

WEISSMAN SCHOOL of ARTS and SCIENCES, General Faculty Report, Spring 2006

The Weissman School's mission—to engage all Baruch students with the liberal arts and sciences, to develop the skills that will enable them to transform their productive lives in meaningful ways, and to prepare them to lead responsible and fulfilling lives as individuals and citizens, -- received important support this year from the administration, from CUNY Central, and from the Baruch College Fund.

The number of majors, minors, Tier III minors and capstones have increased significantly in the last two years and the course load for the school providing the first two years of general education has not diminished with the numbers of qualified students who are coming to Baruch. Significantly, however, the adjunct budget increased to a degree to cope with the situation. Classes at the base level did not burgeon out of control though upper level courses did move up to the thirties and forties and in some departments to jumbo size, quite out of keeping with our ambitions to offer quality teaching and research experiences for all of our students. The upshot of this news is that while the demand grew in WSAS, in most cases it has not overwhelmed the school in part because funds were reallocated, CUNY has provided support to help with the task of fundamental education, and the Baruch College Fund has assisted faculty in its scholarly ambitions.

The further development of the (CUNY Central) CUE initiative supporting English, communication, and mathematical skills as well as student integrative and developmental opportunities enabled the school to pilot smaller classes, workshops, experiments to improve the teaching and curriculum of base courses. CUNY is pulling together a number of initiatives under the heading of CUE, drawing together the General Education programs (at Baruch these are the base curriculum or “core” courses), the Writing Across the Curriculum program, and other support efforts – those upon admission and those that develop once the students are here. At Baruch the cooperation of the individuals who lead these efforts (a campaign for success) whether they are in the office of the vice-president for student development and enrollment management or in the offices of WSAS has been strengthened. Cooperation across the schools around learning goals and assessment programs have opened up teaching and learning discussions and piloting models that have and will have positive effect. Whether the initiatives are undertaken at the first year or the end of the second, the achievements of the students and faculty are significant even at these early stages.

The Weissman school, aided by the CUE and Weissman revenues, took the most active role in the Baruch learning communities, pairing two classes for each of fifteen learning communities including a wide variety of abilities and interests of faculty and students alike. Peer and faculty advisors were an integral part of the experiment, the results of which were impressive in terms of student interests, achievements, and expressed satisfaction. The aim is, of course, to make an educational and social experience to connect new students to the

college and to each other. All of CUNY does block programming and most of it has experimented with learning communities by many names sometimes supported by grants in our sister colleges in CUNY. Throughout the country, particularly in residential schools, learning communities exist or are being adopted but the difficult process is to make the model work in urban, commuter schools to counteract the lack of connection to the place and to the learning. We are observing in the Baruch learning communities positive effects—sense of belonging when freshmen first arrive, improved grades, drop in the drop-out rate, and satisfaction among the participating faculty. Other than the 15 communities which the students chose to enter (about 300), the remainder of the freshman class continued to be block programmed. For the fall semester 2006, the ambition is to develop 25 learning communities, including guidance by peers and by mentors, as well as some activities of a social and cultural nature for those who choose the LCs

There are a significant number of important pilots in English composition and rhetoric and in mathematics taking place at the present time. Thoroughly innovative approaches to both of these vital skills have been undertaken for which we will have results at the end of the semester and then again at the end of the summer and next fall terms. Some of our faculty are presenting this experiments at conferences or in journals devoted to pedagogy. Political Science and Psychology have been an important presence at scholarly conferences this year.

The Baruch College Fund monies--\$139,000 for WSAS—joined with more ample Weissman funds provided more faculty with research released time than in the previous year as well as more travel money and greater research assistance than in the past three years. It is the goal of the administration to be able to plan on secure funds sufficiently so that the released time and research assistance might be allocated in both semesters. This would make scheduling of classes more predictable.

The January term allowed almost 800 students to enroll in classes to fulfill their Tier III or other major/minor requirements. Psychology, Philosophy, health education, and theatre with a particular emphasis on self-presentation were appropriate for a three week offering. Faculty are encouraged to develop a January term program if it is appropriate to their discipline and their subject, even to experiment with special topic courses for varying credits.

The cycle of external review for departments has returned to psychology and communications this year. The external review will be completed with visitors in April and significant planning for the future in both. Both departments are the focus of the strategic plan which was completed this year after an eight month process. The focus for next year will be English/journalism, mathematics, and sociology/anthropology.

This year WSAS is hiring for nine positions—one in psychology, two in communications (both strategic plan hires, one each financed by CUNY Central for graduate programs), one in philosophy, one in modern languages, one in political science, one in sociology/anthropology (an Islamicist), one fine and performing arts (music), and the English writing director. This year's recruiting is

not yet finished but Political Science and English have been unable to hire. We have hired excellent faculty in modern languages, philosophy, and the other positions remain open or offers are out awaiting a response.

Our expectations of our very good faculty are high indeed. The Whiting awards enable junior faculty to finish their scholarly projects in time for the tenure decisions. The union contract supports junior faculty research as well and we have every reason to expect extended support from the coming contract. Financial support has stabilized in the last two years and Weissman has received the financial recognition of the teaching that it does that is greater than it has been in the past. The prospect is on the horizon that Weissman may very well be able to hire in important areas next year as it has been able in the last two or three years to strengthen the social sciences, English and mathematics.

Our faculty who have brought honor to Baruch College are feted in March. Several have reached to the general public for an audience for their scholarship. David Reynolds' prize winning study of John Brown, Carol Berkin's contribution to her on-going work in American and women's history in Revolutionary Mothers: Women and the Struggle for Independence following close upon the publication of A Brilliant Solution, and Barbara Katz-Rothman's Weaving a Family: Untangling Race and Adoption. The annual faculty recognition ceremony citing almost 25 of our faculty for scholarly and artistic achievements worthy of recognition.

Weissman has undertaken a major project in support of our long term relationship with the Alexander String Quartet, our artists in residence. The arts and humanities have come together around the Baruch Performing Arts Center to present a Russian Festival in honor of Shostakovich and the ASQ's recording of the string quartets. The school will offer films, theatre, readings of plays and poetry, as well as the music for this event which will stretch over March and April. Simultaneously the Mishkin Gallery has mounted an exhibition of post-Soviet photography and video. This is the result of more than a year of the planning by many faculty and staff and promises to be a special event.

At the end of last year we could look to the support of a number of large gifts to the school—the Antonowsky for the greater impact of the arts on our students, the existence of the Engelman and the Nagelberg gifts for the arts, the steady support of Marvin Schwartz for communications, the Harmon chair for writing and the George and Mildred Weissman gift which remains the foundation of the arts and sciences at Baruch. The year 2006 has begun well with the school's realization of the potential of these gifts for our students and our faculty.