Peter Kolozi graduated from the Ph.D. program in 2011, majoring in American Politics with a minor in Political Theory. He is currently Associate Professor of Political Science at Bronx Community College, CUNY.

By Beth Newcomer

Beth: Describe your experience in the program. What did you value the most about your time at the GC?

Peter: The best thing about the program was the faculty. They were easy to talk to and available. And my student colleagues were great. When I was here they started the teaching fellowship program and through that I got to teach classes at BCC. There I met a colleague who became a mentor. He really took me under his wing and helped me learn how to teach, navigate the bureaucracy, and learn about the culture of the college and get involved in service for the department.

B: Tell us about your dissertation, Conservatives Against Capitalism.

P: It’s essentially a history of ideas. I chart the conservative critique of capitalism from early U.S. history starting with pro-slavery arguments against Northern industrial capitalism to modern-day people like Pat Buchanan and the neo-cons. Conservatives used to be very critical of capitalism but that criticism hardly exists at all any more, or is relegated to the far margins and is more of a cultural critique.

B: How does this manifest today?

P: I just submitted a paper co-authored with my colleague James Freeman on Donald Trump and conservatism. Basically we argue that Trump personifies what conservatism is today. He’s a market fundamentalist, but he also taps into this white resentment. There’s a general sense of insecurity that for many whites, especially working-class whites, they’re doing worse than their fathers and grandfathers. This is true for everybody, but this economic problem is being translated into racist resentment against Muslims, Latinos, and African Americans, when the real culprit is capital. But from the conservative side there’s no critique of the economic system. If you accept the system as it is, then you have to find someone to blame. Trump signifies a turn in what conservatism is today. He doesn’t bother with any of the “culture war” issues, but still social conservatives support him.

B: You’re a member of the executive committee of the PSC chapter at BCC. What has that experience been like, and what are the next steps in negotiations for a new contract?

P: It’s been a great experience, working and organizing with the union. We’ve been planning teach-ins for students and union members about what the union does, why it’s important to be an active member, and what social unionism is. We’re trying to build a more organic community; building solidarity, if you will. As far as the contract, we got over 1,000 people to the protest at the Chancellor’s apartment. That was great but I know the PSC is planning to escalate things a little bit. The next step is teach-ins at various campuses. After that there’ll be some disruptive actions to put pressure on the Chancellor and the Governor as well.

B: Last semester you were on the faculty hiring committee at BCC. Do you have any advice for current students who are on or about to enter the job market?

P: I’m speaking from a community college perspective, but generally, there are three things a prospective candidate is evaluated on: teaching, scholarship, and service to the department/college. So be aware of those and try to strike a balance between the three. Also know the institution you’re applying to. Do some research, find out what the students are like, what the service and committee structures are like, and what the institution emphasizes. If it’s a big research school, teaching may not be as important. But at BCC we try to look for people who cover all three of these areas.