

WCC TUTORS—AN ACADEMIC SUCCESS STORY

By Jean Robbins

“But I can’t do Math. Never could.” the student protests. Jonathan Schere nods. He’s heard that dozens of times. Patiently, they work to get to the core concept of the algebra problem, taking apart the language, dealing with the student’s anxiety. Suddenly, she whoops, “Hey, I’ve got it!” A tutor’s day is made and Jonathan’s absolute conviction that anybody can learn math is once again vindicated.

Jonathan is a retired engineer and a volunteer tutor working in the Math Tutorial. He is one of the approximately 100 tutors at Westchester Community College scattered in Tutorials across the campus, many of them volunteers like Jonathan. They work in every major area of the curriculum — Math, Science, Reading, Writing and English as a Second Language.

Before being accepted as volunteers in the Math Tutorial, tutors must pass a test. Professor Madalena Mansinho, its coordinator says, “So much as changed in Math. But we are eager to have them and supply material that will catch them up. Our volunteer tutors are a major asset.”

The extraordinary reach of the College’s tutorial system fans out from the Academic Support Center, chaired by Professor Susan Arietta. She points out that in a college in which students commonly work several jobs, commute long distances, and many study in a language and even an alphabet other than their native one, succeeding in college is a challenge.

The Academic Support Center was created by College President Joseph Hankin as a support mechanism to make that success possible. Dr. Hankin wants students not only to pursue their educational dreams but to have a successful Community College experience. Tutoring is free and students soon learn that the doors are always open.

Tutors’ backgrounds are widely diverse. Some, of course, are retired teachers. But there are scientists, engineers, lawyers, business men and women, editors, stockbrokers, technicians—each with a passion for their subject area and a belief in the future of the young people they work with.

The structure of the many Tutorials differ, responding to student and content need. In Professor Beth Holden’s Writing Tutorial, one-on-one is the order of the day. Because passing Composition and Literature I and II are a graduation requirement, hundreds of students pass through the Writing Center and reflect the diversity of the student body. One tutor kept track of the countries of origin of her students; it took only two years to reach fifty six.

Students bring in any writing problem from uncertainty with subject-verb agreement and sentence structure to a five paragraph essay to a twenty page research project or a scholarship application. Tutors also help dissect the meaning of a poem or a short story or essay. If it’s writing, it belongs here.

Tutor Marc Ginsberg understands that poetry often seems perversely strange to students—why not just say what you mean in prose. A student assigned to respond to a John Donne poem struggled with not only the poem’s meaning but with its Elizabethan language. “We dealt with the vocabulary first, then went through it line by line for meaning. I wanted her to see that poetry can express feelings that prose cannot. And she did. She finally got to that “wow” moment when she experienced something beautiful. That’s important. Both the feeling and the process.”

The Science Tutorial is open seven days a week and sees about 300 students weekly, reports its coordinator, Professor JoAnn Gala. “Sessions maybe one-on-one or a tutor may realize that three students in a class are stuck on the same problem and form a little group. Or a group can be as

big as twenty. We’ll even organize a workshop if that is what students need. We stay very flexible.”

Tutor Ben Romney is still a practicing MD Radiologist. “I enjoy working with young people, especially the ones going into the health field. We go over whatever they’re studying — gross anatomy, the metric system, physiology, anything. I can make understandable something that confused them in class. And it’s not too unusual for me to learn something.”

Professor Joanna Peters is the coordinator for the Reading and ESL Tutorial. “We work with the faculty to supplement the class work. Assignments are integrated into the developmental classes with tutors required to sign off on them. Assignments range all over — finding context clues, defining an idiom, recognizing a main idea, wherever the students are.”

Tutor Anne Klass says, “It’s like watching a baby taking its first steps — what’s proofreading, a glossary, a summary, how do you use a dictionary. There’s no cookie cutter student. Each has different needs and you have to figure them out. Our job is to empower students to take away strategies that will see them through.”

Professor Arietta concludes, “It takes a special person to be a tutor. Our volunteer tutors are absolutely essential to the work of the Support Center. Without them we simply could not accomplish the educational goals for the hundreds of students we need to reach — and do.”



Tutor Ben Romney in the ASC’s Science Tutorial

THE COLLEGIUM AT WCC

ADULT LEARNING WITH A CAPITAL "L"

by Hubert B. Herring



SHIRLEY PHILLIPS

VICE PRESIDENT OF
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**MANY THANKS AND GOOD
LUCK IN YOUR
RETIREMENT!**

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Shirley Phillips. During her tenure, the Foundation has grown by leaps and bounds, becoming the institution you see here before you today. We in the Volunteer Office extend our best wishes to her and thank her for her support and dedication to us, the College and the Foundation.

THANK YOU TO
ALL WHO HAVE
CHOSEN TO
MAKE A DIFFER-
ENCE ON OUR
CAMPUS!



**WE'RE MOVING TO
THE GATEWAY CENTER!
COME SEE US IN OUR
NEW OFFICE ON
THE 2ND FLOOR
IN SEPTEMBER!
OUR PHONE NUMBERS
WILL REMAIN THE SAME.**

When Collegium students break for coffee and cookies between classes, two topics are forbidden, grandchildren and doctor visits. Edith Litt, the indefatigable prime mover behind the Collegium, W.C.C.'s popular adult-education program, sees those coffee breaks as integral. Her goal was to create the perfect blend of learning and mingling. But she envisions chit-chat on a higher plane.

And make no mistake: this is learning with a capital L. "We don't do beginning yoga, or courses on getting older," she says. Instead, the offerings include everything from archeology to economics to the origins of World War I. In one memorable course, Janet DiFiore, Westchester's district attorney, followed the twists and turns of a case against a serial killer.

The instructors might be current or retired professors, or those who've had nary a brush with academe. Ms. Litt recruited nearly all of them, and they're all volunteers. And they're not instructors but "leaders," she says, and students are "members"; she sees the learning as very much a collaborative process.

Ms. Litt, a retired city planner, had a vision for a

Lifelong Learning Center. After the library at the College expanded, there was finally space, and she reached out to her network of acquaintances for leaders.

"I asked everyone I knew," she says. She knew exactly what she wanted, and expertise was just a starting point. She took prospects out to lunch, and signed them up only "if there was a spark."



Leader Susan Grunthal instructing a class in "The Concerto"

Then she needed "members." When only 13 people signed up in response to the initial ads, she said to herself, "Let's call it off." But when over 100 people showed up for an open house, "we knew we were onto something." The 70 students in fall 2004 grew to about 175 by last fall, and, if new leaders can be found, the Collegium could grow even further next fall. With a ripple effect from the opening of the new Gateway Building, the program gets "wonderful new quarters," with four classrooms.

Classes run all day on Wednesdays, and on Friday mornings. You pay for the six-week semester, then take one class or all of them. But watch the registration deadline closely, for returning members get first dibs, and they are a loyal lot.

Who are these generous souls who give so freely of their time and expertise? There's Greta Cohen, a retired English professor,

whose short-story classes are a big draw. There's David Blank, former chief economist at CBS, who in one class gave a lucid overview of the recent recession. And there's David Oestreich, an investor with a passion for military history, who

impressed at least one student by bringing a musket to class. How were so many of these wonderful leaders lured to the Collegium? By Edith Litt, of course.

A clear motivation for these and the other leaders is the caliber of the members. Ms Litt says leaders report that "this is the most interesting and alive group they've ever taught."

As the Collegium celebrates the completion of its 5 Year Anniversary, all applaud Edith. As David Oestreich said, "She had a vision and saw it through."

IN MEMORIAM:

NINA JONES FINK - We lost a staunch advocate, supporter and visionary. Part of the College since 1972 and a leader on the Foundation Board since 1984, Nina Jones Fink exemplified forward thinking, dedication to public education and a legacy of women's rights. Quoting Dr. Joseph Hankin, "Nina Jones Fink has served this college for 37 years...She possessed marvelous skills and was a role model to many of us. We will miss her immensely."

MARY BREEDE - Former volunteer and alumnus, grandmother of 18 and great-grandmother of 14, Mary Breede passed away this winter. Mary could always be counted on to help with special projects at the College. She and her late husband established the Walter Breede Jr. Scholarship Fund in support of WCC and its mission.

MARY HINRICHS - We lost one of our long time volunteers this winter. Mary was our official Tour Guide, welcoming new volunteers to the campus every Fall. She organized the docent training and tours for the opening of the "new" Harold Drimmer Library. As part of the American Association of University Women, Mary also recruited many volunteers to campus.