





# Miniversity

## The Faculty

Miniversity faculty, by and large, are people who, not unlike their students, have a background and interest in community service work. Many of them are SICC faculty who either fulfill their required course load or work on an adjunct line at the satellite campuses, because Professional Staff Congress regulations do not allow teachers to work on a voluntary basis.

At the Stapleton campus, for instance, the staff is largely made up of people from SICC who come out of social service oriented departments in accordance with the curriculum which was decided upon by the student population in the beginning. The courses and teaching methods, however, range from very informal internship-type seminars to structured lecture course, depending upon the approach of the professor and the particular requirements of the course material.

AID staff member Calvin King teaches Sociology I to miniversity students and now expresses a great deal of pleasure at the progress which the students in his course are making. Initially, however, it was a different story. "At first, I felt that this was an attempt on the part of CUNY to decrease the number of non-traditional students who were taking courses on campus," he says in retrospect. "However, the make-up of students enrolled in the mini proved my idea to be invalid."

His students, he says, are a heterogeneous group with a common denominator of high motivation. "Basically they are there for two reasons — one reason is to seek an alternative to the traditional campus, and the second is to acquire the academic learning necessary for a new career."

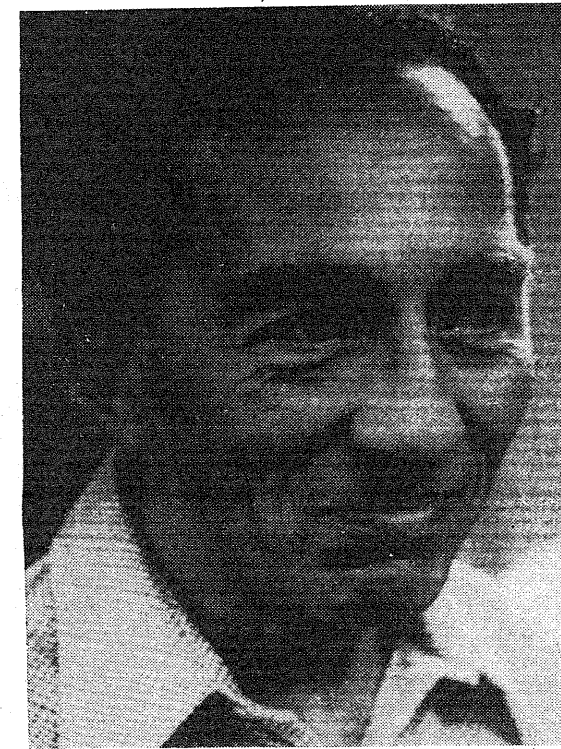


Photo by Abe Reznay

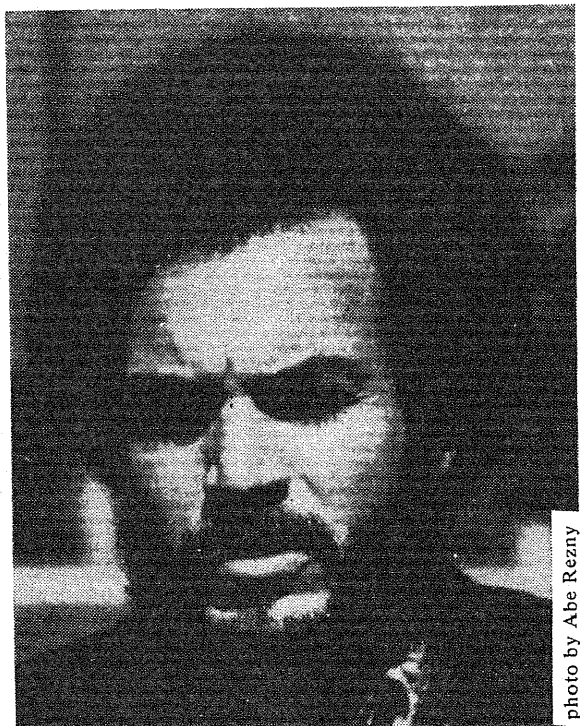


Photo by Abe Reznay

Al Maxman, (left) and Tom Bucaro both teach Community Service Training in Miniversity program.

different and this enhances the program. These are students who might be frightened by a more formal, traditional structure.

His course is structured like a seminar and he has a relatively small class which enables him to achieve an informal atmosphere. In his view, his class provides "an opportunity for people on community service jobs to get educational credit for what they do. It gives them the theoretical background which they are lacking and they get the chance to explore what they are doing every day."

The students in his Community Service Training program work primarily at Willowbrook and at the Staten Island Community Corporation; the age range is from mid-20 to mid-60, although blacks in their mid-30's make up most of the class enrollment.

As Bucaro sees it, "They are people who normally would have missed college. Now, they are in college, and the interest is high, although there were some initial problems with attendance."

Diversity in the student population at the miniversity has caused Bucaro to "re-think, re-design my teaching methods." He comes from the Public Health Department at SICC where "the field work comes at the end of classroom courses. Now I have to integrate the theoretical material into the practical experience." He believes that the students have become engaged in the educational process, only to want more of the same in terms of academic learning.

The location of the Stapleton miniversity in the Stapleton Youth Center effectively enhances the nature of the program, in his estimation. "The location is interesting in that we're located in a community service agency. In some ways, it's a mirror in a mirror — the students work in community service and learn community service right in a community agency. In that sense, the classroom is a lab, and everything becomes relevant."

Alvin Maxman of the SICC Public Health Department also teaches Community Service Training, but this time the locale is the Lower East Side campus which of necessity places somewhat different demands on the instructor. There is common ground, however, in that "students of the Lower East Side seem to be excited by the learning — they want to make sense out of what they know."

Explaining his concept of the miniversity, Maxman says, "When I got into the program, I accepted the

concept that a community college must make services available to the community. I see myself helping to make that concept come alive." His role as a teacher is, in his eyes, important in response to the experience of the students: "My students have been recipients and dispensers of community service with no background knowledge. I see myself integrating their knowledge, skills and attitudes to make them professional workers."

To him, the miniversity affords these people a chance to broaden their range of options, given their initial high level of self-motivation, their strong sense of where they are going. "They shouldn't have to struggle to fit into a student role as the recipients of traditional knowledge. We have to start with them where they are already. We have to get the students both involved in learning and involved with the development of the miniversity so that they will know where and how to express their own needs."

His students, for the most part, do a variety of social-service oriented jobs; they are people who are "interested in where they live and who they associate with. They feel short-changed by local agencies and they want to learn to change or better utilize the services that presently exist."

## Community

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She believes, further, that most of the students know what they want to do with their careers and are trying to "legitimize" it at the miniversity. "Some seek to gain prestige in the community; some, even though they have responsible jobs, don't get the respect or the pay benefits that graduates get." These are people who have learned by experience without a formalized education — in many cases, "they can run an agency, but they can't write a term paper."

While these professionals are in the majority of the student population, the sizeable minority are the people who want to be promoted in a field (such as the school aide who would like to be a teacher), or they are housewives, secretaries and the like who want an entirely new career area. As conceived by the administrators, "the mini is geared for demonstrably competent adults. High school students begin with no experience at the ground level in college, but these people have an average age of 34 and have worked for 10-15 years, have raised families, have been around."

In light of these facts, the premise of the miniversity is that these people would normally have never come to a campus either for financial reasons or for lack of time. Furthermore, in a regular evening program, they would have been forced to carry part-time course loads which would mean about eight years before graduation. Miniversity students can graduate in three years, while getting the kind of course material that will be the most useful to them.

From an administrative viewpoint, the organizational structure of the program is loose but functional. Ms. Sanazaro explains that the students are presently finishing up the writing of the by-laws in preparation for incorporation. "In the future, a student board and student officers will run the affairs of the mini." As it stands now, all students must enter the mini as matriculated students at SICC, but the elected student boards will hopefully be able "to negotiate with other CUNY schools to get a wider variety of courses." Also in the works is a plan to offer upper level courses which will enable mini students to obtain a B.A. at any of the locations.

Funding, at the moment, is through SICC since "these are all CUNY students, and, as such, they are entitled to an education from the city." The program directors have applied for a Chancellor's Grant for next year, but the college now pays faculty either release time or compensation to cover all instructional costs. Responsibility for the provision of the facility, janitorial service, utilities, and basic classroom equipment falls to the community; and students are expected to raise funds for the cost of incorporation as well as any other services they need.

The current miniversity offerings are as follows:

STAPLETON	
Social Planning Internship	Howard Stanton and Art Schlansky (CD)
Sociology I	Calvin King
Community Service Training	Tom Bucaro
Group Dynamics	Carroll Palmer (CD) and Joyce Goldstein
Conversational Spanish	Rosa Caparrós
Independent Project Soc. 30	Luis Diaz
English	Karen Sanazaro
LOWER EAST SIDE	
English	Mike Wallace (CD)
History and Culture of Puerto Rico	Gloria Garcia
Group Dynamics	Dermmy McDermott
Community Service Training	Al Maxman

Because these students are different than the average college student, Stanton feels, teachers and administrators must alter their methods of education accordingly. "I had one woman who had a couple of years of college and then got married, etc. Since then, she has had years of work experience. If we treat her like a deficient high school student, we are missing the point. Let's not mistake a weak high school student for a strong adult."

He also believes strongly that miniversity courses should not be of a remedial nature because the primary objective of such an education should be to respond to the abilities and skills of the students. "You have to build on what the students know. This entails a different range of knowledge. Certainly, it's not fair to give people a shabby education, a meaningless B. A., but the teachers have to respond to and use the competence of the adults. Students respond with joy and excitement for the recognition of their potential."

As for the future, he is trying to complete the application procedure by May 1st for the planned Chinatown miniversity, and that one is expected to open soon. By next September, all the miniversity students will be full-time matriculated students at SICC, so that financially and legally they are in line for all CUNY educational benefits. Furthermore, this will enable them to come on-campus to take courses of a technical nature which requires facilities that the miniversity cannot provide.

In terms of Stanton's own role in the project, he sees himself in a largely advisory capacity — he and the other administrators give assistance in such matters as the recruitment of teachers and the planning of the curriculum. He also acts as a liaison with the departmental P&B committees at SICC which are responsible for the hiring of miniversity faculty — "When we talk, we pass on what the students say about things." And finally, from a financial perspective, "we are legally using city money for these courses. This reverses the trend of the poor getting the least money from the city treasury."



Photo by Abe Reznay

Miniversity coordinator Karen Sanazaro talks with one of the students from her evening English section.

## The Students

"Non-traditional" is the term most frequently used in reference to the miniversity by instructors and students alike, and to a great extent, that aspect of the program derives from the age and professional work experience of the students. Many of the students have spent years in a particular field and have competence which reaches far beyond their academic credentials.

While many of the participants have worked in community service-related areas, some of the others have run the gamut of job possibilities; having finally settled into one, they have come to the miniversity looking for the academic background which will enable them to get promotions and raises. For some, the main attraction of the storefront campus is convenience — with jobs and families, they simply cannot afford the time to commute to a campus.

Edward Harris is one of these — a man who has been out of high school for twenty years. In that time, he has worked as a correction officer and as a staff member in a state drug addiction program. At the miniversity, he is taking English, Conversational Spanish, and Sociology; and this initial encounter with the world of college has prompted him to matriculate at SICC next fall.

For Harris, "a degree would mean a promotion." While he intends to stay in the social services, a degree will enable him to become a counsellor which is his primary interest at the moment. He is at the miniversity because "it is easier to come here — I don't like to hassle with the crowd." He does not see any major differences between the mini-campus and a regular campus other than the convenience factor, although he does mention that his co-workers who attend the Evening Session at SICC often complain that the instructors expect a great deal of prior knowledge, a problem which he has not encountered at the storefront campus.

Catherine Mudd is another of those who like the fact that the miniversity is immediately accessible to the neighborhood residents of Stapleton. She is a homemaker and the mother of a son, but the years

between high school and college have been spent as a receptionist, a computer operator for the Post Office, and a bank teller. Intending to start at SICC this semester, she discovered that she was too late to enroll and took an English course at the miniversity instead.

Although she still plans to enroll in the Nursing program at SICC next fall, she feels that the neighborhood environment "gives you a closeness you don't get in a university (she spent some time at N.Y.U.). I'm not intimidated by school," she explains determinedly, "but I enjoy school and I really can't handle the 9-5 syndrome."

Like Ms. Mudd, radio DJ's George Hiss and Merrill Richardson have held a variety of jobs in the time that they were out of school. Hiss has done a gospel show for the last five years on WHBI-FM and WRNW-FM; before that, he held a civil service position with the Economic Development Administration of the City of New York. Fifteen years ago he finished tenth grade and has not been to school since; now he is enrolled in English, Group Dynamics and Independent Study in Stapleton and is looking to "advance myself in the field of communications."

A radio producer at present, he would "like to produce TV shows, work in the field of visual media, and help people who also want to be in the field." To this end, he is involved in setting up workshops on production in conjunction with his stations "to help anyone who is interested in the field."

Hiss explains his reluctance to return to school, saying, "I've always been too busy for education, but I decided that it is now time to do things I should have done years ago. For the average person who doesn't have a chance to attend school during the day, this place is beautiful."

Hiss' partner Merrill Richardson is also a communications major in the CUNY-BA Program; under that system, he takes classes at the miniversity as well as at SICC and Richmond College.

With a quiet voice and a high-powered range of interests, Richardson wrote the proposal for station WVSI at SICC, assists in an Introduction to Broadcasting course here, and works for the TV Center at Richmond.

In his spare time, he is preparing a video-tape study of environmental problems in the ghetto areas of Staten Island from "a public relations viewpoint." As he sees it, "Environmental problems are not created by the people in the area, but by a lack of attention on the part of local government. I'm dealing mainly with black areas, because a lot of people are concerned with the environment as a whole. The media," he feels, "can show what's really happening."



Photo by Abe Reznay

## The Generations

Spanning two generations, the mother and daughter team of Pauline and Elaine Young is not selling dish soap or breakfast cereal — they are both back in college after many years away from school, jointly enrolled in an English course offered at the miniversity.

Pauline, the mother, is well past sixty and describes herself as a "retired homemaker and the mother of six children." Her education, before she came back, went as far as the eighth grade as well as Greek school (run by the Greek Orthodox Church).

Now she takes, in addition to English Literature, Community Service Training and Group Dynamics. She returned to school, she says, "because I had a lot of time on my hands and wanted to further my education." She finds, however, that Group Dynamics is "not what I expected — there are far too many analysts."

Of miniversity teaching methods in general, she claims that she doesn't understand the method of teaching — "it's too lenient and not a bit effective." In spite of her quarrel with the methods, though, she adamantly insists that "I won't give up, even though I get all zeros. I'm always open for learning."

Daughter Elaine, on the other hand, has been a secretary since she graduated from high school some eight years ago. Her opinion of the type of teaching found at the Stapleton miniversity is at odds with her mother's. "I like this," she says somewhat apologetically. "It's not too structured; the groups are small and personal."

She is very candid about explaining why it took her eight years to come back to school. "I was intimidated by the idea of college. I had no confidence in myself and I was afraid of competition. Working was important to me, so I never wanted to go."

Like her mother, she is taking Community Service Training and Group Dynamics, although English Literature is "about my favorite." She claims that she and her mother stay away from each other — "we don't bother with each other." Since she is interested in psychology, she chose to intern in St. Vincent's Hospital for her Community Service Training course and she spends six hours per week there working with patients to fulfill her requirements.

Of the miniversity system, she finds that the "teaching is more personal, not as rigid." She appreciates the fact that the program is not graded-oriented which, to her, reflects the overall informality of the place. On a more personal level, she feels that "being in school has given me confidence in my ability. I was always afraid of going back to school because I thought I would be the oldest in the class. Now I find that I'm the youngest."

## The Project Director

In some sense, Miniversity Director Howard Stanton is a professional community organizer — he has applied his community-oriented philosophy and skills from Puerto Rico to Boston, teaching the less wealthy members of society to utilize their rights in order to make government work for them. In the field of education as well he believes strongly in the concept of the community-based university and in the responsibility of city government to offer people an opportunity to learn, even if they do not wish to learn on a traditional campus.

At present, from his position as the Chairperson of the Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology Department at SICC, he is focusing his talent and energy on several off-campus, storefront campuses which are jointly termed miniversities. At the moment, two are in operation — one in Stapleton and one on the Lower East Side — with another scheduled to open in Chinatown very soon and Mariners Harbor later. Now, with his project making important inroads into communities, he spoke of the progress so far and plans for expansion in a recent interview.

First and foremost, "there is no one area which is causing problems — we have very few dropouts (2 out of 58 students in Stapleton), and the students are essentially happy with the academics." In his view, miniversity students are potentially as good or better than on-campus people, and he attributes this expectation to the fact that these students are older people who have often had years of work experience and who are fully competent in their respective fields.



Photo by Abe Reznay





