First Year Experience Program
Easing the Transition

Newly named faculty director of CCSU’s First Year Experience program (FYE) Chris Pudlinski wishes such a program had existed some 20 years ago when he started college. He groans, “I had a horrible first semester at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY. I was homesick, and failing calculus, and my roommate slept 22 hours a day. I told my parents I wanted out.”

Fortunately for Pudlinski, who went on to earn a doctorate at Temple University and is now professor of communication at CCSU, events shifted in his favor. He says, “I landed a small acting role in a campus play — aptly titled Desperate Hours, got involved with the radio station — an experience which prompted me to change my major to communication, and found a more compatible roommate.”

Pudlinski reflects, “There was no help for transitioning into college then. That’s why I value the idea of teaching students to build connections. Through the FYE program we bring a myriad of support systems to bear so students can connect with caring faculty members and use resources available from the library, the Counseling and Wellness Center, and the Learning Center. We also want students to get involved in satisfying recreational and club activities.”

The FYE program supports a student’s transition from high school to college by integrating the skills needed to succeed in college into regular academic courses that fulfill general education requirements. In smaller classes, specifically trained faculty teach students to develop study and test-taking skills, to learn to use library and computer resources, and to solve personal, social, and academic problems. “Among the most common difficulties new college students face in transitioning are time management to get course work done effectively, adapting to the academic rigors of college, and social adjustment,” explains Pudlinski.

continued on page 2
First Year Experience Program
Easing the Transition

continued from page 1

FYE Program Undergoing Its Own Transition

Last spring Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Carl Lovitt announced a shift of the FYE program from a predominantly Arts & Sciences initiative to a University-level program. This change, Dr. Lovitt said, was recommended by the FYE Steering Committee (chaired by Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Joseph Paige). As a result, the program was moved from the Provost’s office to a faculty-led initiative with the appointment of Pudlinski as faculty director of the FYE program.

“It was also agreed that recruitment of faculty to participate in the program would be further enhanced by the appointment of a faculty director,” states Lovitt. “These changes will allow us to continue building on the strong foundation developed under the outstanding leadership of Associate Dean Richard Roth.”

Lovitt stresses, “We are hoping to come very close to our goal of accommodating 100% of our incoming students in an FYE course in their first semester.”

Pudlinski says of the shift, “I think it’s great. It creates more faculty ownership of the FYE program and hopefully will boost voluntary participation.” This fall, Pudlinski stood before the Faculty Senate and urged more faculty involvement. He plans “to actively seek the addition of about 12 more FYE sections for fall 2009 in order to meet our goal of 100 percent participation.”

Meg Leake, FYE coordinator and director of the Learning Center, states, “The shift from FYE courses offered predominately by the school of Arts & Sciences to offerings by all schools provides opportunities for students to engage early with faculty from their own schools. This allows the schools to communicate their expectations early, establish a bar, and support students as they strive to reach it. It also provides a wonderful venue for connecting teaching faculty and administrative faculty across campus in the promotion of a rich first-year experience, both in and out of the classroom.” Leake, who reports directly to the Provost, provides administrative support for FYE, develops the FYE budget, and reports on results and new initiatives from all four schools.

The FYE Evolution

The FYE program has evolved and expanded since the 1980s when CCSU joined the FYE “movement.” A different approach was piloted in 1994 (with anthropology, biology, English, geography, and psychology integrating first-year content into their general education courses), and this approach continues today. The curriculum was designed to integrate an extended first-year orientation program into regular academic courses that fulfill general education requirements.

Subsequently, three other curricular models have been introduced: First Year Seminars, topic courses specifically designed for first-year students (in fall 2006); Learning Communities (www.ccsu.edu/linc), linked courses with a common theme (in fall 2006); FYE 101, a one-credit course paired with a discipline-based course (in fall 2007). Several departments also have added courses designed to meet the specific needs of their first-year students. In 2006-2007, faculty articulated learning outcomes (www.ccsu.edu/fye/learningoutcomes.htm) for FYE 101 that went far beyond an “extended orientation” curriculum. And in fall 2007, for the first time, every school was providing FYE curricular experiences.

FYE Benefits to Faculty

According to Pudlinski, there are 54 faculty members teaching in the program this semester, with 1,137 students enrolled in FYE/Learning Community for fall 2008. “This represents 87 percent of the 1,297 first-time, first-year, full-time students entering in fall 2008,” he said.

Benefits are gained by FYE faculty participants as well. They teach smaller, similar groups of students, and, since training
is required, a professor’s overall teaching performance can improve in other classes.

Elizabeth Wright ’03 (BA psychology) ’05 (MS counseling), now CCSU assistant registrar, remembers enjoying the smaller FYE classes. “I was nervous when I entered CCSU in 1998,” she recalls. “I remember the small FYE class size and the friendships I developed. It helped that it was all first-year students, because everyone was going through the same issues.” She continues: “The FYE course connected me to the University. This is when I first developed an interest in psychology and declared my major. The class also taught me time management, study skills, and how to deal with stress.”

As the FYE program takes on a fresh focus, students and faculty have another opportunity to enrich and enliven the college experience.

—Geri Radacsi

Donis Honored as 2008 Latino Citizen of the Year

CSU Professor of Psychology Francisco Donis has been named the 2008 Latino Citizen of the Year by the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LAPRAC). Recipients of this award are recognized for their demonstrated dedication, leadership, and commitment to the advancement, promotion, and development of the cultural, social, economic, and political welfare of the Latino community in Connecticut. Professor Donis and others were recognized at the 11th Annual LAPRAC Gala Awards in October.

Donis directs the Latino Connecticut College Access and Success (ConnCAS) program, which is funded by a grant he was awarded from the Connecticut Department of Higher Education. The five-week summer program prepares and supports Latino students in the transition from high school to college. He is also the director of the Latino Mentorship Program at CCSU. The primary goal of this program is to promote the retention of Latino students and increase their graduation rates.

In 1996, Donis co-founded the Latin American Association at CCSU (LAAC) and has served as its president since 1997. LAAC is a unique association of Latino faculty, staff, and administrators, established to advocate for Latinos and Latino issues. He has completed the intensive Quest Program of the Leadership of Greater Hartford in 2005 and is a member of the Steering Committee of the Latino Endowment Fund of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Carl Lovitt congratulated Donis “for his excellent work in the wider Latino community and his tireless efforts on behalf of Latino students here at our University.”

—Christopher Michalski
Elizabeth Kaminski
Education as Key to Democracy

Why did Elizabeth Kaminski, associate professor of sociology, go into college teaching? She says, “Because I believe higher education is fundamental to democracy. It provides knowledge outside of one’s own life experience, and it fosters dialogue, critical reflection, debate, and innovation.” Dr. Kaminski ensures that her sociology students develop and hone these skills by drawing from contemporary examples and events that require them to do research, express their ideas, and engage their classmates and professors. This process enables her, she says, to “continually learn new ideas and concepts from my students. It gives me a sense of pride and satisfaction, because when I learn something from my students, I know they have learned something from me.”

Contemporary Culture as Fodder for Thought
Whether she’s teaching Introductory Sociology upper-level courses, such as Research Methods, Gay and Lesbian Communities, or Social Movements, or a newly developed course, such as Sociology of Music, Kaminski uses contemporary examples as tools to spark class discussion—and debate. “By making popular culture, current events, and political issues a part of the curriculum, I hope to show students that learning and critical analysis are not confined to the classroom but are part of their everyday lives,” she says. For example, in the Sociology of Music class, small groups debate whether rap music is sexist, politically empowering, or simply another commodity in the music industry.

Learning from Students
Kaminski admits to learning a good deal about rap music from her students. She had read about the origins of rap as an outgrowth of a post-industrial economy in the late ’70s resulting from outsourcing and a decrease of government support which exacerbated problems of poverty in urban areas. “Rap as a genre is political,” states Kaminski. “Youth created rap as a form of self-expression in desperate times. Today’s rap is different, and we debate whether rap is a critical voice for change in democratic society, or if it has become overly commercialized, centered on objectifying women and glorifying wealth.” Sociology of Music fits into one of Kaminski’s research interests—how marginalized people use music to affirm their positive identity. Kaminski, who holds a PhD from Ohio State University, did her dissertation on drag music, performance, and the construction of oppositional culture.

In her course, students present pieces of music to the class and discuss the social circumstances surrounding the songs. Dawn McDonald, a senior with a psychology major and sociology minor, is one such student. “I once brought in a song that was found on YouTube.com called My Petition by Jill Scott,” she says. “I chose this song because I feel that it speaks the truth about the relationship we have with our government. The song mentions the hurt, pain, and disappointment due to decisions that our government has made.”

McDonald, who is currently taking Social Movements and Collective Action with Kaminski, plans to study social work in graduate school, aiming for a career in education. She is president of the campus club Women Involved Now. She comments, “Professor Kaminski’s classes always provide me with the opportunity to keep up with current events. I take a deep interest in political and social issues. I have expressed my opinion through several papers and connected the social issues taking place today with what we learn in her classes.”

In Kaminski’s Gay and Lesbian Communities course, students discuss current issues including gay marriage and representation of gay culture in the media, using examples from television shows such as The L Word and Will and Grace. “By incorporating humorous and familiar examples from popular culture, I show students how to use sociological concepts as tools for understanding complex social problems, media, and situations they encounter in their own lives,” explains Kaminski.
Teaching Ideas of Social Equality

Topics of social equality have absorbed Kaminski since her college years at Northwestern University. She explains that as an undergraduate, “I took a course on medical sociology, and I realized that we must have an equitable health distribution system so health care is available. I came to realize how important it is for people to have information on inequalities and the distribution of resources in health care and education. I became interested in having conversations with young people who one day will make policies and getting them to think about social justice.” During her graduate work at Ohio State, she studied lesbian health and the impact of identity on well-being as the topic for her master’s thesis.

Passing on Legacy of Social Activists

Kaminski, whose research interests include aspects of sexuality, culture, and social movements, has published steadily and made presentations to professional groups on these subjects. Most recently, she authored a chapter dealing with music and collective identity in drag performances. It appeared in Identity Work in Social Movements, a collection published by University of Minnesota Press this year. She and colleague Stephanie Gilmore have made joint presentations at professional meetings and conferences in Boston and the UK, speaking on a current research project, which examines depictions of domestic violence in American popular music.

A mentor to many women on the CCSU campus, Kaminski is faculty advisor appointed by President Miller of Women Involved Now, and she is co-chair of the campus Committee on the Concerns of Women.

Kaminski recalls women who inspired her—Ella Baker, who pioneered the Southern Christian Leadership Congress and helped create the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) of the ‘60s, and Bernice Johnson Reagon, who, as an SNCC member and founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock, used music to spread messages of social movements.

Kaminski declares: “Why were they inspirational? Because they tried to empower others to stand up against oppression and create a more equitable and just society. In turn, through my teaching I try to motivate students to understand how historic social movements have brought people together to realize positive change.”

—Geri Radacsi
Little has been written to date probing the political ideas of Andrei Sakharov (1921–89), a world-renowned Soviet nuclear physicist, dissident, and human rights activist. Until now. Dr. Jay Bergman, professor of history, has completed An Intellectual Biography of Andrei Sakharov, which shines new light into the mind of this advocate of civil liberties and reforms in the Soviet Union who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975.

The book, to be published by Cornell University Press in 2009, explains how crucial Sakharov’s dissidence was in his intellectual development. According to Bergman, the book looks at why the famed “Father of the Soviet H-Bomb” became a dissident as part of a movement opposing the Soviet system in the late ’60s until the mid ’80s when Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies of perestroika (reconstruction) and glasnost (openness) incorporated aspects of this opposition. The book defines the nature of Sakharov’s dissidence and demonstrates how it contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, two years after his death.

Early chapters of the prodigious volume, which runs some 500 pages, deal with how Sakharov emerged from the Soviet establishment with privileges reserved for the elite to become an opponent of the regime. “Although Sakharov did not feel guilty about developing weapons of mass destruction,” declares Bergman, “he was concerned with, then alarmed at, the radioactive fallout from nuclear weapons detonated in the atmosphere.” Sakharov used his prominent position to try to influence Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and successor of Joseph Stalin. The scientist advocated that the nuclear powers negotiate a treaty banning atmospheric testing. In 1963 such a treaty was signed by Khrushchev and US President John F. Kennedy.

From Scientist to Activist
Bergman traces how Sakharov moved from intellectual engagement with scientific issues to political and ethical ones. In the book’s introduction, Bergman writes: “Sakharov’s campaign against the Soviet system was principally an ethical one, traceable intellectually to the intelligentsia, whose ethos of moral wholeness and consistency Sakharov inherited first from his father, Dmitri Sakharov, and then from the renowned Soviet physicist, Igor Tamm, Sakharov’s mentor and role model while he was pursuing postgraduate training in physics in the late 1940s. The charge that the Soviet Union denied its people human rights was always paramount in Sakharov’s indictment of it.”

In ensuing chapters of the biography, Bergman deals with Sakharov’s stepped up, harsh criticism of the Soviet goliath, as he vehemently set forth ideas on social development and enunciated the principle of human rights as a new basis of all politics. While the KGB harassed Sakharov and his family, because of foreign policy and the scientist’s world-wide fame, he was not arrested. However, in January 1980, following his public protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, he and his wife were sent into internal exile in Gorky, a closed city inaccessible to foreigners. Sakharov remained isolated until 1986 when he was allowed to return to Moscow under Gorbachev’s policies. Turning to politics, Sakharov ran for election in 1989 to the Congress for People’s Deputies (a parliament of sorts) and won. In so doing Sakharov made a successful transition from dissident to participant in the political process.

Universal Chords in Sakharov’s Story
Although the biography will be good reading for Russian historians, Cold War scholars, and anyone grappling with the role of science in society, Sakharov’s story reverberates with universal messages. Bergman writes: “The kind of society Sakharov considered most conducive to the emancipation of the individual personality was one that was governed by rational people and organized on the basis of rational principle; for this reason, the sentence in Sakharov’s writings that best encapsulates his political philosophy is his exhortation in his Nobel Lecture in 1975 that ‘we must make good the
demands of reason.’ It is expressive of the universalism that characterized his moral and intellectual principles.”

Bergman has brought a wealth of scholarly credentials to the difficult task of writing the biography. He holds the PhD in Russian history from Yale, and, prior to joining CCSU in 1990, he taught at Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Miami, and Albright College. He is author of Vera Zasulich: A Biography (Stanford University Press, 1983). This year he wrote a chapter on Peter the Great in the writings of Soviet dissidents in Festschrift for Robert O. Crummey (Slavica Press), and he’s published numerous articles in professional journals dealing with his areas of expertise.

Approach to Research
To write the Sakharov biography, Bergman did extensive research in the Sakharov archives at Brandeis University. He said Tatiana Yankelevich, the director of the Archives and Sakharov’s stepdaughter, answered his many questions, as did Sakharov’s widow, Elena Bonner. Bergman read in English and in Russian his subject’s writings, speeches, and memoirs.

“To write this biography I had to learn a fair amount about physics, ecology, various US and Soviet weapon systems from the Cold War, and how nuclear and thermonuclear weapons worked—this was part and parcel of understanding Sakharov as a nuclear physicist as well as an intellectual,” explains Bergman. Two physicists at Notre Dame read the parts of the manuscript that describe and evaluate Sakharov’s contributions to physics and cosmology. The manuscript was refereed, and it was repeatedly read and evaluated by peers and colleagues.

This formidable work of scholarship will have taken just over 11 years when it is published next year. One lesson Bergman has gained from the process is that “Sakharov’s life was certainly a study of character and courage. His ability and willingness to stand up to and defy one of the most repressive regimes in human history are an inspiration.”

—Geri Radacsi

Africana Studies Conference
The Center for Africana Studies hosted its 15th annual conference, “Foreign Intervention in Africa: The 21st-Century Scramble.” The keynote address, “US/Africa Command: Challenge to Peace and Security,” was delivered by Dr. Horace Campbell (at right), professor of African American studies and political science at Syracuse University. Other topics addressed were “China-Africa Relations in the 21st Century,” “State Terrorism and Surveillance,” and “The Fate of All of Us Is at Stake in the Congo: Rape, War, Interventionist Scrambles, and the African Revolution.” The conference was sponsored by the Africana Student Organization, the Center for International Education, the School of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Anthropology, the Office of Diversity and Equity, and the School of Engineering and Technology.

Chief Public Defender Speaks at CCSU
Connecticut Chief Public Defender Atty. Susan O. Storey (photo, on left) and former Connecticut Chief Public Defender Gerard Smyth (on right), CCSU adjunct lecturer of criminology and criminal justice, spoke at CCSU on “Criminal Defense of the Poor in the US and Connecticut,” as part of the Current Topics in Criminal Justice Lunchtime Speaker Series. The event was sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Crime and Justice and the Governor William O’Neill Endowed Chair in Public Policy.
El Salvador Delegation Visits CCSU

An international delegation from the University of El Salvador (UES) recently visited CCSU. The delegates’ goal was to become further acquainted with the University, to revise and renew former international agreements, and to explore the possibility of future partnerships, programs, and international initiatives, in addition to exploring ways to better define its management and involvement with international relations.

Dr. Gloria Marie Caliendo, associate professor of the of modern languages and outreach program coordinator, was granted a US Fulbright Scholar Award for the creation of the International Center for Teaching Excellence (ICTE) in the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador. She initiated professional development for faculty and trained those in the department in innovative methodologies.

CCSU Joins Multi-University Study of Alcohol Abuse among College Students

CCSU has joined in a collaborative effort with Yale University, Trinity College, the University of Connecticut Alcohol Research Center, and the Olin Neuropsychiatric Center of Hartford to study alcohol use and its relationship to cognitive, developmental, and academic performance. The multi-site, five-year study — Brain and Alcohol Research in College Students — is funded by a $2.6 million grant from the National Institution of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). Part of the National Institutes of Health, the NIAAA is the primary US agency for supporting and conducting research on the causes, consequences, prevention, and treatment of alcohol abuse, alcoholism, and alcohol-related problems.

The study investigates alcohol intake among college students in order to better understand the effects on brain development, cognitive functioning, and academic performance. First-year college students, who are emerging out of late adolescence and entering young adulthood, are particularly relevant to the study. This period of human growth is a sensitive time in the process of brain maturation. Intended to be a step toward a more complete and integrated scientific understanding of the environmental, biobehavioral, and genetic factors contributing to harmful use and abuse, the research will add to the scientific community’s knowledge base.

The lead principal investigator is Dr. Godfrey Pearlson, MD, of Yale University and the Olin Neuropsychiatric Center at the Institute of Living in Hartford. The research team includes Dr. Carol Shaw Austad, professor of psychology and principal investigator at CCSU, and co-investigators, Associate Professor Carolyn Fallahi and Assistant Professor Rebecca Wood from the Department of Psychology. Dr. Sara Raskin is the principal investigator for Trinity College.

— Christopher Michalski

Assistant Professor of Economics Mitchell Charkiewicz spoke with WDRC radio on the current financial crisis and the AIG situation. CCSU was featured in a New Britain Herald cover story, “Students Lean to Obama,” that explained how Dr. Jerrold Duquette, associate professor of political science, organized the viewing of the October 7 presidential debate in DiLoretto Hall.
CCSU Participates in Polish Genealogical Conference

Four nationally recognized authorities on Polish genealogy and history shared their expertise on tracing family roots during the 2008 Polish Genealogical Conference. The experts – Dr. Stephen Morse, Romuald K. Byczkiewicz, Jonathan Shea, and Matthew Bielawa – presented workshops and lectures to help beginners and advanced family history researchers gain access to resource books, maps, and other documents. Personal help in translating genealogical documents was offered, as was the opportunity for informal discussions with the speakers.

Bielawa, associate registrar at CCSU, serves as vice president for the Polish Genealogical Society of Connecticut and the Northeast (PGSCTNE) and has received degrees in slavic and east european studies and slavic languages and literature.

Byczkiewicz is an adjunct lecturer of history at CCSU, as well as the University of Hartford, and Tunxis Community College. His lecture, “A Question of Identity: Polish Immigrants and Polish Americans,” covered the chaotic period after the first world war that displaced many Poles.

Morse, who spoke on “A Potpourri of Genealogical Search Tools,” presented an overview of his “One-Step” website, which contains over 100 portals to databases that serve as a comprehensive search engine. His second lecture addressed how DNA can be used to find very distant ancestors.

Shea, founding president, reference archivist, and translator for the PGSCTNE, serves as editor of its journal, Pathways and Passages. He is an adjunct lecturer of modern languages at CCSU, and serves as a professor of foreign languages at Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport. He has received degrees in slavic languages and literatures, library science, and archival management.

—Christopher Michalski

Noteworthy Musicians Perform for Annual Polish Musical Event

Award-winning violinist Mariusz Patyra (left) and internationally acclaimed pianist Giovanni Casella (right) performed at the annual Alex and Regina Rudewicz Musical Event. Among the pieces performed were works by Debussy, Saint-Saëns, Paganini, Brahms, and Chopin.

Patyra’s career took off after becoming the first Polish violinist to win the prestigious Niccolò Paganini International Violin Competition in 2001. He has toured Europe, Japan, the United States, and Mexico. Casella won numerous first prizes in Italian national competitions and earned a third in the International Piano Competition in Cantù in 1994. He is the official pianist of Genoa’s Paganini International Violin Competition. The concert was presented by the Stanislaus A. Blejwas Endowed Chair in Polish Studies, in conjunction with the Embassy of the Republic of Poland.
CCSU Hosts Artists of Color Exhibit

CCSU hosted “(an)OTHER Show,” an art exhibition which featured selected works by artists of color from the CSU faculty. The exhibit encompasses and embraces an almost infinitely diverse universe of cultures and ethnicities.

CCSU Art Department Chair Cora Marshall notes, “The creative work by artists of color is as varied as the artists who create it. There are artists of color who employ recognizably African, Native American, Latino, or Asian icons and symbols in works that speak to our shared and individual histories. For other artists, process is the subject and driving concern in creating their work. These frequently abstract or semi-abstract works hint at imagined worlds of endless possibilities. For other artists of color, their ethnicity informs their work as subtle underlying principles just below the surface of explicit expression. Spiritual healing takes precedence for some artists and they compose new narratives inspired by their ancestral pasts.” The show was sponsored by a School of Arts and Sciences Diversity Initiative grant and by the Greater New Britain Arts Alliance and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism.
CCSU Emerges as a First Participator in the VSA

In the spring of 2008, the CCSU Faculty Senate voted in favor of the University’s initial participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). This system was established to improve the public’s understanding of public colleges and universities, by presenting comparable and transparent data on the characteristics of institutions and students, the engagement of students with the learning process, and the cost of attendance. By 2011, institutions must also provide information about core educational outcomes from one of three standardized tests administered to incoming and graduating students.

“The most useful innovation of the VSA is a new way to present student success and progress rates. Institutions participating in VSA now provide not only retention and graduation rates for first-time students but also retention and graduation rates for transfer students. Perhaps most importantly, institutions also provide success rates for students who transfer to and graduate from other colleges and universities,” said Dr. Braden J. Hosch, director of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA).

CCSU’s OIRA collects, analyzes, organizes, and disseminates data and institutional information to support the institution’s participation in the VSA.

OIRA’s responsibilities include coordination of campus-wide activities as well as assisting in continuous improvements at the University based on data-driven adjustments and decisions.

“The controversial element of VSA is the learning outcomes section,” explains Hosch.

According to Hosch, there are concerns in the research community about the validity of assessment instruments administered by testing companies, because the tests attribute institutional “value-added” without testing the same group of students at the beginning and end of their college experiences. Only a small sample size of about 200 students is tested in most cases. Hosch further explained that these tests are very costly to administer, and the testing conditions and incentives for students to perform well are uneven across institutions.

CCSU’s OIRA has goals to manage the University’s data, provide the University with accurate reports, respond to external inquiries about the University, conduct research on aspects of the University and the external environment, and coordinate campus-wide assessment activities.

CCSU President Jack Miller has served as vice-chair of the VSA Learning Outcomes Work Group in VSA’s development at CCSU.

For further information on CCSU’s involvement with the VSA, visit: www.ccsu.edu/oira/assessment/VSA or view the CCSU VSA College Portrait at www.ccsu.edu/oira/assessment/VSA/College Portrait2008.pdf.

—Christopher Michalski

CCSU Alumni Speak about Travelers’ Recruiting

Led by Professor David Fearon, the School of Business recently held a two-phase Travelers event. A “Faculty-Recruiting Leaders Dialogue” allowed the company to express what it seeks in CCSU students when considering them for internships, graduate leadership development programs, and first-time professional positions. Following the discussion, Alumni Affairs hosted a reception for CCSU alumni who participated in the dialogue as employees of Travelers.
activist speaks at ccsu
Harry C. Boyte, author of *The Citizen Solution: How You Can Make a Difference*, delivered two presentations at CCSU. His first lecture, for students and faculty, focused on the subject of his book. His second presentation, for the larger community, stressed the importance of working together on common challenges through community engagement initiatives.

Boyte is an activist, author of several books, and senior fellow at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. He cofounded the institute’s nonpartisan Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

The event was sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence and Leadership Development, Academic Affairs, and the Center for Public Policy and Social Research.

alumni news
William Hooker ’69 returned to Connecticut with his “Silent Films Live Music” project. Part of the project is to bring filmmaker Oscar Micheaux’s silent film, *Symbol of the Unconquered*, to venues all over the United States. *Symbol of the Unconquered* was written and directed by Micheaux in response to D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*. Hooker’s “Silent Films Live Music” project is part of the Wadsworth Atheneum’s Art After Hours program. After an outdoor screening of the film, accompanied by Hooker’s drum solo, he held an open forum for questions on Micheaux, a prolific black filmmaker who died in 1951. In an interview with *Cadence Magazine* in 1991, Hooker noted that CCSU, “was an outlet where I could actually think about what I was playing and put it into practice. So it was good, it freed me up. And I was getting a degree at the same time.”

veterans drop-in center opens
The new Veterans Drop-In Center, located in Willard Hall, room 100, provides a place for student veterans to study, network, utilize computers, have lunch, share conversation, and participate in Veterans Appreciation Organization (VAO) meetings, as well as other veteran-related activities. Information on scheduled activities and other pertinent announcements are posted inside the Veterans Drop-In Center.

extra credit
Dr. Cora Marshall, associate professor and chair of art, exhibited *Dark Matter* at New Britain’s Downtown Gallery. This display also included works from her *Runaway: Going, Going, Gone* mixed media painting series that was recognized as part of the 81st Celebration of African American History at the White House. The *Dark Matter* paintings are based on 18th- and 19th-century ads depicting enslaved men and women who had escaped captivity. Marshall’s own ancestors were enslaved, and through this exhibition she tries to discover what is missing in their stories.

The theatre department presented *Early Stages*, a story-telling festival for young audiences, which is in its fourth year at CCSU. The production presented four 15-minute pieces on the four elements (earth, wind, water, and fire) and included an audience-participation improvisational session for children. Kevin McNair, an educational theatre major, produced the event.
Early Academic Warning System Implemented to Aid Struggling Students

CCSU faculty have a new tool to assist students who are struggling academically. The Early Academic Warning System (EAWS), a development of the University’s Retention and Graduation Council, provides faculty members with a straightforward web-based program through which they can report on students who, at mid term, have poor attendance, poor academic performance, low exam/quiz scores, poor class motivation, or personal problems, as well as those that have never attended the course. Early intervention with struggling students is critical to student success, since only 9% of students who earn below a 2.00 GPA in their first semester graduate in six years (data drawn from the 1999, 2000, and 2001 entering classes).

Information from the online referral is provided to Assistant Dean of Students Ramon Hernandez if non-academic factors are identified; if there are academic factors, the information goes to Meg Leake, director of the Learning Center and lead developer of the system.

After faculty have identified students who are in academic jeopardy, the Learning Center intervenes via e-mail and phone to each student asking him or her to make an appointment with either the assistant dean of Student Affairs or the Learning Center, depending on the circumstances. If a student does not respond in 24 hours, a reminder in the form of a postcard is sent to the student’s registered address. In compliance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the postcard is an informal reminder to set up a meeting.

By identifying students through the EAWS, the Learning Center can point students in the right direction, such as eTutoring, School of Business Tutoring, the Writing Center, or one-on-one academic coaching in the Learning Center.

Since its implementation, over 716 reports have been received electronically, with 50 reports by phone or e-mail from faculty and parents. Students who never attended class were referred to the Registrar’s office, as they may have inadvertently kept a course on their schedule and were in danger of receiving a failing grade, jeopardizing their GPA.

“Students have been extremely gracious and grateful,” notes Leake. “Those who come to Academic Coaching through the EAWS are the ones who most vigorously work towards improving their academics. It’s amazing how students respond when they know where to go and what steps they need to take.”

—Christopher Michalski

Middle East Lecture Series: Rabbi Shlomo Yaffe on “Law & Ethics of War”

As part of CCSU’s ongoing 2008–09 Middle East Lecture Series, Rabbi Shlomo Yaffe, a distinguished scholar and rabbinical and legal authority, presented “Law and Ethics of War Based upon Judaic Sources.” His lecture focused on Jewish legal and ethical considerations relating to armed conflict, including authority to wage war, treatment of civilians, collateral damage, and the use of non-conventional weaponry and treaties.

Yaffe discussed broad concepts derived from Halachic (Jewish religious) sources, such as the laws of war, the Judaic view of universal law, attitudes towards war as an instrument of policy, the obligation to maintain treaties, the rights of combatants and non-combatants, and the justification for war.

Yaffe serves as rabbi of Congregation Agudas Achim in West Hartford, CT, and is the dean of the Institute for American and Talmudic Law, as well as a scholar-in-residence at Chabad at Harvard University. He has been active in dialogue between Talmudic and American law since 1993. He is also the co-founder and director of the Connecticut Conference on Contemporary Legal Problems and Judaic Law.

The Middle East Lecture Series is underwritten by the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences and is sponsored by the Middle East Studies Committee of CIE, the History Department, and the Peace Studies Program.
Karen Costes: From Little League to Women’s World Cup

Karen Costes started playing baseball when she was eight years old. After playing in Little League for five years, she moved her game to the softball diamond. Baseball came back into her life again last year, and Costes made the most of what could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Costes played softball for four years at CCSU. “Karen was a wonderful student-athlete,” head coach Mandy Roczniak said. “She performed at a high level with great passion for four seasons.”

The Glastonbury native was a 2007 All-NEC selection, leading the Blue Devils with 45 hits, 25 runs, and 7 stolen bases as a junior. Costes, who also hit .300 during that junior campaign, totaled 97 hits during her four-year career at CCSU. And while Costes firmly believes hitting a rise ball will always be more challenging than hitting any type of pitch seen on the baseball diamond, she never lost sight of her dreams.

“Baseball was my first passion,” she says. “It still is.”

Costes Shined

The first semblance of a chance to continue her baseball career came from a CCSU connection. Former Blue Devil assistant coach Kelly Rodman invited her to join the North American Women’s Baseball League. It gave Costes an opportunity to fill her summers with that first love again. “As an outfielder I discovered that the ball travels differently in baseball from the way it travels in softball,” Costes noted. “There is more friction, so I had to learn to stay back on the ball when my softball instincts were telling me to charge. I also had to get used to the pitches. There is a bigger variation of pitches in softball. Plus, in baseball, the movement on the ball is far less dramatic.”

Costes persevered, however, and made the league’s all-star team. That earned her an invitation to Kenosha, WI, for a Team USA tryout.

“I have always wanted to wear the red, white, and blue,” she says. “I take a lot of pride in the United States. It has always been my dream to play for our country at the highest level.”

Her all-star team came together in Kenosha with players from a half dozen other leagues, and they all competed for another tryout.

Costes’s play merited a chance to join 18 preselected players at a tryout in Los Angeles, CA. She and 11 others headed to the West Coast for the final audition.

Team USA left for Japan and the 2008 IBAF Women’s World Cup with an 18-player roster. Costes and her #5 red, white, and blue jersey made the trip.

Costes had earned her spot to wear her nation’s colors in the Women’s World Cup. She started five of six Team USA games, playing in both center field and right field. She had four hits, including a home run, and totaled five RBI’s to help Team USA earn a bronze medal.

The games, which included two wins over Australia—the second of which came in the bronze medal contest—and victories against Chinese Taipei and India, didn’t provide the only highlights for Costes.

A history major, Costes was grateful for the opportunity to visit Hiroshima. “We visited the A-bomb Dome, which is only about 500 feet from where the bomb was dropped,” she says. “I love American history because we can witness its effects in our everyday lives. Being in Hiroshima gave me a new appreciation for world history.”

Costes had studied the Pacific War during a class with Dr. Mark Jones, associate professor of history and coordinator of East Asian studies.
“One of my goals is to get students to look at the history of the world from a perspective beyond the United States,” Jones says. “I remember Karen being particularly excited about considering the history of the Pacific War from both sides, how America viewed Japan, and how Japan viewed America. She was avidly interested in understanding why Japan felt it needed to fight this war against the United States.

“When American students go to Hiroshima, it can be both an eye-opening and enlightening experience.”

Costes, who carries a 3.50 grade point average, is now finishing up her education and waiting for another opportunity to play baseball. While she focuses on student teaching at Conard High, the baseball-to-softball-to-baseball star is waiting for an opportunity to just keep playing the game she loves.

“I would certainly continue to play,” she says. “Being a teacher leaves my summers free, so you can be certain I will make it a top priority every June.”

— Jason Stronz

Diversity Event Helps Students Develop Skills for 21st Century

Jane Fried, professor of counseling and family therapy, organized and presented “Mirrors, Angles, and Reflections: Does Diversity Make Us Smarter?,” a dialogue conference where participants exchanged ideas and experiences concerning diversity. Chancellor of the CSU System David Carter welcomed participants and discussed some of his powerful experiences in learning from people who are different from him.

The goal of the conference was to examine the many ways that learning in diverse environments teaches us to think more clearly and effectively. Dr. Fried noted, “People from different cultures have different ways of understanding what’s going on and different values and ideas about how to treat each other. All of us are responsible for understanding the differences, as well as the similarities, between people so that we can respect each other and communicate effectively. This subject is important to all students because college graduates tend to become community leaders, and they must understand a wide range of people in order to lead effectively.”

Dr. James Mulrooney, associate professor of biomolecular sciences, and Dr. Beth Frankel Mensenstein, assistant professor of sociology, presented methodologies to introduce diversity into the classroom. Ken Barone, Alex Rodriguez, and Melissa Cordner spoke as representatives of various groups on campus, describing student experiences with diversity and learning.

Over 60 students and staff from CCSU, Southern Connecticut State University, Western Connecticut State University, University of Connecticut, University of Hartford, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Bridgewater State University, Fairfield University, Trinity College, and Wesleyan University attended.
Murals Inspired by Educational Issues Adorn Barnard Hall

Commissioned by the School of Education and Professional Studies, CCSU students have completed a series of murals that span three stories of the east stairwell in Barnard Hall. The murals are individual works inspired by historical and contemporary educational issues including standardized testing, medicating students, desegregation, and religion in the classroom.