Location, location, location. Columbia has long stood out among Ivy League schools for its setting in New York, this most dynamic of American cities. It is a magnet for students and scholars who seek an academic environment that is not apart from the world but rather at its center. As novelist and alumnus Herman Wouk once said, Columbia is a place of "doubled magic" where "the best things of the moment were outside the rectangle of Columbia; the best things of all human history and thought were inside the rectangle."

What’s fascinating, of course, is the opportunity to navigate between these rectangles. Students do this regularly with research projects, internships and volunteer services, but countless faculty and staff, too, are deeply engaged in the city where they live and work. In recent months alone, researchers at the Mailman School of Public Health offered mobile health services to uninsured workers in Harlem, an art history professor stepped up to become chief curator of architecture and design at MoMA, and Columbia’s Office of Government and Community Affairs pledged its support for “Miracle on 138th St.,” one of the largest food giveaways in New York City history.

While it’s impossible to present the complete picture here, we can provide a glimpse of the University’s reach into the broader community from both inside and outside the classroom. Toward that end, we offer insights from both faculty and staff whose recent work enriches the city and for whom the city is a source of constant inspiration.
SPRING 2007

University in the City

These two pages present a small sample of faculty members whose current work focuses on the city. New York as urban laboratory. New York as art subject, and even New York as ecosystem. One of them is also running a program at the medical center that addresses the unique health concerns of Hispanic women in Washington Heights and Inwood.

The achievements of these faculty members represent just a few of the many ways in which scholarship and service intersect at Columbia University in the City of New York. Faculty are involved not only in a range of academic research but also in an array of health, education, cultural and other kinds of partnerships that help improve the quality of life in the community and the quality of academic work on campus.

HILARY BALLON

POSITION: Professor of art history and director of Art Humanities

WORK ON NYC: Ballon, an architectural his- torian whose interests range from the Paris of Henri IV to the high-rise buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright, is now working on a project all about New York. With Columbia colleague Kenneth T. Jackson, she has co-edited a book, Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York, about the city’s long-time planning czar and how he changed New York. The book will be published by W. W. Norton next month, when a trio of exhibitions curated by Ballon opens at the Queens Museum of Art, the Museum of the City of New York, and Columbia’s Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery.

ON WHAT’S NEW IN HER BOOK: “The book’s contributors tend to position Moses in a national context. They show that Moses was quicker than anyone else to figure out how to use federal funds to advance particular plan- ning goals. The book also highlights the phys- ical transformation of the city under Moses and describes in detail the structures he built as well as the controversial projects that were defeated.”

BALLON’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE BOOK: “Moses was an agent of modernization. For instance, Moses used urban renewal to keep New York City a magnet in an age of decen- tralization. He said if we don’t take action, New York will become a city of the rich and the poor. He promoted affordable housing for the middle class. He promoted new institu- tions, such as Lincoln Center, to raise the stature of the city. Another goal was to advance education so that the city was a center of brain power.”

LAST WORD ON MOSHE: “The record is mixed, with some notable successes, such as Lincoln Center, and some features that failed because he didn’t understand neighborhoods, the social fabric of the city, or race. Interestingly, the size of his renewal projects was small compared to those in other cities like Chicago and St. Louis. He created superblocks, but they’re relatively small, and in most cases they’ve been absorbed into New York’s grid.”

JAMES DANOFF-BURG

POSITION: Associate professor and director at the Earth Institute’s Center for Environmental Research and Conservation (CERC) and a pro- fessor in the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Environmental Biology (EEB)

WORK ON NYC: “The book’s contributors tend to position Moses in a national context. They show that Moses was quicker than anyone else to figure out how to use federal funds to advance particular planning goals. The book also highlights the physical transformation of the city under Moses and describes in detail the structures he built as well as the controversial projects that were defeated.”

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ELSA-GRACE GIARDINA

POSITION: Associate professor of clinical medicine and director of the Center for Women’s Health, Columbia University Medical Center

WORK ON NYC: “The book’s contributors tend to position Moses in a national context. They show that Moses was quicker than anyone else to figure out how to use federal funds to advance particular planning goals. The book also highlights the physical transformation of the city under Moses and describes in detail the structures he built as well as the controversial projects that were defeated.”

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STEVEN HOLL

POSITION: Associate professor of architecture and director of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation

WORK ON NYC: “The book’s contributors tend to position Moses in a national context. They show that Moses was quicker than anyone else to figure out how to use federal funds to advance particular planning goals. The book also highlights the physical transformation of the city under Moses and describes in detail the structures he built as well as the controversial projects that were defeated.”

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JAMAL JOSEPH

POSITION: Instructor of art and acting chair of the School of Art

WORK ON NYC: “The book’s contributors tend to position Moses in a national context. They show that Moses was quicker than anyone else to figure out how to use federal funds to advance particular planning goals. The book also highlights the physical transformation of the city under Moses and describes in detail the structures he built as well as the controversial projects that were defeated.”

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Record

Compiled and edited by Mary-Lea Cox

PH

JONAH ROCKOFF

POSITION: Assistant professor of economics and finance at Columbia Business School

WORK ON NYC: Rockoff, along with two other economists, has published a study on the effectiveness of teacher certification in the winter issue of Education Next. Using data from a citywide database on student performance, Rockoff and his colleague found that student performance isn’t affected by whether teachers have been traditionally certified or if they come from alternative programs such as Teach for America and New York City Teaching Fellows.

ATTRACTION TO NYC: “I chose Columbia because it has a great group of economists and, personally, I love New York.”

MOST GRATIFYING ASPECT OF HIS NYC WORK: “Seeing our work taken seriously by policymakers. We were able to present our research on teacher certification to Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and members of his staff, and he was extremely engaged and asked great questions. I was told the next week that he was carrying around a copy of our paper and brought it up in a meeting with State Commissioner Mills.”

CHALLENGE OF DOING RESEARCH ON NYC: “The number of languages spoken. You need language skills to obtain the trust of various populations and to adapt interventions to their particular needs.”

OTHER RECENT FINDINGS: “The economic growth of the 1990s benefited the city overall, but some segments of the population were left behind—including immigrant populations and to adapt interventions to their particular needs.”

WHY HE LOVES NYC: “New York City is one of the most interesting places to study how neighborhoods and cities shape people’s lives, both because of its diversity and because of its role as an immigrant gateway to the United States.”

ON THE REVSON PROGRAM: “No big as Chicago was, it is essentially a small town. It’s very difficult to get the feeling that you’re grasping New York City’s essence. This place exceeds your fondest caricatures. But New York is similar to Chicago insofar as the poor can’t get work. Almost all of them had a personal crisis as they reached their late twenties. I did not do first-person field work until I moved to New York, but I was asking many of the same questions as I did when studying Chicago’s urban poor.”

ON THE REVISION PROGRAM: “The Ressy Fellowship exemplifies Columbia’s commitment to the civic needs of New York City. Since last year the program has been housed at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, expanding the fellows’ opportunities to engage in ongoing ISERP projects that address the challenges facing urban communities.”

WILLIAM SHARPE

POSITION: Professor of English at Barnard College

EARLY ATTRACTION TO NYC: Unlike everyone else in his small town in Western Massachusetts, he recalls, “I rooted for the Yankees, not the Red Sox.” He moved to New York in 1969—as a Columbia College freshman—and has lived here ever since, spending the last 26 years in the same Morningside Heights apartment.

WORK ON NYC: His research, at the intersection of English and urban studies, has often focused on representations of New York City in art and literature—the topic of a course he has taught since the 1980s. Recently, he has focused on images of New York at night, and in 2008 Princeton University Press will publish his volume on that subject, encompassing everything from Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings of the skyline to Hart Crane’s meditations on the subway.

STUDYING NYC AT NIGHT: “It struck me that the nighttime was one of the keys to understanding the modern city. Gas lighting and then electric lighting arrived in the 19th century, at a time when cities were growing tremendously due to migration from rural areas. That led to an opening up of the nighttime as a realm of work and entertainment, which in turn led to interest in portrayals of nighttime in painting, writing and photography.”

COMPARISON TO TODAY: “In the 1840s and 1850s, most respectable people did not go out at night unless they had a good reason. There were no restaurants or theatres. That changed around 1900. Now we’ve gone to the other extreme. The city seems like a 24-hour theme park. There’s little night left nowadays—we can no longer see stars.”

PLUG FOR CCS: “Columbia Community Service, where I’ve served on the board, helps fund programs in the neighborhoods surrounding Columbia. There is no overhead; 100 percent of the money goes to the organizations. It’s a wonderful thing the University does.”

JULIEN TEITLER

POSITION: Assistant professor at the Columbia University School of Social Work

WORK ON NYC: As director of Columbia’s Social Indicators Survey Center, Teitler searches out unique data sources for the city’s problems. This month he is conducting a project called Operation Shadow Count, which entails working with the city’s Department of Homeless Services to count the unsheltered homeless population. On the lot of 19, when DHS sends out hundreds of volunteers to count the homeless, he will send out 150 decoys as a way of statistically adjusting the figures.

WHY HE LOVES STUDYING NEW YORK: “New York City is one of the most interesting places to study how neighborhoods and cities shape people’s lives, both because of its diversity and because of its role as an immigrant gateway to the United States.”

EARLY ATTRACTION TO NYC: “I was a Columbia student when I was carrying around a copy of our paper and he was extremely engaged and asked great questions. I was told the next week that he was carrying around a copy of our paper and brought it up in a meeting with State Commissioner Mills.”

CHALLENGE OF DOING RESEARCH ON NYC: “The number of languages spoken. You need language skills to obtain the trust of various populations and to adapt interventions to their particular needs.”

OTHER RECENT FINDINGS: “The economic growth of the 1990s benefited the city overall, but some segments of the population were left behind—including immigrant groups, families with children, the elderly, and the very poor. Another recent finding is that New Yorkers are very resilient. While the emotional and economic costs of 9/11 were astronomical, most residents of the city bounced back pretty quickly. Perceptions of the city were as positive in 2002 as they were prior to 9/11.”

MORE ON “OPERATION SHADOW COUNT”: “It brings together experts in survey research and homelessness in New York City. Also, it engages graduate students in a project that directly benefits the city while giving them hands-on experience in survey methodology.”

SUDHIR VENKATESH

POSITION: Professor of sociology and director of the Center for Urban Research and Policy in the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISERP)

WORK ON NYC: Venkatesh moved to New York City from Chicago. One of his earliest projects was on New York’s underground economy during the Giuliani administration. Another project has involved looking at the social identity of New York’s leisure class. Since last year Venkatesh has been directing the Charles H. Revson Fellowship Program, which offers local urban leaders a chance for a mid-career, nine-month retreat to Columbia, where they take courses that suit their interests.

WHY HE LOVES NYC: “It’s allowed me to try things I could not have done had I stayed in the Midwest. I just did a documentary film and a fictional film. Also, this city constantly encourages you to get out of the ivory tower. Major philanthropists are here. A lot of important social policy is made here. The publishing industry is here. You can have an impact and a voice and really get your ideas out.”

CHALLENGE OF DOING RESEARCH ON NYC: “No big as Chicago was, it is essentially a small town. It’s very difficult to get the feeling that you’re grasping New York City’s essence. This place exceeds your fondest caricatures. But New York is similar to Chicago insofar as the poor can’t get work. Almost all of them had a personal crisis as they reached their late twenties. I did not do first-person field work until I moved to New York, but I was asking many of the same questions as I did when studying Chicago’s urban poor.”

ON THE REVISION PROGRAM: “The Ressy Fellowship exemplifies Columbia’s commitment to the civic needs of New York City. Since last year the program has been housed at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, expanding the fellows’ opportunities to engage in ongoing ISERP projects that address the challenges facing urban communities.”
Now hosted approximately 1,000 junior high and high school students, Double Discovery college-bound students are the target. To qualify for the largely federally funded program, the students must be either low-income or first-generation college-going. College students serve as tutors. Columbia College students are our tutors. They come in every week and do homework help and work with our students. And when the Double Discovery students are on campus during our summer program, College students are our residential advisors and teaching assistants. We count heavily on them for involvement. And it's especially helpful for kids who are the first in their families to apply to college.

The program's current leader is Olger Twyner, a former attorney and graduate of Columbia Business School. The Record recently spoke to him about the current state of the program, which now hosts about 1,000 junior high and high school students per year.

**Q. Can you tell us briefly about Double Discovery's origins?**

We started in 1965 by two Columbia College students who wanted to be more engaged in the community and also wanted to bring the community to Columbia—hence, Double Discovery. The students got a grant to run a demo academic enrichment program with kids over the summer. This pilot program turned into Upward Bound, one of the Department of Education's TRIO programs for helping low-income high school kids enter college. (It was called TRIO because there were three originally.) Today, Columbia's Double Discovery hosts two of the original TRIO programs: Upward Bound and Talent Search.

**Q. What is the difference between the two programs?**

I like to think of Upward Bound as prix fixe, and Talent Search as à la carte. Upward Bound students are committed to college. Talent Search students can pick and choose. They might come in just for SAT preparation, for instance.

**Q. Are the bulk of your volunteers still from the College?**

Yes. Columbia College students are our tutors. They come in every week and do homework help and work with our students. And when the Double Discovery students are on campus during our summer program, College students are our residential advisors and teaching assistants. We count heavily on them for involvement.

**Q. How easy is it to recruit Columbia College students as volunteers?**

There's more competition than there was in 1965. And there's a lot of different ways people want to serve. Sometimes I wish we could have reached the families. Sometimes I wish we could have reached the families. Sometimes I wish we could have reached the families. Sometimes I wish we could have reached the families. Sometimes I wish we could have reached the families. It's been more of a citywide thing, and the first-generation focus wasn't there. But over time it's become more targeted at first-generation college-bound, low-income students. We've restored the urge to serve students who don't meet that criteria.

**Q. Has the program changed much in 40 years?**

In the beginning it was more of a citywide thing, and the first-generation focus wasn't there. But over time it's become more targeted at first-generation college-bound, low-income students. We've restored the urge to serve students who don't meet that criteria.

**Q. Do you still get most of your funding from federal grants?**

We get most of our money from two U.S. Department of Education grants, and we supplement that with gifts from foundations, corporations, and individuals.

**Q. Is there anything you'd like faculty and staff to know about Double Discovery?**

They can volunteer. We get some faculty and staff, but not a whole lot. I'm not sure why—maybe some subjects like high school calculus are fresher for college students than for people on staff. Several faculty have done mini-courses for our students. They tend to become involved in ways like that.

**Q. What do you do in your spare time?**

I spend most of my free time with my wife Chaumtoli, who graduated from Columbia College in 1967. We were married in 1969, and we have a 2-year-old son, Zainf. Currently, I am applying to Columbia's executive M.B.A. program.