City College has renamed the Division of Social Sciences The Colin L. Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership. The School’s formal inauguration took place at a ceremony in The Great Hall, Shepard Hall on May 2, 2013 at which General Powell ’58, spoke and received the CUNY Chancellor’s Medal from then Chancellor Matthew Goldstein ’63. The Medal is the University’s highest executive honor, recognizing extraordinary contributions to CUNY, commitment to education and outstanding public service. Past recipients include Jonas Salk, Coretta Scott King, John Cardinal O’Connor, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

I am humbled and honored that the governing bodies of City College and, now, The City University have viewed this change as a major step in enhancing all academic programs under the banner of this school,” stated General Powell (USA) ret. “I look forward to with the school.”

Other speakers at the ceremony included actress Linda Powell, advertising executive Linda Kaplan Thaler ’72, 75MMJ, journalist and author Tom Brokaw and President Lisa S. Coico, all of whom serve on the Powell Center Advisory Committee. Ms. Powell is General Powell’s daughter.

President Coico said: “City College is one of the great success stories of our democracy. Educating generations of local, national and international leaders. The Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership—named for a CUNY alumnus of extraordinary national and international accomplishment—expands this legacy in a transformative way. Integrating our social sciences, I have no doubt that the Colin Powell School will become known as one of the best places in the world to study issues of equity, democracy, citizenship and service.”

“General Powell epitomizes the CUNY success story,” Chancellor Michael Bloomberg to General Powell.

General Colin L. Powell ’58 spoke at the inauguration of the Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership.

Inauguration of the Colin L. Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership

Yet Colin Powell was not a classically good student. He took up and discarded several courses of study before settling on the pursuit of a degree in geology. At the same time, however, he joined the U.S. Army Reserve Officer Training Corps, which became a transformative experience. Military life deeply appealed to him—its structure and mission made sense and motivated him as nothing had before. And among his fellow ROTC members he also found a cohort of friends with whom he shared and commodes that fit in with the Pershing Rifles—an organization he joined and has supported ever since.

In the same period, he rose through the ranks of the military, and then entered more political and diplomatic work, he frequently found himself working alongside graduates of the best private schools in the country, and saw how well his own preparation—from elementary school on up—stacked up against theirs.

The education of “the whole people” hence became for him not merely a resonant phrase from his past, but a cherished value and a lifelong mission.

Quot apart from what he learned in the classroom, the experience of finding something at college—something motivating, service-driven and life changing—solidified his appreciation of how education should work for young men and women who are finding their place in the world. Throughout his life he has carried a sense of himself as a product of the City, and a graduate of an institution that, like New York itself, was a profound and historic gateway into American life and leadership.

In 1962 he was deployed to Vietnam, where he received a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. He completed an MBA program at George Washington University and subsequently accepted a White House Fellowship. After a tour of duty as battalion commander in Korea, he enrolled at the Army War College, where his military and managerial training was augmented by an intensive course of study in politics, security and international relations. Rising to the rank of brigadier general, he commanded a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, one of the most highly decorated units in the U.S. Army. In the decades that followed, General Powell became a key advisor to members of the staffs of Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, who named him National Security Adviser in 1987. In 1989, he was appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under President George H.W. Bush, becoming the first African-American to hold America’s highest military post. Following his retirement from the Army in 1993, General Powell joined Senator Sam Nunn and former President Jimmy Carter on a peacekeeping mission to Haiti that resulted in the end of military rule. In 2000 he was asked to serve as President George W. Bush’s first Secretary of State, the first African-American to hold America’s most important diplomatic post.

Colin Powell’s work in the school has been in tandem with his increasing public responsibilities. In 1997, he and Mrs. Powell founded America’s Promise, a nonprofit organization that works to foster character and competence in young people. Today, America’s Promise has a presence in more than 500 communities in all 50 states.

That same year, General Powell founded the Colin L. Powell Center for Leadership and Service at City College to develop new generations of publically engaged leaders and to promote civic involvement at CCNY. The Center started small, with a limited budget and a scholarship program that supported eight student fellows. With General Powell as Chair of the Center’s advisory council and the single largest individual donor, however, the program grew dramatically and today supports nearly 100 students on full scholarships. They are engaged in a program of leadership training, service learning and professional skills development that mark Colin Powell Fellows as among CCNY’s most successful students.

As the Center’s programming expanded, it became evident that it could play a larger role across the campus. As part of President Lisa S. Coico’s effort to develop innovative approaches to education, she decided, in consultation with General Powell, to combine the programs of the Powell Center and the departments of the social sciences into a new school: The Colin L. Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership. Its ambitious goal is to re-imagine how students and faculty can address society’s most pressing issues, while supporting the best research possible and promoting close and productive relationships between the campus and other service and research institutions.

The fundraising campaign and the new school owe their success to the love Colin Powell has for CCNY, along with President Coico’s vision, and the support of CCNY’s 21st Century Foundation and its Chair, Martin S. Cohen ’70. The need for both public and private funding remains vital to the school, today’s students and future alumni. This is a challenge Colin Powell has readily accepted, and City College welcomes the support and interest of alumni and friends who care about CCNY as much as he does.