New Beginnings for a Columbia Veteran: Alan Brinkley’s First Days as Provost

By Katherine Moore

Alan Brinkley has been a provost of Columbia for just over three months and is already juggling a daunting schedule as Columbia’s academic officer. From early morning budget meetings, to work on search committees for new deans, to presiding over convocation celebrations, the provost plays a major role in the everyday life and future standing of the University.

President Lee C. Bollinger appointed Brinkley, a well-known American historian and former chair of Columbia’s history department, to the post last spring. “Throughout his career, he has shown an unwavering commitment to academic excellence,” Bollinger noted then.

His colleagues — although lamenting the loss of a very popular scholar — agree. “Alan is a superb historian who sincerely values the rights of the individual and has the respect of the entire faculty,” said Eric Foner, Dewitt Clinton Professor of History and a Brinkley friend. “He is conscientious and a scholar — agree. “Alan is a superb historian who sincerely values the rights of the individual and has the respect of the entire faculty,” said Eric Foner, Dewitt Clinton Professor of History and a Brinkley friend. “He is conscientious and has good judgment, and is a bit of a Renaissance man.”

These qualities augur well for his term as provost.

Brinkley finds his biggest surprise in his first days to be, “the magnitude of the job.” “I knew it was a big job, but knowing it and feeling it are two different things,” says the new provost in his Low Library office that overlooks Lewiston and Earl Halls. “I have been in this office since July 1st and mostly what I am doing so far is trying to learn about other areas in the university.”

After a decade as a historian, Brinkley is now working with deans of every school and discipline, and one of his priorities will be determining a new found direction for science in light of recent advancements and discoveries. With Ira Katznelson, acting vice president for Arts and Sciences and David Hirsh, the new executive vice president for research, the provost is tasked with improving science at Columbia and increasing scientific resources. In 2003-2004, Brinkley will direct campus planning, long-term financial strategy and academic policy initiatives.

“Everyone” is spending quite a bit of time this year on the campus plan, said Brinkley. “What we envision is a cultural mosaic that will have a lot more space, which will lead to a lot more opportunities for meeting new academics and research initiatives. The provost will review strategic proposals for the best use of additional space to meet university needs over the long-term.

Financial issues and a long-term campaign for viable economic growth are also at the top of his agenda. “I don’t think of this as a fundraising job; he notes. But he plans to be very involved in development, which he sees as crucial to ensuring the University can grow, recruit top faculty and students, and remain fiercely competitive in diverse fields in the coming decades. He also will focus on shaping faculty appointments and has been an active participant in the recruitment process. Alan Brinkley is expected to play a similar role when Columbia begins its search for Business School Dean Meyer Feldstein’s replacement.

Alan Brinkley has been at Columbia for 12 years and is the former Allan Nevins Professor of History. A specialist of twentieth-century American history, he frequently appears as a commentator on national news programs, discussing a range of political issues, from the erosion of the New Deal after 1937 to the Bush White House. He is the author of numerous books including, Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression (1982), which won the 1983 National Book Award in History; A Tragic Nation: A Concise History of the American People (1992) and Liberalism and its Discontents (1998). Brinkley taught at M.I.T. and Harvard before coming to Columbia.

The provost, if he can find a few hours, will continue to work on his biography of Henry Luce, founder of Time magazine. Although Brinkley is on teaching leave, he continues to advise his current graduate students and hopes to return to teaching next year.

This fall, as the school year begins, Brinkley is cautiously sanguine about his legacy as Columbia’s new provost. “I hope the University a stronger and better place,” he says. Brinkley’s final words, he rushes off to another meeting.

Windows on the Past to Glow Again: Tiffany Stained Glass Pieces Return to Campus

By Elizabeth Golden

A pair of rare 100-year-old Tiffany stained glass windows returned to luminous splendor at Columbia University this week. The 13-foot high windows represent allegorical figures of Virgil and Sophocles. The stained glass windows were created for Tiffany Studios for modification. They remained for more than 40 years in a campus building. They were purchased from behind.

The figure of Sophocles was re-created from behind. “He is conscientious and has good judgment, and is a bit of a Renaissance man.”

The top was rounded off in order to fit the larger style neoclassical window of the original McKim, Mead and White building design. These are the only Tiffany pieces in the University’s holdings.

Both windows were mounted in the main-floor lounge of Hartley Hall, the former men’s dormitory on campus, which opened in 1905. They remained for more than 40 years, accumulating layers of cigar and pipe smoke, as well as coal dust from the fireplace and dirt from Amsterdam Avenue traffic. In 1948, the two windows darkened with years of grime, were put in storage when the lounge was remodeled. In 2002, Columbia began a complete renovation of 100-year-old Hamilton Hall, one of the original McKim, Mead and White buildings and home of Columbia College, the University’s undergraduate liberal arts college. Two niches on either side of the lobby have been created to hold the stained glass panels, which will be illuminated from behind.

“Tiffany’s figures of Sophocles and Virgil renew the links between the College’s medieval and Morning-side eras,” said Austin Quigley, dean of Columbia College.

Surrounding the classical figures in the Hamilton lobby are a number of display cases which will contain books, pictures, and other artifacts that will exemplify the cultural contexts around the figures that are also incorporated into the Core Curriculum,” said Quigley.

“In that curriculum, tradition is treated as both an instrument of continuity and an engine of change. Historical cultural contexts of many kinds are involved to guide but not govern students preparing to help create the future.

Their presence in the contemporary Hamilton Hall lobby also exemplifies the interplay between tradition and innovation that is such a defining feature of the College’s Core Curriculum,” noted Quigley.

“Education is a community of learners learning together. I am pleased that the Hamilton lobby is a community of learners learning together. I am pleased that the Hamilton lobby is a history of the university in the 20th century. The stained glass windows are a reflection of the university in the 20th century. The stained glass windows are a reflection of the everyday life and future standing of the University.

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The windows were originally presented to the university by the classes of 1885 and 1891. Their donation was made possible by a gift from Arthur G. Rosen, CC ’65.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR BEGINS WITH BUDGET

By Ellen S. Smith

Federal fiscal year 2004 (10/01/03-9/30/04) began on Oct. 1, 2003, but only three appropriations bills have been signed. The Government keeps running with a so-called continuing resolution until Oct. 31. It is the task of the House Appropriations Committee to work out the differences between the House and Senate bills. Leveraging funds for research and for student aid are unlikely to increase as much as many have in the past. Some funds may, in fact, remain level or reduced.

Last week, Dean Lisa Anderson met with the New York members of the House Education and Workforce Committee to discuss the importance of international education. The Department of Homeland Security is still addressing the issue of fees for the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), but plans to publish a rule within the month. The high costs for education continue to reinforce the importance of developing a fee system that is accessible and fair for students coming from abroad.