MEALAC DISORIENTED
Edward Said and the CIA
Battle for the Soul of a Department
By Katie Reedy

THE WRITER OF WORDS
A Conversation with Poet Mark Strand
By Hannah Goldfield

also: Jeffrey Hunter Northrop II is a Campus Character
THE BLUE AND WHITE

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Typographical Note
The text of The Blue and White is set in Bodoni Seventy Two ITC, which was based on original designs by Giambattista Bodoni of Parma (active 1765-1813). The display faces are Weiss and Cantoria.

WWW.theblueandwhite.org  COVER: “Phrenology of the MEALAC Mind” by Maxine Keyes
In the *Ladies’ Almanack* (1928), a guide to all things celestial and seasonal, March is a time of great surprises. According to Djuna Barnes’ fantastical account, a flock of angels descended from the sky and let loose an egg that fell to the Earth and split. The modern woman (if you take my meaning), was newly hatched and without trepidation, left her shell, exclaiming “Pardon me, I must be going!” And so it became fashionable to enter the world in March. The good ship *THE BLUE AND WHITE*—always the lion, never the lamb—was not one to be left behind or considered, God forbid, antiquated. And so we present the March issue, which unlike an archaic heavenly egg, has not dropped from the sky but has sprouted like a wild flower along an adopted New Jersey parkway amid the toxic fumes of midterms.

From the MEALAC department’s home in Kent, Katie Reedy reports on the department’s state of conflict—how the dramatic increase in student interest and potential career prospects in the State Department have ushered in an existential crisis of sorts. Should MEALAC cater to its government-minded majors, or uphold its roots in the humanities? Miss Reedy explains it all.

Hannah Goldfield sits down with U.S. poet laureate Mark Strand to figure out precisely why everyone—at this University? In this city?—thinks they can write. Strand confirms our deeply held convictions that they can’t and this gratifies us.

The pearl of this issue—the article to send home to Mom and Dad—is Alexander Statman’s carefully wrought portrait of Jeffrey Hunter Northrop II, a man smaller than his myth who can claim to have the most publicly viewed abdominal muscles on Facebook. After a day in Northrop’s shadow, Statman reports back, and is buffer and wiser for it.

These are our offerings. There is no theme among them, no trope to tie them together. These writers and editors can smell Spring Break’s arrival in Butler’s musty corridors and we’re itching to abscond. Pardon us, we must be going!

— Anna Phillips
*Editor-in-Chief*

**TRANSACTIONS**

**ARRIVALS**

“How don’t I own this?”

Plans for a brand new consistently mediocre, over-priced Italian restaurant

Mid-semester malaise

Junior Mints at 212

The calm after the storm

The commencement of the hunt for summer internships

Campus unity, ushered in on the wings of Hawkmadinejad

The horrors of the First Amendment, in the form of juicycampus.com

Housing lottery-driven nausea

Cadbury Crème Eggs... they’re everywhere!

**DEPARTURES**

“I drink your milkshake!”

A consistently mediocre, overpriced Italian restaurant

$76 unlimited Metrocards

*Ad-Hoc*, apparently

The appearance of your friends on your Gchat buddy list

Dogs in winter outerwear

The missing hour between 2 AM and 3 AM on March 9th
SHOW & TELL

A B&W editor was waiting for the uptown 1 train at the 86th street stop. As he milled about, waiting for the train to arrive, he noticed a framed mosaic hanging on the wall. He had never noticed the artwork before, but immediately recognized the mixed media creation as a portrait of the 72nd street subway station. Which is precisely the sort of curatorial expertise expected from the people responsible for the G Train.

REMEMBRANCES OF THINGS PAST, PRESENT

“It” Conservative
Past: Chris Kulawik
Present: The late William F. Buckley, Jr.

The Source of Columbia’s Indie Cred
Past: Vampire Weekend
Present: The Kitchen Cabinet

Irrelevant Social Activity
Past: COÖP
Present: Postcrypt

Self-Perpetuating Controversy
Past: The War on Fun
Present: Madonna Constantine

Hot-Button ID Card Issue
Past: Swipe access to Barnard
Present: Off-campus Flex

CONNECT THE DOTS

Connect the dots to reveal a picture of Barnard College’s latest misguided foray into Lerner-esque architecture. It’s sloppy and ill-conceived, and the drawing isn’t that good either.

Compiled by Juli Weiner
Illustrations by Maxine Keyes
Benjamin, the street cart vendor on 116th Street and Amsterdam is, like most men of his trade, part of Morningside scenery—literally. The cover of the 1997-1998 copy of the Law School’s phone directory features a photo of Benjamin’s old cart sitting on the sidewalk. Benjamin keeps a copy—he’s been on his corner for over a decade and his permanence is a matter of pride.

Street cart vendors are ubiquitous, anonymous, and nearly always seem to offer the same wares—stacks of suspicious bagels, pastries and pungent halal food. But their profession is far from simple.

Every morning they drive to garages that house their carts, where they stock up on everything perishable: eggs, cheese, milk, and the pastries that must be sold that day—a surprise to anyone who has stopped to wonder at the age of these goods. Their Costco-sized boxes of bulk items (napkins, cups, utensils) come from restaurant depots in working class neighborhoods in the outer boroughs. By early morning, they’ve assumed their positions, ready and waiting for the breakfast rush—the cash crop of chilly winter days.

Constantly moving, street cart vendors wipe down every flat surface, check the contents of every condiment bottle, and clean the carts daily. As licensed vendors, they’re required to follow the strict sanitation regulations of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, whose examinations are continually failed even by grounded establishments like Columbia.

Most of the vendors arrive in the U.S. speaking little or no English and learn to prepare food from their mobile aluminum boxes in a matter of hours. Benjamin, a Jewish immigrant from Uzbekistan, learned English from his customers. He works grueling hours entirely alone and when he runs out of napkins, he calls the vendor on 114th and Amsterdam, whose assistant brings over extras.

By day’s end, what is not sold is not wasted; the city’s homeless depend on the vendors for bags of unsold goods and limitless generosity. One man has been coming to Benjamin for over a decade.

“You got to do good things,” Benjamin said, pointing to the sky. “Because He sees everything, you know?”

—I. Joseph Vlasits

In a university neighborhood where experimental cuisine is more likely to involve ignoring the expiration date on a carton of milk than eating escargot, it seems pointless to seek out revulsion. Ignoring this, I traveled...
to Tokyo Pop one recent evening to sample a mysterious drink known as a “foie-gras cappuccino.” By the time I arrived at the restaurant at 104th and Broadway, I was repeating a mantra to myself: try everything once.

Inside, a Spanish-language remix of “Hotel California” played softly and sweetly in the background, the refrain occasionally asserting itself above the restaurant’s texture of fashionable conversation and red ambient light. One wall was hung with an assortment of chaotically arranged picture-frames; another featured a woman emerging, Roy Lichtenstein-style, from a pointillistic sea. The bar’s big-screen TV was tuned to college basketball. The aesthetic of the place bore about as much resemblance to Tokyo as Caesar’s Palace does to Rome.

The foie-gras cappuccino was conspicuously absent from the ludicrously colorful menu.

The waiter arrived, and I spoke. “We’ll have an eel roll, a yellowtail roll, and a foie-gras cappuccino.”

“Oh,” he said, brow furrowed in consternation. “I’m not sure if we can prepare that... the chef isn’t here, you see... I can check...”

Five minutes later, he had checked, and my fears that the hajj to Tokyo Pop had failed were allayed. Two vessels with cylindrical necks and funneling tops were placed in front of us. The liquid within was brackish, off-white, and contained a few points of green and orange roughage.

I took a diffident sip: it tasted like miso soup with an extra infusion of MSG (the tastiest part). In no way did it resemble cappuccino or anything deriving from the genus Coffea. There was, however, the subtle undertone of unnaturally fattened goose liver. Savoring the masochism, I drank it up. Drainage!

Some time later another waiter came by, bearing the check. The cappuccinos were euphemistically listed as “Tokyo Pop soups” at $4.50 each. Jilted out of the diegesis, my friend and I left the trendy environs and headed to Koronet for our actual dinner. God willing, the foie-gras cappuccino will remain Morningside Heights’ best-kept secret.

—Christopher Morris-Lent

Shortly before Christmas, Columbia undergrads planning to spend the spring semester studying abroad in London received an e-mail invitation to a most titillating engagement. The event advertised was a “Pub Night,” a networking party with the Columbia Club of London hosted by the Study Abroad office.

The night of the party, I made my way through a neighborhood strangely reminiscent of the Upper West Side. The bar, called The Old Crown, was filled with young, hip professionals downing pitchers of cider. A friend and I were getting ready to order drinks and join the fun when we noticed a terrible sign tacked to the wall: “Columbia, 2nd Floor.”

Up a short flight of stairs we were greeted by Deans Kathleen McDermott and Scott Carpenter (of the Office of Global Programs) in a small private room. They had flown in for the event. Students were clumped in pairs of twos and threes, drinking punch and making small talk—neither alumni nor alcohol were anywhere to be found.

Eventually, the alums began to roll in, about 20 in total: SIPA graduates in their 30s, young CC graduates working at financial firms, and some wildcards who finished Columbia grad programs anywhere from 10 to 40 years ago. They all seemed surprised that a Columbia Club of London existed. None had ever met, except for two men who had a standing trivia-night date.

Everyone under the age of 30 griped quietly about the lack of drinks. Some journeyed downstairs for a pint or a glass of wine.

A social dynamic developed quickly: the older the alumnus, the fewer students they’d be approached by and the more students they would approach. Business cards were pocketed, and more than twice I was warned about selling out.

Then, about an hour after the festivities had begun, the deans slipped out, leaving Columbians past and present to loosen their ties and guzzle drinks freely. Sloppy intoxication and bad pick-up lines ensued. If I closed my eyes, I could have been in the Heights.
Campus Characters

You might not know the following figures—but you should. In Campus Characters, The Blue and White introduces you to a handful of Columbians who are up to interesting and extraordinary things, and whose stories beg to be shared. If you’d like to suggest a Campus Character, send us an e-mail at theblueandwhite@columbia.edu.

Jeffrey Hunter Northrop II

Wise men have said that what is closest is also most distant. So for social and holistic learning, I sought a teacher as widely known as he is little understood. From the hallowed halls of Butler to the fertile fields of the South Lawn, there could be no greater guide along the way to self-improvement than Jeffrey Hunter Northrop II, CC ’08.5.

Like most success stories, Jeffrey’s began on a wayward path. And like many such paths, it began in Connecticut. As a first-year in 2003, young Jeffrey arrived in the big city and, like St. Augustine, was drawn toward debauchery and sin. “I own up to my actions of freshman year. I deserved a lot of the shit I’ve been given,” Jeffrey recalls. The five-year-old rumors still fly: St. A’s parties and sleepless nights, Barnard girls and Barnard dorms. Everything was out of control, and Jeffrey’s life became “unman-ageable.” So he took a one-year medical leave to put his affairs in order, and has been sober since December 2004. His only remaining chemical vice is a daily hoo-kah habit—one that he indulges morning, noon and night.

Jeffrey may have made his reputation in raunchier days and nefarious ways, but his live-hard ethic survives. To study with Jeffrey is to study like Jeffrey, and that means in Butler Library: “I love Butler. It’s my haven.” But Jeffrey, I reply, Butler clouds the mind. “You need to go to the fourth floor. It’s really all about the fourth floor.” On Butler Four, Jeffrey maintains his shrine to the intellect. Until four AM, he fuels himself with an array of books, energy snacks, and most importantly, Red Bull: “Sugar free, of course. It’s healthier.” Artificial sweeteners, healthy? Jeffrey clarifies, “Well, unhealthy, maybe, but better for your fitness physique.”

A healthy mind requires a healthy body. Both require dedication. “I literally cannot do work until I’ve been to the gym. Even with a 102 degree fever.” Talk about burning calories! As he surveys the land from the backseat of a taxi on Broadway, a gym catches his attention: “Oh shit! That’s the new Equinox!” Jeffrey is a member of three gyms and he works out for about 1.5 hours a day. Jeffrey’s honesty is remarkable: “I like to look good.” Don’t we all? Without spite or judgment and always with a smile, Jeffrey rejects pretense.

Jeffrey encouraged my own budding athletic devotion with a grocery bag filled with two kinds of protein mix and three energy snacks. I was naturally suspicious of the SYNTH-6™ Multi-Functional Micellar Protein Matrix and the NITRIX™, N.O.-XPLODE™, CELLMASS™ and ASTRO-PHEX™, but he assured me that they do indeed maximize physique and performance impact. His rippling biceps and washboard abs, memorialized for all time in a Facebook photo album entitled “Money and Sex,” seemed a good indication. Convinced, I took a big bite of a protein-chocolate chip cookie. It was pretty good.

Even though fun-enhancing drugs are out of the picture, Jeffrey’s lifestyle still allows ample time for play. In the last year, Jeffrey has taken up polo, a sport “more addictive than drugs.” “The best fields are in Barbados. They flatten them with lasers. But Jamaica is still pretty good.”

Jeffrey’s enthusiasm extends from the polo field to the dance floor. “People ask me, how do you know...
the owner of every main club, like Bungalow Eight, Beatrice and Waverly Inn?” The trick is simple: networking. “Mostly, I try to be a nice person.” And Jeffrey is nice to everyone, not just the high-powered socialites and Adonis with whom he regularly associates. From hookah salesmen to cab drivers, he wears his gregarious and friendly nature on his muscle-shirt (half)sleeve.

— Alexander Statman

Michelle Diamond

Like most Columbians, I met Michelle Diamond under less than ideal conditions that were not of my choosing. One night last year, I was awoken by a loud knock at my bedroom door. Bleary-eyed and expecting the worst, I trudged across the room to find out what the matter was. Outside was a girl I vaguely recognized—long blond hair, an inexplicably massive smile, large brown eyes—who had far too much energy for that time of night. I cannot remember what she said, but I remember it seemed fairly rational, and I think it may have caused me to vote in the CCSC election.

When I sat down with Michelle last week, she was much the same: sitting cross-legged, she paused for a moment after all of my questions before replying earnestly and with a heavy dose of superlatives—emphasizing the best in everything: her classes, her classmates, her running-mates, her Columbia experience. There is only one thing our student body president disdains: “I really hate campaigning,” she said, as soon as I broached the subject of door-knocking jaunts—which she refers to as “dormstorming.”

“I hate it so much, because you see someone you haven’t seen in a while and you’ll be like, ‘Hey, let’s grab lunch,’ not thinking about the campaign, and they’ll be like, ‘Oh, is this ’cause you’re running for election,’” said Diamond, shaking her head in exasperation.

But, hate it or not, Diamond is a damn good campaigner. She got into student government in high school, and after a hiatus during her first year, Diamond tossed her hat back in the ring. “I think,” she paused to consider, “I like doing it. I like looking at a school or a situation and saying, ‘This is what could be made better about it.’ When I was debating whether or not to run for student body president, I feel like my experience at Columbia was amazing, and I had so many great opportunities. How could I not try to give back? As cheesy as that sounds.”

Diamond also classed her ideal legacy—bringing the campus closer together—as “cheesy.”

“There were tons of people at homecoming this year and it was just like, if we had things like this more often... People do want to be excited about the school, and I think they need to be given the opportunity. You know, admins say this to me, ‘Columbia students don’t want their hands held, they’re very independent, they’re not into school spirit and cheesiness,’ but I think that people like to have that there and I think that they need to.”

But what does Michelle Diamond actually do? The answer is everything. On top of 24/7 duty as president, Diamond is writing a poli-sci thesis on healthcare—one of her four courses, plus pilates, “which is possibly my favorite class at Columbia—and has made me want to become a pilates instructor next year.” She is an RA, publishes the Columbia Political Review, and was a finalist for the Rhodes scholarship. “I’ve learned to sleep a lot less,” she confessed.

My question: how does she do it all without coffee? “I’ve got my green tea,” she says, sipping from a large, paper cup from Cafe 212. Two hours of sleep and no coffee? “Never,” Diamond answers, before I can finish my question. Why in heavens name not? “Well, this is kind of funny,” she smiles, “But when I was little I watched Clueless and you know how Cher says ‘No coffee, I want to grow up to be 5’9’”? I thought, well, I want to be tall too.” She is.

— Andrew Flynn
MEALAC DisOriented

Edward Said and the CIA battle for the soul of a department.

By Katie Reedy

The sixth floor of Kent Hall, the present home of the department of Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures, is a warm corridor, a Columbian Babel. Old-school classics-obsessed Indologists and Arabists pore over 20-volume printings of the Mahabharata, postmodern theorists apply lit crit to Persian epics, and neophyte undergrads wait to enter offices festooned with trinkets and tomes. In the hall, yellowed maps of the Holy Land and loving portraits of the late Edward Said—whose influential theory of Orientalism extends far beyond the MEALAC department—hang alongside postings for State Department fellowships.

MEALAC is booming: By next semester, it will increase the number of sections for its major languages (Arabic, Hindi, and Persian), add African studies, and appoint several significant chairs—and, according to faculty, still not meet student demand. And due to that growth spurt, the department will forfeit its haven in Kent. Soon—perhaps this summer or fall—as sub-Saharan African studies joins the ranks of the Middle Eastern and Asian languages and cultures, the whole operation will move into more spacious quarters in Knox Hall on Claremont Avenue. Scores of beginning Arabic students will make the trek each day to learn their alif, baa, taas, and dozens more to train in Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Hebrew, Bengali, Turkish, Tamil—and perhaps, soon enough, Swahili or Xhosa.

With growth, however, comes the burden of choosing a future for the department and field, buffered as it is by the winds of both pragmatism and postmodernism, of social science and humanities. Each semester, dozens of students come to MEALAC to learn “skills” that will allow them to engage in the business and governments of America’s latest interest overseas. Dozens more come—and often stay—with the hope of reading Naguib Mahfouz, Premchand, or Sadegh Hedayat in their original tongues. Students who want to work for the C.I.A. and students who find the idea repugnant coexist in the same creaky classrooms. But their different motivations have deepened a long-simmering existential crisis within the department.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

MEALAC is a comparatively small department. It currently has only 25 full-time, exclusive professors (the History Department, for example, boasts 60) and 65 majors. It bills its degree as an “interdisciplinary major.” In other words, MEALAC relies heavily on comparative literature, anthropology, history, and other departments to supplement its offerings. Currently, five lecturers are responsible for instructing approximately 130 Arabic students, two lecturers oversee more than 60 students in Hindi-Urdu, and more than 170 students are enrolled across other MEALAC-affiliated languages, not to mention the department’s 65 majors and nearly 50 graduate students. Professor George Saliba’s survey course on Islamic civilization is among the most popular in the College—drawing upwards of 200 students each semester—and others like Topics in the Middle East and India have become popular ways of fulfilling the Major Cultures requirement.

Columbia students are not unique in their growing fascination with the Middle East and Islam. The Modern Language Association (MLA) reported in November 2007 that Arabic enrollment in American universities increased by 126.5 percent between 2002 and 2006. Other major languages saw a comparatively more modest increase—enrollment in Chinese, for instance, grew by 51 percent, the MLA reported.

But MEALAC’s most significant boom may be on the horizon: As of next fall, there will be 15 beginning and intermediate Arabic sections, including heritage and colloquial sections, in addition to, according to director of undergraduate studies and Assistant Professor in South Asian Literature Allison Busch, new appointments in Hindi-Urdu, Persian, Indo-Islamic civilization, and Islamic law.

“It’s driven by student demand,” said Busch. “When we show the administration we have overflowing classes or we’re turning students away, we can tell our chairman we need to start a new section of ‘X’, and they see it’s important.”
And at least one other professor cited Vice President of Arts and Sciences Nicholas Dirks—a scholar of South India who studied Asian and African culture as an undergraduate at Wesleyan—as an ally of the department.

Some faculty, such as Professor of Islamic Science George Saliba, see the rapid growth of Arabic and Middle Eastern studies as reflecting greater diversity among students and the institution of requirements such as Major Cultures.

“What you are witnessing now is the harvest of about 15 years,” he said. “As of ’92, ’93 and beyond, we began to phase in a lot of culture courses, of content courses... That was the turning point. There is no student on campus who does not know what we do here at MEALAC. The networking is exactly like water breaking through a dike.”

CRITICAL LANGUAGES

There is a significant population of students who, in their words, see Middle Eastern languages as opening “opportunities” and “doors”—vague terms that imply career advancement, travel, and excitement. And the growing sense of the “usefulness” of Arabic, Persian, and Hindi-Urdu, in particular, seems to correspond directly to the re-emergence of government funding to study “other” cultures with whom we are currently at war—or of which we are simply wary.

The last great era of language funding from the State Department during the Cold War initiated the massive programs of Area Studies—regionally-based institutes and departments—that are primarily credited with producing a bloc of Slavic experts who went on to populate political science departments (at Columbia, Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder) and government (Madeleine Albright).

As an intellectual endeavor, Area Studies has long been linked to the Eurocentric aim of studying non-Western cultures for political gain.

“Area Studies is a glorified word for mediocrity all over...but, there was funding,” Saliba said.

When Edward Said put his thoughts on studying “the East” to paper in Orientalism, he referred to Area Studies as the imperialist knowledge-gathering endeavor of the modern era.

“Oriental studies was to be thought of not so much as scholarly activities but as instruments of national policy towards the newly independent, and possibly intractable, nations of the postcolonial world,” Said wrote in the final chapter of Orientalism in 1978. “Armed with a refocused awareness of his importance to the Atlantic commonwealth, the Orientalist was to be the guide of policymakers, of businessmen, of a fresh generation of scholars.”

While Columbia still maintains an Area Studies section in the library system—in the basement of the Lehman Library of Social Sciences—its relevance has long been waning, and it faces a dim future, according to Africa Area Studies librarian Yusuf Caruso. Undergraduate students who are interested in becoming regional experts study within east Asian languages and Cultures (EALAC), MEALAC, Latin American Studies, and Slavic Studies. On the surface, these may appear to be transmuted versions of their previous Area Studies forms, but they all have the intellectual integrity missing from that field of scholarship.

Professor of Modern Indic Languages Frances Pritchett—whose work with Urdu literature is one of the primary reasons the study of South Asia has long remained a part of MEALAC—traced the development of culturally-focused programs like MEALAC...
from a natural outgrowth of Area Studies.

"Area Studies departments are irreducibly sustained by the language. You’ve got a nucleus, then there’s a sense that something will grow up above that, like cultural studies... beyond that, you have to have something," she explained.

Yet, for all the increased emphasis on culture, the old paradigm of regional studies as a state-supported endeavor has not been abandoned.

“Arabic has become a commodity, as has knowledge of the region,” said Marya Hannun, CC’09, a MEALAC major currently studying abroad in Jordan. Hannun is Lebanese and came to the University after reading the works of Rashid Khalidi. “I always feel at Columbia that I have to be an econ major or get a competitive internship with Goldman Sachs just because everyone around me feels that way,” she said. “Here the equivalent of that for people studying Arabic is an internship with the State Department.”

On examinations for the Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Foreign Service, knowledge of Arabic or other “Critical Languages” results in the direct application of a bonus to the applicant’s evaluation.

“Learning a Critical Needs Language is actually 100 percent the best thing you can do,” said one recent Columbia College graduate who just matriculated to the Foreign Service. “If you pass the oral exam and the language test you’re in almost without exception.”

Other immediate benefits to studying languages offered through MEALAC include an array of fellowships, grants, and State Department-funded educational trips ostensibly for the purpose of field practice of a newly acquired tongue. The Critical Languages Scholarship Program, for instance—launched in just 2006 after President Bush launched the National Security Language Initiative—provides all-expenses-paid summer trips for students of Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, and Turkish to their respective countries of origin. According to Busch, most of Columbia’s students who applied last year received Critical Languages funding, and this year, applications and competitiveness have increased dramatically.

“I don’t have a problem with getting money from the State Department. After all, that’s my tax money too,” said Hamid Dabashi, Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature. “I’d rather have it spent on training a student in Arabic and learning culture than [spent] on bombs, guns, bullets, tanks.”

Ari Sacks, CC/JTS ’05, said he majored in MEALAC to get a better understanding of what was going on in the region and how it affected the world, a perspective that “greatly impacted” him and his understanding of the historical significance of current affairs.

He commented that he began to notice a correlation between news events and enrollment early in his college career. “My first semester of school was 9/11. I definitely got the feeling that there were a lot more people interested in [the department] because the material that you learn in MEALAC has a great role in the world today—it relates to things like al Qaeda, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the oil crisis.”

For instance, Noah Schwartz, CC’08, came to Columbia with the intention of declaring a major in MEALAC, and studied Arabic for five semesters before opting out of the advanced track. He had attended a Jewish day school, “had a fair amount of Zionist indoctrination,” and became interested in foreign policy and security issues during an 8th grade trip to Israel. He “totally fell in love with the place” and the region. “I thought I was going to move to Israel, and fix everything there, and save the world,” he said.

But since then, he has become “burnt out” on the Middle East, and disillusioned with the MEALAC department’s lack of courses on “history or traditional social science.” Schwartz is now an economics major and will soon begin studying Spanish—he
wanted something more practical.

Then again, not all of the useful applications of MEALAC languages relate to foreign policy or counter-terrorism.

Busch, for instance, said she hopes to introduce a new “flagship program” of Hindi-Urdu courses that would outfit students in the School of International and Public Affairs with skills needed for development work in India.

“They are enamored by the cultural literacy they gain, but really want to go to a village and help women set up smokeless stoves to save their health,” she said. “I am a literature professor, so I value that, but I recognize that students have different needs.”

And yet Busch expressed concern that students may be trading intimate knowledge of language for more practical tools. She articulated the central dilemma of the MEALAC debate: “How can we outfit our students without compromising our humanistic values?”

THE OTHER

Busch’s query resounds through the rest of the department. Even as students are drawn to Arabic because of the Iraq War, or Critical Languages, or a keen understanding of globalization, Columbia’s MEALAC remains uniquely resistant—even opposed—to the legacy of Area Studies. It receives no funding from the government, has a history of a strict humanities-based, critical-theory center—with roots in the comparative literature department—and requires that all majors take two courses steeped in Said and post-colonialism: Topics in the Middle East and India and Theories of Culture.

Many of the department’s distinguished faculty speak of MEALAC as a bastion of values that speak truthfully to powerful figures within the University—some even imbue it with a sense of quasi-spiritual destiny. Busch, for instance, mentioned “core MEALAC values.” Dabashi spoke warmly, in an office surrounded by shelves containing the complete works of Said and Rushdie, of the early connection MEALAC made to literary criticism and theory, thanks in large part to his work with individuals such as University Professor Gayatri Spivak and Comparative Literature and Society department founding director Andreas Huyssen. Saliba explained that MEALAC had resisted influences that might shift it away from its humanistic roots.

“We’re lucky. We survived the onslaught of Area Studies rather well because we are configured slightly differently” from other regional departments, he said with satisfaction. “We kept our department in what used to be known as the faculty of philology... We never felt intellectually committed to enhance the little bits at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA),” he added, referring specifically to the regional institutes housed in that graduate school.

The Middle East Institute, for instance, which was founded in 1954 in the golden age of Area Studies, remains directly connected to sources of government funding, according to Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies in History and MEALAC and Director of the Middle East Institute Director Rashid Khalidi, who noted the institute receives money and distributes grants from the National Resource Centers (NRC) and Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships (FLAS) sponsored by the United States Department of Education.

Meanwhile, the MEALAC department’s course offerings reflect a certain ideological bent. In the spring 2008 semester, for instance, courses that were offered included: Freud and Derrida, Reading Orientalism, Postcolonial Theory, and Orientalism and Islam.

In the words of the department’s website: “Textual expertise, if deprived of intellectual history, literary
knowledge, and social and cultural studies—three additional pillars of MEALAC—is crippled, just as the latter deprived of the former is blind."

"I did feel like most of the people interested in MEALAC were politically inclined," said Lucie Kroening, CC’07, who majored in MEALAC and is currently continuing her Arabic studies at a French school in Damascus. "So I felt like a bit of an outcast, being a literature person." She said that classes on the Arabic short story with Taoufik ben Amor, Coordinator of the Arab Language Program, allowed her to gain a grasp of Middle Eastern culture.

At the very least, many majors and most faculty view MEALAC as an important bridge between the West and non-West, between the Christian and Islamic worlds, between America and its current "enemies."

Laurel Ackerson, a 40-year-old General studies student who came to MEALAC, which she calls "the center of the universe," from a job as a legal secretary in California, said she wanted definitive answers about the Middle East, information she wasn’t getting from the media or other sources. She said after taking MEALAC classes, she realized how "ignorant" she had been of how "human" people from the Middle East truly were.

"I didn’t know that I thought that way," she said ruefully. "And when I found out I did, I felt like I was covered in poo. It was like, ‘Help, get this off me!’ I was in a box my whole life and I didn’t realize it."

Ackerson plans to study Arabic in Yemen next year, but, despite being more than $120,000 in debt, she refuses to entertain the notion of working for the government. "It feels to me like I’d be selling the soul of the people I’m studying. Especially because of the tenor of what’s going on in the country right now."

She credits MEALAC courses on Islam and Arab society with "opening up a part of the world I felt like I’d never be able to touch."

FUTURE TENSE

When the MEALAC department moves from Kent to Knox, it will bring with it several decades of debate, development, and success. It will bring the legacy of Orientalism, of Area Studies, of philology, of Edward Said, of post-modernism, of over a century of controversy along the way.

But unlike other complex departments like History or English—which will surely be endowed and supported until Ivy League students are no longer interested in books—MEALAC operates within a niche, as a microorganism that must continually adapt to survive. Student enrollment dictates funding and hiring power, and the quality of courses and professors encourages more students to choose the department for their academic home-base.

The immediate future may depend on how the department defines its object of study—and if the addition of Africa studies is any indicator, professors will continue to emphasize themes of colonialism and modernity rather than regional specialization.

Professor Mamadou Diouf, hired by Columbia last November to direct the Institute for African Studies reflected on its responsibility in the central debate: “This is Columbia’s response to the idea of fitting into a world defined by global flows and interactions”—read: globalization.

Four years ago, MEALAC became infamous because of allegations of anti-Semitism made by the David Project in “Columbia Unbecoming.” Five years from now, the department could rival political science or anthropology in its popularity and prominence. But what it will look like and who it will serve when it gets to that point is anybody’s guess.

Illustrations by Rachel Lindsay

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The Blue and White: What is it like to call yourself a poet, by profession? When you have to fill out a form that asks for your occupation and you write poet, that strikes me as unusual.

Mark Strand: Well, I don’t always say poet, sometimes I say teacher, or professor. Sometimes I say writer. But the older I get the more often I will use poet to describe what I do, who I am, or what I am. When I was younger I was a little ashamed of calling myself a poet for fear that I would be perceived as perhaps emotionally unstable. And then after a while after you’ve been writing a long time and publishing a lot everybody knows you’re a poet anyway, so why not just say you’re a poet?

B & W: Do you ever get strange looks from someone who’s never heard of you or doesn’t recognize you?

MS: Usually when people don’t know who you are and you’re introduced to them as a poet, they start looking toward the exit. Or to see who else is coming into the room, with whom they can have a conversation. Most people probably find it hard to talk to a poet.

B & W: Why is that?

MS: Well, most people don’t read poetry and they don’t know why anyone would do something that nobody reads. And the image that most have of poetry is wrong. They think it’s about spilling one’s guts and the idea of one spilling one’s guts is a very unattractive one, so if you think that’s what poets do, you won’t want to spend much time talking to one of those.

B & W: Are you ever treated like a celebrity?

MS: Yes. Not here so much, but in Italy, and Spain. Other countries. Because they’re smaller countries and here I’ve been around a long time so I’m sort of old hat, but there, in the last 10 years or so, so much of my stuff has been translated and published I’m sort of a new item. So I’m treated very much like a celebrity. Especially in Italy. They’ve even made a movie of me. It’s an hour-long documentary. It’s going to be done in May.

B & W: Is poetry taken more seriously in other countries?

MS: Maybe there’s a tradition of caring more for poetry. Traditionally, America’s orientation to the world has been largely business, money-making, mercantile... We don’t value works of imagination as we value other things. Largely because we’re a Puritan culture and we have a Puritan ethic—straight talk, “why didn’t you say so at the beginning?” We mistrust people. We see it in these debates now, a mistrust of language. Criticizing Barack Obama because he’s all talk, as if words had no substance. The presumption that deeds speak louder than words is a Puritan presumption. It seems to be Hillary Clinton’s. But deeds very often don’t speak so loudly, and words do. Think of how Barack Obama’s words have mobilized this nation of under-30s. In the Soviet Union you hear of football stadiums filled to hear a poet read—it’s possible but it seems unimaginable to me. They must have blocked out every event that night and given 70,000 people free tickets. But I don’t think that many people go to poetry readings now in the Soviet Union, I think it’s probably just what it is her. The importance of poetry can’t be measured by the number of people who attend readings.

B & W: How is it measured?
MS: I think the importance of a poem can be measured by how long it sticks around, whether it outlives the poet. Even if it’s 10 minutes. You just don’t want to go out of print and still be around.

*B & W:* So it’s about the poet, as opposed to the poetry.

MS: Well, one feels badly for one’s poems if suddenly they’re no longer available. Imagine if you go to a party and you meet people and they say, “What are you?” “Well I’m a poet.” “Ooh can I buy your books?” “No, they’re out print.” End of conversation.

*B & W:* They didn’t want to talk to you anyway, right?

MS: Well, you change the subject. It’s like a dagger in the heart. I’m fortunate not having had that happen to me. I certainly can imagine it happening, unless I hurry up and die.

*B & W:* Do you remember what you wanted to be when you grew up, when you were young?

MS: I wanted to be a painter.

*B & W:* What kind of painter?

MS: Just a painter of paintings.

*B & W:* Do you see a connection between painting and poetry?

MS: Not much. I think you use different parts of your mind for each. When you’re a painter you utilize a visual intelligence. You try to create relationships that are pleasing visually. Writing is a different enterprise entirely. Since language is immediate, it’s used many different ways and the poet struggles against, in some ways, the language of the newspaper, the language of television, which is constantly...dirty and a poet’s job is to renew the language, to make it seem fresh. The number of clichés that we are exposed to in the newspapers and daily life tends to water down language. It doesn’t have much zip. The poet needs to refresh it, reinvigorate it, make it seem alive.

*B & W:* Would you call Barack Obama a poet?

MS: No, but he’s a damn good writer. He writes excellent prose. He’s an inspirational speaker, that I will say.

*B & W:* You don’t think he’s clichéd?

MS: Oh, yeah, change and hope—these are clichés but these are absolutely necessary to cast the widest net possible. But he writes well. This is his campaign jargon—hope, change, etcetera, not red states, blue states but united states. If T.S. Eliot were running for president he wouldn’t get any votes. No one would understand what he was talking about. The same with just about any poet, I don’t care who it is.

*B & W:* But why is that?

MS: Because poetry takes concentration. You have to meet the poet halfway. Poetry’s simply harder because it deals with ideas and states of feeling that are more elusive. Sometimes they’re emotions that are very complicated, and feelings that are very hidden and so they produce a more difficult poem. Sometimes what poems are about is very hard to recognize.
THE CONVERSATION

B & W: I know you’ve said that you write—what is it—one poem every—

MS: Well, some years I don’t write any poems. Some years I’ll write 6 or 7. I average about four poems a year.

B & W: So what do you do when you’re not writing poems?

MS: I’m writing, I’m just writing very slowly. I read a lot. I write some prose. I stare at the wall. Take walks, go out to dinner, drink wine. Watch basketball on television.

B & W: What do you like about teaching?

MS: Well, I like rereading books, and talking about them. I like smart students. Columbia undergraduates are terrific, so it’s fun. Sometimes I don’t know what I’m going to say in class, that’s always a mystery to me, what’s going to come out of my mouth.

B & W: What do you think about courses in poetry, and courses in creative writing?

MS: I think writing classes are OK. I don’t think the writing major is a very smart idea because the subject is oneself. Writing courses are essentially courses without content. It’s much more important when you’re young to read as wide a variety of great texts as possible—you have plenty of time to work on your own stuff. Once you’ve decided to be a writer, it might not be a bad idea to go to a writer’s workshop and meet other writers your own age at your level of expertise, but as an undergraduate major I don’t think it’s a good idea. It’s much more important to learn foreign languages, to be a Classics major or a romance languages major.

B & W: So you think being an English major is useful?

MS: Yeah, I mean it teaches you to read, and read carefully and deeply. I think a writing course or two for an undergraduate is a good thing because you get to deal with works in progress. So that you gain a familiarity with the making of poems. I think that people who have taken a writer’s workshop are much more aggressive readers. That is, even when they’re dealing with great poems that doesn’t stop them from saying, well, this great poem might have been a little better if Keats had done this, or Byron had done that. The idea that every time a poem is published it’s ipso facto a perfect poem, I think that’s not something that kids who have been in a workshop are ready to believe.

B & W: Do you think that writing can be learned?

MS: Well, I think you need talent to become even a mediocre writer. I don’t think you can teach talent, any more than a basketball player can be taught height. I think people with talent who receive good instruction can be very good poets. But without talent they can’t.

B & W: OK, so you’re a successful poet, obviously, you have talent, but what is the breakdown of talent and the choices that you made and the path that you took?

MS: Well the path I took and the choices I made were because it became clear that I was talented in one area. You know because everybody writes, everybody thinks they’re talented, whereas, not everybody is a good musician. Many people don’t play the piano well.

B & W: Why is it that everybody thinks they can write?

MS: Because they have to, in one form or another. But if you write, it’s not just writing. There’s writing and there’s writing; just as there’s plunk-plunking on the keys at the piano and really being able to play Schubert. Or being able to dribble a basketball. There are some people who can be taught to play basketball but have simply no talent, will never be able to put the ball in the hoop. But we don’t question the fact that there are superbly talented athletes and most of us aren’t talented at all. When it comes to writing, it’s different. We believe that one can be a gifted mathematician; one can be a gifted painter; one can be a musician, but writing? Pft, oh, I can write. I can write my life story. This is what everybody wants to write. As if living through it once wasn’t enough, they have to endure it again. It’s so boring.

B & W: Why do they do that?

MS: I think they want some record of their exis-
tence. They don’t want to leave without a trace. They don’t want to be simply one of the things that were.

B & W: Do you feel that you’ve accomplished that with your writing?

MS: I have no idea, that’s something that’s up to the future. I have no control over it. But I do it because I enjoy doing it.

B & W: Pure enjoyment?

MS: Well, it’s hard. But when you’re writing, it’s absorbing, and you get ideas, it’s terrific, and when you finish a poem you feel relieved. Then you have to start work on more—it’s never ending. Writing poetry gives me a purchase on the world. I really feel I belong, because I’m paying attention to it. I’m always on the lookout for an idea, an image. A word, a phrase. I wake up wanting to write. If I didn’t write I wouldn’t get out of bed. Well, maybe that’s exaggerating. I’d find some other reason to get out of bed.

B & W: I’ve been told so many times: you can’t be a writer unless you physically can’t live without writing, unless you feel that drive. Do you believe that?

MS: You need to be driven, I think, especially at the beginning. I go years without writing a poem, but I never cease thinking of myself as a writer. There’s always something going on in the back of my mind. I’m always thinking about it. I’m reading other people’s poems. When you’re not writing and you’re a writer, it’s very hard. But I always have faith that I will come back to it, be writing poems again. Living in New York is such fun. The distractions are so many and so available that one can enjoy not writing. Whereas when I lived out west in Utah, it was so boring, so dull, that I was driven to write.

B & W: Are boring but beautiful places more inspiring?

MS: The beauty of one’s surroundings doesn’t necessarily energize one’s imagination. Maybe nature writers feel, ‘I’ve got to live in a particular place,’ I don’t know. I tend to look in, instead of out. In fact, when I write I’d rather look at a blank wall, or look down at my desktop. I’m inspired by what I read more than anything else.

B & W: What do you think of Columbia as an institution?

MS: I think it’s great! How can it fail? Here it is in New York City, a great city. The students are totally brilliant and the level is extremely high...I think life at Columbia is a little chaotic. I think the university could be a little more organized. But that’s the standing joke about Columbia, it’s not anything new. I wish I had gone to school here—of course I would never be able to get in.

B & W: What’s the sense you get of Columbia as a poetry community? Is there one here?

MS: I don’t know anything about it. I’ve never been a part of any poetry community. I’m independent.

B & W: So you’re not part of a generation?

MS: I’m part of a generation but I’m not part of a school.

B & W: So there are no New York poet dinner parties or anything like that?

MS: No. Not that I know of. At least I’m not asked.

B & W: Do you think that poetry as a medium is disappearing into the—

MS: Will it disappear? No. Because it’s the only way we have of knowing who we are at the deepest level. Our humanness is best witnessed in the history of poetry.

—Hannah Goldfield
It should be a Columbia student’s dream. Lit Hum as it’s meant to be experienced: out loud, on your iPod, playing as you hike to and from (and to and from) local bars on a Thursday night.

I had just downloaded a handful of chapters of *The Odyssey* from LibriVox.org, a non-commercial, non-profit, ad-free, volunteer-powered, loose and open, hyphen-happy free culture project that aims to “acoustically liberate” all books in the public domain.

Think Wikipedia, NPR-style: volunteers read books—in a multitude of languages—into recording software. They send their recordings to the website’s editors, who then post their offerings on the homepage. Works are not always available in their entirety, but with a quick search it’s possible to find and download select chapters to your computer or iPod.

It seemed simple, or so I thought when I agreed to listen to the Core over the course of a weekend. But a few minutes into Samuel Butler’s translation of *The Odyssey* (total reading time: 11 hours, 5 minutes, 24 seconds), I realized it wasn’t going to be painless.

LibriVox cheerfully preaches the gospel of a free culture utopia. “We accept all volunteers in all languages, with all kinds of accents. You don’t need to audition or send us samples,” the site claims. “We’ll accept you no matter what you sound like.” True to his word, founder Hugh McGuire refuses to filter or edit the content, unless there are technical problems.

Not surprisingly, listening to an entire book can be an experiment in patience. Case in point: Books One through Five of *The Odyssey* are read by Kirsten Ferreri, who sounds like she spent a few too many years at an amateur acting class learning how to over-enunciate.

The beginning “t” in the famous first line (“Tell me oh Muse, of that ingenious hero,” in case you forgot) sounded like it was being shot out of a cannon hidden inside of my computer—and not in a good, bring-on-the-Cyclops kind of way.

Things didn’t get much better from there. While recounting Telemachus’s visit to Menelaus and Helen, Ferreri’s voice rose and fell along each line of dialogue; it was too dramatic for a notoriously uneventful affair.

Book Six and Book Seven, read by first-name-only “Gesine” and LibriVox founder Hugh McGuire, respectively, offered major improvements: British accents and a low-key, deceptively casual (think Ira Glass) delivery. No need to over-read when you sound like Hugh Grant. The highlight, however, was Book 20, read by Kara Shallenberg, whose LibriVox-linked blog on crafts previewed her style of expression. Her descriptions of cable-knit vests and the different colors of wool belied a soothing, motherly inflection that carried over into her spoken word.

After reading the blog, I imagined her *Odyssey* performance would sound like a mother trying too hard to keep her kids interested in books and indifferent to videogames. According to her blog, Kara has been recording children’s books for fun for at least ten years, and gives away tapes of works like *The Scarecrow of Oz* for free. Though she occasionally resorts to the singsong rhythm of an elementary school teacher, her voice and diction are warm and personal. When she speaks of the suitor who threw a heifer’s foot at Odysseus, she reads as if she is sitting in the corner, condemning the act gently while waiting to see what happens next.

Whatever its faults, LibriVox must be excused. With the occasional gem like Shallenberg’s reading, who could complain?
Verily Veritas does not read the publication to which he contributes (which he supposes would have mitigated the sordidness of this whole revelation). VV does not wish to be infected by impersonal, verbal, or written congress with the undergraduate population at large. He writes because the B&W pays him in port and walnuts, and because he enjoys holding forth to you whelps, as long as you do not try to hold back.

Today’s lesson comes as The Blue and White celebrates the ascendancy of its second consecutive editrix-in-chief. Verily was under a woman’s heel long ago, and not at all unpleasantly: It was June 1922, and Verily had just come off a rather bad affair with the bottle and two twin nieces of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Only the one without the unibrow really caught VV’s attention, but it was Springtime in Naples—why not be greedy?

Concerned uncles spirited him back to New-York, where they placed him under the apprenticeship of family friend Scofield Thayer, who had used family money to resuscitate a moribund Transcendentalist rag called The Dial. “Verily, my boy,” Mr. Thayer clapped him on the back as he led him down to The Dial “office,” the basement of a ramshackle down-town tenement. “We’re doing some very special work here. Now, I know we agreed on some small salary, but we’re about to give T.S. Eliot a large cash prize for his recent work, and, well—” Thayer, one of the richer men in New England, squirmed uncomfortably in his three-piece suit, and checked his pocketwatch. “You know my boy, in all honesty, people are just about falling all over themselves to enter into association with our publication. And here you are in our central offices! You must relish this opportunity, and seize it with burning loins. Which is to say, erm...ta!” Thayer took a brisk bound up the stair, shut the door, and Verily became the world’s first unpaid summer intern.

The “office” had a dim kerosene lamp, a musty, oblong hole in the ground (the lavatory? the entrance to a lair of rat-men?), and two desks. A woman with dark, close-set eyes was sitting at one of them. Verily ventured to ask the woman her name.

“I’m Marianne Moore. I publish my own poetry, but I’m also stuck fixing these assholes’ work. You know Yeats, yes? You know his most famous poem? Well, we were supposed to publish this thing, and I looked at it, and it originally started, ‘Things fall apart/ I throw poop at the wall,’ until I stepped in and knocked some sense into the man. I write this rag’s essays, and pass them off to an editor who slaps his name on it. It’s a tough world for a woman—but why am I talking to you? You’re the new office slave. Go get me some cigarettes and a wedge of Limburger, little man!”

VV became a zealous pupil of this sparkling, dyspeptic woman—the two would take afternoon jaunts through Madison Square Garden (before that name conjured up sweaty sport spectacle or rhythm & blues (is that the voguish term?) performances) and puff on cigarettes as they watched fat-armed wenches dump human waste from the roofs of tenements. There was a mutual affinity.

Like any summer intern, Verily was summarily cut loose without so much as a janitorial job offer, but that dim, dank office has an eternal place in his reverie. Verily was delighted when the formidable Ms. Moore became head of the entire publication some years later. It collapsed under her reign, but pshaw, she was a special talent! Verily is not wary of all women, just most; and if he sometimes seems an old-fashioned misogynist, he is not so out of principle, only out of experience.

—Verily Veritas
John*, CC ’08, is a recovering alcoholic. “I guess I was not in the classroom too much freshman year,” he says. “When I came to Columbia I didn’t feel that comfortable because people weren’t using things the same way I was.”

Throughout his freshman year, John was an abuser of drugs but managed to avoid getting CAVAed or written up by ResLife. In Columbia’s eyes, he was fine. Then he went on a trip with his brother during which he was unable to drink. He started to go through withdrawal, which led to his family deciding to send him to rehab. He took a medical leave from Columbia and later returned, clean and with a new Thursday night activity: Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and, later, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

Coming back to Columbia after rehab wasn’t too difficult for John. “I had known someone at school who was also sober, so that helped.” He found the on-campus AA chapter and started working through the program’s 12 steps. Two-and-a-half years later—and two-and-a-half years sober—he looks healthy and confident. AA is “definitely a big part of my life,” he says. During the first 90 days that he was in the program, John went every day (as was required), and he still goes two or three times a week.

In many ways, John is a success story, but not every student who combats an alcohol dependency problem will see such positive results. It was only after he left Columbia and after a familial intervention that John’s problem was identified and addressed, but for those with less vigilant parents, alcohol dependency easily can go unnoticed. Furthermore, finding a good AA chapter just became more difficult—the one John used to attend within Columbia’s gates, called Campus Group, recently disbanded.

The group fell apart last semester when the organizer, a Columbia student, decided to study abroad. The handful of members dispersed to different chapters—John now goes to a meeting outside of Morningside Heights—and the group’s disappearance went largely unnoticed.

One person who did notice was Dr. Hilary Colenso, the director of the Alcohol and Substance Awareness Program (ASAP), who was concerned to hear that the AA group that used to meet at the Kraft Center was no longer there. Her program provides “one-stop shopping” for Barnard students looking for information and help related to alcohol.

Health Services doesn’t have anything like ASAP, which is only for Barnard students and the lone Columbia woman that may join a recovery group. When asked why, Justin Laird, the Senior Health Educator of Columbia’s health promotion program (known as Alice!), explained that there is no plan to streamline or specialize alcohol programming on campus and that Alice!, Columbia Psychiatric Services, and Primary Care would make referrals to counselors and even state and national hotlines. Even though there are free clinics all over New York, Columbia still has its own, but when it comes to alcohol-related services, neighborhood services are apparently sufficient.

Colenso’s program maintains a network of student AA members and the meetings that they attend around the city. As of our print deadline, Campus
Group was still at the top of Colenso’s list. Others on the sheet are those that students have reported trying and liking. Following Campus Group’s demise, the closest group meets on 88th Street. An alcoholic’s chosen AA group “is a big part of [a recovering] student’s community,” Colenso says, adding that she also keeps contact information so that prospective AA members can get in touch with students who are currently in recovery.

Colenso said that students, especially those living in the anonymous shuffle of New York City, have a hard time finding groups they can connect with. In an off-campus setting it’s likely that lone 20-something alcoholics will find themselves ringed by middle-aged alcoholics of different educational and socio-economic backgrounds, making it difficult to compare experiences or reach a necessary comfort level. Students can “feel a tremendous sense of isolation,” said Colenso. Wandering the city searching for a group that meets their needs only compounds the feeling that they’re the only students with dependency problems.

And since they must attend the meetings frequently (every day for the first 90 days), going too far out of the neighborhood can be difficult. According to Colenso, “People come in and ask, ‘How come NYU has three campus meetings and we don’t?’”

Max*, a student who drinks regularly and whose father is a long-time AA member, said that it’s “ridiculous” that there is no group on campus. “If I did feel I had a drinking problem I would be much more likely to go to a Columbia campus-specific AA. In fact, I would most certainly not go to a neighborhood one and probably would go to a campus one.”

“If I did feel I had a drinking problem I would be much more likely to go to a Columbia campus-specific AA. In fact, I would most certainly not go to a neighborhood one and probably would go to a campus one.”

Compared to other schools, Columbia does not have a drinking problem. According to a U.S. Department of Education study of alcohol infractions at Ivy League Universities between 2003-2006, Columbia ranked second to last. In those three years, Columbia had 82 reported infractions while Cornell had 887.

While there’s not a culture of alcohol abuse, as there is on many campuses, there are Columbia students who abuse alcohol on a daily basis. “I have a friend who once approximated that in the average week his BAC [Blood Alcohol Content] didn’t reach zero,” said Beryl Schragger, CC ’08 and a member of Columbia’s Psi Upsilon fraternity. Schragger’s friend had been drinking since age 12 and continued the habit at Columbia. “There wasn’t much that could have been done,” he shrugged.

“I just have no idea where I would go if I had a friend with any sort of addiction problem,” agreed fellow Psi Upsilon brother Bobby Brennan, CC ’10.

Amid a sea of Rape Crisis stickers and free condoms—not to mention an entire week devoted to eating disorder awareness—alcohol abuse is a shy issue at Columbia. Alcohol Edu, the one program students do know about, is universally loathed and mocked. Even if you’re lucky enough to know you need help—or you have friends that do—the most successful way to get Columbia to notice your alcohol-related behavior is to get CAVAed.

Ben*, CC ’10, got CAVAed his freshman year. He was partying with some friends in Carman when they decided to go for Koronet. “I was being a little loud. The security guard decided to call CAVA... then CAVA came and they kind of forced me into the ambulance.” He went to St. Luke’s completely conscious, they gave him an IV, he vomited, and then he went home.

* person’s name has been changed
But the aftermath of Ben’s irresponsible drinking didn’t end with his hospital release. About a year ago, Alice! launched a formal intervention program to follow-up with students who get CAVAed or written-up by ResLife. That program is called Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS), and it’s part of Columbia’s ongoing attempt to deal with something related to alcohol use on campus.

Addressing that something is required of Columbia by the federal government, which, under the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, can deny funding to schools that don’t have an alcohol and drug prevention program. But the stipulations of the act are unclear—the Department of Education’s website lists around 10 general strategies for complying with the Act and each participating college has its own adaptation.

In Columbia’s version, the BASICS experience, which Ben and every other kid who gets CAVAed are required to complete, begins with an initial talk with the practitioner to discuss the reasons for the visit. There, students are asked to fill out an online assessment of their experiences and drinking patterns. Two weeks later, they return for another appointment, a second discussion, and an “evaluation of their lifestyle.”

BASICS was developed, tested, and deemed effective at the University of Washington. “The program itself wasn’t that bad,” says CAVAed Ben. “The woman that did it was nice, not judgmental or anything.” Non-judgment is the goal, according to Melissa Kenzig, the director of Alice!, who also oversees BASICS. But according to George*, CC ’08, whose rough night with mixed drinks ended in the CAVA ambulance, BASICS was neutral—so neutral, in fact, that it was “not helpful at all.”

Max, who has a family history of alcoholism, had not heard of BASICS before being interviewed, but thinks the program is a misguided idea. “I would think it would lead to people not calling CAVA when they should.”

Studies of BASICS done by the University of Washington show that program graduates tend to make better choices regarding alcohol. But all students interviewed for this article expressed doubts about the program’s efficacy. For those in denial about their alcohol problem—a common obstacle and the first one addressed by AA’s 12 steps—BASICS’ emphasis on self-evaluation makes it fundamentally incapable of identifying those with real problems.

Ben scoffed when I told him that BASICS will soon be offered as a voluntary service (though it will remain mandatory for students who break campus alcohol policies or get CAVAed). “Not that many people would do it voluntarily,” he said.

When I asked John whether he’d ever tried any Columbia programs or services during the last few years, he said that he had tried a recovery group. He struggled to be positive about it: “I don’t want to make opinions about these things. But for me what’s worked has been AA.”

Dr. Colenso thinks that Barnard’s approach is successful because ASAP doesn’t suffer from being mixed in with other types of health programming. The difficulty of getting in touch with the right people is demonstrative of the problems of placing alcohol treatment under a psych services and disciplinary consequences umbrella: It prevents students from getting the help they need.

This is often the case at college campuses—ten years after the federal mandate on university alcohol programming began, an organization through the University of Michigan called various universities and asked to speak to the person in charge of alcohol dependency and abuse programming. In many cases, they were bounced between offices and by the time they reached the right person, it was clear that they were also in charge of a wide array of other issues. Columbia has no specific office dedicated to alcohol abuse prevention—this is the university’s problem.

Columbia’s latest effort in alcohol abuse prevention is the 21st Birthday Initiative, through which students will receive an email on their 21st birthday complete with information about “what is in a drink, how to look for signs of alcohol poisoning and how to engage in lower risk drinking,” said Laird. He didn’t mention anything about teaching students where to go on campus if they need help. And the Initiative fails to address that drinking habits—addictive or not—tend to be formed before this landmark day. For students who needed a direct mailing before then, it may be too late.
Excerpts from “The Naughty-Naughtian”—the 1900 Senior Class Book.

“The great secret of my life is that I was born a day later than I was scheduled for. Ah! ...The consequence is that I have been late on every occasion. My reputation in this regard is wellnigh unsullied. Indeed, I remember having arrived promptly at a lecture, by an unforeseen accident, only once, from the shock of which mischance the department hasn’t quite recovered yet...On the whole, I don’t believe that there is another institution in the University except Spectator which exhibits a like amount of punctuality. There is, also, another point of similarity between us, for we both hope to “get out” on Commencement-day, the which God grant.”

—Henry Garfield Alsberg

“My future plans? The law or the stage, with some writing as a side line. But there’s my cab. Au revoir. Call again soon”

—S. John Block

“As to religion, the “Parson” is a Churchman, and after graduation will enter the General Theological Seminary to study for Holy Orders. He is an ardent lover of nature as displayed in the gentler sex, and he most assuredly does not believe in celibacy.”

—Roelif Hasbrouck Brooks

“In political principle he is a Jeffersonian Democrat; in religion he is a Churchman and looks forward to the priesthood. He will graduate from Columbia as he did from St. Paul’s [School at Garden City], minus the roses and the prize in Greek.”

—Walter Nicholas Clapp

“I hope to become a minister, and would here inform my classmates that, when they have selected their girls, I will set them for life free of charge. This offer also holds good for the Barnard girls (God bless them!). In politics I am a political orphan. I shall never marry. My bride is Columbia.”

—Rudolph Isaac Coffee

“WILLIAM CHURCHILL DE MILLE was born on July 25, 1878, at Washington, N. C. The first five years of his life were passed in comparative idleness, a habit which he never entirely overcame; but at the age of six his parents set him to work in a coal-mine. The hard life of a miner, however, did not agree with the delicate child, and at the age of six years and one day he began to pine away and die. His parents, realizing that heroic measures were necessary to save his life, took him from the mine and told him he might rest until he felt like working again. At the time of going to press he is still resting.”

—William Churchill de Mille

“Born the fourth day of June, 1878, of the house of Durham, I decided at once to prepare for Columbia University.”

—Roger Durham

“Like every other Senior, I intend to leap at once into the arena of life and seize some golden Maude Adams by the forelock. I shall melt her down to ingots and retire on the proceeds. And then on my large, loose steam-yacht I shall take the whole Class of 1900 for a trip to the land of the Geisha. Vale. I must hence, for there are Wallis Turner, Phil Gardiner, and Tommy the Goat looking at a girl. I must see if she’s pretty.”

—William M. L. Fiske, Jr.
1.
I woke up with a crick in my neck. My pillow was missing. I put on my
glasses and looked around. It was on the floor, trying to put on my running
shoes.

“What are you doing?” I asked, dazed. “You don’t even have feet.”

“Going for a walk outside,” it said. “You never air me out.”

I wanted to go back to sleep. I reached for it and it scurried away. We
raced around the room briefly until finally it tripped over a pile of books. I
grabbed it by a corner and yanked, hard. It shrieked piteously and ripped at
the seams, expelling puffs of cotton and a faint musty smell.

2.
The astronomers notified us about the meteor shower. In the bulletin they
told us to watch, but only from indoors—just in case.

On the prescribed night we all huddled in the kitchen, in front of the big
south-facing windows. We watched the bright meteors fall like fireworks in
reverse; we ate popcorn and pointed out the best ones. Our breath fogged
up the windows and we rubbed the condensation away hastily with greasy
fingers.

We thought we saw one fall into the garden but our mother wouldn’t let
us check. She said it wasn’t safe yet, we could wait until the morning. We
hardly slept that night, imagining what a meteor must look like. I thought
it would be black and smooth and shiny, like volcanic rock. My sister said
it would be bumpy, from the molten bubbles cooling during its descent
through the atmosphere. My little brother said it would be red and powdery,
like Mars.

As soon as the sun came up we ran to the yard. Even before we passed the
rhododendron we could see where it had hit, the flattened day lilies, the
charred stalks. We pushed through the day lilies and peered in the shallow, roughly rectangular crater. The dirt had been exposed, dark and scorched against the extraterrestrial object: a pillow, plump and innocent, in an off-white pillowcase with navy stripes.

We glanced at each other in confusion, then at the house. In the kitchen we could see our mother making coffee, the sun refracted though fingerprint-smudged glass.

3.
In the old country, my grandfather said, pillows grew on trees. They would plant the pillow-tree seeds, tight clumps of cloth and feathers, at the end of the summer. It was his job to follow the seeders and cover the seeds with little mounds of dirt, packing it gently. During the winter, when the ground was covered with frost, they’d cover the seedlings with old sheets.

The pillow-trees usually bore fruit after three years. The first harvest was always a little hard and lumpy; they’d give these to the old folks. Each subsequent year would get better—the ones at the top were always the softest.

Every year the village held a pillow-harvest festival. It was their prize crop; their orchards were known throughout the country. They would make great piles of ripe pillows and the children would run from stack to stack, hurling themselves at the bosomy white hills. The girl and boy elected Pillow King and Queen that year would lie on a huge wooden bed specially made for this occasion, covered with the best of the crop. At sunset, the entire village had a pillow fight.

One year there was an infestation. The pillows rotted and fell off the branches, sad, flaccid heaps. An old man who fell asleep underneath a tree was smothered by a sudden downfall.

—Julia Kalow
At Columbia, I see with my own eyes how Ph.D. students’ lives are. Consequently, I know what will come as a Ph.D. student, the overwhelming workload and discouragement.

I stand up and say, “I’m going to make myself a stiff drink,” which is what my father says on Friday nights. My mother does it every night, but she doesn’t announce it.

Note: Han should remind us of Anakin as we saw him as a boy on Tatooine in Episode 1, (or rather, the boy as he should have been i.e. not stupid and annoying) while Grievous reminds us of the monstrous half man half machine he will become. Therefore, over the course of the film there should be two or three sequences in which we cut from Han to Anakin to Grievous. These will serve to illustrate this development.

I take a warm dumpling in my spoon and poke it. I love seeing the liquid squish around behind the thin dough. The last time my parents had a party, I put one between my front teeth and bit into it so hot soup flew all over Mr. Deacon, my dad’s boss at the bank. Mr. Deacon shrieked like a girl.

Thinking about weed while in this class makes me feel like a kid in “Another Brick in the Wall.” Thinking about sex in this class makes me feel like a eunuch in Caligula’s harem. What in this class could possibly remind you of sex? Other than looking at a few choice people and reminding me about the importance of birth control, I don’t think I could muster the effort.

Moral of Requiem for a Dream: There are times when you get suckered in / by drugs, and alcohol, and sex with women / but it’s when you do these things too much / that you become an addict, and must get back in touch... Ah, Hollywood Squares. As the old grandma in Requiem said, “I always wanted to be on television! My family will be so proud of me!” O gets the square, or is it X? That’s “O” for “opium” and “X” for “xanax.”

What kind of poetry does Clarence Thomas like?

Did the Gorgon have dinner-plate nipples?

I am the only Whitey in my class, and if I fuck around everyone will suspect that all Whiteys are so out of touch with minority status that we will never recover.

I’m glad you know how to enjoy yourself. The reason I mention this is because last year, I remember being locked in some random bathroom on Carman 4 with about 10 strangers, passing around a j, and someone didn’t take it because he “wanted a career in politics.” WTF? Honestly, WTF? Columbia is not that type of school ... does our Student Government (AJ Pascua?) seem the type to join the Senate? I wonder how bad
it must be at Princeton. This is why secret societies were created. (And we all know how their alumni have managed their reputations. BTW, I was one of the lucky few who got to the joint before the girl who had just puked in the shower. Oh, Carman. Anyway, you know Pascua never inhaled...

Typical hip-hop is to Catullus as Trapped in the Closet is to the Aeneid

Just then, I heard a few boys nearby begin speaking Spanish. They were laughing, wearing FUBU sweatshirts, chinstrap beards, and spiked hair. Now, my only Spanish teacher was a five year old girl named Dora and her monkey. These were not the Dora, nor the monkey, that I had expected all Spanish speakers to be. These were gang members. Something clicked. I could no longer live the life of an average Columbia student, working from day to day in some la-dee-da, make believe universe. I needed to get real, fast. I needed to join a Spanish gang.

The ocean, as an unpeopled and predominantly nationless space, is not considered a site of history.

Women are complex, so let’s create minimalism. They are curvy, so let’s make everything postmodern increasingly phallic, heavy, and hard.

By immersing myself in Proust’s queer habits, I hope to begin fashioning a new critical habit, one more attuned to the contingencies of psychological and political reality, one as efficacious as the term Habit itself.

I remember that for my fifth birthday all I wanted was an off-one-shoulder black satin evening gown. I got it. And I wore it to my birthday party.

I remember when I got a five-year pin for not missing a single morning of Sunday School for five years. (Methodist).

I remember when, in high school, if you wore green and yellow on Thursday it meant that you were queer.

Bergman includes two elements repeatedly within the story, the act of using the restroom and storytelling. For example, he gives a long account of Aunt Emma using the privy in the middle of the night, farts and grunts included.

Words I didn’t know/looked up

Goitrous: goiter is an enlarged thyroid gland it seems like a swelling on the neck

Adenoids: swelling of the tissue in the pharynx

Harelip: a deformed lip

Bessie enters the room and Thomas and Lillianus both become very serious. She basically killed their mood by asking “do you want our child to become a vaudevillian?” Bessie begins to play the piano and Lillianus begins to cry. Thomas then plays the piano and Lillianus begins to brighten up.

The worst thing – could be Extermination

In a static universe, one suspects Aristotle would deny both right and left (even if there were, somehow, sensation).

When I was ten, I cried twice watching West Side Story. Maybe it was watching Maria cry over Tony’s dead body. Or maybe, watching Chino and the Sharks was too much – it made me question my own singing and dancing skills, and wonder why I wasn’t be part of a team that strong.

Later, I gained the skills needed to brutally fight and kill.
24 Month-Old Party People

A Brooklyn art collective caters to the next generation of ravers.

By Joseph Meyers

Rubulad, the infamous bi-monthly debauch at an apartment-building-turned-commune in the badlands of Brooklyn, is a decidedly grown-up affair. About an hour and a half away from Columbia, it’s a converted warehouse that sits in the shadow of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, reachable only by switching from the 1 to the A to the G. After arriving at the Classon subway stop, the journeying partygoer must venture about half a mile past two stretches of housing projects, four gas stations and a structure behind a barbed-fence resembling a hybrid of a prison and a hospital.

What I remember of my last bender—ahem— evening spent at Rubulad are attempts to claw my way out through room after room of sweaty, writhing, half naked and less-than-half conscious bodies before my escape was almost thwarted by a man wearing nothing but socks. On his feet. Sort of like Resident Evil meets Fear and Loathing, or flophouse meets rave. It's been a while since I've been back.

It turns out the people who run this classy fête have children—yes, biological children—of their very own. And they're so proud of their new-wave child-rearing skills that they want to share them with you and yours. Future parents, welcome to Kids' Rubulad, a monthly party for the less-than-inhibited toddler. As Vienna, a laid-back mom from Queens, said, “It's really great to have a space for parents to hang out with their kids and relax without the pressure to conform to anything.”

Resistance to societal constructs aside, the space is standard sultry red light bulbs—so perfect for concealing the wages of age and substance abuse—had been replaced by the wholesome schoolhouse fluorescent variety, casting a charming daycare glow over the kids. The kitchen counters—by night used to sell absinthe shots and pot brownies at the discount rate of $5 a pop—now boasted a buffet of non-dairy vegetarian snacks, juice, and marijuana-free chocolate chip cookies.

Since Rubulad technically functions as an “art collective” while recovering from its collective hangover, there are lots of opportunities for kids to learn about free expression. The walls are covered in fluorescent paint and mixed-media murals that look like they were designed by Lewis Carroll on peyote. From the ceilings, plastic severed limbs and surrealist paper-maché sculptures hang, no doubt capable of stimulating the right brain of even the most bookish youth. A sign in front of a canvas depicting Johnny Cash-as-John Paul II-covered-in-feces reads: "Dude! I just got funding from the NRA to make my giant explicit anal sex sculpture at Ground Zero!" But all of the sexually explicit conspiracy theory-themed psychedelia goes unnoticed by the Rubulad Jr. party guest. Illiteracy is bliss.

Commune-resident Ben—who had emerged from a bedroom behind an enormous cardboard airplane—described some of the afternoon’s excitement. “You guys should have gotten here an hour earlier,” he said. “Shit is so Lord of the Flies, it was ridiculous.” When we arrived, the kindergarten-age kids who remained were more than content with just plain old Play-Doh. Burnt-out parents sat on the

Illustration by Maxine Keyes

Continued on page 32
periphery of the crafts circle and discussed how childhood phobias about mixing different colors of doh may or may not have contributed to their current personality disorders.

One parent, Young, kept the kids entertained by making swords for them out of clown balloons, but he was careful to keep the environment safe and respectful. “If you guys are going to be swinging swords at one another, you’re going to have to do it away from the baby,” he chastised. Realizing what he had said, he turned to the infant sitting next to him and quickly apologized. “Not that you’re a baby. I didn’t mean to say that.”

While the parents bravely confronted their childhood anxieties by finally mixing the red and green clay, the Rubulad kids settled into their future roles as archetypal post-collegiate Brooklyn-dwellers. Sammy, who is eleven, plays the djambo for the Hungry March Band (a 25-piece street band that made an appearance during last semester’s hunger strike) and likes to DJ in his spare time. Though for now he’s content bopping around Williamsburg with his buddies Nula, Liberty, and Illya, Sammy says he’s “not sure if the City of Dreams is for him.” He’s thinking about moving to California, where he can just hang out on the beach and meet people to play rock with.

This week’s Kids’ Rubulad was complimented by the volunteer efforts of Dr. Ben Dublin-Thaler, who earned his Ph.D. in cellular biology from fair Alma Mater a few years back. These days Ben spends his days running the BioBus, a converted San Francisco city bus that a prior owner had engineered to run on vegetable oil (“6 miles to the gallon”), and had outfitted with a bathroom and a cast iron wood-burning stove. After the bus fell into Ben’s hands—by means unknown in South Dakota—he installed a high-powered microscope, bought some lab supplies, and plastered the walls of the bus with information about cells.

Though the value of his scientific inquiries to society at large (not to mention the necessity of his Columbia Ph.D.) may be questionable, the kids seemed to love venturing out to the parked bus. “You guys want to watch me torture some goldfish?” he asked with a boyish gleam in his eyes as he snapped on a pair of yellow kitchen gloves. Ben reached into a blue saucepan that had been sitting on the stove, promptly removed a wiggling goldfish, and placed the ill-fated creature in a Petri dish on the counter. Tweezer gleaming, Ben steadied the animal. The small crowd around him was stunned into a silent revulsion as Ben plucked a scale from the fish’s torso. “I’ve never heard any of them scream,” he shrugged.

If anyone could be said to be in charge of Kids’ Rubulad, it’s Jessica. A free-spirit and a loving mother, Jessica was wearing a Peter Pan outfit and had just been dancing in circles amongst a throng of adoring, gyrating tots—for some, it seems, the difference between Big Person Rubulad and Baby Rubulad is negligible. Jessica got started a few years ago by throwing parties for her own son, now eight, out of their Brooklyn loft. For the past year she has held them at Rubulad, where she also helps out as the commune’s plumber. Jessica tries to create a theme for each of the parties based on the most recent holidays, which sometimes leads to slightly awkward combinations. As she spoke to her enraptured audience of candy-hungry treasure seekers about to embark on an epic scavenger hunt, Jessica helpfully reminded them that “those who discover the special containers will get to do some very special science in the spirit of the Irish Easter Bunny!”

As we chatted, one especially enthusiastic boy ran up to Jessica clutching a strange frog-like plastic trinket. “I found one! I found one!” he squealed. Jessica poked at the completely unidentifiable object. “That’s... not part of the scavenger hunt.” She glanced around. “But you can probably keep it.”

Most months the organizers make a piñata for the kids to take a smack at. Ben was kind enough to show us last month’s, which hung proudly from the ceiling, right next to a plywood rendering of a woman’s spread legs featuring ankle socks and a red thong. “It’s, like, crazy fucked up and beautiful,” he said, gesturing to the piñata. “Some nice psychedelic shit for the kids to stare at.”

— Juli Weiner contributed to this article
Every vital part of New York’s culture is two-tiered. The city is renowned for its monuments and refined architecture, but also for its tenements and fire escapes. Four-star cuisine co-exists with hot dog vendors and Koronet.

So it is with music. While New York’s “official” music scene is second-to-none in innovation, cost, and volume (in every sense) there’s a parallel culture thriving underground. Deep in the catacombs of the subway system, unglamorous and often-unemployed musicians subtly perfect a simpler and more populist version of the craft.

The rules of the busker’s hustle were established long before *Once* ever made it to theaters. A good street musician can play for an hour and make $20 or $30. A bad one can play for an hour and make $5. I once played for three hours and earned an apple and one dollar, legal tender. When I first started busking, in Boston’s Copley Square, life was good. Even though I was an impoverished, untalented burnout, I made so much money from tourists that I considered quitting my day job. But New York is a much harsher mistress.

One reason is the fierce competition. One of the best is Clapton Man, who can generally be found sitting on a bench at the west end of the Sixth Avenue L platform with an acoustic guitar. By all appearances, he plays “Wonderful Tonight” and “Landslide” about two thirds of the time. There’s something intimate and unpretentious about his performance—it’s as if he were sitting on the edge of his bed.

Clapton Man’s foil is Bob Marley Man, who perches monastically on an empty sheetrock bucket ten feet away and plays “No Woman, No Cry” on a bass guitar. He belts it out with shocking passion, and reliably, straphangers sing along from wherever they’re standing, quietly and to themselves. There’s a reason this works: cover songs are the staple of playing in large crowds. Save your own material for the dead of night, when the tunnels are quieter, the waits are longer, and people have no choice but to listen.

Even the most talent-bereft neighborhoods have their share of passable performers. The Banjoer, for instance, serenades Morningide Heights with generic songs about women that are slightly off-tempo but not unpleasant. He hums around on the downtown platform at 103rd Street all day, twanging away. James Taylor Man plays the same stage during the morning rush hour and smiles if he catches you mouthing along.

Busking is unforgiving, and unless you’re exceptionally talented, you have to be driven by a passion for the discipline. The composure required to embarrass oneself in front of a crowd for hours at a time with little monetary reward is significant. Many people cope with these complex demands by developing serious mental disorders. Take the Senior Citizen on the downtown QQRW platform at Times Square. He plays unintelligible songs on an out-of-tune guitar, tiredly shuffling his feet well past three a.m. Standing behind a giant sign inscribed with hand-written religious texts, he enthusiastically jangles and mutters all night.

Instead of developing neuroses, I’ve simply learned some tricks to make busking easier. I now know to smile at older women, kneel down for children, and, most of all, to give the crowd what it wants. For example, on the night of a Colombian soccer game at the Meadowlands, I played under Port Authority and sang every song I knew in Spanish. I raked in muchas pesos for the novelty. If I’m playing on a Brooklyn-bound platform, I try to pick whatever isn’t on the radio that week. If all else fails, everybody loves the Beatles.

—Zach van Schouwen

[Notes From Underground: MUSIC HUMANITIES]
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CAMPUS GOSSIP

THE NARCISSISM OF SMALL DIFFERENCES

Overheard on campus:
“It’s not so much that I’m pro-choice as I am anti-baby.”

Last week’s Transportation Engineering class met at a Rockland County mall over an hour away from New York, so naturally no one showed up. But Professor Daniel Peterson had required everyone to email an RSVP, and followed up by opening the class by announcing everyone’s excuses:

Professor Peterson: “You! How was the school play?”
Student: “Um, excellent, actually!”
Peterson: “I’m glad to hear it! And you, did you get your lacrosse team together in time for the big game?”
Student: “Yes.”

DO THE RIGHT THING

Overheard in Butler Café, two girls talking to each other toward the back of the long line:

Girl 1: “Oh my god I am so excited for this chai latte. Like, I really need it.”
(Girl 2 nods emphatically in agreement)
Girl 1: “But I never know whether to get the small or the medium.”
Girl 2: “I mean, do what you think is right.”
(Both pause to study the Blue Java menu intensely)
Girl 2: “There’s only a 10 cent difference between the small and the medium, so you should definitely splurge!”

The small is listed as $2.85, while the medium is $2.90.

From a recent CCSC email from President Diamond:

“Do you want to be respected? Do you want the power to book spaces? Do you want to enlighten other?”

...and later, from that same email:

“Midterms destroy everything that is relaxed in your body!”

Subaltern seeks ability to speak, massage.

A man on campus, speaking into his cell phone:

“What, did she like hit clear on all the SAS programming?”
[long pause]
“Dude that sucks... I guess just tell her to wear shorter skirts to work or something.
Yeah man, okay, peace.”
[He hangs up]

Who says women don’t have the self-esteem to compete in science-related fields?

Male (flirtatiously): Yeah, Ritalin makes me jittery and Adderall just stops working!
Female: Yeah, because you have to keep increasing it.
M: I basically just stalled at two in the afternoon during study week.
F (leaning in): So where did you get the Adderall?
M: Psych Services.
F: Really? ’Cause my friend went there and they just wouldn’t give him any!
M: Yeah, I had to go through some testing. [Pause]
I’m really OCD too.

Male: [to himself]
Female: [to herself]

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The following email advertising Senior Night was sent to all Columbia College seniors:

“Senior Night tonight at the West End (. . . still refuse to call it Havana Central)

They are giving out Becks glasses, Anheuser hats, and Miller Light keychains. See you later”

Entirely futile CCSC correspondence, as everyone worth his weight in promotional Bud Light fuzzy dice knows most seniors won’t leave their dorms for anything less than a novelty PBR inflatable saxophone.

During a demonstration of the movement of iron filaments on a projector screen under the influence of a magnet, Professor Parsons, who teaches Intro to Electricity and Magnetism course, decided to pick up where Psych Services left off.

Parsons: What do you see?
[he gestures at the design on the wall. The class is silent.]
Parsons: Anyone done psychotherapy recently? Do you see your parents? Are they arguing?
[pause, then class laughs nervously]

Go Ask Alice!, Columbia’s online health and sexuality forum, recently moved offices. During the relocation, one employee recorded the following list of sexual accoutrement and sterilized goods that were left in their wake:

- Inflatable microphone
- Condom shaped hats
- Cotton pads for removing makeup
- A book called Rape, Rape, Rape, Rape
- Tripods: about 15 of them.
- Playdough
- “Little Airport” sticker book
- A CD with the caption: “Bridging the gap between the leather bar and your bedroom!”

The BWGossip alias recently received an email from Chancellor Arnold Eisen announcing a contest to compose the official song of the Jewish Theological Seminary. After detailing the guidelines of the contest—“any lyrics must include both Hebrew and English”—Chancellor Eisen wished students luck and signed the email:

“Warmly
arnold eisen signature 2
Chancellor Arnold Eisen”

Because “arnold eisen signature 1” would have been completely inappropriate.

A student on his cell phone standing in Butler, just outside of room 210. He stands and waits as the call goes to voicemail. He leaves the following message:

“Yo. My sister shaved her head. Her head. Later man, peace.”

Later, bro.

A Monthly Pop Culture Review with the Columbia Games Club:

Gamer Male 1: “I drink your milkshake!”
Gamer Male 2 (completely incredulous): “What’s that from?!”
GM 1: “I think it’s from a fad comedy show.”

Join us next month as the Games Club (incorrectly) references Old School, Googles “LOLCats.” D&D may never be the same.

Ten minutes later:

Gamer 1: “Fuck seagulls.”
Gamer 2: “Yeah! Fuck ‘em!”

Deluxe… it’s what’s for dinner!