Dear History Alumni,

How quickly another year has passed. Again, it’s later than I would have preferred. But that also means it’s been a busy spring, with lots of activity going on in the department. I hope your year has been productive and pleasurable. The rest of the department and I continue to be deeply appreciative of your support.

The department has had a productive year. Two new hires will join us in September: Kristina Richardson in the History of Islam and Kate Antonova in Russian History. Thanks to the exceptional quality of our younger hires and our veteran faculty, we have a department that excels in both teaching and scholarship. We have also made an appointment in Sephardic Jewish History, Francesca Brenguier, who will start in September 2009. This gives her an opportunity to complete her post-doctorate at Oxford University. Sadly—both from a professional and personal standpoint—we are losing Professor Elisha Carlebach. She has accepted the prestigious Salo Baron Chair in Jewish History at Columbia University. It is a great honor for her and we wish her all the best. She has been an exceptional teacher and scholar, as well as a colleague who has served the department with great dedication and integrity.

In this newsletter, Distinguished Professor Morris Rossabi describes some of his outside activities. Many members of our faculty have engaged lives beyond the campus, and I thought you would be interested to learn about someone who has contributed to the betterment of societies throughout the world. Next, I was going to issue a progress report on our World War II project. But then I thought that this project, initiated by and with the financial support of Arnold Franco, should receive the write-up it deserved. So I asked Professor Bobby Wintermute, who has done such a marvelous job with the students, to make a report. Professor Kristin Celello just completed her first year here; in these pages, she shares her impressions of Queens College. Finally, I invited one of our senior history majors, Jonathan Gilad, to note down some of his thoughts as he prepared to graduate. What he has written demonstrates the impact that professors and education have on a student.

News of our retirees is for the most part good, though my fellow 1962er, Bob Haas, is seriously ill. I am in close touch with

Mike Wressel and Vivian Gruder. I see Allen McConnell and Jon Petersen from time to time. I am in email contact with Ralph Dell’Acqua. I have heard that Stuart Prall is doing well. I hope you enjoy the articles and photos. I thank you once more for your support. Though I am a terribly delinquent correspondent, I always enjoy hearing from recent and past graduates, and so do my colleagues. To stay in touch with general happenings on campus, go to www.qc.cuny.edu/Alumni_Affairs.

Frank Warren

Extra-Academic Pursuits

Faculty members naturally focus on teaching and research, their most important responsibilities. Facilitating student learning and growth, and contributing to knowledge in their fields via publications and public lectures, are indisputably vital functions. I concur with this assessment and have devoted most of my career to academics.

However, I have also been drawn to other pursuits, including collaborations with museums, educational institutions, and cultural organizations to promote Asian Studies. As a specialist on a region that plays an increasingly significant role in the world, I have cooperated with others to develop curricula (“From Silk to Oil: Cross Cultural Connections Along the Silk Road,” “Interweaving Cultures: Islam in Southeast Asia”) and to foster teaching training programs for both secondary school and college faculties. Democracy requires an informed electorate. Until recently, the general public’s knowledge of the area from Japan to Iran was limited, leading to misconceptions and misunderstandings. I believe that U.S. education, as well as U.S. government policies, will benefit as schools and colleges expand their curricula to include study and appreciation of Asian culture, history, and politics.

Another of my extra-academic interests has been collaboration with the Open Society Institute (OSI), a nongovernmental organization dedicated to the promotion of human rights and democratic principles in previously authoritarian states. In 1994, OSI commissioned me to travel to Mongolia to determine whether the Soros Foundation could play a role in fostering an open society in a country that had suffered almost three centuries of foreign or dictatorial rule. I wrote a report proposing support for arts and culture, the rule of law, women’s rights organizations, educational exchanges, educational reforms, and many other activities.

In 1996, OSI decided to fund some of these initiatives and established an office to implement them. Shortly thereafter, OSI’s president invited me to serve on the board of the Project for Central Eurasia, which supervised the foundation’s programs in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. During my three years on the board, I helped evaluate grants, conducted on-site evaluations of funded projects, and commented on the strategies of various regional offices. Some of the programs were unsuccessful; indeed, on occasion, I disagreed with OSI’s policies. But so many of the projects contributed to education and democracy that I valued my participation in these efforts and remained on the board until 1999. A byproduct of my involvement was remarkable access to numerous levels of Mongol society—from the president to journalists to directors of women’s rights organizations to headers to the director of the national opera and ballet companies—at a time of great stress and change. Thus I conceived of a book on post-socialist Mongolia, entailing an on-the-ground evaluation of the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other international financial organizations that espoused and implemented neo-liberal policies in the country.

After I completed the book, OSI asked me to serve as chair of its Arts and Culture Board targeting Central Asia, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and the Middle East. The board sought to promote artistic and cultural freedom and help reinvigorate artistic and literary production, which had suffered because of the decline of state support and funding. It offered grants to artists, theaters, and museums and, with the cooperation of the American Museum of Natural History, even mounted mini-Margaret Mead documentary film festivals in Central Asia and the Caucasus. My biggest disappointment happened when three OSI program officers and I went to Afghanistan in December 2006. After a ten-day visit, we developed plans for a number of projects (offering art and music instruction to young girls who had been denied education during the Taliban era; sending expert restorers and conservators to the Kabul Museum, one of Asia’s great repositories of Buddhist and Islamic art, which Taliban marauders had damaged; and providing equipment for budding filmmakers and pho-
Retired Professors Leo Hershkowitz and Jon Peterson

Queens College History Club Brings QC WWII Veterans to Web

Thanks to a $10,000 grant from State Senator Stephen Maloney, the Queens College History Club has been busy fulfilling the next stage of its project to honor the school’s World War II servicemen: creating an interactive Web site. Since receiving the grant in January 2008, club members have worked hard under my direction to finalize details on the fifty-nine QC alumnae and alumni commemorated in November 2006, at the dedication of the WWII memorial on campus. The data students are collecting and condensing into a narrative format will form the foundation of a much larger online resource.

The online project will comprise more than a mere database of names, dates, and other service-related information. In cooperation with the Computer Science Department, the History Club has hired a student programmer to create an interactive site incorporating a fully scalable, WWII-era global map. Pull-pin style markers will provide access to detailed information on the men who died in the armed services, including photographs from QC archives and wartime images—now in the public domain—taken by United States Army Signal Corps photographers. A thorough veterans survey, first created by the History Club, will serve not only the QC community, but also researchers worldwide.

At times, of course, the adjustment to my new position has not been easy. The highly touted laid-back collegiality of the history department, which I have come to appreciate as the year has progressed, posed some challenges as I tried to learn how the department and the school work. Not wanting to impose on my already busy colleagues, I struggled by myself to navigate the college’s bureaucracy, from having to convince the bookstore manager to order enough books for my survey class, to trying to persuade the administrative assistant in Human Resources that despite my youthful looks I was, in fact, a professor who needed to fill out health insurance forms.

At the same time, I was trying to figure out the undergraduates, just as they were trying to figure me out. While it is perhaps a cliché to celebrate the racial, ethnic, and age diversity of QC students, I have to say that it was one of the things that attracted me to this position. During my time in Canada, I taught at the Mississauga campus of the University of Toronto, a place with a student population quite similar to that of QC. There, as now here, I enjoyed the refreshing lack of entitlement among the students and developed an appreciation of the sacrifices that they are making in order to be in school.

As any first-year professor would expect, I have had my frustrations in the classroom. I would like my students to spend more time on their assignments, to work on their writing, and to be more willing to ask questions about my interpretations of the historical narrative during class. I have learned not to take it personally if my students put other courses or aspects of their lives above my classes. The positives, however, have far outweighed the negatives when it comes to the students. They have responded positively to my high expectations and, I hope, to my enthusiasm and sense of fairness. I am surely a better teacher after spending a year at QC and I look forward to improving even further in the future.

All told, I am happy and proud to be a member of the QC history department. While I am thinking rather longingly about the upcoming summer break, I am also looking forward to the 2008-2009 school year. I have had a chance to write my lectures and my book is coming out next year, so I hope to become even more actively involved in the department and the QC community.