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The existential crisis of the A+.
By Andrew Flynn

INFORMATION INSECURITY
It’s 3 a.m., do you know where your Social Security number is?
By Juli N. Weiner

SUMMER SABBATICAL: Jean and Lee’s Excellent Adventure

Also: Debora Spar, Seminar Etiquette, Of Axons and Art
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: “The Anatomy Lesson” by Maxine Keyes
Orientation week is to freshman year as Ibiza is to Spain. It’s a coastal island where time halts, beer flows, and the salt-of-the-earth locals regard its frolickers’ existence with bemused scorn. It smells like cheap, bad wine and cheap, bad sex, and unlike Vegas there’s no verbal contract guaranteeing that what happens there, stays there.

But you’re on the mainland now, and the dialect, you’ll find, is different. If you spy upperclassman watching you, pointing, or trying to touch your hair, rest assured that this is customary. We aren’t sure about you yet, and a good number of us can only assume you’re on steroids, as your SATs scores read like the marks of intellectual dope fiends. We’re naturally cautious, and have watched the new heights of your GPAs with base, animal fear. Are you smarter than us? Our testicles are shrinking just thinking about it.

This humble publication, which is now in its 10th year (crazy!) begins to stammer and sweat at the idea of offering such rigorously educated people advice. Rather, we mean only to divert you, to ease the weight of your enormous skulls with entertainment. Forgive us these trespasses.

For amusement and an introduction to your president, turn to Rob Trump’s honest take on President Bollinger’s summer-long sabbatical in Vermont, where he is surprised to find he’s not retired. Follow this with a piece on the A+ grade, which, you’ll be stunned to learn, many humanities professors do not believe in and do not dispense. And, for an inside look at how Columbia handles your private information, take a gander at Juli N. Weiner’s article about the Social Security number breach that occurred over the summer.

This month’s Blue and White aims to please, so finish unpacking your annotated Iliad, turn the page, and dig in.

Anna Phillips
Editor-in-Chief
“We’ll go to 1020 for 15 minutes tops, and then we’ll head downtown.”
(We will be at 1020 until last call, leaving only to buy cigarettes and Roti Roll.)

“I’m going to be a film major.”
(You’ll realize you can learn all the cocktail party film theory you want without actually having to major in it. Welcome to the American Studies department.)

“I’m going to read 50 pages of this book a night.”
(I will spend $67 on Red-Bull in two days, and will not finish the book.)

“I will be holding office hours.”
(The TA’s email is listed on the front of the course packet.)

“At Columbia, the city is your classroom!”
(Hamilton 602 is your classroom, and the city is expensive and far away.)

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THESES PIECES

Help Susie Senior match the titles of her friends’ undergraduate theses to their post-colon subtitles!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>SUBTITLE</th>
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<tr>
<td>A. A Villanovan Hut Urn:</td>
<td>1. Disneyland’s Pirates of the Caribbean</td>
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<td>B. Mortification:</td>
<td>2. Agricultural Wages in Roman Egypt</td>
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<td>C. The Taddei Tondo:</td>
<td>3. A Dilemma of Attribution</td>
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<td>E. The “Spirit of…the Changing Order:”</td>
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<td>G. Meager Returns:</td>
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<td>H. Playing With Fire:</td>
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<td>I. Can He Let His Children Starve For His Dissonances?</td>
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<td>J. Culture or Commerce?:</td>
<td>11. The Book-of-the-Month Club from 1926 to 1946</td>
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Answers: A5, B6, C3, D1, E2, F1, H9, I7, J11

Compiled by Katie Reedy, Juli N. Weiner and Sara Vogel
Illustrations by Allison Halff
Freshpeople, when you sit down at your first Lit Hum class next week, refrain from assessing trivial details such as your professor’s teaching ability, knowledge of the Great Books, and general attractiveness as you attempt to determine his or her competence. Rather, aim your curious freshperson gaze at your subject and ask yourself: Does this seem like a person who can use $200 effectively? And by “effectively,” think, “without causing profound and utter embarrassment or disaster.”

All Core professors receive a stipend to sponsor a class-related activity. Some spend prudently, on museum visits and Core-related movies. Others spend a little too carefully. One current senior said her CC professor donated the whole kit and caboodle to the Rare Books Library in Butler. Another senior accompanied her professor and class to an idyllic picnic in the northwest corner of Central Park—only to be rudely interrupted by a couple making an amateur pornographic movie under a nearby willow tree. And still another traveled all the way to her professor’s house in Greenwich, Connecticut to attend a Sunday afternoon luncheon, only to find upon disembarking from the Metro-North platform that she was the only pupil who had accepted the professor’s invitation. He wept; she got an A.

While an unpopular professor’s efforts almost always end in tragedy, professors’ offers of friendship to students from can be equally embarrassing. Jacob Brunner, CC’09, remembers going to a performance of Oedipus with his attractive Lit Hum professor: “She was young, I mean like 30. She asked if anyone wanted to go and I volunteered. I kind of had a crush on her too.” After an edgy performance in a small, dark theater, complete with shocking full frontal nudity, Brunner recalls entering a bar with the professor, where she bought him a beer, ordered herself whiskey, “got kind of loopy,” and walked him all the way back into his dorm, at which point she said that beautiful phrase, “We should do this again sometime.”

Of course, this is not to say that all of your professors’ sincere attempts will end in complete failure or romantic innuendos—just most of them. Jia Ahmad, CC’11, recounted the night her Lit Hum teacher took her class to Pistioci, excitedly remembering how “he served personal cupcakes (with each person’s name) that he made from scratch! They were pretty good.” —Tony Gong

It’s 8:30 a.m. and there’s been an outbreak of the plague in Pakistan. Soon you learn that it’s not the plague, it’s something else, and in the meantime, there’s been a riot over food prices. And it’s only Monday.

To premature policy wonks, this sounds like a Model U.N. scenario. To Pakistanis, it’s nightmarish, and to Marc Levy—deputy director of the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) – it’s another day at his highly unconventional office.

Commissioned by the Department of Defense-funded Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA) to design a simulation that would expose military and political leaders to the environmental threats their countries may eventually face, CIESIN went looking for lab rats.
Emails to various student groups stated that volunteers would be paid $200 to sit in a room from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. for one day—especially volunteers with “regional expertise in the Middle East, Mediterranean, or South Asia.” During the simulation, participants would be presented with theoretical crises and then invited to suggest solutions.

The request was vague but the payoff huge, and eleven Columbia students—most of them graduate students from the desired regions—signed on. Levy said their workday began with a mock newscast warning that “in the near future” the weather would become “very unusual.” There were food security problems in several cities and refugee camps that had descended from baseline chaos into mayhem. As the hours went by, “the sense of crisis became sharper,” Levy said. And if the subjects weren’t sufficiently terrified, facilitators intervened to add more bad news.

Regrouping after the latest announcement of disaster—the day’s specials included floods, droughts, food shortages, and infectious disease—the students suggested ways of handling the infernos their countries were frying or freezing in.

Though the program doesn’t adapt itself to its subjects’ responses, “If one group just says, ‘Our response is that we want some rich country to come in and fix it,’ then we’ll say, ‘They’re not going to, so you have to do something internally within the region,’” Levy said. With the trial run now complete and successful, the simulation will be turned over to NESA for them to use on trainable world leaders. “It’ll be their baby,” Levy said. Their disease addled, refugee-plagued baby.

—Anna Phillips

Many generations ago, before college students were put on probation for just about anything worth doing, Columbians were a naughty bunch even by antiquated standards. Their collegiate misdeeds did not go unnoticed or unpunished; they were chronicled in The Black Book of King’s College, a record of “misde-meanours” committed between 1771 and 1775 by students of King’s College.

The Black Book’s foreword, written for the typed and bound edition of 1931, insists that the book “has great value…which historians will eagerly pounce upon.” But this heady promise appears to be the error of an excitable archivist: The book has had little publicity beyond a 1900 feature in the New York Times and the occasional stop on a group tour of Butler’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

After all, the Black Book is hardly a police blotter. Rapalje is guilty of “stealing a pair of Cotton Stockings belonging to Moncrieffe.” Cornelius Bogert, a “most frequent offender,” plays hooky and, after the investigators contact his mother, is found “skulking behind the College.”

The Black Book logs “Acts of Contumaciousness,” not crimes. The boys of King’s College respect the rules that today’s university students casually disregard—alcohol never so much as makes an appearance. One might infer that the drinking was done off campus, as smuggling in booze would have been an unnecessary risk to students frequently caught sneaking through holes in the College Fence” at the wrong hour. Fittingly, their punishment was often a spell of confinement.

These are the exploits of the obstinate and disobedient, not the perverses or antisocial. Another common punishment was the completion of tedious “Exercises,” such as the translation of “the second half of the eighth Aeneid,” or more fearsome still, of the Columbia Spectator into Latin.

It was also of paramount importance that the President—who appears personally involved in each of his students’ lives—obtained each culprit’s confession.

To every act of petty rebellion committed by the students, the administrators answered with similarly petty forms of repression. Still, most of the young men remained defiant. Nicoll, who had been punished with the translation of a chapter of the German philosopher Pufendorf, “when desired to do it, told the President to his Face he would not.”

—Alexandra Muhler
The introduction, though boisterous, is largely superfluous. Were a scientific study commissioned on the subject, it would likely find that over the course of Krebs’ time at Columbia, he has high-fived, back-patted and glad-handed most of campus. For him, every stranger is the perfect stranger.

Then again, no one can be a stranger for long. Krebs has a knack for pulling crucial personal information out of his sleeve, as if by sleight of hand. He can recall your significant other, your activities, and your hometown on command. One former opponent suggested that he keeps index cards on everyone he knows, using the minutiae of people’s lives to make them feel as though they are in his inner circle.

Club Krebs is an inclusive place. So inclusive that the fine line many politicians maintain between the private and the public persona simply doesn’t exist for him. Asking his closest friends about the real George A. Krebs—the man behind the suit and jeweled plastic crown—produces the same results as asking his acquaintances. He is gregarious, he likes to show people he works hard, and he seems like a guy you’d want to get a beer with. Completely at ease with having hundreds of friends, he’d want you among them whether he gets your vote or not.

His critics, however, believe that Krebs makes it his business to be an expert on people, like any good politician, and is insincere in his affection - at root, ambitious. There is some evidence for this: last year he wrote a paper for a seminar on how presidents got their political starts in college. (On a less serious note, his phone’s playback tone is “The World’s Greatest” by R. Kelly.) But ask him what he wants to do after graduation and he’ll throw up his hands. Maybe law school, maybe not. “You’re the fourth of I’m sure a thousand people who will be asking me and every other senior that question.” For all of his campaigning and efforts to learn students’ names, he doesn’t seem to have an ulterior motive, which is probably what draws students to him in the first place.

Unlike many of his peers and predecessors, Krebs didn’t tidy himself up for the campaign. He didn’t paint himself as responsible or exceptionally competent. Instead, he ran his campaign for what student government elections are—popularity contests. One former rival remembers talking to students about campus-related issues during her campaign freshman year, frequently coming across the response, “I agree with you on these issues, but I’m friends with George.”

Krebs attracts every kind of person to him exactly because he avoids high-falutin’ stump speeches and refuses to tell his classmates that he’s smarter than they are. In a school filled with specialists working to get 4.33 GPAs or writing full length musicals, he enjoys playing basketball, singing along to every word at a John Legend concert, and throwing up gang signs in his campaign’s rap video.

But whenever you see him at a student event, turning wildly in every direction to acknowledge his seemingly endless supply of friends and acquaintances, there is nothing conniving in him. He looks more like
a child visiting FAO Schwartz for the first time, wide-eyed so as to soak up just a little more of every moment. Krebs said, “When I first arrived at school my dad was leaving me with some wisdom and he said, ‘You know George, there are going to be a lot of opportunities for you at Columbia. I just want to tell you to drink from the water fountain not from the fire hose. Take it a sip at a time, don’t try to overwhelm yourself and try to take it all in.’ I’ve rejected that advice almost entirely and I’ve really tried to drink from the fire hose during my time at Columbia.”

If Krebs has drunk from the fire hose, then the water is full of all of the people that he has met, charmed and turned into his base. When he stands at Alma Mater, shouting amidst the masses, asking for their votes, it’s difficult to see that he is looking back at you, studying you and soaking you up.

— J. Joseph Vlasits

ASHRAYA GUPTA

While hosting WKCR’s soul show, “Across 110th Street,” Ashraya Gupta, C’09, received the phone call of a lifetime. “I picked up the phone and this sort of deep voice said, ‘Hi, this is Al Green. What’s your name?’ I just completely lost it and started making no sense on the phone, which is probably what led him to hang up on me. I think I actually said I love you.” She says she’s still not sure if it was real or not, but she was so flustered she forgot the name of the album she was playing.

At 5’1” and often clad in boat shoes and spectacles, Ash may seem an unlikely authority on soul music. Coming from a musical household, Ash started hosting the show when she joined KCR her freshman year and now possesses a near-encyclopedic knowledge of the genre. In another one of her favorite calls, Ash remembers, “This woman requested a song and then said, ‘My mother and I have been having a debate. Are you black or are you white?’ And I just started laughing because I’m Indian. I asked her what side she was on, and she said, ‘I thought you were European, but my mom said, you couldn’t play this kind of music so well if you weren’t black.’ I guess it means I know my stuff,” she laughs.

Born in New Delhi, India, Ash moved to England with her family when she was four, and after three years relocated to Cincinatti, before settling in Sayville, Long Island. Devoted to her adopted hometown, Ash proudly describes its “huge parking lot full of Deloreans,” award-winning main street, and Long Island’s tightly connected community of musicians. Despite her appreciation for soul music and small towns, she only took her American citizenship oaths in March of her freshman year. “I feel like everyone gets their notion of what it’s like to be Indian in America from Jhumpa Lahiri books, and I feel like that’s true, but not for me. My memory of Indian get-togethers is everyone getting really drunk and my dad playing guitar and my falling asleep.”

Those same activities have earned Ash the nickname Snorah Jones, a comparison to the soft-jazz vocalist in honor of Ash’s husky singing style and narcoleptic tendencies (as she puts it, “I sing a little jazzy and I sleep a lot.”). She may be best known around campus as the lead singer of The Kitchen Cabinet, an experimental folk band that formed in 2007. “This past year, I had decided to get myself together and do pre-med. I was all intent on being practical about things and instead I wound up playing shows every weekend,” she says. Though none of the band members expected The Kitchen Cabinet to take off, after playing their catchy songs at ADP and releasing a free EP on their website, the band has garnered quite a following—nearly 200 Facebook fans as of print. This summer they played Todd P’s Silent Barn with Megafaun, a band they met at the WBAR-B-Q. “It was the sweatiest I’ve ever been,” Ash says of the show.

Ash remains realistic about the future of The Kitchen Cabinet. “We’re not the kind of band where this is it for us.” After much internal debate, she still has plans to go to medical school. “I didn’t want to be another Indian girl who went to a good school and became a doctor, but I’ve always wanted to feel like I’m accomplishing something tangible. If that’s what I want, I have to stop worrying about being a cliché.”

Still, she’s not walking away from music any time soon. “I can’t see myself not writing songs... I just wake up and I pick up the guitar. It’s not like I could stop doing that.”And if Al Green ever calls back, she’ll be ready.

— Sasha de Vogel

Illustrations by Allison Halff
Grade Expectations

The existential crisis of the A+. By Andrew McKay Flynn

You, overly ambitious, prospective history major—you will work hard. You will always have something incisive to say in discussion sections. You will spend hours in Butler, defacing your expensive books with those neon tabs. You will actually do research for five-to-seven-page papers. At home, you will log on to SSOL, check, and rest assured knowing that you got the A you deserved.

And you, disturbingly focused, prospective chemistry major—you too will work hard. You will slog through all those daylong labs. You will write detailed outlines of your even more expensive books. You will learn all the answers to those crazy tests. Come December, you will be satisfied: You will have an A+.

Huh? A+? If you thought that A+ was an imaginary grade reserved for Jesus and kids in cliché TV shows—welcome to Columbia! Here, 4.33-weighted A+s exist, and some of you are going to get them, especially if you are good at numbers. The A+ is a known for those in the sciences, but for those in the humanities, it’s a known unknown; some people are getting them, but why and when is less than transparent. This raises a cluster of related questions: why are A+s so central to grading in the sciences? Who gets A+s in the humanities? Is the widely felt disparity putting the best humanities students at a disadvantage when it comes time to award academic honors?

While grade inflation is a hot topic on campuses, there are few available statistics—the Office of Academic Affairs will not make grade distribution statistics public. According to minutes from an Executive Committee on the Arts and Sciences meeting, A-range grades (A+, A, A-) have increased 22.2% over the last 12 years, but no one knows how many of those are A+s. Thus, The Blue and White decided to go for the next best thing: opinions. Here, in an unscientific sampling, is what we found.

Talking to science professors bolstered the perception that students in the sciences are getting more A+s, because, well, the scientists liked A+s. One professor who works in the sciences and wished to remain anonymous pointed to the most basic difference in grading between the sciences and the humanities. “In the sciences, it is generally possible to discern perfect mastery of concepts tested,” he said. This perfect mastery was, for chemistry professor Scott Snyder, reason to keep the A+ grade. “I gave only 3 people A+ grades this year,” he said. “That’s out of 400 people, and it was for people who were perfect. I reserve it for a performance that is truly extraordinary.” As to the bloated 4.33 the grade carries? “Just as A− counts as 3.67, why should A+ count as 4.0?” he asked.

Among the humanities faculty, however, there...
was little consensus. Many professors wade around somewhere in the middle of the A+ pool, uncomfortable with grade inflation but wanting to reward truly outstanding work. Many are not opposed to A+s on principle, but have rarely—if ever—given them. For others, it is a pedagogical issue to which they’ve given little thought.

Then there are those for whom the grade means a lot. In the anti-A+ corner looms Herbert Sloan, a professor of history at Barnard. When I first emailed Sloan, he wrote back quickly: “No one has ever gotten an A+ from me… The notion is an abomination and the sooner it disappears from Morningside Heights, the better.” Sloan later clarified that he opposes awarding even outstanding work a symbolic 4.0 A+. “It’s an unnecessary grade,” he explained. “An A pure and simple should be enough for anyone, and if you accumulate enough of them, you’ll graduate summa, so the distinction for the happy few is there.” Michael Rosenthal, a professor of English, concurred. “I think it’s a sort of silly grade,” he smiled. “It implies a sort of immortal perfection.”

Sloan also thinks that its disappearance is a real possibility. “As I understand it,” he said, “the subject is under consideration by the relevant faculty and administrative bodies… I wouldn’t be surprised if the A+ disappears in 2008-2009.” (He later said he learned from a conversation with someone knowledgeable that he was probably being too optimistic).

There are certainly those in the humanities who disagree with Sloan. General Studies Dean Peter Awn, also a professor in the Religion Department, was one of the few I spoke to who had taken part in any interdisciplinary discussions about the A+, and he appreciated the scientists’ claim that the grade was necessary. But Awn finds the grade useful in the humanities as well. “Look,” he said, “when someone is writing papers of such an analytic quality that they literally look like they were written by an advanced graduate student—and does that for all four of the eight-page papers in my lecture course—I think that course.” Michael Rosenthal agreed that professors have stopped grading seriously. “After the 60s,” he said, “the faculty lost its corporate nerve. To me, B+ is a solid grade, but people come to me in tears over a B+. If a class has 50% As, how do you distinguish? This really hurts the best students.”

But, while Sloan and Rosenthal worry that the prevalence of A+s in the hard sciences may hurt the best students in the humanities when it comes to academic awards, Awn stresses that different disciplines grade differently and need to be evaluated as such. (Phi Beta Kappa and Latin Honors selection processes include subjective elements like professor recommendations, for example, and thus are not chosen on GPA alone.)

While not disputing the consensus history of grade inflation, some who’ve spent decades in Morningside Heights were quick to note that lax grading is not the sole reason for steadily increasing GPAs. Mellon Professor in the Humanities Karl Krober, who got his Ph.D. at Columbia in the 50s and returned to teach in the 70s, has been around long enough to remember the university’s ebb and flow. “This is Columbia University in the City of New York,” he said. “If New York is up, Columbia is up.” Krober remembered giving an A+ in the 50s as a grad instructor, and gives them now to recognize outstanding work, but gave few, if any, during his time here in the 70s.

Other factors complicate a straightforward assess-
ment of grade inflation. The Executive Committee on the Arts and Sciences held a forum to discuss grading policy this past March, and the minutes offer multiple explanations for rising GPAs. One commenter pointed out that many C and D students drop classes once they realize their destinies. Differences in grading between the humanistic disciplines were a springboard for speculation that students may self-select into higher-grading majors. Someone noted that students can pick majors in accord with their skill sets, but must suffer their ways through the core.

But the biggest takeaway message of the minutes was the lack of consensus. There is little discussion between humanities faculty on grading rationale, no training of new faculty members on how to grade, and few departments with concrete grading guidelines. But, if professors are stuck in their own grade-distribution monads, students are in the position to understand the hills and valleys of grading idiosyncrasies best. So, we sought the advice of some Phi Beta Kappa students.

Like their professors, most students agreed that science and math majors would rack up more A+s than their counterparts in the humanities. And, like their professors, they disagreed deeply on whether the grade should be used in the humanities. For some like Andrew Gershon, an English major, the idea is crazy. “Humanities grading is completely subjective,” he said. “It’s easy to tell what is an A paper and a B+ paper, but honestly I think an A+ is absurd in the humanities. Even for journal articles— you could find ways to make them better.”

Because of the fundamental difference between the disciplines—there are perfect chemistry test scores but are there perfect interpretations of *Little Dorrit*—humanities A+s have come to stand for profound originality in question asking and answering. “I wrote about something that hadn’t been studied much and took a very unorthodox approach to it,” said Michael Alijewicz, an English major who got one of his A+s for a seminar paper that he then turned into a senior thesis. “If you can go against the grain while still being convincing, I think that’s a good criterion for an A+.”

But since breathtaking originality in the humanities seems to be less common than technical mastery of the sciences, students say the A+ has come to stand for two radically different things. While an A in many science classes indicates that the student is probably not the best in the class, in the humanities an A is still the standard upper limit and A+ seems like a bonus. “They are more like pardons or get-out-of-jail-free cards to help smooth over the sometimes rocky results of unstandardized, value-based grading,” said Chris Westcott, who studied English, philosophy and creative writing. “The latter being such, I’d say a lot of professors in the humanities don’t even bother with A+s.”

The fact that many professors don’t give A+, combined with the idiosyncratic standards of the ones who do, gives the feeling that getting an A+ in the humanities is pretty random. “Getting an A+ in a humanities course was really a total surprise,” said Kieron Cendric, an art history major. “I feel like it was really luck of the draw. There were other times in humanities courses when I was working equally as hard and not getting A+s, because some professors just don’t give them.”

Nevertheless, there were dissenters. A quantitative student who chose to be anonymous offered an appropriately quan-
titative analysis of the A+ approach by science and humanities faculty. While the student received more A+ grades in sciences courses, s/he also took more science courses. “I think the proportion relative to the courses in the field was about the same.” The student also wondered whether science and math students appeared to be getting more A+s because their classes are typically larger than those in humanities. “In a huge lecture course, one professor may be giving five or six A+s,” the student said, while no A+s may be awarded in a seminar of only 10 or 12 humanities students.

Jon Siegel, an economics-mathematics major and former chair of the Student Governing Board, refused to accept the line that humanities grading is more subjective than grading in quantitative fields. “I think the reason that it’s harder to get an A+ in a humanities course largely stems from the policies of the teachers,” he said. “Any good course could make itself quantifiable. There is much more grade inflation as a whole in the humanities, so teachers don’t want to give A+s, but there should be standard curves across all the disciplines.”

When it comes down to the effect skyrocketing science GPAs might have on things like getting inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, the A+ drama gets a bit fiercer. “I wish I could say it never crossed my mind,” said Gaby Rothberger, a double concentrator in philosophy and psychology. “I guess even when I did think about the fact that people in the hard sciences might get more A+s, I acknowledged the fact that it would be very hard [and] in the classes I was taking it would be harder to do worse.”

Jeff Shrader, an economics-mathematics major, offered a more controversial hypothesis. “I’m not saying it’s the truth,” he said, “but it could simply be that you have the best students self-selecting into quantitative majors. That may ruffle a lot of people’s feathers.”

Despite these disagreements, many granted that something ought to be done to achieve clearer standards. Shrader had a story. “I went on a job interview once,” he told me, “and I had my 4.0 GPA printed on my resume, and the interviewer said, ‘Well, Columbia grades out of 4.33. Why do you have a 4.0?’ That confused me, and I thought, ‘Why do I have a 4.0? Maybe I should have a 4.33.’ I think Columbia ought to go one of two ways—either keep it at 4.0 or give out a more standard number of A+s.”

While some doubt that departments could ever be brought to cooperate on grading standards. Shrader, who TA’d Macroeconomics, offered the Economics Department as a stellar example of a department that suggested standard grading curves. “It was like the U.N.,” he said. “They said ‘It would be nice if you gave these grades. The whole university could do that.’”

This very point was made by someone at the Executive Committee forum in March. Furthermore, Professor Awn noted that the Task Force on Undergraduate Education is talking to students and seriously investigating issues surrounding grading. Hopefully a more open discussion will help clear up the ambiguities of grading.

What this portends for the future of A+s is anyone’s guess. “Should it be given away like a blue ribbon at the State Fair or like a 1-up in Super Mario?” Chris Westcott wondered. “I don’t know.” He has lots of company.

—additional reporting contributed by Anna Phillips
Seminar Etiquette: A Primer

BY ALEXANDER STATMAN

It takes courage to take a seminar. You've forsaken the anonymity of the lecture hall and with it, the perspective of one who selectively looks on from a dozen rows away. In a seminar, students' doodles and professors' age spots are equidistant from your eyes. People are looking and, yes, judging. True success in a seminar only follows if you understand the bipartite goal of the seminar: learn as much as you can, and act cool while doing it.

Many practices are common to both projects. For example: silence. For the greater part of any class, you should not be talking. Even before you speak, there are a few crucial behavioral mandates. Laptops and note-taking are almost always superfluous in a seminar. The purpose of your class is not to amass information, but to process it. This may seem like an excuse for laziness, but it's a good one, and professors buy it, so you might as well use it.

The seminar professor is an entirely different beast from the lecture professor. You may sit at the same round table, but don't let the arrangement fool you—you are seated like equals, but equals you are not. A proper amount of deference is essential. Students usually err either in the direction of disengagement or sycophancy. Professors like people who are like themselves, so be both casual and playful—this lets you gain popularity and respect simultaneously. For a master of such subtle self-inflation, look no further than Socrates.

The seminar is a fundamentally social thing, and the greatest sins of the seminar student all stem from solipsism. For social purposes, the golden rule is not the answer: the mute in the corner whose opinion the professor perfunctorily asks probably thinks that everyone else is too slow to be worth his time. You're better off indulging your forced fascination with anarcho-syndicalism. At worst, you get called out by a student who's smarter than you are. And if you spout nonsense and your class lets you get away with it, you've won the right fair and square.

Successful seminar engagement calls for great subtlety, finesse, and clarity. Students will often preface a comment with something like: “Yeah, I was just going to say that...” If you were about to say something, and someone else said it, then you don't have to. Other times, people use “I was just going to say” as a disclaimer when they really mean to say “I am about to say something trivial or noncommittal.” Never say anything trivial or noncommittal without magnifying it out of proportion. For purposes of argument, timidity is worse that arrogance, and everyone knows that in a seminar, no one means everything that he says.

It is always best to be explicit. If, after a particularly scintillating comment, you want to voice your simple agreement—and there may be good reason to do so—then be direct: “I was just going to say that. I agree completely.” Now that's a sentiment everyone can get on board with! When dissenting, do not avoid active disagreement—it's fun, and flattering. If you had said something painfully stupid, no one would have thought it worthwhile to respond at all.

Go out of your way to set a pleasant tone: talk to classmates before and after class, don’t use isolationist body language (e.g. pulling your hoodie over your head), and doodle on the chalkboard during breaks if you feel the inclination. Enthusiasm is cloying only when it seems calculated at winning favor and grades. Meaningless acts of alacrity are the most meaningful of all.

Fortunately, as is true no where else in life, if you pay enough attention to being cool in a seminar, real success will follow. Because, in a seminar, the best way to seem cool is to seem smart—and the best way to seem smart is to be smart.
Another summer has come and gone, three and a half months that Verily imagines most Colombians put to worse use than their directionless days of buying into the capitalist apparatus at Havana Central, gulping down and firing off a few shots at the human flesh. As our Dives passed through these dives at the threshold of this new school year, he observed the usual signs of societal malaise: earnest young men in button-down striped shirts with fused vertebrae protruding through white fabric, ladies with skin-tones that could only have been tanned in the light of an iMac, and so on.

Verily wonders: how did they pass their fifteen weeks of self-direction? Envision: rows and rows of desks as distinctive as an engineer’s economics exam, lattices of Bloomberg spreadsheets morphing from monitors into cages of metal bars, luminous days spent in sterile offices staring into the abyss of computer kiosks. And for what, asks Verily? So their children may do the same, reproducing in ever-multiplying litters until humanity covers the earth and all that is dear in the world withers away?

Scatological and eschatological forecasts aside, let Verily propound the following history. As much as it pains him to admit it, the Veritas family comes, as all families do, from the farm. This was not a paltry plot in the middle of Middlesex, mind you, but a baronial manor on which his progenitors indulged their Byronic manners. Alas, the enclosure movement was cruel to the V.s, and soon they’d descended to the ranks of the cultivators. V.’s own great-grandfather became as downwardly mobile as Simon Dedalus and as despondently dipsomaniacal as Sebastian Flyte. But from the ashes of penury there arose a phoenix, and into a bourgeois existence was born V.

Let V.V. be the first to say that the details of his life are quite inconsequential, but the trajectory of his family is of the utmost importance. If his parents had been poorer, he would have been some loathsome Horatio Alger story (not Ragged Dick); and if his parents had been richer, he would have been a hipster. It is this gentleman’s conviction that true wealth consists not in making money, but in renouncing and disdain ing it, and if he were so interested in attaining this chimera, he would be a factotum fetching coffee with the rest of the rabble.

Bearing this in mind, V.V. supposes now that a brief catalogue of his “alternative” summer break is in order. Our narrative begins in Portland, where V. observed hipsters in their native habitat, cordoned off on some side-street at a Northwest Brewfest, velocipedes waiting to whisk them away. From there he took a drive down the Five to visit his cousins, farmers in Humboldt County; rough winds failed to shake his darling buds of May, and he is happy to report that the grass is indeed greener in Northern California. He worked as a bagger at Best Buy, a beggar in Berlin, and a bugger in Chelsea. He was cured of an Oedipus complex in Vienna, the Spanish disease in France, and the French disease in Spain. He seduced Judith Nathan at Yankee Stadium and Benazir Bhutto in her Federally Administered Tribal Areas. He drank Wild Turkey with John Daly, and PBR with Jenna Bush. He got destroyed in New Orleans and built habitats for humanity in Williamsburg. He declared eminent domain on Tehran and read Lolita in Manhattanville.

Which brings us back to the ivory tower, from which yours truly surveys, beyond 125th Street, New York’s Sudetenland while sucking and blowing mint-scented smoke from his hookah. As he envelops himself in wreaths of cumulus and nimbus, spraying towards Sprayergen, watching the freshmen scuttle like ants beneath him, he wonders: is humanity slouching towards hipsterity?

—Verily Veritas
Jean and Lee’s Excellent Adventure

Day One of Bollinger’s Vermont sabbatical. By ROB TRUMP

8:00 AM: Here we are. Sunny Vermont. Sunny, sunny Vermont. Let the sabbatical commence.

8:21 AM: ...

8:25 AM: Jesus, this is boring.

8:26 AM: What the hell am I supposed to do on a sabbatical, anyway? Jean? Jean, could you come over here?

8:33 AM: Jean, would you look up “sabbatical” in the OED for me?

8:34 AM: Under “S.” “S” for “sabbatical.”

8:35 AM: One “b.” No, I’m not sure! Do I look sure? Two “b”s. Three “b”s! Is it really that hard to find when you’ve got “s-a-b” to start?

8:40 AM: “A period of leave from work”? Aw, no, really? Just a... just a period of leave? So I have to go back?

8:41 AM: Which is the one where... which is the one where you don’t have to go back to work anymore? Retirement? Retirement! That’s the one I wanted! That’s the good one!

8:44 AM: Well, I guess that means at least Quigley and Colombo are coming back from their “sabbaticals” too, huh?

8:45 AM: Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me.

8:46 AM: So I’m all alone on this one, huh, Jean? Well, that’s shitty. At least Judy Shapiro is gonna...

8:47 AM: Oh hell naw.

9:04 AM: That crafty tart.

9:31 AM: “Gentrification blah blah blah eminent domain blah blah blah.”

9:32 AM: Hey guess what, kids? If you don’t like this school gettin’ bigger and better how about you protest by NOT GIVING ME ALL OF YOUR MONEY SO I CAN DO IT.

9:33 AM: Don’t do that, though, I like your money.

9:34 AM: I’m just talking to myself, Jean.

9:35 AM: No, I’m perfectly fine. This is just what a sabbatical is for.

9:36 AM: Yes, it’s for talking to yourself! And yes, I’m aware that there was nothing in the dictionary about talking to yourself! It’s for that now because I’m deciding it is! I can do that! I’m still the President!

9:42 AM: Aw, quit it, Jean, or I’m going to take a sabbatical from you.

9:43 AM: Yes, I’m aware that means I’d have to come back to you, thank you. And no, that’s not my solution to all my problems.

9:46 AM: Well, what about the time I said I was taking a sabbatical from weddings, then? No, it was not so that I could avoid giving another speech.

9:47 AM: Yes, I absolutely would’ve enjoyed giving a speech at my own son’s wedding! I couldn’t go because I was taking a sabbatical from weddings, that’s all!

9:48 AM: I know I’ll only get the chance to see my son get married once! So will you, Jean!

9:49 AM: Oh, that’s why you went, huh? Oh, I see. Well, I was taking a sabbatical from weddings. Now let me read my Carl Hiaasen novel in peace, thank you.
10:24 AM: Jean, where’d you go?

10:25 AM: Jean, I have yet to move from this chair during my sabbatical, and I’m not about to start now.

10:56 AM: Oh, there you are, Jean, finally! I—I’m not at a good stopping point now, though. I was earlier! Chaz is in all sorts of trouble now, let me tell you.

10:57 AM: Okay, okay, I’ll put it down. Thanks for shopping, by the way, yes, Jean.

10:58 AM: Oh, you’ve bought the ingredients for lime rickeys? Well, why didn’t you say so?

10:59 AM: Like hell I’ll ever take a sabbatical from drinking.

11:00 AM: Now, who was it that’s taking over for Judy?

11:01 AM: Debora Spar? The hell kind of name is that?

11:02 AM: No, I’m just jealous because it’s awesome. I wish my name sounded like an imperative to fight.

11:03 AM: Lee Attack! Lee Jab! Lee Smash!

11:04 AM: Lee Pace? That some kind of trick to get me out of this chair, Jean? ’Cause I’m not falling for it.

11:05 AM: And don’t you think for a second you’re getting me to change out of my boxer shorts and my NYCLU shirt. This here’s a man’s uniform.

11:06 AM: Oh yeah? You think I should? Well, I might just take this to the NYCLU then. Whaddaya think about that?

11:07 AM: Thought so.

11:10 AM: Some raspberry syrup. Raspberry syrup in the lime rickey. I’m going to take a sabbatical from this lime rickey until you put in more raspberry syrup.

11:11 AM: Ooh yeah.

11:15 AM: Haha, look at me, Jean! I’m on hunger strike, but look what I can still drink!

11:16 AM: It’s funny because it looks like Gatorade.

11:17 AM: I don’t know what kind of Gatorade it looks like, Jean. It’s a lime rickey with raspberry syrup. It looks like a combination of the lemon-lime and the fruit punch flavors.

11:18 AM: No, the hunger strikers did not drink a mix of lemon-lime and fruit punch Gatorade! That is not the point! Stop ruining my jokes, Jean. I’m going to—

11:19 AM: No, I was not about to say that I was going to take a sabbatical from you, Jean. I was going to say that I’m going to write a book. I’m going to write a book while I’m on sabbatical. Yes, that is absolutely what I was about to say. You can quote that to the papers.

11:21 AM: It’s going to be about the usual things, Jean! The usual things books are about!

11:22 AM: You know, like The Odyssey! Or City of God! Or Skinny Dip! A book like those!

11:23 AM: Jean, you don’t have to point out to me that those are not about the same thing. I know that.

11:28 AM: Which one of those will it be most like? It will be most like Skinny Dip, Jean, because Skinny Dip is a fine novel. A fine, fine novel that I might finish one of these days if I just had a minute to myself.

11:34 AM: It might actually have a little more about First Amendment history than Skinny Dip does, to be honest.

11:42 AM: Oh, I’m starting work on my book soon, thank you for reminding me, Jean.

11:54 AM: This sabbatical stinks, Jean. I’m going to take a sabbatical from this sabbatical.
Debora Spar: All of the above. So, I didn’t go to a women’s college. I didn’t go to a liberal arts college. I have spent my life at large research universities, and arguably two of the more male large research universities: Georgetown, which is male because of the Jesuits, and Harvard, which is known as a pretty male place. So, I was making reference then and would make reference again to the fact that I’m really not an obvious person to have wandered into a small women’s liberal arts college.

But it was no accident that I stumbled into the door here. One of the things that I learned as I spent more than 20 years in these large, major research institutions is that, although I loved them, and I was very happy at both of these places, I went down this path presuming that women’s education and the professional career of a woman of my age would be equal to that of a man.

But it slowly dawned on me, and virtually all of my female friends, that that wasn’t true. And even though a lot of the obvious barriers to women’s education and professional advancement have undeniably come down, there are lots of subtler barriers. I had been spending more and more time in my last job involved in women’s studies, working on my last book on reproductive medicine. It became increasingly interesting to me and important to me to actually be able to say, “What is different still for women trying to get ahead in the world?”

Debora Spar: I think it’s both and more. One of the classic barriers that remains is biology. Even with all the advances in reproductive technology, women still bear children, and that’s likely to continue, for some period of time, although there are people in China working on artificial wombs. But putting that aside, if you have a man and a woman who start off at exactly the same career point and they get married, and even if they are both passionately committed to co-parenting and sharing all the responsibilities, we just know statistically over time, in virtually all cases, a woman’s going to wind up doing more of the household duties, which means her career is going to take a hit.

There’s another whole set of subtler, more social issues about how a professional environment treats a woman who’s had a child. And then there are the nastier ones about how a woman presents herself and how a woman’s ideas are taken relative to a man’s. So, there are these very complicated phenomena, and I think what makes them interesting—and also depressing—is that you can’t legislate them away. So, it’s very, very easy to say to colleges, universities,
golf clubs, etc., that you must admit women. That’s a legislative idea. It’s much more difficult to say, “Let’s treat women equally.” Because what does that actually mean?

I think one of the things I’ve seen in my career is that many men who are trying to do the right things are so scared of somehow doing it wrong around women that they’re nervous. They don’t want to mentor women. They don’t want to invite a woman out for dinner or a drink because it might be misperceived, but insofar as professional and personal advancement comes from interpersonal interaction with senior colleagues, women are losing out on those things. And again, it’s very, very difficult. You can’t say to a man, “You must have beer after work with your female colleague.”

B&W: How does a women’s college come into that scenario?

DS: It’s a good question. It’s obviously not just about educating women because there are men around. And these things will only work if everyone is equally educated. But I don’t think we’ve solved the prior problem: What is the answer that we’re educating people towards? We have to do some serious research that’s not ideological or designed to beat anybody up. What do women do different than men? What kind of responsibilities or what maternity leave practices are most successful? Once we have the answers, then we can start educating people. So, I think women’s colleges have not only the opportunity, but also probably the responsibility, to do some hard research.

B&W: It seems like Barnard is the perfect place for this type of research to happen because students get to observe both all-female and coed classroom dynamics, and how they’re different.

DS: Barnard is unique in that you can research these women’s issues and then test them out in a coed environment.

B&W: How will your curiosity about these areas take shape in your new job—in support for faculty research or student initiatives?

DS: All of the above. The Barnard Center for Research on Women is a phenomenal resource, but like everything else at Barnard, it’s underfunded. I would love to see more funding going into the work they’re already doing and then branching out. From what I know about the Speaking Fellows program, it’s a wonderful idea. But it’s broader than speaking, presentation and negotiation skills. Do women negotiate differently than men do? I don’t know, but I have a feeling they do. Some of the research that colleagues of mine have been doing at Harvard Business School and elsewhere is on how women investment bankers behave differently than men investment bankers. Not better or worse, just how they use networks of contacts is different. Certainly, I wouldn’t want to see all of Barnard doing research on women’s issues, but it’s a good place to be doing this.
kind of work. And its being in the city is ideal. It’s your laboratory.

**B&W:** I’m sure you know about the transgender student who enrolled at Barnard last year. I think the impression among many students here was that Barnard kind of swept that issue under the rug, when it could have been an opportunity for discussion. Do you have any thoughts on the matter?

**DS:** I think last year it would have been too soon because there was just one particular student involved, and I think it’s always disastrous to make policy or have debates when there’s an identifiable individual at the center of the debate. It’s just cruel. Having said that, I think now or sometime in the future would be a possible time. I’m going to take my cues from the faculty and students’ interests. One of the things I’ve learned in past lives is that any initiative that comes down from on high doesn’t work. Administrative decisions rarely change the world. Change has to bubble up.

**B&W:** You’re probably tired of this topic already, but let’s move on to the relationship between Barnard and Columbia. There’s always talk about how great it is for Barnard to have access to Columbia. But what does Barnard provide to Columbia?

**DS:** That’s a very good question, and I’m going to hedge it a little bit. I think part of the challenge for Barnard is to make clearer what it does for Columbia, because I think it does a lot. I think it’s a useful exercise for Barnard to understand its own strengths and what it offers. I always used to say to my MBA students that the best leverage in any relationship is to be loved.

**B&W:** Do you have any specific examples?

**DS:** Well Barnard offers a tremendous amount. Part of it is Barnard brings an additional differentiation of skills and division of labor. It doesn’t make sense to have separate drama departments. It makes sense for one side of the road to specialize and to have a world-class drama department, while the other school has a full, world-class Urdu department. Probably both schools could have political science departments, economics departments, and English departments, but there are advantages in specialization.

Historically, Barnard has had incredibly strengths—drama, creative writing. For people who want to do creative writing, this is where you want to be. The Writing Fellows and the Speaking Fellows programs—these are really good programs, and the fact that they are available to Columbia students is an incredible opportunity. I don’t know Columbia well at all...but Barnard offers one of the classic advantages of small liberal arts colleges—small classes. And even a Columbia student who’s really happy with where they are and the classes they’re taking is probably going to want some opportunities to take a class with fifteen students from teachers who define themselves, at least in large part, by their experience and their expertise as teachers, which is different than someone who defines themselves largely as being a researcher.

**B&W:** Looking at the topics you’ve written books on, it seems that your own interests are kind of...

**DS:** All over the map?

**B&W:** What tied it together for me was the sense of some sort of cultural Zeitgeist, or a relation to what’s relevant to us now. Do you think that’s a fair assessment of your research?

**DS:** I think it is, to some extent. I think a part of me is a journalist at the core. I do have a particular affection for big questions that are occurring in society. One of my colleagues once described my work better than I could. He said, “Professor Spar is somebody who always looks at businesses on..."
the edge.” And I thought that was actually a good summary. I’ve never done research on any kind of big, conservative businesses that have been around for a long time.

B&W: You’re working on a book about the global water market right now?

DS: Struggling to. I’m not sure I’ll have time to write a book on the global water market in this job. It might end up being a series of papers on the global water market.

B&W: Did you get interested in that topic because it’s very current, or because of a specific event?

DS: It was somewhat random to be honest. One of the things that really fascinated me both in the baby book and in the Internet book was: how do you figure out what you can sell? For example, we know we can always sell a pen because there are things like property rights and currency systems that work for pens, but how do you do that when it’s babies? How do you own water? You actually can, but people don’t like to think they can.

B&W: Do you think these big questions you’re asking have any relation to your job at Barnard? Do you feel like you’re selling something here?

DS: No. I feel like the research that I do is actually quite separate from my administrative responsibilities. Even I can’t find a connection. But I think I’ve picked up a fair amount by spending 17 years at Harvard Business School, about what, at business school, you call competitive advantage. And what someone might think about as “that special something.” I think it goes back to your earlier question about how Barnard defines itself vis-à-vis Columbia. I think there’s a prior question: how does Barnard define itself? One of the tricks for any organization is to realize what you have that makes you special, and what you can build from what you already have, rather than saying, “Gee, I wish I could be something different.”

B&W: That sounds very applicable to the life of a Barnard student. A Barnard freshman, from the day she sets foot on campus, is immediately bombarded with these questions of identity. Though to a certain extent, this probably happens at all colleges.

DS: Yeah, although it’s probably magnified here because everything’s magnified here.

B&W: If you could replace the phrase “Strong, Beautiful” with any other adjectives you’ve found to describe Barnard students so far, what would they be?

DS: I wouldn’t replace, but I would add “energetic” and “engaged.” That’s one of the things that struck me. I haven’t bumped into a lot of passive, cynical, world-weary types. The young women here seem excited about a range of things—but whatever they’re doing, they’re excited. I haven’t seen anyone yet who’s withdrawn. I would add those ‘e’ words: enthusiastic, energetic, engaged.

B&W: Any thoughts on how the Nexus is going?

DS: Well, I’m just glad it’s reached the point in construction that I can actually see across campus. My husband’s an architect—he does, bizarrely, university architecture—and he thinks it’s going to be a gorgeous building. They’ve really done the right thing. They have a bold design and a bold conception. And it’s going to be spectacular.

B&W: Do you have any words of wisdom for the freshmen with whom you will be sharing your first year?

DS: Please put up with the Nexus. It’s not too much longer. I promise it will be over. And otherwise, just have fun and experiment. Safely, you know, and legally. Even if something sounds completely obscure, go for it. Go to that belly dancing class.

—Irene Glover
Im great! When do u get to the city? I’ve only been here since like Saturday and had soo much fun already. Gotta get some stuff for my suite tho cuz its kinda dull.

im doing good. busy effin summer. lol. i’ve packed everything. im taking two cars, one for my stuff, the other for my family. haha.

Hey hun! What’s the dress code for the party on the 28th? Is it like grown and sexy...casual..?

I’ve been good man i got myself a job at best buy (bro.. all the female coworkers are FIIINE!) but how you been man?

SO stoked!!
i got my bedding a few days ago hah.

THE E-BILL IS UP ON SSOL!!!!!!

Keeping it profreshional.

i think that schedule thing is a mistake they said i have uw in pupin pupin=physics

I don't think so

I’ve actually gotten two confirmations for my vaccine form (about 3 weeks after I sent it in, but I’m in Europe) as well as two reminders for AlcoholEdu in the mail. Health Services really seems to enjoy spamming me.

student 1: i am strangely excited about this whole james franco thing. color me star struck, i suppose.

Student 2: i know what you mean. there’s something so exotic about having a celeb on campus. i hope he doesn’t have a slip-up like julia stiles did with the JJ staff

I’m beginning to think I’ll NEVER get the Iliad.

it’ll be funny next yr when they’re making fun of the 13ers!

fellini is overrated.

and oliver stone! what a tool. i mean like, alexander the great wasn’t gay and angelina jolie wasn’t his mom ok. that made me so mad.

i noticed on the DormAid site that there are no indi-
individual room clean services, just semester plans. Is there a way to get your dorm cleaned once and only once?

I don’t graduate in 2012, but I am new and probably going to Columbia, maan, the transfers always fall through the cracks, we’re like stateless people with no juridical protection from human rights atrocities......

[Ed. note: The poster is from Guatemala.]

I mean, why study for physics when you can make sick mixes?

and I have a wii + guitar hero, but my parents have already made it clear that they’re both staying at home. funny that they’re worrying about my grades already.

who has bought a computer? what kind did you get, and what should I be looking for in one that I’ll be using next year? don’t know much about computers and all advice is appreciated

[From a SEAS student.]

floor 10 is just jealous our milkshakes better than theirs.

Student 1: YOUNG BLOOD!! YOUNG BLOOD!! (ummm...radiohead anyone?)

whoa! we have another member! craziness! EXCLAMATION POINT!

First person in Hartley this year to stick a pizza box in the oven and set off the fire alarm gets flipped the bird. And likely sworn at, too.

ooh, if anyone has one that’s combination dvd player/vcr that’d be even more awesome, because some of my best movies are on vhs...

I don’t personally have one, though.

I definitely suggest going with a group of friends, but just make sure you’re not too obvious/ looking like babies.

haha babies (I don’t know whyyyyy 7h of sleep doesn’t feel like enough....uuuugh)

But I promise I’m not one of those ditzy stupid annoying cheerleaders.

Actually ditziness can be pretty unrelated to intelligence so I take that back.

I just called the Orientation office and they said we DO NOT HAVE TO READ 1-12, just 1-6. It was a mistake in the email.

woooooooo!

I’m on book zero. so it’s all good.

Exactly what is this party suppose to be? If it’s just looking at the galleries, then I don’t really want to go. I practically lived in those galleries from 7-12th grade since my junior/high school was really close to it.

zach i have that same discussion prd...
On a hot day last June, a recent Columbia grad heard his phone ring. The number was blocked, but he answered the phone. In low and breathy tones, the caller proceeded to read the grad’s Social Security number back to him. The student demanded to know what was going on, and then the line went dead.

Laughing, the prank caller dialed the grad again to identify himself as a friend and explain that he meant no harm—he had been playing the creepy joke on a lot of other people. In fact, he had downloaded a spreadsheet from the Internet with 4,999 other names and SSNs to choose from.

Earlier that month, exactly 5,000 students and alumni had received an email from Scott Wright, the Vice President of Student Auxiliary and Business Services, informing them that for 17 months their full names and SSNs had been posted on a public Web page, accessible via nothing more than a serendipitous search—which, incidentally, was how the list was discovered in the first place. Wright declined to be interviewed for this article.

Upon receiving the email, the prank caller promptly downloaded the document, which, despite Wright’s claim that it had been removed, was still available on Google cache and MSN Live search. The caller didn’t have any plans to sell or steal the information, but he wanted to keep it around—just in case he could ever find a use for it, which he of course did.

In the email, Wright explained that an unnamed former student employee of Housing & Dining—later identified by discreet Bwog commenters as German-born Columbia wrestling star Sven Hafemeister, CC’06—had accidentally posted the information; the administration did not suspect malicious intent. As it turned out, the document was related to an assignment for a Computer Science class called Computational Aspects of Robotics.

Hafemeister said he chose the spreadsheet randomly; the file name—output.xls—seemed the least likely to include anything he wouldn’t want public. He needed to test the code for a project he was working on, and needed a file, any file, to do it with. “Now as for how that particular file got there? I have no clue!” he said. What began as an accident backfired immensely—the spreadsheet also contained Hafemeister’s name and SSN.

For emotional and security damages, Columbia offered the 5,000 students two years of free credit protection by a monitoring service and reminded them that since April of 2007, “Housing & Dining manually eliminated SSNs from its online room selection process and contracts.”

The initial ban on SSNs came on the heels of an earlier privacy leak on April 2, 2007, in which Housing & Dining mistakenly exposed students’ personal information by placing it online. After that incident, in a now familiar statement, the University assured students it had taken steps to prevent incidents of this sort from happening again and offered students a year of free credit protection.

Many students were enraged by the most recent leak, and incredulous that a student employee could have had access to 5,000 of his peers’ SSNs. Bwog’s post on the incident provoked over 100 comments, most demanding a more detailed explanation from Wright, and some personally attacking Hafemeister.

One CC’07 alumnus whose number was leaked was skeptical about how effectively the administration is dealing with information security. “Clearly the Social Security numbers were in someone’s personal account, which means that the people working at Columbia don’t have a fundamental understanding of how the Internet works,” he said.

For any employee to access personal information...
about students or staff, a request must be sent to Enrollment Reporting and Data Management, which is known among those in the Columbia IT world as Datagroup. Datagroup is a branch of Student Information Services and it’s basically a database that keeps track of perpetually updated information on everything from class listings to grades to personal numbers.

A CUIT official explained that Datagroup doles out information on a case-by-case basis, and that the amount and type of information provided depends on the needs of the specific project. The official would not comment on the details of the application process, but did say that an applicant must demonstrate a “legitimate business purpose” for Social Security numbers to enter into the picture.

Hafemeister didn’t actually solicit Datagroup for the information; instead, he said, his Housing & Dining supervisor gave him access to the list for a project. “No one except for the managers had access to those lists. Usually they would download the lists from their intranet database, rename the files to something more intelligent than ‘output.xls’, remove the Socials, and then give it to us,” he said.

Hafemeister’s claim—that the SSNs were removed from lists before they were handed to student employees—is untrue, at least in this instance. More importantly, the fact that he obtained the information from Housing and Dining staff means that confidential information is passed along to students without Datagroup’s knowledge or approval.

According to one former CUIT employee, it usually takes a day or two—a lifetime for techies—for Datagroup to send requested information. The lag has inspired some IT departments to keep their own manually updated lists of student information, which bypass Datagroup and its security measures altogether, he explained. These duplicate lists, the former employee said, “probably have your social in them, but aren’t subject to the presumably pretty good enforcement policies that Datagroup can run in their own office.”

Datagroup is run though the University and staffed by its employees. Most projects that involve students’ personal information are run through Datagroup, with just a small percentage of projects—including those relating to health services, financial aid, and legal documents—that are outsourced to unaffiliated vendors. The administration official said that security is a major factor in selecting an outside vendor, and criteria such as track records with other universities and ability to enforce security measures are considered in the choices.

However, problems with Datagroup are indicative of larger problems within Columbia’s technological infrastructure, most of which fall under the scope of Columbia University Information Technology, a bureaucracy Kafkaesque in its impenetrability and pervasiveness.

CUIT is the University’s central computing and communication services provider. It oversees a number of smaller IT divisions and is in charge of creating and enforcing University-wide security policies. But, as one former CUIT employee explained, CUIT is “strained” for resources and is often unable to fully supervise smaller administrative units. If employees are bypassing Datagroup’s security measures, it’s likely CUIT isn’t aware of it.

Since the initial breach in April of 2007, Columbia has, for the most part, replaced SSNs with what it calls the Unique Person Number. A September 2007 statement explained the role of the UPN: it is “used in lieu of the SSN and assigned and distributed to the individual upon
initial association with the University. It will be used in all electronic and paper data systems to identify, track and service the individual.”

The memo also reported that the SSN would now be necessary only in “employment records, financial aid records, health records and other business and governmental transactions as required by law or to satisfy a business requirement.” This means that, while some outside vendors that have contracts with the University continue to use students’ SSNs, Datagroup relies entirely on the UPN.

It was the introduction of the UPN that led Columbia to issue new ID cards in the Fall of 2007 – ID cards that no longer carried SSNs. In fact, the discontinuation of the use of SSNs was the most immediate factor in the introduction of off-campus Flex.

The University also counted among its re-vamped security measures an off-site paper storage unit, better encryption software, and technology that scans for “suspicious activity,” which, evidently, didn’t manage to find Hafemeister’s online list of 5,000 SSNs – it was discovered by two people who happened to be Googling their own UNIs.

In efforts to secure personal information by reforming the personnel as well as the technology, CUIT employees were given new contracts reinforcing the necessity of keeping confidential information confidential after the June 2008 security breech.

Despite these measures, another security breach could occur. After Columbia sent out an email alerting students that their SSNs had been posted online, several recipients downloaded the list, which they still have. And though UPNs have replaced SSNs in many instances, a former CUIT employee said that it was still common for coworkers to keep old lists on their hard drives.

Ultimately, individuals are responsible for their actions, a Columbia spokesman stressed. He refused to comment on whether any individual has been suspended or disciplined as a result of the security breaches.

For those seeking legal recourse, there is little that can be done until a thief makes off with your identity, according to David Raybin, a Nashville-based lawyer who has worked on identity theft cases. Though in the event of any ambiguity about anything, Raybin advises to “always sue everybody, that’s the simple answer to that.”

— additional reporting by Joseph Meyers
LILACS

you, with your lilacs
and white light
flickering petals
about your apartment;

apartment where in march
i found you shouting blindly
against spanish guitars; exploding colors
like some frenetic maestro,

you, who paint yourself in rain and
blossom spring beneath my chest.

—Robert Kohen
Editor-in-Chief of The Columbia Review
Loaded

The buck stops with the University Trustees. By Lydia DePillis

Digits: 221 years old, $7.71 billion in net assets
Claim to fame: 24 wealthy, accomplished individuals, the University Trustees, hold both the purse strings and the pink slip: the President serves at their pleasure, and they can buy or sell any part of the university as they see fit. Bank accounts and social status factor into their selection for six-year terms, but allowances—an author here, a pioneering researcher there—are made for the sake of diversity. Trustees are expected to contribute large amounts of money (an administration source said the baseline was about $1 million) and commit to larger chunks of time than is typical for your average board member. Students familiar with the board’s operations say they actually do care about us, at least to the extent that happy students make happy alumni—the specter of a 1968-style donation drop-off looms in most of their memories, making student concerns worth their attention. And so we bring you your university trustees. In them we trust.

Armen Avanessians, SEAS ’83
Current gig: Goldman Sachs, managing director
Digits: $5,000—Amount donated in 2007 to both Goldman Sachs’ PAC and the industry lobbying organization
Claim to fame: Got laughs from the SEAS graduating class of 2008 with nerdy jokes about putting transceivers on micron chips

A’Leila Bundles, Journalism ’76
Current gig: Journalist, author
Digits: Two—Number of books she has written about hair
Claim to fame: Served as president of the Radcliffe Association, representing her alma mater. She is also the great-great-great granddaughter of the first female black millionaire, about whom she wrote a book.

Lee C. Bollinger, Law ’71
Current gig: The Prezbo
Digits: $739,997–2006 salary
Claim to fame: Defending affirmative action before the highest court in the land, occupying the New York City news cycle for more than a week, being baronial.

Jose Cabranes, CC ’61
Current gig: Federal judge
Claim to fame: The first Puerto Rican to be made a federal judge, in 1979, he was considered for a Supreme Court seat in 1994, and some have speculated that future administrations might make Cabranes—a judicial moderate—the first Latino on the bench. He’s also college buddies with Attorney General Michael Mukasey.

Stephen Case, CC ’64, Law ’68
Current gig: Managing Director and General Counsel of Cohen & Company, LLC
Dollar figure: $28,100—donations to Democrats since 2006
Claim to fame: Was instrumental in the founding of the Columbia Alumni Association, and probably has been mistaken for AOL co-founder Steve Case too many times to count.

William Cambell (Chair), CC ’62, M.S., ’64
Current gig: Being a member of boards
Digits: Seven—Number of U.S. presidents who have received the National Football Foundation’s Gold Medal, which Cambell was awarded in 2004
Claim to fame: By one report, Campbell runs the board of trustees like he captained the football team when it.
won the Ivy Championship for the first time in its history. He also coached the team for six less successful years, and everyone still calls him "Coach." Campbell has been a force behind M. Dianne Murphy’s efforts to improve athletics, although one source speculated that he “probably wouldn’t have gone as far as she did” in banning tailgating at Baker Blast three years ago.

Patricia M. Cloherty, SIPA ’68, TC ’68
Current gig: Venture capitalist
Claim to fame: Received the Order of Friendship from Russian de-facto president Vladimir Putin for making the East safe for capitalism.

Kenneth Forde, M.D. ’59
Current gig: Retired colorectal surgeon
Digits: 108,070—The number of new colon cancer cases per year
Claim to fame: Had other people raise money for an endowed medical professorship in his name, rather than paying for one dedicated to someone else.

Eric Holder, CC ’73, Law ’76
Current gig: Private attorney
Digits: Nine—Number of black U.S. Attorneys when he was appointed in 1994
Claim to fame: As Bill Clinton’s deputy attorney general, Holder abetted the pardon of Marc Rich in the President’s last days. After being chosen to vet Obama’s vice presidential candidates, he may find himself moving into the attorney general job next year. Also a college buddy of New York Gov. David Paterson.

Ellen Oran Kaden, Law ’77
Current gig: Senior vice president at Campbell Soup Co.
Digits: $1.62 million—Annual salary
Claim to fame: Keeping Campbell Soup Co.’s lobbying activities on the down low.

Ann F. Kaplan, Social Work ’72, Business ’77
Current gig: Wealth manager, investment think tanker
Digits: 195—Number of minutes she will spend each Wednesday morning this fall teaching business school students the art of Investment and Wealth Management
Claim to fame: Helping other people make money.

Mark E. Kingdon, CC ’71
Current gig: Investment manager
Digits: 13—Age at which he decided to go into business
Claim to fame: With three other Jewish trustees, endowed the first chair in the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, two years after the David Project protested anti-Semitic remarks by professors.

Marilyn Laurie, BC ’59
Current gig: Owner, Laurie Consulting
Claim to fame: Helped found Earth Day in 1970, and then went into helping companies like AT&T and Bell Labs improve their public image through targeted philanthropy and environmental measures.

Gerry Lenfest, Law ’58
Current gig: Philanthropist
Digits: $100 million—Total donations to Columbia.
Claim to fame: As part of overseeing a cable television empire, Lenfest served as editorial director and publisher of Seventeen magazine.

Philip Milstein, CC ’71
Current gig: Banker, New York real estate magnate
Digits: $20 million—Amount he paid for Leonard Bernstein’s old apartment in the Dakota
Claim to fame: The university hasn’t announced how much Milstein, who refuses to be ranked by the Forbes list, paid for naming rights to Milstein Library in Butler. But Prezbo predecessor George Rupp reportedly offered to name the whole...
thing after him, which Milstein declined. It’s unclear whether the tennis team, on which he bestowed a $2 million gift, made a similar offer.

Vikram Pandit, SEAS ’76; M.S., ’77; M.Phil., ’80; Ph.D., ’86
Current gig: Citigroup, CEO
Digits: $17.9 million—What he paid for ten-room apartment in the Beresford
Claim to fame: Only trustee to donate to George W. Bush

Michael B. Rothfeld, CC ’69, M.B.A., M.S., ’71
Current gig: Theatrical producer, private equity investor
Digits: 38—Length, in feet, of Rothfeld’s yacht, the Martha
Claim to fame: Secured funds to revamp the advising system. You can also thank him for the Lerner Black Box, which he largely financed.

Joan Edelman Spero, SIPA ’68, Ph.D. ’73
Current gig: President, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation
Digits: $0—Annual salary
Claim to fame: Getting rid of money belonging to the one-time richest woman in the world, who decreed that it go to “the improvement of humanity.”

Esta Stecher, Law ’82
Current gig: Goldman Sachs, Executive Vice President and General Counsel
Digits: 200—Number of people who worked under her at the tax division of GS
Claim to fame: Probably the most significant figure in the Columbia-Goldman Sachs cabal, having attained one of the highest offices in the clubbiest of boy’s clubs.

Kyriakos Tsakopoulos, CC ’93
Current gig: California real estate magnate
Claim to fame: Serves on Obama’s finance team. Also a major force for Hellenic Studies at the university, and bar-none the handsomest person on the board.

Savio Tung, SEAS ’73
Current gig: Managing Director, Investcorp International
Digits: $32 billion—Net worth of Investcorp
Claim to fame: Making money.

Faye Wattleton, M.S. ’67
Current gig: Co-founder and President, Center for the Advancement of Women
Digits: 13—Number of honorary doctoral degrees she has received
Claim to fame: Became first black president of Planned Parenthood in 1978, and the youngest, at age 35. Appeared on Hardball to comment on whether Barack Obama had, in fact, snubbed Hillary Clinton.

Richard E. Witten, CC ’75
Current gig: Independent investment manager
Digits: 554—The number of times the New York Times has quoted Witten commenting on currency markets
Claim to fame: After failing to get into Amherst, Witten talked his way into Columbia without filling out an application or writing an essay. Witten is the author of Divided Loyalties, a novel loosely based on his father’s experience in World War II, which was well-reviewed by Columbia College Today and a small newspaper in his hometown of Mamaroneck, N.Y.

Clyde Y.C. Wu, M.D., ’56
Current gig: Cardiopulmonary specialist
Digits: Three—Number of medical professorships he has endowed at Columbia
Claim to fame: Reestablished Columbia’s connection with several medical schools in China, furthering the university’s global aspirations.
In Hong Kong, the Columbian is a special creature. If she chooses to join the alumni association, to attend the social functions, and networks, it’s hard to go wrong. In New York, a Columbia degree may garner an approving nod, a rented section of the Princeton Club, and some free museum tickets. In the international finance hub and image-conscious culture of Hong Kong, an affiliation with Alma Mater stamps approval and opens doors. It’s your all-access pass.

Although countries from Finland to the Philippines have Columbia alumni clubs, the Hong Kong alumni association is one of the University’s gold-star international hubs. Founded in 1982, its membership is between 300 and 400, and according to the association’s website, 26% of its members come from the Business School, 21% from SEAS, and 12% from the College. The club’s older generations of alumni help pull young graduates into the world of Hong Kong success. “There is a genuine interest for older alumni to help the younger alumni get established,” association secretary Helen Chen remarked. “Although the connector might not be that strong, we are all a Columbia family.”

While networking with Columbia alumni in New York is like schmoozing on the L train—a moot point unless you’re uncommonly lucky—in Hong Kong, it’s a way of life. Consider the warm welcome accorded to the students of the Columbia Experience Overseas (CEO) Hong Kong program, including me, during our eight-week stay in Asia’s World City. CEO is a Center for Career Education program that sends rising CC and SEAS juniors and seniors to internships in London and Hong Kong, and while our internships were not necessarily connected to Columbia, our extracurricular activities largely were. And in Hong Kong, when someone invites you out, it’s on his tab—when alumni asked us to dinner or drinks, they usually made sure we never saw the bill.

Of the alumni-related events that quickly became part of CEO lore, our visit to the Hong Kong International Terminals topped all others. One Saturday in July, we met Edith Shih, TC’77, head group general counsel and company secretary of Hutchison Whampoa Limited—a multi-billion dollar corporation that has its hands dipped in everything from ports to property development—at the company’s container port. The immaculate and jewel-laden Shih had hired a private bus and arranged for a prominent port manager with highly pressing duties to spend his day giving us a “special” behind-the-scenes tour of the facilities. Her wish was his command. At one point during the tour, which was more suited for real CEOs (somebodies) rather than undergraduate liberal arts students (nobodies), the manager asked us, “Do you all go to Columbia?” We answered affirmatively. “Are you all MBA students?” Slowly realizing he knew nothing about us, we answered negatively. It didn’t matter; Columbia’s name was our shibboleth.

In the ultimate networking city, while Columbia’s brand is still not as robust as Harvard’s or even Yale’s, Columbia’s prestige is more clearly delineated than it is in the States. One recent SEAS graduate and Hong Kong native noted that he chose Columbia over the University of Pennsylvania because he sensed the former would carry more weight in his home city; he has since returned and is working in finance. Nick Frisch, CC’07, who is based in Beijing, said: “Much like Peking University or Tokyo University graduates can drop their alma mater’s name anywhere and get immediate respect, status, and more or less instant employment, so can mentioning an elite school from the States get you places in Asia with fewer questions asked than it would back home.” All of the Ivies have alumni clubs, and intermingling is encouraged. Harvard Business School, for instance, invited Ivy Leaguers out for monthly Friday drinks, and the...
Cornell Club and Yale Club co-hosted Thursday happy hour.

One of Alma Mater’s contributions to this milieu is the ultimate social event for the educated elite: the Ivy Ball. Shih, known as the “mother of Ivy Ball,” founded the annual gala in 1988. Before long, the other Ivies joined in, along with MIT.

The theme of this year’s Ivy Ball was “The Silk Road,” and its invitation specified its dress code as: “Saris, Sherwanis, Cheongsams, Mao Suits among many possibilities / Black Tie.” Each ticket cost $1,200 Hong Kong dollars (roughly $150 USD), and each school performed a song in talent-show fashion—Columbia alumni did a piece from West Side Story while waving glowsticks, but Cornell’s rap group ensemble stole the show. Afterwards, the attendees poured out into Lan Kwai Fong—the city’s party district—to continue their mingling. The Ivy Ball helps by “cultivating comradeship between the Ivy League universities,” Shih said.

By the same token, the CU alumni association has been instrumental in Columbia’s capital campaign. Hong Kong is one of two international cities (London is the other) where the capital campaign launched in 2006 with much fanfare. (In a video clip on the campaign’s website, two costumed performers present a frenetic Chinese “lion dance” in which the “lion” suddenly hurls a Columbia Campaign banner from his puppet mouth.)

Columbia officials are aware that the alumni association in Hong Kong professes ardor and support to Alma. At an alumni meet-and-greet in the Conrad Hotel in central Hong Kong, Danny Lee, CC’95, a chartered financial analyst at Bain Capital Asia, told the assembled Colombians that his education had translated into a head start in the Hong Kong business world. He then introduced Nicholas Dirks, Vice President of Arts and Sciences, who was on hand to deliver a brief address to the smiling members of the crowd. Dirks handled the reception with professional ease; business cards and witty quips flowed like the free wine, hors d’oeuvres, and, bizarrely, Bugles. The audience included pockets of incoming freshmen and their beaming parents, eager to get a piece of the apparently luxurious Columbia pie.

It was a vaguely atavistic scenario indicative of CEO program students’ encounters with alumni in general. One night, the alumni association invited us to a night out at the Philia Lounge, a swanky bar in Central Hong Kong. Several of us arrived, sticky and sweaty from a tropical rainstorm, to find color-coordinated 20-somethings hitting the bar hard. A pale blue Columbia banner had been tossed over one of the lounge chairs. We perched awkwardly near the entrance until an alumni association representative came over to us. He was amiable but realistic: “These are mainly business school students,” he said. “They want jobs.” We glanced back towards the bar. The B-schoolers looked manic.

At other CEO-related events, alumni offered career advice, exchanged business cards, and debated whether finance, consulting, or auditing was the best first job for graduates. While many Columbia alumni in Hong Kong are wealthy a priori, many others come from modest means, and use the Columbia name as a boost up the ladder.

But after eight weeks in Hong Kong, I’m still not sure what happens when you get to the top of that ladder. Like Levi-Strauss, I traveled to Hong Kong only to learn what I already knew: it’s a big, churning, money-and-status-driven world. Take heart in the fact that Columbia’s name is worth its weight in gold. •
On Axons and Art

On Axons and Art

Proust Was a Neuroscientist
Jonah Lehrer
Houghton Mifflin, 2007
256 pages, $24

As prospective scientists settle into the hardwood seats of Havemayer and Pupin for their first lectures, they’re bound to hear what they’ll come to recognize as the start of any science professor’s desperate bid to make his material speak: “Next is something you might consider using as a conversation starter at your next cocktail gathering—or whatever you kids call parties these days.” What follows is a gripping tale of explosions and revelations that spawned Nobels, designed to zap some life into the sleepers and doodlers in the audience.

In a neuroscience class, the story might sound something like one of the essays from Proust Was a Neuroscientist: Once upon a time, before she tramped off to Paris, Gertrude Stein studied psychology and neuroanatomy. More specifically, she studied automatic writing, the questionable act of writing without consciousness. What Stein found was that even when she attempted to write automatically, grammar and syntax remained. Her quest to escape this underlying structure among words resulted in volumes of prose and poetry. But Stein never could escape the way words linked together in syntactically correct but nonsensical sentences. Later, Noam Chomsky made a theory of this—it seems grammar is built into the brain. How can grammar be? Stein wrote. Nevertheless.

Jonah Lehrer, CC’03, offers the reader this story of Gertrude Stein’s nerdy past and a tasting menu of other morsels in Proust Was a Neuroscientist. Lehrer’s debut spouts science with a sprinkling of history in a collection of essays about “artists who anticipated the discoveries of neuroscience,” supported with the expertise Lehrer gained as a Rhodes Scholar of 20th century literature and as a student of neuroscience and the Core Curriculum.

In an interview, Lehrer noted that his experience with the Core influenced the way he approached the topics in his book. He pointed to the Greek texts of Lit Hum as early examples of man trying to understand human behavior—Lehrer’s own book weaves rather nebulous connections between recent scientific findings and late 19th to 20th century artists’ work. The author described his experience at Columbia as a working version of the book he eventually wrote. Going from seminars on Stein and Woolf to work in Nobel laureate Eric Kandel’s memory lab left him with a sense that the differences in technique between scientists and artists were largely superficial.

Proust Was a Neuroscientist purports to discover ironclad connections between George Eliot’s concept of freedom and findings on neural plasticity, Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring and updated views of auditory perception, and August Escoffier’s cuisine and the discovery of glutamate receptors on the tongue. But take care: these connections should be approached with caution at best, not because the art is misrepresented as concrete truth, but because the science is. “One of the problems with the way science is so often taught,” wrote Lehrer in an interview, “is that it’s presented as disembodied facts.”

That might not be a problem if the book weren’t framed as an argument that science and art contribute equally valuable truths to our understanding of the brain. The author makes the point that Virginia Woolf exposed the workings of the human mind better than any scientific experiment has—and he may be right. But in other sections his argument falters, and it’s difficult to see how the artists’ works do anything but serve as examples of products of the human mind based on the way we now think the brain might function.

Proust Was a Neuroscientist is elegantly wrought, delving into phrenology, MSG, and prions with simple prose, putting science in the unusual context of art and secreting great thinkers’ creative juices left and right. But the scientific ideas in the book are mostly recent findings and not well understood. This is an asset to Lehrer. What better medium for synthesizing art and science than the most mysterious of organs?

—Anna Louise Corke
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The Blue and White
RASH DECISIONS

Like all warriors, RAs must train for battle. This involves push-ups, suicide drills, and rigorous community building exercises. In one drill called “Behind Closed Doors,” students navigate Shapiro’s halls, arriving at rooms where “something is going on” and they must respond with appropriate force. One RA reports:

“I walked into a room and there, under the bed, was a second year RA pretending to have a nasty rash. He kept lifting up his shirt, shrieking, ‘Do you want to see it?’ and rubbing Neosporin on himself. He refused to come out from under the bed...”

Friends, if this is the standard to which ResLife holds us, we are obligated to meet it.

BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

Email to CUIT admin team, not taken out of context:

“Please remove [redacted]’s access to the Religion department and replace with access to Physics.”

TUTELA VALUI

In the endless quest to discover the hallowed ground on which famous Columbians lived (Tony Kushner got it on in Furnald!) there is news. A Harvard student interning in the city this summer stayed in Edward Said’s former Riverside Drive apartment. The Nation reports: it has “sweeping views of the Hudson.” She reports: “the windows are made of bulletproof glass!”

A class of 2007 graduate recently inquired as to how he might keep old emails on his CubMail account, which he had been told would soon become void. He received the following notice in reply:

“Subject: Re: Your Email ID Will Expire Soon!

To keep your Columbia account, you will need to enroll in another course at Columbia or become employed at Columbia.

[Name]
Technology Services Technician
CUIT Client Services”

How about employment as a Technology Services Technician? Seems like a job no one’s doing.
PRIDE, PROFESSIONALISM, SERVICE

Public Safety has ushered in the school year with a new educational video for first-years. In the “film” a crafty incoming freshman plots all the ways he will steal valuables from other students. In one scene he snatches an unattended laptop in Butler. In another, he convinces a student to sign him into EC, claiming he’s “meeting a friend.” In reality, he combs the halls, filching iPods and cell phones. In each scene, the blame rests with the idiot who left his laptop, or the dolt who signed in a stranger, with the message being: IT’S ALL YOUR FAULT.

Finally, the camera zooms in to show him in a room with a very drunk girl who’s protesting his advances. He locks the door and, smiling at the camera, says, “I’m going to give her a good old college try.”

“They didn’t think this through,” sighed one RA. The clip insinuating it’s the girl’s fault that she’s about to be violated has since been pulled and will not be shown to freshman.

COLUMBIAN PSYCHO

Overheard, in front of Starbucks:

Man on cell phone: “If you do that I’m going to take this conversation off the record so fast your attorney will get whiplash.”

PEST PRECEDENT

Overheard, two graduate students on College Walk, making conversation about summer travel grants.

Male, overly earnest, with an undertone of pity: “You’re awesome.”
Female, less earnest, more pitying: “No, you’re awesome!”
Male: “We’re both awesome.”

[Pause, sigh.]

“Yay for waitlists!”

Girl, picking up a huge bouquet at the front desk of a dorm: “Oh, are these from Bill? I hate him.”
Her friend: “No you don’t.”
Girl: “Yeah, I totally want him.”

A Blue & White staffer bid farewell to her coworker in the neighboring cubicle at her internship in Washington, D.C. This was the coworker she knew best, her bosom friend.

Staffer: No, Columbia. I go to Columbia.
Co-worker: Oh. [Blinks.] Ohhhhh.
[Co-worker nods knowingly.]

A Blue & White staffer bid farewell to her coworker in the neighboring cubicle at her internship in Washington, D.C. This was the coworker she knew best, her bosom friend.

Staffer: No, Columbia. I go to Columbia.
Co-worker: Oh. [Blinks.] Ohhhhh.
[Co-worker nods knowingly.]

Columbia… it’s Yale!