

Winter 2009

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The twenty City College Fellows who have entered the program since September 2008 are reinvigorating the fellowship community with the diverse perspectives and energy they bring. As you can see from the journal excerpts below, they are approaching their education with a growth-oriented mindset, and many are already making the switch to thinking about themselves and their education more like doctoral students than like undergraduates. This switch is fostered by their peers who are applying to graduate school, by workshops that help them make the most of their education at CCNY, and especially by the mentoring relationships they are building with faculty members. Without the broad range of support that faculty mentors provide, the program could not succeed. Thanks to them is never enough.

During the fall semester, the fellowship Program also drew on a wealth of expertise from various communities. We were honored to welcome back alumni **Assia Nakova**, and **Bryan Rosenblithe** to talk about their transition to doctoral programs at Princeton and Columbia Universities, as well as **Victoria Chevalier**—now a professor herself at Furman University—who spoke to the Fellows on building productive mentoring relationships. **Professor Joshua Wilner** again gave most valuable constructive criticism to seniors at the important workshop on writing the personal statement for graduate school applications. **Professor Deborah Vietze** enlightened us at the Forum with a discussion about her research on racial identities. **Dr. Regina Biscogolio** of the Wellness and Counseling Center provided encouragement, warm support, and excellent advice at the workshop on mental health. **Ebony Coletu**, MMUF alumna of Williams College and Stanford University PhD recipient, led an inspiring and motivating workshop on financing education and research. We appreciate their generosity and support.

Finally, we hope you will join us for the seventh annual City College Fellowships Program Research Conference. It will be an all day event held on Friday, May 1st. It is open to the public, and we look forward to welcoming many faculty, students, friends and family members to hear the Fellows report on the research they have been conducting. It is always a fascinating and impressive event.

Susan Besse

New Fellows

It is with great pleasure that we announce and welcome our new Fellows. From a most competitive pool of applications, 10 new Fellows have been selected to join the City College Fellowships Program in the spring semester, 2009.

The new City College Fellowship Fellows are:

Mr. Abudulah Beretay	History
Ms. Ashley Canino	English/Philosophy
Ms Millicent A. Cheu	Biology/Asian Studies
Mr. Joshua H. Clough	History
Ms. Ala Fink	English
Ms. Adela Gonzalez	Spanish
Ms. Michelle Muita	Anthropology/IS
Ms. Evangeleen F. Pattison	Sociology
Mr. Winston Scarlett	History
Mr. Fidel Tavarez	History

APRIL 20, 2009

RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE

Proposals for funding for summer research are due in the office on Tuesday, April 20th. For instructions, please read the CC Fellowships Program *Guide: "Funding for Research, Training, Travel: Guidelines for Requesting and Using Research Monies."*

EXCERPTS FROM FELLOWS' JOURNALS

The most important part of the Fellowships Program is the relationship that Fellows develop with their faculty mentors. Below, **Shana Adise**, **Erag Ramizi**, and **Reut Gelblum**, all first semester Fellows in fall 2008, recount how this relationship has transformed their educational experience and their views of themselves.

Shana Adise (Psychology): Before entering the City College Fellowship Program, I viewed school as a boring, mandatory task I had to do every day. I went to school, hated it, but did my work. It wasn't until spring semester 2008 that my attitude towards school changed. My statistics teacher (**Professor Sophie Barrett**, Psychology Department) encouraged me to extend my academic studies beyond my classes and to apply for the CCNY Fellowship Program. During the application process, I started changing how I viewed myself as a student. I began to think about research projects I would like to pursue. I thought about the people I wanted to work with and the difference I could make. My acceptance into the program transformed me even more. I have begun to see myself as a completely different person who takes life more seriously.

Over the summer, I contacted **Professor John Foxe** and asked him to be my mentor. When he agreed, I started preparing for the upcoming semester by reading. Throughout the fall semester, I met with my mentor weekly. We discussed many topics including my goals and the two projects I am working on under his supervision. My first experiment, which has been in development since September, is studying the effects of a bi-stable illusion on attention and multi-sensory integration. The bi-stable illusion is most commonly known as the McGurk effect. The study will involve monitoring brain activity in response to both the auditory and visual stimulus and their effects on attention and multi-sen-

integration. Additionally, I designed another research project that is about to be implemented. It aims to discover if people with autism have some processing capabilities for exogenous (non-voluntary) attention.

Working in John Foxe's lab has challenged me academically. In a few brief months I have gained skills that extend beyond the classroom. I have learned how to place electrodes on a participant's head, set up the lab, work with new software programs, monitor brain activity, and work effectively in a group. In addition, the opportunity to work under two doctoral students has not only fostered my academic learning, it has helped me grow as a person. It is very motivating to work in a lab with people who are dedicated to learning. These peers have both supported and helped me through my academic struggles.

This is just the beginning! If you had asked me just a few months ago if I thought I would be running my own experiments, I would have laughed.

Erag Ramizi (French): The most important achievement this semester was undoubtedly establishing a wonderful mentor-relationship with **Professor Maxime Blanchard**. The mentorship with him has been a profound, involved, genuine experience from which I have learned tremendously. Our weekly meetings developed from the very first encounter into deep, thoughtful, intelligent conversations on topics ranging from literature to social and philosophical problems, such as national identity, the importance of ideas, and the power of writing. The deep veneration that I had for him as a professor and intellectual was strengthened by our conversations that helped me to form a better understanding of graduate school as an institution and the role of a professor in society, and also to appreciate literature more thoroughly, its purposefulness, its beauty and its social importance.

Prof. Blanchard has shown immense support in our discussion of my future as a scholar and a professor. Being doubtful at moments that I may not be a "person of letters", lacking substance and original ideas, I have been convinced by Prof. Blanchard that the path to a PhD degree is indeed a very arduous, demanding, disciplined experience that at times might be very exhausting but that that should not discourage me from pursuing my goals. "It is important to doubt" he would remark, emphasizing that we need to question things as a first step to comprehending them and then changing them.

He has been encouraging me the entire semester to write every day, to sharpen my sensitivity to ideas and to not be overcome by a sense of mediocrity or lack of originality. "Originality is a bourgeois idea" he would say with a lighter tone and then proceed to affirm that "literature is a space for the admirable, the greatness, the best in us." These conversations have been helpful not only in understanding the path that awaits me, but also in forming a better idea of my own identity and in having a stronger belief in myself as a nascent writer.

Prof. Blanchard's class on Revolution has been an eye-opening experience because it introduced me to a wide range of novel (for me) ideas. With the paper for the class, I had the chance to have my writing reviewed and supervised. During that class, Prof. Blanchard showed exceptional encouragement of my desire to be involved by including a poem by Rimbaud that I had sent him in relation to the Paris Commune of 1871 that we were discussing in class. He was really kind to incorporate the poem, which was not originally part of the syllabus, in our discussion, which not only fulfilled a dream of mine, that is to study Rimbaud in school, but also gave me the sense of contributing, although minutely, to the class.

Prof. Blanchard agreed to do an independent study with me next semester, something that will offer me the chance to work by myself and have a glimpse of the type of work required in graduate school. We chose books that suited both my interests and his specialization in 20th century French Literature and will include novels by writers such as Marcel Proust, Andre Gide, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre and Marguerite Duras. In addition I will

be taking a class he is teaching on Francophonie that will explore the idea of identity. This, along with his mentoring my independent study, will help me to improve my writing in general and in French, and will be once again of immense aid in my preparation for graduate school.

Reut Gelblum (Psychology): When the fall semester had just begun, I felt that becoming a researcher was light-years away for me. As the semester progressed, however, I became more aware of the different sets of skills I would have to acquire before I could run my own experiments, my own studies, and later—my own lab. I now realize it will take time, but it is all within my reach.

Mentoring meetings with **Professor Melara** were extremely helpful in helping me understand what designing an experiment entailed. We began by reading articles on subjects related to the experiment already running at the lab, in which I was assisting. We were trying to find questions and doubts that could be raised, in regard to "our experiment" by the writers of those articles. Once we found several questions we were interested in confronting, we conducted additional research, in search of the right method to address those questions. Professor Melara is a very analytical thinker, but as a researcher he waits to be inspired. I later came to realize he was waiting to be excited by an idea, and his search for the right idea reminded me of why I wanted to be mentored by Professor Melara in the first place: he is enthused about what he does for a living. After finding the question and methods for our research, we were able to start discussing the skills I would need to acquire in order to run the experiment.

Working at Professor Melara's lab has helped me gain confidence in my choice. I was introduced into an environment that requires diligence, patience and careful attention for details, and was relieved to discover my passion was not extinguished. Working at the lab has reaffirmed what initially was but a hunch: that neuroscience was a field I could be interested in not only intellectually, but also professionally.

The Fellowships Program offers workshops on a wide variety of topics ranging from funding education and research, mentoring, and applying to graduate school, to fostering mental health and balancing work and life. Below, **Yarisbel Rodriguez** comments on the fall workshop on race, class and gender in the academy. **Kitty Xu** describes how two workshops helped her to improve her personal statement for graduate school applications.

Yari Rodriguez (History): The roundtable on race, class and gender in the academy left a deep impression on me. This was an incredible opportunity for the Fellows to recount their personal experiences of discrimination in school. Most of the fellows are minorities, as well as women, and so the overlap of various prejudices affects our personal and academic lives in different and profound ways. Justino Rodriguez's account of his first year as a graduate student was eye-opening: he noted how the working-class and minority graduate students created ties of solidarity in the face of the other students who had rendered them invisible. The Fellows' accounts of their own experiences of not having received equal treatment in the classroom from teachers and professors because of racism and sexism aligned with my own experiences, especially my elementary school experiences. The most important thing I got out of this workshop was to always remain open about my experiences. Many times prejudice directed against you can be alienating, up to the point where you feel you are the only person experiencing a certain form of discrimination. By being open with your peers, you take the first step in determining how to best counter prejudice in academia. Alienation is the most powerful consequence of prejudice, and it can effectively separate you from other people only if you let it.

Kitty Xu (Biology): Writing the personal statement was one of the most difficult tasks I have ever done. Although I knew that I wanted to continue studying neuroscience in a doctoral pro

CCNY Fellowships Newsletter Winter 2009

gram, I had not formed a clear, concrete, and convincing explanation (to graduate school admissions committees or even to myself) for my choice. In the first few drafts, I merely reported what I had done during the last three years and what I wanted to do in graduate school, but this sounded plain, was full of clichés, and the same could have been said by all strong applicants. I urgently needed a writing lesson that could help me learn to make myself stand out. Thanks to the workshop on writing the personal statement, I gained constructive criticism from both Professor Joshua Wilner and Professor Besse. They encouraged me to include some reference to my unique background as a Chinese international student, to try to tell interesting stories about how my undergraduate experiences had transformed me into a neuroscientist, and to emphasize what special assets I have to contribute to research about human cognition and behavior. The writing samples of Luis Apolo (Physics) and Kimberley Paige Young (English) provided me with handy examples of useful approaches. Then, a second workshop on “Advanced Learning Techniques: Writing and Rewriting” offered me further support by changing my writing habits. Following the advice of the Fellows who led the workshop, I started to let myself type whatever thoughts flew out of my mind, without worrying about grammar or even whether any of the thoughts would prove to be useful. This allowed me to write a lot very fast. Later, when I went back to read what I had written, I found it easy to condense the material and edit. I finally finished the statement after fifteen drafts and with the input of nine readers, including six professors and three lab friends.

The Fellowships program supports the development of Fellows’ research interests and projects in numerous ways, including travel to conduct research and to attend professional conferences. **Reut Gelblum** comments on her recent experience attending a conference.

Reut Gelblum (Psychology): One experience that

was extremely important for me this semester was attending the Society for Neuroscience annual conference in Washington D.C. (thanks to funding from the City College Fellowships Program). The first thing that struck me upon entering the conference was the magnitude of the Society for Neuroscience, which exemplifies the magnitude of the field. I attended many lectures and learned about possibilities for research subjects, as well as methods of which I was unaware. The fact that the conference presenters comprised of prominent, as well as young researchers, has inspired me to pursue my own interests, and assured me that young scholars also have a significant role in advancing this field.

In order to prepare a strong application to doctoral programs and to succeed once admitted, students need to have research experience as undergraduates. Below are a few excerpts from the reports Fellows wrote about summer 2008 research projects that were funded in whole or in part by the City College Fellowships Program and the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship.

Luis Apolo (Physics): I spent my days at the Institute of Physics at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg (Germany). With my coordinator, Oliver Melchert, we studied the properties of an original problem, negative-weight perception of string-like objects. I did not know much about the problem when I started the internship, neither did I have knowledge of C, a programming language, or how to carry out computer simulations. At the same time, statistical physics and phase transitions were as foreign to me as I was to Germany.

The way we managed to change this to the point I could carry out research on the problem was unexpected to me. If there is one impression, one image that comes to mind when I think of research in Germany, it is freedom. Before starting the internship, I thought I would have a formal introduction to computer simula

SPRING 2009 SCHEDULE

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

- Th., January 29** 12:30 - 2 PM
Orientation for ALL New Fellows
- Fr., January 30**
Fellowship Dinner
5:00 - 6:30 meeting with graduated Fellows;
6:30 dinner
- Tu., February 10 (Th schedule at CCNY)** 12:30 - 2 PM
Workshop: The Mentoring Relationship
- Th., February 26** 12:30 - 2 PM
Forum: “On Research”
- Th., March 12** 12:30 - 2 PM
Workshop: Balancing work/career and life
- Th., March 26** 12:30 - 2 PM
Workshop: Applying to Grad School
- Wed., April 1** Submit titles for
CC Fellowships Program Research Conference
- Th., April 2** 12:30 - 2 PM
Round-table: Applying to Grad School
(Q&A follow-up on workshop)
- Mon., Apr 20 DUE: Applications for Summer Research Funding**

- Th., April 23** 12:30 - 2 PM
Workshop: Public Speaking
- Fri., May 1 DUE: Applications for City College Fellowships**
- Fri., May 1** 9 AM - 5 PM
City College Fellowships Program Annual Research Conference
- Fri., May 15** MMUF Annual Dinner

OTHER MELLON AND CCFELL DEADLINES

- Tu., March 3** 12:30 - 1:50 PM
Recruitment meeting: MMUF
- Tu., March 10 DUE: MMUF applications**
- Tu., April 7** 12:30 - 1:50 PM
Recruitment meeting for City College Fellowships
- Mon., Apr 20 DUE: Applications: City College Fellowships**

The Seventh Annual City College Fellowships Research Conference

The Seventh Annual City College Fellowships Research Conference is Friday, May 1, 2009, 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 Wednesday, April 1, 2009.

tions, to the theory of phase transitions, and to percolation. I expected this to take place in a class or in a professor's office. Furthermore, I pictured myself working on small tasks directed by the professor head of the research group.

Quite to the contrary, I was free to pursue my education and research mostly on my own. My coordinator and I planned what needed to be learned and what sources would be ideal to learn it from. In my office, I had a stack of papers by different authors explaining the same problem. I leaned the material however fast and however far I wanted to go. This was a freedom I was not used to. Initially, I think I visited my coordinator's office perhaps too many times, but after a few weeks, I learned to be more academically independent. After defining a research project, I was free to create my own analysis programs on my favorite scripting language (perl), and to analyze the results. So, along with the PhD students with whom I shared the office, I was truly carrying our original research. I could not have asked for anything better.

Yet I was given something even better. This was the opportunity to participate in the intellectual process to leads to research: the spark that generates questions. The goals we set out to accomplish were not on the table when I arrived. Rather they developed from curiosities and discussion with my coordinator. The bonds I established with my coordinator during the short period of ten weeks have extended to the ensuing months as we continue to work on the problem with the aim of publishing our results.

Natasha Walker (Art History): I participated in the nine-week University of Chicago's MMUF Summer Research Institute along with four other Mellon May Fellows from CCNY and fifteen others from various universities. The experience was fantastic: a mélange of hard work, intensity, and challenges that helped us to fine tune our skills and build our perseverance. I went to the program eager to reap the benefits of the "Writing for Research" class. Expecting snappy tips and quaint rules, I was not aware of just how transformative the class would be. It coaxed us to change our focus from the writer to that of the reader and revealed the many secrets of what distinguishes good graduate-level writing from competent but non-innovative undergraduate writing. I love writing and consider myself a writer first, a historian second, so securing the help of Professor Cochran in order to graduate to the next level was extremely exciting.

Conor Reed (English): I experienced a profoundly inspiring and academically productive two-month stay in Spain. My goal was to embark on the introductory steps of a research project about the art and literature produced by opposing ideological viewpoints during the revolution and civil war in Spain, 1936-1939. I chose this project as a "case study" of how art and literature perform a dialectical role influencing as well as being influenced by times of massive social upheaval.

After a month of intensive language study at the Universidad de la Rioja in Logroño, I headed for Madrid. There I conducted research at three institutions: the Reina Sofia Contemporary Art Museum, the Biblioteca Nacional, and the Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo. At the Riena Sofia, I toured the museum collection, took notes on the section dedicated to the civil war, and learned more about the trajectory of wartime activities of Josep Renau, one of the artists whose work I intend to explore. At the museum's library, I found a wealth of information about another artist named Tullio Crali, whose work I will compare to Renau. In this process of research, I decided to start by writing a paper exploring how the iconography of airplanes as a symbol of modernity, heroism, and terror was used in both revolutionary and fascist art in this period.

At the Biblioteca Nacional, I explored the photography archives, which include Spanish Civil War posters. Themes that caught my attention and that I hope to explore in the future include the role of the Moorish forces in Franco's army and the

issue of race and racism on both sides of the conflict, the sexual divisions of labor that fractured left-wing groups, and the culture of various public exhibitions that fueled ideological antagonisms. Finally, I explored the Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo archives to learn more about an often misunderstood component of anarchism within the revolutionary left forces: the role of women and their portrayal in art.

So what now? I plan to work through some of this material with my mentor Professor Jane Marcus in the context of her coordinated seminar series on the Spanish Civil War. I will also be taking an independent study with her with the goal of writing a research paper using the material I gathered. And I hope to return to Spain in summer 2009 to continue my research.

Angela Perez (History): My summer in Bogotá involved conducting both library research and volunteering with the Asociación de Afro-Colombianos Desplazados, AFRODES, a non-profit organization that advocates for the human rights of Afro-Colombians. AFRODES had no structure for internships, so I had to organize a work plan of my own. I decided to work with the women's group on their court project. This involved amassing documentation to present to Colombia's Constitutional Court on how the country's armed conflict has created circumstances that make displaced Afro-Colombian women particularly vulnerable to physical, psychological, and sexual violence. In 2007, the court ruled in favor of 600 displaced women and ordered the government to create a number of programs to guarantee their protection. In light of this success, AFRODES was collecting testimony of 1,000 Afro-Colombian women to emphasize the racial component of women's vulnerability.

My first task—to create a database of all the cases the organization had gathered in a series of regional workshops—was frustrating because of technological impediments presented by antiquated computers and intermittent internet access. But I learned to be patient, resourceful, and most of all, to draw on the help and to appreciate the efforts of AFRODES staff and volunteers whose commitment and passion for their work prevails over their poor conditions. Going through the cases was a particularly painful task. Almost all the black women who filled out the forms were widows, and thus heads of household. In shaky handwriting, they recounted how their husbands, their fathers, and/or their brothers were unjustly tortured and killed by members of paramilitary groups or even the national army. They also described the inhuman conditions in which they currently live. Their problems were all very similar: they lost their lands and could no longer grow crops; they lacked stable jobs and income; they faced discrimination from employers and the population of the receiving cities; they had only a primary school education at the most; they were losing their traditions; and they felt at risk of being attacked.

[This experience provided the basis for Angela to write an excellent paper analyzing how AFRODES—along with other organizations—had succeeded in winning the 2007 constitutional court case and what the significance of this victory was. She used this paper as a writing sample to append to her applications to doctoral programs.]

City College Fellowships Program is an umbrella program that administers several undergraduate fellowships. See our website for information:

www.cuny.cuny.edu/fellowshipsprogram

The City College Fellowships Office is located in NAC 6/316, 212/650-8388.

