The most important thing I can say to you, and to your parents, at this particular moment is that we at Columbia view your education and well-being as our foremost responsibility,” the President said. “We welcome you into our little universe, a universe where understanding is accorded the highest value.”

Bollinger moved on to describe what he said was one of the central dilemmas of our times. Enormous advances in science and equally stunning discoveries in other fields of knowledge have offered the world an unprecedented opportunity to resolve many of life’s central challenges, he said. Yet, at the same time, we are experiencing throughout the world issues and problems of a kind and magnitude we have not seen before. “There is a sense, he said, that if we could only better our understanding, we could harness these advances to promote a better world for future generations.

The confluence of these two seemingly disparate trends makes it a particularly propitious time to be attending college, noted Bollinger. “There are times when ideas matter more than at other times, and now appears to be a time when they can matter most.”

By way of example he noted that while we have broken the genetic code, we are only in the early stages of using that information to cure disease and to improve life; while we have the most advanced economy and democracy the world has known, poverty remains an intractable problem; despite awesome new technologies, our understanding of the forces of globalization remains nascent.

“There is no better place in the world than Columbia University in the City of New York to be undertaking your education,” Bollinger explained. “What you have available to you in this city, with Columbia as your base, is simply unmatched anywhere. The opportunity for you to encounter world leaders, in every field of endeavor is unparalleled. With Columbia’s Passport to New York program much of the greatest art in the world is available to you for free.”

Young Scholars in the School of Continuing Education’s 2003 Summer Program for High School Students tackle biomedical engineering with Columbia Associate Professor Clark Hung (second from right). The University registered its largest-ever contingent of high schoolers this summer, including some 80 international students. Now in its 17th year, the program engages students in serious academics, drawing on a wealth of academic resources at Columbia and in New York City. Individuals choose a specific course of study and spend more than 16 hours per week in class or lab. Course options range from Investigations in Theoretical and Experimental Physics, Constitutional Law, Critical Focus on the Visual Arts, Global Politics, and Survey of Modern Mathematics, to a study abroad opportunity in Barcelona, Spain. For more information, visit www.ce.columbia.edu/hs/introNY.cfm

Senator Hillary Clinton discusses the Mailman School of Public Health’s survey on “American’s Perceptions of the U.S. Health System’s Disaster Preparedness and Efforts Two Years After 9/11” on Sept 8. The Senator was joined by Irwin Redlener, director of the School’s National Center for Disaster Preparedness, and Allan Rosenfield, dean of the School.

Scientists, Globalization and Space
In an e-mail to the Columbia community during the semester’s first week, Bollinger elaborated on the themes in his convocation speech and related them to the issues Columbia as an institution will be addressing in the coming years.

“The most important discussions we have at this moment are about the knowledge we will seek to preserve, the areas of new knowledge we will pursue, and the intellectual environment in which all this will take place,” Bollinger wrote.

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This is particularly important in the sciences. “We must determine, in broad outline, the general directions that science will take at Columbia in the years ahead,” he said. “All science is involved, but the burgeoning information and discoveries in the life sciences pose a very special and urgent set of issues.”

In light of this urgency, Bollinger said that he has asked Provost Alan Brinkley and Executive Vice President for Health and Biomedical Sciences and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine Gerry Fischbach, as well as Executive Vice President for Research David Hirs and Dean of Faculty and Acting Vice President for Arts and Sciences Ira Katznel-son to convene a working group to focus on the general directions that science will take at Columbia in the future.

Another major concern for the University is how best to prepare its students to grapple with the global trends that are transforming our way of thinking and doing business. At issue are such practical questions as how best to include more international students in the University as well as orient the social sciences and the humanities to incorporate dramatic alterations in our literary, political, social and economic landscape, including reinforcing SIPA’s role as a leading center for the study of international public policy. This fall, Bollinger plans to convene a task force, with members drawn from outside as well as within the University, to consider the Columbia’s involvement with the issues concerning globalization.

Unresolved all these issues is the pressing need for more space. “Among the great universities in this country none is more constrained on this score than Columbia,” Bollinger stated. “This is the kind of limitation that must be addressed in a comprehensive fashion before it becomes a burden on our imaginations as well as on our physical potential.” Columbia has gone forward with a general campus planning process that involves the development of Manhattanville, an area just north of Morningside Heights.

“Over the next several months this will be a principal focus of the University, and my hope is that we will find many forums in which to involve everybody who has an interest in helping us think through our planning—academic as well as physical—for the years ahead.”