Melanie A. Farmer
By Erin St. John Kelly and Melanie A. Farmer

STUDENT GROUPS AID TRANSITION OF VETERANS

Seán O’Keefe felt compelled to enlist in the U.S. Army shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and in doing so fulfilled a childhood dream. For five years, he served in the 10th Special Forces—the Army’s Green Berets—in locations such as the Balkans and Africa. Now, as a 24-year-old junior at the School of General Studies (GS), he is one of about 50 students enrolled there who are active or retired military personnel. He also is a member of a six-year-old student group called U.S. Military Veterans of Columbia (MiVetS), and he credit its such campus organizations with providing much-needed support in helping students like himself make the transition from military to campus life.

“It’s nice to hang out with other military veterans who can understand my situation,” he said. “They can relate.”

O’Keefe just learned that in January he will be deployed to Iraq.

“That news unto itself is devastating and difficult to deal with,” said O’Keefe. “But for me, when I am around other veterans it’s nice to hang out with other military veterans.”

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“IT’S NICE TO HANG OUT WITH OTHER MILITARY VETERANS.”

who understand what I am going through and know how I want to be treated, it eases the stress of having to go to Iraq once the semester ends.”

MiVetS promotes dialogue on military life, says Peter Kim, president of the group and a U.S. Marine who served six months in Iraq. “We hope we can bring a viewpoint with experience behind us that will help shape [non-military] minds, rather than be just driven by whatever they read about the war or about military culture,” for example, added Kim, a 28-year-old senior at GS.

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Barack Obama on campus at the ServiceNation Presidential Forum, Sept. 11, 2008 in Roone Arledge Auditorium

By Record Staff

A s the first Columbia College graduate prepares to take the oath of office for president, historians, journalists, public officials and many others are reaching for historical comparisons to both the man and the moment.

Is Barack Obama (CC’83) more like Franklin Delano Roosevelt? The similarities are striking. Each succeeds an unpopular Republican who overwore a financial collapse. Each effectively channeled his message through the new media of the day—Roosevelt through radio, Obama through the Internet.

Or is the better comparison to Abraham Lincoln, another president who got his political start in the Illinois state legislature and later became renowned for his oratorical skills and the quality of his writing? Obama quoted Lincoln in his victory speech on election night and has spoken of reading Team of Rivals, Doris Kearns Goodwin’s book on Lincoln’s fractious cabinet.

Columbia faculty members are at the center of the discussion on Obama and his role, both historical and history-making. After Election Day, Columbia professors Eric Foner of the history department and Patricia Williams of the law school appeared on Bill Moyers’ PBS show to discuss Obama’s victory—on the same night, Provost Alan Bressley appeared on Charlie Rose with fellow historian Michael Beschloss and New Yorker editor David Remnick.

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Columbia defeated Cornell University 17-7 on senior day, the lions’ home finale, Nov. 15. Here the gridiron teammates celebrate victory by singing the Columbia University alma mater in other media. Permission is given to use the Academic year. The amount is payable in advance to the Office of Communications and Public Affairs.
MUCH ADO ABOUT MEMORY WHEN ART MEETS SCIENCE

By Russell Scott Smith

The topic of the talk was "Mind, Memory and the Actor," and most of the speakers were neuroscientists. The conversation could go anywhere. "I don't know exactly what we’re going to be talking about," admitted President Lee C. Bollinger, who moderated the panel, at the outset. "That’s part of the thrill."

As it turned out, the speakers struck an arts-meets-science balance that moved from the challenges of memorizing lines to an analysis of the brain’s mirror neurons.

Boyd started the conversation with observations about the actors in his productions of Shakespeare’s Henry VI, parts I–III, and Richard III. He first directed these plays at the RSC in 2002 and won the Laurence Olivier Award for his work. Four years later, Boyd reassembled much of the cast for a revival, but immediately ran into a problem—the actors couldn’t remember their lines.

"They were panicking," Boyd recalled. "Things didn’t improve when the cast gathered around a table to speak the plays together. So Boyd came up with an extreme solution. "We decided to cut to the chase and just film them onto the stage," he said.

Amazingly, this worked. As the actors moved through the familiar blocking of the play, interacting with each other and their characters’ emotions, the text came rushing back to them. "It was very clear," Boyd said. "That the memory they had been trying to retrieve [on their own] was a broken bit of the memory. It was only complete when the action of their bodies was combined with the recall in the mind." Boyd added. "Maybe our memory is in our bodies as well as elsewhere."

Could this phenomenon, Boyd asked Sacks, be related to the hippocampus? These twin parts of the brain have been connected to both short-term memory and spatial navigation.

Sacks demurred, noting that many people who have lost the use of their hippocampus are still able to remember certain things—often with the aid of just the sort of movement Boyd described.

As an example, Sacks told a story about a gifted British musician who had lost his hippocampus and, with it, almost all his short-term memory. "But this man with a 10-second memory is able to play the piano with feeling for hours and hours," Sacks said. "If you ask him to describe such-and-such Bach fugue, he doesn’t know what you’re talking about. But set him down, give him the first couple of notes, and he’s off."

The give-and-take between Sacks and Boyd was a good example of the multidisciplinary approach to scholarship that Bollinger has prioritized at Columbia. With its commitment to the Mind/Brain Behavior Initiative, the University has particularly focused on connections between neuroscience and other disciplines such as economics, sociology and the arts. The appointment of Sacks last year as a Columbia artist and professor of neurology and psychoanalysis is an example of this.

A frequent New Yorker contributor and best-selling author, Sacks has written frequently about the connections between art and science, most recently in Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain. He seemed to relish the opportunity to trade ideas with a theater artist like Boyd.

"These are wonderful and very important observations," he said. "And they’re the sort of observations that neurologists and neuroscientists usually aren’t in a position to make."

Barnard Inaugurates Spar as New President

By Johanna Witt

Barnard College inaugurated Deborah L. Spar as its 11th leader and seventh president on Oct. 23.

The ceremony in Riverside Church was attended by hundreds of representatives from colleges and universities around the world. In her speech, Spar laid out her vision for a new era at Barnard, in which she sees the women’s college becoming an incubator designed to shatter what is left of the glass ceiling.

She spoke to Barnard’s legacy as a bastion of education for women, but drew from the wealth of experience that are found also from the wealth of expertise in the academic expertise in this extraordinary city and from Morningside Heights, and, she said, "the actors in his productions of Shakespeare’s Henry VI, parts I–III, and Richard III. He first directed these plays at the RSC in 2002 and won the Laurence Olivier Award for his work. Four years later, Boyd reassembled much of the cast for a revival, but immediately ran into a problem—the actors couldn’t remember their lines.

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COLUMBIA COMMUNITY SERVICE
Neighbors Helping Neighbors

food, shelter, health care, education

“With the help of more than 1,600 generous employees, last year’s Annual Appeal raised and awarded more than $287,000 in grants to 55 agencies that provide direct service to our community.

Because of our donations, Columbia Community Service was able to support critical services for our neighbors and ourselves including children, the elderly and the homeless.

In the wake of current economic challenges and reductions in government funding, the need for our contributions is greater than ever.

Unlike similar organizations, CCS has no overhead costs, so 100 percent of your contributions reach the agencies we support. Please join us and make a pledge or contribution to CCS—Every Dollar Counts!”

Donate online at www.communityservice.columbia.edu
I know knowledge begins with curiosity, as Aristotle said, children would be among the greatest philosophers.

But while the study of philosophy flourishes at Columbia, a place that Varzi taught at the elementary school level. Recently, however, a global movement has emerged aimed at philosophy instruction for children.

"The goal is to help children develop their ability to think about the mysteries and puzzles of the world," says Columbia philosophy Professor Achille Varzi, a proponent of teaching children philosophy. He recently published a philosophical book for children titled The Planet Where Things Disappeared: Exercises in Philosophical Imagination. "We must keep alive the spirit of curiosity that children have," he adds.

A scholar of logic and metaphysics, Varzi has focused his research on identity and change over time. Two years ago, Varzi published a version of that same book for adults, Inerrastmable Simplicities: Thirty-nine Philosophical Conundrums, which has since been published in nine languages. Another book, Holes and Other Superficialities, published in 1994, made him known as "the little expert" according to the 2000 presidential election's hanging-chad ballot controversy in the Florida vote.

His children's book, written in his native Italian for children as young as five, poses philosophical questions and provides stories and puzzles. He introduces philosophical themes like change, doubt and possibility, while emphasizing rationality, imagination and modernity.

Of course, he offers no answers, only questions. Is the suitcase I pick up on the conveyor belt the same suitcase I dropped off at the airport, or has it changed? Do I see colors the same way you do? Who cooks for cooks? Varzi, who wrote and illustrated the book with his friend and fellow philosopher Roberto Casati, hopes to publish an English translation next year.

Varzi is not the only Columbia scholar to advocate philosophy instruction for children. Indeed, the movement got its start at Columbia during the 1970s, when philosophy professor Matthew Lipman (GSAS'54) wrote the first-elementary-level philosophy curriculum. Lipman went on to found the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children at Montclair State University. Most philosophy courses offered in U.S. elementary schools are taught by educators who attended the institute, according to its director, Maughn Gregory.

Scholars like Lipman and Varzi strongly disagree with the view, argued by Swiss philosopher and child psychologist Jean Piaget decades ago, that children younger than 11 simply can't grasp philosophical problems. "Piaget's claim was based on the belief that children are not capable of second-order thinking—thinking about thinking—and there is a growing body of empirical evidence to the contrary," Varzi said.

"Philosophy differs from most other subjects in its instruction: "In math and science, you simplify the complicated. In philosophy, you complicate the simple,"" he said. "By asking questions before the answers you see the importance of the answer. You don't just buy into a theory or ideological view of another."" Elementary schools aren't the only educational institutions that can benefit from a higher dose of philosophy, argues Varzi. In America, where philosophy was met with sneers un- til the 1930s, most top-level high schools offer just one intro- ducory philosophy course, with a predictable bent on history. Such disregard for the discipline's essential curiosity and irresponsibility, says Varzi, citing recent articles suggesting that college graduates who majored in philosophy find jobs faster than their peers.

Varzi says his goal is to develop the curiosity that burns so powerfully and naturally within children. Adults would be wise to adopt it, he says. "Children are curious about absolutely everything," says Varzi. "They haven't bought into all the answers. Adults, instead, are full of answers, but have forgotten the questions."
SENATE DISCUSSES PROCUREMENT ISSUES, LOSS OF STUDENT LOANS
by Tom Matheson

The University Senate devoted the bulk of its Oct. 24 meeting to a report from Anne Sullivan, executive vice president for finance, on accounts payable and purchasing operations. At the end, as the result of a last-minute question, senators addressed the impact of the current financial crisis on student loans.

Sullivan’s talk was an update on problems she had addressed at the April 11 plenary; particularly the glitches that had attended the introduction of a new technology last year, which had swelled processing times for routine invoices to a month or more. Several measures taken since then have drastically reduced processing times, Sullivan said. A study conducted by her office had also found that many bottlenecks were attributable to delays in departments submitting the invoices and purchase orders. In the extensive discussion that ensued, senators vented a range of complaints, particularly at having to wait several months for reimbursement of travel expenses, which requires proof of credit card payment.

In his own remarks to the Senate, President Lee C. Bollinger said predictions of a significant, prolonged global recession have prompted new planning efforts by the University. He wanted to avoid both over-optimism and alarmism in anticipating conditions six months from now. While Columbia’s aid would be increased, it could not cover the large losses in loan funds, he said.

Sullivan brainstormed about a range of possible solutions, from the admittedly outlandish—making personal loans to one’s own students—to the more practical—innovative efforts among engineering alumni to guarantee loans for some international students, and possible attempts by Columbia schools to redirect other funds for students loans.

Brindley said the University cannot co-sign loans, and individual schools should only consider such steps in consultation with the general counsel. “It’s a very painful thing for the international students most of all,” he said, “but for everyone in the University, because we prize our international character and the international students. But we’re in the midst of a historic crisis, and it’s going to take a bit of work to get everything back.”

The next two plenaries are on Thursday, Nov. 20 and Friday, Dec. 5. Anyone with a CUID is welcome.

COLUMBIA PEOPLE

Samuel Seward

WHO HE IS: Assistant Vice President and Medical Director, Health Services

YEARS AT COLUMBIA: 5

WHAT HE DOES: Seward directs Health Services at Columbia (HSC), which serves the health and wellness needs for the Morningside campus and three affiliates’ Teachers College, Jewish Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary. He oversees some 120 medical professionals, including doctors, nurse practitioners, health educators, psychologists and social workers who cater primarily to students, although a few programs and services are open to faculty and staff (such as urgent care and travel vaccinations). HSC’s program offerings and services cover a wide variety of health-related topics and issues including psychological services, disability services, health promotion and sexual and domestic violence prevention. The department’s health promotion program operates Go Ask Alice!, an Internet question-and-answer resource where students can get information about their health and well-being.

GREATEST JOB CHALLENGE: “Stress is one of the top three challenges for undergraduate, graduate and professional students face in achieving their academic goals,” Seward says. “We’ve got some great programs to help students (and sometimes faculty and staff) understand how they experience stress and cope with it.” For example, a panel Wednesday, Columbia staffs and students can get a free mini-back rub in Wien Hall. HSC’s “Stress Busters” are students who give free neck and back massages to the campus community; they attend select campus events and will come, on request, to offices or residence halls. HSC also offers CU Move, an online exercise prescription program that participants can use to design and track their personal fitness activities, set exercise goals and record their progress.

A GOOD DAY ON THE JOB: “When we efficiently, creatively and in an evidence-based way join with students to support them through their health challenges.”

THE ROAD TO COLUMBIA: Seward, 47, studied political science as an undergraduate at McGill University in Montreal. After working in Washington, D.C., as a copy editor and editorial assistant, Seward decided journalism was not the right fit. Since he was drawn to volunteerism and interested in helping others, “a career in health care naturally followed,” he says. He received his M.D. in 1984 from the University of Texas in Dallas.

Before joining Columbia, he ran a physician training program at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York for five years and was a consultant to CUNY’s student health service. Seward is also an attending physician at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital and teaches the second-year medical student course Foundations of Medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

BEST PART OF THE JOB: “First, working with Columbia students, who in their diversity, brilliance and openness teach me new things about myself and the world every day. Second, working with my excellent staff who, quite simply, all share the same goal: to help.”

MOST MEMORABLE COLUMBIA EXPERIENCE: “We’ve had some tragic moments during my time here, students who have been badly injured in accidents or have suffered mental health illnesses. My best moments have been when we came together as a community to support these students as well as their friends and families who suffer with them.”

IN HIS SPARE TIME: Seward still volunteers for Habitat for Humanity in Newburgh, N.Y., and by providing pro bono medical services to those with Hermansky-Pudlak Syndrome, a rare congenital syndrome. He enjoys time off with his wife and three children. “Lately, my nine-year-old daughter, Grace, and I have been playing simple clarinet duets together, which for a parent, is just flat-out fun.”

By Melanie A. Farmer

Columbia has a long history of veterans coming to campus to complete their degrees. In 1947, the University Extension Program was reorganized as an undergraduate college to meet the needs of GIs returning from World War II; it was called the School of General Studies. In 1946, three-quarters of the law school’s incoming class were ex-military. Students called to active duty are granted a military leave of absence by the University for the period of their active duty and for one year after its end.

Charles Taylor, also a member of the Milit-Vets who served in the Marines for six years, agreed that switching from military life to campus life has not been too difficult, and in some ways, the pace is equal. A sophomore at GS, Taylor had two deployments to Iraq and also served in Africa, Armenia and Japan. For Taylor, student groups for veterans are a necessity. “They remind returning vets that we are not alone,” he said.
Most people would do anything to avoid thinking about potential disasters. Not Irwin Redlener. As director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Mailman School of Public Health, Redlener thinks about disasters round-the-clock.

Someone has to. As he says in his 2006 book, Americans at Risk, people for the most part are not prepared for a disaster. The book criticizes the U.S. government’s ineffective response to Hurricane Katrina and discusses the lack of improvements since then. He says a main challenge of disaster preparedness is motivating citizens to prepare for something that might not happen.

What should have been wake-up calls turn out to be more like snooze alarms,” says Redlener, referring to recent catastrophes like the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina. “The country gets very distraught. Attention is focused on these major events, and we get aroused, we spend money and then we drift off, back into a kind of complacency—and end up not making as much progress as we should be making when these kinds of events occur in the United States.”

Redlener hopes to change this mindset through research and new policy. The center has begun investigating topics such as workforce availability in the event of major disasters, the readiness of public health systems and disaster communications. It also runs programs for training public health workers in emergency preparedness. Another of the center’s goals is to collect more data that could point the way toward handling a mega-disaster.

“We’re trying to establish how to most effectively use the preparedness dollar by supporting research that says this direction is better than another direction,” Redlener says. “To that end, Redlener is advocating to make nuclear terrorism an item on the list of disaster planners. In May, he testified on that topic before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs. But according to Redlener, at the core of the nation’s inability to prepare for disasters is the fact that the U.S. public health system has been deeply eroded over the past two decades. And when coupled with an ongoing crisis in the health care delivery system, it’s no wonder that we seem unable to make sufficient progress in preparing for large-scale disasters.

Redlener, who also teaches at Mailman, would seem to be an unlikely candidate for a disaster planner. The 64-year-old pediatrician graduated to the field after developing a center for pediatric preparedness at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx. He is president and co-founder of the Children’s Health Fund, a nonprofit that develops health care programs in medically underserved communities and sets up mobile medical units to assist at disaster sites.

This last year has been particularly busy for Redlener, who served as senior health care adviser and national campaign surrogate for Sen. Barack Obama. His forthcoming book, The Politics of Children, will explore the current status of children in America with regard to their education, health and well-being.

Q: Is there a priority in the disasters that your center focuses on?
A: We are most focused on megadisasters, very large scale disasters. Megadisasters are defined as essentially a catastrophic event that overwhelms or threatens to overwhelm local capacity to save lives, to treat victims, and to maintain social order. If the situation is heading in that direction or has reached that place where it is unable to be handled locally, that’s considered a megadisaster.

Q: Disaster preparedness was not your initial career path. What excites you about this type of work?
A: I think when I began getting deeply involved in this, especially around the creation of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, I was concerned about how much work needed to be done in this area, how little research is driving these enormous expenditures and how far we were from achieving a level of preparedness that would be appropriate for the United States. What excites me is helping to shape policies and concepts about preparedness that have national and local impact. But my biggest goal in this work! I want to convince policy makers that we will never be adequately prepared for disasters unless we modernize our public health system and address the general health care crisis in our nation. With the new Obama administration, I am actually optimistic that we can get there.
Surgeons at the Columbia Medical Center donned pink lab coats Oct. 29 in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. This particular group at Columbia, called Powerful Pink, was organized by Davis Lively, a breast cancer survivor and longtime administrative coordinator in the Department of Surgery, Lively collected 20 pink lab coats from surgical attendings and residents (above) and dyed them pink herself. This photo was sent to Susan G. Komen for the Cure as part of its fundraising and awareness program. Passionately Pink for the Cure, which urges people nationwide to wear pink any time of the year as a reminder to women to get a mammogram, or do a self breast examination or give support to those battling the disease.

Obama

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Resford Tugwell, later Roosevelt’s undersecretary of agriculture; law professor Raymond Moley, who was described by Time magazine in 1935 as Roosevelt’s closest adviser and was named by Roosevelt to be an assistant secretary of state; and law professor A.A. Berle, a faculty member (from 1927 to 1936) and economic theorist who helped craft Depression-era banking and securities law reforms. Roosevelt also appointed Columbia law professor William O. Douglas as chair of the fledgling Securities and Exchange Commission in 1937 and two years later to the U.S. Supreme Court. Both FDR and his cousin Theodore Roosevelt attended the law school but left before graduating, they were recently granted posthumous degrees.

The president-elect’s inner circle also includes a number of Columbians, including former assistant attorney general Eric Holder (CC’75, LAW’76) and Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg (LAW’88), who jointly led the vice-presidential selection committee, and technology advisor Julius Genachowski (CC’85).

Brinkley, a leading historian of the New Deal, told The Record that Obama’s victory is remarkable for reasons beyond his mixed-race heritage. “Not since 1932 has the United States faced such a severe financial crisis—a crisis that could ripple through the nation and the world and create severe social, economic and political problems,” Brinkley said. Lincoln and Roosevelt illustrate how great crises can be great opportunities for new presidents, he added, “but great crises can also be the undoing of presidents who might otherwise have been successful. Obama has many of the qualities of temperament and discipline that are important to a president. And he has, at least for now, another far greater asset, the support and confidence of a large majority of the American people, who see in him the possibility of transformative leadership.”

Rushdie

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live at this moment in the history of the world and be an optimist.”

In a question-and-answer period, Rushdie offered a humorous response to a question from the audience about whether his opposition contributed to the wide attention he has received as a writer. “I was doing just fine before that,” he said with a laugh. “I would’ve been quite happy, thank you very much, to chug along at that level” rather than dodging death threats. Rushdie in 1989 received death threats made by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, who ordered international mercenaries to carry out the sentence.

More seriously Rushdie added, “A lot of writers are oppressed. Whether their work continues to be interesting or not in the end has to do with the work, not the oppression.”

The Rushdie event capped off the day of religious-themed discussions. On the topic of art, religion and politics, Thomas Krens, director of Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, talked about the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and how the foundation hopes the museum will serve as a platform for reasonable dialogue, continuing education and cultural exchange.

In another discussion, Columbia faculty members engaged Charles Taylor, emeritus professor of philosophy at McGill University, on his most recent book, A Secular Age, which traces the modern age’s emergence of secularism not in opposition to religion, but in the midst of the religious.

Mark Taylor, chair of the Department of Religion, co-directs the institute with Alfred Stepan, professor of government at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA).

“We need to understand religion historically but also critically,” he said.