

# the meridian

THE STUDENT VOICE OF LEHMAN COLLEGE

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Bronx, New York

## The Bronx's Sole Bookstore Is Closing---Its Final Chapter

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The Bay Plaza Barnes and Noble will close at the end of this year. Photo by Rupa Tharay.

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Cover Image by Rupa Tharay

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# The Bronx's Sole Bookstore Is Closing---Its Final Chapter

By Sydney Boryga



The children's section of the Bay Plaza Barnes and Noble. Photo by Rupa Tharay.

After standing for over 15 years in the Bay Plaza shopping center, Barnes & Noble announced on Oct. 18th that it would close its doors for good, sparking outrage throughout the Bronx. The closure means that a borough with nearly 1.5 million residents will be left without a single general-interest bookstore.

Unfortunately, Bronx residents know the pain of being neglected and overlooked. “I think it’s a slap in the face to the community,” said Taina Cambrelen, a student at Lehman. “To take out our only book store and replace it with a store that people can’t even afford in an area that’s surrounded by projects and low-

income families? This just screams gentrification.”

Two years ago, when the bookstore was threatened with closure, local residents rallied to save it. Lehman graduate Amelia Zaino, 26, started an online petition and gained over 2,500 signatures in just a few days.



Zaino explained to the New York Daily News, “It was an insult to me as a Bronxite. They were taking my bookstore, and it’s not just mine; the community loves this place.”

At that time, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. managed to negotiate an extended two-year lease with Prestige Properties, the landlord of Bay Plaza, while preventing a rent increase. Diaz reasoned that securing the lease would save at least 50 jobs in a borough where unemployment is high and nearly 30 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

However, Prestige Properties announced in October that the beloved bookstore chain, which contains a Starbucks, lounge area, and junior area for younger readers, will not be offered a lease renewal

## “The Bronx is burning with a desire to read.”

— Noelle Santos,  
HR manager and  
Bronx native

after that current lease expires at the end of this year. Instead, a Saks OFF 5TH will replace the bookstore, and pay a higher price for the space. This means that Bronx residents will no longer have a gathering place to enjoy a coffee and a book, or simply find solace in the aisles.

However, not all hope is lost. Noëlle Santos, a 29-year-old HR manager and Bronx native, has been attempting to open a general bookstore/wine bar of her own, called The Lit. Bar. The theme of the bookstore will be “Bronx-related,” with “non-bookstore merchandise that includes reading and wine-related items, as well as anything appealing to women who enjoy the arts,” she stated in a Bookweb interview. Santos was inspired to open her bookstore after signing the petition to keep the Bay Plaza Barnes & Noble open back in 2014, and hopes to get rid of the negative stereotype that seems to project that Bronx residents do not care for literature. “I want to send the message that the Bronx is not burning anymore,” she said. “The Bronx is burning with a desire to read.”



The Barnes and Noble craft section. Photo by Rupa Tharay.



# Fordham Students Protest Starbucks' Ties to Prison Labor

By Eileen Sepulveda

On Sept. 9, the forty-fifth anniversary of the Attica prison uprising in which 33 prisoners and 10 correctional officers died, inmates from dozens of prisons across the country refused to report to their prison jobs. In solidarity with this strike, on Oct. 20, here in the Bronx, members of Fordham Students United demonstrated in front of the Starbucks on Fordham Road, protesting Starbucks Corporation's support of prison labor.

FSU was started by a group of Fordham University students in response to hate crimes, and is working to create conversations about social justice throughout Bronx communities.

"Last year we had an insane number of hate crimes happen on campus," states Reyna Wang, a junior majoring in environmental studies. "A swastika was drawn in a hallway. The 'N' word was written on a black student's door. The administration would respond, they would send out an email, honestly [be] very passive about it,"

she continued. "Then there would be a seminar that not a lot of people would go...and then no one would be talking about it anymore even though these issues are obviously still affecting these groups of students every day. We wanted to create a group that would be able to continue the conversation of these issues and address the concerns for the students."

When asked what motivated the group to conduct the prison labor strike protest, Megan Townsend, a junior theology and social work major, pointed to the connection between Fordham's campus food supplier, Aramark, and the exploitation of prisoners.

"As the prison strike began it was on our radar," Townsend said. "Aramark...provides all of our food on campus, and is one of the biggest exploiters of prison labor because they are also the food service provider for prisons. We wanted to do something, because no one was talking about it, so we wanted to get

students talking about it."

Alex Henderson reported on Salon.com that Philadelphia-based Aramark Corporation "brings in millions of dollars bringing food to around 600 prisons in North America." He further noted that in the year 2014, the company was fined nearly \$300,000 by the state of Michigan "for a long list of infractions, including meal shortages, unsanitary conditions---maggots found in the food, for example---and Aramark employees smuggling contraband into prisons."

This profiting at the expense of prisoners' well-being is part of a larger pattern of exploitative prison labor, which Whitney Bennis, in a Sept. 21 article in "The Atlantic," calls "American slavery reinvented."

An Oct. 31 article by Max Blau and Emanuella Grinberg on CNN.com cited inmate activists' argument that prison labor "amount[s] to modern-day servitude."

According to journalist and activist



Chris Hedges, “nearly 40 states allow private corporations to exploit prison labor.” Hedges lists AT&T, AutoZone, Bank of America, McDonald’s, Merck, Microsoft, Motorola, Pfizer, Procter & Gamble, Quaker Oats, Sarah Lee, Sears, Shell, Sprint, and Starbucks as companies currently profiting from prison labor.

Indeed, Lehman’s own food provider, Metropolitan Food Services, also offers Starbucks products.

Metropolitan, which provides food service for colleges and universities regionally in the New York Metropolitan area, including CUNY’s City College and Brooklyn College,

did not respond to requests for a comment.

In the case of Fordham’s connection to prison labor, Wang said, FSU chose to expose the recent prisoner strike because “News does influence the way we choose to act, [and] there is little to no coverage of the prison labor strike. It is our responsibility to continue these conversations or to bring conversations to light that aren’t covered by the media.”

Wang admits that the response to the protest was different on and off campus. “On campus people walked by and didn’t look at us. Fordham students are so separated from this

issue,” she said. “They don’t have to deal with it. They don’t have to be exposed to it if they don’t want to.”

When confronted by the FSU protesters, employees at the Fordham Road Starbucks said they were not aware of the company’s connections to prison labor.

Townsend says she feels “solidarity” with Bronx community members and adds that these issues affect a majority of our community members. Townsend, Wang and the rest of FSU will continue to tackle these issues because, she says, “We think it’s important for Fordham students to ally with the community around us.”



Sign at Fordham University created by FSU.



# Sherlock Holmes Hunts for Clues at Lehman

By Juan B. García



Jonny Lee Miller (Sherlock Holmes) prepares to film a scene with Jon Michael Hill (Detective Bell) and an extra wearing a cadet uniform.



Jonny Lee Miller steps on a flat wood to be on the same level as the extra.

Actor Jonny Lee Miller, who plays Sherlock Holmes in the TV show “Elementary,” jumped off the screen and onto Lehman’s campus to film scenes for an upcoming episode of the show on Sept. 26, 2016.

Actor Jon Michael Hill, who portrays Detective Marcus Bell, also made an appearance. However, actress Lucy Liu, who plays the trusted sidekick Doctor Watson in the show, did not make an appearance. The

production team for the CBS series was filming scenes for its fifth season. “Elementary” is a contemporary update of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous literary Sherlock Holmes series. In the show, his character is a recovering drug addict and former consultant to Scotland Yard who now assists the NYPD solving crimes. The TV show airs on Sundays.

“Elementary” is one of many TV shows to have filmed on Lehman’s campus. Episodes of “Law & Order,” “Louie,” and “Jessica Jones” were shot here, as were scenes from movies “Glory Road,” “The Pink Panther,” “Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna” (“Never Say Goodbye”), “Griffin and Phoenix,” and “One Last Thing.”

The “Elementary” crew filmed from about 3:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. During the shoot, extras in military uniforms crossed through the walkway between the Old Gym Building and the Music Building in one of the scenes. For the duration of this scene, Lehman students were asked to wait for a short time until the production team reopened the walkway. In another scene, Miller and Hill were talking to an extra wearing a cadet uniform while she was showing them a sniper gun.

From time to time, Miller took a



break close to the baseball field in a tent where he could be seen snacking. He was followed by his entourage most of the time. While the cameras were not rolling, he also exchanged ideas with the production crew behind the cameras. At one point, Miller engaged in a brief conversation with

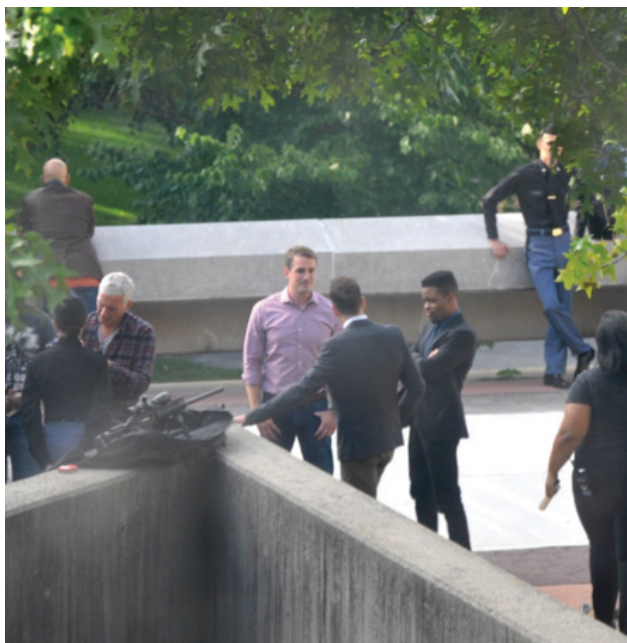
a Lehman student who approached him and shook his hand.

The episode filmed at Lehman, titled “Bang Bang Shoot Chute,” premiered on Nov. 20. In it, Sherlock and Bell search for two murderers after a base jumper is shot out of the sky by a

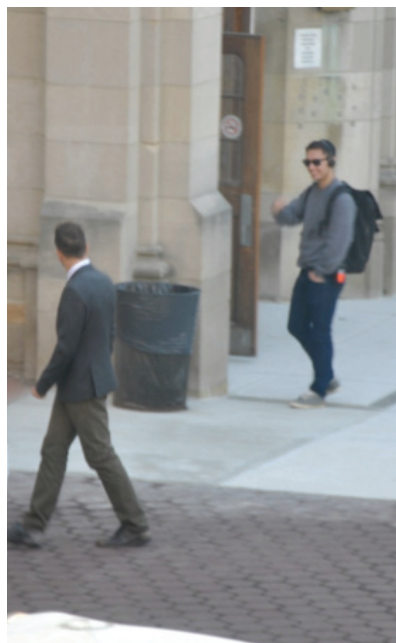
sniper. One of the suspects is a female cadet. Lehman served as a backdrop to give the viewers the illusion that Sherlock and Bell were interrogating her at The United States Military Academy at West Point.



An aerial view of the production team from “Elementary” that is having a quick break before starting to shoot again. To the left, extras wearing cadet uniforms prepare themselves to shoot a scene. In the middle of the walkway, light panels close to the camera operator.



In the middle, Jonny Lee Miller and Jon Michael Hill engaged in conversation. To the right, makeup artists approach the actors. In the back to the right, extras wait to start filming again.



Jonny Lee Miller says goodbye to a Lehman student whom he had a nice chat with. The student wears black shades and carries a backpack.



Jonny Lee Miller talks to a member of the production team while the crew is having a quick break.



# Throwback Movie Picks for this Holiday Season

By Shivani Boodhoo

The holiday season is a time of celebration and enjoyment that brings a sense of nostalgia for Lehman students as they remember holiday traditions and moments with their families. For many, winter break is a time to relax and have fun like a kid again by watching movies that remind them of childhood. The Meridian asked six Lehman students for their perennial holiday favorites.

Jenny Truong, a junior and biology major said, “‘Olive, the Other Reindeer,’ the plot is funny and the title is a pun. It’s great.”

Annabelle Ventura, a junior and English major said, “I like watching ‘The Nightmare Before Christmas’ around Halloween and Christmas! It’s a movie for all ages. It’s funny, cute, and it’s different than most holiday movies. The soundtrack is also pretty noteworthy! Songs have been covered by a bunch of artists.”

Adrianna Matthew, senior, art history major, and member of Lehman’s Bollywood Dance Club said, “‘The Family Stone’ is a movie about a family that’s completely messed up and they all mess with each other. It makes you feel good though because it is so real. Their family could be my family. They come together in the end and it’s all good.”

Ashley Tejada, junior and business administration major said, “‘Home Alone,’ the poor kid is left behind, but then he becomes the man of the house and it’s crazy and funny. I love the storyline.”



Source: Flickr "s\_herman"

Home Alone (1990) is a popular holiday favorite amongst Lehman students.

Mariah Dwyer, junior and English major said, “‘The Nightmare Before Christmas,’ I’ve been watching it since I was little and it reminds me of my childhood. Also, it combines my favorite holidays--- Halloween and Christmas.”

Wallace Ramirez, a senior and computer graphics and imaging major said,

“Twenty-four hours of ‘A Christmas Story,’ it shows every year and has become a tradition to watch.”

Whatever movie you choose, remember that holidays are the best time for curling up on the sofa with a good movie. It seems that Lehman students have this routine down pat.



# Why Many Graduating Seniors Skip Commencement

By Abrian De Luna



Lehman's 2016 commencement ceremony was held outside on the campus's sports field.

Graduation marks a major accomplishment, but the commencement ceremony itself may not be as important to many Lehman students. While some attend out of a sense of personal accomplishment, others find that work and financial obligations outweigh academic formalities. As seniors look forward to completing their majors, the Meridian set out to discover students' reasons for joining the celebration---or passing it over.

Many of those who choose to go see the ceremony as a way to send off their college experience.

Senior Accounting major Kayra Santos will graduate next spring and plans on attending the ceremony because

graduation means she has achieved one of her most desired goals.

"Since my high school years," she said, "I used to imagine going to college and pursuing a superior education degree to have more opportunities to grow in the personal and professional areas... I am proud to say that I will be the first one in my family to complete a college degree."

**"I care more about the diploma than the ceremony as long as I graduate."**

**- Madeleine Wechsler,  
Lehman senior**

Santos views the ceremony as the "highest point" of seeing her dream come true to after a period of "many sacrifices, hard work and sleepless nights."

Alicia Cruz, who will graduate next spring as well, is set on coming to the commencement ceremony, and said that the graduation is "her accomplishment." Bobur Murtozaev, also graduating in the spring, said he plans to attend commencement "just to celebrate the occasion."

For those students who choose not to attend the ceremony, work is one of the biggest factors that dissuades them. In the U.S., in the last 25 years, according to a new study from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce,

more than 70 percent of students worked while attending school. Within the CUNY system, the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment reported that last fall, the total of undergraduate students who also worked for more than 20 hours a week for pay among CUNY's senior and community colleges was 30.2 percent. Overall, Lehman students with pressing work commitments see the commencement as unnecessary.

Alumnus Michael Lau is one of them. He did not attend this past graduation.

"First, I hadn't ordered my cap and gown," he said. "Second, there was work going on that day. Work is more important. No matter what, I had my diploma at that point. Graduation means

you can finally look back on all the work you did since entering the college's campus, to look back and be proud." To Lau, the accomplishment itself is what matters.

Dennis Curtin, who will graduate next year, has also decided not to attend commencement. "I'm always working and I don't like public affairs," says Curtin. "I like to celebrate in private."

Madeleine Wechsler who will graduate next year also does not want to go to commencement, as she feels there is no point in celebrating without her friends, leaving her feeling out of place. She said, "I'm not going because I don't feel like I'm the same age as the people graduating. I should've graduated years

ago and I don't want my family going. Plus, I don't have friends who are going. I feel like it took too long to graduate and get my priorities straight. I wanted to share the moment with my friends. I care more about the diploma than the ceremony as long as I graduate."

While many have made up their minds, some students are still unsure at this point whether to attend the commencement ceremony or not. Ivan Ramos is one Lehman senior who is unsure of what to do.

"I'll probably attend," he said, "but won't wear the cap and gown. I just want to get my diploma and get out but you don't know what you're gonna do until you do it."

# Lehman Students Chase New Year's Resolutions

By Juan B. García

As each New Year's Eve approaches, the commotion across Greater New York intensifies. Stores are crowded. Along with the miles of holiday lights, a celebratory sense of new beginnings hangs in the air. For Lehman students, too, New Year's Eve marks the turning of a page and the start of a new and better chapter in their lives.

"To me New Year's Eve is more like a new start of a year," said Sabab Muhtasim Sawonto, 21. The Lehman sophomore, who is pursuing a major in computer information systems, said that for him, New Year's Eve is just like another day and not transformative.

Sawonto is from Bangladesh but has been living in the Bronx since 2014. He says he has always celebrated New Year's Eve, but how he celebrates has changed with his location. In Bangladesh, he and his friends or family would celebrate by

having a barbecue, staying up until 1:00 or 2:00 a.m., lighting fireworks, having a little party and enjoying themselves. Last year, he celebrated New Year's Eve in Times Square.

"It was a new experience," he said. Here in the Bronx, however, Sawonto has been celebrating New Year's Eve with friends more than with his parents because they come home too tired from

**"It's a way for you to get out of your routine world, and think about what you want to do in the future."**

- Marco Luna, 20, junior and political science major

work. Some years he has celebrated at home because he too was tired from work; calling a friend or two, browsing through social media, and deciding on some new hobbies or goals.

During New Year's Eve, Sawonto sets one or two goals for himself. One of his goals for 2017 is to finish writing a book he's been working on for quite some time, about a guy who suffers from a major depressive disorder.

"I want to portray how people with major depressive disorders see the world," said Sawonto. "I lost a couple of friends because they suffered from depression. They could not find anyone to talk about [their depression with]."

Although Sawonto makes an effort to write a little bit every day---that was last year's resolution---he admits that he has not finished his book due to laziness,



which leads to procrastination. As soon as he realizes he's procrastinating, he reminds himself that he made a promise that he would change or accomplish something within a certain amount of time.

Unlike Sawonto, Marco Luna, 20, a junior and political science major, sees New Year's Eve as a time to get close to the cozy warmth of home. On New Year's Eve, he visits with family, everyone brings food, and they wait for midnight to come.

"It's a tradition. It's a time for family to come together, [and] be there for each other," he said.

Like Sawonto, Luna made resolutions last New Year's Eve.

"About my relationship, my school life, where I was planning to go with my major, and basically, my health," said Luna. He kept the ones about school, changing his major to political science because he likes politics more than engineering and hopes to become an

immigration lawyer.

On the other hand, he did not keep his resolution to go to the gym to work out regularly.

Sometimes, he said, "People don't really want to change. They say they want a change but don't do it." Despite not keeping his exercise resolution, he explains it is important to have resolutions "because you've got to start somewhere. It's a way for you to get out of your routine world, and think about what you want to do in the future."

His views echo a 2002 study about goal progress funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada that says that New Year's resolutions "represent self-change attempts in which individuals develop personal goals to improve themselves or their lives." According to this study, the reasons people fail to keep their goals is due to failing to develop specific action plans, failing to set goals that reflect their interests and piling too many goals.

However, it found that "Goal setters optimize their progress when they align their goals with personal interests and values and buttress their goals with specific plans that allow them to automatize their goal-directed behavior." These findings suggest that although Sawonto and Luna have not achieved some goals, they are likely to accomplish those that focus on goals they like.

Luna has been working as a waiter for two years and one of his resolutions for 2017 is to have a better job. He would like to work in an office, preferably for his congressman.

"I probably can achieve it by making some connections and trying to volunteer for my congressman or my district leader and getting to know them," he said.

As 2017 approaches, Luna and Sawonto are again looking for new beginnings in their lives. Despite setbacks, they still make resolutions and have their own way of keeping them---by not giving up.



Collage representing walking around a New York neighborhood and hearing the voices of Luna and Sawonto.

# Urban Farming Bears Fruit in the Bronx

By Fatah Campbell

In many Bronx neighborhoods there are lots of opportunities to buy junk food at corner stores but not a lot of places to buy fresh fruits and vegetables not sprayed with pesticides. These are known as food deserts. But now, thanks to a movement that began to take root in the nineties, urban farming is spreading across the borough, and many unused lots, rooftops and walled gardens have evolved into productive gardens providing organic

fruits, vegetables, herbs and edible flowers for healthy eating.

According to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, by 2013 the New York City Housing Authority's Gardening and Greening Program had "helped to establish 645 gardens in housing developments, of which 254 grow vegetables." Many of these gardens' names reflect their optimism: Wishing Well Garden, Padre Plaza Success Garden, Morning Glory Community

Garden, Garden of Happiness, New Roots Community Farm, Latinos Unidos, and Libertad Urban Farm to name a few. Collectively, they provide healthier, pesticide-free food to underserved communities that can be sold on a large scale.

These markets include the South Bronx Farmer's Market, which sells local fresh produce to residents of the surrounding underserved community. It was created with the help of La Finca Del Sur, or "Farm of the



Bissel Gardens. Photo by Fatah Campbell.



South” in Spanish, a cooperative farming nonprofit started by a group of Latina and black women in the Bronx on 138th Street in 2009. The name is a tribute to all the southern regions of the world and to the South Bronx, and its founders’ goal is to express economic empowerment and to stand for social equity.

Near Tremont and Arthur avenues, La Familia Verde Farmer’s Market runs from July through November, offering produce from La Familia Verde Coalition Garden, a community organized garden co-founded by Karen Washington 25 years ago. Amish farmers also set up in the Bronx neighborhood of Mosholu Parkway and Jerome Avenue

every Wednesday from dusk until dawn, selling greens, fruit, gourds, and herbs, as well as bread, honey, pies, and apple cider. Montefiore Hospital on East 210th Street and Rochambeau Avenue also holds a farmer’s market on their grounds every Thursday. On Saturdays, a woman sells large fresh yams; local residents around Mosholu Parkway and Jerome Avenue call her “the yam lady.”

Finally, there is Bissel Gardens, a collaboration of volunteers to give gardens to the surrounding community. In 1994, it was a city-owned abandoned lot until Teresa LeCount, with the help of Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer

and volunteers, started the long and arduous work of cleaning the area. It is now eight blocks’ worth of urban farming. The crops are grown to sell at the Market at Bissel. The colorful produce varies from eggplants, tomatoes, and red cabbage to green peppers, cucumbers, and squash.

Workers are eager to sell to the residents of the community. It is open from July to mid-November on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

“Bissel Gardens focuses on educational programs a lot,” said Mr. Paul Kittas, a community gardener and one of teachers in their educational program.



The Market at Bissel. Photo by Merlena Campbell.



Volunteers assisting the Girl Scouts of the USA . Photo by Fatah Campbell.



Along the path to Bissel Gardens. Photo by Fatah Campbell.



# Tennis Star Breakout Season Leads to Historic Award

By Ashley Francis

Despite losing to the defending champions of Baruch, the Lehman women's tennis program had a historic season, in large part due to the play of senior Sacha Espiritu. As the team finished off the regular season 13-1, Espiritu was named CUNYAC Player of the Year in Women's Tennis. This is the first time in Lehman history that a female player has been honored in the sport.

Despite being a fantastic athlete now, reaching that goal wasn't an easy path for Espiritu. Growing up, she moved back and forth between New York and the Dominican Republic, a change of living environments that caused a lack of stability and rooted friendships. Nevertheless, she always had a strong athletic background. Her father was a major influence in her athletic development, as he encouraged his children to play sports. His character and determination are in her DNA, and his presence helped her stay balanced through the changes she faced.

When Espiritu reached the eighth grade, she was supposed to stay in the U.S. for two years, but family issues intervened. Instead, she moved to the



Espiritu playing tennis.

Dominican Republic and completed her first three years of high school while living with her grandparents. In the DR she improved her tennis skills as her grandfather took her to play in tournaments. By the time she moved back to the U.S. for her senior year, playing tennis at Abraham Lincoln High School in the Bronx, she had become a more dynamic player.

But in college she met more obstacles. In her junior year at Lehman, she became a mother and wasn't sure if she could continue to play on the team. She felt her chances had dimmed as she was now facing the responsibility of raising her newborn child.

In the 2015 season, she only played one match. "I didn't want to play no more...I was adapting," said Espiritu.

"I was going back to school, and working so it was my first time doing everything at once."

But with her senior year approaching, she was determined to play a full season. The support of her boss, teammates, and family helped her pursue her goal.

Her dream didn't fail her as she produced strong outings in the regular season against Brooklyn College, Baruch, and The College of New Rochelle. In the Conference, she was undefeated in singles and 3-1 in doubles. As a teammate, she was very strong too. As a duo, she and Rookie of the Year Lizaveta Marakouskaya finished 7-2. "Her commitment and play hard mentality inspired has inspired teammates," said her coach, Ana Belzunce.

Espiritu is completing her B.A. in accounting and looks to further her education in the near future. She still looks to her father's strength as a model. "Whatever is thrown at him, he just takes it and makes the best out of it," she explains. With the same attitude, Espiritu is definitely on her way.

# Lehman Student Associations Host Cultural Awareness Meeting

By Juan Rodriguez



Amanda Monet discusses the nuances of cultural appropriation.

Members of Lehman's Muslim Student Association, South Asian Student Association at Lehman College, and African & Caribbean Student Association came together on Nov. 2 to host "Cultural Awareness: Hate Crime" at the Lehman Underground Lounge. According to Ala Rashed, president of the Muslim Student Association, "These clubs got together and decided we should use our sphere of influence to get people to discuss problems faced by minority cultures in this country." The student-run

organizations discussed several issues vital to many Lehman students: the Black Lives Matter Movement, immigration as it relates to the current election, and the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Burma.

Discussions were lively but cordial. Student leaders from each of the attending organizations fielded questions and guided conversations, which were also open to non-Lehman-affiliated students. On the subject of black cultural appropriation, one participant offered

her perspective. "I don't think there's anything wrong with honoring a culture through imitation. That's okay, but true cultural appropriation is when you popularize some aspects of a culture while marginalizing its people. Our culture is accepted, but we are not. That's a real problem." Her point was generally well received, but another student added, "We can't confuse honoring a culture with capitalizing off it." As conversations continued in the same vein, every student in attendance was encouraged to participate.

Amanda Monet, president of the African & Caribbean Student Association, explained why the event was held in such an informal format. "I thought, let's do it in the form of a roundtable because we want to hear what the students have to say. I feel like the majority of the time, there's always a professor, or somebody with a Master's degree kind of talking down to you." Concerning her association's contribution to the event, she said she hoped to widen students' narrow perceptions of black ethnic groups. Her organization did so by discussing less well-known black ethnic groups in the Caribbean.



# Lehman's Acacia Festival Brings Christmas to Bronx Children

By Leah Liceaga



Source: Pixabay.com

An early Christmas celebration is in the works at Lehman College.

Five days before Christmas, the faculty dining room in the Lehman Music Building will be transformed into a holiday toyland for the Acacia Holiday Festival. For the third year in a row, presents collected by the Acacia Network will be wrapped by Lehman students and CUNY Service Corps members who have volunteered to help with the event, and given to children aged four to sixteen who have experienced domestic abuse. These children are chosen by the Acacia Network and brought to the college to enjoy face painting, arts and crafts and a shared meal.

According to its website, Acacia offers "world-class service to local

underserved populations, providing a wide range of programs including primary care, mental health counseling, housing, substance abuse rehabilitation, and education." It also gives housing to children and families that come from unhealthy environments such as domestic abuse situations or need help finding affordable housing.

The partnership between Lehman's Office of Community Engagement and New Student Programs and Acacia came about three years ago at the suggestion of Lehman alumni Ravi Rampersaud. Assistant Director of the Office of Community Engagement and New Student

Programs, Denny Santos, explained that the Festival has become more Bronx-focused since its first year. Instead of bringing people from all five boroughs as the office and Acacia did at the first festival, only children from the Bronx---430 of them---will attend this year.

The office is seeking student volunteers for this year's event, Santos said. "We will begin to take volunteers right after the students return from Thanksgiving break, and will be taking names right up to the day of the event." Santos explained that while the event is organized by his office and overseen by Acacia, "the volunteers make sure to facilitate the activities."

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