WINTER 2018/2019

GW

Arts & Sciences

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
COLUMBIAN COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

TOC

PHOTO: Roosevelt_1
CAPTION: Eleanor Roosevelt speaking in New York City, 1956. (Photos courtesy Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project)

DEAN'S MESSAGE

"Our students want to be connected, to make a difference, to be front and center on the world stage. And we are making those aspirations a reality."

~Paul Wahlbeck

It is a pleasure to greet you as the interim dean of the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences! I am excited and honored by the opportunity to lead the college this year as we look to advance our agenda for a dynamic learning and research experience, and an engaged and informed alumni community.

As many of you know, I am no stranger to Columbian College, having joined the university in 1993 as a faculty member in the Department of Political Science. I became chair of that department in 2011 and, in 2016, joined the college's leadership team as vice dean for programs and research, serving under Dean Ben Vinson III, who was recently appointed provost at Case Western Reserve University.

Over the course of my 25-year tenure at GW, I have witnessed the incredible growth of Columbian College in size, stature and strength. We have remained relevant to our times because we understand that our students not only seek new knowledge, they also seek ways to apply that knowledge to what they are most passionate about and to what they aspire to become. Our students want to be connected, to make a difference, to be front and center on the world stage. And we are making those aspirations a reality.

I recall in my own classroom, when I was teaching a course on judicial politics, a student stepped forward offering to arrange a class tour of the Supreme Court building and a personal meeting with the Clerk of the Court. How did he have that kind of access? Because he was an intern working in the office of the Chief Justice! It was a classic GW moment and not an unusual one. Our faculty and students are doing archival research in the Library of Congress, working with curators at the Smithsonian, partnering with historians at Dumbarton Oaks and scientists at the National Institutes of Health. And our graduates are taking these connections and doing incredible things. They make us proud.

In this issue of *GW Arts & Sciences,* we focus on how our students, faculty and alumni are forging new pathways of impact. We take you inside exploding stars at the edge of the universe and infinitesimally tiny protons at the heart of the atom. You'll meet faculty who are identifying MIA soldiers from Vietnam battlefields and discovering new spider species on a remote volcanic island; students who are using art therapy to defuse teacher burnout and developing therapeutic tools while treating patients at our professional psychology clinic; and alumni who are making a difference by coaching wounded warriors in Paralympic-style competitions and championing education opportunities for impoverished young people in Africa.

And that's just the beginning. As we approach our Bicentennial in 2021, we continue to reach for new insights and discoveries—whether in classrooms on campus, at institutions and laboratories across the nation or on the broader global education canvas. I know you join me in celebrating our academic achievements, our civic engagements and the traditions that have always made Columbian College a special place to learn and grow.

As a community, we are particularly grateful to those who have advanced our work through their generosity. The service and philanthropic support of the Columbian College family are truly the backbone of our vision and continued accomplishments.

I eagerly look forward to meeting or hearing from you during the coming year. Drop me a line, stop by my office or join one of our many outreach events. Let me know what's on your mind or simply share a hello. In the meantime, turn the page and read about how Columbian College is changing lives and changing the world.

Sincerely,

Paul Wahlbeck
Interim Dean, Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
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CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 2018!

Columbian College conferred 1,146 undergraduate, 863 graduate and 129 doctoral degrees this year, representing a significant percentage of the approximately 6,000 degrees awarded by the university. With the U.S. Capitol providing the backdrop, more than 26,000 people attended the Commencement ceremonies on the National Mall. National Academy of Sciences President and renowned geophysicist Marcia McNutt delivered the Commencement address, encouraging graduates to "bring back hope into the world."

HISTORIANS GARNER PRIZED FELLOWSHIPS

In a rare feat for one academic department, three Columbian College history professors—**Joel Blecher**, **Dina Khoury** and **Erin Chapman**—were awarded 2018-19 American Council of Learned Societies Fellowships. The fellowships will enable each to pursue their respective scholarly research: Blecher is examining the relationship between religion and capitalism in medieval Islam as seen through the spice trade; Khoury, an expert in middle eastern history, is exploring 19th century global migration patterns in light of East African slave practices; and Chapman is preparing a cultural and historical biography of journalist and playwright Lorraine Hansberry.

Joel Blecher, Dina Khoury and Erin Chapman

'1968 INITIATIVE' RECOGNIZES MOMENTOUS YEAR

To mark the 50th anniversary of a tumultuous, ground-shifting year for the U.S. and the world, the Departments of History, American Studies and Museum Studies sponsored the "1968 Initiative" project, a salon series that brought together students and faculty from across the university. The four salons featured discussions on Resurrection City, the Poor People's Campaign, feminism and beauty, student activism and music.

WOMEN REPORTERS FACE TWEETER GAP

Female journalists lag behind their male counterparts in their Twitter impact, reveals a study by **Nikki Usher**, associate professor of media and public affairs. Male journalists retweet other men at three times the rate at which they retweet women. And they reply to other men 91.5 percent of the time. Usher and her research team discovered the gender disparities while analyzing tweets from 2,292 credentialed journalists living and working around Washington, D.C., as part of a larger project on the culture of news production in D.C. The study, "Twitter Makes It Worse: Political Journalists, Gendered Echo Chambers, and the Amplification of Gender Bias," was published in the *International Journal of Press/Politics*.

Nikki Usher

MAKING A MARK IN INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH

GW holds the No. 1 spot as a producer of Peace Corps volunteers among medium-sized schools nationwide—the sixth time in the past decade that the university has topped the list. In 2018, 50 undergraduate alumni served as Peace Corps volunteers across the world. In addition, GW was recognized among the top universities sending students abroad under the U.S. State Department Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship, which gives low-income, minority and first-generation students opportunities for foreign study and internships. GW had 22 Gilman Scholars in 2017.

FORENSICS CLASS SOLVES REAL MYSTERY

What started as a mock mystery for Forensic Science Professor **Daniele Podini's** students turned into a real-life crime drama when the class was asked to examine DNA evidence of an abduction and assault case involving a mother and two children. Working from a blood-stained T-shirt, the student analysts extracted a DNA profile that identified the assailant. Only later did they learn that the assignment mimicked evidence of an actual Florida rape case, and that the survivor—vic-

Podini and students with assault survivor Weil (front row center).

tim's rights advocate Julie Weil—was sitting in their classroom. The students met Weil as part of Podini's ongoing efforts to showcase the real-world impact of their studies. Podini's past classes have met a death row inmate who was exonerated due to DNA and a case involving an abducted a child who was identified 15 years later.

JAPANESE SPEECH WINNER

Yi Zhao, a junior majoring in Japanese literature and minoring in modern music, took home first place at the third annual J.LIVE Talk Japanese speech contest, competing against 30 students from 13 universities across the country. Sponsored by the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, the competition helps students sharpen their communication skills while sharing cultural experiences. Zhao wowed the panel of judges—including a representative from the Japanese Embassy and a scholar from Nanzan University—with a presentation on how Japanese music helped him navigate his journey from China to America as an international student.

Monarch butterflies

BUTTERFLY DIVERSITY TAKES FLIGHT

By examining the complex color patterns of butterfly wings, Assistant Professor of Biology **Arnaud Martin** is studying how genetics and evolution work in concert to shape biodiversity. The research, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, focused on butterfly diversity, but this branch of genetic research has massive implications for studying all types of organisms, including humans. Martin is using gene editing to study the patterns on butterfly wings. Through a technology called CRISPR, DNA can be cut at any desired site in the genome. In this case, Martin can modify butterfly genes one by one and determine the function of genes in making shapes and forming colors.

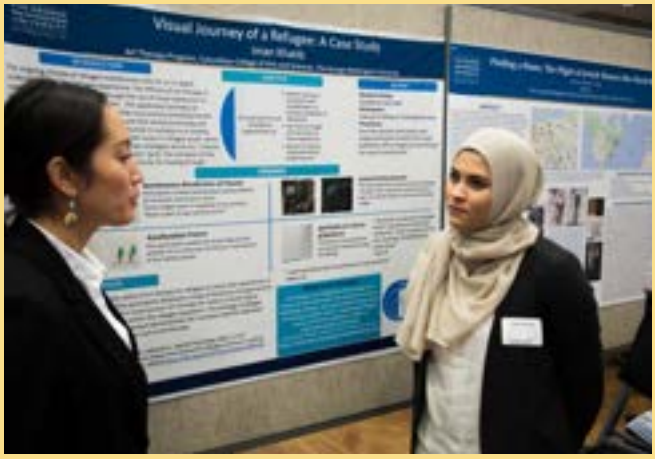
TALLY'S CORNER REVISITED

Decades after opening readers' eyes to the plight of the District's unemployed, the landmark book *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men by the late* **Elliot Liebow**, BA '49, was celebrated by the Columbian College Department of Sociology with a 50th anniversary event that included a panel discussion and appearances by Liebow's family. A renowned anthropologist, Liebow immersed himself in the lives of unemployed men on the corner of 11th and M streets in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, D.C. He emerged with a raw, honest portrait of a traditionally marginalized group, a portrait cited by academia and the literary world alike as a seminal scholarly work.

Elliot Liebow

INTERDISCIPLINARY DEGREES FORGE NEW PATHS

From biological sciences to linguistics, Columbian College students are taking advantage of innovative interdisciplinary degrees and programs. With the new BA in cognitive neuroscience and BS in neuroscience, students can join the ranks of scientists uncovering insights into the biological basis of behavior and thought, as well as the role of the brain in mediating outcomes. Additionally, the college's new linguistics minor draws on courses from both anthropology and speech, language and hearing sciences. And under the direction of Assistant Professor of Biology **Tara Scully**, the sustainability minor continues to thrive, exploring environmental outcomes across disciplines. CCAS students can also take advantage of Special Interdisciplinary Majors, enabling student-designed curriculum that crosses traditional boundaries.



Research Days student presenters.

STUDENT RESEARCH TAKES CENTER STAGE

Columbian College students received top recognition for poster presentations in the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences at Research Days, GW's two-day celebration of student scholarship. More than 650 students showcased their work and competed for prizes—a record high for the 23nd annual event. Presenters included an art therapy graduate student who used visual imagery to communicate with child refugees from Syria and an Organizational Sciences undergraduate who assessed the effectiveness of emergency pediatric care protocols.

IS SHAKESPEARE COLORBLIND?

From Latino Othellos to African Macbeths, theaters around the world are presenting diversity-rich performances of Shakespeare classics. And Professor of English **Ayanna Thompson**, a self-described "performance race scholar," is using the Bard to spark dialogues on race, focusing on modern interpretations of Shakespearean dramas that cast people of color in roles originally imagined for white actors. Both in her GW classroom and as a Phi Beta Kappa scholar, Thompson featured these reimagined performances as a showcase to talk about race. "For me, Shakespeare is a vehicle to engage us in these harder conversations," she said.

Ayanna Thompson

STUDENTS GIVES BACK

Columbian College students and senior class gift campaign co-coordinators **Bethany Perez**, BA '18, and **Luke Scuitto**, BA '18, announced that seniors gave $140,882 to GW this past year. In addition, 50 percent of the class has given back to the university, and a record 16 percent has also decided to make a sustaining gift to GW.

Thanks to matching gift commitments amounting to $20,000 from GW President **Thomas J. LeBlanc** and his wife, Anne, a student community space dedicated to the Class of 2018 will be created on campus.

A VOICE AGAINST BRUTALITY

As a psychiatrist in the Middle East, **Sami Badini** helped heal the mental scars of torture, treating victims in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Now, as a second-year master's student in Columbian College's Forensic Psychology Program, Badini continues to shine a light on abuse. Badini

Sami Badini

received the 2017-18 Alexandria Partnership Fellowship, a full scholarship award for GW students working or interning in Alexandria. Badini volunteers at a local men's shelter, addiction services and the international Torture Abolition and Survivor Support Coalition.

ALUMNI RECOGNIZED FOR ACHIEVEMENT

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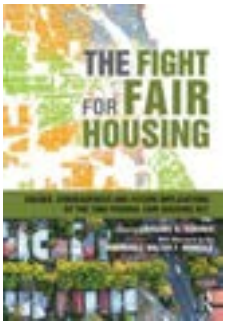
PHOTO: TK

Estimated brain sizes of human ancestors

ANTHROPOLOGISTS DIG DEEP

From uncovering evidence of early humans to mapping our ancestors' growing brains, it was a banner research year for scholars in the Anthropology Department. Professor of Anthropology **Alison Brooks** led international collaborators, including students and Smithsonian scientists, on an East African exhibition that uncovered traces of early humans forming social networks hundreds of thousands of years earlier than previously thought. Associate Professor of Anthropology **Shannon McFarlin** bolstered her efforts to decipher hard tissue evidence of weaning variation in Central African wild great apes with a $400,000 grant from the National Science Foundation. By developing a framework for determining when maternal apes wean their offspring, McFarlin hopes to advance our understanding of our closest living relatives while informing conservation strategies for wildlife veterinarians and park managers in great ape reserves. Research by Professor of Human Origins **Bernard Wood** and a team of alumni revealed that the average brain size of human ancestors increased gradually over three million years, growing to more than three times larger than our closest living relatives. And Assistant Professor of Anthropology **Andrew Barr** challenged the scientific theory that broad-scale events like global climate change caused the origination of diverse new species. Instead, he suggested that the rise of advanced animals 2.5 million years ago—including modern humans—could have occurred by chance.

SAMPLING OF NEW BOOKS BY COLUMBIAN COLLEGE FACULTY

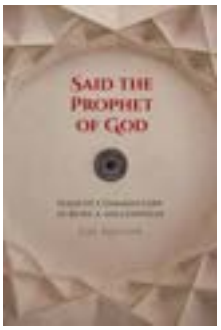


THE FIGHT FOR FAIR HOUSING: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF THE 1968 FEDERAL FAIR HOUSING ACT

To mark the 40th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, **Gregory D. Squires**, professor of sociology and public policy and public administration, tells the story of how the landmark legislation came about, how it confronted discrimination and the segregated living patterns that characterized most cities and what remains to be done to ensure housing equality. The Fair Housing Act was debated in a time of turmoil, conflict and conflagration in cities across the nation. It took the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to finally secure its passage. Squires contributed his own essays and edited those of leading fair housing activists and scholars to document the historic accomplishment and its implications for today's social landscape.

LINGUISTIC AND MATERIAL INTIMACIES OF CELL PHONES

Cell phones are a constant presence in our lives. But what does the proliferation of this ubiquitous technology say about privacy, selfhood and how we communicate in the 21st century? Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs **Joel Kuipers** co-edited with Joshua Bell this detailed ethnographic and anthropological examination of the social, cultural, linguistic and material aspects of cell phones. Using rural and urban examples from communities across the globe, the book links the use of cell phones to contemporary discussions about representation, mediation and subjectivity. It investigates how cell phone technology challenges the boundaries of privacy and raises new questions about the pros and cons of sophisticated communication.

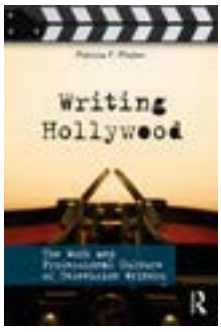


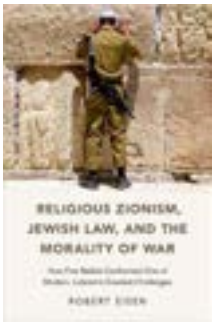
SAID THE PROPHET OF GOD: HADITH COMMENTARY ACROSS A MILLENNIUM

Assistant Professor of History **Joel Blecher** breaks open a brand new field in Islamic studies in his examination of how the hadith (Muhammad's sayings and practices) were debated and understood over the past millennium. Although scholars have long studied the ways Muslims authenticated and transmitted the hadith, the story of how they interpreted and reinterpreted its meanings over the past millennium has yet to be told. Blecher offers a window into how communities from classical Muslim Spain to Medieval Egypt to modern India understood the hadith in different ways, weaving together tales of high court rivalries, public furors and colonial politics.

WRITING HOLLYWOOD: THE WORK AND PROFESSIONAL CULTURE OF TELEVISION WRITERS

What goes on behind the cameras of your favorite TV shows? Associate Professor of Media and Public Affairs **Patricia Phalen** highlights an aspect of the production of television drama and comedy series that few people see: the writing process. Using data from personal interviews and participant observation at a prime time drama, she analyzes the relationships among writers in series television, describes the interactions between writers and studio/network executives and explains how internal and external pressures affect the occupational culture of the television writing profession. Phalen explains writers' efforts to control risk and survive in a constantly changing environment.





RELIGIOUS ZIONISM, JEWISH LAW, AND THE MORALITY OF WAR

Robert Eisen, professor of religion and Judaic studies, examines a dilemma within modern Jewish thought: Although the state of Israel has been plagued by war ever since it was established in 1948, Jewish law includes little material on moral issues in times of conflict. Most Jewish teachings were developed during centuries when Jews had neither a state nor an army. The leading rabbis of the religious Zionist community have had to create an entire body of laws addressing morality in wartime where practically none had existed beforehand. Eisen features five prominent rabbis with insight into the key moral questions in war. His explorations provide a window into the worldview of religious Zionism and Israeli politics.

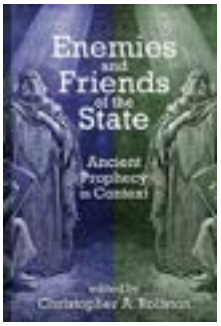
NAMING THE DAWN BY ABDOURAHMAN A. WABERI

SOME SAY THE LARK BY JENNIFER CHANG

Faculty made their mark in the world of poetry with critically praised volumes by Assistant Professor of French and Francophone Literature **Abdourahman A. Waberi**, and Assistant Professor of English **Jennifer Chang**. In Naming the Dawn Waberi offers an introspective and inquisitive collection that reflects on deep spiritual bonds—with words, with great Islamic poets and with the cultural and geographic landscapes in which those poets (and Waberi himself) were raised. In Some Say the Lark, Change narrates grief and loss, and intertwines them with hope for a fresh start in the midst of new beginnings. With topics such as frustration with our social and natural world, her poems openly question the self and place and how private experiences like motherhood and sorrow necessitate a deeper engagement with public life and history.

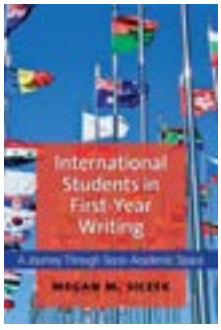
ENEMIES AND FRIENDS OF THE STATE: ANCIENT PROPHECY IN CONTEXT

Within the world of the Bible, prophets and prophetesses were sometimes ardent proponents of royal and priestly rhetoric and deeds. But they could also be vocal critics, speaking truth to power. **Christopher A. Rollston**, associate professor of Northwest Semitic languages and literatures, edited this volume that plumbs the depths of the prophetic voices of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament Apocrypha and the Greek New Testament. More than 25 of the most distinguished scholars in the field of biblical studies contributed articles on subjects such as prophecy in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria and Transjordan.



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING: A JOURNEY THROUGH SOCIO-ACADEMIC SPACE

Megan Siczek, assistant professor of English for academic purposes, chronicles the journey of 10 international students to better understand their experiences at a U.S. educational institution. Through interviews, she gives voice to global students enrolled in a first-year writing course as they navigate their role outside the dominant cultural and linguistic community. Their stories inform practices and policies relative to the internationalization of education and the development of global perspectives and competencies.



MAJOR NEW GRANTS

Over the past academic year, Columbian College faculty received a significant number of grant awards to support a broad swath of innovative research across the disciplines. From examining fossil footprints in Africa to charting Gamma Ray bursts in the deepest reaches of space, scholars are forging new pathways of discovery. The following are among the college's recent major grants:

Andrei Alexandru (physics): $298,000 from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to examine nuclear physics calculations from quantum chromodynamics—the theory behind the strong interaction between quarks and gluons.

Lynne E. Bernstein (speech, language and hearing sciences): $312,000 from Facebook to enhance speech learnability by optimizing how vibrotactile—the perception of vibration through touch—interfaces with the brain's speech systems.

Lisa Bowleg (psychology): $3,681,000 from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) /National Institutes on Drug Abuse for her research on reducing drug use among African American males and addressing related co-occurring negative mental and physical health issues; and $740,000 from the WK Kellogg Foundation to develop an innovative tool for accelerating progress in achieving racial equity in employment and maternal and child health.

Christopher Cahill (chemistry): $373,000 from DOE for nuclear energy-related research on the fundamental chemical behavior of uranium, neptunium and plutonium under environmentally relevant conditions.

Ana Maria del Rio Gonzalez (Latino Health Research Center): $238,000 from NIH to study PrEP (HIV prevention medication) use among Latina immigrant transgender women in the D.C. area.

Robert Entman (media and public affairs): $288,000 from Scripps Network Interactive Inc. for a project on TVN News' practices assessment.

Gustavo Hormiga (biology): $422,000 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to research the evolutionary biology of spiders.

Chryssa Kouveliotou (physics): $200,000 award from NASA Goddard Space Flight Center to help develop a population census of young galactic X-ray sources; and $180,000 from NASA-Goddard for Magnetar observations with the Fermi/Gamma Ray Burst Monitor.

Ira Laurie (forensic sciences): $275,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate the use of gas chromatography with tandem ultra violet and mass spectrometric detection for the analysis of emerging drugs.

Stuart Licht (chemistry): $280,000 from DOE to develop an alkaline membrane-based ammonia electro-synthesis with high efficiency for renewable and scalable liquid-fuel production.

Shannon McFarlin (anthropology): $398,000 from NSF to research and develop a comprehensive framework for deciphering hard tissue evidence of weaning variation in wild great apes.

Daniele Podini (forensic sciences): $493,000 from DOJ to access the forensic applications of genetic markers called microhaplotypes through massively parallel DNA-sequencing.

Scott Powell (biology): $288,000 from NSF to develop a new framework for explaining how ant colonies create well-functioning transportation systems via a process of gradual modification rather than design.

Adam Smith (biology): $351,000 from NSF to research the effects of social behavior on brain evolution in bees.

Akos Vertes (chemistry): $723,000 from NSF to examine high-resolution methods for studying soybean root biology and address the worldwide demand for food and fuel.

NOTE: Dollar figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

[Note: We're imagining each of these is a "leaf" off of a sketched tree….]

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

The Columbian College "family" tree of alumni, students and faculty is making waves in fun and fabulous ways!

Kristin Adair, MA '17, produced *Becoming Free*, a documentary that follows ex-convicts as they begin their lives outside of prison.

Associate Professor of Music Douglas Boyce's new album Some Consequences of Four Incapacities was released by New Focus Recordings.

Former U.S. Representative Steve Israel (D-N.Y.), BA '81, wrote the Washington-spoofing novel Big Guns.

Gideon Yechiel Zelermyer, BA '97, won a Grammy in the Best Rock Performance category for his work on the Leonard Cohen album *You Want It Darker*.

Sophomore biology major Phoebe Elizaga led a group of GW students to the 19,341-summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

Mark T. Esper, PhD '08, was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the 23rd Secretary of the Army.

Steve Elfers, adjunct professor of new media photojournalism, won a Pulitzer Prize for his USA Today Network interactive video at the U.S. border.

Cody Lindquist, BA '02, is the voice of Melania Trump in the Showtime animated series *Our Cartoon President.*

Professor of English Thomas Mallon's novel Fellow Travelers was reimagined as an opera and premiered in New York.

Trapeze artist **Laura Wooster**, BA '97, teaches and performs with Sweet Spot Aerial Productions.

William Isaac Fitzgerald, BA '05, is the author of *Knives & Ink: Chefs and the Stories Behind Their Tattoos (with Recipes)*.

Junior math and economics major Margaret Steiner is editor-in chief of *The GW Undergraduate Review* a journal on undergraduate STEM research.

Dave Gottesmann, BA '03, launched a dating app called Perchance.

Assistant Professor of Physics Sylvain Guiriec escorted French President Emmanuel Macron during his visit to GW.

Jason Kane, BA '07, won an Emmy for his reporting on the *PBS* NewsHour series "The End of AIDS?"

Political communication major Shira Strongin founded Sick Chicks, an international community working to empower and unite women with disabilities and illnesses.

Mosheh Oinounou, BA '04, was named executive producer of the *CBS Evening News.*

Journalism undergraduates Lillianna Byington and Robin Eberhardt garnered front page bylines in *The Washington Post* for an investigation into D.C. homelessness.

Natalie Lund, BA '07, published her debut novel *We Speak in Storms.*

Political science senior intern Jazmin Kay was named one of the "22 Under 22 Most Inspiring College Women" by Her Campus magazine.

SMPA Director **Frank Sesno** was named a top 10 journalism educator by Crain's NewsPro.

Iwonka Swenson, BA '98, writes and produces the Netflix series *We Speak Dance*.

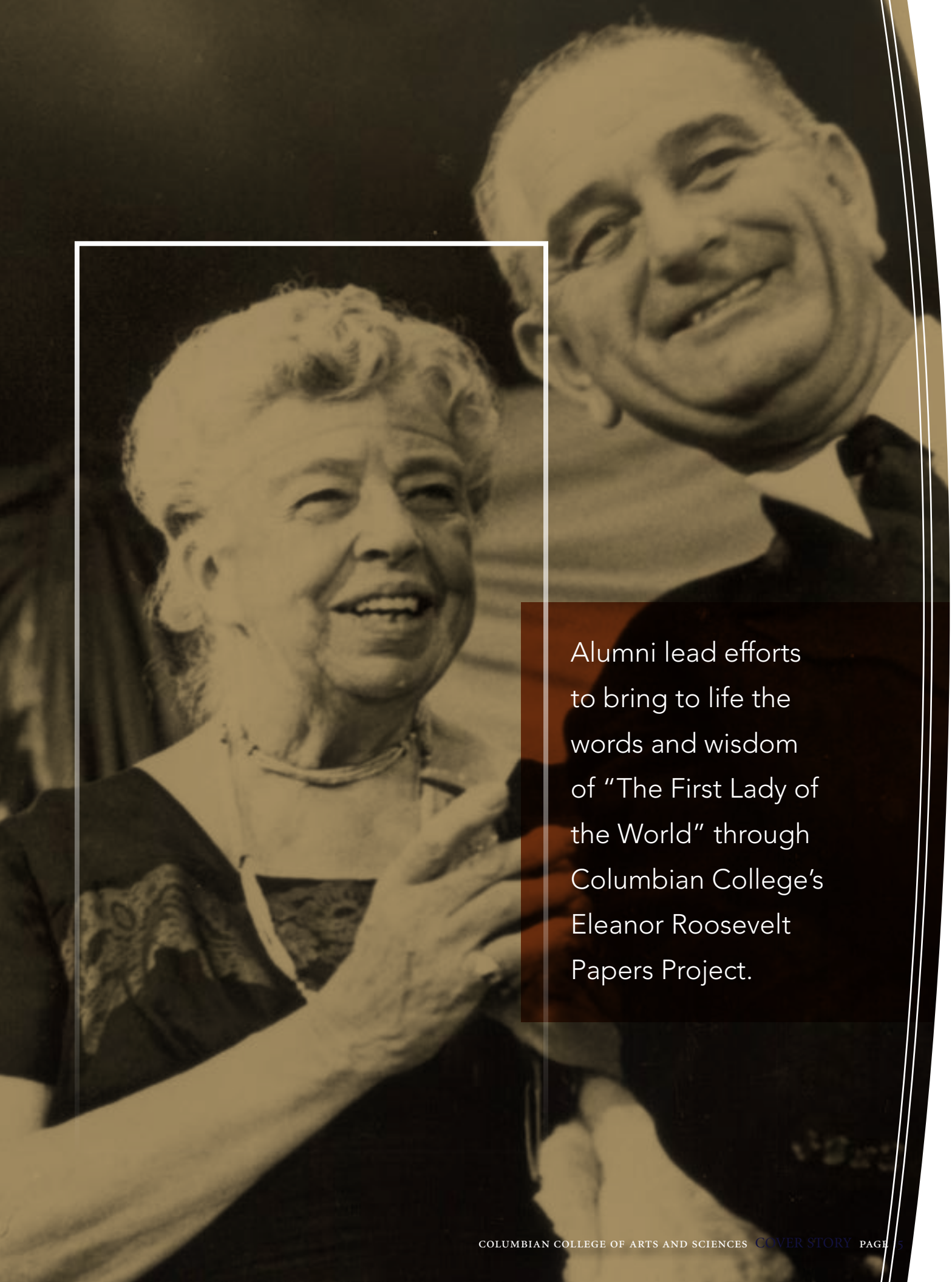
Associate Professor of History Denver Brunsman and sophomores studying the War of 1812 wrote original Wikipedia entries on the war.

spread

Eleanor Roosevelt:

Amassing a Living Legacy

Roosevelt at a 1960 campaign rally for the presidential ticket of John F Kennedy (left) and Lyndon Johnson (right)



Alumni lead efforts to bring to life the words and wisdom of "The First Lady of the World" through Columbian College's Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project.

"In political life, I have never felt that anything really mattered but the satisfaction of knowing that you stood for the things in which you believed, and had done the best you could."

1947

As chair of the U.N. Human Rights Commission in 1947, Roosevelt was the architect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

From the White House to the United Nations to the global political stage, Eleanor Roosevelt was arguably the most influential woman in American history. She was a towering figure through some of our nation's greatest crises—including the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War—and a lifelong champion of human rights, women's rights and racial justice. And as a global representative for democracy, she made her mark not just as America's first lady but, as what Harry Truman dubbed her, the "First Lady of the World."

Along the way, she amassed a prolific paper trail of words that included 8,336 newspaper columns, 27 books and nearly 600 articles. She also averaged 75 speeches a year, penned as many as 150 letters a day and hosted eight radio programs and three television shows.

So how do you go about creating a massive digital archive that encompasses the vast trove of Eleanor Roosevelt materials and make them accessible to everyone from historians to schoolchildren?

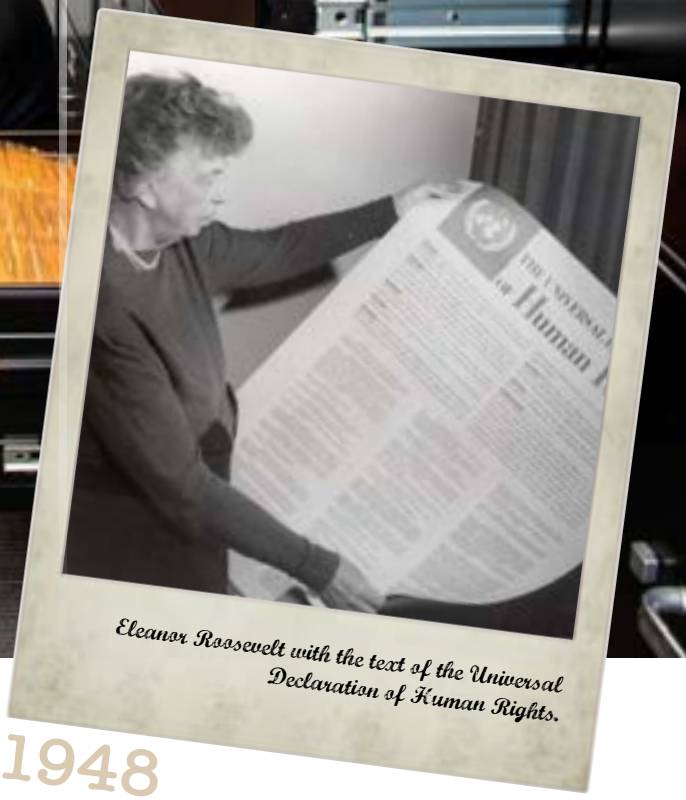
For 18 years, that's been the mission of the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, a research center housed within Columbian College's Department of History and founded by alumna and retired Research Professor of History **Allida Black**, PhD '93. Funded primarily though grants from the National Archives and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project scours the landscape of Roosevelt resources—from the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., to the FDR Library in Hyde Park, N.Y., to international archives in Israel—to amass a permanent collection of her writings and speeches.

"Eleanor Roosevelt is such an important historical figure and she established an enormous written and spoken legacy," said CCAS alumnus and Project Director **Christopher Brick**, BA '02. "But that also means there's no way for any single researcher or historian to digest all of that material."

Brick and a staff of two full-time editors, two PhD students and dozens of student interns have amassed a wealth of historical resources from all phases of Roosevelt's public life. Their archive stretches from her marriage to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1905 (her uncle and then-President Theodore Roosevelt gave away the bride) to her death in 1962. But the work of the team primarily targets Eleanor Roosevelt's life and career from the time she left the White House. Those 17 years were among Roosevelt's most productive, nearly eclipsing her time as first lady. They included her service as chair of the U.N. Human Rights Commission where she acted as the chief proponent and central architect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

During that time, Roosevelt also continued to fervently campaign for civil and women's rights, taking high profile stances to dismantle Jim Crow and oppose Joseph McCarthy. She traveled the world as an "ambassador-extraordinaire" and met with foreign leaders such as David Ben-Gurion in Israel, Jawaharlal Nehru in India and Nikita Khrushchev in the Soviet Union. All the while she challenged her own country to live up to the same ideals it espoused to the world. "Until we have complete equality

Project Director Christopher Brick, BA '02, and Project Editor Christy Regenhardt, BA '95, among the archive of Roosevelt documents.



Eleanor Roosevelt with the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

1948

"You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face . . . . You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

of opportunity in every field, equal rights socially and economically, we cannot consider ourselves a real democracy," she declared.

John F. Kennedy traveled to Hyde Park to court a reluctant Roosevelt's influential endorsement for his 1960 presidential campaign. Although she worried that JFK was soft on civil rights, she eventually supported his nomination and later pushed his administration to take firmer stances on discrimination and violence against African Americans. During her final years, she served on the Peace Corps board of directors and openly supported the Equal Rights Amendment, arguing that "law, custom, and the forgetfulness of men" kept women form equality in the workplace.

"Staying aloof is not a solution," she wrote, "but a cowardly evasion."

Still, her post-White House years receive limited attention from scholars, Brick said. "Our historical memory of her is usually in her role as first lady, but that only captures a small part of the identity she assumes in American public life," he noted. "Her career isn't over by any stretch of the imagination when FDR dies. She continued to shape politics, international law and human rights."

Honoring Eleanor

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project's initial goal was to publish a five-volume print edition of the most important papers from Roosevelt's later political life. Volumes I and II—covering 1945-1952 and featuring, respectively, forewords by Hillary and Bill Clinton—were published in 2006 and 2012. The final three volumes are currently in production, with a recent $195,000 National Archives grant supporting the completion of the third installment, which encompasses 1953-1955.

Over the years and with the advent of new technologies, the project's scope expanded to include digital and audio archives from Roosevelt's entire public life, with staff and students spending thousands of hours uncovering, transcribing and reviewing Roosevelt recordings. The historical treasures they have unearthed include photos of Roosevelt with Tuskegee Airmen; audio conversations with Albert Einstein and John Steinbeck; and records of a flight with Amelia Earhart where both women took the plane's controls. They've documented landmarks in her defense of civil and women's rights, including photos and letters from the 1939 incident in which she resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) after it barred African American opera singer Marian Anderson from performing at Washington's Constitution Hall. In her letter of resignation, she chastised the DAR for failing to seize "an opportunity to lead in an enlightened way." Roosevelt then invited Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial at a 1943 Easter Sunday concert.

Currently, the project's full collection includes 100,000 documents, 500 audio and visual recordings and 5,000 photographs—not to mention three shelves of binders recreating Roosevelt's daily schedule and 40 boxes of Christmas cards. The project's website contains an expansive database

Roosevelt addresses an Israeli crowd in 1952.

1961

Roosevelt with guests on Prospects of Mankind, her weekly public affairs television program, 1961, including Sargent Shriver (left of Roosevelt) and Hubert Humphrey (second from right).

where history lovers can find all of her more than 8,000 *My Day* newspaper columns. It also includes rare recordings like her radio address to the nation just hours after the Pearl Harbor bombing, a full day before FDR's speech on the "day that will live in infamy."

"We are the free and unconquerable people of the United States of America," the first lady declared on that fateful day.

"Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt's extraordinary record means making this material available to a broad swath of people—not just historians but students and anybody who wants to learn about this remarkable woman," said CCAS alumna and Project Editor **Christy Regenhardt**, BA '95. "Eleanor Roosevelt's legacy is part of our American story, and these items are valuable pieces of American heritage."

There is one historical record that eludes Brick and his team—the 3,000-page FBI file that details J. Edgar Hoover's targeting of Roosevelt as a suspected Communist sympathizer. Most of the file has been declassified, but 12 pages remain redacted. Brick is currently suing the federal government under the Freedom of Information Act for access to the missing pages, which most likely deal with Roosevelt's trips to the Soviet Union in 1957 and 1958.

Throughout their research journey, Brick's staff has become intimately familiar with their subject, from the key strokes of her personal typewriter to her often unintelligible handwriting. They have even developed an emotional connection to the former first lady. "I've found myself searching through a collection of letters in our filing room and ending up crying my eyes out over how moving the content is," said **Lee Febos**, an undergraduate history major and student research assistant.

For Brick, Roosevelt's continued relevance and influence in today's environment is cause for celebration. In 2013, the project was awarded a special designation by UNESCO as part of its historical heritage register. And in early 2017, *Hamilton* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda retweeted a Roosevelt quotation— "We have to get over our complacency and stop thinking that democracy is something we have achieved and no longer have to work for"—causing an immediate 500-follower boost for the project's twitter account.

"Her voice is every bit as relevant today as it ever has been," Brick said.

"True patriotism springs from a belief in the dignity of the individual, freedom and equality not only for Americans but for all people on earth."

Student Psychologists:

Training the Next Generation of Mental Health Professionals

Jesse Greenblatt (center) confers with colleagues at the GW Professional Psychology Program's Center Clinic.

Professional Psychology graduate students gain invaluable experience treating patientsw at the program's Center Clinic. The training, combined with rigorous coursework, prepares them for careers as clinical psychologists.

For an hour prior to seeing her first client at the GW Professional Psychology Program's Center Clinic, third-year graduate student Jesse Greenblatt was more anxious than her new patient. She nervously rearranged chairs, adjusted the lamp light and practiced her body language cues like folding her hands in her lap and nodding empathetically—all as her mind raced through the lessons from her clinical skills classes. Could she emulate the practiced manner of the program's more experienced students? Would the client accept her as a qualified mental health professional?

"We have a saying in the program about your first session: Just stay in the room," said Greenblatt, who is pursuing a doctor of philosophy degree in clinical psychology. "If you can put aside your nerves and just hang in there, pretty soon you realize you're just a concerned fellow human being having a conversation."

"We are providing real services . . . and offering students a broad variety of diverse experience early in their training. It's a win-win."

Paul Gedo

Accredited by the American Psychological Association, Columbian College's Professional Psychology Program graduates practitioner-scholars ready for careers as clinical psychologists. The program's 100 students combine in-depth training with classes on the scientific foundations of psychology. Courses are taught by licensed clinicians and faculty members skilled in using a psychodynamic framework for the assessment and treatment of psychopathology. The Center Clinic—a nonprofit outpatient community mental health and training clinic housed at GW—provides students with the opportunity to work directly with patients, many of whom are local D.C.-area residents without access to needed care.

"For students seeking careers as psychologists, our program provides a full-time immersion experience," said Paul Gedo, director of clinical training and associate professor of clinical psychology. "We are providing real services, especially to folks who don't have a lot of money or are historically underserved, and we are offering students a broad variety of diverse experience early in their training. It's a win-win."

Between the clinic and their classroom training, students "hit the ground running," said fourth-year student Celeste Kelly. Students hone their diagnostic and treatment skills through mental health assistance at affiliate organizations like elder care facilities and homeless shelters. They also perform third-year externships at school counseling centers, mental health clinics and hospital psychiatric units around the country.

The emphasis on real-life clinical experience was the reason Greenblatt, who received her BA in English from Wesleyan University, chose Columbian College's program. During her first year at the clinic, she primarily monitored the phones, often serving as the important first point of contact for potential clients. In between classes during her second year, she saw as many as five clients a day, all with a post-doctoral fellow on site and supervised by a licensed faculty member. "This program has helped me learn not only what I want to do but also who I want to be," she said. "I feel like I'm getting to know this field while getting to know myself."

Program Director and Professor of Clinical Psychology Loring J. Ingraham

Students treat clients with depression and mood disorders, while referring individuals with severe eating disorders, substance abuse issues and acute suicidal inclinations to liaison facilities. Those facilities include the GW Hospital, the School of Medicine and Health Sciences and the School of Nursing. "We tell students that even though they are beginners, there are a lot of resources for them and our clients," said Loring J. Ingraham, program director and professor of clinical psychology. "In some ways, their patient receives some of the most dedicated treatment they will ever get."

Building Confidence

Developing confidence and finding their professional voice are sometimes the biggest hurdles for students. "Nothing prepares you for seeing patients—it's incredibly intimidating and you never feel like you're ready," said third-year student W. Max Hurley-Welljams-Dorof, who hopes to use his degree to treat severe psychopathology conditions like schizophrenia. Like many student-clinicians, he is still learning not to internalize his patient sessions. "There is an extreme level of intimacy that develops with a patient," he explained. "They tell you things they haven't told their family or loved ones. You need to find a way to turn those emotions off or you won't be an effective therapist."

Students often undergo independent sessions with a therapist to help them sort through their emotions and provide a window into the counseling process. "If you are learning how to be a therapist, it's important to know what it feels like to be a patient," Kelly said. "You want to see the process from both sides of the room."

CORCORAN ACQUIRES HISTORIC ART TROVE

Columbian College's Corcoran School of the Arts and Design acquired hundreds of sculptures, paintings and photographs from the Corcoran Gallery of Art's permanent collection, laying the foundation for a research collection that will have significant pedagogical value to students and also be accessible to the GW community as well as the public.

The 18 paintings, 642 photographs, 93 prints and 15 sculptures gifted to the Corcoran School include works by Ansel Adams, Eugene Delacroix, Sally Mann, Mary Ellen Mark and William Wegman. Among the notable pieces are Jennifer Steinkamp's "Loop," a vibrant audiovisual work once on display in the Corcoran Rotunda; Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's "The Paradise Institute," an immersive multimedia experience mimicking a grand, old-style movie palace that was created for the 2001 Venice Biennale; and Robert Stackhouse's colossal wooden "Ghost Dance."

"This collection will be used as a dynamic resource for student learning and to generate public discourse on what these objects say about broader issues," said **Sanjit Sethi**, director of the school. "We're grateful for the opportunity to give artists, scholars, the D.C. community and the broader public the means to truly immerse themselves in these works."

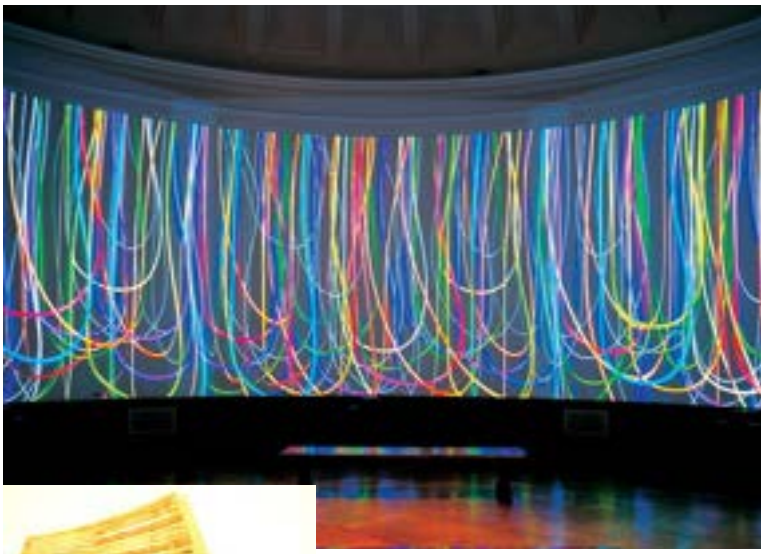
Much of the collection is related to the history of the Corcoran and founder William Wilson Corcoran, including a large oil portrait by William Stone, a series of photographs of the Flagg Building in the 1970s by Paul Kennedy and the original silver and ivory trowel used to lay the landmark building's cornerstone in the late 19th century.

The artistically rich collection includes images, pictorials, landscapes, narratives and journalistic works by both artists and photojournalists. "In that sense it really mirrors the breadth of what we teach here," said Corcoran Assistant Director for Academic Affairs **Kym Rice**.

Sethi also hopes the new collection will enable interdisciplinary collaboration by students and faculty—not just within the Corcoran School but across the university "from American Studies to anthropology and beyond." Other GW art venues, including the museum and the Luther W. Brady Art Gallery, will have the opportunity to design collaborative exhibits, while academic departments will be able to use the pieces as archival and teaching resources.

John Wetenhall, associate professor of museum studies and director of the George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum, said the collection also opens up new possibilities for curatorial and collection management studies. A new electronic collection management system has the potential to make the entire collection publicly accessible, and students will be involved in transitioning pieces to GW's state-of-the-art conservation and collections resource center in Ashburn, Va.

"The very intake of this work—storage, cataloguing, registration—is an opportunity for teaching and learning," Wetenhall said. "We train a lot of collections managers in this country and around the world, and these Corcoran works enhance our ability to give them a hands-on look at the mechanics of museums."



(Above) Jennifer Steinkamp's "Loop," once on display in the Corcoran Rotunda, is returning to the Corcoran Research Collection.

(Left) "Ghost Dance" by Robert Stackhouse

When Scholarship Meets Professional Development

New "Engaged Liberal Arts" courses connect academic interests with professional development skills, preparing students for success beyond the classroom.

Sophomores Maggie Moss (left) and Margaret Perron in Geography Professor Elizabeth Chacko's Migrants and the City class. (Photo: Sydney Elle Gray)

When history major **Carley Christerson** enrolled in Columbian College's Public History class, she was looking forward to a curriculum that included discussions on urban renewal and the shifting political tides of city life. But what she got was much more—a class that showed her how to apply her studies to the professional workplace through field trips, internship opportunities and in-classroom workshops with representatives from the Center for Career Services.

The Public History class was one of several Engaged Liberal Arts (ELA) courses offered to Columbian College sophomores and juniors this past year. Similar to Dean's Seminars for Columbian College first-year students, the courses provide focused study on specific areas of interest, but with one big difference: the introduction of a professional development component.

"By merging the academic with the professional, we want students to think earlier about their preparation for being in the workforce," said **Elizabeth Chacko**, Columbian College's associate dean for undergraduate studies and a professor of geography. "That may mean getting an internship or improving professional skills or learning where talents and strengths lie. These classes provide concrete, practical, professional development without losing sight of our academic mission."

ELA faculty work with Career Services representatives to integrate professional development directly into their curriculum. For example, in the Public History class, Associate Professor of History **Christopher Klemek** had his students network with museum curators, and Professor of Clinical Psychology **Christina Gee** invited alumni into her psychology class to explain how they are putting their liberal arts degrees to work.

"This class opened up a whole new world of occupational history for me," Christerson said of her experience. "I'm now aware of hundreds of career options that I didn't even know were available to me through history."

The ELA initiative launched last fall with classes in biology, psychology, history and music. Two more classes were added in the spring: Gee's Clinical Psychology class and Chacko's Migrants and the City.

Biology major **Priya Brahmbhatt** was initially skeptical of the professional development aspect of Professor of Biology **Keith Crandall**'s Introduction to Bioinformatics course. But the skills she acquired—resume building, networking and interviewing—were immediately helpful to Brahmbhatt when she applied to research-oriented internships. "It definitely made me more aware of the importance of professional development and the impact it makes on my career trajectory," said Brahmbhatt, who hopes to attend medical school after graduation.

In post-class surveys, students said the ELA curriculum made them better able to convey the relevance of their academic experiences to employers. Prior to the classes, 73 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they could articulate the skills they acquired through their liberal arts education. That figure rose to 86 percent after completing an ELA course, with strongly-agree respondents increasing from 10 percent to 19 percent.

"We are trying to help students see the value of their liberal arts education and how it can impact their development both in the classroom and in professional experiences," said Assistant Provost for University Career Services **Rachel A. Brown**. She noted that, at the end of each course, students are required to create a written and video "professional pitch" on how the class relates to their career goals. "In a sense, we are trying to get them to convey the Engaged Liberal Arts in their own words."

In Klemek's class, political science major **Gordon Ehrlich** got the opportunity to meet a former top-level National Security Agency officer, historians at the State Department and curators at Ford's Theatre. "Not only did [the professional development components] help me better understand the technical aspects of applying to a job, but I also gained helpful insights from people who have spent an entire career in the field of public history," he said.

While Columbian College and Career Services continue to evaluate the program, Brown has a checklist of ideas to build on the lessons learned during the program's first year. Those include expanding the number of disciplines, increasing alumni involvement and enhancing student awareness of the college's Engaged Liberal Arts brand. Still, the initial offering, she said, was an important step in the right direction. "We are making a strong statement to our students: Professionalism and professional development are a vital part of the liberal arts."

PAGEANTS AND PROTESTS

Brittany Lewis competed for the Miss Black America title to raise awareness for racial justice and further her own doctoral research. The last thing she expected was to win.

History PhD student and Miss Black America 2017 Brittany Lewis has a message for anyone who believes the stereotype that pageant contestants are all-beauty and no-brains: "These are very intelligent, very accomplished young women," she said. Indeed, on the summer night when she won her crown, Lewis shared the Atlantic City stage with a Carnegie Mellon engineer, a professional ballerina and a MBA-holder who spoke four languages.

Lewis has an impressive resume of her own, including a two-year stint as a Teach for America middle-school instructor, as well as a history of activism for causes such as preventing domestic violence. And, she is the recipient of the History Department's Herber Prize for the Best Graduate Student Instructor.

Lewis has drawn on her pageant experiences as grist for her academic research, which is focused on African American and urban studies. Her dissertation on black history in Atlantic City examined how the Miss Black America pageant evolved in the late 1960s as a reaction to the then all-white Miss America competition—a concept Lewis calls "pageant-as-protest."

"Not many people look at beauty contests as moments of historical significance," she said. "Believe me, it's even harder to see them that way when you're actually in one!"


Brittany Lewis

But Lewis has a skill for viewing almost any issue, from social justice to boardwalk pageants, through a scholarly lens. Even when she strode across stages in swimsuits and evening gowns, she kept her thoughts trained on the research potential, acting almost like an undercover historian in the pageant world.

"Brittany is a smart and insightful rising scholar," said Associate Professor of History Erin Chapman. "As a public historian, Brittany will be in a position to educate a broad swath of society on crucial socio-political issues."

Lewis first entered pageants as something of a lark. At 21, she hoped to garner the ample scholarship money many of those contests award. At first, she failed to win crowns and sashes, but she still took home prizes in categories celebrating academic achievements and interview responses. "I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know where to stand or what to wear," she said. "But I was having fun, making friends and earning for college."

In 2014, Lewis represented Delaware in the Miss America pageant. While she didn't win, she used the pageant as a platform to promote domestic violence awareness—an issue that she has been actively involved in since 2010 when here sister was killed in a domestic abuse incident. Working with then Delaware Governor Jack Markell and state and national nonprofits, she led the charge to declare October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

"Every time I speak to a crowd, there's someone who tells me that they or their mom or their loved one has experienced domestic violence," Lewis said. "Even in schools, young people say they can relate to my sister's story and they recognize some aspect of it in their own lives."

Pageants and Protests

Lewis initially planned to retire from pageants after the Miss America competition. In 2015, she came to GW as a doctoral student, immersing herself in issues like radical movements and black feminism. Ironically, her historical research led her back to beauty contests.

Growing up near Atlantic City, home of the Miss America pageant, Lewis was well aware of the event's history. The Miss Black America contest was founded in 1968 by

Lewis was crowned Miss Black America 2017.

Philadelphia activist J. Morris Anderson as a protest against Miss America's history of racial discrimination. Although the rule specifying that contestants must be of the "white race" was repealed in 1950, it wasn't until 1971 that an African American competitor appeared in the national pageant. In 1984, Vanessa Williams became the first black woman to be awarded the Miss America crown.

"That first Miss Black America pageant was a fascinating moment in history, both for African Americans and women," Lewis noted. At the same time that feminist groups demonstrated outside the Miss America pageant, across the boardwalk black women staged their own form of protest and held a pageant to celebrate black womanhood and black beauty.

That confluence of ideas and activism sparked Lewis' scholarly curiosity and inspired her to return to the pageant world. While maintaining her doctoral course load, Lewis won a D.C. qualifier and then competed at the Miss Black America finals. On her way to the title, she wowed the judges with a dance routine choreographed to an interview with acclaimed performer and civil rights activist Nina Simone.

During her one-year reign as Miss Black America, Lewis spearheaded initiatives close to her heart, including African American education and domestic violence awareness, with organizations like the Congressional Black Caucus and the Obama Foundation. She appeared at the NAACP Image Award and the BET Music Awards ceremonies. Now she plans to take advantage of one of her prizes—an all-expense paid trip to anywhere in the world—to visit Ghana for another research project. "Being a pageant winner is fun and exciting," she said. "But I will always think of my real title as historian."

Can Art Therapy Defuse Teacher Burnout?

With half a million teachers leaving the profession each year, Art Therapy graduate student Christina Hagemeier devised a research project to explain the ABCs of burnout.

In an Oklahoma elementary school, **Christina Hagemeier**, a graduate student in Columbian College's Art Therapy Program, hands out art supplies—paint, colored pencils, chalk pastels—and asks a group of 11 teachers to draw a picture that best describes how they feel about the beginning of the school year. The sketches that followed—which included wilting flowers and fast-moving clocks—were decidedly downbeat, revealing feelings of exhaustion, stress and anxiety.

Christina Hagemeier

As part of her graduate research, Hagemeier sought to test the effectiveness of art therapy in combatting teacher burnout. And, while words were not exchanged during the initial exercise of what was a day-long workshop, those initial portraits spoke volumes. As interpreted by Hagemeir, who graduated this past spring, the fast-moving clock signified the frustration of juggling student needs with time constraints; the falling flower petals represented teachers' worries that some students get left behind.

In the study, teachers responded to the 'droopy flower' drawing (top left corner) with pictures of support.

"The power of the visual image allowed them to create supportive responses without having to say a word," Hagemeier explained. "Through artwork, we were able to have a more fruitful conversation in a few hours than most of these teachers experienced in an entire school year."

After drawing their sketches, the teachers were asked to silently view all of the artwork and then draw a new picture. Their new images were portraits of empathy and support—they included helping hands repairing sad flowers and watering cans reviving wilted gardens.

While art therapy still has its skeptics, it has become a widely-respected technique with proven beneficial effects for a range of populations—from trauma sufferers like combat veterans to children with autism to people battling stress and job burnout. "Professional burnout is a major cause of employee unhappiness and dissatisfaction," said Assistant Professor of Art Therapy **Jordan S. Potash**, Hagemeier's project advisor. "Art therapy addresses [burnout] by engaging the creative process to re-energize people while identifying commonalities and empathy with coworkers."

> *"Through artwork, we were able to have a more fruitful conversation in a few hours than most of these teachers experienced in an entire school year."*
>
> Christina Hagemeier

Teachers may be particularly susceptible to burnout—which Hagemeier defined as "a chronic and persistent feeling of being ineffective and unappreciated." The profession has long been beleaguered by long hours, low salaries and large class sizes. About half a million U.S. teachers—15 percent of the entire profession—leave their jobs every year. An American Federation of Teachers survey reported that 73 percent of teachers say they are "often" under stress while 55 percent described their morale as "low or very low."

"This is what happens when you are juggling kids, a lack of communication and a lack of resources," said Hagemeier, whose mother is a teacher. "Teachers are inherently empathetic and giving of themselves. But when you are constantly under pressure, eventually your empathy tank gets depleted."

With Potash's guidance, Hagemeier built on previous studies by investigating how art therapy-based protocols might lessen the effects of teacher burnout while creating space for teachers to support other struggling colleagues. She tested art therapy's ability to forge a "metaphoric language," as she put it, to foster communication among coworkers and open dialogues about stress in the workplace.

In a post-workshop discussion, teachers told Hagemeier that the artwork forum felt like a safe environment to discuss their struggles, while the responses showed that they weren't alone. By expressing themselves through art, most of the teachers said they could connect with other teachers feeling the same frustrations. "All of us care about every kid but in the back of my mind I am always thinking, 'I should have done this or I should have done that,'" explained one of the teachers.

"The biggest takeaway for me is the power of communicating in a different language," Hagemeier said. "Simply by removing their normal voices and word use, and replacing that tool of communication with art, teachers felt more comfortable sharing their concerns and offering others their support."

Hagemeier hopes to expand her research after she attains her art therapy license. Meanwhile, she's an artist herself, specializing in abstract realism landscapes. "The Art Therapy Program encouraged us to have an identity as an artist as well as an art therapist," she said. "As an artist, you are already naturally curious and open to experimentation. That's what we ask for in the therapy room too: be open, be curious and be willing to look at things in a way you may never have before."

TURNING A CAREER INTO ART

After 50 years of teaching, Art History Professor and alumna Lilien Robinson approaches each lecture as an exciting blank canvas.

In her 19th Century European Art, Robinson introduces students to paintings from masters like J.M.W Turner.

During a recent lesson, Art History Professor **Lilien Robinson**, BA '62, MA '65, showed her undergraduate class on 19th Century European Art an1814 oil painting by French artist Théodore Géricault titled "An Officer of the Imperial Horse Guards Charging." In it, a mounted Napoleonic cavalry soldier appears to be in mid-attack even as his horse seemingly rears away from the battle. Robinson has studied Géricault for years; she was even in the process of writing a journal article that included this very painting. Still, she remained conflicted about the painting. Was the French soldier charging toward an enemy—or away from one?

So she turned to her students for guidance. "Is the soldier fighting or retreating?" she asked her class. "What do you think?"

To many of her students, the moment was remarkable. Robinson is a revered professor with five decades of teaching experience and a mantle full of honors such as the Columbian College Excellence in Teaching Award, the Trachtenberg Service Prize and the George Washington University Award. And now she was asking her students—many of whom had never even taken an art history class before—to help formulate her thoughts.

"As an undergraduate, I never had a professor ask me to respond to their own academic work," said **Elizabeth Brevard Doorly**, a second-year art history graduate student and Robinson's graduate assistant. "But Professor Robinson is a consummate professor. She truly cares for her students and the development of their critical thinking skills."

For Robinson, each lecture is like a blank canvas. She approaches every class as a fresh opportunity to spark passion in her audience—whether she's introducing first year students to French Realist painters and English Pre-Raphaelites or engaging her graduate seminar in discussions of major collectors from Catherine the Great to Duncan Phillips. And, over more than five decades of teaching, she has built a reputation as a beloved educator who stays in touch with her former students long after graduation.

"Lilien inspired in me a lifelong interest in art history and a sustained passion for inquiry," said **Steve Frenkil**, BA '74, a past president of the GW Alumni Association who remains a close friend. "She helped me learn about ways to consider art—techniques that were prevalent at the time; the role of politics and social issues; the implications of artistic, economic and practical constraints on artists; the realities of being an artist in different eras. I want to take her course all over again!"

THE "WONDER" OF HUMAN CREATIVITY

Growing up in Serbia and living in Switzerland, Robinson developed her love of art early, traveling to view the great collections of the Louvre with a family devoted to creativity. When she came to GW as a student, she enrolled in art history classes and fell under the spell of professors who "conveyed the wonder and excitement that human creativity elicits," she said. "Literally I sat on the edge of my chair from the first class on. After that, there was no question that I was going to teach art history."

As a professor, Robinson focuses on instilling a heightened appreciation of art both as a historical and an emotional medium. Rather than asking students to memorize dates and style, a typical Robinson class may feature a lively debate over whether students would hang German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich's "The Monk by the Sea"—a stark portrait of a lone figure—on their bedroom wall. "Some find it inspirational—a contemplation of humanity," she noted. "Others think it's a downer. I want a work of art to speak to students. A great painting will offer something new, something different every time we contemplate it."

During her long career, Robinson has heard from those who question the relevance of an art history degree—a claim she dismisses as "foolish." "I tell them this will make your life better. It will open up so many doors, enriching you both emotionally and intellectually," she said. "Art history is the most interdisciplinary field I can think of. We approach our study of art in the context of the time: historical events, politics, societal changes and cultural developments."

As for Gericault's charging soldier, Robinson's class determined he was apprehensively turning toward the battle—perhaps in an allusion to the fall of Napoleon. The horse, they concluded, was clearly terrified. Robinson included their insights in the journal article she had been writing about the painting, citing her class for their input. "That respect for her students," said graduate assistant Doorly, "is an indication of the caliber of her teaching and her caring."

"I want a work of art to speak to students. A great painting will offer something new, something different every time we contemplate it."

Lilien Robinson

The web of a *Laminacauda rubens* spider from Robinson Crusoe Island. With a lack of predators on the island, the spider is free to extend its web away from tree trunks.

Return to Spider Island

On a remote volcanic island in the South Pacific, Biology's **Gustavo Hormiga** hikes forests and scales mountains to find rare spiders. On each return trip, he's helped define an evolutionary legacy and preserve an ecological landscape.

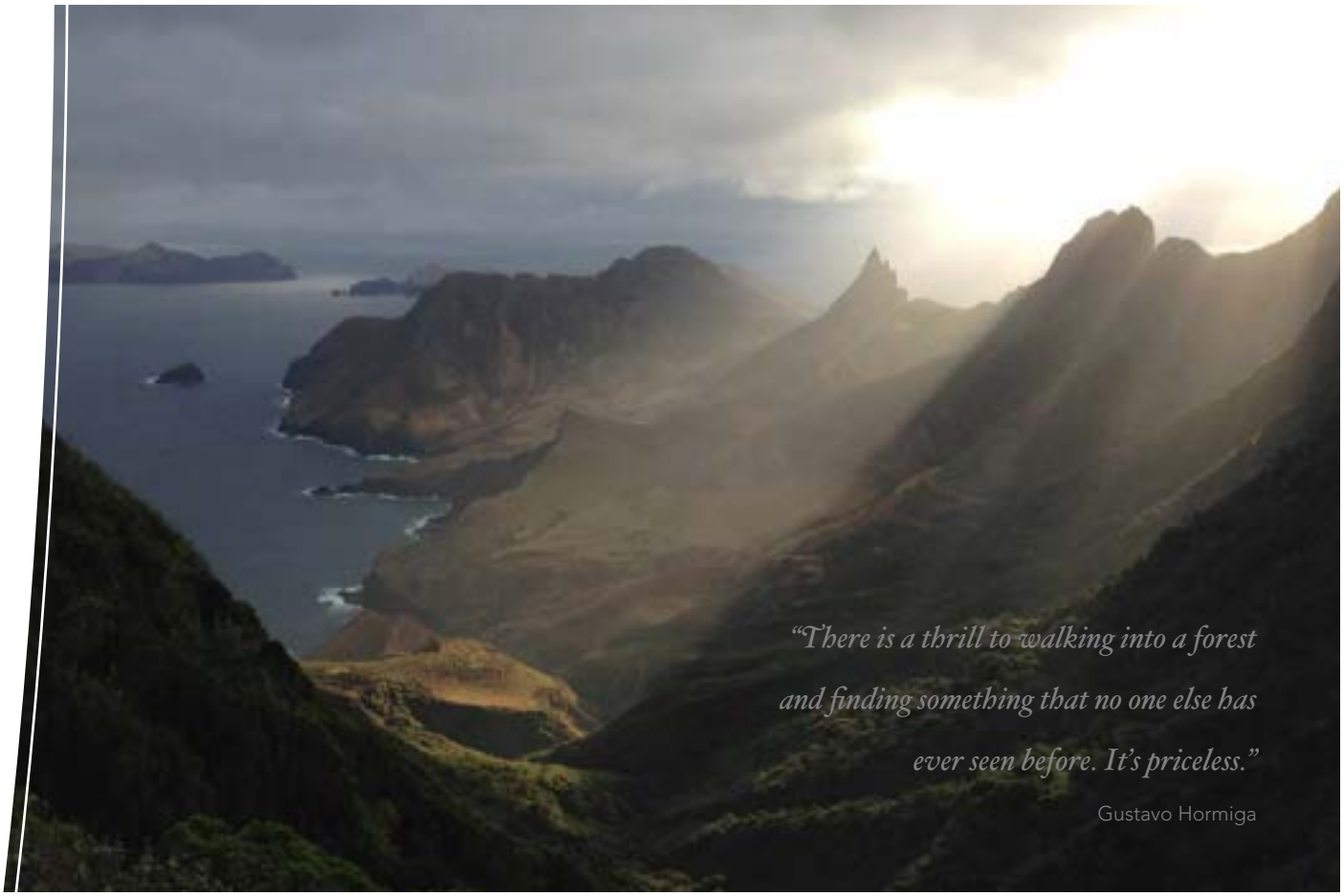
For **Gustavo Hormiga**, the Ruth Weintraub Professor of Biology, the Juan Fernandez Islands are a researcher's dream. The sparsely inhabited volcanic archipelago 400 miles off the coast of Chile is like an evolutionary playground. Virtually untouched by the outside world, it's the perfect living laboratory for studying the evolution of plants, birds and, Hormiga's specialty, spiders that exist nowhere else on earth.

Since 2013, Hormiga has made three National Geographic-funded research expeditions to the islands and discovered 11 new spider species—including two on his most recent trip in spring 2018. Atop jagged mountain peaks shrouded in grey mist, Hormiga has sighted hundreds of rare and undiscovered species: dwarf spiders grown to more than one centimeter when they should only measure a millimeter or two; bright red arachnids that feel like outcasts amid packs of black and brown species; and spiders with legs that are three times as long as their bodies and oversized pincer-like appendages called chelicerae extending from their mouths.

As an arachnologist and a taxonomist—a scientist who discovers, classifies and names life on earth—Hormiga's island research is uncovering new species, saving endangered ones and expanding the field of conservation biology.

"If these species are not collected, described and named, we would not have the hard evidence they existed," he explained. "We have extinction going on at a massive scale, so field work is extremely important, to document those species before they disappear."

While most people consider spiders a creepy annoyance at best, arachnids have always been a passion for Hormiga—whose name, ironically, means "ant" in Spanish. "Most kids go through a bug phase. Some of us never get out of it," he laughed. "It could have been beetles or flies or even ants. For me, it happened to be spiders." Through his travels to locations from equatorial Africa to the Amazon rainforest, Hormiga has discovered numerous new species and genera of spiders and made breakthrough observations on web architecture and its relation to the evolution of spider species.



(Left) Hormiga discovered the first reported linyphiid spider web invader.

(Right) Gustavo Hormiga hiking in the native forest of Alejandro Selkirk Island.

In Juan Fernandez, Hormiga found the perfect marriage of research subject and unexplored ecosystems. The trio of volcanic islands are made up of the densely wooded and mountainous Alejandro Selkirk Island, the uninhabited Santa Clara Island and the relatively hospitable Robinson Crusoe Island, which gained notoriety in Daniel Defoe's novel about an 18th century castaway. (Selkirk, a real-life privateer marooned on Crusoe Island, may have been the inspiration for the novel—although he never set foot on the island that actually bears his name.) Over centuries, the Juan Fernandez Islands have served as a pirate hideout, a penal colony and, as of 1977, a UNESCO Word Biosphere Reserve. Only about 1,000 people live on Robinson, mostly lobster fisherman and their families. A 2010 tsunami destroyed most of Robinson Crusoe's fishing village, San Juan Bautista, killing five people.

Millions of years ago, plants, birds and insects colonized the islands from surrounding land masses. Most spiders "flew" to the islands through a technique called ballooning—the airborne arachnids used their silk as kites to carry them on air currents from the continent. The isolated Juan Fernandez arachnids were free to evolve in unique ways and with "astonishing diversity," Hormiga said. Under thick forest canopy, Hormiga has identified spiders that shifted their web building habits and others that stopped building webs altogether, perhaps, he theorizes, to forage prey on the ground. The absence of natural competitors on Juan Fernandez may explain the relatively gigantic one-centimeter spider's unfettered growth, he suggests.

And in examining web architecture on the islands, Hormiga found that the same spider species that, on the continent, build flat, horizontal webs on the ground actually tilt their webs 90 degree off tree trunks on Juan Fernandez. Hormiga believes their web weaving evolved to suit their environment. "There is basically no competition like there would be on the continent, so these spiders are free to occupy biological niches that otherwise might have been taken," Hormiga said.

'Priceless' Discoveries

But if Juan Fernandez is a scientist's paradise, getting there is a traveler's nightmare. The journey begins with a six-seat propeller plane ride from Santiago through buffeting South Pacific cross winds. The plane touches down on a narrow landing strip on Robinson Crusoe. Next, Hormiga boards a fishing boat for a choppy 90-minute voyage around the island's northern coast; the jagged inland terrain is nearly impassable by car. From there, it's a mule-guided hike up rocky passages, unsteady cliffs and steep slopes as he climbs El Yunque—the "Anvil"—the island's 3,000-foot peak.

To photograph and retrieve samples of nocturnal spiders and their webs, Hormiga navigates Robinson Crusoe's uncertain terrain at night. He and his co-researcher from the University of Barcelona spend long hours shining their head lamps under rocks, ferns and leaf litter while dusting nearly invisible silk webs with corn starch. *Laminacauda*, the dominant genus on these islands, has an unprecedented 15 species, six of them yet to be named, most of them living in close contact with each other. During his last trip, Hormiga observed a long-legged new species that appeared to be a web invader preying on other spiders, a previously unknown behavior for this group of spiders. But back in his lab, Hormiga discovered that the invader wasn't a *Laminacauda* at all, but a brand new spider genus. "There is a thrill to walking into a forest and finding something that no one else has ever seen before. It's priceless," he said.

Hormiga plans to return to Juan Fernandez for expeditions. And he knows the opportunities for new island discoveries are dwindling. Invasive species—plants like Maquis and Blackberrys and non-native mammals like rabbits, rats and mice—are threatening Juan Fernandez's fragile ecosystems by devouring the islands' vegetation and preying on native species. Along with its spiders, Hormiga says much of Juan Fernandez's wildlife is in danger, from its ferns and brushwood forest trees to an endemic hummingbird called the Juan Fernandez firecrown. Meanwhile, he hopes mapping the islands' species springboards conservation efforts—while continuing to chart its evolutionary legacy.

"To preserve the islands' diversity, it is so important to know exactly what it is living there, how it got there and how and why it evolved like it did," he said. "We have to know what we are saving in order to save it."

Vietnamese villagers assisted with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command recovery efforts.

MIA: CHRONICLING THE LONG JOURNEY HOME

Sarah Wagner's research on the recovery and identification of MIA service members has taken her from Vietnam battlefields to forensic science labs to the living rooms of reunited families

It took 46 years for the Wisconsin marine to return home from Vietnam. His story seemed to have ended in 1967, when his helicopter was struck by anti-aircraft artillery and crashed into a central highlands mountainside. He was among the five soldiers killed, lost in an explosion of flames and debris.

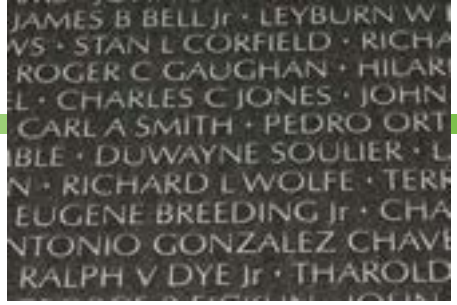
But in 2012, his tale was suddenly revived. A recovery mission from the federal Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command travelled to Vietnam to investigate the crash site. The 13-person team of soldiers and scientists included Associate Professor of Anthropology **Sarah Wagner**. With the aid of local Vietnamese laborers, they hacked through jungle canopy enveloping the impact crater, emerging after 28 days with a handful of excavated teeth. Within a year, a tooth was positively identified as belonging to the Wisconsin Marine. After nearly five decades, his remains were finally returned to his hometown.

For Wagner, a social anthropologist, each MIA service member's return represents both a personal remembrance and a national narrative on how we commemorate fallen heroes. Her ongoing research examines the efforts to recover, identify and memorialize Vietnam War MIAs—and what they tell us about our institutions and ourselves. Wagner is chronicling her work in a book tentatively titled *Bringing Them Home: Identifying and Remembering Vietnam War MIAs*, a project that earned her a coveted 2017-18 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and a National Endowment of Humanities Public Scholar award.

ACCOUNTING FOR THE UNACCOUNTED

In following the final journeys of missing service members, Wagner was struck by how today's sophisticated recovery and identification efforts have raised the potential of attaching a name to every fallen soldier. New methodologies, representing the intersection of science and history, are altering our modes of national commemoration, Wagner said, from the collective anonymity of memorials like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to the personalization of individual sacrifices.

"With these homecomings, family members, classmates and neighbors can remember a person not only as a fallen hero but also as a human being," she said. "He can be more than a symbol. He can be a whole individual welcomed back into the embrace of his country and his community."



Wagner's examination of war loss began in another conflict-torn region: Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2003, as a doctoral student, she spent 16 months in the Balkan nation, initially following refugees as they returned to their pre-war homes. She witnessed first-hand how displaced Bosnians were less concerned with their own fate than with locating the remains of murdered loved ones—even contributing blood samples for DNA matches as mass graves were being excavated.

"It started me thinking about the process for recovering the missing in action or the unaccounted for in my own country," she explained. While acknowledging the difference between the two conflicts—victims of genocide versus American service members lost in battles dating back to World War II—Wagner said both offered windows into the way societies mourn the missing. "There are similarities in how grief persists and the tensions around the ambiguity of not knowing what really happened to them," she said. "It changes how you understand your past, your present and your future."

Wagner quickly learned that identifying and repatriating war dead is a complex, time-consuming and expensive process. More than 1,600 soldiers are still listed as "unaccounted-for" from the Vietnam War alone, according to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency of the U.S. Department of Defense. Still, the remains of more than 1,000 Americans killed in Vietnam have been identified and returned to their families since 1973.

Spurred by pressure from families and veterans' groups, the recovery efforts took on new meaning after the Vietnam crypt of the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery was disinterred in 1998 and DNA testing revealed the identity of its missing soldier—First Lieutenant Michael J. Blassie, an Air Force pilot shot down in southern Vietnam in 1972.

"It was an act that signaled an important shift in forensic practice and the state's means of commemorating its missing members of the military as individuals," Wagner said. "The government and the military are responding to families and veterans but also to current service members by saying: 'This is the sacred obligation we have for those who die fighting for our country.'"

"This is the sacred obligation we have for those who die fighting for our country."

Sarah Wagner

INTO THE WAR ZONE

Wagner believed she couldn't truly approximate the plight of soldiers and their family without witnessing the recovery process in real time. With the JPAC team in central Vietnam, she joined the arduous effort to excavate the fatal helicopter crash site. Alongside dozens of Vietnamese laborers from nearby villages, the team cleared layers of thick jungle brush from the mountain crater. They carried dirt-filled buckets up steep slopes to a station where they sifted the debris through makeshift screens. For days, their efforts yielded only scraps of metal and munitions. Two discouraging weeks into their search, the team uncovered human teeth. Eventually remains recovered at the site led to the Wisconsin marine's homecoming.

"It changed the tenor of our mission," Wagner said. "We were celebratory that we had recovered something after so much labor, but there was definitely a gravity to the moment. It was, in some ways, a somber achievement."

Beyond the mission to Vietnam, Wagner continues to document missing service members' stories, meeting with families and fellow veterans and visiting their hometowns. "They helped me understand the kinship a recovery engenders—from bringing a brother soldier home to finally being able to bury a loved one next to his parents," Wagner explained.

To Wagner, the MIA research highlights the cultural and personal impact of anthropology—a message she conveys to her students. "I tell them that at the core of anthropology are real people's lives," she said. "As anthropologists, we go into communities and spend time trying to understand lived experiences. We tell people's stories. And we have an obligation to do it right."

ARE AUTISM AND OVEREATING LINKED?

For many families, particularly those with small children, the dinner table can be a minefield of stress. Young children are often notoriously picky eaters, eschewing vegetables for chicken nuggets, drowning dishes in ketchup and refusing to even consider new foods if they look or smell unappealing.

But when a family member has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), meal-time pressure can be ratcheted to near-crisis levels. Researchers have long known of a link between eating difficulties and people on the autism spectrum. One study found that children with ASD are five times more likely to face meal-time challenges—from extremely narrow food selections to ritualistic eating behaviors to meal-related tantrums—than their typically developing peers. In some cases, people with ASD may be hyper-sensitive to food textures. And some endure a range of physical difficulties like swallowing issues and gastrointestinal distress.

"People often downplay eating problems with young people and say they'll grow out of it. Well, many young people with autism don't," said **Greg Wallace**, assistant professor of speech, language and hearing sciences, whose research has focused on both brain imaging and behavioral development in ASD. Wallace has talked to parents who are beside themselves at meal-time and young people who compare swallowing crunchy food to knives scratching their throats.

"People often downplay eating problems with young people and say they'll grow out of it. Well, many young people with autism don't."

Greg Wallace

And now Wallace is investigating another possible autism-related eating irregularity: overeating. Studies have shown that children with autism are more likely to be "picky" eaters than their peers, a state usually associated with being underweight. But they are also, paradoxically, more likely to be obese, noted Wallace

"Issues of eating can be destructive in so many ways," Wallace said. "It goes well beyond being picky. Selective eaters may deal with nutritional issues. And, of course, we know the dangers of obesity. These are issues that have real effects on people's health and their quality of life."

As director of GW's Lab of Autism and Developmental Neuroscience, Wallace collaborates with the Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders at Children's National Health System and with the Laboratory of Brain and Cognition at the National Institute of Mental Health. Much of their work involves using magnetic resonance imaging to map structural brain development and examine neuropsychological functioning in people with ASD.

Greg Wallace

But over the past several years, Wallace has moved beyond neuroscience to address the practical implications of eating-related behaviors. "Our research takes a facet of autism—eating difficulties—that has profound ramifications on the wellbeing of those on the spectrum and seeks to understand their underlying mechanisms," said **Emily Richard**, BS '17, Wallace's senior research assistant and lab manager.

Wallace's pilot study on overeating, funded through a $25,000 grant from the Maternal and Child Health Research Program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, employs questionnaire-based data to determine if children with autism are more likely to be rated as overeaters. Phase two of the study centers on in-person testing of children with autism to examine cognitive underpinnings of a propensity to overeat.

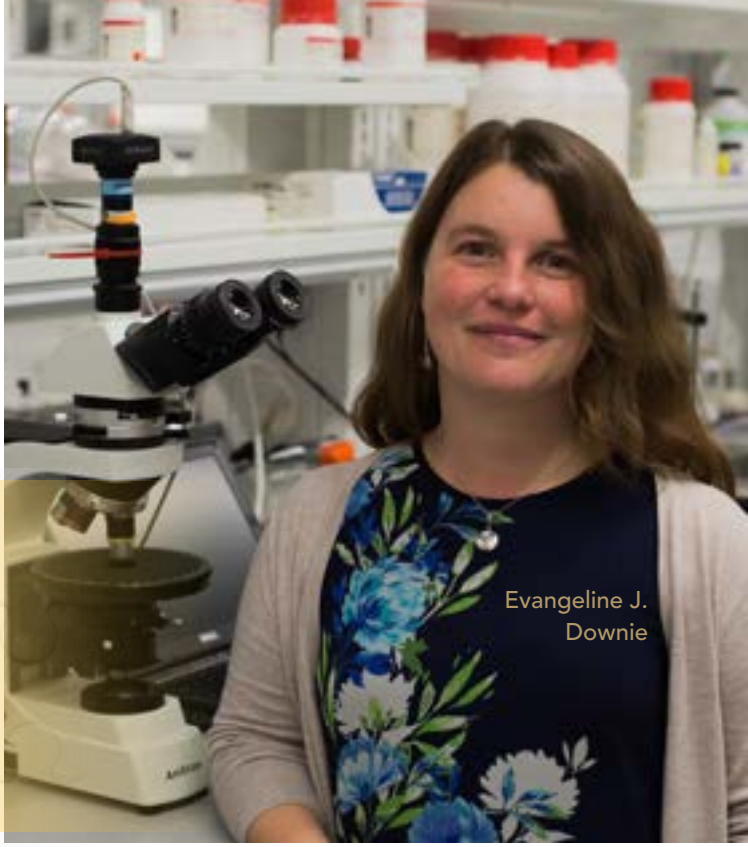
While his work is still in its infancy, Wallace's findings appear to point to a link between overeating in children with autism and difficulties in behavioral flexibility, such as struggling to shift between tasks or settings. That link may explain the connection of autism with selective eaters, who tend to show greater inflexibility. Indeed, Wallace theorizes that there may even be a subset of people with autism who could be both selective eaters and overeaters. "In other words, you restrict what you eat, but if you like it, you really like it and you indulge," he said.

Discovering connections between different aspects of autism may lead to potential research and therapy breakthroughs. While Wallace warns that any firm conclusions are a long way off, cognitive behavioral therapy has shown success with selective eaters and may eventually be adapted to create a similar program for overeaters.

Making assumptions for autism treatments, however, is always hazardous, given the highly individual nature of the disorder. "There's a common saying: If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism," Richard said. "But finding similarities and exploring where differences originate helps us guide future research to better serve the many people who are on the autism spectrum, regardless of how different from one another they may be."

SOLVING THE PROTON PUZZLE

A riddle at the heart of the atom is confounding scientists and suggesting a new model of physics. Evangeline Downie and an international research team are searching for a subatomic solution.


Evangeline J. Downie

There's big news in the tiny world of the proton, a mystery so scandalous that it has divided the scientific community and threatened to upend everything we know about physics. "To call it a giant fuss is an understatement," said Associate Professor of Physics **Evangeline J. Downie**.

The proton, the plentiful particle that makes up much of the visible matter in the universe, may be smaller than scientists have long believed. While it's by only an infinitesimally tiny degree—specifically, 4 percent smaller or a distance about a trillionth the width of a poppy seed—the variable has sent scientists scrambling for answers. Despite careful analysis and re-analysis, no one can figure out why the proton seems to have shrunk.

"The proton makes up about 50 percent of all observable matter, and we aren't sure how large it is," Downie explained. "That's huge."

Backed by funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), Downie and an international team of 45 scientists, including Columbian College Professors of Physics William J. Briscoe and Andrei Afanasev, are on a mission to crack what's become known as the "Proton Radius Puzzle." Begun in 2012, their ground-breaking experiments are heading into the home stretch—and their results may herald a fundamental new theory of physics. "We are the missing piece to the puzzle," Downie said.

INSIDE THE PROTON

Protons are a cornerstone of centuries of science. The positively charged particles in the nucleus of every atom, they formed just millionths of a second after the Big Bang. Protons generate heat in the core of the sun, whiz through space as cosmic rays and are fundamental components of virtually all of the matter around us. Even small shifts in our understanding of protons could have large-scale implications.

Protons are too small to be measured directly. Instead, scientists devised two methods for determining the particle's radius. One is electron scattering: Researchers fire a beam of negatively charged electrons at a hydrogen atom, and then measure the scattering angle as electrons deflect off the nuclei's proton. The second involves laser-jolting an electron with energy—or "exciting" it—to kick the particle between orbits within the hydrogen atom. As the electron naturally falls back to its original state, scientists measure its energy output and estimate the proton's size.

Historically, both methods have yielded roughly the same results: a proton radius of 0.88 femtometers. "And as long as the two methods agreed, everybody was happy," Downie said.

But in 2010, scientists working at the Paul Scherer Institute in Villigen, Switzerland, flipped the physics world on its head. The group replaced the electron in a hydrogen atom with a muon, a particle identical to an electron but about 200 times more massive, and attempted the laser-jolting method. They expected the experiment to offer a more precise radius.

Instead, "they messed everything up," Downie laughed. The muonic radius disagreed with both electronic measurements, recording 0.84 femtometers instead of the standard 0.88. The discrepancy was tiny but it was significant enough to confound physicists.

The mystery runs so deep that some scientists have contemplated a once-unthinkable violation of a sacred principle of physics: Could there be an unknown new particle that interacts with muons but not electrons? That scenario would be revolutionary shift in standard model of particle physics, Downie explained. While it's impossible to pinpoint the implications of a new physics theory, "through unexpected experimental results comes discovery, and in the press to investigate further and understand such discoveries comes new technology," Downie said. "It opens a whole new world of understanding."

THE MUSE MISSION

The muon mystery led to the formation of the international research team and a project dubbed the MUon proton Scattering Experiment (MUSE) Collaboration. Partnering with Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Rutgers University in New Jersey, the group plans to perform a definitive experiment: a version of electron scattering with muons. If the muon scattering numbers agree with the smaller radius, there will be little doubt that the new proton size is correct for muons—and that could lead to a re-thinking of traditional physics.

But preparing for the muon scattering experiment has been a massive undertaking. In 2012, MUSE received a $900,000 grant from NSF simply to design and build equipment. With construction now completed, Downie, who is the spokesperson for the MUSE Collaboration and GW's principal investigator, is leading the second phase of the project. She recently secured a new $420,000 NSF grant to move forward on the experiment.

MUSE is now in the initial stages of conducting muon scattering operations at the Scherer Institute in Switzerland. Downie, Briscoe and Afanasev—along with a team of CCAS postdoctoral, graduate and undergraduate students—are in charge of the data acquisition system that will capture and process the muon scattering angles from more than 3,500 detector elements. The project's findings are not expected to be completed until 2021.

"We could be pushing the edge of what's thought to have been possible," Downie said. "We could be going beyond all of our boundaries."


Kilonova blast

Kilonova Blast!

Four Columbian College astrophysicists were part of a global group of scientists who collaborated to identify and study the first confirmed observation of two merging neutron stars, a so-called kilonova. The existence of a kilonova—an explosive event roughly 1,000 times brighter than a nova—had long been suggested but was never definitively witnessed until now.

"For the first time ever, we have detected both gravitational waves and electromagnetic radiation at the same time from a single source," said Professor of Physics **Chryssa Kouveliotou**, head of the GW Astrophysics Group and an expert on gamma ray bursts. "With these observations, we put the astrophysical context to the gravitational waves. This is a monumental result—the result of the decade."

In addition to Kouveliotou**,** Assistant Professor of Physics **Alexander van der Horst**, Associate Professor of Honors and Physics **Bethany Cobb Kung** and Assistant Professor of Physics **Sylvain Guiriec** contributed to the finding.

The merger of two neutron stars was predicted to generate both gravitational waves and emit electromagnetic radiation at various wavelengths. Researchers also suspected that these mergers are the source of mysterious short gamma-ray bursts. The recent observations confirmed those predictions.

Gamma-ray bursts are the most powerful, brightest explosions in the universe. These short, transient events can last a few seconds or minutes, providing information about the formation and expansion of our universe.

"This is a new era for astrophysics," said Guiriec, who is also an assistant researcher at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. "We can now observe objects that we cannot see. It is like waking up one morning with a new sense to perceive the universe with brand new perspectives."

Living Art:
WHEN A CHEMISTRY LAB DOUBLES AS

Chemistry's Erik Rodriguez uses fluorescent proteins to unlock cellular secrets. But he's also found another use for the multi-colored microbes: paint for creating his own protein portraits from living material.

Erik Rodriguez experiments with dyes in his lab.

In Assistant Professor of Chemistry **Erik Rodriguez**'s lab, fluorescent proteins are lighting the way toward breakthroughs in cancer drugs, diabetes treatments and even unlocking the brain's secret process for learning and memory.

But when he takes a break from pushing the boundaries of science, Rodriguez shares with students another use for these fluorescent microbes: works of art.

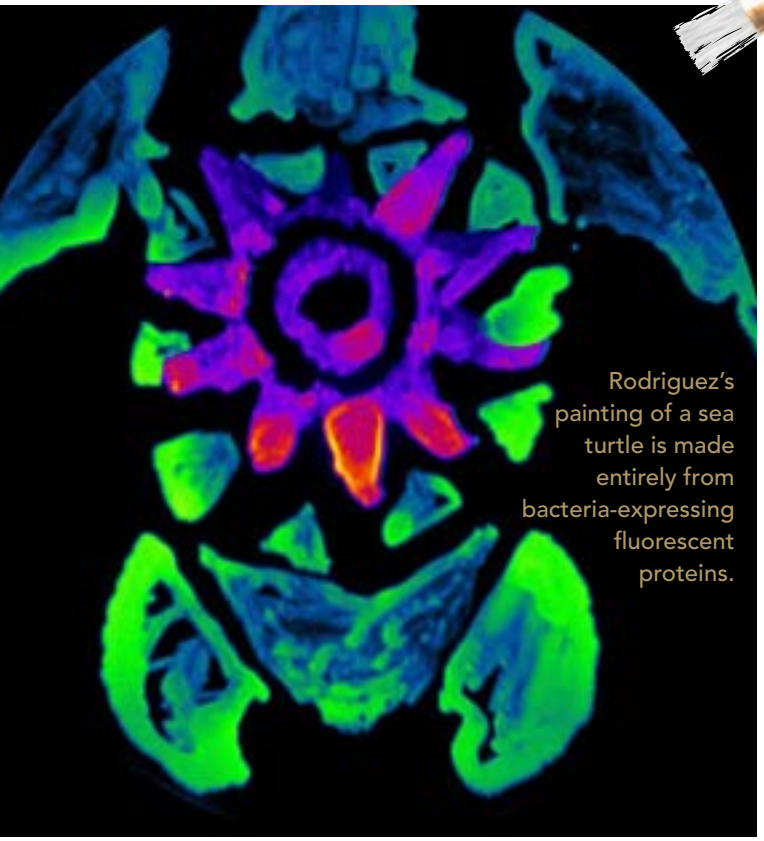
During down time between experiments, Rodriguez has dabbled in drawing portraits of cyan turtles and tangerine unicorns. His canvas is a Petri dish. And his paint—made from bacteria expressing fluorescent proteins extracted found in organisms like jellyfish —is actually alive.

"It's a fun way to break up the monotony of the lab and gives our students a feel for how science and art overlap," said Rodriguez, whose fluorescent protein turtle painting was reproduced in *Chemical & Engineering News* (C&EN), a leading chemistry trade journal. "But, of course, this isn't the most important use of these proteins."

Indeed, since their discovery in the 1960s, fluorescent proteins have revolutionized biology, enabling scientists to see previously invisible aspects of cellular behavior. And Rodriguez has been on the forefront of fluorescent protein milestones. He worked with 2008 Nobel Prize-winning chemist Roger Tsien, who first manipulated proteins to produce a glowing palette that transformed scientific imaging. Rodriguez later developed a bright far-red fluorescent protein that not only allows scientists to observe activity within cells but also provides even deeper imaging through tissue.

"These proteins give us a powerful toolkit for the visualization of structural organization and dynamic processes in living cells and organisms," he said. "We can now see pretty much any process inside the cell."

AN ART STUDIO



Rodriguez's painting of a sea turtle is made entirely from bacteria-expressing fluorescent proteins.

CAPTURING THE GLOW

Fluorescent proteins first came to the science world's attention through the green-glowing North American jellyfish, *Aequorea victoria*. The bioluminescent sea creatures, along with other species like mushrooms and fireflies, can convert their own chemical energy into a photon of light. Scientists isolated the jellyfish's green fluorescent protein (GFP) and attached the harmless fluorescent tags to proteins inside living cells. When the proteins are exposed to light, researchers can track their activity, watching brain neurons fire or mapping the path of a metastasizing cancer cell.

Eventually the jellyfish-derived GFP was engineered to push the spectrum of fluorescent proteins into blue, cyan and yellow mutations. Each glowed with different colors of light and allowed researchers to tag and study different molecules within a single cell. Red proteins, originally found in coral, expanded the color range even further—toward orange, red and far-red spectral regions that allow for deeper molecular imaging. Typically, the farther scientists progress towards the red spectrum, the dimmer the fluorescence glow, leading to less sensitive imaging. But Rodriguez's far-red protein shines as brightly as the original GFP. These proteins have an array of potential uses, including individualizing cancer therapy, tracking the production of insulin-producing pancreas cells for new diabetes treatments and imaging calcium in the brain that may hold the answers to how humans learn and maintain memories.

PROTEIN PAINTING

Rodriguez's bacteria painting technique involves genetically modifying bacteria to express the fluorescent proteins. Using an ordinary paint brush, Rodriguez traces an image with the bacteria on a Petri dish. Initially, he is painting blind; the artwork only appears when the bacteria grows overnight. The light absorbed by the fluorescent proteins is seen by the eye, but the brilliant fluorescence only shines in the dark under a special fluorescent imager. Different colors are captured by using filters that pass certain wavelengths of light. The images are overlaid to allow observers to see or photograph the microbial portraits.

Fluorescent protein painting is more than a chemistry lab pastime. High schools have used the technique to engage students in science. Some artists have even exhibited fluorescent portraits. Most controversially, Chicago artist Eduardo Kac unveiled a display in 2000 called "GFP Bunny," featuring a glowing green rabbit genetically engineered with fluorescent proteins by French scientists.

Rodriguez says his art is designed to illuminate students' interests, while bringing a touch of spontaneity and art appreciation to the lab. His students often paint with leftover fluorescent dyes from chemistry labs after experiments. **Nadine Lo**, an undergraduate lab assistant, created a fluorescent multi-colored dye drawing of an Andy Warhol-like eye, which also was published in C&EN.

Rodriguez's art projects aren't limited to painting. Two of his short films showing fluorescent proteins traveling through cells were named national winners in the 2017 American Wiki Science Competition. Meanwhile, he has no plans to trade in his microscope for a paint brush. He's currently evolving new proteins to expand the scope of imaging technology. "The art is fun," he said, "but our real challenge is taking [the science] as far as we can go."

EXPLORING THE FRONTIER OF THE PERIODIC TABLE

138,906 57 La Lanthanum	140,115 58 Ce Cerium	140,908 59 Pr Praseodymium	144,24 60 Nd Neodymium	144,913 61 Pm Promethium	150,36 62 Sm Samarium	151,965 63 Eu Europium	157,25 64 Gd Gadolinium	158,925 65 Tb Terbium	162,50 66 Dy Dysprosium	164,93 67 Ho Holmium	167,26 68 Er Erbium	168,934 69 Tm Thulium	173,04 70 Yb Ytterbium	174,967 71 Lu Lutetium
227,028 89 Ac Actinium	232,038 90 Th Thorium	231,036 91 Pa Protactinium	238,029 92 U Uranium	237,048 93 Np Neptunium	244,064 94 Pu Plutonium	243,061 95 Am Americium	247,07 96 Cm Curium	247,07 97 Bk Berkelium	251,08 98 Cf Californium	252,083 99 Es Einsteinium	257,095 100 Fm Fermium	258,1 101 Md Mendelevium	259,1 102 No Nobelium	262,11 103 Lr Lawrencium

Professor of Chemistry and International Affairs **Christopher Cahill** has spent most of his academic and research career at the bottom of the Periodic Table. There—far below such abundant elements as hydrogen, oxygen and carbon—resides a little-studied chemical family called the actinides. Some of them are familiar (uranium, plutonium); others sound vaguely artificial (neptunium, americium). As the key components in nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, these last-row elements are enormously consequential—and equally as dangerous. They are so highly radioactive and unstable that they've baffled nuclear scientists and frightened environmentalists and global policymakers alike. Even Cahill calls them "pretty nasty," although he's spent years taking their atomic structures apart.

"They are the frontier of the Periodic Table," Cahill said. "These mysterious and toxic elements may not be on everybody's radar, but they are incredibly relevant. They have, in some cases, made a mess of the environment, and they may continue to make a mess in the future. Or they may help mitigate climate change. Either way, there's still a lot of chemistry to learn about them."

Since 2005, Cahill has received nearly $1.2 million in research funding from the U.S. Department of Energy to unravel these subatomic mysteries. His research team—which consists of two graduate students, one undergraduate and a visiting Fulbright scholar from Argentina—is looking at the fundamental chemical behavior of the elements to the right of uranium on the Periodic Table, a subset of actinides known as transuranics. By testing them in environmentally relevant conditions, Cahill observes how they react under real-world stress. "There are grand challenges in this part of the Periodic Table, including nuclear waste disposal, environmental clean up and security issues," he explained. "But if you don't nail the fundamental science of how these elements behave, then everything else is a wash."

With the exception of uranium—the last naturally occurring element on the Periodic Table—all of the bottom-row trans-uranics are man-made, created in reactors or specialized labs. But while many have existed for more than 70 years, they have remained under-studied, precisely because they are so toxic.

"The materials themselves can be quite dangerous with regard to radioactivity and that can be a limiting factor to studying or handling them," explained doctoral student August Ridenour. He is working with Cahill using a process called x-ray crystallography—synthesizing solid-state materials (crystals) and using X-ray diffraction to investigate their atomic structure. The process enables them to investigate the interaction of radioactive elements with organic material in hazardous scenarios, like nuclear waste disposal or the dismantling of weapons.

"The research we are conducting is very exploratory," Ridenour said. "But that fundamental knowledge is needed to explain the properties of materials that are relevant to real-world problems, such as the very complex chemistry occurring around nuclear fuel and nuclear waste."

BRIDGING SCIENCE AND POLICY

Two years ago, Cahill took time off from his work at GW to serve as an American Institute of Physics Fellow within the State Department's Office of Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism. The experience, which primarily

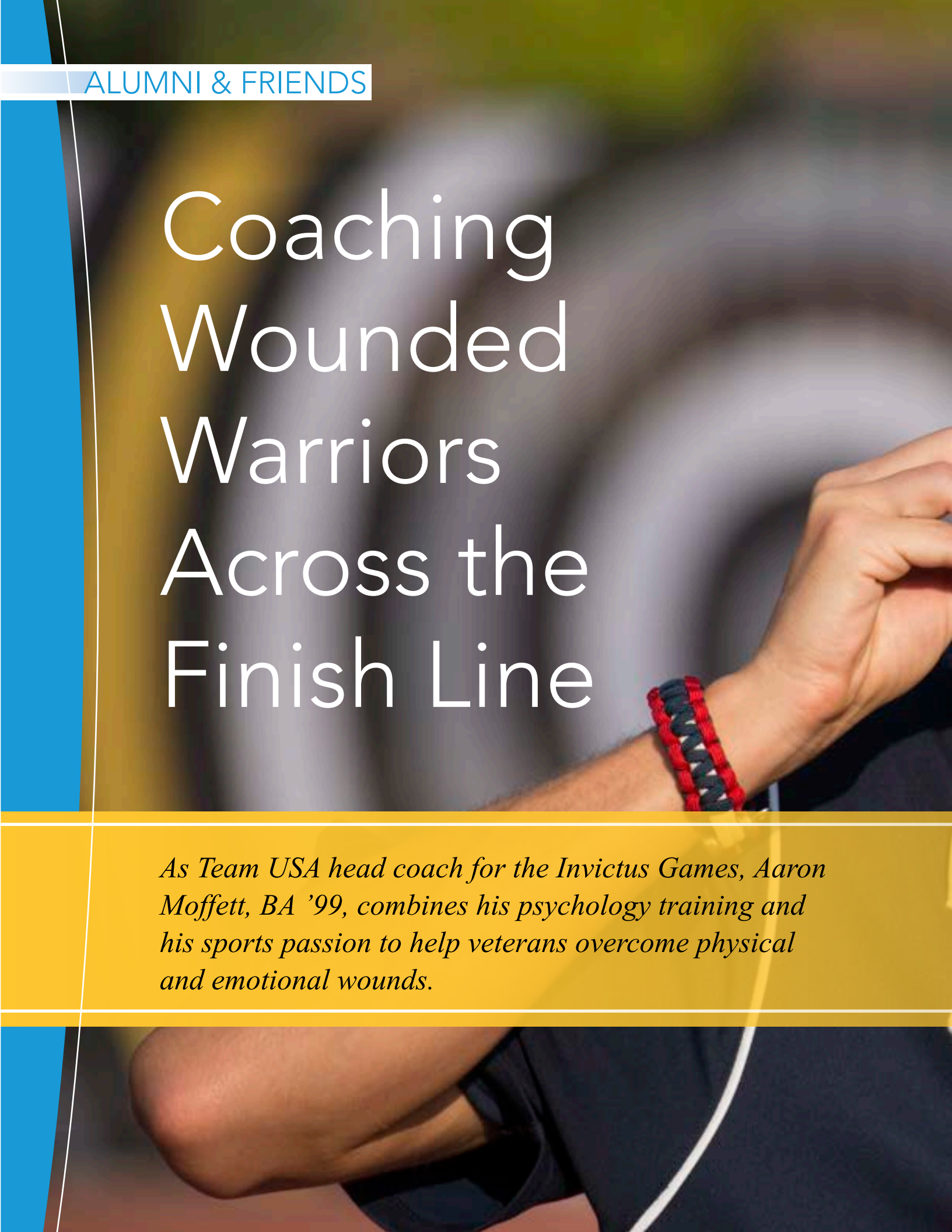
Christopher Cahill (left) with student researcher August Ridenour

involved analyzing the global nuclear landscape, brought a new dimension to his teaching and research. "You would be hard pressed to find a discipline that is more driven by policy than the nuclear arena," he said. "Nuclear science and policy are intimately enmeshed. You cannot be an expert in one without cognizance of the other."

Former and current Cahill students weren't surprised to see the chemistry professor straddle the science arena and the policy world. "It is very clear that he is passionate about this subject," said **Robert Surbella**, PhD '18, a former graduate research assistant in Cahill's lab and the Linus Pauling Distinguished Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. "He is always trying to better himself as a scientist but also as an effective communicator so he can serve as a bridge between science and policy." Indeed, Cahill encourages his students to adopt the role of "hybrid scientist"—prompting them to seek cross-disciplinary collaborations that broaden their knowledge both inside and outside the lab.

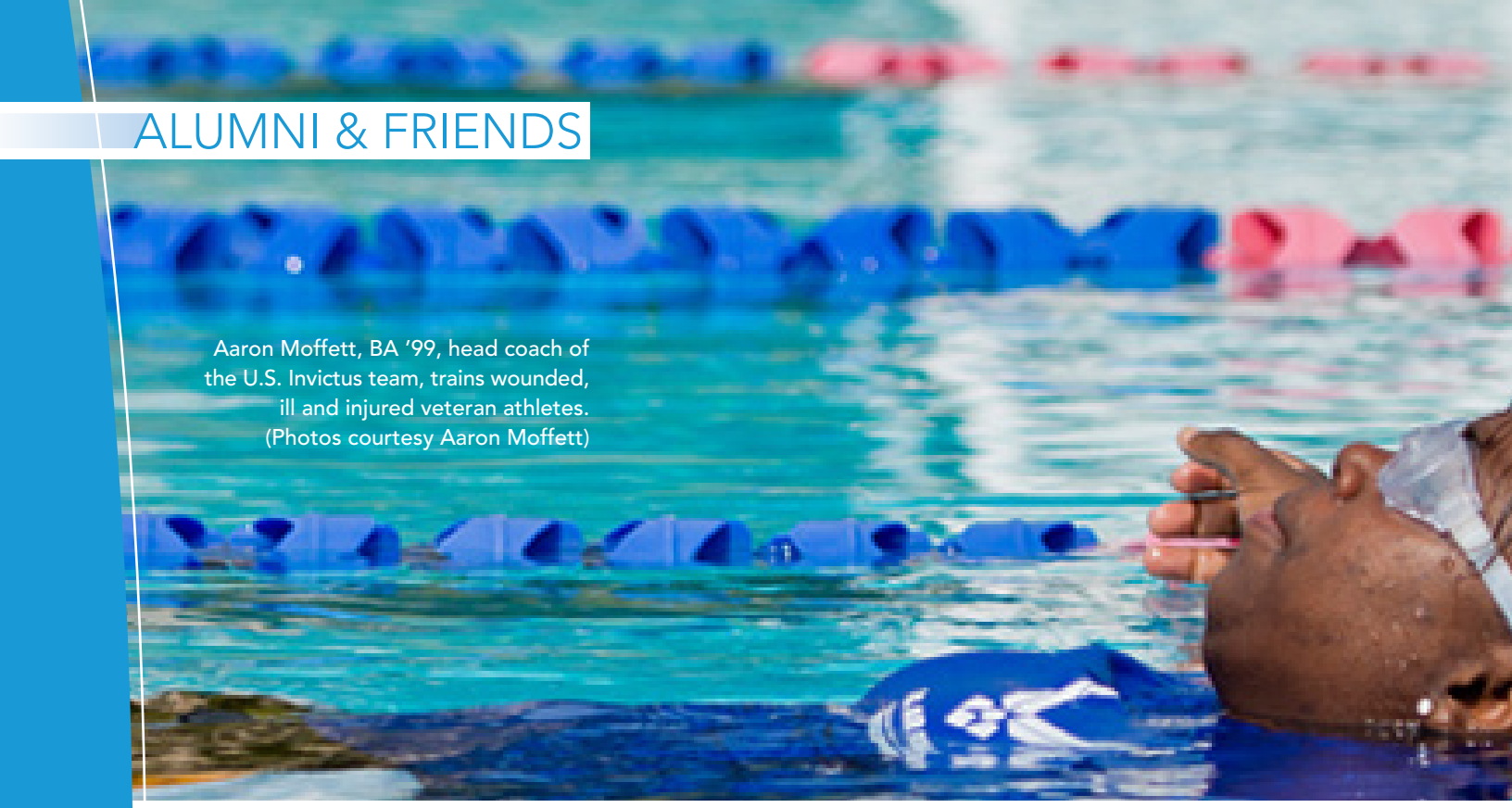
"I want my students to have an appreciation of the impact of their science on the public," he said. "Perhaps more so than those who delve in other parts of the Periodic Table, nuclear scientists have to go an additional step and think about the importance and the impact of their work on the world at large."

Coaching Wounded Warriors Across the Finish Line



As Team USA head coach for the Invictus Games, Aaron Moffett, BA ’99, combines his psychology training and his sports passion to help veterans overcome physical and emotional wounds.

Moffett's athletes took home a tournament-high 139 medals at the 2017 Invictus Games in Toronto.



Aaron Moffett, BA '99, head coach of the U.S. Invictus team, trains wounded, ill and injured veteran athletes. (Photos courtesy Aaron Moffett)

At the Toronto opening ceremonies of the 2017 Invictus Games, with dignitaries like Britain's Prince Harry and former president Barack Obama looking on, USA Head Coach and Columbian College alumnus **Aaron Moffett**, BA '99, took a moment to survey his team of athletes. They included a world record-holding Navy swimmer who lost both his eyes when he stepped on an IED in Afghanistan; a one-armed archer whose Air Force squad was ambushed by a terrorist cell in Indonesia; a wheelchair cyclist who, after years of serving as linguist for the Air Force, developed debilitating multiple sclerosis; and a veteran servicewoman who found a measure of peace in the pool after struggling with the effects of a sexual assault.

"These wounded warriors are overwhelmingly resilient, incredible people who are dedicated to their country," Moffett said. "I am privileged to be even a small part of their recovery."

That team took home a tournament-high 139 medals in the world-renowned sports competition for wounded, ill or injured veterans. And now, Moffett and a roster of nearly 100 U.S. athletes will try to top their success as they compete in the 2018 Invictus Games this fall in Australia. Alongside 500 disabled veterans from 20 different countries, Team USA is out to add to their medal-count in events such as swimming, cycling and wheelchair basketball and tennis. For Moffett, the games will once again offer him the opportunity to combine the skills he honed as a psychology major with his passion for athletics and service.

Back Into Blue

Moffett first began working with disabled athletes as a competitive swimmer at GW. In addition to offering lessons to professors and their families, he volunteered to help hearing-impaired children gain confidence in the pool.

After earning his PhD in kinesiology at Michigan State University, Moffett went on to create a nationally-recognized Paralympic-style tournament while he was an associate professor at Cal State San Bernardino. Since 2014, he's coached servicemen and women as a sports psychology consultant for the Air Force Wounded Warrior program and, in 2016, was named the head coach for Team USA at the Invictus Games.

"The Invictus Games lets our athletes show that they are not defined by their wounds," he said. "They have productive and fulfilling lives ahead of them. And sometimes those lives begin with the starting gun."

For Moffett, coaching adaptive sports is as much about teaching life skills—such as coping, socialization and goal setting—as athletic techniques. Many of his trainees suffer not only from physical disabilities but also what he calls the "invisible wounds" of combat and illness. Too many of his soldier-athletes saw their military career plans derailed by everything from mortar fire to post-traumatic stress disorder to an unexpected doctor's diagnosis.

Moffett uses the pool and track as classrooms for instilling confidence and renewed purpose. Something as simple as putting on a blue Team USA uniform can show veterans that there's still a place for them within the military. "We want to bring them back into the family—back into blue, as we call it," he said.

Moffett relies on a staff of professional coaches to help athletes adapt their skills to both traditional sports like swimming and specialized competitions like power lifting and sitting volleyball. Because team members live in various locations throughout the country, his staff do much of their instruction by phone, e-mail, Facebook and a team app that enables them to manage workouts and coordinate training regimens. Some of the athletes they coach are world-class contenders—like Navy Lt. Brad Snyder who has two prosthetic eyes and has won swimming medals at events around the world.

But many others haven't donned a pair of swim trunks or ridden a bicycle since their high school days. "We take a lot of our wounded warriors off the couch and help them become international-caliber athletes," Moffett said.

For Moffett, there is little difference between coaching Invictus athletes and training people without disabilities. Crediting his psychology studies for teaching him to focus on competitors as individuals, his coaching methods vary for each team member. "But I can be tough on all of them," he laughed, noting that many of his athletes don't want to be treated with kid gloves. Still, the rules and techniques of adaptive sports programs can be hard to master. The wounded Air Force archer, who lost his right arm below his elbow in Indonesia, learned to pull a bow string with his teeth. Swimmers with varying degrees of sightlessness wear blackened goggles to level the playing field, and keep track of their stroke counts to gauge when they are approaching the pool wall.

Moffett tallies the team's successes not by medals but by the number of athletes who mentor other service-people. "You really feel the team comradery when you see these wounded warriors giving back to their fellow brothers and sisters," he said. As he prepared for the 2018 Invictus Games, Moffett recalled the inspirational moments he witnessed at every finish line. They include the Air Force linguist who gave her recumbent cycling medal to a struggling teammate, and the warm embrace he received from a veteran dealing with the aftermath of sexual trauma—a giant step forward for a person who had resisted physical contact.

"We have a saying that you need eight hugs a day to survive, but you need 12 a day to thrive," Moffett said. "We put a lot of meaning into every single wounded warrior and every single hug."

Detective Edward Gillespie, BA '92.

PLATO AND POLICING: ALUMNUS' CLASS FOR COPS

Whether policing Baltimore's streets or teaching cops in the classroom, Detective Edward Gillespie, BA '92, emphasizes the lessons he's learned through his study of history and the humanities.

"As a cop, literature, history and philosophy helped me through some difficult situations."

Edward Gillespie, BA '92.

At a Baltimore City police precinct, Detective **Edward Gillespie**, BA '92, leads a classroom of officers through a lesson on procedural justice. But the text he uses isn't a police manual or a law book. It's a passage from John Steinbeck's classic novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. In it, Tom Joad, a Depression-era ex-convict struggling to support his family, describes a beating he endured at the hands of police. The exercise isn't intended to shame the officers in his class—it's meant to open their eyes.

"Every day on the street, cops encounter the Joad family," Gillespie said. "We meet people who are disenfranchised, people who are afraid, people who are vulnerable and marginalized. The humanities are a window into understanding those people and the conditions within their lives."

Like other cities around the country, officers in Baltimore—fresh-from-the-academy recruits and veterans alike—spend one to two weeks off the streets and in a classroom for refresher courses on new police techniques. As a police instructor, Gillespie has taught programs on counter terrorism, de-escalating crises and spotting implicit biases.

But his classes are unique. Along with standard law enforcement lessons, Gillespie, who studied history, literature and philosophy while at GW, believes cops should be introduced to a heavy dose of the humanities. His syllabus eschews defensive tactics and weapons training for Plato, Dostoevsky and James Baldwin. His class is as likely to discuss Camus as crime scenes.

"The humanities are important for what they tell us about the human experience," Gillespie explained. "Police officers work in a profession in which human experience is not just pertinent but relevant all the time."

As an undergraduate, Gillespie participated in GW's ROTC program and intended to join the Marines after graduation. But a back injury undercut his plans and he became a school teacher instead. To advance in the education field, he enrolled in a master's program at Johns Hopkins University, only to have his first classes cancelled on 9/11. After the attack, Gillespie decided he would join the police department once he completed his graduate studies. He earned his master's degree in 2004 and was a member of Baltimore's police academy class of 2005.

Gillespie worked beats from auto larceny to gang task forces. When the pressures of police work threatened to overwhelm him, he often fell back on the humanities lessons he learned at GW. "Being out in the city as a cop can be such a culture shock, so I would step back from some traumatic incident and think about something Richard Wright said," he explained. "As a cop, literature, history and philosophy helped me through some difficult situations."

When Gillespie began teaching fellow officers, his use of literary or historical reference points took on even more significance as questions of police conduct drew local and national scrutiny. For example, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* could offer insight into how desperation can turn ordinary people into criminals. James Baldwin's essay "A Report from Occupied Territory," which depicts racially biased policing in 1960s Harlem, led to discussions on the perils of racial profiling. And Plato slipped into Gillespie's ethics classes to explain how the intellect can override our worst impulses.

His lessons can occasionally draw eye-rolls from jaded veterans. "They think I'm a little eccentric," he laughed. "When I jump into Plato I say, 'Just hang with me guys. We are going to ancient Greece for a while but then I'll get you right back to Baltimore.'" Gillespie contends the public too often underestimates officers' desire to broaden their education and improve their policing skills—myths he hopes to dispel. "Cops are multi-faceted professionals, proud public servants and students of human nature," he said. "They want to do their jobs the best they can. And it's my job to give them every type of training to help them do just that."

Making Global Dreams a Reality

Ashleigh DeLuca, BA '13, helped impoverished Gambian children graduate from high school. But she's not stopping there. Her next goal is to bring them to the U.S. for college.

At age 17, **Ashleigh DeLuca**, BA '13, took a gap year prior to coming to GW to teach English to sixth graders in Mukumbaya, an impoverished rural village without running water or electricity located in The Gambia, West Africa. It was a life-changing experience as she witnessed the extent of the village's day-to-day challenges and the strain on families to keep their children in school.

She approached the village leader about an idea she had to pair American sponsors with students who needed help paying their annual $100 school fees. Tentative arrangements were made and, after returning home and locating a group of willing donors, the Starling Sponsorship Program was launched during DeLuca's first year at Columbian College.

In the ensuing years, DeLuca stayed in contact with the students, first through the village leader and later through email as the children grew old enough to travel to an internet café. While many of the original group of 18 eventually had to drop out to support their families, three of the students—Adama Jarju, his twin sister Awa and their friend Penda Jallow—were able to graduate from high school.

Now DuLuca has embarked on a new mission: helping the three Gambian youths—all of whom expressed an interest in attending college in the United States—take the next steps in their education.

"It's unacceptable to me to think that they've gotten this close—within a hair's breadth—and the only thing holding them back isn't that they aren't smart enough but that they don't have enough money," she said. "I refuse to give up on them."

After DeLuca raised enough money to fund SAT and application fees, all three of the students were accepted to St. Thomas Aquinas College in New York. But college scholarships will only cover half their tuition so DeLuca is now actively seeking additional donations through fundraising events and a GoFundMe page. The challenge is enormous but she remains inspired by Awa, Adama and Penda, each of whom hopes to use their education to improve conditions in their homeland.

"I want to show . . . the Gambian women that [we] can be so much more than just wives and mothers: [We] can help change our country," Awa wrote on the project's website. She plans to study business and open a chain of hotels throughout her country. Adama is determined to earn a computer science degree and expand internet access to his nation's poor. "I want to dedicate my studies at school so that I can become a cyber-superhero for the Gambia," he wrote. "I may not be able to save the world, but I can try to help families like my own rise above poverty and make better lives for themselves."

And Penda wants to study health and business in college, hoping to become a nurse and transform rural health care in The Gambia with better facilities, access to life-saving medicine and a fleet of clinics on wheels to tend to patients in the countryside. "I will bring my college education back to the Gambia to make sure that children…can survive childhood illnesses and grow up to be successful adults who can also help our country," she wrote. In her native language, Mandinka, Penda added: "Dunya munov maccoro"—"the world is about helping one another." For DeLuca, that means doing everything possible to give Penda a chance to make a difference.

Ashleigh DeLuca, BA '13, taught sixth grade English to students in The Gambia.

DeLuca's former students (from left) Adama Jarju, Penda Jallow and Awa Jarju earned their high school diplomas and are now trying to attend college in the U.S.

EDWARD GREEN ESTABLISHES POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP

Edward C. Green, BA '67, has dedicated his career to improving health outcomes in under-served populations around the world. Through his gift to create and endow the Edward C. Green Postdoctoral Fellowship Fund, he is now empowering the next generation of anthropology professionals to combat the world's challenges and contribute to social and political change.

The Green Fellowship will provide post-doctoral fellowships for scholars from Africa who want to put their academic knowledge to work to address contemporary social problems. Fellows will take an active role within the university community, as well as intern or consult with extramural agencies and organizations, serve as mentors to students, and teach courses or seminars to expand the breadth of offerings in the department.

Green's philanthropy is reflective of his notable career as an applied and medical anthropologist. He worked in 18 different African countries, as well as in Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. Much of his work since the late 1980s has focused on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, primarily in Africa. He has advocated for foreign nonprofits, governmental organizations and other aid-providers to consider closely the culture of local populations when trying to change public health outcomes. For example, while working in Uganda in the early 1990s, Green found that leaders who advocated for changed behavior—such as monogamy and delayed sexual activity—had a greater impact on slowing HIV contraction rates compared to those who pushed for condom use.

"Good and effective development work requires understanding why a problem exists and proposing solutions you believe will work and makes sense culturally to the people themselves," said Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs **Richard Grinker**." And, according to Grinker, Green was respected for sustaining supportive, personal and emotional connections with the people he has met.

Green has written nine books and published more than 450 peer-reviewed articles and other influential work in the field. He served as a senior research scientist at the Harvard School of Public Health and director of the AIDS Prevention Project at the Harvard Center for Population and Developmental Studies. While he is now a research professor at GW, Green intentionally left academia early in his career in order to directly work with communities on international development issues. Edward Green Fellows will similarly focus on obtaining applied positions in the field.

PHOTO: Edward_Green
CAPTION: Edward C. Green, BA '67, relaxing with his guitar at home.

Alumnus Poet Turns Reluctant Activist

Writer Yahia Lababidi, BA '96, is loath to mix politics and poetry. But in his latest collection, he points his pen at anti-immigrant hostility.

Yahia Lababidi, BA '96, doesn't think of himself as a political person. An Egyptian-American writer who has published seven books of poetry, essays and aphorisms, he prefers waxing about Persian mystical poets and 6thcentury Chinese philosophy than modern laws and election results.

But times have changed since Lababidi immigrated to America shortly after he graduated from Columbian College with a major in English. Between travel bans and divisive rhetoric aimed at immigrants, Lababidi felt that he couldn't keep his voice on the political sidelines. And as a poet, his most effective weapon was his pen.

"I'm an apolitical creature, and I am not confrontational by nature," said Lababidi, whose work has appeared on NPR, the *PBS NewsHour* and the Best American Poetry anthology. But in his new book *Where Epics Fail* (Unbound-Penguin Random House), the celebrated author addresses what he calls a "clotting of the arteries of America" with the pithiest of verses: aphorisms, an ancient art form that's part poetry, part philosophy and often consists of just a single line. In the book, Lababidi strings together 800 maxims written over a 10 year period into his own message of acceptance. Alongside lines condemning intolerance—such as "The right to free speech ends where hate speech begins"—his verses also are meant to remind us of our shared humanity: "Take two opposites, connect the dots and you have a straight line," he writes.

In a sense, Lababidi sees his collection as a "peace offering," he explained, one that is particularly relevant to the time. To Lababidi, the "humble epigram" can be every bit as powerful as larger narratives.

Or, to quote one of his own aphorisms, "In the deep end, every stroke counts."

Wit and Wisdom

Growing up in Cairo, the child of art-patron parents, Lababidi was surrounded by a literary salon of writers, poets and philosophers. At his family parties, he served drinks to Egyptian satirist Ahmed Ragab and playwright Yusuf Idris. His own talents were acquired "intravenously," he jokes, from his grandfather, a celebrated Lebanese poet after whom he's named. Still Lababidi didn't aspire to be a writer in his youth. "I thought the idea of being in your room by yourself and writing was a punishment," he said. "No way was I going down that route."

Aphorisms were a form of literature he couldn't escape. From the bustling Cairo bazaars to his grandmother's kitchen, Lababidi was captivated by the Egyptian custom of passing on inherited wit and wisdom through proverb-like expressions. When warning him to mind his own business, his grandmother might extol Lababidi to "never get between an onion and its skin—you won't get anything except its stink." He'd overhear family friends bemoan an unfaithful spouse by declaring, "If you trust men, you trust water in a sieve." And when reinforcing the importance of oral traditions, a teacher might explain, "Knowledge is what's in your head. Not in your notebooks."

It wasn't until he came to GW that Lababidi took his own writing seriously. He fell under the sway of former English Professor Robert Ganz, whom Lababidi has described as "a free-spirit and independent thinker, whose classes I recall almost as a form of performance art in service to the life of the mind." In addition to introducing Lababidi to Nietzsche and Wilde, Ganz, now a professor emeritus, encouraged him to mine his culture's aphorisms for poetic insights. Following his guidance, Lababidi began jotting down verses on napkins and grocery store receipts, capturing "anything I thought was worth quoting from my soul's dialogue with itself."

While at GW, Lababidi also met Diana Restrepo, BBA '95, a finance major whom he later married. As Lababidi honed his writing craft, the pair would spend silent hours reading. "I was sort of a solitary, introverted bird but she let me materialize into whatever I needed to be," he said. "I began to think that here was someone whose air I can breath."

'Modern Day Master'

Lababidi's aphorisms have been featured in volumes alongside Voltaire, Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson. President Obama's inaugural poet, Richard Blanco, called him the "modern-day master" of the art form. And Lababidi himself believes the verses are perfectly suited to today's 140-character culture. "Twitter has made aphorists of us all," he said.

Still, he never planned his new book of aphorisms to be overtly political. As the divisiveness over immigration ignited passions and tempers—culminating in the Supreme Court upholding President Trump's travel ban—Lababidi found ugly incidents creeping into his own life. From his Fort Lauderdale home, he was fielding questions about whether all Muslims were terrorists or if it was even possible to be a moderate Muslim. In a 2006 poem titled "Speaking American," Lababidi wrote about struggling to fit in as an immigrant, encountering "stray violence or casual hate of shifting shapes/racial slur, ethnic insult or what specialists term/linguistic xenophobia..." Suddenly, the lines felt more relevant than ever.

Lababidi is squeamish about identifying himself as a Muslim poet. "The last thing on my mind is being an unwitting ambassador for 2 billion souls," he said. But with *Where Epics Fail*, he put aside his reluctance to insert politics into his poetry and confronted bigotry head-on. As his aphorisms attest, his writings take a subtle approach, reminding readers of what we have in common rather than our difference. "Mercy is to cover the nakedness of others and stand beside them—naked yourself," he writes.

"I'm trying to say, 'I come in peace. I am not to be feared or hated. But this is my home too. And I am no more or less a human being than you.'"

PHOTO: Yahia_Lababidi

CAPTION: Yahia Lababidi, BA '96

CLASS OF 2018: REFLECTIONS

As Columbian College's newest graduates said goodbye to friends and faculty, a few shared the moments and memories that shaped their Columbian College experience.

"I spent a semester studying abroad in Prague. It was genuinely amazing, a magical city! I worked at a human rights think tank and interacted with so many people Not only did I learn how to balance the workplace with academic responsibilities, but I learned how to operate by myself abroad. It was a fantastic adventure."
— Samuel Rosin, Journalism

PHOTO: **Samuel_Rosin**

CAPTION: **Samuel Rosin**

"I loved finding surprising niche groups at GW. For example, I have a passion for marine science. Within my environmental studies major, I connected with a support network that helped me build on my academic interests. I worked with [Assistant Professor of Biology] **Tara Scully** on preserving oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. I did fieldwork in the Turks and Caicos Islands, researching corral and sharks. And I teamed up with classmates to design experiments for future students who want to focus on marine science. Everyone here is so eager to pass on knowledge!"
— Daniela Heflin, Environmental Studies and English.

PHOTO: **Daniela_Heflin**

CAPTION: **Daniela Heflin**

"I will miss GW a lot. I enjoyed my academic experience and learned so much from the internships that were available. I worked in the office of Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), where I improved my writing skills and my political knowledge. Now I'm looking forward to what comes next. After graduation, I'll be serving as a youth development specialist in the Peace Corps in Morocco. I'd like to run for office someday . . . GW helped me gain the skills and the confidence I'll need to get there."
— Anna LaRocco Masi, Political Science and Sociology

PHOTO: **Anna_LaRocco_Masi**

CAPTION: **Anna LaRocco Masi**

"The thing I'll remember most about GW is the combination of people and experiences I encountered here. GW has a diverse population. The student body comes from very different backgrounds, and you can always find someone studying something you know nothing about. It's been great to talk to people from different disciplines and learn from them. Believe me, when your idea of fun is running computer modeling cell movement simulations, it's not always easy to find your tribe!"
— George Sangiolo, Biophysics

PHOTO: **George_Sangiolo**

CAPTION: **George Sangiolo**

"As an Army vet, I was grateful to be a part of GW Veterans. They helped me adjust to college

life as an older student after being away from school for a few years. Like the Army, there's a competitive atmosphere here that's contagious. It made me want to do better things. It made me want to get that Hill internship, go for the best grades, the best grad schools, the best jobs. I'll always think about this school and how it drove me to strive for the best in myself."

— Michael Brier, Political Science

PHOTO: **Michael Brier**

CAPTION: **Michael Brier**

"My only-at-GW moment would be my internship at CNN—which led directly to my post-graduation job as a CNN news associate here in Washington, D.C. I reported on President Trump's first State of the Union address and the funeral of former First Lady Barbara Bush. Getting that real-world experience was invaluable to me. I was also privileged to find a home within several campus communities, including the Student Association and the GW Black Student Union. I'm excited, nervous, even a little bit anxious about beginning my career. But I know my GW friends and mentors will always be there to support me."

— Devan Cole, Journalism and Mass Communications

PHOTO: **Devan Cole**

CAPTION: **Devan Cole**

[NOTE: THESE 2 ARE TOGETHER]:

"The most important part of our GW experience? Definitely our friendship. We're both from the same town in New York, but we didn't actually meet until Colonial Inauguration. We were in *Thurston Hall* together. I'm excited to be moving on to the next adventure, but I'm going to miss being able to just knock on my best friend's door and hang out with her whenever I want."

— Caroline Elias, Sociology

"Living in D.C. with your best friend when you're this age is really special. There are just so many opportunities here and places to see. We were all about exploring D.C., especially during our first year. We went to the monuments and museums all the time. It's an incredible place to be."

— Morgan Bryant, Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences

PHOTO: **Caroline_and_Morgan**

CAPTION: **Morgan Bryant and Caroline Elias**

"My dream is to author and illustrate books. GW not only prepared me for that dream but matured me as an artist and a person. My instructors were real-world artists who knew what the art scene was really like out there. My work was featured at exhibitions, and I was introduced to contemporary artists like Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald who created the National Portrait Gallery paintings of, respectively, Barack and Michelle Obama. So now I'm picturing that dream and I'm thinking about all the things that I can do and all the new experiences I can have. There's nothing but good things coming for me."

— Kyle Marcus Bryant, Fine Arts

PHOTO: **Kyle_Marcus_Bryant**

CAPTION: **Kyle Marcus Bryant**