FIFTY YEARS AT THE CENTER

THE GRADUATE CENTER

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
A History of
The Graduate School and University Center
of the City University of New York
from 1961 to 2011

by Michael Anderson

The Graduate Center
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016
Introduction 4

Origins 8
  Mina Rees 9
  Consortium 13
  The First Four 16
  Albert Bowker 18
    Remembering: Kenneth Clark 23
      Henri Peyre 24

Survival 26
  Harold Proshansky 27
  “A Lifeboat Environment” 31
  Crossing Departmental Boundaries 35
    Remembering: Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. 41
      Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin 43

Homes of Our Own 55
  “Miracle on 42nd Street” 57
    Rhapsody in Blue 58
  “A Small Environmental Miracle” 62
  Saving Bryant Park 63
  Frances Degen Horowitz 68
    B. Altman & Company 74
      The Graduate Center Foundation 81

A New Century 83
  William P. Kelly 84
    An Era of Interdisciplinary Innovation 87

Academic Programs and Initiatives 91
Centers and Institutes 93
The Graduate Center Foundation Board of Trustees 94
It is the fulfillment of a dream, set in stone in midtown Manhattan. It is the final installment of a pledge from the mid-nineteenth century that higher education would “open the doors to all” and “let the children of the rich and poor take seats together and know no distinctions save that of industry, good conduct, and intellect.” It is the culmination of a vision that the advantages of advanced scholarship would enrich a city and its citizens, through both the cultivation of individual minds and the application of knowledge for social betterment. It is a world leader in doctoral training. It is the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York.

Since its creation fifty years ago, the Graduate Center has housed many mansions. Its official mission, of course, is to train the scholars of the future by preparing them for the Ph.D. degree and to enable research and the advancement of learning by the scholars of the present, its faculty. However, the Graduate Center has always represented something more than book learning. Its identity and tradition are inextricably connected to its position as a public university in America’s metropolis. The stirring call to
“open the doors,” uttered by the New York merchant Townsend Harris, that led to the founding in 1847 of the Free Academy—the institution that metamorphosed into City College and eventually into CUNY—remains the touchstone throughout the system, as true for the Graduate Center as for the community colleges. The depth and range of this commitment is reflected in the words of the four men and women who have served as presidents of the Graduate Center during its first half-century.

“CUNY is a mission-driven institution,” says William P. Kelly, the current president of the Graduate Center. “We are committed to the American dream.”

“I came from a family that lived through most of the Great Depression. We never made it economically,” the GC’s second president, Harold M. Proshansky, once recalled. “Were it not for City College, my whole life might have been different. In my experiences—and I’ve taught at many places—I have seen examples of thousands of people who had nothing, and who came either to one of the CUNY colleges or to the Graduate School or both and who suddenly became part of the workforce of people of commitment and ability. Without the City University, God knows what would have happened.”

Frances Degen Horowitz, Proshansky’s successor, declared, “A democratic society is more dependent on an educated public than any other form of government. That’s why public education is so critical to the future of our society.

“I’m very committed to public education as a major force in this country,” she added. “The only solution to our problems is education—money alone won’t solve them.”

As Horowitz also noted, “New York is where the reality is. It’s where all the problems of our society exist in the largest dimensions. Being part of the effort to bring education to bear on those issues is a very exciting prospect.” The “ivory tower” of the
Graduate Center has always been located in the grit, grime, and noise of midtown Manhattan, a barbaric yawp that the faculty and students have set to melody.

“It is my firm belief,” Proshansky once said, “that a public graduate school should be committed to providing service to the New York City community by way of research, consultation, and teaching.” The Center began by granting degrees in the classical disciplines: chemistry, economics, English, and psychology. Today, it ranges over thirty-four subject areas, including on-the-ground fields like urban education, physical therapy, and nursing.

The Graduate Center was created in the hope that it would provide teachers for the baby boom children growing up in the sixties. It has evolved into an institution that uses New York City as a laboratory and a client; it studies the urban scene and puts its knowledge to practical use, both as an adviser to government and as an intellectual emporium for the general public.

“I feel very strongly that public education has a different mission than private education,” says Kelly. “CUNY has a public mission to be responsive to the people of New York.”

It has been a delicate balance between the rigors of intellectual pursuit and the needs of the surrounding society. Perhaps the most significant triumph of the Graduate Center’s first fifty years has been its devotion to scholarly integrity. Never has it wavered in its belief that its truest service would be achieved through adherence to the highest standards. It never has seen itself as the vocational training ground for the children of the poor; rather, the Graduate Center has committed itself to serving as the escalator for the talented. In the words of its founding president, Mina Rees:

“Education is not designed to prepare people to do whatever work flows from the blind and predestined imperative of technology; rather, it is intended to educate people of vision and
sensitivity, who will be motivated to direct technology into humanly constructive channels.”

From its inception Rees insisted that the Graduate Center draw upon the best the CUNY system had to offer. She devised a unique system of faculty procurement that mixed and matched components from the entire university to create a graduate program that, with astonishing rapidity, won recognition as one of the finest in the country. (“I never cease to experience a little thrill,” Rees once commented, “when I am attending a national educational or scientific meeting to find that the CUNY Graduate School is so highly regarded.”)

Her legacy was a rigorous dedication to accomplishment. Rees’s success was the creation of a place and atmosphere whose quality might be best measured not in the repeated encomia of evaluation committees or placement on “Ten Best” lists, but rather in her assessment of her tenure as president, one whose spirit has been echoed by those who followed her: “I have had the rare privilege of working with people whom I greatly respect and enjoy.”
The decision to offer doctoral education at CUNY was, as an administrator once put it, “an exercise in possibility—perhaps chutzpah.” It was the result of a fortuitous confluence of historical circumstances and the accident of geography, driven by the obligations of a country assuming world dominance in the aftermath of World War II and by the desire of a city eager to consolidate its national stature. It was something that could have happened, as they say, “only in New York.”

In a century, the experiment in educational democracy created by Townsend Harris in 1847 had grown from the Free Academy to City College. City, combined with the three other municipal colleges (Hunter, Brooklyn, and Queens) and three community colleges (Bronx, Queensboro, and Staten Island) had developed into a world-class educational system. By 1961, the four senior colleges collectively produced the eighth-highest number of master’s degrees in the country, and led the nation in graduating students who went on to other schools to study for their Ph.D.s; by 1963, the senior colleges produced more graduates in chemistry than the combined total of the four largest chemistry departments in the United States, and nearly 40 percent more in physics than the runner-up, MIT.

But would that be enough, given the technological demands of the brave new world that had emerged after the war, given the demographic bulge of the baby boom, given the sudden opportunities provided by the GI Bill and other incentives to pursue advanced degrees? Throughout the 1960s, a series of governmental studies emphasized that educational resources needed to be expanded, rapidly and drastically. The most significant of these was commissioned by Governor Nelson Rockefeller to examine the need for higher education and offer recommendations for planning. In its report, issued in 1960, the
Heald Committee—named for its chairman, Henry Heald, the president of the Ford Foundation and former chancellor of New York University—emphasized the need for the state to enlarge its educational resources (it predicted, with astonishing accuracy, that registration in state educational institutions would double by 1970 and triple by 1985).

It was in this atmosphere that, on April 11, 1961, Governor Nelson Rockefeller signed legislation creating the City University of New York; thus, CUNY was born. The legislature’s action also endorsed the Board of Higher Education’s recommendation that the new institution be given authority to grant doctoral and postgraduate professional degrees. The state Board of Regents took the next step in October when it authorized CUNY to confer the Ph.D. degree.

The task of transforming these aspirations, grand but unfocused, into a functioning reality was placed in the very capable hands of a woman produced by the City College system whose administrative ability had won international respect. After all, she had become accustomed during World War II to being addressed as “sir.”

MINA REES

Putting learning to work was the theme of Mina Rees’s long and distinguished career. Her special gift, as a colleague once said, was “giving life to the imagination”; she possessed a rare combination of rigorous intellect and cultivated sensibility that empowered her to function with equal ease as a scholar and as an administrator. In science, in government, and in education, she fulfilled the goal she proclaimed as student government president during her senior year at Hunter College: “to carry on the ideals of the past and enrich them a little by our endeavors, to realize a hope of worthwhile service.”
Her unusual synergy of brains and character was put on prominent display during World War II, when Rees was plucked from teaching algebra to undergraduates to help the American armed forces put planes in the air. Rees played a central role in the mobilization of the academy on behalf of the military. From 1943 to 1946, she served as technical aide and executive assistant to the chief of the Applied Mathematics Panel in the Office of Scientific Research and Development, the organization that also included a supersecret unit that became the Manhattan Project. Her job was to coordinate thirteen groups of mathematicians on campuses around the country to apply their expertise to pressing military problems. “The whole driving force of the office,” she later recalled, “was to do something now to get scientific results into the field of battle.”

With characteristic modesty, she added: “We mathematicians made studies and suggested things to try. Yes, we got some little jets operating during the war.”

Her war work was honored by the President’s Certificate of Merit and the King’s Medal for Service in the Cause of Freedom, awarded by the British government in recognition of wartime civilian services by foreign nationals. It also won her a position in Washington with the Office of Naval Research from 1946 to 1953, in a series of posts of ever-increasing responsibility. She aided in the development of jet propulsion, hydrofoil craft, and high-speed computers.

Her career was a triumph of a large intellect over the small-minded. Once, giving a talk to naval officials on the importance of computers, she was interrupted by an admiral: “What are we doing talking to a woman about this sort of thing?” Rees’s response? “I didn’t say anything,” Rees smiled. “Then I started talking about scientific matters.” Such was her bearing that she always was remembered as exceeding her five feet four inches.
Junior officers, reporting to her for the first time, frequently called her “sir.”

Throughout the war, Rees maintained a balance of mind and spirit—she took up painting as a means of relaxation. About a decade later, after she had returned to Hunter, she worked in the studio of a fellow instructor, the abstract impressionist Robert Motherwell. “I had the hardest time figuring out what was going on,” she remembered. “He’d say, ‘What do you want to paint? Go ahead.’ So I produced this one painting of which he said, ‘If I saw that painting hanging in an art gallery, I’d look at it again.’ I decided it must be a great work of art—well, the best I could do anyway.” Her office in the Graduate Center was decorated with her own artwork.

When Rees returned to Hunter as dean of faculty, after her stint in the Office of Naval Research, it was closing the circle. Mina Spiegel Rees (1902–1997) was a product of Hunter College High School as well as Hunter College, where she graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, and where she taught mathematics before taking her Ph.D. in 1931 at the University of Chicago, one of the leading institutions in her discipline at that time. Her field was associative algebras, and her dissertation was supervised by Leonard Eugene Dickson, the professor who attracted her to Chicago.

Born in Cleveland, Rees was brought to New York as a child with her five older siblings and was raised in the Bronx. In 1955, she married a physician, Dr. Leopold Brahdy, who shared her enthusiasms for hiking, bird-watching, music, and theatre. Dr. Brahdy died in 1977.

Accolades continued to adorn Rees’s career. In 1962, she received the first Award for Distinguished Service to Mathematics from the Mathematical Association of America. In 1983 she was awarded the National Academy of Sciences Public
Welfare Medal “in recognition of distinguished contributions in the application of science to the public welfare.” She served as a presidential appointee to the board of the National Science Foundation from 1964 to 1970, was active in such organizations as the American Mathematical Society and the Mathematical Association of America, and was the first woman elected president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in 1969. In an obituary editorial, the New York Times declared that Rees—“as Marie Curie, Lisa Meitner and Dr. Margaret Mead before her—had proved that scientific creativity was not just for men.”

But of all her tributes, she might have been happiest that the library of the Graduate Center bears her name. As was said at her memorial service: “The Graduate School is Mina Rees’ monument.”

On September 1, 1961, CUNY’s Graduate Division came into being when Mina Rees, the newly appointed dean of graduate studies, reported to an office in the administrative headquarters of the Board of Higher Education. “I confronted the realities I had to face,” she recalled. “Not a student in sight. No secretary. Nothing!” From this she was expected to create the first publicly supported doctoral education program in New York City.

But what form would it take? Seemingly the most obvious would be to establish Ph.D. programs at each of the four senior colleges, which, after all, were already granting master’s degrees. Because of the necessary duplication of resources, this option would also be the most expensive. (As one CUNY study had it, “To mount identical doctoral programs on all senior colleges would be to dissipate university resources and prevent the achievement of any real distinction in graduate work.”) Another possibility would be to assign various doctoral programs at different colleges—thereby creating administrative problems of a different sort.
“The key,” as Rees recalled, “was to find that delicate balance which would draw upon the best resources of the university, avoid duplication of effort, and enhance the undergraduate programs at the colleges, but, at the same time, would provide for a rational doctoral program.”

She was guided by two considerations, one official, one personal. Nine months earlier, the city Board of Higher Education had adopted guidelines for doctoral programs, one of which was that they “should be unified and fully draw upon the resources of these colleges.”

More important, Rees was staunchly determined that advanced scholarship at CUNY would be second to none. “Quality faculty and quality students constitute the basic ingredient of doctoral programs of excellence,” she believed, and the teachers were in place. (After all, CUNY already was producing more candidates for the Ph.D. than any other institution in the country.) “To ignore these resources seemed, to say the least, a mistake in judgment.”

To make the best use of what she had, Rees decided to use a model for doctoral education unknown in the United States—but one quite customary in the country where she and her husband had spent their summer vacation.

“I should welcome an opportunity to meet and talk with someone at London, at Cambridge and at Oxford,” Rees had written to the secretary of the Association of the Universities of the British Commonwealth in London.

“It seemed to me,” as she later put it, “that, if we really wished to base our Ph.D. development on the ablest of our faculty, scattered as they were on four geographically separated campuses, I should look for suggestions to England where
universities had many colleges with separate programs and budgets, but only one Ph.D. program (or none) in a field."

A fruitful discussion with the registrar of the University of London clarified myriad issues: "how to organize the Ph.D. work as a central function at the university and how to encourage its growth in the separate colleges; how to prevent the growth of a doctor's program at one college from tending to weaken another college in this area; how much interchange of faculty and of students between colleges to encourage; and so on."

Think of it as an academic version of mix and match. Take a specialist from one college, another specialist from a second college, a third from number three. They remain on faculty at their home colleges, but the courses they teach are part of a separate entity, the Graduate School. This is the consortial model Rees developed, one that rapidly catapulted CUNY to the forefront of graduate education, and the one that remains in operation to this day.

It has worked so well because Rees foresaw how to best fulfill another of the Board of Higher Education's guidelines: "that graduate work should be developed out of strong undergraduate and master's programs."

"Competent faculty is the most difficult, and by far the most important, component to develop in a graduate program," Rees said in retrospect; "it usually takes years, even in the prestigious institutions. At the City University, a unique situation existed. We were able to draw upon the excellent faculties already at the senior colleges within the system. In short, we began with an almost 'ready-made' base."

One of Rees's successors, Frances Degen Horowitz, who came to the Graduate Center after serving as an administrator in conventionally administered universities, sang the praises of consortium. "The inherent advantages are the wealth of
intellectual resources available to students; the community of scholars that the faculty become part of, that is larger than one campus, and the flexibility,” she said. “As fields change, and as campuses hire young people, they bring those changes with them. It’s like we have an unending pool of fresh water on which to draw.”

“Most universities have no more than one authority on the French Revolution, for example,” said one of the Graduate Center’s distinguished professors, the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb. “We have several and they have different sub-specialities.

“It is almost paradoxical that our strength comes from being able to draw from all the undergraduate colleges,” Himmelfarb continued. “That would seem to dissipate the program and leave it without a fixed base, but it means we have a lot of people in many areas of specialization.”

Consortium also has served to keep the CUNY faculty intellectually invigorated. Professors have relished the opportunity to advance their work through interaction with up-and-coming scholars. And because doctoral faculty are invited to teach to meet the programs’ needs, the Graduate School administration has had to develop exceptional flexibility and good relations with the CUNY colleges; comity has become a guiding spirit.

“The consortial arrangement—unprecedented, experimental and difficult to fine-tune—was for the first six years a work in progress,” Rees once commented. It has caused proprietary disputes among the constituent colleges and occasionally among faculty members who have nursed injured *amour propre*.

But it worked, and continues to do so. And it does so because, as Rees perceived, the CUNY system contains a collection of scholars second to none.
It was an ambitious dream in the early 1960s, publicly supported education for the Ph.D. Public officials dreamed aloud: eleven fields of study, an urban affairs center, funding in the millions of dollars. But between the conception and the creation fell the shadow: getting doctoral education out of the skies and into the classrooms. After Mina Rees decided on consortium as her method, she had to decide where to begin.

The faculties of the senior colleges had recommended that doctoral education begin with eight disciplines; committees for each studied such factors as student interest, the adequacy of resources, and the need for the program. From the beginning, Rees established a principle that has guided the Graduate Center’s development: “Doctoral programs would be mounted only in those areas in which we were ready.”

Other problems were administrative in nature. First-year master’s degree courses at the senior colleges were not uniform. Because first-year students were located at the senior colleges, and because turf battle is the perennial preferred recreation of college administrators, their presidents proved balky (when not uncomprehending) about cooperating, about providing proper space or adjusting teaching loads for faculty engaged in doctoral work. Professors who had to travel to another college to teach doctoral students—say, an English professor from City College going to Hunter, where the English Ph.D. program was located—bristled when students innocently mistook them as members of that college’s faculty. “The list of problems went on,” Rees remembered.

And, of course, there was the question of money. State and city government had made lavish promises that failed to be realized. The initial budget, a pie-in-the-sky $6 million, kept shrinking. “After much worry and struggle, we received a $1 million
appropriation from the state,” Rees recalled. “I actually found a check for a million dollars in my mail one morning, an experience never repeated!” The City of New York contributed $2.6 million.

Cash in hand, Rees decided to start out with programs in four disciplines: economics, English, chemistry, and psychology. In the fall of 1962, eighty-eight students began taking classes. The Graduate Center was up and running.

Three years later, the GC presented its first two diplomas. The ceremony was emblematic of the unconventional, almost improvisatory and freewheeling nature of the institution.

The date had been accelerated to accommodate the advanced pregnancy of one of the graduates. “Stork Outraced, a Ph.D. is Earned,” chortled the New York Times. “The real significance,” Mina Rees noted, “may be that it illustrates the commitment of the City University Graduate School toward providing equal opportunities for both men and women to pursue graduate studies.”

“There wasn’t a rehearsal,” one of the graduates recalled. “We were told to show up at the appointed hour and be sure we had our cap and gown—the City University would take care of our doctoral hood.”

But there they were, the first products of the Graduate Center, Class of 1965: Daniel Robinson in Psychology and Barbara Stern in English. Their subsequent careers illustrate the breadth and flexibility the GC has always prized in its education.

Robinson used his training in psychology to apply neuropsychological research to philosophical problems. He retired as a professor of psychology at Georgetown, having also taught at Oxford, Amherst, Princeton, and Columbia. He wrote or edited more than fifty books, ranging over moral philosophy, the philosophy of psychology, legal philosophy, the philosophy of the
mind, intellectual history, legal history, and perhaps the best
known, *An Intellectual History of Psychology*. He also served as
the principal consultant to PBS and the BBC for their award-
winning series *The Brain* and *The Mind*.

Stern put her literary training to use in the business world,
applying literary theory to the analysis of advertisements,
consumer behavior, and marketing texts. She was a professor at
the Rutgers Business School–Newark and New Brunswick,
including a stint as chair of the marketing department. She also
founded and was coeditor-in-chief of the journal *Marketing
Theory*.

In 1963, the Graduate Center began its second year of instruction
with 218 students and two new programs, in Biology and in
Engineering. The year also brought a new chancellor of the
CUNY system, one who would exert decisive influence on the
development of its doctoral education. The appointment
delighted Mina Rees. Not only was the new head man a greatly
esteemed administrator, but he also was a fellow mathematician,
one with whom Rees had worked during the war—even though
he was only a grad student at the time.

**ALBERT BOWKER**

He had always been a fast mover. In 1949, a year before he was
granted his Ph.D. from Columbia University, Albert Bowker had
been named chairman of Stanford’s newly created statistics
department. He had already displayed his talents during World
War II, working while a graduate student with the university’s
statistical research group on bombsights, methods of firing
various weapons, and measuring how ships attempted to evade
bombardment by aerial torpedoes. This was what had brought
him to the attention of Mina Rees.

A native of Winchendon, Mass., Albert Hosmer Bowker (1919–
2008) would be a mover and shaker in education administration
for forty-five years. After becoming dean of Stanford’s graduate school, Bowker would follow his stint as CUNY chancellor from 1963 to 1971 with positions at Stanford, the University of California, and the University of Maryland, before returning to CUNY as vice president for planning of its research foundation from 1986 to 1993. He also served as the first U.S. assistant secretary for postsecondary education, and helped select two New York City public school chancellors.

A dry, sardonic wit—he once described his duties at Stanford as “putting water on some fires and gasoline on others”—illuminated Bowker’s resolve. “When I took over the chancellorship in 1963,” Bowker told CUNY-TV in 2007, CUNY’s colleges “seemed to be catering to primarily white students.... And the population of New York was changing, as more and more minorities, blacks and Puerto Ricans, were moving in. So it seemed absolutely essential, both educationally and politically, to try and develop some programs that would integrate the colleges.” He responded by opening ten more colleges, putting at least one in each borough of the city.

He was no less forthright concerning his ambitions for the Graduate Center. “We are going to overwhelm you,” he once told the president of Columbia University. “We are going to build the strongest graduate school in the city.”

“For the graduate program, Dr. Bowker’s appointment was most fortunate,” Rees remembered. “To have in the chancellor’s chair at the City University a man who was generally credited with playing a considerable role in establishing Stanford as one of the country’s educational leaders was helpful in simplifying some of our difficult organizational problems. As the graduate program developed and as the conversion of the Graduate Center progressed, many of the problems that had seemed unsolvable yielded to simple solutions.”

Recognition came quickly. An evaluation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools stated: “The quality of educational performance in the Graduate Division compares favorably with that in similar American graduate institutions. To have reached this level of quality within the short space of four years strikes the committee as a remarkable achievement.”

The most important determinants of the quality of a doctoral program are the quality of its faculty and the quality of its students. The two are mutually reinforcing: students are drawn to programs with outstanding faculty; professors relish teaching outstanding students and interacting with superior colleagues. And there’s the promotional value, too: star faculty puts a college on the map. Nothing succeeds like success.

Fully aware of all this was the New York State Legislature, which in 1964 launched an ambitious project to enhance universities in the state. It voted to establish ten regent professorships, five in the sciences and five in the humanities, each to be assigned to a university that proposed to appoint a scholar of acknowledged stature. The Graduate Center gained one of these positions, called the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities, in 1966.
Funding for this position also enabled the GC to invite many outstanding scholars and to conduct lectures and seminars with individuals including the diplomat and journalist John Bartlow Martin, the composer and critic Nicolas Nabokov, the philosopher Morton White, and the British Americanist Marcus Cunliffe.

However, the first scholar to hold the Schweitzer Chair at the Graduate Center remains its most famous. Indeed, the appointment of Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. in 1966 brought a luster to the Graduate Center that illuminated the estimable institution it had become in a mere half-decade.

"Nothing defines our age more than the furious and relentless increase in the rate of change," Schlesinger said at a convocation celebrating the first decade of the Graduate Center, an event that honored nothing less than the birth and growth of an academic miracle. In ten years, the GC had awarded nearly five hundred Ph.D.s ("a highly satisfactory record of productivity for a new program," as Mina Rees noted). Its academic offerings had expanded to twenty-six programs; Linguistics had been added in 1970 and Art History in 1971. Enrollment totaled 2,700 students.

However, as CUNY’s chancellor Robert J. Kibbee proclaimed, "The contribution of the Graduate School to this University transcends the distinction of its faculty, the quality of its graduates or the abilities of its students. To City University, a close federation of semi-autonomous colleges, it is our centralizing academic focus, the overarching program that makes us in fact a university. For this we treasure it even more and because of this we will fight for it and nurture it."

For Rees it was the satisfaction of a job well done. The success of the Graduate Center propelled its stature within CUNY’s administration: doctoral study was accorded the status of a...
separate college in 1971, and she became the first woman to serve as president of a CUNY college, a year before she took a deserved retirement.

"My work during the past ten years in establishing and guiding advanced work in the University has been difficult, sometimes successful, often rewarding," she wrote. Along with its structure, Rees left a statement of vision that would remain a lodestar for doctoral training at CUNY:

“Education is not designed to prepare people to do whatever work flows from the blind and predestined imperative of technology; rather, it is intended to educate people of vision and sensitivity, who will be motivated to direct technology into humanly constructive channels.”
Remembering Kenneth Clark

In a century that witnessed the growing influence of social science over public policy, perhaps no scholar exerted greater consequence in American law than a diffident professor of psychology at City College. He did so by watching children play with dolls.

Kenneth Clark put a human dimension to the damage that racial discrimination inflicted on the minds of America’s young people. With his wife and lifelong collaborator, Mamie Phipps Clark, Clark conducted a series of studies showing that black children who attended segregated schools frequently preferred to play with white dolls instead of black ones, which they stigmatized. These children gave such responses as early as the age of three, showing, the Clarks theorized, that they already had inculcated the effects of racism—a finding endorsed by the U.S. Supreme Court in its landmark decision of 1954, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, that declared de jure racial segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional.

It was the Clarks’ findings, documenting the measurable harm caused by Jim Crow—not only its moral and legal outrages—that Chief Justice Earl Warren cited in his unanimous decision: “To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone.”

It was an early vindication, personal and professional, for Kenneth Bancroft Clark (1914–2005), who devoted his long career to protesting and remediating the consequences of structural bigotry on young minds. A graduate of Howard University, where he met and married Mamie in 1938, Clark took his Ph.D. at Columbia University—the first black student to gain a doctorate in psychology there. (Mamie was the second.) He also was the first black full-time professor at City College, whose faculty he joined in 1942. Clark began teaching at the Graduate Center in 1967 and continued until his retirement in 1975.

Decades before college professors styled themselves as “public intellectuals,” Clark was putting his expertise into action. In 1946, he and his wife founded the Northside Center for Child Development in Harlem, a small clinic that treated children with personality disturbances. Sixteen years later, he organized Harlem Youth Opportunities
Unlimited, an effort to recruit educational experts to reorganize Harlem schools, provide for preschool programs and after-school remedial education, and reduce unemployment among black dropouts. The project influenced President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty program.

Clark was the first black member of the New York State Board of Regents, which oversees public education in the state, where he served for twenty years and was sometimes described as “the conscience of the board.” He was also the first black president of the American Psychological Association.

The Supreme Court’s reliance on social science in the *Brown* decision met with much criticism, but was vigorously defended by Clark during a symposium celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Graduate Center.

“Those who contend that only with the *Brown* decision were the federal courts influenced by the prevailing social sciences either were unaware of or seek to ignore some basic historical facts,” he said. “Right through the third and fourth decade of the twentieth century, social science reflected and reinforced the permeating racist theories of the society of which it was a part. . . . This is the pre-*Brown* reality of the relationship between social science and court decisions”—a relationship that Clark’s scholarship did much to challenge.

Remembering Henri Peyre

The phrase “a scholar and a gentleman” might have been coined to describe Henri Peyre. Along with immense learning—he was the leading expert on French culture and literature of his day—he brought a dedication and warmth, spiced by more than a dash of Gallic charm, that epitomized the spirit of the Graduate Center.

“There was nothing he did not know, nothing he was not willing to read if you were interested in it, nothing he did not want to know more about,” said Mary Ann Caws, his former student at Yale University and an academic colleague at the GC. “You never felt any topic was too small to be of interest or too large to overwhelm him. Whatever the topic, he not only knew it, but how to explain it. People liked to be around Henri and he around them.”
Nearly as prolific as his countryman (and contemporary) Georges Simenon, Peyre published forty-four books, including *The Contemporary French Novel* (1955) and *Literature and Sincerity* (1963), most notably on French classicism and modern literature but ranging to comparative literature and higher education in the United States. He worked to keep his mind fresh and active over his lengthy career: he tore up his notes after every lecture “so I won’t repeat myself each year. . . . Scholarship must be hardy and rash. It must take risks.”

He was also an urbane but staunch believer in the value of liberal education. During campus protests during the Vietnam War, he recommended that students study the humanities: “studies can open windows for students and can help them understand motives that have moved men in the past.”

Henri Maurice Peyre (1901–1988) was born in Paris and received his doctorate from the Sorbonne. After early posts at Bryn Mawr College and the Egyptian University in Cairo, he joined the Yale faculty in 1938; under his chairmanship Yale’s Department of Romance Languages was ranked first in the nation several times by the American Council on Education. Following mandatory retirement from Yale in 1969, he became a distinguished professor at the Graduate Center, where he taught until 1980.

A much-honored scholar—Peyre ceased accepting honorary degrees in the late 1960s—he was made an officer in the Légion d’honneur and was awarded the Grand Prix from the Académie française. He was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and served terms as president of the Modern Language Association and of the American Association of Teachers of French.

In Caws’s words, “He represented the very best of America to many French people, and the very best of France to many Americans.” Both his memory and his work are continued at the Graduate Center in the Henri Peyre French Institute, which sponsors programs and publications relating to the arts and humanities in French and Francophone culture.
Survival

For the Graduate Center, the seventies and eighties were the best of times and the worst of times.

There were springs of hope: more than four thousand doctorates would be awarded during this period; the GC initiated several exciting programmatic expansions; through a combination of scholarly study and hands-on activity, the GC became an active and forceful presence in the social and intellectual life of the city.

However, forces outside the institution brought it winters of despair. New York City’s near slide into bankruptcy choked the GC’s financial lifelines—at the same time that the entire CUNY system was buckling under the financial obligations of its open-admissions policy. Budgetary panic created a shrill atmosphere. The city government grew desperate as it literally ran out of money and the federal government refused a bailout (inspiring the immortal *Daily News* headline: “Ford to City: Drop Dead”). Suddenly, the very notion of publicly supported doctoral education was attacked as a costly frippery. Barely ten years old, the Graduate Center was fighting for its very life.

That it not only survived but endured was the consequence of its sturdy foundation, its commitment to academic excellence, and the indomitable spirit so necessary for making it in the Big Apple. Most of all, however, the Graduate Center prospered even through adversity because of a happy accident of continuity: the GC’s longest-serving president was at the helm during its most tumultuous period, 1972 to 1990. He was the right man at the right time—even though when he accepted the job, he forthrightly stated, “I would like it understood that I am only committing myself to this position for a period of three or four years.”
Fate indeed: the second president of the Graduate Center was a man of New York City, by birth, by education, and by academic interest. Harold Proshansky studied the effects of urban living on the human psyche: noise, crowding, lack of privacy, riding in elevators, waiting in doctors’ offices. A daily trip on the subway represented “a crisis in human dignity.”

Proshansky was a pioneer in the field of environmental psychology, the study of the relationship of setting and behavior. He investigated how the design of psychiatric wards affected the behavior of patients, how the arrangements of apartments and private homes influenced patterns of eating, sleeping, and privacy. And, perhaps because he was a lifelong New Yorker, he wondered about the consequences of people facing the daily stress of subways. “I’m interested in the kinds of interpersonal strategies that develop on subways. People are forced to relate in extremely intimate ways under these conditions, ways in which they’d never relate anywhere else.”

He did not exempt the academy from his perception of city stress. “The urban university setting mirrors some of the less desirable characteristics of the urban community,” he once said. “It is big, crowded, impersonal, stress producing, and less than responsive to meeting the identity needs of students.”

He was coeditor of the first definitive work in his field, *Environmental Psychology: Man and His Physical Setting* (1970), served as a consultant to the Ford Foundation’s Educational Facilities Laboratories, and was on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Social Issues* and the *International Journal of Group Tensions*. He also was a fellow of the American Psychological Association, and was a president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. But Proshansky’s major contribution was to establish Environmental Psychology as a
discipline for doctoral study at the Graduate Center, the first such program in the United States and for many years the only one.

Harold Milton Proshansky (1920–1990) received his bachelor’s degree from City College after a hardscrabble upbringing in the East Bronx. He and his two sisters were children of an immigrant clothes cutter (“a dyed-in-the-wool socialist,” his son recalled). They were “always very poor,” and young Harold sold newspapers on the subway. He received his master’s degree at Columbia before serving four years in the Army Air Corps and obtaining his Ph.D. from New York University in 1952. The following year he joined the psychology faculty at Brooklyn College.

Proshansky joined the Graduate Center’s faculty in 1963 and became executive officer of the psychology program three years later. In 1968 he was named dean of graduate studies, then provost in 1970.

His commitment to research made him reluctant to take the next step up the administrative ladder. “It was never my intention to serve in an administrative role for the rest of my academic career,” he wrote CUNY’s chancellor when accepting the presidency of the Graduate Center. “I would hope to return to these academic pursuits on a full-time basis within a reasonable period of time.”

To a friend, he bemoaned: “The worst has happened.”

“It’s going to be a bitter and difficult period,” Proshansky continued, “but I’ve decided that it is better for me to protect the interests of the many programs I have nurtured.”

Therein, perhaps, lies the reason for his lengthy tenure and an insight into his character: his commitment to scholarship and his determination to safeguard it. Proshansky had his full share of New York moxie. “A shortish, compact man, with graying hair
and neatly trimmed mustache and goatee and gray-tinted gold-rimmed glasses,” as the New York Post described him, “Proshansky has half the look of the classic Viennese psychiatrist and half the look of a satyr who reads a lot.” He was a man who inspired strong reaction, pro and con; as a Graduate School student publication once put it, he garnered “the respect—if not always the love—of the faculty, staff and students.”

But, as the paper continued, “the prestige of the Graduate School is the result of President Proshansky’s leadership and love for the institution.” Asked in 1983 what had been his greatest satisfaction during his presidency, Proshansky replied:

“When I get off the elevator usually thinking about what seems to be endless administrative problems, I am always heartened by the sight of the newly published books by our faculty, students and alumni displayed on that floor. And there isn’t a month that goes by that I do not receive copies of the latest papers, monographs or books written by our faculty; some by our students and alumni. It is this that makes it all worthwhile.”

Proshansky began as the president of a newly named entity. When, in 1971, the Board of Higher Education approved the reorganization of CUNY’s Graduate Division into an autonomous unit, with its own administration, budget, and governance, it also transferred other university-wide activities under its aegis, including the university’s baccalaureate program, some master’s degree programs, an urban research center, and the Study Abroad program. The new megalopolis was dubbed the Graduate School and University Center; the University Center encompasses all the nondoctoral research and education programs, while the School refers to doctoral training. The distinction is honored more in the breach than the observance, and the Graduate Center is the name commonly used.
Notwithstanding this administrative juggling, the institution Proshansky inherited had settled upon its structure and routine. “The consortial arrangement,” as he noted, “was for the first six years a work in progress.” Although the offices of the Graduate Center were located in midtown Manhattan at 33 West 42nd Street, first-year classwork was scattered throughout the senior colleges, with advanced work being given at the 42nd Street site. The result, as an early evaluation by the State Department of Education reported, was “an administrative pattern that is complicated, cumbersome, and loaded with friction points.” Coordination was a nightmare; at one point, students in eighteen disciplines were enrolled in fifty-six programs across the university because of duplication across the colleges. (Fewer than ten students were enrolled in twenty-six of those programs.) Record-keeping at the four admissions offices was inconsistent.

Such obvious headaches impelled the Graduate Center to centralize. By the end of its first decade, coursework was moved to 42nd Street. The exceptions were professional and science disciplines that required expensive hardware, like the laboratories already up and running in the senior colleges. In such cases, the appropriate colleges, called “chosen agents,” continued to house the doctoral programs.

“A biologist from Yale once told me that if the Graduate School could put all its biology faculty, laboratories, and libraries in one central location, CUNY would have the best doctoral program in biology in the nation,” Proshansky once wrote. “‘Why don’t you build a big building on 42nd Street to house it all?’ he asked me. Well, the only rub is that you could send a man to Mars for what it would cost to rebuild all of our science facilities next to Times Square. Given that this would be prohibitively expensive, and that setting up multiple Ph.D. programs at the different colleges
would dilute the strength of our faculty, the chosen-agent concept is the best compromise."

Another, more significant, move toward administrative concentration was the decision to assign certain faculty members exclusively to the Graduate Center. “To make sure there would always be a ‘critical mass’ of doctoral faculty at the Graduate Center,” Proshansky recalled, “we began to make a number of ‘central appointments’ — that is, to recruit distinguished faculty whose only affiliation would be with the Graduate School (although most of them occasionally teach courses at the other campuses).” Executive officers also were assigned as much as possible to work in the GC rather than at their home colleges.

Such appointments were few — the GC’s faculty would barely number 150 after fifty years — but served as the vehicle to attract acclaimed scholars to CUNY, both from within the system and from other colleges and universities.

“A LIFEBOAT ENVIRONMENT”

The steady progress of the Graduate Center ran aground in the mid-seventies. Suddenly the institution was frantically protecting itself from the collateral damage resulting from New York City’s financial implosion.

In April 1975, after more than a decade of budget deficits and creative bookkeeping, the city government ran out of money. Its credit ratings ruined, it could find no underwriters for the sale of municipal securities. New York was forced to beg three-day loans just to meet its payroll. The impending bankruptcy of the nation’s largest city set off a mad scramble for solutions at every level: city, state, federal, even international (both France and West Germany warned Washington that the fall of New York might implode the international banking system). By November, Congress narrowly approved a bailout — at the price of severe
austerity measures. City taxes were raised, municipal workers (including police officers, firefighters, and hospital workers) were laid off, wage increases were canceled, and fees for city services were hiked.

Education was not spared. “The impact of the rapidly deteriorating fiscal situation in New York City threatens the very existence of the City University of New York,” the state’s Board of Regents warned. The university’s $650 million budget had been cut by $20 million in the middle of the 1974–75 academic year, only to be reduced another 11 percent the next year. (The state eventually would assume the full cost of financing CUNY.) At the Graduate Center, the number of course offerings was reduced by 10 percent, and faculty teaching loads were increased. As in the rest of the CUNY system, employees went unpaid for two weeks in 1976. Most dramatically for a research institution, the GC closed its library over the weekends—“a shocking development,” Proshansky wrote, “to an academic community accustomed to having research facilities available.”

With dollars scarce and demands desperate, a Hobbesian spirit of bureaucratic ruthlessness engulfed the city’s officialdom. It was every agency, department, or institution for itself. This “maelstrom of change and distress,” Proshansky said, created a “lifeboat environment.” And a cacophony of forces clamored to push the Graduate Center overboard. A CUNY vice chancellor reminisced, “I well recall being present and indeed sitting in the hot seat at executive sessions of the Board of Estimate, of the Finance Committee of the City Council, and of a caucus of the Democratic legislators in Albany, and being bombarded with challenges to defend the cost of the doctoral programs in the face of the ruthless need to cut back on the increases in the City University budget.”

The campaign against the GC was fueled by misapprehension, compounded equally of misinformation and resentment. Six
years after CUNY had adopted an open-admissions policy, assuring all graduates of city high schools a free college education, the fiscal crisis had forced the imposition of tuition. Wouldn’t closing the Graduate Center save money that could be used to keep undergraduate tuition minimal? Well, no. Not only had tuition always been charged at the Graduate Center, but its costs represented less than 3 percent of the entire CUNY budget, although its enrollment represented nearly 8 percent of full-time systemwide enrollment.

But what was a public university doing in the business of doctoral education, anyway? Wasn’t its mission the education of the underprivileged, who would be better off learning a trade? Couldn’t doctoral work be left to the many private universities? Wasn’t the Graduate Center an “elitist luxury,” a “frill at a time of budgetary austerity”? This argument was enthusiastically promoted by administrators of private universities, seeking additional students and more state funding. (It also proved popular with the heads of CUNY’s senior colleges, who still hoped to put CUNY’s Ph.D. programs under their administrative domain.)

“During the Seventies,” Proshansky recalled, “I spent much of my time fending off blows.” Joined by members of the GC’s faculty, his rebuttal underlined the speciousness of barbs directed at the GC: “Proposals recommending that either the Graduate School or graduate education be eliminated from CUNY are political in character,” Proshansky said. “Such a move is neither economically nor educationally justified.”

Its defenders emphasized the GC’s acknowledged excellence. Responding to a statement by the president of New York University that doctoral education be limited to private institutions, history professor Gertrude Himmelfarb retorted, “The City University program in History was rated superior to that of
NYU. Would he not agree that it is NYU, not the City University, which should close down its programs?"

Speaking from the bully pulpit of the *New York Times* op-ed page, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. not only pointed out the benefits a Ph.D. program bestowed on a university — “a good graduate school provides the best way of assuring high academic and intellectual standards . . . they are bound to pervade the whole institution. Without a graduate school, it would become almost impossible to maintain adequate standards in a large and diffuse educational system” — but also took the higher ground: he reminded his readers that creation of doctoral studies represented the culmination of CUNY’s mission:

“...The experiment in mass higher education undertaken at CUNY requires specific and abiding attention to the recruitment of faculty and the preservation of standards if the students—undergraduates as well as graduate students—who go there for a decent education are not to be cheated of what they seek and deserve. Far from being ‘elitist,’ the existence of a graduate school at CUNY is a signal to the undergraduates that they will not be defrauded. . . . Any large university that does away with its graduate school would cease to be a serious educational institution. If the City University were to do so, it would slam another door in the face of the poor of New York. And, by such an act, the university would be abandoning the quest for excellence that has characterized public higher education in New York City since the establishment of the City College of New York in 1847.”

A letter from one of the GC’s students to the *Village Voice* made the same point more pungently: “The CUNY Graduate Center gives students who cannot afford to pay very much, intellectual training to rival the best available to the wealthy. Closing the Graduate Center would be tantamount to saying to the women, the poor, the black and the ethnic undergraduates in the City
Read history, economics, and criticism as undergraduates, if you like, but don’t aspire to write your own versions of them. That is the preserve of those wealthier than you are.”

“Graduate education, particularly at the highest level of graduate study,” Proshansky told the State Legislature, “is essential to the work of higher education and, indeed, to society at large.”

Slowly, the storm passed. Public protest and behind-the-scenes lobbying shielded the Graduate Center. Proshansky mended fences, persuading Columbia, Fordham, the New School for Social Research, and New York University to join the GC in an interuniversity doctoral consortium to permit cross-registration in disciplines where enrollment was low. In 1980, the Legislature confirmed the continued existence of CUNY and its Graduate Center.

Yet the costs were considerable. Hiring was frozen systemwide—for five years the GC was prohibited from replacing retired or transferred faculty members. Also frozen by the state was expansion of the GC’s offerings: no new doctoral programs were allowed until 1981. The threat of intellectual stasis was obvious. The Center survived, but could it endure?

But Proshansky had not fought so hard for the GC just to have it stay in place. And he was fully aware that learning should not be confined to a classroom.

CROSSING DEPARTMENTAL BOUNDARIES

“Interdisciplinary studies” is probably the academic ideal most honored in the breach. No matter how necessary it may be for intellectual inquiry to roam widely, higher education seeks to sharpen the mind by narrowing it—within well-regulated departmental boundaries. But the Graduate Center has never sought to so shackle its scholars (young or old). “Frequently, of
course, a student’s scholarly interests are not confined to a single academic discipline,” Proshansky once said. “In recognition of this, the Graduate Center has a long-standing interest in facilitating interdisciplinary work at the doctoral level.” And this disposition served as a beacon during the late seventies when the customary paths of intellectual expansion were blocked.

Research centers and institutes bring myriad benefits to their host universities. “They provide a physical place for faculty and students interested in interdisciplinary issues to meet and talk,” Proshansky said. “They sponsor colloquia and special seminars. They give direction to students pursuing our interdisciplinary concentrations. They provide fruitful contacts with government agencies, corporations, private foundations, and foreign governments. And they are enormously successful at attracting research funds and contracts to the Graduate Center.”

Proliferating under Proshansky’s tenure, such independently funded entities infuse vigor into the GC’s intellectual life. They provide venues for scholars and thinkers, including faculty from other institutions, to contribute to publications and conferences, and for professors and students to pursue areas of interest without departmental constraints. And their activities raise the profile of the GC in academic, governmental, and international circles.

Thirty-one centers and institutes currently are housed under the GC’s auspices. Their foci range over the humanities, social and hard sciences, and the performing arts—as wide as the inquiring mind can reach, as can be illuminated with four examples.

Named for the Nobel peace laureate, the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies works in the spirit of its namesake to foster international reconciliation and
understanding, with special emphasis on activities of the United Nations. It sponsors monthly forums to analyze issues of international security, development, and human rights, and a series of seminars to discuss international politics. It also organizes a variety of humanitarian projects, including the Inter-University Consortium on Security and Humanitarian Action, the Consortium on Security and Humanitarian Action, and the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. Graduate students are enabled through several awards and fellowships. The Ralph Bunche Dissertation Fellowship Award is granted to students researching issues that were of particular interest to Bunche, such as the United Nations and multilateralism, international politics, African and Middle Eastern affairs, American foreign policy, decolonization, race relations, and human rights. The John H. E. Fried Memorial Fellowship in International Human Rights is granted to conduct research on international human rights. The George D. Schwab Fellowship in American Foreign Policy underwrites expenses for dissertation research in American foreign policy.

As a public institution, its home city has always been central to the identity and mission of the Graduate Center. The Gotham Center for New York City History strives not only to preserve the story of the city but also to share it with its inhabitants and visitors. A labor of love for history professor Mike Wallace, coauthor of the Pulitzer Prize winner Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898 (1998), the center is as multifaceted as the city itself. “Gotham Center Forums” present panel discussions on historical topics; the Garment Industry History Initiative conducts academic symposia and public programs that trace the rich story of the city’s needle trade. But what makes the center a cornucopia of information is its website, which resembles one of the city’s department stores in its abundance and variety of offerings. From books to discussion boards to a library of video
and images, the Gotham Center’s website (like the city) never sleeps.

Nothing is more New York than the theatre, and the **Martin E. Segal Theatre Center** has become, in the words of theatre professor Marvin Carlson, “a major player and attraction with national and international interest.” The center combines academic studies in theatre, dance, and film with opportunities for on-the-boards activity. It publishes academic journals devoted to American drama, western and eastern European performance, and film, and collaborates in the English-language translation of international works. The seventy-seat Martin E. Segal Theatre provides a performance space for staged readings, lectures, and seminars. Through it all, the center seeks to tear down the fourth wall between stage and audience, academics and professionals.

Though too often taken for granted, the humanities form the heart of higher education — the kind that should not end once liberated from the classroom. To provide a forum outside the academy to pursue the interest in ideas, the **Center for the Humanities** provides free events — lectures, panels, readings, seminars — on the liberal arts and their implications in urban society. This emphasis was the theme of the center’s inaugural daylong symposium, “The Humanities and the City.” Similar subsequent events, on figures like Irving Howe, Ralph Ellison, and Michael Harrington, have assembled scholars to discuss topics dear to the hearts of the symposium subjects, like socialism, immigration, the future of the welfare state, and black culture. The Center for the Humanities has been an active cosponsor with other cultural institutions to organize events tied to exhibitions or publications; for example, a show of the works of Edward Hopper at the Whitney Museum inspired a symposium on the painter, organized by his biographer, art history professor Gail Levin. The center also conducts two endowed lecture series. The Irving Howe Memorial Lecture
concentrates on such subjects as politics, Yiddish and Jewish culture, and immigrant history; speakers have included Robert Alter, Paul Krugman, Clifford Geertz, and Frank Kermode. The Stanley Burnshaw Lecture, hosted alternately by the Center for the Humanities and the Harry Ransom Center for Research in the Humanities at the University of Texas, Austin, honors the poet and critic with such speakers as Harold Bloom, Robert Pinsky, Galway Kinnell, and Denis Donoghue.

New York City achieved a precarious but workable financial equilibrium in the eighties; the municipal government was finally allowed to sell long-term securities in 1981. Nevertheless, finances would prove a continuing headache for the CUNY system. In 1989, proposed legislation to impose a $200 tuition increase ignited a two-week protest that saw students occupy administrative offices on ten CUNY campuses. Students at the Graduate Center joined midway, closing the GC for one day in support. A more serious disruption occurred two years later, when the stakes were raised: this time, a $500 tuition hike was on the table, combined with a $92 million reduction in the CUNY budget. Student demonstrations that shut down the system from April 8 to May 1 included a ten-day occupation of the Graduate Center, accompanied by teach-ins and open forums. As well as expressing sympathy for the undergraduates, the doctoral students issued demands for expanded library hours and expansion of Ph.D. programs. Proshansky had died the previous December, but a graceful resolution including appointment of an ad hoc committee was achieved by Steven M. Cahn, the GC’s provost, who served as acting president before the appointment of Proshansky’s successor.

With the financial stability of the eighties, the moratorium on new doctoral programs was lifted, and the GC moved rapidly to make up lost ground. A doctoral program in Criminal Justice was inaugurated in 1981 and Earth and Environmental Sciences two
years later, with Computer Science, Classics, and Musical Arts in Performance following closely. A survey by the National Research Council in 1983 ranked six of the GC’s programs (Anthropology, English, French, History, Linguistics, and Music) among the fifteen best in the country. In 1986, in honor of the GC’s twenty-fifth anniversary, Mayor Edward Koch declared in a proclamation: “Dedicated to excellence in higher education, the Graduate School and University Center greatly strengthens and enriches our city’s system of public education.”

“I must confess,” Proshansky wrote to a friend in 1982, “the Graduate School has gotten into my blood and so my enthusiasm for growth and development, even in the next difficult five years, has not waned.” The man who had so reluctantly ascended to the president’s chair oversaw in his last decade the consolidation of the institution’s reputation. The Center awarded more than four thousand doctoral degrees under Proshansky’s tenure, and attracted more than $100 million in research funds. At a memorial service following his death in 1990, he was lauded in terms personal and professional for his service to the GC.

“He was an unassuming man of quiet charm and wit,” said Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “who without pretense or pomposity made the Graduate School a national institution.”

“As you walk down the corridors, or peek into the classrooms, or look at the faces of students from around the world, or read the roster of world-class faculty, realize what you are doing,” said CUNY’s chancellor at the time, W. Ann Reynolds. “You are gazing at Harold Proshansky’s living monument.”
Remembering Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.

“I have lived through interesting times and had the luck of knowing some interesting people,” he wrote of his long and fruitful life. For Arthur Schlesinger Jr., to live in interesting times was not a curse but a blessing. Believing that history moves in cycles, he devoted his many years to both understanding the pattern of events and attempting to direct their course; the corridors of influence were both his subject and his favored habitat.

Schlesinger came to maturity during the Great Depression and World War II; his lifelong intellectual project was to rationalize that social and political tumult in the light of American liberalism, newly dominant but perennially fragile. His second book, *The Age of Jackson* (1945), was both a scholarly success and a popular one, selling 90,000 copies in its first year and winning the Pulitzer Prize. Challenging accepted interpretations, Schlesinger argued that Jacksonian democracy represented the triumph of popular sovereignty over business domination—in effect, the precursor of the New Deal. “Liberalism in America has been ordinarily the movement on the part of other sections of society to restrain the power of the business community,” he wrote. “This was the tradition of Jefferson and Jackson, and it has been the basic meaning of American liberalism.”


His presidential chronicles continued with his second Pulitzer Prize winner, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (1965). Like his subsequent *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (1978), which received the National Book Award, the book derived its special insight from Schlesinger’s three years as special assistant in the Kennedy Administration—itself an extension of his energetic political endeavors during the fifties. Not only had Schlesinger been active in the presidential campaigns of Adlai Stevenson and John F. Kennedy, serving as a speechwriter and spokesman for both candidates, but he also had been a leading intellectual Cold Warrior. In 1947 he was one of the founders, with Eleanor Roosevelt, Walter Reuther, John Kenneth Galbraith,
and Hubert Humphrey, of Americans for Democratic Action, the self-defined liberal anticommunist organization that sought to preserve the progressive policies of the New Deal from the Scylla and Charybdis of communist totalitarianism on the one hand, and the atavism of the postwar Red Scare on the other.

“The guarantee of freedom in any liberal capitalist state,” Schlesinger had written in *The Age of Jackson*, is “that enduring struggle between the business community and the rest of society.” His argument for an activist liberal interventionist state untainted by totalitarianism was articulated in *The Vital Center* (1949). Following the ideas of the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Schlesinger contended that in the place of Marxist dystopias, a limited but reform-minded liberalism could best “restore the balance between individual and community.”

Throughout, he was never far from the classroom. Arthur Meier Schlesinger Jr. (1917–2007) was born into the academy: his father, Arthur Sr., was a pioneering social historian; his son grew up on the campuses of the University of Iowa and Harvard, where Arthur Jr. graduated summa cum laude at the age of 20. Following wartime service in the Office of Strategic Services, Schlesinger returned to Harvard, where his History 169 course would become the department’s most popular. After he resigned his White House position in 1964, he brought some of the stardust of Camelot to the Graduate Center. Having served as what *Time* magazine called the Kennedy administration’s bridge to the intelligentsia (acting as the president’s conduit to, say, the historian Isaiah Berlin or the composer Gian Carlo Menotti), Schlesinger easily slid into a role as CUNY’s envoy to Manhattan’s salons, where he was renowned for his brightly colored bow ties and appreciation for the well-mixed martini.

But his scholarly labor never ceased. Writing as many as five thousand words a day, Schlesinger produced nearly half of his twenty-nine published books during his tenure at the Graduate Center, where he remained an active presence after his retirement in 1994. The Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. Chair in American History was established at the GC in 2001.

To the end, Schlesinger described himself as an unreconstructed New Dealer whose basic thinking had changed little in a half-century. “Problems will always torment us,” as he wrote in *The Vital Center*, “because all important problems are insoluble: that is why they are important. The good comes from the continuing struggle to try and solve them, not from the vain hope of their solution.”
No generalization applies universally to the critics and thinkers now known as the New York Intellectuals—except, perhaps, one: all were passionately engaged with issues political and aesthetic. They fervently pursued that “dark and bloody crossroads,” as the intersection of literature and politics was so famously described by Lionel Trilling, the most celebrated of the group, an intensity inspired by the origins of most of them as first-generation Americans. Coming to maturity in the hothouse atmosphere of the Great Depression and World War II, they were eager to amalgamate the political progressivism of their ethnic roots and the artistic modernism of their new culture.

For many of them, the stepping-stone to social mobility was an education at City College (dubbed the “Harvard of the poor”), the alma mater of Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin, the outstanding literary critics among the New York Intellectuals. For all their cosmopolitanism, each remained a New Yorker born and bred, and during their tenures at the Graduate Center, each attempted to convey what Howe called the “international perspective” bred from “provincial experience.” As he said of himself and his cohort, “They meant to declare themselves citizens of the world and, if that succeeded, might then become writers of this country.”

His own career epitomizes this lifelong political engagement and intellectual commitment. Irving Howe (1920–1993) engaged in a range of alliances, from boyhood socialist to collegiate Trotskyite (he was remembered for jumping on tables to give speeches during the Spanish Civil War) to postwar liberal anticommunist to critic of the New Left of the sixties. Throughout, his principled stance was summed up in the title of the journal he founded in 1954, *Dissent*. As Morris Dickstein, his academic colleague at the Graduate Center, put it, “Howe was always a counterpuncher who tended to dissent from the prevailing orthodoxy of the moment, whether left or right, though he himself was certainly a man of the left. Whatever way the herd was going, he went in the opposite direction.” (Howe said of his style of argumentation, “Rudeness becomes a spear with which to break the skin of complacency.”)

Such contrarianism was equally evident in Howe’s literary criticism. He consistently argued that literature (particularly modernist literature) must not be measured by ad-
herence to political orthodoxies. Art, he contended, is “the triumph of reality over ideology,” a stance that illuminates his studies of William Faulkner, Thomas Hardy, Sherwood Anderson, and the brilliantly articulated *Politics and the Novel* (1957).

However, Howe kept faith with his roots as the son of immigrants from Bukovina who ran a small grocery store in the East Bronx that went out of business during the Great Depression. He championed Yiddish literature—he commissioned the first English translation of the future Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer—edited collections of Yiddish stories and poems, and taught courses in Yiddish literature during the 1950s at Brandeis University. His social history *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (1976) received the National Book Award.

After posts at Brandeis, Stanford, and Hunter College, Howe joined the Graduate Center in 1963 and taught there until his retirement in 1986. Never a man to suffer fools gladly—reproached at a lecture for not titling his book *World of Our Fathers and Our Mothers*, he retorted, “*World of Our Fathers* is a title. *World of Our Fathers and Our Mothers* is a speech”—Howe was remembered for the passion with which he lectured on literature and for being one of “the New York writers” who, as he wrote, “introduced a new voice in American literary life: a roughening of tone, a burst of demotic speech.”

This “demotic quality” had been heard in forebears like Melville and Whitman, Howe continued, but had been ignored, with some embarrassment, by most critics. “A notable exception,” he declared, was Alfred Kazin. Kazin sought and celebrated the sound of America singing—which, to his vibrantly attentive ear, could be heard everywhere: “Every taxi driver and bartender who told you his story wanted to be a novelist.”

His very first book, *On Native Grounds* (1942), a groundbreaking interpretation of American novelists from Howells through Faulkner, established its twenty-seven-year-old author as a critic of the first rank. A prolific reviewer (like Howe), Kazin’s ten books and countless articles would earn him membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the first Truman Capote Lifetime Achievement Award for literary criticism, presented in 1966, and the esteem of authors as disparate as Jack Kerouac (“I like this guy because he is excited”) and Philip Roth (“He was America’s best reader of American literature in this century”).

Kazin’s criticism always attempted to situate an author in his historical situation, to illuminate the interaction between time and place and literary accomplishment. Though vastly less partisan than Howe, he found in American literature the chronicle of what
he called “the connection between literature and democracy,” asserting that “long before the practice of literature was identified with belles lettres, our first great writers were Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, the Adamses.” His final book, *God and the American Writer* (1997), includes a chapter on Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address with discussions of Hawthorne, Whitman, Dickinson, and Faulkner.

“Criticism for me was not a theory,” he once told an interviewer. “It was a branch of literature, a way of writing like any other, of characterization, analysis and almost physical empathy. One could be a writer without writing a novel.” The fervor, the “humanistic moral passion” that animates his criticism was engendered by his roots in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, where Alfred Kazin (1915–1998) was born the son of a housepainter father and a dressmaker mother, both émigrés from czarist Russia. He never abandoned the second generation’s fascination with the New World. The irresistible allure of landscape, and his restless exploration of it, permeates his trilogy of reminiscence, *A Walker in the City* (1951), *Starting Out in the Thirties* (1965), and *New York Jew* (1978). Kazin said he attempted to write a prose rhapsody to Brooklyn to rank with *Leaves of Grass* or *The Bridge*, as in his paean to the Brooklyn Bridge: “As soon as I look up to the coil and swing of the cables, I am threaded through, caught up by millions of lines going through the arches of the towers. I slowly and unflinchingly make my way through, then watch the lines streaming back and forth and up and down on every side of me. I am threaded through, I am led on into the thousand thicknesses and coiled strength of the lines. I am led on. . . . This is my only understanding of the divine.”

“Literature has been my lifework, my passion, and oddly enough my ‘profession,’” he once commented about a peripatetic career that took him from editorial posts at the *New Republic* and *Fortune* to teaching positions at Harvard, Smith, Amherst, Cornell, Notre Dame, the University of California at Berkeley, Cambridge, Cologne, the University of Puerto Rico, and State University College at Stony Brook. He joined the faculty of Hunter College in 1974 and taught seminars at the Graduate Center even after his retirement in 1985.

In 1986, at its twenty-fifth anniversary commencement, the GC awarded Kazin a Doctorate of Humane Letters to honor him as “someone who has captured and exemplified much of what the Graduate School would want to have reflected in its faculty and in its students.”

“The teaching was important to me,” Kazin commented. “Being a professor was not.”
The elegant, landmarked building above, built for B. Altman & Company in 1906, became the Graduate Center’s second home in 1999. “People will still shop in the building,” said Frances Degen Horowitz, then GC president, “but now they will shop for ideas.” Bright, airy, and affordable apartments for students and faculty became available in the fall of 2011 when the Graduate Center Apartments (left) opened on CUNY’s East Harlem campus.
With 72,000 square feet on three floors, the Mina Rees Library (right) increased the school’s shelf space by more than a third. Its Dissertation Reading Room (above) holds dissertations of all the school’s Ph.D.s.
Gracing the library with touches of Altman elegance are this stairway (above) and “birdcage” elevator (left).
With excellent acoustics and seating for 180, Elebash Recital Hall is a superb venue for music. Also off the entrance hall (right) are the Mina Rees Library and the James Gallery.
The Empire State Building looms over the Dining Commons and the Skylight Room (above). Below are the library’s second floor reading area (left), the Fifth Avenue entrance’s vestibule (center), and one of the building’s seventy classrooms (right).
Doctorates Number One and Ten Thousand (above): Daniel Robinson (Psychology, 1965) and Kristen Case (English, 2009); Robinson hooded Case at the 2009 commencement (below), held at Lincoln Center’s Avery Fisher Hall.
“What cuts the deepest channels in our lives are the different houses in which we live”: Leonard Woolf’s observation holds particularly true for the Graduate Center. Each of the two buildings it has occupied in its fifty years has possessed, one might say, a distinctive personality—atmospheres that have exerted a subtle influence over the sort of educational institution the GC has become. Always roosting in the heart of Manhattan, the Graduate Center has been immersed in the bustle of the Big Apple, a circumstance it has enthusiastically embraced; it has become an invigorating presence in the political and social, as well as the intellectual, life of the city. Perhaps it was destiny that the GC would become part of the fabric of New York City history; each of its homes was already historic in its own right.

In the beginning was a desk in the Board of Higher Education building, where Mina Rees worked to coordinate the profusion of Ph.D. courses offered throughout the four senior colleges. This method rapidly proved itself untenable. Administration was haphazard: “There was no uniformity in the way the several colleges handled the teaching loads of faculty participating in doctoral work, and inadequate appreciation of space needs of the students,” Rees recalled. Just as important, with students and professors scattered over the city, it was impossible to create the environment of intellectual interchange so crucial to higher education. “The mathematicians had said from the beginning,” Rees continued, “that it would be impossible to establish Ph.D. work of quality unless they had a central place where faculty from all the colleges could participate together, and students and faculty had places to meet and work together. There was increasing agreement, at least among the doctoral faculty and students, that a central place must be found.”
Accordingly, in January 1964, the second floor at 33 West 42nd Street was leased to house the GC’s administrative offices and as a site for advanced seminars. (First-year coursework continued to be given at the senior colleges.) Rees wanted a location in midtown Manhattan, which would serve as a compromise on traveling distance from the outlying colleges and be close to the New York Public Library. “It was, of course, evident that a new graduate program was in a hopeless condition unless it had a library of quality that we could not hope to establish in a reasonable time and the NYPL was, as one evaluation put it, ‘the best.’” In 1965 the fourteenth floor and part of the sixteenth were leased, their rooms redesigned for classroom use. The Center was now able to centralize all instruction in some disciplines and advanced work in more.

“The location proved to be a success in virtually every respect,” Rees reported happily in 1986. “Students like it. The faculty likes it. Requests for additional classes at the Graduate Center increased. Requests by faculty and student organizations for meeting space grew. Faculty and students from the senior colleges working in the same discipline found a common convenient meeting ground.” And it gave the doctoral programs a physical identity: “The move to the present location of the Graduate Center at 33 West 42nd Street has given visibility and impetus to the growth of the doctoral programs and has emphasized the idea of the university as something larger than a mere congeries of colleges.”

However, success brought its share of difficulties. “The trend toward increased utilization of the mid-town Graduate Center continued in 1965–66,” Rees wrote. All instruction in the social sciences, humanities, mathematics, and education, as well as some nonlaboratory work in the sciences, was conducted in the GC—in order to, as she put it, “provide a common experience and ‘home’ for all doctoral students.” (Research work in the
sciences, as well as instruction in professional areas like business and engineering, continued to be located in the appropriate senior college.) With the addition of new doctoral disciplines, the need for more space escalated—and not only for classrooms and student-teacher meeting spaces; the Graduate Center’s reputation and attractiveness were threatened by its cramped quarters. After announcing that “Sir Isaiah Berlin has agreed to join our faculty on a visiting basis in September, 1966, with a strong likelihood of continuing after that time,” Rees complained that “at the moment, no office space is available for him.”

The Center already was dickering to acquire another floor at 33 West 42nd Street when Rees wondered: why not go for it all?

“MIRACLE ON 42ND STREET”

The eighteen-story building at 33 West 42nd Street was doubly memorable to New Yorkers. Since 1924, its ground floor had contained Store No. 1550 of the F.W. Woolworth Company chain, a busy five-and-dime department store. More gloriously, the building was a cultural landmark. The Aeolian Company, which had introduced the pianola in 1898, had occupied Aeolian Hall from 1912 to 1927, and had turned it into one of the city’s major musical venues. The building’s concert hall, located on the second floor and boasting a twenty-foot ceiling, had seated more than 1,300 patrons, who had applauded artists including the New York Symphony Orchestra, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Jan Paderewski, Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, and Efrem Zimbalist Sr. (It also had been home to WJZ, one of the country’s first radio stations.) And most memorably, Aeolian Hall was the site where a twenty-four-year-old wunderkind named George Gershwin had taken the piano on February 12, 1924, to perform his composition *Rhapsody in Blue.*
Rhapsody in Blue

The very notion was heresy: “Jazz in the Aeolian Hall! What is the world coming to?” Yet such is historical irony that the once-stately temple of classical music lingers in the memory as the site of a matinee concert titled “An Experiment in Modern Music” that witnessed the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The organizer of the event, Paul Whiteman, later wrote that “playing a jazz concert in what a critic has called the ‘perfumed purlieus’ of Aeolian Hall . . . struck everyone as preposterous.” But Whiteman, a popular bandleader who had been dubbed “the King of Jazz,” dreamed of winning critical approbation for the new and still disreputable music.

“I believed that jazz was beginning a new movement in the world’s art of music,” he wrote. “I wanted it to be recognized as such. I knew it never would be in my lifetime until the recognized authorities of music gave it their approval.” Accordingly, Whiteman invited the country’s leading music critics to join a judges’ committee that included luminaries like Sergei Rachmaninoff, Jascha Heifetz, Efrem Zimbalist Sr., and Alma Gluck.

And to realize his dream of showing “the advance which had been made in popular music from the day of the discordant early jazz to the melodious form of the present,” he arranged a lengthy, disparate program, which began with “Livery Stable Blues” and “Mama Loves Papa” and progressed through “Yes! We Have No Bananas” and “Limehouse Blues” before showcasing Irving Berlin in “semi-symphonic arrangements” of “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” “A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody,” and “Orange Blossoms in California.” The program closed (prophetically, given the hall’s destiny as an educational institution) with Elgar’s “Pomp and Circumstance,” only twenty-three years old and not yet rendered a cliché through repetition at graduation ceremonies.

However, it was the penultimate performance that made history, a work that Whiteman had commissioned for the concert from a youthful Tin Pan Alley song plugger who had made a name for himself four years before, at the age of twenty-one, with the hit song “Swanee.” (George Gershwin was a familiar sight at the Aeolian building: in 1916, he had begun work as a recordist and arranger for the Aeolian Company and Standard Music Rolls.)

Legendarily indolent, Gershwin put off work until five weeks before the day of the concert. A train journey from New York to Boston provided inspiration: “It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattle-ty bang, that is so often so stimulating to
a composer—I frequently hear music in the very heart of the noise. . . . I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our blues, our metropolitan madness.”

Snow was falling at 3 p.m. on February 12, 1924, but “men and women were fighting to get in the door,” Whiteman recalled, “pulling and mauling each other as they do sometimes at a baseball game, or a prize fight, or in the subway.” In the audience were luminaries of the day such as Otto Kahn, John McCormack, Fannie Hurst, Heywood Broun, Gilbert Seldes, Deems Taylor, and Carl Van Vechten. (“The ticket-office people said they could have sold the house ten times over,” Whiteman wrote.) Victor Herbert, the enormously popular composer of Babes in Toyland and Naughty Marietta, rose to acknowledge an ovation.

The audience was growing restless with the lugubrious concert itself (a broken ventilation system didn’t help) until they heard an insolently insinuating glissando from the clarinet, destined to become the most famous opening in American concert music.

“This composition shows extraordinary talent,” the music critic Olin Downes wrote in the New York Times. “The audience was stirred and many a hardened concertgoer excited with the sensation of a new talent finding its voice.”

Jazz returned to Aeolian Hall in 1974 when the Graduate Center saluted this cultural milestone on its fiftieth anniversary with an all-Gershwin concert. With Gershwin colleagues like E. Y. (Yip) Harburg, Burton Lane, and Kay Swift in attendance, the Queens College Orchestra, under the direction of Queens Music Professor Thomas Conlin, performed selections from Porgy and Bess and Rhapsody in Blue. “What made the evening especially significant for me,” Harold Proshansky wrote in appreciation to Conlin, “is the fact that I have been a long-time devotee of American jazz. I have long appreciated Gershwin.”
The building remained architecturally imposing, boasting mezzanines in its basement and third floor. But by 1966, the upper floors at 33 West 42nd were a warren of 360 professional offices, most of them small—300 to 400 square feet—and inexpensive; thanks to rent controls dating back to World War II, some officeholders were paying as little as $2.50 per square foot for prime commercial space in midtown Manhattan. Woolworth’s was more than willing to make a deal—in fact, it offered to take a $700,000 loss to sell this white elephant. The State Dormitory Authority purchased the building for $6.25 million, and authorized a further $2.2 million for renovations—a cost that escalated to $9 million before the GC was completed in 1970, but money that proved to be well spent.

Working with architects Carl Petrilli and Samuel DeSanto, and with John Gallin, the contractor who had performed the previous renovations at the building, the GC’s Assistant Dean J. Marilyn Mikulsky produced an architectural splendor. Features included a basement auditorium (“a jewel of a concert hall . . . acoustically sealed from the noise of pedestrian traffic,” raved an architectural magazine) whose seats had turn-up desk panels, to convert the auditorium into a lecture hall; a library that occupied three floors; a computer and statistical center; laboratories in anthropology, psychology, guidance and school counseling, and speech pathology and audiology; a closed-circuit television system; and a “buffeteria,” as well as offices and faculty-student lounges.

“A $9 million beauty from a 10 cent store,” an architectural trade magazine proclaimed. Moreover, Ada Louise Huxtable, the famously censorious architecture critic at the New York Times, fulsomely praised the renovation as “an exemplary blend of economic considerations and good architectural judgment.”

“Only the exterior walls and basic structure remain,” Huxtable wrote. “But it has been spared the banal indignity of total
resurfacing. . . . Above a projecting, boldly modern marquee and a clean-surfaced second and third floor, 1912 swagged lyres and torches still embellish the four central piers. . . . The original, ornate bronze elevator doors have been kept and deepened in tone to match the sleek new bronze . . . ground floor fittings.”

Calling the renovation “a lesson to architects, urbanists and educators,” Huxtable concluded: “The result proves, in terms of function and esthetics, that you don’t have to take down a good old building and replace it with a new one. . . . The Graduate Center is a quiet coup.”

The renovation garnered several awards, including a Certificate of Modernization Excellence from Buildings magazine, the Albert S. Bard Award for Merit in Special Urban Spaces from the City Club of New York, and the Municipal Art Society Prize for improvement of the aesthetic quality of life in New York City. Dean Mikulsky was cited by the Women’s Architectural Auxiliary of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Parks Council.

The new building also gave a physical presence to the doctoral program’s intellectual presence. As an evaluation from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools put it: “The building has not only supplied the new enterprise with a commodious headquarters but also — and perhaps more importantly — brought together in one place a significant amount of the actual blood and muscle of the doctoral program — members of the doctoral faculty, executive officers . . . advanced seminars, the beginnings of a graduate library.

“The existence of this central facility and the wise use that has been made of it have moved the doctoral program ahead at a pace that would have been impossible without it,” the evaluation concluded. The Graduate Center, it said, was “the miracle on 42nd Street.”
“A SMALL ENVIRONMENTAL MIRACLE”

Now entrenched between Sixth and Fifth Avenues, the Graduate Center could more effectively fulfill its chosen role as a public university. In fact, service to the community guided the very planning of the new building. The Center decided to evict Woolworth’s from the ground floor and to spend $1 million to convert the space to a public open-air mall connecting 42nd and 43rd Streets.

“Quality, that rarest of New York products, can pop up unexpectedly and unannounced,” Ada Louise Huxtable wrote in the *New York Times*. “This mall offers the kind of sophisticated urban and architectural design that most New York builders, lovers of pretentious schmaltz, shun like the plague. It also offers 16,000 square feet of public pedestrian space in a midblock passage 200 feet long.”

This was more than what Huxtable called “a small environmental miracle.” When the GC decided in 1971 to devote the mall to public art exhibitions, it became, as a planning board wrote in commendation, “the only free community cultural center” in midtown Manhattan.

“We had a chance to educate the public,” said Ray Ring, director of the Graduate Center Mall. “After all, few people go to a gallery show more than once, but many people walked through the mall four times a day—in the morning, twice at lunchtime, and in the evening.”

In its very design, the mall was a work of art, with a bluestone floor sloping gently upward toward its center. Every day between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m., about two thousand people strolled through the seventy-five feet of exhibition space, which hosted a series of artworks ranging from artifacts from the South Pacific, including canoes, house lintels, and drums, to a Volkswagen Beetle
covered with hundreds of tiny light bulbs shining in constantly changing patterns.

“In looking for appropriate works for the mall, we realized that many of the conventions of artistic display would not be relevant,” Ring said. “For one thing, the people who pass through the mall every day do not come there to look at art. They are on their way to somewhere else. Anything we put there had to overcome the natural impetus that keeps pedestrians on their way.”

Aesthetic education worked in many ways. As a public convenience, the mall remained open during installations. “So what we intended simply as a courtesy to pedestrians proved to have an educational effect: passersby who were intimidated by works of art, sitting on their sacred pedestals in the gallery or museum, saw sculpture built as a house or a shed is built,” Ring said. “The experience demystified art in a healthy way.” He cited an installation by the New Zealand artist Neil Dawson.

“As he welded, painted, and hung his delicate wire and metal creations, people often approached him to talk or ask questions. At first, Dawson said, he was irritated. However, as his work took shape, he began to find the questions and comments helpful. He came to feel that working in the mall had broken down the traditional barrier between the artist and the audience.

“When I stood in the mall helping with an installation or looking at a finished piece, the most common question I was asked was, ‘What is it?’” Ring recalled. “The response that left most of the questioners satisfied was simply, ‘It’s a work of art.’”

SAVING BRYANT PARK

In 2010, Bryant Park joined Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia and the Emerald Necklace in Boston as one of the American Planning Association’s ten “Great Public Spaces” in the country.
The association especially cited Bryant Park for helping to “promote social interaction and a sense of community.”

In 1976, Bryant Park was nicknamed “Needle Park,” the scene of more than twenty thousand felonies, including two murders.

The transformation of one of the city’s most dangerous and notorious bazaars for drug trafficking and prostitution into a rustic retreat in the heart of midtown Manhattan is a dramatic example of the civic involvement of the Graduate Center and its commitment to put scholarship to public service.

Bryant Park was a 9.6-acre expanse of greenery across 42nd Street from the GC, named after William Cullen Bryant, the nineteenth-century poet (best remembered for “Thanatopsis”), naturalist, and editor of the *New York Evening Post*. (The park contains the first monument in the city to honor a woman, a fountain named for the women’s rights advocate Josephine Shaw Lowell.) Established in 1847, and named for Bryant in 1884, the park drifted into blight, exacerbated by the tearing down of the Sixth Avenue elevated train and construction of the subway. By the seventies, it was a place most city dwellers avoided.

In 1976, serious crime in the park jumped 23.5 percent. Business and civic associations formed an emergency steering committee for the park, and made a drastic recommendation: if it could not be made safe, Bryant Park should be closed. Eleven corporations agreed to fund an investigation by the Graduate Center into ways to rescue the park.

In their report, sociology professor William Kornblum and a student, Tanja Jovanovic Kasnar, took note of a previous effort, in 1974, that “achieved a significant parks cleanup.” However, “the next summer, because there was no follow-up, the Police and Parks Department ignored Bryant Park and the drug trade came back in full force.” Presciently, Kornblum and Kasnar concluded
that the upcoming summer “is the critical time period if the momentum for change developed in the past year is to be continued. With city officials particularly responsive in this mayorality election year, the active major corporate participation can generate substantial city efforts toward permanent Bryant Park improvements. . . . The Parks Department has lost substantial percentages of its manpower and funds for repair and maintenance. Consequently, only those parks that most effectively press for results and have well organized constituencies will be adequately maintained.” The study presented an “action plan” calling for improved security, the establishment of a regular calendar of events, better communication about the positive aspects of the park, and the establishment of a permanent administrative structure for it.

In 1980, a Bryant Park Restoration Corporation was formed; Harold Proshansky served on the board of directors. Its coordination efforts ranged from the ordinary, like recruiting volunteers to plant ivy and bushes, to the creative, arranging concerts, book fairs, and dance performances. The Center was active in both spheres: students put in time on hands and knees in the dirt, and the GC cosponsored the park’s performance series in 1981, which featured dancers, Latin bands, scenes from Shakespeare, jugglers, the Little Theatre of the Deaf, music, and mime.

“The Graduate Center is our major institutional anchor in the effort to improve the park,” the executive director of the Parks Council wrote Proshansky.

“As an environmentalist I am strongly committed not only to the improvement of Bryant Park but to all the recreational areas in and about New York City,” he replied. “My office and the Graduate Center will always be ready to cooperate with the Parks Council in any and all of its effort.”
By the end of the eighties, the Graduate Center once again was suffering from success. Renewed stability and continuing expansion created a new space shortage. “The Graduate School is bursting at the seams,” an administrative report complained. Enrollment had increased 40 percent since 1972, but no new classrooms had been added. “We do not have a computerized classroom that will seat more than six. We do not have a wet laboratory. We have just five rooms that will seat more than 50 persons.”

Two floors were rented in the W.R. Grace Building next door, and more space was acquired at 25 West 43rd Street (nicknamed “the north campus”). The aesthetics of the new quarters won praise. “Teaching in the Grace Building was a grace,” recalls Joan Richardson, a professor of English and Comparative Literature. “There was nothing better” than discussing Emerson in front of the building’s floor-to-ceiling windows, she continued, unless it was being able to teach a seminar across the street in Bryant Park: “It was just wonderful.”

“The quality of the space is high; there simply is not enough of it,” the administrative report agreed, continuing with uncommon bureaucratic emphasis:

“At present there is no space available in the Graduate Center after 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday for additional classes, lectures, presentations, conferences, meetings . . . At present there is no space for faculty offices. Space for new central appointments can only be obtained by relocating other activities. . . . All members of the doctoral faculty who teach at the Graduate School but who have their primary appointment at one of the college campuses must share office space at the Graduate Center. The typical arrangement is four persons to an office sharing one telephone and two desks.”
Students suffered even more. They did not have assigned offices or research space; they did not even have lockers. “Graduate students who spend much of the day at the GSUC must carry research materials, books, papers, coats and other items with them across the day,” the report said. The dispersal also cost students—and faculty—one of the critical, if subtle, components of doctoral education: opportunities to interact.

“When English was on the 40th floor of the Grace Building and history on the 15th,” William Kelly recalls, “colleagues were lucky to wave to each other in the lobby!”

Even more critical for a research facility was the shocking condition of the GC’s library, as the report detailed. It was jam-packed (“over 200,000 volumes, 375,000 microforms, 170,000 art slides, 1,800 current serials subscriptions, and music scores and records”) and inadequately financed (“The Graduate School must be the only major doctoral institution in the nation that does not have at least some library hours seven days a week”) — but those might be said to be the least of its problems. Located in the basement of the Grace Building, the library had no natural light and no heat or air-conditioning after six o’clock in the evening. (Little wonder it was nicknamed “the dungeon.”) Worse yet, every heavy rain or snowfall caused extensive flooding: “It is not unusual to see whole sections of the stacks draped in heavy plastic to protect the books and serials from water damage, or plastic pails positioned to catch dripping water. Two study rooms are unusable because of water damage.” The GC was forced to reject donations of materials because of insufficient resources.

“The steady growth in enrollment in recent years, the development of a number of new research institutes and centers, the appointment of new faculty members and the approval of a few new doctoral programs have all contributed to the current strain,” the administrative report concluded.
“If there is one thing we are chronically short of besides money it is space,” Proshansky declared in his final president’s report. “I believe strongly that the kind of exchange of ideas among students and between students and faculty that I deem necessary in a Ph.D. program would not flourish unless there is a different physical solution.”

Once again, the GC needed a new home. Finding one would be the main job of Harold Proshansky’s successor.

FRANCES DEGEN HOROWITZ

The minds of young people have been Frances Degen Horowitz’s lifelong fascination—how they respond, how they learn, how they grow. She has worked with children across the United States and around the world, from elementary school classrooms in Iowa to university executive offices in Kansas and Manhattan. Her “burning question,” as she once put it, is: “How do you get the match between the child and the environment that fosters good development?” To find answers, she studied the reactions of infants to a visual stimulus and observed how some lose interest after five seconds but others gaze for as long as a minute.

“I have always been very interested in individual differences,” says Frances Degen Horowitz. “Differences in attention, in the way children process information, in the capacity of children to handle varying amounts of information; also, the way individual differences shape the interaction of the child with the environment, and the way parents and care-givers adjust to those individual differences. I thought by studying infants I could see the beginning of individual differences.” Such work led to an association with the renowned pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton and the development of the Neonatal Behavioral Assessment Scale, the so-called “Brazelton scale,” a series of twenty-seven tests that evaluates newborns on thirty-eight behaviors,
including alertness, motor maturity, irritability, consolability, and interaction with people.

Her efforts to measure the growth of young children have made Horowitz an internationally recognized developmental psychologist, a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and of the Division of Developmental Psychology of the American Psychological Association. She has been elected president of the Society for Research in Child Development, and has widely published on infant development, early childhood development, high-risk infants, the gifted, and theories of development.

With a combination of scholarly rigor and sensitivity to young people’s needs, be they environmental, societal, or financial, if ever someone might be said to be a born educator, it was Frances Degen Horowitz. However, developmental psychology was not her first scholarly interest; when she graduated from Antioch College, her major was philosophy. At twenty-one, she married a childhood friend, Floyd R. Horowitz. (“Nothing would have been possible without him. He is more than my other half.”) Her husband’s career as a literary scholar and poet took her to Iowa City, where she taught fifth grade for two years. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of Iowa, writing her dissertation on how peer reinforcement served as a social stimulus on preschool children.

After two years as an assistant professor of psychology at Southern Oregon College, the Horowitz family—which now included two sons—moved to the University of Kansas, where Horowitz took a position as an associate professor of psychology and conducted her most important research. She also began her career as an educational administrator, rising to chairman of her department, then associate dean of the university’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and finally vice chancellor for research, graduate studies, and public service, in which she was
the university’s principal liaison in economic development activities. Her responsibility extended to all internally and externally funded research, and she oversaw thirty centers, institutes, museums, and service units.

Her tenure in the upper offices won plaudits from her colleagues at Kansas. “Frances doesn’t brook any incompetence,” said a professor in her department. “She’s always fair and supportive, but she’s also tough.”

“Frances’ major strength is her ability to give people a chance to work at their strengths while diminishing their weaknesses,” said a fellow administrator. “Her high set of standards made her a successful vice chancellor. Her skill with people would have made her a good director of a shoe factory.”

“What stands out about Frances, what makes her unique is her institutional perspective and her optimism,” said another administrator. “Her perspective, her optimism are rare.”

Taking the reins at the Graduate Center was a return to her roots. Horowitz was born in 1932 on Eastburn Avenue and the Grand Concourse in the Bronx. “If you read E. L. Doctorow’s novel World’s Fair, you can get a pretty good picture of what life there was like,” she says. “In fact, Doctorow lived on the same block of Eastburn Avenue as I did. We were in the same school together, P.S. 70, and I can remember some of the events he recounts actually happening—a car crashing through the school, for instance, which was quite odd in those days because there weren’t many cars around. It was very enriching to grow up in New York.”

Such enrichments include a love of music, “particularly the opera. I’m a fan of the Italian repertoire, particularly Verdi”—her favorite is Don Carlo — “and of the French repertoire.” She also has maintained a charming family tradition of exchanging poems on birthdays. “I also write for my own pleasure, mainly free
verse. My hero is Emily Dickinson.” Her holiday greetings at the Graduate Center were enhanced by her creativity:

For 2002

Mid the bustle of a busy day

dwelling on tasks

at and near to hand

Do the seedlings of dreams

for some moments intrude

And tease the distracted spirit

into the pleasure of

a smile

For 2004

Now does the tour of days begin anew

Occasion for prophecy and desire—

May the good be realized more than

a grace note to hope

And the challenge to make meaning

convert to more than promise

While yearnings to increase the portion

of peace become reality—

This turning of the page our yet one more

chance to write the future
When she came to the Graduate Center in 1991, Horowitz displayed her characteristic modesty: “I would be less than frank if I didn’t admit that I am a little scared at the magnitude of the job.” She also brought her steadfast dedication to expanding educational opportunity, a determination that had been evident at the beginning of her career, as a fifth-grade teacher in Iowa City. Noticing that her pupils were not all reading at the same level, she requested different sets of books for them. Similar demands—for field trips and a student-run supply store—soon earned her the label of “troublemaker.”

More space, better space, location, remodeling, budget constraints, location, location—the hunt for new habitat is a Gotham ritual. It starts by persuading the relatives that the move is necessary; Horowitz spent much of her first years as president educating a multitude of governmental officials and agencies that a cramped Graduate Center could not fulfill the duties of a world-class educational institution.

For example, “We are made aware constantly that the highly visible scholars at the Graduate Center must often refuse to entertain proposals from scholarly societies with which they are associated to be host to many medium-sized academic and scholarly conferences,” she said. “The scheduling of conferences, colloquia and other events are not just frills for the Graduate Center. Such activities are the heart and soul of an institution devoted to doctoral education and research.”

By July 1995, the GC had budget approval: $50 million to buy, $16 million to remodel.

But where? For a time, it seemed likely that the GC would move west, near the Port Authority. But when that possibility failed to pan out, the GC, like many another Gotham house-hunter, found its dream location on a tip from a friendly neighbor—in this
case, the New York Public Library. Branching out from its main building opposite the GC on 42nd Street, the library planned a science, industry, and business library on eight floors on the east side of a building occupying a city block between 34th and 35th Streets and Fifth and Madison Avenues. It would have a compatible roommate, Oxford University Press, but 600,000 square feet along Fifth Avenue were unoccupied and available. “You belong in the front of the building,” the library’s president, Rev. Timothy S. Healy, had told Horowitz.

She agreed. “The Graduate Center has always been stuffed into someone else’s office space. Now we will have a well-designed home of our own, specially crafted to our needs, and it means we can fulfill our promise to reach out to the community, the city and the university.”

What’s more, the new building had the distinction of being an architectural landmark and the cachet of being a place where discerning New Yorkers already were long accustomed to visiting in search of finery.

“People will still shop in this building,” Horowitz announced, “but now they will shop for ideas.”
Fifth Avenue became Fifth Avenue when B. Altman & Company moved its department store there in 1906. Since the 1880s, the chic shopping districts had been located between 14th and 23rd Streets, the “Ladies Mile” on Broadway and on “Fashion Row” on Sixth Avenue. But the Sixth Avenue elevated train cast dark shadows over the street, and subjected pedestrians to grit and what a contemporary journal described as “an endless. Ear-splitting clatter.” Construction on Altman’s new store was under way by 1902, and the next year, plans to reconstruct the Grand Central terminal on Park Avenue and 42nd Street were announced.

“These two events alone turned Fifth Avenue from 34th to 42nd Streets into prime commercial property,” in the words of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. “Suddenly that stretch of the street would be within easy walking distance of both Grand Central and Penn Stations, accessible both to daily commuters and to ladies from further out of town on day-long shopping excursions into the city. Local residents would prefer a Fifth Avenue site as well, since it was on an open, light-filled avenue and within walking distance of both east and west side elevated subways.”

The cachet of Upper Manhattan already had been enhanced in 1893 when Mrs. William B. Astor moved to 65th Street at Fifth Avenue; Tiffany’s had moved from
Union Square to Fifth and 37th. The announced move by Altman confirmed, as a contemporary journalist wrote, that a new “period has begun.”

“The peculiar importance of the Altman project,” he continued, “consists of the fact that it is the first big store of a general character which has moved into middle Fifth Avenue. . . . A store such as this finds its customers among the whole mass of well-to-do people. The range and number of its frequenters . . . include almost everybody for whom cheap prices are not the first desideratum.”

What was once “a small-scale street filled with shops catering to the upper crust of New York society,” the Landmarks Preservation Commission said, was transformed “into a grand boulevard lined with many department stores serving broad clientele.” Soon after, W. & J. Sloan, Best & Company, Arnold Constable & Company, and Bergdorf Goodman had all relocated to Fifth Avenue.

For an establishment already called “the Palace of Trade” and a world leader in fine dry goods such as silks, satins, and velvets—“one of the greatest department stores in the world,” to newspapermen of the day—the new emporium had to be appropriately grand. (And tony: in keeping with the pretensions of the neighborhood, B. Altman would not display an outdoor sign for twenty-five years.) The new building featured thirty-nine elevators: twenty-two for the public, ten for employees, and two “of vast size” for vehicles. A contemporary newspaper reported that its “spacious, well-lighted” engine room (with a floor “as clean as a New England kitchen”) contained an independent power plant (which would keep it illuminated during the 1965 blackout). The store’s six-story garage (“superior to any department store in the world”) housed 85 motor trucks, 157 horse vehicles, and 200 horses to haul delivery carriages.

The building’s appearance was equally impressive. The design by Trowbridge & Livingston, whose other architectural projects include the St. Regis Hotel, an extension to the New York Stock Exchange, and the Hayden Planetarium, won immediate praise. “The architecture is classic,” wrote a critic for the *New York Times*, “doorway and entrance columns are handsomely decorated. . . . The store adds materially to the beauty of Fifth Avenue.” It was also noted for its facade of French limestone, high ceilings, parquet floors, and crystal chandeliers. The building would be designated a landmark in 1985.

The store was distinguished not only for its design, its modern conveniences (for B. Altman & Co. proudly boasted of “every device calculated to contribute to the greatest efficiency of service”), and the quality of the goods it offered for sale. It was also
celebrated for the enlightened practices of its owner, which fulfilled B. Altman’s boast that it was “a store of infinite resources.”

Benjamin Altman provided his four thousand employees with amenities unheard of for a businessman at the turn of the twentieth century. He was the first major employer to establish a shortened working day (a 9 a.m. opening and a closing at 5 p.m. in the summer, with Saturdays off in July and August) and vacations with advance pay. He also was the first major employer to install restrooms and a subsidized cafeteria for his employees. (“Ill-nourished” workers received free milk.)

The Fifth Avenue store contained what the store called a “spacious, airy recreation room” for female employees and a medical department with a seven-bed clinic, a surgery room, a full-time physician, and two nurses—all available at no charge whatever to employees. (Any customer “seized by sudden illness” could also receive free medical care.)

Altman also established a voluntary Mutual Benefit Association, which eventually numbered 2,500 workers, and conducted an in-house school, which gave daily instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The store’s roof held a running track that was used in training the American team that competed in the 1924 Olympics, later depicted in the film *Chariots of Fire.*

Upon his death in 1913, Altman left the Metropolitan Museum of Art his thousand-item collection of Chinese porcelains, Persian rugs, Renaissance tapestries, ivories, jades, and seventy-five paintings by old masters. It was, according to the *New York Times,* “by far the most valuable gift the Metropolitan had ever seen.”

Altman’s will also created an Altman Foundation, directed to operate the store and also “to promote the social, physical or economic welfare and efficiency of the employees of B. Altman & Company . . . and to the use and benefit of charitable, benevolent or educational institutions within the state of New York.”

During the Graduate Center’s first convocation at its new site, Frances Degen Horowitz noted that Altman’s spirit was fulfilled by his store’s new occupants. “Through industry, imagination, and undoubtedly dollops of luck, Benjamin Altman realized his American dream of success. At the Graduate Center and throughout the City University of New York, the sons and daughters of the poor, the near poor, and the middle class, and the sons and daughters of today’s immigrants, who want to realize their American dreams of success can do so by reaching for higher education. For, like Benjamin Altman, we understand that it is our responsibility to give gifts to the city.”
From historic department store to modern graduate center—the very notion tickled the imagination. “Where generations of shoppers once fingered silks, velvets and embroideries,” the New York Times wrote, “a new generation of students will be swarming to a library and recital hall. On the second floor—in the former domain of women’s blouses, dresses and coats—doctoral-candidate worker bees will study in a block-long reading room illuminated by tall arched shop windows. And the Oriental rug department on the fifth floor will soon be the terrain of medieval studies.”

However, retrofitting a landmark is a painstaking task. Any change in the exterior required approval. Windows had to match the building’s original design. Air conditioners could not be installed in windows or through the building’s facade. New entrance doors could not be added. The redesign had to be okayed by Graduate Center administrators, CUNY’s central design group, and the official overseer, the New York State Dormitory Authority. The architects also had to consult with as many as seventy independent departments, administrative groups, and study programs at the GC.

“The most complex, elaborate and intricate planning we’ve ever done in Manhattan,” said Robert Siegel, whose firm, Gwathmey Siegel & Associates, was a veteran at academic assignments; previous projects included student centers at Princeton and Oberlin, the Fine Arts Library addition to the Fogg Museum at Harvard, and the College of Engineering at Cornell, as well as CUNY’s Hostos Community College. Closer to the task at hand, Gwathmey Siegel had also served as architects for the neighboring Science, Industry and Business Library.

Siegel was also sensitive to the project’s aesthetic obligations. “We are trying to honor the craftsmanship of the artisans who made the Altman building,” he said. Hence, the building’s French limestone exterior was preserved, along with its vaulted display
windows and the curving Art Nouveau metal and glass canopies above the entrances. Inside, cast-iron staircases and the original bronze-sheathed elevator cab and shaft were also kept. What was once the store’s Charleston Garden restaurant was converted into a dining commons, seating nearly three hundred people; its forty-foot ceiling was enhanced with a new skylight (replacing one that had been blacked out during World War II) that provided what the Times called “a zoom-lens view of the Empire State Building.”

The biggest advantage of the new building was increased space. For example, the new Mina Rees Library—72,000 square feet on three floors—increased shelf space by one-third; seating capacity nearly doubled in the GC’s newly named Harold S. Proshansky Auditorium. Seventy classrooms and an expansive computer center were added. Planned as a cultural showcase, the building now features the James art gallery, the Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall, and the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center.

Not only was there more space—about one-third more, 480,000 square feet on eight floors—but it was space conceived for an academic environment. Instead of the “vertical silo,” as Horowitz called the Aeolian Building, the expansiveness of the new Center permitted a coherent layout to maximize the interactions vital in doctoral education. The numerous institutes, once spread over twenty floors in four buildings, now were grouped over five floors. “Students now have a reason to be here,” said William Kelly. “They are invited to interact with each other—and with their teachers.”

“Space changes people’s behavior,” Horowitz said, “and good space is finally an investment in programmatic quality.”

As any New Yorker will tell you, the worst part of moving happens right at the end—especially if you are remodeling.
Work is never finished when promised, moving dates have to be frantically readjusted, and you wind up living inside a work-in-progress for a while.

The endgame was no different for the Graduate Center. Delays resulted from an accumulation of frustrations: the first contractor was fired after work fell behind schedule, the construction manager had to be replaced, the state Dormitory Authority replaced its site manager, a fire resulted in water damage that set work back by several months, asbestos removal took longer than anticipated, new furniture was not delivered on time. The completion date, originally scheduled for 1998, kept being pushed back: January 1999, then June, then September, in time for the beginning of fall semester, which was set in stone because the State University of New York’s College of Optometry was taking over the GC’s old building on 42nd Street.

But that deadline was missed, too: classes were delayed a week as about 250 workmen continued to pound and drill, string wires, and paint and varnish; modern technological equipment was not up to speed for a couple of months. Repairs continued into the new year. (In keeping with the GC’s spirit that lemons should be converted to lemonade, professors and students in the Environmental Psychology program used the hubbub created by the dislocation for survey and study.)

Eventually, of course, the kinks were worked out, the final repairs made, the routine settled. A convocation celebrating the building featured a keynote address by the distinguished sociologist William Julius Wilson.

More important, a new identity was forged. With its expanded resources, the Graduate Center fulfilled, at last, a vision dating back to its founding: that it would serve as the focal point for the entire City University system. “It means,” said Horowitz, “we can
fulfill our promise to reach out to the community, the city and the university.”

Starting rapidly down the road it intended to follow, five months before the new building officially opened, the GC organized symposia on literature and the arts in the city, educational policy, international issues, and women writers around the world. The departments and the research centers also made haste to schedule regular events. The converted B. Altman’s soon became a one-stop shopping center for intellectual and cultural stimulation: where issues are examined, ideas explored, and art expressed. On any given day in any given month, the GC offers an astonishingly varied selection of sophisticated delight—say, a performance of a radio play by the poet Sylvia Plath (“Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices”), a discussion on “Crude World: The Politics of Oil,” recitals by students in the music program, a lecture about “Reflections on the Psychology of Evil: The Holocaust,” and a discussion between the eminent jazz critic (and Graduate Center instructor) Gary Giddins and the diva Cassandra Wilson. Remarkably, most of these events were—and continue to be—offered free to the public. Within a year of relocating, the GC’s programs were attracting about three thousand visitors a month.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Graduate Center was firm in all its foundations. Not only was it located in new, attractively refurbished surroundings, but ratings by the National Research Council ranked one-third of CUNY’s doctoral programs in the top twenty of universities in the country. The Center was poised and prepared to take on the millennium.
The Graduate Center Foundation

Tax dollars go only so far. Even public education—perhaps especially public education—requires more than public monies provide. If they are to achieve a margin of excellence, public universities must enlist private support.

Like virtually every public university in the country (including the senior colleges of the CUNY system), the Graduate Center partners with an allied foundation. Organized as a not-for-profit 501(c) corporation, the Graduate Center Foundation is charged with developing private support for the center. This arrangement facilitates gift-giving; donations are tax-deductible and may be earmarked for specific purposes.

Serving on the foundation’s board are leaders from the community and business sectors, who contribute not only their dollars but their knowledge and enthusiasm to develop and refine the GC’s mission and enable it to flourish. Monies raised for the foundation are used for student fellowships, endowed chairs, lecture series and concerts, research support, and endowments for centers and institutes.

Although the foundation was established in 1984, it did not become the thriving institution it is today for another decade. It was Frances Degen Horowitz, assuming the presidency of the Graduate Center, who recognized what a potent partner the foundation could be. Bringing to the post a fresh perspective, Horowitz quickly observed that what she called “a climate of giving” did not exist at the GC—a circumstance that demanded rapid correction in the forbidding climate of the fiscally constrained nineties. Her efforts to breathe new life into the somewhat moribund foundation produced dramatic results. Within four years its assets skyrocketed from less than $30,000 to nearly $5 million.

While the foundation was conceived as the fund-raising adjunct of the Graduate Center, another group, the Board of Visitors, was charged with advising the GC’s administration and raising general awareness of the center’s active engagement in the intellectual and cultural life of the city and its contributions to higher education. After the foundation’s revitalization, however, Horowitz found that so many members of the Board of Visitors were becoming members of the foundation that the two groups effectively merged. The GC Foundation now serves as an advisory council, with the happy benefit of being able to provide support for many of the initiatives it proposes.

The advantages of combining these functions have been particularly evident since the Graduate Center moved to its present location. This larger and custom-designed
facility—with its ground-floor cultural complex, spacious auditorium, and meeting spaces throughout the building—has enabled the GC, with foundation support, to mount a rich and varied schedule of public programs. During this period the foundation’s ability to carry a project through from fund-raising to ribbon-cutting could be seen in such initiatives as the creation of the Leon Levy Center for Biography, the opening of the James Gallery and its rapid recognition as a venue for cutting-edge art, and the growth of the GC’s fellowship program. By 2011, the program’s five-year fellowships were providing stipends, tuition remission, and health insurance to the majority of GC students.

Under the leadership of Amabel B. James, who chaired the foundation board from 2000 to 2011, foundation assets increased tenfold. Among these assets is the Graduate Center Apartments, a foundation project that provides affordable housing for students and faculty.

“The Graduate Center Foundation has been a prime driver of the progress we’ve made over the last decade,” says the GC’s current president, William Kelly. “The commitment of its members has inspired our efforts; their financial support has underwritten our vision.”
In 2002, the *New York Times* noted that a fifth member of the Graduate Center faculty had just won a Pulitzer Prize: music professor John Corigliano, for his Symphony No. 2 for String Orchestra. (Corigliano was also an Oscar winner for the score of *The Red Violin*, in 1998.) It was a resonant milestone. The new century witnessed renewed vigor and determination by the GC to build and sustain an outstanding faculty.

This was a virtue born of necessity. Leading educational institutions follow a non-Newtonian physics: if not moving ahead, they feel they are falling behind. The competition is always for top-ranked scholars — that’s how they attract the best students, as well as other desirable professors. The Center’s combination of a roster of world-class professors and diverse, driven students — plus the manifold lures of New York City — has proven close to irresistible to estimable senior scholars. A case in point was the revitalization of the GC’s philosophy program, which was capped with the appointment of Saul Kripke in 2002. Considered by his peers one of the ten most important philosophers of the past two hundred years, Kripke is esteemed for his contributions to the study of semantics, modal logic, and the philosophy of truth. Five years later came the foundation of the Saul Kripke Center, which preserves the philosopher’s archives and sponsors fellowships for doctoral students in the discipline.

Between 1998 and 2005, the GC expanded its core faculty from 106 to 128, including twenty-three scholars at the rank of University Distinguished Professor. Frances Degen Horowitz gave due praise to the official responsible, her provost, who “presided over and made possible, in recent years, the unprecedented achievements embodied in two goals: keeping and supporting talented and engaged faculty already serving the doctoral
programs while also designing the strategies that have helped us recruit successfully an outstanding group of new faculty whose presence has refreshed our intellectual purposes.”

This process would continue, indeed accelerate, when Horowitz retired in 2005, and the provost took an administrative step upward, to the office of president.

WILLIAM P. KELLY

His friends have a private competition: name a book he hasn’t read, or a classic jazz recording he hasn’t heard. The frustration keeps mounting; no one yet has been able to claim victory. But there is a consolation prize: giving him a tip on a new barbecue joint.

The fourth president of the Graduate Center is a man of a remarkable breadth of interests and taste, from high culture to the dirty blues, as is illustrated by his academic career. He received his Ph.D. in the heartland, at Indiana University, and then took a degree in intellectual history at the University of Cambridge. A scholar of American Studies, he was named Chevalier dans l’Ordre des Palmes Académiques by the French Ministry of Education for his contributions to Franco-American educational and cultural relations. A longtime educational administrator, he still finds his way from behind a desk to the front of a classroom.

The passion to learn and to synthesize (while retaining the wisdom to recognize the limits of synthesis) is necessary in that peculiar hybrid discipline of American Studies, so it is little wonder that William Kelly chose it. During his undergraduate years at Princeton, he was awarded the David Bowers Prize in American Studies and wrote his dissertation on James Fenimore Cooper, later the subject of his book *Plotting America’s Past: Fenimore Cooper and the Leatherstocking Tales* (1983). Kelly is also editor of the Oxford University Press edition of *The*

The perspectives provided by his internationalism have made Kelly especially appreciative of CUNY and its homegrown mission. “We have been part of this city’s identity,” he says. “CUNY has helped forge a vision of upward mobility that is self-fulfilling. And that is a damn good thing. We’re a place that provides an equal footing for higher education. That is a noble calling.”

William Patrick Kelly was born in Pittsburgh in 1949 and grew up in Summit, New Jersey. He graduated from Princeton in 1971, and received his doctorate at Indiana in 1976. He was a Fulbright Fellow in France, and served as a visiting professor at the University of Paris. From 1976 to 1998, Kelly taught at Queens College, where he was named Golden Key Honor Society Teacher of the Year. He joined the GC’s English faculty in 1986 and served as the program’s executive officer from 1996 to 1998, when he was named provost. His wife of thirty-five years, Sally, is an obstetrician/gynecologist; their daughter, Ann, is a medical anthropologist who teaches at the London School of Tropical Medicine.

A man of unfailing geniality, Kelly is popular with his colleagues—he was described as “dazzling” by the chair of CUNY’s faculty senate at the time of his ascension—and consciously strives to maintain collegiality as a characteristic of the GC: “We are a community of scholars, and we must treat each other with dignity, down to the guys who clean the restrooms.”

Kelly took the top job fully cognizant of the challenges facing both his institution and higher education generally. “Our task is to deliver more services with fewer dollars and maintain quality. There is no argument for a mediocre graduate program.”
He also was confident: “I inherit a strong, vital institution. I have great faith in our faculty, our students, and our staff, and I’m confident that we can make the Graduate Center a crucial forum for the issues of today and a crucible in which we identify and address the challenges that will confront us tomorrow. I’m also confident that we can and will have fun doing so. I’m committed to joy, to finding and promoting pleasure in our common enterprise.”

Moving ahead so as not to fall behind, Kelly continued the drive to maintain the Graduate Center’s intellectual eminence. Six scholars joined the faculty in 2009, eight in 2010, and four more the next year, adding luster to the programs in History, Political Science, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Social Welfare, Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Languages, Philosophy, Sociology, Urban Education, English, Linguistics, Mathematics, and Speech–Language–Hearing Sciences.

Student financial aid has long been the GC’s “Achilles’ heel,” in Kelly’s opinion. He made it an area of major concentration during his term as provost, and as president he has continued to focus attention on this critical issue. Under Kelly’s leadership, the GC has tripled financial aid from 2001 to 2010. Another form of student aid represented a major capital expenditure: construction of an eight-story residence hall for graduate students and faculty. Located on East 118th Street, and sharing the plaza of CUNY’s East Harlem campus with the Schools of Social Work and Public Health, the complex, set to open in the fall of 2011, offers sixty-four apartments for students and twelve faculty residences. The facility is enhanced by a rooftop garden, an exercise room, and a lounge on the ground floor.

But what would be the overall direction of the GC? How would it fulfill its historical imperatives of public doctoral education and scholarly eminence in the new millennium, one in which the
traditional definitions of education—even of a university itself—were being questioned, analyzed, redefined?

These were the questions that haunted Kelly. Finding the answers was the project he set himself.

AN ERA OF INTERDISCIPLINARY INNOVATION

One way or another, educational innovation always seems to get back to basics. So it was at the Graduate Center as it pondered its direction for the twenty-first century. Its founding principle was consortium—the judicious consolidation of talent from throughout the CUNY system. The interchange with various colleges had created a powerful synergy: students were taught by the best faculty, and professors were given the opportunity to teach at the highest level and to share ideas with their peers. The push-pull of an intellectually ambitious student body and an intellectually invigorated faculty had been the key to the GC’s rapid ascension to prominence.

However glib it is to say that most learning takes place outside the classroom, it is also true; discussion is the proving ground of ideas. (That was why the redesign of the Altman building ensured that each program had its own lounge. “The best thing we could do,” Kelly remarked at the time, “is to have as many meeting spaces as possible.”) Such give-and-take had grown increasingly important as the pursuit of knowledge blurred departmental boundaries. Interdisciplinary study had become an intellectual reality, if not yet an administrative fact, and Kelly firmly believed that intellectual synthesis was the bedrock of higher education. “Too often,” he argued, “disciplinary structures constrain inquiry. Universities must derive insight from a wide variety of canons and methodologies.”

Perhaps the way to go was to think in terms of an intellectual cluster—to create a consortium of scholars to pool their energies to ask and to address consequential questions. Such an
approach would continue the time-honored association of selected professors from the CUNY colleges with the GC’s core faculty, but in this iteration, college faculty would come to the Graduate Center to conduct research as well as to teach classes. Selected doctoral candidates would also be included, as well as postdoctoral fellows, all in the interests of expanding the search for knowledge and the capacity of higher education.

Accordingly, in 2010 the GC secured a $2.4 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund part of a five-year project for “renewal and interdisciplinary innovation in the humanities and the humanistic social sciences.” The plan developed by Kelly and Provost Chase Robinson was directed toward the creation of a new model for graduate education, one capable of fostering interdisciplinarity, strengthening the GC’s research culture, and building capacity in promising new areas of humanistic study.

Kelly and Robinson envisioned cohorts of senior and junior faculty meeting with doctoral and postdoctoral students in three broad but focused areas of concentration. These scholars would, in a variety of forums—seminars, workshops, conferences, public programs—focus their research on three major concerns: religion, science, and social change.

Differences in religious experience, in collision or collaboration, strongly impinge upon modern life. The humanities traditionally have studied the subject rather than the experience. In an effort to reverse that practice, the Committee for the Study of Religion has committed its energies to a historical, sociological, and anthropological engagement with religious practice, identity, and politics. Among other goals, the committee pursues a deeper appreciation for the intersection of religious identity and literary forms, a keener sense of the role of religious claims in epistemological and political theory, and a firmer grasp of the evolutionary origins of religious belief. What, the committee asks, do we mean by “religious” and “secular,” how did these
categories emerge, and how useful are they for understanding our own modernity?

The hardware of the physical sciences has never been located at the GC, but the issues associated with technology and the scientific enterprise can be examined without building expensive laboratories. The Committee for Interdisciplinary Science Studies, comprising scholars in philosophy, English, and history, investigates the tension between the creation and social practice of scientific knowledge on the one hand and humanistic understanding and creativity on the other. The committee’s affiliated scholars explore the ethical implications of advancing scientific knowledge, the commonalities that link scientific and religious understandings of the world, and the possibilities and limitations of new technologies. Its first seminar focused on mind and nature: what is mind, what is the nonhuman mind, and how are conceptions of mind shaped by political and social forces?

“Globalization” is the buzzword of the new century. Like most buzzwords, its meaning shifts from speaker to speaker, sometimes even from statement to statement. Yet it is inarguable that a postnationalist globe is a process in the making, one with profound social, political, and economic consequences. The Graduate Center has always been conscious of CUNY’s mission to serve the needs of the city of New York; today that means it must look beyond the borders of municipality, state, and country. The Committee on Globalization and Social Change recognizes that its charge is vast and somewhat unwieldy. Consequently, it seeks to create common ground: What do public figures mean when they speak of “globalization”? Are historic categories, like nation-state, citizenship, society, culture, now outmoded or are they still useful concepts with which to make sense of the world? The committee is approaching these and many other questions by marrying the social science expertise at the Graduate Center with the insights of scholars who study how transnational
processes affect culture, communication, and language. Its distinctive character resides in its focus on the movement of people and communities across the world through emigration, immigration, and displacement, and, of course, in its attention to New York as the primary reflection of and engine for globalization. In short, the committee is involved in the business of building a foundation: defining terms, identifying the questions it will pursue.

Thus, the educational experiment has begun, just as the GC begins its second half-century. Its results, even its dimensions, remain to be seen. But it is consistent with the institution’s first fifty years: innovation, enterprise, service. As Kelly puts it, “There’s nothing to be gained by duplicating the work of other graduate schools. CUNY is a great experiment, an institution that tests the radical proposition that excellence and access are cognate rather than contradictory goals. To be a worthy partner in that enterprise, the Graduate Center must continually reinvent itself, demanding ever higher levels of achievement and service.”

What also continues is the triumphant demonstration that New York City’s experiment in publicly financed doctoral education not only can succeed but will prevail. As the Graduate Center begins its second half-century, it stands atop a solid foundation of accomplishment and a continuing determination to fulfill the vision set forth in the mission statement of the Free Academy: “The experiment is to be tried, whether the highest education can be given to the masses; whether the children of the whole people can be educated; and whether an institution of learning, of the highest grade, can be successfully controlled by the popular will, not by the privileged few, but by the privileged many.”
Academic Programs and Initiatives

**Doctoral Programs**

Anthropology  
Art History  
Audiology (Au.D.)  
Biochemistry  
Biology  
Business  
Chemistry  
Classics  
Comparative Literature  
Computer Science  
Criminal Justice  
Earth and Environmental Sciences  
Economics  
Educational Psychology  
Engineering  
English  
French  
Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures and Languages  
History  
Linguistics  
Mathematics  
Music (Ph.D./D.M.A.)  
Nursing Science (DNS)  
Philosophy  
Physical Therapy (DPT)  
Physics  
Political Science  
Psychology  
Public Health (DPH)  
Social Welfare  
Sociology  
Speech–Language–Hearing Sciences  
Theatre  
Urban Education
Academic Programs and Initiatives

Initiatives
Initiative for the Theoretical Sciences (ITS)
Revolutionizing Americans Studies Initiative
The Committee on Globalization and Social Change
The Committee for the Study of Religion
The Committee for Interdisciplinary Science Studies

Master’s Programs
Classics
Comparative Literature
Liberal Studies
Linguistics
Middle Eastern Studies
Philosophy
Political Science
The CUNY Graduate School of Journalism

Interdisciplinary Certificate Programs
Africana Studies
American Studies
Demography
Film Studies
Interactive Technology and Pedagogy
Medieval Studies
Renaissance Studies
Women’s Studies

Interdisciplinary Concentrations
Advanced Social Research
Cognitive Science
European Union Studies
Fashion Studies
Food Studies
Language and Literacy
Latin American and Caribbean Studies
Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies
Psychology of Political Behavior
Public Policy and Urban Studies
Twentieth-Century Studies
Urban Health and Society

Special Programs
Interuniversity Doctoral Consortium
Language Reading Program
Latin/Greek Institute
The Writers’ Institute
Centers and Institutes

American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning
Americas Center on Science and Society
Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies
Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research and Documentation
Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies
Center for Advanced Study in Education
Center for Human Environments
Center for the Humanities
Center for Jewish Studies
Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies
Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies
Center for Place, Culture, and Politics
Center for the Study of Culture, Technology and Work
Center for the Study of Women and Society
Center for Urban Education Policy
Center for Urban Research
Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society
CUNY Institute for Software Design and Development
European Union Studies Center
Gotham Center for New York City History
Henri Peyre French Institute
Human Ecodynamic Research Center
Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean
Saul Kripke Center
The Leon Levy Center for Biography
The Luxembourg Income Study Center
Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center
Research Institute for the Study of Language in Urban Society
Howard Samuels Center
Martin E. Segal Theatre Center
Frank Stanton/Andrew Heiskell Center for Public Policy in Telecommunications and Information Systems
The Graduate Center Foundation

OFFICERS

Gabriella De Ferrari, Chair
Author and Art Historian

Craig Kaplan, Esq., Vice Chair
Of Counsel, Rabinowitz, Boudin, Standard, Krinsky & Lieberman, P.C.

Myron S. Glucksman, Treasurer
President, Myron Glucksman Consulting

Caroline Urvater, Secretary
Investments

CHAIRMEN EMERITI

Douglas Durst, President, The Durst Organization, Inc.
Amabel B. James
Julien J. Studley, Trustee, Julien J. Studley Foundation

VICE CHAIR EMERITUS

Martin E. Segal

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Albert Bildner, Chairman, Latin American Marketing, Ltd.
Fortuna Calvo-Roth, President, Coral Communications Group, LLC
Reginald A. Chambers, Principal, 3i Group plc
Anne Ehrenkranz
Robert I. Halpern, Senior Attorney, Robinson & Cole LLP
Lynn P. Harrison 3rd, Partner, Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP
Michael Hecht, President, Hecht and Company, P.C.
Sarah E. Lewis
Elizabeth Rosen Mayer, J.D., Ph.D., Director, Express Associates Inc.
Joanna Migdal
John Morning, Trustee, Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Frederic S. Papert, President, 42nd Street Development Corporation/The 42nd Street Fund
Raymond Quinlan
Barbara Rifkind, Barbara Rifkind, LLC
Steve Shokouhi, Principal of the Kalimian Organization
Eric Simonoff, Literary Agent, William Morris Endeavor Entertainment
John Harrison Streicker, Chairman, Sentinel Real Estate Corporation
Martin S. Tackel, Attorney at Law, Tackel and Varachi LLP
Robert Wechsler
Migs Woodside, Senior Advisor, Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center, Arizona State University
Michael Zigman, Founder, Partners in College Aid
HONORARY MEMBERS

Richard D. Parsons, Chairman of the Board, Citigroup, Inc.
Marshall Rose, Chairman of the Board, The Georgetown Group, Inc.

DISTINGUISHED COUNSELOR TO THE GRADUATE CENTER FOUNDATION

Frances Degen Horowitz, University Professor and President Emerita, The Graduate Center

EX-OFFICIO

William P. Kelly, President, The Graduate Center
Sebastian T. Persico, Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration, The Graduate Center
Chase F. Robinson, Provost, The Graduate Center
Raymond C. Soldavin, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, The Graduate Center
Executive Director, The Graduate Center Foundation, Inc.
CREDITS

Photography
Inside covers: Don Pollard
p. 9: The Graduate Center, CUNY
p. 18: André Beckles/CUNY
pp. 23, 24, 27: The Graduate Center, CUNY
pp. 41, 43: Wayne Geist/The Graduate Center, CUNY
pp. 46–47: Julien Jourdes
p. 48, top: Jason Fulford
p. 48, bottom: Wagner Photos NYC
pp. 49, all, and 50, top: Jason Fulford
p. 50, bottom: Holger Thoss
p. 51, top: Peter Waldvogel
pp. 51, bottom, and 52, top: Paul Warchol
p. 52, bottom: Jason Fulford
p. 53: Don Pollard
p. 68: Peter Harris/The Graduate Center, CUNY
p. 84: Peter Waldvogel/The Graduate Center, CUNY

Drawings
p. 54: Edwin D. Mott