Goldhaber, in the Queens College Freshman Year Initiative, write about “Reacting to the Past” pedagogy, which uses historically based “games” to engage students in creative simulations. Davison and Lantz Goldhaber's insight in using these Barnard-originated games at Queens College, a commuter college located in the most diverse county in America, is that ESL students are brought into the grips of history at the same time that they gain fluency in academic discourse. The games locate ideas and language patterns in specific historical contexts, thus unsettling notions of literacy as ahistorical “correctness” and freeing beginning students from a debilitating sense of language-as-correctness.

Next, Robert F. Cohen and Kim Sanabria at Hostos Community College have mounted no less than a reworking of the traditionally exacerbated relationship between “remedial” and “college level” work. Their chapter, “Our Mission at Hostos: Charting a Course to Self-Empowerment,” is written in the belief that it is the responsibility of a college to take as its starting point the proficiencies with which students enter, keeping in mind that many of them are rendered invisible by cultural value systems at work within higher education institutions that privilege certain types of knowledge and abilities. In their award-winning design of pedagogy that invites students into the academy starting with their very first semester, Cohen and Sanabria provide intensive, content-based scaffolding for beginning students, while refusing to represent the students as “deficient” or “remedial.”

In “The Shakespeare Portal: Teaching the Canon at the Community College,” Crystal Benedicks poses questions about the role of Shakespeare as a byword for high art. What kinds of assumptions about what it means to be liberal educated are implicit in curricular structures that offer canonical figures like Shakespeare as the pinnacle of literary study? In addition, what kinds of currency does Shakespeare represent for students? Through a turn to Shakespeare’s history as a “popular,” rather than “high art,” author, she attempts to envision Shakespeare more as accessible rather than sacred.

David Potash works with the idea of the collaborative classroom in “A Shared Classroom: General Education at Baruch College,” where he describes an upper level history class he designed to bring students actively into the production and dissemination of knowledge. Baruch is a business college; Potash’s model class was based on the assumption that business students must be at home in oral communications of the type that is privileged at board meetings and professional presentations. Like Davison and Lantz Goldhaber, then, he invites performance studies into his classroom through the use of student presentations specifically designed to allow students to make scholarly and pedagogical choices about how to represent their chosen subjects to the classmates.

Finally, Paul Arcario and James Wilson set out in “Putting It Together: General Education at LaGuardia Community College” to first describe the articulation of general education goals at LaGuardia Community College and then to envision
Our Mission at Hostos

Charting a Course to Self-Empowerment

ROBERT F. COHEN AND KIM SANABRIA

Eugenio María de Hostos Community College

If it is true, as Zora Neale Hurston asserts, that “ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board” (1989, 1), then Hostos Community College embodies the vision of success that all students carry in their hearts. One needs only to enter the doors of Hostos to understand how powerful this dream can be. The special desires of each individual, multiplied by a population of over four thousand students, create a pulsating current, wherein each traveler sees the college as a kind of buoy guiding them toward the realization of their hopes. No newcomer to the buildings can ignore the power of this dynamic.

Students at Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, which was founded in the South Bronx in 1968 and named after a Puerto Rican educator, writer, and visionary, are more than willing to tackle the challenges this voyage represents. Laden with hope, many of them are entering an unfamiliar educational terrain, either because they come from countries with different educational infrastructures or because they have not had access to educational opportunities within the United States itself.

The college has a wonderfully diverse population. 55.3% of our students are foreign-born; 60% are Latino, mostly Dominicans, with many Puerto Ricans and an increasing number of newly arrived students from Central and South America. Another 29.7% are black. Women account for 72.3% of the student body (2005 statistics from the Office of Institutional Research, Hostos Community College). Some
are graduates of New York City high schools who switch seamlessly from Spanish to English and back again; some are seeking to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, or journalists; some are recent immigrants and second-language learners seeking a more secure future or fleeing countries torn by poverty, war, or violence. Some are raising families and building a new life for themselves and juggling this responsibility while studying and working in a garage, a restaurant, a hair salon, a foyer. Some are well on their way to becoming nurses; others have plans to go to business school or pursue careers in early childhood education. Some are very involved in the community and volunteer their time with the disabled or in after-school programs.

However, despite the rich tapestry of experiences that they bring to the college, our students’ knowledge and experiences are undervalued in American schools. This lack of recognition is unfortunate because few among us can compete with our students in naming a novel written in Chad, in reciting a poem by Pablo Neruda, in listing government leaders in Ecuador, Colombia, or Puerto Rico, in speaking four African dialects, or in understanding the power of the story of Las Mariposas. Discussions about subjects like these reverberate along the college’s corridors and contribute to the college’s stimulating and vibrant atmosphere. Somehow, when we evaluate the skills our students have yet to acquire, we must also leave room to admire their verve, appreciate their life histories, and embrace them for the considerable knowledge that they acquired in the different worlds they inhabited before coming to Hostos Community College.

Accompanying our students’ vision and commitment is a sobering reality. They are, as a whole, among the poorest of New York residents, and many of them represent a segment of society that has lacked extensive exposure to the benefits of a formal education. According to recent census data provided by Ed Morales in his New York Times article “Nickels and Dimes,” the South Bronx remains the nation’s poorest urban county (2005, 14: 1, 8). Strikingly, only 7.7% of the Dominican population over the age of twenty-five, born on the island but now living in New York, have a college degree or more, and 56.2% have less than a high school diploma (New York City Department of City Planning 2004, 152).

These incontrovertible facts are critical to our mission. If our students are not fully equipped with the skills required of them to enter the academic discussion, they will be unable to respond adequately to the subject matter that we present to them or see themselves as part of the academic setting. In addition, they will also lack the tools needed to construct a future for themselves, and will be denied the academic certificates and diplomas required for better positions to which they are entitled. As a result, they will be constantly barred from the rewards of economic security and a higher degree of comfort in life that they so urgently seek. While nobody would argue that the purpose of education is merely to get a better job, we are cognizant of the college’s mission, which is to provide access to higher education leading to
both intellectual growth and socio-economic mobility. Entrusted with this hope, we educators must lay the groundwork for students to grow academically, giving them a passport to a better future. This is our goal.

Nevertheless, this eventual achievement entails great challenges. As students move from familiar ground to a world riddled with obstacles they have never before encountered, they are catapulted into new expectations and demands that inhibit their movement. Entry tests are undeniably the most visible stumbling blocks for Hostos students. Of the entering freshmen at the college, almost 85% must enroll in developmental English/ESL courses and over 50% in developmental math, because the placement tests administered at initial registration determine a lack of preparedness in reading, writing, or math. Although these standardized tests suggest that a significant percentage do not have sophisticated English language skills and may not be equipped for the expectations of college life, students tend to perceive these tests not as gateways, but as amorphous and arbitrary nets holding them back from realizing their dreams. Despite the high degree of frustration that characterizes their lives as many of them take these examinations over and over until they make the grade, it is to our students’ credit that a far-reaching vision of advancement and potential enables them to tackle the tests again. However, behind the backdrop of the statistics and failure rates lies another, less measurable brake on our students’ progress: the erosion of their self-confidence. In the end, considering that putting a dream to the test is the most important task that anyone can face, we are doubly charged with supporting our students’ quest, and we cannot afford to tolerate their failure in this endeavor. Helping our students prosper and succeed is ultimately the measure of our efforts as educators.

Indeed, what Hostos students undergo in a more dramatic way than many of their counterparts at other colleges is a radical reorientation of their educational perspective, along with a confrontation with their own strengths and weaknesses. While they pursue their studies, they therefore tread a reflective path, one which asks them to analyze the significance of their progress at every step and to consider their own responsibilities, evolution, and potential. In fact, the motif of reflection embraces various beliefs that we ourselves hold about the educational process. First, self-assessment, that confrontation with ourselves that we experience whenever we look closely and honestly at our own efforts, should be a constant exercise, because this practice allows us to evaluate and direct our learning. As the universal emblem of the truth and a lens through which we often focus on our future dreams and aspirations, the “mirror” also encompasses our belief in the need to strive toward our personal best, because seeing ourselves also entails seeing who we want to become. In short, peering into our own reflection permits us to reflect back and examine ourselves more critically as we project ourselves into the future. Surely, if our students learn to exercise such judgment, they will be better equipped to negotiate the challenges of this new environment.
Educators must also undergo a reflective process as they seek to understand the complex challenges that their students face, and they respond by evaluating the effectiveness of the programs and initiatives that they are implementing. Our own partnerships in the realms of teaching, writing, and editing have benefited considerably from such a process. We, the authors of this essay, have been close friends and colleagues for almost twenty years. Our backgrounds in linguistics, translation, and foreign language acquisition cemented our relationship all the more because we immediately found common ground in our professional endeavors. Although we both moved to Hostos to become tenure-track faculty members of the Department of Language and Cognition, we met at Columbia University's American Language Program, where we collaborated on materials development and curricular changes that have recently come under the rubric of "General Education." We have both been very active writers of textbooks in English as a Second Language at various levels, from beginning to freshman composition. Furthermore, our recent collaborations as editorial consultants for two textbook series in Turkey and the United Arab Emirates have given us greater insights into the benefits of learning academically focused, interdisciplinary content that permits students to explore themes across the curriculum.

We are convinced that when people study a full range of subjects, they cultivate a better understanding not only of their chosen field but also of its significance within the full scope of acquired human knowledge. Thus, inherent in our work is the understanding that a liberal education gives our students an opportunity to examine a diverse range of subject matter. This diversity stimulates their imagination, appeals to their common sense, cultivates their global awareness, and enables them to pose questions and find solutions to universal problems that concern us all. Throughout this process, students not only achieve academic success, but they also emerge from our doors as more empowered citizens of the world. We must debunk the myth, an entrenched vestige of outdated notions of educational philosophy, that academic proficiency is a prerequisite for liberal arts instruction. On the contrary, although some may presume that language proficiency in reading and writing is a goal to be reached before students are exposed to meaningful content, recent pedagogical theory suggests otherwise. Indeed, a curriculum that does not divorce skills from content, but instead allows the integration of the two, gives students a sense of purpose and direction.

Briefly stated, the content-based instruction model, which forms the backbone of the programs we describe below, prepares students for the courses they take in the academic content areas. It addresses these fundamental requirements:

- our students' need to develop linguistic competence, not just to pass tests but to contribute their own voice to the academic forum;
- their need to cultivate the skills that will enable them to navigate the college environment;
their need to become familiar with academic content from various disciplines.

Although this model reflects a current trend in English language-learning pedagogy, it naturally embraces the spirit of General Education principles. Through content-based instruction, students focus on interdisciplinary modular units that permit them to study in depth all kinds of academic material. In sharp contrast to the older “skills-based” models of instruction, in which reading, writing, speaking, and listening courses were taught in isolation of one another, the integration of these skills is essential to the success of all our students. The model benefits not only those who are still taking developmental courses, but also those who have made the transition into the regular college sequence.

At Hostos, various programs have been engineered to take both our students’ needs and challenges into consideration and help them to emerge as empowered learners and competent participants in the academic arena. In the six years that we have been faculty members of the college’s Department of Language and Cognition and active participants in college-wide endeavors, we have seen the school undergo a major transformation that has enabled it to serve its students better. We are proud to say that we have participated in this renaissance through our contributions to several significant initiatives, such as the development of the content-based ESL curriculum, and the creation of the College Enrichment Academy and Honors Program. These programs affirm our belief that all students, especially those who are at the entry point of their academic journey, can benefit from multifaceted instruction yielding a strong combination of background knowledge and core competencies, which form the tenets of the General Education initiative. The three programs are not necessarily sequentially linked, even though they do intersect at various points as students progress in their skills. Nonetheless, they all subscribe to a similar pedagogical philosophy and take into consideration the realities of the Hostos population.

ESL CURRICULUM: DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE AND COGNITION

Of the difficulties that our students bring with them, the one that is easiest to single out is their failure to pass reading and writing skills in English. If they fall below the threshold of the minimum competencies stipulated by the university, they are in fact unable to proceed with their academic programs because they are not permitted to register in content area courses required for their majors. However, our students arrive at the college with such complex linguistic backgrounds that simple questions about their language proficiency or language dominance are often by
no means clear-cut. Appropriate placement in language sequences, either English or ESL developmental classes, is a monumental task that forces us to consider myriad factors such as the students' age at their time of arrival in the United States, the number of years they have spent in the country, the language they speak at home, the culture or peer group with whom they identify most closely, and so on. This lack of homogeneity creates a serious dilemma, leading to difficult choices at the institutional level. A particularly complex group is our burgeoning population of "Generation 1.5" students, U.S. educated English language learners whose oral and writing skills are at opposite ends of the spectrum. As for all students, these students need to be assured that they will receive a closely tailored program that will allow them to pinpoint their areas of weakness and go forth with confidence. It should be noted here that Hostos is unique not only among CUNY schools, but among colleges across the nation, in its bilingual mission. Therefore, students who do not yet command English may take advantage of the opportunity offered by the college to take content classes in Spanish. However, this is a transitional model, and as students advance in their English proficiency, they need to take more and more courses in English that reinforce their second-language competency.

Once our students are in classes, we must continue to make sure that our curricula form the proper guideposts toward their goals. In this process, we insist that the key ingredients to our students' success—language, skills, and content—be intertwined. It was with the imperatives of such thinking in mind that the Department of Language and Cognition recently revamped its ESL curriculum by replacing the former skills-based approach with a content-based model, which allowed us to incorporate the three parallel elements referred to above. This new curricular structure was realized through the concerted efforts of a committee of devoted colleagues who recognized that just as we are asking our students to become reflective learners, we, too, had to engage in careful examination of the responsibilities and impact of our educational strategies. Of course, the spirit of this evaluation continues, as we explore ways to cement a more collaborative relationship with our colleagues in the English Department and the Modern Languages unit.

The new curriculum in our regular ESL Program takes its cue from our reputed Intensive Program, which for many years has successfully prepared students for their careers through content-based instruction. The coordinator of this intensive fifteen-hour a week English immersion course selects outstanding students from among our regular ESL population through a competitive procedure and gives them the opportunity to progress through the ESL sequence at an accelerated pace, that of two semesters in one. Considering that people achieve proficiency in a language at different rates, this course obviously is not appropriate for everyone. Most students need to follow the path of our regular ESL sequence, and even the four-semester itinerary mapped out for them, which culminates in their eventual acceptance into
Expository Writing (Freshman Composition), once they have passed the ACT reading and writing examinations. This seems for many to be quite a rocky road. Students entering at the lowest level take twelve hours of courses per week: *ESL in Content Areas I* for six hours and *Literature and Contemporary Issues for ESL* for six hours. They then move on to a nine-hour block, with *ESL in Content Areas II*, at six hours a week, and either *Contemporary Issues for ESL II* or *Literature for ESL II*, at three hours each. The advanced level follows suit, with *ESL in Content Areas III* at six hours a week, and either *Contemporary Issues for ESL III* or *Literature for ESL III*, at three hours each. Upon completion of this level, exceptional students are given the opportunity to take the required ACT examinations. Those who pass both exams go on to take *Expository Writing*, thereby joining their non-ESL counterparts. Those who do not pass follow the regular sequence, a combination of *Basic Composition*, at six hours a week, and *Foundations of Critical Reading*, at three hours a week, and then take the aforementioned ACT exams.

In the ESL classes, students focus on modular units that permit them to study in depth all kinds of material related to such areas as immigration, the environment, first amendment rights, family structure, business ethics, and philosophy. Concurrently, depending on their level of language proficiency, they may also take courses in English or Spanish in early childhood education, sociology, political science, and other disciplines. The success of such an approach is guaranteed because the students’ motivation is heightened all the more when they see that the content of their language classes complements the themes of their future majors. In addition, we must not forget that in an atmosphere in which content information is valued, where students participate in the discussion of existing ideas and the birth of new ones, their critical thinking skills are constantly being put to the test. Undoubtedly, as ESL students explore the full range of academic disciplines studied at the university, they become more able to negotiate the challenges of a university education.

This strategy provides our students with a means of becoming familiar with the discourse, methods, and concerns that are idiosyncratic to the various disciplines across the college curriculum. Although, ideally, a visitor to these classes might believe that the “content” is the driving force behind all the lessons, the astute observer will soon come to realize that “language” is being consciously taught as teachers deftly weave necessary grammar elements, rules of pronunciation, and ways of recognizing word forms into the “discussion” at each given level. Indeed, despite the fact that techniques for vocabulary building and syntactic control are being taught through thematic context, in response to the needs of the content that is being studied, it is important to understand that the teaching of particular linguistic tools at a particular time is not at random. For instance, if students do not learn the present tense, past tense, and the future tense in the lowest level, they will not be prepared to go on to the next level, where more complex verb tense structures are learned. Similarly, if they
do not learn how to form questions with “Wh” question words in the lowest level, they will not understand how to distinguish a question from a noun clause in the next level. In the same vein, if students do not learn first how the use of the negative prefix “un” can reverse the meaning of the adjective “prepared,” they will not be ready to learn how adding the suffix “ness” to that newly formed adjective will convert it into a noun. Because the scaffolding of grammar lessons and vocabulary-building initiatives is essential for effective language teaching, a definite schedule specifying the linguistic tools that students are required to master from level to level is woven into the logic of the curriculum. Ideally, students learn to appreciate the wholeness of this approach when they realize that they need a particular structure or word to express what the content compels them to say.

The value of improved linguistic competence within the academic context goes hand in hand with the cultivation of skills that will ensure success in the college environment. Time management, academic preparedness, and learning to use resources correctly are among the factors that guarantee a successful college experience. However, beyond these so-called “study skills,” we have found that in assigning tasks, we must provide structured tools and mechanisms to allow students to build the academic competencies, or cognitive skills, which form the foundations of inquiry. For example, it is not enough to ask students to “read this essay” or “come to class ready to discuss Chapter X,” because we commonly find that students skip tasks they perceive to be too easy, skim readings without weighing the significance of the ideas they present, fail to grasp the main points, or see connections between them, avoid the more difficult pieces altogether, and fall back on personal experience too readily. To address such deficiencies, we have designed our curriculum so that students are taught to perform the above tasks well. For instance, we teach them to advance from reading for main ideas to reading for specific details, and to be able to distinguish purposes of inference, and to analyze tone, audience, and language. It is our hope that as they learn to conduct vocabulary searches, answer multiple-choice questions, take notes, cite, paraphrase, summarize, read related material, prepare to lead class discussions, or construct reactions to the class material, they will become aware that the skills they are practicing will serve them well as they advance in their academic programs, read longer and more complex material, and prepare more detailed written assignments. This specific focus on skills, with an attendant increase in academic competence, also leads to a heightened sense of self-esteem and students’ ultimate engagement in the academic forum.

In order to understand fully what we mean by “content” and its “connection” with the linguistic and cognitive tools that students must acquire, we will briefly describe how one of our modular units is orchestrated at the lowest level. Students read a text about a true story, “The Baby Jessica Case”: Baby Jessica’s biological parents, the Schmidtbs, would now like to raise this two-year-old girl, who thus far
in her life has only known her adoptive parents, the De Boers. Detailed information is furnished pertaining to why Cara Schmidt gave Jessica up for adoption, how her life was when Jessica was born, and how it is now. The same updates are also provided for Dan Schmidt and Roberta and Jan De Boers. Because students are not familiar with the outcome of the story, the task they are presented with is to decide who should have Jessica. Should the child stay with her adoptive parents, the De Boers, or should she go back to live with her biological parents, the Schmidts? The objective of the unit is therefore the writing of an opinion essay in response to this question.

Apparently, many layers of scaffolding are required in order to prepare students for the writing task. The activities that precede the actual writing of the essay are “integrated-skills” discussions that come to life through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. As they prepare this essay, the students are differentiating between facts and opinions, because encapsulated in their thesis is an opinion based on real information that they have learned. They are also practicing summarizing and paraphrasing the readings that they have done together, and by so doing, learning skills that will be essential for their future academic development. They are using new vocabulary—adoptive parent, biological parent, suburban, and so on. In addition, as students consider the Baby Jessica story itself within the context of adoption, they practice the use of modal auxiliaries, such as should and ought to. The groundwork for the writing task has already been laid through extensive class discussions, lists of ideas, and supporting details that have been justified and expanded through paired and group discussions. Furthermore, they have examined lexical and syntactic models, as well as written work that can show them the basic tools needed to organize and elaborate on their thesis through topic sentences and paragraph development. As they brainstorm possible outcomes to the Jessica case—by writing sentences such as “If Jessica stays with the De Boers, she will live a comfortable life” or “Cara Schmidt will be very happy if Jessica comes back to live with her”—they are practicing the present real conditional with “if” sentences and correct tense sequencing. This activity not only provides grammar practice, but also embeds reasoning that will ultimately lead to the preparation of body paragraphs. As teachers provide the necessary models for language, form, and content, students imitate the models, and through this mirroring, they succeed in making the necessary progress.

Thus, in this example, the cognitive tools and the language tools are combined in sophisticated and meaningful assignments. This approach represents an ambitious undertaking for students at this beginning level. Similar units throughout the ESL sequence engage the students accordingly with increasingly complex material. In all our courses, language is not the end in itself, but rather the means by which students explore academic subjects worthy of their attention.
COLLEGE ENRICHMENT ACADEMY

Complementing credit-bearing courses of the developmental English/ESL sequences is the College Enrichment Academy (CEA). This program is free of charge, and it provides an additional forum for students to practice their language skills, gain familiarity with college procedures and expectations, and expand their knowledge base through the study of interdisciplinary content. The program, funded by a Title V grant that was awarded to Hostos in 2004, carries no academic credit. It is held on the weekends during the fall and spring semesters for a total of 24 hours, and also during the intersession periods (June, July, and January), for a total of 48 hours. Spaces are available for approximately five hundred students per year, and their participation is entirely voluntary. Once they are registered in the program, they are exposed to an intensive course of studies, working in groups of about twenty-five people and studying with both instructors and tutors. Attendance is strictly enforced in order to allow students to retake one of the “exit tests” referred to previously. Although the CEA’s mission is enrichment, not test preparation, students who have joined the program thus far have been showing significant passing rates on their reading, writing, and math examinations—not surprisingly perhaps, because their participation in the program means that they are being exposed to an additional learning experience that complements their regular class work.

The CEA is organized thematically by topics that revolve each session: Art, Personal Success, Health and Medicine, Education, Science and Technology, Immigration, and so on. These themes are broad enough to allow us to explore different angles and subtopics, and they can grow in different directions, according to the interests of various groups. Students in the program read articles and journal entries related to the topics, write about questions emerging from the material, go to guest lectures and visit museums or other institutions. They also engage in a common reading with other program participants. For example, during the recent session on Health and Medicine, the six concurrent classes considered questions related to diet and exercise, child obesity, bird flu, hospital reform, alternative medicine, and insurance practices.

The topics always include a significant number of reading and writing assignments, and the main focus is on language development because this is the area that really prohibits movement through the college sequences. However, during the intersessions, students also read about math themes—fear of math, women in math, and so forth—and study challenging problems in math in small groups. The groups become so intrigued with the material that even students who once hated math start to like studying it with their peers and with the program’s tutors. Naturally, some students who may be weak in English are quite competent in math, or vice versa. The smile on the faces of students who suddenly become their group’s instructor for polynomial or quadratic equations demonstrates that they are envisaging themselves in
new roles. The sessions also allow us to pinpoint areas of difficulty that may be holding certain students back in their math sequences. The students are also given practice in the computer lab and may take advantage of personalized academic advisement.

The first benefit of these CEA sessions is that students are able to practice their skills in a different learning environment. There are no grades and no tests for the class, so the students’ focus is squarely on the material under discussion and the progress that they are attempting to make. As students read and discuss material on the topic of the month, they acquire new vocabulary, evaluate different viewpoints, participate in debates, practice note-taking, answer multiple-choice questions, learn essay organization, and take timed essay simulations of the actual tests they subsequently need to pass. In the session on *Health and Medicine*, for instance, many students did not know what alternative medicine was or had never heard of acupuncture; few were familiar with the “placebo effect,” but some who had taken a course in ethnicity and illness were eager to share their understanding of the Hippocratic Oath. Their engagement with the material is unquestionably high. For instance, in one recent session, a young woman came to class every Sunday morning straight from an all-night shift at the hospital. Despite her tiredness, she enthusiastically contributed to the class, reacting to the *New York Times* special issues on patient complaints from the perspective of someone who really knew what she was talking about. The students had no trouble exercising critical thinking, finding weak points in the writers’ arguments or juxtaposing one argument—that “nurses in most hospitals are greatly overworked”—with another—that “a nurse’s responsibility is to treat people, not just illnesses.”

Just as in the ESL program, the emphasis on grammar and vocabulary fades into the background as the students fight about the patients’ bill of rights or write letters about soda machines in the hallways of our elementary schools, and yet there is real language learning going on here, fed by the teachers, tutors, other students, and the material itself. Even more importantly, this program establishes a community of learners. Within rough guidelines, the CEA admits students from a variety of classes, language backgrounds, and levels of language proficiency.

In the same session on *Health and Medicine*, the students read *Tuesdays with Morrie*, the touching story of the friendship between Mitch Albom, the author, and his dying professor. When at the end of the six weeks, we watched the incredibly moving film of the story, the level of engagement in the material was at its highest. The tears demonstrated the power of the real lessons we had learned: We need to “connect the dots” between reading, writing, and thinking; literature can touch us, ignite our imagination, and illuminate our lives; and we are all enriched by sharing our perceptions. There are other intangible offshoots of an engaging academic experience. For example, a professor from the Nursing Department visited the class and saw the students fired up in a discussion of flu vaccines. He was so enthralled
that he sat in the class for two hours. The students, believing that he was another student, were eager to share their own ideas with him about hospital practices and doctor/patient relationships, and when they learned that he was a professor, became so proud to have been able to discuss such sophisticated content with an expert in the field. As a result, not only was their confidence level boosted, but this interchange triggered their expression of interest in applying to the nursing program and seeking him out as a mentor. Acquiring new study habits and practices helps people to envisage themselves differently, and the goals of the program—to increase language use, skills, and content—found their apogee in a fledgling community whose worth continued to grow far longer than the scheduled twenty-four hours of the program itself.

HOSTOS HONORS PROGRAM: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The learning community model is also the prelude for entrance into the Hostos Honors Program. Starting in June each year, students who are exempt from or who have passed out of the developmental sequence are invited to participate in the Leadership Development Institute. This is a five-week intensive program in which they enjoy the building of community, not only because they study shared content together, but also because they get to know each other as human beings. Although students in this cohort have gone beyond the scope of the developmental rubric, they benefit from the program in the following ways: They attain a stronger background in English and math; they achieve an enriched awareness of diverse ideas and cultivate an understanding of the many issues that our society confronts today; they engage in collaborative approaches to solving issues of public concern; and they become aware of the different ways in which they can be of service, not only to the college community itself, but also to the community at large. Of course, achieving these ends can only be possible through a curriculum that helps us to realize these objectives. Throughout the Leadership Development Institute, students question their values, their hopes, and their dreams as they re-evaluate not only their ways of thinking but also their ways of behaving toward one another as human beings. Since the program was established, the main thrust of our curriculum has come from one very provocative question: “What does it mean to be human?” As students consider this question, other questions such as “What is a leader?” “What is a hero?” “What is an educated person?” come to the fore. Students test their answers to these questions as they try to create their own definitions and support them with examples. Throughout this inquiry, they read and discuss material related to the following themes: Leaders in our Society, Science and Ethics, Prejudice and Stereotypes, The Values of Indigenous Peoples, and Technology and Modern Life.
Seven different learning “formats” give body to the structure of the Institute. Throughout the session, students address the themes mentioned above by participating in (1) *Intensive Discussions*, generated in response to readings, viewings of films, and talks of guest lectures. The value of these discussions is reinforced as students (2) *Meet a Leader!* Leaders such as environmental activists, documentary filmmakers, and personality theory psychologists have added a rich and colorful texture to the discussions of recent institutes. The “dialogue” continues as students themselves lead and participate in (3) *Conflict Resolution Simulations* that exercise their leadership and critical thinking skills. To heighten students’ awareness of their inner creativity as thinkers, the (4) *Math Component* has students go beyond the traditional math curriculum and engages them in games of logic, teaching them to have fun with numbers as they consider such questions as the “history of π.” In this continual process of self-empowerment, students also share their own personal life experiences with the group as they assume center stage and take their (5) *Place in the Sun*. Related to this self-affirming activity is the (6) *Weekly Reflective Journal* that students write in regard to their total Institute experience. In addition, participants enjoy (7) *Field Trips* to such venues as a community garden (e.g., Genesis Farm) or *Pacem in Terris*, the home of artist and sculptor Frederick Franck in Warwick, NY.

We hope to achieve through these formats what we want our students in all our programs to realize—that the abstract concepts that they may explore in liberal arts courses are not abstract at all when they revolve around everyday problems.

We have found that students derive a lot of benefits from this summer experience. Not only do they develop more confidence in their ability to pursue academic work, but they also construct strong bonds with other students and teachers that continue to have a positive effect on them as they continue their course work during the regular academic year. Most importantly of all, they find themselves as people. One student remarked: “For the first time in the two years I have been in this country, I have felt at ‘home.’ ” Another recommended: “The Institute shouldn’t even be called an institute. It’s like a family to me.” Reflecting the rigor of the curriculum, another said “Every day that I take a seat in the Hostos Honors Institute is a challenge.” This sentiment is echoed in a further comment, “I feel as if I have moved from one level of education to another within this short period of time.” Finally, commenting on the power of a cohesive support network, students stated that “Sharing your experiences, strengths and hopes with others is always positive: it lets you know that you are not alone,” and “The seminar helped me to acknowledge that sometimes people act the way they think they are, instead of acting the way they are.”

Undoubtedly, as can be seen from these students’ comments, this process of self-examination is a very important aspect of the learning experience. We realize that if a learner does not become responsible for the learning process, he or she will never be able to truly progress. Plutarch’s axiom, “A mind is not a vessel to be filled but
a fire to be ignited," explains the intent of our commitment at Hostos. Not only must we furnish our students with the skills they need in order to do college work, but we must also help them to cultivate a vision of who they can become. Without intense reflection, how can this be possible?

We have seen many changes take place at our school. The three programs we have described, brought into being under the leadership of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Daisy Cocco de Filippis, have the potential to help our students transform their lives, and they mark the first steps of a longer journey. Undoubtedly, because these programs reflect the principles inherent in the General Education initiatives that are now being discussed throughout CUNY, it is our hope that along with the knowledge that our students will acquire under our direction, they will become not only the guardians of the past and the present but also the guarantors of humanity's future. On another level, it would truly be wonderful if every student who entered the developmental English/ESL sequence and participated in the enrichment program were to eventually enter the Honors Program and graduate with an "H." In fact, to our great delight, we can honestly say that because of the efforts of many of our dedicated colleagues at Eugenio María de Hostos Community College, more and more of our students are beginning to fit this profile.

WORKS CITED

Students “urgently seek . . . the rewards of economic security and a higher degree of comfort in life.”

“Laden with hope, many of them are entering unfamiliar educational terrain . . .”

While both this essay and the one discussed above similarly critique inhospitable college structures at the basic skills level and call for a more inclusive curriculum, student identity is construed very differently. Here, students are physically realized: They have hearts pulsing with “desire,” they are almost painfully “laden” with hope. Cohen and Sanabria’s definition of students as “urgent seekers” of “comfort in life” points to the high stakes involved in educating the urban working class while refusing to blame students (as is so often done) for seeing the economic and social (rather than moral or humanistic) benefits of a college education. “Few among us,” they write, “can compete with our students in naming a novel written in Chad, . . . in listing government leaders in Ecuador, Columbia, or Puerto Rico, in speaking four African dialects . . .” By understanding basic skills students as possessors of undervalued knowledge (African literature, South American government) rather than as essentially “underprepared,” Cohen and Sanabria are able to launch an alternate curriculum that envisions all students as scholars. Further, in respecting students’ economic and social motivations for success, Cohen and Sanabria bypass the common assumption that the professional and the liberal arts tradition are inherently oppositional. As a result, they are able to envision innovations such as a Saturday Academy, an enormously popular optional weekend program, not for credit, that explores interdisciplinary topics while improving writing skills. Embedded in this approach is the assumption that students are willing to commit to “extra” work if it is the kind of work that allows them to participate as scholars and the explicit result is an increased chance at graduation. In describing students as impassioned yearners, Cohen and Sanabria respect both the amount of work that these students, most of whom face several semesters of “basic skills” courses, will have to do, while also recognizing their ability and desire to do it, especially when the curriculum is conceived in such a way that “basic skills” work is not seen as remedial or prior to the real work of the academy.

Turning now to the senior colleges, David Potash, associate provost at Hunter College, titles his piece “A Shared Classroom” in reference to an upper level history course that he designed to involve students as participants in the generation of knowledge. Potash devotes the first half of his essay to an overview of efforts at Baruch College (where he also served as associate provost before his current post) to envision a general education experience that respects the liberal arts as well as the professional orientation inherent in a business college. The college decided to focus on oral communication “skills” as similarly central to the liberal arts ideal of the well-spoken individual and the business executive who must excel at sales pitches and boardroom presentations. In this section of his essay, Potash describes students consistently as learners: “I was deeply involved in issues of student learning” and “[we evaluated] what we really