LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

I am delighted to welcome a new, very strong cohort of eleven City College Fellows and three Irani Fellows. They bring our numbers to an all time high of fifty Fellows, including increasing numbers from the sciences and engineering. Congratulations to the new Fellows. I look forward to their participation; they promise to infuse new energy and perspectives into our diverse and exciting community.

Among the most satisfying developments is the growing sense of community within our group. Perhaps most important has been the fellow-directed luncheons, at which Fellows discuss among themselves topics of common concern. The past semester started off with a bang with their two lively discussions on how differing class backgrounds shape the academy and the individuals in it. We were also honored to welcome Distinguished Professor Jane Marcus to address our Fellows. She left an indelible impression on us all, and inspired the Fellows with her stories of perseverance, her obvious passion for intellectual inquiry, and her wisdom and generosity.

Another tool for community building is this semester’s fellowship seminar, on “The Industrial Revolution and its Discontents,” team-taught by Professors David Jaffee (History) and Joshua Wilner (English). It will bring together Fellows from across the disciplines in examining the complex relationships between technological change and social, political, cultural, and intellectual changes. Case studies will focus on textile production, the invention of the steam engine, the industrialization of clock manufacturing, and the development of photography, which lend themselves to a consideration of changing conceptions of time and space.

Please see this semester’s calendar of events, taking note of our program’s second annual research conference, which is scheduled for April 30, 2004 and open to the public, as well as recruitment meetings and due dates for applications. Recruitment for the third cohort of five Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellows (formerly Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship) will begin at the start of the spring semester. Note that in response to this past summer’s Supreme Court case, the eligibility criteria for MMUF have been changed slightly. Please read our new brochure carefully or log onto our website (www.ccny.cuny.edu/fellowshipprogram) for details. Applications are due March 15, and awards will be made soon thereafter in order to give the new Fellows time to design summer research projects, which will be funded by the Mellon Foundation.

Finally, I invite you to read the excerpts from Fellows’ journals, which provide a glimpse of the many ways in which the fellowships program provides academic support and the fascinating projects that Fellows have been pursuing. As always, we are greatly indebted to the faculty mentors. Thank you!

Susan Besse

NEW FELLOWS

It is with great pleasure that we announce and welcome our new Fellows. From a most competitive pool of applications, 14 new Fellows have been selected to join the City College Fellowships Program in the spring semester, 2004.

The new City College Fellowship Fellows are:
Ms. Ana Aguirre (Spanish/English)
Mr. Joaquin Colon (Mathematics)
Mr. Rafael DeJesus (Psychology)
Ms. Sharon Fader (Psychology)
Mr. Jonathan Maltz (Physics)
Ms. Marika Michalos (History)
Mr. David Orlowski (English)
Mr. Shams Rashid (Electrical Engineering)
Mr. Bryan Rosenblithe (History)
Mr. Aron Szekely (Bio-Medical Engineering)
Ms. Tanya Thurman (Asian Studies/English)

The new Irani Fellows are:
Mr. Thalet Bukhari (English)
Ms. Fawziyyah Madyun (English)
Ms. Carmel McMahon (English)

APRIL 15, 2004
RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE

If you have not already picked up a copy of “Funding for Research, Training, Travel: Guidelines for requesting and using research monies,” please stop by the office to get your copy. Proposals for summer research are due in the office April 15th.

Summer Reports 2003

by: Papa Tall
Papa Tall is a Political Science major and a junior. He is a Mellon Fellow who participated this past summer in Project Ascend.

“When I took on the task of researching the political participation of the people of ‘Little Senegal' in
Harlem, I knew it was going to be an enriching experience. What I did not know, however, was that I was engaging in groundbreaking research that was going to shape the scholar I want to be. As a Political Science major, I think that I need to have this ‘hands-on’ experience, in order to gain a better understanding of political phenomena such as participation, voter apathy, disenfranchisement, and so forth.

Although I was new to the field of social sciences in general, with the help of my mentor, Lily Hoffmann, I designed a strategy of research that would give me accurate and credible scientific results. Because the political participation of my target group has never been researched, I had to draw on research about other immigrant groups to see if I could find patterns and trends that would be applicable to the Senegalese. To that effect, I reviewed the literature about Jamaicans, Dominicans, Indians and others who do not apparently have much in common with the migrants from Senegal.

The help I was receiving from my mentor and Project Ascend workshops culminated when Kris Riddle, another fellow told me about Professor Krinsky of the Political Science Department of CCNY. Energetic and enthusiastic, Dr. Krinsky gave me four books that had very useful information about current and earlier immigrants’ transnationalism at a time when I desperately needed data on that. He also introduced me to leading authors in the field of immigration in New York City, including Dr. Philippe Kasinitz of the CUNY Graduate Center.

In no time, I was making real progress in my research, and also creating a network of scholars from whom I can definitely learn. The experiences of my summer research are invaluable for my future career as a scholar, especially the professional connections I made and the research techniques I learned.

This summer transformed me into a critical social science researcher, rather than just an impressionable undergraduate consumer.”

by: Anja Soczewksa

Anja Soczewksa is a Biology major and a senior. She is a City College Fellow who spent summer 2003 conducting research in the field of microbiology.

“Thanks to the City College Fellowships Program, I was able to obtain funding to conduct independent research in the field of microbiology during summer 2003. This experience has taught me countless academic and professional skills that are rarely taught in the classrooms and lecture halls.

Since we have entered an era of genomics and proteomics, I chose to design a project that involved sequencing genome of a new organism. In addition, knowing how to sequence DNA is very useful in almost any laboratory and is a widely used technique.

A perfect candidate for sequencing is a bacterium or a virus. Since the latter is smaller, I decided that it would be suitable for my project. The final choice was a phage, a virus that lives inside of one of the bacteria that my lab investigates in depth. Just for comparison the length of its genetic material is 50 thousand units, while the genome of a bacterium is 2 million units and for a fruit fly it’s 122 million units. Once I had the material to work on, I had to figure out what I would actually do with it. That prompted me to first talk to researchers I knew in order to gain ideas on how to initiate the project. I then utilized online resources and read literature pertaining to genome sequencing and techniques involved. The first stage of my research was trying all these techniques and comparing their overall efficiency. This was an extremely frustrating task as some of these experiments I ran for the first time in my life, and I encountered many unexpected problems. My work has been extensive, but it has made me realize how much effort goes into a project that may seem simple to the outsider. The intellectual benefits and the satisfaction of solving problems are definitely worthwhile. I have learned to better appreciate the tremendous work involved in the scientific process. I learned how to be more patient, a virtue that should characterize every good scientist.

Working on this project has also helped me to develop my critical thinking skills. Whether it was working through problems with equipment or drawing conclusions from data, I have gained new confidence in my ability to handle challenging situations. I came to realize that in a majority of cases, theoretical certainties that I had learned from textbooks were nothing more than hypotheses. No longer do I blindly accept date presented in a text without an appreciation of the tremendous work that was required to attain such results.

In the end my struggle paid off, as once I was proficient and familiar with the different approaches, I was able to develop a novel protocol for DNA sequencing that is cheaper, less laborious and tedious than all the others. I was able to complete my project and create a professional power point presentation. I gave a talk in front of a group of scientists and have prepared a paper for publication in a scientific journal. I also hope that other scientists will utilize my technique.”

The Journal

City College Fellows are paid their stipends for the activities they perform as Fellows, that is, activities beyond normal classroom activities, including attending Fellowship workshops and symposia and working on a project under the guidance of a Mentor. The journal is the way Fellows have of both documenting those activities and reflecting on their experiences.

In keeping with the practice of exchanging ideas and information, five journal excerpts have been chosen for inclusion in the Newsletter. They are excerpts from the jour
nals of Jane Lee, Alexis Logsdon, Tonino Miano, Edgardo Molina, and Sokunthary Svay.

by: Jane Lee

Jane Lee is an Irani Fellow and American Studies major, whose fellowship project includes writing a children’s book.

“...My second semester as a fellow was easier because I knew what to expect from the mentoring relationship. I kept the same mentor, Professor Laskin, so we were able to start early and work on my project for most of the semester. I liked the continuity of having a project that lasts longer than a one-semester course. Regular meetings with Prof. Laskin were a stable, enjoyable activity and her mentoring kept me motivated and forced me to produce work. Still, Professor Laskin felt more like an ally than anything else. It’s very different from a normal teacher-student relationship where students are told to answer to the teacher as an authority figure. I enjoyed working on a voluntary, self-directed project, and Professor Laskin’s support and advice helped keep me on course when I got lost or discouraged. I wrote a chapter every two weeks, roughly, and it was the first time I’d succeeded in writing regularly and producing a lot of material. Writing regularly helped me learn to write freely and productively (instead of getting bogged down and overcritical) even when I thought I didn’t have any ideas. I also came to point at the end of the semester when I really did run out of ideas. That’s when I learned the difference between writer’s block, which is usually laziness of self-censorship, and truly drawing a blank, which as Professor Laskin suggested is a sign that I need to recharge and get inspired by reading.”

by: Alexis Logsdon

Alexis Logsdon, a City College Fellow and an English major, discusses in her journal the Applying to Graduate School workshop. At CCNY Fellowships Program workshops, including the one on applying to graduate school, Fellows who are seniors pass on the lessons they have learned and lots of good advice to newer cohorts of Fellows:

“...Last year, Jose made a Graduate School Application Checklist sheet for all the schools to which he was applying. When he first showed it to us, I was a little disturbed by the level of organization it implied; I thought he had gone a little overboard (that he told us he had come up with the idea at three o’clock in the morning did not help this assessment.) This fall, however, I realized that his

SPRING 2004 SCHEDULE

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<td>Orientation for New Fellows</td>
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<td>Workshop: On Mentoring</td>
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<td>MMUF NY City-wide Conference at Hunter College</td>
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<td>Recruitment Meeting City College Fellowship and Irani</td>
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Fellow-Directed Luncheons

Faculty Dining Room on the 3rd floor of the NAC building

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GRE PREP COURSE

There will be additional GRE PREP courses in the winter and spring:

1) Fridays, February 27th - April 2 (10 AM-2 PM)
2) Fridays, February 27 - April 2 (3:30-7:30 PM)
3) Fridays, April 23 - May 14 (10 AM-5 PM)
4) Saturdays, May 22 - June 12 (10 AM-5 PM)

For more info, contact: www.primeprep.com or 866/206-9067, x3066.

Remember: the Fellowship Office will pay the course fee.
idea was brilliant. Those sheets have saved me countless hours of hunting for information on the Internet. Early in the semester, I sat down with my twelve sheets and tried to fill out as much information as I could, then made a note of all the information I did not find readily available on the college’s website. This took a lot of the mystery out of the application process.”

by: Tonino Miano

Tonino Miano, a City College Fellow and Physics major, comments in his journal on the Fellowship’s forum lead by guest speaker, Professor Jane Marcus.

“A feminist? I thought. Let me bring my helmet. Well, not quite, but my lack of experience with feminism triggered an involuntary surge of misconceptions. I was expecting stories and anecdotes about the fight against men’s power-driven ideology and obtuse insensitivity to women’s rights. Instead, the aspect of Professor Marcus’ work that was most striking to me wasn’t the hate with which she fought her battles, but the love with which she fought them. She gave an account of her discovery of the painting that became the front cover of her latest book. I was struck by the depth of her interpretation of the image, and by the investigative aspect of the work that was to follow the discovery. My misconceptions crumbled little by little as Professor Marcus talked about her experiences as a wife and a mother, and I knew I had in front of me a person struggling to make the best out of all that life had given her. Professor Marcus is not the feminist I imagined. She is a person with a deep fundamental belief in one’s power of self-assertion and transformation, and she’s dedicated her life to bringing to light that belief in many different ways, ways that transcend gender and other categories. That was inspiring.”

by: Edgardo Molina

Edgardo Molina, is a Mellon Fellow and Computer Science major, he comments in his journal on the MMUF Northeast Regional Conference. Each year, Mellon-Mays Fellows participate in a New England regional conference and a New York City conference with Fellows from other universities.

“One of the highlights of my first semester as a Mellon-Mays Fellow (MMUF) was the trip to the MMUF Northeast Regional Conference at Wesleyan University. Not only was the trip to Connecticut a good break during the semester, it was great to be able to meet other fellows. I enjoyed hearing about other students’ research, and especially hearing a few of their presentations on the discussion topic: ‘Leaving ‘Home’: Fellows and their Communities.’ Like many of the students who presented, I also often find myself not knowing the “home community” I belong to because I was born here in New York with American culture while most of my family and community were not. This often leads my “community” to look at me differently, like a “sellout” or an outcast for “leaving them behind” when it comes to success in my education and other accomplishments. From the conference, it became apparent to me that I belong to a small minority of fellows from the field of Engineering. But, I find this to be an advantage, because I am able to hear and learn more about subject areas I wouldn’t normally explore.”

by: Sokunthary Svay

Sokunthary Svay, an Irani Fellow and English major, writes in her journal about the City College Fellowships’ community. The City College Fellowships Program seeks to provide not just academic and financial support, but an intellectual community for Fellows from across the disciplines.

“As an Isaacs Scholar, I have felt the honor of its prestige but also isolation from others in the Isaacs program. It is quite the opposite with the City College Fellowships Program. After attending all the fellow-initiated luncheons, I have started a dialogue within the program environment, but also outside of the meetings. I have established a rapport with some fellows I had known prior to entering the program, and a few that I met this semester. Since being in the program, I have felt less isolated from the English Department and other students. When problems arise with my fellowship project, I find that help and guidance is accessible beyond that offered by professors. I have run my project ideas across many of my new friends who have provided a wonderful support system. Their encouragement, constructive criticism, and accessibility have been one of the surprising, but helpful aspects of the program. The cliché of a tight-knit community actually applies here, where upon seeing any other fellow, I am greeted warmly and attentively listened to.”