Innovate: Finding New Ways to Make Resources Available

At BMCC, where the majority of students qualify for financial aid based on family income, the high cost of textbooks can impact academic performance and delay graduation. In fact, the cost of college textbooks has soared 73% in the last ten years, according to a 2016 report from the non-profit Public Interest Research Group. Individual books often cost more than $200 and sometimes go as high as $400.

To remove that barrier, BMCC has joined the nationwide OER Degree Initiative led by Achieving the Dream, Inc. This initiative seeks to make Open Educational Resources (OER), or free online textbooks, available to college students who are struggling to buy them. BMCC, along with Hostos Community College and Bronx Community College, comprise the CUNY consortium within the 38 colleges involved in the project, and will share an award of $300,000 over a 3-year period.

“Open Educational Resources makes dollars and sense for BMCC students and faculty,” says Jim Berg, Associate Dean of Faculty at BMCC. “Since the beginning of our involvement with OER, students have saved $500,000 on course materials.” He adds that the BMCC Criminal Justice program has committed to be the first academic program at BMCC to provide a completely OER-based degree.

“The interesting part of doing it within an entire degree program is that it brings in all the department courses a student would take to earn those 60

Continued on page 2
(Continued from page 1)

“...” says BMCC Librarian Jean Amaral, who co-led the college’s OER program from its inception in Fall 2014 with a textbook affordability meeting for faculty and students. “What’s exciting is that it’s not just a textbook-for-textbook conversion; the OER material is often an enhanced version of the textbook, and it opens up a world of other materials that could include primary documents, articles online, videos and more ways to engage students in learning.”

Connect: Enhancing Learning with Mobile Technology

The BMCC community stays connected through the college website, email, texting — and now those modalities have converged in the new BMCC app. Launched in Spring 2016 and designed to be compatible with Apple and Android phones, the app was developed through an in-house group — Matthew Conroy, Lawrence Damaguang and Milla Wynn — led by Joseph Spadaro, BMCC’s Vice President for Information Technology. “They’re a super team,” Spadaro says. “Milla works on web development, Larry does database design and Matthew is the programmer.”

Their hard work is yielding promising results. “Mostly, we see people looking at their course schedule or using something called ‘Classmates’, which is the online chat tool we developed,” Spadaro says. “That’s probably the most innovative component of the app. When you enroll in a course, you will automatically put into a chat room for that section of that course — and that’s exactly what we hoped people would use the app for: getting quick information about their experience at BMCC.”

The chat feature, he says, is unique to BMCC’s app. “No other college within the CUNY system has an app with a chat feature that integrates with your course schedule.”

VICE PRESIDENT
JOSEPH SPADARO

“No other college within the CUNY system has an app with a chat feature that integrates with your course schedule.”

Grow: Meeting High Standards in Early Childhood Education

“We have a rich history, including our relationship with the BMCC Teacher Education Department, so we know the importance of providing developmentally appropriate practices for young children,” says Cecilia Scott-Croff, Executive Director of the BMCC Early Childhood Center. “We are also committed to sharing best practices with parents who use the Center. The Center was recognized recently for its commitment when it was awarded accreditation from the New York State Association for the Education of Young Children (NYSAEYC). Accredited status “often makes the difference between getting funded and not funded,” says Scott-Croff, and it reflects a childcare center’s alignment with national standards of quality programming.

Close to 150 children a semester, ages two to 12, attend the BMCC Early Childhood Center, which “serves single parents, single moms, single dads — a variety of student parents,” says Scott-Croff. “We give priority to matriculating students, but we also serve special populations at the college; veterans, families living in transitional housing and others.”

Highly subsidized, the cost to student parents and guardians using the Early Childhood Center ranges from $5 to $35 a week, and Scott-Croff emphasizes the Center’s impact on their academic success. To help build graduation rates for student parents, the Center has received U.S. Department of Education funding through a program called CCAMPIS, the Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program. It also houses a Family Childcare Network Program, serving an additional 20 children not age eligible for the campus program, in a supervised network of about 15 homes.

The NYSAEYC accreditation will be renewed every five years, and will enable the Center to focus more on staff development, says Scott-Croff. “Also, BMCC students doing work study, and those who are interning and volunteering at the Early Childhood Center will benefit.”

Manny Romero
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lynn McGee
COMMUNICATIONS PUBLICATIONS EDITORIAL MANAGER

Cody Lynn
STAFF WRITER

Louis Chan
EDITOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Rob Gizis
PUBLICATION DESIGN

Cynthia G. Blyer
WEB CONTENT MANAGER

Tom Volpe
DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS

Nerina Penzhorn
VIDEOGRAHHER

Sharmela Bhagwant,
Johanna Lugo
DESIGN STAFF

Rosalia Rodriguez,
Camille Walker
OFFICE STAFF

Please address any queries or information about the Commons to: publicaffairs@bmcc.cuny.edu
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Reinforcing Strategies to Strengthen Student Retention

Our college is expanding its leadership, scholarship opportunities, degree offerings and partnerships. At the heart of this growth is our commitment to create an environment where students, faculty and staff thrive, and to set the bar higher for community colleges nationwide.

At BMCC, our Gilman Scholars travel abroad and join the cultural exchange that fuels the global economy. Our professors create national forums on issues at the forefront of higher education, and our development and grants offices join with faculty to bring major gifts to our college, opening doors for students in STEM and other fields.

As part of our student retention strategy, we have also expanded our associate degree programs at BMCC, adding Psychology and Science for Health Professionals to a list that has grown to include Animation and Motion Graphics, History, Studio Art, and others. We not only provide a growing list of academic programs, we are committed to removing the barriers our students face as they pursue these degrees. For example, we have addressed issues including the high cost of textbooks by joining the Open Educational Resources, or OER movement, making free, enhanced classroom materials available to our students.

These efforts are part of the carefully planned growth of our college. To ensure that we remain aligned with our strategic goals — to strengthen our students’ college readiness, improve graduation rates, develop 21st-century workforce opportunities and cultivate sustainability — we have reinforced our leadership team with individuals applying dedicated focus to those areas.

The fiscal and social realities our students face may seem daunting, but we are optimistic that a balance of close mentoring, rigorous academics and special opportunities make their success achievable, but we are optimistic that a balance of close mentoring, rigorous academics and special opportunities make their success achievable.

As the title article in this issue of the Commons suggests, at BMCC we value innovation, connection and growth. To that list, I would add reflection, assessment and the flexibility to change and create overarching strategies that ensure our students’ success.

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

BMCC Modern Languages
Assistant Professor Sophie Maríñez is one of six faculty scholars from across CUNY to have been accepted as a 2016-2017 Faculty Fellow by the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at the CUNY Graduate Center. The fellowship provides release time for two three-credit courses over the 2016-2017 academic year, enabling Professor Maríñez to dedicate time to her research project, “The Dynamics Between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.”

BMCC Professor of Business Management Katherine Conway donated $5,000 to the BMCC Foundation during the BMCC Gala on June 6. “Professor Conway was inspired by the wonderful student presentations and the challenge match of $50k from Stephen Meringoff, a friend and supporter of the college,” said Joy Cooper, BMCC Director of Development.

BMCC Professor of Sociology Soniya Munshi (pictured right) and the BMCC Center for Ethnic Studies has received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) award of $99,998 to fund a year-long project, “Building Asian American Studies across the Community College Classroom.” The project team also includes Patricia Mathews-Salazar, Director, Center for Ethnic Studies, and Nita Noveno, English Lecturer at BMCC. Other members are Jennifer Hayashida, Director, and Linta Varghese, Professor, Asian American Studies Program, Hunter College/CUNY, and Caroline Hong, Professor of English, Queens College/CUNY.

BMCC Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs Karrin E. Wilks was selected by The Aspen Institute for its inaugural class of the Aspen Presidential Fellowship in July. Wilks is one of 40 extraordinary leaders nationwide being recognized for having the drive and capacity to transform community colleges to achieve higher levels of student success.

The BMCC Office of Grants and Research Administration offers a wide range of resources to faculty and staff as they search for external funding sources, develop proposals and manage funded projects. For more information, call (212) 220-8010.

The BMCC Office of Research and Scholarly Inquiry provides training and support for faculty and student researchers, as well as providing Core Student Research Laboratories in a number of disciplines. For more information, call (212) 220-8320, Ext. 7980.
Leadership Team Members

College Welcomes Leadership Team Members

Reflecting a commitment to enhance opportunity for faculty, students and staff, BMCC has expanded its leadership team to include Diane K. Walleser, the college’s first Vice President for Enrollment Management; Christopher Shults, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning; Jim Berg, the college’s first Associate Dean of Faculty, and Janice Zummo, the college’s first Assistant Dean of Academic Support Services.

“I am thrilled to welcome these very strong leaders to our team in Academic Affairs,” said Karrin Wilks, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs. “They collectively bring the skills, knowledge and experience to further our strategic priorities; particularly to improve student success and support faculty development and scholarship.”

BMCC and Year Up Form Partnership

On April 21, a reception was held in the Shirley Fiterman Art Center to celebrate the new partnership between BMCC and Year Up, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to closing the opportunity divide for young adults ages 18 to 24. The BMCC Year Up program is an intensive, one-year experience for students earning an associate degree while completing internships at some of the largest U.S. corporations. BMCC President Antonio Pérez welcomed guests at the event, and Gerald Chertavian, Year Up Founder and CEO, remarked that “The most important institutions in the United States today are our community colleges. It is in these four walls, that global competitiveness will be won.”

Guests included Year Up participants and their professors, as well as Garrett Moran, President of Year Up, who was honored at the BMCC Foundation 2016 Gala, “Invest in a Future,” on June 6.

Facility and Staff Foster National Dialogue

At BMCC, faculty and staff attend conferences to build their academic networks, compare research findings and participate in debates on the most pressing issues in higher education today. BMCC faculty and staff have also founded conferences that are gaining a national audience and establishing BMCC as a hub for scholarly inquiry and growth.

The launch of one new series, An Interdisciplinary Conference on Inequality & Social Justice, is scheduled for October and will address the theme Transcending Punishment. This series was founded by Benjamin Raas, a professor in the Speech, Communications and Theatre Arts department, and Michelle Ronda, a professor in the Social Sciences, Human Services and Criminal Justice department. Their intention, says Ronda, is to address ways to transcend punishment in seeking social, political and economic equality and social justice. The speakers will include Baz Dreisinger, Founder and Director of the Prison-to-College Pipeline at John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY; Daniel McGowan, a prison reform activist and subject of the Oscar-nominated documentary film If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front, and Joshua Allen, whose analyses of race and gender have been featured in news outlets including CNN, MSNBC, BBC and ABC.

Transitions and Transactions, another conference series started at BMCC, is “dedicated to helping community college teachers flourish and excel as we envision, invent and expand our ideas of teaching, given the demands of the community college population and the demands and constraints specific to our profession,” says its founders, Professors of English Margaret Barrow and Many Steinkoler, in their call for submissions to present at Transitions and Transactions III, held April 2016. More than 135 faculty from across the country, as well as 30 students, attended the conference. Over the years, guest speakers in the series have included acclaimed poet Billy Collins, NY1 journalist Errol Louis, and preeminent scholar on the teaching of writing, Sheldon Blau.

Also in April, the nineteenth Colloquium of the Modern Languages Department presented Music of the World: A World of Music. “The colloquium was devoted to issues that impact the music industry across the globe, and how languages and cultures are intimately involved in this topic,” said event organizer and Modern Languages Professor Alejandro Varderi.

One of 15 Colleges Nationwide, BMCC Wins $1 Million NSF Grant

BMCC has received a $1 million S-STEM grant from the National Science Foundation for a project, “Broadening STEM Participation Among Minority Students in an Urban Community College.” The project runs July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2021, and its Principal Investigator is Computer Information Systems Professor Anna Salvati. It serves low-income, full-time, academically talented S-STEM students who receive $5,000 per year for tuition, books and student fees, as well as MetroCards. They meet with dedicated STEM advisors and take a five-week course in preparation for faculty-mentored research projects. Other options include internships within the entertainment, finance and other industries. The project team, in addition to Salvati, includes Science Professors Lalitha Jayant and Adolfinoko Roch, and Mathematics Professor Abduramane Serme.
New Degree Programs Build Student Retention

Janice Walters, a Professor of Psychology within the BMCC Social Sciences, Human Sciences and Criminal Justice Department and Chair of the Teacher Education department, authored the proposal to create the college’s new Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree program, which kicks off in Fall 2016. BMCC psychology faculty have a broad spectrum of interests within the field, she says, and “students will have the opportunity to develop research projects with these professors. In addition, psychology is part of STEM, so that opens up opportunities for students in terms of funded research at the associate degree level and beyond.”

Professor of Science Charles Kosky wrote the proposal for BMCC’s new Associate in Science (A.S.) degree in Science for Health Professions, offered through the Science department. Students will complete courses in general, organic and biological chemistry as well as general physics and other areas such as microbiology, nutrition and pathophysiology. “It’s the kind of science-based program that students need for many health professions,” says Professor Kosky. “We articulated the program so that it would fit into nutrition and also exercise science bachelor’s degree programs. Graduates of the program will also be able to transfer into accelerated bachelor’s degree nursing programs.”

These and other new associate degree programs at BMCC — including Sociology, Modern Languages, Animation and Motion Graphics, History, Gerontology, Art History and Studio Art — are part of a strategic plan to build retention at the college, says Erwin Wong, BMCC’s Dean of Academic Programs and Instruction. He refers back to the high-retention rates of students in the BMCC Learning Academy, which places them in cohorts led by faculty with whom they shared a subject-area interest — subject areas not reflected, when the Learning Academy began, with a degree program at the college. Those students showed much higher persistence and success than their Liberal Arts peers. As a result, Wong says, “The college has made it a priority to create niche Liberal Arts degree programs that allow students to engage with faculty on a consistent basis in their areas of interest.”

Student Researchers Honored at Undergraduate Research Symposium

The February 2016 BMCC Undergraduate Research Symposium featured a faculty discussion led by Science Professor Jun Liang. Psychology Professor Marjan Peruh and Engineering Professor Kibrewosen Tesfagiorgis. Student winners of the Annual Poster Presentation included Engineering Science major Rron Dedushi and Science majors Hrilario Garcia, Obeng Buo, Shvron Sugrim, Shvron Sugrim, Kateryna Zhadnova and Banke Baghahia. Each winner received $500 toward presenting their poster at a national conference.

Student Researchers Honored at Undergraduate Research Symposium


Seven BMCC students — the second largest number among all community colleges in the United States — were selected to receive the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship to take part in BMCC Study Abroad in Summer 2016: Daisy Crispin, Miriam El, James Perez, Rafael Gell, Michelle Murillo, Jessica Bravo-Martinez and Jane Wu.

BMCC Science major Aurela Dragani (pictured right) was one of 85 students nationwide to win the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship in Spring 2016. The scholarship is the largest private scholarship for two-year and community college students. Winners receive up to $40,000 to complete their bachelor’s degrees at a four-year college or university. Dragani is a 4.0 student at BMCC and has been involved in cellular research with Science Professor Mario F. Benavides. She was also awarded the BMCC Foundation’s Loretta Lee Scholarship.

Nathanael Alexander just completed his Associate of Science (A.S.) degree in Studio Art at BMCC, and is a recipient of the Loretta Lee Scholarship, making it possible for him to transfer to Alfred University in upstate New York this fall and begin studies for his bachelor’s degree in Drawing, Painting and Photography (artwork above).

BMCC students Christoni Mbida Tongue, Bintou Kone, Kristen-Kaye Barnaby, Diandra Williams and Ricardo dos Santos Almeida Nunes have been accepted to the College of Arts and Science at New York University through the Pipeline Opportunities for Inter-College STEM Education (POISE) program at BMCC.

Norbesida Bagablia (pictured right), Jasmine Brathwaite and Melanie Poggi have just been accepted into the Kaplan Leadership program. “We meet with the Kaplan staff once a week,” says Brathwaite. “They mentor us to become really good candidates to top schools in the country, and they also help us apply for private scholarships to transfer to those schools once we graduate from BMCC.”
BMCC Foundation 2016 Gala Raises More Than $1.17 Million for Scholarship Fund

The BMCC Foundation 2016 Gala, “Invest in a Future,” held at Cipriani on June 6 raised $1,174,468 to benefit the BMCC Scholarship Fund. This year’s Honorees were Don Callahan, Head of Operations & Technology, Citi, and Garrett Moran, President, Year Up. Cindy Hsu, Emmy award-winning CBS 2 News anchor was MC for the evening. BMCC President Antonio Pérez hosted the event. Special Guest Star Honoree was Edie Falco: Four-Time Emmy Award Winner, Golden Globe Award Winner and Tony Award-Nominated Actress and Philanthropist. Film and television producer Paula Weinstein introduced Ms. Falco, who said she was inspired by the BMCC scholars who spoke at the event. “Events like this help balance out the bad news in the world,” she said.

American Express Awards $100,000 Grant to BMCC Leadership Fellows Program

In Spring 2016, American Express awarded $100,000 in grant funding to the BMCC Leadership Fellows Program, which provides trainings and hands-on exercises to encourage emerging BMCC leaders from a broad cross-section of the college community. “American Express has long-recognized the importance of strong leadership in the nonprofit and social purpose sectors,” said Timothy J. McGlumly, President, American Express Foundation. “We are inspired by BMCC’s commitment to employee development and are excited to support the growth of talented leaders in higher education.”

Alumni Attend Inaugural Council Meeting

In December 2015, the BMCC Alumni Council was launched with a meeting led by Theresa Clark Messer (*81, Accounting), Chair of the Alumni Committee of the BMCC Foundation Board. More than 45 alumni attended and took part in discussions such as how to strengthen alumni communications and connect with BMCC students. The Alumni Council Leadership Group emerged from that launch meeting and has met several times since. To join the alumni email list and learn of upcoming events, please contact alumni@bmcc.cuny.edu. Join other BMCC Alumni on Facebook and LinkedIn by visiting www.bmcc.cuny.edu/alumni.

BMCC Among Beneficiaries of Goldman Sachs Gives Community College Fund

Goldman Sachs, in collaboration with the American Association of Community Colleges, has selected nine community colleges, including BMCC, to receive grants from the Goldman Sachs Gives Community College Fund. The $1 million donation from Goldman Sachs Gives will be distributed to community colleges throughout the country and is being matched 1:1 by donors in their respective communities.

“Grants from Goldman Sachs Gives reinforce our belief that community colleges serve a unique need by providing educational opportunities to individuals who may not otherwise be able to pursue or complete a degree,” said Lloyd C. Blankfein, Chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs.

“We are deeply grateful to the Goldman Sachs Gives Grant, and the ways in which it will enable us to grow as an institution and a community of learning,” said BMCC President Antonio Pérez.
Donors & Alumni

Donor Loretta Lee Provides $75,000 for Scholarships and Internships

BMCC supporter Loretta Lee, founder of the Merchant House International Group, donated $75,000 to the BMCC Foundation in Spring 2016 to fund a scholarship, an international internship and an upcoming art exhibit at BMCC. Nathanael Alexander, who just graduated from BMCC, received the Loretta Lee award of up to $25,000 a year, for two years, to complete a bachelor’s degree in art. BMCC students Fiona Stone and Xuemeng Wang were selected to take part in a Summer 2016 internship at Lee’s factories in Mainland China and Hong Kong. “We are excited about this generous scholarship, and this unique opportunity for our students to learn first-hand, the practical aspects of textile design, printing, manufacturing and merchandising,” said BMCC President Antonio Pérez. “We are grateful to Loretta Lee for enabling our students to continue their education and apply their art and design skills in a global setting.”

Out in Two Program Receives $50,000 Grant from BNY Mellon

In Summer 2016, BNY Mellon provided $50,000 in grant funding for the funding for scholarships for the BMCC Out in Two Program. Founded in 1999 by BMCC President Antonio Pérez, the Out in Two scholarship program helps students graduate within two consecutive years. The BNY Mellon grant will enable BMCC to admit 10 additional students to the program, increasing the Fall 2016 cohort to 70 students. Each participant will receive a scholarship for three semesters, meet with a dedicated advisor and join community service activities.

“Out in Two is a unique program that enables our students to graduate within two years and pursue a career in a shorter period of time,” said Doris Holz, Vice President of Development and Chief Operating Officer, BMCC Foundation. “We are grateful for this generous support from BNY Mellon, which enables us to expand the BMCC Out in Two program scholarship and serve an increased number of outstanding students.”

Time Warner Foundation Funds Screenwriting Fellowship Program

The BMCC Foundation has received a $20,000 grant from the Time Warner Foundation to provide a screenwriting fellowship in Fall 2016. Up to 10 BMCC students or 2016 alumni who have taken a BMCC screenwriting class will be selected for the program. The student fellows will meet for 14 Saturdays to develop a feature screenplay or long-form television pilot. The program will begin September 10 and conclude with a gala presentation of readings from the completed scripts, featuring professional actors in January 2017. The fellowship includes the cost of transportation, lunch, books, screenwriting software and laptop computers for those who complete the program.

The BMCC Office of Development launched its “Why I Give” campaign, highlighting donors at all levels of giving. The campaign features video profiles of recent alumni, community leaders and friends. Watch the videos on: www.bmcc.cuny.edu/foundation

“In 2001, my mother and I decided to fund a scholarship for BMCC students because as a professor here, I know how hard our students work. I know how they struggle to pay tuition, to make time to go to school and study, while earning a living. So we decided in memory of my father, to fund an endowment and call it the Simon Peskoff Scholarship, and now in the memory of my mother, too, we have the Lila and Simon Peskoff Scholarship.”

Fred Peskoff
BMCC Mathematics Professor and Chair of the Mathematics Department
The BMCC/CUNY men’s basketball program, founded in 1979, has garnered many honors over the years. The CUNY Men’s Community College Basketball Tournament began in 1988 and BMCC has appeared in 16 championship games winning four times. Most recently, the team ranked third in the 2014-15 NJCAA Division III Top Ten National Poll.

The photo on the left is from a 1984 BMCC Yearbook. The photo on the right shows the BMCC Panthers versus the Bronx Community College Broncos in the CUNY Athletic Conference Semi-Finals on February 17, 2016.