



Borough of Manhattan Community College • The City University of New York  
A Journal of Award-Winning Students and Mentors  
2009-2010





### A Journal of Award-Winning Students and Mentors 2009-2010

Welcome to *Marks of Excellence*. I am delighted to introduce the first issue of this annual publication showcasing the extraordinary academic achievements of BMCC students.

It is no exaggeration to say that community colleges have grown to become a powerful driver of workforce development and economic growth—both here in New York and across the United States. They have also become centers of academic excellence and intellectual ferment, and nowhere is that more evident than on the campus of BMCC, recognized today as one of the nation's premiere urban community colleges.

In these pages, you will have a first-hand view of the creativity, dedication and scholastic achievements of more than 25 BMCC students in a wide array of fields, from poetry to economics to neuroscience. Some have been singled out for prestigious awards, scholarships and honors; others have competed with—and outperformed—high-achieving students from four-year colleges. In all cases, they have drawn upon the support and mentorship of dedicated faculty and staff.

“With a mentor, you work with someone who actually believes in you and wants you to fulfill your full academic potential,” says aspiring physician Gary Waiyaki. “I think for minority students, one of the problems we experience, especially in an academic setting, is a lack of mentors—people who actually push us. So, working with Science faculty member Manita Pavel was really motivating.”

Perhaps the biggest challenge in assembling this issue of *Marks of Excellence* was having to choose which students to feature. Space constraints meant that many academically outstanding students could not be included. Their omission by no means reflects on the quality of their achievements.

Virtually all of the students featured in *Marks of Excellence* plan to continue their studies at four-year colleges, and many will go on to pursue graduate degrees. But what matters today is the extraordinary work that they have done right here at BMCC, in the arts, sciences and humanities—work that would be worthy of the most academically rigorous and highly regarded senior colleges in the country.

Indeed, if there is one conclusion to be drawn from *Marks of Excellence*, it is that academic excellence is alive and well at BMCC. The following pages offer a sampling of some of the exciting things taking place in and around our classrooms and laboratories, and introduce you to some remarkable young men and women. As you learn about them, I trust you will be as gratified as I am.

Antonio Pérez  
President, Borough of Manhattan Community College  
The City University of New York



# Rising Stars

The sky's the limit for two leaders-in-the-making.

David Thelemaque and Wilson Acuna, this year's newest Kaplan scholars, credit their faculty mentors for encouraging them to work hard and focus on life after BMCC.

Thelemaque, a math major, asked his African Civilization Professor Nicholas Ofiaja for a recommendation to the Kaplan Educational Foundation's Leadership Program. "Professor Ofiaja really changed the way I thought of myself, and my perception of the world. With every class, I learned more and more about my ancestors," says Thelemaque. "He also gave me insight to the problems in my community today."

Likewise, Acuna, a science major, received solid advice from former science professor Melissa Nashat. "She helped me think about possibilities beyond BMCC and told me not to limit myself; to think big and possibly attend a college outside of Manhattan."

The Kaplan Educational Foundation's Leadership Program helps high-potential, lower-income and under-represented community college students reach their educational and career goals. Acceptance into this program consists of an extensive application process, including two rounds of in-person interviews. "For those accepted, the program is demanding and requires a lot of time," says Jennifer Benn, Director of the Kaplan Educational Foundation. "We're working to develop leaders."

In addition to maintaining their grades, as Kaplan scholars, Thelemaque and Acuna attend weekly meetings at the Kaplan headquarters in Manhattan and receive advising, career guidance, test preparation and tutoring throughout their time at BMCC.

According to Sussie Gyamfi, BMCC's Scholarship and Special Services Coordinator, "There are few scholarship opportunities for community college students, which is why this Kaplan Leadership Program is so coveted."

Acuna, who is considering a career in environmental science, advises future Kaplan scholars to take advantage of everything BMCC has to offer, both academically and socially, from the Learning Resource Center to on-campus clubs.

Thelemaque, a former football player, believes being forced out of the sport due to injury led to his improved grades and eventual acceptance into the Kaplan Leadership Program. "Starting now, the sky's the limit."

**"It's satisfying, and an honor, to be called a 'mentor'. It makes me feel like I'm doing my job well. I'm still in touch with many former students, and hopefully David will be one of them after he graduates," says Nicholas Ofiaja, Professor Emeritus, Center for Ethnic Studies.**



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# Problems? No Problem!

The BMCC Math Team trounces its opponents—  
and gets a head start on the “big problem-solving exercise” of life.

Mathematics isn't typically thought of as a competitive sport. But try telling that to students on the BMCC Math Team. For the second straight year, they've placed first in the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges Student Math League (SML) competition, Northeast Region. In addition, team member Xian-Zhen “King” Zhu competed solo, earning an impressive Second Place in the 2010 CUNY Math Challenge—outpacing a strong field of two- and four-year colleges.

“The problems the team trains on are not the kind they would ever see in a math class,” says BMCC Math Professor Jason Samuels, who co-coaches the team with his colleague, Math Professor Michael George. “Rather, they're designed to test creative problem-solving, a skill that comes into play in every aspect of our lives.”

Team member Si Si Cui says the problems “tend to be more about logic than straight math.” Sheng-En Zhang and Owen O'Leary, the team's unofficial captain, agrees. “They're really logic puzzles,” he says. “And I love solving puzzles.”

Professor Samuels, who was on his own high school and college math teams, says coaching the students “is the continuation of a long tradition. I relish the opportunity to pass on the knowledge and techniques that were taught to me.”

The two professors model strategies such as finding shortcuts to solutions. “That's important, since we have to solve 20 problems in an hour in

the SML competition,” says King, who moved to New York City from Shanghai a year ago, and has been known to begin conversations with random strangers in Time Square to practice his English. Why “King?” “Because that was the first English word I learned—and because when people call me King, I feel more confident.”

His confidence was tested when he participated in the recent CUNY Math Challenge, winning \$2,000 plus \$250 for a bonus question. “I already bought the ticket to go back to China this year,” he says. “With the rest of the money, I plan to buy some robotics kits.” King, who has an interest in “electrical stuff and how computers work,” says “to design something, you have to know math.”

Whatever career routes the students take, their math team experience will serve them well. “Life can be seen as one big problem-solving exercise,” says Professor George. “Math offers a pure arena in which to test our abilities.”



Math Team Co-Coaches, Professors Jason Samuels and Michael George love what they do—both coaching students, and math itself. “Problem solving is a seductive and addictive pastime,” says Samuels. “I'm fascinated by complex and interesting problems, and enjoy tackling them with others,” says George.







# Putting Wildlife on the Map

Kimberly Thompson wins the CUNY Nobel Challenge, and uses Google Earth to analyze the ecology of New York City parks.

Last winter, BMCC science major Kimberly Thompson won a first place seating in the 2009 CUNY Nobel Science Challenge—plus \$5,000 as an overall Grand Prizewinner. Thompson—the contest’s only awardee from a community college—wrote her award-winning essay on the Nobel-prizewinning work of Elinor Ostrom, who proposed eight basic tenets relating to sustainable common-pool, or shared resources (CPRs).

“A key component to Ostrom’s work,” writes Thompson, “is an interdisciplinary approach; her research and publications on CPRs draw from conservation biology, ecology, psychology, and economics, among others.” Overall, Thompson explains, Ostrom’s findings indicate that economic and social systems are as key to resource sustainability as ecological issues—that when people trust each other, they’re more likely to share resources in a productive way, one that causes the least harm to plants and wildlife.

Thompson’s own focus on resources is part of an ongoing urban ecology project she’s part of, with BMCC science professor and paleontologist David Krauss, whose interest in ecology spans back to the Mesozoic era. “I’m interested in how dinosaurs interacted with their environment,” he says, “and what they ate.”

Research standards and data analysis are some of the skills he’s sharing with Thompson. “Mentoring students is an essential part of academic

development,” he says, “and in a mentoring situation, students have a chance to learn by doing.”

Part of what Thompson is doing is applying a familiar tool—Google Earth—in an unexpected way. “We’re using it to do an initial investigation of environmental conditions in New York City parks,” she says. Professor Krauss, who is leading the project through a Google Earth Education Initiative Grant adds, “We’re looking at the size of the parks, their proximity to each other, the relative percentages of lawn, wood lawn, impermeable surfaces, water, and other factors. We’re ultimately interested in the effect of those things on wildlife.”

Meanwhile, Thompson continues to pursue her studies at BMCC, and participate in competitions related to her work. When she was announced as the surprise Grand Prizewinner at the CUNY Nobel Challenge award ceremony—which even a blizzard couldn’t deter—her elation alternated with stunned disbelief. She stood for cameras holding a giant, sweepstakes-style CUNY check made out for \$5,000. “I plan to put it toward school,” she says.

“Teaching is all about showing people how to become what they want to be—in this case, showing students how to be the kind of scientist they want to be,” says Science Professor David Krauss.





# Poetry Takes Flight

Through spoken word, John Acevedo reaches children's hearts and minds.

When John "Chance" Acevedo chose bilingual childhood education as his major he asked himself, "Am I ready to take 12 Spanish credits? Am I ready to teach in my native tongue?" Equally important, was he ready to work closely with children's families? The answer to all three questions was a resounding "yes."

Parents who don't speak the classroom language, he explains, can't help with homework or communicate with their child's teacher. "And to have the child translate for them," he explains, "causes more of a struggle."

Acevedo applies pedagogy he's discovered at BMCC, in his work as a paraprofessional at East Brooklyn Congregation High School for Public Service in Brooklyn. He credits BMCC professors Yolanda Medina and Jean Yves Plaisir, in particular, for what he has learned. "They always say, 'There's more than one way to teach a child,'" he says. "All children are not visual. All children aren't auditory. I say to myself, 'Let's see how it would help if I add what I've learned at BMCC to the class I'm assisting with'."

Acevedo also reaches children through his poetry collective, *El Grito de Poetas*, which won the 2009 Commissioner's Distinguished Award from the New York State Department of Health. "Statistics show there are more youth diagnosed with HIV and AIDS every day," he says. "We do a lot of spoken word and poetry. Whether it's talking about the everyday struggles of kids, or the neighborhoods and streets we live in, there's always an educational component."

For educators, says Professor Plaisir, "to have a natural gift with spoken word is quite an advantage because before children learn to read and write, they speak—and they speak with their imagination."

Through *El Grito de Poetas*, Acevedo has facilitated workshops at schools, correctional facilities, women's and homeless shelters. It was Acevedo's own struggles—his mother was a domestic abuse victim—that brought him to poetry, and helped him value the role educators fill in children's lives.

"When I was in school," he says, "my bilingual teacher knew something was wrong. She would ask, 'Is everything all right at home?' My best friend became a pen and paper. It's a cliché, but I wrote everything down. Now I'm a storyteller. I write stories about the kids I work with, the situations I've been through."

The message he sends to children is one of hope. "There's someone who's been through the same thing," he says, "who's here to help you."



"We begin with the spoken word because it gives us a window into the mind of the child, the heart of the child," says Jean Yves Plaisir, Assistant Professor of Bilingual Childhood Education. "I believe John will be an exceptional teacher, who will use his natural gifts and dispositions as a bilingual teacher and poet to make a difference in the lives of immigrant children and families."





# Not Resting on Their Laurels

After winning the Laurel Award, two BMCC students take time for giving back.

At 16, both Nodira Makhmudova and Yohan Garcia emigrated to New York City—Garcia from Puebla, Mexico, and Makhmudova from the Central Asian nation of Uzbekistan.

They enrolled in GED classes—Makhmudova at BMCC's Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Development, and Garcia at Lehman College—then progressed to the CUNY Transition to College program, eventually winning the Peter Jennings Scholarship/Laurel Award for outstanding GED recipients accepted into a CUNY college. After clearing one more hurdle—the CUNY assessment tests—they began their studies at BMCC.

Things are going well for the students, but neither is resting on his or her laurels, as the saying goes. Having gotten themselves on track academically, they're helping others as well.

"Although I was born in Mexico, I've lived more than a third of my life in the U.S. and have fallen in love with America," says Garcia, who balances working part time with a full course load. "This country has helped me enormously, so I want to give something back."

One of the ways he gives back is volunteering as a conversation leader with We Are New York, a project that provides free English practice to new immigrants and is co-sponsored by CUNY and the Mayor's Office of Adult Education. Likewise, Makhmudova has donated her time at the BMCC Women's Resource Center, and has worked as a classroom assistant

for students with disabilities. She's also a regular speaker at BMCC's continuing education program, encouraging GED students to use the college's resources to their fullest advantage.

"Volunteerism helps students build self-confidence and develop a sense of responsibility by joining others in important causes," says Deborah Parker, Director of the Women's Resource Center at BMCC.

The importance of family is another value the two students share. Makhmudova's father, a cardiologist, encouraged her to consider medicine—but he passed away just before she left Uzbekistan. Garcia, who lost his father during his first semester at BMCC, found support with his six brothers, who had moved to New York before him.

Both remain optimistic about their futures. "I want my college life to be full of experiences, as well as full of knowledge," says Makhmudova, who plans to attend medical school for a career as an OB-GYN physician. Enrolled at BMCC, Garcia is working toward an Associate degree in Business Management, with a concentration in Travel and Tourism, and dreams of going to aviation school to become a pilot.

**"Volunteerism helps students identify where their personal interests lie, and how they are a part of change in our society," says Deborah Parker, Director, Women's Resource Center.**







## Encore! Encore! Encore**Encore!**Encore!

Two multi-talented students are awarded Coca-Cola Scholarships.

BMCC alumna Lori Colón, and student Sheldon Porter, both Liberal Arts majors, each returned to college after more than 10 years in the working world. They thought enrolling at BMCC later in their lives would be hard enough, but it was a walk in the park compared to the challenge of writing about themselves for a national Coca-Cola Scholarship facilitated by Phi Theta Kappa.

As members of Phi Theta Kappa, an honor society that recognizes the achievements of students at two-year colleges, Colón and Porter received information about the 2010 Coca-Cola Scholarships, and decided to apply.

Hard work pays off, and both Colón—who graduated from BMCC in December and currently attends Columbia University as a psychology major—and Porter received a scholarship, an award, and first team placement in the Coca-Cola All-State Academic Team, proving their personal essays truly struck a chord with the judges.

Colón's Coca-Cola essay focused on why she teaches New York City and Jersey City children how to Salsa dance. "Teaching and performing, particularly on behalf of children, has become a way for me to contribute to my community," she wrote.

According to Colón, BMCC "caters to students who want to succeed." While attending BMCC, she found support and guidance from Michael Gillespie, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. "As a new student,

someone who'd been out of school for many years, I felt overwhelmed by all that lay in front of me. Dean Gillespie loaded me with the encouragement I needed," she recalls. "He was instrumental in my acceptance to Columbia and in receiving my Coca-Cola scholarship, as he wrote letters of recommendation on my behalf."

Sheldon Porter, a part-time BMCC student, is also a professional songwriter, singer and illustrator. "I was very hesitant to be an older student," he admits, which was the focus of his scholarship essay. "But everyone at BMCC has been wonderful and made me feel at home." One professor in particular, Alister Ramírez Márquez of the Modern Languages Department, was instrumental in Porter's success as a student, encouraging him to perform a Spanish song in the classroom. "He took a genuine interest in my skills as a singer and as an illustrator," says Porter. "Professor Ramírez also gave me information about seminars for authors and artists."

**"Lori has been exceptional in her capacity to balance a full schedule of courses, a full-time job, and substantial community involvement to nurture the talents of the youth in her neighborhood," says Michael Gillespie, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs.**







# Silent Strength

In an essay about his grandfather, Anthony Heyward brings alive a harsh and often unspoken truth of American history.

Growing up in the South, Anthony Heyward revered his grandfather as “the definition of masculinity and character”—a perception reinforced by a tense exchange between the man and a local bank manager. That incident is the subject of Heyward’s essay “Granddaddy,” which appears in the 2009 *Nota Bene*, literary anthology of Phi Theta Kappa, a national honor society of two-year colleges.

“It took intellect and an incredibly strong will to be able to walk away after having just been cheated,” writes Heyward of his grandfather’s restraint—a survival strength in that era, and woven into other memories: “I would quietly marvel at his callused, hardened hands...his skin shone like mahogany after a summer shower.” Heyward had been working on “Granddaddy” for some time, he says, “but it was in my last semester at BMCC that I got it into shape with the help of my creative writing teacher, Carlos Hernandez.”

As a Phi Theta Kappa member, he also drew guidance from Professor Precious Sellars-Mulhern, who worked closely with the scholars. “I’m glad to see he is using his experiences to motivate other students,” she says. Now pursuing a double major—English and education—at City College, Heyward speaks of his “passion for the possibility of activism through education, and an understanding of how I might turn that passion into ways for students from urban areas to overcome some of their disadvantages.”

Heyward’s “Granddaddy”—his name was Joseph Smith—grew up in the Great Depression, worked as a mechanic, and supplemented that income with landscaping jobs. One hot August afternoon, Heyward and his

grandfather were mowing the grounds of a bank. “Afterwards, I observed my grandfather having words with the bank manager—apparently over payment,” writes Heyward. “Finally...he reached out his hand, grabbed the envelope that was being offered and came back to the truck.”

They never spoke of the incident, but in 1993, at Granddaddy’s funeral, Heyward told of how his grandfather “had been cheated, and done nothing to defend himself.” His uncles and cousins laughed at him, he says. “It turned out, he had done this same thing with each and every one of them—same bank, same bank manager, year after year.” Granddaddy, Heyward realized, had been showing the young men, “what not to do, in business,” through the banker’s behavior—and through his own, how to walk away from injustice, dignity intact. “He was just trying to teach us a lesson.”



Precious Sellars-Mulhern, a psychologist and Associate Professor in BMCC’s Counseling Center, motivates students toward positive change. “I have witnessed Anthony walking away from a disappointing situation with the same grace and pride he experienced with his ‘Granddaddy,’” she says, referring to Heyward’s resiliency at BMCC. “He didn’t allow defeat to dampen his spirits or affect his performance.”





# The Chemistry of Curiosity

Kwame Amin examines the mystery of a folk remedy from his childhood.

In the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago, people with high blood pressure often seek relief by eating a native plant called “mauby.” “Folk remedies are popular there,” says Trinidad-born Kwame Amin, a recent BMCC graduate who earned an Associate in Science degree, with honors. “But is there anything to these treatments? Do they really work?”

Setting out to investigate the theories he heard growing up, Amin found research guidance and support through BMCC Science Professor Brahmadeo Dewprashad—and his efforts earned him a first-place showing in the chemical sciences division at this year’s prestigious Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students.

“I derive great satisfaction from mentoring students,” says Dewprashad, who supervised Amin’s lab protocols. “It’s an opportunity for me to help a new generation develop into researchers. They bring experiences, perspectives and diversity that can only enrich the research community.”

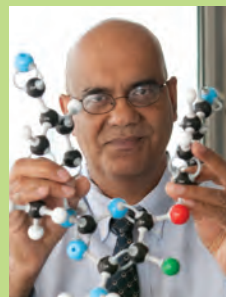
With Dewprashad’s input, Amin set his project’s direction. “A doctor in Trinidad had done a clinical study with hypertensive patients,” he says, “and found there actually were chemical compounds in mauby that could lower blood pressure. Our goal was to expand on his study and confirm his findings.”

Together, Amin and Dewprashad monitored mauby’s effect on California blackworms, a scientifically acceptable stand-in for human subjects which present physiological responses easy to observe with a microscope. “There was a distinct lowering of their pulse rate, just as the Trinidadian doctor had reported in humans,” Amin says. “Our findings were consistent with his.”

Amin had first taken part in the Biomedical Research Conference in 2008. “He worked hard at preparing for presentations by rehearsing many times, and soliciting feedback on ways to improve,” says Professor Dewprashad. “Mostly I was there to observe the work of others,” Amin says. “I went back to BMCC, tidied up my research, collected more data—and, the next year, I guess I impressed the judges.”

Sweetening the victory was the fact that Amin won out against sophomore students from an array of Ph.D.-granting institutions, including several Ivy League colleges. Now in its ninth year, the Conference attracts nearly 2,800 individuals, including 1,500 undergraduates and 230 graduate and postdoctoral students.

“Winning First Prize shows that there is really no difference between our students and those at the top-ranked, four-year schools,” Amin says. “Professor Dewprashad demands a lot of his students and held us to extremely high standards. We wound up beating out some very tough competition.”



Science Professor Brahmadeo Dewprashad, who grew up in Guyana, researches indigenous plants of the Caribbean—many of which he remembers from his own childhood. “It is essential that we re-stock the research pipeline—and our students have much to offer to the pipeline,” he says.



# INTERNET AFFECTS SENIORS

- EMOTIONALLY
- SOCIALLY
- ECONOMICALLY





# Finding Her Voice

A Computer Science major wins a coveted speech award.

Amy Cusma didn't know exactly what to expect from her speech class. After all, she came to BMCC to study computer science.

Speech instructor James Webb surprised Cusma and her classmates by telling them that one of his ground rules is: "You are not to start a speech by saying, 'Hello'."

"[Cusma] looked at me funny when I said that," recalls Webb. "But when preparing students for their first speeches, the challenge is for them to start the speech with something attention-getting."

The next day, when it was her turn to give a speech, Cusma "came into the room, loudly, with this complete burst of energy and zest," says Webb.

Webb asked Cusma to participate in a CLASP (CUNY League of Active Speech Professors) Student Speech Competition. Her Informative Speech focused on the many ways the Internet can benefit senior citizens.

Before competition time, Webb had Cusma practice her speech in front of 16 professors. "They were her toughest audience," says Webb, who was convinced Cusma's speech was a winner.

This spring, Cusma presented her 5-minute Informative Speech, competing against other CUNY students. "Professor Webb taught me how to speak from the heart and be passionate," says Cusma. "After I spoke, I thought, 'Professor Webb is right—I might win this'." And she did.

As the first prize winner in the Informative Speech category, Cusma received a trophy, a gift card, and a huge vote of confidence. She believes that Webb's course will be one of the most valuable classes she'll take at BMCC.

"As a computer science major, I think communication skills are absolutely essential. When some people hear 'computer science' they imagine a person glued to their desk, interacting only with their computer. However, most tech jobs require teamwork, and there's no place for ambiguity or vagueness when collaborating with others," says Cusma.

"Professor Webb taught me skills that I will use for the rest of my life. The confidence I now have as a speaker will help me stand out to prospective employers. I can't wait for my next job interview because I know I'll ace it!"

**"I once worked in information technology (IT) and saw that many of my colleagues excelled in the technical aspects of the job, but were lacking in the realm of interpersonal communications," says James Webb, an Instructor in the Department of Speech, Communications, and Theatre Arts. "Because of Amy's growth as an effective communicator, her skills will propel her into the frontlines of her career."**





# Next Stop: Neurology

Science major Gary Waiyaki calls BMCC a 'stepping stone' to a career in medicine.

Science major Gary Waiyaki grew up in Kenya, a developing country where "there are food shortages because of famine or drugs." One of the proposed remedies on how to deal with hunger in Kenya and other such countries is to use genetically modified foods, a topic that has always interested Waiyaki. "Children can have certain allergies to food substances, such as tomatoes or peanuts, which can be life-threatening," says Waiyaki. "That's one of the reasons why I wanted to research the impact of genetically modified foods."

As a Cleo and Zack science scholar at BMCC, Waiyaki decided to research genetically modified foods—foods that have had specific changes introduced into their DNA via genetic engineering—with the help of Science faculty member, Manita Pavel.

Waiyaki surveyed people of various ethnicities throughout Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, asking what they knew about genetically modified foods. Pavel helped him analyze and chart his survey, which he showcased at BMCC's Annual Student Research and Honors Presentations.

In order to conduct paid research as a Cleo and Zack scholar, Waiyaki had to complete the course Biology 210, maintain a 3.5 GPA or higher, and possess a willingness to conduct science research with Pavel two to three days a week.

Pavel, the coordinator of the Cleo and Zack Project, mentored and advised Waiyaki for two semesters. "Cleo and Zack, which is endowed and supported by former BMCC Science Professor Sylvia Saunders, encourages minority students to increase their science knowledge, and teaches them how biotechnology techniques impact their lives and their communities," she says.

Waiyaki currently attends the University of Rochester and is an aspiring neurologist. "I view all the mentoring programs at BMCC, including Cleo and Zack, as a stepping stone towards medical school," he says.

A former Kaplan Leadership Scholar, Waiyaki fondly recalls the educational guidance he received at BMCC.

"With a mentor, you work with someone who actually believes in you and wants you to fulfill your academic potential, especially in the sciences," he says. "Working with Professor Pavel was really motivating."

**"Gary had a clear vision and ambition and worked hard to achieve it. He is an intelligent individual with an inquisitive, scientific mind and a desire to forge a career in neurobiology," says Coordinator of Cleo and Zack Project, Manita Pavel.**







# Start Here. Go Anywhere.

Aspiring economists, business executives and hotel managers gain acceptance to Cornell.

Eric Maimon always loved staying in hotels, so he decided to study Hotel Management after he graduated from BMCC. Fellow 2010 alumni Santiago Salazar hopes to work in real estate and economics someday, and Ksenia Saenko wants to land a finance-oriented government job. Currently enrolled at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, these three BMCC alumni are one step closer to fulfilling their dreams.

Cornell's Pathway to Success program has prepared students for the admission and transition from BMCC to Cornell University. Funded by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Pathway to Success has been Cornell's way of encouraging community college students to transfer to Cornell after they receive their associate's degrees.

At BMCC, Freda McClean, Director of the Academic Advisement and Transfer Center, along with Sussie Gyamfi, Scholarships and Special Services Coordinator; and Allana Hankey-Thomas, an Advisor in the Academic Advisement and Transfer Center, coordinated Pathway to Success.

"BMCC prepared me for Cornell by giving me the resources that I needed in terms of academic advisement, faculty support and the sense of community," says Salazar, who is from Colombia. "I will really miss BMCC's diversity. I don't think at any other college I'd have the chance to work with students from all over the world—from Africa, from Russia...."

This spring, Maimon, Salazar and Saenko, along with fellow Pathway alumni Ojore C. Akpala, Wazier Browne, Tomi Olaniyan, Qianzhuang Qu, and Sandra Sicangco were accepted to Cornell's Fall 2010 class.

"Visiting my parents in Belarus just a few days after graduation, I already missed BMCC. There, I took my first steps into American life. If you sit on the bench near BMCC's Icarus statue for just a few minutes, you're likely to run into a friend or classmate," says Saenko, who chose to study economics at Cornell.

Although Pathway to Success will no longer be funded due to economic constraints, the coordinators say BMCC staffers and administrators will continue to identify students who are a good match for Cornell and other universities of its caliber. Says Salazar: "After visiting Cornell's campus, I just knew I had to enroll there."



"This year's group of Pathway students has truly bonded. I see them together all the time, and they'll continue to have each other's support at the university," says Allana Hankey-Thomas, Advisor, Academic Advisement and Transfer Center, who coordinated Pathway to Success at BMCC along with Freda McClean, Director, Academic Advisement and Transfer Center; and Sussie Gyamfi, Scholarships and Special Services Coordinator.



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To learn more about these and other BMCC students, go to [www.bmcc.cuny.edu](http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu).







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