FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
The peculiar power of the Columbia presidency

DRUGS, SEX AND ROTC
Columbia’s year in the headlines

ALSO INSIDE: THE QUIXOTIC QUEST FOR A QUIDDITCH TEAM
THE BLUE & WHITE

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It's hard to tell sometimes how much we should care about the nitty, gritty details of life at Columbia. Most students, when we leave the gates, will feel a sense of pride and attachment to this place—in that sense, we'll care. And that's enough to get an alum to dip into the bank and pull out a nice wad to add to the endowment. But not many of us, I think, will look back with any regularity to wonder what happened at this place on an institutional or policy level: is the MESAAS department still organized like it was? Did someone finally get the issues with Council funding worked out?

Given the short time one has here and the eons it takes to see the changes one desires manifest in the university as an institution, it can be hard to make oneself care about the university as a whole.

For those who do care, it can be hard to reconcile the time invested in a relationship with the school and the expiration date of that relationship. So, dropping all formality, I'll get to the question that's been bugging me for a while, and that I'm sure bugs some readers as well: why should we read and write so much about Columbia, invest ourselves so heavily in an institution we will soon leave?

Columbia is a special place—if there's one thought that has accidentally seeped into almost every page of this issue, that's it. Whether it's our special relationship with the media (pg. 28), our views on how to educate students (pg. 31), or the peculiar history and position of our president (pg. 14), this place is like no other university in the world. And that will weigh upon us for the rest of our lives.

The lessons we learn here by interacting with the administration, the other colleges, with any facet of life at this strange, wonderful place—these lessons will carry over for many of us into the way we manage and think about the places we work, the people we work with, etc. The power of this bizarre place over us in subtle and gradual ways, the hold it has on our mentality and worldview as our brains continue to spring around with the last elasticity of our youth, it is all quite amazing.

That's a good part of why I devour this and let myself be consumed by all of it. No matter how transitory or petty it can feel, this place will leave an indelible mark upon us. I want to understand this place, how it works, and how it works upon me. And I hope, dear reader, that you'll come along for the ride.

Mark Hay
Editor in Chief
WHAT IS A BARISTA...

The most basic Platonic form? Below we have dissected the creature using Reason and Philosophy, all alongside personal statements from the sweetest and most tempestuous of baristas—the men and women of Joe: The Art of Coffee. Such words have been from the Joe website. We stress: these are real.

For now and the foreseeable future, I live in Brooklyn where I use coffee-stained fingers to messy up film cameras and books.

While not doused in coffee, Jessica is either reinventing the American novel, making black and white photos, speaking Italian, or perpending GRE lexemes.

He recently graduated with a bachelor degree at The New School, likes to ride his bicycle, and makes a mean espresso. He’s proud of his prematurely graying hair.

When he’s not performing and recording original synthpop music for an imaginary MegaMan game or drawing portraits of subway riders, he’s soaking up the beautiful visual rhythms of the city and humming happily to himself.

Becoming a Barista is the second act in her epic culinary tragicomedy as she makes an escape from the sweaty and lucrative kitchens of the restaurant industry to delight in the glamour of a life in coffee.

Ask him a question before he wises up and starts charging, or just ask him for some K-Ci and Jo Jo because he sure as heck has “All My Life” on his iPod.

In my spare time, I’m writing an Encyclopedia of American Menswear.

She collects house, hip hop, soul, funk, breaks, dub and downtempo.

She enjoys long walks on the beach, thinking about editorial design, sweaty vinyasa yoga classes at Kula Yoga Project and sushi!

His nickname is Cuddles and his favorite coffee beverage is a jazzy iced espresso.
It’s unsurprising that the Starr East Asian library catacombs only hosts student visitors once or twice a year. Accessing the subterranean levels of Kent requires an appointment, a chaperone, and the unlocking and locking of three doors. Further security measures preserve Columbia’s collection of 67 ancient oracle bones from the Shang Dynasty (1554-1045 BCE). They rest inside individual glass boxes in a temperature-controlled chamber. Brittle and browned by the ink used to make rubbings of the inscriptions, any sudden movement or warm air could damage the bones irreparably.

Oracle bones are the first records of Chinese script—and these bones are easily the oldest pieces of writing in the library’s collection, (the largest bone is also the most famous such bone in the world). Mostly cattle shoulder blades and tortoise shells, the bones predicted cataclysms or offered “yes’s” or “no’s” to the questions of bored monarchs. Diviners bored holes into the bones and heated them with a hot rod, revealing predictions of the future as they fractured. The dialogue between diviner and oracular spirits was then etched into the bone.

Although the bones hardly seem the most reliable source of counsel (the same bone reads both “Grandfather Ding is harming the king,” and “Grandfather Ding is not harming the king”), the royal family relied upon them to give guidance on such pressing issues as: “What will the weather be like next week?” and, “Should I get married in May?”

Later generations forsook the bones as fortune-tellers, and used them instead as pharmaceuticals. Countless bones were destroyed by misguided doctors who prescribed them for many illnesses, serving their patients the earliest recorded Chinese script in a fine powder.

But age has done nothing to the original awe the bones inspired. Although most visitors are students on field trips, curator Ria Koopmans-de Bruijn adds, “It’s remarkable how respectful even undergraduates become with the bones. They immediately recognize that these are real pieces of supernatural history. No one ever even expresses a desire to hold the bones. They somehow know that they’re in their boxes, and that’s where they will stay.”

— Anna Bahr

It was a typical boathouse pig roast—beers, boys, and a pig roasting on a hot fiery spit,” recalls varsity rower Alexandra Angelo, CC ’11. The annual spring pig roast was a lively, debauched tradition, including a beer funnel extending from the second floor of a boathouse to a rower’s grounded gullet. Although this tradition has since ended, its legacy lives on in younger rowers, a tight-knit group of hulking partners.

But crew is more than just a roving, bacchanalia clique: it was the University’s first varsity sport. Reminders are everywhere. Rowing’s unofficial symbol is a crown with two oars crossed behind it and “1776” underneath, the year the sport was established at Columbia. What draws the crew back to its historical roots, however, isn’t names, but the boathouses watching over them every morning at practice.

At Manhattan’s northern shore, down the street from Baker Field, stand two boxy white buildings. On the left is Columbia’s “Class of 1929 Boathouse.” Named for the year the team last
won a national championship, the boathouse was completed in 2001. To the right stands the quaint, weathered “Gould-Remmer Boathouse,” usually referred to by its contents: locker rooms and the Wood Room. According to a rower, “People have lived there” (“people” being coaches between apartments). Downstairs is a bathroom unused “since the ‘Great Sinking Debacle of 2010.’”

The Wood Room feels more like a ski lodge than a boathouse. Names of rowers past are engraved on the wall, from 1873 through 2002. With its dusty fireplace, rich paneling, and mounted three-point deer’s head, the room has a certain mystique, though a lack of heating precludes frequent use. On particularly cold mornings, coaches hold boat meetings in the Wood Room instead of the drafty loading bay. Standing among the paneling, current crews imagine the dedication and strength of athletes past as coaches outline the day’s workout. For a few minutes of the morning, before the cold bites through their sweaty uniforms and they return to campus, they are struck by the age of their sport and its importance to the Columbia tradition.

— Sylvie Krekow

Perhaps befitting its namesake, the Malcolm X Lounge in Hartley Hall was born in a decidedly activist manner when a group of students—excluding current US Attorney General Eric Holder, CC ’73—occupied the Dean of the College’s Hamilton Hall office in 1970. Among the occupiers’ demands was the creation of a meeting space for black students out of the ROTC’s vacated offices in Hartley 106. The Dean eventually acquiesced, and 106 has since hosted weekly meetings of the Black Students Organization and other black student groups.

Despite swipe access restrictions, BSO Executive Board members open the space to the curious and leave it totally accessible to those fleeing the library during midterms and finals. One notices mainly the resplendent mural of golds and oranges upon walking into the lounge, ignoring the motley plastic chairs and sofas. In the anteroom, the BSO houses its archives and a library that lends out Lit Hum and CC books to members. The Lounge has even been known to host notable visitors—NAACP President Ben Jealous, CC ’94, recently stopped by the Lounge unannounced.

Despite its value for cultural and identity-based groups, BSO President Felicia Bishop, CC ’12, describes the Lounge’s designation for black students as the object of perpetual scrutiny. Sometimes called a “safe space” (though BSO Secretary Essane Diedro, CC ’13, says the group never uses the term in reference to the Lounge), the space has recently been attacked in a flier released by the CU College Republicans. The fliers parody the annual LGBTQ “Safe Space” signs and refer to the Lounge as “troubling.”

BSO Political Chair Loweye Diedro, CC ’13, acknowledges these concerns and criticisms: “We can’t just gloss over it,” she said. In response the BSO ultimately co-hosted a Safe Space Forum in late March.

As space on campus grows scarce, the Lounge is regularly opened to groups outside the umbrella of BSO sponsorship. “It’s at the core of what we do,” Bishop said, adding of the lounge, “It’s a space that’s welcome to student groups of all kinds, whether or not they address issues of race.”

— Allie Curry
Campus Characters

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

Matt Powell

Ask people how they know Matt Powell, CC ’12, and they will describe a food. Sir Mike, beloved EC security guard, recalls spicy, subtle hints of ground jalapeño in the best burger he’s ever eaten. One of Powell’s closest friends, Hannah Christ, CC’12, will tell you about the fresh baked cupcakes which cemented their friendship. Ask someone from Powell’s San Diego high school and you might hear about homemade peach cobbler.

During his sophomore year of high school, Powell gobbled down a plate of peach cobbler at an African-American history event. When the caterers refused to give him their secret recipe, Powell devised his own. “That whole summer was dedicated to making peach cobbler,” Powell remembers, “which was really convenient because we had a peach tree in the backyard. I probably made five different cobbler until I made the perfect one.” When Powell shared his hard work with his classmates, cooking had hooked him. “I really liked the reaction people gave me when I gave them something delicious.”

Today Powell is co-president of the Columbia Culinary Society and demonstrates new appliances for Good Housekeeping. This summer he will be working for upscale food store Dean & Deluca. But Powell didn’t always know he wanted to devote his life to food. Originally, he planned on studying sociology, but while sociology “is interesting, it’s just not as interesting as food. I found it was much more enjoyable if I crafted my studies to center around food—for my sociology major, I’ve done a study on the kitchen in Daniel [Daniel Boulud’s New York City restaurant], I’ve done a study on the top five pastry chefs in the city.” Powell takes food seriously and it shows.

“I have strong food views,” Powell admits. “I’m very pro-butter and bacon.” Among his culinary commandments is a rule against cooking the same thing more than once a year, and a law that no dish shall be complete without three colors on the plate. In his quest to create the perfect tablescapes, Powell has tracked down props from all corners of New York and lugged them across campus. After spotting Powell brandishing a sprig of holly for a holiday meal, a friend of Powell’s texted him: “I think I saw you with a tree.” It would be strange to see Powell without food. “Food is his personality,” Claire Bullen, CC’11, fellow co-president of Culinary Society explained. “Matt’s passion for food is so all consuming that it really is the core of who he is.” Yet food does not overwhelm Powell’s character; rather, it is a vehicle for his creativity, sense of humor, and love of friends. Bullen describes a “Gods and Goddesses” themed dinner that Powell hosted: “Matt has a special, trick fork that looks like a normal fork but can actually extend to three feet long. He began the meal eating normally with the fork before subtly extending it and grabbing food off a freshman’s plate sitting several chairs away. We joked that it was Culinary Society’s version of hazing.”

“When you think of Matt you immediately think of the perfect one.” When Powell shared his hard work with his classmates, cooking had hooked him. “I really liked the reaction people gave me when I gave them something delicious.”
delicious food, but there is definitely more to him than that,” Christ reflects. “When you’re sick, he’ll make you chicken soup and bring it to your room. When you are feeling upset, he’ll come to visit you and cheer you up. He’s there for his friends unconditionally.” Sir Mike of EC puts it best: “The thing about Matt is he’s a good person and he’s a good chef.”

—Matthew Schantz

**BEN COTTON**

On just another sleepless night at the Columbia Spectator office, former Editor-in-Chief Ben Cotton, CC’11, was holding a meeting in his office with his staff. He suddenly dropped to the floor and started vigorously performing push-ups. Unlike many of his notoriously caffeine addled Speccies, Cotton crusades against java, proud to rely solely on will power and bad pop music. “If I have to stay up, I’ll stay up,” Cotton insists, sometimes devoting as many as eighty hours a week to working on the Spectator. His suitemate since freshman year, Dhruv Vasishtha, CC’11, and former Spectator Managing Editor, Thomas Rhiel, CC’11, both credit this stance to his “boyish” impulses. He injects an almost juvenile energy and authenticity into his two passions, Spec and baseball.

Vasishtha sums up Cotton in five words: “Ben loves the Red Sox.” That almost unconditional and inexplicable fervor the Newton, MA native dedicates to his home team carries over to Spec. His suitemate since freshman year, Dhruv Vasishtha, CC’11, and former Spectator Managing Editor, Thomas Rhiel, CC’11, both credit this stance to his “boyish” impulses. He injects an almost juvenile energy and authenticity into his two passions, Spec and baseball.

“Ben loves the Red Sox.” That almost unconditional and inexplicable fervor the Newton, MA native dedicates to his home team carries over to Spec. “I have a hard time relaxing in general, I always get stressed about something and want to find a problem to attack.” Spec, he explains while gesticulating emphatically, provided a productive outlet. The paper quickly became all-consuming, as its new online presence, Spectrum, which Cotton helped create, required constant attention. Following the uneasy editorship of Melissa Repko, CC ‘10, Cotton emerged as a decisive director and charismatic coach. His identity grew inextricably entwined in Spec. He describes, with the terminology of a seasoned leader, “tackling challenges at the macro level” and “getting my hands into the problem.” Suitemates still catch Ben, like “a retired executive still trying to stay active,” longingly checking his Gmail and waiting for something to do. But unlike many past editors, Cotton won’t be writing for a newspaper next year. With hopes of playing baseball professionally dashed by age fourteen, he’ll instead work as a strategic consultant for McKinsey to develop his interest in all things “macro” and managerial.

He maintains a sportsman’s mentality—a competitive streak and unbridled enthusiasm, tempered by mature drive and professionalism. On spotting strangers reading Spec, Cotton immediately sits up in his chair and eagerly exclaims, “Yeah, it’s the best thing ever. I get so giddy and start Gchatting everyone in Spec.” He quickly calms himself, crosses his hands, and adopts a more serious tone. “Yes, I would always be thrilled by that.”

Spec readers credit Ben with his copious and comprehensive coverage of the thorny Columbia housing lottery, a process fellow housing aficionado, Vasishtha, likens to Cotton’s other pastime, fantasy baseball. Practically a Nate Silver in training, Cotton insightfully overlaid a statistical scheme to extract something digestible, as he eagerly uncovered the logic behind McBain cut-off numbers. “There’s no logical answer to why I spend hours writing about Columbia’s housing process,” Cotton concedes, “but I think it’s fun when you get interested in something to learn everything about it.”

As he untangles himself from Spec and the school he so tirelessly covered, friends step in to chart his course. “Up until this year,” Vasishtha jokes, “my plan was for Ben to become President of the United States and appoint me to some cabinet position.” With a careful combination of quiet competitiveness and endearing compassion, Cotton claims to channel fictional president Jed Bartlet from the TV series, *The West Wing*, when he gives speeches at Spec. He’s only half kidding.

―Carolyn Ruvkun

Illustrations by Chloe Eichler
I snap the menu shut with something like élan, turn to the waiter, and announce that I’ll be having the prix fixe. I’m spending the semester abroad in Paris, you see, and I’ve determined to make the absolute most of it, despite the often great cost to my wallet, my dignity, and my imagined competence as a master of romance languages. No struggling-student buffets for me, and certainly no Hemingway specials—there is an apocryphal story that the author, scraping his way in gay Paree, would make regular forays into the bourgeois wilderness of the Luxembourg Gardens to capture pigeons for dinner. I’m not too good to eat pigeon, of course; all’s I mean to say is that if I eat it in Paris, I’d like it to be prepared by a chef with a particularly dramatic moustache. I do not believe this to be an unreasonable request.

At the bistros and brasseries found on every corner, one can order from the carte, which means “menu,” or the menu, which does not. The latter is what we Yanks typically call a prix fixe: usually three courses (appetizer, entrée, dessert) offered for, yes, a fixed price. The prix fixe, I’ve decided, will serve as my sentimental education (ahem) to Paris. Because if you can understand something of New York’s character through, say, its public transportation system (loud, sometimes efficient, beloved only to its partisans—who will tell you it’s far superior to any alternative), you can learn as much about the Parisian mien from its food: impossibly rich, steeped in equal parts tradition and duck fat, and occasionally standoffish.

My lunchtime companion, Brian, takes the opposite tack. He seems to enjoy the freedom in ordering straight from the menu: an entrée here, half a roast chicken there—in short, more freedom than I know what to do with. I would rather bow humbly to the grand tradition of French cuisine (and boy, do these Parisians enjoy being bowed humbly to), and let the chef do the thinking for me. While I’m here, I’d better make the most of it. I want the Frenchiest and most plentiful food I can afford.

And, mon dieu, that triumvirate of dishes is something. Green beans that just taste more like green beans than you ever thought possible; foie gras—the provenance of which you’d be better off not thinking about, ever; other proteins are stuffed with the same foie gras, accompanied by humble and unbeatable frites. French cooking is a testament to the simple genius of the brilliant caveman who, bored with a diet of rocks, raw veggies, and buffalo sashimi, asked: how about we cook this beast in its own fat? And wash it down with a carafe of vin rouge?

All this, of course, is not without a price. In two too-short months I’ve acquired, in no particular order, three-and-a-half inches on my waist; between eighty and ninety-five pounds; an occasionally crippling addiction to duck confit; and the loss of most, if not all, of my willpower. However, I have also come to the realization, unthinkable in my Mesozoic age of semi-regular exercise, that these trophies are not only rightly deserved but well worth the trouble. Sure, the delights of France come at the price of occasionally funny looks, and a dispiriting tendency to froth at the mouth at the mention of cassoulet, the canned iteration of which might be renamed pork-crack. But I’m here to immerse myself, right? Who doesn’t want that? So yes, monsieur, I’ll be having the prix fixe. And a minor coronary, while we’re at it.
Hold up, Big Spender. We're in Paris; yes, it's lovely, but you've got to do this right. On the surface, the prix fixe lunch special would seem to be the perfect way to indulge oneself—for something around 20€, that placard by the café’s front door tells, the diner on a budget can have two courses, entrée and plat or plat and dessert with a glass of wine thrown in to boot. What could be wrong with that?

A hell of a lot, that’s what.

Having now spent nearly a full semester in the City of Lights, I think it would be fair to say that the question of whether to order the prix fixe is one of the central dilemmas of the study abroad experience. It does, after all, pose itself nearly every day, and the consequences of your decision can stay with you until dinner if you’re lucky. So you’ve got to be smart about this and consider the situation rationally.

At this point, I would note to the reader that, while the crisis of the Paris, it is a problem that affects all of us, on either side of the pond. What Manhattanite, hungry on a lovely spring day, has not faced this question? And who, I might add, has never felt a tinge of regret at their decision?

From the perspective of your pocket book, the supposed “bargain” one gets when ordering the prix fixe is in fact somewhat deceptive. While, yes, it is true that ordering the prix fixe lunch typically costs between five to ten euros less than ordering two courses and a glass of wine individually, the student lunching on a budget is rarely making a decision between these two courses of action. More often than not (and I dare my opponent to disagree), the choice is one between the prix fixe and ordering a single course à la carte.

Thus, most of the time, the prix fixe costs more, not less, than what you would have ordered otherwise. However, there are, of course, those days (I call them Wednesdays) when you really do have to treat yourself, when a single mid-day course just won’t do. For those days, and I think we all have them, I still maintain that the savvy student out to lunch should forgo the prix fixe and just go all out and order the dishes his or her heart desires. If you’re going to splurge, splurge.

It’s simple: quality. Those who would tell you to order the prix fixe lunch (ehem) imagine that it is a charming dining tradition, a menu thoughtfully planned out by an aproned and loving chef. They kid themselves into believing that the kitchen staff, whether on Mercer Street or Montparnasse, couldn’t possibly have ulterior motives. But they do, I assure you, they do. They’re thinking about their bottom line.

Where the prix fixe lunch menu is unchanging, it is made up of the cheapest dishes on the menu (if you would care to “indulge” yourself with these, who am I to stop you?), but where the prix fixe is changed regularly, amounting more or less to a gussied-up blue plate special, the truth is far more sinister. In these cases, shamefully more often than not, the ingredients of the dishes on offer are those the restaurant needs to unload—that is to say, ingredients that either proved unpopular or are inching close to expiration. Filets of white fish, previously unheard of cuts of pork, and “very special” scallops are being pawned off on the likes of my dining partner like aged ladies of the night, no longer (or perhaps never at all) beautiful, but sufficiently concealed in cheap rouge, garlic, and low lighting so as to be passed off for an easy 20€, 25€ with extras.

And who wants that?
Ah, a spring romance, what could be finer? After having narrowly escaped the clutches of a veritable peasant revolt, your own VV cut short his semester abroad and departed France for the Eastern Seaboard by way of a dear friend’s palazzo in Venice (regardless of the whims of the Parisian crowds, one does have to experience Carnevale at some point, and Verily Veritas verily did need some cheering up).

After a safe arrival back in New York, rooms were arranged for, the sorbid details of enrolling for the semester at our fair University were delegated, and your VV sent for his darling pup Wagner from the Newport house. Spring had sprung, the grass had risen, and life began, it seemed, to return to normalcy.

And so it was that, now safely ensconced in Morningside Heights, Verily stopped short one day while walking his dear little Jack Russell through Riverside at the sight of an angelic figure waltzing in his direction. As this vision passed him by, VV caught a glimpse of delightful amber locks, flawless skin, and a wardrobe and bone structure that spoke of impeccable breeding—your own Verily Veritas had found love!

Oh! But how to woo his new darling? Very much vexed at the daunting task of capturing the heart of this marvelous creature, V retreated to 5th Avenue in search of the proper attire for the endeavor. Nothing says spring like madras!

Through such mutual acquaintances as one has, VV successfully sought out the name of the object of his desire, though for the sake of propriety shan’t divulge it in these blue-printed pages. So enraptured was your hapless hero that he found himself unable even to throw himself into his riding, a pastime that had so comforted him through past hardships. Whole days were lost in reflecting on those captivating green eyes, as lovely as an afternoon spent strolling down the banks of the river Neva.

It would be two agonizing weeks until a lovesick V would see his darling again, and even Wagner noted his master’s moribund temperament. But then, one day on the Steps of Low Library, like a mirage, VV’s beloved appeared. Having just returned from lunch (that is to say a bit drunk), your Verily was emboldened and approached his lovely. First glances, then pleasantry, were exchanged, and finally VV’s darling (to the relief of all involved) admitted to adoring the Oak Room, and a date was set.

Heart beating, Verily Veritas immediately called his tailor.

As the town car pulled up to the Plaza, Verily felt a twinge of panic strike his heart, what is it was not to be? But as, over the amuse bouche, conversation turned to the works of Byron, your skittish V knew he had found love. VV’s new darling’s taste in wines proved impeccable, and it must be admitted that your own Verily verily felt a jolt of excitement when—like a consummate professional—that fascinating creature sent back an overdone magret de canard with hardly more than a stern glance at the waiter. As the meal ended with glasses of moscato, a rousing discussion of the benefits of wintering at the Breakers, and a shared tarte tatin, your VV imagined happily imagined the romance that was to follow.

Ah, how delightful it is now, when our hero and his love walk Wagner together.
Bed Intruder

Giant, diabetic bedbugs invade Columbia

BY MIKE YOUNG

Ariel Bloom
Cimicidae finally interfere with what little sleep I get! Sunday 6:03 a.m.
Eric Hamilton likes this.

Monica Rynders: Call the exterminator!
Ariel Bloom: It’s Sunday. No exterminator. @Eric: why the ef would you like this? My arms are covered in pink rashes and I can’t call facilities on Sundays. Not funny!

Eric Hamilton: I have them, too! I like that we’re all in the same boat. My gf slept over and we both woke up rashy. Lets have a bedbug sleepover!

Ariel Bloom: You wish. I’m washing my clothes on high heat and staying at a friend’s apartment.

Jared S.: I had to take my gf to the hospital. Apparently they’ve never seen this kind of bedbug before—well fed, twice the regular size.

Ariel Bloom: Morton Williams sold out of hydrocortisone. Blame it on your mutant bugs. Probably came from Pupin.

Jared S.: You’re right...there was a Pupin experiment involving high fructose corn syrup. Cimicidae->corn syrup->giant diabetic? bedbug.

Your Events:
Escape the Bedbugs Campout: Location: South Lawn. Date: Monday April 25 9:00pm-Tuesday April 26 12 noon.
Rid yourself of bed bugs, camp with us on South Lawn. No refreshments, but enough love to feed all!

Ariel Bloom: Eric, you can’t eat love. Not coming.

Eric Hamilton: Well WE’RE camping. Stuff’s already out there.

Jared S.: East Campus is infested! They’ll probably join your ranks.

Ariel Bloom: Just stay the hell out of Butler, all of you.

Eric Hamilton: You guys missed it! There were tons of us camping out last night. People all over campus have pinkish radish-patch rashes. One guy walking down Low steps was scratching so hard he ripped off his shirt and started clawing his body in front of a campus tour. I think one of the moms was asking about campus counseling. Hilarious!

Ariel Bloom: Did you study in Butler? They’ve spread through the reading rooms. They’re fumigating the library!

Megan Li: Aaaand Claremont is officially infested. We’re coming!

Eric Hamilton: Three more infested! Welcome, folks! Anybody else checking in?

Jared S.: Hey, Hartley, Carman and Broadway have them as well.

David Zepeda: I’m holding you responsible, Eric!

Eric Hamilton: ;) Tent. City. Y’all. Spilled over college walk, surrounding La Maison as well.

Ariel Bloom: Health hazard, much? If you haven’t heard, Prezbo is coming to your little campout.

Eric Hamilton: Actually...Prezbo has a Gregor Samsa case on his hands: morphed into a bedbug. He’s called off facilities and he’s heading over with the mutants he’s taken under his wing. Call him Prez Xavier. It’s the meet & greet you’ve all been waiting for!

Ariel Bloom: I’m glad you’re having such a great time, Eric. I’m staying off campus. $8K to end up homeless with you assholes because someone in Pupin couldn’t monitor the corn syrup? Have fun, geniuses.

Eric Hamilton: K. Magneto.

Your Events:
South Lawn Campout #2
Saturday, April 30–Friday, May 13.
Cost of housing: $8,000. Mutant President: Priceless. Come kick it with Lee, your tie-wearing metamorphosed Prez!

David Zepeda: Congrats, Eric. Brownstones have vacated as well. •
By the time the typical Columbia undergraduate stands on Low Plaza in mid-May decked out in a light blue graduation gown, the number of times that he or she has been in Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger’s presence can likely be counted on one hand. Most students possess a fleeting memory of Bollinger giving his short speech during Convocation at the kickoff of NSOP week, after which he disappears into the depths of the hallowed Low rotunda. Perhaps they saw him once at the yearly Fun Run, in Dodge Fitness Center at a rowing machine, or at a fireside chat for the luckier members of the student body.

At the University of Michigan, students who attended college during Bollinger’s stint as the school’s president from 1996 until he took office at Columbia in 2002 knew a far different Bollinger. The Bollinger of Michigan seems a little more laid back than the man many Columbians know today—instead of political figures like then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg who made a show at Bollinger’s Columbia inauguration, students at Michigan were graced with hot dogs and rock and roll when Bollinger stepped in. A story from The Michigan Daily in 1997 reported that he even opened his home to a group of roaring drunk students after a football victory. Barring behavioral differences, Bollinger’s interests at Michigan were much the same as they are at Columbia: affirmative action, free speech, global learning, and fundraising and expansion, to name a few. But despite his power as a virtual mayor of Ann Arbor and his success in taking affirmative action case to the Supreme Court, his ambitions and personality never manifested so fully or freely as they have from within Columbia’s Presidential Manor.

It is obvious that the Bollinger of Michigan was substantially different from the Bollinger of Columbia. What is not so easy to observe is whether that is a function of Bollinger himself, or the office in which his desk resides. The answer to the riddle may lie buried in the graves of two successively moldering Columbia presidents of yore: Seth Low and Nicholas Murray Butler.

Low, who served as Columbia’s 11th President from 1890 to 1901, became known as the “Great Harmonizer” thanks to his flair for institutional politics and administration. Known best for moving the campus to Morningside, Low also laid the ground for future growth and power when he consolidated Columbia’s schools into one cohesive university and preempted movements towards professorial autonomy by creating a centrally-controlled University Council to channel and manage faculty input on university matters. Low’s political prowess as well (he was the Mayor of Brooklyn from 1881 to 1885 and served as the second mayor of the newly consolidated New York City after his presidency) served to establish short- and long-term ties between the university and the city that would benefit presidents to come. When Low departed his newly minted campus, he left the office of the president with great power and even greater potential for growth.

Butler, who stepped in after Low (from 1902 to 1945), clasped hold of that power and took it a step farther. Columbia under Low “was a small operation,”
says Roberta and William Campbell Professor of the Humanities and Butler biographer Michael Rosenthal. Butler, “made it huge.” Much of this was self-serving—Butler was the first president to consciously and actively use the university as a springboard to larger political ambitions. While in office he conducted several bids for the Republican presidential nomination. To these ends, Barnard History Professor and avid Columbiana chronicler Robert McCaughey cautiously notes, Butler sought to gain wealth and power for the university by stacking “money people,” or rich outsiders, onto the board of trustees. It is not inconsequential in considering the growth of presidential power and centralization under Butler to remember that he was a fascist. An admirer of Benito Mussolini and early Adolf Hitler, Butler even brought a Nazi diplomat to the university in 1933 to defend Hitler’s policies. This unfortunate disposition no doubt influenced the way Butler addressed administrative change and power during his tenure. By the time Butler left the university, it had been bolstered financially, gained prestige through its expansions, and power by its ever-growing ties to external institutions.

It is hard to argue with Rosenthal’s assertion that, in the early 20th century, Columbia presidents were titans. So were many presidents of prestigious universities at that time, but Butler went so far as to view the Columbia presidency as second only to the presidency of the United States. But expansions, organizational innovations, and the ever-present need to raise more and more money from further and further outside the gates have limited the ability of many subsequent presidents to match Low and Butler. The job becomes all-consuming and requires the delegation of tasks, fracturing the potential powers of the president among subordinate offices (George Eric Rupp, in power from 1993 to 2002, was notorious for this with his exceptionally strong provost position). Columbia, by virtue of its growth and prestige, it appears, has historically bucked the Low-Butler presidential image.

In part because the office of the president has been quite and its substantial power remained divided for some time, and in part due to the mostly unexceptional records of the presidents from 1754 to 1889, many Columbia historians have a hard time acknowledging the idea that there is something special about the Columbia presidency. McCaughey stresses that other universities have had strong presidents who rose from their posts to do great things. This leads McCaughey to call Bollinger’s move from Michigan to Columbia “a lateral move”—there is little he can achieve here that his ambition couldn’t have built for him there. While McCaughey’s explanation, and his assertion that we have simply gotten lucky during the past 40 years with four active and effective presidents, is temptingly simple, it remains unsatisfying.

The power of our presidents is not solely a function of their personal ambition that could have manifested elsewhere. By comparing Bollinger to his contemporaries at other large schools in the spotlight, it becomes apparent that, while much of his power and national visibility come from his own personality, much of it was gifted to him when he passed through the 116th gates as well.

John Sexton, the President of New York University, took his post the same year as Bollinger. Both NYU and Columbia share a geographically advantageous location for those interested in making national headlines (as Claire Sabel’s article in this issue of the magazine suggests). Rosenthal believes the move to Columbia and New York offered Bollinger something he wanted: “a larger forum for [his] ambitions.” In addition to their shared location, Sexton is of comparable age and accomplishment to Bollinger. The two even face similar controversies. Sexton’s NYU 2031: NYU in NYC plan, a rough foil to Bollinger’s Manhattanville project, envisions a 6,000,000 sq ft expansion of the NYU campus, which will swallow up Governor’s Island and, to the chagrin of many, alter the character of Greenwich Village. Sexton has been a prolific fundraiser, and Rosenthal and others credit him with turning NYU into a powerhouse, even creeping up on Columbia in reputation. Like Bollinger, Sexton has a strong personality and lofty ambitions—Rosenthal sees him as a good potential candidate in New York politics in the future. But a search of the archives at The Times reveals that he has received half the amount of coverage as Bollinger since taking office. The Times ran an article on Bollinger’s selection and inauguration. Sexton’s inauguration did not receive nearly equal treatment despite being nearly equidistant from the media’s headquarters in Midtown.

The unequal media attention is intuitively attributable to Columbia’s Ivy League status. The title lends weight, no matter how unfounded, to the actions of a president. But even at Harvard, a university with equal pull, the experience of the presidency is different. In early January 2005, Harvard President Lawrence
H. Summers made an unfortunate remark at a public event about his belief in an innate difference between men and women responsible for lack of the latter in high-level science and math careers. Over the next year, Summers received threats from donors ready to tie off their purse strings and substantial ridicule from the national press. But it was a vote of no confidence launched by the Harvard faculty that pushed him into penance for a year, and the threat of a second such vote that moved Summers to resign in early 2006.

The same year as Summers’s debacle, Bollinger was facing severe criticism from 50 faculty members over his involvement in Manhattanville expansion. In addition, Jewish students who felt he had allowed anti-Jewish intimidation in courses were petitioning for his resignation. Then, a year after Summers’s resignation, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited campus with Bollinger’s approval. The criticism of over a hundred faculty members and a mixture of prolonged national coverage, controversy, and student-led initiatives (far more than had been faced by Summers) now threatened Columbia’s reputation, donor network, and faith in its leadership. Bollinger, however, did not flinch.

Upfront, the two situations are not directly analogous. Bollinger’s stance on Manhattanville and Ahmadinejad was more nuanced than Summers’s analysis of the female brain. Yet the fact remains that Bollinger weathered the unrest far better than Summers. Despite pressures from larger-scale interest groups over a longer period of time, Bollinger charged forward instead of stepping back.

Part of that is, again, personality. Former campus reporters who have followed Bollinger from the beginning of his Columbia career until the present day agree that he is a man who knows how to choose his battles. He speaks only when he has control of the issue and the venue. And the office of Columbia’s presidency is a platform over which Bollinger’s control has never wavered for a second. This is partly due to Bollinger’s micromanaging tendencies, but he has also benefited from the comparatively centralized powers granted to Columbia’s president by the school’s bylaws.

Columbia Professor of Sociology Emeritus Allan Silver recently stood at an event showcasing faculty perspectives on the ROTC debate at which he, with the backing of Astronomy Department Chair David Helfand, asserted that, “the [University] Senate isn’t the sovereign body of the university; the faculty is the sovereign body of the university.” At many American universities he would be correct. Summers faced at Harvard a university that had slowly devolved power over budgets and administrative decisions to semi-autonomous faculty organizations. That dispersal of power gives the faculty considerable lobbying power in university-wide matters, especially against the president, who grows weaker as professorial bodies grow stronger.

But as per the 2001 amendment to the “Bylaws, Statutes, and Rules of the Columbia University Senate” Section 25, policymaking power is vested in the Senate, unless the matter directly concerns the University Trustees. All other interest parties are more or less restricted in their power and funneled into a policy body whose reaction time is akin to an Entmoot and whose practices, as the criticisms of ROTC revealed, are far from transparent or decisive. Even then, Section 25 contains a sub-clause allowing the president of the university to “convene a special meeting of the University Senate within fifteen class days of any University Senate action, and [during that meeting, he/she] may request it to reconsider such action.”

Bollinger’s interactions with the Senate during the ROTC debate are a useful exhibit of both the powers afforded to him and his knack for using them effectively and intelligently. Professor McCaughey describes these interactions in a way that (unintentionally) echoes the powers of the presidency conferred by Section 25 of the “Bylaws.” By allowing the Senate to make its vague, provisional statements over a long time, says McCaughey, Bollinger let the Senate look and feel effective when it needed to. Still, as McCaughey implies (and student reporters who cover the Senate agree), Bollinger’s words tend to carry the debate forward much faster—once more, partly due to his skill as an administrator and politician, but also due to the powers afforded to him by his unique office.

The existence of these concentrated and well-organized power structures provide an outlet for a strong president to act more unilaterally than perhaps he could at Harvard or Michigan. Ties to the city and happy accidents of geography and history force
DESIGNED FOR GREATNESS

Columbia’s leader into a near-blinding spotlight as well. In the case of Bollinger, he uses his position to its utmost. As Nathan J. Miller Professor of History Michael Stanislawski notes, growth of the university has increased the pressure on the president to raise funds, often from donors far beyond the 116th gates, potentially at the expense of local involvements. Bollinger, rather than shirking the spotlight as he attempts to manage such endeavors, seems to use this exposure to his advantage, fundraising while growing his reputation as a popular academic.

By leveraging the legacies of presidents past and the University’s status as one of the city’s largest employers and landowners, Bollinger has put a rather large foot in the door of New York City politics for future Columbia presidents. According to Bloomberg mayoral office spokesman Andrew Brent, Bollinger and the mayor “interact regularly” and Bloomberg has seen fit to include Bollinger in several large initiatives, including giving him great autonomy over the MediaNYC 2020 program, intended to maintain and enhance NYC’s position as a global media capital. And this is to say nothing of Bollinger’s positions as Chair of the Board of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and a director of the Washington Post Company.

In the future, Bollinger may yet bring even more power to the presidency. His focus on the university’s position in a global era and his efforts to bring world leaders to the campus suggest, as McCaughey put it in a 2010 article by Jake Schneider, CC’10, and Joy Resmovits, BC’10, in The Eye, “a return to a presidential style that fell out of favor in the preceding three presidencies: showcasing Columbia as the gateway to America.” Bollinger has the ambition to make Columbia a global forum, and as an individual he appears apt enough at managing criticism and marshaling the resources of his post to realize this goal. It does not hurt that he and his office would benefit in the process of bringing that prestige to the rest of us.

Upon a seat that has been blessed in ways which allow it to stand apart from those who would at first be thought of as peers, Bollinger tightly manages a presidency at the head of a global platform, intertwined in the politics of the Capital of the Universe. To say that the Columbia presidency under Bollinger realizes Butler’s vision of the Columbia presidency as the second most important position in the world would be gross hyperbole. But given the presidency’s trajectory and history, perhaps in the future it will not be a totally unfounded notion.

-Reporting by Anna Bahr, Helen Bao, Chris Brennan, Claire Heyison, Conor Skelding, and Mike Young
A student darts across Butler Lawn, sporting a cape and cradling a kickball in his arms. Two more swarm around him, brandishing nerf balls. They zoom towards the goal posts located near the Butler staircase. The first student scores, and the crowds lining the fences cheer. Along the sidelines, a man in a gold leotard prances by, flapping his hands and evading other students on the field. Oh, and they all have broomsticks jammed between their legs. This is Muggle Quidditch.

Played at a growing number of colleges nationwide, Muggle Quidditch takes inspiration from the rugby-like game played by characters in the Harry Potter franchise. The latest effort to create a Columbia chapter of the, shall we say, “sport,” began when Chloe Gogo, BC’13, camped in line for the opening of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1. Sporting elf ears and a pillow-case, an extraordinary idea dawned upon her.

Soon afterwards Gogo decided to use Facebook to gauge student interest in a Muggle Quidditch club. She created a group with the description “Interested in Quidditch? Love Harry Potter? Got a thing for bad Harry Potter pickup lines and shiny golden balls?” Through that page, she met fellow Potter-phile Kristina Lee, CC’13.

Gogo and Lee met once but, owing to logistical and personal concerns, decided to postpone the creation of Columbia’s Quidditch team. They were not the first students to try, nor will they be the last to fail to bring the nerdy chic sport to the Upper West Side. Gogo hit bureaucratic difficulties in starting a club by herself, and without spells and magic she could not shout “Accio” to call together broomsticks, goalposts and players. “I’d realized I’d bitten off more than I could chew,” she said. Unfortunately, economic reality must be dealt with and Gogo simply had neither the galleons nor the dollars to purchase all of the necessary equipment.

Another obstacle encountered was the dark, sunless depths of Dodge Gym. Quidditch as a league sport does exist—the International Quidditch Association hosts consistent and competitive regional tournaments—but for the most part the sport is about fun and enjoying the outdoors. “We thought it would be fun to play in the middle of the day in front of people,” Gogo explains. “What’s fun about playing shut up in Dodge or LeFrak?” However, given the tarps that cover South Lawn during the winter months, even a team willing to brave the snow might be forced to practice in the gloomy gym.

Gogo might consider the advice of Middlebury graduate and Muggle Quidditch creator Alex Benepe, class of ‘09, whose experiment has evolved an obsession for his alma mater. Benepe grew up on the Upper West Side and has been patiently waiting for Columbia to create a Quidditch team. “Even if the school doesn’t have space, you can go to the local city parks,” suggests Benepe, acknowledging, then dismissing, the challenge of founding a Quidditch team in an urban environment. “Columbia is very close to Riverside Park and not all that far away from Central Park. You can apply for permits online and it’s cheap and free.”

Ex-Quidditch enthusiast Josh Lin, CC’13, once one of the most spirited forces on the Columbia Quidditch Facebook page, opines, “To be honest, now I see Quidditch at Columbia as more of a joke—something that should exist because it’d be fun but something that isn’t dire or necessary.” Lin’s opinion speaks to the current apathy towards Quidditch on campus. But hope remains. In every incarnation of the Quidditch team push, logistics aside, there is more than enough support and interest on campus. And Benepe urges anyone interested in starting a team in the future to contact him. He will help. Perhaps soon we will see Keepers, Beaters, and that snugly-outfitted Snitch zooming around Butler Lawn bringing joy (or supreme smugness) to students on their way to Lit Hum. ✭
An Unloved Archive
The Life and Times of an Ill-Fated Wiki
BY PETER STERNES

WikiCU pictures itself “an insider’s guide to Columbia University.” The “About” page cites our online counterpart: “As an observant Bwog commenter notes, WikiCU is to an extent Columbia’s ‘institutional memory.’” This became much more of a self-fulfilling prophecy than the creators realized; the site has not been seriously updated since 2007, when the founders graduated. More than just a relic of the humor and industriousness of a handful of alumni, it harbors authoritative, thoughtfully written Columbian alongside the cheeky commentary we have come to expect from institution-specific reflections. Longtime WikiCU contributor Tao Tan, CC’07, CBS’11, says “if anything, that defines the character of WikiCU: long, serious, and formal pieces coexisting with irreverent snark.”

The story of WikiCU and its current stagnation begins with the death of another website: CUCommunity, a Columbia social networking site created in 2004 by Adam Goldberg, SEAS’07. Like many such sites, it was made obsolete in late 2006 thanks to one Mark Zuckerberg. While Facebook let Columbians poke and post pictures, the loss of CUCommunity left its active members without a Columbia-centric online hangout, so they decided to create their own.

The air beneath the wings of the wiki’s maiden flight was Barnard historian Professor Robert McLaughuy. Several of the site’s founders had taken his class “Social History of Columbia University,” which culminated in a research project on some topic of Columbia history. The class awakened a passion for Columbia’s roots within the wiki’s creators, eventually gifting the site with a raison d’etre beyond simply aggregating useful Columbia information. Its deeply historical articles, inspired by these projects, set WikiCU apart from other college wikis. Tan recalls: “We realized that there was a ton of absolutely fascinating Columbia history that was lost to the mists of time and disinterest. I was fascinated by the architectural foibles,” while a fellow early editor “was obsessed with the crown, shield, seal, and other elements of CU symbols.” Accordingly, these were among the first articles to appear on WikiCU.

The site filled a major void. Columbia’s anemic attempt at an online student portal, MyColumbia, allowed students to do only two things: check their Colum mail, and view work-study paychecks. Columbia College Student Council observed the need for a student-run repository of Columbia information, and spent years developing an official Columbia wiki codenamed “Project Athena.” Though Athena never launched publicly, its articles were quickly swallowed by WikiCU when the latter launched in early 2007 independently of the university. Though largely unknown to current students, Athena’s memory has been immortalized in its own WikiCU article. As one editor notes, “preserving little slices of history like this is exactly what WikiCU is good at!”

While the wiki grew in popularity among students for just this reason, it soon faced a crisis. In late 2007, the message “OK, guys, help. I graduate in May. How do we take WikiCU forward?” appeared on the site’s Talk:About page. Various proposals were tossed around, from handing the site over to the Columbia Spectator, Bwog, or Culpa, to simply recruiting current students to join WikiCU. Ultimately, the crisis went unaddressed: some current upperclassmen edit, but the core group of editors is predominantly alumni.

The site has started showing its age. Many of its articles have not been updated since 2008, making it a less reliable source for current housing or dining advice. As a historical resource for Columbia, though, it remains valuable. Irreverent yet well-researched, it symbolizes the essential condition of the Columbian, who speaks with a bitter sarcasm even while working his hardest.
An Uneasy Exit

Reflections on an Evacuation

When the Arab Spring spread to Egypt, sparking an unexpected revolution, a handful of Columbia students found themselves caught on the sidelines. More than tourists, but not bound enough by the nation to be drawn into the action, the students watched the early protests unfold from a unique perspective as they awaited their evacuation.

The voices of evacuees are rarely heard. They may not be voices that will change the world, but their experiences of crises are unique and valuable. Here, three Columbia students evacuated from Egypt share their stories.

From Dakhla

When I tell people I was evacuated from Dakhla, Egypt, I know they assume it was more thrilling than it was. The main action was in Cairo: Dakhla is just a remote oasis, twelve hours away by car. Ironically, the eighteen-hour process of evacuating—from being told to leave to boarding the bus—required more mundane work (housekeeping, cleanup) than the everyday tasks at our archaeological dig site did. Several members of the team drove out to the dig site early to backfill the areas that had been dug just the week before, but most of us remained behind gathering our possessions, packing up library books, and stripping beds. The afternoon before, I was sorting glass, pottery, and painted plaster from a 4th-century Roman town. Somehow, the shift to these simple household tasks, if not exciting, made the experience feel stranger, more surreal.

I had followed the trajectory of events from individual demonstrations to mass protests in Cairo, but I only became truly aware of the situation’s gravity on the Friday that the government shut off the Internet and text messaging. Even faced with this drastic measure, most of us assumed the worst-case scenario was that we’d continue excavation, but miss our tour of the Nile Valley in March. We felt the impact of the government shutdowns, but assumed that the real brunt of the protests would never reach Dakhla. Two days later our group was told at an after-dinner meeting that New York University had decided we would evacuate the next morning. We were in more danger trying to leave the country than we would be by staying in Dakhla. However it was clear that the unrest was spreading. No one could be sure what turn the situation could take, even this far from Cairo.

The morning of the evacuation, we left the dig orderly. The road connecting the nearby villages of Mut and Sheikh Wali was almost entirely deserted except for the forty or so archaeological team members waiting for our buses, hastily-packed luggage in piles around us. Occasionally a farmer drove by with his donkey and cart or a pickup truck motored past. The stillness did little to calm my nerves. I was on edge, not because I registered any real danger, but because of the perpetual frustration of uncertainty. None of us were sure where we would wind up that day, that week, or for the rest of the semester. The buses that were to take us six hours east to the Asyut airport had mysteriously driven off right before our noon departure time. They left us alone with our military escort, and without any idea where they had gone.

I confess that when the protests began I was not well-informed on Egyptian politics, or the reality of an ubiquitous military presence. Military checkpoints are common along Egypt’s roads and it was standard protocol that officers were continuously escorting us on a trip to the nearby Kharga Oasis the week before. Egyptians’ mistrust of the police and their relative confidence in the military was a peculiar vantage to adopt to as an outsider learning about the upris-
ing and made it that much harder to understand at the outset. As Americans, we are taught to support pro-democracy revolutionary movements, but generally they involve clashes between rebels and a military under government control. In Egypt the two institutions were at odds, and my aversion to martial law in general conflicted with my unconditional support for the Egyptian people. As our escort tailed us on the six hour drive out of the country, I had to question the amount of freedom the Egyptian people could gain through this movement given the military's increasing involvement. As our escort tailed us on the six hour drive out of the country, I had to question the amount of freedom the Egyptian people could gain through this movement given the military's increasing involvement.

The further away I've moved in time and space the more I wonder about the people we left behind in that oasis town, barely touched though it was at the time. In evacuating from Dakhla, I experienced only the mundane disarray that accompanies political upheaval, but that disorder can quickly escalate. And given the speed of that change, I wonder how drastically life in the oasis has changed in such a short time. Egypt's major cities were immediately affected and life there is undoubtedly different now. That rural hinterland is a world away from the streets of Cairo, but I imagine that the shift in political power has altered people's relationships with the military, like those young men who drove behind us to the airport, and the police, like those who railed against the protesters in Cairo, even in little Dakhla.

— Emma Spencer

FROM ALEXANDRIA

The two-and-a-half weeks I spent studying abroad in pre-revolutionary Alexandria, Egypt were exhilarating. After so many sleepless nights studying Arabic from a textbook, I was finally using it every day. I went to classes on the Israeli-Arab conflict taught entirely in Arabic, hung out at night with my Egyptian dormmates, found a favorite ‘ahwa (coffee shop), and gathered around the TV watching distant events unfold in Tunisia.

The protests began on January 25, purposefully coinciding with Eid esh-Shorta, or police day. Although we had watched the Tunisian revolution succeed, the prevailing opinion among Egyptians was that the same could never happen in Egypt. Even after the large turnout for the first day of protests, the idea that Mubarak's thirty-year reign would come to an end seemed far-fetched.

Since I had listened to the director and stayed in the dorms on the 25th, I decided to see what the city was like on the 26th. Everything was eerily calm, except for a large group of riot police and some closed shops near the Mahattat Ar-Raml tram station. I faintly heard a scuffle with police in the distance, but saw no protestors. The next day was also quiet, and I wrote my family and friends to say that everything was fine, and that the protests seemed to be dying down. I estimated that within the week the country would return to normalcy. It quickly became clear that I was wrong: on Friday, the entire country lost both Internet access and phone service. Affairs would not return to normal any time soon.

We heard on TV and by word of mouth that the protests were getting more violent and intense. When several of my Egyptian friends who had defied the 6:00 pm curfew returned from protesting, they showed us video footage they had taken. “There are no police in Alexandria!” one dormmate exclaimed. Slowly, we all began to realize that this revolution was going to happen: Mubarak had to go.

I wondered how much safer it would be for us to be in a private home as we rushed to gather our belongings from the dormitories, gather food for the night from a supermarket, and get into a classmate’s apartment before curfew. I began to feel extremely vulnerable. The directors were unable to communicate with us—phone service was spotty at best—and we were eleven conspicuous American students in a lawless city. A couple of days ago I had felt perfectly safe alone wandering small desert streets at night, and now I was nervous in broad daylight.

That night in the apartment, another student attended a meeting with all...
of the Egyptian men in the building to decide what to do in case looters attacked. When only that morning we had been worrying about homework, we suddenly found ourselves taking stock of knives, poles, vases and other possible weapons to use against potential intruders—I was in panic mode. As we watched the street from our balcony, I saw the residents come together to form a makeshift night watch to protect their families.

It was heartwarming to watch them in action. Professors, grocers, and other decidedly un-militia-type folks stood outside throughout the night in identifying white shirts with copper pipes and wooden planks, searching any cars that came down the street, and scrambling whenever gunshots were heard. That night the director called us and told us we were to be evacuated the next day.

The next day we paid a bus driver to take us to the airport. Some of my classmates were crying and we all felt a mix of emotions. After waiting so long in the airport, I was happy to be going elsewhere, but even after all we had been through, I couldn’t help but want to stay. Seeing the momentous changes going on in Egypt, and talking with people who were excited to leave to spend to relocate elsewhere abroad for the rest of the semester and am now here in Istanbul. Although I had wanted to be in an Arabic-speaking country for my semester abroad, my assumptions about the Arab world had been shattered. I had arrived in what I thought was a safe, stable country and when I left, it was in a state of anarchy. As I thought about every other country where I would be able to continue studying Arabic, I knew that I couldn’t discount the possibility of a subsequent revolution anywhere. Although I often think about Alexandria and how I will return there someday, I am now trying to learn Turkish and to make the most of where I am now.

— Dexter Thompson-Pomeroy

Illustration by Stephen Davan

LEAVING EGYPT

AWAY FROM DAKHLA

I knew from the start that my study abroad experience in Egypt’s Dakhla Oasis would be different from most. But it wasn’t until I fled the country on a rickety bus with the other eleven girls in the NYU Amheida study abroad program that I realized just how different—both from others’ experiences and my own expectations. A police convoy was escorting all of us across Egypt from the provincial Dakhla Oasis to urban Asyut in the center of the country, from one of the safest places in Egypt to a one some said was even more volatile than Cairo.

The morning of the evacuation, we left the dig. Twenty-four hours earlier, the director of our dig at Amheida, Robert Bagnall, told us that NYU had decided to suspend excavation of the ancient city and to evacuate us from our new home in the Oasis. To some in our group, it seemed odd to say that this “outer” oasis was considered dangerous. Looking outside our modest mud-bricked walls, I could see the donkey carts, school children rushing home, and various other signs of quotidian life in Dakhla. There was no indication that a riot was going on anywhere in the nation, much less that we were in any immediate danger. You would have to travel 300 kilometers or more to the Nile Valley for any physical signs of the revolution that was taking place across the country. We would see that turmoil soon enough.

Our futures set in motion by the news, the twelve girls in the program attempted to reconcile the realities of the revolution, as they rushed home to pack their bags. Scambling through the house, I encountered our house staff gathered around the TV in the kitchen. Our beloved guide, Ashraf, was in tears. His two daughters and pregnant wife were stranded in his home in the violent Nile valley, hundreds of kilometers away from our kitchen.

Ashraf’s watery eyes were the most real sign of the revolution’s effects. Always quick to crack a joke and flash a smile, Ashraf was the most powerful symbol of Egypt for me. “Finally! The Egyptian people shall be free of Mubarak!” Ashraf had said. Slowly, as the riots grew more violent and as he realized only a neighborhood watch of fellow citizens remained to protect his family, he sunk into sorrow. Compounding the tragic circumstances of his family, Ashraf realized his skills as an Egyptian guide were losing value with each day of the riots. Despite these distractions, he managed to
LEAVING EGYPT

As I peered inside the bus driving us to Asyut, weary but determined faces smiled back at me. Deep down there was some fear; still, all of us had contemplated for at least a split second staying behind in the Oasis. That was only natural. Our archaeological excavation was abruptly cut short; tantalizing discoveries would have to wait until the next season. More importantly, our Egyptian friends faced uncertain futures. It seemed unfair that we would escape from this uncertainty on a plane chartered by the US State Department. Ashraf faced the great challenge of traveling up the Nile towards his family. While we were passing through airport security in Asyut, he left the tentative safety of the airport crowded with military personnel, and disappeared mysteriously into the dark.

Two months later, Mubarak is out of power and after a brief stay in New York, I have decided, to finish my semester in Melbourne, Australia. I am still not sure how Ashraf got home that day. But thanks to Facebook, I know that he has welcomed a new baby boy into his family. The Oasis remains the safest place in Egypt and the Amheida program will continue where it left off this fall. For now, though, I’m thousands of miles away from Egypt, thousands of miles away from where I’d expected, and thousands of miles away from Ashraf.

— Bree Doering
I have tried the usual things but always still the Wanderlust returns and I think I might be splenetic • might suffer from strange notions of the sublime and a need to alter my scenery • to take in the misshapen leaves of lettuces or go looking for fault lines and the crab shanty days of the spaces in floorboards •

Already I am too old but am tuning myself to myself • feeling the turn of bones turning in sockets my spine rolling inch by inch to the floor

Asked about the Eucharist I can say nothing but mutter again and again hoc est corpus • hocus pocus and I couldn’t say when the line was drawn when I was hacked into pieces for blasons or what then are bodies and which is bread •

— Erica Weaver
SONNET 2
The sea is foaming around my ankles
You are bobbing around in the distance
I look at you as the waves roam and wrinkle
the sand silt slides, melts; moving persistence.

There is something effortless in tides and seas,
sunburns, and eyelids hanging limply away
from heavy sun. Where are you now, deep asleep?
Plastic bags wander the length of the bay.
God surely wasn’t joking when he stole
from your purity a ghost

— Anayvelyse Mossman
The sentence is not meant to mean anything. It is equivocal and imprecise. If only such academic writers could see their writing from the perspective of organic chemistry. Just like the techniques involved in synthesizing molecules, the purpose of academic writing is to create the most efficient and precise mechanism to answer fundamental questions.

The last day of Arif Hassan’s life began with an urge to pee.

A blowfly wheezed out of the sink, flapping its lacy wings, and sat on his penis.

Maggie was a precocious four-year-old girl, a child prodigy. By the tender age of four, she had already become a violin virtuoso. Sweet as the sensuous pleasure of tasting a piece of candy was she.

Consider this… making it applicable through illustration!

Suppose you had a vision… last night NY KNICKS made it to the playoffs. We had a dream and vision that Jesus was fighting for the Knicks… And the vision was confirmed because Tim Keller, John Piper, Heidi Baker all received the same vision! But another announcement went out that the entire Muslim world was backing Lebron James and the Miami heat! And its no longer the Miami heat vs. the NY KNICKS! Its Jesus vs Allah! But suppose the Knicks lose! As painful as the thought maybe. Imagine the theological implications! Is Allah greater then Jesus! But this is where we find ourselves

Written to a people who are defeated… wrestling with the questions... God where are you? You are on our side aren’t you? it seems either he wasn’t there, or wasn’t able!?”

Now they are in baby, while Jerusalem lies in ashes. sources of protein.

Please provide a statement that addresses your reasons for transferring and the objectives you hope to achieve.

Recognizing that there is nothing that harvests more satisfaction than being of service to someone in need, I build my dream to help the underprivileged.

Men Seeking Receptacle.
Meet tonight?
Educated.
Sane insanity.
Clinical depression.
Been on all the meds.
Piles of them.
Hello.

She was only thirty-five years old, eight years into a career that established her as the most successful prosecutor in the history of the criminal justice system of Indianapolis by virtue of the fact that out of the numerous cases she prosecuted, she had never lost a case. Despite all her accomplishments and the luxuries life afforded to her, the one thing denied to her was an orgasm.
Take the 1 to Riverdale

The Blue & White settles down in a house on the hill

BY CONOR SKELDING

Ride the 1 train north, all the way to its terminus at Van Cortlandt Park – 242nd Street. Once you get off the train, turn left to face a long, steep hill, which will take you out of Van Cordlandt, past Manhattan College. You will find yourself where the moguls of the 19th Century built their country estates, where 20th-Century captains of industry rode the train. You will find yourself in Riverdale.

The 15 minute climb away from Broadway will relieve you of the remnant street smells and noises of Manhattan dragged north by the elevated train, and replace them with a quiet breeze. Once you get to Riverdale, you will be—literally and metaphorically—above the rest of New York.

It doesn't feel like the big city any more; 15-story apartment buildings are replaced by one family homes, divided streets with unmarked intersections, cars honking and birds chirping. Most novel is simply the lack of people. Crowds are unknown to these cobblestone sidewalks; rather solitary and silent passersby shuffle past. A mother pushes a stroller. A combed, loafed boy walks nervously to Horace Mann at noon. There are even fewer people than cars—Riverdale feels like a suburb.

The complete absence of businesses and public spaces gives the neighborhood over to one thing alone: beautiful one family homes. Riverdale is a series of hills, and the architecture reflects that. Older “Tudor” haus homes are set into the gentle slopes, each entry framed by gardens and paved steps. An assortment of period set-piece houses flaunt card-access gates to stone driveways. More modern cubic homes on stilts look over spacious backyards. Stairs peek out between segments of winding roads, providing shortcuts and a glimpse into the beautiful houses they run between.

Trash and recycling bins are responsibly stacked at the ends of driveways. Audis, Mercedes, and minivans, and “Lexi” are parked on the unlined avenues next to “NO PARKING PRIVATE STREET” and “YOU ARE UNDER SURVEILLANCE” signs. The gradient ensures an open, airy overlook of the rest of Riverdale and the Bronx, a perspective rarely found on a street closed in by skyscrapers.

Riverdale’s tranquility almost deals culture-shock to the wanderer accustomed to the comparative din of Morningside. Walking through the hushed avenues, it’s not difficult to pretend that the town is completely deserted. Tree-lined cul-de-sac and parks are open but deserted, and windows are dark. The peace will force you into contemplation in spite of yourself, tempting you to recline against a tree with a novel and doze off in the sun. Though there is not a lot to do in Riverdale—after all it has always been a commuter community, ideal for working in the city and raising a family on the side—the neighborhood is worth a visit on a sunny day, either for a picnic in the park—just the two of you!—or just a little bit of time to be truly and refreshingly alone.
Late December was, unfortunately, an auspicious time for student reporting. The NYPD’s undercover drug bust and the David Epstein incest case had shaken up Columbia, splattering the University’s name across the national media for stories that were to varying degrees degrading and embarrassing. Come spring, Columbia was in a prime position to bear the brunt of the press’s disapproval over another highly sensitive issue: questioning whether those academic institutions that had taken a stand against the military’s discrimination should be expected to formally engage with them after the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

One expects Columbia’s critics would be ready to mobilize these scandals from the fall; contesting the obligation to invite ROTC back to campus could easily have been presented as further evidence Columbia students and faculty were over-privileged and amoral. While the attention garnered by the debate over military aid, the New York Post, were more than willing to take the bait. Despite the fact that one of the arrested students was on financial aid, the New York Post harped on the students’ privilege when describing the bust, writing that “five students at the prestigious college—some from wealthy families—made stacks of cash by peddling a wide range of narcotics out of their frat houses and dorm rooms, authorities said.” The Post did not just assume that all Columbia students are wealthy, but went to lengths to be condescending. The Post described the arrested students’ claims that they only sold drugs to pay for tuition as “whining,” and wrote that “daddy doesn’t seem so stingy anymore” after Harrison David’s father bailed him out of prison. David had allegedly told the police that he was selling drugs to help pay for college, and that his father did not pay tuition.

The New York Times was much more cautious about boarding the Ivy-bashing bandwagon. Their headline, “Typical Drug Case, Except for Ivy League Address,” was more critical than inflammatory. The
The New York Times recognized that the bust was noteworthy not because of the actual facts of the case, but because it fit into a narrative of elites laid low. “The five-month investigation, branded Operation Ivy League by the police,” they wrote, “is more noteworthy for its locale than its scope, considering the relatively meager size of the haul and the amount spent on drug purchases by the undercover officers.” The NYPD was willing to expend a 'module'—several undercover cops, a sergeant, and five investigators—on such a minor bust, and then heavily promote it to the media, because they knew that taking down Ivy League students was striking. In the same interview, Kelly claimed that the cops on the case were not planning on announcing the sting. Until the morning of the arrests, he had not heard of the tabloid-friendly label.

Columbia’s status as an Ivy League school does not entirely explain why Operation Ivy League was covered so extensively by the media, though, since drug busts at other Ivy schools did not receive the same coverage accorded to Columbia’s experience. Only a week after the Operation Ivy League bust, Hanover police arrested a Dartmouth freshman after intercepting a shipment of drugs bound for his campus mailbox. No media aside from the The Dartmouth and niche blogs like Ivygate paid any attention to the story, although the student was charged with three felonies. The next month, a Cornell senior was busted in possession of a heroin stash worth $150,000. The NYPD’s haul of 4 bottles of LSD, 38 ecstasy capsules, 15 Adderall pills, 2 plastic bags of psychedelic mushrooms, and a pound of marijuana pales in comparison. The discovery of a lab producing DMT in a freshman dorm at Georgetown passed through media outlets both major and minor, but these reports lacked any perniciousness towards the individual students or the university.

There are two important and intimately related reasons for this, which are both closely related to, but not wholly predicated on, geography. After all, NYU reports five times as many drug-related infractions than we have in the past few years. Columbia is a major player in New York. After the Catholic Church, it is the largest private landowner in New York City, and is one of the city’s largest and most important employers. It is hugely influential in local and national politics, and frequently provides a forum for discussion of important political issues—the week we go to press has seen Columbia host a discussion about New York’s current budget crisis with Senator Gillibrand, former Governor David Paterson, former Mayor David N. Dinkins, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, and many other prominent academics and influential policy-makers. The university is one of the most prominent and influential sites for policy-making in New York.

In turn, New York is the capital of equally powerful public advocates—the press. Typically, the press coverage benefits Columbia. Faculty, departments and specialized centers are cited daily in the news. As December’s drug bust and Epstein scandal make clear, though, being located in an international media hub means that your dirty laundry will be aired all over the United States and beyond. Even international media conglomerates are more readily prepared to report on matters that occur closest to their main sites of operation, which is a virtual guarantee that the press will both heavily publicize anything related to Columbia and reduce issues that affect all colleges to their impacts at Columbia. “Illegal drug use,” The New York Times wisely observed, “is an issue on virtually all university and college campuses in the United States, and Columbia is no different.” Of course, there is one difference: the media can pay much more attention to Columbia.

Columbians saw this attention become uncomfortable once again this Spring when the press turned a beady eye on the campus’s public ROTC hearings. The same factors went into the equation, and The Times treated Columbia gracefully while The Post threw bombs at a sensationalized stereotype of Columbia. The Times, in fact, did not even comment on the return of ROTC to Columbia until after the University Senate had already voted to bring it back. The Post, on the other hand, used the “heckling” of Anthony Maschek, GS’14, as the basis for editorials.

"If Columbia has become merely the plaything of the 24 hour news cycle, with such an easily manipulated reputation, we have lost some integrity as an institution."
that excoriated Columbia. Ignoring the actual arguments being made by both sides of the debate, and more importantly assuming that all Columbia students opposed ROTC when polls clearly showed most supported its return, The Post argued that Columbia students are fundamentally inferior to their peers in the armed forces. “Who’s to doubt,” asked a Post editorial, “that [Columbia] would benefit from being marched around the Afghan outback long enough to learn what fundamentally better young men and women do on their behalf all around the world, every day, as a matter or routine?”

Given the sensationalism of papers like The Post, it is remarkable there was no intersection between this view of Columbia as a hotbed of liberal sentiment and the drug bust’s rendering of the university as a bastion of entitled elites who think they are above the law. Even the most salacious reports on the student body and their unpatriotic tutelage, such as The Post’s claim that “the academy’s affection for Marxism, a doctrine in fundamental conflict with America’s founding principles, is invincible,” never made a link to either the drug bust or the Epstein case. The Post made sure to connect the opposition to ROTC to our activist past, even noting at one point that “Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who tortures and imprisons journalists and other critics, is welcome at Columbia, but not a program to train officers for the US military,” but they never connected this opposition to the scandals of the previous months. Why didn’t the Post choose to mention Operation Ivy League as evidence that Columbia’s America-hating liberalism leads them to run roughshod over the rule of law, or the Epstein scandal as evidence of Columbia’s moral depravity?

While we should of course be grateful that the reputation of our institution, and our degrees, was not raked through three-month stale mud to arrive at the regrettable heckling incident, it does warrant concern for another reason. If Columbia has become merely the plaything of the 24-hour news cycle, with such an easily manipulated reputation, we have lost some integrity as an institution. At least in the aftermath of our hallowed activist past, highlighted in The Blue and White’s Farch issue, we had an unwavering character for people to rail against. Increasingly it seems, we’re more of a Lindsay Lohan than a leader of either academic institutions or national politics, as we emerge from the anti-climactic and somewhat bumbling process of inviting ROTC back to campus (which all of the members of the Task Force approved). Given our extremely privileged position in the media and the political sphere, we could afford to pull our weight a little more, stand up a little straighter, and stop being (proverbially) Perez Hilton’s bitch.

-Additional Reporting by Peter Sterne
Who Are These Kids?

In recent weeks the debate over ROTC has brought several groups from the School of General Studies into the spotlight. Freshmen pause for a moment when they come to their first lecture class and see a gaggle of grown adults in the front row. But after a time, they come to casually accept GS students without ever really stopping to consider just how unique Columbia is due to their presence.

In the process of hearing opinions offered by the U.S. Military Veterans of Columbia University on ROTC, among others, many students have stopped to scratch their heads and wonder just what GS’s place in the Columbia community is—how our strong adult education program makes us different.

The Blue and White now takes this opportunity to revive an old feature in which staff writer Mike Young sat down with Dean of GS Peter J. Awn to discuss the unknowns of GS, its place in Columbia, and problems the school faces moving forward.

The Blue & White: So you were not quite 20 years here and you became Dean in ’97?

Peter Awn: That’s right, in ’97 I became Dean, absolutely. But I think what’s important is that very early on I got hired and I start teaching my undergraduate courses, which is what I did for the most part (I had a few graduate course) and I said, “Who the hell are these people in my class?” I thought I was going to be teaching 18-year olds! Or you know 18- to 21-year olds. And so it was this much more diverse environment, which I thought was a kick. And I went to my department chair, and I asked her, I said, “Who are these people?” And she laughed and she said, “Go over to Lewisohn Hall and you’ll find out.”

So I came over here and in some was I was hooked. I thought it was just a terrific, terrific model of education that I thought really complemented traditional education... The problem is, we’re so used to it, we don’t appreciate how incredibly cutting-edge it is in terms of undergraduate education and why.

The traditional model of quote: “adult education” was seen as an appendage on the “real” university structure, the real colleges at the university, and they were always embedded within a broad continuing education division that ran non-degree programs. Come take a course, do whatever you want kind of environment. So you created a kind of culture in which when people reached a certain age they were allowed in, kind of, but never taken really seriously. And so the culture creates this dichotomy between the real undergraduates and the older students who are here for self-enrichment, maybe self-advancement. But somehow age and experience have created a sort of mental deficiency that doesn’t allow you to compete. And that has become ingrained within the American private education structure...

If you don’t begin to take in and take seriously the fact that 75 percent of Americans interested in higher education fit more the non-traditional model than the traditional model, you are going to become completely on the fringe of how American society is evolving. Realize how the demographic changes have affected education, and how people’s choices about how they manage their education have changed dramatically since the 1950s.

B&W: You say that pretty early on in your career here you were hooked on GS because you saw it as a cutting-edge model for education
PA: Well, it was but it needed a lot of fixing. It really did. It still suffered from the fact that Columbia had for decades, if not centuries, been wildly decentralized so that each dean hired his or her own faculty. The academic programs were determined by the faculty of the school, so that even thought you might be in some of your classes with students from the other colleges, in fact the separation among the colleges was fairly pronounced.

So that, I knew, and my colleagues around the University knew, was a model that was well on its way to being buried. That what matters most is an academic model of full integration and the creation of a model of education that the faculty can manage easily without worrying about, “What the hell are the GS requirements. What are the College requirements?” A department should determine, “What do you think is critical for a student to know in order to complete a major?” And if you determine that, why would you make a distinction between one population and another? ... So the advantage that we’ve reached now is a Columbia graduate is a Columbia graduate no matter what school they’re from. And that’s how faculty see it and that’s the reality.

Now, my ability to really push this forward as a model as dean has been really [been based upon] the enormous support that one gets from faculty for GS students. And that’s in contrast to what you will find at other elite, private universities. We’ve had 60-some-odd years to be able to bring the faculty along. When you broach this with other Ivy League faculties, they’re horrified. They have no context in which to see this work. Now, I know some colleagues at Princeton and Harvard for whom this is a really interesting idea, but they’re never really sure how to engage their colleagues on this.

Now... when I came in the ‘70s—and this is true, it isn’t in any way to put Columbia College down, it’s just the reality—in the late ‘70s... The City was in such dire financial straits that everybody was as surly as can be. The neighborhood was to put it mildly dangerous.

So in the late ‘70s Columbia College could not generate more than 3,500 to 3,700 applications. We would take one of two applicants to try to build a class of 650. We’d sit at faculty meetings wringing our hands. The faculty was terrific, but why would anyone from outside the city send their child here when they read all of how horrible... And therefore it was hard to keep the level of quality that now seems so obvious.

For a whole variety of reasons, in the ‘80s the whole city turned around. The College went coed and it really began to come into its own, as it should. So it became then, for GS: this is the bar you have to reach to be credible. It’s not just integration, but the students you integrate have to be as competitive intellectually as everybody else.

And that’s been the fun of this for me. Admissions here is really interesting because you have to evaluate people in a very different way from the way you have to evaluate seniors in high school. It’s not less rigorous. It’s just more comprehensive, and in fact we try to prequalify applicants. When you contact us—and we try to make you contact us—we want to have at least one or two initial engagements to help you decide, is it really worth applying? The last thing we want is a pointless application. So we want to convince you not to apply if we don’t think you’ve got a good shot at getting in. So getting thousands and thousands of applications is not to our benefit. We want to be engaged with applications that are seriously viable.

B&W: So do you think that accounts for the much higher acceptance rate in comparison to the College?

PA: Oh absolutely. That’s exactly why. And we do that quite deliberately. Everybody says, “How can that be, how can that be?” First of all, we’re a small...
operation and we spend an average of four hours per application. You show me a traditional college that does that. Now we have to on some levels because you all come with very complex lives and there’re no two applications that are going to be the same.

Rarely is it a question of your intelligence, but it is always a question of, “Well, how have you managed your life?” For example, we get people from the military, I’d say, and dancers. I talk about them in the same breath and they all look at me, but in fact you’re very similar in terms of background. Why? Frequently people who enter the military do so right out of high school...

B&W: Typically, yeah.

PA: If you just looked at their high school record, yeah, you’re going to get some sense of their potential. But you know, that’s a long time ago, so what’s been going on now? Do they read, can they think, can they write? And do they have the focus and the commitment to do this?

And like the dancers who frequently do the same thing (in fact some of them don’t even go to high school, they frequently have to get a GED)—they haven’t been to school. They’re mid-20s, late-20s. They’re like athletes: you get to a point where your body’s going to give out. You have to decide what you want to do with your life. The ones that we take are voracious readers. They’re really intellectually alive. So they’re auto-didacts, and I think in some ways the people we get from the military are like that. And so you transfer that focus to your work at Columbia in ways that students who haven’t had that rigorous environment don’t necessarily have or have to self-generate. And it really is interesting how those kinds of parallels exist in the GS population.

B&W: So it seems like GS has flagged certain groups of people out there in society that you know from experience will likely do well.

PA: Yeah, but I can give you half a dozen other groups. For example, entrepreneurs. We’ve had a long tradition of incredibly successful entrepreneurs.

B&W: Well I think that the most common perception that I’ve heard is that GS is the back door.

PA: Which is bologna. It can’t be the back door if you’re doing as well as the College students, which is really true. The graduating seniors—basically the GPAs... There’s a little bit to go to make them identical, but it’s so close as to be actually irrelevant. And I also think in a few days it will be better than the College. [Laughs] So give me a break, when you’re the best student in the department as a graduating senior, tell me why that’s a back door.

B&W: So...

PA: The culture wars were ferocious. I find sadly now it’s the Barnard women who are taking the brunt of a lot of the negative sort of press, or negative kind of cultural push. But, oh, no, they were vicious, absolutely vicious to the point where GS students couldn’t join clubs. If you did, you couldn’t become an officer. It was, I mean, all of these kinds of ways to make you feel like a second-class citizen.

Now, more often than not, and I don’t know whether it’s to make me feel good, but a lot of the College students I’ve spoken to (but it seems to come out naturally) say, “You know, I’ve really enjoyed being in classes with GS students. That I really learned a lot from having GS students in my class. It really does make the educational process something a little more complex than it might be were I at Princeton or Yale.”

B&W: Now that, at this point, it’s safe to say that GS is definitely working in the Columbia community, has definitely been accepted...

PA: Where is the real problem?

B&W: Well, my question was going to be: when are
we going to change the name?

**PA:** Oh, no, it’s a horrible name. I could give you a lecture on the Studium Generale, which is the origin of this, but it means absolutely nothing now. There’s nothing “general” about it. The issue—it’s linked to the issue I was going to bring up: where have I, in a sense, failed.

Though I’ve done a lot better, but it’s not even close to enough and will really … and has already begun to have a damaging effect, is financial aid. You’re paying the same tuition as Columbia College students... We get, percentage-wise, functionally half the financial aid dollars that are available to Columbia College students. That’s untenable.

**B&W:** I almost didn’t come for that reason. I was this close to not [coming] for that reason.

**PA:** You and 98 percent of your fellow students, and you would be depressed to hear how many people do say no. Really, really talented people who say no, who would thrive here, be an immense contribution to the community.

And as I’ve joked, you could rename it [the college] whatever you want for a couple hundred million. But it has to be a name that is truly unique, that isn’t mirrored at other universities, and that therefore embodies the uniqueness of this educational experiment. Now, if the money doesn’t come, then the pressure that I feel—and rightly so—to change the name may lead us to make a move to pick a name.

You know, you may go for a dead white male from Columbia’s history. Frankly, I would love to name it after a woman. I mean, what Ivy League college is named after a woman? I mean, other than women’s colleges, zero. So now’s the time to say: the majority of undergraduates on this campus are women and we [GS] were the beacon of women’s education, co-education anyway, and adult women’s education in the city and at Columbia.

**B&W:** Possible names?

**PA:** You know, I don’t have a serious list. If I did, I’d tell you.

**B&W:** Well, you covered all my questions without me having to even ask them.

**PA:** Well, I guess. But you can tell I really believe in this. And it does really disappoint me that colleagues around the other elite colleges and universities haven’t quite recognized this yet.

Now realize that I’m not saying something terrible’s going to happen to Columbia College or Princeton or Harvard. There will always be a very strong constituency for the traditional colleges. The model I’m arguing for is really the marriage of both.

Traditional applicants are very different from how you approach a non-traditional student. Advising is different. And that’s why you need a separate division... And that’s a very interesting model where you have this parallel process of separate divisions recruiting different constituencies. But then they all end up in the classroom together and it’s that that I espouse—an elite traditional college as well as an elite non-traditional college.

**B&W:** Does it seem to you like other (call them top tier) colleges are testing the waters right now?

**PA:** Well I think they’re starting to catch on... The best story is [Provost] Claude Steele when he arrived from Stanford. He had literally been here a week and I invited him to speak at orientation for the fall class. And he didn’t know the campus well. I had to go pick him up at his office and bring him over to, you know. And when I got there, he had to admit, “What’s GS?” And I gave him GSstor as we walked across campus and by the end he said, “Why doesn’t every private university have one of these? This is amazing. This is what I’ve been writing about my whole career.”

**THE CONVERSATION**

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**THE BLUE & WHITE**

34
Dairy Delinquency

One cool, intoxicated evening, a certain member of a varsity sports team entered Westside Market and stumbled down the cheese aisle. He drunkenly took a wheel of cheese, bit into it, and was promptly confronted by Westside security. They called the police, who escorted the young “grand theft cheddar” to a jail cell for the evening. On the young man’s Facebook wall, friends posted comments such as “MOUSE TRAP!” “The cheese stands alone,” “I’m not even mad, I’m impressed,” and the music video to Sublime’s “Jailhouse.”

Either Idyllic and Cute...

Professor Mark Lilla (of Stillborn God, New York Review of Books and CULPA Golden Nugget fame) spotted one sunny afternoon jetting down Park Slope’s 7th Avenue (aka Main Street bougie USA) on a white Vespa. Be-helmeted, bespectacled and far too self-satisfied for his own good. Young girl with big pony tail clinging to his waist. Daughter? Bride? Student? Intrigue! Or Homewrecking!

Sexual Satisfaction Is Integral to Life

A group of girls with wings were assembled outside of Butler giving out condoms shouting “My love for you is like a fractal!”

It’s kind of like a Red Bull commercial.

Better or Worse Than Getting Friended by Your Parents?

Roaree Lion Facebook friended the women’s crew team at the beginning of racing season. Suspicious rowers posited that he (or she?) “probably friended us to see if we’re drinking during the season.” So, to accept or deny? Opinions ranged from “Who wouldn’t friend a mascot!” to “I’m dangling him for a while,” to a simple “Denied.”

Rotten-Apple Express

In early April a skunk went wild on the Barnard Quad and coated it with a ferocious stench. Students jumped to the most logical conclusion: “Jesus, who’s hitting the ganj so hard right now?” Upon learning the true source, quoth the students: “Ugh, whoa! Totally thought it was the skunkiest weed I’d ever smelled!”

Then again, it is possible that Pepe LePew has started dealing.

Red Card from the Ref.

A girl bumps into a coat rack, knocking off the coat of a former Columbia Athlete of the Month. The athlete elbows said girl in the face, to which the girl replies, “I’m so sorry.” The social order was preserved today.

The Institution Formerly Known as SCE

At the last University Senate meeting, after hours of debate on ROTC, the senators approved a name change for the School of Continuing Education in less than 60 seconds: it will now be called the School of Professional and Cross-Disciplinary Studies. SCE admins at the meeting went back to their offices and broke out a bunch of champagne to celebrate. Table-dancing most likely ensued.

The name change isn’t totally official yet—there’s red tape yet. And since SPCDS is a horrible acronym, they might call it "PAX" (Professional And X-Disciplinary), which sounds like some outdoor summer camp for high schoolers rather than a professional school at Columbia.

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