Excerpts from Fellows’ Journals

The Fellowship program supports Fellows’ independent research projects in labs, archives, and beyond. **Agata Tumilowicz** (French) describes her experiences participating in European street theater festivals.

After my semester in Paris, I set out to the south of France to visit Aurillac, the most important city on the French map of street theater festivals. There I visited the festival’s center and obtained many valuable research materials. I also had a chance to interview the citizens of Aurillac, as I profited from the hospitality of a previously unknown French couple that I found via the couch-surfing website. In August, again I had the opportunity to work as an interpreter/guide for a Slovenian theatrical troupe *Ljud* during the International Street Theater Festival in Jelenia Gora. I cannot stress enough how this experience helped me in my research. The Slovenian actors opened my eyes to aspects of street theater that were hitherto unknown to me and later on helped me find appropriate textual materials. In addition, I became acquainted with, interviewed, and have stayed in touch with many creators and performers from Poland and Germany.

Learning to write successful applications for research funding is a key aspect of success in academia. **Elva Yang** (Biology) discusses what she learned about this challenging process.
Grant writing requires turning your scientific vision into concrete language and compressing richly persuasive details into a few pages with clearly stated and measurable objectives. I attended a webinar on grant writing during the semester, which introduced me to the many steps required: writing a letter of intent, pre-proposal and proposal; gathering information; making a budget; and justifying each cost. I learned two new strategies. First, it is important to pay attention to what kind of research each particular funding agency supports. We should review the mission statements and recent awards of each funding agency to see if our idea fits with what they are looking for. Second, almost all funding agencies want to get something back for their money: tangible results that expand knowledge in particular areas.

My mentor, Dr. David Lohman also helped me out by sharing his strategy for applying for grants and fellowships. His five key points to success are: 1) explain why your research is worthwhile; 2) describe your measurable objectives; 3) highlight your qualifications as the best fit for conducting this research; 4) explain how this grant is critical for your professional development; and 5) justify why the research cannot be conducted elsewhere, especially if you are seeking a travel grant. Writing a good research grant proposal is not easy!

Every semester a faculty member addresses the Fellows at our “Forum” On Research.” At these, Fellows learn about different aspects of doing research across the disciplines. Professor Deidre Anglin (Psychology) described the potential and the difficulties of conducting longitudinal research to discover correlations between health and life circumstances. Eliezer Poser (Math) reflects on her presentation. We often hear regarding all sorts of assertions that they have been proved by “studies.” Professor Anglin’s talk gave an inside view into how those facts are produced/teased out of the mounds of data that studies produce. As a math-

**SPRING 2012 SCHEDULE**

**CCFELL SCHEDULE**

All events are from 12:30 - 2:00 PM, unless otherwise noted.
* Required attendance for all Fellows

**TU Feb 28 (NAC 6/316)**: Recruitment meeting for MMUF

**TU Mar 10**: MMUF applications

**TU Apr 3 DUE:** Submit titles for CC Fellowships

**TU Apr 3 (NAC 6/316)**: (12:30 - 2:00 PM):
Program Research Conference

**TU Apr 3 (NAC 6/316)**: Applications for City College Fellowships

**TU Apr 10 DUE:** Applications for summer research funding

**TU May 1 DUE:** Applications for City College Fellowships

**MMUF EVENTS**

**FRI Mar 30**: Tenth Annual NY Regional MMUF conference, Brooklyn College

**WED Apr 4**: MMUF Conference, Johns Hopkins University

**FRI May 18**: MMUF Annual Dinner

**The Tenth Annual City College Fellowships Research Conference**

The Tenth Annual City College Fellowships Research Conference is Friday, April 27, 2012, 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 Tuesday, April 3, 2012.
ematrician, I was interested in the statistical side of her work. The mathematics I study is abstract and deals with certainties. I have learned only the most rudimentary statistics, but I find it interesting how statistical methods can be used to somehow find meaning in the messy patterns of real-life data and to somehow magically figure out which patterns are significant and which are not. At one point Professor Anglin mentioned how new statistical methods can deduce certain things which older methods could not. Sometimes I fear mathematicians are spending their lives proving theorems merely so that other mathematicians can use them to prove other theorems. I was nice to hear that mathematics is making real, useful progress.

Yexenia Vanegas (Anthropology) reflects on the most important lessons she learned as a first semester Fellow.

The first fellowship events I attended helped me to understand what a great decision I had made to apply for MMUF and what an invaluable opportunity I had been given. At the roundtable discussion about Summer Research Experiences, I was both impressed and a little intimidated not just by the amount of work Fellows had done on various research projects, but also by how well they articulated their ideas. One could not help but notice how much they had grown as researchers and intellectuals. Despite being intimidating, it was encouraging as well. Talking to the Fellows about their summer research experiences allowed me to understand that they are just like me: people who know how to work hard to build skills to attain the knowledge they desire. They too face difficulties, challenges, and sometimes get discouraged, but it is by overcoming challenges that one gets stronger and smarter. I now know that earning a PhD requires hard work for everyone; it is not just super smart geniuses who succeed.

Many of the Fellows raved about the workshop on “Advanced learning techniques” led by (Fellows) Christen Pruitt and Joshua Clough.

Yexenia Vanegas (Anthropology). This workshop was very helpful and encouraging. Christen and Joshua introduced us to a variety of strategies for reading and writing that I applied right away. Some of the techniques Christen mentioned I vaguely knew in the back of my head; however the discussion really helped me to put them into action. It was also reassuring to know that different people learn in different ways. Some people are disorganized thinkers who have post-its and little notes scribbled in the margins, like me, while others type up notes to file in neat notebooks. Neither is better or worse; it is just a matter of what works best for the individual. I believe many people left this meeting revitalized with new ideas on how to approach a daunting piece of literature or writing assignment.

Hoang Nguyen (Biochemistry). Christen and Joshua were wonderful workshop leaders who helped me a lot. They offered plenty of useful advice and introduced us to valuable resources that helped me improve my efficiency. Among other things, this workshop focused my attention on how to be an “inquisitive reader” and how to judge the quality and reliability of articles in academic databases.

Roy Song (Biology), like all the Fellows, appreciated the excellent workshop on managing stress given by Fred Dombrowski, Outreach Coordinator of CCNY’s Wellness and Counseling Center.

Fred appeared excited about his job and knowledgeable about the topic of stress and stress management. A few things I liked about his approach were that he gave many examples, periodically asked questions, and tried to involve everyone in the room. The take home messages were: there are many different types of stress, not all bad; CCNY Health and Wellness Center provides FREE assistance to anyone who needs it; take few moments and do some breathing exercises every day to help reduce stress.

Although it is not required of applicants to doctoral programs to take the initiative to contact and meet the professors with whom they would like to study, it can often help. Zachary Masur (History) recounts what he learned doing this.

In mid-October, I traveled to Philadelphia to meet with Professors Peter Holquist and Benjamin Nathans at the University of Pennsylvania. I prepared for the interview by imagining what they might ask: where I came from, what my interests are, and what my project is all about. I was correct that they wanted to know these things, but they also asked me many other things, for example: “What classes have you taken that shaped your understanding of history in relationship to the work you want to do?” I did not have a good answer to this question, as I couldn’t even articulate what my

**GRE PREP COURSE**

Students wishing to attend a GRE Prep Course, which the Fellowships Program strongly recommends, may choose from a Kaplan course or the Prime Prep course led by Prof. Pilette. Prime Prep’s next course is scheduled for Wednesdays (6:15-9:45pm) from Feb. 15 to March 21. If you are interested in this course, want additional info, or want to know more about other upcoming courses, please email Prep@primeprep.com. For info on Kaplan courses, please consult the website: www.Kaptest.com. Note: Prime Prep bills the Program for tuition payment, so there are no upfront costs. You will have to pay for the Kaplan course and be reimbursed.

In either case, you must write Renee and request permission to attend a course, supplying dates and costs, before taking a course in order to be eligible for the GRE Prep course tuition payment. Remember, it takes three to four weeks for a check to be processed.

**VERY IMPORTANT:** If you want to take one of the Kaplan courses, you MUST apply for the 50% CCNY discount even before asking for approval! To receive a discount, you must:
- Enroll individually by contacting Kaplan directly (1-800-KAPTEST = 1-800-527 8378)
- Provide Kaplan with your CCNY email address and copy of CCNY ID.
- At time of enrollment, students must be prepared to pay at least 1/3 of the final cost (after the discount).
understanding of history is. When they asked why on earth I wanted to study with them since they are Russianists and I am a historian of Poland, I had a better reply: that their work is relevant to mine and that I envision myself as a historian of eastern Europe, not just of “Poland.” Articulating my interests in this way made everything clearer. When the meeting ended, I felt I had scored some victories but did not close the sale. They had to ask me too many leading questions, and I did not always have satisfactory answers. I needed to draw up a new marketing plan.

A few weeks later I met with Timothy Snyder at Yale. I was extremely nervous about meeting this eminent historian who I admire so much, and as a result I prepared much more. This time, I had a better idea of what to expect and was able to frame my experiences and interests concisely. When I walked into Snyder’s office I launched into my sales pitch without any poking or prodding. I understood that it was not his job to get to know me; it was my job to come prepared to offer relevant information. I talked briefly about my family background and explained how my foray into linguistics had lead to my research project in Poland. I nutshelled my project quickly, and Snyder seemed thrilled. Apparently, I had succeeded in my task.

By the time I headed to Harvard for my last set of interviews, I was much more confident because I had made a lot of progress finalizing my writing sample and knew exactly what I wanted to say about my research. During one of my interviews I even managed to articulate a reasonable extension of my current project into a dissertation topic. Having gained clarity over the fall semester about the significance of my research, the dam broke and everything could flow. This, in turn, made it easy for me to finalize a statement of purpose that I felt presented me in the best possible light.

One of the biggest challenges in applying to doctoral programs is writing the difficult statement of purpose. Roy Song (Biology) describes how he tackled this challenge.

The workshop on writing the statement of purpose was very helpful and relevant for me. Reading three rough drafts by other Fellows put my own work in perspective. Feedback given by Professor Joshua Wilner and by the other Fellows was constructive, which helped me to finish my own essay. A few comments I thought were especially helpful: grab the attention of the reader in your first paragraph and include the program you are applying for right away; construct the essay as a theme, rather than a chronological list of accomplishments; be honest.

I discussed many different revisions of my statement with my mentor, Professor David Lohman, and each time I came closer to a strong, well-drafted essay. Dr. Susana Neves (Mt. Sinai School of Medicine), Dr. Amy Berkov, and Dr. Susan Besse were also instrumental in the process by providing constructive feedback. In hindsight, I realize my first mistake was underestimating the amount of time I would need to write my statement. I didn’t comprehend the level of commitment and time required. My words of wisdom to future students writing their statements of purpose are: start early, keep many drafts, and allow enough time to solicit feedback from your advisors and to incorporate their suggestions. [Like many seniors,] however, I could not connect all the pieces in my statement until I had completed and reflected on my summer research. That is why I started late. The key to successful completion of a doctoral degree is building productive mentoring relationships with faculty members. Natalia Leston (Psychology) describes how becoming a Fellow empowered her to reach out to faculty who share her intellectual passions. In his final journal as a Fellow, and after having completed applications to doctoral programs, Rashun Miles (Psychology) reflects on the power of mentorship.

Natalia Leston (Psychology). The workshop on mentoring was invaluable, inspiring and empowering me to initiate contact with professor Joseph Nagler of Queens College. He was very helpful in discussing with me different forms of music therapy and directing me towards articles on therapeutic research that I did not know existed. As a jazz musician of eleven years with a fascination in psychology, I was happily overwhelmed by this discovery and spent the semester reading a lot of books and articles that provided me with focus and the confidence to pursue a major in music as well as psychology. I had the exciting new experience of reading Professor Nagler’s published research and then discussing with him his findings.

Rashun Miles (Psychology). This semester had highs and lows, but most importantly, my appreciation of mentorship, the City College Fellowship, and education grew. I would not have built a formalized mentor/mentee relationship had I not been a City College Fellow. I knew I wanted to pursue a PhD and that this required rigorous studying, dedication, and sacrifices. But I only gradually came to understand that the mentor/mentee relationship is the key element for beginning and completing a doctoral degree. Through the strong mentorship of Professor Deidre Anglin, I was able to do more than merely complete my undergraduate degree. I learned to formulate and express research questions, create a research proposal, experience the tediousness of the IRB process, and submit work for publication. Professor Anglin also pushed me through thirteen drafts of my statement of purpose until “Rashun” finally emerged: until I was able to articulate why I wanted and needed to pursue a doctoral degree in psychology. All these experiences helped me to realize that my passion lies in research and academia. This is the product and the power of excellent mentoring.

My time in the Fellowship has taught me how to look for resources, to ask for letters of recommendation, and to “show up.” I have “shown up,” engaged, and achieved goals that I once thought were far-fetched dreams.

City College Fellowships Program is an umbrella program that administers several undergraduate fellowships. See our website for information: www.ccny.cuny.edu/fellowshipsprogram
The City College Fellowships Office is located in NAC 6/316, 212/650-8388.