

INTRODUCTION

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From English to the Library, from the Humanities to Behavioral and Social Sciences and from Business to Math, faculty members across Hostos have worked together to produce this third volume of *Touchstone*. We thank our contributors as well as our readers, who, we are assured, will be stimulated and inspired by reports from their colleagues.

We would like to acknowledge the support and dedication of the following individuals: Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Lucinda R. Zoe; Interim Associate Dean Amanda Bernal-Carlo, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning; Department Chairs, who have constantly backed this publication and encouraged their departments to collaborate; and our reviewers, Dr. Richard Gampert, Director of Institutional Research, and Professors Gina Cicco, Jennifer Tang and Elyse Zucker.

The journal begins with the story of an interdisciplinary undertaking conducted by Profs. Zucker and Bill Casari. This was a project that connected the Grand Concourse, the century-old “Boulevard of Dreams” along which the college is located, with the dreams and aspirations of our students, many of whom live in its shadow. Students engaged in this project read about an array of individuals, weighing and considering their stories as Francis Bacon exhorted all true readers to do, and advancing their capacities as booklovers.

The second piece in the journal is another dramatic story, documenting a day at the college when writing seized center stage in the students’ educational journey. Profs. Fabrizio and Hirsch describe how, in observance of the National Day on Writing, Hostos students filled the walls (both physical and virtual) with their observations, interpretations, artistry, and aspirations, and were pictured proudly sharing their work for public examination. The wall was an extracurricular venue that Prof. Henderson would value for its ability to create the student interactions she described in her comments.

In the digital design classroom, meanwhile, students were learning about collaboration in a more structured setting as they worked to build consensus around team projects under the leadership of Prof. Shad. Worthwhile accomplishments are rarely the work of only one, and as Prof. López also noted in his observations on ethics education, cooperation is a must. When viewpoints diverge, students are presented with the opportunity for real learning, as they move from the classroom into professional environments where both personal responsibility and partnership are valued and equality upheld. To complement this ideal, offered next is a report by Prof. Ialongo, who describes two projects in which students examined gender in the context of Enlightenment documents, including the Declaration of Independence.

Moving from the Humanities to Natural Sciences, the next two pieces tackle the importance of educating our students about health issues and the environment, respectively. Prof. Trachman made topics in microbiology real to her students by linking theoretical studies about the flu with some hard-hitting evidence about viruses and vaccines, topical issues that truly affect us all. Then, in the next piece, a five-faculty team from the perspectives of biologists, chemists and physicists, call the college's attention to the challenges of creating a sustainable environment, and describe teach-in events at Hostos that raise our collective awareness about the need to protect our fragile world.

In the spirit of emphasizing the bond between the classroom and life, we turn next to two exciting new approaches to teaching mathematics, described by Alfred North Whitehead as the divine madness of the human spirit. If critical thinking involves seeing a problem from multiple viewpoints, then that was exactly the skill students practiced in Prof. Vaninsky's class, where the dry language of linear and quadratic functions was grounded by studying a business transaction from the perspective of customer and retailer. Prof. Cunningham, similarly, sought to make conscious discernment part of students' approach to problem-solving. She gauged the impact of this methodology with a student survey, and as predicted, found that students are indisputably appreciative of faculty's attention to their learning styles and cognitive development, especially as regards algebra, a hurdle for many of them.

Finally, readers will enjoy the journal's coda: two heartfelt exposés of teaching practices that altered the academic landscape not for students, but for faculty. Prof. Figueroa, first, confesses a growing addiction to writing across the curriculum—an affirmation, perhaps, that putting pen or fingers to paper or keys unleashes a mysterious originality. Prof. Bates, in turn, discovered an unknown talent and passion for the theater—and with his use of words like rapt, epiphany, and exhilaration, has presented an account that will stir us all.