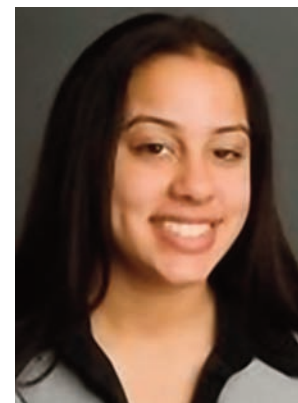


City College SEEK Student Gains Valuable Experience as a Watson Fellow

Google Alexa Mieses, a 21-year-old member of the SEEK program at City College, and the first entry that pops up is an article she wrote while serving as a Jeannette K. Watson Fellow summer intern at the Gay Men's Health Crisis, Inc.(GMHC).

“I was interested in interning at GMHC because I wanted experience in public policy,” said Alexa, who is a senior majoring in biology. “At this juncture, I’m considering pursuing an MD and Master’s in Public Health. My work over the summer strengthened that desire. It was an eye opener.”

The Jeannette K. Watson Fellowship provides internships, mentoring, and enriched educational opportunities to 15 promising New York City undergraduates each year, with the goal of increasing their life choices and developing their capacity to make a difference in their own and others’ lives. Forty-five students serve as Watson Fellows at any one time.



Alexa Mieses

Alexa’s article, “Gender Inequality and Corrective Rape of Women Who Have Had Sex with Women,” appeared on the front page of GMHC’s December 2009 Treatment Issues newsletter. The article describes the tragic murder of Eudy Simelane, a star on South Africa’s women’s national football team, who was brutally raped and stabbed because she was a lesbian. Also while interning at GMHC, Alexa authored policy briefs about sex education funding and state and local legislation and produced a voter guide for the 2009 mayoral election.

Alexa was named a Watson Fellow in 2008 following a rigorous application and interview process. Watson Fellows are placed in paid internships for two summers, and the third summer the students travel abroad. Her first internship was as a summer teaching fellow at the Bronx Zoo where she taught children of all ages about biology and ecology. This summer, Alexa is considering internships in Central or South America or South Africa.

Alexa applied for the Watson Fellowship because her SEEK counselor, Professor Debra Kennedy, encouraged her. “Without Professor Kennedy, I wouldn’t have known about it,” Alexa said. “She helped me with the essay and interview and wrote a letter of recommendation for me.” “Alexa has this incredible drive and incredible level of confidence,”

Professor Kennedy said. “She’s really trying to make herself as well-rounded as possible, and she takes advantage of the myriad of opportunities out there.”

Professor Kennedy, who has been a counselor for 17 years, said of her work, “It’s very rewarding, particularly when you see students like Alexa come through. Without the SEEK program, she wouldn’t have been able to enter City College.”

Also with Professor Kennedy’s encouragement and support, Alexa applied for and received a SEEK scholarship to study abroad in Madrid, Spain, after her freshman year, became involved with the Minority Association of Pre-health Students, serving as its secretary her junior year and now its president, and was named a SEEK Scholar her sophomore year, which has given her the opportunity to mentor other SEEK students and assist with seminars. Alexa also tutors students in biology and chemistry through the City College Academy of Professional Preparation for Science Majors.

Alexa, who was born and raised in Astoria, Queens, graduated from the Bronx High School of Science but nearly went to LaGuardia High School because she is as passionate about the arts as she is about science. She’s been tap dancing for 17 years and also sings, plays the piano, and played the clarinet when she was younger. In junior high school Alexa performed in a borough-wide band, played with the New York Pops Band at Carnegie Hall, and was in the Bronx Science chorus. A tragedy in high school, the drug overdose of a friend she mentored, led her to create a club offering peer support to students using drugs and inspired her to pursue a career in medicine.



The Watson Class of 2010, Alexa Mieses is in the red sweater, fifth from the right.



SEEK/CD Mission

The SEEK/College Discovery Mission is to increase the level of education, social mobility, and vocational capability in NYC and NYS by providing access to higher education to students who are:

- **Educationally disadvantaged** (as defined by CUNY)
- **Economically disadvantaged** (as defined by NYS)

To provide comprehensive services in:

- **Academic support**
- **Counseling**
- **Financial Aid**

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City College Watson Fellow

www.cuny.edu/seek
www.cuny.edu/cd

Brooklyn College SEEK Program Praised in Middle States Report

Ask Martha Bell about the students in the SEEK Program at Brooklyn College and she will immediately begin listing their accomplishments.

“These are very good young people,” said Professor Bell, who is the SEEK Department Chairperson. “They really want to be in school. When they get to us, they may not be the strongest academically, but we give them the tools to succeed.”

Professor Bell isn’t alone in her assessment. A recent Middle States team evaluation report on Brooklyn College singled out the SEEK Program, along with other college initiatives, as “innovative and quite successful,” describing in particular the SEEK e-portfolio program as “a very effective tool for engaging new students in age-appropriate self reflection on their progress through the first year of college.”

As Director of the Brooklyn College SEEK Program since 1983 and on staff since 1977, Professor Bell believes the current SEEK students are even more motivated than when she first began working in the program.

Eighty-five percent of the participants have family incomes below \$13,000 and high school GPAs and SAT scores that would have prevented their admittance to Brooklyn College if not for the SEEK Program. SEEK students at Brooklyn College, however, have a higher rate of passing the CUNY Proficiency Exam and fewer instances of academic probation than other undergraduates.

“Our kids are exceeding the regularly admitted students,” Professor Bell said. “By national standards, only 11 percent of these kids should be graduating, but our graduation rate is far higher than that.” The SEEK graduating class of 2009 boasted the most graduates, highest number of honor students, the most places won at graduate schools, and the highest grades in the history of the program. In the fall of 2009, the program at Brooklyn College welcomed 230 freshman, one of the largest SEEK

classes in the history of the college, bringing the total number of participants to 830 students.

Professor Bell also praised the diversity of Brooklyn SEEK as it follows the original intent of SEEK which was established in 1966 to serve every ethnicity of talented but poor students who aspired to higher education in the City of New York.

In its recently released report accrediting Brooklyn College, The Middle States Commission said the SEEK Program is an excellent example of Brooklyn College’s commitment to improving the educational attainments of students with either special needs or special interests. It commended the program in three categories—the Pre-Freshman Summer Program, freshman year progress, and outcomes assessments.

Professor Bell is particularly proud of the report’s findings on Benchmarks for Success, the outcomes assessment tool that requires SEEK students to outline annual goals and demonstrate what they’ve learned from classes and extracurricular activities. The assessment measures the students’ growth during their college career, encourages independence, and forces them to take responsibility for their own learning.

The Middle States Commission Report recommended the re-accreditation of Brooklyn College for the next decade. The Commission action in June 2009 represented the culmination of an intensive, multi-year self-study process that was conducted through committees, town hall meetings, and public comment to gauge Brooklyn College’s success in meeting the 14 Middle States Characteristics of Excellence, record the major accomplishments of the past decade, and set out the institutional requirements for maintaining excellence in the years ahead.

Students in CSI's SEEK Research Program Recognized

Adam Grabowski, a research assistant in the College of Staten Island's SEEK Research Program for two years, was acknowledged in Professor Alan Zimmerman's recent co-authored publication, *The Economics of Counterfeit Trade*.

Professor Zimmerman, of the Department of Business, wrote in the acknowledgements, "Special thanks to Adam Grabowski, my undergraduate research assistant, whose dogged determination helped unearth many interesting sources. Thanks to Jean Como of the SEEK Program at the College of Staten Island for providing me with such an excellent researcher."

Another research assistant, Mohammed H. Bhuiyan, as a graduating biochemistry major was selected to present at the CSI Undergraduate Conference on Research, Scholarship, and Performance in April 2009. His presentation was on the "Expression and Purification of the Cytosolic Tail of the Ste2p I+-Factor Receptor."

Eleven SEEK Program students participated in the SEEK Research Program during the 2008-09 academic year. Five students worked in the areas of science and technology (chemistry, biology, and nursing). The remaining six worked in media culture, history, anthropology, and sociology.



Norberto Tavares Garcia

College Discovery Helps Hostos Student Become a Kaplan Scholar

Norberto Tavares Garcia, a College Discovery participant who graduated from Hostos Community College last spring with a 3.7 GPA, has been named a Kaplan Leadership Scholar and awarded a scholarship to New York University.

As one of 21 students in the elite Kaplan Leadership Program, Norberto also receives leadership development and training, mentoring by industry leaders and other professionals, career counseling, job placement support, and admissions guidance for graduate and professional programs, and cultural enrichment opportunities. Norberto credits his academic success to his persistence, confidence, determination, and help from his professors in the College Discovery Program. "College Discovery was very important in my educational career," Norberto said. "The program provided a lot of opportunities and I took advantage of all of them."

For example, Norberto worked on his Kaplan application with professors in the Life Skills Compass Project, which was developed by the College Discovery staff at Hostos to help students with a 3.0 GPA or higher create a portfolio to use when applying for scholarships. The portfolio consists of a cover letter, academic resume, scholarship essay, and references. In addition, the College Discovery professors help students prepare for interviews. An added benefit is participants can apply the skills they learn in the Life Skills Compass Project to their other coursework. "College Discovery was like a family to me, also it was like a team where I got a lot of support," Norberto said. "The first semester I never felt alone."

Norberto arrived at Hostos after overcoming a number of obstacles. His education in the Dominican Republic was interrupted in August 2001 after he fell from a tree and suffered a spinal cord injury that left him paralyzed from the waist down and unable to finish his senior year of high school. After several surgeries, Norberto moved with his family in 2002 to the United States where he learned English, passed the GED test, took college prep classes, and was accepted to the College Discovery Program at Hostos Community College.

Norberto said his injury, which forced him to use a wheelchair initially and now a walker, has helped him relate to other people with disabilities. "I learned that there is nothing impossible in life if we work hard and give our heart to get it, recognizing that we must be dedicated, motivated and accept that nothing is easy," Norberto wrote in his Kaplan application essay.

At Hostos, Norberto served as president of Ability Awareness Club, was a member of the Committee on Disabilities Issues, and worked on campus in the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. He also represented the college at CUNY's SEEK and College Discovery Programs' Leadership conference, was inducted into Phi Theta Kappa, and honored with the College Discovery Program's Academic Excellence Award in 2007, 2008, and 2009. Norberto is continuing his studies in NYU's Silver School of Social Work and is interested in working with people with disabilities. "Social work is my passion," he said. "I love working with people with disabilities."

Maria E. Grieco, Director of the College Discovery Program at Hostos Community College, beams with pride when speaking of Norberto. "Norberto is a wonderful young man," she said. "He's made so much progress. He is physically challenged and walks with a walker, but when he came to us he was in a wheelchair. Some of our best students are disabled and they seem to have a tremendous will to move on."

CSI's Strategies for Success Taps Into Students' Desire to Serve Community

Rhagina Chisolm always dreamed of becoming a teacher, so when the College of Staten Island's SEEK Program offered her the chance to mentor and tutor students in the local public schools, she took advantage of it.

"I decided to get involved with the program because I want to teach, and I saw this as a great opportunity," said Rhagina, a 22-year-old English major who plans to get her master's degree in education. "It's a rewarding experience and sometimes we get hugs. It just makes you feel good on the inside."

Strategies for Success, which was started by the SEEK Program and is now open to all students at the college, offers mentoring, tutoring, and college role models to 200 youngsters in after school programs at P.S. 57 and I.S. 49. The college students function as tutors by helping students with homework or studying for a test, and as mentors by sitting down with students and talking, playing games, and organizing activities such as poetry workshops. About 40 percent of the participants in Strategies for Success are SEEK students, most of whom are also education majors.

Rhagina, a SEEK participant who graduated from Port Richmond High School in Staten Island, previously tutored her younger sister and god sister at home. Her college mentoring career began at I.S. 49 in 2007, and soon she was working with students that had been placed in special education classes because of behavioral problems. Rhagina said she succeeded by sitting down and getting to know each student. She connected to the girls by talking to them about fashion or telling them about her dance classes at the College of Staten Island, and to the boys by talking about sports. "I try to get down on their level," she said. "They can see they have a friend, a college role model and it works."

In September 2008, Rhagina was promoted to site coordinator for IS 49 and assistant site coordinator at PS 57, which has allowed her to develop leadership skills. Although she supervises 12 SEEK mentors Monday and Wednesday at I.S. 49, and 12 SEEK mentors Tuesday and Thursday at P.S. 57, she said it isn't difficult because her peers are so motivated. "The mentors are self-starters," Rhagina said. "They have the same passion I have to serve the community and help these children succeed in life and encourage them to go to college."

Georgia Landrum, Assistant Director of Strategies for Success, said the program is designed to address the needs of the children and give SEEK students the opportunity to serve their community by becoming role models. The college arranges for a bus to take mentors to the schools so they can participate

between classes.

"A lot of SEEK students want to give back," Ms. Landrum said. "They are helping these children who are financially and academically disadvantaged by giving them their time and passion. A lot of the kids being mentored don't know anyone in college and our college students provide them with role models."

Mentors are required to take a week-long mentoring workshop that teaches them how to mentor and tutor, and they learn valuable study skills that they can apply to their own classes. To qualify, mentors must have at least a 2.75 GPA, 24 or more college credits, and basic skills proficiency. "It's really a nice experience for them beyond the classroom," Ms. Landrum said. "All of them are going into education and they're able to put into practice what they learn."

Strategies for Success was launched at I.S. 49 in 2001 in partnership with the Jewish Community Center's Beacon Program. The Staten Island Bank and Trust Foundation (now the Staten Island Foundation) asked the College of Staten Island to help children struggling academically in the Stapleton area and provided the founding grant. In 2004, the program was expanded to P.S. 57 in partnership with the YMCA's after school program. Grants totaling \$94,000, including a \$25,000 grant from JP Morgan Chase and a \$40,000 grant from the Staten Island Foundation, have enabled the program to continue.



From left to right: Jessica Imperatrice (mentor), Gina Gutman (Time Warner Cable representative), Georgia Landrum (Assistant Director of Strategies), Rhagina Chisolm (Site Coordinator at I.S. 49) and Professor Gloria Garcia (Strategies for Success Program Director). The students in the photo from left to right in the front row are: Ariyana, Juan, Julissa, Xavia, and Margaret.