SIGNIFICANT OTHER
Comparing the Core Curricula of Columbia and University of Chicago

GROUP DYNAMICS
Dissonance Within the A Capella Community

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THE BLUE & WHITE

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The Blue & White

One of the things I enjoy most about Columbia is the lack of monotony. Fundamentally, most of us do very similar things day in and day out—go to class, study, get coffee, study again, sleep. But deep down, our daily lives are far more dynamic than the regimented soggings of high school or a nine-to-five job. Shifting class schedules, an ever-changing workload, and the fact that no two assignments, papers, or lectures will ever be the same throw a bevy of new experiences at us every week. Not to mention the fact that we change where we live on a yearly basis, or that one of the effects of an incessantly stressful workload is an unyielding search for new forms of procrastination.

I’ll admit that this ubiquitous barrage of activity is on occasion a bit much, and springtime—and more specifically April—is when Columbia tends to really let loose. Finals loom, the last volley of midterms lands, some mediocre bands perform on the steps, and, oh, have you gotten a summer job yet?

Because concentrating on all of these things is too easy, this is also right about when the weather perks up, and the campus sheds the dull gray cocoon of the winter months. Daylight stretches well into the evening, and the daily Butler trudge grows more and more difficult. Flitting about on top of all this is the mercurial thought that another year of college is nearly spent.

At the risk of sounding tired, it can be easy to forget the good that comes from taking a break every now and then. Sure, the purpose of the tuition we pay is to receive an education and attend classes, but there is a point when it’s necessary to shelve the books for a while. It’s okay to join your fellow sunbathers out on Low Plaza from time to time instead of only passing through between classes in a frantic rush while dodging rogue frisbees.

It’s the small things that we’ll miss most when our time at Columbia is over, and while schoolwork is important, don’t forget that it’s really just background—it’ll get done eventually. So take a brief pause on occasion, and look around you. Take in all of the small quirks, the brief absurdities that constitute the better half of the love-hate relationship many of us harbor with our school. Or at the very least, join us as we do the same—I think we’ve done a pretty fair job of sussing out our school’s most endearing bits.

Brian Wagner
Editor-in-Chief

Editors of The Blue & White recently stumbled upon what is most likely the only interesting thing on the Columbia University alumni web page: a section titled “Collected Stories” where graduates from all schools and eras can post their fondest college memories. The anecdotes range from the familiar (“As a native Texan, I was grossly unprepared for the NYC cold,” writes Laura Adams, CC ‘87), to the uncomfortable (“I enjoyed hiding in the stacks at Butler Library,” recalls Kathryn Pitro, GS ‘02). Scattered amongst pieces exalting the glory of Low Steps in the spring and how JJ 7 was, like, the best floor in the history of ever, there are several recollections from alums who lived in the era when Columbia was still all-male. Here are a few politically incorrect yet oddly charming memories from the men of the University’s yesteryear.
E. Michael Geiger, O.D. ’58

It was a warm, beautiful, late spring day, and we were studying for finals. As I looked out of my Livingston Hall second floor window, a pretty co-ed walking by caught my eye. I yelled a hello to her. Then someone at another window shouted something. Then someone on the campus shouted something back. Soon there were students at many windows in Livingston and John Jay shouting to the mob of students that had gathered on the campus and were shouting back. I yelled “panty raid” and hundreds (it seemed) of us rushed to the Barnard dorms. I got in the gate, but the police were there almost immediately and blocked the entrance. When asked what I was doing there I said that I had a date. Fortunately, the Barnard gal who was my “date” backed me up and all ended well...except no panties.

Adam Bender, CC ’64, ’68 P&S

In 1960, Carman Hall had just opened and still was known as New Hall. The College and the dormitories were all-male and unchaperoned women were not allowed in the rooms.

In the early 1960s, a new rule took effect that was considered very progressive at the time. During certain daylight hours, women were actually allowed to come into our rooms unchaperoned, on one condition: There had to be “a book in the door” to keep it open. The dean assumed that such a threat of exposure would prevent us gentlemen from taking too many liberties with our lady guests. Being the clever and literate Men of Morningside that we were, we decided to interpret the definition of “book” very liberally. We opened a match book and pushed the cover between the doorpost and the closed door—and the rest is history!

Arthur Bernstein, CC ’64

In those glorious days of yesteryear, when New Hall was unfinanced and therefore unnamed, women were prohibited from the dorm. Surprisingly, this even applied to Vassar women, as I discovered one rainy day when I smuggled such contraband into my room. Bad smuggling when wet footprints lead to your closet, which is where our floor counselor discovered the body—quite alive and embarrassed—when he flung back the door.

POSTCARD FROM MORNINGSIDE
Gleaning from the event description that “the ‘Old Sod’ has infused itself at the Club,” this reporter thirsted for nothing more than to investigate “Libations from Ireland: An Irish Whiskey Tasting.” This opportunity to sip on “a unique sampling of Clontarf, Greenore, Knappogue Castle, Middleton, and Redbreast” was made available to members of The Columbia University Club in Midtown this past March 15 at 6:30 pm.

To my dismay, touring guests (non-members) were expected to retrieve their coats and Brooks Brothers bags from the valet by 4 pm. What debauches carried on in the evening hours, I cannot say. House Rules in hand, it became clear that “Working Press and members of the media are not permitted in the Clubhouse, except by permission of management.”

Oops.

Director of Clubhouse Services Glenn Gang brushed aside my media affiliations, supervised a comprehensive tour of the Club, called the blue, non-denim pants I was wearing jeans, and inquired as to my interest in joining. Flipping through the packet that was thrust into my hands post-tour, I sifted through a curious surfeit of capitalization-happy information that might be more precisely described as an “Admissions Procedure” than an application. The following constitute critical points of interest:

- The Dress Code demands something it terms “Smart Casual,” which includes “sweater sets” for women and excludes “Birkenstocks.” It controversially takes the stance that leggings are not pants. The notable exception to this rule is the deviant “Relaxed Casual Attire” — permitted exclusively during weekends between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

- The application packet comes with a handy pocket “key to New York,” which offers possessors the cross street to any address along an avenue in Manhattan.

- Curiously, “Business Meetings”, which require obvious use and display of papers, are disruptive to other members and are not permitted” (House Rules).

- “Online services, such as Skype, are prohibited [sic] inside the Clubhouse” (ibid.).

Should readers wish to bare their souls before yet another Columbia admissions committee, one recommends brevity: Section E. of the form gives the applicant a mere two lines to indicate his or her reasons for seeking membership. A sentence or two about sweater sets should suffice.

—Allie Curry

Rumor had it there was a pig living in a University-owned building somewhere in the city. The Blue & White took it upon themselves to investigate, and set out to find either pink, porky proof or call hogwash on the matter. But a Skype date with Gus and his landlords, to whom we will refer by their self-selected pseudonyms, proved the tail true.

“Young Dirty Tree Hugga” (YDTH) and the less flatteringly labeled “Broken Johnson” verified that a mini Vietnamese potbelly indeed inhabits their living space, despite the University’s ban on animal residents. But losing the hairs on their chinny-chin-chins is well worth the risk. As Broken Johnson explains,
“he nuzzles me for hours.”

A piglet may not be the most sensible choice for a pet: Gus seems a bit porky for tight NYC quarters. Broken Johnson, however, readily explains his dedication to housing Old McDonald’s favorite friend. “I’ve wanted a pig for years now. They are smart and capable of amazing feats.”

Truly, with Gus’s skills, he deserves a gangsta name of his own. He can sit on command and spin in a circle until rewarded with food. Gus also doubles as the roommates’ “mentor—[he’s] an inspiration.” An avid disco fan, the pig criticizes YDTH and Broken Johnson’s music as they produce it; if the track is bumping, his tail goes bananas. If they’re off, Gus gives them a death stare, indicating the jam is nothing short of swine. “He’s a smart motherfucker,” YDTH concludes.

Gus spends most of his time sleeping or, as YDTH comments, “Looking for food, or eating food, or asking for food. Maybe because he’s a pig or something?” Gus, conscious of keeping his potbelly under control, looks to greens, such as lettuce from the university cafeteria, to maintain his svelte figure. When he does pig out, Gus’ guilty pleasure is straight from Mary Kate Olsen’s cookbook: unsalted popcorn.

Though he is “loved by everyone,” the future for this young, porcine talent remains uncertain. The human pair agrees that Gus is “really [their] friend,” but YDTH darkly reminds us of his own vices: “I really like bacon.”

— Zuzana Giertlova

Few at Columbia were thrilled when Livingston Hall was renamed Wallach Hall. “I do remember there being people, including myself, who thought that was the wrong thing to do,” recalls an anonymous CC alum. The building was originally named after Robert Robert Livingston, a King’s College graduate who enjoyed an illustrious political career — he was even one of the five original drafters of the Declaration of Independence. But after a generous donation from Ira Wallach, CC ’29, LW ’31, to renovate the building, the founding father’s name was literally ripped off of the building and mounted onto a bulky hardwood sign that hung inside a Hartley housing office. Livingston was thus replaced with the surname of the newer, wealthier benefactor. For many undergrads, this amounted to nothing less than an underhanded buy-in to Columbia’s cultural institutionality.

In 1988, on the last day of classes before Christmas, the Livingston sign was “liberated” from the Hartley housing office by a student. Galvanized by an inspiring combination of indignation and boredom, Walter* stole into the office where the sign was held and opened the window. He returned through the window that night, when the office was closed and locked, grabbed the sign, and snuck it into a nearby office where he worked part-time. The sign is hefty — at least 4 feet long and 2 feet tall, not to mention heavy — so smuggling it past the Hartley security guards was no easy feat.

Using the holiday season to his advantage, Walter strategically placed several rolls of festive wrapping paper in his office before the heist in order to wrap the sign like a present. After swaddling the sign in green and red, he carefully addressed the package, “To: Walter, Love: Walter” and tipped his hat to the guard who held the door for him as he departed Hartley, sign in hand. Mischief managed, Walter carried old Livingston back to his room where it hung until he graduated. Although the statute of limitations has more than likely passed for this supposed “crime,” the alum who, ahem, emancipated dear Livingston wishes to remain anonymous — and requests that the current location of the sign remain undisclosed.

*Names have been changed to protect the guilty.

— Sylvie Krekow

April 2012

Illustrations by Louise McCune & Chantal McStay
Aki Terasaki, CC ’12, CCSC president and two-time class president, might be one of Columbia’s biggest fans, as evidenced by his high school graduation gift: a cat he named Roar-ee.

His devotion to community is clear. Most of Terasaki’s work as CCSC president is grounded in absolving the communicative disconnect separating administrative bureaucracy from the student body. One of his weekly emails even included his personal phone number; another announced his resignation from the presidency as an April’s Fool’s joke. It’s important to him that student government has a face, and Aki works hard to ensure it’s a friendly one.

“He’s got a fantastic personality and a bubbling laugh that pours over into every ounce of his personality. First off, he’s charismatic. He has the right attitude and gives personal attention to his work that makes him an effective campus leader. I voted for him every year and I don’t even like voting for things!” Pat Blute, CC ’12, joked, “I’m truly proud to call Aki a colleague, classmate, friend, and future husband.”

Karishma Habbu, CC ’13, will readily list her favorite of Aki’s attributes. “His perfectly coiffed hair, his intensity during our 9 am Body Sculpting Class, his ability to pull off huge events like Glass House Rocks and class formal on a BOAT... Aki is fun and style in one.”

Aki’s warm and enthusiastic attitude is likely what caused the shift in the tenor of CCSC meetings, he transformed the cut-and-dry systemic rituals into dynamic, open dialogues among members. He even went as far as to instate non-mandatory meetings. Terasaki took a risk, believing that obligation was dampening enthusiasm among Council members.

Though the meetings quickly swung back to required attendance, Terasaki’s initiative to remodel meetings based on town hall-style transparency became the new standard in communication between the governing and student bodies. At the beginning of the spring semester, he held a “complain session” for students to air their grievances to the Council.

While student advocacy is his priority, Terasaki’s aim for CCSC extends beyond CCSC <3’s You cards for Valentine’s Day. Though dedicated to his twin pursuits of administrative discourse and advocacy for students, he is often forced to choose just one. “Sometimes you have to go against the grain in the case of the administrators,” he says. “It’s important to fight for students.”

And he has. Terasaki was a major contributor to the new CCSC website, yourCCSC.com, which maintains a healthy average of 300 unique visitors a day, with a record high of 1200.

“He wants students to be in touch with their council leaders and University administrators,” said current CCSC VP Communications Virat Gupta.

Terasaki was born in Tokyo, though he could claim Hawaii, Ohio, Maryland, or, most recently, Delaware as his home state. But it’s not until now that he’s put roots down. “I know it’s cheesy to say, but I found my hometown in New York. I get the chills every time I
come back to the city.”

After graduation, following in the tradition of former CCSC presidents, Terasaki will apply his mediatory skills to a stint in management consulting. As for the legacy he hopes to leave, Terasaki is gracious, and humbly credits Columbia for his successes: “Columbia has done so much for me,” he says. “I just want to give back to my community.”

—Augusta Harris

SAM ROTH

Sam Roth, CC ’12, hopes for a future in politics. He doesn’t plan on running for office, but rather “would love to be the guy that that guy turns to.”

While Roth has made his undergraduate career as the Editor-in-Chief of the Columbia Daily Spectator for 2011-12, the Westchester native dabbled in various political organizations and publications before winding up at the helm of the newspaper.

Yet even Michele Cleary, who worked with Sam as Spec’s managing editor, didn’t know that he made several attempts at writing the Varsity Show script, earning accolades from the show’s managers before being ruled out in the advanced rounds. He admits to keeping a file with bits and pieces of humorous sketches, though he insists - with typical modesty - that “there are way more talented people at Columbia.” While Sam presents himself with remarkable composure, his friends unanimously emphasize his keen sense of humor, described variably as “subtly intelligent” and “pretty dirty.”

But what strikes you when you first meet Sam is his seriousness, immediately apparent when he describes his relationship to the University. “I fell in love with Columbia very quickly,” he recalls, “I still am in love with Columbia...but it’s become more complicated.”

Looking back on his time at the College, he speaks reverently of the faculty—noting Alan Silver and Andrew Delbanco as particularly inspiring—who “embody the virtues of what we think of as the greatness of Columbia.” This admiration does not come without qualifications. Roth recently published an open letter to the faculty in Spec, calling on them to engage more seriously with the Core, and to “get involved in students’ lives and problems.”

Roth is also in love with his girlfriend of a year and a half. The couple recently decided to raise a minidachshund together, whom they named Robin. Sierra Kuzava, a friend of the couple who occasionally puppy-sits, notes that even though “Sam was openly not a dog person before this puppy adventure,” he has grown to care deeply for the pet. Nor does Sam take commitment lightly. For a long time, he was wedded to the idea of triple majoring, in History, Political Science, and Economics, the latter of which he eventually dropped out of necessity, given his full-time engagement at Spec. He doesn’t deny that he was attracted to the prestige of such an accomplishment, but sees it as a question of fundamental engagement with a subject. By satiating oneself with an intro course, he contends, “you’ll probably end up more ignorant, because you think you know something.” Sam qualified this with the concession that his life has been considerably enriched by taking Shakespeare I and II.

Statements like this reveal the surprising quirks in Sam’s ostensibly conservative façade. He frequents Mel’s and The Heights—“I was never really a Campo guy”—he once coordinated a “Peep Week” during which he and his girlfriend garnished every food they ate with Peeps marshmallows. When he worked for Hillary Clinton’s Senate campaign in 2008, he adopted an unabashedly pro stance on the ROTC. From his pet to his politics, Roth applies himself with impressive intensity and self-confidence to everything he cares about.

“He’s passionate about equity, politics, and promoting social justice,” avows his EC suitemate Vignesh Subramanyam. When asked about his own impressions of his reputation, Roth responds with typical self-assurance, modesty, and sense of institutional history, invoking the words of a former campus paper EIC, the venerable Nicholas Murray Butler: “I am, at best, a medium-sized man on campus.”

—Claire Sabel

Illustrations by Maddy Kloss
Mark asked me to commit.

He wanted me to pick a side, buy a ticket, and follow him all the way. What Mark failed to mention is that once you’re in, the only way out is the way you came. He asked me to meet him at the 110th stop.

It’s not the first time he’s pulled this. For weeks, Mark has tried yanking me away from 116th. Which is to say, distancing me from all that is beautiful, all that is familiar, all that sits close to home. In both proximity and aesthetics, 116th personifies what I value; Mark has proven time and time again that he just doesn’t give a shit.

A relationship means meeting in the middle, and Mark can’t seem to grasp that. Things have to be his way. If he opened his mind for even a moment, he might realize that there is absolutely no logical reason to walk six extra blocks to the subway.

Sure, he’ll probably give you some anachronistic, aphoristic wisdom about the merits of strolling Broadway—some of that Baudelairean hogwash he tends to spew. For all his talk of superiority, Mark is no more than a manipulative, pseudo-intellectual name-dropper, unable to face reality.

Fine. I can play his game. To borrow Mark’s pretentious rhetoric: why, if more intellectually stimulating, does the journey to the 110th dump the unlucky rider in The Cave? The 110th stop is claustrophobic. It is poorly lit, noisy, and has no windows to the outside world. Devoid of the lofty arched ceilings and tiled mosaic of my beloved 116th, that southerly station feels placeless—a dark world of meaningless shadows.

But petty intellectuation misses the mark: my opponent is entirely oblivious. Doesn’t he see that I need my space, that I need options? I take comfort in knowing that, having entered a station with someone on the east side of Broadway, I can still go uptown while she goes down; I can even leave the station entirely. I like knowing that there are two staircases, and I that can choose either one. I like knowing that even after a 45-minute trip from Brooklyn, I can duck out at the 115th exit. It’s about the high ceilings; it’s about having room to breathe.

If anything, Mark’s choice of 110th over 116th reflects his poor understanding of what a girl wants, what a girl needs. A good relationship with your subway station is of the utmost importance.

Like Mark, 110th comes on all too strong. 116th eases you into things. It’s like the mandatory 24-hour period before calling after the first date.

Like Mark, the 110th stop steals you away from yourself. At 116th, you can hear birds, smell the NUTZ4NUTZ, feel sunlight, and see flakes of snow fall through the metal grates. It allows you to be in the relationship, but keep your independent interests. It doesn’t go into your iTunes and delete all your guilty-pleasure ’90s girl-pop.

Like Mark, 110th is the paranoid boyfriend who doesn’t let you chat up the guy in the ticket booth. In fact, the station is so hostile, ticket-sellers don’t deign to set up shop there. Sometimes you need that face-to-face connection. I’m not asking for physical contact, but is it so bad to like a man in uniform?

At least tell me this: when you have $1.90 left on your Metrocards, who, Mark, will consolidate them? Not anyone at the 110th station, and certainly not me.

\[\text{Affirmative}\]

\textit{By Victoria Wills}\n
\[\text{In Two Swords’ Length}\]
Victoria thinks I’m making this all about me, me, me. She acts like I’m trying to control her, to own her, to lock her down in this one-way stairway to what I presume she thinks is a living hell.

Well, though most Columbians do see it that way, the borderlands of 110th are not the River Lethe; each successive subway stop south of 116th is not another circle of Hell. Manhattan Valley was not laid out by Dante Alighieri. Nor is it about commitment. My insistence on using the 110th subway stop is about self-respect, dedication, and an everyday practical education that Little Miss Columbia Bubble 2014 needs to drill into her head if she wants to make it in the real world.

Because that’s what the 110th stop is: The Real World. Where people stop being polite and start getting real. Or at least they stop being anthropology majors and start getting real jobs.

Victoria tries to convince me to meet her at 116th because it has choices. It’s a station made for someone who comes tearing in at the last minute, having miscalculated the time, but knows that just so long as they make it to any corner of 116th, they’ll be fine. But 110th takes precision. It takes situational awareness and knowledge of one’s geography.

110th is for those who sharpen their minds in their everyday lives and believe in forethought and punctuality. 116th is for people who can’t live without iPhone navigation and a constant connection to GCal.

But, Victoria protests, it’s not all about the entrances. It’s about proximity. It makes no sense for her to hoof it all the way to 110th. And to that I say for shame, Victoria, for shame. You are truly a sloth. I bet you order all of your food via GrubHub.

We scholars are an atrophied breed. If you have ever stood out front of Butler, you will realize that all the students within and hipsters without are chicken-legged and brittle. They hobble on their stilt-shins over to the nearest subway station and cling to the pole for dear life. But those who choose 110th, regardless of (or in fact due to) its distance, are of a heartier stock. We live our lives with health in mind. We are the Greek ideal of balance between physical and mental education; Juvenal’s mens sana in corpore sano. I especially pride myself on the maintenance of calves that can only be adequately described as majestic.

True, we are Columbians, and 116th is “our spot.” But what does it do to us to linger underground and stare at walls glorifying our names, to see our institution hailed as the ultimate end of all travels? 116th is the death of humility and the greatest ego boost ever to poison Morningside Heights.

110th is escape from the Ivory Tower. It is the physical manifestation of its riders’ balanced minds and bodies and their noble, humble spirit. 110th is a reality check with regard to one’s place at Columbia; it asks that acute attention be paid to even our smallest actions. It challenges our identities and pathetic Ivy superiority complexes.

110th is sublime, profound. And that’s why my love of the 110th stop makes me so much better than you, Victoria. It makes me so much better as a human being. So much better. •

Illustrations by Adela Yawitz
Ah, Eastertide, what could be finer? Pastels, a—far too rare, one fears—yearly opportunity to pass over drab hues in favour of more vibrant ensembles (months spent summering at the Vineyard aside, naturally). But did not Mill, despite his many failings, not write that every pleasure carries a corresponding pain? Thus, Lent lives on.

Accordingly, for these past forty days, your own Verily Veritas did fix to forgo cigarettes. But beg pardon, Old V is getting ahead of himself; his nerves aren’t quite right.

Firstly, he reflected, “How frightful. Giving up cigarettes is on its own unthinkable, let alone to serve a liturgical season which so reeks of Papism.” But he thought further. His mother—a truly Episcopal woman were there ever one—encouraged him to wash his delicate hands of vice. And because VV does take pride in his own self-governance (and since to renounce the sweet fruit of the vine might be considered blasphemy) he did settle on giving up cigarettes.

On Mardi Gras, VV reclined with friends in the new spring grass, imbibing, conversing, and smoking. At just past midnight—and with nothing in his heart but good intentions, Lord—VV verily tossed the smoldering butt of his last Winston into the sterling ashtray before taking a last nip and leave of his companions.

Awakening to what promised to be a bleak and bleary Ash Wednesday, V took Wagner for a walk about his cheerful corner of this great City. Fiercely desiring his customary coffee and cigarette to commence tardily l’après-midi, V settled for coffee alone. Reading the Times in the park wasn’t quite the same without a smoke, but VV soldiered through the day with a dogged Christian spirit.

In fact, you will be proud to read that V had no strong urges for the America’s finest crop until one Saturday evening two weeks hence.

Naturally, he and his companions indulged in their leisurely late-night agenda of drinking and talking whilst strolling the Village. Though it would be too much to say the strong drink went to his head, Verily Veritas’s resolve did weaken. Two drags into a sweet, sweet Winston—O, what devious friends he has!—V tossed the thing into a gutter. “Perhaps less than one cigarette for forty days is as good as victory,” he Pharisaically philosophized, blunted as he was.

The week following was hellish: VV’s briefest of indiscretion had, as it were, fired his passion for that tantalizing, contemplative, leaf. He wrestled with the beast of temptation—truly understanding Adam’s most punishing encounters with earthy evil—spent much time in bed, and much time drinking coffee and eating sweets.

He, ashamed as he is to relate it, avoided even his own reflection.

Three weeks passed, and as he went about his usual early spring business of slouching through his papers and midterm examinations, V craved a cigarette...but, curiously, did not need one.

Easter Sunday approached, and the family gathered. More than once did Verily consciously congratulate himself for the foresight evinced by his decision not to swear off of alcohol—it seemed that Eastertide, like Christmastide, necessitated social lubrication that he and his aunt (bless her sour heart) were only too happy to provide for one another.

Upon returning from Easter Sunday Mass, V and his dear father Vernon stopped on the porch, and shared a smoke. What wonderment God in nature hath wrought!*
The Core Curriculum is the defining feature of Columbia College’s intellectual identity. Undergraduates who chose Columbia specifically for its intellectual classicism—seeking the “wide-ranging perspectives on classic works of literature, philosophy, history, music, art, and science” touted by Columbia brochures—likely also considered the University of Chicago.

On the surface, similarities between the two schools abound: both undergraduate colleges are situated within a prominent research university in a major metropolis; both boast a robust general education grounded in the Western canon. In addition, both venerable curricula are undergoing significant changes as they adapt to contemporary sentiments in educational.

Still, for all their similarities, these two educations are far from identical. Chicago’s Core is not organized around cornerstone courses like Columbia’s Lit Hum and CC. Rather, their Common Core requires that students choose two or three “Hume” courses, three Sociology (“Sosc”) classes, two or three under Civilization, and one or two in Art, Music, or Drama. It’s not “common” at all. Finally, students must take five to seven math and science courses (far more rigorous than Frontiers), in addition to fulfilling language and physical education requirements.

These various tracks provide a self-selective slant to Chicago’s Core: while some are less demanding, others offer a rigorous, traditional sequence in the Great Books. For instance, students on the Classics track engage deeply with the same thinkers taught in Lit Hum and CC. More zealous students major in “Foundations,” a deep and broad sequence in the traditional liberal arts, which spans all four years. Columbia, on the other hand, takes a populist approach: one track for all, Global Core and science requirements excepted.

Mark Lilla, a professor of humanities who has taught Core classes at both schools, believes Columbia’s unified curriculum is “far superior” to Chicago’s decentralized equivalent. Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization follow a more traditional progression of texts, whereas Chicago’s flexible regimen has, Lilla says, reduced its Common Core to “just one more requirement to get through”—more akin to general education requirements at other colleges. Moreover, these brief, quarter-long, courses fail to foster the kind of year-long bond that the right Lit Hum adjunct can form with the right class.

At Columbia, the popular perception is that institutionally, Chicagoans are more serious intellectually. Lilla disagrees: “To my surprise, Columbia students are more enthusiastic.” It would appear, however, that the enthusiasm Lilla identifies in Columbians is relatively short-lived. He observes, “I find [the two student bodies] equally curious in their first two years, but after that, something happens to Columbia students when they are busy pursuing their majors. They lose the thread and become more professionally oriented.” He contends, “We don’t do a good job of connecting the Core experience to what happens after.” With the advent of junior year and graduation, students become more outwardly focused, looking to secure an internship and a future rather than cultivate a cerebral relationship with the Great Books.

It seems the most important difference between the schools isn’t curricular, but cultural. Roosevelt Montás, CC ’95, and Director of the Center for the Core Curriculum, believes that the Core at Columbia is strong on the whole. According to Montás, students generally complete the reading, although that varies by section.

However, a quick look at Bwog comments reveals pervasive cynicism among students regarding Core participation. Chicago, apparently, has well-entrenched undergraduate culture of dedication and curiosity. Nathan Tarcov, Professor of Political Science at Chicago since 1978, has taught Classics of Social and Political Thought, an analogue of CC, for many years. He finds that Chicago succeeds in nourishing and sustaining their students’ intellectual intensity. “My sense—as chair, I read the course evaluations
for the whole course—is that most students are enthusiastic about the Core and, for some, it is life-changing.

Graduate and undergraduate students echo his sentiment. Helen Beilinson, UChicago ’14, a biology major, suggests Chicago’s academic culture is one of positive peer pressure. “If you don’t do the reading,” she muses, “people sort of look at you, like, ‘Oh, you didn’t do the reading?’ because it only takes a few hours.”

Donald Laackman, UChicago ’12, will graduate with a B.A. in math. He, like Beilinson, describes positive academic peer pressure at Chicago. In “one of the more serious Sosc classes, everyone did all the reading. In my easier Hume class, I would say most kids did 60 or 70% of the reading, some of us did it all, and one kid did none.” This points to one benefit of UChicago’s decentralized Core: serious students end up together in the more demanding classes. Though this breeds less school unity than Columbia’s curriculum, it fosters more student participation.

But even if, as Lilla, Beilinson, and Laackman have noted, social pressure to do the reading is stronger at Chicago, the Core’s extracurricular social effect is the same. “If you’re at a party and you need to talk to someone, you usually talk about Common Core classes,” says Beilinson. Some things do survive translation.

Giuliano Wrobel, UChicago ’14, does allow that not every student is wholly behind the Core. A double major in math and computer science, Wrobel admits that “for the people who are trying to do more than one major, there is definitely not a super high level of enthusiasm.” Nonetheless, the student body believes itself “more devoted than anybody” to the liberal arts, specifically when compared to Columbia students.

Nick Juravich, UChicago ’06 and a Columbia History PhD candidate, recalls being “aware that Columbia had [a Core], but Columbia is a big east coast Ivy, whereas we were out in the gray Midwestern citadel.” Chicagoans, then, chose the school for neither Ivy League bragging rights nor for the business or pleasure to be found in New York City, but for a more monastic mode of scholarship.

Saskia Sassen, Professor of Sociology first at UChicago and now at Columbia, agrees. Hyde Park is remote; “there is no Manhattan or Brooklyn.” As for the student bodies: “It’s almost a tribal thing abroad, [graduates] have so much pride for saying, ‘I am from Chicago.’” She adds: “My experience at Chicago was a real engagement [on the part of the students] with difficult intellectual questions. Some Columbia students are not very interested in those questions.” Her final verdict on Chicago? “It is a very intense place.”

Chicago clearly distinguishes itself from Columbia in faculty engagement. “For some reason, in the culture of Chicago, that eminence [of the Core] is broadcasted,” explains Thomas Meaney, UChicago ’04 and Columbia History Ph.D candidate. “If you’re an older professor, you absolutely want to teach the Core, it’s not a burden at all.” This is largely incongruous with Columbia College’s model, in which many first-years’ first seminar experience is led by a graduate instructor only a few years older.

John W. Boyer, Dean of the College at UChicago
since 1992, innocently denigrates Columbia, musing
that, “If you have a Core and it’s taught mostly
by adjuncts or grad students, that’s a sign that the
faculty don’t really believe in it.”

Senior Columbia faculty have acknowledged
this problem. The resignation of Columbia College
Dean Michelle Moody-Adams led to a crisis of con-
science over the direction of the college and its com-
mitment to maintaining an expensive set of Core
seminars. In a feature on the college’s upheaval
in Capital New York (by former Bwog Editor Eliza
Shapiro), Lit Hum Chair Christia Mercer noted the
rapidly declining proportion of faculty teaching the
Core. “We have more students [taking the Core]
and a lower percentage of faculty teaching
them,” she confirmed. Successive class
expansions have first forced Core
section sizes to exceed formerly
hard caps. Chicago’s professor-
taught Core classes, on the other
hand, appear to be shrinking.
Professor Tarcov noted a
“significant improvement
in lowering the section cap
from 22 to 19, which I find
makes discussions much
better.”

President Bollinger’s
avowed goal is for the univer-
sity to, “over the course
of this century, fulfill its
aspirations to be a center
of research [...] unparalleled in the world.” This
is the inherent financial
tension between the college’s
robust (and expensive) core
curriculum and the major research
university within which it is set. But Bollinger’s
strategy of slow, impalpable change can elude the
notice of undergraduates who are only here four
years. Andrew Delbanco, Director of American
Studies and Professor in the Humanities, in a
speech at Columbia’s Casa Italiana, cited the exis-
tence of “a real threat to the Core [...] not sudden
abolition so much as slow attrition.”

But UChicago may be running a parallel course
to Columbia’s. Juravich bemoans “a general and
unfortunate trend away from a broad liberal educa-
tion towards a very professionalized approach”—
not unlike Columbia’s recent addition of an openly
preprofessional undergraduate special concentra-
tion in Business Management.

Juravich attributes Chicago’s slide towards pro-
fessionalism in part to Robert Zimmer, president
of the university since 2006. “Zimmer is more
in a Lee Bollinger mode, running the univer-
sity [in a way that] McKinsey might like, more
like a business. I know he’s reduced the Core,” he
said. Beilinson, too, hinted at Chicagoan crisis
of conscience. Hesitating to believe in any real
threat to the Core, she allows that deci-
sions including Chicago’s migration
to the Common App suggest
that “Zimmer is definitely
more of a businessman”
than his predecessor
Michael Rande, whom
Noel Moore, UChicago
’81 and involved alumnus, called a “devotee to
a dying breed of liberal
arts.”

For all its virtue, could
Chicago be shifting away
from the gray, Midwestern
citadel? Beilinson muses,
“A lot of people are upset,
feeling that UChicago is
becoming more Ivy League,
trying to accept less people.”

Will the admissions litera-
ture of Columbia and UChicago
continue to boast of the rigor and
uniformity of their core curricula
while simultaneously and hypocritically
allowing them to move toward Delbanco’s death of
“slow attrition”? That’s not clear.

Utterly apparent, however, is Chicago students’
unaffected dedication to the Core. Chicagoans of
all stripes stress the student body’s intense, recip-
ciprocal pressure to truly engage with one another
and the Core’s difficult questions. To implement
cultural change is a nearly impossible task, but it’s
for this Columbia ought to strive.”
LOCALLY GROWN

Under No Management
The Current State of Occupy CU
BY BRIT BYRD

"Nothing will grind our gears like the words ‘head of the group,’” Elliott Grieco, CC ’12, corrected me. After spending only a short time at the occupation of Tuck-It-Away Storage at 125th Street and 12th Avenue, it became clear that I had assumed a top-down leadership structure that didn’t exist. Today’s occupation site—a West Harlem step bedecked with picket signs, plastered with fliers, cluttered with musical instruments, and cordoned off by NYPD barricades—reflected this plurality of aims, motivations, and interests.

Nothing regarding Occupy CU points to an overarching agenda. Instead, one feels an intense sense of hyper-locality. As Grieco understands it, this is the Occupy movement at its most effective: “While what happens downtown at Zuccotti has a global audience, [this] enables self-empowerment at a much more local level, oftentimes implicitly asking me, ‘What can you do with your power, your position of privilege?’”

Those involved with Occupy CU are intensely focused on the minutiae of the issues. Grieco says much of the energy devoted to the movement is about getting people to understand, if not appreciate, this intricacy. “It took me a long time to just sit down, take a second, and understand the situation and all the actors involved,” he said. Ideological understanding takes precedence over physical presence. When asked the common organizing question, “Do you need bodies?” Grieco maintains that while bodies do help command attention, he ultimately needs “people here who are interested or willing to learn about the issue—someone I can sit down and have a conversation with about eminent domain and local interests.”

Occupy CU remains independent from the seminal movement in Zuccotti Park. While the notoriously ambiguous “spirit of Occupy” clearly manifests itself in Morningside Heights, all official networking is absent. Yet, while the Columbia-local group maintains its unique ideological integrity, its work simultaneously represents a microcosm of the larger movement. As Grieco points out, the University directly benefits from its heavy presence in global finance. This includes President Bollinger’s position as Chairman of the NY Federal Reserve’s Board of Directors, and President Spar’s role on the Goldman Sachs Board of Directors.

Still, supporting these specifically local projects is not mandatory for Occupy CU-ers. The Tuck-It-Away occupation—and the Manhattanville expansion in general—is not a position within a platform that members are expected to oblige. Indeed, the term ‘members’ might be an overreach in vocabulary (at this point occupiers are beginning to border on Derridean in their treatment of language). The amity between “members” stems not necessarily from a common cause, but from, as the general declaration of the group states, the connection of all social grievances. The discussion extends to a public Google Groups page and a Tumblr, where posts vary from exhaustive and invective to short and conversational. These posts express solidarity with a nurses strike at St. Luke’s, a National Student Debtor Day of Action, chronicle NYPD violence directed at protesters, and share notes from past General Assemblies.

At Tuck-It-Away, the drums were not beating, but sitting idle upon the stoop. It must be said that the aesthetic of the group is undeniably of the crunchy liberal variety. Making any such observations out loud, however, would be ill-received by a group which so prides itself in openness.

Illustration by Julia Stern
Paying the Bills

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UNIVERSITY HOUSEWARES & UNIVERSITY
HOUSEWARES & UNIVERSITY HARDWARE

Framing
Francis Furnald funded the erection of Furnald Hall in 1913, in memory of his son Royal Blacker Furnald, CC 1901. It is unclear why the building was then first used as a dormitory for female graduate students. The building has served a variety of functions, including housing naval officers in World War II who were deployed after a 90-day training stint on campus. The basement successively housed locker rooms (for South Field sportsmen), a co-op grocery, and a legendary pub. It has been an undergraduate residence hall since 1960.

Though the Supreme Court’s first chief justice graduated from King’s College in 1764, his legacy was not commemorated until 1927, with the advent of John Jay Hall. The building’s notoriously dysfunctional elevators forced students to climb stairs to their lofty rooms in the “skyscraper dorm.”

Carman Hall was named after Harry J. Carman, the fourth dean of Columbia College and an agricultural historian who spent much of his administration farming upstate. First-year students continue to uphold Carman’s Arcadian legacy by fertilizing the building’s potted plants with the partially digested contents of their stomachs.

Hartley Hall opened its doors in 1905. The building was named by Marcellus Hartley Dodge Sr. after his grandfather, also Marcellus Hartley. While it takes most alumni a few decades to be able to fund campus infrastructure, Dodge Sr. handed over the $300,000 donation with ease only a few years after graduating, secure in the knowledge of a $60 million inheritance due to him at age 26.
Hartley’s neighbor was originally christened Livingston Hall after Robert R. Livingston, one of the five drafters of the Declaration of Independence. As proof that money trumps—or rather, purchases—institutional history, the building was renamed after Columbia alum Ira D. Wallach generously contributed to its renovation in the late ’70s.

Hamilton is named after CC ’13 Facebook group administrative stalking conspiracy “Alexander Hamilton”, who was also a founding father, first secretary of the US Treasury, a federalist and “instrumental in reviving King’s College as Columbia College” after the Revolutionary War according to literature from Columbia’s 250th year. It first opened its doors in 1907.

The Columbia landmark was built in 1895 by University President Seth Low, in memory of his father, whose first names, Abiel Abbot, boast splendid bilabial plosives which would not have suited a campus map. Low financed the building with a million of his own dollars because alumni weren’t paying up at the time.

Originally the Law School until it moved across the street to Amsterdam in 1960, Kent Hall opened in 1910 at a cost of $500,000 from an anonymous donor. The building was named for James Kent, the first Law Professor who was affiliated with the university for over 50 years. Its library, now the C.V. Starr East Asian Library, was modeled after that of Trinity College in Cambridge.

Lewisohn Hall: home to General Studies since 1964 and a living emblem of Columbia’s historic, institutionalized anti-semitism! The building was partially funded in 1904 by art collector and philanthropist Adolph Lewisohn. Lewisohn’s surname name proved too Jewish to grace a university building; his contribution was thusly dubbed the “School of Mines.”
Home of the Chemistry Department, Havemeyer owes its name to Theodore Havemeyer, SEAS 1868. He named it in honor of his father, Frederick Christian Havemeyer, CC 1825, in 1896. The honor came at the price of $450,000 even while the family was embroiled in expensive Progressive Era city politics.

William Colford Schermerhorn, CC 1840 and member of the longtime fancy pants and Columbia-connected Schermerhorn dynasty, helped Low to move Columbia northwards in 1895. He gave $300,000 to build a building of any kind Low wanted and to accessorize the President’s new million dollar library.

Avery was the name of Columbia’s movable architecture collection before it was a building. Near the turn of the 19th century, Samuel Putnam Avery named the itinerant library after his son, Henry Ogden Avery. In 1912, Avery opened as Columbia’s found a permanent home in Morningside Heights, as the campus’ second library after Low.

Although it is now houses the History Department, Fayerweather was designed for use by Columbia’s physicists in the late 19th century. Mysteriously, the building’s donor, the shoe tycoon Daniel Fayerweather, shared no connection with the University, not unlike the late Z.Y. Fu.

Seeley G. Mudd named buildings on no fewer than thirty-four university campuses after his father, Colonel Seeley Wintersmith Mudd. Columbia happened to be one of them, and our Engineering building honors the Mudds’ legacy. A mining engineer, the younger Mudd was never a student or faculty member of SEAS.

Formally known as the Nicholas Murray Butler Library, this neoclassical wet dream was completed in 1934. Butler the library was constructed after a verbose librarian sent Butler the university president a thirteen-page letter urging that a new library was necessary to relieve the overcrowded Low Library.
When Columbia got a new a cappella group this past fall, most people didn’t think twice. A cappella groups, though perhaps not central to life for many people, are a defining feature of collegiate institutions—especially in the Ivy League. So the addition of another band of wandering male minstrels popping up in floor lounges to serenade students with soothing Top 40 hits was just part-in-parcel with everyday life.

But within the a cappella community, the birth of “Sharp,” as the group calls itself, was a dark bit of history, resulting in a disquiet that emphasized the seriousness and professional competitiveness undergirding collegiate singers. Upon founding, this new group poached the big talent in a capella across campus, threatening the established choir hierarchy. Through the silent background efforts of the other a cappella groups to resist Sharp, however, a new tone of cooperation, communication, and respect has developed in this idiosyncratic community that may change it forever.

Sharp was born into a Columbia atmosphere teeming with a cappella offerings. At the end of last year, at least thirteen a cappella groups were active on campus, including one all-male group, three female groups, two Jewish-oriented groups, and two Christian-oriented groups. Offerings included gospel, R&B, rock, pop, comedic music, barbershop quartet tunes, traditional school songs, jazz, Jewish liturgical music, and countless mashups.

While it might seem difficult for a new group to find its niche, especially one with a not-unique preference for pop and rock, the atmosphere seems welcoming of a plurality of groups. But the controversial formation of Sharp disturbed the fine balance of the musical ecosystem.

Members of Sharp’s all male ensemble were plucked from pre-existing groups, leaving their former song-fellows mid-season to start this new venture. Notes and Keys, the oldest of the co-ed groups, took a particularly hard hit as three of its star members broke off, announcing their new commitment to Sharp and leaving Notes and Keys in the lurch.

A cappella, members of the community stress, is a delicately balanced performance. When a group loses any member, even if he is not a soloist, this upsets the composition and quality of pieces fine-tuned to reflect and best exploit the specific strengths of the group members. And Sharp, created as a super-group, skimmed off many of the stronger members of Columbia’s a cappella groups, creating a massive challenge to their vitality. Even among groups which maintained integrity, there was worry about the genesis of a new a capella powerhouse.

“Some were concerned with the effects that another all-male group on campus could have on existing groups,” says Connor Spahn, CC ’12, and president of the jazz-oriented Uptown Vocal. “And those are valid concerns since great male singers can sometimes be hard to come by.” Audition seasons, already a free-for-all in which groups compete to attract the year’s best talents, could become even more contested.

The separation was even more painful considering the bonds of friendship between members of a cappella groups. As Spahn stresses, those who sing together, stick together. These groups travel together up and down the eastern seaboard to record and perform constantly. On Uptown Vocal’s last tour, the group participated in communal busking, hiking, and even spelunking, all for the sake of fun and bonding. This is a family more than a group, they say. Losing members is debilitating; to have a member leave without warning? A betrayal.

In response to concerns among a capella leadership over the emergence of a bitter and corrosively competitive atmosphere, Leah Sikora, BC
'12, president of Notes and Keys, called together representatives of most of the campus’s a cappella groups in what numerous sources have referred to as the High A Cappella Council. The High Council was a novel solution, and one welcomed by many of the other groups as, Sikora admits, “Historically, we have not interacted with each other all too often.”

By the end of the High Council, most representatives of the a cappella community left feeling content. After engaging in dialogue, they now express universal support for Sharp, even collectively applauding Sharp for filling a niche on campus—the only other all-male a cappella group on campus, the Kingsmen, focuses on a more comedic or traditional feel than Sharp’s pop tone. And, as Josh Warshawsky, GS/JTS ’13 and co-music director of mixed-pop group Clefhangers, notes, the founding of Sharp puts Columbia on par with most of the other Ivy League schools, which have at least two all-male a cappella groups themselves. That last statistic may threaten to open a whole new can of gendered worms in and of itself, but it does speak to a peace and acceptance from the High Council.

Everyone believed by the end of the semester that they had achieved a golden level of communication between groups. Standards were set, the past was behind them, and in the future they would be better equipped to handle the genesis of new groups and any competition that came with them.

But the peace didn’t smooth out all resentment toward the new group. “Around the time of auditions at the beginning of this semester, somebody ripped down Sharp’s audition posters,” says Sikora. The posters were high quality broadsides with color printing, making it a very expensive form of sabotage. This silent, bitter targeting was exactly the sort of thing the High Council sought to end, so it proved a particularly disappointing setback. Even more upsetting is that this sort of petty targeting has been taboo in many groups for ages. Spahn sits down with the members of Uptown Vocal every audition season to talk about respecting the audition posters of other groups and hopes and believes that other groups do the same. Sikora believes the incident, while troubling, was limited to the actions of a few anonymous and highly aggrieved individuals and should be viewed as an isolated event.

But that kind of backstabbing will more than likely subside with time, and all groups believe they now have the tools to avoid any such future crises. The High Council was ubiquitously appreciated as an opportunity to air grievances and resolve inter-group conflict. And this semester, Sikora says, she has noticed more openness and cooperation between groups and less competitiveness in auditions.

With the Sharp incident behind them and new collaboration and peace being fostered among groups, a new balance moderates the musical geniuses of campus. And with that, a cappella at Columbia continue to offer a competitive group of talented individuals, butting up against each other and coming into conflict, the opportunity to subsume it all into an environment of support and friendship.
What do the proletariat and bikes have in common? Chains.” So began our course on human emancipation. “Occupy the Field” was its name; it was a course offered by the anthropology department promoting “rigorous and creative intellectual inquiry.” Though I was at first afraid of roaming the wilds of Zuccotti Park, the syllabus assured me that “the risks of disengaged scholarship seem more profound.” Safety first! I took the class because I could not just watch as the “seemingly endless wake of the 2008 financial crisis” destroyed lives and livelihoods. Why not get academic credit for my moral indignation?

It was Week 4 and my first “field memo” was due. I was a bit nervous about my lack of expertise in toppling governments, since the syllabus had stated that “some training in social sciences [was] preferred.” But Lenin’s saying (from our supplemental reading) that “every kitchen maid will be able to govern the country” allayed my anxieties. I was truly the everyman. I moseyed down to the “public atrium of 60 Wall Street” and was astonished by some of the revolutionaries’ signage: “Eat the rich!” I’d thought these people were vegans. My fervor for social justice wavered as the crowd began to chant: “One Solution: Revolution.” One? But where’s the diversity? Solution? As an undergrad used only to asking questions, I felt out of my element. Alarmed, I turned to the young, unkempt enthusiast next to me as he cried out, “Revolution!” (His no doubt ironic “Keep Calm and Carry On” T-shirt was particularly apropos.)

“Revolution? What kind?” I asked, seamlessly switching from participant-observer (an anthropological method we’d studied) to interviewer (a course requirement).

“I don’t know,” he demurred. “Everyone else is chanting, so I joined in too.” I was a bit taken aback at this explosive slogan, but just as I floundered, there appeared unto me the spirit of last week’s reading, Rosa Luxemburg. “I am Rosa,” she announced, “she that stands in the presence of the masses; and I am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.” And, “behold,” she said, “The masses are in reality their own leaders, dialectically creating their own development.” Aha, so that’s what was going on here!

Rosa continued, “And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.” Suddenly, I was confused. What was coming? The Revolution or the Revelation? Who was speaking? Rosa...or Luke? It was becoming difficult to tell.

The end of the course is nearing, and a specter haunts Columbia—finals. But we Occupiers of the Field are in for a unique treat. The professor has given us this question for our final: “Is ‘occupation’ a tactic or a solution?” According to Marx, patron saint of Occupy the Field, “The formulation of a question is its solution.” The prompt has already been answered! Though not entirely so; we still have to present “extended participant-observation collaborative work with other OWS participants [...] presented at OWS site.” It looks like the masses will have a 30 percent say in our final grade.

So what will happen if I share with the excited Occupiers some of my doubts and test Rosa’s theory that “freedom is always the freedom of dissenters?” What will roll: their eyes or my head?•
Measure for Measure

Advice

O what on earth
was she thinking
that big girl all

but there was something
I forgot to tell
to you
and I remember it was because

a slender line from nose to chin
grew and
shuddered with
your sound, so I heard it

and knew what
my ear caught in
its tinny dish

only a moonfleck, whiter
than she: all
dolled up flaking
and white like bread upon
that morning’s slated shelf

-Tucker Kuman
Is it morning or a new kind
of darkness when the door
opens · in slips the cat and a gate
slams in the courtyard
your cupboards have emptied
like stillbirth and the sound
of my footsteps sounds
on the tiles · the time has come
to move elsewhere · to forget
the accumulation of hours
spent in walls · the shadows
of your face that look like other
faces · Listen · in fur-light you’ll come
upon me in the wood · and in the dark
I’ll leave you wandering
the hills wounded with vines

- Erica Weaver
Renowned theoretical astrophysicist Janna Levin has mastered the art of simplifying the overwhelmingly complicated into something tangible. She wakes up every morning looking to explain the mysteries of the universe, which, she tells us, has a great soundtrack. While holding the position of Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Barnard, Levin's research interests include the early universe, chaos theory, and black holes. In her free time, Levin writes fiction; her novel A Madman Dreams of Turing Machines was a runner up for the Hemingway award and brought home the Bingham Fellowship. She recently found some time to chat with Senior Editor Anna Bahr about splattering stars, avoiding the role of the anomalous "woman of science," and making Star Trek a reality.

The Blue & White: For those of us whose knowledge of physics doesn't extend past Bill Nye, Can you talk, in a general sense, about your research involving the early universe, chaos theory, black holes, etc.?

Janna Levin: I've been most interested in the idea that two black holes can orbit each other. So, just like we orbit the sun, there are situations where you had two stars have long lives together and at the end of their lives collapsed to become black holes. It’s the death state of these two stars. It’s very likely that there are many pairs of black holes that are absolutely invisible to us. They don’t emit light, they don’t reflect light. You’re never going to point a telescope to a bare black hole and be able to say something about them; we could point one right at a black hole and just not see it. We can use telescopes in other ways, like, you can see a black hole tear up a neighboring star; that’s a very violent event and you can see the light from the star being torn apart—the star literally splatters on the black hole. A lot of people have been trying to measure gravitational waves [around the black] holes. When black holes orbit around each other, the shape of space actually starts to wobble around them. The fabric of space starts to squeeze and stress. The waves moves outward, just like water waves would. There are waves passing through us right now that are squeezing and stretching us slightly. It’s happening because a billion years those two black holes orbiting each other collided. And when they collided, the result was so energetic—that wave was so strong—that it traveled for a billion years and right now is uselessly passing through us and we don’t notice it. If I measure this changing shape, it’s literally like measuring the beats of a drum.

B&W: You’re telling me that the universe makes audible music?

JL: Yes! It’s like you can take an electric guitar and record it without hearing any sound and when you play it back you hear a sound. So, you can measure
the wobbling drum—which is the shape of space—and play back a sound. And some of the frequencies are actually in the human auditory range, which is crazy. Some are not. A lot of my mathematical calculations are predicting the sounds the universe will make.

B&W: Are we talking a Top 40 hit?

JL: No, no. They’re a little disappointing and most don’t sound like much. But they are banging sounds.

B&W: It’s interesting—you mentioned earlier the opposition of a contingent of physicists against designing this experiment—and it’s true that there’s a lot of controversy over even the most basic principles of science today. You believe that the universe is limited—making you a part of a shrinking group of people still attached to that theory. What attracts you to a finite universe?

JL: It’s not that I believe it’s finite. I don’t actively believe it; I just think that it’s a possibility. It’s a possibility that we haven’t ruled out. It’s a possibility that in some ways makes more sense. For example, there are some cases where if you told me the universe unfolded in some specific way, then I would say, “Oh it’s infinite,” and would be absolutely fine with that. But if you’re saying it began by some quantum fluctuation event and it came out of nothing and then it was instantaneously infinite, I really have to scratch my head. You start to realize it is possible for it to be finite. There’s an infinite number of ways for the universe to be finite, but a finite number of ways to make it infinite. In some strange sense there are many more ways the universe could be small than in which it could be infinite.

B&W: What is it that makes the infinite universe the popular platform of choice these days?

JL: It’s an unnecessary complication that we’re not forced to confront. People can say, “Maybe it’s finite, maybe it’s infinite. But you know what? We can only see so far because we’re bound by light travelling from the origins of the universe, we can’t see deeper back than that. If it’s bigger than that it might as well be infinite.” And that’s a perfectly fine attitude. So, totally—if that’s the case, then we’ll never know and we just throw our arms up. But there is so much talk now about string theory that there are extra special dimensions and that those dimensions are finite. And it becomes really weird: you’re telling me the universe was created with ten dimensions, three became infinite, but seven are finite? No way. In that case, everything is finite and everything is blown out of our frame of view.

B&W: So what drew you to theoretical physics as opposed to experimentally-based, more provable sciences?

JL: The bottom line is that’s where my aptitude lies. I’ve been known to fail at boiling water. A soft boiled egg is nearly impossible. I’ll just walk away from whatever I’m doing and an hour later be like, “Oops...what was I doing?!” I’m just not an experimentalist by nature. It’s hard for me to pay attention to things like that. I’m very interested in theoretical questions. I want to know how the universe began; I want to understand its shape and size. I realized that there were things that you could know through math; I was absolutely blown away. That realization came to me quite late. I thought I was going to
study philosophy. I like the abstract. You just have to go, “I don’t quite understand this, and then keep scratching away at it.”

B&W: I’m curious as to how you actually visualize a lot of these more abstract concepts. Particularly because most of the measurable experimentation is only applicable to your work in the data it produces. You aren’t involved in the actual procedure.

JL: Right. So we do it mostly in our minds. Which is very strange. Sometimes I want to go to the experiment to remind myself that that it is real stuff—that it doesn’t just go on in my mind.

B&W: Just how far off base do you think the layman is when he throws in some black hole, string theory jargon while trying to impress someone? How does the colloquial understanding of physics match up to its reality?

JL: It’s funny because some things do sink in well and other things don’t. One of the things I’m writing about narratively, outside of my research, is this idea of fearmongering and how much it cracks me up. Like, everything has to be scary. Black holes will suck everything up and destroy the universe. If our sun were replaced by a black hole tomorrow, we would not fall into it any more than we fall into the sun. It will no more suck us in than the sun sucks us in. It would be exactly the same. It’s the same solution, mathematically.

B&W: Except for the whole light and heat thing.

JL: Except that it would be really cold and really dark and we’d be dead. Except for that part. But our orbit would be fine! Black holes are not vacuum cleaners. That concept is funny. You hear all of these metaphors on science shows like, “The beast swallowing his insatiable hunger.” But things aren’t as interesting without a little drama.

B&W: Your book, *A Madman Dreams of Turing Machines*, received accolades from reviewers everywhere—it was even a runner-up for the Hemingway award. You have a lot of work that exists in a completely different academic focus. How do you feel your interdisciplinary interests affect your teaching style?

JL: People rarely ask me about teaching. That’s one place in which it comes together very effectively. It helps a lot for teaching. I’m teaching an introductory physics class with 45 students. Very few of those want to go onto physics. Most of the students I’m talking to are not that interested in physics. They have all of these hang ups about whether they are good at math or not good at math—there’s a little bit of defensiveness that’s a barrier. So, the fact that I’m comfortable reaching for an anecdote in a novel makes them more comfortable. It’s natural for me to do that. And I pick up some crazy stuff listening to [my colleagues in other fields]. Life forms with non-DNA, terrestrial, alien life, people who are growing meat in laboratories. So If I’m teaching physics and most of my students are more interested in biology or medicine or basically anything else, it makes them happy that I can reach for it. I think that it really just points to how there shouldn’t be such separations in disciplines, anyway.

B&W: From a kid’s perspective, physics is certainly the scariest of the lab science. What do you think about keeping kids invested and interested in such a stigmatized branch of science?

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**B&W:** You've spoken a little bit about your disinterest in being pegged as “the woman physicist” and you avoid taking on the responsibility of speaking on women in the sciences panels. Why is that?

**JL:** The reason for someone to invite me on the radio is hopefully because I have a different take, or something interesting to say about something they know nothing about that I've worked really hard to understand. And gender issues are not something I've worked hard to understand. I don't feel I'm an expert in it. I'm one example. I don't want to generalize from me outward. I feel frustrated if you invite me on to a show to talk about my work and then ask me about being female. I don't see that happening to my male colleagues. I don't see Brian Greene being invited on television to talk about string theory and then they start probing him about his masculinity. If he can talk string theory, why can't I talk black holes?

**B&W:** Still, physics, and the sciences in general, are, statistically, at least, boys’ clubs. Was there ever a point at which you did feel the impetus to make these gendered issues more public?

**JL:** Let's say I wake up and say I have a responsibility to honor women. How am I going to get that job done best for them? Is it going to be by half assedly talking about something I have very little insight? Or is it because I really am excited about this discovery about black holes. I think it's a false dichotomy. That by not talking about it I'm neglecting women. Maybe that's not the case. Maybe it benefits the next generation to see a possibility in real life. There’s something inherently that bugs me about people being only interested in themselves. Shouldn’t I also talk equally about the lack of African Americans or Latinos in the sciences? Why isn’t that my concern? Because people assume I don’t know anything about it. Well, I don’t know anything about women. I don’t know anything about other women. We don’t think all alike. I don’t have advice that will make sense for anybody else but me and my crazy trajectory.

**B&W:** And yet, you chose to teach at an all-women’s college.

**JL:** Yes. But I also could not have. I do love Barnard. Barnard happens to be an awesome school. If it were co-ed and maintained a lot of the same qualities, I would still think it’s an awesome school, and would love to teach at it. I didn’t choose Barnard because it’s an all female school. I like the Barnard-Columbia combination because I have a full research university but I have the attitudes and philosophies of a small liberal arts college. That’s a really beautiful combination to me. Barnard has a broad sense of scholarship. I felt very comfortable thinking I [as a scientist] could write a novel. I didn’t think I would feel that comfortable at a typical university. It’s those things. High intellectual coals with a broad sense of art and culture that New York provides—these are special attributes. The being all-female turned out to be something I really did appreciate as a professor, but I didn’t know that before I started teaching.

**B&W:** Last question, and you have to take it seriously. Could the warp drive work as explained in *Star Trek*?

**JL:** [laughing] There have been serious papers written about warp drive with solutions to Einstein’s general relativity, where you literally have a certain kind of energy that causes space to come closer to you, and then causes space to expand again. So, yes, in principle I could bring alpha centauri closer, travel there, and then push it far away again. But it would require an energy density that we don’t know exists.

**B&W:** So Spock was a liar?

**JL:** Maybe it just has yet to be discovered.
The fourth movement seems to begin in the middle of something already occurring.

Why is it important that the husband waits for the wife to no longer be menstruating? It is possible that, because the woman is in a disadvantaged state by being impure, Mohammed requires the husband to wait until she returns as a fully-functioning member of society—the woman the husband married—for him to divorce her. In this way, the week-long cycle of menstruation—which the husband endures twice—also gives him time to think over his decision.

The characters of the story work very well but they really could be hammered up. Bring their most superficial qualities to the forefront. The mother’s pretentiousness, Sarah’s cutting observations, Patrick’s fixation with social status. I pictured Patrick as a cut-throat businessman, but otherwise stumbling and socially inept. Sarah and her mother always had a wine glass in hand when I read.

Price-Mars goes to Paris to study in 1899 on a scholarship from his cousin President Tirésias Sam. But he returned two years later to study sociology and anthropology at the Sorbonne, the School of Political Science, (Sciences po?) and the College de France. He returned to Haiti in 1903.

In all my time at Columbia, I have never utilized the “pass-fail” option (see attached grades screen from SSOL), and thus was not clear on all the policies. I was not aware that there was a deadline by which I needed to declare that I wanted to take the course for a letter grade. Most of my friends are in Columbia College and they uncover grades even semesters later, so I thought that the College of Engineering could do the same.

A: I think you know so much about me. We’ve been talking for, like, six hours, and you just summed up my life....

I: Six hours? Oh, my god.

A: Yeah.

I: Wow.

A: I know.

I: Wow.

Isaac’s sacrifice is, ironically, about life; God spares Isaac, but God also reinstates His covenantal promise. Samson’s sacrifice, meanwhile, ends in death and destruction: “and the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life” (Judges 16:30). As such Samson’s sacrifice points to the descent of the Israelites into a period of chaos and violence in the book of Judges. The time of hope for the future in the promise of children has passed. Instead, there is only death.

Lastly, I am a huge advocate of Setting. I think a few descriptions of the house they are staying in on the beach, as well as the beach community, would provide a stronger sense of place for the reader, and also allow the narrator to stress certain features of Lana’s character through the setting. The scenes where she allows herself to roast in the sun are particularly telling of her character and are intimately tied to the setting.
CAMPUS GOSSIP

NAKED AND FAMOUS
One early Saturday morning around 5 am, an unsuspecting undergrad was strolling the grounds when she spied a completely nude, handcuffed man sitting in the grassy patch between Low steps. Shameless Spring has sprung, huzzah!

VOCA BLESSING
A pickleback is a shot of whiskey followed by a shot of pickle juice.

META
A Heights bouncer/employee was overheard on Broadway gossiping about the Cannon's bouncer. “Yeah man, they hired this guy who can't even tell the difference between Manhattan College kids and Columbia ones.” Bouncers: they're just as elitist as we are!

BROHEMIAN RHAPSODY
The “raging” day drinking party at Delta Sig was fully in swing—warm beer that tasted of piss was plentiful, sorority girls with skirts the size of oversized belts were, like, shitfaced, and David Guetta was exalting the virtues of being a “sexy bitch.” In short, life was good...until somehow a bottle got smashed in their neighbor’s yard, prompting a drunken screaming match between the brothers and the nearby, non-Columbia resident. After the prerequisite threats of “We have lawyers, man,” were made, both sides backed down and retreated, but the fight wasn’t truly over until a young Delta Sig whipped out his notably small penis and began urinating in the neighbor’s yard. Atta bro!

THERE’S A 30% CHANCE THAT IT’S ALREADY RAINING
Scene: A young lady and gentleman approached Butler, smoking and discussing Kerouac like douchebags. Two girls on the bench by the entrance are also smoking.

Boy: Yeah, not a huge fan of Kerouac either.

Girl: On the Road should be titled “Cool Story Bro”—I could write about drinking and screwing my way across America too, but it doesn’t mean anyone wants to read it.

Sitting Girl: Wait, are you guys freshmen? You don’t like Kerouac? [sidenote: the boy and girl are not, in fact, freshmen]

Boy: No.

Sitting Girl: He’s, like, uhmaaaazing—I do Kerouac when I go to sleep.

Boy: Oh. What’s your favorite Kerouac book?

Sitting Girl: I mean, I haven’t actually read anything by him, I just like reading his quotes.

[awkward silence as the boy and girl uncomfortably finish their cigarettes and enter Butler]

Girl: On the plus side, her degree will be worth as much as ours when we graduate.

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