45 PM	Feb 20 - March 26 Upper East Side
Fridays 3 - 7:00 PM	Feb 22 - March 28 at CCNY
Thursdays 6 - 9:45 PM	April 10 - May 15 Upper East Side

## The Sixth Annual City College Fellowships Research Conference

The Sixth Annual City College Fellowships Research Conference is Friday, May 2, 2008, from 9 AM – 5 PM in NAC 6/316. All students, faculty, family members, and friends are welcome and encouraged to attend. Fellows who wish to present their work at the Research Conference must submit a title by Thursday, April 10, 2008.

