



# SEEK News

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

WINTER 2016

## FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR



As I write, it is CSI's Winter Session, and a frosty wind is blowing outside the window. While we are using this time to plan for the coming spring semester, it's also a chance to reflect on the fall. In fact, much of the "news" in this newsletter is focused on things that happened last semester. Like most semesters, this past one flew by with amazing speed.



Fall on campus often seems to be a time of reinvigoration and renewal. It's frequently when we try out fresh programming ideas or work out new systems for moving our mission forward; this year was no exception. In the Learning Center, we decided to put special emphasis and new life into our math program -- an area of study which seems to pose many challenges for incoming and continuing SEEK students alike. At the same

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## NEWS FROM THE LEARNING CENTER

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What is the most effective way to help new students conquer basic skills deficits? How best to keep these students engaged? What impact, in particular, do math challenges have on student persistence and success? Are our students adequately prepared for the gateway math course they face? These are just some of the questions that the Program continually asks, as we strive to help our students move forward. In the SEEK Learning Center -- the academic support center for the Program -- these issues, especially basic skills, are central to our work.

While many of SEEK's incoming freshmen face at least one developmental course, math seems to be the most challenging, and research points out that math struggles are very often linked to attrition. For these reasons, in the fall, math became the focus of some new strategies and some happy successes in the Learning Center.

First it should be noted that many incoming freshman achieved success in the summer through CSI's Immersion Program, run by the Office of Academic Success;

this summer, 76 of our freshmen passed a summer Immersion math course. But for remaining students in the fall, a new SEEK Math Team was assembled, comprised of a respected math instructor, Ms. Mojgan Keshtgar, along with Academic Coach Nancy Goetze and a group of seasoned math tutors under the leadership of long-time SEEK staffer, Georgia Landrum with help from Jessica Rainer. This special team, aside from continuing to offer individual help at every math level, moved quickly to expand the number of math study groups we

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## FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR (continued)

time, of course, we didn't forget those students who are challenged by reading and writing, especially our ESL freshmen. In the Counseling team, new funding from the CUNY Office of Special Programs enabled us to improve our outreach to certain subgroups of our SEEK population, like those who are close to earning an associate degree. We were happy to see so many students thriving academically, attending our special events, doing internships and volunteering. No wonder the semester whirled by!

This fall we also saw some administrative changes on campus which resulted in SEEK becoming a part of the Division of Academic Affairs. This has introduced new energy and ideas into the Program, and promises to enhance our partnerships with departments and other academic areas as well.

While we miss our colleagues in Student Affairs, we have stayed in touch via our participation on the Enrollment Strategies Committee with new Vice President Jennifer Borrero. At the same time, we have enjoyed getting to know CSI's new Provost, Gary

Reichard, and look forward to working with him more closely.

Now, as we begin a fresh semester, I hope you'll take a few minutes to read about some of SEEK's activities, and share in the satisfaction we gain from seeing our students participate and succeed. Our students warm our hearts and souls, even when it's freezing outside!

**Gloria Garcia**

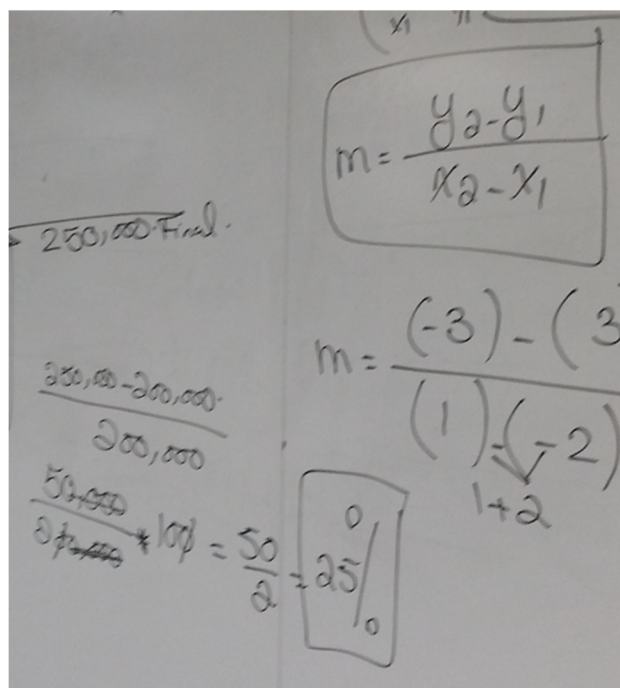


## NEWS FROM THE LEARNING CENTER (continued)

had been using, situated the groups in math labs where access to required online homework was available, monitored attendance closely and opened new communication channels with the Math Department and course instructors. While all of these efforts were important, direct access to homework proved to be especially effective in motivating the students to keep working. Of the eligible students who completed this course, 80 percent passed.

These results are a testament to the new Math Team's efforts, but they could not have been achieved without the determination and persistence of the students involved. It's not surprising that those who face math challenges after leaving high school can easily give up or avoid engaging at all. This time, with the encouragement and special attention of our dedicated staff, these freshmen pressed forward toward success. We will be watching them closely as they move on, and cheering them along the way toward their goals. As for the Learning Center, we are carrying these strategies into the future, hoping that we may have found some new approaches to old problems.

**Ralph Pagan, Coordinator**



## COUNSELING CORNER



### CELEBRATING SERGIO, SEEK SCHOLAR!

*The SEEK Program staff takes great pride in the scholastic and other achievements of our students – not because we can claim responsibility for their successes, but rather because, as members of the SEEK family, our students have triumphed over great odds and surmounted great obstacles to success. In this issue of SEEK News, the “Counseling Corner” is devoted to the story (told by Counselor Mr. Steven James) of one such student, Sergio Mendoza Gallardo.*

Sergio Mendoza, now a CSI senior, was born in Santa Ana, El Salvador and came to this country in 2008. When in high school in Brooklyn, one of the major struggles he faced was the language barrier. Although a dedicated student, not knowing English resulted in lower grades. Nonetheless, he overcame these challenges and arrived at CSI in fall of 2012 as a new member of the SEEK Program. At CSI, he has earned an impressive 3.92 GPA and is looking forward to graduating this spring. During these years, he has not only qualified for the Dean’s List and Chi Alpha Epsilon (CSI’s chapter of the National Honor Society for Opportunity Programs) but was one of the

founders of SEEK’s “Men of Excellence” group, serving as a leader among its Black and Latino members.

A first generation college student, Sergio chose to major in Spanish education (with minors in English-linguistics and Italian) because he feels that “there’s nothing that connects one to a culture better than its language.” His initial struggles with English and the stigma of not being able to speak English fluently inspires him to want to help other non-native speakers of English. With a future goal of becoming a high school Spanish teacher or language professor in college, he hopes to have an impact on others and give back to society by helping and educating young people.

Sergio’s advice to incoming freshman is to always be optimistic. “College life might be intimidating,” he says, “but with a positive attitude and perseverance one can achieve anything. The most important suggestion is: don’t learn and study just to pass a class, learn and study for the sake of learning. Classes come and go, but knowledge stays. That is the path to success.”

### “FRESH” FACES TO WATCH

*Every fall (and sometimes in the spring) SEEK happily welcomes a new group of freshmen (170 this fall). While we treasure each and every newcomer, sometimes particular students are standouts – those who show a special energy or spark that makes us really take notice. Freshmen Nasley Garcia and Akira Campbell are just such students.*

“What makes Nasley stand out,” says counselor Miriam Perez-Lai, “is her dedication to her studies. She seems to spend all her time with her books, and then claims that reading is her leisure activity as well. I seldom

see a freshman with such focus.” Those habits may just be Nasley’s ticket to success, as she achieved a 3.57 GPA her first time out. Still, books and reading are not Nasley’s only pursuits; while in high school she volunteered in a local food pantry, and no doubt will become similarly involved in the future.

Another noticeable newcomer, according to counselor Steven James, is freshman Akira Campbell. “She is very pro-active and attentive to detail,” says Mr. James...“a very special attribute for a freshman.” Akira’s terrific organizational skills and persis-

tence helped net her a 3.51 GPA in her first semester here.

While these are only two of our special new students, they are definitely “fresh faces to watch.”



# SEEK



Happy Grads: Gisselly Balcacer (AA, Liberal Arts and Science), and siblings Kaitlin (BA, Psychology) and Michael Tighe, (BS, Computer Science) - just a few of our January 2016 graduates!



SEEK Student Wafaa Jaber and Professor Mojgan Keshtgar at one of our many math sessions

# IN ACTION



Lucky invitees: Damelsa Hatmil and Victor Ramirez at CSI's Celestial Ball, December 2015



Some of SEEK's tutoring staff get ready for the spring semester

## INTRODUCING A SEEK LEADER: DAMELSA HATMIL

When Damelsa Hatmil first arrived on CSI's campus back in 2013, the SEEK Counseling Team recognized her leadership potential from the start. So it was that they nominated her last June to be one of two CSI representatives to the CUNY Student Leadership Academy, a retreat organized annually by the CUNY Office of Special Programs. The goal of the Academy is to prepare students to become leaders at their home schools and within CUNY.

Part of this initiative is a group called United Leaders of CUNY (ULC) which provides a continuing forum for leadership development throughout the year. We are happy to report that Damelsa is now part of ULC's Executive Board, as



the newly elected Vice Chair for SEEK Affairs.

As a member of ULC, Damelsa attends regular meetings in the City, and reports that learning how to conduct herself professionally at a meeting or business lunch is just one of the skills she has gained through participating. During the spring, the new Vice Chair expects to be actively involved in SEEK's citywide 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, among other activities. Damelsa is one of a number of outstanding SEEK students who always seem ready to go the "extra mile." We're proud of her dedication, and willingness to contribute. Those traits will certainly take her far.

## THE SEEK RESEARCH ASSISTANTS PROJECT CONTINUES TO THRIVE

The SEEK Research Assistants Project (RAP) is alive and well, having just reached its 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Originally established by Dr. Roberta Vogel (Professor Emerita), RAP was conceived as a way to encourage our students to gain hands-on exposure to research questions and methodologies by following the progress of faculty researchers. To date, over 50 SEEK students have participated, working with faculty from Art to Women's Studies, and many disciplines in between.

This past fall, senior Emma Petit-Frere completed a second semester in the Psychology Department, working as an active member of the Cultural Knowledge and Racial Identity Lab led by Dr. Collette Chapman-Hilliard. Dr. Hilliard's work focuses on racial and ethnic identity and cultural knowledge, and how these may mitigate race-related stress, the relationship between cultural consciousness and mental health, and the factors that contribute to an affirming racial/ethnic identity.

According to Dr. Hilliard, Emma has "...contributed importantly to my research program, and is currently working on a study that examines the role of cultural assets, such as knowledge of Black history, in contributing to help-seeking attitudes among college students of African descent." Emma is a role model for several other SEEK students who plan to enter RAP this spring, including one who will join Emma under Dr. Hilliard's tutelage. We are not only proud of these students, but also extremely grateful for the dozens of faculty, like Dr. Hilliard, who have so willingly provided these unique opportunities over the years. For information about this Project, contact Coordinator Jean Como in the SEEK Office.



Emma Petit-Frere (L) with her faculty supervisor, Dr. Collette Chapman-Hilliard

## NEWS TO KNOW



◆ Once again this fall, SEEK students were well represented on the latest Dean's List. 17 SEEK students made the list – the annual “honor roll” which recognizes matriculated students who have demonstrated academic excellence in the previous year. On the list in alphabetical order by last name are: **Redwan Ahmed; Tabish Ali; Menat Aly; Terry Benedict; Huangbin Chen\***; **Ramata Diallo; Yara Edrees\***; **Danielle Fletcher\***; **Yaneris Jimenez; Jasmin Pons; Rodina Sadek; Meriam Setti; Mathew Sokoloff; Kaitlin Tighe\***; **Safiya Vera;** and **Selkey Zhen Fung.** Those marked with an asterisk were on last year's list as well. What does it take to achieve such stellar academic records? Discipline, organization, persistence and a strong desire to learn and succeed -- our hats are off to you all!

◆ Twelve SEEK students were selected for this year's CUNY Service Corps, the city-wide initiative that pairs CUNY students with paid internships at non-profit and government agencies, museums, community organizations and other places. The Corps is intended to help students develop new skills

and discover new interests, while at the same time making valuable contributions to the life of the city. This year's group includes SEEK senior **Shawntavia Williams** (Communications) who is working in Brooklyn at the TFOA Professional Preparatory Charter School. According to Shawntavia, the best part of her experience has been working with the children. “Not only do they learn from me, but I've been learning from them. They teach me patience and kindness, which are two important virtues people need in order to happily thrive in everything they choose to do.” How right she is!



**STUDENT ALERT:** The SEEK Program is happy to report that, going forward, SEEK students will be included among the groups earmarked for *priority* registration. This means that you will be assigned an early registration date each semester, making it easier to get courses and sections you want. The new procedure should go into effect for 2016 summer and fall registrations, expected to begin mid-spring. To make yourself ready for this great opportunity, begin talking with your CSI advisors NOW to design the next phase of your academic plan. Don't forget the old saying – the early bird gets the worm!

## “SOCKS FOR SEEK”

This past holiday season, SEEK student **Bruce French** came to the SEEK Office with an idea: why not help Project Hospitality, Staten Island’s respected not-for-profit agency for the homeless, find warm clothing for those in need? The idea, eventually dubbed “Socks for SEEK,” took hold when he and Counselor Fran Fassman decided to reach out across campus for donations of warm winter socks. As a result, socks of every size and style began pouring in, and in the end, Bruce and his fellow students managed to collect 225 pairs.

Delivered to Project Hospitality by Dr. Fassman and Ms. Perez-Lai just before the holidays, the socks made their way into the agency’s holiday baskets in time for Christmas. Not only did SEEK students and staff give to this drive, but donations poured in from other offices as well – (Financial Aid, Bursar, Testing, Academic Advising, Counseling, Alumni to name just a few) -- proving that CSI staff members always rise to the occasion. Three cheers for all involved!



“Socks for SEEK” student Bruce French with Dr. Fassman



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