LEGO® at the Library

By Wendy Kosakoff and Jonathan Torres

Here’s a fun fact: Playing with LEGO® can improve cognitive and motor skills! This fall the Sidney Silverman Library initiated “LEGO® Thursdays,” an opportunity for students to take a break from their work and have fun in the library.

The library’s centrally-located LEGO® building station provides a stress-free environment for all ages. It gives students an outlet to express themselves creatively, work with their hands, take their minds off school work, share ideas, and indulge in friendly competitions.

Many businesses have used LEGO® to improve employee productivity and encourage team building. The LEGO® building station continues to gain momentum with students, and their creations are on display in the library.

Future plans include a theme-based LEGO® building competition, and many more LEGO® bricks to play with!

The authors are Reference and Instruction librarians at the Sidney Silverman Library. They can be reached, respectively, at wkosakoff@bergen.edu or 201-301-9685 and jtorres12@bergen.edu or 201-493-3697.
After a successful fall semester, Bergenstages is proud to be presenting William Gibson’s play “The Miracle Worker” as the first production of the spring 2015 semester.

Drawing heavily from letters written by Anne Sullivan in 1887, as well as from Helen Keller's autobiography, Gibson constructed a drama around the events that took place when Helen Keller and her teacher, Anne Sullivan, first met in the 1880s. The exchanges that take place in “The Miracle Worker” are all derived from factual events that Gibson has woven together to construct a fluid, emotionally real depiction of the "miracle" Anne Sullivan was able to work: teaching Helen Keller language.

Bergenstages’ production is directed by Prof. Mary Clifford. “It’s a play about teachers who make a difference,” Clifford says. Audiences will find the story of Annie's struggle to teach Helen language and her eventual success to be both life-affirming and uplifting.

“The Miracle Worker” will be performed in the Ender Hall Lab Theatre on Feb. 27, 28, March 5, 6 and 7 at 7:30 p.m., and Feb. 28 and March 7 at 2:00 p.m. The performances on March 5 and 6 will be special, sign-interpreted performances. Sure to be a sellout in our small, 96-seat theatre! Tickets are available online at ticket.bergen.edu or in A-130. For additional information please call 201-447-7428.

The author is the director of Bergenstages, and a director and assistant professor of performing arts in the School of Arts, Humanities and Wellness. He can be reached at jbumgardner@bergen.edu or 201-493-3615.

Congratulations to Dr. Michael Redmond, the 2014 NISOD Awardee

Congratulations to Dr. Barbara Davis, the John and Suanne Roueche Excellence Awardee
The Power of Learning Communities

By William Mullaney, Ph.D

At the Faculty Conference in September, I identified three academic initiatives that I believe hold great promise for the college in the coming years: developmental education, suburban studies and learning communities. These initiatives can play a significant role in the college’s commitment to student success by tapping into the expertise and innovative spirit of the faculty. For this edition of Faculty Focus, I would like to focus on the power of learning communities (LCs), an idea which really seems to be catching fire here at BCC.

During the course of my teaching career, I have had the opportunity to teach in a number of different learning communities. Most of these were LCs which linked English or literature (the courses I taught) with education, history or technology. Given the amount of time that instructors in LCs spend together, these relationships are often referred to as marriages. I had my share of wonderful LC marriages, a decent few and one too disastrous to mention.

When we first started, my colleagues and I didn’t have any real proof that LCs were an effective way of teaching, but we soon discovered that they allowed a much deeper dive into our subject matter. We also noticed how students began to transfer their knowledge across disciplines (what has since become called “integrative knowledge”). Since then, the work of Vincent Tinto and others has shown that LCs are effective in promoting student involvement, learning and retention at both two- and four-year institutions.

Initially, the idea of sharing a classroom or even curriculum with another instructor may seem intimidating. As I alluded above, it is crucial that instructors in LCs are compatible. I was fortunate enough to eventually find a partner with whom that compatibility evolved into trust. More importantly, together we watched our LCs develop into challenging and safe environments that bonded the students and inspired their intellectual growth.

And speaking of marriages, my long-time teaching partner and I got a wonderful and proud laugh when we received invitations to the wedding of two of our former LC students, whom we just happened to seat next to each other on the first day of class, a true LC marriage.

The author is the Vice President of Academic Affairs. He may be reached at wmullaney@bergen.edu or 201-447-7190.

Symposium on Hip Hop and Youth Culture

Wednesday, February 18, 2015

9:30 - 11:30 am – Student Center - Hip Hop in Suburbia
11:30 - 12:30 pm – Student Center - Kool Herc, Founder of Hip Hop and Cindy Campbell
12:30-1:45 pm – C313 - Critical Pedagogy and Hip Hop Culture in the Academic Classroom
2:00 – 3:00 pm - Ciccone Theater – Tupac Shakur and The FBIs War on Tupac and Other Black Leaders

Events sponsored by: Office of Vice President of Academic Affairs, Black History Month, Office of Student Life
PJR Commemorates Armenian Genocide

By Thomas La Pointe

One hundred years ago, under the cover of World War I, nearly two million Armenians were systematically uprooted from their homes in eastern Turkey, banished to the deserts of Syria, and brutally exterminated in what would become the first genocide of the modern era.

The campaign to eliminate the Armenians proved so effective that it became a template for other genocides in the 20th century, an inspiration to perpetrators: “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” Hitler observed. Today, the relevance of this genocide to modern experience is again confirmed, as the boundaries of Iraq and Syria implode, and the specter of genocide again looms large on the global stage.

In the spirit of remembrance - and to address the urgency of the present moment -the Center for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation (PJR) will continue to launch events to commemorate the centenary of the Armenian genocide in the coming semester. Events include our ongoing Armenian Genocide Education Initiative, which helps Bergen County educators meet the New Jersey state standard that mandates the teaching of genocide in secondary schools, a series of lectures by prominent scholars of the genocide, a workshop on genocide education, exhibitions and films.

Other initiatives include our ongoing series of TEDx video salons, a conference and gallery exhibition devoted to women in conflict zones, programming to commemorate the Holocaust, dialogues for students on global and local conflict, and our annual faculty grant program and scholarship challenge for students.

If you are interested in learning more about PJR, feel free to contact us at cpjr@bergen.edu, or stop by our office in room S-152.

The author is an assistant professor of Literature and Composition and the co-director of the Center for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation. He can be reached at tlapointe@bergen.edu or 201-674-2675.

Innovations Award

Melanie Walker, Linda Kass, Iris Bucchino, Leigh Jonaitis and Kelly Keane won for “Developmental Education Council: Bridging Acceleration Initiatives.” The award includes $750 for the project, submission to the League of Innovation in Community Colleges and funding for two team members to attend the LICC conference.
On February 18, 2015, the Bergen Community College Division of Business, Arts & Social Sciences and the Performing Arts Department will present “RAFAEL: An evening of performance and conversation with Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence and BCC Distinguished Artist, Rafael Bianciotto.”

The event will take place in the Ciccone Theater at 6:30 p.m. and admission will be free. Rafael will share with the audience the journey his career has taken from Argentina to Paris. He will talk about his experiences working as a director/performer in physical theatre, mask work, commedia dell’arte, clown work and with his company, Zéfiro Théâtre. Rafael will also discuss the process and the creation of, as well as perform excerpts from, his production, Preuve D’Amour, which the Zéfiro Théâtre will be performing at Ramapo College and in New York City this Spring.

In 1995 Rafael founded the theatre company, The New York Mask and Clown Workshop, in New York City. He has been working since 1998 in Paris with his Zéfiro Théâtre. Rafael has directed workshops in France, Sweden, Iceland, and throughout the world. This spring he is the Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence working jointly with BCC and Ramapo College.

It will be a wonderful event and all are encouraged to join in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. A reception will follow where everyone can meet Rafael personally.

The author is the director of Bergenstages, and a director and assistant professor of performing arts in the School of Arts, Humanities and Wellness. He can be reached at jbumgardner@bergen.edu or 201-493-3615.

The Self Study and Gift Baskets

By Sony Tiwari

I never associated the Self-Study with gifts until last December. It was then I attended a Middle States Commission on Higher Education workshop titled “Self-Study: Writing the Report and Preparing the Team.” It’s a good thing the college has until spring 2016 to prepare for a three-day visit from peer evaluators before they make a recommendation on our accreditation status. This half-day workshop covered every step of the process, from completing the Self-Study report to responding to the Commission’s final decision.

What started as an overview of pitfalls to avoid during the writing process slowly morphed into a discussion about… gift baskets. One panelist began to describe how their institution spiced up the evaluation team dinner on the first night of the visit with a festive atmosphere and complimentary handouts.

Wait, what? You mean this entire two-year process culminates in a discussion about what colored napkins and flavored drinks to serve?

The presentational element of the Self-Study presents a conundrum for colleges: Is it more reflective or smoke-and-mirrors? Peer review further complicates the process. Yes, regional self-governed accreditation is a unique and mostly prided feature of American higher education. At the same time, being evaluated by our peers creates the perception that there’s more at stake than compliance. It’s like a date, and we want to impress our social circle, which dozens of Self-Studies refer to as “Peer and Aspirational Institutions.”

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Eaten Alive aired in December, 2014. Though it was sold as an adrenaline-rush tale of how a man makes himself a meal for an anaconda, the real message he was trying to convey – save the Amazon – fell through the scales. But I am jumping ahead of myself, because before all the drama about the show came out I was going about my business, running the Environmental Club with Dr. Charlie Sontag.

As anyone who has been around BCC long enough knows, not only do we talk about past giants (and sit on their shoulders), we also walk with future giants. It was an average day when petite BCC student Gowri Varanashi came to the Environmental Club meeting as we started a new semester. She had bright eyes and a ton of enthusiasm for species conservation.

Her husband (fiancé at the time) Paul Rosolie would also come often to BCC meetings and they would both talk (and show pictures) about their work in the Amazon which everyone LOVED! They had an organization called Tamandua Rainforest Expeditions, where they would take volunteers out into the Amazon to experience the hand-sized butterflies, Howler monkeys, snakes and gigantic trees.

Gowri always inspired and awed me. One time a bunch of us stayed at an 80-acre farm in Vermont and I watched Gowri swiftly and abruptly scale a 40 foot tree in a matter of seconds with no tools. I also had the privilege of being at their beautiful wedding. I consider Gowri and Paul pivotal to showing youth by example that leadership isn’t a game reserved for the elders. It’s a choice. And every leader decides the best way for them to express their passion.

Part of the show Eaten Alive featured a key group of people going through the Amazon forest to find a large anaconda. One of those people was Gowri Varanashi, a BCC student. Her husband was the person to be eaten alive by the anaconda. Before the show aired, there were many upset people who feared the anaconda might be hurt in the challenge, so a petition was started to have the show canceled.

Though the couple was pleased people went out of their way to protect a snake, they hoped that the show would raise awareness about the phenomenal number of species that die every day in the Amazon from logging, metal harvesting, deforestation for beef production, the pet trade and oil exploration. You may be interested to look more into this mega-story if you have not heard about it. But probably you have because it was covered on every major news show. I am grateful to see BCC youth so passionate about making sure life, in all its amazing forms, continues.

Links to check out:

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Designing and Approving Our Curriculum

By Alan Kaufman, Ph.D.

An unfortunate incident took place at a recent meeting of the College-Wide Curriculum Committee—which is one of the permanent, Standing Committees of the Faculty Senate. A curricular item was brought before the committee for consideration for approval. Once approved by the Curriculum Committee such an item moves next, in the college’s curricular approval process, to the Senate. If approved by the Senate, the course goes forward to the college President for her or his approval, at which point it becomes a part of the college’s curricular offerings after approval by the Board of Trustees.

In the course of discussion it turned out that this item, prior to coming before the Curriculum Committee, had not been officially approved by its home department. Once this was recognized the item was tabled by the members of the Curriculum Committee and returned to the department. I call this incident unfortunate because the Curriculum Committee is a site where prospective college curriculum is supposed to be brought when it is ready to be approved — not before. In fact, the officers of the Faculty Senate, in tandem with the office of the Academic Vice President (now the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs), worked for a couple of years to clarify forms and, in general, to make the curriculum approval process clearer and more straightforward so that this process could follow a carefully-delineated and predictable path.

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Approval follows a specific course. All curriculum items, whether individual courses or entire curricula, generate from the faculty. This fact is unambiguously clear. As it stipulates in our “Faculty Constitution”: The “curricula of the college” is the responsibility of the faculty (Article Two. 1.1.c). To follow the curricular process of the college, an item originates in a department. One could, I think, make the argument that this is one of if not the principal reasons why we have departments: they are the home base where curriculum is generated. While Chairs may play a role in leading this process, any individual faculty member has the opportunity to initiate a new course or program.

But courses/programs are not initiated and then designed in a vacuum. Allow me to use myself as an example. A few years ago Professor Stacey Balkan and I created a new course for the Composition and Literature Department: Introduction to the Novel (LIT-226). We designed a syllabus and brought it before our department, which considered it and voted its approval of the course. At that point, we followed what is the college curriculum approval process: The dean sent the paperwork along to the Curriculum Committee; that committee considered the course and voted to approve it; next it went forward to the Faculty Senate, which also approved it. The course then went to the President, who affirmed the Senate’s decision and sent it along to the Board of Trustees. Many of you have designed and followed courses and entire curricula through this same process.

The process is careful and time-consuming— which is at it should be. (As part of this process, as you may know, the Senate created two recent positions: Course Auditor and Curriculum Auditor. The purposes of these positions is for their occupants to assist individuals or departments at any point in their development process and to look at and approve materials before they are sent forth to the Curriculum Committee and then the Faculty Senate. Joan Dalrymple has been the Senate Course Auditor and George Cronk the Curriculum Auditor; for Spring 2015, while Dr. Cronk is on leave, Joan will fill both positions.)

What, after all, is more important to any college than a rigorous, carefully-conceived academic curriculum? It is the foundation upon which a college rests.

This is why the Curriculum Committee tabled the aforementioned curriculum item. The decision had nothing to do with the worthiness of the course; it had everything to do with the integrity of the curricular process.

There is no other correct way to do this. Curriculum must be generated from the faculty members within a department. After departmental approval, the process outlined above must be followed. There is no other process that is available to a college as it participates, as it must, in appropriate shared governance processes— such as those clearly delineated in our own “Faculty Constitution.”

Of course, administrators and even Boards can, through micromanaging, initiate and impose new courses/curricula. In fact, we do sometimes hear, during these difficult times for shared governance, about colleges and universities where administrations and even Boards have intruded into the curricular process. But such inappropriate intrusion does not occur at Bergen, where the faculty and administration have historically respected, and continue to respect, the primacy of the faculty in this process. To do so is to maintain the integrity of our academic curriculum— which of course benefits our students— even when the process may seem inconvenient, or too time-consuming; this insistence in turn assures that Bergen will maintain its well-earned, traditional academic integrity.

The author is a professor in the department of Composition and Literature and Chair of the Faculty Senate. He can be reached at akaufman@bergen.edu or 201-493-3550.