Meet, for instance, Kathleen Apláuwa, who decided it was time for a change. ‘I felt my lack of formal education was preventing me from being able to make an even more powerful and effective contribution to my community,’ she explains. Her decision to follow a more conventional educational and career path ultimately led her to the doors of GS. ‘I came to Columbia to pursue an undergraduate degree in political science, with the intention of continuing on to law school one day so I could become more of an advocate for women’s causes,’ Apláuwa says.

Apláuwa, who is an ordained minister in the Jehovah’s Witness faith, works at the Watch Tower Organization in Brooklyn, continues to dedicate her personal time to mentoring young women who have little adult guidance, educating them about women’s issues, domestic violence and HIV/AIDS.

Some in my congregation do not come from homes with skilled, loving parents, so I try to make up for the lack by serving as their friend, surrogate mother, cousin, and sometimes a combination of all of these,’ Apláuwa says.

Her new career direction recently received a fillip when she won a 2005 Women’s Forum Educational Award for her efforts to improve her life and contributions to her community. She is the third GS student to be recognized by the Women’s Forum.

A few more transitions of note:

Born to Palestinian parents in Amman, Jordan, Insaf Abdullah, 45, arrived in the United States in 1980. Married with a child at age 19, she did not have the option of pursuing a college education. Instead she studied English and then founded her own travel business.

Her children grown, she entered community college and in the fall of 2004 transferred to Columbia to study political science, with a focus on U.S.-Middle East relations.

By coincidence, Abdullah’s daughter, Zaynab, 23, entered GS last month as a transfer student from a community college, also as a political science major. The younger Abdullah had also decided to attend Columbia, working in her mother’s business.

Insaf Abdullah: “I can’t always deal with the openness of faculty members and my fellow students on topics that are off-limits to someone of my background and culture, but I’m gradually learning to respect other people’s opinions even when I do not agree with them.

One of the most fulfilling experiences thus far has been attending a lecture a few weeks ago by Armi Bishara, a leading Palestinian activist who is a longstanding member of the Israeli Knesset. He spoke about war, occupation and democracy, and in the process answered quite a few of the questions I’ve been carrying around inside me, about how superpowers behave.”

Zaynab Abdullah: “For me, too, seeing Armi Bishara speak at Barnard is one of the highlights of my student life thus far. He put forth a view of the Arab population that is rarely heard this country.

Before enrolling at Columbia, Anthony Carter, 29, was the foreman for a team of electricians in charge of restoring train service to the World Trade Center in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In recognition of his work, he was selected to travel on the first train into Ground Zero in September 2003. In the course of these momentous events, Carter made the decision to return to school full time. He enrolled in a local college and then transferred to Columbia this fall, where he plans to focus on psychology and then put that to work helping young people. I want to be a model for them.

Anthony Carter: “Columbia is the kind of place that sculpts you into a student-citizen. My most memorable experience thus far was pulling an all-nighter in Butler Library to finish a paper that was due at 9:00 a.m. the following morning. Amazingly, I was not alone, which helped me get through it. If I were to give advice to others contemplating this kind of transition, I’d say it’s important to include your family in your preparations, by walking them through the CU Web site and taking them on campus visits.”

Lauren McFall, 25, is no stranger to challenges. Having led the U.S. Olympic synchronized swimming team to bronze medals in the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece, as captain of the team, she was also its spokesperson, appearing on major talk shows.

While training for the Olympics, Lauren managed to return to college part-time to earn the credits that would help her enter Columbia University – retired from her athletic career, she looks forward to being a full-time student, pursuing her interest in political science, foreign affairs and broadcast journalism.

Lauren McFall: “I didn’t foresee how much time I would spend in GS, and we help each other out. The most enjoyable part of the experience so far has been starting up my own talk show on CTV with three other women, called ‘That Show’ I do the ‘sports and fitness’ segment. I would advise incoming students to make sure you attend the orientation sessions on time management and how to read textbooks. Also, don’t be scared to ask other students for help. As I know from my previous life as an athlete, teamwork is always a better recipe for success.”

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deal students as he hoped they had learned from him.

“If I should thank them for what they taught me,” he said. “He went on to say that he was proud of his father, who’d taught him about the connection between history and the present, as well as the links between the Abolitionists and the struggle for civil rights.

Conference Explores the Contentious History of American Freedom

In the process, former students pay tribute to an extraordinary teacher

Eric Foner (middle) with 10 of his former Ph.D. students: Martha S. Jones, Penny Von Eschen, Martha Blundt, Mae M. Ngai, Lisa McGarr, Michaela Zakin, Sven Beckert (tall, in the back), Manisha Sinha, Melinda Lawson and Anne Kronhausen.

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