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Harlem Children Society Science Boat Cruise 2007:
Celebrating future of science & technology for under resourced & underserved
High school and Undergraduate students in the HCS Science & Technology
Research program

HCS takes to the sea And goes overboard! S.O.S.!

Take one sultry August afternoon. Add one spectacular yacht. Mix with the Harlem Children Society (HCS) students, mentors, and staff. Blend well and allow creative flavors to develop. Garnish with music and refreshments. Yield: an unforgettably delicious experience! – “The first HCS Science Boat Cruise in 2007”

This was the recipe for the outing planned by the HCS as a break from the intensive work of summer research program. The HCS Research Program is so academically intense that the students do not get much time to interact in a social setting. On the cruise they were able to share laughs, stories and learn about each other in a more social setting. This was even more evident during the group presentations – a uniquely crafted collage of showcases by our students involving science and society. They showed a unique blend of exceptional creativity and team spirit and camaraderie, furnishing an opportunity for the students to mingle, and perhaps begin shaping lifelong relationships with one another.

On Friday, August 3rd, the *Skyline Princess* began boarding for a four-hour cruise, just before noon against a backdrop of summer sizzle and flying golf balls at the nearby Chelsea Piers golf range. As the students and mentors filed past the crew and HCS staff, their animated conversations were punctuated with laughter signaling their excitement and anticipation. A true New York experience from beginning to end, we launched from Pier 59.

HCS is a New York community based organization, founded in 2000 by Dr. Sat Bhattacharya, a cancer research scientist at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, that provides scientific education to under-resourced and under-served, yet gifted high school and undergraduate students. Over 250 HCS students – mostly from high school (all from extremely impoverished and underserved backgrounds; 97% students are minority – mostly black, Hispanic and American Indian and over 65% are young women), mentors, educators and parents attended the event. The goal was to celebrate our students, their families and mentors who work extremely hard in their research and internship in science, engineering and math with HCS. They got to know one another and also showcase some of their creative talent in science and society – bringing science, arts and culture in unique ways.

Each student, drawn from a wide range of public schools, is provided with a mentor in the science community, including doctors, professors, engineers, and more. They are given the chance to perform high profile one-on-one research with reputed scientists, engineers and doctors in over 75 institutions like Cornell, Columbia, NYU, Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Mt. Sinai, and many others, with first-rate equipment and materials – which they would never be able to do in school. They also attend

weekly workshops and lectures by leading experts at Cornell University Medical Center. More than 230 students from over 65 schools [most (~210) in New York City; some spread out across the US from Camden in NJ, Detroit in MI, New Orleans in LA, to several Indian reservation across the country – including several in the Hopi reservation in AZ]] were inducted into the program in late June this year. Students were selected from well over a thousand applications, and these are some of the smartest students in many scientific fields. HCS is touching all four corners of the earth, and hopes to expand exponentially for the next several years - and has started a pilot program in several countries where there is a dire need of science education like in Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Columbia, and others.

As the cruise unfolded, the students wandered from deck to deck, some gathering in groups of various sizes, some gathering in pairs, chatting, laughing, snapping photographs and playing games. Certain students sat around the large tables playing cards. Others took advantage of the free soda bar. Some just busied themselves rehearsing their presentations in anticipation of their performances to come later that day. Everyone's curiosity was piqued as they glimpsed of an array of objects and musical instruments students had brought with them for their performances.

The cruise also showcased a unique talent show of science and society by our students, which were perhaps the jewels in the crown of the cruise. Incorporating the theme, "science and society," the student groups – comprising of 11 such groups - tackling such weighty subject matter as HIV and alcoholism, yet they framed the topics in cleverly entertaining ways. And those sundry objects and instruments students had brought along that everyone was wondering about? Their purposes were gradually revealed as the students used them as props in the performances.

Presentations included a wonderful array of talent showcases like - how Life Started on Earth; recital of poems with a Scientific Touch consisting of a selection of poems composed by the students on the boat. These poems were written with many connections to the scientific community by using different science topics such as reproduction and neurons. It was a wonderful experiment connecting poetry with science.

Other presentations included skits on global warming ("Man's Great Folly: Global Warming"): its origins, causes, facts, and how human beings are adding to the problem through pollution and deforestation – in a skit called. Alcoholism was the content of the show that group four came up with - A skit based upon Dr. Alky a hidden alcoholic.

Yet another, put up a wonderful scientifically choreographed show on the on the influence of excessive exposure to sunlight in the development of skin cancer. They conducted a play involving molecules and the pathways leading to the progression of skin cancer in a uniquely choreographed skit. The importance of regular testing for AIDS and other STD's, especially in women, and the practice of safe sex, was the focus of an eager team.

Group eleven, dealt with Awareness and Conservation of Natural Resources in the Society. Their *goal was to deter the abuse of water, energy and fossil fuels and promoting a better, cleaner & healthier lifestyle.*

In a brilliantly conceived sketch mirroring the pop culture reality television sensation, "American Idol," one student group presented a mock show entitled, "American Science Idol." Everyone could relate to the extremely popular television show, and how it was adapted to a scientific presentation.

An interactive presentation including "Science Jeopardy" and "Who Am I." was showcased by another group of creative students. One could sense fierce competition and excitement during "Science Jeopardy," in which audience participants demonstrated their skills as game show contestants answering challenging rapid-fire science questions. "Who Am I," allowed the entire audience to

participate in divining the identities of famous luminaries, past and present, based on clues the presenting group furnished.

The Science Cruise was a unique celebration of having fun and combining science and arts by our young enthusiasts addressing some important issues of our times – providing information and yet extremely creative. The cruise was worthwhile and many are already looking forward to attend next year. Later that night, the rains came more heavily. But it held off just long enough for a beautiful afternoon, and an historical event for the Harlem Children Society.

Some student impressions:

“The cruise has kept true to its aim, which was to promote group unity and cooperation. I was able to meet new people from other groups and my fellow group members and I were also able to get closer. We were able to work together to create a presentation that was both enjoyable and informative. I learned many things from the skits and games from other groups as well. The cruise showed spectacular places near Manhattan such as the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. I was able to enjoy this with other students. There was dancing and people were able to communicate with each other as well as with the HCS staff. Overall, it was a great experience that I hope to see continue in the future”.

- Mashkura

“Going on the cruise was a magnificent experience because it gave the students of HCS a chance to meet everybody else in the program. I for one enjoyed it because I did everything from participating in the group competitions, to dancing and eating the dessert. I believe that every student had fun and would like to repeat this experience next year. I believe the cruise was a very good activity that allowed the students to not only enjoy science but also at the same time meet more students than those in their groups. It was nice to take a day off and hang out without listening to a lecture. We got to share a lot of information with the younger students.”

- Alberto

“I was able to talk to the staff members and got recommendations on college, what to improve on during the lectures, lecture notes, and the importance of behavior during the lectures. I enjoyed the group competitions. I learned about chemistry and how science affects and plays a role in society. I am taking chemistry in the fall, so now I know that carbon is the only element that can turn from a solid to gas. I also enjoyed the ride, although I felt it was a bit short. I made even more new friends at the boat ride then during lunch at the lectures or afterward.”

- Dalibell

“Even though I didn’t interact with every single person on the Cruise, I felt that I made a lot of friends that I can keep in touch with during my years with HCS and beyond...”

- Shainee

About Harlem Children Society:

Harlem Children Society (HCS) is a New York community based nonprofit organization, founded in 2000 by Dr. Sat Bhattacharya, a cancer research scientist at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, that provides scientific education for select high school students (grades 7-12, and beyond) from

under-resourced and under-served areas in New York City and the tri-state area and across the nation. Students are paired with mentors, who are top professionals in their field, and train and research on specific projects. The program identifies under-resourced and under-served communities, targets at-risk children and youth in those communities and provides them an opportunity to explore the world and their future through science, thereby helping to revitalize the community as a whole. It aims to develop a society for a better humanity by creating awareness in scientific literacy and social issues.

HCS - a 7 year old summer “bridge program” has grown exponentially – **increasing enrollment from 3 students from 2 high schools guided by one mentor in 2000 to over 230 students from 70 schools, guided by over 200 mentors in 60 leading research institutions like Cornell, Columbia, NYU, Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Mt. Sinai, NASA, Steven’s Institute of Technology and many others, with first-rate equipment and materials – which they would never be able to do in school. this year (2007). Most (~210) in New York City;** some spread out across the US from Camden in NJ, Detroit in MI, New Orleans in LA, to several Indian reservation across the country – including several in the Hopi reservation in AZ. Students were selected from well over a thousand applications, and these are some of the smartest students in many scientific fields, and **come from extremely impoverished and underserved backgrounds; 97% students are minority – mostly black, Hispanic and American Indian and over 65% are young women.** All students receive a substantial stipend for their research. HCS’s rate of success is exemplified in the number of former students who have gone on to top colleges, including **Columbia, Rutgers, Dartmouth, Penn State, UMDNJ, Swarthmore, Cornell and other universities. Over 20% of HCS students continue their education in IVY league universities, and most of them opting for science and math. In addition, Harlem Children Society has been honored for its level of accomplishment with many awards, including, several New York Times Scholarships, Gates Millennium Scholarships, and Posse scholarships, among several others.**

Students perform research in a myriad of scientific and engineering fields – such important subjects as Celiac Disease, cancer treatment therapy, HIV/AIDS, neurological activity in the auditory system, environmental, nanotechnology and much more. Students interested in astronomy and space engineering have also been sent to the NASA at Kennedy Space Center in Florida and in University of Wisconsin Madison. They also attend weekly workshops and lectures by leading experts at Cornell University Medical Center.

HCS is gradually touching all four corners of the earth, and hopes to expand exponentially for the next several years - and has started a pilot program in several countries where there is a dire need of science education like in Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Columbia, and others.

Harlem Children Society Founder, **Dr. Sat Bhattacharya**, who has earned his reputation as a research scientist, at the renowned Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, says that this cruise “is keeping the dream alive in Harlem that science can be fun and exciting and that all children should have access to the knowledge that prepares them to be successful entrepreneurs and productive world citizens”. He has been honored by the New York Academy of Sciences during Black History month as a leading educator in minority education in the sciences, and by New York Daily News as “50 unsung heroes of NY”. Dr. Bhattacharya, an immigrant from India, started Harlem Children Society with Harlem in mind, as more than a geographical location; but as a symbol of the drive to succeed and to achieve your dreams, inspite of the tremendous hardships and circumstances. Harlem Children Society is keeping the dream alive and well, with its dedication to promoting an innovative science education program for children and youth living in under-resourced and under-served communities and school districts. It seeks to empower the youth of tomorrow with the skills to pursue higher education and career achievement and to give back to their communities by becoming innovate entrepreneurs and productive world citizens.

This year's HCS class began its summer session in late June. In addition to full-time laboratory work, New York students attend a lecture every Tuesday at the Cornell University Medical Center. They hear a variety of experts speak about their professions, providing insight into important current issues. So far an educators from UNESCO & UNICEF, a professor of chemistry at Bronx Community College, a producer of National Public Radio's *Science Friday*; and soon to be followed by other luminaries lich Nobel Prize wining scientists will expand the horizons in these young minds. Students also present their projects during the lectures, keeping everyone aware of their progress in their laboratories.
