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Jazz Ensemble Wins Top Awards at Prestigious Villanova Collegiate Jazz Festival

Congratulations to Dr. Carl Knox and the talented, hard-working musicians of the CCSU Jazz Ensemble!

Trumpets
- Grayson Merriman
- Rachel Rubino
- Ryan Vacca
- Mike Vita

Saxophones
- Nate Allen
- Jeff Boratko
- Mike Carabillo
- William O’Keefe
- Joe Proud

Trombones
- William Cornish
- Jeff Spitzer
- Adam Twombly
- Eric Vargas
- Jordan Vasquez

Rhythm
- Matt Bellevue
- Cemre Dogan
- Dan Hollenbeck
- Harold Limkemann
- Isaac Monts
- Greg Perault

A ssociate Professor of Music Carl Knox knew this year’s CCSU Jazz Ensemble was among the best he has directed.

“I told them, ‘Those are the best sounds I’ve heard in this band room in my 15 years here,’” he said. “The Ensemble has been really, really good this year.”

Yet in the final seconds before the judges at the 52nd annual Villanova Collegiate Jazz Festival announced the first-place winner, the anticipation was agonizing. “Come on! Come on! Let us win!” he recalls thinking.

In fact, the excitement was so intense that when Central captured first place in the prestigious competition, trombonist Eric Vargas fell off his chair. Few noticed because of the standing ovation from the other college musicians.

“It just felt great to win,” said saxophonist William O’Keefe. “All our hard work paid off, especially for Dr. Knox. He puts everything he has into the band. After this, we can never lose again.”

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The Ensemble also won the best trumpet section and best saxophone section at the March event, the only collegiate jazz competition on the East Coast. The CCSU jazz band beat Carnegie Mellon and the University of Maryland, which took second and third place, respectively.

Despite driving to the event the day of the performance, the musicians were not going to let a little travel fatigue derail them.

“We felt really good,” Bassist Greg Perault said. “We were excited to play and it showed.”

Regular competitors in the Villanova event, Central has won second place a number of times—as well as awards for outstanding soloist, best saxophone section, best trumpet, and best rhythm section—but until this year hadn’t walked away with the grand prize.

The band played three pieces, lasting about 25 minutes, including “Channel One Suite,” “90 Degrees Celsius,” and “Crisis.” The musical lineup included recommendations from Knox’s wife and teenage daughter.

Some of the musical arrangements were hand-written pieces borrowed from William Penn College, where Knox, a professional saxophonist, earned his bachelor’s degree.

“The hardest part of my job is selecting the right music to play,” said Knox, who has been with CCSU since 1997.

“Dr. Knox looks for music that the audience will enjoy, as well as songs that the students want to play,” said senior Joe Proud, a saxophonist, who said the first-place award is a nice legacy to leave. “Our goal is to play good music, and have a good time doing it.”

One of the highlights of the event was that the winners got to meet and perform with renowned jazz flautist and tenor saxophonist Lew Tabackin.

Most of the 20-member Jazz Ensemble is composed of music majors, four of whom will graduate this spring.

Most music students attend Central for five years in order to complete their teaching work, develop their musical expertise, and complete core requirements. In addition to their academics, most of Knox’s students participate in multiple ensembles and are always juggling practice times, student teaching, and other commitments.

“Music is our whole life,” O’Keefe said. On a beautiful spring day, pianist Dan Hollenbeck expected to be in the practice room until at least 10:00 p.m.; O’Keefe until 1:00 a.m.

“We just keep going until our hands wear out—or we die,” joked Hollenbeck.

Vargas said he’d been waiting to attend the competition for two years.

“I’ve been counting down the weeks. I said, ‘We need to go and show them what we’re about.’ The excitement and the focus we put in made it one of our best concerts ever,” he said. “It was an honor to represent our school the way we did.”

— Claire LaFleur Hall

Rudolph Giuliani Delivers Vance Lecture

CCSU welcomed former federal prosecutor and New York City Mayor Rudolph “Rudy” W. Giuliani in March. Giuliani was the guest lecturer at this year’s Robert C. Vance Distinguished Lecture Series.

Giuliani’s speech mixed humor with discussion of some of the most serious issues facing New York City. His talk included the qualities of good leaders and his success in reducing crime in the Big Apple. The most riveting part of the evening was his discussion of the emotional and tactical approaches he took in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attack. Earlier in the day, he spoke with students and answered questions on a variety of topics.

The lecture series is supported by a grant from the Robert C. Vance Charitable Foundation, which this year celebrated 23 years of hosting US presidents, international heads of state, and other dignitaries at CCSU.
Central faculty and staff view their work as personally rewarding, express pride in their affiliation with the University, and say that they are very satisfied with their employment here.

Those are some of the key points of a recently released Employee Satisfaction Survey, in which almost half of all full-time employees, as well as many part-time employees, participated. The survey was conducted over seven weeks in fall 2012.

When employees were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their employment, the average respondent gave CCSU a 4 out of 5, up substantially from the last survey rating of 3.69 in 2010.

In fact, 82 percent of the survey questions showed significant improvement, up by more than 0.30 points from when the original survey was conducted in 2007, said Director of Institutional Research and Assessment Yvonne Kirby.

President Jack Miller said, “It’s very gratifying to see that we have built on the many successes we achieved earlier. When NEASC reaccredited the University in 2009, the report noted that ‘The climate of the campus is collaborative, open, optimistic, and eager to move forward.’ Clearly, as this new survey compellingly demonstrates, we have continued our progress. We can create great things together when we keep our focus, as we have, on meeting our students’ educational needs.”

Chief Human Resources Officer Lou Pisano said the upswing is particularly noteworthy during a time when employees haven’t seen pay increases in years, and structural and administrative changes have taken place at the state level.

“To have improving satisfaction under those circumstances speaks volumes about how much people enjoy working here,” he said. “This report is overwhelmingly positive.”

Participants were asked to rate their responses to a series of statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being dissatisfied, and 5 indicating very satisfied.

The results seem to indicate a great deal of pride and personal satisfaction with the scope and purpose of employees’ tasks. When asked about the statement: “The type of work I do on most days is personally rewarding,” the average score was very high at 4.54.

When prompted with the statement: “I am proud to work at this institution,” the typical employee rated it a 4.30. The statement that, “The work I do is valuable to the institution,” scored a 4.54. Employees also gave a favorable response to the statement, “My supervisor pays attention to what I have to say,” rating it 4.05.

Other questions focused on how the University treats its students. The statement, “This institution promotes excellent employee-student relationships,” rated a 3.89, up from 3.13 in 2007. “This institution treats students as its top priority,” netted a 3.84 rating, up from 3.0 five years prior.

When asked to evaluate whether “This institution does a good job of meeting the needs of students,” employees offered a rating of 3.74, up from 2.95 five years earlier.

When presented with the statement that “Faculty take pride in their work,” employees gave a rating of 4.14 (up from 3.67 five years earlier); a similar question pertaining to staff resulted in a score of 4.10 (up from 3.49 in 2007).

“At every orientation, the President does a good job conveying the message that no matter what department you work in, the students are the number one priority,” said Human Resources Administrator Laurie Dunn. She thinks that mission resonates with employees and gives greater purpose to their work.

Elizabeth Hicks, the union spokesperson for the State University Organization of Administrative Faculty (SUOAF) was pleased with the results.

“Our professionals derive deep personal and professional satisfaction from every student success,” she said.

“In the last survey, 3.0 five years prior. Other questions addressed the maintenance and resources of the campus and those results were also good.

“The Institution does a good job evaluating its physical and technological resources and implements these items into the institution’s master plan,” garnered a score of 3.57, up from 2.96 in 2007.

Despite its success, the University will continue to strive for excellence. 

“Of course there is always room for improvement,” Pisano said. “We need to look at more ways to involve employees in planning for the future of the University and improve communication with the leadership of the institution in order to have a clear sense of purpose and to continually improve the reputation of CCSU.”

Dunn said she thinks the survey will be well received on campus, especially among those who don’t regularly interact with faculty and staff from other departments.

“I think that most employees know that others within their department are happy, but may not recognize that that enthusiasm is shared by the majority of employees on campus,” Dunn said.

In addition to their professional responsibilities, Dunn said she thinks employees also enjoy the opportunity to attend sporting and musical events and lectures on campus.

“Those are bonuses that get people really excited about working here,” she added. Other events like Employee Appreciation Week and Family Day let the faculty and staff know that they’re appreciated, she said.

The survey will be conducted again in fall 2014. For complete results, visit www.ccsu.edu/ESS.

— Claire LaFleur Hall
Robbin Smith and Kara Russell Receive 2012 Excellence in Teaching Awards

Two professors—one who looks out for every aspect of a student’s life, another who makes the Bard lively at 8:00 a.m.—have won CCSU’s 2012 Excellence in Teaching Award. The winners were honored at CCSU’s Faculty Day on April 19, after a nine-month selection process in which a committee reviewed recommendations from colleagues and students.

Robbin Smith, Political Science

Robbin Smith, a Political Science professor at Central since 2008, won the full-time faculty award.

“Robbin is one of the most phenomenal teachers,” said chair of the Political Science Department Paul Petterson. “She goes above and beyond to find ways to make political knowledge meaningful to students.”

He said she has devoted enormous effort to creating exercises that get students to feel like members of Congress and understand the inherent pressures of elected officials. She finds enjoyable ways to help students think about and understand politics, he said. She is also a much sought-after adviser, particularly for students applying to law school.

Student Michael Ficorilli said Smith “puts her heart and soul into teaching. She is extremely passionate about her courses.”

“Professor Smith has consistently demonstrated excellence not only in her teaching, but in her ability to effectively engage and motivate students as well,” said Brian Crowe, a student who has taken several of her classes, and credits her for helping him get involved on campus.

“I am just one of the many students that Professor Smith has assisted in creating a successful and active college experience. Many of her students partake in political activities both on and off campus, in part (due) to her enthusiasm,” he wrote. “She is more than just a professor on campus; she is a mentor and an advocate for students.”

“These students are so incredible and have so much potential, and that’s what inspires me,” Smith said. “The opportunity to help them discover their own abilities and talents is very rewarding.”

Kara Russell, English

Kara Russell, an adjunct lecturer of English who has been at the University since 1995, won the award for part-time faculty.

Russell said she tries to emulate the professors she most enjoyed. “When I was an undergraduate, I loved the teachers who were most passionate about their subjects,” she said. “I love what I teach so much that it’s easy to get caught up in it.”

Russell received many accolades, with her students noting that she could make her classes lively even at 8:00 a.m.

“I have always been a bit weary of Shakespeare, viewing his work as over-hyped and dated,” said student David G. Rich. “Following a Shakespeare class with Professor Russell, he is now among my favorite writers. This is truly the sign of an excellent professor, one that takes a subject that a student has zero interest in and makes it a magical and life-altering experience. She radiates a love for her craft and her students.”

Professor and former chair of the English Department Gilbert Gigliotti said, “I cannot tell you how many times her students came, unsolicited, into my office simply to complement Dr. Russell’s teaching. These were enthusiastic and passionate proclamations of how she is the best teacher they have ever had and how she makes Shakespeare come alive in a way no author ever has for them,” Gigliotti said. “That is what a great English professor does!”

Student Julie Palmer agreed. “When I first registered for Shakespeare 220, I was terrified,” she wrote. “Several of my professors in the past have tried to teach me Shakespeare, but I was unable to understand it. Ten minutes with Dr. Russell was all it took to see how passionate she was about Shakespeare. That passion is contagious. Because of her I now see Shakespeare as a brilliant writer.”

– Claire LaFleur Hall
New Robotics and Mechatronics Major Teaches the Latest Technology

As associate Professor of Manufacturing and Construction Engineering Ravindra Thamma, and assistant professors Daniel Kirby and Haoyu Wang know that the future of the manufacturing industry is dependent on cost savings and efficiencies afforded by advances in automation and robomechanics, precisely what a new engineering program is teaching.

Robotics and Mechatronics Engineering Technology (RMET) is the newest major in the School of Engineering and Technology. In this program, students embrace a holistic approach to engineering, balancing electrical and mechanical engineering, computer science, and more. This is not just an educational exercise—the RMET major is truly on the cutting edge of evolving technology and business practices.

“At present, manufacturing that uses old technology is converting to new technology. Automation is currently driving the manufacturing industry,” says Thamma.

The program is young, but Kirby speaks with confidence that they’re teaching something truly unique. “We are the only university with this sort of major in the region,” states Kirby. “Similar programs have launched recently in other regions, but we are the first to answer the call in New England.”

The call for graduates trained in robotics and automation is being heard at CCSU, thanks to its close relationship with manufacturing partners within the state. An industrial advisory board, comprised of professionals in the engineering and manufacturing industries, provides support and input for the program. Thamma says much of the coursework is dependent on what he’s seeing in the workplace.

“When we go out to industries, we watch and analyze the various manufacturing processes. Then we come back to campus and incorporate this knowledge into the classroom. All this is coming straight from the workplace.”

“*We are the only university with this sort of major in the region,*” states assistant professor Daniel Kirby.

Before students enter the workforce, they have ample opportunity to gain knowledge and experience in the RMET program. Students must complete 130 credits outlined in a detailed and finely tuned academic map. The core is mainly physics and math, but students draw on learning from all areas of engineering technology to be successful in this major.

Coursework is enhanced with a unique lab requirement. For every two hours in the classroom, students spend two hours in the lab. This arrangement means direct translation from coursework to lab work, theory to application.

Over the last six years, the University has invested a great deal in the engineering labs, which now house some of the most up-to-date robotic equipment in manufacturing technology. The lab requirement provides a hands-on approach to learning, giving students relevant skills on the newest equipment.

The classroom learning and lab experience culminate in a capstone project during senior year. Students spend a semester working with a professor, finalizing research, and preparing a presentation on their acquired knowledge within the program.

A large component of the RMET degree is a 480-hour internship. What sounds like a daunting task outside the classroom, according to Professor Thamma, is easily attainable in this field.

“All of my freshmen who started the program this year have an internship lined up for the summer,” he says. “That tells us a lot.”

Internships are primarily offered to students in the summer, allowing time during the academic year to focus on coursework. With the increasing demand for future leaders in this field, companies beyond Connecticut are also eager participants in the internship process, and having summer internships allows students to travel for work.

The program creates a CCSU graduate who is wanted and needed in the workplace. Thamma says, “Our graduates are well-regarded in the workplace. The program produces a graduate who is not only trained in technology but also receives a balanced education and shows effective management, communication, and professional skills.”

The RMET degree is still in its early stages. A small number of students are enrolled in the introductory levels, and many students who have not yet enrolled have spent the year fulfilling general education requirements, preparing to enter the degree program in the fall of 2013.

“We are still young,” says Professor Thamma. “We have just begun actively marketing this program.” Regardless, students throughout the School of Engineering and Technology are excited about this new opportunity in engineering.

– Ian Mangione
Growing up, Kory Mills had a difficult time identifying with his Puerto Rican heritage. However, after following in his sister’s footsteps and coming to CCSU through the ConnCAS (Connecticut College Access and Success) program, Mills has learned to take pride in his culture and embrace his roots. Today he is an active member of the Spanish Club, treasurer of the Latin American Student Organization (LASO), and president of Central’s Organization for Latin American Dance Awareness (COLADA).

He is also involved with the Man Enough Support Initiative (MESI), which offers a supportive environment for male students. Mills is currently a commuter senator and a member of the finance committee for the Student Government Association (SGA) and has been elected to serve as treasurer of the SGA in the fall. Mills is also currently employed on campus for Student Activities/Leadership Development.

An all-star in campus involvement, Mills is also an extraordinary student. With a 3.7 GPA, he is highly regarded by his classmates and professors alike. Professor of History Mary Ann Mahony says of Mills, “He is an exceptional student, one of our best here at CCSU. He is extremely bright, hardworking, always prepared, and very good natured. He not only excels at academics, but he is deeply involved in student life on campus.”

As an international studies major with a focus in Latin America and a history minor, Mills has many career options. At this point, he is deciding whether to go into politics or education. He is interested in both, and both paths would allow him to reach his long term goal: to make his hometown of Hartford a better place.

After he graduates in May 2014, Mills plans to get his master’s at Central and envisions the day when he becomes the first in his family to get a PhD. This idea of doing better than those who came before him drives Mills to do well and to succeed at everything he tries.

Though he is involved in many different clubs and activities, it seems COLADA has become his passion: “Once I came to Central I met a few people who opened my eyes to what being Latino could be. And then I joined COLADA. Growing up, my mother always played salsa music and I could never understand it and I couldn’t dance, so I didn’t enjoy the beat either. Once I joined COLADA I had a better understanding of the music.”

This year, under Mills’ direction, COLADA will put on several on-campus performances, thus spreading knowledge about Latino dancing and culture. He feels that this is more important than competing, although the club performed in one competition at the University of Hartford at the end of the academic year.

This semester has been a busy one for Mills. In February, he attended and presented at the Conference of Student Government Associations at Texas A&M. He was also recently awarded the Man Enough Initiative Student Excellence & Merit Award and the Ebenezer D. Basset Student Achievement Award, for his involvement in MESI. As a leader in CCSU’s Latin American community, Mills used his spare time this spring to help organize New England Latinos in Higher Education Conference, which took place at CCSU in early March.

Mills credits Central with allowing him to be a part of so many clubs and on-campus activities. He says that being involved has improved his time management and leadership skills: “I am making the main decisions and coordinating the events. I have to make it work. It’s made me embrace that I am a leader—I have to step up.”

— Alayna James
Christopher Williams

Christopher Williams doesn’t just tackle football players. The CCSU senior completed his college football career this fall and started tackling a new challenge—his future.

After getting a full-time job offer from Verizon, Williams mulled over a tough decision—play another year of football or take the job.

“No brainer,” Coach McInerney says of the decision. “He came to talk to me and I said, ‘You came here to get an education and get a real job. Don’t worry about me.’”

Despite his original plans to follow in his grandmother’s footsteps and become a nurse, Williams will receive a degree in communications and business management in May before starting his job this summer.

Coach McInerney recruited Williams for the fall 2009 season after reviewing his highlight tape from West Catholic High School in Philadelphia.

“It was a family-oriented atmosphere,” Williams says of CCSU after coming to visit with his mother. “I went to the academic center and I liked what they had to offer.” He accepted the offer to play for Central, receiving a partial athletic scholarship as well as financial aid, without which the Pennsylvania native could not attend the university.

At CCSU, Williams worked as an intern with the athletics department; his job focused on bringing more people into the newly renovated Arute Field for football games. He also got the opportunity to go to a local elementary school on Dr. Seuss Day to read to the students with several other Central student athletes.

“He’s always used every resource that CCSU has to offer,” McInerney states. “He’s a perfect, classic example of the good that can happen to you in an institution if you use the resources. He’s a great success story. I’m so proud of him.”

Williams believes his future success hinges on what he learned during his time at CCSU. “I had a very positive, well-rounded experience here.”

His caring attitude comes from his mom, Williams’ biggest inspiration. “My mom is my biggest fan,” he says. “She’s always instilled in me confidence that I’ll be something in life. She always made me feel like I’m going to be somebody; I’m going to be special. If I’m going to do it for anybody, I’m going to do it for her.”

It was his mother who encouraged him to start playing football. The sport has provided plenty of life lessons that he will take with him. “Football has taught me more about life than most things I’ve ever done,” Williams says. “One of the biggest things it teaches you is hard work and determination, overcoming obstacles and adversities. I’ll forever be grateful for football because of all the valuable lessons I’ve learned.”

Along with the lessons he learned from football, Williams happily employed all of the resources that Central provided. “He’s always used every resource that CCSU has to offer,” McInerney states. “He’s a perfect, classic example of the good that can happen to you in an institution if you use the resources. He’s a great success story. I’m so proud of him.”

Williams believes his future success hinges on what he learned during his time at CCSU. “I had a very positive, well-rounded experience here.”

“We got to talk to the kids about the importance of reading and the importance of staying focused; all of the things that truly matter,” Williams says. “It was an invaluable experience.”

The experience inspired him to possibly write a children’s book to encourage young children to “work hard and shoot for the stars,” just like he did. His positive, selfless attitude makes him a good role model for everyone around him and will no doubt propel him forward in his career.

Coach McInerney admires Williams’ passionate and optimistic attitude. “Chris has always been a team-oriented, giving person. He cares, he gives, and it’s not about him.”

— Jackie Ferris
CCSU Sophomore Raising Funds for Newtown First Responders

Very often we hear about a student who is doing something truly inspiring. Sophomore David Rohner is one of those students. So far, he has raised more than $15,000 to benefit the Sandy Hook Elementary School first-responders.

Rohner is well on his way to a career in law enforcement. His father is retired from the East Hartford Police Department and the Drug Enforcement Agency. His uncle is an East Hartford police officer. In addition to Rohner’s course work as a criminal justice major, he holds part-time jobs as a security guard at the Westfarms Mall and as a student worker for the CCSU Police Department. So it is no surprise that after the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School, he felt compelled to aid the first-responders in some way.

Rohner was at work at the mall when he heard about the Newtown shooting. As the tragedy unfolded, he decided to design a pin honoring the Newtown police; sell them to his family, friends, and coworkers; and donate the proceeds to the Newtown Police Officers’ Union. He ordered 300 pins and sold them for $5 each. The pins cost Rohner $1.18 each; he donates the rest to the charity.

Word spread quickly—the Farmington Police Department ordered pins for all of its officers; then Coventry, Bloomfield, Hamden, and East Hartford placed orders. The first 300 pins sold faster than Rohner ever imagined. His next order of 1,500 pins sold out as orders began coming in from other states and other countries. He is now well into the next order of 3,000 pins.

The money he raises will help cover first-responders’ costs for therapy and additional sick time. “Officers are only given a certain amount of sick time,” Rohner says. “There are a lot of officers who won’t be returning to police work—they’re too traumatized. No one can imagine what they saw. They need time. If they feel that they can come back, I want them to have the support system to do so.”

He will continue to sell the pins until demand diminishes. “As long as people are still buying, I want to be able to keep giving to Newtown,” he says.

In addition to this charity, Rohner is involved with the Fraternal Order of Police, and plans to become involved with Habitat for Humanity.

– Alayna James

Ebenezer D. Bassett Student Achievement Awards Presented in March

In his position as Assistant Counselor in the Counseling and Wellness Center, William Fothergill encounters students every day who successfully manage life changing events, such as homelessness, physical and mental illness, and professional roadblocks, while attending CCSU. And yet, he felt that these students are not acknowledged for overcoming challenging life circumstances.

Because of this, the Counseling and Wellness Center and the Office of Recruitment and Admissions created the Ebenezer D. Bassett Student Achievement Award, which recognizes personal effort, persistence, and fortitude as factors of college achievement. Since its inception two years ago, more than 50 awards have been presented to deserving male students.

The award is named for Ebenezer D. Bassett, a graduate of the New Britain Normal School (now CCSU). Fothergill says, “Bassett’s life serves as a testament to an individual’s willingness to transcend the constructs of race, socioeconomic status, and societal barriers. As the first African American United States Ambassador, he serves as a beacon of excellence for all aspiring CCSU gentlemen. Ambassador Bassett is home-grown and he is one of our own.”

Fothergill is working with Director of Recruitment and Admissions Larry Hall and alumni of the Man Enough Support Initiative to make the award a prominent fixture and to find a permanent place to honor Bassett on campus.

This year, in addition to individual awardees, the History Department was recognized for their active participation in the awards nomination process.

Michael Davis
Selfless Scholar Balances Student Learning with Research

A solid research scientist, Michael Davis comes armed with a PhD in biochemistry and molecular biology from Harvard. He revels in working with bacteria. His busy labs are breeding grounds for breakthrough developments.

CCSU students might, for example, be running experiments that could one day restore soil contaminated with gasoline back to health. Or they might be painstakingly isolating and characterizing novel antibiotics from soil microorganisms. Or they could be puzzling how to identify viruses that can kill bacteria which cause acne. Or they could be probing the gut flora existing in the digestive system of flatworms.

Is there a miraculous acne treatment on the horizon? Will CCSU Professor of Biomolecular Sciences Davis and “his gang” come up with a better ‘Activia’ yogurt to improve normal gut microbiota?

In fact, Davis and his students have drawn public attention. About five years ago, Davis and three of his students—Brandon Albright ’09, Katie Neely ’07, and Maggie Zurowski ’08—attended the annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM) in Boston. The students’ presentation was about the new acne treatment. The ASM meeting is always well attended, with nearly 10,000 microbiologists participating, and there is usually broad media coverage of the interesting discoveries presented.

How does he feel about having his original idea “scooped?” He replies, “Ordinarily, a research scientist who has his idea pushed forward by someone else is going to be angry. Scientists are supposed to progress at a fast pace to the end without anyone passing them.”

Davis could have opted to do research alone in his lab at a break-neck pace. Instead, he chose a different course. “I wanted to strike a balance between educating, training new scientists, and getting the scientific research done,” he remarks. “Such a balance I find satisfying and appropriate for this institution.” He adds, “My personal definition of scholarship is skewed toward the student.”

If that sounds selfless, it is. Davis admits, “Twenty years ago, if the acne treatment—which was my original idea—was taken away, I’d have been angry. Now I’m not, because I’m happy others found it a good idea that will be on the market. I feel validated for this viable method.”

“Dr. Davis is one of the most selfless people I have ever had the privilege to meet,” declares Albright, currently a fourth-year PhD student in the Biomedical Sciences program at the UConn Health Center.

Davis secured funds for Albright to attend the microbiology conference in Boston. “He knew it was important on my resume when applying to graduate school and important to hear and talk to the biggest names in the field describe their research. That experience confirmed what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

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CSU filled the calendar with events for the 2013 Carter G. Woodson African American Studies Black History Month Lecture Series in February. The lectures brought history, philosophical insight, and interesting discussions to the faculty, staff, guest speakers, and students who attended the events.

The first event featured Memphis Mayor A. C. Wharton, who spoke on the “City of Memphis and the Civil Rights Movement.” He spoke candidly about the city’s role in the Civil Rights Movement and the struggles faced by African Americans in the 1960s. Memphis was the scene of major events during the Civil Rights Movement, including the Memphis Sanitation Strike of 1968, when black sanitation workers refused to work until their pay was more equitable with their white counterparts; and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination at the Lorraine Motel. Mayor Wharton stressed that students need to take the lead in creating change and championing equality.

CSU Professor of Philosophy, History, African American, and Religious Studies Felton O. Best gave a lecture on his new book *The Significance of the Black Church in America: From Bishop Richard Allen to President Obama* on February 13. The lecture, which was also part of the Central Authors Lecture Series, was co-sponsored by the Department of Philosophy and the Religious Studies Program.

The Department of Philosophy also co-sponsored a lecture by Capital Community College Professor of Philosophy Femi Bogle-Assegai. The subject of Bogle-Assegai’s lecture was “Citizenship and Humanity: Existentialism as a Philosophical Concept Regarding African Americans.”

Professor of Political Science and African American Studies Walton Brown-Foster moderated a panel discussion on “Reflections on the Election of 2012: President Barack Obama and the Political, Historical, and Philosophical Implications of the Next Four Years.” Panelists included Associate Professor of Political Science and Chair Paul Petterson, Adjunct Lecturer of History and African American Studies Katherine Harris, Adjunct Lecturer of Philosophy and African American Studies Shawn Council, Adjunct Lecturer of Philosophy and African American Studies Stephen Balkaran, and Professor Best.

Topics discussed during the two-hour panel moderated by Brown-Foster included the legacy of policy accomplishments during President Obama’s first term and implications for the second term; the long term impact of President Obama’s elections and policies on the future of American elections; the presidency, and domestic and foreign policy; President Obama’s use of the powers of the executive office, specifically the executive order in comparison to former US presidents; and the impact of the Obama presidency on the politics of race in the US.

At the end of the month, The Africana Center hosted its 10th annual Amistad Lecture and banquet. The lecture commemorates the historical events surrounding the *Amistad*, a Spanish ship that transported illegally-purchased African slaves from Sierra Leone to Cuba and then from Cuba to Long Island, New York. During the voyage, the slaves formed a rebellion, killing the captain and forcing the slavers to sail back to Africa. The ship sailed to New York instead where the slaves were incarcerated and tried for murder and piracy. Former US President John Quincy Adams represented them during their trial, and the US Supreme Court ruled that they were free men in 1841.

The Africana Center sponsored its first lecture in November 2003 and now holds the lecture in February as part of Black History Month.

This year, Professor of Social Studies at the University of Central Lancashire Alfred Babatunde Zack-Williams gave the keynote address entitled “Contemporary Africa and the Spirit of Amistad.”

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Associate Director of the Wellesley Centers for Women Peggy McIntosh lectured on her famous essay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” on February 28. She spoke to the audience of faculty and students about key points of her essay. Audience members then paired up to discuss topics such as earned and unearned privileges, and the inequalities between races, sexes, classes, and genders.

Also on February 28, Adjunct Lecturer Council spoke on “Atlantic Creoles: How Enslaved Africans Built New York City.”

Black History Month concluded with an event sponsored by the Minority Advancement & Retention in Higher Education committee. During the discussion, CCSU professors gave personal testimonies of their successes in undergraduate programs as persons of color and guest speakers discussed the process of going to graduate school and attaining a graduate degree. Speakers included Professor Best, Professor of Psychological Sciences Daphne Bruno, Social Worker Firmena Bruno, and Associate Director of Recruitment and Admissions Pat Gardner.

– Jackie Ferris

Global Environmental Sustainability Symposium Focuses on Transportation and Human Mobility

CCSU recently hosted the sixth annual Global Environmental Sustainability Symposium. This year’s theme was “Transportation, Human Mobility, and Sustainability.” Founder and chair, Associate Professor of Geography Charles Button, along with President Miller, opened the symposium with a welcoming address. CCSU alumnus and Professor of International Affairs at Penn State University John Kelmelis gave the keynote speech titled “Transportation, Migration, and Sustainability in Four Worlds,” looking at four hypothetical scenarios from the US National Intelligence Council. This was followed by a panel discussion on electric cars, alternative vehicles, and the issues they face going forward as a viable substitute for vehicles that run on fossil fuel.

Transportation and pedestrian dynamics were discussed, including new transportation initiatives that have been implemented to improve human mobility on and around campus. One such initiative is a new web resource for transportation information on Central’s website.

The event featured a performance by the Sonia Plumb Dance Company called “Water Wars,” that explored the human relationship to water both spiritually and physically, as well as a tour of the new Social Sciences Hall, which was designed to meet the Connecticut High Performance Building requirements and achieve LEED® Silver certification in sustainability, with the possibility to achieve Gold certification, pending a third-party review of the facility.

A presentation titled “Tracing the Evolution of Sustainability at the Four Connecticut State Universities” looked at how sustainability has been and is currently being implemented at the four CSU campuses, and another presentation introduced the rapid transit system in central Connecticut and discussed how communities can create walkable, sustainable environments.

The symposium concluded with an illustrated poster session, eco-fair, and reception featuring research posters presented by students and academics, followed by a town hall-style question and answer session with Button discussing CCSU and State of Connecticut transportation initiatives and policies.

The symposium was presented by the CCSU Global Environmental Sustainability Action Coalition.
Michael Davis

“I owe most everything I have now in my life to Dr. Davis and the BMS department. Coming to CCSU was one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life.”

Davis, who joined CCSU 15 years ago, explains that at many research universities, only a few graduate students get to conduct actual experiments with research scientists. Students work in laboratories full-time, become productive, trained scientists, and move projects along quickly.

By contrast, he says, “Here our students go to class and may hold down outside jobs, so they put in 3-10 hours a week in the lab. The emphasis is on scientific training and education.”

He mentors about 20 upper-level biomolecular sciences majors each semester, and many of these students continue to do research with him for multiple semesters. He supervises small groups of two to four students and meets with them at least weekly for lengthy discussions.

Laboratory experiences enhance the skills learned in Davis’ courses and help students gain part-time employment during college and career path training that serve them well upon graduation. Davis has received 14 research grants totaling over $250,000 for his lab. Some 150 students have done research.

This year, about a dozen students contributed four different presentations at the 2013 Eastern College Science Conference, which draws undergraduate researchers from 20 schools in the northeast. One of the students, Jessica Strein, is a senior biomolecular science major planning to work in a research lab after gaining a PhD. She worked on the bio-remediation of soil using natural bacteria project. “We isolate different bacteria that naturally live in different kinds of soil and determine if they can survive solely on gasoline,” she explained. “I explored how already isolated bacteria worked alone and together on decontaminating gasoline-contaminated soil.”

Strein described Davis, her advisor for four years: “He is always available for consultation on projects, coursework, or personal issues that his students may have. He is always welcoming and is able to teach people not to make the same mistake again without being condescending or frustrating.”

Jason McCormick relates how working with Davis set a life-path for him. After graduating from Manchester Community College, he lacked direction for future goals. Invited to observe Davis in action, McCormick remembers, “Within five minutes of entering the lab, Dr. Davis had me performing a real experiment—of the sort I had never done before. He was explaining fascinating things about bacteria to me. His enthusiasm was infectious, and his ability to convey his vast amount of knowledge to someone just entering his lab was incredible. It took less than 20 minutes for me to decide that I was going to come to CCSU and get my degree from the BMS department, and I was going to work in Dr. Davis’ lab.”

He ended up being Davis’ lab technician for three years, then one of the department’s graduate assistants. During three summers, he was a mentor in Davis’ lab for the High School Research Apprenticeship Program and helped in the Partnerships in Science program. He worked on a hefty project involving CRISPR, which stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats. “This is a type of bacterial ‘adaptive’ immune system, which senses exogenous genetic material,” he states.

Today McCormick teaches microbiology at Capital Community College and still “talks shop” with Davis. “I owe most everything I have now in my life to Dr. Davis and the BMS department. Coming to CCSU that May afternoon was one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life.”

No wonder then, that Davis was honored with the 2006-07 Excellence in Teaching Award for dedicated teaching and his expertise in microbiology and in bacterial genetics.

Davis has received 14 research grants totaling over $250,000 for his lab. Some 150 students have done research.

Students, Davis asserts, are his main source of pride. He harkens back to his own undergraduate days at the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned a bachelor’s in bacteriology and immunology. “I remember Prof. Jeremy Thorner, a microbiologist, asking me point blank with whom I would be doing independent research and what I would do after graduation,” he chuckles. “I stopped in my tracks. I hadn’t given those questions a thought.”

Davis went on to do research with Thorner, his subsequent mentor. “I like to think I’m passing on the baton that Thorner handed me, whenever I do ‘guerrilla advising’ and go out of my way to approach students directly with those same questions.”

Daily, Davis passes the baton along to his students. It shines with knowledge to foster keen scientific observation and curiosity so that they may find new and wonderful discoveries along their way.

– Geri Radacsi
Elevator Pitch Highlights Students’ Entrepreneurial Skills

In March, CCSU hosted its 11th Elevator Pitch Competition. The event, run by Professor of Management and Organization Drew Harris, gave 35 students the opportunity to pitch their entrepreneurial business ideas to a panel of judges that included lawyers, business professionals, and alumni, all in 60 seconds or less. An audience of approximately 60 fellow students, family, and friends gathered to listen to pitches for ideas such as healthy fast food and a new take on power-generating windmills. It was a close competition, as the judges conceded that at least half a dozen entries were deserving of winning.

The judges selected three winners. Amanda Pizzoferrato, a dual marketing and management/entrepreneurship major, won the Personal Venture Award for her concept—a techno-gym for kids that combines tech-entertainment tools with a gym designed to encourage exercise and a healthier lifestyle for children and their parents. Kevin Devery, a dual history and English major, won the Scalable Venture Prize for his pitch of a Piezo energy-capture system that would recharge smart phones and other portable electronic devices using the natural movement of the device holder. Rob McGrath, a management/entrepreneurship major, won the Judges’ Discretionary Prize for his pitch of a smart phone app that would allow moviegoers to play competitive games against one another while waiting for the movie to begin. The winners took home a total of $500 in prizes from event sponsor Shipman & Goodwin, LLP.

“I believe the competition has improved student engagement in our entrepreneurship courses, increased enrollment in these courses, and raised the awareness and the profile of our program across campus,” stated Harris. He congratulated the winners and all those who participated and encourages all Central students “to explore the entrepreneurial concept of creating value through novel combinations of resources and opportunities.”

– Nicholas Irving

Central Hosts World-Renowned Topology Conference

CCSU hosted the 47th annual Spring Topology and Dynamics Conference in March. Since its inception in 1967, the conference has been one of the most important and well-attended topology conferences in the world, regularly attracting top professionals from the fields of topology and dynamics.

The goals of the conference are to advance the knowledge and understanding of the fields through the communication of recent research results to a broad and international audience. In particular, the conference encourages participation from underrepresented groups from around the world.

Members of CCSU’s Department of Mathematical Sciences served on the local organizing committee. They included Professor Ivan Gotchev, who served as Chair, Professor Charles Waiveris, Professor Luis Recoder-Nunez, Assistant Professor Roger Vogeler, and Adjunct Lecturer Frank Gould.

Students Take Master Classes During Dance Residency

In February, the CCSU Dance Program and Dancentral sponsored a three-day workshop for Central students with four senior dancers from the New York based Elisa Monte Dance Company (EMDC).

Approximately 30 students attended the free master classes which offered modern dance technique, partnering, ballet, and repertory instruction. Select participants were invited to learn a piece from the EMDC repertoire. In April, EMDC Associate Director Tiffany Rea-Fisher returned to campus to coach the Dancentral dancers for their performance on April 25th.

At right, professional and student dancers gather around director of the CCSU Dance Program Catherine Fellows (center, in pink).
CCSU IN THE COMMUNITY

Students Learn More than Building Skills with Habitat for Humanity

Internationally renowned for their work, Habitat for Humanity has been an inspiring leader in the mission to help the less fortunate build out of poverty. At CCSU, the Habitat Club embodies that same mission with more than 90 students dedicated to exposing poverty and working to alleviate it.

The CCSU chapter abides by the four pillars of the Habitat Collegiate Challenge: building, fundraising, advocating, and educating. Bi-weekly meetings allow students to plan fundraising events and future builds. Senior and president of the chapter Korinn Taylor says, “Habitat changes your outlook on life. It gives you a whole new light to things. You learn to work from the ground up, literally.”

During this year’s Spring Break mission in March, Taylor and 11 club members, including sophomore nursing major Myca Lacerna, traveled to Vero Beach, Florida, to participate in a build with other college chapters.

“The trip was absolutely amazing,” Lacerna reports. “It made me a better person. It opened my eyes to a different and simple way I could give back to the community.”

Lacerna joined Habitat as a freshman, and attended the trip last year as well. “I learned some basic skills like hammering and drilling wood,” Lacerna says. “But meeting and getting close to students from Central and other schools was half the fun.”

The chapter’s hands-on work reaches out to local communities as well. Sometimes, the club works in conjunction with other local chapters and other times they work independently. Despite these build-to-build changes, the mission stays the same.

As a CCSU club, the Habitat chapter receives a base budget from the student government. The club generates additional funds through bake sales, promotions, and the annual Undie Run, which Taylor is proud to call one of her best achievements as president. This annual event invites students to gather in the Student Center Circle and shed their outer clothing before running around campus in the spirit of charity. Taylor reports that last year, more than 700 articles of clothing were collected and donated to local shelters.

To help educate fellow students about poverty, the club has developed a hands-on approach. The annual Cardboard Campout is a fun and educational opportunity for students to experience a night away from the comforts of their beds. Given just a cardboard box and some duct tape, participants build their own “home” and spend the night on Vance Lawn.

Lacerna shared a lesson she took away from this year’s trip. “I’m so caught up with stress that I forgot there are people who have it way worse than me. This trip reminded me to appreciate what I have and to help others in any way I can.”

Habitat makes a lasting impression on volunteers, says Taylor. “It’s an experience you feel connected to.”

Building, Fundraising, Advocating, Educating. The CCSU chapter of Habitat for Humanity is a club committed to benefitting others. Their efforts take them across the campus, the city, the state, and the nation, giving students an opportunity to travel and experience the world through service work. Whether it’s a bi-weekly meeting or a Spring Break mission, an Undie Run or a local build, dedicated students are living the Habitat mission here at CCSU.

– Ian Mangione

Honor Society Organizes Book Drive to Benefit Local School

The CCSU chapter of the Golden Key International Honour Society held its annual book drive this spring, collecting almost 100 books, which will be donated to Holmes Elementary School in New Britain. The group, which is an honor society for education majors, also held a social event on the last evening of the drive and encouraged attendees to donate a book. At left, honor society officers Jade Cogswell and Katie Reyes with some of the many donated books.
Second Toiletry Drive a Success
The Criminology and Criminal Justice Department held its second toiletry drive, collecting products to put together more than 100 “Healthy Packs” for male and female offenders. The packs contained toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorant, soap, and various other hygienic products. Graduate Assistant Nicole Grimaldi organized the drive and students put the packs together. Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice Susan Koski said, “Research supports that these types of activities help students understand the issues facing this population, and these initiatives aid in forming a collaborative connection between offender and their community.”

The Circle, an Early Stages production that addresses themes of bullying and peer pressure using movement, puppetry, and original dialogue, debuted at the Black Box Theatre in February. Directed by senior Angelica Badillo, the play then toured local schools to help educate students on these topics.

Empty Bowl Fundraiser Helps New Britain Homeless
CCSU students and faculty organized the first “Night for the Children” event in April. Also called the “Empty Bowl” fundraiser, the evening was a creative approach to raising money to help alleviate homelessness in New Britain.

Assistant Director of Continuing Education Hannah Hurwitz and students from Associate Professor of Management and Organization Sarah Stookey’s classes helped to organize the event, which was held at Trinity-on-Main in New Britain. Professor of Art Vicente Garcia, CCSU students, and students from New Britain’s Vance Elementary School, as well as artisan Lauren DeMaio created more than 300 ceramic bowls for the event. Attendees chose one of the handmade bowls, which was then filled with soup or chili.

Entertainment was provided by The Al Fenton Big Band, and raffles and auctions rounded out the fundraising efforts. The event raised more than $5,000, which benefitted the Mayor’s Workplan to End Homelessness.

At right, Professor of Art Vicente Garcia (third from the left) and his students sculpt ceramic bowls for the “Night for the Children” event, which helped to raise awareness about and money for the homeless population of New Britain.

The Naylor/CCSU Leadership Academy in Hartford held its fifth annual Family Health and Fitness Fair in April to promote a healthy lifestyle. The fair is a collaboration between many departments on the CCSU campus, as well as Naylor students, faculty members, and the community.

CCSU’s Department of Nursing and Community Central sponsored a screening of the movie Rare at Smalley Academy in New Britain. The film, which was produced and directed by Maren Grainger-Monsen and Nicole Newnham of the Stanford University Center for Biomedical Ethics, documents a mother’s quest to treat her daughter’s rare genetic disease.
Like so many people, Judy Young has a “bucket list.” One of her first items: Swim laps without stopping to catch her breath, so that one day she could teach her grandson Remington to swim.

Her friend, CCSU’s chief administrative officer Richard Bachoo, put her in touch with Bill Ball, women’s head swimming and diving coach. Ball remarks, “Right from the start I was impressed by her determination. That kind of stick-to-it-iveness has to explain her success” as an owner of six McDonald’s restaurants.

At first, Young, 60, was tentative in deep water. She’d run several half marathons and had taken water survival training in the Marine Corps, where she rose to the rank of captain. But she’d never been able to swim more than one lap without becoming short of breath.

She thrived under Ball’s “kindly personality” as he encouraged her to find that comfort level when muscles relax. From shallow water swimming, to using fins for more laps, then shedding that aid, Young was amazed: “What I thought would be a one-hour training session turned into a year-long lesson. With excellent coaching from Bill, I went from not being able to swim one lap to swimming 60 laps in one hour.”

This achievement touched Young so deeply that she decided to endow a CCSU women’s swimming scholarship. The Remington Young Scholarship is to be given to a women’s swimmer who displays dedication, leadership, community involvement, and academic success.

Christine Smith, a senior in the nursing program, became the first scholarship recipient in April. Ball says, “Her drive and determination reminded me of Judy.”

For Young, “making a donation to others has a long term impact; spending that money on material goods is a short-term fleeting joy. The scholarship is in Remington’s name so that he will be reminded that he also has an obligation to help others, and this initial scholarship will give him a head start in recognizing his obligations.”

Professionally, Young is a straightforward, responsible entrepreneur, who holds a master’s in management from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She was vice president of consumer marketing at AT&T for nine years and assistant vice president of finance at Citibank for four. As a McDonald’s franchise owner, Young declares, “I develop leaders to effectively manage a profitable organization of 300 employees dedicated to meeting profitability and operational goals while satisfying customer needs.”

Always a “careful saver” with a good credit rating, Young purchased her first McDonald’s franchise in the Bronx in 1992. She bought three more in three years, then sold them and purchased six franchises in Connecticut.

Today, Young is in charge of strategy, finance, and business planning, while her daughter Aneka, who holds an MBA from the University of Hartford, has run day-to-day operations for the past 10 years. “I didn’t get into business until I was 40. Aneka went into business at 21,” Young notes with a mother’s pride.

Aneka shared her business expertise with CCSU students a few years ago, during an event Bachoo organized highlighting successful African American business women.

Bachoo says, “When I consider what Judy Young has accomplished in life, how she is looked upon by the community, and her generosity, she is clearly one of the most impressive individuals I have been fortunate to know. The same can also be said of her daughter, Aneka, who has participated in the University’s Black History Month celebrations. CCSU is proud and honored to have Judy and her daughter be

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Judy Young

supporters, and we look forward to a continued relationship with the Young family.”

For Young, the most satisfying aspect of owning a McDonald’s restaurant is watching the development of the people who work there. Over her 20 years in the business, she has seen many people start as crew and become restaurant managers.

“McDonald’s is an outstanding training environment, and watching the employees grow within McDonald’s, pursue their education, and buy homes is a wonderful experience,” Young says. Along with that, she faces the challenges of coordinating the operations, marketing, and personnel to run a profitable business. “It is particularly challenging to maintain low prices in an environment where our costs are continually increasing,” she observes.

Young has developed a pragmatic but compassionate outlook. “My personal philosophy is short-term sacrifice for long-term gain. In order to succeed, first you have to show up. Too many people give up before starting and many people do not start. If you want to succeed in anything, you must be willing to put in the effort. You must be willing to work just a little harder than the next person. In order to run a good business, you have to have a vision, you have to care about others who will support you in your vision; you have to want to see others succeed, you have to be financially responsible, you have to have a plan, and you have be willing to put in the effort.” Clearly, that wisdom has served Judy Young very well.

— Geri Radacsi

Musician/Novelist, Subject of CCSU English Course, Speaks to Students

Wesley Stace (a.k.a., John Wesley Harding), the subject matter of Professor of English Gilbert Gigliotti’s course, “English 214: Allusively John Wesley Harding,” spoke with students on campus about his career as a singer, songwriter, and novelist. Joining Stace (far right) on a discussion panel were (left to right) Gigliotti, chair of the Music Department Charles Menoche, student Stephanie White, and Professor of English Tom Hazuka.

Economist Speaks on Campus: “Fixing America”

Boston University Economics Professor Laurence J. Kotlikoff (right) presented the lecture “Fixing America” in April as part of The American Savings Foundation Endowed Chair in Banking and Finance Distinguished Lecture Series. Kotlikoff has written several books on financial reform, personal finances, taxes, and social security, and his articles have appeared in the Financial Times, Bloomberg, and Forbes, among others. He has also served as a financial consultant for international banks and major US companies, and was a senior economist with the President’s Council of Economic Advisers from 1981–82. The lecture series is sponsored by The American Savings Foundation and presented by CCSU’s School of Business.
Professor of History Jay Bergman’s recommendation, “Require Western Civilization,” was a contribution to the article, “One Hundred Great Ideas for Higher Education,” which appeared in Academic Questions, a publication of the National Association of Scholars (NAS). Bergman has been a member of NAS since 1990 and serves on the board of directors.

The New Britain Herald quoted Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice Stephen Cox about the upward trend in property crimes (i.e., burglaries, larcenies, and car thefts) in some central Connecticut towns, and how the trend may be directly related to current economic conditions.

Professor of Counseling and Family Therapy Jane Fried was quoted in an article on CBS.com about security on college campuses after the Newtown tragedy. She suggested that faculty receive training on recognizing the signs of an emotionally-troubled student, and that professional threat assessment teams be hired.

Professor of Psychological Science Laura Levine was quoted in an article in the Chicago Tribune about how studying while multitasking (i.e., texting and Facebooking) can have a negative effect on students’ grades.

Assistant Professor of Economics Naranchimeg Mijid’s article, “Gender and the Credit Rationing of Small Businesses,” was featured in The Social Science Journal.

In March, Associate Professor of English Aimee Pozorski was featured in an article about Philip Roth’s 80th birthday in The New York Times. Pozorski, the president of The Philip Roth Society, presented at the conference, “Roth@80.”

Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice Raymond “Chip” Tafrate was quoted in an article on MSN.com about positive ways to manage anger. Tafrate, who is also a clinical psychologist, is the author of Anger Management for Everyone: Seven Proven Ways to Control Anger and Live a Happier Life, published in 2009.

Christa Sterling Joins CCSU as Director of Continuing Education

CCSU welcomed Christa Sterling as the Director of Continuing Education in March. Her responsibilities include creating and supervising the University’s certificate and non-credit courses.

Sterling earned her BFA from Central in 1984 and her MBA in marketing from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1995. She has marketing and sales experience with Konica Minolta, Lanier, and other companies. In her previous job, she worked with many of Connecticut’s large employers.

She is also an adjunct lecturer at Goodwin College, where she teaches computer and management courses.

In her free time, Sterling is training for the New York City Marathon. The Office of Continuing Education is located in Willard 112 and can be contacted by calling (860) 832-2276.

Fifth Annual Brian O’Connell Lecture Series, Memorial Scholarship Presented in April

This year’s Brian O’Connell Lecture was presented by Associate Dean at Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University Clinton J. Andrews. Andrews, whose lecture was titled, “Who Controls Smart Stuff,” is also a recipient of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Brian O’Connell Distinguished Service Award. Both the event and the award are named for former CCSU Professor of Computer Science and Philosophy Brian O’Connell, who passed away in 2008.

After the lecture, student Mark Smith was awarded the Brian O’Connell Scholarship, which is awarded to an undergraduate student who best exemplifies O’Connell’s intellectual passion, curiosity, and accomplishment. Smith, a computer science major, was awarded the scholarship due in part to his outstanding academic achievement. He also made news last semester for finding a security flaw in Apple software. “I had the Computer Science Department with me every step of the way,” stated Smith. “Every day the students, staff, and professors pushed me to better myself.”

New Home for the Bursar and Financial Aid Offices

The Bursar and Financial Aid Offices moved from their location in Memorial Hall over spring break. The offices are now located in Davidson 221.
Softball right fielder Kelsey Barlow broke CCSU’s home run record this season. Barlow, a senior exercise science major, hit her 21st career home run in April, breaking the previous record of 20 career home runs. By the end of April, she had increased her total to 28 career home runs.

Assistant Dean of the School of Business Sharon Braverman, Hillel Program Coordinator/Jewish Student Life Coordinator Pamela Majidy, and students Benji Miller and Michael Weiss attended the fourth annual Interfaith Hunger Seder at the Connecticut State Capitol in March to plan strategies to help feed the hungry in Connecticut.

In March, Assistant Professor of Art Education Jerry Butler led a group of Fort Worth, Texas art students and teachers in creating a cut-glass mosaic design, which was unveiled at the inaugural Magnolia Make Believe Street Festival. Butler has been involved in several community art projects encouraging students to become artists and art teachers.

The Art League of New Britain displayed the artwork of Professor of Art James Buxton in March and April. The centerpiece of the exhibit was his piece titled “In Pursuit of a Free Spirit.” Buxton was welcomed with an opening reception and gallery talk.

Juniors Krisztina Dearborn and Elizabeth Eberhardt set new CCSU women’s track and field records at the Penn Relays in Philadelphia in April. Dearborn shattered the record set in 2000 for the 5,000m run, and Eberhardt set a new record and won a bronze medal in the 3,000m steeplechase.

Adjunct Lecturer of Geography William DeGrazia coordinated the 25th annual Connecticut Geography Bee, which was held on campus this spring. Students in grades four through eight competed for a trip to the National Geography Bee in Washington, DC, in April.

History Professor Gloria Emegwali gave the keynote address at the Historical Society of Nigeria’s 57th annual Conference in October, where she was made a fellow of the historical society and a member of council. Emegwali will also contribute to the restructuring of the graduate program at Mekele University in Ethiopia and give a public lecture to the university community.

Assistant Professor of Engineering Khaled Hammad, and Associate Professor of Engineering Nidal Al-Masoud, together with University of Hartford Professor of Mechanical Engineering Ivana Milanovic, co-authored a paper titled “Characteristics of a Confined Annular Jet Flow Field,” which was presented at the 2013 American Society for Engineering Education Northeast Section Conference. Hammad also served as a technical reviewer for recent editions of Microfluidics and Nanofluidics and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronauts journals.

CCSU Professor of Communication Karen Ritzenhoff and Angela Krewani, Professor at the Institute of Media Studies at Philipps University in Marburg, Germany are organizing the international conference, “Melancholia: Imagining the End of the World.” Along with Ritzenhoff, Professor of Physics Kristine Larsen, Associate Professor of Sociology Fiona Pearson, Associate Professor of English

Katherine Sugg, Professor of Modern Languages Shizuko Tomoda, Professor of Communication Cindy White, and Assistant Professor of Design Kinga Wlodarska will attend the conference in June.

The Stanley-Whitman House in Farmington exhibited paintings by graduate student Mary Cottle Smeallie in March. Smeallie, who earns her master’s degree in art education this spring, is an art teacher/art coordinator for Berlin Public Schools.

Assistant Professor of History Matthew Specter will be Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Human Science in Vienna in the fall. During his fellowship, Specter will work on his second book, The Realists: The Making of a Transatlantic Foreign Policy Tradition. He also presented his paper, “Between Critical Theory and Basic Law: Jurgen Habermas’s Reconstruction of German Political Thought” at two recent conferences.

Graduate students from Associate Professor of English Leyla Zidani-Eroglu’s “Research in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Applied Linguistics” class recently presented their abstracts at major conferences. Dawn Hambrecht, Renee Hryniewicz, and Brad Manwaring presented at the New York State TESOL 34th annual Applied Linguistics Winter Conference at Columbia University, and Pinar Akpinar and Valerie Lofland presented at the seventh CCSU Conference of Language Teachers.

CCSU Hosts Literacy Essentials Conference

CCSU hosted the seventh annual Literacy Essentials Conference titled “Rewriting the World: Issues of Literacy, Biliteracy, and Democratic Schooling” in April. Chaired by Professor of Reading and Language Arts Jesse Turner and Adjunct Lecturer James Johnston, the conference featured distinguished keynote speakers Antonia Darder and Alan Lawrence Sitomer.

Darder is an internationally-recognized scholar, artist, poet, and activist whose work has focused on comparative studies of racism, class, gender, and society. Darder holds the Leavey Presidential Endowed Chair in Ethics and Moral Leadership in the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University, and is Professor Emerita of Educational Policy, Organization, and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Sitomer is a celebrated author of over 16 children’s and young adult fiction books, a former inner-city high school English teacher and former professor in the Graduate School of Education at Loyola Marymount University. Sitomer is a nationally renowned speaker specializing in engaging reluctant readers. He received the 2004 award for Classroom Excellence from the Southern California Teachers of English, the 2003 Teacher of the Year honor from California Literacy, and was named the 2007 Educator of the Year by Loyola Marymount University.
A vibrant woman with a quick smile and warm demeanor, Knight was the only Connecticut teacher to win the prestigious Milken Educator Award in 2013.

Knight earned her bachelor’s degree in mathematics education from CCSU in 2000, attending the university on a full basketball scholarship. Her college experience, Knight said, made her a better and wiser person.

A no-nonsense teacher, Knight set a Hartford school-system record for raising her fifth-grade students’ mastery test performance by 20 percent. She teaches at the Annie Fisher STEM Magnet School in the city’s Blue Hills neighborhood.

“I set the bar high and tell them, ‘This is what I expect you to get and nothing less.’ I tell them ‘Every time you get an F, that’s my F. And Ms. Knight doesn’t like to fail. If I have to fight you until June, I will. I don’t get Fs!’”

Her interest in her students’ success is genuine. Long after they leave her classroom, she asks to see their report cards and encourages them to strive for excellence.

“The challenge is getting the kids to value education as much as you do. I try to get them to realize you shouldn’t throw away an opportunity. Do your homework and push yourselves, and stop complaining,” Knight said. “The hardest part is showing them the value and relevance of what they do in the classroom. I want them to become problem solvers. I cringe when a child says, ‘I don’t care!’”

The Annie Fisher School is bright and welcoming and the students seem happy to be there. But like their school, many are at a crossroads. Annie Fisher sits just two miles from some of Hartford’s most exclusive West End homes. But its immediate neighbors are rows and rows of dilapidated brick apartments with bars on the windows.

Knight, a Hartford native, tells her students: ‘If I can go to college, so can you!”

She makes sure that before they leave fifth grade they have a career plan. And if that plan is sports or music, she makes sure they have a Plan B. “I tell them that jobs are scarce and that only the strong survive,” she said.

Her grandparents put a high value on education, respect, responsibility, and independence, and Knight did well academically and in sports.

As a high school student, Knight said she had one goal: the WNBA. Her high school adviser noticed that she had been a tutor, camp counselor, and had run basketball clinics. She explained to her that CCSU had one of the best programs for teachers and recommended Knight consider it. It turned out to be a great decision, Knight said.

“I tell my students if you ever get the chance, live on a college campus. I thought college life was the best thing. I loved having my classes close by and meeting different people, and the athletics. I had so much fun.”

But CCSU changed her in other ways.

“In high school, I always wanted to be the leader, to be number one, to be the one who got the most points,” said Knight who played forward and center for the Blue Devils. “But I learned that sometimes you have to take a back seat for the good of the team.

“CCSU taught me we all have roles to play. I took that with me as an educator. I’m a collaborative teacher; we each play a role on a team.”

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Tamika Knight ’00 Wins 2013 Milken Educator Award

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“CCSU taught me we all have roles to play. It really changed me,” she said. “I took that with me as an educator. I’m a collaborative teacher; we each play a role on a team. You may not be the one scoring all the points, but you’re still important!”

“The challenge is getting the kids to value education as much as you do. I try to get them to realize you shouldn’t throw away an opportunity.”

In addition to her teaching accomplishments, Knight, 35, is a mentor for new and student-teachers and a basketball coach at the Boys and Girls Club. She has also developed a pre-engineering team which made it to the state finals in its first competition.

The Milken award is unique because the Milken Family Foundation searches for outstanding teachers on its own. The award comes with a $25,000 cash prize. Knight said she hasn’t decided how or if to spend it, but she is thinking about a vacation to the Bahamas. She may even take some of her co-workers.

Bobbie Kaplowitz, CCSU’s academic coordinator for men’s and women’s basketball, was like a second mother, Knight said. She helped her with everything from scheduling classes to the social transition to college. A good listener and great adviser, Knight said Kaplowitz was always available to help.

Kaplowitz recalls Knight’s “incredible determination to reach her goals.”

“I’m so proud of her,” Kaplowitz said. “She was someone who just worked and persevered to fulfill her dreams. She’s not only become a teacher, but an excellent one!”

— Claire LaFleur Hall

NOTABLE PROGRAMS

Peace activist Miko Peled spoke on campus in March regarding The Current Situation in Israel and Palestine. Following the lecture, Peled signed copies of his memoir, The General’s Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine.

The Department of Design (Graphic/Information) hosted the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) Emerging Professionals Workshop in February, which offered advice about getting a job and staying in-demand in the creative industry. Students also took part in portfolio reviews with industry professionals.

“Freedom Writer” Manny Scott spoke on campus in March about persevering through adversity to become successful. Scott and his classmates’ experience in Erin Gruwell’s class was the basis for the movie Freedom Writers.

CCSU welcomed former NBA guard Chris Herren, who spoke to more than 350 students about his struggles with substance abuse, and his inspiring story of beating his addiction and helping others.

In April, The Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Center presented Kaleidos in Concert. The program featured world and contemporary music by Yoviana Garcia and Sayun Chang.

A panel discussion on Media and Trauma After Newtown was held in April. Hosted by Vance Chair in Journalism and Mass Communications John Dankosky, the panel included renowned journalists from the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, the Los Angeles Times, and WNPR.

The Stanislaus A. Blejwas Endowed Chair in Polish and American Studies presented The Rudewicz Musical Event in March. Adrian Sylveen gave the lecture, “Andrzej Anweiler: A History of the Man and the Artist—Introduction to His Late Orchestral Works.” Anweiler was an accomplished pianist who resided in New Britain until his death in 2009.

In March, Guggenheim fellow and award-winning poet Lisa Russ Spaar performed her newest poetry in the Marcus White Living Room. Spaar is a professor of English and creative writing at the University of Virginia, where she also directs the area program in poetry writing.

CCSU’s 19th annual Africana Studies Conference, Talking About Freedom: From Emancipation to Present, was held in March. Speakers included researcher for the Institute For Community Research Chinekwu Obidoo, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at American University Daniel Sayers, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Central Florida Rosalyn Howard, and Associate Professor of Human Communication at Arizona State University Olga Davis.

The International and Area Studies Spring Lecture series welcomed Rami Khouri in March. Khouri, who is a senior fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University and Editor-at-large of the Beirut (Lebanon) Daily Star newspaper, spoke on Understanding Arab Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions.

The Women’s Center presented Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues in Torp Theatre in February to celebrate V-Day, a global movement to bring awareness to end violence against women.

The Stanislaus A. Blejwas Endowed Chair in Polish and Polish American Studies, the Polish Institute of New York, and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw sponsored a lecture by author Agata Tuszynska on her new book, Vera Gran–The Accused. The biography documents Polish Jew Vera Gran’s singing career in Warsaw during Germany’s occupation in World War II, and her role as a possible collaborator with the Gestapo.

Retired Connecticut Supreme Court Justice Barry Schaller spoke about his new book Veterans on Trial: The Coming Court Battles Over PTSD in April. His book examines issues faced by returning veterans and their families.
ALUMNA IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Judy Willis ’71
After Life in the Fast Lane, A Time to Help Others

Judy Willis ’71 has sped along a journey from blue-collar East Hartford to glamorous heights as a corporate attorney for Mattel, Inc., as its Senior Vice President, Business Affairs. It’s been a whirlwind career—she traveled the world, met celebrities, and had experiences that many people only dream of—and she’s enjoyed it all.

Willis spent 20 years at Mattel, the last 15 as SVP. In that position, she was responsible for negotiating in-licensing deals, obtaining the rights that Mattel needed to manufacture toys using third party trademarks and copyrights. “A couple of my happiest days were when we were granted licenses for Harry Potter and for World Wrestling Entertainment. Mattel obtained the master toy license and sold many millions of dollars worth of toys.”

She describes an impressive list of accomplishments: “We licensed movies like Toy Story and Harry Potter; DC Comics action figures like Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman; and the Disney Princesses, i.e., Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, etc. We had licenses with all of the car companies for use in Hot Wheels and Matchbox. We also obtained licenses with top fashion designers including Dior, Versace, and Bob Mackie. Needless to say, these deals took me many places around the world.”

And travel she did—to Russia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Turkey, and all over Europe. In Russia, she took in the Bolshoi Ballet and the Russian Symphony, paying the equivalent of 20 cents US for a ticket. Willis remarks, “I was thrilled to be in Moscow. Russian literature was always my favorite. As a freshman at Central, I was allowed to take Russian Lit even though it was an upper-level course. That was a special time for me at Central.”

Life with the world’s largest toy company also led to brushes with stars like Jerry Seinfeld, Tom Hanks, Jamie Lee Curtis, and Cindy Crawford at celebrity fundraisers.

But even more exciting adventures came about as she negotiated Hot Wheels licensing arrangements with Ferrari, Lamborghini, and NASCAR. Driving at the Daytona International Speedway, Willis says, “I got up to an embarrassing 110 miles an hour. When Kyle Petty took me out in the drive-along car, he was doing 180 and was right on the bumper of the car in front of us. I actually thought I could die.”

After 15 years of working in licensing and trademarks, Willis declares her own trademark—optimism—an unrelenting positive attitude wrapped in a self-described Type A personality. Willis attributes her drive for success to her upbringing: “Although my parents did not have a lot of money, they always encouraged all six children to go to college.” They all did.

Three of Willis’s sisters also graduated from Central. Lynn ’69 taught for more than 35 years at Penney High School in East Hartford; Margot ’79 is currently with Travelers; and Debbie ’80 worked for the state Department of Social Services for 27 years.

“I think that Judy’s intellect, combined with a strong work ethic, has made her successful,” Debbie said. “Everyone in our family worked while attending college and that takes a lot of organization and determination. That is not an easy thing.”

After graduating with a degree in English, Willis became a social worker for six years, and then earned a law degree from Boston College.

With few opportunities available for a lawyer in social service, in 1979 she accepted a corporate position and “continued to solve problems for...”

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people” at H.P. Hood, the largest dairy in New England. She worked for Hood for four years before accepting a job with Parker Brothers, the Massachusetts game company. Five years later, she became a corporate attorney for Mattel in El Segundo, California.

As a woman in the business world, Willis broke a number of glass ceilings. When working at Parker Bros. as legal counsel, she was the only woman who attended all of the management meetings—and the only one who was not a vice president. She relates, “One day I went into the President’s office and asked why I was not a vice president even though I was working at that level. I was told on the spot that I would be promoted to VP. Sometimes it’s important to speak up and to serve as your own best advocate.”

After retiring from Mattel two years ago, she volunteers at a shelter for abused mothers and their children and she aids students at San Pedro High School, Los Angeles, to guide them with their career choices. “This year, she was instrumental in helping some undocumented students complete the Deferred Action paperwork which allows them to work legally,” said Valerie Armstrong, College Counselor at San Pedro.

Willis also volunteers at Toberman Neighborhood Center, which provides educational and social programs for youth. “I definitely get way more than I give,” said Willis, with a sparkling smile. “I love being around the kids, and I’m lucky to have these great volunteer opportunities. It doesn’t get much better than that.”

Willis’ charitable nature has extended to her alma mater, CCSU. As a consistent donor, she remarks, “It’s important for alumni to give back to their university. It is where we got our start, the place where we launched our careers.”

– Geri Radacsi

Paul Amenta ’47 Honored for Decades of Support

CCSU honored Paul S. Amenta, Sr. ’47 in April for his long-standing support of the University. Amenta, a former state senator, has played a crucial role in securing funding for several campus expansion and improvement projects, including the Elihu Burritt Library. His advocacy for the school started in the 1950s and continues to this day. At right, Amenta speaks to faculty, staff, family, and friends after being honored with a bronze plaque at the library.

Adaora Akubilo ’06 was featured in the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition for a second year in 2013. She was also in the 2012 issue.

In March, CCSU welcomed Connecticut state archaeologist Nicholas F. Bellantoni ’76 back to campus. Bellantoni gave a presentation on the life of Lakota Sioux Albert Afraid of Hawk, his death in 1900 while working as a performer with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, and his journey from an unmarked grave in Wooster Cemetery in Danbury to his reburial at the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota.

Donald M. Casey ’86 and his students at Stepney Elementary School in Monroe were awarded an educational grant to support an original project titled “Stepney Elementary School Fit Kids,” a project to promote a healthy lifestyle for children.

Mary Beth Iacobelli, SYC ’01, EdD ’10, was named East Haddam’s Superintendent of Schools in February, after serving as the interim superintendent for seven months. Previously, Iacobelli was Assistant Superintendent for the New Britain School District.

Wethersfield High School Principal Tom Moore SYC ’90, MS ’98, SC ’08, was named the 2013 CAS High School Principal of the Year for his focus on building a relationship-driven school and a “students first” approach to school leadership.

Maurice B. Mosley ’97 was recently sworn in as a State Superior Court Justice after his nomination by Governor Malloy in January.

Carmen Espinosa ’71 became the first Hispanic justice on the Connecticut Supreme Court when she was sworn in at the end of March. In her remarks during the ceremony, she credited the education she received from New Britain public schools and CCSU, and said she hoped her example would inspire young people to achieve their goals.
Networking Reception Honors Award-Winning Alumni Educators

The Department of Educational Leadership held its annual networking reception in April. The event honored many award-winning alumni, including Annie Fisher STEM Magnet School Principal Melony Brady MS ’06, SYC ’09; Education Officer of the Ministry of Education in Kingston, Jamaica Clive Bowen MS ’08; East Lyme Middle School principal Judy DeLeeuw SC ’11, EdD ’12; East Hartford High School math and science teacher Tyler Hoxley MS ’98, SYC ’11; Wethersfield High School principal Tom Moore MS ’98, SYC ’90, SC ’08; and Canton Middle School principal Joseph Scheideler SYC ’84. The keynote speech, Defending Public Education: Empowering Teachers and Leaders, was delivered by Brunswick, Maine Public Schools superintendent Paul Perzanowski BA ’74, MS ’82.