Robert K. Merton, University Professor Emeritus, has been awarded an honorary doctorate by Università degli Studi di Roma. He is the recipient of some 30 honorary degrees and was recently named to be awarded the National Medal of Science, the nation’s highest scientific honor.

Allan Rosenfield, dean of the Mailman School of Public Health, was recently named to the boards of two prominent foundations: the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the David and Lucille Packard Foundation. Rosenfield has worked in the past with the Packard Foundation on its Population Program’s advisory committee and will continue to work with the Foundation on public health issues for children, families, and communities.

Jessica Kandel and Yoshi-fumi Naka have been named Irving Scholars in the department of surgery for the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Each Irving Scholarship includes a grant of $200 a year toward the scholar’s research efforts for a period of three years, beginning July 1, 2001. Kandel was awarded the Resident’s Prize of the American Academy of Pediatrics Surgical Section, and is a member of the Society for Pediatric Research and director of the Charles Edison Library for Pediatric Surgical Research at Columbia.

Naka has received the Young Investigator Award of the Japanese Association for Thoracic Surgery and is a member of the Heart Failure Association and the International Society for Heart and Lung Transplantation.

John P. Bilezikian, professor of medicine and pharmacology and chief of the division of endocrinology at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, has been designated a master of the American College of Endocrinology, the scientific and educational arm of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists. Bilezikian has served as president of the American Society for Bone and Mineral Research and president of the International Society of Clinical Densitometry and is editor of the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology.

Paul Brandt-Rauf, professor in the Mailman School of Public Health’s Environmental Health Science Division, received the Robert A. Kohoe Award in recognition of his work with the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at its annual meeting in San Francisco this spring. The award was presented to Brandt-Rauf for his “outstanding leadership...and significant work in cancer research.”

From left to right, Bianca Lapusan, Amy Yan and Clare Ferris conduct an experiment for the course “Biomedical Engineering: Physical Effects on Cells.”

ON CAMPUS

Students Challenged to Think Critically and Independently In Columbia’s Summer Program for High School Students

BY JASON HOLLANDER

Not all high school students prefer to spend their summers lying on the beach and wasting away the hazy days. This fall, participants from Columbia’s Summer Program for High School Students return to their regular classes equipped with the experience of an intensive month of study and an incomparable sample of college life in New York City.

Nearly 900 high school students vigorously pursued subjects from politics to physics on the Morningside campus this summer, finding themselves challenged to think critically and independently in a collegiate environment. For the more than 400 students who resided in dorms on campus for the month of July, their studies were complemented by a sense of independence greater than most had ever experienced.

High school students come to Columbia each summer to be immersed in one specific course of study, spending more than 16 hours a week in class or lab. Course options include “Investigations in Theoretical and Experimental Physics,” “Constitutional Law,” “Critical Focus on the Visual Arts,” “Global Politics” and “Survey of Modern Mathematics.”

The classroom environment is considerably different from that which students are accustomed to. In the program, every student possesses a keen interest in the subject matter they study.

One would sacrifice their summer unless they really wanted to do this,” said Amy Yan, 17, of Chicago, Ill., a student in the course “Biomedical Engineering: Physical Effects on Cells.”

Most high school students have never delved so deeply into one area of study. Yan and her lab partners, Bianca Lapusan, 18, of Queens, N.Y., and Clare Ferris, 17, of Rochester, N.Y., spent the summer engineering tissue and growing cartilage. They placed cells in various solutions to test whether the cells shrink or swell, an experiment which can help determine how fast certain medicines are released into the body. The demands placed on the biomedical engineers proved to inspire a more thorough degree of comprehension.

“Not only do you learn more here, but you really understand what you’re learning,” said Ferris. “You get to work hands on with the cells,” said Yan. “In school, we just look at pictures of them.”

Across campus, in a very different type of lab, a theatre lab, Richard Niles walked his students through the entire process of play development, exposing them to directing and playwriting. Niles, an associate professor of theatre and coordinator of the BFA program at Marymount Manhattan College and seminar director of Columbia’s Internship in Building Community, conceived of the class as an opportunity for “opening up students to the possibilities in theatre that go beyond acting.”

Niles structured the class, called “Theatrical Collaboration: the Actor, the Director and the Playwright,” so students would have to create a production to be performed at the end of the program, an experience that would prove to be extremely empowering for them. “They surprise themselves by doing something they didn’t think they could do,” said Niles. “They’re discovering aptitude they didn’t even know they had.”

Niles made a special effort to get the students to take artistic risks. Those in the workshop responded to its challenge. “He gained our trust,” said Jessica Chayes, 15, of Scarsdale, N.Y. “If we didn’t trust him, it would have been much harder to open up.”

What was his method for gaining this trust? “Knowing when to challenge them, when to push, and when to nurture,” says Niles. His goal in the process was to communicate to students that “once you give up control and allow the instinct to work, you find that is how you get to the good stuff. That has applications far beyond the theatre.”

David Futernick, 17, of Hartford, Conn., who wrote part of the class production, said his struggle to compose the right script helped develop his understanding of the art form. “It matured me as a person, so badly,” he said. Futernick also benefited culturally from living in Manhattan for the month. “I went to a lecture at Lincoln Center with Edward Albee. Arthur Miller and Jonathan Guare,” he said. “That’s an opportunity I wouldn’t have had anywhere else.”

Darlene Giraitis, who has been with the program for 13 years and was named director last spring, said that the experience offered to students ‘just keeps getting better and better every year.” Instructors who begin in the program, said Giraitis, almost always continue teaching. Many members of the administration have been in place for more than a decade. “The continuity of people creates a real family atmosphere,” she said.

All students are invited to attend optional Friday events that include special academic presentations like “The Magic of Chemistry,” and walking tours through Harlem, the Lower East Side and Greenwich Village. For residents there are evening and weekend trips to museums, Broadway shows, concerts and Central Park. Several students said they enjoyed just hanging out in Union Square and the neighborhoods of Brooklyn.

Giraitis and her staff work to attract the most highly-motivated high school students in the country. While no specific grade point average is required, students must submit a transcript, personal statement and letters of recommendation. Giraitis said that many top colleges, especially the Ivies, take careful notice of her students who complete the month-long enrichment program.

Though the experience is a rigorous one, Giraitis points out that students have a very good time. “The kids make wonderful leadership...and significant work in cancer research.”