



The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college



The Roger Lehecka
Double Discovery Center

The Writing Center

A new opportunity for DDC students to develop their writing skills in preparation for **college-level writing, Regents & AP exams, and personal essays for college & scholarship applications**, through a series of workshops and individual sessions.

Workshop #1: Anything But Basic(s)
Open to all grades



Workshop #2: Brainstorming Gains
Open to 9th and 10th grades

Workshop #3: What's the point?
Open to 11th and 12th grades



The Double Discovery Center congratulates Ms. Meisha Ross Porter on her appointment as Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools! DDC looks forward to working with Chancellor Porter in the pursuit of equity and excellence as we continue to help NYC youth get to, through, and beyond college. Best wishes to Chancellor Porter for much success in her new role.

In this March 2021 Issue:

1. Spotlight on:

- **Kassandra Frederique, DDC'04**, Executive Director, Drug Policy Alliance, was recognized by the Ford Foundation as one of the most vocal opponents of America's persistent War on Drugs, and a social justice advocate for the decriminalization of drug possession. To learn more, visit: [Ford Foundation's Just Matters - Kassandra Frederique is reimagining the future of drug policy in America.](#)
- **Nahid Uddin, DDC'20**, Fordham University Gabelli School of Business, was awarded a scholarship from *Successful Steps* for his academic accomplishments. He is also the recipient of the Fordham's Woolworth Award, which recognizes high academic achievement for freshmen.
- **Iovanni R. DDC'21, Samia I. DDC'21, and Clementina A. DDC'21**, won respectively 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in this year's DDC Piper Scholarship competition. This opportunity is made possible by the generosity of a DDC donor and recognizes students who demonstrate outstanding written and oral skills through an essay and presentation around a contemporary social issue.

Congratulations Kassandra, Nahid, Iovanni, Samia, and Clementina!

2. DDC Launches Two New Programs

- **The DDC Writing Center**
- **The DDC Book Club, brainchild of Jydin H., DDC'23**

The DDC Writing Center

While writing is an essential skill for college readiness and success, more than 75% of the nation's 12th graders lack writing proficiency according to 2011 data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This parallels the experiences of DDC students who have told us how much they struggle with their writing – from developing a strong thesis to building a coherent outline to presenting ideas in a logical, clear and compelling narrative.

To respond to this critical need, DDC has launched its Writing Center that provides students and alumni with structured workshops along with targeted writing conferences and tutorial sessions for individual support. Developed in collaboration with the Writing Center at Columbia University and led by Gabriella Araya, Graduate Student, School of Social Work, this DDC program builds participants' writing skills across the various stages including: brainstorming, pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. With a focus on college-level writing, the program cultivates the skills needed to effectively communicate in college and beyond.

“DDC's Writing Center honors the whole student by showing them their strengths and providing them with the tools to better express themselves, everyone has a voice,” says

Gabriella. “Some students think they are bad writers because they were told so and it stuck with them!” she adds. “We have a totally different approach. We value students where they are and their opinions and we help them shape their writing mold by strengthening their writing skills.”

The workshops and conferences are tailored interventions that both remediate challenges and extend strengths. The Center welcomes students at every level of proficiency, from writing fundamentals to the development of one’s voice or personal writing style. Once they master the basics – a concise introduction, structured paragraphs in support of an argument, and concluding sentences for an effective summary – the Center helps them advance their skills by honing in on and amplifying their voice. Through practice, students acquire a strong foundation of tools and skills to support effective writing in college and beyond.

This is a very unique learning center, says Gabriella, in that it is totally devoted to the kind of individualized attention that schools cannot provide. Many students did not grasp the lessons at school, so at DDC, we work with them to find exactly what they need for success and make sure they get the personalized coaching that matches their needs.

Different grades need different levels of writing instruction. *With 9th and 10th grades, we focus on the fundamentals, says Gabriella. With 11th grade, the approach is more nuanced, she continues. We conceptualize the idea of the writer’s voice and help them find the way they like to write. We show them how to write as a whole person. Some writers are long winded, some are short to the point, some like descriptions and illustrations, some favor dark tones, others prefer happy tones, there are writers with a flair for the dramatic, and others who stick to bone-dry prose. All are valuable and should be encouraged.*

Destiny Howell, DDC’19, Hunter College – Career goal: Astrophysicist – *Writing is not my strength, so I joined the Writing Center because I need this lifelong skill that is part of our daily lives. Hunter College does not provide the personalized support that I have found at DDC. Through Writing Center workshops, my research skills have really improved, which is crucial for college papers. I am better at selecting and integrating great sources into my essays to strengthen my arguments. Overall, I am much more confident when I have to write a paper and I highly recommend this program to students and alumni. DDC is here to help us succeed, they never let us down!*

The DDC Book Club, brainchild of Jydin H., DDC’23

I love to read – in class, at home, everywhere! – and I was looking for a special place dedicated to discussing literature, says Jydin H. DDC’23. I figured DDC could be the space so I asked my DDC College Counselor if the Center would be willing to set up a Book Club. They said yes!!! Now, interested DDC students, staff, and volunteers meet to discuss the plots, characters, and themes of the books that we read together.

Reflecting two of DDC’s core values, advocacy and community, Jydin advocated for her vision and helped create a community of DDC students who shared her interest in reading. With Jydin’s input, DDC launched its Book Club in February 2021. Taylor Dawn Ellis, DDC College Counselor, and Margaret Banks, DDC Fellow and Ph.D. student in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia, co-facilitate the Club that meets for two hours every two weeks.

Students select the books and also identify films and other media to support and extend their discussions of the books. While the Book Club is open to all DDC students, girls have overwhelmingly signed up for it, so the group has adopted the motto “**It is very cool to be a smart girl!**” for this semester. They are working to encourage boys to join.

I was both surprised and impressed that students were interested in a club specifically focused on reading books because reading seems to be losing popularity with every generation, says Taylor. Through their engagement in reading and discussion, students can strengthen their writing, expand their knowledge, develop their critical thinking skills, and increase their empathy for self and others.

The DDC Book Club offers an enriching experience in a safe space where students direct their learning through the selection of books and discussions to share insights and question themes and ideas. *There are no tests or pressure to be right, no right or wrong answers. The variety of perspectives are encouraged and embraced,* explains Taylor. *It is a great learning environment where we all work to connect ideas to the real world and dig deeper as we explore different issues highlighted in the books* says Jydin. *At school the literature you read is only to pass a test, not to feed your passion.*

This semester, the Book Club will read:

- *Piecing Me Together* by Renee Watson
- *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison
- *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah
- *Claiming Space for Who You Are* by Elaine Welteroth

We wanted to create a space that would increase students’ reading stamina, expand their exposure to different authors, and strengthen their analytical and critical thinking skills, says Taylor. *I enjoy hearing students critique the literature we read and the films we watch,* says Margaret. *Critique is such a vital skill, and I love hearing them put forth compelling arguments and analysis about the texts.* And Jydin adds, *I appreciate that we use multimedia – books, short films, poems – to further explore ideas presented in the books that we read.*

As the group delves into the stories and explains what they like or dislike, they tackle issues of racism, misogynoir, and class prejudices evoked in the texts. *I am very impressed by DDC students’ breadth of analysis,* says Margaret. *They’re able to connect things we encounter in films and literature to theories they’ve read or generated. Through that analysis they find meaning in the texts or pull them apart to expose authors’ thought holes.*

With every class, students show us how ready they are for college/career success. They dedicate themselves to extracurricular activities, they are intentional about their interests, and they are increasing their reading stamina for higher text levels, adds Taylor.

DDC is very enjoyable and memorable, says Jydin. *This is why I wake up early on Saturdays to attend DDC classes. I am so happy about this Book Club. When I suggested it to Taylor, I was not sure it would happen, but it did! At DDC, you are not just a student, you are also a collaborator and your voice is heard.*

**Double our Discovery, Double our Impact!
Partner with us to offer the gift of education!**

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Calling all DDC Alumni and Former Volunteers!

We want to hear from you!

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