The Teaching Learning Center of Borough of Manhattan Community College reflects the mission of the college to preserve academic excellence and extend educational opportunities to a diversified urban population. The center strives to improve the quality of teaching and learning by cultivating an institutional climate that strengthens and promotes professional excellence.

The Teaching Learning Center provides a forum for faculty to exchange ideas about teaching and learning, serves as a center for presentations, maintains a collection of educational resources, disseminates information through a newsletter, and provides a calendar of faculty development activities of the college.

Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL)
By Lalitha Jayant

Recently I attended a Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL) leadership meeting in Kansas City (Dr. Dennis Robbins from the science department also attended) and I would like to share my experiences here in Faculty Focus. PKAL, as I found out, is a national organization founded and directed by Dr. Jeanne Narum and funded by NSF grants. This organization is committed to improving math and science teaching at the collegiate level. It is an organization of like-minded college science instructors who believe in teaching methods that focus on “student learning and motivation.” PKAL’s mission is aligned with my own belief that teaching goes beyond just conveying subject matter and involves awakening students’ curiosity and intellectual appetite.

This organization works to bring together college educators from all over the country who share a common interest in making science and mathematics a more successful and integral part of the student experience at all levels of the educational process. Faculty from all over the country came to share their success stories and find solutions for their problems.

PKAL’s central objective is to identify and disseminate “best teaching practices” so as to enhance undergraduate education. The organization also works to promote support networks among educators who have a common concern for improving science and mathematics education in general. The meeting was an opportunity for sharing, as well as an

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Seminars
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Presentations:
Share your research with other faculty. Present readings of in-progress writing. Engage in discussions on classroom issues, teaching, or tenure/promotion questions.

The Teaching Learning Center is for all Faculty!
Contact the Programming Committee or TLC Co-Directors (see last page).
opportunity for gathering ideas and insights regarding issues relating to undergraduate learning and teaching. Some of the workshops I attended were very informative and helpful. This is an excellent opportunity for faculty to showcase innovative teaching techniques and be commended for it.

PKAL executive members Dr. Jeanie Nakamura and Dr. Nancy Janik toured BMCC last month and talked to science and math faculty regarding some of the best practices that are used to enhance STEM education here. Their comments were very positive. In an email to BMCC, Drs. Nakamura and Janik wrote: “Your reflections were of great interest and will be important in informing Project Kaleidoscope’s efforts to assist BMCC and other schools dedicated to excellence in undergraduate STEM education. We enjoyed meeting each of you and look forward to sharing the results of the Inquiry Task Force’s work with you in the future. We were impressed by the energy, commitment to the students, desire to provide resources for the faculty, and sense of community that characterized the PKAL group at BMCC.”

I personally feel that PKAL promotes current “best teaching practices” and we should move along with the trend. To achieve this goal we should create a bigger team with more dreams and ambitions. In the spirit of PKAL, a team of faculty members from Science, Mathematics and Computer Information Systems has been meeting regularly to plan and undertake activities that would promote faculty development and promote the success of students in these fields. The local team is supported by our senior administration and by PKAL and can have a greater impact with increased faculty participation. All faculty at BMCC should join, take part, and involve themselves in PKAL with eagerness and enthusiasm.

Together we at BMCC can make STEM education a successful and meaningful learning experience for all students.

Guys and Dolls:
the Musical as Pedagogy
By Lauren Goodwyn

This spring BMCC’s Theater Program (in the Department of Speech, Communications and Theatre Arts) put on their first musical, Guys and Dolls. While previous years have seen a variety of plays such as Othello and The Importance of Being Ernest, the theater faculty attempts to expose students each year to different theatrical genres, as well as to different historical periods and perspectives. When looking for a piece for the theater students to perform, Professor Diane Dowling, head of BMCC’s theater program, says faculty always look for a “hook” that will draw students into the performance. For example, in Othello students could identify with interracial tension. Professor Dowling selected Guys and Dolls for this year’s production because “the bad-boy gambler types are so much fun to play and the large cast gives many opportunities for students to get on stage.” The story, however, is set in 1950s New York, and as such, requires historical insight to understand the motives and values of the characters. On the other hand, the musical contains an easy-to-grasp vocabulary (compared to Shakespeare which is more daunting) and since it is based in New York, it contains local flavor. She also chose a musical because, importantly, there were enough singers among the theater students and they had demonstrated enthusiasm about performing a musical.

A musical also provides specific opportunities for students to fulfill certain types of roles; for example, a role might help them to build confidence in singing or acting a particular “type” on stage. Professor Dowling states that “We are not doing our job as theater instructors unless we provide them that opportunity for growth.”

A musical also gives students opportunities to learn in ways they cannot learn in class. For example, the pressure of getting the musical ready to perform by the performance date presents a much bigger challenge than turning in a paper. They learn that this collaboration is important not
only for themselves, but also for their peers and the audience. According to Professor Dowling, a musical performance helps students understand the necessity of deadlines and of cooperation in completing a project. Showing their work (the musical) publicly increases a sense of importance in their work and their contribution to it. Indeed, public performance gives students an opportunity to take pride in their accomplishment.

There are mental and physical challenges in a musical not always present in a more traditional stage play. Students must coordinate several tasks at one time: spatial coordination and rhythm for dance numbers, musicality for singing and the development of their character. As Professor Dowling notes, students have to do all that and be aware of the other thirty actors/performers on stage. Singing also develops the voice and projection—essential skills for performers. Equally important, students experience a rise in energy as their voices are blended and strengthened in the choral numbers. “From the outside, it might look like fun, but fundamental skills are being strengthened,” says Professor Dowling.

While students benefit from the musical format, so does the audience. Many BMCC students who have never been to a live performance learn that musicals are inherently fun and enjoyable to experience as a theater goer. The actors get a payoff from being able to connect with their peers—those they perform with and those they perform for—and the audience has a chance to experience a new form of entertainment. Therefore, the musical provides unique benefits to both the students on stage and those in the audience.

All students enrolled in theatre courses benefit from the production, because during the semester students have lessons based around the production. “The performance presents students with a model or reference point for their classes,” Professor Dowling explains. For example, students in Elements of Production (THE 121) are asked to think about how they would design the production, then they compare their ideas with those of the actual production. These types of tie-ins are present in all theater classes during the semester and extend the impact of the musical as a teaching tool.

As successful as the play was, it was difficult to coordinate certain aspects of the production. For example, BMCC students typically have very different schedules, so finding time for rehearsals proved a challenge. This year, many students had obligations on the weekends, requiring evening rehearsals during the week, primarily on Tuesday and Thursday. Additional small rehearsals with cast members were held during the day. Because rehearsal time was limited, several different types of rehearsals would happen at once, sometimes in different parts of the same room. This meant students had to remain focused and flexible. Professor Dowling stressed to her cast that this flexibility is an important skill to develop, not only for a career in theater, but also in life.

Because the cast of a musical is larger than that of a play, everything becomes more expensive. As Professor Dowling points out, thirty people not only means at least thirty costumes, but a greater time commitment for both students and faculty involved. However, the extra commitment is necessary: “There is no way to know if someone can have a career in theater unless they stand up and do it!” insists Professor Dowling. In addition, participation in a musical changes a student. “You see a different person after the performance.”

A final benefit of staging productions of this type is that a musical performance creates a sense of pride, not just within BMCC, but also in the surrounding community. Professor Dowling finds great satisfaction when she hears from outsiders: “I was surprised. I didn’t think a student production could be that good at BMCC.”
Faculty Publications Day

By Paulette V. Starling

Faculty Publications Day was held March 28th in the BMCC Teaching Learning Center and was highly attended and supported by the college community. TLC Co-Directors, Manawendra Roy and Sherry Engle, gave opening remarks and welcomed the group.

Sixty-three BMCC faculty and staff from departments across the campus submitted a wide array of scholarly publications, ranging from textbooks to an anthology of Latino writers to award-winning poetry. Displayed were teaching and clinical manuals, translated novels, scholarly essays, peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, a variety of pamphlets, newspaper and magazine articles. English and Psychology case studies and a poster presented at the American Astronomical Society on students’ performance and teaching in the classroom were also displayed.

A raffle provided a sense of suspense and fun in the proceedings. Professor Jack Estes donated five books from his publishing company, Pleasure Boat Studio, with a few other published faculty (Sue Horowitz and Maria Enrico among them) following suit by donating their books as well. Professors Hyacinth Martin and Sue Horowitz coordinated the raffle.

The highlight of the event was a panel discussion moderated by Professor Paulette V. Starling, during which four faculty and one staff member shared experiences about their publications and answered participants’ questions. The entire panel discussion provided a close look at the process leading to publication in various genres. Professor Joe Bisz (English) spoke about his essay on gender wars in science fiction writing. Professor Maria Enrico (Modern Languages), a professional translator, captivated the audience by translating from English to Italian when reading “This Is,” a poem from her book, “Water on the Sun.”

Professor Saavik Ford (Science) spoke about conducting research on student learning and about presenting a poster paper in the Bulletin of American Astronomical Society. Kahlil Koromantee (Counseling Center) shared his process of writing a book for young adolescent African American females based on personal developmental milestones that his daughter had experienced. Professor Francisca Suarez-Coalla (Modern Languages), who is involved in the Latino writing community in New York and abroad, shared her anthology of modern Latino writings entitled, “Here, I had to write.”

Dean Michael Gillespie complimented all the authors on their contributions and encouraged continued success. The display of academic achievement showcased during Publications Day, he stated, indicates the scholastic and intellectual vigor of the faculty and staff at BMCC. His closing statement captured the mood and atmosphere of this very successful day. “We have the distinction of being University professors and we are scholars.” Senior Vice President Sadie Bragg congratulated faculty and staff on their publications and encouraged them to keep researching, writing and publishing.
Technology Day
By Lauren Goodwyn and Miriam Dalmau

On April 13th, BMCC hosted the 2007 Technology Day: “Tool, Toy or Terror? Student and Faculty Perceptions of Technology.” This annual event showcases ways in which technology can be utilized in the classroom. The six-hour event covered a range of activities for faculty participation. “Walkup and Learn” stations provided information on a variety of topics ranging from a demonstration of “Diigo,” a web annotation tool to using digital portfolios. Other stations provided practical help on using Blackboard to hold virtual office hours and information on what to do if your students have trouble logging in to Blackboard. Donna Dickinson from Instructional Technology demonstrated how to use “clickers” to promote interactivity.

Showcase sessions provided a forum for faculty to discuss their use of technology in their classroom. Again, participants could choose from a wide range of topics. For example, Professor Brahmadeo Dewprashad (Science) discussed using technology to enhance the use of case studies in teaching, while Professor Claire Pamplin (English) spoke about creating digital projects in her Feature Writing course.

In order to facilitate discussions among like-minded individuals, “Birds-of-a-feather” sessions were created around topics like “Teaching distance learning” and “Using Web 2.0 tools to enhance teaching and learning.” Professor Robert Farrell from the Library coordinated a discussion on the potential downsides of “Too much technology.”

The highlight of the day was the keynote speaker, Professor Meredith Farkas, distance learning librarian and noted blogger. Her speech on “Social Software in Higher Education” (http://www.slideshare.net/gofull/38576/1) showed the power and range of software that can allow individuals to collaborate and create easily, irrespective of their location. Examples of these types of applications are Wikis (e.g. wikipedia), online review sites which “capitalizes on the wisdom of crowds,” and blogs. Blogs can especially be useful in creating connections between students and can have a more flexible role as on-line course management systems. She also discussed the use of podcasts to provide students asynchronous access to lectures. Screen casting (capturing computer screens and adding sound and graphics) offers a new way to comment on student papers and create tutorials for individual courses. Dr. Farkas’ final remarks asked faculty to remember that not every student likes technology nor is proficient in its use but to nonetheless experiment with new teaching techniques without worrying about failing.
In 2004 CUNY’s Central Office mandated that all campuses implement DegreeWorks Degree Audit program (developed by Sungard Higher Ed.), in an effort to attain consistency in degree audits throughout the university. This web-based program is designed to provide a graduation audit for students by providing information on students’ progress towards degree requirements such as courses completed, remedial placements, transfer courses and CPE results. It matches courses that students have completed and other requirements met by students, with the requirements for a student’s degree program as listed in the college catalogue. In essence, the DegreeWorks audit provides information similar to that found on BMCC’s Data Advisement Sheet, and it will, in fact, eventually replace the Data Advisement sheet. DegreeWorks debuted at BMCC in fall 2006, when it was used by Title V advisors for their cohort of students. Faculty Focus spoke with Professor Glenn Miller, Co-activity Coordinator for Title V and charged with providing technological support for faculty advisors. Professor Miller has worked closely with the Registrar’s Office regarding BMCC’s implementation of DegreeWorks, including training faculty members to use the program when advising students.

While there are many similarities between DegreeWorks and the BMCC Advisement Data sheet, there are also many differences, some of which are described here. First, and most importantly, DegreeWorks does not explicitly state the prerequisites that are needed for many courses, and the advisor must go to the course description to determine what is required. It is possible to do this to some extent on the DegreeWorks program, but in some cases, the advisor still has to refer to the course catalogue for this information. Second, the data in the DegreeWorks audit is updated after 24 hours, and does not reflect any changes that might have occurred during the day. The Advisement Data sheet on the other hand, represents the most current information, including recently registered courses and new test results.

There are, however, many positive aspects to DegreeWorks. The program clearly indicates what courses the student has completed; what courses he or she is currently enrolled in; courses that are still required for degree completion; what grades, transfer credits and waivers the student may have; and whether the students’ developmental skills courses and CPE requirement have been fulfilled. The program also has direct links to course descriptions – if a student has a science course requirement, for example, a simple click of the mouse pulls up the complete course description as given on the TIPPS website.

DegreeWorks also has a “what if” capacity that allows the student and advisor to see the effect of a possible program change. It is theoretically possible to quickly change the student from being a Liberal Arts major to a Science major, for example, and to then ascertain what additional courses the student will need, and also how much the change will delay the student’s graduation, if at all. The current Advisement Data sheet does not have this capacity – if a student intends to change programs, the student and his or her advisor need to consult the college catalogue and to map which of the student’s completed courses fulfill requirements for the new program.

There is also a Planner tool in DegreeWorks, which allows the advisor to enter recommended courses for future terms and to determine how recommended courses affect the degree progress. It is possible, using this tool, to plan the student’s entire degree, semester by semester, on a single advisement sheet. The planner can be saved on the audit, to be accessed, but not changed, by the student. It is also possible to print out the planner for the student. The current Advisement Data Sheet requires that advisors write future selected courses onto the sheet by hand, and there is no way to determine how the selected courses would affect degree progress. DegreeWorks also offers the advisor the opportunity to write notes on the advisement session. These notes get logged on the data sheet and can be changed after they have been...
saved, although by the advisor only and not by the students.

For students, the online DegreeWorks program provides a useful tool they can access at any time to determine their progress, their current GPA, and their future courses. One of the most attractive features of DegreeWorks for the students is a timeline, which gives an estimate of how close the student is to completing his or her degree. Also useful is the Look Ahead audit, which allows students to determine how particular courses affect their degree progress.

Professor Miller pointed out that while the DegreeWorks audit is an effective tool for an advisor to use in providing students with details about the next steps to be taken to meet graduation requirements, it is not a replacement for academic advisors, nor for the advisement process.

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On March 29th, the Faculty Development Committee sponsored the Joe Doctor Colloquium, the topic of which was faculty retention and success. The colloquium began with opening remarks by Professor Joy Dunkley (Library), who welcomed everyone on behalf of the Faculty Development Committee. Professor Dunkley told the audience that given how well the Faculty Development Day of 2006 discussion on (student) retention was received by the college community, the Faculty Development Committee decided to continue along the theme of retention, but this year decided to specifically address the retention of faculty and to discuss what it takes for new faculty to be successful. She expressed the hope that faculty would be inspired and challenged by the presentation, commenting that new faculty can learn from successful senior faculty.

Professor Dunkley’s opening was followed by welcoming remarks by both Senior Vice President Bragg and Dean Michael Gillespie, who reminded faculty that the aim of BMCC is to retain all faculty who are hired. The expectation of the administration of BMCC is that everyone who is hired by BMCC will engage in their teaching, scholarship, and service successfully.

Following the welcoming remarks, four faculty members spoke on faculty retention at BMCC. First to speak was Professor Rachel Theilheimer, chair of the Teacher Education Department and professor of Early Childhood education. Professor Theilheimer described how her own expectations as a new faculty member at BMCC were shaped by a mentor, who told her what to do in her first ten years at BMCC. Professor Theilheimer remembered being given a large amount of advice, from what to bring to the Winter party, to what committees she should volunteer for, what college activities would be vital to her development and a range of other topics. In her experience, what was not discussed was good teaching, which is expected of all BMCC faculty. She
recalled feeling completely overwhelmed because the message seemed to be: DO EVERYTHING. However, it is hard to do everything: everything includes not only college and departmental service, but also good teaching and scholarship. Regarding scholarship, Professor Theilheimer noted that there is an increasing emphasis on publishing at BMCC; the university wants to become a premier institution and requires faculty to publish scholarly, peer-reviewed articles. Conference proceedings, book reviews, and newsletters are not considered publications. An article in “Inquirer” counts as college service, but again, does not count as a publication. Publications are limited to peer-reviewed works, and are an absolute necessity for promotion. In closing, Professor Theilheimer’s advice to faculty wishing to be retained is for faculty to define for themselves what works best for them to be the best teacher, the best colleague and the best scholar.

Professor Philip Eggers, chair of the English Department, started his talk with several quotes, including one from Albert Einstein: “If A = success, then A = X + Y + Z, where X = work, Y = play and Z = keeping your mouth shut. Professor Eggers highlighted “X” and “Y” and summarized those things that count towards tenure. First, faculty must teach well. Student evaluations and faculty observations are both important. If problems are indicated on these evaluations, faculty must work on them. Second, faculty must give service: this is a more complicated issue since there are many levels and kinds of service. The bottom line is that one should get to be known around campus by participating in different college activities and committees. Third, faculty must be scholarly, meaning they must publish, as highlighted by Professor Theilheimer. Most importantly, Professor Eggers noted, it is not enough for faculty to simply worry about tenure. Faculty need to look ahead to promotion as well. Few BMCC faculty came to BMCC just to be “relatively sufficient.” We came to be our “ideal self” (Joseph Conrad).

The third speaker was Professor Juliet Emanuel, associate professor in the Department of Developmental Skills, where she teaches academic and critical reading. Professor Emanuel started her career thinking that she would be an English professor spouting Dante. She now teaches remedial reading, and once had a student ask her to teach her “to read words.” Professor Emanuel is still at BMCC for the simple reason that BMCC has changed in a marvelous way over the years. Professor Emanuel expressed the opinion that if you are not a success at BMCC, you have “not chosen success.” There are many opportunities at BMCC for success—faculty need to find what suits them best in their pursuit of success. When they find it, they will succeed.

The final speaker of the day was Professor Wambui Mbugua, (Library). Professor Mbugua highlighted the fact that new faculty today are lucky because they have mentors. She expressed that she was lucky to have had a good departmental chair, of key importance, because a good chair has faculty interests at heart and presents faculty in the best way at the college-wide P&B. She commented that faculty need visibility in the college. They should join committees, know the P&B members, and get known around campus. People know you by what you do. She said that some of the best advice she got was from Joseph Doctor himself, who told her and VP Bragg, as new members of the Curriculum Committee to “pay attention and apply yourselves.” Professor Mbugua finished by telling the audience: “You must be known, you must get publications, but above all you must teach well: make sure you give the students what they need. If you want to succeed, MAKE IT HAPPEN.”

Professor James Tolan, assistant professor in the English Department and Faculty Development Committee Chair, finished the proceedings by thanking the panelists and opening the floor to questions, concluding an extremely successful event.
Directors’ Corner

As directors of the Teaching Learning Center, we are privileged to work with so many talented and bright faculty who offer their energy and time to the events and business meetings that keep the TLC a vital place. This year offered a wide array of events, including the on-going Open Houses, Holiday and End of the Year parties, and the always stimulating “Coffees” with President Perez. We congratulate the organizers of the many events reported in this Faculty Focus, including Faculty Publication Day and Technology Day. This year several “Food for Thought” sessions, such as “Manage the Classroom with More Success and Less Stress,” provided us with opportunities to share pedagogical methods and improve our teaching.

At the heart of the TLC remain the faculty presentations, averaging one or two per week. These presentations represent individual faculty efforts in research and writing as diverse as, for example, talks on “Battle Star Galatica: Love & Schizophrenia;” and “How to Make a Book;” a showing of the film, Fugitive Chef; and readings from “Bellas Letras. Comentario literario espanol.” As varied as our faculty, presentations serve not only to share work with fellow colleagues, but also to provide an opportunity to receive constructive feedback.

We are enormously grateful for an active and supportive TLC Board this year, whose members have chaired committees and shouldered the responsibility in organizing TLC events. Many of you have worked quietly without expectation of public acknowledgment. We are very appreciative of your time and efforts to the TLC. In addition, we must thank Dean Michael Gillespie, who is always ready to lend us guidance and advice.

This month marks Manawendra Roy’s last as TLC Co-Director. Sherry and Samuel want to thank Manawendra for his leadership over the last two years. It has been enjoyable working with him as a cheerful and supportive co-director. His ongoing humanitarian efforts in his book drive for tsunami victims serves as an example to us all.

From parting Co-Director, Manawendra Roy: “I would like to thank all former and present TLC family members for your kind support and help. I am grateful to all of you. I really enjoyed working closely with you for the last two years and I will strive to serve and support the TLC in the years to come.

Learning is a never ending journey. The TLC is one the most valuable mediums to undertake it, and I would like to encourage our BMCC faculty and staff to join the journey for the betterment of all.”

The outlook for the TLC for this coming fall is very exciting! Thanks to the college and Senior Vice President Sadie Bragg, the room is currently being redecorated; we will have a lovely space with new furnishings to welcome us in September. Plans are underway for our first fall “Planning Retreat” on Friday, August 24th for all board members and volunteers who can attend. This next academic year we want a stronger emphasis on pedagogy in all its various aspects and will be aiming for seminars throughout the year, along with forming another Scholarship of Teaching and Learning cohort. It is not too early for each of us to consider how we might want to participate in these events or individually present research in the TLC.

In closing, we want to remind you that the Teaching Learning Center is for all faculty, whatever our discipline or rank, part time or full time; it serves as a place of support and collegiality for each of us.

Do look ahead to fall, but in the meantime, have an enjoyable summer break!

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