

## INTERDISCIPLINARY IMMERSION: CITY SEMESTER TAKES OFF NEXT YEAR



**I**N SPRING 2012, 26 Form V and VI students will take part in City Semester: The Bronx Experience, a semester-long interdisciplinary program that integrates history, English, science, ethics, language, civic leadership, and the arts around the study of New York City through the lens of the Bronx. “The vision of City Semester,” states the program brochure, “is to challenge students with a rigorous curriculum that connects student-centered, interdisciplinary, place-based scholarship to leadership, personal growth, and engagement in the communal life of the city and the world.”

City Semester is the logical outgrowth and expansion of Settlement: The West Bronx Story, an interdisciplinary course offered last year that explored the community, culture, ecology, social geography, and his-

tory of several landmarks and neighborhoods in the borough. That course, too, placed high emphasis on “place-based” education – a form of experiential learning that immerses students in local heritage, cultures, and landscapes, and involves extensive community service. As the City Semester program covers all disciplines, participating students will, in essence, be taking a semester abroad without leaving the city (field projects will take place in all five boroughs) – this is a home-grown, home-based alternative learning semester led by a team of 10 teachers from across the high school departments.

Andy Meyers, a Fieldston Upper history teacher who will be one of the City Semester teachers, is also a college counselor. He recently reached out to colleges for their opinion, and they expressed enthusiasm about the new program. “They say that City Semester will provide a compelling narrative of a student’s unique interests, intellectual adventurousness, and willingness to think ‘outside the box,’” explained Meyers. “This program will be an asset to the college process for creative thinkers, making them stand out among other more conventional applicants.” One college representative observed: “Bold? Yes. Edgy and risky? Yes. The invention required a special way of thinking to fully develop the program and the end result is Fieldston being true to its principles and core values.”

Each week, teachers will lead a combination of academic classwork with at least two days of hands-on fieldwork, organized around specific questions and themes, such as “Is New York Sustainable?,” “Diversity and Mobility,” Art in a Global City,” and “The Contested City: Who Runs New York?” Outside of the classroom, students



will conduct research, explore neighborhoods, interview residents, work with community groups, present in the field, and speak to experts and policymakers. Recently, City Semester teachers held a reception with the families of the students who will be participating, and afterwards, parents volunteered to be some of those experts and policymakers.

The four connected core academic courses will be taught by teachers in their own disciplines while also working across boundaries to reveal new connections. The four courses are: Settlement of the City (history), Nature and the City (science), Writing the City (English), and Culture of the City (foreign language – Spanish, French, Chinese). These core courses connect directly to Serving the City (a leadership, activism, and advocacy course that collaborates with community organizations in the Bronx) and Art in the City (in which students choose either theater, photography, music, drawing, or film and apply their skills in those media to their academic study of the city). – J.B.



*Fieldston Upper students enrolled in City Semester will take trips similar to those depicted here, and much more.*

*PREVIOUS PAGE: Students gather in front of Strivers' Row, an architectural landmark in Harlem (top), and take a canoe trek on the Bronx River (bottom).*

*THIS PAGE: Checking in on Manhattan's Chinatown (top); interviewing a worker at the Hunts Point Market (bottom).*