President Bollinger Receives NAACP Legal Defense Fund National Equal Justice Award

By Katherine Moore

Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger was awarded the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) 2003 National Equal Justice Award for his early and sustained efforts to defend the use of affirmative action in university admissions policies. The LDF presented the award at a gala dinner in New York City on Nov. 6, honoring President Bollinger, University of Michigan President Mary Sue Coleman, Cornell University President Jeffrey Lehman and General Motors Corporation for “their steadfast support of a diverse student body and the principle of educational equity enshrined in Brown v. Board of Education.”

In Grutter v. Bollinger, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the University of Michigan Law School’s affirmative action policy in a landmark decision. Although the Court struck down an aspect of the University of Michigan’s undergraduate admissions procedure in a companion case, Gratz v. Bollinger, it reaffirmed that race may be considered by colleges and universities as a factor in making admissions decisions.

“The Supreme Court has delivered the most important decision dealing with affirmative action—perhaps the most important decision dealing with race in America—in a quarter-century,” wrote President Bollinger in a Washington Post opinion editorial (June 24), “Against the alternative of eliminating consideration of race in admissions, the decision is of immense significance. There are no effective alternatives to achieving an integrated student body, at least without sustaining enormous costs to the quality and character of education.”

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund noted that Bollinger had “steered the [University of Michigan] through five years of challenges to its admissions policies.”

The Fund also praised all the honorees for “[holding] open the door of opportunity that the LDF paved open 50 years ago, ensuring black and brown students continue access to the nation’s institutions of higher education.”

The Legal Defense Fund is the nation’s preeminent public interest legal organization. It was founded in 1940 under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall, the renowned civil rights attorney and first African-American U.S. Supreme Court Justice. Although LDF works primarily through the courts, its strategies include advocacy, educational outreach, monitoring of activity in the education and legislative branches, coalition building and policy research.

Guilamo-Ramos Works With Community Parents to Combat Risk Behavior Among Youth

By Kristin Sterling

To address the rise in tobacco use and new AIDS cases among Latino adolescents, Social Work Professor Vincent Guilamo-Ramos embarked on a family-based intervention study to prevent or reduce tobacco use and sexual risk behavior among adolescents.

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Guilamo-Ramos is now in the third year of the five-year Linking Lives Health Education Program that he developed. Participants in the program include 4,750 Latino and African American students and parents in middle schools in Harlem and the South Bronx.

“The purpose of the research is to develop and evaluate a parent add-on component to existing school-based programs designed to prevent or reduce sexual risk behavior or to prevent or reduce tobacco-use in young adolescents,” said Guilamo-Ramos.

The primary feature of the new component is a manual, offered in English and Spanish, which teaches parents how to communicate effectively with their children about these topics. The manual is designed to be used in conjunction with parental workshops, where participants practice talking to children and engage in other activities to assist them in implementing the strategies outlined in the manual. Trained parent partners regularly call the participating parents to determine if lessons are being applied.

The process began in 2000 with a pre-intervention study of 600 children in grades six through eight to identify factors related to the risk behaviors. Based on these results and input from focus groups, community and school leaders and a panel of experts, the manual was developed.

Guilamo-Ramos’ manual is unique because the contents are culturally integrated to Latino family values. In his pre-interviews, Guilamo-Ramos found that ethnic pride played an important role for these populations, and students who are more knowledgeable about their background and history are less likely to engage in these risky behaviors. The manual also builds on the historically strong emphasis on kinship and extended family ties that is common among Latinos.

Although it will be two more years until Guilamo-Ramos officially concludes the study, parents already seemed pleased with the assistance. Many confided that thanks to the program they are able to talk to their children about the difficult subjects of tobacco use and sexual behavior that parents previously had avoided because the conversation was so uncomfortable.