The Transitional Dance
Since childhood, most professional dancers sacrifice, showed discipline, and gave themselves over dreams that required laser focus on their goals. But what happens when their dream careers are closer to the end than the beginning?

Forecasting Success
For more than 20 years, GS Admissions has used a distinctive process to successfully evaluate prospective students’ potential impact on the greater good at Columbia and beyond. The stories of four alumni who are now well established in their chosen careers illustrate the powerful results of this holistic, time-tested process.

GS, Columbia, and COVID-19
A beacon of healing and redemption for so many, GS Dean Emeritus Peter J. Awn was one of the most beloved and impactful people in the history of Columbia University School of General Studies.

Remembering School of General Studies Dean Emeritus Peter J. Awn
A beacon of healing and redemption for so many, GS Dean Emeritus Peter J. Awn was one of the most beloved and impactful people in the history of Columbia University School of General Studies.

Kikka Hanazawa ’00 Employs Her Smarts
Tokyo native Kikka Hanazawa uses her knowledge of the fashion industry and her passion for social change to make a difference in the world.

.Kikka Hanazawa ’00 Employs Her Smarts
Tokyo native Kikka Hanazawa uses her knowledge of the fashion industry and her passion for social change to make a difference in the world.

Forecasting Success
For more than 20 years, GS Admissions has used a distinctive process to successfully evaluate prospective students’ potential impact on the greater good at Columbia and beyond. The stories of four alumni who are now well established in their chosen careers illustrate the powerful results of this holistic, time-tested process.
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 11, all course instruction at Columbia moved online. On March 16, all GS administrative offices moved to remote operations. A pass/fail grade policy was implemented for the spring semester and students were offered emergency funding to transition out of Columbia housing. Over 400 GS students took advantage of a $500 grant offered by the University.

256 dual degree students living and studying in France, and Ireland were supported in moving to safe environments, and the GS Board of Visitors raised more than $200,000 to create a COVID-19 emergency fund to assist GS students. Rent-abatement initiatives were put into place and educational financing was enhanced.

Courses for the 2020 summer session were conducted remotely and a normal grading policy was restored. The ability to study remotely attracted a record number of students. Enrollment for the summer sessions was up 57% over summer 2019. During June, July, and August, faculty reconceived their course instruction for fall 2020, redesigning teaching methodology for an online environment and integrating novel technologies to facilitate remote learning. All undergraduate courses for the fall semester were administered online and will remain online or will be offered as a hybrid for the spring 2021 semester. Faculty members are employing synchronous and asynchronous teaching concepts. The academic calendar was modified to three shorter terms featuring an array of new seven-week immersive courses. There is an ongoing effort to create co-curricular and extra-curricular programming to support community building, even at a distance.

About 3000 students who are living in Columbia residences and faculty and staff who are working on campus are required to participate in weekly testing for COVID-19. Anyone participating in campus activities must abide by the Columbia policies and procedures implemented to encourage social distancing through touchless technology and reservation systems alongside with sanitizing enhancements throughout all facilities.

There are approximately 4,400 students living in and studying from off-campus Columbia residences, and approximately 15,400 students living and studying remotely, including those based in more than 155 countries. In a written address to the University community, University President Lee C. Bollinger said, “Thanks to the tireless work of many, I am fully confident we can provide a meaningful academic experience no matter where our students reside. And so today I welcome all Columbia students, faculty, and staff to this new era with a full heart and enormous appreciation for your patience, resilience, and determination.”

Louise Glück Awarded The Nobel Prize In Literature

In October, Louise Glück, who spent years in the 1960s studying at Columbia GS, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. On behalf of the University, President Bollinger extended his congratulations to Glück, writing, “At risk of appearing to celebrate—or even claim some credit for—the achievement of anyone with a Columbia tie (which I am, in fact, always happy to do), I want to extend the University’s warmest congratulations to this year’s Nobel laureate in Literature, poet Louise Glück. Ms. Glück took classes at Columbia’s School of General Studies and our School of the Arts, and she later taught at SoA. In 1993, Columbia and the Pulitzer Board awarded her the Pulitzer Prize for The Wild Iris. Ms. Glück was a treasured traveler through our gates, and we delight in her extraordinary moment of richly deserved, international recognition.”

While at GS, Glück was published in Quarto, the School of General Studies literary magazine that went on to become Columbia’s official undergraduate literary magazine. She attended night classes with the poets Léonie Adams and Stanley Kunitz, teachers she credits with helping her find her own voice.

GS LAUNCHES JUSTICE AND PANDEMICS PREPAREDNESS ACADEMY

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised urgent questions about the failure of the public health and political systems in the United States and throughout the globe to protect all people, especially those in vulnerable and marginalized groups. As a call to action, together with Mailman School of Public Health and the Columbia School of Social Work, the School of General Studies created the Justice and Pandemics Preparedness Academy, an interdisciplinary, co-curricular activity for undergraduates across the University.

The Academy is an interdisciplinary experience consisting of introductory lectures, a weekly journal club, and production of an individual or collaborative project. It offers an opportunity for undergraduates to collaborate with one another and faculty mentors on service and research projects while exploring the history of pandemics, scientific epidemiological and social justice concepts, and frameworks of effective public health and social justice research and practice.

With successful completion of the program, students will strengthen their skills in critical thinking and reflection, research, speaking, and writing and be able to analyze the relationship between illness and the ways social, cultural, economic and political factors shape health outcomes.

The Academy will be offered each of the three semesters in the 2020-2021 academic year and will seek to accept 20 undergraduates each semester. In Fall 2020, the Academy welcomed 24 students.

Rosen-Metsch Establishes GS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce

GS Dean Lisa Rosen Metsch appointed eight staff members, four current students, and four alumni to the new GS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce. The committee is meeting regularly to develop its overall goals, identity initial areas of work, and implement a plan and timeline to work towards an anti-racist, multicultural school that builds on GS’s long-term commitment to educational access and equity for students of all backgrounds.
RECOGNITION
GS students were recently awarded prestigious scholarships and fellowships including:
- Belfer International and Global Affairs Fellowship at Harvard University
- Kathryn Davis Fellows for Peace
- Knight-Hennessy Scholars Program at Stanford University
- National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship
- Pat Tillman Scholars Program
- Schwarzman Scholars Program at Tsinghua University

“...I am thrilled to have joined the School of General Studies. I made a commitment when I began my career in higher education to join institutions that believe in transforming education with a profound interest in the overall student experience.”
— Marlyn Deila, EdD
Dean of Students at Columbia GS

In 2020, the Columbia Core Curriculum celebrated its centennial year. Today, all GS students take University Writing, Art Humanities, Music Humanities, and the Global Core. In Fall 2020, for the first time, GS students were able to enroll in Columbia College sections of Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization.

Current student James Van Hess served as Vice President of External Operations of Columbia University Formula SAE in 2019-2020. As a part of the group, he helped design, fabricate, assemble, and pilot a formula-style open-wheel vehicle. During summer 2020, he interned at Honda R&D as a simulation CAE engineer working with driver-in-the-loop simulations. In spring 2021, Van Hess will matriculate at SEAS for a master’s in mechanical engineering.

With nearly 500 veterans enrolled at GS, Columbia University boasts the highest undergraduate veteran student enrollment in the Ivy League—enrolling more than all other Ivy League schools combined—while maintaining a graduation rate above 90 percent and a record of job and graduate school placement that equals Columbia’s non-veteran graduates.

On June 1, Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz was selected to be the eighth chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). Prior to serving as chancellor, Schwartz served as provost at JTS and dean of the Gershon Kekst Graduate School. For 25 years, she was dean of List College, GS’s undergraduate Joint Program partner.
In General

Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers Honored For His Service To Veterans

On March 29, 2019 at the 9th Annual Columbia University Military Ball, Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers was honored with the Peter J. Awn Lifetime Service Award by members of U.S. Military Veterans of Columbia University (MIVets). The award honors a lifetime of outstanding support for military veterans and service members.

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart for recognizing me for this work that I’ve been called to,” Rodgers said. “But I have to ask one thing—be there with me as we go forward because there are so many great accomplishments ahead and there is so much more work to be done.”

As vice dean, Rodgers is the senior administrative officer of GS. During his time at Columbia University, he has gained broad experience identifying a variety of top-performing adult, returning, veteran, nontraditional, and traditional students, as well as developed innovative enrollment and retention strategies for these distinct populations. Rodgers’ impact on the workings of the School over the past two decades is profound.

“It was truly a heartwarming and an electrifying moment to see Curtis awarded the Peter J. Awn Lifetime Service Award,” said Lisa Rosen-Metsch ’90, Dean of Columbia University School of General Studies. “It is because of all that Curtis has done over the past 20 years that GS is the destination for student veterans. He is the reason why Columbia is a national leader in veteran transition and integration.

“Curtis is an exceptional, incredibly talented, brilliant, and kind leader who has mentored countless students, alumni, and staff over his 20 years at GS,” continued Rosen-Metsch. “When we announced his recognition, the room, in which Peter’s family was present along with dozens of MIVets who Curtis had personally recruited to Columbia and supported over the years, exploded with joy and thunderous applause, for it was so meaningful for Curtis to receive this award just one month after the loss of our beloved Dean Awn.

“Peter was never one to seek the spotlight, but somehow the spotlight always found him,” Rodgers said. “While he was always the first to thank everyone else and give credit to everyone else and was a reluctant recipient of all the honors and accolades he received during his life, this honor—the naming of the library on this campus—would be the one he would embrace most.”

The notable distinction preserves Awn’s legacy of belief in the power of nontraditional, innovative education.

New Public Health Concentration Prepares a “Global Citizenry”

By Nancy J. Brandwein

It is easy for college students to feel helpless in the face of ever-mounting crises: gun violence, the opioid epidemic, climate change, mass incarceration, healthcare inequities. However, a new special concentration in public health gives Columbia and Barnard undergraduates the perspective and tools with which to address these and other pressing national and global problems.

The number of public health programs for undergraduates has more than doubled since 2007, according to a study by the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health, but almost all of these programs are pre-professional. Victoria Rosner, Dean of Academic Affairs for the School of General Studies, emphasizes that this expressly liberal arts concentration aligns perfectly with Columbia’s Core Curriculum because, “Public health courses focus on meta level thinking. They focus on reasoning, analytical and critical thinking skills, and, most importantly ... using knowledge to help solve problems from multiple perspectives.”

Dana March, Director of Undergraduate Studies at Columbia College School of Public Health, considers public health key to developing a “global citizenry,” and after seeing undergraduate public health courses become ever more popular on campus, she proposed the concentration and teaches its foundation course: Introduction to Public Health: Population Health and Society. Other required courses are Fundamentals of Global Health, Social History of American Public Health, Your Longer Life: Biology, Person and Society, and Environmental Justice. Students must take five required courses and three electives to complete the concentration.

March notes that Columbia GS students, many of whom have witnessed the HIV and, now, coronavirus crises, and who come to school with more life experience, are “really well poised to take what they’re learning in the classroom and do even more with it.”

One such student is Jeffrey Scott Bailey ’17, who came to GS after a career in TV and film acting and three years as a surgical tech. Bailey will pursue a Doctor of Nursing Practice with a focus on meta level thinking. They focus on reasoning, analytical and critical thinking skills, and, most importantly ... using knowledge to help solve problems from multiple perspectives.”

The number of public health programs for undergraduates has more than doubled since 2007, according to a study by the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health, but almost all of these programs are pre-professional. Victoria Rosner, Dean of Academic Affairs for the School of General Studies, emphasizes that this expressly liberal arts concentration aligns perfectly with Columbia’s Core Curriculum because, “Public health courses focus on meta level thinking. They focus on reasoning, analytical and critical thinking skills, and, most importantly ... using knowledge to help solve problems from multiple perspectives.”

Dana March, Director of Undergraduate Studies at Columbia College School of Public Health, considers public health key to developing a “global citizenry,” and after seeing undergraduate public health courses become ever more popular on campus, she proposed the concentration and teaches its foundation course: Introduction to Public Health: Population Health and Society. Other required courses are Fundamentals of Global Health, Social History of American Public Health, Your Longer Life: Biology, Person and Society, and Environmental Justice. Students must take five required courses and three electives to complete the concentration.

March notes that Columbia GS students, many of whom have witnessed the HIV and, now, coronavirus crises, and who come to school with more life experience, are “really well poised to take what they’re learning in the classroom and do even more with it.”

One such student is Jeffrey Scott Bailey ’17, who came to GS after a career in TV and film acting and three years as a surgical tech. Bailey will pursue a Doctor of Nursing Practice with a focus on meta level thinking. They focus on reasoning, analytical and critical thinking skills, and, most importantly ... using knowledge to help solve problems from multiple perspectives.”
JTS’S 21ST CENTURY CAMPUS PROJECT

By Nancy J. Brandwein

In 2015, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) embarked on an ambitious capital improvement plan not only to bring the campus into the 21st century but also to make it a global center for Jewish life and community for decades to come. This 21st Century Campus Project includes a modern residence hall located within the flagship quadrangle at 122nd Street and Broadway, as well as a state-of-the-art library, performance spaces, and conference facility.

During the Fall 2019 semester the first first floor student apartments opened on the JTS campus.

"All of our new spaces are designed to encourage not only shared Jewish living, but innovation, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas," said Marc Gary, Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer of JTS. "Our new spaces are designed to encourage community among students and allow them to grow together with shared values, while also featuring large common areas for cooking, studying, and sharing meals on each floor. The residence hall also features a large light-filled "moadon," Hebrew for gathering space, where students can meet, work, relax, and hold holiday celebrations and social events.

The residence hall also features a large light-filled atrium that opens directly onto the JTS campus. The atrium is designed to encourage not only shared Jewish living, but innovation, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas." In keeping with JTS’s long history of hosting enriching community events, the performance space’s design will allow the school to present cutting-edge work by Jewish theatre, music, and performing artists, as well as discussions by leading thinkers, writers, and public figures on Judaism and significant issues of the day.

The new 200-seat auditorium will feature a larger stage, excellent acoustics, and advanced streaming technology, enabling events to reach an increasingly global audience. Joining all the buildings—old and new—a light-filled atrium will welcome visitors, encourage relation-hair, and reflect the inclusive, open, dynamic spirit of JTS in the 21st Century.

Dual Duos: Sibling Pairs Share Their International Dual Degree Experiences

By Nancy J. Brandwein

The Dual BA Program Between Columbia University and Sciences Po is such an exceptional undergraduate degree program that it is surprising when two members of the same family matriculate; yet, three sibling pairs have this Program in common.

Marie-Sophie ’16 (Reims) and Julie-Anne Revault ’18 (Menton) grew up in New York City as French citizens to French parents and attended high school at the Lycee Francois. "I always enjoyed comparing and contrasting both cultures," said Marie-Sophie. Her sister Julie-Anne concurred that growing up as a Frenchwoman in New York played a significant role in her decision to apply to the Dual BA Program, for when Julie-Anne attended her sister’s political science class at Sciences Po, the visit convinced her that the Program was "the place I needed to be.

Both share a keen interest in social sciences, a specialty of the French university. Marie-Sophie majored in economics at Sciences Po and Columbia, and she earned law degrees at Sciences Po and University of Pennsylvania. At Menton, Julie-Anne immersed herself in Mediterranean-Middle East Studies and double majored in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies (MESAAS) and political science at Columbia. Enrolling after her older sister meant Julie-Anne met a lot of people who knew her sibling, and they consequently had common friends, especially at Columbia.

Sisters Julia ’17 and Elisa ’19 Sisto both studied at Reims. Born to an Italian father and an Irish mother, Ignacio ’16 (Menton) and Monica ’20 (Reims) Villalon spent their early years in Senegal, and returned for summers while living in Gainesville, Florida during the school year. As friends stayed in that college town after high school, the siblings gravitated to an international experience and similar studies. Ignacio studied Middle East and Mediterranean political science and history at Menton and MESAAS at Columbia, which Monica pursued as well, along with the Africa program in economics at Reims. Both siblings agree that Ignacio’s expanded worldview influenced Monica’s decision to apply. “His points of cultural, social, and intellectual reference grew exponentially ... and I wanted to understand these ... too.”

For Ignacio, studying abroad had one unexpected effect. “Paradoxically it was through this program that I realized just what Americans I was … My sister and I talk about this quite a bit.” As with all “Dual Duos,” conversation is enriched by their shared transatlantic experiences.

By Nancy J. Brandwein

In 2015, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) embarked on an ambitious capital improvement plan not only to bring the campus into the 21st century but also to make it a global center for Jewish life and community for decades to come. This 21st Century Campus Project includes a modern residence hall located within the flagship quadrangle at 122nd Street and Broadway, as well as a state-of-the-art library, performance spaces, and conference facility.

During the Fall 2019 semester the first floor student apartments opened on the JTS campus. "All of our new spaces are designed to encourage not only shared Jewish living, but innovation, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas." In keeping with JTS’s long history of hosting enriching community events, the performance space’s design will allow the school to present cutting-edge work by Jewish theatre, music, and performing artists, as well as discussions by leading thinkers, writers, and public figures on Judaism and significant issues of the day. The new 200-seat auditorium will feature a larger stage, excellent acoustics, and advanced streaming technology, enabling events to reach an increasingly global audience. Joining all the buildings—old and new—a light-filled atrium will welcome visitors, encourage relation-hair, and reflect the inclusive, open, dynamic spirit of JTS in the 21st Century.

Dual Duos: Sibling Pairs Share Their International Dual Degree Experiences

By Nancy J. Brandwein

The Dual BA Program Between Columbia University and Sciences Po is such an exceptional undergraduate degree program that it is surprising when two members of the same family matriculate; yet, three sibling pairs have this Program in common.

Marie-Sophie ’16 (Reims) and Julie-Anne Revault ’18 (Menton) grew up in New York City as French citizens to French parents and attended high school at the Lycee Francois. "I always enjoyed comparing and contrasting both cultures," said Marie-Sophie. Her sister Julie-Anne concurred that growing up as a Frenchwoman in New York played a significant role in her decision to apply to the Dual BA Program, for when Julie-Anne attended her sister’s political science class at Sciences Po, the visit convinced her that the Program was “the place I needed to be.”

Both share a keen interest in social sciences, a specialty of the French university. Marie-Sophie majored in economics at Sciences Po and Columbia, and she earned law degrees at Sciences Po and University of Pennsylvania. At Menton, Julie-Anne immersed herself in Mediterranean-Middle East Studies and double majored in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies (MESAAS) and political science at Columbia. Enrolling after her older sister meant Julie-Anne met a lot of people who knew her sibling, and they consequently had common friends, especially at Columbia.

Sisters Julia ’17 and Elisa ’19 Sisto both studied at Reims. Born to an Italian father and an Irish mother, Ignacio ’16 (Menton) and Monica ’20 (Reims) Villalon spent their early years in Senegal, and returned for summers while living in Gainesville, Florida during the school year. As friends stayed in that college town after high school, the siblings gravitated to an international experience and similar studies. Ignacio studied Middle East and Mediterranean political science and history at Menton and MESAAS at Columbia, which Monica pursued as well, along with the Africa program in economics at Reims. Both siblings agree that Ignacio’s expanded worldview influenced Monica’s decision to apply. “His points of cultural, social, and intellectual reference grew exponentially ... and I wanted to understand these ... too.”

For Ignacio, studying abroad had one unexpected effect. “Paradoxically it was through this program that I realized just how American I was … My sister and I talk about this quite a bit.” As with all “Dual Duos,” conversation is enriched by their shared transatlantic experiences.

By Nancy J. Brandwein

In 2015, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) embarked on an ambitious capital improvement plan not only to bring the campus into the 21st century but also to make it a global center for Jewish life and community for decades to come. This 21st Century Campus Project includes a modern residence hall located within the flagship quadrangle at 122nd Street and Broadway, as well as a state-of-the-art library, performance spaces, and conference facility.

During the Fall 2019 semester the first floor student apartments opened on the JTS campus. "All of our new spaces are designed to encourage not only shared Jewish living, but innovation, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas." In keeping with JTS’s long history of hosting enriching community events, the performance space’s design will allow the school to present cutting-edge work by Jewish theatre, music, and performing artists, as well as discussions by leading thinkers, writers, and public figures on Judaism and significant issues of the day. The new 200-seat auditorium will feature a larger stage, excellent acoustics, and advanced streaming technology, enabling events to reach an increasingly global audience. Joining all the buildings—old and new—a light-filled atrium will welcome visitors, encourage relation-hair, and reflect the inclusive, open, dynamic spirit of JTS in the 21st Century.

Dual Duos: Sibling Pairs Share Their International Dual Degree Experiences

By Nancy J. Brandwein

The Dual BA Program Between Columbia University and Sciences Po is such an exceptional undergraduate degree program that it is surprising when two members of the same family matriculate; yet, three sibling pairs have this Program in common.

Marie-Sophie ’16 (Reims) and Julie-Anne Revault ’18 (Menton) grew up in New York City as French citizens to French parents and attended high school at the Lycee Francois. "I always enjoyed comparing and contrasting both cultures," said Marie-Sophie. Her sister Julie-Anne concurred that growing up as a Frenchwoman in New York played a significant role in her decision to apply to the Dual BA Program, for when Julie-Anne attended her sister’s political science class at Sciences Po, the visit convinced her that the Program was “the place I needed to be.”

Both share a keen interest in social sciences, a specialty of the French university. Marie-Sophie majored in economics at Sciences Po and Columbia, and she earned law degrees at Sciences Po and University of Pennsylvania. At Menton, Julie-Anne immersed herself in Mediterranean-Middle East Studies and double majored in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies (MESAAS) and political science at Columbia. Enrolling after her older sister meant Julie-Anne met a lot of people who knew her sibling, and they consequently had common friends, especially at Columbia.

Sisters Julia ’17 and Elisa ’19 Sisto both studied at Reims. Born to an Italian father and an Irish mother, Ignacio ’16 (Menton) and Monica ’20 (Reims) Villalon spent their early years in Senegal, and returned for summers while living in Gainesville, Florida during the school year. As friends stayed in that college town after high school, the siblings gravitated to an international experience and similar studies. Ignacio studied Middle East and Mediterranean political science and history at Menton and MESAAS at Columbia, which Monica pursued as well, along with the Africa program in economics at Reims. Both siblings agree that Ignacio’s expanded worldview influenced Monica’s decision to apply. “His points of cultural, social, and intellectual reference grew exponentially ... and I wanted to understand those ... too.”

For Ignacio, studying abroad had one unexpected effect. “Paradoxically it was through this program that I realized just how American I was … My sister and I talk about this quite a bit.” As with all “Dual Duos,” conversation is enriched by their shared transatlantic experiences.
Peter J. Awn (1944 – 2019) was one of the most beloved and, as Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger eloquently stated, impactful people in the history of Columbia University School of General Studies. No one cared more for our entire school community—students, staff, alumni, friends, and family—than Dean Awn.

Peter served as Dean of the School of General Studies from 1997 to 2017. When he passed on February 17, 2019 from injuries sustained when he was struck by a car weeks before, the loss to our community was overwhelming. “Peter personified the School’s character, its values, and its mission,” wrote President Bollinger in a letter to the community, “in every way that mattered, he and the School were one. This unmatched legacy, in addition to his remarkable scholarship and teaching as Professor of Islamic and Comparative Religion, made Peter, without question, one of the essential leaders of Columbia University’s modern era.”

Bollinger went on to say, “The rare gift [Peter] was able to bestow upon generations of General Studies students was his unconditional belief that Columbia was better for their presence and his insistence that they believe this as fervently as he did. Peter recognized that General Studies represented the “cutting edge of undergraduate education,” as he put it, and under his stewardship the School has been able to fulfill its promise. For him, that meant a student body heavily comprising student veterans, first-generation students, and international students, whose age and life experiences would further diversify and enrich our undergraduate classrooms.”

Peter was a rare and special person who leaves many legacies. President Bollinger said during the May 14, 2019 celebration of Peter’s life, “He was a mix of personal qualities and life experiences: an ex-Jesuit priest, a scholar of Islamic studies—his life, like his socks, was always a surprise. He was the very embodiment of a humanist in the true sense of that word, as a person who relished the realities of the diversity of humanity.”

Larry J. Lawrence ’69, ’11BUS described Peter’s personality as effervescent and slightly mischievous, saying there was “a twinkle almost always present in his eyes,” yet behind “the soft, deep chuckle which signaled his delight at the turn of the conversation,” was, as John H. Coatsworth, then Columbia University Provost, described him, a maverick—a strong manager with razor sharp logic and a clear vision of what would best benefit Columbia students. Peter was motivated to serve others, Lawrence explained. He possessed “a selfless devotion … first as a priest, then as a scholar and teacher, then as the leader of a block of nontraditional students, a role in which he exemplified the concept of leadership as service rather than as a quest for any form of individual glory or recognition.”

Frédéric Mion, President of Sciences Po, the French university with which GS has a cutting-edge dual degree program, said in tribute, Peter’s “mentorship, charismatic presence, and genuine kindness were an inspiration to students and staff alike.”

“Dean Awn took on the bold issues from fighting for the rights of transgender students to supporting the opening of a food pantry in Lerner Hall,” said Dean of the School of General Studies Lisa Rosen-Metsch ’90. “It is only Dean Awn who could have the gravitas, the elegance, and the courage to be the person who was a loud voice in both bringing ROTC back to campus and being the faculty member to cut the ribbon for the Donaldson Lounge for LGBTQ students in Schapiro Hall.”

A generous educator, Peter was known to be completely invested in his students. Najam Haider, Associate Professor in the Department of Religion, explained that Peter, who taught Introduction to Islam for decades, was famous for grading and commenting on every single paper himself. “He had a thoroughly unique presence and an amazing knack for presenting information without losing the interest of an audience,” Haider said.

Over the years “Dean Awn gave us so many gifts and tied so many bows for thousands of us at Columbia,” waxed poetic Rosen-Metsch. “There are few people in this world that I can say have had such a tremendous impact through his personal relationships, teaching, scholarship, service, and to our social structure here at Columbia. As we reflect on Peter’s legacy and heal from our loss, I encourage all of us to honor his memory by embracing the opportunities to reevaluate our beliefs and to celebrate the amazing possibilities that occur when we open our minds and our classrooms.”

Remembering School of General Studies Dean Emeritus

Peter J. Awn

A beacon of healing and redemption for so many
By Eric Butterman

They required laser focus on their ultimate goal. But what happens when their dream career is closer to the end than the beginning? Or what if the music stops all together? They rely on the foundation of their Columbia education to help formulate their next moves.

Life is a dance. And for those who live to move, the tempo of life may change, but their desire for motion keeps beating long after the stage lights dim.

Stepping Into A Spot On A Different Side of the Curtain

Since starting to dance, most professional dancers sacrificed, showed discipline, and gave themselves over to an immense dream.

Michael Novak ’09, who tried many popular sports in those northwest Chicago suburbs yet failed to find his ballplayer footing, would ultimately succeed as an athlete on an actual stage. “When I found dancing, I found a part of myself,” Novak says. And after a fateful audition with the famed Paul Taylor Company in 2008, Novak found he had only just begun to compete for a spot. “The first time, I at least made it to the final group—I looked at that as encouragement, not an exit.”

Then, the next time, in 2010, Paul Taylor himself would choose Novak—not for the last time.

In 2018, at age 87, Taylor thought he had made his last curtain call. But a year later, he changed his mind. “I didn’t expect it, and I knew I just had so much to offer,” Novak says. “There’s a terrific history here, and I want to honor it.”

Finding Her Voice

Alicia Graf Mack ’03 has a resume that flies through the air and causes all to take notice. Both having been a principal dancer at the Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, she now calls The Juilliard School her home. As director of its dance division since July of 2018, she inherently knows the hunger the dancers has been very special, and, working with students. “Getting to know the performers, my heart bursts with pride when I see how much work they’ve put in,” she says.

As Graf Mack’s performing career gets closer to its final steps, she seeks gratitude. “I wanted to be a ballerina since I was a toddler, and it was unimaginable that it would happen,” she says, still with a sense of surprise. “I toured so many places, performed in major theatres, and had a chance to inspire young people who wanted to have a similar career.” And now, from her position at Juilliard, she continues that work, yet from the other side of the curtain.

Photos: Gregory Costanzo

Novak knows that one day the curtain will fall for the last time for him as a performing dancer, and he feels fortunate about having this second act in his career. “I see the opportunity but also the trust that [Paul] put in me when he chose me,” Novak says. “There’s a terrific history here, and I want to honor it.”

“I actually thought I would flunk out of Columbia because you’re required in classes to contribute to the discussions,” she says. “I was so afraid to talk and share. But then I actually ended up taking a public speaking course which made the difference—so much that I took it twice.”

Alicia Graf Mack, director since Paul Taylor Company’s founder, Novak, much to his own surprise, was selected to become the second artistic director since Paul Taylor Company’s founding in 1954.

“Different skills in communications were widely emphasized,” he says, explaining that partly because of his liberal arts degree, “I have the confidence I can do this job. Now it’s so much more about what I can help others to do.”

Novak knows that one day the curtain will fall for the last time for him as a performing dancer, and he feels fortunate about having this second act in his career. “I see the opportunity but also the trust that [Paul] put in me when he chose me,” Novak says. “There’s a terrific history here, and I want to honor it.”

Finding Her Voice

Alicia Graf Mack ’03 has a resume that flies through the air and causes all to take notice. Both having been a principal dancer at the Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, she now calls The Juilliard School her home. As director of its dance division since July of last year, she inherently knows the hunger the dancers has been very special, and, working with students. “Getting to know the dancers has been very special, and, with their performances, my heart bursts with pride when I see how much work they’ve put in,” she says.

As Graf Mack’s performing career gets closer to its final steps, she seeks gratitude. “I wanted to be a ballerina since I was a toddler, and it was unimaginable that it would happen,” she says, still with a sense of surprise. “I toured so many places, performed in major theatres, and had a chance to inspire young people who wanted to have a similar career.” And now, from her position at Juilliard, she continues that work, yet from the other side of the curtain.

“IT was a hard decision to move on, but I hadn’t been home in eight years, and I knew I wanted to come back to the United States. I felt returning to college was part of doing the first step right.” –Larissa Higgins ‘10

“I actually thought I would flunk out of Columbia because you’re required in classes to contribute to the discussions,” she says. “I was so afraid to talk and share. But then I actually ended up taking a public speaking course which made the difference—so much that I took it twice.”

Graf Mack singled out economics, accounting, and finance classes as particular standout courses. Not exactly unrelated when you consider fundraising is a key part of her current job description. Of course, the most important part of her position is working with students. “Getting to know the dancers has been very special, and, with their performances, my heart bursts with pride when I see how much work they’ve put in,” she says.

As Graf Mack’s performing career gets closer to its final steps, she sees gratitude. “I wanted to be a ballerina since I was a toddler, and it was unimaginable that it would happen,” she says, still with a sense of surprise. “I toured so many places, performed in major theatres, and had a chance to inspire young people who wanted to have a similar career.” And now, from her position at Juilliard, she continues that work, yet from the other side of the curtain.

Higgins’ Place in the World

Larissa Higgins ’10 traveled the world since she was a teen, dancing for the Hartford Ballet, Hamburg Ballet, and Dresden Semperoper Ballet, but always knowing that eventually, her world of dance would stop spinning. Despite her career success, she made the decision to walk away in 2006. She has not danced professionally since.

“It was a hard decision to move on, but I basically hadn’t been home in eight years, and I knew I wanted to come back to the United States,” she says. “I felt returning to college was part of doing that first step right.”

While at Columbia, Higgins found a way to still be involved in her old life—a move that not only helped quench her thirst to share her enthusiasm for dance, but also inspired her career aspirations. A founder of Columbia Dance Collaborative in 2007, together with fellow students, she brought professional and amateur dancers from the University community together to share the joy of this age-old art. “But, again, I made the decision not to dance,” she says. “I needed to be done with it, so I instead focused on the business side, such as public relations. Helping get Columbia Dance Collaborative off the ground showed me I loved being a part of launching new things.”

She has continued to do just that. Over the last few years through her roles...
appearance was liberating …” she says. “I had to look physically and my career didn’t depend on it, and I leap at that opportunity.” That meant finding an answer to the question of who she was separate from ballet. Columbia School of General Studies, she says, helped reveal that. With every stimulating class, with every success, she would find a new clue to answering her personal question.

She thought she would be a journalist. An internship at a media company gave her one of her biggest clues—the business side of that company interested her more.

In 2006, Melamed graduated as valedictorian with a bachelor’s in political science. After Columbia, she was recruited by Lehman Brothers and embarked on a career as an investment banker. She worked with Lehman Brothers Private Equity, where she helped them through bankruptcy during the financial crisis. Eventually she became vice president at Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc. and an associate client advisor for Bridgewater Associates, one of the most well-known hedge funds in the country. She recently started as a principal at KKR, working with various U.S. helping countless others with her outspoken advocacy. After 5 years with ABT, she took a personal battle of having an eating disorder.

Regardless of where their lives have taken them, all four GS graduates shared a belief in dance’s importance, which continues to this day.

“For my point of view, ballet is a unique art form because it is transcendent, both for the audience and for the dancers,” Higgins says. “There is a magic to ballet that still excites me to this day, and I love when others are moved by that magic.”

For Novak, who spoke to us from a past tour in the UK, she has seen how it can bring people together around the globe. “I’ve watched from shows in different countries that what dance communicates in a way that breaks language barriers,” he says. “The visuals speak in their own way.”

Among other reasons, Graf Mack loves the response children have to the art. “You see how their faces light up,” she says. “It inspires like few things.”

And for Melamed? Well, it even brought her something she considers a gift through a child. When her daughter asked to go to the ballet, Melamed reluctantly agreed.

“She fell in love with it and—I never thought I’d say this—but we go very often now and she is following in my footsteps studying ballet herself!” Melamed shares. “It’s come back into my life in an extremely positive way through her. Through my daughter, I remembered why I loved it so much to begin with … and, just as importantly, I remembered the joy it brings to others.”

Spotlight on
James Colgrove
‘01MSPH, ’04GSAS

Examining the relationship between individual rights and the collective well-being

By Allison Scola

In the midst of the spring 2020 semester, when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, faculty member and dean of the Postbacalaureate Premedical Program James Colgrove ’01MSPH, ’04GSAS was teaching The Social History of American Public Health and Coercion and Persuasion in Public Health: Ethical and Historical Perspectives. Colgrove had published many works about epidemics, vaccinations, and the relationship between public health policies and social, political, and legal processes, when unfolded before him in real time was all too familiar.

“When I look around at what is happening, I see very little that’s new. These themes of … the relationship between individuals and the state, about what are the appropriate limits of public health to control the pandemic… these have always been the questions related to disease control,” Colgrove explained.

Indeed, Colgrove has spent much of the better part of the past two decades writing about the history of public health, infectious diseases, communication, and ethics, and as a result, he sees history repeating itself, if even not exactly. “Mark Twain is attributed as saying, ‘History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.’” Colgrove said. “That’s true with coronavirus.”

“There were anti-mask societies in 1918. [A century ago], there was much less of an emphasis on public health,” Colgrove said. “But when I look at what is happening now, I see the same thing.”

“I love mentoring students,” he said. “Helping them realize the value of their prior preparation for what they are now doing is rewarding.”

Although Colgrove describes himself as painfully shy, when asked who he would choose if he could have dinner with anyone throughout history, he responded, “Could I have a dinner party?” Particularly interested in early 20th century United States history, he named his notable guests as sociologist, activist, and author W. E. B. Du Bois, nurse, social worker, and public health official Lilian Wald, and workers’rights advocate and Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins. Such renowned diners would certainly offer stimulating conversation and place Colgrove in his ideal domain—a group of smart people talking about challenging issues that face humanity time and again.

FEAT U R E  S T ORY
2002 was a good year for Pavan Surapaneni ’06. A one-time high school dropout, Surapaneni had overcome his teenage struggles with substance abuse and was preparing to graduate from a therapeutic boarding school with stellar test scores and a brace of college classes at a leading liberal arts college under his belt.

There was only one problem: the traditional top-tier colleges and universities he had applied to were not interested in a 21-year-old with a troubled past.

“They felt like I was too big a risk,” says Surapaneni, who is now a partner at a leading global law firm.

Risk was also on the minds of Vice Dean Curtis Rodgers, then Dean of Enrollment Management and Communications, and Peter Awn, then Dean of the School of General Studies. But for very different reasons.

Rodgers and Awn were not sure if Surapaneni was ready to jump into the academic pressure cooker of an Ivy League school. But as Rodgers recently explained from his office in Lewisohn Hall, the greater danger seemed to lie in passing over a nontraditional applicant “with all kinds of contributions to make.”

“You ultimately took a risk on me—a huge risk, I think,” Surapaneni says.

It paid off immediately. Surapaneni served in student government and on the Ivy Council while double-majoring in political science and MEALAC (Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures). He taught conflict resolution to fifth graders in Washington Heights through a volunteer program sponsored by Community Impact, the University’s largest student service organization. And he graduated as salutatorian before going on to Harvard Law School, where he landed a coveted summer associate position at his current firm following his first semester—with only one semester’s worth of law school grades in hand.

“That opportunity came about almost entirely on the strength of what I’d done at GS,” he says.

These days, Surapaneni spends his time helping clients navigate complex high-stakes transactions such as multibillion-dollar real estate deals and sales of major-league sports teams. Yet he continues to volunteer, serving on the School’s Board of Visitors and on the board of Saving Teens, a nonprofit that helps troubled teens and their families cope with anxiety, depression, and addiction.

For more than 20 years, GS Admissions has used a distinctive process to successfully evaluate prospective students’ potential impact on the greater good at Columbia and beyond. The stories of four alumni who are now well-established in their chosen careers illustrate the powerful results of this holistic, time-tested process.
A 10-year-old high school or college transcript might reflect an applicant’s academic history, but it is a poor guide to one’s current ability.

Consider David Drury ’08, who currently teaches history and classical literature at Estancia Valley Classical Academy, a charter school near Albuquerque, New Mexico. After graduating from high school on Staten Island in the late 1970s, Drury went straight to work on the docks at Port Mobil, a petroleum storage facility in the southwest corner of the borough. At age 22, he joined the FDNY; and he spent the next 20 years as a firefighter before retiring in 2001 after working on the ruins of the World Trade Center.

Towards the end of his firefighting career, Drury worked as an instructor at the FDNY Academy, an experience that convinced him to pursue a second career in teaching. Drury admits that coming to Columbia was intimidating—an ironic situation for a guy who once ran into burning buildings for a living, but an understandable one given that he had been out of school for nearly three decades.

“I lacked the confidence that I could handle this level of academic expectation,” he says.

Drury may have lacked confidence, but GS did not. As Rodgers puts it, other schools tend to accept nontraditional candidates like Drury in spite of who they are, whereas GS admits them because of who they are. Rather than viewing their unconventional backgrounds as liabilities, the School sees these as assets: crucial elements in building a rich and varied student body. “For a 17 or 18-year-old to engage in class with someone like Dave Drury? That’s incredible,” says Marinaccio.

Drury himself could not have been happier. By mapping in history and minor ing in education, he was able to pick up real-world teaching experience at the Bronx School for Law and Finance while fulfilling the coursework he needed for his New York Social Studies Teaching Certification. “It was a really great trifecta,” he says.

After graduation, Drury earned a master’s degree from St. John’s College in Santa Fe, digesting a curriculum of Great Books in small seminar classes structured around the Socratic method—something he says he could not have managed without the education and work ethic he acquired at GS. Drury now uses the same methods and materials to teach his students at Estancia Valley. “I am literally doing exactly what I planned to do,” he says.

One might argue that GS was willing to gamble on Surapaneni when its peer institutions were not. But if GS took a risk with Surapaneni—or indeed with any of the GS alumni profiled here, all of whom are now eight to 15 years into highly successful careers—it was a highly calculated one, the end result of a unique admissions process that is custom-tailored to gauge the potential of nontraditional students.

Evaluating nontraditional applicants poses a variety of challenges. On the one hand, the relevance of grades and test scores—the traditional measures of academic success used by most traditional undergraduate admissions offices—fades with time; a 10-year-old high school or college transcript might reflect an applicant’s academic history, but it is a poor guide to one’s current ability. SAT scores, for example, are less predictive of successful outcomes for GS students than they are for Columbia College enrollees—and less predictive still than the School’s own in-house assessment tools.

On the other hand, conventional metrics completely ignore the rich backgrounds that nontraditional applicants bring with them. Weighing high school transcripts and standardized test scores, says Jessica Marinaccio, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid at Columbia College, is “entirely different than understanding someone’s job or their life choices.” Consequently, while GS and Columbia College are essentially looking for the same thing—i.e., evidence that applicants can succeed at Columbia—GS admissions officers must dig deeper to find it.

Part of that involves an application process that is designed for students who have spent time away from school. (See “The Life of a GS Application, opposite page”). Among other things, GS requires candidates to submit a lengthy autobiographical essay explaining why they have chosen to enter such a rigorous academic environment at this point in their lives—and what in their past has prepared them to handle it.

But it also involves an admissions team that specializes in determining the motivation, the potential, and the overall fit of applicants who present very differently than high schoolers, and who may be very different people than they were as teenagers. It takes time to extrapolate a person’s current academic potential from their experiences outside of the classroom, and the learning curve can be steep; according to Rodgers, it takes several admissions cycles to become adept at interpreting the files of GS applicants. But the climb is worth it.

That may be especially true of those applications where the team must peer more deeply into a person’s history to identify what Rodgers calls “the moment of transformation.” Unlike the more obvious cases where applicants have demonstrated such extreme discipline and success in their lives that there is a clear connection to future success in the classroom—the principal ballet dancer, the Olympic athlete, the Navy SEAL—these candidates require more careful consideration.

“We look to understand how their time away from school has prepared them for the rigors of the undergraduate classroom at Columbia,” Rodgers says.
The Admissions Committee is adept at sussing out whether an applicant is poised to take full advantage of their time at Columbia; at seeing an applicant is poised to take full advantage of their time at GS; at gauging them clearly for who they are and what they are capable of, even if others cannot.

Inspired by the diversity of the GS community, Rejwan came to New York a very different person than she had been on her first collegiate go-round: possessed of a work ethic forged by years in the film industry, determined to get everything she could out of her GS experience, and grateful for the opportunity to do so.

“I felt so lucky to be exposed to so many diverse lives and experiences,” she says. “And it enriched my own.”

After graduation, Rejwan moved back to Los Angeles and became assistant to filmmaker J.J. Abrams, who gave her the chance to coproduce Star Wars: The Force Awakens for Lucasfilm. She went on to produce Abrams’s second Star Wars feature, The Rise of Skywalker, collaborating with him from beginning (developing the story, joining him on set during shoots) to end (choosing trailers, designing marketing campaigns).

Now senior vice president for live-action development and production at Lucasfilm, Rejwan finds herself drawing regularly on the skills she acquired at GS—in particular, the ones she developed under Guy Gallo, a former adjunct professor of screenwriting at the University who wrote several highly regarded Hollywood films. Studying with Gallo “really changed the way I approached reading scripts,” says Rejwan. “To this day, it informs my instincts in terms of how I approach any kind of material.”

Rejwan was primed and ready for that kind of transformative experience, and the admissions team knew it. But that is only because they have become adept at sussing out whether an applicant is poised to take full advantage of their time at GS; at gauging them clearly for who they are and what they are capable of, even if others cannot.

When fashion-industry labor activist Sara Ziff ‘11 first considered applying to GS, for instance, she worried that her years as a fashion model might count against her. Sussing out whether an applicant is poised to take full advantage of their time at GS; at gauging them clearly for who they are and what they are capable of, even if others cannot.

When fashion-industry labor activist Sara Ziff ‘11 first considered applying to GS, for instance, she worried that her years as a fashion model might count against her. Sussing out whether an applicant is poised to take full advantage of their time at GS; at gauging them clearly for who they are and what they are capable of, even if others cannot.

Despite that moment of clarity, however, Rejwan felt that she had what she calls “unfinished business with education.”

For a 17- or 18-year-old to engage in any Ivy League institution while continuing to work part-time, Ziff worried, however, that she would not be taken seriously; that her modeling career would be dismissed as frivolous, and that she would be seen as someone who could not possibly enrich the GS community.

At the admissions team saw, however, was her potential.

Classes in labor history and feminist literature helped Ziff frame her own experiences in the fashion industry—the sexual harassment, the pressure to lose weight—as labor rights issues; and she began to think about organizing her fellow fashion models.

In 2012, Ziff founded the nonprofit Model Alliance to fight for basic labor protections for models. But she soon broadened its mission to promote fair treatment, equal opportunity, and sustainable practices from the runway to the factory floor, taking up the cause of garment industry workers in Bangladesh and pushing for state and federal legislation to protect child models here in the United States.

Following the rise of the #MeToo movement, Ziff turned her attention to combating human trafficking within the fashion industry. She also initiated the RESPECT Program, which urges brands, modeling agencies, photographers, and other fashion-industry players to accept a legally binding code of conduct aimed at stamping out sexual harassment and workplace abuse.

Ziff credits GS with giving her the confidence and the conceptual framework to do the work that she does today. And she emphasizes how important it is for the School gives nontraditional students from all walks of life both a world-class education and the means to apply it in meaningful ways.

“It’s essential that people have access to an education that will allow them to go back to their communities with the tools they need to be advocates, and to bring about the change we need,” she says.

Providing nontraditional students with the tools they require to achieve their goals and fulfill their potential is what GS is ultimately about. The admissions team is at the forefront of that effort, identifying applicants who have what it takes to thrive at the School and contribute to the Columbia community—and to society as a whole.

“How will they fit into a classroom with Columbia College students, and what will they have to contribute to that classroom based on their past experience?” asks Rodgers. “What will a 32-year-old combat veteran who served in Afghanistan be able to contribute to a foreign policy class?”

These are the kinds of questions that the admissions team asks, asking that they have become expert at answering.

Of course the same qualities that predict success for Columbia College students—qualities that, according to Marincaccio, include independence, resilience, creativity, intellectual curiosity, and a desire to draw connections between ideas and to engage with the world—also predict success for GS students. But identifying those attributes in someone who has experienced a lengthy school dropout, a 20-year veteran of the NYPD, a 10-year veteran of the modeling industry, a Hollywood insider whose first stab at college did not quite pan out—provide ample proof that the School’s time-tested methods do indeed work.

Just as importantly, those outcomes prove that taking thoughtful risks can pay off for everyone concerned.
Recognizing that attending GS is not limited to the matriculant, as part of New Student Orientation each semester, parents and families of incoming GS students are invited to attend Family Orientation, an event that is aimed at introducing loved ones to the community and resources available at the University that will support “their student” during her time at Columbia. Pictured with Dean of Academic Affairs Victoria Rosner ’90CC, ’92GSAS, ’99GSAS (center) from January’s New Student Orientation are new undergraduates Rachel Adams (second from left) and Iynul Waseekah Rizwan (third from right). Rizwan, who described feeling “simply ecstatic!” that day, was accompanied by her husband Zainul Rizwan (first from left) and her two younger children Wais and Mareeha (first and second from right, respectively). Rizwan’s two older children are both in high school and were not able to attend; however, she said having a caring family and supportive husband who participated in Family Orientation was, “frosting and a cherry on top of the cake” of matriculating at Columbia GS.
By Eric Butterman

Calvin Reynolds ’52, ’59BUS has truly had a global career. From Uniroyal Europe to working with the United Nations, he has experienced and contributed. But, when he looks back, he credits Columbia University School of General Studies as a vital contributor to what he accomplished and to who he became.

“I just wasn’t a very motivated student before General Studies,” he admits. “It made me more well-rounded ... Some may be surprised to know that the logic and astronomy classes made as big a difference as any in helping me expand my appreciation for learning.”

It was his classmates as well. “I was one of the few students who wasn’t a veteran of World War II,” he says. “They were so focused after what they’d been through, and that also encouraged me by example to reach higher in academics.”

Reynolds contributed his own military service from 1952 to 1955, serving as a lieutenant and an air intelligence officer in the Naval Reserve. After being stationed in several posts throughout the world, he embarked on a career with international finance at Columbia, my first job at Uniroyal was bringing together marketing, financial, and engineering information on foreign investments. I wrote recommendations for building a factory in Cuba, and I also worked on one in Venezuela and other places,” he says. “When the change in Cuba occurred, I worked on one in Scotland. These were rich experiences that created a foundation.”

After Uniroyal, he served as vice president of the National Foreign Trade Council and then Organization Resources Counselors (ORC) as a senior vice president and later, a senior counsel. “With the National Foreign Trade Council, I helped make the human resource activity with international assignments a major force, and that led to eventually being recruited by ORC,” he says. “At ORC, one of the major things I was able to do was set up a subsidiary in Japan. I [also] did expert witnessing in different legal affairs, primarily for Japanese companies.”

Still Learning

Now retired, Reynolds is still quite active, even ballroom dancing multiple times a week. “I was very involved in choir as a child and never lost the love of music,” he says. “This was just a new way to be a part of it, I actually took it up in my 80s. I like to have the attitude that it’s never too late to learn something new.”

Though Reynolds has contributed to many worthy causes, he admits donating to General Studies is his favorite. He sees, in a way, that they have grown up together—since General Studies was in its infancy when he enrolled. “There aren’t many of us still alive from those early days,” he says, even allowing a chuckle. “It’s been special to see what it’s become. General Studies truly helped me who I am, and I want to help it do the same for others ... You don’t forget an experience like that.”

“General Studies truly helped make me who I am, and I want to help it do the same for others.”
– Calvin Reynolds ’52, ’59BUS

Our top goal at GS is to strengthen our financial aid program so we can support every student in need. With your generosity, we can alleviate financial hardship and allow students to focus on their studies and achieve their goal of attaining a Columbia education.

The Columbia Commitment Campaign is a university-wide initiative to address world issues from climate change to social justice. The Columbia Commitment builds partnerships with donors and volunteers sharing an urgent sense of what Columbians can do for our students and the world. At GS, we are focused on providing a world-class education in pursuit of social justice. GS is set to surpass our goal of raising $35 million to support our students.

Making Strides: Giving Day 2015 to 2020

Columbia Giving Day is a spirited world-wide fundraising event produced to engage alumni, students, parents, and friends to donate to schools, initiatives, and departments across the university.

Did you know?

The Board of Visitors raised over $200,000 for a student-centric COVID-19 emergency fund.

$35,000,000

Seven new GS scholarships were established in 2020

$30 million dollars a year is given to General Studies students in financial aid. Ideally, to support our students’ needs, GS would offer $45 million dollars a year for financial aid.

$10,280,200

The Center for Veteran Transition and Integration raised $2.6 million in the last two years, including two major grants from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). The Center is gaining national recognition for its work with veterans.

Thank you for changing lives that change the world!
Class Day 2019

PHOTOS BY BRUCE GILBERT

1. Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch ’90 rejoices with the Class of 2019.
2. Class Day Speaker Sara Ziff ’11
3. Class of 2019 Valedictorian Brittany Summer
4. GS 2019 Campbell Award winner Raisa Filoi, Dean Rosen-Metsch, and Alumni Key Award winner Yona Aryeh Korsogld
5. Dean Rosen-Metsch addresses the graduates and their families.
6. The graduates cheer for their colleagues.
7. Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger
8. Eytan (Ethan) Penn, a graduate of the Joint Program with List College of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)
9. Acting Dean of Students Ivonne Rojas ’12GSSAS presents the graduates to family and friends.
10. Dean Rosen-Metsch congratulates graduates.
POSTBAC PREMED
Class Day 2019

PHOTOS BY BRUCE GILBERT

1. Andrew Sunshine ’79CC, ’83GSAS, ’89GSAS, ’91GSAS, Associate Dean of Students, addresses graduates.
2. The faculty and staff of the Postbac Premed Program recognize the graduates.
3. Graduate Catherine Jennings delivers the student address.
4. Dean Lisa Rosen-Mentsch ’90 recognizes the graduates.
5. Postbac graduates show off their new scrubs.
6. Rachel Monane with Mike Allen, Senior Assistant Dean of Students.
7. Class Day keynote speaker, Dr. Olajide Williams, Chief of Staff of the Department of Neurology and an Associate Professor at Columbia University.
8. Always attentive, the Postbac graduates listen to the wisdom imparted by the day’s speakers.
9. Graduates celebrate their accomplishment.
GS Bachelor of Arts Recipients

Class of 2019 salutatorian Matthew Hess is a Marine Corps Reserve veteran and first-generation college student. He grew up in Ogden, Utah where, because of family financial struggles, he started working at a young age. In 2009, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. After completing a tour in Okinawa, Japan, he volunteered for the Marine Security Guard (MSG) Program, eventually working at embassies in New Delhi, Beijing, and Cairo. Matthew excelled in the Corps and was recognized for his leadership. At GS, Matthew served on the Veteran Advisory Board and volunteered with the Veteran Mentor Program, where he was instrumental in developing the Program as a peer-to-peer support system that values inclusive community building. Matthew was awarded a President's Global Fellowship to study abroad in Amman, Jordan and a Gilman Scholarship that allowed him to intern with the Department of State’s U.S. Embassy in Muscat, Oman. Matthew received a Senior Award from the School of General Studies, recognizing his dedication to service and leadership within GS and the Columbia University community. After matriculating at GS, he excelled academically. Transferring to Northern Virginia Community College, where she excelled academically. Transferring to Northern Virginia Community College, she earned her associate degree from Hudson County Community College and with USAID in Washington. Also during her time away from school, she studied for which she was looking. The daughter of a mother who was born in Cairo and a father who grew up with the Film Academy, she helped curate and coordinate free screenings for the campus community. Blair was also the production and interstitial content producer for the DNA, the National Cinematic Society, coordinating productions, building films, television, and web series for student films. During her time at GS, she directed, wrote, edited, and produced 16 films, and her interest in writing and filmmaking blossomed. She attended the MFA summer TV writing intensive where a pilot she wrote was chosen to be part of the Telefilm, and the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts - Pitch NY. In addition to receiving a scholarship as an emerging content creator to NALIP Media Summit, she also interned at Quebrada Entertainment and Assemble Media. Blair majored in film and media studies at GS, and she is currently an MFA candidate in film and TV production at University of Southern California, where she was awarded the George Lucas scholarship, which seeks to support individuals that inhabit the United States including the Boston Opera House, the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center. Upon her 50th anniversary, she performed a leading role in front of 50,000 people at Boston Common. Off stage, Brittany worked with the Boston Ballet’s Education and Community Initiatives division. Additionally, she studied at Northeastern University. Once matriculated at GS, Brittany studied psychology and served on the membership committee of Columbia Women in Business and volunteered for the GS Mentor Program. Outside of her activities at Columbia, she served as an intern at the private equity firm KKR and with Heidrick & Struggles, an executive search and leadership consulting firm. After graduation, Brittany joined Heidrick & Struggles as an associate in their artificial intelligence and data & analytics practice. Her main interest lies in organizational psychology and leadership, and she hopes to be able to make workplaces better environments for the individuals that inhabit them.

When Annie Whitney of Charlotte, N.C., discovered the Dual BA Program Between Columbia College and Sciences Po, she knew it was the college experience for her. A year after her graduation at Sciences Po, Annie served as student council treasurer, co-founded the campus yearbook, and performed in the University of Southern California, where she earned her Bachelor’s degree in psychology and completed her master’s degree in educational leadership. On campus, she served as an intern at the University of Southern California Pre-medical Association (PMA) and worked as a research associate in the Metropolitan Hospital Emergency Medicine department. While under the mentorship of Dr. Getaw Worku Hassan, she published her first clinical research paper in the Journal of Emergency Medicine. She also served as a patient educator in Mount Sinai St. Luke’s Department of Bariatric and Minimally Invasive Surgery, where she led patient support groups and organized events and activities to help patients prepare for bariatric procedures. Currently matriculated at the Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Currently a medical student at Icahn School of Medicine Mount Sinai, Ruth Letchinger holds a Bachelor of Science degree in biological sciences, ecology, evolution, and environmental biology from The University of Chicago. As an undergraduate she studied wing patterns and performed behavioral male-choice research on butterfly species. After college, she continued biological research at Lincoln Pines Zoo in Chicago, Ill., studying monarchs and flamingos; at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Gamboa, Panama, investigating the potential effects of climate change on tick ecology; and at Rutgers University performing research on host specificity. While volunteering at Iowa Fairﬁeld Hospital in Virginia, she helped pediatric patients and their families negotiate long-term hospital stays. As a student in the Postbac Premed Program, Ruth demonstrated outstanding leadership and a commitment to service to the premedical community. Upon completion of the Program, she was recognized with the Dean’s Citation Award. She served as an orientation leader and vice president of social events and served on the Premedical Association. She served as a clinical research coordinator in the Department of Neuroradiology and Imaging at Irving Medical Center, where she examined diagnostic tools used to treat neurological disorders.

Before enrolling in the Postbac Premed Program, Katherine Jennings taught middle school science in both public and private school settings for more than 10 years in Knox County, Tenn., and Brooklyn, N.Y. She earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in educational leadership and administration from University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Catherine also danced with a modern dance collective in Tennessee and worked in therapeutic horseback riding teaching riding lessons for children and adults with mental, physical, and neurological disabilities. At Columbia, Jennings served as vice president of the Columbia University Premedical Association (PMA) and worked as a research associate in the Metropolitan Hospital Emergency Medicine department. While under the mentorship of Dr. Getaw Worku Hassan, she published her first clinical research paper in the Journal of Emergency Medicine. She also served as a patient educator in Mount Sinai St. Luke’s Department of Bariatric and Minimally Invasive Surgery, where she led patient support groups and organized events and activities to help patients prepare for bariatric procedures. Currently matriculated at the Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.

When Annie Whitney of Charlotte, N.C., discovered the Dual BA Program Between Columbia College and Sciences Po, she knew it was the college experience for her. A year after her graduation at Sciences Po, Annie served as student council treasurer, co-founded the campus yearbook, and performed in the University of Southern California, where she earned her Bachelor’s degree in psychology and completed her master’s degree in educational leadership. On campus, she served as an intern at the University of Southern California Pre-medical Association (PMA) and worked as a research associate in the Metropolitan Hospital Emergency Medicine department. While under the mentorship of Dr. Getaw Worku Hassan, she published her first clinical research paper in the Journal of Emergency Medicine. She also served as a patient educator in Mount Sinai St. Luke’s Department of Bariatric and Minimally Invasive Surgery, where she led patient support groups and organized events and activities to help patients prepare for bariatric procedures. Currently matriculated at the Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons.
Class Day 2020: An Online Occasion

On Monday, May 18, following best practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 1,800 guests gathered for an online Class Day ceremony that recognized the accomplishments of the graduates of the Class of 2020. The presentation included remarks by Dean Lisa Ross-Metsch ’90, Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger, School of General Studies Dean Donald Michael Lawler, and Dean of Students Marlyn Delva. Keynote speaker Michael Noven ’09, Artistic Director of the Paul Taylor Dance Foundation, Sungtae Yoon was the class valedictorian, and Alissan (Al) Block was the salutatorian. Rachel Ballew was recognized as the Campbell Award recipient, and Eurasia Kopola was granted the Alumni Key Award.

The Class of 2020 comprises 683 graduates from diverse backgrounds, representing 59 states and 44 countries. Ranging in age from 19 to 77 years old, it includes 116 military veterans and 133 dual and joint degree program graduates. The new graduates join a global community of nearly 20,000 GS alumni.

New Graduates 2020

Rachel Ballew

Rachel Ballew served as the director of women veteran initiatives for the U.S. Military Veterans of Columbia University (MilVets), and graduates for her impactful contributions to the women veterans community at Columbia. She also served as a resident advisor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, during his time at Columbia. David was captain of the Columbia sailing club, overseeing operations and managing the organization’s budget. Meanwhile, as a student, he produced or co-created 14 plays in three years. In 2016, for Koelk Treatman Theatricals, he co-produced the Broadway play Puffs, or: Seven Increasingly Eventful Years at a Certain School of Magic and Magic with Columbia Engineering alumnus Alum Koelk ‘19EEAS. The success of Puffs led David to many other projects, including being part of the production team for the 2018 Tony Award-winning Broadway revival of Tony Kushner’s Angels in America and the 30th anniversary tour of Falsettos. While the pandemic has postponed many of his upcoming projects and touring while also staying active in the research community. She plans to eventually pursue graduate studies in clinical psychology.

Growing up in Nixa, Mo., Logan Everett dreamed of becoming an actor. At age 17, she moved to Los Angeles, California, attended an agency, and signed with an agency. Hollywood, however, was not so glamorous. While she loved the craft of acting, she did not love the entertainment business. She valued the nuances of human connections and wanted to inspire an audience to connect with a story, which led her from acting to advocacy. After attending Santa Monica College, Logan enrolled at Columbia GS, where she studied political science and government. She interned in the office of U.S. Representative Adriano Espaillat and the office of the U.S. Representative Jerry Nadler, and she currently works at Dare2B, a non-profit that supports homeless children in New York City. Also, while a student, she worked on new projects to pioneer the post-pandemic landscape.

Following the Korean adage: take the tortoise to find the way, 2013 graduate Sungtae Yoon grew up in South Korea and adopted a novel transnational path to GS, with a competitive fellowship to the Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in biological science from Korea University, Yoon entered the Columbia University Postbaccalaureate Pre-Medical Program. In his second year of the program, he completed his required coursework and graduated summa cum laude with a degree in biological sciences with departmental honors. He is currently conducting clinical research and applying to medical school.

Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program Graduates

Huda Algsasa earned her BA in linguistics and Japanese from University of Pittsburgh in 2018. After enrolling in the summer Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program, she worked as an intern in the office of U.S. Representative Adriano Espaillat and the office of the U.S. Representative Jerry Nadler, and she currently works at Dare2B, a non-profit that supports homeless children in New York City. Also, while a student, she worked on new projects to pioneer the post-pandemic landscape.

Following the Korean adage: take the tortoise to find the way, 2013 graduate Sungtae Yoon grew up in South Korea and adopted a novel transnational path to GS, with a competitive fellowship to the Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in biological science from Korea University, Yoon entered the Columbia University Postbaccalaureate Pre-Medical Program. In his second year of the program, he completed his required coursework and graduated summa cum laude with a degree in biological sciences with departmental honors. He is currently conducting clinical research and applying to medical school.

Huda Algsasa earned her BA in linguistics and Japanese from University of Pittsburgh in 2018. After enrolling in the summer Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program, she worked as an intern in the office of U.S. Representative Adriano Espaillat and the office of the U.S. Representative Jerry Nadler, and she currently works at Dare2B, a non-profit that supports homeless children in New York City. Also, while a student, she worked on new projects to pioneer the post-pandemic landscape.

Following the Korean adage: take the tortoise to find the way, 2013 graduate Sungtae Yoon grew up in South Korea and adopted a novel transnational path to GS, with a competitive fellowship to the Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program. After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in biological science from Korea University, Yoon entered the Columbia University Postbaccalaureate Pre-Medical Program. In his second year of the program, he completed his required coursework and graduated summa cum laude with a degree in biological sciences with departmental honors. He is currently conducting clinical research and applying to medical school.
Donita Session ’19: From Service to Serving

Upon separating from the U.S. Air Force and moving back to New York City, Donita Session found herself in need of housing and employment assistance. She attained assistance from Easterseals New York, which has a program that provides transitional programs to returning veterans. Once settled, recognizing her potential, the organization hired her as a case manager and outreach specialist. While in this position, she experienced firsthand that laws and policies can make it difficult to serve those who need help.

Determined to continue serving and supporting her community, Session matriculated at Hostos Community College to study public policy and administration. She graduated with honors and earned the Gold Award for Public Administration. Session was inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa honor society and the Veterans in Global Leadership Fellowship Program—all accomplished while working full time. With help from the Warrior-Scholar Project, she applied and was admitted to Columbia University School of General Studies.

At Columbia, Session participated in many clubs and organizations. She served as treasurer of the Students of Color Alliance, as a chairperson for the Columbia University Model Congress, and as a constituent of the Black Student Organization. As a result, she found a new interest for theater as an actor in the Black Theater Ensemble. Her passion for improving the lives of veterans led her to major in political science.

"It is my belief that the veterans that return home and are capable have a duty to support their fellow veterans who are unable to support themselves," said Session.

Session is currently a job developer for homeless veterans in New York City and serves as an executive board member of Even Me, a non-profit organization that assists young people who are aging out of foster care and transitioning to independent adulthood. Committed to her life’s work of serving others, Session plans to study law to strengthen her ability to assist her community fully.

Qutaiba Idlbi ’20
Driven by Justice

Qutaiba Idlbi survived detention, torture, and political exile in his home country of Syria before being granted asylum in the United States. Idlbi grew up in Damascus. His father, a community activist focused on nonviolent political reform, died when Idlbi was 15. That moment was a turning point for Idlbi, who, once he entered university for finance in 2008, began his own pro-democracy activities that led to multiple arrests and an eventual need to flee Syria to protect his life in 2012.

While attending a political meeting in Egypt where he had found refuge, Idlbi helped United States Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford diffuse a fight between two diplomats. They struck up a friendship that eventually led to Ford encouraging Idlbi to apply to be part of the Leadership Development Fellowship, a U.S. Department of State training initiative and partnership program for leaders from the Middle East and North Africa who are involved in civic engagement and social entrepreneurship. Idlbi successfully completed the intensive training and applied for and was granted U.S. asylum in 2013.

While working as a consultant and researcher for various think tanks in Washington, D.C., it became clear to Idlbi that if he wanted to fully contribute to building a better Syria, he would need to complete his education. The stars aligned, and in 2016, Columbia launched the Scholarship for Displaced Students (CUSDS), a full-tuition and room and board scholarship program that supports displaced students from anywhere in the world who are unable to complete their higher education due to wars and natural calamities.

Idlbi applied and was accepted into the inaugural class of CUSDS, matriculating as a political science major at Columbia University School of General Studies in 2017. While a student, he continued to work full time as a researcher and analyst and in May 2020, Idlbi earned his bachelor’s degree.

Now a representative to the United States at the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, Idlbi plans to continue his research fellowship with the International Center for Transitional Justice in New York City while applying to law school. When looking toward the future, he said, “In an ideal world, I imagine myself working internationally, making sure that people get the justice they deserve. My dream is someday to establish a small college in my home country where I can transfer my knowledge and experience to Syrians like me.”
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES

Elizabeth Beerman
Volunteer and Former Co-Chair, Programming Committee of the General Studies Alumni Association (GSAA)

What drives you to contribute to GS’s alumni community?
In addition to volunteering for the GSAA and being involved in the Columbia community, I stay active by participating in sports. In my free time, I play tennis and I stay active by playing sports.

What is your favorite Columbia GS memory?
My favorite memory stems from the American Lit class I took. We were such a group of inquisitive and emotionally charged students! When asking us a question, the instructor had no idea where any of our conversations were going to lead but took it all in stride. Interacting with my class that summer in Fayerweather was so enlightening. Thirteen years later, I randomly encountered one of those classmates in Harlem. We connected as if no time had passed, which proved we were as individuals than just learning the material. Now this classmate and I sit on the GSAA board together!

Tell us about the Programming Committee of the GSAA.
The Programming Committee develops programs and events, reflecting the diversity of GS students and alumni and their respective interests and backgrounds. We want to ensure all alumni and students feel welcome and comfortable participating in our events, whether they be social gatherings, educational and arts events, or family-oriented programs.

What has been the most fun and rewarding GSAA project with which you’ve been involved?
Being on the Programming Committee, I would say all of our events are fun, and one can take away something from each gathering: whether it be intellectual, making connections, or just socializing. The opportunities for students to learn and practice their networking skills with a friendly, but demanding, group of alumni are excellent.

Tell us about your career.
Where do you work?
My career is here at Columbia. I am the Director of Contracts and Compliance at Columbia Technology Ventures (CTV). In a nutshell, CTV’s mission is to help bring the cutting-edge scientific innovations emerging from Columbia’s research labs out of the lab and into the market via partnerships with industry and startups, in order to benefit society on a local, national, and global basis. Most people don’t know that Columbia’s research leads to over 400 new inventions, over 100 agreements with industry, and over 25 science-based startups each year! In addition to managing two teams, I oversee the Columbia Tech Ventures Fellows Program.

What do you do in your free time?
In addition to volunteering for the GSAA and being involved in the Columbia community, I stay active by participating in sports.

What is your favorite Columbia GS memory?

The March 29, 2019 Military Ball was held at Capitale in Little Italy. The Ball celebrates Columbia’s distinguished veteran community, uniting them with the leaders and scholars of New York City and the world. Proceeds from the Military Ball help underwrite academic and career transition programming for all veterans and military family members nationwide, financial aid for veteran students at Columbia University, and veteran student and alumni programming.

Attendees of the 2019 Military Ball included current students, alumni, and members of the community.

The 2019 Winter Cocktail Reception was held at Landmark in New York City.

PHOTOS: DAVID DINI
PHOTOS: SIRIN SAMMAN

March 29, 2019 at Capitale NYC

The table is round to represent the everlast- ing concern survivors have for the missing. A white tablecloth illustrates the pure intentions of service members who responded to their country’s call to arms. A single red rose in a vase reminds us of the blood that service mem- bers have shed. A slice of lemon on the bread plate signifies the bitter fate of the missing. Salt sprinkled on the plate suggests the tears shed by waiting loved ones. An inverted glass represents the fact that the missing and fallen cannot partake. A lit candle connotes the light of hope that lives in our hearts in order to illu- minate the missing’s way home. An empty chair exhibits the absence of the missing and fallen.

During Roll Call...
Following tradition of military balls, a Missing Man table, pictured, was set in the dining area. Its significance was described to the guests: The table is round to represent the everlast- ing concern survivors have for the missing. A single red rose in a vase reminds us of the blood that service mem- bers have shed. A slice of lemon on the bread plate signifies the bitter fate of the missing. Salt sprinkled on the plate suggests the tears shed by waiting loved ones. An inverted glass represents the fact that the missing and fallen cannot partake. A lit candle connotes the light of hope that lives in our hearts in order to illu- minate the missing’s way home. An empty chair exhibits the absence of the missing and fallen.

During the evening’s roll call, the sergeant at arms called to the stage parts of the current officers and past presidents of MVets who all denied gaudy socks with their formal attire. Fi- nally, the officer called out the name of Peter Awn with no response. A moment of silence ensued. “Peter J. Awn,” he called again. Still no response. A third time, the sergeant called, “Dean Peter J. Awn.” A final moment of silence gave way to the sound of “Taps,” and in recognition of Dean Awn’s lifetime of support of the education, transi- tion, and integration of United States service members and veterans, a U.S. flag that had been flown over the U.S. Capitol was solemnly and proudly presented to his family and friends.

Military Ball

During the evening’s roll call, the sergeant at arms called to the stage parts of the current officers and past presidents of MVets who all denied gaudy socks with their formal attire. Finally, the officer called out the name of Peter Awn with no response. A moment of silence ensued. “Peter J. Awn,” he called again. Still no response. A third time, the sergeant called, “Dean Peter J. Awn.” A final moment of silence gave way to the sound of “Taps,” and in recognition of Dean Awn’s lifetime of support of the education, transition, and integration of United States service members and veterans, a U.S. flag that had been flown over the U.S. Capitol was solemnly and proudly presented to his family and friends.

What are the goals of the Programming Committee?
The goals of the Programming Committee are to foster a sense of belonging and community among GS students and alumni, as well as to provide opportunities for networking and professional growth. We also aim to celebrate the accomplishments of GS alumni and to provide resources and support for current students.

How does the Programming Committee involve students and alumni?
The Programming Committee involves students and alumni through a variety of events and programming, including social gatherings, educational and professional development workshops, and family-oriented programs. We also provide opportunities for students and alumni to volunteer and become involved in the GSAA.

What is the role of the Programming Committee in the GSAA?
The Programming Committee is a key component of the GSAA’s efforts to engage and involve GS students and alumni in the organization. We work closely with other committees and staff to plan and execute events and programming that meet the needs and interests of our constituents.

Tell us about the General Studies Alumni Association (GSAA).
The General Studies Alumni Association (GSAA) serves as the primary organization for GS students and alumni. We provide opportunities for networking, professional development, and socializing, as well as support for students and alumni.

What are some of the events organized by the GSAA?
The GSAA organizes a wide range of events, including social gatherings, educational and professional development workshops, and family-oriented programs. We also host events that celebrate the accomplishments of GS alumni and provide resources and support for current students.

What are the benefits of being involved in the GSAA?
The benefits of being involved in the GSAA include opportunities for networking and professional growth, as well as a sense of community and belonging among GS students and alumni. We also provide resources and support for students and alumni, as well as opportunities to make a difference in the lives of other GS students.
Throughout 2019 the GSAA hosted panels on film and media, finance, and tech, happy hours celebrating St. Patrick’s Day and students’ return to campus, dinners and discussions about career transitions and entrepreneurship, a dance performance and backstage tour at Lincoln Center, and many more engaging happenings.

Graduating seniors were invited to a Senior and Alumni Reception at Faculty House on May 8, 2019, where Senior Class President Raisa Flor ‘19 (pictured right with GSAA board member Dominique Harfouché ’14, left) addressed attendees.

On September 7, 2019 over 50 Columbia alumni met Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch ’90 for a reception at Reid Hall in Paris, one of Columbia’s Global Centers. Laetitia Butler ’16 (left), Dean Rosen-Metsch (center), and Justice Betty ’18 (right) all spoke at the event, which highlighted the Dual BA Program Between Columbia University and Sciences Po, the program from which both Butler and Betty graduated.

On February 25, over 100 GS alumni, students, and guests enjoyed the Annual Winter Cocktail Reception at Ascent Lounge in New York.

She Opened the Door convened women from all 18 undergraduate, graduate, and affiliate schools at Columbia for an historic conference in New York City. February 9th’s event celebrated 100 years since the ratification of the 19th Amendment that granted women the right to vote in the United States and featured a powerful lineup of inspiring speakers including two GS alumnae, Sara Ziff ’11 and Carla Zanoni ’05, ’06JRN.

Columbia shifted many of its operations to an online format in spring 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, giving students and alumni an opportunity to engage with one another in a safe and meaningful way via the internet.

“If there is one silver lining in our current work environment,” said Aviva Zablocki, Director of Alumni Relations, “it has been the ability to connect members of our community far and wide, without the obstacle of geographic boundaries.”

Alumni Online: “GS Alumni In Conversation” and More

To receive notice of upcoming GSAA events, submit your email address to gsalumni@columbia.edu
It all began on Thursday, May 30, when alumni, alongside Dean Lisa Rosen-Metsch ’90, kicked off the weekend with dinner and drinks on the Hudson River at the 79th Street Boat Basin. Nearly 300 guests enjoyed reminiscing and meeting new friends at the popular waterfront restaurant on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. Pictured are GSAA friends at the popular waterfront restaurant on Hudson River at the 79th Street Boat Basin. Nearly 100 guests enjoyed reminiscing and meeting new friends at the popular waterfront restaurant on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. Pictured are GSAA friends at the popular waterfront restaurant on Hudson River at the 79th Street Boat Basin. Nearly 100 guests enjoyed reminiscing and meeting new friends at the popular waterfront restaurant on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. Pictured are GSAA friends at the popular waterfront restaurant on Hudson River at the 79th Street Boat Basin. Nearly 100 guests enjoyed reminiscing and meeting new friends at the popular waterfront restaurant on Manhattan’s Upper West Side.
Fashion is in Kikka Hanazawa’s DNA. Her mother and aunt were both professional women highly involved in the fashion business—quite rare for 1930s and ’40s Japan—but despite these deep roots, Hanazawa had no designs on starting her own career in the industry. Born and raised in Tokyo, Hanazawa first came to the United States and the School of General Studies in 1989 to study English in the American Language Program. She was blown away by the resources at Columbia and in New York, and she knew that this was the place she needed to be. She enrolled at GS the following year.

“I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life at the time—I kind of thought I could do whatever I wanted,” Hanazawa remembers. “GS was perfect because it enabled me to study any subject with amazing faculty in each discipline. I decided that no matter how long it took, I was going to figure out what I was interested in at Columbia.”

In order to pay for her education, Hanazawa began her degree part time while also working at Hocku, a major Japanese trading company, bringing American brands like J. Crew to Japan. She took her time at GS, taking courses in anthropology, literature, philosophy—anything that interested her. After graduating in 2000, Hanazawa went directly to Harvard Business School to earn her MBA. Her goal at the time was to get out of fashion and into finance, interning at Accenture in Tokyo and at a private equity firm.

“Working in finance, I felt the glass ceiling in a way that I didn’t in fashion,” Hanazawa says. “I gained a more positive outlook on the fashion industry in that I saw that women could do more.”

Post-MBA, she headed solidly back into fashion, working as director of strategic planning for Theory before investing in VPL, a women’s wear company selling leisure and active wear, eventually becoming CEO in 2007. Then, on March 11, 2011, a massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami devastated northeastern Japan. Hanazawa called her peers in the industry and organized designer clothing sales in New York, Japan, and London, raising $600,000 to benefit the victims. This act of generosity and support would become the seed for founding Hanazawa’s nonprofit, Fashion Girls for Humanity.

Looking forward to the future, Hanazawa wants to use her knowledge of the fashion industry and her passion for social change to try to make a difference for the world. “Every day, I think about how all of the excess fashion merchandise out there affects our environment,” says Hanazawa. “We all wanted to help, but we knew that individuals can only do so much and that we would have a greater impact together,” Hanazawa.”

By Gilda Fasullo

For much of her career, Barbara A. O’Neil, MD ’76PBPM was clinical instructor of medicine and supervisor of second-year medical students at Harvard Medical School. Because of her contributions to the future of medicine, Dr. O’Neil garnered a certificate of appreciation from the School. Furthermore, she was eventually charged with the supervision of the outpatient clinical medicine program, and she was appointed preceptor of primary care residents at Mt. Auburn Hospital and Cambridge Hospital. Still, even with such clear success that is indicative of a self-assured and personable doctor, the road leading to O’Neil’s choice to practice internal medicine was like many who attended the Postbac Premed Program—winding.

Having had a close relationship with her father while growing up, O’Neil valued his opinion. Her father, who served in the U.S. Navy as a surgeon during World War II, consistently encouraged her interest in medicine and praised her academic achievements and mental toughness. Nevertheless, when it came time to make the decision of a major area of study during college, O’Neil found her own voice and chose English literature.

After earning her Bachelor of Arts at Harvard Community Teaching Program, she became employed at Harvard Community Health Plan (today called Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates) and participated in the Harvard Medical School Teaching Program, where she subsequently earned the Robert Ebert Teacher of the Year Award (1983). Dr. O’Neil loves to travel and continues an annual tradition of spending time in Grand Cayman, which she considers a second home. In the past, she made several trips to South Korea, where she made the life changing decision to adopt two children, Brendan and Menola.

Making the decision to enroll in the Postbac Premed Program at Columbia was clearly a pivotal moment and had such a lasting impact on her professional trajectory that she contributes to the Program to this day and has included Columbia in her estate plans.

A personable doctor with international experience, Barbara A. O’Neil ’76PBPM supervised hundreds of medical students and new doctors throughout her rewarding career in medicine.
1950s

“Wall Hanging Entrance II” by Artist Dolores Demb Bittelman ’52 was recently displayed as part of the Taking A Thread For A Walk textiles exhibition at the newly renovated MoMA. The 76 inches by 72 inches wool piece was created in 1964. Bittelman says that she is inspired by listening quietly to the threads. They “suggest what could be done with them.”

Fun Fact: Major League, left-handed pitcher Sandy Koufax briefly attended GS in winter 1955. While at Columbia, he studied architecture, graphics, and physics. Koufax went on to pitch 12 seasons with the Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers and was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972. The Dodgers won the 2020 World Series.

1960s

New York City historian and mapmaker John Tauranac ’63 recently published Manhattan’s Little Secrets Uncovering Mysteries in Brick and Mortar. Glass and Stone, a guidebook that makes New York City’s social history come alive.

Mary Edwards ’66 is a professor of art history at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y. and is a member of the Renaissance Seminar at Columbia University. Her articles have appeared in Studies in Iconography, Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, and the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. Edwards recently published Doppelgängers, Alter Egos and Mirror Images in Western Art, 1840–2010, an edited collection of essays during which scholars focus on double portraits and other pairs, human and otherwise, that appear in a large variety of artistic media.

During summer 2019, Gail Rodney ’69 exhibited her watercolors, pastels, oils, and collages at Old Sculpin Gallery in Edgartown, Mass. After majoring in English at GS, Rodney started painting once she began spending time on Chappaquiddick Island, Martha’s Vineyard. Its scenery became a muse. She went on to study fine arts at the National Academy School of Fine Arts in New York.

Milton “Mickey” Mesherir ’54 Stuck to His Curiosity

By Allison Scola

From the time he was a child growing up in Astoria, Queens, Milton “Mickey” Mesherir ’54 was curious about how things worked. When he was five, he set his house on fire while seeking to learn what was flammable and what was not. His father had a successful business as a milliner, and Mesherir was taught to inherit the family trade and discouraged from seeking other professions. But he loved chemistry, and despite his mother’s attempts to undermine his ambitions, he enrolled at Columbia to understand who he was. “I had the only Jewish mother who didn’t want her son to become a doctor,” Mesherir said.

A budding chemist, Mickey’s creativity and curiosity led him to create a new type of floor wax that he proceeded to sell to institutions such as The St. Regis hotel. His success, however, led him to postpone his university coursework, and inevitably, notice arrived from the U.S. military. It was the era of the draft and the Korean War, and Mesherir reported to Fort Dix and enlisted in the Army.

Mickey would have it that because of an incident he witnessed, Mesherir’s troop shipped out to Asia, while he stayed behind. A desk job in the personnel department presented itself, and fortunately, it delayed his assignment to the front lines—yet he found himself on a different front line, one that revealed itself through patterns of personnel being sent to Korea. A colleague revealed to him that a sergeant was prioritizing soldiers with last names that appeared Jewish, and Mesherir could not ignore this unethical behavior. Along with two other colleagues, they collected evidence to prove what the sergeant had been doing, and eventually their work led to the sergeant’s transfer. But it also led to Mickey’s transfer to Asia.

Mesherir became a machine gunner facing combat in Korea, where he served the remainder of his duty. “The Army makes you into a different person,” Mesherir explained. “You are tougher. You’re not afraid of anything.”

“When I came back from Korea, I wanted to win.”

He was driven to complete his degree at Columbia, and Mickey recalls going straight to the admissions office after his flight home. He enrolled to study chemistry and was determined to do well. “I was intolerant of professors. If I didn’t understand the lecture, I would insist that they helped me learn it.”

Mesherir worked for his father’s hat company during the day and studied at night. Meanwhile, the demand for hats was waning. He asked his father to give him a few months to consider other ideas for the business, and eventually it became clear that the glue—or an improved version of it—that they had been using for attaching the feathers, beads, pompons, and other decorations on the hats was the future of the business, and Beacon Adhesives was born.

As the company’s chief chemist, Mesherir continued to invent new adhesives and other products, including in recent years, a sealant that waterproofs bullets. He sold the patent to the U.S. Army.

A great success, Beacon Adhesives products can be found in Walmart, Michaels, and Jo-Ann stores. In 2019, Mickey retired at 91 years old. Today, his son and grandchildren operate the business. “It was time for me to slow down,” he said.
"A lot of alumni like me are putting real effort into this community events, and workshops and networking events. Bingham is inspired by such activity by students, both then and Africa. There were student demonstrations in front of a trustees' divestment of investments and other economic ties from South on a big issue. On campus, there was a growing movement for today. Groups were protesting the apartheid regime in South electric, echoing the social movements occurring in our country explaining that students' political activism on campus was returned to his hometown, New York City, to start a new chapter. Pennsylvania followed by a year working in restaurants, Bingham he attended Columbia. After completing a year at University of several years.

Arthur W. Bingham ’84

Arthur W. Bingham ’84 has worked in corporate and family finance for the past 30 years. Currently, he is managing director at New York Private Finance, where he initiates and structures loans for private investors and entrepreneurs and oversees the credit compliance function. Bingham also brings his financial expertise and acumen to the General Studies Alumni Association and Annual Fund Committee of which he has been a member for several years.

Bingham’s commitment to GS and to the Columbia community is grounded in the profound and exciting experiences he had while he attended Columbia. After completing a year at Pennsylvania opposite a year working in restaurants, Bingham returned to his hometown, New York City, to start a new chapter: “It was the 1980s and a very happening time,” Bingham said, explaining that students’ political activism on campus was electric, echoing the social movements occurring in our country today. Groups were protesting the apartheid regime in South Africa, seeking to remove world support for apartheid laws.

“The world was coming together as it does from time-to-time on a big issue. On campus, there was a growing movement for investment in South Africa, and other economic ties from South Africa. There were student demonstrations in front of a trustees’ dinner, in front of Low Library, and the students closed the doors of Hamilton closed forming a barricade,” said Bingham.

Bingham is inspired by such activity by students, both then and now—his reason for staying involved with GS. For example, he has been a member of the Annual Fund Committee for more than five years, and he is proud of GS’s commitment to support students, citing an increase in the number of advising deans, academic support services, combined alumni and student events, and workshops and networking events.

“A lot of alumni like me are putting real effort into this community and into making this school as strong as possible. I’m very proud of that,” said Bingham.

1970s

Chef, author, and television host Jacques Pepin ’70 was awarded a lifetime achievement award at the 46th Annual Daytime Creative Arts Emmy Awards. He is the first culinary profes- sional to have been recognized in this fashion.

Maria Nodarse ’73, ’74JRN published Approaching Freedom An Exile’s Quest for a New Self A memoir; the account starts when she arrives in the United States as a political refu- gee from Cuba at 13 years old. A writer, edi-tor, and translator, in 1979, Nodarse made a three-week, life-changing trip to Cuba with a group of young, left-wing elites. Inspired by the experience, she wrote an extensive article that was picked up by two major American newspaper.

PowerHouse/Simon & Schuster recently pub-lished The Boys, a photo book and memoir by Rick Schatzberg ’78, in which images in-teract with text. Schatzberg collected old snap-shots that tell the story of a group of men who have been close friends since early childhood. Paring vintage photos with contemporary port-ret, he connects the boys to the men, in-tepersing images with poetic text about friendship, aging, memory, and loss.

1980s

Deerfield Editions released The New Plant-a-tion: Lessons from Rikers Island, a memoir by novelist Jason Trask ’81. The New Plant-a-tion chronicles Trask’s experiences as an En-lish teacher of incarcerated teens in a public high school on Rikers Island in New York City. During his three years on the island, over 200 students passed through his classroom, but only five were non-Hispanic whites. Trask also published a novel in 2011, In Nix Muhammad, by Red Wheelbarrow Books.

Becoming Arab: Creole Histories and Modern Identity in the Malay World by Sumit K. Manal ’84, ’85GSAS, ’87GSAS, ’94GSAS was awarded the Harry J. Brubaker Book Prize in Southeast Asian studies for 2020.

Mystery writer Stan Trybulski ’86 com- pleted in the 2018 Amsterdam Marathon. Before publishing books such as One Trick Pony and the children’s book Juno Trybulski was a felony trial prosecutor for the district attorney’s office in Brooklyn and later a civil trial attorney at the New York City Department of Education.

1990s

Mark Robbins ’91, ’93GSAP of M-HR Development based in Norwalk, Conn. com-pleted a comprehensive building and sustainabil-ity project at the School Sisters of Notre Dame’s 38-acre campus in Winton, Conn. The project in-cluded creating Winton’s first ground-mounted solar system, one component of a large-scale project aimed to reduce the environmental im-pact and operating expenses of the international educational institute and congregation.

Jay Amari ’92, ’95GSAS was featured in Backstage magazine in December 2018. A professional actor and entertainment profes-sional for more than 30 years, after graduat-ing from GS, Amari was awarded a fellowship at Columbia University School of the Arts film division.

Mark Rotella ’92 has been appointed di-rector of the Joseph and Elida Cecia Insti-tute for the Italian Experience in America at Montclair State University. He joins the Coc-cia Institute from Publisher’s Weekly, where he was senior editor since 2006. Rotella is an in-ternationally recognized writer on the Italian American experience. He has published two books, Stolen Figgs And Other Adventures in Cabi-bini and Amore: The Story of Italian American Soap and nearly four dozen articles in an array of outlets including the New York Times, New York Times Book Review, the L.A. Times, Washing-ton Post, Wall Street Journal, Minneapolis Star Tri-bune, Vanity Fair, Savoir Magazine, and NPR.org to name a few.

Advocacy-based storyteller JoAnn Stevelos ’94 holds an MPhil in biosciences from Albany Medical College and an MPH from State Uni-versity of New York. As a health public pro-fessional, Stevelos works with community organizations, policymakers, schools, govern-ment officials, and more to create health-ier and happier environments for children. A writer and author, since publishing her novel How To Be Tame, she continues to write for Psychology Today and recently published Un-covering the Hope, a five-step guide aimed to help people in crisis.

Michael Ehrenreich ’95PBPM, ’96GSAS is a practicing dermatologist living in South Or-ange, NJ. He invented Ziggo Leader Carrier Bike and designed the board games Start Up and Election. He composed the music and wrote the book for Medicine the Musical that pre-miered at Here Arts Center in New York City in fall 2018. Medicine the Musical follows a group of first-year medical students as they grapple with their lives, loves, and the rigor of a med-ical education.

2000s

Daniele Petrevo ’01 published Her Daughter’s Mother: A psychological suspense novel that was named one of five thrillers to read during summer 2019 by Time magazine and one of the best summer books by O Mag-a-zine, the New York Post, PopSugar, and InStyle.

Filmmaker Julia Baca ’03 recently re-ceived a grant from the Enterprise Documen-tary Fund by the International Documentary Association for her latest project.

Erica Cantley ’02 published Teaching Hamlet: A Memoir about the timeless bond between parent and child. Organized by act and scene, just like the play, Cantley’s chronicles offer insights of a passionate and skilled educator, the humor and sweet-ness of young people confronting epic themes in life, and the caring and ongoing never-ending love between a daughter and her father.

In July 2020, Keren Yarhi-Milo ’03 was named director of the Saltzman Institute for War and Peace at Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs. Yarhi-Milo joined Columbia as professor of political science and international affairs in fall 2019. Prior to this appointment, she was an associate professor with tenure of pol-itical and international affairs at Princeton Univer-sity Department of Politics and the Woodrow Wilson School for Public and International Af-fairs. In 2018, her book Who Fights for Reputa-tion? The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict was published by Princeton Univer-sity Press. Yarhi-Milo’s research and teaching fo-cus on international relations and foreign policy with a specialization in international security, in-cluding foreign policy decision-making, international communication and crisis bargaining, intelligence, and US foreign policy in the Middle East.
Eliza Factor ’97 Brings Together Families Possessing Strange Beauty

By Adrienne Anfaint

Eliza Factor ’97 (née Miller) is a novelist and founder of Extreme Kids and Crew, a community center for children who have disabilities. In addition, she is the author of Novels The Mercury’s Light and Love Bliss and Measurers of Evil. In 2012, in which she discusses her journey of mothering her son Felix and how that precipitated a transformation within herself.

The eldest child of three, Felix was born in 2003. At three years old, he was diagnosed with three different disabilities: autism, hypotonia, and hyper IgM. "Felix has a very powerful and charismatic, funny and furious personality. He is wonderful, but the world of hospitals and doctors was becoming very, very boring. I had no idea what was going to happen. I didn’t have other parents with whom I could compare notes." Factor became inspired the idea of creating a communal space that would be accessible to families with children who have disabilities. In 2011, she opened the first location of Extreme Kids and Crew in Bedford-Stuyvesant with the intention to create a place that felt like “a warm embrace” for families to meet and enjoy their children.

Partnering with the Department of Education, Extreme Kids and Crew now has two fully outfitted play stations and sensory gymnasiums in Titone Elementary schools in Brooklyn and Queens, and one underway in the Bronx. All are free. The gym are located in elementary schools so students with disabilities can use them during the week for therapy.

“On the weekend the space is an art/play space for families, including siblings, and it is packed. We hold art classes and concerts to bring people together. We also have parent education programs, where parents socialize, learn from one another and bolster their advocacy skills.” Since its founding, New York City’s families with kids who have disabilities have made about 30,000 visits to its play-spaces and special programs. In her book Strange Beauty, Factor writes about the multifarious ways she changed when Felix was born and all that she learned, "For children with disabilities, the story of how the nation wrestled with an important question of moral and legal equality and engaged at DNAinfo.com. For the past year, Akiva Zablocki directed the Center for Mindfulness, Meditation and Stress Reduction, and oversaw the Center for Civic Education and a lecturer in constitutional law and government at Columbia University.

Akiva Zablocki ’07

Extraordinary Circumstances Led to Founding a Global Community

By Adrienne Anfaint

Akiva Zablocki ’07, MPH, and with Amanda Zablocki, "I was biking in life. In 2012, the couple had married after meeting at Columbia, were enjoying their careers, and, above all, they were in love with their eight-month-old baby, Idan. Then they were struck by the worst-case scenario. Assisted reproductive technology had led to the birth of a rare immune deficiency disorder called Hyper IgM Syndrome that affects one person in a million. People with the disease do not have functional immune systems and are more susceptible to developing infections and unable to fight off infections that do occur. Idan could not produce antibodies, and he had a 50% chance of making it to adulthood. The only known cure for their son’s disease was a risky bone marrow transplant.

“We had never heard of Hyper IgM. There was no real [support] community, and most of the information that was available was outdated. I felt very alone,” said Zablocki. The couple started a campaign to cover the costs of their son’s bone marrow transplant, which subsequently drew extensive coverage from the media. Families around the world who saw Idan’s story on the news reached out to Akiva and Amanda expressing that they also had a child diagnosed with Hyper IgM and never believed they would meet another patient with the same disease.

When Idan was diagnosed, Akiva and Amanda did everything they could to become educated about Hyper IgM. A bone marrow transplant was the only known cure, but they encountered the lack of information available and armed with the knowledge that they could use the information they compiled and exploit the expertise they met along the way to establish the Hyper IgM Foundation, “We had the skills to set up my son’s medical situation,” said Zablocki. “I use what I worked as a healthcare consultant for corporations and Amanda is a director of public relations. We wanted to help people around the world who had this disease but did not have the resources we did.”

In November 2018, Kenneth Bogner ’13 was elected state senator of District 19 for the State of Montana.

Jeffrey Omar Patrick ’13 is pursuing an MPH in health policy and management at New York Medical College. This past year, he co-authored an article for the Journal of Health and Human Services titled “Healing through Self-Expression: The Role of Art Therapy in Medicine,” with Mill Elyemer, MD, MPH, FANAP, Adam Ken Karp, and Hannah Carberry, MD.

In March, Patrick was appointed to New York Medical College’s Strategic Planning Subcommittee on Community Engagement.

In 2015, Idan received a second bone marrow transplant that was a success, and today he is thriving with his own immune system. Meanwhile, the Hyper IgM Foundation continues its efforts “to help improve the treatment, quality of life, and long-term outcomes for children and adults living with Hyper IgM Syndrome.”

In the last five years, the Foundation has established a global community consisting of hundreds of families. It has connected patients from around the world with treatments, doctors, and the most current information available about the disorder. Raising over $200,000 for research and working closely with families from diagnosis through treatment, the Foundation provides advocacy on behalf of its patient community, empowering them to make informed medical decisions.

The Foundation’s international scientific advisory committee includes some of the world’s most renowned immunologists. In addition, it works to drive research on Hyper IgM by paying $1,000 every year for grants that support scientific research of a possible cure of gene editing that could fix the disorder on a genetic level.

Idan currently attends elementary school, loves building with Legos, playing with friends, and solving multiplication problems. "He lives a normal life without ever thinking about Hyper IgM. (Meanwhile), I’m staying in this world because it is my mission to help other families,” said Zablocki. “Many times people don’t have a donor or the resources, or a child may not be healthy enough to have an already risky bone marrow transplant. We need to find a better cure.”

Elegance Bratton ’14 graduated from NYU Tisch School of the Arts with an MFA in film. His long-awaited documentary Pier Kids about queer, black homeless young people in New York City is currently on the festival circuit. While editing more than 400 hours of footage for Pier Kids, Bratton directed and produced the documentary series My House that aired on Viceland TV network, published a photo book, and produced the adventure series titled “The Owl Magazine.”
Maria Markina ‘17 Outstanding Entrepreneurship. Period.

By Adrienne Anfunt

Entrepreneur Maria Markina ‘17 founded her company Athena Club in 2017. Athena Club offers women an affordable subscription plan for high quality, menstrual products that are free from harmful chemicals. Recently named to Forbes’ 30 under 30 list, she foresaw a need in the market for these products while working as a consultant at McKinsey and Company.

“Everyone knows your period can catch you by surprise, and it is inconvenient to run to the pharmacy. Then, furthermore, you don’t know what is in the products or anything about the manufacturing,” said Markina.

With an Athena Club subscription, women receive high-quality, responsibly-manufactured menstrual products—no more messiness, for as little as $6.50 a month. Women can customize their order depending on quantity, size, and absorbency. They choose between the premium option made out of cotton and cotton tampons made from 100 percent organic cotton. In addition to the quality and convenience, Athena Club is 35 percent more affordable than other menstrual product subscription companies.

“People are not always comfortable talking about periods, but we are trying to change that. It is the most natural experience for a woman and the human body,” said Markina.

Markina named her company after Athena, the Greek goddess of war and wisdom. Athena’s companion, the owl, is symbolic of the moon and women. Athena Club is 35 percent more affordable than other menstrual product subscription companies.

In the coming months Athena Club will expand their line to include other period products such as pads and panty liners.

“I am most fulfilled when I receive feedback from customers saying how much our products have positively impacted their lives. People love our products and that makes me happy,” said Markina.

William Falcon ‘18 is passionate about using artificial intelligence (AI) for social impact. Falcon was selected to receive a 2019 National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship. The Fellowship provides financial support for three years of graduate work. Falcon is earning a PhD in AI at the Computational Intelligence, Learning, Vision, and Robotic Lab at New York University. As a co-founder and chief technology officer of NextGenWest, he built and led the engineering team that helped thousands of low-income students access over $37 million in financial aid.

Abigale Wyatt ‘14 and Christopher Beierschmidt ‘17 were also awarded NSF Graduate Research Fellowships.

Joseph Kissane, former Director of Columbia’s Summer Session, former School of General Studies Dean of Students, and a beloved preceptor in English and comparative literature, passed away from COVID-19 on April 19.

Described by many as an extraordinary person, Joseph was “smart, savvy, thoughtful, gracious, loyal, kind, and always good-humored,” explained David Scott Kastan, George M. Bodman Professor of English at Yale University. The two shared a mutual interest in Shakespeare.

“Even after I left Columbia,” Kastan wrote in an email, “Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 1968. His field of study, according to friend and Columbia Professor Emerita Joan Ferrante, was 18th century novel. His dissertation focused on Jane Austen and Samuel Richardson.

“Joseph and I stayed in touch, usually after he had seen some Shakespeare production (and he seemed to see them all) and had noticed some rearrangement of the text, or an actor’s interpretation of a speech, or a director’s idea about how to make the play relevant to a modern audience.”

Born in Pittsburgh, Pa. on December 4, 1930, Joseph Kissane graduated from Central Catholic High School and Duquesne University. After serving in Korea as a 2nd lieutenant in the Army during the mid-1950s, he enrolled at Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, where he earned an MA in 1956 and a PhD in 2019-2020. THE OWL ALUMNI MAGAZINE
Dr. Kurt L. Shell ’48, ’55GSAS (1920-2018) was a prolific writer who published dozens of works in three languages. Her obituary notes her great interest in comparative politics, culture, and society of Austria. The United States, and West Germany. Forced to emigrate from Austria by the Nazi occupation during World War II, he worked in a London bakery before serving the U.S. Army on the Italian front. After the war, he earned his bachelor’s and graduate degrees from Columbia. Shell was a professor of political science at Goethe University in Frankfurt Am Main, Germany from 1967 to his retirement in 1986.

Dr. Uriel Barzel ’54, ’58PS (1929-2019) was a professor emeritus at the Department of Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He and his wife Anna recently established the Professor Uriel S. Barzel, MD 1954 GS Achievement Fund which provides support to GS students enrolled in the Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program. An internist, Dr. Barzel was motivated to create this fund to alleviate the financial burden of students pursuing a career in medicine.

Memorials and eulogies: Barbara Probst Solomon ’60 (1929-2019) was known for documenting life in Spain during and after the regime of General Francisco Franco. Her obituaries note her devotion to her family and community and volunteer work. After graduating from GS, she worked as a photo researcher at the Associated Press, which included cataloging pictures of the Holocaust. Later, she moved to the AP sports department, where she wrote stories and edited copy. Rosapepe-Bodwell’s husband, Douglas Faulkner Bodwell ’44MC, was working for the president of Tulane University in 1967 when race riots erupted at the foot of campus. Rosapepe-Bodwell volunteered to manage press relations for the university during the crisis. In 1985, while a resident of Virginia, she worked as a legal secretary, and then served as legislative aide to Virginia delegate Warren G. Stambaugh. A devoted husband, father and grandfather, Joseph F. Stinchfield ’94 (1936-2018) wrote for MD Magazine and conducted analytical work for Standard & Poor’s before beginning a successful banking career during which he held senior positions with both national and international institutions. He was a member of the Bank Credit Analysts of New York, taught a variety of banking and introductory courses on credit analysis, and worked on behalf of various NGOs overseas.

Richard Munger ’67 (1928-1998) was grateful for his Columbia degree from GS which he earned while working as a full-time pilot for United Airlines. William A. J. Bremer ’68 (1944-2019) was proudly in the middle of the student demonstrations that took over Columbia’s campus in the spring of 1968 and loved regaling family and friends with first-hand memories from that incredible time in American history. Physician Joyce Wallace ’64PBPM (1940-2020) established the Foundation for Research on Sexually Transmitted Diseases in 1982. A pioneer in women’s health, she was given the Brooke Russell Astor Award that recognized her as an inspiring hero who was “relentless” in improving the quality of life in New York City for her treatment of prostitutes during the height of the AIDS epidemic and beyond.

Sarah D. Madden ’69 (1945-2018) was a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother. “Sassy,” as she was known to her loving granddaughters, was an active and respected member of the Greenwich, Conn. community for more than 40 years. She was chairman of the Friends of the Greenwich Library and a trustee of the Greenwich Library.

In Memoriam
Alicia Graf Mack ’03 performed for A Celebration of Dance at Columbia during Reunion 2019. Graf Mack is one of the alumni featured in “The Transitional Dance,” this issue’s feature article. “I wanted to be a ballerina since I was a toddler,” Graf Mack said. “I toured so many places, performed in major theaters, and had a chance to inspire young people who wanted to have a similar career.” And now, from her position as the director of the dance division at The Juilliard School, she continues that work, yet from the other side of the curtain. Read Graf Mack’s full story along with those of three other alumni who are former professional dancers on page 14.