

SEEK NEWS

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WINTER 2014

THE PERCY ELLIS SUTTON SEEK PROGRAM
COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND/CUNY

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

Special points of interest:

- *Caring counselors and staff*
- *Enhanced financial assistance*
- *Free academic and other workshops*
- *Personalized services in our Learning Center*
- *Career building opportunities*
- *Computer facility with technical assistance*
- *Exciting leadership training*

Dear Students and Colleagues,

As I write this message, it's Winter Intersession – always a good time to look back at the last semester, as well as looking ahead to the new one. As usual, the fall was a time for new beginnings, especially for the 186 freshmen we welcomed into the SEEK family this year. We got to know most of them over the summer, and greeted many in our expanded August “Bridge Program” in which new students attended workshops and



participated in other activities designed to promote skills and personal reflection. Many new students stand out in our minds; you can read about a few of them in the “Counselor’s Corner” on page 3.

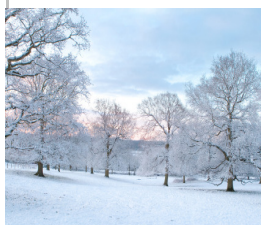
Of course, fall was also a new beginning for our continuing students. To me, all of our students are a never-ending source of inspiration; they move steadily toward their goals while facing myriad issues – juggling academic challenges with the responsibilities of home and

(continued on page 4)

NEWS FROM THE LEARNING CENTER

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Who are the tutors who toil away many hours a week with the success of SEEK students as their goal? We thought in this issue, we'd tell you a bit about them.

TUTORS/SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:

Although SEEK students can ask their tutors for help or referrals for all fields of science and technology, most want to focus on their math skills.

Amos Dean—Definitely the

most long-standing member of the tutoring staff, math tutor Amos can be found in the Learning Center most days of the week, except when he's off teaching math classes. Originally from Pakistan, Amos migrated to the US in 1994 and started tutoring SEEK students soon after. Back in Pakistan, he was a science teacher and high school principal, but he says he's also been “... a mediocre musician, singer in Eastern music -- and a sportsman,

especially in basketball.” Adds Amos, “I enjoy my work and am willing to serve with all of my abilities and capabilities.”

David Lightcap—If you pass by the Learning Center in the a.m., you'll no doubt see David pouring over the books with some of his “early bird” tutees, as he's usually the first staff member to arrive every morning. He's been a popular math teacher and tutor for years, and leads weekly group sessions for calculus and pre-calc. Surprisingly he says “Having failed

NEWS FROM THE LEARNING CENTER (continued)

math in high school, I understand the stress of not understanding the teacher or the book.” David’s warmth and enthusiasm for his subject is contagious, as many a tutee will attest. His aim is to take the fear out of math (and also physics). “My methods are not traditional, but they’re very successful,” he adds – “so all you have to do is reach out to me.”

Fouad Salem—Salem, as he prefers to be called, is the latest addition to our math staff, having recently graduated from CSI with an impressive *three* bachelor’s degrees in Finance, Economics and Mathematics. Salem was born in Brooklyn, but graduated from Staten Island’s New Dorp High School. In his free time he loves to work out and lift weights. The thing he enjoys most about working in the Learning Center is “when students understand the material.” Looking ahead, he’s not sure where his future is headed, saying his “plans in life change from day to day” – but like many of us, he’d “... like to be relaxing on a beach somewhere in the French Rivera.”

TUTORS/HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES: Many SEEK students, especially freshmen and non-native speakers, come to the Center for help with English writing, but they also get assistance with other humanities and social science subjects, such as COR 100, psychology or other introductory courses.

Rebecca Strobel—Rebecca, who has worked in the Learning Center since fall 2010, graduated from CSI with a BA in English Literature & Writing and a minor in French. As an experienced and multi-talented staff member, Rebecca wears many different hats to help the Center run smoothly, especially coordinating and presenting workshops. Apart from

writing, her real love is teaching and working with students -- especially on “questions about grammar, citations, and essay development.” Outside of the College, Rebecca’s interests include travel, reading, writing and arts & crafts.

Joseph Pentangelo—Joe, who tutors English and coordinates the LC workshop program with Rebecca, has been with SEEK since 2010. He graduated from CSI in 2012 with a BA in English, with a concentration in linguistics and a minor in cinema studies. Now a student at the CUNY Graduate Center, Joe is pursuing a PhD in linguistics. He also enjoys writing, playing music, and reading, as well as helping organize Second Saturday Staten Island, a monthly local art-walk. His love of travel has taken him to Australia, Ecuador (including the Galapagos Islands), Canada, and Italy, as well as all over the U.S.

Jonathan Smith—Although a native Staten Islander and CSI graduate, tutor Jonathan traveled the world while getting his degrees (a BA in world literature with a minor in philosophy and a joint master’s degree in English literature and American cultural studies) – with time spent in Denmark and Austria. While Jonathan’s zest for learning is clear, he has several pursuits outside of academia as well. “When I am not talking about writing or literature,” he says, “then I’m riding my snowboard, strapping skates to my feet, and listening to insanely fast music.”

Kayleen McGuckin—Kayleen is new to the SEEK family having joined the LC just this past fall after recently moving back to Staten Island from Mississippi, where she received a BA in Anthropology from Mississippi State University. Says Kayleen, “I’m a proud alumna of Delta Xi Phi Multicultural Sorority, Inc. and many other honorary/academic fraternities. My interests include travel, culture, movies, and community service. I love meeting new people and learning about new cultures.” Kayleen tutors students, and you can find her helping students in the lab as well.



Tutors are pictured with other members of the SEEK Learning Center staff. From left to right: Earl Gatchalian, Peter Galati, Nancy Goetze, Ralph Pagan (LC Coordinator), Jonathan Smith, David Lightcap, Kayleen McGuckin, Kristina Montesano, Fouad Salem, Joe Pentangelo, Rebecca Strobel and Geeth Padmaperuma. (Missing Bio: Peter Galati, the newest member of the tutoring staff).

COUNSELING CORNER

As we mention quite often, one goal of our Program is to get to know each new student among the more than 150 admitted each year. Our counseling staff is key to this goal, as they look to discover the specialness of each new member of SEEK. There are always many who stand out for one reason or another -- students who make a deep impression and are likely to stay in our memories for many years to come. We asked our three counselors to note just a few from their recent freshman orientation classes.

According to counselor Stephen James, Aldona Prus is one of those students. Aldona arrived at CSI this past fall straight from high school and aspires to CSI's nursing program. Why did she stand out? For her maturity and consistency, says Mr. James. As he recalls, "She attended every class on time, participated and offered insightful comments that kept the class on track." Not only did she show intelligence and leadership, he adds, but "...her ability to think critically and ask questions allowed *me* to better facilitate class discussions." These are qualities that will help Aldona and other SEEK students go far.

Another new SEEK leader is Mark Anthony Blounte, a member of Fran Fassman's class. Mark served as an intern at Maimonides Medical Center

after his 2011 graduation from Sheepshead Bay HS, and entered CSI this fall with his eye on a career in medicine. His 4.0 GPA in his first semester may help a lot toward that goal. Mark added a spark to the class, says Dr. Fassman, because he was very responsible while at the same time being a lot of fun. "He participated in every activity and was a real leader," she adds. Staying involved and bringing one's "A" game to class will help all SEEK students succeed.

According to counselor Miriam Perez-Lai, leaders come in all different shapes and sizes, and this is really true of 4'11" freshman Amesty Perez (no relation). "The key to not being knocked off course as a freshman is perseverance" says Ms. Perez, and Amesty showed this to others by not giving up when the going was tough. What made an impression on Ms. Perez was Amesty's "feistiness and ability to keep striving." Ms. Perez saw Amesty build trust and confidence during the course of the semester, and begin to work tirelessly with tutor David Lightcap to pass her math class. "She has real leadership potential," says Ms. Perez. "I could see her as a Latina lawyer or politician – perhaps even the first woman president!" Amesty's perseverance is shown by many SEEK students who overcome numerous hurdles on the road to success.

SEEK HOSTS GATHERING OF COUNSELING COORDINATORS

CSI/SEEK was the site for a "mini" conference entitled *Focus for Spring Semester of the First Year Experience* held on January 10th for members of the CUNY Council of SEEK/College Discovery Counseling Coordinators (see photo.) Organized and attended by various members of the Council, the event gave those present an opportunity to share their experiences regarding the currently enrolled freshman class. Many topics were discussed, including: practices for contracting and accepting first semester incoming students; transfer students; and GPA and other Program compliance issues. Other topics focused on civility and personal responsibility. The Coordinators shared a common concern about giving students the proper skills for making their education a priority. I want to thank my colleagues for coming to Staten Island. It was a valuable discussion, and great fun was had by all!

Fran Fassman



Dr. Fassman, left front, shares lunch with her colleagues from other CUNY campuses.

SEEK TRAVELS THE WORLD

Our SEEK students are encouraged from day one to consider study abroad, and over the years some have traveled far and wide – to places such as China, Greece, England and Ecuador. This past summer was no exception, as Holdalitz Brito, a senior sociology and Spanish major, journeyed to Italy for a Liberal Arts and Studio Arts Program there. In November, she was part of a group of 25 students from across CUNY who were recognized at a luncheon and ceremony hosted by the CUNY Office of Special Programs (OSP). The event showcased the students' experiences in their travels to South Korea, Japan, France, Ghana, Spain, Germany and more.

Not surprisingly, CSI figured prominently in the event: our own Ralph Pagan, Coordinator of the Learning Center, was an important member of the

planning committee; a video montage of photographs was contributed by Tony Gallego of CSI's Media Services; SEEK student Troy Weekes performed a musical interlude; SEEK tutor Rebecca Stroebel edited the students' journal entries; and last but not least, Gloria Garcia joined other speakers at the podium. In the commemorative booklet of students' journals and photographs that was produced for the event, Holdalitz wrote of her love for the people and culture of Florence, and the way the experience had transformed her. "I definitely learned to look at life with a new perspective. This has been an indescribable experience and I will forever be grateful for this opportunity." The thought that we may have helped encourage such students keeps us all going on the toughest days. (See Holdalitz in Florence on page 5).

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR (continued)

families, jobs outside of school, long commutes and more. This fall, many also participated in several other SEEK projects, such as the SEEK/Strategies for Success Program, our Black & Latino "Men of Excellence" group, and the Chi Alpha Epsilon Honors Society – all of which you can read about in this issue.

Now, as we move into a new "spring" semester (buried under a pile of snow and frost), our students continue to persevere. They're doing interesting internships, trav-

eling abroad, building their leadership skills and immersing themselves in their majors. We hope they'll find time to partake in some of the special SEEK events we're planning for the spring. As always, our SEEK counselors and Learning Center staff stand ready to provide support in any way that is needed. And *my* door is always open; so please stop by and say "hi".

Gloria Garcia

SEEK EXPLORES "DISTANCE LEARNING"

As reported before, the SEEK Program has been looking at the possibilities of "distance learning" for its student population, exploring ways that new technologies and offsite opportunities can be utilized for student benefit. Last year, we began testing out "virtual" tutoring by offering math help using email and Skype to connect with students during weekend or evening hours. Although limited in scope, we are seeing from the pilot both the value and the challenges of this approach to tutoring.

In the fall we expanded our investigations by incorporating Blackboard instruction into both our freshmen orientation courses and our Learning Center workshop offerings. In the SKO 100 courses, Dr. Fran Fassman (Counseling Coordinator) and the other counselor/instructors added a component to the curriculum that introduced Blackboard and required several assignments to be completed online.

A second more extensive pilot by the Learning

Center asked other freshmen to complete four online workshops and participate in discussion groups. According to staff member Nancy Goetze who designed and led this effort, close to 90 freshmen chose from six possible workshop offerings and chatted with her via Blackboard. While the complete results are still being analyzed, Ms. Goetze reports that many students gave positive feedback about this option. "They mentioned such things as convenience, the lack of time pressures, the chance to review the content at one's own pace and so forth," she said, "confirming what we see as the potential benefits of providing alternative ways of teaching." Although distance learning was not preferred by everyone, as Ms. Goetze says, "we aren't trying to supplant face-to-face instruction, but rather to give students a choice for some of our offerings, and help them feel comfortable in the Blackboard environment." SEEK plans to keep experimenting with various options in future semesters.

SEEK IN ACTION



The Italian city of Florence makes Holdaliz Brito smile.



Lissette Altreche is all smiles at the nursing pinning ceremony on January 31st.

This fall, another SEEK student, Winnie Darius, ventured abroad to Paris, France. Watch for her report in our next issue.



Members of CSI's first Latino Learning Community gather for first class. SEEK counselor Miriam Perez-Lai taught the freshman orientation course that was part of the community's courses.

SEEK WORKS WITH STATEN ISLAND SCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH ITS STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS PROGRAM

During the fall 2013, the SEEK/*Strategies for Success* Program continued to bring tutoring and mentoring services to after school programs at IS 49 and PS 78, and to the JCC Cornerstone at the Gerard Carter Community Center in Stapleton. Preparing for this work, the 30 or more college students were taken through a rigorous training agenda – including topics such as study skills (led by Professor Emeritus, Dr. Jed Luchow), financial literacy (conducted by representatives from JP Morgan Chase) and interviewing & resume writing (provided by Richard Krysztoforski of the CSI's Career and Scholarship Center). They also went through intensive leadership training.

The mentors at IS 49, many of whom are education majors, were given an outstanding opportunity

to showcase their leadership skills at the after school sessions, where they guided small groups of intermediate students in workshops and activities involving singing, dancing, dressing for success, and arts and crafts. They also organized both a Young Males Mentoring Group (YMMG) and a Female Youth Initiative (FYI). For the students at PS 78 and the community center, our mentors provided homework help, and taught about (and modeled) the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Going forward, we are hoping to work very closely with Dean Ken Gold of CSI's new School of Education. Our goal is to align the *Strategies* Program with CSI's other initiatives and collaborations in the public schools on Staten Island.



Pictured above: *Strategies for Success* Mentors (from left) Marwa Othman, Noura Abdel, Annmarie Cantasano, Troy Weekes, Jr., and Chelsea Garcia lead a college preparedness workshop for students at IS 49.

NEWS TO KNOW: FALL/WINTER HIGHLIGHTS



- As usual, SEEK students stepped up when given an opportunity – this time a chance to improve life in NYC through the newly created **CUNY Service Corps**. Starting this past fall, this highly competitive paid internship program put CUNY students to work across the five boroughs, where they contributed to the common good while gaining work experience and building their skills. Among the CSI contingent during this first year are six SEEK students: **Rawnag Abdelaziz, Jacqlyn Davis, Kevin Gomez, Wing Yan Law, Khanshea Lewis and Kareem Wilson**. We are always so proud of our students!
- And speaking of internships, congratulations to SEEK student **Karen Ramirez** who was selected among many applicants to receive an Intern Counselor position at the Staten Island Mental Health Society. She worked this past semester with special needs children, and is concentrating in early/elementary education at CSI. Internships provide valuable learning and help build careers.
- Other SEEK achievers are the newest members of **SEEK's chapter of the Chi Alpha Epsilon (XAE)** National Honors Society which held its fall induction ceremony in November. Six (6) new members, eligible to join based on their recent stellar academic performance, were welcomed into XAE by Dr. Roberta B. Vogel and other staff members, and given their Honor Cord and XAE pin. The new members include **Sallem Asmar, Hanifah James, Cynthia Domond Paultre, Karen Ramirez, Ana Valerio and Troy Weekes, Jr.** To be eligible for the Society, candidates must have completed at least 24 credits and earned a least a 3.0 GPA in two consecutive full-time semesters. Once inducted, students who maintain academic excellence in future semesters earn jewels to add to their pins. **Pin upgrades this time included ruby** for **Aya Ali, Holdalitz Brito, Danielle Castro and Anna Tam; emerald** for **Selvya Botross, Danielle Fletcher, Matthew Leavy and Marwa Othman**. Congratulations to all.
- And another big congratulation goes to **Lissette Altreche** (pictured on page 5) who attended the Department of Nursing pinning ceremony on January 31st. She has successfully completed all the requirements for the AAS nursing degree, the path toward becoming a registered nurse (RN). You can learn more about Lissette in a future issue of "Eye on CSI" (CSI's alumni publication).
- With the goal of helping students persevere and continue to graduation, **SEEK's Black and Latino Male Initiative (BLMI)** was back this fall, organized around the theme of **"Men of Excellence."** Led by **Stephen James and Ralph Pagan**, the group started the year off with an engrossing leadership workshop on the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Over the course of the semester, 24 students participated. One measure of success is that 11 of them attended 3 or more of the 4 meetings. Another positive outcome: 100% of the participants have re-registered for spring, 2014. Mr. James and Mr. Pagan plan to continue to promote the concept of "excellence" as they move on with this group this semester.
- SEEK is partnering this year with CSI's Master's degree program in Mental Health Counseling by providing an internship for **Mr. Kenneth Hernandez**. Ken, who is with SEEK two days a week, will finish his degree at the end of the semester, and hopes to work in higher education in his future counseling career. Internship supervisor Dr. Fran Fassman calls Ken "sharp and dedicated" and adds that "he shows great respect for students, knows the community and engages easily with students." He has been working particularly with students on academic probation and helping out at "Men of Excellence" meetings. We all value his contribution to the SEEK team.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: SEEK GOES TO THE MOVIES

On December 7, four new SEEK students from Counselor Miriam Perez-Lai's Freshman Orientation course got an exciting and unexpected opportunity to rub shoulders with one of Hollywood's most popular celebrities -- none other than Ben Stiller, the talented star of such films as "Night at the Museum" and "Meet the Fockers", and, more recently, producer and director of "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." The four students, pictured (at right) with Mr. Stiller, met the man of honor when they attended "Ben Stiller Directs" at NYC's Lincoln Center. The students want to send special thanks again to CSI's Alan Hoffner (Director of Testing) for providing the tickets, and to SEEK Director Gloria Garcia for facilitating their transportation to the event. Just goes to show...SEEK students

never know what great experiences will pop up -- if they just keep their eyes and ears open.



Pictured with Mr. Stiller from left to right: Kimberly Flores, Nestor Meza, Amesty Perez and Surquonna Soleyn.



THE PERCY ELLIS SUTTON SEEK PROGRAM COLLEGE OF STATEN ISLAND/CUNY

WE'RE ON THE WEB!

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