LABOR RELATIONS
How Enterprising Students Are Picking Up
Where Financial Aid Left Off

BONUS PULL-OUT: GREEK LIFE TRADING CARDS
By Juli N. Weiner, Illustrated by Allison A. Halff

OPEN TAB: 1020, THE BAR WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR GAME

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THE BLUE AND WHITE

Vol. XIV FAMAM EXTENDIMUS FACTIS No. I

COLUMNS

4 Bluebook
8 Campus Characters
12 Digitalia Columbiana
20 Verily Veritas
40 Measure for Measure
43 Campus Gossip

Bonus Pull-Out

Julia N. Weiner 21 Greek Life Trading Cards!
Illustrated by Allison A. Halff
The unofficial guide to Columbia’s Frat Row All-Stars.

Labor Relations

Lydia DePillis 25 Capitol Gains
Getting ahead and getting a life as a D.C. summer intern.

Katie Reedy 28 Columbia Cottage Industries
Student-run businesses make more money than you do.

Lucy Tang 32 Don’t Call Us, We’ll Call You
Morningside’s snobbiest businesses offer service with a scowl.

Sara Vogel 34 The Tutor Diaries
Spanish, algebra, and chemistry for forty dollars an hour.

Features

James R. Williams 10 Open Tab
Welcome to 1020, the neighborhood bar where everybody knows your game.

B&W Staff 16 Mystery Science Theater 2007
Meet the men (and woman) who lead you through the science requirement.

Paul Barndt 36 The Replacement
A conversation with Interim SEAS Dean Gerald Navratil

Criticism

Anna Phillips 14 Shakespeare in Line
These violent delights have violent ends.

Paul Barndt 41 Qu’est ce que c’est RoboCop?
Expat artist shows provocative work in Brooklyn.

www.theblueandwhite.org   Cover: “8 Semesters to Go” by Allison A. Halff

September 2007

3
I don’t want to tell you an orientation story. You’re all savvy enough (and have better SAT scores than the rest of us, albeit out of a creepy 2,400 points) to make it on your own. And with the aid of frenetic pre-college Facebooking, you got a six-month head start on the pearls of conventional wisdom we all had to absorb during orientation.

For instance, you don’t need us to tell you that Barnard is absolutely part of Columbia—except when it isn’t, with a pre-menstrual vengeance; or that engineers are uncool—unless your roommate’s one, in which case, keep her on your good side for help with Frontiers equations (tricky for an English major, but that mathlete was doing them in kindergarten).

Not one to burn the bones of the dead horse that NSOP bludgeoned for eight days straight, *The Blue and White* isn’t here to offer lofty advice—just some entertainment, and maybe even some help. We hope this issue proves useful in navigating Columbia’s Red Sea of tape.

Considering your parents just dropped 40K on this year’s socio-academic adventure, you might be looking for a way to pay for books—or at least your own beer. Our package on student labor (p. 25) documents what your ambitious classmates will do for a buck (or a few more lines on their resumes).

But suggesting that Columbia is all work and no play does injustice to the frats, those specters of state-school debauchery that no one quite understands. With the best real estate on campus and theme parties like “Jungle Night” and “Sex and Exes,” they’re worth a closer look—so we’ve included a set of trading cards (p. 21), complete with fun facts about Columbia’s most peculiarly conventional subculture.

Tragically, we can’t remember the last time we had as much fun as during Orientation Week. We just didn’t have it at NSOP events. So as you hold fast to the spirit of youth, welcome to Columbia! Only eight semesters to go.

—Taylor Walsh
*Editor-in-Chief*
REVELATION OF THE MONTH

The proposed Manhattanville expansion is politically correct again! Hazel N. Dukes, President of the NAACP’s New York State Conference of Branches, has come out publicly in support of the University’s plan to expand into West Harlem. “On behalf of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and NAACP branches that are located within the boundaries of this proposed project, I support Columbia University’s Proposed Manhattanville in West Harlem Expansion Project,” she said in a statement on July 9. “I can think of no other project in this area of Harlem which will provide residents and the University the opportunity to grow together, as partners.”

The entire rigidly-worded statement, unsurprisingly, can be found on the University’s website.

FIRST-YEARS JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND

ACROSS
4 The most studious perv
7 You won’t get it as an upperclassman, either
9 What pre-Bono Sachs had
10 Verboten Business School eatery
12 Flash in the Internet pan
13 “Ninguno ser es _______”
15 Havel’s vodka holder

DOWN
1 Hey, what about _______?
2 Cohen; LaSalle
3 Hockey team motto
5 A cock and bull storyteller
6 Our favorite news station; Class Day speaker
8 An apple; a gaping hole in the ground
11 FroSci Youtube celebrity
14 “My ______ get stuck between the bricks on College Walk.”

COME AGAIN...?

“If we go in and make the Middle East a successful, capitalist part of the world market, and if kids are playing, you know, PlayStation 2s instead of just receiving religious instruction, then maybe we’ll stop seeing terrorism or stop seeing suicide bombers. Maybe it’s a chance to fix the Middle East.”

—Iraq War veteran and GS third-year Garth Stewart on NPR’s Talk of the Nation, when asked for his definition of victory
While enjoying the weekly jazz brunch at Havana Central, I recalled a balmy late August afternoon—two years ago, almost to the day—when I ate my first meal in Morningside Heights. Back then, the place was called the West End, and harkening back to that dining experience doesn’t exactly fill me with warm nostalgia. I remember greasy chicken fingers, a filthy bathroom, and the desire not to go back.

At Havana Central today, the old cast-iron West End sign hangs on the back wall, and photos of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg are incongruously pasted on the otherwise Cuban-inspired menu. The mash-up is a bit illogical, and while the inclusion of such memorabilia may be a polite stab at a sense of “roots,” it’s also a smugly ironic acknowledgement of what was destroyed so that Havana Central could emerge, phoenix-like, from the West End’s scuzzy ashes—as if Castro were to place a photo of Batista over the mantelpiece and call it historical reverence. Either way, the alluded-to former Beat hangout is hardly the ‘Stend that the current generation of Columbia students will remember. The grimy neighborhood joint of yore is thoroughly gone, and easy to forget.

To its credit, Havana Central is unique in this neighborhood for retaining any sense of history at all, however superficial it may be. For the most part, the past lives of formerly favored establishments are forgotten as soon as the fresh coat of paint dries.

A walk down Broadway today reveals Morningside Heights at the height of its transience. Global Ink, the fantastic, overstuffed magazine depot, has closed, soon to be replaced with a children’s shoe store. According to rumor, an organic sandwich shop and Jamba Juice clone will soon replace Nacho’s, the one-time inauthentic Mexican-themed dive with reality TV-star bartenders and largely underage clientele. Casbah Rouge, the bumpin’ (if seedy) hookah bar, was swiftly forgotten in the hubbub surrounding the new Chipotle—a neighborhood addition that has been welcomed with open arms in the past weeks. These changeovers happen quickly, without any sign of protest and only the occasional pang of nostalgia.

It would be easy to pass off this high rate of commercial and cultural turnover as evidence of the transience within New York City at large, but I’m inclined to believe that this particular brand of shape-shifting belongs to Columbia. A friend at another school, who grew up on the Upper West Side, recently admitted that he literally “cried like a baby” when he saw the vacant storefront where his favorite movie rental store, the Movie Place, used to be on 105th Street; the New York Times also covered the outrage and grief upon its closing. It seems unlikely that any Columbia students mourned this loss quite so thoroughly, though
the University libraries did buy the Place’s collection of DVDs soon thereafter, leaving the VHS tapes to collect dust.

This is not to say, of course, that Columbia students lack a capacity for attachment. It’s pretty easy to get upperclassmen and alumni going on The Good Ole Days, back when you could get a decent bagel at 3 a.m. in Morningside Heights and before Amsterdam Café, with its epic pitchers of beer and more-the-merrier attitude, mutated into a swanky (and unnecessary) tapas bar. I arrived too late to experience AmCaf or Columbia Bagels; instead, I’ll grieve for Global Ink, along with the long-defunct Crema Lita, where I procrastinated away many nights of freshman year with new friends. The ice cream was less than delicious, but the memories are dear.

I suspect that each of us will have our Good Ole Days by graduation. But these attachments, whether steadfast or fleeting, are unable to stand in the way of the rapid turnover of neighborhood institutions. This year, and every year, incoming freshman will arrive anxious to embrace all the newest locales that the neighborhood has to offer, not caring much what was there before. And why should they? We students are a transient population, whose four-year stints in Morningside Heights make us just as temporary as the businesses on Broadway. Just as we come and go in fairly regular cycles, the neighborhood readjusts itself to the ever-changing needs of fickle youth.

Pinkberry, the lovable Korean-by-way-of-L.A. fro-yo chain, will soon open its doors in Crema Lita’s former storefront. Assuredly, scads of new freshmen will procrastinate many hours over its frosty desserts, eager to make some memories. Odds are, I’ll be in line too.

— Lauren Glover

Since mid-May, when I started my internship at Men’s Vogue, I have been consistently fielding the same three questions. The answers: The legendary fashion closet is little more than a room crammed with clothing. No, the staff is not cold, mean or made up entirely of supermodels. And no: not all of the men are gay.

For me, it wasn’t the questions that were surprising—they’re all pretty harmless in and of themselves—but rather the frequency with which they were asked. People seem to think they know everything about the Vogue empire, with its cutthroat atmosphere and stunningly awful (not to mention awfully stunning) staff of editors and editrixes. I found myself wondering where exactly these people had gotten their information. Had I missed some memo? As it turns out, I had: a little movie called The Devil Wears Prada.

Curious friends referenced Prada’s infamous “cafeteria scene”—in which Anne Hathaway’s character is told that the main ingredient in chowder is cellulite—when asking if anyone actually ate. Actually, the Frank Gehry-designed Condé Nast cafeteria is surprisingly busy. The sushi table, the omelet station, or the featured truffle cart all have lines that spill into the hallway. The fashion-types tend to congregate at the frozen yogurt machine, while the sandwich bar usually bustles with scruffy twenty-somethings in Harvard sweatshirts who can be seen wandering en masse back to The New Yorker, subs in hand.

Like in the film, the staff members are taller, more stylish, and more attractive than average office workers, but let’s not forget that tall, attractive, well-dressed people are people too, and often very friendly people at that. In any case, I have yet to see Gisele Bundchen (or any other leggy Brazilian goddess) walking the hallowed halls of Times Square.

In spite of the relative—shocking, even—normalcy of the Men’s Vogue working environment, the universe of five-star hotels, bank-breaking bottles of Château LaTour, and stunning Helmut Lang loafers described therein has lost none of its allure. And while I left at the end of the summer without so much as a handle of two buck chuck, I did finally get a good look in The Closet—which provides a happily apt metaphor for the world of Men’s Vogue, that mythical treasure trove may hold racks of Tom Ford suits and piles of Prada, but in the end, it’s all just clothing. Really great clothing.

— Michael Snyder

Illustrations by Allison A. Halff
Henry Pedersen

“It’s hard to explain,” says Henry Pedersen, CC’08, when I inquire as to the nature of his summer job. “Just come over whenever you can. My boss is away, so we’re having a barbecue. It’s gonna be awesome!”

I showed up in Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighborhood around lunchtime, expecting the headquarters of an internet start-up or some obscure grassroots organization. Instead, I found an unmarked gate on a quiet residential street. Out bounded the 6 foot-plus Henry, the picture of oh-so-ironic indie rocker in a worn blue 90s-era tank top and paint-splattered pants, hair cropped short but for a single thick forelock flopped over one eye.

But anyone who saw last year’s Varsity Show could surmise that if Henry, who composed it, were going to be in a band, it would be a tribute to Earth, Wind and Fire. He plays bass, French horn, and piano; I once found him struggling to get a baby-upright into his Ruggles dorm room (he failed). And it only takes a short conversation with him to figure out that he vehemently despises anything deemed “indie”—within five minutes of our interview, he referred to his own sister as “hipster scum.”

So why the tag-sale look? Pure practicality, of course. He swung the gate open to reveal his office: the courtyard of an apartment complex. Far from the Merrill-ing crowds, Henry was employed as a landlord’s handyman.

Henry is not afraid to admit that he likes going against the grain for the sake of it, though he stipulates that he cares less about outcome than pathway. It’s how he explains his decision to take both Lit Hum and CC as a freshman, an experience he describes as “so fucking hard.” It’s why, on a trip to India two summers ago, the primary goal of which was to learn Sanskrit, he ended up wandering the desert for two weeks on a camel, then borrowing a canoe from a fisherman and accidentally traveling thirty kilometers upstream in a monsoon. “Coming back,” he reminisces, chuckling, “I was so sunburned that I couldn’t paddle—I had to float. It was awesome!”

But it’s neither odd-jobbery nor ancient language that really gets his blood pumping; it’s bones. Henry started off as a religion major. And then, on a sophomore-year whim, he decided to enroll in—of all things—Forensic Osteology, and hasn’t looked back since. Before settling into his maintenance stint, he spent a few weeks in Taos, New Mexico, surveying a Pueblan Kiva, or underground house, excavated by Barnard anthropology professor Severin Fowles. For his senior thesis as an Evolutionary Biology of the Human Species major, he plans to run a faunal analysis of the decapitated skeletons of two dogs and an infant found at the site. Not exactly “Victorian Literature and the Concept of the Self.”

What’s perhaps most surprising about Henry, however, is his dichotomous personality. It’s hard to tell whether he’s a lion dressed as a lamb or vice versa; he can be incredibly sweet one minute and stinging sarcastic the next. He’s split his time at Columbia between bar-bouncing (you may have seen him, shoulders hunched, posted outside a certain popular Morningside watering hole) and a cappella singing (he served for three semesters as the musical director of the Kingsmen); between advocating what he calls “considerate science” (in a nutshell,
acknowledgement that there’s more than one way to
define truth) and needling his peers (this semester
he plans to sport a Hezbollah t-shirt a friend brought
back from Lebanon). His academic path seems sure
to lead to a professional life spent mostly in a dusty
lab, yet he dreams of being on television. “If I’m not
rich or famous by 25,” he declares, inexplicably, “I’m
moving to New Zealand.” His ceaseless enthusiasm
seems to be his only constancy.

Henry promised barbecue, and he delivered. But
as his coworkers gulfed down sausages and Kool-
Aid, he seemed to have no appetite. “I feel kind of
sick,” he said, breaking into his signature, gummy
grin. “I ate an entire box of Trader Joe’s cereal this
morning. It was awesome!”

— Hannah Bourne Goldfield

HENRY KLEMENTOWICZ

Henry, royalty of Ruggles, friend on Facebook.
Hen-ry: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of four
steps down the palate to tap, at four, on the teeth:
Klem. En. To. Wicz.

Monday through Thursday Henry’s an auxiliary po-
lice officer in the NYPD, and on holidays he’s an elect-
ed official, a selectman for Ward 3 of Nashua, New
Hampshire. But on weekends he’s an amateur rapper,
Rabula Tasa, the Chief Grammarian, and he’s:

The best poet since Shakespeare? I am. sick.
Check the record, son. My pentameter, iambic.

And:

I reign in the astral plane, Earth, Hell, and all
dimensions.
Ifly to Geneva and write lyrical conventions.

Not many Columbians have been to Switzerland. Nor
are many of us elected officials, winning by two votes,
no less (His mother, fearing that he might miss too
much school as a public official, voted against him).

But let’s not stop talking about his mother. Last
year, when the Minutemen were all the rage, Bwog
posted a quote from one of the protesters, a Martin
Lopez, CC ’09: “I demand that Columbia University
not take any reprisals against the students who took
the stage,” to which Henry replied in the comment
thread (uncensored) “I demand an f-ing ham sand-
wich.” As Henry tells it, a short time later: “I got a call
from my mom, inviting me to lunch at Le Monde with
her and one Evangeline Morphos, professor of theater
arts, friend of the family, and the wife of Provost Alan
Brinkley. There I ordered a croque madam.”

(This is a ham sandwich with an egg).

“The meal was lovely, and when Mrs. Morphos
picked up the check (to my strenuous objections),
I explained my comment on Bwog. To which she re-
piled, ‘I guess you got your demand. Come over to our
house anytime and I can guarantee you that an admin-
istrator will personally make you a ham sandwich.’”

And he did go there—and all over.

In Minnesota, he lost his shoe in a pile of corn (you
can see him do it on YouTube: search “Columbians
Climbing Corn”). In Maine, he trespassed into a sce-
nic lighthouse to avoid paying the $2 entrance free,
illegally slept in a private campsite, and got pulled
over for an erratic right hand turn (One night he an-
nounced, “I can’t go back to prison”). In Washing-
ton, D.C., he declared anything south of Trenton the
“Deep South” and refused to return.

And in Nashua, Henry called the cops on six-term
Congressman Charlie Bass (R-NH) for illegally park-
ing at a campaign event. Remember, Henry is an
elected official. That’s his job. In fact, he’s already got
the slogan for his re-election campaign:

“As an auxiliary police officer in the NYPD, Henry
Klementowicz knows that ‘52 hours of mandatory
training’ isn’t just a word. It’s four words preceded by
a number.

Grammatical.”

— Brendan Ballou
Welcome to 1020, the neighborhood bar where everybody knows your game. By James R. Williams

I want to tell you a 1020 story. One night last year or the year before that, the barback at Morningside Heights’ favorite living-room extension left the door to the liquor supply closet open, glistening bottles of low-grade alcohol in full view. The closet is in a back corner of the single-room hangout, near the bathrooms and the slightly elevated seating area that attracts the largest groups of patrons. Usually, these groups are packs of undergrads who move from bar to bar in hordes, ending up here more frequently than anyone would care to admit. 1020 is probably the only bar in the neighborhood that any of us can stomach for more than an hour at a time, and undoubtedly the only bar in the neighborhood that everyone you know can agree on.

Near the open door, a group of three undergrads, no longer thirsty, glanced up. One of them, a senior girl and principal social figure in the extended group of friends that spanned the back wall, dared two of her male sophomore protégés to take what they could get, and they did: a bottle of vodka, or maybe two, a detail no one seems to remember.

What happened next remains unclear. Perhaps there was an attempted escape, raised voices, or the threat of police involvement. It is possible, if certain versions of the story are to be believed, that the Australian bar manager, the only male 1020 employee who could possibly be construed as good-looking and also the only one that none of the customers seem to like, pinned one of the sophomores against the wall and spit out harsh words in a tone at least slightly more sinister than the situation called for. There is no confusion, however, about the story’s ending. The next Saturday morning, the two amateur thieves sanded and refinished 1020’s dark wood bar, which had been hoisted out of the building and onto the sidewalk of Amsterdam Avenue, as punishment. The boys worked in full view of the bar staff, passing pedestrians, and certain friends who came to lend support and make small talk with the owners over fast food takeout. A few hours later, their work completed, the debt was considered paid, without prejudice.

Today, both of these former miscreants are still frequent 1020 customers. They are not proud of this story—they will not boast, or speak on the record—but they are fiercely loyal to the bar that taught them that youth and a cavalier attitude don’t always excuse you from bottom-line accountability. On any given evening, you’re likely to see at least one of them walk through the massive wooden door, greeted heartily by Tommy, the omnipresent bouncer and barback who splits his hours between washing glasses, catching up with regulars, and checking IDs from his post in the old-time barber’s chair that sits just beyond the vestibule. The employees have not forgotten the incident, but as a parent does a child, the staff of 1020 has learned to forgive.

I tell you this story not to poke fun at the wayward, or spread news of scandal, but to illustrate the point: You are always welcome at 1020. I go there myself rather frequently, and have never felt awkward, or unwelcome, or out of place. For someone who almost always feels awkward and out of place, this is monumental. “I’ve never seen the show,” says one 1020 all-star, “but I think it must be like Cheers.”

In fact, 1020 is not like Cheers, at least not in the obvious way. The crowds are larger, the in-house romances between the pretty young female bartenders and the grizzled middle-aged male ones are kept to a
minimum, and the regular clientele is too large for everybody to know your name—although if you come by often enough, odds are at least one person will. Instead, going to 1020 is sort of like running into someone, only vaguely familiar, wearing a Columbia sweatshirt in Moscow. You might not know much about each other, but the fact that you’re both there means something, is somehow special, even if you don’t quite know why.

Of course, the bar has its problems. On weekend evenings during the school year, there is often a line to get in the door. Within the past year, the ID checkers have gotten stricter: a hand-stamping policy is the annoying byproduct of a number of recent high-profile raids by the NYPD. The vodka cranberries and rum and cokes are weak on busy nights, the credit card minimum is $15, and service can be slow when one bartender has to work the whole room. Even though the recent closure of Mona, Roadhouse, and Nacho’s means that the space is more crowded than ever, the dart board in the front and pool table in the back are perpetually in use, and players are so territorial that they will make you get up from your seat if you are in the way of their shot. Inconveniently, the door to the men’s bathroom does not lock, and there’s a threatening sign on the door of the women’s room decreeing that any male caught inside will be kicked out. Those who get their thrills from cocaine and hurried public sex will have to go elsewhere to indulge; this is not, after all, The Heights.

Still, 1020 remains, if not the neighborhood’s most popular bar, certainly its most acceptable. A recent graduate and 1020 enthusiast tries to explain why. “The place itself is so human, with its peeling floor and ratty furniture and torn up walls—it just presents this environment that says ‘I’m doing the best I can.’” Indeed, the décor hints at a diversity of memory that has no real unifying theme. Like the human mind, the space is jumbled with fragments of the iconic: a strangely placed disco ball, an old-fashioned barber’s chair, vintage tin signs that encourage abstinence from drink. (“Lips that touch Whiskey,” says the voluptuous young Depression-era vixen, “are lips that will Never touch Mine.”) Yankees pennants hang from the ceiling; Red Sox memorabilia sits behind the bar. On two televisions and a back-wall projection, movies (Back to the Futures I, II, III; Blue Velvet) whose words you know by heart play without sound.

It’s all part of the grand nostalgia that saturates 1020; each bit of memorabilia, down to the bartenders themselves, is evocative, even if you are not sure of what, even if you only know what is being evoked from movies or general American mythology. Perhaps that pervasive nostalgia, more than the cheap beers or the comfortable booths or the sympathetic crowd, is what keeps Columbia coming back. “It’s just far enough away from mainstream,” says the recent graduate, “that anyone who feels a little strange, or uncool, or off in any way can come here to feel at home.”

He looks off for a moment, pensive. “Did I mention they’re playing ‘American Pie’ right now? It’s just another thing.”

Illustrated by Ben Weinryb-Grohsgal
This space is usually home to excerpts culled from documents left on Columbia’s lab computers. But this month, as a special orientation issue treat, we bring you excerpts culled from documents written by Columbia professors, so you know just how good you have to be to teach at this here Ivy League university.

I usually have no idea what I will say before I begin to write.

—Mark Strand, “Poetry in the World”

How do holes come into existence?

There are several different ways of creating a hole—of transforming an object into a holed object, or a holed object into an object with a hole of a different type.

Digging comes to mind first. To make a hole in the ground is typically to dig a hole. You can do that with your bare hands or with the help of some tool or machine: a scoop, a shovel, a spade, a hoe, a dredge, a bulldozer, or what have you. Furrowing is also a form of digging, though this process is typically related to the creation of grooves.

—Achille Varzi, *Holes and Other Superficialities*

If emptiness is the lack of intrinsic reality of substance, it is also the lack of intrinsic reality of non-substance as well. Indeed, in general emptiness is not some thing empty of other things. Emptiness is the ultimate condition of all things, including all non-things or nothings.

—Robert Thurman, “Beyond Buddhism and Christianity”

Housing is an outward expression of the inner human nature; no society can be fully understood apart from the residences of its members. A nineteenth-century melody declares, “There’s no place like home,” and even though she had Emerald City at her feet, Dorothy could think of no place she would rather be than at home in Kansas. Our homes are our havens from the world.

—Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*
Detailed replies elaborated in one generation may inaugurate a period of calm, while resentment of Darwin and the establishment that defends him smolders sullenly.


Welcome to Cackledom!

O you cacklishly contagious Cacklings!

Splattering cachinnations, cackle every which way!

Cease not, O noontide Cacklettes

and Cacklings—cackle away!

—Paul Violi, “In Khlebnikov’s Aviary”

The space of this essay may be distinguished from those more perilous watches as the quicker tempo of the eve and the morning-after of that night, the night of non-knowledge, when a just decision tears time, the time of effect following just cause.7 What the two spaces share is that “the limit of... [the] formalization... [of a problematic is] a sort of intermediary stage.”8

—Gayatri Spivak, “Responsibility”

Hats off, therefore, to the merlins of Hollywood for conjuring up for us whole species of human-devouring insectoids from outer space. Thanks to them, postdomestic movie-goers can have their thrills and eat their tofu, too.

—Richard Bulliet,

“Why Bugs are the Bad Guys”

That it is a Nazi subject that Bellmer is targeting is made particularly explicit in one of the dolls in which the wheel of bent legs rotating around a central ball joint is made to take the configuration of a swastika.

—Rosalind Krauss, Bachelors

When each of Jack and Jill says, “I am tall,” but only Jack is tall, we could explain the truth-value difference by the intensionality of ‘true,’ namely ‘I am tall’ is true, under the description ‘the sentence uttered by Jack,’ but not true under the description ‘the sentence uttered by Jill.’ I doubt we want to adopt this picture.

—Haim Gaifman, “Pointers to Truth”

Morally and emotionally, the philosopher who glories in the idea of the Good or the Beautiful is like a fetishist ogling a shoe or a foot.

—Edward Mendelson, The Things That Matter

Aguablanca. White Water. The gangs multiply and the door is shoved in by the tough guys with their crowbar to steal the TV as well as the sneak- ers off the feet of the sleeping child; the bazuco makes you feel so good, your skin ripples, and you feel like floating while the police who otherwise never show and the local death squads hunt down and kill addicts, tranvestites, and gays—the desechables, or “throwaways”—whose bodies are found twisted front to back as when thrown off the back of pickups in the sugar-cane fields owned by but twenty-two families, fields that roll like the ocean from one side of the valley to the other as the tide sucks you in with authentic Indian flute music and the moonlit howls of coke-smelling dogs welcome you to the Gold Museum of the Banco de la República.

Something like that.

My Cocaine Museum.

A revelación.

—Michael Taussig, My Cocaine Museum

The imperative of brevity has made footnoting impossible.

—Anders Stephanson, Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right
Shakespeare in Line
These violent delights have violent ends. By Anna Phillips

In late June of this year, within several days of each other, The New York Times and The New Yorker both came out with rave reviews of Shakespeare in the Park’s production of Romeo and Juliet. The water! The moonlight! Lauren Ambrose! Critics squealed in delight, and everyone in the city with a literal interpretation of the printed word immediately made plans to attend.

Shakespeare in the Park, as one Times reporter put it, “is one of those grand New York traditions that really works well, that everyone loves, like dog walkers or bagels and schmear.” But it’s a little different in that, unlike paid help or food, it’s free entertainment.

Free being the key word there. The theater festival’s publicists made certain to emphasize that point this summer by splashing the city’s subway walls with hot pink advertisements that read “Free Love.” The slogan appealed to a sense of nostalgia for the 1960s, as Romeo and Juliet’s glorification of young lust over practicality melded nicely with the sexual revolution. But advertising aside, free theater in New York is too rare to give up.

Accordingly, getting tickets to the shows tests the limits of patience and fortitude. There’s an array of ways to go about trying to get in, none of which is remotely quick or easy. Having waited in line for 14 hours and spent an entire day trying to avoid crack addicts and street musicians, allow me to lay out some guidelines to aid others in the process.

Barring a tempest, enter the park at 81st Street and Central Park West, then follow the footpath to the Delacorte. Before you see the theater, you’ll see the line, which will inevitably have formed. While the Public Theater’s website does say that Central Park opens at 6 a.m., it doesn’t tell you that it’s the best time to show up—which, in a way, is good, because a 6 a.m. arrival is still too late. The first wave of people arrives at around 4 a.m., which is technically illegal. You’ll see them asleep in line, enveloped in blankets and absent friends or family, which can only be expected by people who wake that early.

Most people with some experience in the process

These violent delights have violent ends. By Anna Phillips

In late June of this year, within several days of each other, The New York Times and The New Yorker both came out with rave reviews of Shakespeare in the Park’s production of Romeo and Juliet. The water! The moonlight! Lauren Ambrose! Critics squealed in delight, and everyone in the city with a literal interpretation of the printed word immediately made plans to attend.

Shakespeare in the Park, as one Times reporter put it, “is one of those grand New York traditions that really works well, that everyone loves, like dog walkers or bagels and schmear.” But it’s a little different in that, unlike paid help or food, it’s free entertainment.

Free being the key word there. The theater festival’s publicists made certain to emphasize that point this summer by splashing the city’s subway walls with hot pink advertisements that read “Free Love.” The slogan appealed to a sense of nostalgia for the 1960s, as Romeo and Juliet’s glorification of young lust over practicality melded nicely with the sexual revolution. But advertising aside, free theater in New York is too rare to give up.

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Most people with some experience in the process
arrive around 5:30 a.m. These strivers will catch each other’s eyes as they enter the park, recognize a competitor, and suddenly break into a dignity-killing power walk. I went head to head with a group of middle school girls who saw I was small and female and, not realizing I was the Trojan horse of public theater, underestimated my speed.

In order to ensure comfort while you wait, bring several large blankets, as well as a book or an iPod. You should also bring a friend or significant other to fetch coffee and refreshments, since by 10 a.m., the staff of the Public Theater will begin to lay down the law. After 10 a.m., you must commit to the line with all of your being. You cannot leave the line: if you do, you will forfeit your ticket. You cannot leave the park: if you wish to purchase food, you must use a delivery service arranged by the theater. Your friends can visit you in line, but they cannot join you, and they must leave before 12:30 p.m. If you attempt to jump the line, you will be asked to leave. You are allowed to go to the bathroom. You’ve entered a system modeled after the gulag.

At 1 p.m., the Public Theater’s staff—rife with failed actors and soaring egos—will line you up single file and march you toward the theater. Those at the front of the line receive tickets, a few in the middle receive vouchers for tickets, and the rest remain empty-handed. If you have a voucher, you must come back to the theater shortly before the show and check to see if there are people with tickets who have not claimed their seats. If there are, you can get in. People with vouchers almost always get in; rejoice if you are among them.

Following the distribution of tickets, those who received nothing will immediately become frantic. Taking advantage of your confusion, the staff will form you into a “stand-by” line where order is not based on the time of your arrival. Those in the stand-by line must wait until the show begins at 8 p.m.—another seven hours, after you’ve already waited seven already—to see if there are empty seats.

Don’t do it. Instead, leave the park and return around 5 p.m. to join the stand-by line. Because each person in line gets two tickets, many people who never stood in line—those whose friends got tickets for them—simply won’t show up. Even if you join the stand-by line quite late, you’ve got a pretty good chance of getting in.

If you do decide to wait in the stand-by line, however, prepare to find yourself surrounded by the outer boroughs of humanity. When I stood by, the woman in front of me was engaged in an epic cell phone battle with her no-good boyfriend. (In the course of the call, she fittingly compared him to Othello’s Iago.) She pulled me into a seven-hour monologue and, I am sad to say, I learned that things would not work out between them before he did. Although the woman clearly dabbed in crack, she did not seem to have any on her.

Then there was the Mexican family—the father sleeping on the woodchips, the mother adjusting her knee-high leather lace-up boots. Their fully-grown child, drunk from a paper bag, coaxed cell phone lady into harmonizing with him in several painful duets. The stand-by line convinces you that you are not crazy; you are just determined where others are weak. Oh, you are fortune’s fool.

Shakespeare in the Park succeeds not only because it brings the value of Shakespearean theater to the masses, but also because it gives modern theater-goers a real sense of what it was—what it is—to be a groundling. Whether you wait seven or 14 hours, you’ll likely end the day by reaching the conclusion that capitalism rocks, that you’d have preferred to spend $20 for a ticket, and that the imposition of democracy makes man ugly.

But to go, or not to go? There is really no question. A Midsummer Night’s Dream runs until September 8.
Dr. Troels Jorgensen is an aptly named man. Stout and round with a wisp of brown hair on his potato-head, a genuinely jolly grin, and a befuddled Scandanavian accent, Troels would be better garbed in overalls and a pointed cap than the drab attire of a mathematician. Well, most mathematicians. However, this great Dane specializes in hyperbolic geometry—a surprisingly antiquated pursuit that places Troels with the likes of Escher, Lovecraft, and Hegel’s grandson-in-law.

But don’t get your hopes up, because you’re most likely to find Troels teaching you a decidedly un-exotic course in calculus. Or rather, not teaching you calculus, for which he is famous. He likes to skip the parts of the textbook that are unnecessary unless you want to take more math classes. Or his final. But, hey, that’s only at the end of the semester, and you shouldn’t let it take away from the good stuff. To Troels, calculus is like an old friend – he likes to goof around with it, take a few derivates, have a few laughs. Certainly nothing that would require breaking a sweat—or taking a test.

(Bewildered student: “Professor Jorgensen, I didn’t get anything wrong on the midterm, but you took 15 points off.”)

Troels: “Ha! This is the midterm. The midterm. I never look at it again!”

Of course, that means that the final counts for everything—so don’t forget the most important part.

“Can we eat during the final?”

“Erm,” Troels ponders, “no popcorn.”

—Andrew Flynn

Phrased in Achille Varzi’s northern Italian lilt, even his true linguistic love—the language of logic—sounds sweet. Which is high praise considering that, as a language, symbolic logic lacks everything that one would want to listen to: tone, style, personality and, well, humanity.

Take the statement: “Every student who takes symbolic logic finds it to be comically absurd.” Varzi would tell you that what you really mean is something more like: “Every x is such that, if x is a student and x takes Symbolic Logic, then x finds Symbolic Logic to be comically absurd.” See how much more sense things make when you use universal quantifiers and predicate all your variables? No? Perhaps that’s because you are entirely illiterate in logic. That sentence is written: \( \forall x((S(x) \land K(x,j)) \rightarrow L(x,j)). \)

After you learn how to complicate (and illuminate!) things further with world-models and domain-restricting clauses, you may be able to apply your new language to real-life problems. Take the word “homological.” A word is “homological” if it describes itself, like “short,” “bombastic” and “sesquapadalian.” It is “heterological” if it does not. So is “heterological” heterological?

If it is, then it does describe itself and is therefore not heterological. So the word itself is absurd!

A logician like Varzi can use his language to find meaningful and fun answers to such paradoxes. And rumor has it that in the even-more exciting sequel, Modal Logic, he writes symbolic-stanzas of predicate poetry.

—Alexander Statman
CARL HART

Carl Hart begins each class of “Drugs and Behavior” with the sounds of Bob Marley. He has, I assume, the longest dreadlocks of any Columbia professor. And theories abound regarding the remarkable length of his fingernails. He either a) uses them to break up cocaine (“but isn’t that just the pinky?”), b) plays classical guitar (“wouldn’t that be for only one hand?”), or c) does some weird sexual thing (“ouch!”).

The course is heavier on the drugs than the behavior. After a four-week intro to neuroscience and federal drug policy, it’s roughly divided into sections on different psychoactive drugs. Hart seems particularly interested in studying unfamiliar on- and off-label uses for the amphetamine-like drug Modafinil, as well as the (false) hype surrounding the so-called meth crisis in America, which he calls “the media’s drug du jour.” The one fact that gets him truly stirred up, however, is the astronomical sum the government spends every year on its war on the stuff that makes Carman smell funky.

Jokes about Hart wanting to teach “Drugs and Behavior” during the 9:10-10:25 a.m. spot so that students can wake-and-bake are only true for some. His lectures are dense but spotted with some truly hysterical film clips and two or three captivating guests. His tests comprise his favorite asides from class and nitpicky specifics from the textbook he co-authored. Beware (but do not fear) the killah curve.

I should say that Hart opened and closed the class with two versions of the same proviso. To paraphrase: “I’m not trying to make you take drugs or not take drugs.” Grilling Professor Hart about his personal experiences with the substances he discusses, I assume, just isn’t done.

—Jessica Cohen

ADAM CANNON

If you must take computer science, do it in a setting where you can at least focus on the teacher rather than trying to subtly check your email. With Adam Cannon, winner of Ivygate blog’s first annual professorial hotness contest, you may not have much of a choice.

Which isn’t to say the class is easy, or even all that fun. Cannon teaches the introductory comp sci courses, where you learn the difference between a bit and a byte, and what a CPU is. It’s also where you learn that, even though it’s called ‘Introduction to Computers,’ you still have to program, and you still, unbelievably, have to do math—without calculators.

But that’s okay, Cannon’s going to get you through it. “Don’t worry,” he tells you, looking dreamy but a little sad and tired, “You’re going to hate me for a while, but you know what? We’re going to do this together.”

And you do. He talks slowly, and makes sure everyone’s keeping up, and writes the layers of the Internet Protocol three or four times, just to bring the point home.

“You know, when I was your age, we didn’t have the Internet.” He pauses and looks down. “We didn’t have legs either, we had stumps.”

—Brendan Ballou

JANET CONRAD

“Physics for Poets” sounds like a fourth course for second semester seniors, or first-years with prematurely limited ambitions. Or, maybe it’s a comically dated holdover from Columbia’s ’68 tumult, when we were liberated from the oppressive separation of the soft arts and the hard sciences, when we started to
feel the truth of the laws of nature real deep, man. It’s certainly not the sort of course one expects to inspire devotion from the professor consigned to teach it.

That’s not the case with Janet Conrad. “I teach Physics for Poets as a mission,” she declared a few minutes into our conversation. Conrad is a cheery redhead with a Ph.D. in “High Energy Physics” and a love for neutrinos. (See her web page for more information about neutrinos, as well as a variety of snapshots of Conrad posing with reactor paraphernalia). And Conrad is serious – serious enough to trek all the way from her lab in Chicago weekly to teach a course designed for people who may never crack a physics book again.

For Don Hood, understanding science is a lot like reading Hegel. No, science is not obscurantist gibberish, but it does take a lot of introductory reading before you can get to the good stuff. Hood’s an old hand at explaining deep scientific truths to staunch liberal arts majors-to-be, having taught the popular class Physiological Psychology (now known as Mind, Brain, and Behavior) for much of his 39-year Columbia career. Now he has vaulted to the top of the explainer totem pole, exposing himself to the ire of the first-year hordes as he takes a turn at the helm of Frontiers of Science.

Hood possesses less of the mad-scientist mystique than predecessors David Helfand and Darcy Kelley. With his neatly combed hair, tucked-in polo and winning smile, he looks more suited to the golf course than the lab. But don’t let this relative external blandness fool you: Hood is a character in his own right. He is a one-man myth-buster, excited about debunking those popular theories the layman has internalized. Think you use only ten-percent of your brain? Hood is ready to disabuse you of that notion.

He might grade students’ papers to the eighth of a point, but he’s also a great teacher—the winner of the trifecta of Columbia teaching awards—who is fully invested in the future of Frontiers. “Science is constantly changing,” says Hood, and so will the beleaguered freshman survey course. His new vision for the class includes coursework based on actual content, in addition to concepts. “People are busy, they’ve got other demands. We want them to come to the lecture, and if we do, we have to test them.” Well…there goes your easy A.

~Alec Turnbull

~Lucy Tang
Contribute to
THE BLUE AND WHITE

Come to our first meeting!
Monday, September 10
9:30 PM
Basement of St. Paul’s Chapel
(to the right when facing Low Library)
TOLD BETWEEN PUFFS

In which our hero grapples with the Core.

Verily Veritas recently made one of his cautious, infrequent attempts to keep up with the times—he utilized the Inter-Web to check his electronic mail databank. A bevy of messages from The Blue and White deluged him, mostly “overdue this,” “unsubmitted that,” but near the bottom, a message entitled “Class of 2011 Mindset.” It was a list of historical events to which the newest Columbia brood, birthed annis domini 1988 and 1989, had never been party.

The most shocking of all? Les enfants terribles have always known Burma as “Myanmar.” Verily recalled a day when Pakistan and East Pakistan were still parts of the mighty Subcontinent, when Rhodesia was but a twinkle in a diamond tycoon’s eye, and he raised a despairing, whippersnapper-bludgeoning fist towards the heavens. Stringent post-colonialism is decidedly attractive intellectual theory, Verily thought, but no need to be un-Romantic about it.

Another electronic epistle, sent a baker’s fortnight past, captured Verily’s fickle attention:
From: Center for Student Advising
Subject: “Core Requirements—URGENT”

“I’ll be frank, Mr. Veritas. We Ivy League schools care about our four-year graduation rate, and normally if a student is missing a class here or there, sleeps through his swim test, we’ll give him a complimentary 3.2 and send him on his way. But you haven’t fulfilled a single Core Requirement—no Lit Hum, no CC, no Major Cultures—and yet have more than enough credits for majors in both Comparative Literature and Art History, and a concentration in Vorticist Studies. Am I correct in saying you have transferred schools within Columbia twice, and that this will be your fourteenth year enrolled as a student? Please respond ASAP, and we will figure out how to coordinate your academic future.

Best, [Redacted], Class Dean”

The never of that drab, Verily thought, conspiring to throw a spanner in his well-oiled dissipation-and-loafing machine. But the Dean had done her homework. Verily first matriculated to Columbia some time during the Harrision administration, and, not long after, retired to the Continent, where he later attempted to join the Lost Generation (alas, they were nowhere to be found); winter followed upon fall, spring upon winter; when he finally did head New-York-ward, he enrolled in the School of General Studies, a place Verily heard welcomed men much like himself: world-weary flaneur who wander in search of hyperintellectual environs.

What Verily found was a battalion of hommes et femmes des vieillesse, wan, tube-shaped people—miscues oozing out between be-hooded sweat-shirts and ill-fitting denim trousers—holding forth on everything from the Fauvist school to Keynesian economics vis-à-vis their own unfulfilling marital coitus. No, the College had always been Verily’s home, his nostos postponed far too long, and the transfer was successfully placed. But, coitus interruptus! The unbearable weight of volumes of insipid Penguin Classics on his shoulder!

Our hero had suspected said obligations might be impending, thus he implemented his contingency plan—systematically and methodically, for every course in the Core Curriculum, Verily made grandiose Mephistophelian excuses. “Zuerst,” Verily wrote, “let me say that I have indeed fulfilled the freshman composition requirement, in the form of logic & rhetoric, university Writing’s august predecessor. UW is the fetid marsh where the Henry James in all of us goes to die.” Off to a good start, and, as the pages filled with justifications of sophisticated workmanship, Verily’s pen only flowed all the mightier.

And as Verily Veritas described spirited Sanskrit lessons under the banyans of Bangalore (foreign language), the numerous pashas and padishas who dispute his presence during the winter months (Major Cultures), and his enduring flirtation with Nadia Boulanger (Music Humanties), he realized he had made a précis of a most promising memoir. Several months’ work, preferably on a small Greek isle, and several more months’ recuperation, preferably at his favorite Teutonic baths, and he just might have something. And the requirements? Well, what’s the harm in putting them off one more year?

— Verily Veritas
Pi Kappa Alpha

Standard Pick-Up Line: “Here, drink this.”

Stereotype: Scandal-tainted bros who are in all likelihood terrified of women.

Restriction: Pre-gaming harder than you party!!!

Token Good Work: Um, as freshmen, must have attended the Consent is Sexy assembly?

Rush Horror Story: That time they had to pause Wild Things to go to the Consent is Sexy assembly.

Bone to Pick: Closest thing to actual frat at Columbia, hyper-self-conscious about maintaining this image.

Also: You said “Bone.”

Alpha Delta Phi


Stereotype: Co-ed consortium of oversensitive, unsuccessful acoustic guitar players and free-verse poets.

What Their Rivals Say: “WBAR rejects.”

Restriction: A knack for uncensored vacuousness, rhyming.

Random-Ass Fact: On the Road is not a remotely good book.

Token Good Work: Holding meetings infrequently, underground.

Professor Alter Ego: Stefan Pedatella.

Bone to Pick: You wouldn’t understand.

Beta Theta Pi

Standard Pick-Up Line: “We believe in Greek love. Emphasis on Greek. And love. Handjobs.”

Stereotype: Power-hungry, low-ranking student government officials and their acolytes; tortured artists.

What Their Rivals Say: “Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.”

Restriction: Feigned aversion towards idea of joining a fraternity followed by subsequent joining of fraternity.

Token Good Work: Simply being present, natch.

Rush Horror Story: Let’s all watch the Derrida documentary and talk about it. God, I feel like an intellectual. (beat) I also feel like a beer! Hah! Right?!?

Professor Alter Ego: Michael Golston.

Sigma Delta Tau


Stereotype: Long Island-hailing Juicy Couture enthusiasts.

What Their Rivals Say: “One of their official colors is Cafe au Lait.”

Random-Ass Fact: CU SDT website features vaguely incriminating slide show set to inexplicably chosen ballad “You Shook Me All Night Long.”

Token Good Work: Tzedakah.

Rush Horror Story: Group outings to Tasti D-Lite in Lerner.

Bone to Pick: Greek letters look like the word “EAT” on those baby pink sweatshirts, which is ironic, because, you know...
**Alpha Chi Omega**

**Standard Pick-Up Line:** “Where do you see this relationship going?”

**Stereotype:** Less attractive, more tolerable version of SDT.

**What Their Rivals Say:** “AXO are sluts... Or something.”

**Random-Ass Fact:** Average SAT: 1380.

**Token Good Work:** Joining Facebook group “For every 1,000 people that join this group I’ll donate $1 to Darfur.”

**Rush Horror Story:** Tasti run overlapped with that of SDT; low-cal gauntlet was thrown.

**Professor Alter Ego:** Laura Mansone (Barnard Body-Sculpting)

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**Alpha Epsilon Pi**

**Standard Pick-Up Line:** “I have *Starry Night* hanging above my bed. It’s by Van Gogh.”

**Restriction:** Pork.

**Random-Ass Fact:** “Member-at-Large” is an actual position on the executive board.

**Token Good Work:** Socializing with SDT members. Also, calling their mothers.

**Rush Horror Story:** That time they only had enough pot for one night, but it burned for eight.

**Professor Alter Ego:** Samuel Moyn.

**Bone to Pick:** Birthright trip and Spring Break fall on the same week this year.

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**Society of St. Anthony’s**

**Standard Pick-Up Line:** “Your voice is full of money.”

**Stereotype:** Columbia’s *soi-disant* high society.

**What Their Rivals Say:** “Anachronistic.”

**Restriction:** Purchasing and subsequently destroying non-refundable round-trip plane tickets to Asia.

**Random-Ass Fact:** Gideon Yago was a member.

**Token Good Work:** The estate tax.

**Professor Alter Ego:** Harvey Mansfield. (We don’t have Republicans, we’re Columbia.)

**Bone to Pick:** Gideon Yago was a member.

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**The Blue and White**

**Standard Pick-Up Line:** “Did you see my Bwog piece linked on Gawker?”

**Stereotype:** Gossipy, over-committed “intellectuals”; ex-Spec vagabonds.

**Restriction:** Oodles of time to pen self-important “think-pieces” (ergo, a major in English).

**Random-Ass Fact:** Mentions of Harold Bloom were briefly banned in 2005 following usage in three (or four) consecutive issues.

**Professor Alter Ego:** Bruce Robbins.

**Bone to Pick:** “Spec is so incestuous. I would never work there. Unless they offered me a position.”
Capitol Gains
Getting ahead and getting a life as a D.C. summer intern.

By Lydia DePillis

Washington, D.C. runs on young people. Behind the cameras photographing grizzled politicos at press conferences, flocks of twentysomethings carry clip boards, make photocopies, and stuff envelopes. They’re at the end of every phone line, researching every speech, eagerly trading their labor for “experience.”

The D.C. summer is pretty common among the “I want to be a diplomat/politician/CIA agent” set. Most of them will probably end up flacking for the people with real power, or pushing paper at one of the monolithic federal buildings south of the Mall, or selling out and managing a hedge fund. But the summer is full of optimism, idealism, and the sense that even if you’re not doing anything important now, somebody is, and sooner or later you might get their job.

D.C. has a kind of tidal motion to it: button-downed hordes rush in via bus and train in the morning and flush out when the bell rings to release them. However absolute the power they wield over hapless unpaid interns, when the clock strikes five, the professionals leave for their homes in Bethesda.

Then, interns rule.

I worked at Greenwire, a news service in Washington, this summer, and lived with family friends in a cozy, conservative bedroom community. Somewhat removed from the heart of the scene, I was able to observe in a detached manner the culture that arises when thousands of young people interested in public affairs are thrown together for two months, dubiously busy for eight hours a day, and otherwise utterly unsupervised.

HOW IT WORKS

As one of the few perks your tuition yields, Columbia’s tiny Office of Government Affairs hooks up students with internships on the Hill, vetting them through a process that weeds out the weak applicants and helps the strong get placed in congressional offices. While some end up at agencies or non-profits, most spend the summer in the House and Senate office buildings, weaving their way through tennis-shoed tourists and flocks of citizen lobbyists brought in by the busload.

Joining life on the Hill involves a journey to the Congressional ID office, a worn but orderly room on the ground floor of the Cannon House Office Building. During my pilgrimage, I noticed a cheery sign on the counter: “It’s Intern Season!”

As a member of the press, I got a green badge, clearly distinguishable from the red badges of government staffers. On my way out, I was followed by a well-groomed young woman with several slightly younger, equally well-groomed women and men in tow. I was surprised by their formality.

“These are Senator Lott’s interns,” she said, with a light Southern drawl. Oh.

It’s typical, I learned, for each office to reflect the character of the region it represents. This makes sense, considering that legislators hand out internships to residents as a form of constituent service. The office of Congressman Pete Stark, representing the East Bay of San Francisco, feels like a perpetual party. Offices
from rural and southern areas often have a more formal atmosphere. Archconservative Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma asks new interns whether they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

“I can totally point out Republicans,” said one (Democratic) intern. They wear bow ties with popped collars, she observed, “like small Tucker Carlsons.” Numbers also vary by legislator: Senator Patty Murray of Washington has five interns, while Ted Kennedy has 40.

According to rumor, Nancy Pelosi doesn’t allow her legislative staff—many of whom are barely out of college themselves—to fraternize with interns after work. But there’s plenty of time for intern play dates. Interns from far-flung offices will sometimes meet on the National Mall, where some from large offices wait for hours in the burning sun to reserve space for after-work softball games.

“People who are very subdued in the office are beasts,” said one intern. “We played the OMB last week,” she noted, referring to the all-stars in the Office of Management and Budget.

And there are certain commonalities that are uniform from office to office. Congressional interns are always in charge of the phones—they have to master a system called Audix, a giant switchboard that directs incoming calls. The whole town works better as they begin to master the system. And it’s an important system: besides greasing the gears of congressional communication, interns are the first line of defense between legislators and their irate constituents. The phone lines nearly burned up during the immigration debate, when any call could have begun with a string of expletives.

Working in a press shop or for a campaign involves watching TV and screening for any mention of your employer. Some media operations are more intense than others—Senator Chuck Schumer, a notorious spotlight hog, keeps his four interns busy writing press releases for every legislative action he takes—but the worst are the campaigns, since media outlets can’t shut up about them. One poor soul worked the graveyard shift for the McCain campaign (pre-implosion), 11 p.m. to 7 a.m, trolling blogs and TV networks for every allusion to his boss. I’d get instant messages from people narrating car chases on MSNBC in between talk shows, their brains numbed by talking heads.

And everyone, constantly, stresses the importance of “connections.”

“After a while, I became so burnt out, that I’d seriously stand in the corner of ‘networking events’ and just people watch,” one girl who worked at the Justice Department told me. “It was kind of soothing, and entertaining to watch people hover, trying to get a word with the speakers. Meeting other interns after a while became tiring. D.C. is such an awkward town.”

LIFE AFTER HOURS

Summer in D.C. is like the first semester of freshman year all over again. During the first few weeks especially, you’ll wish you had a sandwich board strapped to your chest with your vital stats: where you’re working, where you go to school, where you’re living.

If a red ID is the ticket to professional personhood in Congress, a fake ID is the key to social life. CampusProgress—the student arm of the liberal think tank Center for American Progress (CAP)—is the main facilitator of uncomfortable social events, building the new progressive ascendancy by bribing hungry teenagers with pizza and free drinks. For a typical CampusProgress function early in the summer, I followed a posse to a bar in Foggy Bottom, the intern ghetto that feeds off George Washington University’s summer housing.

The line was heavy with people looking for something to do, especially if that something involved free alcohol. My fake was rejected by the slightly older CAP staffer in charge of refereeing the feeding frenzy. “I’m from Massachusetts,” the babysitter said. “That is not a Massachusetts ID.” (That was the only time my ID
LABOR RELATIONS

was rejected all summer.) By the time I got inside the food was gone, ravaged by the prescient folks who got there on time. Organizers passed stacks of glossy publications through the crowd, which was clean cut and mostly white, fresh from the office in their ties and heels.

Almost all the interns I spoke with reported drinking, to excess, several times a week. Real staffers drink to soften the stress of their day, while journalists drink to schmooze with sources. Interns drink to ease the awkwardness of hanging out with people they barely know.

The party starts early, with happy hours at every bar, every night. Thursdays and Fridays especially, the southeast end of Pennsylvania Avenue is packed with suited revelers, none of whom are over 25, flocking to the $1 beers. The Hawk ‘n Dove—which bills itself as the “archetypal Capitol Hill Bar”—is overrun with college kids hoping to absorb that West Wing cool, their crisp shirts wilting in the humidity. This is often where the staff-intern barrier breaks down, and it’s not uncommon to find attorneys playing flip cup.

Sometimes, if you’re really lucky, you’ll rub shoulders with a boldface name.

“Is that Adam Smith?” asked a hopeful intern at a Washington State Society open bar. We all craned our necks to look at one of Washington’s obscure representatives. It wasn’t him.

“We thought we saw Scott McClellan in a limo once,” the same intern compensated. Welcome to Washington, where celebrity culture revolves around balding old men.

Of course, after-hours activities are limited by the amount of cash on hand. It’s incredibly rare to be paid as an intern; in fact, the privilege to serve costs quite a bit. Aside from the lucky few with school-sponsored internships, most sink thousands into food, alcohol, and housing—an average double at George Washington University costs $1,500 for five weeks.

There are ways to mitigate the pernicious effects of a D.C. summer on one’s wallet. Matt, a chatty, earnest young intern I met, financed work at two congressional offices with data for a manufacturing company and web design. At the end of our conversation he handed me a business card he’d made for himself as founder and president of his small school’s College Democrats chapter. He might just be the guy who ends up on top of the Who’s Who in Washington lists—at least I hope it’s him, not the glad-handing sort who you know is adding you to their mental Rolodex.

USEFUL EMPTY TIME

Most interns leave the District with a new bullet point on their resume, the promise of a good recommendation, and something to say when people ask, “How was your summer?”

“The truth is, Congressional internships are not going to be very substantive,” said a student who spent three summers in Representative Pelosi’s office, working her way up from organizing supply closets as a high schooler to tackling Katrina relief efforts for the Speaker of the House. Doing your time actually does help with landing jobs later—no one ever said Washington was a meritocracy.

Congressional internships attract more hacks than wonks. Not interested in any particular issue, not motivated by any one cause, they drift into their representatives’ offices because it’s one of those boxes you check on your way to getting paid to work in politics. But the status anxiety doesn’t end there. Hill staffers are obsessed with Legistorm, a website that details all of their coworkers’ salaries—public information that can make water cooler conversation even more stilted.

There are other ways to spend a summer in Washington. One girl from a small college in Kentucky interned at an intensive inpatient care program for homeless women with substance-abuse issues. She worked in the arts and crafts room, listening to the women’s stories, getting to know them throughout their treatment. Another worked at the National Institutes of Health, writing papers on malaria infestation in resort areas all over the world. Working for a public defender’s office, or a newspaper, or a nonprofit are all viable options.

But those are things that you could do elsewhere. Washington is for the aimlessly ambitious, for those who feed off competition for its own sake. It’s the perfect transition to a career in government. ♦
Columbia Cottage Industries

Student-run businesses make more money than you do. By KATIE REEDY

You see them everywhere. They’re the kids who bring you snacks, get you drunk, and entertain you. They’re colleague-minions who truck your dirty boxer shorts to New Jersey to make an extra buck. They’re the undergrads who run campus businesses, and they’re way ahead of you in the money game.

A few of these businesses are proudly independent, including Lion Laundry, the Lion (formerly Pirate) Card, and some nascent startups (such as the faltering Campusboxoffice.com). Lion Laundry, incorporated in 2003 by two Pike (PKA) fraternity members who bought a pre-existing company called SUDS, is perhaps Columbia’s best example of unfettered entrepreneurial spirit. The company functions as a transport service: employees are hired to fetch bags from customers’ rooms, send clothes to a laundromat in New Jersey, and then re-deposit them on their doorsteps.

Last year, rather than simply pass it on to friends, Lion Laundry’s founders formally auctioned the business off to two College freshmen, Rome native Carlo Passacantado, CC ’10, and hockey player Otto Magdanze, CC ’10. Although the rumor mill places their purchase price at $40,000, the buyers refused to comment.

“I talked to some of the people who manage our [family’s] money” before making a bid, said Magdanze. The elder Magdanze, who run a glassblowing shop in Martha’s Vineyard, put up a significant portion of the Lion Laundry price. “Mainly, my parents saw that it could be very profitable but that it was more of a learning experience,” said the young entrepreneur. “Ideally, [the investment] would be repaid to them soon.”

Despite the change in ownership, the business is still operated out of Pike. Neither Magdanze nor Passacantado is a Pike brother, but the affiliation of Frat Row and the boardroom is not unusual in the world of campus businesses. Beta boys hawk the Lion/Pirate Card, and the managing director of the guidebook Inside New York (part of the Columbia Student Enterprises; see below), Brett Robbins, CC ’09, found out about the managerial position through one of his AEPi brothers. (Dmitry Shevelenko, CC ’08, was the assistant manager the year before.) It seems that student businesses, like i-banks, have a Greek fetish.

Some outfits, however, have managed to shield themselves from the whims of the free market, coooned in the school’s paternalistic embrace. Four University-sanctioned “student agencies”—CU Bartending, Inside New York, the Columbia University Tutoring and Translating Agency (CUTTA), and CU Snacks—comprise the Columbia Student Enterprises (CSE), a program in the Center for Career Education administered by two full-time University employees. Every year, after a competitive application process, CSE’s directors select one Columbia student to be in charge of each agency. During their tenure, each so-called “Student Manager”, in theory, runs all business operations—including anything to do with hiring and firing.
staff, customer service, and financial solvency. All under CSE’s watchful eye, of course.

This arrangement between the student agencies and CSE is intricate and strange. The closest “real-world” equivalent might be a quasi-governmental agency: each has an independent administrator and caters to the general public, yet at the same time benefits from its official affiliation (think of the more transparent Lion Laundry as a publicly-traded company, accountable to its shareholders).

At Columbia, perks for all student agencies include office space in the Career Center, CSE money for capital, school-managed financial accounts, University staff who deal with credit, legal issues, and invoices, and—in some cases—work-study for employees. In return for these benefits, businesses tithe 45 percent of their profits to the CSE, leaving student managers “eligible for up to 55 percent,” according to Assistant Director of Student Enterprises Rebecca Rodriguez. Funds that flow into the office, she said, are then re-distributed back to businesses, which are “expected to be self-sustaining” at the end of the day. According to Rodriguez, funds are allocated evenly between the four companies, due to the center’s policy “to not use the funds for something that will only benefit one agency.”

Sounds a bit Marxist, but first-time entrepreneurs may need the aid that a little communism provides.

GOT PAID

In the 2006 fiscal year—the final year the business was run by its founders—Lion Laundry brought in $51,000 in net revenue. After costs, the business earned $24,500 in net profit. (Magdanz and Passacantando hope to increase these profits by expanding to service graduate and Barnard students.) So, if Lion Laundry is pulling in fifty grand, how are the school-regulated businesses doing?

CU Bartending, dating back to the 1960s, currently boasts about 200 agency members, said managing director Renee Stroebel, SEAS ’08. Each year the agency accepts about 15 percent of graduates from the agency-run School of Mixology, where classes are taught by “TAs” and veteran instructors who get a cut from each of their pupils’ $180 tuition checks. Once you make it into the agency by proving you can passably titrate ethyl alcohol concoctions, you’re on the list for city and campus gigs that pay $22 per hour for a minimum of four hours, plus tips. (Some say that everyone works “four hours” for each gig, regardless of the clock’s record.) The agency, meanwhile, takes a $30 commission per job, and the year-round staff recently grew to include paid office workers and a team of six managers who handle public relations, website maintenance, “special projects” and more.

The real moneymaker, though, is the Mixology class. You can’t join the agency or sign up for gigs without passing the final exam.

The real moneymaker, though, is the Mixology class itself. The school offers several classes every semester, with between 20 and 70 students enrolled in each, and you can’t join the agency or sign up for gigs without passing the final exam—at least half of which is a subjective review of your personality and sense of humor. Public Relations director Alec Turnbull, CC ’08, (who is also a B&W staffer), noted that, in addition to hundreds of CU students, classes often include Columbia employees and even non-University affiliates who just want to add bartending skills to their resume.

“I’ve always been somewhat of a leader,” said Stroebel, an applied physics major who has been involved with the agency since she was a first-year. With her elusive speaking style and penchant for business jargon, Stroebel is one of the few Columbia undergrads who can make terms like “human capital” sound commonplace—yet she refused to divulge business income figures. “Our budget is very complex,” she explained, due to “different sources of income.”

One assistant manager, who claimed he did not know exact revenue figures, suggested a “back of the envelope” calculation. If the agency arranges an estimated three jobs per day year-round—an average figure that takes into account the slow summer season and increased business around the winter holidays—and earns a $30 commission for each, that’s over $32,000 of annual income from gigs alone. Combined with high revenues from bartending classes, which run year-round and draw hundreds of attendees, he surmised that the annual revenue might approach “the high tens of thousands...maybe more.”

Which means that, theoretically, there should be plenty of money to go around to agency employees.
And some bartenders do say that there’s no better way to make easy money than to take a few gigs. The process of claiming them, however—going into the office to physically sign up for jobs in a binder kept on the manager’s desk—can be a source of annoyance for the many agency employees who are not a part of the managerial structure.

“The people who work in the office get the good jobs,” said one student in the agency, citing gallery openings and downtown loft parties as high-tipping gigs. Managers, she said, are always first in line in a first-come, first-served system. “There’s one [manager] who comes in every morning in the summer and takes all the jobs.”

Of course, these are irritations you experience if you even make the cut. Some will just never get that valuable seal of approval, no matter how well they know their apple martinis.

“They stress that you have to be hot,” the student said. “I’m a terrible bartender. I mean, it helped me that I’m not ugly.”

A HIERARCHY OF VALUE

Rodriguez refused to answer questions about exact financial figures having to do with the Student Enterprises. (The last publicly available numbers come from 1998, when there were at least 12 student agencies. In that year, a Columbia University Record article pegged CSE gross revenues at “between $800-900,000 per year.”) While Rodriguez insisted that all agencies receive a slice of the funds that make up the CSE pie, she admitted that some businesses are more profitable than others. “Obviously something like bartending is going to make more money than... snacks,” she commented reluctantly.

Compared to the 200 members of CU Bartending, the fat masthead of Inside New York, and the hundreds of translators and tutors who work for CUTTA, CU Snacks does seem somewhat anemic. The current head manager, Eugene Kogan, SEAS ’08, said the company hires about 20 employees and a board of three managers, including himself. Rumors have circulated about the solvency of the business, which was founded in 2004 with a grant from the Committee on Columbia Organization of Rising Entrepreneurs (CORE), but Kogan downplayed the possibility of CU Snacks’ financial troubles.

Kogan does admit that he faces the challenges of both carving a niche for the relatively new business and cultivating customer loyalty. He noted that expensive treats like milkshakes keep customers interested, but actually lose money for the company. CSE, he said, functions as the safety net he would lack if he ran his business independently. Contrary to comments about self-sustainability from Rodriguez and managers of other businesses, Kogan noted that his company is very much dependent on CSE, and seems grateful for the added security. “Columbia finances our operations. Essentially they own the business and provide us with the opportunity to manage it,” he said.

Bartending special projects manager Andrew Ness, CC’08, said that his company has pushed to keep CU Snacks afloat. “I know Renee [Stroebel] has lobbied on their behalf to the greatest extent possible,” he said. “She helps them,” he said, primarily because of the developing friendships between the managers.

“CCE gives you three years,” says Ness. “If you’re not on your feet after that, then they cut you.” Indeed, the current crop of student agencies is dramatically pared down from the CSE of yore—dozens of other agencies have become obsolete or gone bankrupt. The rise of the Internet, for instance, put the kibosh on a short-lived New York Times delivery service, and others, such as a stationary supplier, have simply faded away due to the campus’ tempestuous market forces.
Despite profit differentials, Kogan says that each of the business managers gets an $8,000 baseline salary from CSE—which can be supplemented by their 55 percent cut of agency profits.

STOP THE PRESSES

“I don’t,” said Brett Robbins, CC ’09, publisher and manager of this year’s edition of Inside New York, when asked if he was getting an $8,000 check for his labors. His explanation of the payment structures was less than revelatory. “This year,” he said, “the Center determined how much money would be allocated from the operating expenses of the business, but it did not pay the manager. The business paid the manager.”

Inside New York, founded in 1978, is uniquely seasonal. While the bartending agency and Lion Laundry supply students throughout the year, the guidebook is reborn each summer, produced by a completely new staff. Every June and July, about 40 writers, editors, designers, and advertising salespeople put together the Time Out-style guide; in August, each incoming Columbia freshman receives a copy as part of the orientation package. [Full disclosure: James Williams, CC ’08, this year’s Inside New York Editor-in-Chief, is also a B&W editor. He was not interviewed for this article.] The guide, which is also sold to other area schools and businesses that distribute it to their own students and employees, will top 375 pages this year. Robbins said he “oversaw all operations of the business from hiring to firing to marketing and sales.”

In financial terms, the guidebook operates like most commercial publications: business staff members are paid handsomely, while writers and editors makes considerably less, or in some cases, nothing at all. According to the application package distributed to potential staff members earlier this year, which laid out the positions the agency sought to fill and their associated salaries, advertising sales directors are promised a base summer salary of $500, in addition to sales commission ranging from $300 to $1,500 per ad. The dining and nightlife editors, on the other hand, can expect to receive only the base salary of $500. Features writers and arts reviewers were offered $20 and $5 per article, respectively, while restaurant and bar reviewers get nothing beyond complimentary meals and drink tickets. The package also calls for “interns”—presumably, students more or less the same age as the managers—who are completely unpaid. But, the application promises, “All in all, interns gain transferable, marketable experience in all aspects of producing a world-class travel guide...and have a pretty good time too.”

Joanna Bernstein, CC ’09, who worked as neighborhoods editor—her job included finding and reviewing interesting New York landmarks and sights for the guidebook—said she hasn’t been paid for her work, though she’s been told she’ll see a check once school starts.

“I worked really hard for eight weeks,” she said. “I didn’t even have time to read a book or a newspaper.” She added that she watched her business staff co-workers earn regular money throughout the production process, even when they joined up mid-way through the summer.

In retrospect, she said, she wishes she’d insisted more strongly on a “minimum amount.” While she took her job seriously, other staffers “didn’t do anything because they knew they weren’t getting paid.” But, she ruefully acknowledges, there’s nothing she can do about it now.

IT’S WHAT I WANT

The bee-like managers of Columbia Student Enterprises and independent campus companies share a common characteristic beyond burgeoning business savvy: they all view their money-making exercises as fundamentally educational. In addition, almost all of them want to someday go into business on their own. For now, though, they’re lords of petty fiefdoms. Perhaps the heavily regulated environment even makes these mini-Buffetts stronger, honing their ability to work the bureaucracy, peddle their wares, keep mum about their finances, and deflect criticism.

If Columbia’s anything like the real world, they’ll do just fine.
Don’t Call Us, We'll Call You

Morningside’s snobbiest businesses offer service with a scowl.

By Lucy Tang

At American Apparel, Labyrinth and Kim’s Mediapolis, the customer is always wrong. The salespeople at these oft-extolled, oft-maligned Morningside haunts are never perky, and will not pander to your needs. They don’t need your flattery: they’re indie. This summer, hoping to better understand those who have never made an effort to understand me, I decided to join their disaffected ranks and applied for jobs at all three stores.

American Apparel is the manufacturer par excellence of the hipster uniform, outfitter of Parliament-smoking boys and Cory Kennedy acolytes. The employees, as in-house style guides of the I’m-with-the-band aesthetic, are aloof and seem a bit strung out.

I’d heard various anecdotes about applying for retail associate positions at American Apparel. One friend told me that her “interview” was tantamount to a casting call, complete with headshots and measurements. Another was hired after submitting her Missshapes party photos with her online application. Most retail stores ask, “Do you have experience?” American Apparel wants to know, “Will you actually wear a whimsical eighties sweatband to work?”

Now, I’m no Edie Sedgwick, but I drink the occasional St. Ides. More importantly, I’ve worn those ridiculous gold metallic leggings in public. That alone should qualify me for immediate employment.

There tend to be more employees than customers in the American Apparel at 110th and Broadway. On the morning I went to inquire about applying, a lone girl in leggings sauntered around the store, haphazardly pretending to organize racks of clothing. Two other heroin-chic staffers stood behind the counter, flipping through US Weekly.

Then there was me. I shuffled up to the counter awkwardly.

“Um, excuse me?”

“Yes?” The pants-less girl looked up from her magazine, annoyed by the distraction.

“I saw you guys were hiring.”

The boy in short-shorts and a skimpy tank hands me a business card. “Yeah, call this number.” He began to twirl his necklace. “We don’t handle paper applications.”

The company’s website was slightly less contentious. The form looked fairly standard—contact info, resume—except for the request for a “letter of interest.” Though I doubted the powers that be at AmAp really cared about my literacy, I feigned enthusiasm: “American Apparel is more than retail—it’s selling an image, a vision for the future.”

Despite my best bullshitting efforts, that vision apparently did not include me. A month later, I still haven’t mugged for an ironic Polaroid, and must continue to pay full price for my cotton basics.

The logo-wear at Labyrinth Books makes an even stronger statement than American Apparel’s rainbow of solid colors. The ubiquitous tote bag and t-shirt scream, “I support independent booksellers!”—a flashier alternative to lugging around a dog-eared edition of Ulysses.

I had hoped for better luck at Labyrinth. I’d never heard any horror stories about the application process and the employees seemed at least to have the knowledge to back up their elitism. Being one of those irritating people who actually read all the Lit Hum books, I assumed that my dedication to literature would be enough.

The girl at the register quickly shattered my illusion. “You don’t have to know anything about books, just how to work the register.” That statement suggests populism, but the store lacks the egalitarian ambience of Barnes & Noble. Instead of chick-lit favorites like Prep near the checkout line, Labyrinth features page-turners like The Derrida Reader.

Later that afternoon, I went back to meet the man-
Two thirty-something men were sitting behind the counter on the second floor, the very image of academia in rumpled button-downs and khakis.

My conversation with the manager wasn’t the intellectual discourse I’d imagined—it was more like trying to convince a bouncer I was 21.

“So are you a student?”
“Yeah, at Columbia.”
“Grad or undergrad?”
“Undergrad.”
His brow furrowed. “What year are you?”
“2010.”
“So that makes you a … freshman?”
“Err, a sophomore.”

From behind the counter came either a quiet chortle or a chair squeak. Maybe I’m paranoid, but it seemed that work at Labyrinth was not for those lacking an advanced degree. The manager remained courteous. “Well, we are looking for people during the fall rush. E-mail me your resume, and if you’re a good fit, we’ll set up an interview.” Handing me his e-mail address on a slip of paper, he disappeared into the back before I had a chance to respond, too shy to look me in the eye. Maybe it had been a while since a girl had talked to him.

Three weeks later, I had received no e-mail, call back, or response of any kind. Perhaps Labyrinth is a world best seen through thick-rimmed glasses—I will acquire once my eyes degenerate with age. For now, I’m switching my loyalties to the Strand.

Brushed off by two of my three targets, I feared another indirect rejection at Kim’s, the book/music/video store notorious for cinephilic clerks who barely deign to take money from those who rent Wedding Crashers instead of Matthew Barney’s The Order. “You don’t want that, that sucks,” one clerk infamously tells customers. If it isn’t Criterion Collection, don’t bother; if it’s in English, there’s a Blockbuster in Harlem.

Like Labyrinth, Kim’s telegraphs its taste ad infinitum. Imagine the record store in High Fidelity, only with less vinyl, and camaraderie. Plastered on the front counter are various Kim’s employees’ “Top 10 Dreamboats” lists, on which mainstream hotties like Jessica Alba and Jake Gyllenhaal are overlooked in favor of cult favorites like Isabelle Huppert and Guy Picciotto.

As a smaller uptown branch of the Kim’s flagship on St. Mark’s Place, the Morningside store lacks cool factor in terms of location, but makes up for it in obscure DVDs—ignoring the fact that, in this part of town, customers are more likely to rent Mean Girls for use as background noise at a keg party.

To my mild surprise, Kim’s gave me a warm reception; one of my good friends is a Kim’s employee, and she stuffed me with a cupcake the minute I walked in. High on sugar, I was imbued with a newfound sense of courage. Presenting the clerk with my resume was as easy as it sounds. Then I made the mistake of trying to shake his hand. A few seconds with my hand left dangling in mid-air were enough to bring me back to reality.

Hoping to introduce myself to the manager, I asked my friend to point her out. I saw an unfriendly woman shooting me suspicious looks and decided to refrain from approaching. It was probably for the best: I don’t know if I can answer to someone wearing a Suicide Girls shirt.

Despite my bevy of “connections” at Kim’s, I have yet to hear back. Apparently, our mutual choice of Justin Theroux for our top ten dreamboat lists wasn’t enough to land me a job.

Although a trio of implicit rebuffs from the triumvirate of Morningside’s retail elite was a blow to my self-esteem (perhaps I already had a vague sense that I was not the frostiest PBR in the mini-fridge, but the hard evidence still stings), the experience was not a total waste. Turns out that a Columbia degree may be a good thing to fall back on. Lesson learned: I’m not too cool for school. ♦
The Tutor Diaries

By Sara Vogel

More lucrative than psych studies, more intellectually stimulating than babysitting, and less borderline deceptive than standing on street corners begging pedestrians to save the environment; tutoring middle and high schoolers trumps all other casual jobs. If you pay attention to the right listings, you’ll soon realize that students and their frustrated parents are desperate to pay you around $40 an hour (professionals charge up to $100) to illuminate the mysteries of science, math, or foreign language. Here’s what you can expect as you attempt to establish yourself in Manhattan’s neurotic teenager circuit.

**The Spanish Prisoner.** I inherited Noreen* from a friend who was leaving to study in Spain for a semester. I was forewarned: the petulant eleventh grader refused to learn Spanish, and her parents had somehow managed to strike a deal with the teacher in which Noreen would receive an automatic B+ simply for completing all of her assigned homework, no matter the quality. (The parents’ end of the deal was unfortunately not divulged.) The $40 hourly rate is hard to turn down, so once a week I shuttled down to her apartment on 73rd and Riverside.

“Is viajar a regular verb?” I would ask patiently.

“I don’t know.”

“Well, it is. I know you know how to conjugate regular verbs in the present. I’ve seen you do it before. So tell me how you’d conjugate this one in the first person.”

“Viajaro?”

“…Try again.”

I learned to resist the urge to seize and destroy her messy loose-leaf, becoming more and more committed to the Socratic method with each of her bratty pouts— even when she tested my patience with pressing questions like “Why do I have to do this? Everyone at my hotel will speak English to me anyway!”

It was the only time I’ve ever felt like hired help while tutoring.

**Brain Food.** Eighth-grader Lauren was a bright student who just needed some positive reinforcement and a buddy to coach her through algebra of the y=mx+b variety. When she struggled, I’d urge her to “talk it out” because you know you’ve learned something when you can explain it—and her mom’s cooking kept my own mouth busy. It started slowly, with a glass of water, carrot sticks, and crackers. I soon graduated to tea, cheese cubes and fresh-baked cookies. At some point I stopped eating dinner before our sessions, as grape leaves, stuffed pasta shells and sesame chicken materialized on my placemat. When Lauren got into her specialized high school of choice, I was thrilled, and helped myself to seconds.

**Back to Basics.** I met Alissa at her large apartment in TriBeCa to prepare for her Regents exam in chemistry. With a week to go before the exam, I expected to walk her through the best “test-taking tips” I’d picked up from thumbing through review books at Barnes & Noble. I soon learned, however, that Alissa attended one of those “alternative” schools, and it became clear that my tutee needed more than sure-fire strategies.

“There are some atoms on the periodic table of elements that lose electrons more than others… did you learn why?”

“No,” she said, close to tears, poring over her reference table.

Where could I start but the beginning? *\

*All tutees’ names have been changed.*
The Blue and White: First of all, how do you pronounce your name?

Gerald Navratil: NAV-ruht-tel. It’s a Czech name. My father’s parents emigrated around the turn of the century.

B&W: And you came to Columbia in 1977?

GN: That’s right. I was an undergraduate in physics and engineering at Caltech, finished my doctoral work pretty fast—less than three years—and showed up here as a 25-year-old assistant professor. An academic baby, so to speak.

B&W: You helped start the Department of Applied Physics and Applied Math the year you arrived at Columbia. Was change in the air at the SEAS of the mid-70s?

GN: It was a very exciting time—within the first year of my arrival we created the department of Applied Physics, the department of Computer Science was created, and Industrial Engineering and Operations Research were merged into a single department, which still exists today. The modern departmental structure was all established in that academic year of 77-78. My mentor was Bob Gross, who later became Dean of SEAS, and he certainly had a tremendous influence on me, in forming my views on what was important in education, and in forging my lifelong loyalty to Columbia.

B&W: What views on education, exactly?

GN: When I came here in the 70s, the engineering school was still transitioning into a modern research university, where there is an emphasis on cutting-edge graduate research that you use to strengthen your undergraduate program. The two go hand in hand. Bob Gross saw, as our competitors I think saw even earlier, that it was necessary to change the way we did business, and that’s what we really did in the 80s and 90s.

And I think that because of our proximity to the financial industry, we’re gradually broadening our mission. We are no longer a classic technical research university. Many of our undergraduates are interested in fields related to finance, and we’re starting to promote resources at the graduate level in financial engineering and financial mathematics.

B&W: It’s interesting that you describe Columbia’s connection with the financial world as one of its assets. I recently heard a computer science PhD student
lamenting the lack of SEAS undergrads who go on to engineering graduate programs and the large number who become investment bankers.

GN: That’s making the case a little too strongly. The largest undergraduate major at this point is Industrial Engineering and Operations Research, and it’s not a majority, but there’s a significant minority of students that come in and are definitely interested in things related to finance. I might also point out that the most popular minor we offer is Economics, so the students are letting us know that even if they’re an applied physics student or a chemical engineering student, they’re minoring in economics because they might want to get involved in the business end of technical management, and there’s a real need for that in the country and in the world. These students may be trained in an engineering discipline, but that discipline is extremely fungible.

B&W: But it does beg the question that if one wants to focus on pure research—

GN: We still have students who want to follow the traditional academic research track, and they can work with some of the best people in the world here. That’s something that we still do quite a bit of, and it’s very important to us. We have not diminished the quality of our graduate research by any means—we’ve only broadened to include things that are outside traditional doctoral research. And we have graduates being trained and taking positions in finance. It’s not just the undergraduates.

If you think about what we do, and the people we train, we want them to go out and affect the world. That’s how you measure that you are doing your job: that you are giving students not just the tools, but also the perspective and the motivation to affect the world, hopefully for good.

B&W: How exactly is SEAS doing its job of preparing students to affect the world for good?

GN: Well, now you see a lot of student interest in things like sustainability, climate change, interest across a wide range of issues that directly affect people’s lives. It’s as close as the neighborhood. We have a lot of students who work through the Gateway lab doing projects for the community, so we have a direct impact with people right here in Morningside Heights. And then it’s as far away as participating in Engineers Without Borders, where students go halfway around the world to work on drainage systems to try and improve the lives of people in a developing country.

B&W: I want to ask you about the Gateway Lab. It seems sort of the equivalent of Frontiers of Science in the College, not in terms of content, but in that they are both ambitious first-year classes that get mixed, and often hostile, reviews from students. Why do you support Gateway?

GN: Gateway serves a number of purposes. The students do projects that expose them to the different engineering departments, and they get some common experience with the tools of modern design and computation. We try to put really good equipment in there—we just renovated the whole lab, a whole set of new high-end Mac processors, nice screens like this [points to his exorbitantly large Apple display]. Gateway does far more than that, though. Students get involved with the neighborhood. [SEAS Associate Dean and Gateway’s lead instructor] Jack McGourty has set up a program where we use the Gateway facility as a tool to help undergraduate students work with community groups to actually do design projects, basically pro bono work by the University that helps local community groups and businesses with the design of stores or helps them work out an energy plan. The students can do something immediately practical, something that someone in the community needs.

B&W: If I’ve heard one complaint about Gateway, it’s that the students do work on these building projects, but that the projects never get used in that practical, real-life way you’re talking about. Is there an example of a successful, practical project that comes to mind?

GN: I believe the answer to that is yes, that students do work on projects that motivate the neighborhood
groups, and at least some of these projects have actually been used, and it’s greatly appreciated. Does that mean every project does that? Obviously not. Considering we have 320 students in Gateway every year, the number that actually get to the level of helping the community groups directly might be more in the 10s and 20s.

[Navratil referred B&W to Associate SEAS Dean Jack McGourty for examples, and while he did not send specific locations before the magazine went to print, he did assure us that many such projects do exist.]

B&W: Do you see yourself handing your Interim Deanship over to someone else at the end of the year?

GN: Well, I made no secret of it, I told [President Bollinger] that I would only consider the job if I was considered a serious candidate for the permanent position. Since I don’t want the school to just spend a year coasting, I’m going to act in every way as if I were staying on the job.

B&W: You know Zvi Galil will be a hard act to follow— the man had life-sized cardboard cutouts of him all over campus. As the Dean for this year, and possibly many more, have you tried to develop a personal style?

GN: I don’t know about the cardboard cutouts—it even took Zvi a few years before he reached the cutout stage—but my style is a little different. I won’t promise to be sending out e-mail jokes every week. It’s always intimidating to follow a larger-than-life figure, and after twelve years here Zvi had reached a near-iconic status, but I didn’t want to let that concern about trying to follow such an extremely popular well-known dean deter me from trying to make a contribution. Zvi has sent me some advice by e-mail.

B&W: What has he told you? What are some Zvi tidbits?

GN: “Keep it short.” People don’t have time to read long messages.

B&W: Tell me about nuclear fusion.

GN: It started back in my undergraduate days. Junior year you had to write a term paper, and I stumbled on an article that reported the very first creation of fusion neutrons in the laboratory using high-powered lasers. A laser at the time was actually a relatively new invention. Writing the term paper convinced me that fusion was a neat thing to study, and I stuck with it, and that’s how I ended up here.

B&W: And you are the resident fusion guru?

GN: I don’t know if I’d go that far. I have a number of very good colleagues, but yes, fusion is my life. And I’m one of the senior people in fusion here at Columbia now, and I represent the work to lots of national committees, and I’ve served on the Department of Energy advisory board on fusion. But of course it’s not just myself.

B&W: What is the state of fusion right now? Even in the last year, people have become exponentially more interested in the state of the environment, looking for alternative sources of energy.

GN: Yes, and fusion is a non-carbon based energy. Its fuel source is deuterium and water, and so the fuel is available everywhere. It is a very high technology energy field because the equipment you need to produce fusion is not easy.

Right now, the world (countries representing over half the world’s population) has pooled its resources and, in France, it’s building the first sustained fusion power producer, called ITER, the International Thermonuclear Engineering Reactor.

The construction is going to begin around the first of next year, and it’ll take eight years to build. It should pave the way for future commercial activity.

B&W: What are some of the obstacles to fusion power plants becoming a reality?

GN: The biggest obstacle is that it requires high temperatures, a temperature beyond anything that could be contained by matter—everything would
vaporize—so most of the work has gone into producing insulating magnetic fields that surround the fusion plasma [often referred to as the fourth state of matter: heat a solid and it melts, heat a liquid and it becomes a gas, and heat a gas up enough and it becomes a plasma]. The insulation and the stability of those magnetic fields is really what’s occupied by fusion researchers. In fact, my colleagues and I just received an award from the American Physical Society for exactly that.

B&W: In fifty years, do you think fusion plants will dot the landscape?

GN: Yes, I do. It’s not the answer, but it’s part of the answer.

B&W: So what about the risk of a Spider-Man 2 Doctor Octopus sort of incident, where a mad scientist creates an out-of-control mini-Sun?

GN: I’ve seen that movie, and even though Doc Ock does actually work with feedback control of instabilities—I must admit, I was a little surprised to see that in there—the movie doesn’t have all its science right. There’s not enough energy content in plasma for it to run away in that sense. There is a lot of energy stored in the magnetic fields, and what we worry far more about is if the fusion process is quenched, and we rapidly lose the energy in the magnetic fields, the experiment could suffer severe structural damage.

B&W: Well, I think that about wraps things up. Now, as you know, the incoming class of 2011 will not have known Zvi Galil. Do you have an anecdote about him or a joke of his you’d like to share with the newcomers?

GN: How many Columbia College students does it take to change a light bulb?

B&W: I don’t know, how many?

GN: Only one, and this satisfies his or her CC Science Requirement.

—Paul Barndt
I’m thinking in terms of what’s been washed
and what hasn’t yet
what still has the dirt of before left on it

at the holy lake, they put a red spot on my forehead
it filled my pores with the smell of burning

[the places your hand touched me, your
finger oil still in the fibers of my shirts, how I had

I washed the paint off as soon as I could

hesitated to take that first shower]

once I’ve done all the laundry
I find something in the back of my drawer
the smell still clinging to it

and I’m trying not to
I’m trying not to
I’m trying not to remember anything

— Alexandra Polsky
Qu’est ce que c’est RoboCop?

The French Evolution: Race, Politics, and the 2005 Riots, works by Alexis Peskine
Museum of Contemporary African Diasporic Arts
James E. Davis 80 Arts Building, 80 Hanson Place, Brooklyn

Take the downtown 2/3 to Atlantic Avenue

When I arrived at MoCADA, the Bastille Day party was going strong, complete with free crêpes in the museum’s backyard. The patriotic holiday was an occasion to celebrate not just independence, but MoCADA’s current exhibit, “The French Evolution,” a decidedly un-nationalistic exploration of modern-day race relations in France.

Founded in 1999, the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporic Arts currently occupies the ground floor of the James E. Davis Arts Building, a gallery just down the block from the sprawling Pacific-Atlantic Ave. subway stop in which the Brooklyn Academy of Music allots space to cutting-edge artists and organizations (the “Bang on a Can” collective operates from the seventh floor).

One such artist, Alexis Peskine, the creator of “French Evolution” could be the poster boy for MoCADA’s mission— he has French, Russian Jewish, and Afro-Brazilian heritage. He splits his time between Paris (his childhood home), Salvador, Brazil (where his mother’s family lives), Washington, D.C., and New York.

Peskine, whose soft, thoughtful voice has traces of France and Brooklyn, is at least 6’4”, and built like a linebacker; he first came to the U.S. for high school basketball camp, and went on to play football at Howard University. When I met him, he was wearing jeans and a yellow Astro Boy t-shirt.

The focal point of his exhibition is the 2005 French riots, eruptions of civil unrest that occurred predominantly in Paris’ banlieues, suburbs where large numbers of Arabs and Africans have immigrated in recent years. Despite the intricacies of the situation, Peskine is an able, versatile guide in examining the conflict.

“The French Evolution” fills three rooms; the first contains political cartoons depicting popular icons. In one several-feet-high painting, RoboCop, holding a baguette, looms over a background of hundreds of French national identification cards, which all citizens are required to carry. On occasion, French policemen ask people to produce these cards—more frequently in certain neighborhoods than in others. Peskine explained that the baguette symbolized the attempt to “beat the Frenchness” into people from other cultures. “I thought about putting a beret on [RoboCop], but that may have been a little too much,” he told me.

Peskine himself was once roughed up by the cops. He shrugs off the experience as something relatively commonplace, but it clearly impacted his art. One piece in another room of the exhibit shows a silhouetted black male pressed up against a wall and showcases one of Peskine’s signature techniques. First, he uses “rasterization”—the process of turning an image into a series of pixels or dots. Then, with that photograph as a guide, Peskine creates a pointillist image with hundreds of nails in place of the dots. Each nail must be filed down by hand, and the result is both digital and immanently tactile.

The second room contains a mix of the sociopolitical—one wall is covered with dozens of copies of a racist food advertisement—and the personal—Peskine’s own elementary school class photo transferred to a duochrome conceptual grid. The black paint and white canvas of the piece, titled “Qui?,” allows the races and genders of the students to become ambiguous.

Peskine makes no bones about his politics. One painting, “Tintin and Your Kids,” looks like it could be a panel out of Belgian artist Hergé’s popular comic, except Tintin is wearing a bomber jacket with a swastika armband, and a heap of tires in the background is emblazoned with a Congolese flag. A table near the entrance displays five bars of soap, each with a different racial slur in the shape of the Irish Spring logo.

His work has plenty to teach an American audience, but his ultimate goal is to see the exhibit “The French Evolution” to France. “If you are not white, if you are a minority in France,” he said, “…There is a victimization mindset. You are not supposed to complain. I hope people can see this, and I hope it excites them.”

—Paul Barndt
Thinking of switching to a Mac? Have questions about connecting to CU resources? Need help in setting up your new Mac?

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Edward Chaffetz CC’09
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Mike Gerson SEAS’09
Bug me: m.gerson@mac.com

Tony Hall SEAS’09
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In late March of last year, the senior class received the following email from Student Affairs:

“Due to the volume of emails and phone calls from disappointed parents whose children did not sit for a Senior Portrait, there will be ONE LAST MAKE-UP DAY. If you do not take a portrait you will not appear in the Columbian 2007 yearbook. All students should be sure to have their hair and nails neatly groomed. Flyaway hair, unmanageable ends and wisps cannot be retouched. It is suggested that men shave just before their sitting as Carl Wolf Studio cannot remove a five o’clock shadow.”

Over the summer, the phalanxes of Korean bible-thumpers that perpetually canvas campus were replaced—temporarily, we hope—by a traveling circuit of Southern Baptists. Reportedly, this group migrates from campus to college campus, engaging all whom they meet in dialogue about Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A B&W staffer found herself a participant in the following dialogue:

Christian: “On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your desire to know God?”

Heathen: “Zero.”

Christian: “Oh...well, zero isn’t on the scale.”

Heathen: “Let’s go with one then.”


MAGAZINES ARE FOR DOUCHEBAGS

Overheard, Condé Nast cafeteria:

“Jet lag is for poor people.”

YOUR FEDERAL TAX DOLLARS AT WORK

A friend of a B&W staffer recently shared stories of her work-study job in the office of a low-level Barnard administrator. Among other duties, the student was instructed to weed through emails that the administrator received in response to her profile on J-Date, sort the eligible suitors from the not-so, and forward the cute ones on to her boss.
Last semester’s Lit Hum cheating scandal (in which one particular section leader showed her students the final exam ahead of time, resulting in its widespread dispersal among first-years) did not, as many had expected, result in the firing of the embattled faculty member responsible for the leak. Instead, Wen Jin, an assistant professor in the department of English and Comparative Literature, is back at Columbia this fall with a vengeance—according to the directory of classes, her section of Asian American Literature and Culture has “28 students as of 12:48 AM Saturday, August 25, 2007.”

Overheard on SSOL:

Slacker 1: “Why’d you register for her section?”

Slacker 2: “You know. Easy A.”

PETITION WARFARE

While President Bollinger was making bold statements against academic boycotts overseas, a minor scandal was brewing on our side of the pond over Barnard assistant anthropology professor Nadia Abu El-Haj’s 2001 book, *Facts on the Ground*, which disputed Israel’s historical claims to its territory. The online “Deny Nadia Abu El-Haj Tenure” petition quickly garnered 1,715 signatures—Steins and Bergs predominated—while the “Grant Nadia Abu El-Haj Tenure” petition—including many more Ahmads and Habibs—lagged behind at 1,088.

One day last year, esteemed economics professor, Earth Institute demigod, and Angelina Jolie BFF Jeffrey Sachs entered Lerner and received the red-light treatment when he tried to swipe his card. Miffed that he lacked swipe access, he approached the desk attendant and said, “Hi, I’m here for a meeting.” The attendant barked, “Name, please?” Sachs responded: “Jeffrey Sachs.”

FIRST-YEARS SAY THE DARNEST THINGS

Pre-frosh #1: “Could you live in a coed double?”

Pre-frosh #2: “No way. What if you and your roommate started hooking up?”

Pre-frosh #1 (nodding): “Shortest walk of shame ever.”

Pre-frosh #2: “More like roll of shame.”

Guy: “So, do you…”

Girl: “…think the Columbia Bookstore will be selling Harry Potter books?”

Guy (staring in disbelief): “Uh, yeah.”

Girl (shocked): “Wow, that was weird.”

Guy (after a moment of silence): “So…do you?”

Girl #1 (excitedly): “…and I was just walking and the sun was shining and my parents weren’t there. And it just kind of hit me, like, this is it! I’m here!”

Girl #2 (frowning): “But…you were downtown.”

Girl #1: “No, I mean, like, I’m here in college.”

Guy: “Okay, do you want Chinese or Japanese?”

Girl: “I don’t really care.”

Guy: “Let me put it another way, do you want Ollie’s or sushi?”

Girl: “Um. Let’s just get sushi.”

Days on Campus Host: “So, do you guys smoke weed?”

(Prefrosh look at each other nervously.) “You will.”

(Pause)

Prefrosh: “Do you smoke, Kenny?”

Host: “No. I have a collapsed lung.”

Free food... it’s everywhere!