Maria Mosca: The director of Student Information Services (SIS) recounts the challenges of keeping track of data on the new students.

The Record: What were the implications for your office once the University decided to accept some students affected by Hurricane Katrina?

Maria Mosca: SIS serves all 16 schools of the University in storing and providing data relating to student records. When the news arrived that displaced students would be enrolling as visiting students at CU, we knew right away that we'd have to devise a simple and quick way to identify them in our system and provide instructions to our colleagues in the schools who were on the front lines. If the information didn't get into the system, then we wouldn't be able to provide meaningful reports about this unusual population.

The School of Continuing Education, which was receiving the bulk of the visitors, had been enrolling them for half a day by the time we were notified. They'd been inundated with inquiries at a time—the first week of the semester—when things were already very hectic. So we offered to go back through the records and add the codes that would uniquely identify the visiting students.

It sounds like hard work. Was any of it gratifying?

Two aspects were particularly gratifying: 1) being part of the ad hoc group pulled together on a few hours' notice with the brief of sorting out and resolving the myriad issues necessary to help the displaced students get settled at Columbia; and 2) seeing my own team rise to the occasion under great pressure, something they do time and time again and never disappoint. The spirit of trust and collegiality among my Columbia colleagues was truly remarkable. And my team jumped into the fray without hesitation, staying late into the evening every night for a week to make sure the record-keeping was as accurate as possible.

I also took pride in the higher education community in general, and Columbia in particular, for immediately opening their doors and so generously offering victims of the tragedy access to their wealth of educational resources.