LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Following the end of each semester when I read the Fellows’ journals, I am always awed by their intelligence and passion, as well as by the pure grit it takes for many and how to achieve their goals in the face of sometimes overwhelming challenges. Fall 2012 was an especially challenging semester as our city suffered a devastating hurricane, leaving us to cope with tragedy as well as disorienting disruptions to routines. In such times, the importance of community becomes paramount. Although our fellowship community is small, the deep camaraderie among the Fellows—cemented by honesty, empathy, trust, generosity, and big and small acts of kindness—fosters an essential sense of personal well being that contributes significantly to academic achievement. I hope you will enjoy reading excerpted passages from the Fellows’ journals below, which provide a small window into the very special community that the Fellows have formed and the benefits they reap from collaboration with one another as they pursue their varied and ambitious academic projects.

Our community includes the faculty mentors who generously support the Fellows’ success. Heartfelt thanks are due to them as well as to colleagues who spoke at our various fall luncheons. Joshua Wilner (English) led our workshop on writing the statement of purpose, providing Fellows expert guidance and encouragement for tacking this difficult task. Barbara Naddeo (History) spoke to the Fellows about how (and why) to think about the research they will do in terms of where it will fit into specific academic fields and what audiences it seeks to reach. Kenia Fernandez (History) led a most helpful workshop on effective writing strategies. A panel of our local experts addressed the Fellows on multiple ways to secure financing for education and research as well as how and why to make financial planning a priority: Diane Watford (Bursar’s office), Anna Hutcheson (Scholarship Manager), and our own Renee Philippi and Fellow Rocio Rayo. Thank you all!

Susan Besse

New Fellows

It is with great pleasure that we announce and welcome our new Fellows. From a most competitive pool of applications, 8 new Fellows have been selected to join the City College Fellowships Program in the spring semester 2013.

APRIL 9, 2013
SUMMER RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE

Proposals for funding for summer research are due to Prof. Besse on Tuesday, April 9th. For instructions, please read the CC Fellowships Program Guide: “Funding for Research, Training, Travel: Guidelines for Requesting and Using Research Monies.”

Summer Research Reports

During summer 2012, the fellows pursued a broad range of research projects in CCNY labs, in structured research programs at universities around the country, and working independently in several foreign cities. Below, two fellows reflect on their very different experiences.

Yan Fei Luo (Math). In three months of research, Tai-Danae Bradley, Yin Choi Cheng, and I, with Dr. Brooke Feigon, found the asymptotic expansion for the average norm of the greatest common divisor (GCD) of a pair of Gaussian integers inside a given radius of a complex plane. Finally, at the end, we arrived at two theorems and plan to submit a paper to a journal. Although I was initially concerned about whether I could contribute to the project, Dr. Feigon assured me that we would all learn a lot from each other, and this certainly proved to be the case. Bradley has a very strong logical mind and Cheng has a strong mathematical and number theory background, and they were generous in teaching me what they knew. When we brainstormed together, we discovered that the best idea never came from one person but from bouncing ideas off one another, which inspired us to think in new ways and to arrive at a solution that none of us could have thought of alone. Regular meetings with Dr. Feigon helped keep us on track, and we benefited from her hints and leads. Along the way, we learned that no idea should be discarded, even if it seems irrelevant, because it may come in handy later.

Rachel Ansong  English
Tameekia Cooper  English
Corey Gingue  English
Jeffrey Kasper  Art
Tamra Parks Lepro  English
Natalya Mishchenko  Mathematics
Neelam Prashad  Psychology
Chunbio Wang  Mathematics
We also worked efficiently when we divided the work. Toward the end, while Cheng was working on fixing the error term in our expected value formula and Bradley was working on editing our journal paper, I continued to work with MATLAB to produce graphs and computational data that supported our results. I was inspired to work hard because I knew I had to keep up with my partners. Now that we found the expression for the expected norm of the GCD of a pair of Gaussian integers, we want to continue investigating the distribution of the GCD of Gaussian integers by studying higher moments. I certainly understand after this summer that learning never stops!

Mayelin Perez (English). I arrived at The University of Chicago’s MMUF Summer Research Training Program with a very vague research topic—feminist Gothic literature. When prompted to state my all-important research question, I was stuck, but I resisted my mentor’s suggestion to begin working with a “stand-in” question. My assumption that this would be a waste of time was proven wrong! Diving headfirst into the University of Chicago’s awe-inspiring library, I set to work researching my “stand-in” question: why has the Gothic genre been so dominated by women authors?

At the height of my research frenzy, I piled up over fifty books on my desk: books that traced the trajectory of my summer research. From my original, too broad idea, I began to refine and narrow my focus until I zeroed in, first on one particular time period—the 19th century—and then on a specific novel—Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Given time constraints, I decided it would be prudent to research one novel in depth. *Frankenstein*, being the quintessential female Gothic novel of the 19th century, seemed the perfect choice.

Yet there already exists a world (or two) of literature on *Frankenstein*, complicating my amateur attempts at criticism. I soon discovered that from the 70s to the present, feminist critics have utterly appropriated *Frankenstein* in their efforts to elevate women writers to the canon of Anglophone literature. This left me questioning whether I had anything new to bring to the table.

After countless hours in the library and an illuminating and productive meeting with a subject librarian, I began to develop a clearer vision of the current state of *Frankenstein* scholarship. I became fascinated with analyzing notions of being in connection with depictions of women in *Frankenstein*. This led me to the most unforeseen of places: John Locke and his notions of property and personhood. My final research proposal, titled “‘Bring him into being’: Women as Prerequisites for Manhood...
in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein,* drew on Lockean theory to arrive at an explanation for both the marginality of female characters and the monster’s request for a female mate. I argued that the monster’s request for a mate places the female he desires in the position of property, which the monster believes will “bring him into being” as a man.

If I learned anything from my research experience this summer, it is that research truly is an unpredictable pursuit!

**Excerpts from Fellows’ Journals**

Below, fellows share stories about how they benefited from participating in our program’s various workshops. As you will see, these events foster solidarity while communicating information that helps Fellows to get the most from their undergraduate education and prepare to gain admission to and to thrive in doctoral programs.

**Rebecca Panko (Biology).** Of all the events I attended this semester, I learned the most about my peers at the “Roundtable on summer research experiences.” Although some challenges are unique to specific fields of research, I recognized that there are many that we all share. Miguel Briones’ comments on the difficulty of taking full responsibility for an entire project resonated with my own experience of having to learn to multitask to see a project to completion. I especially related to remarks by Luke Hwang and Danielle Clare, who discussed the all-too-common frustration of obtaining inconsistent results in scientific experiments. Deciding when to “cut your losses and run” and when to embrace inconsistencies that might lead to new discoveries can take a mental toll. Like Fei Luo, I learned while conducting summer research that asking for help is a good thing. Emilie Gruchow, Hanifah Robinson, and Rakim Jenkins discussed the challenge of representing yourself, overcoming the fear of new experiences, and adjusting to the rhythm of working abroad. They also reminded us of the importance of maintaining relationships you build during your career and the importance of collaborating with your peers. Glenda Ullauri and Yexenia Vanegas admitted struggling with self-discipline issues, a challenge all Fellows face. Yexenia referred to the common “illusion of time,” which can lead to procrastination. Shanna Jean-Baptiste shared her struggle to stay true to her own work, and to say “no” when necessary. Hearing about each fellow’s summer experience helped me cope with fall semester challenges, as I knew that I was not alone. In trying times, I drew inspiration from the accomplishments and determination of my fellow Fellows.

**Glenda Ullauri (Anthropology).** The sense of camaraderie among the Fellows was greatly strengthened by our roundtable discussion on “Race, Class and Gender in the Academy.” I discovered that the insecurities I have about my academic work are widely shared by my peers. For example, for a long time I was a victim of the “imposter syndrome,” secretly thinking that I had somehow lucked out by getting into an elite group where I did not really belong. This feeling intensified when I realized that the summer research program I participated in was for minorities only; this made me fear that it was my identity as a Hispanic female that explained my admission to the program, and I started to doubt my qualifications and abilities. I was surprised to learn that so many Fellows had experienced these emotions but had not shared them with others.

**Yexenia Vanegas (Anthropology).** At the lively roundtable discussion on “Race, Class and Gender in the Academy,” everyone participated. Miriam Abdullah’s story about her struggle to bridge her double worlds of traditional Palestinian girl at home and American girl at school resonated with many of us. As aspiring scholars, we are beginning to understand that many of us may have to learn to navigate double worlds or multiple worlds. Within academia, we may feel like outsiders by virtue of our identities and/or the research topics we pursue; but no matter what we study, our research and reading can also separate us from family and childhood friends. Friends and family members are not always supportive of our educational and professional goals; nor can we assume that they will be interested to learn about our research. Some express disapproval in comments such as “you are reading too much into [fill in the blank].” Even (or especially) the language we learn to use as aspiring academics sets us apart and can strain relationships with people from our communities of origin. Although our discussion produced no easy solutions to these challenges, it is comforting to know that I am not alone.

**Rene Cordero (History).** At a certain point, I became intimidated by the scope of my research ambition, and got stuck. I couldn’t start writing. I fell into a common trap: the burden of thinking one should create scholarship that is entirely new, that says something no one has ever said. Finally, I was able to overcome my anxiety by reading Howard Becker’s chapter “Freshman English for Graduate Students” [in his book *Writing for Social Scientists,* which we discussed in the workshop on “Building Academic Skills.”] Both this chapter and the discussion liberated me from a tremendous amount of stress by helping me to see writing as a process. That is, writing is all about rewriting;

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**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 from 6:15-9:45pm at Hunter College. The course begins Wed., Feb. 13 and finishes Wed., March 20. 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 CCFELL 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).
there is no perfect first draft. I received wonderful suggestions from peers who knew nothing about my research. Through their support, my mind seemed to clear, and I discovered novel ways to approach my topic.

Mayelin Perez (English). One of the most valuable workshops this semester was undoubtedly the “Forum: On Research,” led by Professor Naddeo. Prof. Naddeo focused on a little discussed aspect of graduate school: the practical and strategic considerations that graduate students should take into account when writing a dissertation. Professor Naddeo discussed the importance of turning research into a cohesive argument that fits into a larger conversation in one’s field. I appreciated this workshop so much because it offered a window into life beyond graduate school, along with advice on how to succeed in the competitive world of academia.

Natalia Leston (Psychology). The “Statement of Purpose Workshop” helped me to better understand how to structure this important and concise piece of writing, which should be an intellectual autobiography. Professor Wilner’s most important suggestion is that one keep in mind a simple story line: where am I coming from, where am I at now, and where am I going. The four statements we workshoped illustrated different points. Jessica Mendez effectively contextualized her research interests by tying them to her upbringing in a Puerto Rican immigrant family and a poor New York neighborhood. She received encouragement to strengthen her voice and to “own” her achievements. Luke Hwang’s statement included little personal information, opening with a clear, direct statement of his research interests in chemistry. I found this very effective. He received suggestions to clarify the specific role he had had in the lab and also to elaborate further about the kind of research he wants to pursue as a doctoral student. Debra Williams’ Statement of Purpose taught me that one should write about the influence that specific scholars have had on one’s research.

I found all of the tips given during this workshop very helpful, and I created a list of “formulas” as a toolbox to use when I begin to write my own Statement of Purpose. I plan to reread Professor Besse’s guidelines and also to study model statements written by former Fellows who are now doctoral students.

Fellows frequently attend academic conferences in New York City and further afield. Two Fellows describe the very different types of conferences they attended in the fall.

Rebecca Panko (Biology). In early October, the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Departments at CCNY held a retreat at Black Rock Forest, Cornwall, NY to allow professors and graduate students to present their current research and receive feedback from their peers. As an undergraduate student, I was surprised and excited to be invited. We were housed the Forest Lodge, a marvel of green building technology that features self-composting toilets. The retreat opened my eyes to a different side of academia. I had never seen professors and graduate students discuss their work so informally in such a relaxing and fun environment. It was interesting to see my former professors asked tough questions about their research, and even more interesting when they didn’t have an answer! With encouragement from Professor Berkov, I too presented work in progress to the group. I was so nervous; but luckily, the audience was very receptive and polite, and offered great suggestions. I look forward to similar retreats in the future that combine hours of presentations with hikes in the woods and delicious food. The informal setting offered plenty of opportunities to break off into small groups and continue discussions late into the evening.

Benjamin (Sben) Grans-Korsh (Architectural History). In late October I attended the Urban History Association’s annual conference at Columbia University. The weekend was my first experience at an academic conference, and the process of presenting papers was entirely foreign. I picked up the routine after several sessions, and was engrossed in the expertise of the presenters; their public speaking skills varied, but the fast paced rhetoric was absorbing. Follow-up discussion and prepared critiques from session leaders often countered or expanded my understanding of the presented work. I learned invaluable lessons on academic research and discourse.

Fellows sometimes accept invitations to teach a class and in so doing realize that teaching is an excellent way to learn a subject more deeply.

Emmanuel Lachaud (History). The most fun challenge of the semester was teaching a class in Prof. Besse’s Colonial Latin America course. In preparing, I had to digest what I knew about the Haitian and French revolutions and contextualize complex historical details within the broad transatlantic revolutionary experience. My lesson focused on how the Haitian revolutionaries defined liberty and equality (as evident in the nation’s early constitutions), as well as the larger question of the extent of the Enlightenment’s ideological impact in Latin America. I found that I enjoyed discussion more than lecturing, especially when my classmates raised so many new questions about a topic I thought I knew like the back of my hand. I did not anticipate that that planning and teaching this class would push me to consider so many new ideas and perspectives.

Last but not least, we return to the value of community.

Shanna Jean-Baptiste (French). This semester, I was particularly astounded by the sense of community that the fellowship nurtures—not only among the current fellows but also with graduated fellows who are pursuing doctoral degrees. Agata Tumiłowicz [who is in the NYU comparative literature doctoral program] randomly emailed me one day about an event involving a contemporary Haitian writer and Michael J. Dash, one of the most influential scholars of my field. I also had a pleasant interaction with Joshua Clough [who is pursuing a doctorate in history at Duke University]. At Professor Rosenberg’s suggestion, and because Joshua works on more or less the same period of Haitian history as I do, I decided to email him. He answered within hours and sent me very useful links to two of the major Haitian literary journals of that time period.