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Peekskill Hosts the 14th Annual WISE Conference

On Friday, April 1, 2005 WISE Services held its 14th Annual Conference at Peekskill. Hosted by the Peekskill WISE/Peekskill Individualized Experience for Seniors under the direction of co-coordinators Allison Risoli and Dot Bertram, the conference was held at the Paramount Center for the Arts and the Westchester Community College Peekskill Extension Center. Over 100 people representing 17 different high schools listened to Dave Marcus, Woodlands WISE '78 speak about his WISE project in journalism and his career as a Pulitzer-

Prize winning journalist. Dave described the work that went into his latest book, *What It Takes to Pull Me Through - Why Teenagers Get in Trouble and How Four of Them Got Out* and how this work is an extension of his WISE project. He also indicated that he is looking for some interns!

Participants attended workshops on Introduction to WISE, Task Force Renewal, WISE Classes, Discovering Your Passion and WISE Student Roundtable. They listened to a panel consisting of three Peekskill graduates from the Class of 2000, Martin Oballa, Jaimie Zimmerman, and Amanda Luria. For the finale, three current Peekskill students presented their video about the 2005 Peekskill program. Genner Villon, Nya Joseph, and Jorge Herrera did a great job and their work was well appreciated by the audience.

Everyone had a great day. Evaluation forms had comments like:

"This was a wonderful morning!"

"I learned what other schools are doing."

"I valued having the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas, experiences, etc."

"The sharing of ideas is very important for success."

"As a mentor, I will not give up on my student. We still have time left for me to get him into shape."

"The workshops were very informative. It was very good to see a lot of people in the same 'boat' as myself."

"It's very important to share ideas and hear stories you thought were only yours."

"I learned about the importance of Task Force and [got] great ideas"

"I loved both workshops. I am usually very shy, but they allowed me to open up."

We hope your school team will be able to join us for next year's conference!



Dr. Judith Johnson, Superintendent of Peekskill Schools, welcomes the audience at the opening session of the 14th Annual WISE Conference at the Paramount Center for the Arts

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

What's in a word?

An often underappreciated part of the WISE experience is the one-on-one preliminary "interview" by a staff or community adult of seniors who are exploring what their WISE projects could be. Designed to probe the student's interests and passions, as well as reinforce understanding of the WISE program's structure and opportunities, the "interview" can become a predictable and boring chat about career exploration. Having done thousands of "interviews" over 30 years, I just met with a number of seniors at Woodlands High School and I was delighted by our wide ranging conversations.

In an hour with Jane, we discussed and took notes on family history, perceived strengths and weaknesses, hopes and dreams, realities and specific interests (Gothic fashions, make-up, learning German, the guitar and boxing). Morgan, a high-achieving and athletically gifted middle child, was serious about a forensics internship with a medical examiner, engaged in theater, thrilled at possibly rediscover-

ing her passion for horseback riding, and bubbling with joy about her baking.

The adult-rich environment WISE provides is only as good as the enriching adults make it. We can enrich our work with students by helping them talk, think, write and converse about exploration vs. focus, empowerment vs. discipline, pragmatism vs. idealism, means vs. ends, now vs. later, me vs. us. We can encourage them to ask for help by sharing our wider and deeper life experiences and by showing that we seek help from and listen to each other.

I am suggesting that the word "conversation" replace "interview" - not simply as a technical correction, but as a way of thinking and behaving from the time of the initial project discussions through mentor meetings, journal writing, reflection, presentation preparation and final assessment. Each project is an individualized journey, but each is also related to the larger movement for experiential and collaborative life-long learning.

This newsletter illustrates the work of WISE Services. Through our workshops, coordinator seminars, annual conference, website, enrichment trips, regular contacts with our schools and graduates, we provide an ongoing conversation that helps us all gain deeper insights into the WISE experience.

VISIT TO THE MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

On Wednesday, May 25, 2005, eight WISE students spent a terrific day at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Students who attended were: Christy Dash (Medicine) and Anju Varghese (Medicine) from Nyack HS; Alexandra Alamon (Pediatrics), Immaculata Obi (Nursing) and Mia Lynn Deaver (Nursing) from Woodlands HS; Danielle Alamon (Medicine) from the Westchester Magnet Academy; Jonathan Hack (Patient Care) from Solomon Schechter Academy; and Krystal Sarcone (HIV/AIDS) from Hendrick Hudson HS.

This visit was a wonderful experience on many levels. Students were provided with an opportunity to hear from dedicated and passionate faculty members whose stories of their research were eye-opening and fascinating. Dr. Ana Abraido-Lanza, Professor of Sociomedical Studies, described her work with the health of immigrant populations, which derives from her own experience as a young immigrant from Cuba. Dr. Melissa Begg works as a biostatistician and she explained why she likes her work so much. As a biostatistician, she is much in demand to help researchers explain the data they collect from many different types of studies ranging from breast cancer to schizophrenia. Originally a medical doctor, Dr. Donna Shelley worked for the Department of Health and developed a research interest in smoking cessation programs. She is now an Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences. Students also heard about work of Dr. Steve Stellman, Professor of Epidemiology, who has done research on the effects of Agent Orange (sprayed during the Vietnam War) and on the chemical effects of smoking.

WISE students then journeyed to

the Columbia University Head Start, where they were greeted by Dr. Gloria Farber, Director of Education. In a series of visits to classrooms students had a chance to see health education at the grass-roots level for preschoolers and their parents. They learned that Head Start personnel track immunizations and health records for the students and make health-based referrals for follow-up care when necessary.

For some students, the highlight of the day was the visit to the labs of two working scientists – both extremely passionate and articulate about the extraordinary work they are doing. Dr. Greg Freyer, Associate Professor of Clinical Environmental Health Sciences, provided a mini-lecture on DNA and then showed us his experiments with yeast, which are designed to determine how to repair damaged DNA. Dr. Joseph Graziano, Associate Dean and Professor of Environmental Health Sciences, gave students an overview of his work in Bangladesh, where his team has researched and provided care for people exposed to arsenic poisoning in wells. Through the efforts of these dedicated public health workers, many thousands of people now have access to clean water.

Lunch with Dr. Robert Fullilove provided both physical and mental sustenance. Dr. Fullilove, Associate Dean and Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences, spoke about his work with his wife, who is a medical doctor. Their focus is on health care in Harlem and much of their current work is on HIV/AIDS prevention. Dr. Fullilove also described a personal medical crisis, and his interest in issues related to drug addiction. Perhaps the highlight of this fascinating conversation was a discussion with students about stressors in their lives and the toll stress takes on high school students. One student commented that it would be great if the staff of their own schools asked them about stress.

The day was brought to an end by the two Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health staff members who organized and hosted the day. Students learned about the work of Susan Smith, Associate Dean for Program Development, and Dr. Ian Lapp, Assistant Dean and Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences. They introduced the Dean of the School of Public Health, Dr. Allan Rosenfield. Dr. Rosenfield, who is an obstetrician, described his

(Continued on page 5)



Dr. Greg Freyer illustrates his lesson on DNA as Susan Smith and WISE students look on.

Graduate Voices



Andrew Ross Sorkin – Scarsdale High School, 1995 – Business Journalism

There's not much I liked about school. Classes bored me, teachers harassed me (for handing in my homework late) and the cafeteria food upset my stomach. So when Scarsdale High School announced that I didn't have to go to school for the last five weeks of my senior year if I could just find a company that would allow me work for it – and that I'd still graduate -- I thought this school thing may not be so bad after all.

"Senior Options" turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me. I managed to sneak my way into *The New York Times* as the assistant to the assistant of Stuart Elliott, the legendary advertising columnist in the Business Day section. The plan was for me to do a bit of stapling and some photocopying. For an eighteen-year-old kid, it was a dream just to be in the building. At the time, I had no intention to put two words together let alone a sentence.

Of course, as you would expect from any overachieving high school brat from Scarsdale, by my third week on the job I had written my

first article for *The Times*. They asked me to stick around for the rest of the summer to pen some more and the rest is history: My mother can now brag that I was the youngest writer for the paper ever. (Apparently a true fact.)

Ten years later I write for *The Times*, as chief mergers and acquisitions reporter, and I love every minute of it. Since my Senior Options program in 1995, I have written over one-thousand articles including dozens of front-page stories; met with heads of state and corporate titans; traveled around the world on assignment; appeared on countless television programs and lectured at some of the nation's premiere universities.

And to think what would have become of me if I had been stuck in school..

Jennifer Marcus – New Rochelle, 1994 – HIV Clinic

Our WISE experience was amazing and quite progressive in retrospect. I teamed up with Alyssa Malaspina, a classmate and Alexi Brock, our mentor for the WISE program in 93-94. This was the first year that WISE was implemented into the curriculum for seniors. Alyssa and I decided that we wanted to make a difference in people's lives and to give back to the community. We chose Project Hope in Yorktown, NY, an outpatient clinic for people living with HIV or AIDS.

We made that trip up to Yorktown weekly and loved every minute of it. Initially, we never thought this choice of program would get accepted by the faculty, parents, and school officials. Fortunately, we were dealing with open-minded individuals who thought this would be a wonderful experience for two 17-

years-olds. At Project Hope, we listened to people living with HIV or AIDS share their words and feelings with us. We did hospital visits that were emotionally charged and we experienced the death of one of the clients.

Looking back, this was a very intense experience that we'd do again in a heartbeat. The friends we made at Project Hope came to our WISE presentation. There was nothing better than standing on that stage, sharing our experiences and looking at the front row and seeing the new friends we made be so supportive. It was amazing!

Eleven years later, I am working at Reuters America. At night, I am pursuing my true passion, Massage Therapy. One could say that Project Hope inspired my career choice, a choice that enables me to give back to society, just like our WISE project.

Alyssa too has chosen a career that gives back to society. She is a drug and alcohol rehabilitation counselor at NYU.



Graduate Voices



Kristina Newland – Woodlands High School, 1993 – Sleep Disorders

My decision to participate in WISE was one of the best I made in high school.

When I first made up my mind to participate in WISE, I asked Mrs. Browne, my Biology/Physics teacher, to be my mentor and she accepted. My focus of study was on Sleep Disorders. I can not recall how or why I came to decide on that topic, but I am glad I did because it was very interesting. I interned at the **Sleep Disorders Center at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center** in White Plains. It was a great experience and I learned a great deal about the physiological processes of sleeping and sleep disorders.

In addition to working in the Sleep Disorder lab, I became a patient for a night. I was hooked up to all the sleep monitoring machines and taught how to read the brain wave patterns. I used my personal print out for my final presentation. (I think I still have that print out, you know...now where is that journal?).

The great thing about WISE is that participants gain so much more than "book knowledge". By getting myself up and out of the house everyday (I was driving) - I learned about responsibility, discipline, and accountability. By recognizing and accepting my strengths and weaknesses - I learned about myself. By making mistakes and surviving them (mistakes are "life threatening" for teenagers) - I learned about not being afraid. By writing in my journal and having others read it (which was mandatory) - I learned about giving others the chance to really know me.

WISE is a wonderful program and it's so good to see it continue and spread. Some of my favorite moments happened in that WISE room senior year. The leadership, camaraderie, respect, and support among fellow students and our mentors was priceless. I'll say it again - *My decision to participate in WISE was one of the best I made in high school.*

Columbia visit (Continued from page 3)
own public health work in Africa.

As WISE staff members who have our own passion – the belief in experiential learning for high school students — it was exciting to watch our students learn as we all experienced the day for ourselves. It was also especially exciting to watch students interact all day long with such fabulous role models. Danielle Alamon mentioned that she “loved how everyone there is so motivated to pursue their passions.” “Saving lives millions at a time,” was what impressed Jonathan Hack. He also found the hallway “DNA Yeast lecture” to be “amazing.” Krystal Sarcone commented:

“The Mailman School of Public Health experience was awesome. I am confident that I want to work in the public health field and this opportunity was perfect. I loved the whole day. Not only was I able to hear from professors themselves but we got to visit places like the epidemiology unit which was my favorite. I loved learning about the arsenic problem in Bangladesh. It is certainly a tragedy and a public health nightmare, but a situation like that is exactly what I want to work with. Another benefit was the connections that I built, not only with other students and WISE coordinators, but also with the School of Public Health. I went back the following day for a seminar on AIDS in the Kalahari. It was definitely a beneficial opportunity and I will use the knowledge I got from that day in years to come.”

We are thrilled to embark on a collaborative relationship with the staff of the Mailman School and look forward to many future opportunities for our students to visit the School of Public Health and learn about the fascinating research and interests of the faculty. Some day we hope we will have the pleasure of seeing some of our WISE graduates enroll as degree candidates at the Mailman School of Public Health.

UNIVERSAL WEATHER AND AVIATION VISIT



Ralph Vasami, WISE 1978 and Linda Greene, WISE Executive Director

On July 26, 2005 three high school juniors and future WISE students had the opportunity to visit Universal Weather and Aviation and meet with the President of the company, Ralph Vasami. Ralph began his career with Universal in 1978 while doing his WISE project at Woodlands High School. As an intern at Universal, then housed at Westchester airport, Ralph started his meteorology placement at 6 a.m. and spent three hours a day at Universal before he started his senior year classes at Woodlands. At Universal, Ralph had responsibility for filing meteorological data, analysis of weather maps, and providing live radio broadcasts on the local weather for WFAS. This made him an “instant celebrity.” At the time, Ralph wasn’t sure he wanted to go to college, but his WISE internship helped him decide to pursue a career in meteorology. After high school graduation, he spent every school vacation working at Universal, attended college in Vermont to study meteorology, and then returned to Universal to start his career. During his 22 years at the company, he has been instrumental in creating the Sales and Marketing Department and various new services launches. Previous positions in the company have included Senior Manager of Meteorology, Manager of

Marketing, Vice President of Marketing and Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer.

Since 1959, Universal Weather and Aviation has pioneered international flight support services for corporate aviation and has been coordinating and providing services in trip support around the world. Headquartered in Houston, Universal employs over three hundred people and services many of the world’s largest companies.

The tour of the Universal facilities included a visit to the Meteorology Department where the students were able to view weather software and meet with the Head of the Department. The meteorology department provides corporate pilots with weather information and updates around the clock. The students were excited to see an application for all those hours of earth science and to discover how pervasive computer use is in the real world.

WISE is thrilled to count Ralph Vasami among its graduates and appreciates Universal Aviation’s support of our program.



Nicole Craigen, Alex Willingham, and Charles Basler, high school juniors and future WISE students, learn about meteorology from the Universal Weather and Aviation meteorologist

A WISE FAMILY - BY MICHELE ROSENBERG AND PAUL SHAPIRO



Michele Rosenberg, English teacher and WISE coordinator with Paul Shapiro, former Assistant Principal.

Last year the WISE program began at Spring Valley High School. Here is the story as told by Michele Rosenberg and Paul Shapiro. We begin with Michele's reflection on her own WISE experience at Woodlands High School in 1987:

By the beginning of my junior year at Woodlands High School, the WISE program had been thriving for years and as I watched several of my teammates and friends participate, I knew it would be a wonderful opportunity for me. Although I had always loved school, for senior year I wanted to do something different, fun and personal. My only concern was, "What should I do for my WISE experience? As an athlete, I was always fascinated by athletic injuries. For this reason, I decided to pursue an internship in the field of Physical Therapy.

Deciding on a particular project or internship idea was the difficult part; choosing a mentor was simple. Although I adored several teachers, I knew I wanted my softball coach and physical education teacher, Roberta Moloney, to be my mentor. I had played softball for her for four years and we had a wonderful relationship. Plus, she was as passionate about sports as I. I knew she would always have excellent ideas, constructive criticism and a supportive attitude, and I was right.

After interning at a Physical Therapist's office for over four months, I began my presentation by saying, "Well, I now know that I have no desire to become a Physical Therapist or Athletic Trainer!" The comment evoked tons of laughs from the audience members because they understood that it did not mean that WISE wasn't a wonderful and gratifying experience. Being a WISE student was not only about exploring career options, but for me, it was

more about new experiences, interacting with interesting people, and developing life long skills. Without question, WISE was one of the most memorable experiences of my senior year.

Paul Shapiro picks up the story: Prior to the 2003-04 school year, Michele Rosenberg (or Rosey as we know her) had often spoken about her high school experience with WISE. We spoke about our seniors each year, noting how many of them "caught senioritis" and lost steam going into their final semester. When we decided to bring WISE into the school for the 2004-05 school year, I became extra excited. Both Rosey and I knew that this particular senior class was special. We were sure that they would become excited about WISE and help us create a successful program, and they did.

I worked closely with Rosey to plan task force meetings, work on student schedules and engage in a constant exchange of ideas. My personal stake was to be a mentor. I hoped a student doing a project in politics would ask me to be her mentor for the program, and I was thrilled when she did. While my relationship with her had been the typical student-administrator one prior to WISE, it became closer and mutually beneficial for each of us because of her WISE project. Her excitement became my excitement...our mutual enthusiasm grew as we worked together...her times of worry and concern became my cue to buoy her up and help her find solutions and the silver linings around some not too dark clouds.

Thinking about her journal and discussing it with her turned into another responsibility, but one that I looked forward to more than many others. When I introduced her at her presentation, I felt like the proud father at his daughter's "mini-graduation" as she showed her enthusiasm and interest to her classmates and teachers.

Michele picks up the story: Becoming the WISE Coordinator and serving as a mentor to students is an extremely rewarding experience. It has been an unbelievable feeling to watch this program grow from infancy. As we start our second year, we are a flourishing program. The support from the administration, staff, community, parents and the students has been overwhelming. Students are excited to work with mentors, eager to explore careers, and curious to see what they are going to learn about themselves. To witness presentations, now from the adult perspective, makes me feel like a proud parent!

Paul concludes: I retired in June. While I have retired from my full-time job, I have not retired from WISE. As part of the WISE Services team, I hope to continue to be involved with the program at "my" high school, as well as to introduce and help bring the program to other schools throughout the region. WISE had the effect on me that it has had on so many other people – it has become a fulfilling part of my life.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Vic Leviatin, Linda Greene and Deborah Harris will present a WISE Services workshop at the Fall Forum of the Coalition of Essential Schools in Boston, MA on November 5, 2005.

A piece about the WISE program appears on the Heartland.Pac website. This website, started by Governor Tom Vilsak of Iowa can be found at www.Heartlandpac.org. Click on "Ideas from the States" and scroll down to the discussion on "Engaging High School Students Before their Graduation."

The New York Times published two articles on WISE last spring. WISE schools in Westchester were featured in the Westchester Section of the Times Sunday, April 24, 2005. Long Island WISE programs were described in an article that appeared in the Long Island Section on Sunday, May 29, 2005.

Janine DeFeo wrote a fine article about Miramonte High School's WISE program that appeared in the June 9, 2005 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

WISE staff members are currently working with six new schools for Spring, 2006 – Briarcliff High School (Briarcliff, NY), Dobbs Ferry High School (Dobbs Ferry, NY), Mt. Vernon High School (Mt. Vernon, NY), Nelson Mandela High School (Mt. Vernon, NY), Springville Griffith Institute (Springville, NY), and Yorktown High School (Yorktown, NY) and one school for 2007 – Sleepy Hollow High School (Tarrytown, NY).



*WISE students and WISE Services's Deborah Harris
lunching with Dr. Robert Fullilove of the Mailman School
of Public Health at Columbia University.*