Happy Holidays!!

As we reflect on 2015 and look forward to 2016 we are proud of the students in our Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) and CD (College Discovery) Programs and our collective accomplishments.

Let us continue to take every opportunity to share our successes and to connect with others with whom we share the common goals of supporting access to education, retention and success. Our mission of providing high-potential, low income students with the resources and services to help them succeed was communicated in several forums of diverse audiences.

On Friday, November 13th, 2015 Dean Cheryl Williams and Ms. Annette Hernandez, Director of the Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK program at Lehman College (2015 Examples of Excelencia Program Finalist) presented at the CUNY University Faculty Senate (UFS) 2015 Fall Conference on Supporting Academic Success. This discussion with faculty included the many programs that CUNY has launched as a part of the national effort to better prepare students for college. The successes of our programs and the profiles of our students were included in the conversation about CUNY’s performance improvement plan’s elevation of the importance of graduation and retention rates.

The background of SEEK and CD students was also communicated at the NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Higher Education Public Hearing on the Changing Demographics of Students in Higher Education and Educational Opportunity Programs on Tuesday, December 15th, 2015. Over the last several decades the demographics of the student population in higher education have changed. The “traditional” college student is becoming the exception. This is the student who enrolls in college immediately after high school graduation, pursues a degree on a continuous full-time basis, and completes a degree program in four years.

Today’s college students are more likely to be financially independent; need remediation; delay college enrollment; enroll in college part-time; be employed full-time; have children; be single parents; or be first-generation college students. These characteristics can become barriers to college success. Let us continue to give our best to support our students as they conquer the challenges they face.

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The SLA Post-Conference was held in the Moot Court at John Jay College on Friday, October 9th, 2015. Students from ten SEEK and College Discovery programs gathered to share their growth and experiences since their participation in the 2015 annual SLA Conference held in June. The reflective discussion facilitated by Kyoko Toyama (College Discovery Counselor, LaGuardia Community College) and Paul Dorestant (Director, SEEK New York City College of Technology) provided an opportunity for students to describe how their lives have changed. They discussed what they have been involved with since the conference and how they have applied what they had learned.

Baruch’s SEEK Counselor, Betty Duverger presented Stephen R. Covey’s *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* in a creative way, which included movement to emphasize certain points to assist students with learning the lessons that could help them be successful. The seven habits include being proactive and practicing the principle of personal vision; beginning with the end in mind (personal leadership), putting first things first (personal management), thinking win/win (interpersonal leadership), seeking first to understand and then to be understood (empathic communication), practicing principle-centered leadership where synergy exists (creative cooperation), and sharpening the saw (balanced self-renewal).

A Public Narrative Workshop was facilitated by Philip Gordon (Research & Assessment Associate, CUNY Office of Special Programs) and Masha Burina (Small Business Organizer, Riders Alliance). Students were guided and empowered to develop and share their personal “story of self.” Sharing stories is a powerful use of words, the ability to teach and also inspire others through the communication of each individual’s challenges and efforts to overcome those challenges. Students were given the opportunity to convey their educational values to their peers in the form of personal storytelling, to also identify the choices they made and share the outcomes from those choices. Marshall Ganz, a Harvard professor to our own Philip Gordon, pioneered the successful grassroots organizing model which includes the story of self, used during President Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign.

This first SLA Post-Conference was deemed to have been successful by all who participated.
The 10th Annual CUNY Black Male Initiative Conference

The 10th Annual CUNY Black Male Initiative Conference was held on Friday October 16th, 2015 at John Jay College. A number of SEEK members including an alumni of the program acted as Conveners, Panelists and Moderators during numerous panel discussions throughout the day. One panel, *College is For Me: A Student Perspective*, consisted of a workshop and Q&A session attended by various college students who came together to share their individual college experiences. They provided tips for success in study habits, financial aid, and even maintaining a healthy social life as a college student. In attendance included Moderator James Bravo, a recent SEEK Baruch Graduate, Manuel Castillo, an Urban Male Initiative member and John Jay College Student and Convener Geomary Sanchez, a Baruch SEEK Society member.

A second panel, *Academic Enhancement: Adding an Additional Layer of Support*, included a discussion on how free additional academic counseling, workshops and tutoring sessions have aided in the improvement of academic performance across CUNY BMI projects at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Mark Francis, the Academic Support Director at SEEK John Jay served as the Convener and Kristy Perez, Deputy Director at SEEK Baruch, served as a panelist.
TRiO is one of the many student programs on CUNY campuses which address the academic and vocational needs of student subsets. Unlike other special programs, TRiO is grant-funded by the U.S. Department of Education (ED). TRiO is not an acronym. It refers to the three original programs created by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to help underrepresented students access and succeed in college. Upward Bound was founded in 1964, followed by Talent Search (1965), and then the Student Support Services Program -SSSP (1968).

Upward Bound and Talent Search serve pre-collegiate students while SSSP serves matriculated post-secondary students who are either students with disabilities, low-income, or first generation students. SSSP is mandated to provide five specific initiatives 1) tutorials, 2) college advisement, 3) financial aid assistance, 4) financial literacy, and 5) assistance with transfer to the next educational level. SSSP programs are also able to provide other interventions like counseling. Since 1968, additional TRiO programs have been created that serve additional populations such as graduate students and veterans.

Every five years on a rotating basis, colleges submit proposals to the ED in response to a very detailed request for proposals (RFP). The most recent competition for SSSP was held during fall 2014. Programs that received an SSSP award were notified in July 2015.

Even with technical assistance from ED and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), SSSP proposal writing is not for the faint of heart. Applicants have fewer than two months to prepare a 60-page proposal. This proposal must include a description of the proposed project, its intended effects on students, and how programs will measure if the SSSP is having the intended effect. This year, ED encouraged applicants to develop programming focused on developing the non-cognitive skills of their students. Moreover, the proposal must include references to peer-reviewed studies of similar projects that have demonstrated statistically significant effects for similar students. Competition for SSSP grants was fierce. ED received more than 1,500 grant applications, but funded fewer than 70 percent of these applications.

Congratulations are in order for the four continuing CUNY SSSPs that were re-funded: City College, Queens College, York College and Kingsborough Community College. However, SSSP Directors and their staff will have little time to rest. As outcomes-based programs, ED expects them to begin implementation as soon as they are notified of their award. ED checks annually that each SSSP program adheres to the persistence, graduation, and transfer rates set in its proposal.

For the first time in applying for SSSP, CUNY’s TRiO programs had an additional support from the Central Office. Since 2013, CUNY has a university-wide TRiO Council which meets monthly. Meetings are dedicated to promoting best practices, professional development, and program visibility. The meetings are chaired by Dean Cheryl Williams, who provides council members with University information and opportunities, with the indefatigable assistance of Phil Gordon and Mavis Hall. All three were instrumental in facilitating council initiatives to improve the chances of SSSP re-funding.

With the start of the new SSSP grant cycle, now is a great time to find out if there any TRiO programs on your campus. The TRiO Directors encourage our fellow CUNY administrators and faculty to connect and develop relationships with us. We look forward to collaborating with additional CUNY and campus programs to make sure that CUNY students have all the resources they need to persist and to achieve their educational goals.
Four CUNY campuses awarded TRiO Student Support Success grants from the U.S. Dept. of Education

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<td>Pre- Collegiate</td>
<td>Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) provide counseling and information to qualified adults who want to enter or continue their college education. EOCs place a strong emphasis on the financial literacy skills of their students.</td>
<td>BMCC</td>
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<td>Talent Search</td>
<td>Through academic support, mentoring, workshops, college fairs, college and financial aid application assistance, and many other services, Talent Search helps middle and high school students from low-income backgrounds get into college with the skills they need to succeed.</td>
<td>Bronx, Brooklyn, John Jay, Lehman, Medgar</td>
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<td>Upward Bound</td>
<td>Upward Bound (UB) serves high school students from low-income families with the goal of increasing college access and success. UB provides students with tutoring, mentoring, counseling, cultural programs, and financial education that is designed to prepare students to apply to and succeed in college.</td>
<td>BMCC, Bronx, City, John Jay, Medgar</td>
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<td>Collegiate</td>
<td>Student Support Services (SSS) programs provide college students with academic support, financial aid application assistance, and individualized counseling support. The goal of SSS programs is to increase college retention and graduation rates for underserved students.</td>
<td>City, Kingsborough, Lehman, Queens, York</td>
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<td>Graduate Education</td>
<td>The goal of the McNair Scholars program is to increase the attainment of Ph.D.s. from underrepresented students. McNair programs provide opportunities to conduct research with faculty, summer internships, seminars, tutoring, counseling, and designed to prepare students for graduate study. Students also receive application assistance with their graduate applications.</td>
<td>Hunter, John Jay</td>
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On Wednesday, September 30th Professor Yasmin Dalisay (ENG 101) and Professor Cheryl Franks (EDU 100) took their Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Freshman Learning Community Class (John Jay College of Criminal Justice) to Brooklyn Boulders for a team-building, problem-solving, decision-making climbing experience.

The trip was a huge success. In the words of Professor Dalisay who proposed the idea out of her own love for climbing, "The trip was amazing. Our students approached the whole experience with open minds and with such a sense of adventure, and they were so beautifully supportive of each other. I was proud of them!".

Professor Franks is grateful to Professor Dalisay for proposing the idea. She agrees with the outcome. "Something shifted in our class after our day together climbing. This is something I hope to have on our syllabi for many years to come!"

So far this year, this Learning Community has seen an increase in class attendance; decrease in class lateness; increase in assignments being submitted on time and quality of work; increase in students coming prepared having read the material; increased utilization of academic support centers; increase in critical consciousness and translating this to social action and advocacy; increase in problem solving and decision making abilities; and an increase sense of "team" and "community." Students are already discussing ways of staying together next semester and throughout their sophomore year.

The SEEK Department's SEEK Sophomore Success Committee (SSSC) together with the Administrative Team led by Chair and Director, Dr. Nancy Velazquez-Torres, are already developing ideas for building on this sense of community and success as students transition into the sophomore year.
On August 27, 2015, approximately 100 incoming students participated in the College Discovery Orientation experience in which students were engaged in a multitude of educational and cultural activities.

One of the activities was a workshop created and facilitated by College Discovery Counselors Sundeese Borden and Desiree Gulliver entitled “Countering Negative Stereotypes of Community College Students.” During this workshop, incoming students explored popular negative stereotypes and stigmas that are held about the community college student population.

Upon exploring these untruths, students engaged in dialogue about how common many of the stereotypes were, shared experiences where they were the subject of these stereotypes, and even expressed how these untruths impacted them emotionally.

Afterwards, students were guided in a challenge in which they would identify positive characteristics and traits that would counter the negative stereotypes they previously identified. Students worked in pairs and used a dry erase marker to write the stereotype on their left arm and the counter to the stereotype on their right arm so that they could present their peers with both and verbalize the positive over the negative. This is the first step in the psychoeducational process of defeating negative stereotypes and recreating a positive identity.

The exercise provided incoming students with a pertinent start of their education at LaGuardia Community College and their membership in the College Discovery Program. In addition to introducing them to a powerful psychological technique of mindfulness, it gave them the opportunity to recreate their identities as students regardless of their academic performance in the past. Additionally, students left knowing the importance of actively and purposefully defining themselves as college students vested in their institution and their education.

Upon the completion of the workshop, students raved about the experience, expressed that they had never done anything like this before, had never realized the importance of being mindful about what they thought; especially thoughts that came from other people.
In the fall semester of 2008, I enrolled as a freshman student at Medgar Evers College and was accepted into the SEEK program. After feeling discouraged by the results of my math placement exam, I dreaded the idea of having to spend my entire summer in remedial courses. However, I saw it as an opportunity to attend college a little earlier than my peers and as a great way to meet new people and familiarize myself with the campus. After successfully passing my courses, I was anxious for my first year of college to begin. As a SEEK student, I thought to myself, “What did I do to receive additional financial assistance, free tutoring, learning skills workshops and counseling?” After watching a documentary about the SEEK program in my group counseling course, I quickly learned that I was not given this opportunity in recognition of my personal accomplishments, but rather the merits of those who came before me. Thus, my purpose in life began to appear much clearer.

Unfortunately, towards the end of my second semester as a college freshman, my mother suddenly passed away from congestive heart failure. Despite my incredible loss, I was even more determined to pursue my degree and encourage other students along the way. During my experience as a Mission Possible Peer Mentor in the SEEK program, I helped my college mentees gain access and awareness to all direct resources on campus such as tutoring, counseling, and personal assistance necessary to make their first academic year less burdensome and more successful. Equally important, I served as Director of the Hebron Highlanders Pathfinder Club, a non-profit organization affiliated with the Hebron Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brooklyn, NY. With the assistance of staff and parents, I aided in the mental, physical, and spiritual development of youth, ages ten and older. The Club engaged in community service and outreach programs such as soup kitchen, coat and canned food drives, beautification projects, visiting the shut-ins, and encouraging the less fortunate. Members were taught how to be leaders, plan recreational and fundraising activities to support various causes, and trained on how to effectively prepare for crisis situations. My breadth of experience in working so closely with youth, children, and families ignited my passion to become a social worker.

With the resources, tools, and support of the SEEK program, I graduated Summa Cum Laude, with a bachelor’s degree in Psychology. I later applied and was accepted into the Silberman School of Social Work program at Hunter College in 2012. Two years later, I graduated with my master’s degree in Social Work. I became a social work intern at STEPS to End Family Violence; an Alternatives to Incarceration program, dedicated to providing counseling services and legal advocacy to women facing criminal charges related to their history of domestic violence and/or abuse and trauma. Through my weekly visits to Rikers Island and working closely with the courts and attorneys, my eyes were opened to the discrimination and disproportionate number of people of color represented in the criminal “justice” system. Many of my clients were not able to attain a high school degree, or college education. This experience motivated me to help others thrive in society by taking full advantage of the resources and opportunities within the education system.

Today, I am currently a Licensed Social Worker and SEEK counselor at my alma mater. My mission is to “Educate, Elevate, and Empower” youth.

(Continued on Page 9)
CCNY Wins Big at ABRCMS Conference

The 15th Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students in Seattle ended with The City College of New York a big winner. Eight students from the Division of Science received awards in the poster presentation category, including one TRiO SSSP student.

The winning students and their topics are:

Rachel Hernandez, social and behavioral science; Melissa S. Evelyn, engineering, physics, and math; Christina Torres, developmental biology; TRiO SSSP student Zhiying Zhu, oral presentation engineering, physics and math; Electra Nassis, cancer biology; Hazeezat Shittu, social and behavioral science; Shirley Mo, social and behavioral science; and Christopher Reid, neuroscience.

ABRCMS is one of the largest, professional conferences for underrepresented minority students, military veterans, and persons with disabilities to pursue advanced training in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. ABRCMS attracts approximately 3,600 individuals, including 1,900 undergraduate and post baccalaureate students, 400 graduate students and postdoctoral scientists and 1,300 faculty, program directors and administrators. Students come from more than 350 U.S. colleges and universities.

From SEEK Student to Counselor
(Continued from Page 8)

to fulfill their highest potential in life”. I am grateful that God allowed the SEEK program to exist, to help nurture the intellectual capabilities and potential of a young Haitian, African-American woman with a vision. I hope to inspire my students to overcome adversity and encourage them to build resilience on their journey towards academic success.

LaGuardia College Discovery’s New Student Orientation
(Continued from Page 7)

The impact didn’t stop at Orientation. A month into the start of classes, College Discovery Counselors still see the results of the workshop. First semester students are already viewing themselves as successful pre-professionals. They are actively inquiring about ways in which they can continue defining their roles as LaGCC students on campus. Their engagement in career exploration and transfer opportunities that will reinforce the positive characteristics they chose during the workshop.
Students’ Success and Achievements

Kryst Cedeno (BA, '15), an alumna of the Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Department, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, is working at the New York State Psychiatric Institute as a research assistant for Dr. Neil K. Aggarwal. They are conducting a study on the importance of clinician cultural competency when providing services to ethnic and racial minorities suffering from mental illness, and how this affects rapport, treatment initiation and continuation.

Ms. Cedeno stays connected to the SEEK Department, and is being supported by her counselor, Dr. Cheryl Franks, and the Chair and Director, Dr. Nancy Velazquez-Torres to enter a social work masters program in the 2016-2017 academic year.

Congratulations to Chidinma Okezue, Medgar Evers Class of 2015 Valedictorian and SEEK Alumnus in being accepted into the Icahn School of Medicine Master of Public Health Grad program after completing her Bachelor of Science in Biology. Best of Luck!
Join us in welcoming Shirley de Peña, LCSW, Director of the Foster Youth College Success Initiative.

The “Foster Youth College Success Initiative” is a new program designed to provide additional supports and benefits for the 2015 - 2016 academic year for enrolled students who are:

- Currently or previously in foster care
- Wards of the court
- Orphans

This initiative works to ensure that students are given equal opportunity and the resources needed to enhance their ability to successfully thrive and complete a college degree.

Students who identify as any one of the above may be eligible to receive additional benefits (including but not limited to metro cards, campus meal vouchers, and inter-session tuition). Interested students should contact Shirley de Peña, LCSW, Director of the Foster Youth College Success Initiative. Shirley may be reached at shirley.depena@cuny.edu or 646-664-8786.
Save the date
The Percy Ellis Sutton SEEK Program Celebrates 50 Years!

Sharing What Works Exhibit

THE SEEK LEGACY:
STUDENT SUCCESS IN
AN URBAN SETTING
Wednesday, April 13, 2016

John Jay Gymnasium
899 10th Ave. New York, NY 10019
(b/w 58th and 59th streets)
4th Floor
Invitation to follow

Office of Special Programs
City University of New York
555 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019
646-664-8700

Cheryl Williams, University Associate Dean
Shirley de Peña, Director, Foster Youth College Success Initiative
Mavis Hall, Director
Frances Kingston, Program Associate for Financial Affairs
Philip Gordon, Research & Assessment Associate
Starla Braswell, Program Director, CD Scholars
Akilah Bryan, Administrative Assistant
Ramon Garcia, Program Assistant
Morgan Kollarus, Social Media/Communications Assistant

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