

A History of Medgar Evers College®

Medgar Evers College has the distinction of being the youngest of the four-year senior colleges in The City University of New York. In the early part of the Sixties, the Central Brooklyn community recognized the need and expressed a desire for a local public college. Through various community organizations including, but not limited to, the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, and the NAACP, and through their local elected officials, the residents of Central Brooklyn approached the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York with this request. Members of the various community-based organizations constituted the Bedford-Stuyvesant Coalition on Educational Needs and Services, which served as the primary vehicle for interfacing with the Board of Higher Education. After many discussions and much involvement by community residents and the Coalition, the Board of Higher Education, on November 17, 1967, "approved the sponsorship of Community College Number VII, with the indication of an intention to admit students in the Fall of 1969.¹

On 13 February 1968, the Board of Higher Education announced that the college would be located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn. On 27 January 1969 the Board approved the establishment of an "experimental four-year college of professional studies offering both career and transfer associate degrees and the baccalaureate degree, to be located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn, said college to be established in place of a previously approved but not started new Community College VII, and further directed that the City University Master Plan be amended accordingly." This action was endorsed by action of the Regents on March 20, 1970.²

The Board of Higher Education Proceedings of April 14, 1970 reflect the Board action, which modified the 1968 Master Plan to delete Community College Number Seven and listed in lieu thereof under Senior College, "College XVII, Mid-Brooklyn, Initial Facilities, Estimated Cost: \$10,000,000." The College was officially established on July 30, 1970 when Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller signed the legislation approving the "establishment of an experimental four-year college of professional studies offering both career and transfer associate degrees and the baccalaureate degree..." Finally, on September 28, 1970 the Board of Higher Education approved the recommendation from the College's Community Council that the name of the college be Medgar Evers College, in honor of the martyred civil rights leader, Medgar Wiley Evers (1925-1963). In recognition of this, September 28th is observed as "Founders' Day" at Medgar Evers College.

¹*Minutes of Proceedings*, Board of Higher Education of the City of New York, November 17, 1967, Calendar Item Number C8

²*Minutes of Proceedings*, Board of Higher Education of the City of New York, January 27, 1969, Calendar Item Number 3

On December 2, 1970, the Medgar Evers College Community Council, chaired by John Enoch, and the Board of Higher Education co-hosted an announcement ceremony at the Y.M.C.A. on 139 Monroe Street in Brooklyn. Chairman Enoch stated, "The Medgar Evers College, reflecting the image of the martyred leader who dedicated his life to the cause of individual freedom, dignity and personal fulfillment, will add another pillar of strength to the growing educational, economic, cultural and social foundations of the central Brooklyn community and New York City." Mr. Evers' widow, Mrs. Myrlie Evers, and two of the couple's three children flew in from Claremont, California for the ceremony. She was presented a scroll that cited Mr. Evers' "...effective contribution to the cause of human freedom and dignity...In choosing the name of Medgar Evers, it is our hope that his ideals will inspire students and faculty of the college in their pursuit of truth as the surest path to human freedom and social justice."

The community was then and continues to be an important force in the life of the College. The method of planning for the college and selection of its first president were unprecedented in the history of the Board of Higher Education. For the first time, representatives of the local community participated actively in the decision-making process. Seven members of the Bedford Stuyvesant Coalition on Educational Needs and Services served on the Presidential Search Committee and mandated Community Council was organized in the Spring of 1970 under the leadership of Mr. John Enoch, Acting Chairman. The sense of commitment and service to the community, which pervades throughout the College, may be attributed directly to the multi-faceted roles, which the Community Council and the community as a whole, have played in the establishment, growth and development of this institution.

The first president, Dr. Richard D. Trent, began his tenure on March 3, 1970. The first group of 1,069 students began classes on September 13, 1971 following the first registration period, which occurred September 7-10, 1971. These students enrolled in baccalaureate degree programs in teacher education, inner city studies, business, accounting and secretarial science. Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degree programs. The first student body included 36 part-time and 753 full-time degree-seeking matriculants and 293 non-matriculating students. Ten students were enrolled in the SEEK Program.

During the early years, several locations throughout central Brooklyn were used for classrooms and offices. These included the 317 Clermont Avenue (Masonic Temple) location; 402 Eastern Parkway (main library that was relocated to this site in February of 1975, classrooms, faculty offices); St. Luke's Church (classrooms and offices); Lafayette Presbyterian Church (classrooms and offices); St. Joseph's School at 658 Dean Street (classrooms and offices); 1127 Carroll Street (administrative offices), 244 Rogers Avenue (administrative offices); and 660 Nostrand Avenue (office of Community Services Division that included Continuing Education). The first library of the College

was established on the second floor of the Masonic Temple at 317 Clermont Avenue and its holdings consisted of 20,000 volumes on loan from Kingsborough Community College. In September of 1972, the College began its second academic year in its first permanent building at 1 ISO Carroll] Street, a Brooklyn landmark and the site of the Brooklyn Preparatory High School for many years. It was not until 1988 that the second permanent building at 1650 Bedford Avenue was opened.

Initially, the college was organized into four divisions under the leadership of acting divisional chairpersons. The divisions and their acting chairpersons were; Humanities • Dr. William Wheeler; Natural Sciences - Dr. Charles Remain; Social Sciences- Dr. Anderson J. Franklin; and Professional Studies - Dr. Wendell Clement. By AY 1973-74, the academic structure had been expanded to include: Special Programs (Professor Frank E. Brown, Director), Division of Academic Development (Dr. Roderick Loney, Chair), Division of Business and Secretarial Science (Professor Levy Elzy, Jr., Chair), Division of Humanities (Dr. Charles Veley, Chair), Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (Dr. Charles Romain, Chair), Division of Health Sciences (Professor Hilda Richards, Chair), Division of Social Sciences (Professor Clifton Harrell, Chair), Division of Teacher Education (Dr. James Lewis, Jr., Chair), and the Health and Physical Education Program (Professor Paul Bobb, Director).

The mid-Seventies is a period in the College's history that is marked by a series of significant accomplishments by the students, faculty, staff and administrators of the College. In April of 1974, the student newspaper, ADAFL, was founded under the leadership of its first Editor-in-Chief, Diane Ifill; the Beta Alpha Zeta Chapter of Phi Beta Lambda Future Business Leaders of American was chartered on May 17, 1974; degrees were conferred on the first ninety-four graduates in June, 1974; and in November of 1974, Dr. Royce M. Phillips, Associate Professor of Education and Chairperson, Division of Teacher Education and Professor Mary Umolu, Associate Professor of Speech, became the first members of the faculty to be presented the CUNY Award for Excellence in Teaching. In April of 1976, the College received notification of its full accreditation as a four-year college by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Unfortunately, during this same time, New York City was undergoing a fiscal crisis- As a result, Medgar Evers College was redesignated a community college, but retained its ability to award baccalaureate degrees. Ironically, this redesignation became effective on September 1, 1976 — just five months after the College's accreditation status as a four-year institution had become a reality.

Despite the change in the College's status, the spirits of the faculty, students, staff and administrators remained undaunted and the College continued its metamorphosis. After twelve years as president, Dr. Trent tendered his resignation and on July 19, 1982, Dr. Denis Paul was appointed the university administrator to lead the College while a national search was undertaken for a new president. On March 1, 1984, the second president, Dr. Jay C. Chunn 11, began his tenure. Dr. Chunn served

the college for three years and was succeeded by Dr. Leo Corbie, who was acting president from July 1, 1987 through August 31, 1989.

Throughout the ensuing years the College and community family fought diligently to regain senior college status. This did not become a reality until the dynamic and visionary leader, Dr. Edison O. Jackson, the third president, who assumed the helm on September 1, 1989 following a national search, formulated new strategies. On June 8, 1994, the College was restored to senior college status by the State of New York Legislature with an effective date of July 1, 1994, culminating a nineteen [year] struggle to regain senior college status. Justice also prevailed in another significant way in that year. After thirty years of investigations and court proceedings, Byron de la Beckwith was finally convicted of assassinating Medgar Wiley Evers and sentenced to life imprisonment on February 5, 1994.

In 1992, the College adopted a new governance plan and today, Medgar Evers College is organized into four schools under the leadership of Assistant Deans who report directly to the Provost and who are responsible for the day-to-day administration and leadership of the individual schools. The School of Business and Public Administration, headed by Assistant Dean Alien Singleton, is comprised of two departments: the Department of Accounting, Finance, Economics and Law (Dr. Nathan Ezuma, Chair), and the Department of Business and Public Administration (Dr. Joyce Siler, Chair). The School of Liberal Arts and Education, under the leadership of Dr. Deborah Shanley, Assistant Dean, consists of five departments: Department of Education (Dr. Charlotte Phoenix, Chair), Department of Interdisciplinary Studies (Dr. Don Quinn Kelley, Chair), Department of Languages, Literature, Communication Skills and Philosophy (Dr. Brenda Green, Chair), Department of Mass Communications, Creative and Performing Arts, and Speech (Dr. Mary Umolu, Chair), and the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences (Dr. Thomas Edwards, Chair).

The School of Science, Health and Technology is composed of four departments and is led by Dr. Hiroko Karen, Assistant Dean. The departments are: Department of Biology (Dr. Edward Catapane, Chair), Department of Mathematics (Dr. Darius Movasseghi, Chair), Department of Nursing (Dr. Bertie Gilmore, Chair), and the Department of Physical Sciences and Computer Science (Dr. Leon Johnson, Chair). The School of Continuing Education and External Programs is headed by Assistant Dean E. Thomas Oliver and provides an array of non-credit continuing education, basic skills and high school equivalency instructional programs to more than 4,000 area residents.

Located in the heart of the Crown Heights section of Central Brooklyn, Medgar Evers College is noted for its commitment to academic excellence and the development of the community in which it resides. The College presently offers seventeen degree programs leading to the Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Applied Science, Bachelor of Arts, and Bachelor of Science degrees. Medgar Evers College is the

only institution in The City University of New York with a career ladder in nursing (including a non-credit nursing assistant program, 45 credit hour practical nursing program that articulates directly into the A.A.S. degree program. Associate in Applied Science and Bachelor of Science degree programs). Today, the College enrolls more than 5,300 degree students and over 4,000 continuing education students. The spiraling enrollment has resulted in a dire shortage of space and the College continues to use several locations throughout Brooklyn and Manhattan for classes and to house its Centers, two Headstart Programs, and the Offices of Sponsored Research, Development and Multi-Campus Programs.

The library, which is located in the Bedford Building, contains approximately 100,000 volumes and 600 periodicals (including nine ethnic newspapers), encompassing all academic disciplines as well as advanced research in support of pluralism and cultural diversity. Special Collections holds the South African Collection and the Porter Black Bibliography of the African American experience, a collection of microfilms of 40,000 titles includes the Schomburg Collection for Research in African American studies. Media Services house more than 17,000 items of non-print resources. The Learning Center provides both tutorial and computer-assisted instructional services. Computer, physics, chemistry, biology, microbiology and environmental science laboratories are available to students in support of the academic curricula. Recreational facilities include a gymnasium and Olympic size swimming pool. The Office of Student Affairs and Services ensures that special services are available for differently-abled students. An on-campus Child Care Center and the nearby Headstart Programs provide childcare services for the children of College students and community residents.

Under Dr. Jackson's leadership, Medgar Evers College is leading the way into the twenty-first century with a vision to create innovative academic programs that meet the demands of the changing workplace, to enhance teaching and learning, to expand research avenues, to promote student success and to establish linkages to the community. In keeping with the College's mission and mandate to offer effective educational programs to residents of Central Brooklyn, Medgar Evers College conducts a variety of innovative and effective programs, which are designed to enhance the participation of persons from disadvantaged populations. These programs include basic skills and literacy programs, English as a Second Language, and numerous enrichment courses. The College continually demonstrates its commitment to underserved and disadvantaged populations through innovative academic initiatives, among which are the ACCESS Center, the C-STEP Program and the R.E.A.C.H. Program.

The College remains a major force in addressing the needs of the citizenry of Central Brooklyn and a significant portion of this charge is carried out through the services provided residents by the School of Continuing Education and External Programs, within which the Center for Law and Social Justice, the DuBois-Bunche

Center for Public Policy, the Small Business Center and the Caribbean Research Center are housed. The Center for Law and Social Justice, for example, advocates for social justice for community residents. One of the Center's major endeavors is the Fair Housing Project that assists persons who have been discriminated against in seeking adequate housing. The Small Business Center provides assistance to small businesses through technical assistance workshops, conferences and training sessions, with an emphasis on increasing productivity and competing in the global market.

Traditionally, Medgar Evers College has focused on the development of the children and youth of Central Brooklyn. In keeping with this thrust, the Medgar Evers Middle College High School, a New Visions high school, was opened in the Fall of 1993. The high school now enrolls 475 students and focuses on the preparation of its students for college enrollment, with an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and skills in mathematics and the natural sciences. The majority of the student population is of African American and Caribbean ancestry and resides in Crown Heights, Fort Greene, Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New York and Brownsville. Oversight of the high school rests with the Assistant Dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Education. Among the other College initiatives targeted to the intermediate and high school aged youth of the community are the Liberty Partnership Program, Central Brooklyn School-to-Work Initiative, Talent Search Program, the NCAA National Summer Youth Sports Program and the various City of New York Department of Youth Services supported programs.

In keeping with the College's promotion of excellence, the Freshman Year Program was established in 1991 and the Honors Program began operation in the Fall of 1995. The Freshman Year Program focuses on effecting a smooth transition into the senior college setting while enhancing freshmen students' knowledge in the various disciplines, providing intensive academic support services, and augmenting students' cultural development through a variety of enrichment activities, including exposure to nationally and regionally renowned leaders via the Presidential Lecture Series. The Honors Program provides students with a rigorous academic and intellectually stimulating experience. Honors students receive special tutoring and academic counseling, opportunities to attend lectures, cultural programs and other events both on and off campus. All courses for Honors students utilize a "writing across the curriculum" approach and the students pursue challenging academic programs tailored to their needs and strengths. A study abroad component, currently in its formative stage, will be available to Honors students.

Medgar Evers College has a history of being the primary vehicle for upward mobility of Brooklyn residents. If you ask ten different students what Medgar Evers College means to them, you will, most likely, get ten different answers:

- To a new immigrant, it is a place that provides English language instruction

that will facilitate pursuit of a degree and full participation in a new culture.

- To a middle class undergraduate with limited financial aid eligibility, it is a place that provides high quality educational options at an affordable price.
- To a promising doctoral student fulfilling a teaching assistantship, it is a place offering teaching and learning experiences under the tutelage of faculty among the finest in higher education.
- To a unionized worker, it is a place that offers accessible degree programs, as well as retraining for the rapidly changing requirements of the regional economy.
- To a student at risk of dropping out, it is a place that takes special care to assist that student, offering programs and academic support services to ensure academic success.
- To a community college student who wants to continue study, it is a place that eases and encourages transfer into its senior college setting.
- To an entering freshman not prepared fully for college-level work, it is a place that combines pedagogical and technological innovation to help overcome the effects of years of inadequate support.
- To a single mother on public assistance, it is a place that provides high quality childcare and the necessary support systems while she pursues the education she needs for economic independence.
- To a senior citizen, it is a place that offers opportunities for personal enrichment or completion of an education interrupted by family or work.
- To a differently-abled student, it is a place that is working hard to remove the physical and programmatic barriers to college study.

Ten different people.... ten different answers.... each significant--. Students come to Medgar Evers College from many backgrounds and circumstances and with differing educational objectives and personal aspirations. While others might bend under the weight of such a challenge, Medgar Evers College not only welcomes the diversity that results, but draws its very strength and identity from it.

The student population is diverse and demographically representative of the city in which they live. Some fit the stereotypical profile of a college student: they are young, middle class and relatively well-prepared for college life. They attend college full-time, live at home, are cared for by parents and do not worry about problems more serious than achieving good grades. While some students fit this picture, a significant

number do not. Many Medgar Evers College students are poor, working class, immigrants and minorities. Many are single parent heads of households and a significant number are older adults who balance part-time attendance in college and full-time jobs. The ability of these students to matriculate is possible because of the College's historical willingness to reach into the neighborhoods it serves and to offer every citizen a place in its classrooms, laboratories and studios. For those who seek the door to a stable economic, cultural and social life, Medgar Evers College is not the last resort— it is the only resort.

Medgar Evers College has produced more than 4,000 alumni who contribute immeasurably to the productivity of New York City and State. These alumni include teachers, educators, college professors, administrators, physicians, dentists, nurses including nurse midwives and nurse practitioners, occupational and physical therapists, and health care administrators. Other alumni are politicians, attorneys, judges, law enforcement officers, authors, fine and performing artists, counselors, social workers, psychologists, family therapists, businessmen and businesswomen, managers, and entrepreneurs. Regardless of their chosen professions, all of the alumni of Medgar Evers College render invaluable services to the communities in which they live and work, and each day promote the rich legacy of their alma mater.

As Medgar Evers College enters its third decade of academic excellence and service to the community, it is engaged in an ongoing strategic planning process, linking productivity, quality and accountability. This direction was begun in 1989 when the College set forth its goals, objectives and initiatives in Setting a New Agenda for Medgar Evers College: A Blueprint For Excellence, 1990-1995. In the Fall of 1992, the College revisited the blueprint and as a result, enhanced its basic philosophy with the inclusion of global education and internationalization of the curricula as vital elements, as discussed in Educating Our Students for the New World Order. As the College continues in this same direction, the following theme has been adopted as illustrative of its guiding philosophy: Medgar Evers College, 1995-2000: Leading the Way into the 21st Century- Improving Productivity and Enhancing Quality (1995).

President Edison O. Jackson stated, "As Medgar Evers College strives to reinvent itself in a new and rapidly changing world, one thing is certain: it must come to grips with its core processes, balance cost and quality, and widely invest its resources in clearly defined programs and services within the context of niche creation and internationalization of the curricula. Improving productivity and enhancing quality most form the cornerstone of all that we undertake as we enter the twenty-first century. It is to this end that the College will embark upon during the next five years of its existence.

"Armed with the necessary tools and skills, and encouraged by the phenomenal success of the past years. Medgar Evers College will pursue the following strategic

direction for the period 1995-2000: (1) create academic programs that meet the demands of the twenty-first century, (2) enhance teaching and learning, (3) integrate teaching, scholarship and service, (4) promote student success, (5) develop a Facilities Master Plan, (6) expand its linkages to the community, (7) expand international activities, (8) implement outcomes assessment, new procedures and: programs mat improve effectiveness and efficiency, (9) expand the institutional image and visibility, (10) create an electronic campus, (11) expand and strengthen student recruitment, and (12) expand revenue streams and development efforts. As we prepare to enter the twenty-first century, Medgar Evers College is poised to assume a position of leadership in urban higher education, We are positioned to make a significant difference not only in the lives of those constituents we serve, but also to contribute radically to the educational revolution that is taking place within The City University of New York, the nation and the world." Medgar Evers College is indeed on the threshold of greatness.

This abbreviated history, by Dean Edwina E. Hamby, is based on official records of the Board of Higher Education of the City of New York; reports and documents in the archives of The City University of New York and Medgar Evers College; the minutes of meetings of various community organizations -who advocated for the College's establishment; and interviews with selected Founders of the College.

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