

# SEEK NEWS



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The Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program  
College of Staten Island at CUNY

## FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

As we roll into summer, I want to first take time to reflect on the wonderful accomplishments of our students this past year. SEEK had over 100 students graduate with their associate and bachelor degrees. We even celebrated two of our SEEK alums who earned master's degrees. We are proud of our students' achievements, and recognized many at our SEEK Honors Awards Dinner held in May. This is one of my favorite events of the year because we get to celebrate the hard



*Interim Director, Stefanie Gardiner, takes part in an evening activity at the 2019 Tri State Leadership Institute.*

work and dedication of our students as well as staff. In addition to the many awards given to students, two CSI staff members were honored for their dedication to the SEEK Program: **Donna Brogna from Financial Aid** and **Robert Kee from Student Life**. **SEEK Counselor, Miriam Perez-Lai**, who always goes above and beyond for our students was given a SEEK Dedication Award.

The celebrations continued at CSI's Annual Student Leadership Summit Awards Ceremony which was held at the Hilton Garden Inn this

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## NEWS FROM THE LEARNING CENTER

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### **BUILDING BASIC GRAMMAR SKILLS, ONE STUDENT AT A TIME:**

Sentence fragments...run-on sentences...tricky homonyms: these are just some of the writing issues that confound many of our new and continuing SEEK students, even those who are already enrolled in English 111, CSI's course that focuses on honing stu-

dents' skills for college writing and critical thinking.

Students are frequently referred to tutoring centers for help with the basic building blocks of writing. Also, English is not the primary language for many of our students, causing even greater challenges. SEEK English tutors acknowledge that working on basic skills -- grammar, sentence structure and word usage -- often must be the

first order of business.

Enter tutor Beth McNelis who, this semester, was recruited to teach a new workshop series, which ran for three consecutive Wednesdays in April. At one of the sessions, students engaged in fun exercises to distinguish among those pesky "they're, there, and their" choices and many others. Students in other sessions explored how to end a sentence properly or how to correct sentence

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## FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR (continued)

year. **Safiya Vera**, senior in the Nursing BS program, received the SEEK Pioneer Award for her outstanding academic achievement, service to the SEEK Program and significant impact within the CSI community. **Steven Gordillo**, a communications major, received the SEEK Summit Award for his outstanding dedication and service to the SEEK Program and CSI community through exceptional leadership and mentorship. **Doha Shehabeldin**, an artist and aspiring teacher, was the recipient of the SEEK Perseverance Award for her exceptional work ethic and determination while achieving academic success (see photo of the winners on page 8.)

Also deserving of high praise is **Victor Ramirez** who graduated in January with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology with a 3.75 GPA. Victor was given the SEEK Honors Convocation Award at the CSI Honors Convocation for his outstanding academic achievement and service to the SEEK Program.

While many of our students have completed their educational journey with us, we continue to support our new and continuing students. Thanks in part to funding provided by CUNY's Office of Special Programs, more students than ever before took advantage of enrolling in one or two summer courses this year. Most of our students can get a head start or catch up on credits

with little to no out of pocket cost. We are also excited to begin welcoming the Class of 2023 with our newly developed Launch Sessions. This is part of our revamped recruitment process and expanded pre-freshmen summer experience which welcomes new students to the SEEK family. Incoming students get to meet each other as well as continuing students and staff. Also new this summer is CUNY's "CD/ SEEK Welcome Day" sponsored by the Office of Special Programs and the Central Office of Student Affairs. New students joining College Discovery and SEEK Programs throughout the University are invited to Queens College for a day filled with fun activities.

While we are excited for our graduates, award winners and new students, we never lose sight of our continuing students – the sophomores, juniors and seniors who persist despite great personal and financial challenges. SEEK, as always, looks forward to supporting all of them as we move toward a new academic year.

— **Stefanie Gardiner, Interim Director**

## NEWS FROM THE LEARNING CENTER (continued)

fragments. Says Beth, who also teaches ENG 111 and ASL 213, "Our main goal is to help all SEEK students discover the errors in their own writing, and learn how to fix them. My hope is that our students will find the workshops both educational and fun."

Looking ahead, these helpful topics may also soon find their way into SEEK's Virtual Learning Center, joining the many other online sessions which help our students build new skills at their own pace. These initiatives are examples of the ways SEEK continues to strive toward achieving its mission -- to help students survive and thrive in the college environment.

— **Georgia Landrum, SEEK Learning Center Coordinator**



Professor Beth McNelis discussing grammar with her students.

## COUNSELING CORNER

### WORKING WITH THE CENTER FOR CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

The SEEK Counseling Team always strives to establish working relationships with other CSI offices and services on behalf of our students. One such strong connection over the years has been with the CSI Center for Career and Professional Development. Center staff visit our fall “Freshman Orientation” classes (SKO 100) and guide students through “Focus2,” the online career development program which helps students explore their interests. They also offer our students individual appointments for career counseling as well as groups for resume writing. The Center also co-organizes an annual SEEK “Etiquette Luncheon,” a perennial favorite of our students.



of activities, from volunteerism, club membership, research and academic planning, and other on and off-campus events. They may also apply for internships, attend job fairs and more.

The Academy’s Coordinator, Kristi Nielson, reports that at least ten SEEK freshmen participated in the new Academy. One new SEEK student, **Madelin Cruz**, used the Academy to improve her interview skills, complete her resume and LinkedIn profile and explore some internship possibilities. She also got a part-time job as an usher in the Center for the Arts. Madelin, like other Academy participants, received a certificate of completion at the end of the year.

SEEK counselors know that students with clear career goals tend to do better in relation to persistence and retention. SEEK maintains its close partnership with the Career Center with that thought in mind,

This year, the latest addition to the Center’s roster of helpful services is the **CSI Career Success Academy (CCSA)** which offers a program of career-building experiences to all first year and transfer CSI students, from day one on campus. Academy students build and reflect on their career-readiness skills through a variety

and we’re grateful for the expertise and caring provided to us each year by Center Director Caryl Watkins and her staff. We hope to carry on this connection for many years to come.

— **Maria Levine, Counseling Coordinator**

## THE BETA IOTA CHAPTER OF XAE

This happy group of SEEK students and staff, pictured with Associate Provost Ralf Peetz (center, back row), was gathered to celebrate past and newly-inducted members of the Beta Iota Chapter of the Chi Alpha Epsilon (XAE) National Honors Society. Members are invited to join after having achieved a 3.0 GPA or better for two consecutive full-time semesters, and are further rewarded for continued achievement by jewels being added to a basic membership pin.



The mission of the Society is to recognize the academic excellence of students admitted to colleges and universities through non-traditional criteria.

This year, SEEK Counselor Peter Collazo, pictured far-left, reorganized the CSI Chapter, after a lapse due to the retirement of Dr. Roberta Vogel. Thirteen new individuals were inducted in May, bringing the number of active members to 153. Congratulations to all!

# SEEK'S HAPPY GRADS

As always, we are **supremely proud of our 2019 graduates.** This year's group totaled 102 individuals, including 70 who earned a BA or BS! All told, our grads represented 18 different disciplines, with two students completing double majors, and two achieving the highly coveted nursing degree. This year's group was feted, along with other high achieving SEEK students, at our annual SEEK Honors Gala on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, and again at the Student Leadership Awards Ceremony on May 8<sup>th</sup> (see page 8).



Dean's List SEEK graduate, Tabyas Jones, showing us his AA in Liberal Arts.



SEEK's Renaissance Man, Steven Gordillo, (pictured here with his mother) received his Associate's degree!



Michker Mathurn earned her BS in Psychology!

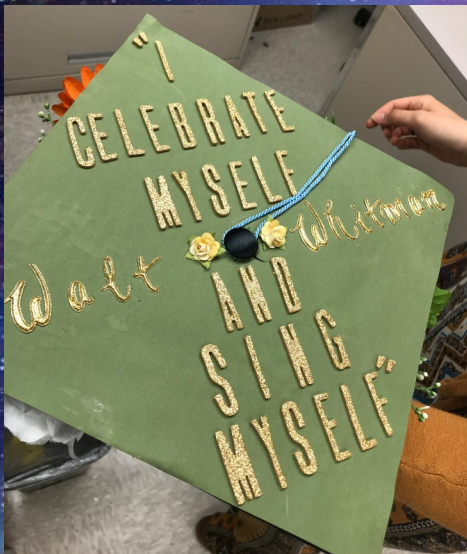


Luis Zaragoza (BA, Anthropology) with SEEK's Online Curriculum Coordinator, Joe LaCerra, (MA, Liberal Studies).



Graduate Ashley Wilson in front of CSI's blue fountain.

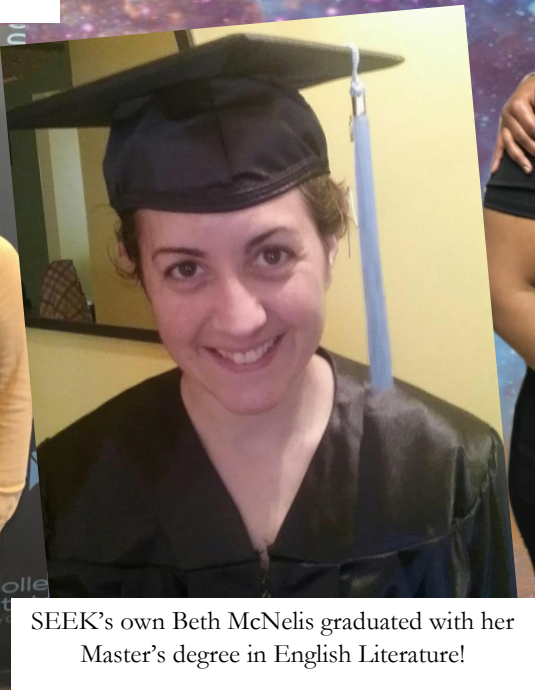
# AND OUR TUTORS GRADUATE, TOO!



SEEK English tutor, Taylor Brennan (pictured with President Fritz) graduated with honors in English Literature. She also made this beautifully-decorated graduation cap!



To see more photos, check out our Instagram! @seekcsi



SEEK's own Beth McNelis graduated with her Master's degree in English Literature!



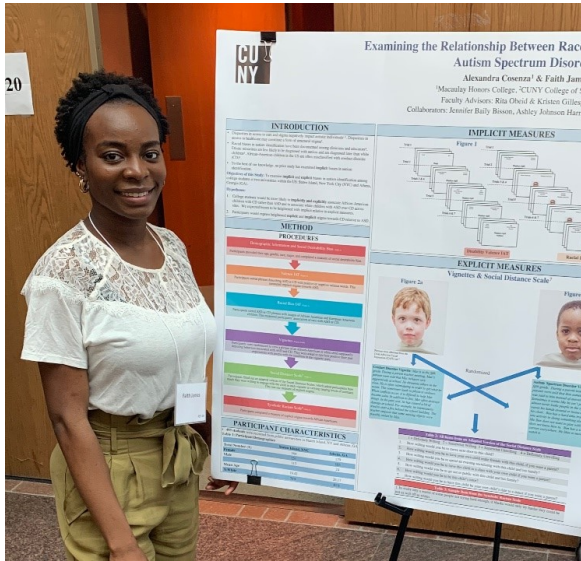
SEEK English tutor, Nadia Marie Davis, graduated with honors in Social Work! She is pictured with SEEK student Mariama Ba.

Georgia Landrum, SEEK Learning Center Coordinator, with SEEK student and tutor, Zhiqi Chen, who earned her Bachelor's Degree in Accounting.

## SEEK SCHOLARS SHINE

Over the years, students in the SEEK Program have made their mark on campus in many different ways, through student government, athletics, artistic achievement, community service and much more. Perhaps not as well-known is the way that many SEEK students distinguish themselves through serious scholarship. The 2018-19 academic year produced several outstanding examples, among which were:

**Alberto Coats, Jr.**, a junior majoring in electrical engineering, got involved in research through a multivariate calculus course with **Dr. Brett Sims**. Dr. Sims mentioned a research project combining psychology and behavioral science with mathematical tools, which led to Alberto's participation in a fascinating study applying Universal Algebra and Category Theory to challenges faced when different groups of people having different philosophies attempt to work together to solve common problems. The research resulted in an article in the *Journal of Mathematical Sciences and Mathematics Education* (Vol.14, No.1) with Alberto listed as a co-author! Says Alberto, who transferred here from BMCC, "I've only been at CSI for two



semesters, but I love the experience of working with other individuals who strive to be great."

Another SEEK student who has been doing important research is senior psychology major, **Faith James** (pictured here). As part of SEEK's Research Assistants Project, Faith has been working with **Dr. Kristen Gillespie-Lynch** on various projects targeting autism spectrum disorder. Faith and a peer colleague participated in CSI's 2018 and 2019 Undergraduate Research Conferences, presenting their work on the relationship between race and stigma toward autism spectrum disorder. She also helped fellow students and Dr. Gillespie present Dr. Gillespie's re-

search findings at a spring meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association. Going forward, Faith is expected to be listed as a co-author for an upcoming publication. Not only does she exemplify great scholarship, but Faith also is a leader in Dr. Gillespie's PROJECT REACH, works at an autism treatment center called "A Friendly Face" (a CUNY Office of Special Programs' internship) and contributes time and sisterhood to SEEK's Women's Group.

## ...AND SHINE

Aside from **Faith James** (above), not to be overlooked are this year's other SEEK Research Assistants: **Steven Gordillo (Media Services)**, **Wafaa Jaber (Biology)** and **Luis Zaragoza (Sociology/Anthropology)**.

Several other outstanding SEEK student scholars (and two of our tutors) also participated in this spring's Undergraduate Research Conference. Work done by students **Shu Yu Zhang**, **Emily Rodriguez Escalona** and **Beatrice Ajayi** was represented at the Poster Session, and **Doha Shehabeldin** (pictured on the right) won an award for her art. SEEK tutors **Matt Henshke** and **Hannah Baraket** also contributed the results of their research projects.



# NEWS TO KNOW

- CSI-SEEK is pleased to welcome Ms. **Sunday Coward**, the new **University Dean of Special Programs at CUNY's Central Office of Student Affairs (COSA)**. As part of her multi-faceted new role, Ms. Coward is leading all SEEK and College Discovery Programs throughout CUNY, as well as Trio Programs, the Single Stop College Initiative and more. Her most recent position was Assistant Dean of Academic Services at Stony Brook (2016-19), but she is well known to many within SEEK, having formerly directed the SEEK Program at Hunter College for four years. We've enjoyed getting to know Ms. Coward, and look forward to the new ideas and energy she brings to the Program.
- On Friday March 8, a group of sleepy-eyed SEEK students gathered in CSI's parking lot at 7:30 AM to begin a day-long trek to Albany and back. Led by SEEK staffer **Joe LaCerra** and accompanied by **Robert Kee** (Office of Student Life), the students spent the day at the annual **Collegiate Summit Somos El Futuro (We are the Future)** sponsored by the CUNY Office of Student Affairs. SEEK students **Sumer Odeh, Cristina Garcia, Steven Gordillo and Layla Khan** had a chance to meet peers from across NY State, hear from elected officials and business leaders and tour the Capitol building. This is an experience they won't soon forget!



- SEEK student **Azure Cayenne** (pictured at left), a **finalist in the annual "CSI's Got Talent!" competition**, showcased his vocal talents for the crowd in April. Azure, a sophomore English major, is hoping to become a teacher, and in his spare time devotes his energies toward church work and groups such as the NYC Men Teach Program. He also entertained SEEK staff and students at CSI's Honors Gala in May. Way to go, Azure!

- **SEEK's Women's Group ("Sisterhood of Empowerment, Elevation and Knowledge")** has put service at the forefront of its mission. This spring this meant organizing an "Operation Prom" Drive with the goal of collecting gently used "prom wear" to pass on to students with a limited budget. The group wants to thank all the members of the CSI community who dug deep into their closets to contribute over 150 articles of clothing and accessories. And thanks to SEEK counselor, Clarisse Domingo, who helped organize all the donations for drop off.

- A number of our students participated in **CUNY Service Corps** internships this year: **Beatrice Ajayi, Tarik Arabi, Mariama Ba, Bernice Boateng, Irvin Rodriguez, and Sarah Slocum**. Mariama interned for immigration services at the Brooklyn Public Library, eventually assisting with citizenship classes and co-facilitating English conversation groups. She says that getting involved in these activities "...boosted my confidence and helped me overcome my fear of public speaking."
- "Say yes to opportunities." This is a mantra that the SEEK Program repeats to our students from day one, and this year, freshman **Norhan Hassan** was clearly listening when the opportunity arose during her first semester to apply for the annual "Salzburg Global Citizenship Alliance." Norhan spent spring break in Austria along with eighteen other students from CUNY.
- And lastly, several of our students have been selected to join fellow CUNY students in Puerto Rico this summer in answer to CUNY's call for volunteers. **Vanessa Escobar, Safiya Vera and Cristina Garcia** will all be pitching in to help rebuild after last year's devastating hurricane, and will no doubt return with many interesting stories to tell. We're so proud of you all!





At the annual Student Leadership Summit Awards ceremony on May 8, SEEK staff gathered for a photo at the Hilton Garden Inn with winners Steven Gordillo (the SEEK Summit Award), Safiya Vera (the SEEK Pioneer Award) and Doha Shehabeldin (the SEEK Perseverance Award). This trio of deserving students represents what the SEEK Program is all about, and we are delighted to recognize their value to SEEK and CSI!

## THE PERCY ELLIS SUTTON SEEK PROGRAM AT CSI



[www.csi.cuny.edu/seek](http://www.csi.cuny.edu/seek)



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