CUNY PROJECT REACH
Resources and Education on Autism as CUNY’s Hallmark

NEWSLETTER # 4
FALL 2012

This is the fifth edition of the CUNY Project REACH newsletter, and we have a lot of exciting information to report. Project REACH has been in existence for 11 months now, and has shown steady growth since its inception. New and exciting things are happening on a regular basis:

Here are some of our ACTIVITIES OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS:

1. Project REACH launched a page on the CUNY website in September. On our website, you will find information about Project REACH itself as well as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). We included links to the CUNY Salute to Scholars article which details our Project, including our goals, links to resources about ASD, and a link to the CUNY Office of Student Affairs Reasonable Accommodations Guide 4th edition: A Faculty Guide to Teaching College Students with Disabilities, which includes a section on ASD. We also have links to articles about existing programs for students with ASD on two of our campuses, Brooklyn College and College of Staten Island. With this new web presence, we can answer many of the questions people have about the project by directing them to the website. You can visit the page by going to www.cuny.edu/projectREACH. This website will be updated regularly. We thank Zina Yakubova, CUNY’s Division of Student Affairs Website and Technology Coordinator, for her expertise and professional guidance to get this website up and running.

2. Two of our Project REACH students were recently accepted into the ASTEP/Corporate Lecture Series (Asperger’s Syndrome Training and Employment Partnership) program for the 2012-2013 academic year. ASTEP is an organization that creates and supports programs that promote long-term employment for people with Asperger’s Syndrome and High Functioning Autism. These two students were selected for the Corporate Lecture Series, a competitive program in which students attend presentations from a series of fortune 1000 companies and then network with them afterwards. This program gives our students a
unique opportunity to meet corporate executives, market their resumes, and possibly gain employment with one of the participating companies.

3. As of August, Project REACH has a new employee. We hired a part-time project assistant to help strengthen the ability of REACH to move forward. John Schiavone is an alumnus of both Kingsborough Community College and Brooklyn College. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Broadcast Journalism. His presentation skills and outside-the-box thinking, as well as his strong work ethic and incredible drive will help make Project REACH even stronger. In the short time that he has been with the Project, his presence in the office has already made an impact on our goal of increasing CUNY’s ability to support students with ASD.

4. Project REACH gave three presentations during the month of September. These presentations are aimed at increasing awareness of ASD and Project REACH, and they were all well-received. This is one way for us to spread the word about our program in order to ‘reach’ more people.

- First, we presented to CUNY’s Section 504/ADA Coordinators on September 10, 2012. Jennifer Rubain, Esq., University Dean for Recruitment and Diversity, invited Project REACH to give a presentation to these campus coordinators because it is important for this group to be informed about our Project. Thank you to Jennifer Rubain for inviting members of the Project REACH team to present this information. We appreciate your inclusion of Project REACH (and CUNY LEADS) in your diversity programs.

- John Schiavone delivered compelling testimony about Project REACH at the CUNY Board of Trustees Annual Manhattan Borough Hearing on September 19, 2012. The purpose of these public meetings is to provide interaction between the Board of Trustees, the Officers of the University, and the communities and constituents of the CUNY colleges; to hear testimony from concerned individuals about university issues. This was a unique opportunity to bring Project REACH to the attention of the Board of Trustees, Chancellors, College presidents, and the other individuals in attendance. As John stated in his testimony, “We are here to help make our university a leader in providing quality higher education to our growing student population with ASD.”

- Project REACH was invited to give an electronic poster presentation at Autism Speaks’ Fifth Annual ‘World Focus on Autism’, on September 27, 2012. As many of you already know, Autism Speaks is a large autism science and advocacy organization. Our participation allowed us to present our project to health ministers from across the globe. It also enabled us to network with leading experts in the
autism field and share our ideas. We were able to promote Project REACH to policy leaders, heads of state, scientists, and members of the autism community from around the world. Our poster was entitled: ‘Project REACH: Students with ASD at CUNY – An Inclusive Global University Community’. This annual event features the participation of leaders and experts in the field of autism from more than 30 countries (60-80 participants) and was held this year during the opening week of the United Nations 67th General Assembly session, in order “to raise awareness of autism around the world and to encourage collaboration among nations to share best practices.” According to the Autism Speaks website, this year’s event “assembled one of the broadest coalitions in the organization’s history.” If you would like to read more information about this event, go to:

http://www.autismspeaks.org/news/news-item/autism-speaks-convenes-fifth-annual-world-focus-autism. We would like to thank Dr. Michael Siller, co-director of HARPP Center for facilitating our inclusion at this event. We would also like to thank Ahmed Osman, CUNY’s Division of Student Affairs Information Technology Coordinator, for his hard work and technical skill on the preparation of the poster. Two brochures from the event are attached.

5. Project REACH issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in early September which makes funds available to support a mini-grant program for the CUNY colleges. This allowed staff, faculty, and student organizations from all of our campuses to submit project ideas so that Project REACH could fund the best practices put forward by our campuses. This was an exciting opportunity for campuses to develop ideas to address the issues and challenges relevant to the population of CUNY students on the spectrum. We accepted proposals until the October 12, 2012 deadline, and we received 14 proposals covering different aspects of the issues that come with the rising number of students with ASD attending college. Project REACH will provide funding to selected campuses so that they can put their projects into action. This is one important way that we can empower our campuses to help students with ASD, because through the hard work of our colleges, more students can have equal opportunities to succeed in our University. In issuing the RFP for mini-grants, Project REACH is grateful for our partnership with the FAR Fund, for their staunch support of higher education opportunities for individuals on the autism spectrum. We would also like to thank the Office of the University Dean for Health and Human Services, led by Bill Ebenstein, for all of their guidance and additional resources.

6. We held a ‘Meet and Greet Student Breakfast with REACH’ for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders on October 5, 2012. We invited CUNY students on the spectrum to participate in this event. We discussed many topics, including academic challenges, difficulties faced by students on the spectrum, what we could provide to support students with ASD and how Project REACH could help. We held a similar meeting for students last Spring, but attendance was limited to only students since it was held in a focus group style.
The October event was widened to encourage participation not only from students with ASD, but also CUNY student leaders from CCSD, and members of Student Affairs staff. We identified problems, found solutions together, and developed plans to help students on the spectrum accomplish their goals. We also listened as students shared their similar experiences at college (with instructors, with support services, with peers), made practical suggestions, and found opportunities to improve services. We asked questions such as: “What impacts your CUNY experience?” and “How do instructors know what you need?” This event proved to be very affirming because we all came together for project REACH under one common goal: Making a difference for students on the spectrum.

7. Media Coverage:

✓ Project REACH was highlighted in a New York Times special edition article about Diversity in Education, on September 23, 2012. Jennifer Rubain, Esq., University Dean for Recruitment and Diversity, who was interviewed for the article, gave a description of REACH’s diversity goals and the project’s relationship to inclusive higher education. Once again, thank you to Jennifer Rubain for her advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities and for remembering Project REACH when interviewed for the article. A copy of this article is attached.

✓ An Age of Autism piece referred to Project REACH as “good news in a bad news world.” The article, entitled City University of New York Offers Unique Program for Students with Autism, had this to say: “Imagine if our kids could attend college with the necessary support they need to meet their potential? It would be life-changing in terms of self-esteem, income earning ability, socialization, and more. Thank you to CUNY for this program.” See: http://www.ageofautism.com/2012/09/city-university-of-new-york-offers-unique-program-for-students-with-autism.html

8. For the past several months, we have encouraged all of our Project REACH students to attend and participate in the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD) meetings and activities. CCSD is an exciting organization that provides a wonderful opportunity to interact and network with other students who face issues with their disabilities and have found ways to not just be successful, but to thrive in our university. They are a very welcoming group, and they organize or participate in a number of different CUNY-wide activities year-round. We encourage students with ASD to take advantage of this opportunity to collaborate with these CUNY student leaders. This allows them to explore how CCSD operates, and gives them a chance to be part of the self-empowerment and university-wide student advocacy that these leaders display. We want to help facilitate everyone becoming more comfortable with each other. CCSD is a not-for-profit advocacy organization that fosters community, increases awareness, and empowers college students
with the leadership skills to improve access and opportunity for CUNY’s students with disabilities. (The next CCSD meeting is Friday, November 30: contact info@cunycoalition.org for more details.)

9. Improving the lives of students with ASD requires that we keep up to date on the latest information about how to better serve our students. To that end, we attended The Autism Spectrum in Higher Education Conference, held at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology on November 7, 2012. We were able to learn about new research that could help our students, as well as network with other higher education practitioners and researchers about how other colleges and universities are serving students on the spectrum. Going to this conference helped us gather valuable information that we have now brought back and are putting to work for our students who are on the spectrum. This unique conference featured sessions on residential life, employment strategies for career success, new technologies, peer mentoring, transition to post-secondary education, research findings about what colleges are doing to meet the needs of students with ASD, and a panel of students. Expect highlights from this conference in a future issue of the Project REACH Newsletter. For more information on the event, visit: http://mit.edu/uaap/lds/conference/events.html

Now let us move onto FUTURE ACTIVITIES OF THE PROJECT. Our plans going forward are based on the data we have collected from faculty, staff, and students about CUNY’s needs and priorities to better serve students with ASD:

➢ RFP awarding: The Project REACH Proposal Committee convened at the end of October to review and evaluate all of the 14 proposals that were submitted for funding. The committee had to make the difficult decision about which proposals would be accepted and receive grant awards. We received a number of high-quality proposals, and it was a very rigorous process as a result. We should be announcing the winners by the end of November. From there, funds will be issued and the selected projects will begin. Funding for the projects will be up to $20,000 each, so the selected campuses can carry out their best practices. These projects can then be shared, expanded and replicated, and their impact measured. We will keep you posted with an announcement about these projects shortly. Expect highlights of the selected projects in the next issue of the Project REACH Newsletter.

➢ We are looking forward to beginning an innovative new way of delivering information: a podcast/radio show called Podcast REACH. This entertaining and informative show will
feature discussions with guests, pertinent topics, and a lot of wonderful information about ASD and college life, so ‘stay tuned’ for more updates about this.

➢ **We plan to continue to give presentations** to educate others about ASD and to spread the word about our project. The next presentation we are preparing will take place at the upcoming **CCSD Leadership Retreat**. The goal for this presentation is to provide CCSD students with an interactive learning experience that will give them as much knowledge as possible about college students who have ASD.

➢ We will continue **developing our website** into a comprehensive web resource. Plans for the near future include adding updates of our recent activities, including photographs and audio, as well as adding a section for links to articles in the news media (such as those found on the last page of this newsletter). We are continually adding more resources, including plans for a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. Suggestions for future additions and/or comments on the current resources can be sent to: lisa.pollich@mail.cuny.edu

➢ We continue to search for meaningful co-curricular activities, and leadership and service learning opportunities for our students with ASD. Other items under consideration for the Project's future include “Bowling with REACH,” a “Project REACH Logo-Design” contest, a legislative breakfast, exploring different ways for students with ASD to communicate with each other, the use of peer mentoring, holding awareness workshops and activities, exploring the best use of technology, developing marketing strategies, continuing to expand our mailing list, inviting guest speakers for future events and presentations, partnering/collaborating with other organizations, and a student spotlight.

We have a lot of ideas in the works, and I look forward to reporting all of the work that Project REACH is doing for our students with ASD in the next issue.

You can keep updated about Project REACH’s activities in several ways: Reading our newsletter, Visiting our website, and (soon) Listening to the podcasts. These three methods will work together to ensure that our message gets to you.

On the last page you will find a compilation of recent articles in the news media relating to autism. This is not an endorsement of any of these articles by Project REACH, simply a sampling of information to encourage discussion.

Thank you to the following individuals who contributed information for this issue: Roberta Adelman, Charles Carr, William Ebenstein, Abigail Nelson, Jennifer Rubain, John Schiavone, Michael Siller.

Please call me or send me an email if you need further details about anything within this newsletter. We welcome your feedback to help shape this project. I encourage you to submit information to me.
that you believe may be relevant. This newsletter highlights our commitment to providing our CUNY family with resources to embrace students with ASD and promote diversity.

**REMEMBER:** If you are in need of disaster relief or know someone who is, please refer to this page for a list of resources available to the CUNY Community: - the website is updated regularly.

**Hurricane Sandy Resources and Services**

[http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/sa/GeneralinfoResources.html](http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/sa/GeneralinfoResources.html)

CUNY Central Office Division of Student Affairs developed a list of useful resources with information on support and services to students, faculty, and staff coping with the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

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Attachments: NY Times Diversity article, HARRP Brochure, Autism Speaks World Focus Brochure

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**NEWS MEDIA LIST FOR FALL ISSUE OF REACH NEWSLETTER**

(Articles from August, September, October)

1. New York Times article on Diversity in Education, 9/23/2012. Includes one paragraph on Project REACH. (Attached)

2. New York Times article on School Bullies Prey on Students with Autism, 9/3/2012:  

3. Autism Speaks article on convening the 5th Annual World Focus on Autism in conjunction with UN General Assembly. (Project REACH presented our project here.)  

4. New York Times article on Report Sees Less Impact in New Autism Definition, 10/2/2012: New research may soothe the anxieties of parents worried that their children could lose state-financed services because of proposed changes to the official diagnosis of autism.  

6. Two articles on Heart transplant denied for man with autism, 8/14 & 8/15:

   From Disability Scoop, August 14, 2012
   Heart Transplant Denied Due to Autism Diagnosis
   http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2012/08/14/claim-heart-transplant-autism/16251/

   From ABC News, August 15, 2012
   Autistic Man Denied Heart Transplant/Autism Transplant Denial Sparks Debate

7. New York Times article on Father’s Age is Linked to Risk of Autism, 8/23/2012:
   Researchers reported that: Older men are more likely than young ones to father a child who develops autism because of random genetic mutations that become more numerous with advancing paternal age. These random genetic mutations in children that become more numerous with advancing paternal age may account for as many as 30% of autism cases.

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Project REACH is a university-wide project that is funded in part by the FAR Fund and coordinated by the Central Office Division of Student Affairs of the City University of New York (CUNY). The purpose of Project REACH is to enhance CUNY’s capacity to support its growing population of college students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).