Research Center Environmental NSF Helps making. impact on human decision mate uncertainty and its to understand the effects of cli- social scientists work together explained, that natural and ones. It is therefore critical, he questions as much as scientific they present to human society. timing of these threats and our degree of uncertainty in our he emphasized the great and Greenland ice sheets. Yet threats, such as rising levels of greenhouse gases and poten- tial melting of the Antarctic potential global environmental Oppenheimer discussed seri- ously global environmental threats, such as rising levels of greenhouse gases and poten- tial melting of the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets. Yet he emphasized the great degree of uncertainty in our knowledge of the extent and timing of these threats and our understanding of the risks that they present to human society. The dangers posed by social questions as much as scientific ones. It is therefore critical, he explained, that natural and social scientists work together to understand the effects of cli- mate uncertainty and its impact on human decision making.

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Columbia Celebrates Commencement 2005

By Colin Morris

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tark rays of sunshine finally presided over this year’s commencement ceremony as President Lee C. Bollinger addressed over 50,000 parents, fam- ily, alumni and faculty along with the class of 2005. The event, which for the previous two years had been battered by steady rainfall, marked the largest graduating class in Columbia’s history, with more than 11,000 students receiving degrees.

Bollinger began his commence- ment address poking fun at the graduating class, who, along with their studies, has also mastered the art of procrastination, he said. The president expressed confidence that, thanks to their time at Columbia, students could now rec- ogize the difference between patiently biding their time before the stroke of inspiration and wal- lowing in fruitless inaction.

yet the president was intent on drawing their attention to a more serious challenge, which he intro- duced using journalism as an exam- ple of what he described as the increasingly polarized points of view in society. “In journalism and politics, the emphasis used to be on reaching the largest and most diverse audience possible,” he said. “That’s one reason it’s called ‘broadcasting.’ Today, though, it’s a different story. The emphasis is on what some call ‘narrowcasting.’”

Bollinger explained that too often the public succumbs to efforts geared at solidifying one’s beliefs, as opposed to challenging them. “You can go through each day reading the newspaper, watch- ing TV news, and surfing the Web— feeling highly informed of world events—and never encounter a view that’s different from your own,” Bollinger said.

Through a Columbia education, the president explained, students are taught to resist this compla- tent trend while remaining open to the complexity of issues. Bollinger stressed that the academ- ic character is more than a series of debates. “You do not come to the uni- versity to learn how to build a case for some ideology, but clearly think out to see as much of the whole as you can,” he said. “Not to sharp- en your beliefs but to see as others see. To learn to ask: Is that true? Maybe there’s something to what she just said. Let me think about it. That’s interesting. Maybe I should change my mind. I changed my mind. ‘These are the sentences of the university’ Bollinger said that thinking across frames of reference (to bor- row a term from College Dean Austin Quigley) not only fosters in- humans the compassion of view- ing another side of an issue, but is continued on page 7

CUMC’s Andrew Marks

wise hearts and minds.