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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Disrupting the Systemic Incarceration of Communities of Color:
What can Public Universities Do?
Students at Macaulay Honors College Convene Leaders to Outline New Strategies**

**Friday, March 14th 2014 from 9:00am – 2:30 pm
At Macaulay Honors College**

New York, NY - (March 4, 2014). On Friday, March 14th, students at Macaulay Honors College of the City University of New York (CUNY) will convene leaders from higher education and the public and private sectors for “Supporting Excellence: A Public University’s Role in an Age of Mass Incarceration of Communities of Color.”

Sponsored by the student-run Diversity Initiative at Macaulay and the Horace W. Goldsmith Scholars Program, the conference will explore how public universities can better respond to the institutional forces that have marginalized and criminalized the city’s communities of color, specifically the practices of targeting young men of color through suspensions, expulsions and school-based arrests for minor offenses. These measures set off a sequence of events that contribute to the mass incarceration of communities of color.

“The Supporting Excellence conferences are an exciting way for us to engage educators, activists, and peers in a dialogue about important topics affecting students of color,” says conference co-founder and New York City Urban Fellow

Ana Billingsley '13, (Macaulay Honors College at Hunter College), "This year's topic is a step forward into an even larger conversation: the important role that higher education should play in engaging with students involved in the criminal justice system."

Data from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) show that African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites. African American and Hispanics comprised 58% of all prisoners in 2008, even though they make up approximately one quarter of the US population. The NAACP reports that if the trend of one in six black men being incarcerated as of 2001 continues, one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime.

Macaulay's conference comes in the wake of new guidelines by the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice that charge schools with addressing school discipline practices that disproportionately affect African-American and Hispanic youth. The NAACP reports that 35% of black children grades 7-12 have been suspended or expelled at some point in their school careers compared to 20% of Hispanics and 15% of white students.

"I am proud that our students are tackling such a critical issue," said Macaulay Dean Ann Kirschner. "Macaulay students continue to demonstrate their leadership capabilities and their commitment to justice," she added.

To address the needs of incarcerated people who have lost their educational opportunities, students have centered the lunchtime plenary on educational access. Speakers from the Bard Prison Initiative, a program that provides incarcerated men and the women the opportunity to earn a Bard degree while serving their sentences, will be featured. A series of break-out sessions, including prisoner re-entry issues, will be explored in greater depth throughout the day. As a result of Macaulay's conference, scholars, activists, and professionals working on the front lines will co-share strategies with educators, administrators and community activists on how to successfully work with students and families in at-risk communities.

Highlighting this year's conference is keynote speaker Sandra Thomas, VP of Community Affairs at WABC-TV and former candidate for Brooklyn City Council. Thomas also chairs the Council for Unity, which partners with the public and private sector to reduce violence in schools and communities. Thomas will lead a discussion on dismantling the school to prison pipeline with Janet Garcia, a Macaulay at Hunter graduate who is currently pursuing her PhD in criminal justice at Rutgers University, and Hernan Carvente, a John Jay College student, who serves as the Northeast Regional Representative for the Coalition for Juvenile Justice's National Youth Committee.

"Supporting Excellence: A Public University's Role in an Age of Mass Incarceration of Communities of Color" is the third in an annual Macaulay

conference series addressing key issues that affect students of color. The first two conferences explored the experience of underrepresented students at prestigious academic institutions, as well as CUNY's promise for "a first rate education for all." This year's conference builds on the momentum generated by a capacity-crowd February screening of the documentary *American Promise* at Macaulay.

The conference is free and open to the general public. Held at Macaulay Honors College, 35 West 67 Street (Off of Central Park West), the conference runs from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

About Macaulay Honors College

Macaulay Honors College at The City University of New York offers exceptional students a uniquely personalized education with access to the vast resources of the nation's largest urban university and New York City itself. Selected for their top high school records and leadership potential, Macaulay students receive a full-tuition scholarship, a laptop and technology support, and a \$7,500 Opportunities Fund to pursue global learning and service opportunities. A Cultural Passport provides access to museums, libraries, and other treasures around New York City. Macaulay students enroll in one of eight CUNY senior colleges (Baruch, Brooklyn, City, Hunter, John Jay, Lehman, Queens and Staten Island). For more information, see macaulay.cuny.edu.

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