



The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college



**December 3rd is Giving Tuesday, The International Day of Giving!
Partner with DDC to [give the gift of education!](#)**

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November 23rd & 24th was DDC's First Annual Gratitude Weekend!

I am very thankful for my DDC Counselor and the social work team; they have been and continue to be such a great support!

Thank you to my DDC Counselor and the efforts she puts in every day to help me

I am grateful for having a space like DDC to come do work and study

These are just a few of the sentiments from the Gratitude Cards completed by the nearly 80 DDC students and families who joined the staff last weekend for an opportunity to pause and give thanks for the many amazing things in our lives, big and small. It was a wonderful occasion for us to collectively celebrate all the positive commonalities that bind us together and make us feel connected, appreciated and encouraged.

Kristan Rosenthal, DDC's Assistant Director of Healthy Minds & Bodies, reminded participants that a spirit of gratitude is an essential part of maintaining positive mental health. Research shows that a thankful attitude reduces anxiety and depression and promotes physical health, compassion, and generosity, all positive changes that in turn, strengthen relationships.

Friday's "Gratitude" theme was showing appreciation for ourselves – our "perfectly imperfect" lives, and our wonderful communities. Students participated in the following activities:

- Created their own essential oil rollers and stress balls to honor their mental health and reduce stress. They are really useful when we need a little relaxation on the go.
- Looked at themselves with understanding and loving eyes while celebrating their physical bodies through movement with a gratitude themed yoga class.
- Sent out ripples of gratitude and encouragement to the world around us. They wrote letters of thanks to important people in their lives and handmade cards with special uplifting messages to brighten the day of hospitalized children all over the country through [Cards for Hospitalized Kids](#), which will distribute the cards to children in hospitals and Ronald McDonald Houses.

On Saturday, we all shared a community meal together! Volunteers brought dishes from all over the world. Our plates were full of healthy and delicious treats: chili, macaroni and cheese, roasted veggies and chicken, quinoa salad, empanadas, apple crisp, tres leche cake, and more! We are so thankful to all the volunteers who helped us cook, prepare, and serve so many different dishes and for all the local businesses – Fairway, Trader Joe's and West Side Market – whose donations helped support this special DDC event.

**We are grateful for your support of DDC.
We wish you and your family a Happy Holiday!**

Aisha Haynes joins DDC as Pedagogical Specialist

Often, the NYS Regents exams, standardized state exams, are considered a viable measure of college readiness, but they are not. The academic standards to achieve Regents proficiency are well below those required for college success. My role as pedagogical specialist is to increase the rigor in our classes to ensure that all DDC students have consistently high-quality learning experiences across all of our classes that will get them ready for the academic demands of college. When students are not academically prepared for college, there is a cost to their finances and self-efficacy. Our academic enrichment work is a collaborative effort and I will draw on my years of classroom experience to help our faculty design and implement curricula for college readiness that is rich, relevant and engaging.

We have great instructors, many of whom are Columbia University graduate students. They know "the what" – the content and skills that students need to master. I will help them answer "the how" – the strategies to create effective learning environments. We will emphasize the specific skills that students need to be academically college ready and work to identify students' knowledge gaps so that our instructors can create lesson plans that address

their learning needs. I will facilitate the entire process and use student outcomes to continuously refine our academic enrichment efforts so that students have relevant and meaningful learning experiences that effectively prepare them for the rigors of college.

For example, we know that the writing gap is significant. Students cannot write high-quality papers of sizable length. However, this is an essential skill for college success; consequently, we have to invest in building students' capacity in this area. I am developing a curriculum that will take them from outlines to paragraphs to essays and right to the point where they can write a well-constructed, well-written ten-page paper.

I also support DDC's College and Career Success activities. I am building a culturally-relevant financial literacy curriculum to help our students acquire the awareness and skills to strategically manage the financial challenges that might otherwise undermine their social mobility. This project is made possible by a grant from the Macquarie Foundation. In addition, I will be developing a career readiness curriculum to broaden the comprehensive college and career supports for our students.

For the past 11 years, I have taught in NYC public high schools where resources are limited. Like DDC students, many of the young people in my classrooms were from low-income families and their parents did not have the opportunity to go to college. I understand and love working with this population of students that mirror my own background. They are at a pivotal point in their lives where they have this incredible potential to grow and are just beginning to think about their futures in really meaningful and powerful ways. The idea of being a catalyst to help them realize their dreams is amazing.

This is why I decided to join DDC. DDC actively recognizes that community youth are underserved by their schools; and that they need as well as deserve the same high-quality support as their more affluent peers to effectively compete in college and beyond. DDC works to address the gaps not just with remedial classes but with innovative courses and activities that reflect college-level standards. DDC clearly understands the academic expectations of higher education and constantly works to make sure our programs consistently meet those standards.

We have a wonderful connection with the University and it matters that our students can experience the culture of learning on the campus. Believe me, in this space, they all stand a little straighter! It makes them wonder, "What do I have to do to get here?" This is very powerful! DDC's slogan is "Getting community youth to, through and beyond college." For these reasons, I am so excited to bring my skills and expertise to DDC!

DDC Alum Spotlight: Carla Luna DDC'12

I got so much out of my experience at DDC! I would tell any student today to hang onto all of the opportunities that DDC offers. DDC helps you get into college, which opens doors to a better life. Without college, your opportunities are very limited.

I was at DDC from 8th through 12th grade. After high-school graduation, I did an undergraduate degree in business at Babson College, in Wellesley, Massachusetts. While working as a business consultant, I realized that I wanted to provide my clients with legal advice related to their businesses. Now, I am in my second year of law school at Harvard.

Right from the start, DDC gave me all of the encouragement I needed. I gained self-confidence and most importantly, the feeling that I belong on the campus of an Ivy League institution. When you come from a working-poor neighborhood and you are the first in your family to even consider attending college, it is empowering to think that a prestigious university is an attainable goal and to know that you have the support of an organization like

DDC. It is huge! So many of my peers are overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy that have nothing to do with their academic accomplishments and often, this prevents them from reaching their full potential. DDC helped me realize that I am more than adequate.

I went to DDC classes because I enjoyed them. I never saw them as an obligation. The DDC office is so welcoming and homey. Instructors, mentors, and counselors – they all recognize you, appreciate you, and encourage you at every turn. I knew that when I needed encouragement or advice, they were all there for me. Two of my best memories are spending time in the office with my DDC counselor to go over my college application; and using my CUID to get around the Columbia campus. It made me feel so cool!

In addition to tutoring and the classes that strengthen students' academic skills, DDC offers unique educational opportunities. Through DDC, I attended in 2011 the Columbia Business School's ten-week "Emerging Leaders" program, founded by two Columbia Business School students who were both African American. It focused on developing our leadership and finance skills through different activities including mentoring by Columbia's MBA students. I thought, "If they can make it here at this elite institution, I can make it too!" I have kept in contact with them and in fact, I reached out to them when I applied to Harvard Law School! DDC experiences, learning, and connections endure over time.

DDC opened so many doors for me. My DDC counselor helped me apply for a summer internship with Macquarie, a global investment bank and financial services company, when I was in the 11th grade. This internship was my introduction to the corporate world and I learned about corporate etiquette and presentations. It was my first professional experience and I had real responsibilities with expectations that I could and would complete significant assignments. I also successfully competed in the Elizabeth H. Piper Scholarship as an 11th grader. I won the first prize, an award of \$3,000, which I carefully put aside to help pay for college!

DDC changed my life for the better. My advice for current DDC students who may feel overwhelmed now by the classes, the internships, and the college prep courses is: **Always remember that you have the entire DDC community supporting you. Do not be afraid to ask your counselor for help when you need it. If you keep the stress to yourself, it will only get bigger. When you share it with others, you realize it is manageable. I know, I have been there and I made it through.**

So many DDC alumni have persisted, pushed through, and made it. SO CAN YOU!

**Calling all DDC Alumni and Former Volunteers!
We want to hear from you!**

Click on this link to reconnect:

<https://ddc.college.columbia.edu/ddc-alumni-and-former-volunteers>

Partner with us to offer the gift of education! To help fund our programs and expand our outreach, click here: ["Change a Life"](#)

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