

May Day Protest Attempts to Spark Change (Page 3)



The Lehman May Day Protest. Photo by Anthony Vasquez.

Also in this issue...

Lehman Undergrads
Showcase Activism
through Academia

(Page 4)

Lehman Students
Want an Updated
Canon

(Page 12)

Lehman Student
Wins Prestigious
Watson Fellowship

(Page 16)



the meridian

**250 Bedford Park Boulevard West
Student Life Building Room 108
Bronx, NY 10468**

Questions? Comments? Write us at...

lehmanmeridian@gmail.com

BUILD YOUR PORTFOLIO WITH US

Be part of our team of reporters, writers, photographers, videographers and artists. Send your sample writing, photography, and/or art to our email, or come find us in our office at the Student Life Building Room 108

the staff

Ayesha Depay
Editor in Chief

Zoe Fanzo
Print Production Editor

Margarete Rodriguez
Managing Editor

Jean Carlos Soto
Spotlight Editor

Leah Liceaga
Lifestyles Editor

Juan Vasquez
Arts and Entertainment Editor

Elissa Fanzo
Copy Editor

Ashley Sanchez
Office Manager

Jennifer MacKenzie
Faculty Advisor

Writers: Shivani Boodhoo, Mairin Cahill, Abrian De Luna, Ashley Francis, Keidy Gómez, Leonel Henriquez, Melanie I. Hernandez, Zayna Palmer, Jarol Rivera-Diaz, Margarete Rodriguez, Eileen Sepulveda, Jean Carlos Soto, Juan Vasquez

Correction to "Lehman Student Assaulted and Staff Member Robbed" by Juan Garcia in the November 2016 issue: The perpetrators were incorrectly described as being in possession of a gun. They were in fact three students from Walton High School, and did not have a gun.

GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The Meridian reserves the right to edit articles and letters as the editor(s) see fit. The views expressed in editorials are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Meridian staff. Ads published both in print and online do not reflect the views or opinions of the Meridian staff. The message or product being sold in the ad may not be in accordance with our staff's personal beliefs. The Meridian articles, in whole or in part, may only be reprinted with permission from the editor(s) of The Meridian. All letters, opinions and articles sent to us must have the name, phone number, and email address of the author for verification. Letters without the author's name(s) will be ignored. Upon request, authors' names may be withheld from publication.

May Day Protest Attempts to Spark Change

By Juan Vasquez

Cries of “No borders! No nations! No more deportations!” echoed through the Lehman quad as a protest organized by the International Socialist Organization and the Lehman D.R.E.A.M. Team fought for sanctuary campuses. Official sanctuary status would mean the school would have no legal obligation to comply should Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers enter campus with a warrant to arrest all undocumented students.

“The D.R.E.A.M. Team has pushed for sanctuary campus resolutions which have been denied by previous Student Government Associations in the past,” Jona Kerluku, 22, a protester and a member of student government said. “The [CUNY] University Student Senate also passed a Sanctuary Campus Resolution to encourage the chancellor to support students who are undocumented. However, this resolution at Lehman has not passed committee for the College Senate and we have not yet established that Lehman College, and even CUNY at that, is a true sanctuary place for students.”

One observer of the entirety of the campus protest, Lehman student Liza Giralado, said that the protest was “something that should happen.” However, she was afraid to join, she added, because “I’m actually an immigrant...so I am kind of afraid that if I protest the cops are going to come and I just can’t afford to get arrested

because I have to keep my nose clean for the citizenship.”

Two members of the Lehman D.R.E.A.M. Team, Denise Acevedo and Flor Reyes, differed as to whether or not the protest had made an impact.

Acevedo thought not, arguing that much more was necessary. “In order to make a difference we must all have an understanding of why May Day is important,” she said, “and that comes

with a lot of unlearning and learning to do. I want Lehman administration to fully support and stand next to us and not be bystanders like they did today.”

Reyes, however, was much more optimistic. “Yes, quantity over quality... The protest today was just a mere example of actions that should be taken everywhere in order to better our future.”



Lehman Students march during the May Day protest. Photo by Juan Vasquez.

Lehman Undergrads Showcase Activism through Academia

By Jean Carlos Soto

The Activism in Academia Symposium, held on April 7 at the Segal Theater of the CUNY Graduate Center, offered academics and selected students from across CUNY an opportunity to discuss and present work that challenged what Lehman English professor Olivia Moy called the “false dichotomy” between activism and academia. This dichotomy arises from the belief that the “contemplative life” of academia, especially in the humanities, has no real-world value nor impact on society, whereas the “active life” of activism inherently does.

The symposium consisted chiefly of department chairs from various CUNY campuses, whose interdisciplinary work touched on a range of topics. However, the student panels of five Lehman undergraduates were the highlight of the conference, exemplifying the activism the symposium’s organizers had sought to address. The Lehman undergraduates used the platform to present theses reflecting academic research that tied into issues both personal and social.

The first half of the student panels focused on the Black-authored text. C. Lionel Spencer, a Lehman English major and Africana studies minor, examined the academic value of hip-hop in presenting “strong positive Black leadership,” a representation he seldom found in the literature of his English classes. As an example, he analyzed the lyrics of rapper Kendrick Lamar’s song “King Kunta,” which, as Spencer stated, has us “re-imagine that [Black] history does not begin as slave, but as Black royalty.”

Panelist Nadia Floyd also touched

on representation, primarily on the marginalized voice of the Black woman. Drawing from the characters of Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye” and Floyd’s own experiences in classrooms over the years, Floyd presented on the need for Black women to execute and reclaim their voices in a classroom setting. Fittingly, the conference allowed Floyd to realize such a situation.

“It was great to relate to people around the room,” recounted Floyd, a Lehman double major in English and Psychology, “[and] to have our voices heard.”

“They blew away every other panel,” said Moy, who coordinated the gathering with Dhipinder Walia, a fellow Lehman English professor, “and they showed every other panel how much we have to learn from them...what they had to say today really educated all the faculty and tenured emeritus people here...to show that it’s already equal, it’s just that the platforms haven’t been there.”

The coordinators wanted a diverse audience, because they felt that academic conferences typically draw a homogenous crowd. In contrast, the audience at this activism conference was diverse in terms of education, age, race, and ethnicity. However, the panels of faculty presenters were less so.

“The only thing that was a bit weird to me,” said Floyd, “was that most of the panelists weren’t people of color. I mean, there was the department chair who was Caribbean, and there was Jorge [Valldeljuli], but other than that they were

“I learned that my pen was my tool in pursuing social change.”

– Lehman senior,
Nadia Floyd



Panelist Nadia Floyd (center) presenting at symposium with Sheema Alamari, and C. Lionel Spencer.
Photo by Jean Soto.

talking about issues that directly affect us, the urban, and I thought it was weird that they were speaking from this privileged space, even though they have ownership of what they researched. That unsettled me a little bit that I didn't see more people of color, and that shows how academia really isn't diverse, in terms of faculty."

On the panel of current and former English Department chairs, John Jay professor, Allison Pease, likewise suggested that the conversation of diversifying the curriculum should include discussion on who is teaching the material, i.e. more diverse hiring.

According to CUNY's "Fall 2016 Staff Facts," 60.5 percent of the total full-time faculty across CUNY was white, 12.2 percent was Black, and 8.9 percent Puerto Rican or Hispanic, with part-time faculty just slightly more diverse: White 58.6 percent, Black 16.1 percent, Puerto Rican or Hispanic 10 percent.

In the same year, Lehman reported a greater disparity between full- and part-time faculties: the former was 66.5 percent White, 10.2 percent Black, and 12.8 percent Hispanic/Latino. Part-time faculty, who receive a fraction of the full-time faculty's salary and resources, was 52.4 percent White, 20.4 percent Black and 15.9 percent Hispanic/Latino. Although Lehman prides itself on its "diversity and commitment to multicultural understanding," its students may struggle to see that in who is teaching them.

Some of the presentations during the second half of the student panels addressed the experience of navigating academic settings where their identities were not fully welcomed, and offered examples of how their presence there could be a kind of activism. Lehman undergrads Alegna Santos, and Sheema Alamari related how they reconciled

religion with other facets of their identities in classroom settings, followed by Lehman junior Ndeye Fatou Coundoul passionately reading her poem, "A Letter to My Future Daughter." Alamari also openly pondered how women who identify as both feminist and Muslim could balance and embrace both worlds.

"Here's the way I do it," began Alamari, "I don't march on the streets, but I do so through the choices of what I read and write on campus. In fact, I take on all these feminist ideas from professors and classes which have shaped my identity through all my college experience."

Along with bridging the gap between activism and academia, many panelists, like Alamari, indicated that activism can take various shapes besides the stereotypical, such as marching, demonstrations, and boycotts.

For Professor Joyce Harte, chairperson of the English Department at BMCC (the Borough of Manhattan Community College), activism can even come in the form of college enrollment.

"Many are first [in their families] to go to college," said Harte, "and the fact that they are there embodies activism."

Floyd echoed this sentiment. "I learned that my pen was my tool in pursuing social change," said Floyd as she presented. "Being an honor student in both majors

[English and psychology] is an act of activism for me, because hardly anyone in my public life expected these feats from me."

One audience member, Marceo Bravo-Lopez, 22, a double major in English and philosophy at Lehman, said he also uses the act of writing newspaper articles on topics like policing policy to participate in what he considers "indirect activism," more so than the "direct activism" of demonstrations or protests in a public space. Another audience member, Nisha Varughese, a double major in English and education at Lehman, said she finds activist value in her educating others, but shies from the label "activist" as a fear of judgement often holds her back whenever it comes time to speak in a large group.

Even Floyd is hesitant to call herself an activist. "I feel like an activist," she said, "[but] it's a term that's very glorified, it's very loaded, and I'm still sorting out my identity. So, it's sort of hard for me to say 'activist'...I can say it, but I can't say it at the same time."

"Activism starts at the heart and mind," said Spencer, "and moves to the feet and hands. So, whether it's holding a protest sign or pen, marching on Washington or dancing with Alvin Ailey, we must all choose what we're going to do with what we learn."



Poet and Lehman undergrad Ndeye Fatou Coundoul reading "A Letter to My Future Daughter," with J. Bret Maney. Photo by Jean Soto.

Bronx Native Addresses Nation with New Album

By Eileen Sepulveda



Alynda Lee Segarra and her band, Hurray for the Riff Raff, performing live. Photo courtesy of Wikicommons.

Born and raised in the Kingsbridge section of the Bronx, Hurray for the Riff Raff's lead singer Alynda Lee Segarra electrifies the ears with her Nuyorican poetic lyrics on the band's eighth album. "The Navigator" explores the effects of the gentrification that is occurring throughout New York City. Segarra combines her Latin roots and folk music to generate a powerful message, and the band's performance is vibrant and alive with spirit. With a combination of old-school salsa, acoustic guitar, and Segarra's velvety voice, the album takes you on a soul-searching journey.

In the title song, Segarra shares memories of being "raised by the street." She asks with a melancholy tone and a sense of tremendous pride, "where will all my people go?" referring to

entire communities being displaced by gentrification. This song can speak, not only to a lot of native New Yorkers, but to many immigrants who currently feel unwanted in America.

"It's the people of the Bronx that made me who I am."

- Alynda Lee Segarra, Hurray for the Riff Raff's lead singer

Segarra told the Meridian, "I know that right now, especially in the South [Bronx], gentrification is creeping in. Lots of people are in danger of losing their homes. This album touches on that. Cities all over the country are changing for the sake of profit, not people."

Segarra also emphasized the importance of her Bronx roots. "Everywhere I go I tell people specifically---I am from the Bronx, a borough that has soul! It's the people of the Bronx that made me who I am. I had to leave to know what I had, and now I pray the borough does not lose the very people who made it a historic place."

In the song "Rican Beach," the cries of the people speak through her lyrics. "Now all the politicians/They just squawk their mouths/They say we'll build a wall to keep them out," she sings. "You can take my life/But don't take my home." Here Segarra addresses America's new leadership, the many struggles of immigrants that want to come to America, and the reality of gentrification happening within our own communities.

The song also has a strong Latin vibe; the heaviness of the timbales and the bluesy sound of the bass guitar spark memories of legends like Willie Colón and Tito Puente. At the same time, “Rican Beach” is an example of true Americana folk music.

“Pa’lante” is powerful and upbeat. It was also the name of the newspaper of the Puerto Rican nationalist group of the

1970s, the Young Lords. Segarra includes lines from the famous poem “Puerto Rican Obituary” by Pedro Pietri, “where the mice live like millionaires/and the people do not live at all.” This blends well with Segarra’s assertion that we must “pa’lante,” or move forward.

Unlike the country folk southern feel of their last seven albums, “The Navigator”

is funky, and the honest grittiness of Segarra’s voice is definitely a breath of fresh air. The album appeals to both a broader audience and the hearts of her New Orleans fans.

Following up a sold-out show at the Bowery Ballroom in Manhattan on April 20, the band will soon be touring nationwide to promote the “The Navigator.”

Gallery Director Aims to Bolster Lehman’s Contemporary Arts

By Abrian De Luna

Bartholomew Bland, the new director of the Lehman College Art Gallery, plans to make it more accessible to the Lehman and Bronx communities by keeping it open in the summer---a first since its founding in 1984---and by creating new events such as the Bronx Borough Arts Festival. Bland took over the position from Susan Hoeltzel in May of 2016, and says he really loves the gallery’s mission of mixing new, aspiring artists with established ones and everyone in between.

Bland was attracted to Lehman, he said, because “I had admired a lot of the work that [Hoeltzel] had done. She had done some great shows here and I like Lehman very much, I think it’s a beautiful campus.” He also praised the Fine Arts building where the gallery is located as a “very striking space.”

Bland’s love of art started when he was eight years old and visited the Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, Florida. Bland likens entering the Flagler to “stepping into another world... back into time and history. It was this beautiful sort of palace and I really loved the aesthetics of that. It was so different from everything that was this modern suburbia in South Florida and so I used to go there all the time and I think that got me started being more interested in art, architecture and the decorative arts.” Bland kept visiting the Flagler Museum throughout his teenage years, saying the experience and memories gave him “such an awareness of how the

arts can really transform the lives of others, particularly at a young age.”

Bland has a B.A. from Florida Atlantic University and graduated from the Getty Leadership Institute at the Claremont Graduate University in 2011. He also holds two master’s degrees: one in arts and U.S. history from Hunter College and one in museum studies from George Washington University. Prior to coming to Lehman, Bland became an assistant curator of the Flagler Museum in 1993 and since then he has curated exhibitions at the Staten Island Museum and the Hudson Museum, even serving as a director in both of them. Bland also wrote exhibition books and catalogs, many in collaboration with Fordham University Press.

Mary Ann Siano, grants associate of the Lehman College Art Gallery and a member of the search committee for the position of its executive director, recalled that Bland “always came out on top” when compared to the others for his “amazing” knowledge of contemporary art. “Meeting Bart in person solidified my feelings about choosing him for the position,” she explained. “I have been working with Bart for the past year---a year filled with camaraderie as we work together---and I look forward to working with him on new and exciting projects for the Art Gallery.”



Bartholomew F. Bland, director of the Lehman College Art Gallery. Photo by Abrian De Luna.

Bland says balancing the needs of the college with the professors using the space for their classes and the community outside of it can be “tricky,” as he wants to get the general public more involved. However, Bland is drawn by the chance to work with the “incredible” team at the Lehman College Art Gallery. “Being the director of this gallery is a wonderful opportunity to bring together the college community, people in the Bronx, and gives me a chance to work directly with emerging artists, which is a very exciting thing.”

A Letter to My Younger Self

By Margarete Rodriguez

Dear young Margarete,

You will become the person you never thought you could be: confident, strong-willed, outgoing, magnificent, and fearless. You will actually be happy, to the point where you randomly smile to yourself in gratitude.

You will get tattoos even though you always swore to yourself that your body would be an empty canvas. You won't believe this, but there will come a day when you can look yourself in the mirror and say, "you're beautiful." Fair warning---things will get ugly before this happens and you won't really learn to say nice things about yourself, with full confidence, until after high school.

A seemingly nice boy with a mohawk will try to mold you into someone you're not: quiet, reserved and apologetic, but you won't let that happen. You truly have a mind of your own and only you know what you want out of your life. I would tell you to avoid him entirely, but he actually helped you learn a lot about yourself and the things you are willing to accept and REJECT from people and relationships. So, if you want to turn out to be the dope individual you read about in that first paragraph, you're going to have to bite the bullet.

The good news is, your resilience is unparalleled and your heart, and mind, will guide you to all the right places. So, know when to walk away from things that

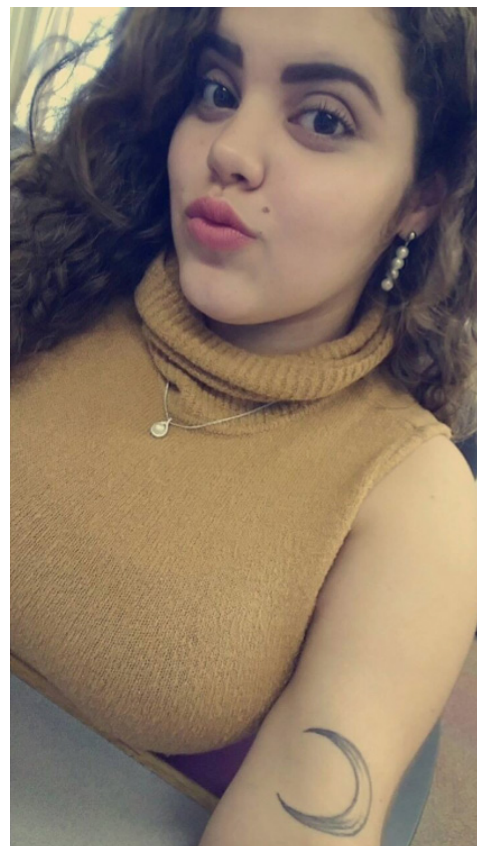
aren't meant for you, even when they tug at you to stay. There's a power in doing just that. Your gut will tell you when it's time; you only need the courage to follow it.

From time to time you will feel isolated and alone, partly because you put yourself there. Even I do that sometimes, but we know damned well that is far from the case. Feel whatever you have to feel, just don't keep yourself in that bubble for too long. If you turn around you'll see a sea of strong women, and a few reliable guys too. Don't take them for granted. We both know how hard it is to make friends.

Keep your chin up, kiddo. You will be where you are meant to be.



13- or 14-year-old Margarete at Build-A-Bear Workshop for her sister's birthday. Photo courtesy of Margarete Rodriguez.



Present day Margarete working at the Lehman Counseling Center. Photo courtesy of Margarete Rodriguez.

A Letter to a Naïve Boy

By Jarol Rivera-Diaz

Dear Jarol,

Hola! Rather, Hello. I am me, yourself. A new and older you, to be exact. You might not be able to read this letter just yet. You are still seventeen, naïve, and monolingual. Do not worry, you will learn how to read and write in English in six months. Your thick accent might get in the way sometimes; do not let the smirks and laughs discourage you. In the end, you will still manage to lead discussions in class. Yes, you will become a college student, but no, you will not choose pre-med as mom wanted.

Your career choice, you ask? Anthropology. Why? Because you wanted answers. To what? A simple conundrum. You will discover that you can board a plane and change your race.

On August 25, 2012, you will fly in a plane for the first time. Do not be anxious. There will be lots of turbulence. The food will be nonexistent, and your brother will rest his head on your shoulder. Do not push him away. You will drift apart from each other eventually. Your schedules won't match and eventually you will see each other only at night.

You will miss your friends immensely. Unfortunately, you won't be able to say your goodbyes. Your high school graduation date will be postponed a whole week, the same day you are moving to America. Do not promise them you will meet them again. You will not. Forget them, move on with your life. They will ignore your texts. When K. and A. give you the cold shoulder and make fun of your accent, do not mind them. They'll leave your church community by the end of the year. The biggest lesson you will learn in your twenties is that relationships are a two-way street.

While filling out your school application, do not choose "Latino" as your racial/ethnic background. Through phone calls and official

papers your Spanish accent and Spanish-sounding, hyphenated last name might reveal you as Latino; your looks won't match the preconceived image of a young Latino man in the U.S. The following winter, while you work as a cashier at McDonald's, do not help translate for Spanish speakers. They will thank you by raising their eyebrows and telling you, "you don't look Latino; how can you speak Spanish?" Tell them you used Rosetta Stone for beginners. They won't believe if you tell them you are a native speaker, even though you are far more literate and fluent.

Speaking of disbelief, when your classmates at choir demand you to speak Spanish to prove your Latinness, don't do it. You have nothing to prove. Brazilians and Haitians are both Latinos and neither speak Spanish as a first language. Neither do your Hispanic classmates. Don't get tired of introducing yourself as an Afro-Latino; Black and Hispanic are not mutually exclusive. People's ignorance will amaze you. At first you will think it is not your job to educate them. It kind of is. Don't overreact when the white girl in your writing intensive class, in your sophomore year, asks you, "What kind of drink is 'Afro-Latino?'" She has honestly never heard that word before. Neither have your fellow Black Latino friends. When your friend Frida gets mad because you called her Black, do not apologize. She is blacker than you, for God's sake. She will tell you she is a mulatto, mixed person like the rest of your countrymen. Her swarthy looks, broad nose, and kinky hair are the result of her French and African ancestry, she'll say. Do not try to convince other Dominicans they are Black. You will lose friends if you do, Frida included. Dominicans still believe in a utopian racial democracy where the small white oligarchy controls everything.

Don't be jealous of your brother because of his lighter skin and bright hazel eyes. Caucasian blood is not a magical tonic that grants beauty. Do not despise your hair. When Grandma tells you to get a buzz cut to look presentable, do not listen. You got your coiled, kinky hair from her. Do not try to accommodate others, not even your family. Hug mom a lot more; she will present bipolar tendencies as time goes by. She did not prefer your brother over you, by the way. He just needed more attention and help with school work than you did. More importantly, love yourself more. There is nothing wrong with your body. I lied. There is. You will develop a binge eating disorder by 21. You still have it. Do worry about your mental health. Lastly, do not worry about your looks; melanin is just a natural protection against sun, and does not define your character.

Love,

You (me)

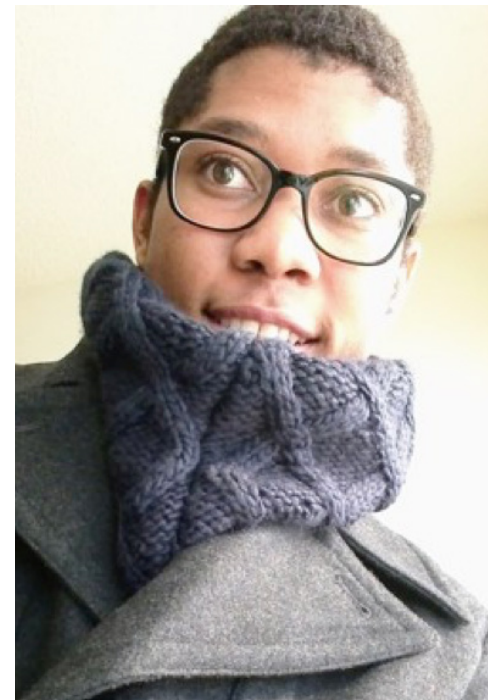


Photo courtesy of Jarol Rivera-Diaz.

What I Would Tell My Younger Self

By Zayna Palmer

Zayna,

You are a smart girl, born and raised in the Bronx. It is fine that you keep many things to yourself and are an introvert, because it shows that you're comfortable with your own company.

You are very beautiful, and you shouldn't care about how others judge you based on the way you look. Let go of the negative comments that people have said about you throughout high school because they are irrelevant. You have the power to do many things because you are very talented and creative. You drew amazing things in your art notebook, and you create unique quotes which can inspire others. Walk with your head high and your shoulders back because confidence is everything. The world would love to see your lovely smile more often and not a sad face due to overthinking things that aren't true, such as assuming you won't pass that big exam or you will stutter when presenting a project. Just relax and breathe, you got this.

Things take time. Stop rushing and chasing people you don't need because you waste your time that way, especially with the people who never cared about you to begin with. Chasing people has been one of your biggest regrets because you never got to realize who you truly are as a person and you would put all of your happiness on someone else, which led to you trapping yourself in your room and crying all night.

Don't compare yourself to anyone else. God created you to be you, not her. Love yourself and keep your family first, because they've never let you down, not once. You often put friends before family, which resulted in guilt.

You've picked yourself back up and realized that family is all that you have and you wouldn't trade it for anything.

In order to be great, you have to overcome the most difficult challenges, such as doing things you've never done. I'm proud of you because you've learned to go out there and do things on your own without depending on anyone else, such as going to the Metropolitan Museum for a school project. It's great to do things on your own because it shows that you are independent. Speak up and say how you feel, otherwise no one else will know. Your voice always counts so don't hide it, let someone know what's bothering you and why you stayed in the house all day and didn't want to come out. Dance to

the rhythm of your own drum and stay in your lane, just like your mom always told you. Forgive and move on, because holding grudges is the same thing as holding anger. You have a whole life ahead of you, so do what makes you happy whether it be dancing, singing in the shower, or even playing dress up. Your most meaningful lesson was to grow and become the mature adult that you are now. Look at you, in college and aiming for the top. Don't let anyone take that away from you.

Most importantly, believe that you serve an extraordinary God who is greater than all things.

Sincerely,
Zayna Palmer



Photo courtesy of Zayna Palmer.

Fight for Our Sake: A Letter to My Middle School Self

By Melanie I. Hernandez

Dear Melanie,

Your innocence will be completely lost by the time you enter high school. You cannot change this, so just let it happen. Your surroundings will alter, but you will not learn from them. Out of fear, you will let these surroundings manipulate you into conforming. This will haunt you into your early twenties, while you continue to suffer and live with regret. This letter, if you take it into consideration while you are now searching for answers, will help you learn from your current circumstances so that you can understand and accept who you are. By the time you are 26, you could already have your life together, instead of still struggling to correct the mistakes of the past. Listen for our sake!

Yes, you are different. People, especially your peers, do not understand different, and not only do they not understand it, they are afraid of it. When an animal, as we are, is approached by any danger, which they think you are, their natural fight-or-flight instinct comes into play. You have already experienced this for yourself, just this week, when the boy sitting next to you made a racist remark and you decided on “flight” by cowering in silence with your head down. The others, like that boy, are more attuned to the “fight” instinct. This is because of the culture they were brought up in. Although you have lived in the same neighborhood as them for most of your life, as you’ve come to realize, you were sheltered. You didn’t even attend the same schools. While they were fist-fighting in Kindergarten, you were sneaking Barbie dolls in your bookbag so that you could play with them after school at your babysitter’s house. You know this, but you do not use it to your advantage. Just because you do not know how to trigger your “fight” reflex doesn’t mean it isn’t there, or that you won’t be eventually forced to use it.

Fighting is painful in all circumstances, win or lose. It hurts physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but you have already learned that

running away can be just as “detrimental.” (Look up this word, it will be useful for you in this time!) You have come into this school full of children your age who look at you as something they want and fear. You know that you are neither of those things yourself, but they cast you out immediately. You know who you are. Ethnically, you are three-quarters Puerto Rican, one-quarter Italian. Socially, you are shy, introverted, but really cool once people get to know you. Economically, you are much poorer than your peers, even though they treat you as the opposite based on your skin tone. Emotionally, you want so badly to be accepted and to make friends. Academically, you are highly intelligent, but you are aware that this is also something your peers dislike. All of these things make up who you are. Listen to me now: these attributes are perfectly you, so live up to them fully and make no apologies.

Ask your uncles and father to show you how to fight. You will try to run away as much as you can, but a fight will ultimately come knocking at your door---literally. Fight, because that’s what people do. Fight, because that is what you must do to remain true to yourself. The next time someone makes a “white girl” remark, open your mouth and tell them, “I am Puerto Rican!” The next time those girls try to bully you, stand up to

them no matter the consequences. When the friendly Jamaican girls befriend you, cherish every moment and don’t let them go because they are your real friends. When the girls who live in your building, who also go to the same school as you, try to convert you into their “pet,” don’t let them.

I know you think the girls in your building are your friends, but friends don’t hurt you. Friends don’t bully you. Friends don’t steal your stuff. Friends don’t steal your crushes. Friends don’t try to force you into sex with older men. Friends don’t force you to skip school. Friends don’t force you to do drugs. Friends don’t use racial commentary to hurt you. Friends don’t bring you down. Friends raise you up.

Your friends are Simone, Tamika, Angelica, Jailyn, Tattiana, George, Joseph, Calixto, Matthew, and Lizette. That is a substantial number of peers who love and support you. Keep these people close and you will continue to rise above the hate around you, and excel as that person you made a list to become. Don’t let this list be full of lost goals. Stick to the plan. There will still be many roadblocks on the way. Just take each one as a lesson you need to keep moving forward.

Sincerely you,

Melanie H.

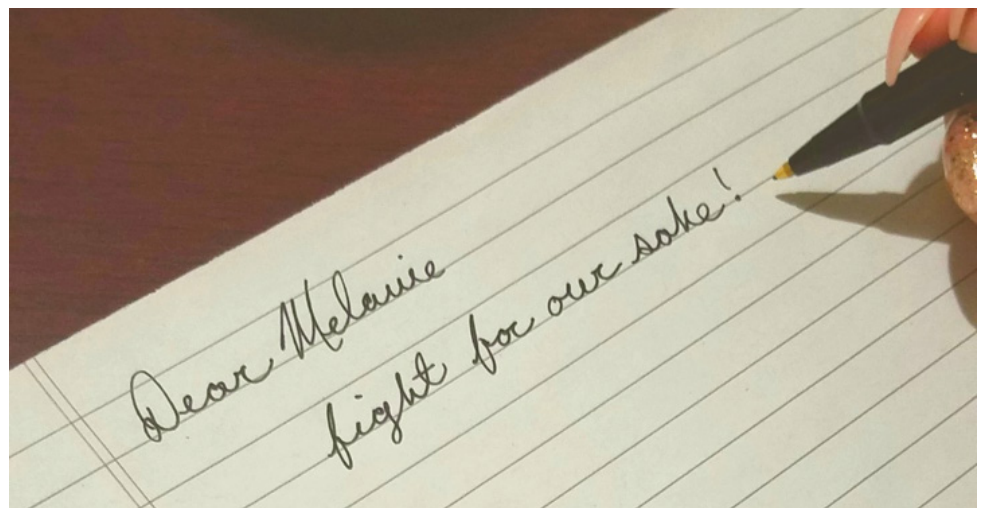


Photo courtesy of Melanie Hernandez.

Lehman Students Want an Updated Canon

By Shivani Boodhoo



Updating the canon is a good idea according to Lehman students. Photo from Creative Commons.

The English canon, or books considered to be classics, consists mainly of books written by dead white European men. To this set of classics a few writers of color have been added. In 2017, in a globalized world full of writers of different ethnicities and faiths, many students believe the canon should be revised to introduce more writers that aren't white and male. At Yale University, for instance, students have started a petition to revise the courses. According to *The Daily Beast*, the petition states, "It is unacceptable that a Yale student considering studying English literature might read only white male authors." This inclusivity is important because as Mark Lilla, a Professor of political philosophy and religion, wrote in *The New York Times*, "What Americans yearn for in literature is self-recognition."

Several Lehman students cite Junot Diaz as an author that gives them this sense of self-recognition, and concur that the canon should be expanded. Edgenis Abreu, a senior, and environmental science major, loves Diaz because "when he speaks about certain Dominican traits or cultural things, I can see how true they are." For example, he explained, Diaz talks about how sexist guys are, which Edgenis agrees is a very big thing in Dominican culture. Having started off with Diaz's novel "Drown" and liking it, Edgenis continued to read other books by Diaz, loving the way his characters speak. "It's in tune to the way we speak other than an old-fashioned story. It's more relatable to our age than other books might be." Abreu believes is important to have authors like Diaz in whose work students can see

themselves through characters that are minority or POC.

Other Lehman students would also like to see the traditional canon adjusted. Jose Lazo, a bookworm and Lehman alum, believes that the classics are relevant today, and that we should update, not replace, the canon. "I think it hasn't been updated because literature doesn't get as much attention and people don't read as much as they used to. Students only read because they have to," he said, adding that it's rare in his social groups. He doesn't think race plays a factor in the chosen classics. When he reads, he said, he doesn't look at the author and think of color, he hardly even notices the author, just judging the book on whether or not it is a good read.

Lehman junior Ndeye Fatou Coundoul, an English Literature major, thinks the classics are great, but also overrated. “We are learning from the old traditional stories and plays, but at the same time we are readers who as students are missing a lot of other great books,” she said. “I think we should most definitely update the classics. There are authors who have been set aside due to societal standards, class, and race and that takes a lot from the overall learning and understanding differences through literature.” Coundoul doesn’t want people to give up on trying to expand the canon, but feels it is difficult to even try to talk about it. She added, “It almost feels like no one is listening.”

Several of Lehman’s faculty members agreed that the canon should be more diverse. J. Bret Maney---a professor of English who teaches courses in American literature, critical theory, and composition ---said, “The literary canon, or set of ‘classic’ texts we read, reread, and teach, should definitely present a rich diversity of

perspectives, which can be broken down by race and ethnicity, faith traditions, gender and sexuality, class, and other pertinent categories.”

“There are authors who have been set aside due to societal standards, class, and race and that takes a lot from the overall learning.”

– Ndeye Fatou Coundoul,
an English literature major

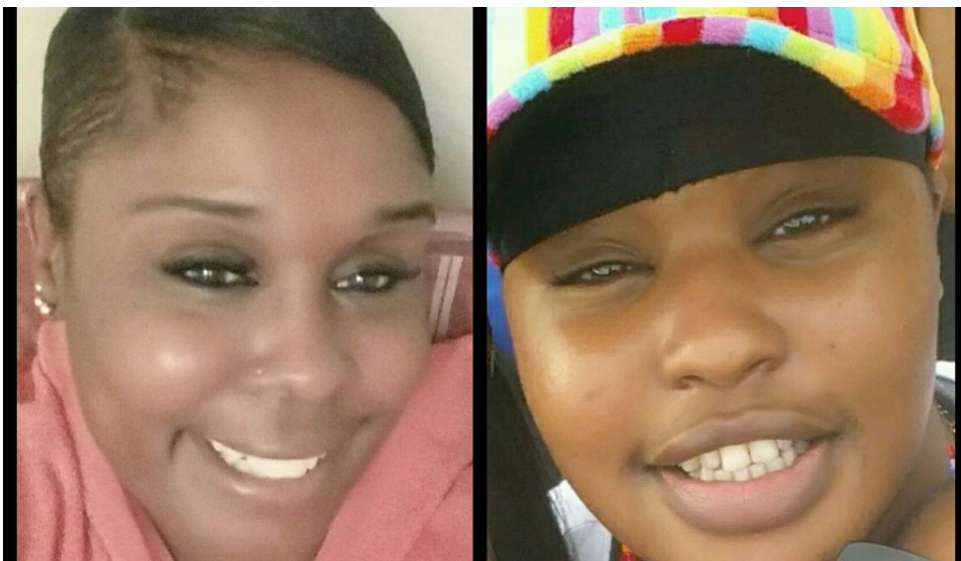
Maney also explained that historically, DWEMs, or Dead White European Males, made up the majority of the canon, and that in the 1970s and 80s, feminists, African

Americans, and Latinos fought for the canon to be expanded so that it would represent accurately the diversity of the human experience. This, he believes, led to the Latin American, Latino, and Puerto Rican, as well as the Africana Studies Departments at CUNY.

Another English Professor, Phil Mirabelli, who specializes in English Renaissance literature and culture, echoed Maney. He holds that the canon wars have calmed down now and that the canon has been expanded in different ways because, “Many teachers and editors of anthologies have taken a wider view of what we mean by literature.” Mirabelli said, “I think it’s important to study not only our own culture and society but also other cultures from around the world and through history. It seems to me to restrict our students from studying any type of literature, media, theory, criticism, and culture, either historical classics or more recent classics, including those from all cultures and subcultures, would be impoverishing our education.”

How Lehman Students Cope without Mom on Mother’s Day

By Keidy Gómez



Shareida Spencer (right) with “my moms” Vanessa Spencer. Photo courtesy of Shareida Spencer.

Mother’s Day presents a special challenge for Lehman students who can’t always celebrate the holiday with their mothers. These students have to struggle to fill the void of her absence and recreate the bond they miss. In doing so, though, they creatively keep the memory alive by giving all the love that wasn’t provided to them. While this can be difficult, in some cases, they find themselves blessed with another created family of their own.

“Due to both of my parents having personal issues, I was placed in foster care from the age of one till five,” said Lehman senior Kimberley Aguirre, 26. Aguirre, an English major, explained, “Throughout the years



Biancania Romero (right) with mother Judith Espailat, enjoying an event last summer. Photo courtesy of Biancania Romero.

I've spent sporadic time together where [my biological mother] tried to buy my love with toys and clothes. After a fight at the age of ten over tickets to my graduation, she walked out my life." Aguirre admits that wanting to have your mother in your life and not having her there is hard, but she herself embraces motherhood vigorously so she can foster a bond with her own daughter. "What I've learned from this is to focus on my daughter and no matter what happens to be there for her always."

For Lehman students who grew up in foster care, Mother's Day has brought about feelings of loneliness, sadness and grief, because they have been hurt before, or they are waiting to see their mothers again. "In foster care days, you can't just sit there and buy things, you have to wait for visitation," recalled Shareida Spencer, a 25-year-old Lehman sophomore majoring in social work. We get into a group and if all [the biological mother's] kids are in the same foster care we get one big card and put flowers in it." She added that for someone who has been separated for so long from her mother, it is difficult to feel close to her. "I've haven't been with her all my life, so there's lots of Mother's Days I've missed," said Spencer, who had to deal with the fact that on Mother's Day she either had to wait to see her mother or celebrate it with strangers. Spencer hasn't forgotten her mother, whom she cares for deeply. "I would love to get her...a house. She's been talking about it ever since I was born, that's 25 years, and she's never had one. If my life was to get right and things go



Kimberley Aguirre and daughter. Photo courtesy of Kimberley Aguirre.

the way they are supposed to, I would get her a house," said Spencer.

For other students, illness has separated them from their mother on Mother's Day, and fear instead of celebration becomes heart-wrenching. "The worst Mother's

"Mother's Day is a day for my love as a parent to be recognized."

– Kimberly Aguirre, Lehman senior

Day, I would say was back in 2014, when my mom had open heart surgery months before and I was taking care of her until she was better," recalled Biancania Romero,

a 20-year-old junior, majoring in speech pathology. However, the experience taught her an important lesson, she added. "I think that Mother's Day was the day I realized I had to appreciate my mom the most because of everything she's done for me since I was born. My mother is truly the person who always had my back no matter what."

Ultimately, many students found that growing up without a mother can actually strengthen their own love and shape them to choose to be there for their mothers even when they hadn't done the same. "If I have a break, I'll visit [my mother]" Spencer said, "and we'll cook and sit there and have conversations." For Aguirre, the experience has made her into a mother that creates a stronger bond with her children. Now, she said, "Mother's Day is a day for my love as a parent to be recognized. Although my daughter is only two and a half, I tell her every morning and night that I love her, and give her a hug and a kiss. All a child needs is to be reminded that they are loved."

Lehman Alum Addresses Hood Education

By Leonel Henriquez

At the New York City Writing Project's (NYCWP) 19th annual Teacher-to-Teacher conference, held at Lehman on March 18, its keynote address was delivered by Dr. Christopher Emdin, a Lehman alumnus and author of the New York Times bestseller, "For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education."

The NYCWP models itself on the belief that teachers bring knowledge, expertise and leadership to their profession and that teachers are the best teachers of one another because they bring experience gained from working in actual classrooms. The conference consisted of 25 workshops and panel sessions, all conducted by educators, on topics including literacy, communication, cultural interpretation, writing, math, ethnomusicology, common core standards, and activism.

For Jane Higgins, director of the NYCWP, having Emdin deliver the keynote speech brings her journey in education full circle. Higgins was a high school English teacher, and Emdin, "was one of my students," she recalled. "Chris Emdin gave me language to talk about what I tried to do in the classroom."

Emdin's rousing and charismatic speech was titled, "Teaching to Get Woke: the Teacher, the Preacher, the Healer." In it, he emphasized that in order to teach effectively in "the hood," i.e. in urban centers, there must be a different level of comprehension of the hood culture where the school is located, and a better understanding of the responses required of the students that live in the area. White educators, Emdin believes, cannot come to teach in the hood with the idea that they are coming to save the hood. Educators need to better comprehend what the students are saying in response to how and what they are being taught, he said, and better communication between teacher and student fosters better learning relationships.

"Over half the suspensions in public schools as they relate to men of color or boys of color in those schools is a function of a teacher confronting a child head on and creating the dynamic that ushers that you have to respond," he explained. "Hood rules dictate that when someone calls you out, you have to respond. When a student responds in a manner that is consistent with what his environment has taught him this paints him as a disciplinary problem and sours the student's taste for learning".

"The government talks about weapons of mass destruction. We have weapons of mass distraction" he said. Those distractions are things like budget cuts to after school meal programs. Emdin pointed out that some kids go to a home with little or no food and are concerned with the fact they are hungry and don't think about doing homework. Other distractions he addresses are the debates over funding for charter and public schools. This debate, he said, distracts educators and parents, while many kids continue to go to a school without enough resources.

"I have his book and I was just inspired by him and everything he represents," said Janice Johnson who joined Emdin in a hip-hop cypher during his address. She is a teacher at P.S. 531 in the Bronx and

is earning her Masters through Lehman Teaching Fellows. She said, "I think it's important being a woman of color teaching in the Bronx and being from the South Bronx that you have to have some kind of knowledge of who you are teaching."

Billy Green, a teacher at the Frederick Douglass Academy III in the South Bronx, and a former student of Emdin's concurred. "I came here today because one of the things I learned is that Chris Emdin has given us that platform, that language for us educators who like I said embrace the hood, the rules of the hood," he said. "This book brings it all together in order for us teachers in urban centers to do our work, and for white educators like Miss Higgins who have to face a lot of backlash" he said.

The NYCWP also sponsors other events throughout the year, including a Spring Writing Marathon at Poets House, a Spring Writers' Residency from April 20-June 8, two Summer Open Institutes for new K-12 teachers, and an Invitational Leadership Institute both from July 10 to 20, at Lehman.

Those interested can visit nycwritingproject.org.



Dr. Christopher Emdin and educator Janice Johnson perform cypher at NYCWP conference. Photo by Leonel Henriquez.

Lehman Student Wins Prestigious Watson Fellowship

By Mairin Cahill

Lehman freshman Victoria Smith won a Jeannette K. Watson Fellowship this April. The fellowship gives freshmen and sophomores selected from 12 partner institutions in New York City access to a rigorous program intended to help them flourish in their undergraduate careers via stipends, internships, cultural events, and mentoring.

Of the 16 Lehman students invited to an interview before a panel of college faculty, four were selected to represent the college before fellowship board, with Smith selected as the sole winner from Lehman.

Smith says she hopes the guidance provided by the fellowship, coupled with the experience of being a Lehman and Macaulay Honors College student, will be instrumental to her growth as a student. Though Smith has not yet declared a major, she anticipates her Watson internships will help her find her educational and career paths. Her passion for social justice issues has led her to consider majors in African studies or psychology, but she said that could all change, depending on how the next three years as a Watson Fellow shape her. She added that her undergraduate career is an opportunity to transition from being identified solely as a female drummer, as she was in high school, to a more comprehensive identity. "I'm open to a lot of different options" she said, regarding the future.

For her first internship this summer, Victoria will be working at the Thyroid, Head, and Neck Cancer Foundation. Though at first unsure if it would be a good fit, her impression soon changed. "I loved the environment! I wouldn't just be in a lab coat breaking down molecules, this would be a research internship where I would be learning about what goes into a successful research project and I would learn how to work with people in many different areas of concentration, and study a very broad topic such as cancer."



Helina Owusu, a Lehman finalist for the Jeannette K. Watson Fellowship. Photo courtesy of Helina Owusu.

Hillary Frank, a Lehman junior majoring in chemistry, is currently flourishing as a Watson Fellow. During her Freshman year, she began working in a research lab on campus, where faculty mentors encouraged her to explore other areas of science, and prompting her to apply for a Watson fellowship. For her first internship with the program she was able to do just that. As a Digital Learning Fellow at the Museum of Natural History, she was moved out of the lab, and into a science-teaching position in which she was creating curriculum, and coordinating science programs for children over the summer.

Hillary is looking forward to her internship this summer working with the Smithsonian Institute Research Center on their Waterland Biochemistry Project near Edgewater, Maryland. There she'll be working with researchers to measure chemicals in water and on the surface of trees. "We'll be looking at chemicals related to methane in the water, and trying to determine how it connects and contributes to global warming," said Frank.

The Watson Fellowship has exposed her to many scientific sub-fields, including public policy, education, and lab work. "I don't have any concrete ideas about what I would like to do [for a career], but this program is exposing me to different areas that will help me decide," said Hillary.

Sophomore Helina Owusu, one of the four finalists, also feels that the



Victoria Smith, winner of a Jeannette K. Watson Fellowship. Photo courtesy of Victoria Smith.

application process pushed her to grow. Owusu, a first-generation immigrant from Ghana, is driven to make a difference by becoming a pediatric or family practice physician.

"My goal is to help that kid get better and help them get back to school," she explained. "I've had the opportunity to meet new students through the application process, and we encourage each other throughout the process. I've been able to build myself professionally through the mock interviews. Going forward I'm going to use all those skills I learned through this process."

Owusu and Smith, along with sophomores Amna Azeem and Natori Beckford, the other finalists from Lehman College, were all assisted by Professor Alice Michelle Augustine, faculty member and facilitator for the Office of Prestigious Awards which includes the Beyond the Bachelor's Program and the Emerging Scholars Program. As an undergraduate student at Lehman College, Augustine herself was a Watson Fellow, which led her to internships at the State Supreme Court, the New York City Council, and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice in Ghana.

Augustine said that Smith was committed to the application process since first hearing about the award last year. "She stayed on top of it, and was very invested," said Augustine. "She asked for a lot of feedback and did what she needed to do to be a really competitive candidate."

New Muppet Julia Raises Autism Awareness

By Leonel Henriquez



Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

On April 10, a new red-haired muppet named Julia made her debut on Sesame Street. Although she is just four years old, it took PBS and Sesame Street over five years to create her, in consultation with more than 250 organizations and experts. Julia, the result of these efforts, is autistic, and Sesame Street is hoping her presence on the show will increase awareness about autism. They also hope she will provide the opportunity to educate others on how to positively interact with friends and family who have been diagnosed with the disorder which, according to the Center for Disease Control, is one out of every 68 children in the United States.

Julia exhibits several traits typical of many autistic kids: she doesn't like to shake hands, doesn't always immediately respond to questions, waves her arms over her head when feeling anxious, and covers her ears when sounds are unpleasant to her.

Parents and educators are responding enthusiastically to Julia. Mabel Concepcion, a mother of three school age children, likes the new character. She thinks it is a great way to not only talk to your children about a sensitive topic but also provide them with an example on how to interact. "I think parents should talk to their kids about other kids with disabilities so that they are aware, so that they know

how to act," she said. "Kids don't know how to act when they see something the first time." She added that as a mother, "you want [your kids] to learn to get along with everyone." Concepcion also believes parents can also learn from Julia. "It is just as important for one parent to recognize when another parent in a restaurant or movie might be dealing with a child that is having a difficult moment and offer help or support."

Many share the hope that awareness will translate to inclusion, and believe that

"I think exposing preschool students to Julia will help them understand more about how people communicate and play in different ways."

- Jen Flinn-Knizeski, teacher
people with autism and other disabilities live somewhat segregated lives just because others just don't know how to constructively interact with them. "Sesame Street is taking a step towards an inclusive culture for all students with disabilities," said Jen Flinn-Knizeski, a special educator with the NYC Department of Education for ten years. "I love that the script explains

autism as 'what autism for Julia is,' because it is a subtlety that is so important for our children to understand. For one child, the blender may really bother them, but for another child it may be the most soothing noise to them."

The hope is that children will be able to recognize certain behaviors in their classmates and be able to interact accordingly. "I think exposing preschool students to Julia will help them understand more about how people communicate and play in different ways. They understand social cues from their friends and when given guidance, like Elmo gives guidance about Julia, they will understand how to be patient with children with autism. Indirectly, they may learn how to be patient with others and themselves," said Flinn-Knizeski, a special educator trained in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention.

Elise Saldana, assistant chair of the Department of Early Childhood and Childhood Education at Lehman, expressed a similar opinion. "Yes, I think that young children are very capable of adapting and accepting the different behaviors, personalities, and situations that they see in each other, without prejudice, because they are not too presumptuous at this age," she said. When asked if she thought if children ages four to five would be able to recognize similar traits in their classmates she replied, "I do think that young children can make associations and recognize similar behavior in others because they are open-minded and conscience regarding their world, and all that is in it and around it. When trying to mainstream or integrate children, I would think that it is best to highlight our similarities, rather than our differences."

To learn more you can read Julia's back story at www.sesamestreet.org.

New Coach Aims to Turn Around Lehman Softball Slump

By Ashley Francis

This season hasn't been a walk in the park for the women's softball team. With new players and a coach in her first year, the Lightning have a lot of potential obstacles to overcome if they're to make it through. In the previous season, they had had a subpar record, averaging out as an under .500 team. The 2017 campaign also started in a severe slump, with the Lightning starting 1-14 throughout March. This performance means the new coach, Erin Van Nostrand, will have her hands full for the rest of this season.

Van Nostrand, who took over the position at the start of the season, makes the team's fifth coach in four seasons. With her history of success, it is hoped that she will turn the team's losing streak into a winning one. In 2012, Van Nostrand was named Softball Coach of the Year after leading the Pacific Lutheran University Lutes to win the 2012 NCAA Division III National Championship.

Given the many coaching changes of the Lehman team, she hopes bring that same intensity to the Lightning. "It's been an adjustment to go from a nationally ranked team to [a team] trying to rebuild," she commented. The Lightning has a lot athleticism, she added, but needs to develop a better understanding of a winning culture.

During an intense practice in preparation for the upcoming double header against St. Joseph's College, it was apparent that the team was looking for new ways to regain confidence after two wins before spring break.

Player of the Week Maranda Diaz said that in her opinion, communication will determine the outcome of the season. The essentials, she added, are "coming

together as a team, communicating more, and just working as a team." She has been on a roll of late, going 9-for-12 (.750) with seven runs and nine runs



Maranda Diaz and Arlette Martinez during practice. Photo by Ashley Francis.



The Lightning huddles as they prepare for a doubleheader matchup against St. Joseph's on April 15.
Photo by Ashley Francis.

batted in, without a doubt showing up as one of the few bright spots for the struggling Lightning.

Lehman senior Linda Resto, who has had quite the career after leading the team in RBIs last season as she nears graduation with a major in social work, explained that there was a point early on this season when she felt overwhelmed and took a break to gain some clarity. However, she says, having a new coach has boosted her confidence. "The coaching has been the best it's been since I've been here," said Resto.

Van Nostrand encourages her players not to be defeated, but instead to strive. "Don't give it anything more or anything less, but play with all you've got" she said. "This is your college experience."

The Lightning won eight of their last ten games, but the season came to a tragic end after losing to Hunter College on May 7, 2017 in the CUNY playoffs.

New Tennis Coach Moves from Player to Staff

By Ashley Francis

Lehman's new assistant tennis coach, Gene Nakagaki, has come a long way since his senior year at Eastchester High School when he was unsure where tennis would take him. Then his high school coach, Tim Otoshi, encouraged Nakagaki, whose newfound interest in the sport turned it into a beloved vocation. In high school, Nakagaki recalled, "I was just fooling around on the court." When he came to Lehman, he became a star on the court leading

the Lightning all four years he attended, graduating in 2016. This year, Lehman's tennis coach Ana Belzunce saw a spot for him on her staff.

Now the newly acquired coach has to adjust to his new role. He admitted that he misses playing on the court. "I'm not used cheering them on," he said of not being on field with teammates. However, on the field as a coach, Nakagaki presents himself with knowledge and carries himself beyond his years.

Lehman's head tennis coach, and former tennis player at the University of Maryland, Ana Belzunce was the person who ultimately led Nakagaki to return to Lehman. He explained how she invited him back last season to volunteer as an assistant coach for a dominating the women's tennis team. The 2016 season was also Belzunce's first season coaching the Lightning, and this experience inspired her to ask him to join her staff in 2017. The position is an opportunity

for him to help the players and transfer his skill set to use on their behalf so the team will develop after not having an assistant coach last season.

For the players, it hasn't been difficult to get used their new coach. Senior Adrian Grant appreciates Nakagaki's presence on the court and doesn't feel intimidated by his former teammate. "The same passion he played with as a teammate, he also carries as a coach,"

Grant said, emphasizing how Nakagaki carried the same intensity into new role. Communication has been a plus with him because he makes sure the players remain involved by breaking down plays to win against the opposition.

As the team played Albertus Magnus on April 9, Nakagaki showed players how to fix their posture while preparing to battle. He even knows when to joke around with the team because he still

has a close relationship with them as a former player.

In Nakagaki's first season, he hopes to work on giving his players more advice. Things have been somewhat of a challenge coming in because he is not playing, but now leading from the bench. Coach Belzunce, however, believes in him. "He's been great this season," she affirmed, "and brings a lot of energy."



Assistant Coach Gene Nakagaki as Lehman played Albertus Magnus on April 9, 2017. Photo by Ashley Francis.