Most Columbians know The Columbia Daily Spectator for its coverage of University news, events and sports. But behind the historic student-run newspaper is a non-profit business that oversees six full-time employees, two part timers, and a student volunteer staff of 200. Each year, a new student CEO/publisher is selected to run the operation and help maintain the balance between news coverage and financial accountability. The Spectator, brought up with this year’s publisher, Robert Mitchell, CC’03, to find out more about the vision and business goals of the second oldest (126 years) college daily in the country.

**RECORD:** The Spectator— which has been independent from the University since 1962—publishes five days a week during the academic year. With such a rigorous schedule, what kind of structure governs the newspaper to ensure a smooth production?

**BRUCE:** I think the motto of The Spectator has always been to allow students the opportunity to experience this newspaper and this business without having to worry about any of the real troubling financial aspects. Ultimately, The Spectator is an educational body, and so as a non-profit business [The Spectator Publishing Company], our primary concern is making enough to invest back into the company so that students can have this opportunity to experience life on a newspaper. That said, we operate on three main levels: First, we have a Board of Trustees, comprised of eight alumni who meet once a semester to keep up to date on the financial situation of the paper. Next, we have a corporate board, which is made up of the publisher, the managing editor and the editor-in-chief. We meet regularly and discuss any daily business decisions. Finally, there is the managing board—which includes the three of us from the corporate board as well the editorial page editor, production editor, the editors for arts and entertainment, news and sports. It meets four times a week to discuss how the paper will be laid out and to come up with editorial ideas. We also have day employees—an office manager, ad representatives, graphic designer, controller—who are professionals hired not because of any explicit tie to Columbia but because of their expertise. And of course, we have all of our reporters, photographers, columnists, etc.—students who are working without pay and just for the experience.

**RECORD:** Last December, you became the publisher for The Spectator, bringing a variety of leadership experience but none working for a newspaper. Isn’t it a little unusual for a student with your major—philosophy and economics—to be running a newspaper? In other words, how did you become interested in working as the president of a not-for-profit publishing company?

**BRUCE:** Jeffrey Posnick, the publisher before me, is also a philosophy and economics major. We had several classes together and he encouraged me to apply for the job because he knew they needed someone who would be financially responsible during these economically difficult times. He knew I worked for an investment firm as well as a hedge fund so it helped that I understood what I saw when I came here [to the office at 2875 Broadway] and saw how much people at The Spectator really care about Columbia and about doing excellent work on the newspaper. I feel that at this point in my career at Columbia, I wanted to get more involved in the community. The Spectator gave me that opportunity and made me want to try to make it better. It’s a fun atmosphere with a lot of motivated people, and it grabbed me.

I think the motto of The Spectator is an excellent way to run a newspaper. It’s hard to run a newspaper, especially here at Columbia, because of the high number of friends lost to suicide. It was really helpful—we’re even making a video of it we hope to show new staff members.

**RECORD:** So you’ve had some unhappy experiences but you were also able to initiate some things. What’s left for you do before you turn the job over to the next publisher in January of 2003?

**BRUCE:** I have had to reduce spending and expenses for our staff, but I was once told that cookies are important for morale. Our advertising revenue has gone down, so I hired a professional journalist and a grief counselor last semester to come in and talk about coping methods in dealing with such tragedy and grief. It was really helpful. We’re even making a video of it we hope to show new staff members.

**RECORD:** You’ve had a full load of classes and two other part time jobs on campus in addition to your term as publisher. What will happen after you leave The Spectator?

**BRUCE:** I’ll miss the editorial debates and Sunday afternoon meetings. There’s an amazing sense of pride to see a paper you worked on, knowing what went into making it happen and how many people stayed until 5 a.m. to make it happen. At first I became publisher because I thought it would be fun to work with this great group of people. And I was right. But now I feel a very deep sense of commitment to The Spectator and making sure it can sustain and offer students the sort of experiences and rewards so many have had throughout its amazing history. Our annual dinner events for alumni have shown me how The Spectator has been more than a newspaper for students starting their journalism careers; it’s been a great jumping point for lasting friendships. I’d like to think that ten-years from now, kids will still be starting out with The Spectator and I’ll be coming back for alumni dinners.

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**Career Week Prepares Over 1,500 Students for the Job Market**

More than 70 organizations, including American Express, Microsoft, the United States State Department and the Peace Corps, attended the Fall 2002 Career Fair, held on Sept. 20 in Alfred Lerner Hall. The fair, attended by more than 1,580 students, was the culmination of Career Week, a new initiative sponsored by Columbia’s Center for Career Education, Barnard’s Office of Career Development, the School of International and Public Affairs’ Office of Career Services and the School of Social Work’s Office of Career and Leadership Development. The week long series of activities included resume reviews, practice interview sessions, tours, workshops and a networking bootstrap and reception with alumni/alumnae and employers.

Over 2,100 students, alumni and employees participated in the Career Week events.

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**SPECTATOR**

Fifteenth Century

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**RECORD:** Publishers for The Spectator change each year because of the paper’s policy to encourage fresh leadership. You were accepted into the business during a difficult year, considering the attacks of Sept. 11 and the declining economy. What effect did both have on the publication of the paper?

**BRUCE:** We were coming under some very hard times last year especially during the fiscal year of 2001. Advertising had dropped considerably and there was a huge economic change for the company between 2000 and 2001. We ended up losing close to $88,000. Board of Trustees had to become inactive for a while so I asked them to come together and he encouraged me to apply for the job because he knew they needed someone who would be financially responsible during these economically difficult times. He knew I worked for an investment firm as well as a hedge fund so it helped that I understood what I saw when I came here [to the office at 2875 Broadway] and saw how much people at The Spectator really care about Columbia and about doing excellent work on the newspaper.

“I liked what I saw when I came to the office, how much people at The Spectator really care about Columbia and about doing excellent work on the newspaper.”

— Rob Bruce, Publisher