New Fellows

It is with great pleasure that we announce and welcome our 15 new Fellows.

Eseosa Aiwerioghene  
Biochemistry

Dilenny Cisnero  
History

Christopher Colon  
Sociology

Yasmine El Gheur  
Art History

Joel Engelman  
Psychology

Ivette Gomez  
English

MD Kabir  
Chemistry

Lukas Lindwasser  
Physics

Jose Ramirez  
History

Lediona Shahollari  
History

Vannessa Velez  
History

Rebecca Wellington  
Philosophy

Alexandra Whittaker  
Art History

Timothy G. Williams  
Philosophy

Xiangfu Zhang  
Psychology

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Recently, I have received a number of emails from graduated Fellows who are thriving. Those pursuing doctoral degrees speak of their gratitude for the academic preparation they received at CCNY and in the fellowship. Emmanuel Lachaud (History PhD, Yale) expressed the general sentiment as follows: “I find myself just as prepared (and unprepared) as the other grad students. … While the work is overbearing at times, I never feel like an impostor or like I don’t belong.” Graduated Fellows pursuing other professional paths express equal gratitude for the many ways in which their experiences at CCNY have prepared them for life and work. Their inspiring example of success and commitment to giving back speaks volumes about the empowering potential of education.

This spring we are delighted to welcome a diverse and talented group of fifteen new Fellows. Congratulations to all! We look forward to getting to know you, and we welcome your contributions to the camaraderie and intellectual excitement of our community. As you can see from reading Fellows’ journal excerpts below, the safe space and various supports of the fellowship foster risk-taking and growth on many fronts.

The fellowship incurs many debts every semester. Most importantly, our program cannot succeed without the faculty’s generous commitment to mentoring; the Fellows’ success in developing academic skills and research agendas that will win them admission to doctoral programs depend on support from faculty who have dedicated time and energy to fostering their growth. Thank you is never enough. In particular, the Fellows and I thank Professor Andras Kisery (English) for the keenly intelligent constructive criticism he provided to Fellows at our important fall workshop on writing the statement of purpose. We were all tremendously impressed by the ability of Professor Adrián Rodríguez-Contreras (Chemistry) to engage non-specialists in his discussion of research in neuroscience and brain development. Professor Amr Kamal (Foreign Languages) skillfully led a workshop on academic writing that allowed free expression of differing views and provoked much thought among the Fellows who gleaned important insights even as they agreed to disagree.

Please join us on Friday May 1st for the City College Fellowships Program’s 13th Annual Research Conference. Everyone is welcome to attend the panels on which Fellows will present their research and to participate in the discussions that follow. We hope to see you there!

Susan Besse

Journal Excerpts

Research funding provided by the Fellowship Program allowed several Fellows to travel abroad to conduct archival research during summer 2014. Below, two Fellows reflect on their experiences. Fellow Asha Whale (History) commented: Our fellowship round table discussion on summer research experiences was eye opening. The challenges that Karim and Ivana faced to gain access to archives raise important questions about the relationship between academia and nationalism. If private interests and national governments control archival records, does this limit who can write particular histories and thus compromise...
ethnic identities and tap social networks to circumvent barriers to access, not everyone is positioned to do so.

Karim Elhaies (History). I spent the summer in Egypt conducting archival research in a few of Cairo’s archives. Due to my interest in the process of knowledge production and history writing, I wanted to explore Egyptian national history curricula during the 1950s to examine the state’s official discourse on Egyptian independence that followed the Egyptian Revolution of July 1952.

I discovered that archival research is challenging on many fronts, from navigating the bureaucracy to learning how to sift through piles of documents. I never succeeded in gaining access to Egypt’s oldest archive, Dar Al-wathah’iq. Because of current political conflicts in Egypt, rising xenophobia, and the presumption that access to historical documents could threaten national security, the government is restricting access to this archive. Nevertheless, I learned that I should have presented a more polished proposal written in language that raises no red flags, and I should have also secured references from Egyptian professors. Luckily, having become savvier about how to pass screening by intelligence officials and archivists, I gained access to the Ministry of Education’s archive and museum. There, I was able to peruse boxes and boxes of curricula and school textbooks adopted for use in Egypt’s public schools. I quickly realized, however, that figuring out which documents I should read carefully and which I could pass over was far from

SPRING 2015 SCHEDULE

SPRING 2015 CCFELL SCHEDULE

* Required attendance for all Fellows
Please see the “Guide” for other events required for Fellows at different stages.
All events begin at 12:30 in NAC 6/309 and lunch is served, unless otherwise noted.

TH Jan 29: Orientation for all new Fellows

FRI Jan 30: *Fellowship Dinner
(6:00 meeting with graduated Fellows; 7:00 dinner in NAC 6/316)

TH Feb 19: Workshop: The Mentoring Relationship

TH Feb 26: Workshop: Balancing Career and Life


TH Mar 19: Workshop: Public Speaking

TH Apr 16: *Workshop: Applying to Graduate school

TH Apr 23: Round-table: Applying to Graduate school
(Q&A follow-up discussion)

FRI May 1: *City College Fellowships Program Annual Research Conference (9 AM - 5 PM) (Held in 6/316 and 6/309.)

DEADLINES

WED Feb 25: Learning Agreements due

MON Apr 6: DUE: Applications for summer research funding
(Note: due date falls during spring break.)

MON Apr 13: Submit paper titles for CCFELL Research Conference

TU Apr 14 (NAC 6/316): Recruitment meeting for CCFELL

FRI May 1: DUE: Applications for City College Fellowships

MMUF EVENTS & DEADLINES

MON Feb 16: DUE: Submit paper titles and synopses for MMUF Research Conference

TU Feb 24 (NAC 6/316): Recruitment meeting for MMUF

FRI Apr 24: Thirteenth Annual NY Regional MMUF conference, Barnard College, 9 AM - 5 PM

FRI May 15: MMUF Annual Dinner (5:30 round table at CCNY; 7:00 dinner at Covo Restaurant)

The Thirteenth Annual City College Fellowships Research Conference

The Thirteenth Annual City College Fellowships Research Conference is Friday, May 1, 2015, 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 Monday, April 13, 2014.
easy. In the end, I discovered that Egypt’s late 1950s history curricula reflect contradictory perspectives. Textbook chapters that cover the period of 1922 (when Egypt was granted its “semi-independence”) to 1952 (when a military coup ended colonialism) reflect the perspective of the Egyptian monarchy; chapters that cover the 1952 Revolution and its aftermath reflect the perspective of the new post-independence state. The unresolved tensions and debates evident in these school textbooks underlie conflicts in Egypt today.

Ivana Lazaroska (History). My summer research in the Balkans started just after the area had suffered floods, landslides, power outages, and an outbreak of water-borne diseases. Luckily, this did not prevent me from meeting and working with my mentor Prof. Greble in the archives in Novi Pazar (Serbia). There, she introduced me to the complexities of conducting archival research. First, I learned that no research can be accomplished in small local archives until one builds relationships of trust with the archivists. This is particularly true in the Balkans that has a vexed historical relationship with the West, and with the U.S. since the 1990s. Even native-born researchers like myself who emigrated to the U.S. must seek to allay distrust by showing respect for archivists and interest in their story.

After attending a conference on The Great War in Sarajevo (Bosnia) and an intensive two-week seminar at the University of Graz (Austria) on “Transforming the Western Balkans and Turkey,” I traveled to the land of my birth, Macedonia, to pursue my own research agenda. Although I had arranged to use archives in both Ohrid and Skopje, the latter was unexpectedly closed for the whole month of August. As it turned out, the more extended time I spent in Ohrid paid off. Given that nationalist Macedonian historical narratives focus mainly on Alexander the Great and the “name question” with Greece, my interest in Ottoman and Yugoslavian history raised suspicion, as did my status as emigrant to and student in the U.S. It took me until the second week to build the necessary trust with archivists before I managed to gain access to documents relevant to my interests, including documents from women’s organizations in the 1950s and 1960s as well as some sharia documents from the 1920s. Archival documentation forced me to reshape the questions I was asking; just as important, my interactions with people outside the archives taught me a lot about myself, the region I want to study/research, and stories that need to be told. I short, this summer gave me confidence to pursue an academic career.

Fellowship round table discussions and workshops provide Fellows information, inspiration, and both personal and academic support. Below, several Fellow comment on what they gained from participation in fellowship events.

Jerry Guillaume (History). Entering the fellowship taught me to switch my mindset from that of student to that of aspiring scholar. Listening to my peers discuss their summer research experiences, I realized that I should take charge of my education, rather than merely seek to fulfill my professors’ expectations. It is one thing to hear your professors discuss their research, and an altogether different experience to hear your peers discuss their research. To succeed in conducting independent archival research—as the stories of Ivana, Karim, Samina, Seth, Josetin, and Jeff all clearly illustrated—I need to start to consider what I can add to scholarly debates. The Fellows have certainly inspired me to raise my aspirations and my goals! Previously, it had never occurred to me to apply for any funding beyond PELL; now, I intend to seek a grant to conduct research in archives in Philadelphia.

Maria Gavrutenko (Biology). The Fellowship workshop on writing a statement of purpose (for doctoral program applications) was very important and immensely helpful. The program’s guidelines for writing statements of purpose provide succinct information on key elements that make a successful statement, and I kept referring back to them when I was working on my own statement. But beyond this, the workshop gave me invaluable insight into the point of view of the professors who read these statements and grant admission to competitive doctoral programs. Professors Andras Kisery and Susan Besse gave the Fellows a clear idea of what admission committee members look for when they weed out weak statements and select successful ones. Keeping in mind the point of view of “the target audience” such statements helped me to avoid common mistakes such as including generic phrases in my own statement.

The fall semester’s research forum featured Professor Adrián Rodríguez-Contreras (Chemistry), who managed to engage the diverse audience of non-specialists in presenting

**GRE PREP COURSE**

Just a reminder that the City College Fellowships Program will cover the cost of GRE Prep for all Fellows (up to $650), whether they choose to enroll in a Kaplan GRE-prep course (at the CCNY discounted fee) or in any GRE online tutorial (such as Magoosh). Fellows may also receive reimbursement for the purchase of any GRE prep materials, up to a total of $650 for all GRE prep course fees and materials. If you would like to take the Kaplan course, you MUST apply for the CCNY discount. To receive the CCNY half-price 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).

You must obtain approval from Renee (RMPhilippi@ccny.cuny.edu) before registering for any of the courses mentioned above or before purchasing GRE prep materials.
an overview of his research on the neuroscience of sensory perception and brain development. I was greatly impressed with his ability to explain the key aspects of his research and to make them fascinating by sharing some little-known facts about brain structure. The ability to make scientific research understood by the general public is crucial, especially now that the divide between the sciences and humanities is growing wider than ever. Professor Rodríguez-Contreras showed us that science is a field full of exciting new directions of study that lie outside the realm of medicine and pharmacology. The idea that other scientific research also provides viable career paths especially resonated with me, as I am often frustrated to encounter people who equate my desire to pursue scientific research with aspirations to become a medical student.

Keevin Brown (Sociology/Black Studies). I thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship meetings, and I appreciate that all ideas are heard and respected within our community. Perhaps the most memorable meeting was the workshop on academic writing led by Professor Amr Kamal (Foreign Languages). I have sometimes felt pressure to write verbose and cryptic prose in order to try to sound sophisticated. But this workshop reassured me that I don’t have to write in a style that is inaccessible to the very people I’m trying to help. This revelation has helped me make peace with my writing style. I feel it is important that we future producers of knowledge use language that not only speaks for the subaltern, but at least in some cases also speaks to them. I find it disheartening when academics use needless jargon that excludes the very people who could benefit from the ideas expressed. Although I understand that sophisticated concepts may sometimes require the use of complex language, my goal is to make complex ideas accessible to a broader public, breaking down the dichotomy between scholars and laymen. It was comforting to know that Professor Kamal and others who have built successful academic careers do not advocate the use of cryptic jargon.

Zachary Hayworth (English). Professor Amr Kamal led one of the most interesting and personally engaging workshops of the semester, addressing issues of academic writing. Through discussion of the merits of various styles, we defined the issue as whether difficult language that characterizes the academy (1) is an attempt by a hyper-educated elite to hide from transparent discussion by lording above the reader a highly expensive verbal training? Or (2) is the opposite true: that language which seems difficult often seems that way because it challenges the status quo linguistic usage of the dominant discourse, itself perhaps a product of habit and power structures that stands in the way of clear communication? The question is critical, and though the group of Fellows did not reach any consensus, I walked away with a new sense of what is at stake for someone like myself who is researching theory of language and literature and headed towards an academic career.

Building strong mentoring relationships with faculty members is a key goal of all Fellows. Although this can be challenging, it is critical to Fellows’ success; in order to develop a research agenda, to secure admission to doctoral programs, and also to learn how to earn the mentoring that is essential for success as a doctoral student, Fellows must take initiative to build positive relationships with faculty. One new Fellow describes his transformative first semester.

Jonathan Perlow (Psychology). Although I had a pretty good sense of the kind of research I want pursue, I initially felt at sea when faced with the fellowship requirement to establish a formal mentoring relationship. Before the semester began, I read through virtually all the bios of Psychology Department professors; and then during the first two weeks of classes, I sought counsel broadly. I got a fantastic reminder of how dangerous it is to judge people and their suitability to mentor from paper profiles. Seeking a mentor is a little like online dating; professors’ bios suggested who might be a “good fit” for me. But 2 of the 3 candidates I had in mind were on sabbatical, and the 3rd was totally unresponsive to the idea of mentoring. One adjunct professor had been incredibly kind and helpful to me, but I was warned against the perils and unfairness of asking an adjunct to serve as a mentor. Finally, two Fellows who are psychology majors recommended that I speak to Dr. Melara. I had been intrigued by his bio, but figured he must be too busy. Anyway, what did my interest in meditation have to do with his research in attentional control? When I met with Dr. Melara to discuss a few other matters related to my degree, I really enjoyed our interaction. Then I reconsidered how our interests might intersect: How did I initially miss the connection between meditation and attentional control? After another brief conversation in which I outlined my research interests and aspirations, Dr. Melara invited me to join his neuroplasticity research group that meets once a week. The group is amazing and opened my eyes to so many new, important concepts over the semester. It’s a warm and collaborative group, and that means the world to me. During my first semester as a Fellow, I conducted a literature review, attended a major conference in Boston, and gave a few presentations to the neuroplasticity group. We have outlined a very rough experimental design to investigate the effects of meditation on the development of compassion. I’m beyond excited about how the semester went.

City College Fellowships Program is an umbrella program that administers several undergraduate fellowships. See our website for information:
http://fellowshipsprogram.ccny.cuny.edu

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