Having earned her doctorate from John Jay less than two years ago, MEREDITH DANK is already the recipient of five federal grants worth $1.5 million for research into human-trafficking abroad and the commercial sex economy in the United States. Dank, who finished the John Jay/CUNY Graduate Center PhD program in 2009, based her dissertation on research she conducted under the guidance of Professor Richard Curtis, chair of the Department of Anthropology, and Dean of Research and Strategic Partnerships Karen Terry. The project looked at the commercial sexual exploitation of children in New York City, and on the strength of that work she was hired as a research associate at the Urban Institute. “The Urban Institute was actually starting to build up its human-trafficking portfolio,” she said.

Three of the grants Dank was awarded are from the U.S. State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G-TIP). The Urban Institute, she noted, was one of the first organizations to receive funding from G-TIP to assess whether anti-human-trafficking programs abroad were collecting enough information. “The Government Accountability Office did a report in 2007 on USAID [the U.S. Agency for International Development] and the G-TIP office,” said Dank. “In 2007 we’re giving out millions of dollars to these anti-trafficking programs all over the world and nobody was doing evaluations, nobody knew what impact these programs had on combating human trafficking.”

Under the new grants, Dank will be conducting a process evaluation of an anti-trafficking program in Brazil, creating a best-practices model, and evaluating the impact of anti-trafficking protocols in a country that she is not allowed to name. “All of these countries are Tier 2,” Dank explained, noting that Tier 1 rankings from the State Department are for those nations that are doing the most to combat human-trafficking, followed by Tier 2 and Tier 2 Watchlist. Tier 3, she went on to note, comprises those countries doing absolutely nothing and which might face U.S. sanctions as a result.

The remaining two grants are from the National Institute of Justice. On one, Dank will work with Curtis and Professor Blaize Khan of the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science to estimate the unlawful sex economy in the U.S. “That includes prostitution, child pornography and human trafficking, in addition to looking at the networks of these various groups,” she said. “Part of that is going to be interviewing convicted offenders in prison.”

The second NIJ grant will look at the use of new media and technology to promote dating violence, sexual harassment, stalking and other victimization. Dank will survey 8,000 middle school and high school students in two cities.

JOHN JAY GRANTS UPDATE

John Jay faculty and staff in a variety of disciplines and departments continue to win major grants to support research, education, training programs and community initiatives. Some recent noteworthy awards include:

SCOTT ATREK (Center on Terrorism) — $289,713 from the National Science Foundation for his research on culture, psychology, and modes of moral decision-making.

DANIEL BARNEST (International Studies) — $221,839 from the U.S. Department of Education for the Title V project “Emphasizing Success in Criminal Justice” with Bronx Community College.

TERESA BOOKER (American Studies) — $424,000 from the DoE to support the McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program.

ANTHONY CARPI and NATHAN LENTS (Sciences) — $405,306 from the DoE for the Title V project “Success through Engagement: Development of a Comprehensive Program to Promote Undergraduate Research and First-Year Transition Toward Increasing Persistence and Graduation Rates of Hispanic Students.” Carpi and Lents (Freshmen Services) received a separate grant of $232,167 from the National Science Foundation for his research on culture, psychology, and modes of moral decision-making.

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Professor Baz Dreisinger of the Department of English has received a $100,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for the New York State Prison to College Pipeline, a reentry-oriented initiative that will offer courses to inmates at Arthur Kill as well as classes composed of both incarcerated men and students. Inmates as well as John Jay undergraduates who wish to participate will be required to go through an interview and admissions process, she explained.

“We’ll be selecting those who are the best fit for the program,” said Dreisinger. Credit-bearing classes will be offered to both John Jay students and prisoners in a variety of disciplines, with students being bused out to Arthur Kill once a week. According to Dreisinger, the program will start small, with just two classes offered per semester, but will eventually grow to about four courses. The initiative, set to begin in the fall of 2011, will be in its pilot phase for the next five years.

“I do a lot of work on pop culture, and writing about culture and crime,” said Dreisinger, who was a writer and producer of the 2009 documentary film Rhyme and Punishment, about hip-hop culture and the prison-industrial complex. “Through this, I started getting involved in prison education, working with prisoners. When I was giving a talk at a prison upstate, I was approached by one of the superintendents who said, ‘Why don’t we do something with John Jay?’ That got the ball rolling.”

Dreisinger will be using some of the Rockefeller Foundation funds as “start-up money” and the remainder to carry the program through its first year. To launch the program, Dreisinger will need to secure funding for at least two years. “We’re confident we’re going to get it,” she said.

The Prison to College Pipeline program, noted Dreisinger, is a new initiative based on an old idea. “It’s really a return to what used to be, which is that CUNY and SUNY used to be present in the prisons and offering courses in the prisons. It is incredibly closely linked to education, and we as a CUNY institution can set an example to be present in the prisons and offering courses in the prisons. It is incredibly important that there be a pipeline created,” she said. “Reentry is becoming closely linked to education, and we as a CUNY institution can set an example as far as offering courses in this context. It’s the embodiment of the CUNY mission as a whole to serve the community.”

Kovera and the others also have a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation, Kovera is currently researching whether it matters how similar a suspect is to the witness’s memory of the perpetrator. In an earlier study, she found that when people receive cues from lineup administrators, they do not always change their minds about the perpetrator’s identity. If a witness says that the person is not in the lineup, Kovera notes, then it does not matter whether or not unconscious steering takes place. The people who do get swapped, however, are those who choose “folks,” or lineup members who are not suspects.

Power steering: Looking for Unconscious Cues in Police Lineups

Kovera Explores Mistaken ID &Wrongful Conviction

Some researchers believe that when the administrator of a police lineup knows who the suspect is among those people standing behind the one-way glass, that knowledge is transmitted — unconsciously — to the witness. This so-called “steering effect” cannot be corrected, nor is it even detectable, by either officer or observer, according to Professor Margaret Bull Kovera of the Department of Psychology.

An expert on the use of two common types of lineups — blind administered, in which the officer does not know the identity of the suspect, and non-blind administered, in which the officer does — Kovera supports the former. “In terms of trying to reduce the number of wrongful convictions due to mistaken identifications, one of the things that have been suggested is that police officers conduct lineups without knowing who the suspect is in the lineup,” she said.

“From a policy standpoint, it’s clearly not true,” she said. “You wouldn’t run a drug trial with the doctors knowing who’s getting the drug and who is getting the placebo. You shouldn’t do it for this situation, either.”

The recipient of a $397,988, three-year grant from the National Science Foundation, Kovera is currently researching whether it matters how similar a suspect is to the witness’s memory of the perpetrator. In an earlier study, she found that when people receive cues from lineup administrators, they do not always change their minds about the perpetrator’s identity. If a witness says that the person is not in the lineup, Kovera notes, then it does not matter whether or not unconscious steering takes place.

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Homeland Security Education Begins Here

John Jay Faculty Seek to Build Multi-Level ‘Framework’

John Jay is moving toward the creation of a “framework” for homeland-security education for undergraduates, and a $506,000 grant from the Department of Homeland Security will take the College one step closer to realizing it, according to psychology Professor Andrew Glasford.

Glasford is Principal Investigator for the John Jay College Homeland Security Scholars Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. The three-year grant will support the mentoring of five sophomore students by three faculty mentors in addition to Glasford: David Green from the Department of Sociology, Joshua Freilich (Criminal Justice), and Maria Hartwig (Psychology). All are engaged in homeland-security-related research.

“The broad focus of the grant is to get undergraduates into graduate school,” Glasford explained. “How we’re doing that is giving them training in research. There are a bunch of undergraduate programs that do that;” he said. “but one of the unique things this grant does is ask them to submit a grant [application] for money, just a small amount, and also submit their research project for publication.

The project Glasford is working on with the two students he mentors deals with countermessaging and how it might make some individuals more inclined to join terrorist groups. Isolation is a key precursor in these cases, he noted. Those who cut themselves off from their social groups could be more susceptible to recruitment by terrorist organizations.

“Research is looking into that process,” said Glasford, who has a PhD in social psychology from the University of Connecticut. “What are the ways, whether it be in the speeches of presidents, prime ministers, or just in a culture, that people are led to decide they want to be isolated rather than engage? My students are looking at parts of that in terms of this grant.”

According to Glasford, there are several different components in place for building a framework for homeland-security education. In addition to his grant, which focuses on undergraduates, Hartwig has a similar grant for doctoral education. Another colleague, Preeti Chauhan of the Department of Psychology, has applied for a grant that will support outreach to high school students.

“We’re trying to get them a little bit earlier,” Glasford said. “On the whole, what we’re trying to do is create a comprehensive program.”