



# The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center

*Getting community youth to, through, and beyond college*



*Courtesy of LinkNYC and NBCUniversal*

## **In this September 2019 Newsletter:**

- DDC Students Tackle The 1619 Project
- Why Healthy Minds and Bodies (HMB)?
- DDC Student Spotlight: Destiny Howell DDC '19

**Columbia Giving Day is Wednesday October 23!**

**Columbia alumni can choose the Double Discovery Center and give the gift of education to community youth!**

On Columbia Giving Day, visit [givingday.columbia.edu](https://givingday.columbia.edu) and click the *Make Your Gift*

button from the top menu. Use the *Search Funds* feature to select Double Discovery Center on the giving form and Give the Gift of Education.

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## DDC students tackle The 1619 Project

On August 20, 1619, the first ship bearing 20 Africans kidnapped from their villages in what is now Angola lands at Port Comfort in the British colony of Virginia. This marked the beginning of the brutal system of slavery that built America. 400 years later, *The New York Times* marks the anniversary with its [1619 project](#), a series of essays that examines the legacy of slavery in modern United States.

This semester, DDC students will participate in a course that grapples with the same question that historian Nikole Hannah-Jones asks in her essay: *What would it mean to regard 1619 as our nation's birth year?* Margaret Banks, a Columbia University PhD student in English and Comparative Literature and a member of the inaugural cohort of DDC Fellows, is the instructor. She has designed a class that will help DDC students build their college-ready academic skills as they examine and discuss America's historical narrative in specific consideration of Nikole's question, which centralizes the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans.<sup>[1]</sup>

Throughout the semester, Banks and students will analyze different texts and topics, from mass incarceration to Hurricane Katrina to Hip Hop. Ultimately, she and her students will interrogate and answer the question of how centering slavery and black history changes our understanding of America, democracy, race and the world. Students will discover how slavery is interwoven into the tiniest threads of our country, and how it impacts America today. They will conclude their study by creating their own magazine to respond and pay homage to the kidnapped and enslaved Africans who arrived on America's shores in 1619.

With this course, Banks wants her students to understand that history is a crafted story – one that can and will continue to be molded. Even the silences and gaps in the narrative tell us something. She wants students to remember that they have a say in how their histories are documented and stories are told. This course will challenge them to engage critically with nonfiction and literary texts, while encouraging them to rethink the prevailing narrative of our country's history.

<sup>[1]</sup> [The 1619 Project](#) – *The New York Times Magazine*

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## Why Healthy Minds and Bodies (HMB)?

With Healthy Minds & Bodies (HMB), DDC is one of the few college access and success programs in the country that specifically addresses young people's social-emotional wellness as part of a comprehensive approach to college readiness. This is increasingly important given that researchers who conducted a 2018 survey of nearly 14,000 first-year college students found that 35% struggled with mental illness, particularly depression or anxiety.<sup>[1]</sup> In their efforts to prepare for and transition into college, students find themselves in unfamiliar territory and under enormous pressure to succeed. Studies show that 80% of college students feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities and 50% are so anxious that they struggle academically.<sup>[2]</sup>

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) empowers students with the skills to excel in and out of the classroom. They are equipped to set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate empathy for self

and others, cultivate positive relationships, and make responsible decisions so that they achieve long-term success – socially, academically, and professionally. Kristan Rosenthal, Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has joined the DDC team as the Assistant Director, HMB and will lead this important work. This newly established position supports DDC's more comprehensive approach to college readiness for low-income and first-generation youth, and is made possible by the generous gift of a longtime DDC supporter.

Kristan understands the social-emotional distress that low-income and first-generation youth encounter in their college journeys: *First-generation college students do not have role models or peers to help them navigate the college social environment. Stress and isolation drive their lives. They have to work to pay for the hidden costs of college and sometimes send money back home to help their family, which means they have less time to study and attend networking events. Their backgrounds are so different from their peers' – the neighborhoods they live in, the vacations they are familiar with, the high schools they attended – that it is difficult to find the common grounds to build healthy supportive relationships. Their loneliness and distress compound and they do not know where to find help to cope.*

And then there is the impostor syndrome, defined as chronic self-doubt coupled with a sense of intellectual dishonesty that override any objective proof of competence. *A huge part of getting to college is believing you are smart enough to handle it, Kristan adds, and being able to seek resources when you do need help. When you are lacking this basic knowledge and self-confidence, you fall into impostor syndrome, where you do not want to be seen as not able to do the job, you do not want people to feel you are not smart enough to be there.* This can have devastating consequences, including dropping out without graduating.

*Dropouts are nearly twice as likely as college grads to be unemployed, and they are four times more likely to default on student loans, thus wrecking their credit and shrinking their career options.[3]*

DDC's HMB component addresses the “whole” college student and consequently increases the likelihood of success getting to, through, and beyond college. Students are engaged in different activities that strengthen their resilience and determination in the face of challenges and develop their attitudes, skills, and habits for lifelong physical and mental well-being.

Kristan, along with two graduate interns from Columbia University School of Social Work, also provides DDC students with one-on-one and small group counseling sessions, workshops on adolescent health topics, and other activities to help them develop healthy coping mechanisms, as part of DDC's HMB component.

[1][https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_colleges\\_today\\_are\\_sup...](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_colleges_today_are_sup...)

[2] <https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/top-5-mental-health-problems-facing-college-students/>

[3] “[The College Dropout Scandal](#),” David Kirp, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 26, 2019

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## **DDC Student Spotlight: Destiny Howell DDC ‘19**

*I needed help with math in middle school and my mother heard about DDC from a friend. That was in 2013 when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and I have been at DDC since then. I graduated in May and now I am at Hunter College!*

*DDC offered me so many opportunities, they changed the way I see myself. They showed me I can do anything I want as long as I put my mind to it and I persevere. DDC taught me to be determined and to welcome new challenges, because I can always figure out new ways to solve problems. In the process, I've uncovered new things about myself. I loved so many DDC classes, especially the science classes – biology, organic chemistry, radiology, and neurology.*

*Another great thing about DDC is that it enabled me to develop skills outside of science. I learned business skills through my internship at Macquarie LEADS. When I first heard about the Macquarie LEADS internship, I thought it was for students with an interest in business. I only signed up because my mom said “If you stay in your comfort zone, you will not experience life.” She was right! At Macquarie, I learned to take risks and I made great connections. I learned about business and finance. I acquired new skills such as networking, presentation and communications. My mentors taught me how to manage real life issues and most importantly, they helped to build my self-confidence. I loved the learning that happened during my internship!*

*Through another DDC opportunity, a movie project with NBCUniversal, I learned filmmaking skills – storytelling, screen writing, production, public speaking, and editing. I participated in workshops with professionals in the media industry that allowed me to meet directors and get their advice about how to engage audiences through film. With other DDC students, I produced a social campaign video on gentrification in Harlem, a topic that is very personal to me. I see every day how Harlem has changed since my childhood. Harlem has lost some of its magic. Morningside Park is not well maintained, people do not go there anymore, my favorite ice cream store, the friendly hair salon, they are all gone because rents are too high. Instead, we now have high-end chain stores like Whole Foods. I feel sad that the new generation of children will not enjoy the Harlem that I once knew. I wanted to raise awareness about the impact of gentrification so we can come together and have conversations about solutions.*

*Working on the film project was amazing! Christie Neptune, our instructor, told me I am skilled at screen writing. That surprised me because writing has not been my passion, but hearing that feedback from someone with a different lens did spark my interest. I am now taking film classes at Hunter and I continue to cultivate my relationship with NBCUniversal. Last week I attended the NBCUniversal BOLD Connections event that brings together college students and Senior Leaders to review careers in the media.*

*I thought I was just good at science but with DDC's help, I now am a more rounded person. I still want to work at NASA, but if there is an opportunity to produce a film, I will jump on it! I could make documentaries on scientific research or educational videos for kids – the possibilities are endless and DDC helped me to imagine this. New York does not have many resources in math and sciences for middle- and high-school kids. I would like to inspire them to go into the science field.*

*I am so grateful to DDC for all of these opportunities! Because of them, I know I will be fine socially, emotionally, academically, and mentally. **Thank you DDC!***

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