

## Lehman College Launches 'Bronx Recovery Corps' to Boost Borough's Struggling Economy

Wednesday, January 27, 2021



By [ALONZA LEWIS ROBERTSON](#)

In just a few days, 40 Lehman College students will be deployed across the Bronx to small businesses and nonprofits in a borough rocked by the pandemic as part of a unique program set to become a model for students to gain academic credit while contributing to the Bronx's and New York City's economic recovery.

Similar in concept to the Depression-era Citizens Conservation Corps, a New Deal program that put young unemployed Americans to work on conservation projects, the Bronx Recovery Corps will match 20 Lehman students with Bronx employers and community organizations. Job funding for these students comes not from the employer but from a generous grant from [Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation](#) and, if students are eligible, the federal work/study program. The 20 remaining program fellows are students already employed by local businesses and community organizations. As part of the program, all 40 students will prepare for career pathways linked to New York City's recovery through part-time paid positions in growing industries like health care, hospitality, and education.

“The goal is to provide training, mentoring and investment for the building of Lehman student networks and their future careers while also assisting with the economic recovery of the Bronx,” said **Amanda Dubois-Mwake**, director of Lehman’s Office of International Programs and Community Engagement and the program’s director.

It’s all part of an effort to aid the Bronx economy that has been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic while also providing Lehman students with valuable work-based learning experience—opportunities that have become harder to find in the current pandemic economy. Recent CUNY employment surveys indicate that 50 percent of students have lost their jobs or have been furloughed since the pandemic began, and as many as seven out of 10 are looking for work.

Student fellows won’t just receive a paycheck while supporting the Bronx economy—they’ll also be enrolled in a career readiness course for which they’ll receive academic credit and attend monthly workshops on career development and community engagement. The course will cover resume writing and mock interviews, but it will also give students the skills to navigate workplace relationships successfully and professionally.

“After taking this course, Lehman students will be able to enter any work environment with the confidence and self-awareness to not only do the job, but to also advocate for themselves,” said **Department of Africana Studies Department Professor LaRose Parris**, who is co-teaching the career readiness course. “We will facilitate best practices that will allow students to excel in the following areas: conflict resolution, collaborative partnerships, and interpersonal relationships. We will also discuss other sociopolitical issues that present themselves in any work setting. Students will acquire and cultivate the cultural capital needed to maneuver successfully in the workplace.”

“The Bronx Recovery Corps program truly illustrates what we mean when we refer to Lehman College as a catalytic anchor institution in the Bronx,” said **Lehman College President Daniel Lemons**. “In the most difficult of times for our borough, we can continue to support both our students and the Bronx through creative and innovative solutions to critical needs for the region.”

The Bronx-based nonprofit [HERE to HERE](#), whose mission is to unite employers, educators, and community-based organizations towards the shared priority of launching young people into family-sustaining careers, has paired Lehman students with more than 15 employers throughout the borough. HERE to HERE has also provided support to Lehman for the design of the Recovery Corps model through a grant made possible by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“We are so excited to launch the Bronx Recovery Corps at Lehman College and congratulate the first class of Recovery Corps fellows. We look forward to all that they’ll discover and achieve together with their employers,” said **Judy Dimon, founding chair of HERE to HERE**. “These visionary employer partners will offer young people paid employment, teach them technical skills that can be applied across industries, and provide career preparation support that will position them for future career and civic success. HERE to HERE is proud to work with Lehman to engage regional employers to identify high-demand occupations that will hasten a post-COVID economic recovery and offer middle-

and higher-paying wages in fields like manufacturing, trade, education, and health services.”

“The Bronx is Blooming engages communities and youth in environmental stewardship through the revitalization of local parks. The Bronx Recovery Corps will engage Lehman students to not only train to be leaders within their community but will also help to support the Bronx parks that our community has come to depend on during the pandemic,” said **Jennifer Beaugrand, Executive Director of the Bronx is Blooming**, one of the program’s employer-partners.

Other participating-partners include: **American Red Cross Greater New York, Ariva, BronxCare Health System, The Career Exploration and Development Center @ Lehman College, Cents Ability, Inc., CUNY Mexican Studies Institute, Duro Workforce, Fromer Eye Centers, The Herbert H. Lehman Food Bank at Lehman College, HERE to HERE, Janet Collection, Lasgay's Construction & Development Co., Inc., the Lehman College Art Gallery, Office of the Bronx Borough President, Office of International Programs & Community Engagement @ Lehman College, Office of Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-15), The Thinkubator, and We Stay/Nos Quedamos, Inc.**

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on The Bronx. In addition to the highest hospitalization rate and second-highest case rate in New York City, the Bronx economy has been hard hit, with many local businesses suffering significant losses and large numbers of Bronx residents facing unemployment, with rates as high as 26 percent in the fall of 2020. At the same time, Bronx residents, including CUNY students, have been keeping New York City running throughout the pandemic, serving as essential workers, and risking their own lives to ensure communities across New York City continue to receive needed services and goods,” said **Abby Jo Sigal, HERE to HERE founding CEO**. “Lehman College is a leader in the CUNY system, and in the nation, in recognizing the relevance of this work to student’s career preparation, and to

the Bronx's and New York City's economic recovery by pairing work experiences with classroom learning and specialized instruction. Together we can elevate student career success as a shared and primary priority in our economic recovery. The talent of young people fuels our economy and our world."

"The Bronx Recovery Corps at Lehman College embodies the true spirit of us Bronxites and New Yorkers. When devastation occurs, we act," said **Bronx Borough President Rubén Diaz Jr.**, whose office is one of the program's employers. "I am glad to partner with HERE to HERE and Lehman College, two organizations I have been working with for several years. This pandemic devastated our borough, and I am grateful for the many donors who funded this pilot program for our college students to gain work experience while still pursuing their degree(s)."

"We offer the Bronx Recovery Corps as a model for how colleges and universities can award credit for real-world, work-based experiences," said **Lehman College Provost Peter O. Nwosu**. "The launching of Bronx Recovery Corps underscores Lehman's commitment to applied or experiential learning as a signature component of a Lehman education. Under our 2020-2025 strategic plan, we anticipate that 30 percent of Lehman students would have participated in an experiential learning opportunity, especially paid internships, prior to graduating from the college."

The program launches Jan. 29, the beginning of Lehman's spring semester. Lehman aims to double the number of students with access to the program by fall.