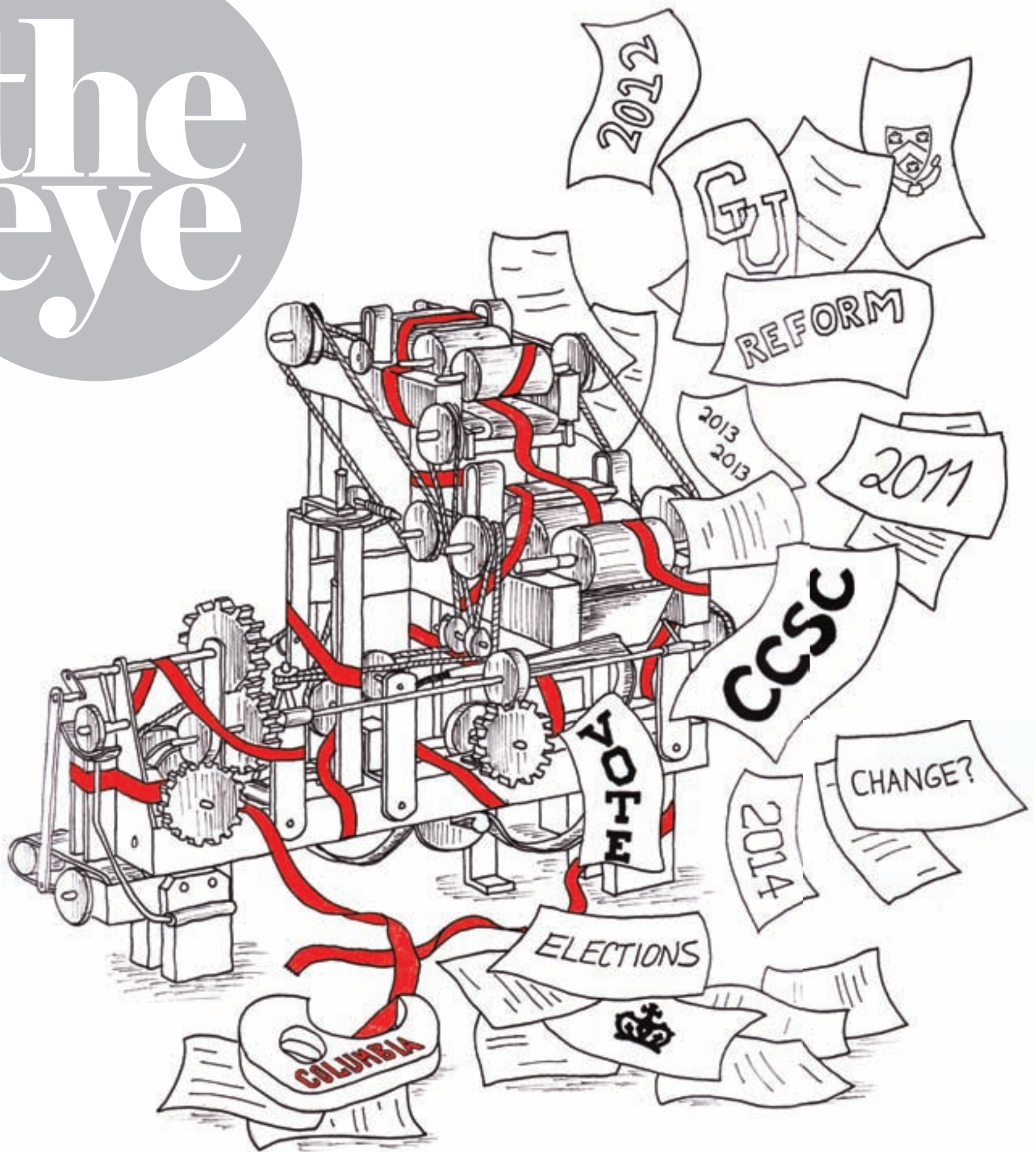


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the eye



UNPOPULAR MECHANICS

THE INNER WORKINGS OF STUDENT COUNCIL—
AND WHETHER WE SHOULD CARE

by Sarah Ngu



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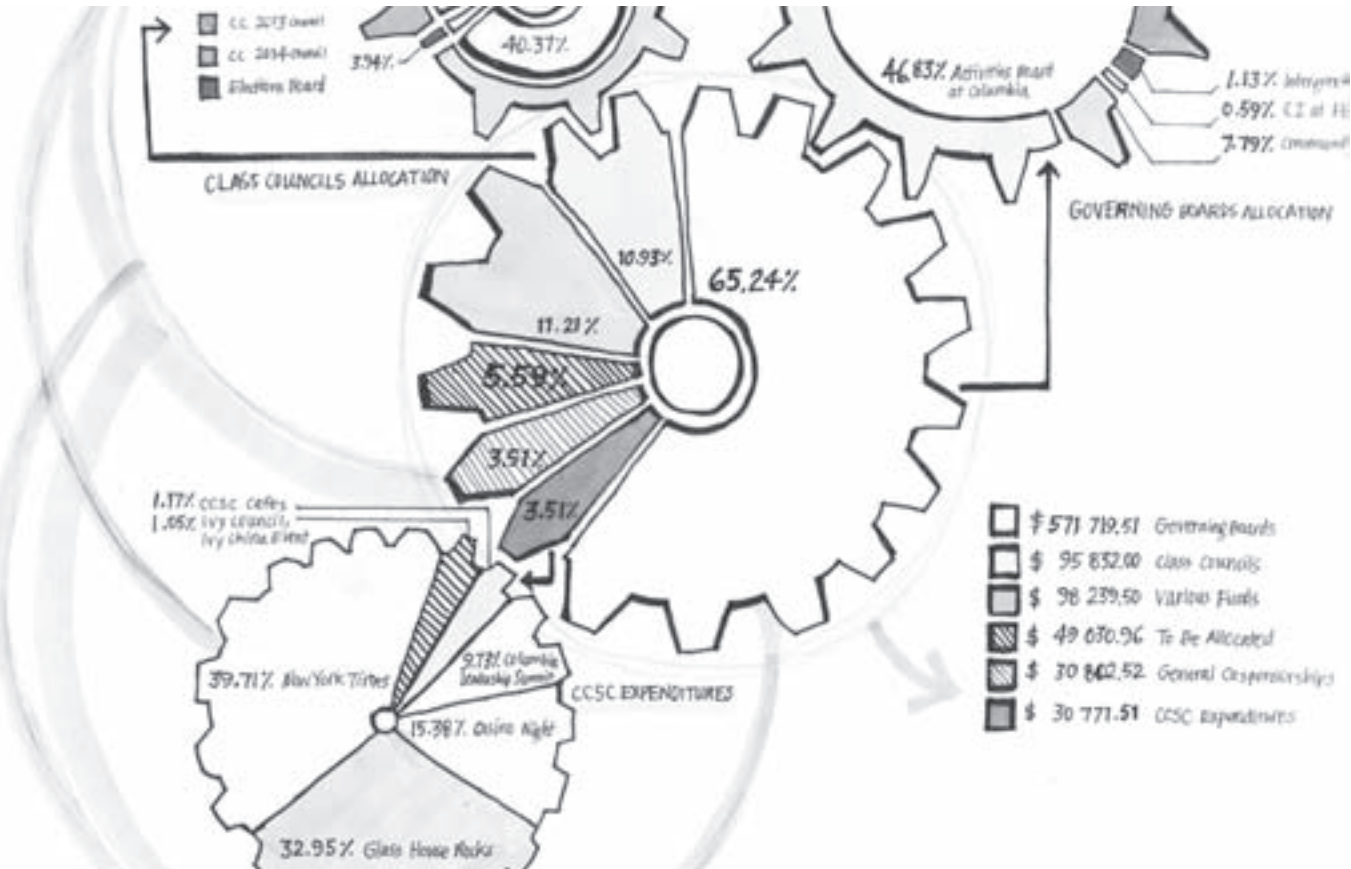
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UNPOPULAR MECHANICS

The inner workings of student council—and whether we should care, pg. 07

by Sarah Ngu
cover illustration by Colin Sullivan

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Regarding “Is Teachers College Doing its Job?” (March 31): the story nicely captures the work that Teachers College is doing to strengthen public education in Harlem. That ongoing involvement with schools, and the new TC-affiliated public elementary school, reflect and advance TC’s mission and objectives to invest its expertise and resources in improving education for children in our community.

TC’s plans for the new school have excited many people. We want to be clear that our main objective in creating The Teachers College Community School is to offer children and families an outstanding academic program coupled with community services to support happy, healthy living and learning. In keeping with our deep commitment to public education, the school will be a regular DOE school, and not a charter school.

TC has been energetically engaged in community outreach and consultation about the new school since we began planning for it three years ago.

Last year, Teachers College and Community Board 9 co-hosted three Community Conversations in order to gather constituents’ input. Participants’ responses were incorporated into a full report and shared with the planning team that is designing the school. As we approach the projected opening in the fall, TC is stepping up its outreach by hosting a series of parent outreach and information sessions.

We also want to be clear that TC’s focus on opening the new school will not divert our attention away from ongoing initiatives. In fact, TC is preparing to initiate the Teachers College Partnership Schools consortium, which will extend comprehensive TC services to as many as 12 public schools. How great for all of us when we ALL can say that Harlem has the best public schools in the country!

Sincerely,
Nancy Streim
Associate Vice President
for School and Community
Partnerships

SIGHTED THE BIG SCREEN

BY RACHEL ROSEN AND MARGARET BOYKIN

Movies released in the past month feature everything from aliens to wrestling matches. Seeing as we're in the lull of the semester, when it's almost

forgivable to go see one on a school night, we're giving you the low-down on three new films to see instead of doing your homework.

PAUL



2.5 EYES

Two British science fiction enthusiasts (Simon Pegg, Nick Frost) go on a road trip and visit sites of possible alien encounters.

They have an encounter of their own with an alien named Paul (voiced by Seth Rogen), who is fleeing a nearby military base and enlists their help.

GOOD

Though it's not their best performance, British comedians Pegg and Frost have great chemistry.

BAD

The humor can get a bit repetitive.

SURPRISING

In spite of the sci-fi references, viewers whose favorite films don't normally feature small green men won't be totally lost.

WINWIN



3 EYES

Mike, a family man/lawyer/wrestling coach experiencing a mid-life crisis (Paul Giamatti) unexpectedly finds himself housing Kyle (Alex Shaffer), the teenage grandson of one of his clients. The boy and his wrestling talent enchant Mike and his family, but when the mother comes to town to claim her son, things get a little complicated.

GOOD

Great acting and a heart-warming performance

BAD

Predictable plot

SURPRISING

How endearing Shaffer's performance is, despite his Eminem hair. Found ourselves uncomfortably wondering how old he was in real life...

LIMITLESS



3 EYES

A novelist (Bradley Cooper) suffering from writer's block and a bad break-up is introduced to a designer drug called "NZT" that allows him to access 100 percent of his brain, rather than the usual 20 percent. He gets his life together and rises to the top of the financial world, but NZT has unexpected and potentially fatal side effects.

GOOD

A creative concept that makes you wonder what you'd do in Cooper's position.

BAD

Cooper's voice-over, coupled with the film's violence and strange plot, makes you feel like you're watching a less awesome version of *Fight Club*. Which kind of makes you wish you were just watching *Fight Club*.

SURPRISING

That a man using 100 percent of his brain repeatedly thinks it's a good idea to get involved with criminals.

EDITORS PICK MUSICAL EDITION

It's been said that going to the theater is the new concert, and the rise of comical musicals like *Anna Nicole: The Opera* and *The Book of Mormon* certainly suggest a new trend. However, the editors feel that Broadway has made some oversights—here are some of their ideas for fresh material.



COMPILED BY MARGARET BOYKIN
ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN



You Say You Want a Revolution

bringing the local and organic movement to columbia with a new café

BY OLIVIA HULL

ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN

Food is given all sorts of labels these days. There's low-carb, gluten-free, whole-wheat, vegan, ethical, zero trans fat and "made with real fruit" (really?). It's hard to decide which to privilege over others—or what to believe.

Michael Pollan, in his new-wave classic *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, advises, "Don't eat anything your great-great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food." Pollan instructs us to eat organic food, which according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is by definition "produced or involving production without the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or other artificial agents."

Though a relatively new term used to describe a food movement of the 20th and 21st centuries, and which for many connotes "over-priced" or "hippie," organic farming and locally-sourced food were the norm for most of human history. Industrial farming, a relatively recent invention, became the worldwide norm in part as an effort to feed population growth in poorer regions of the world—what's known as the Green Revolution. Instead of increasing the area of land to increase crop yield, farmers applied synthetic fertilizers to get more out of the soil. These synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are thought by organic foodies to be harmful to consume, though many cite a lack of scientific research.

Josh Arky is the unofficial vice president of the fledgling club "4Local" and one of four cooks in the group. The group, which recently received Student Governing Board recognition, has been preparing locally sourced food and selling it during lunchtime on the ramps of Lerner.

"4Local" is obviously a play on 'Four Loko', " Arky says. "We thought that was cute, but more importantly it's 'for local' which is what we're all about." According to Arky, though people complain about tasteless food, many fail to recognize the connection between transporta-

tion time and lesser quality. "They don't realize how much it has to do with where their food is coming from."

4local and two other campus food groups, FeelGood and CoreFoods, are currently preparing a proposal to open a sustainable student-run co-op café, possibly somewhere in Lerner Hall.

However, 4local's title is a little misleading when two of 4local's most common ingredients, salt and olive oil, are without local suppliers. The lack of local is even more prevalent during the winter, when not much of anything tasty is growing in New York State. "We make compensations, striking the best balance we can," Arky says. These compensations require certified organic labels to specify how organic they really are, via a numerical system. Level one includes brands that use 100 percent

"OUR PRESENCE IS A STATEMENT IN AND OF ITSELF, A FORM OF ACTIVISM."

organic ingredients (barring water and salt).

Most of the products that stock the CoreFoods shelves qualify as level two; they claim "organic" and contain at least 95 percent organic ingredients. CoreFoods stocks products with a shelf life of three days or more, which they source from "United Natural Foods" or UNFI.

Stephanie Jurburg, director of CoreFoods, laments the fact that UNFI, though entirely "natural" isn't really local at all. In fact many of their products—tortilla chips, popcorn—are transported to Morningside Heights all the way from California.

Jurburg is looking to hire a grassroots provider called Angelos, which sources its products locally. "It would feel good to not be bringing things from California," Jurburg says. In fact, Angelos is cheaper—they offer less mark-up on their products and include no shipment cost.

Recently, the three groups sent out a campus-wide survey to gauge interest in the café. "We've started to get great feedback," Arky says and, according to him there are, nearly 800 signatures on a petition signed via Facebook and club listservs. "A greater presence for us means a continuing conversation" Arky says, referring to the three groups. "[We are] raising the issue of what it means to be environmentally conscious. Our presence is a statement in and of itself, a form of activism."

The name they have chosen for the café is The Flying Beet. The co-op eatery/café would be an entirely vegetarian enterprise, with vegan and gluten-free options offered commensurate with demand.

Arky realizes that having an all-vegetarian café will alienate some students. "A lot of people will not see a full meal—we acknowledge that and are okay with it. We aren't trying to fit in every niche of every diet on campus. We want to be able to support that market, that would be a luxury—a lot of us view meat in that way anyway." He calls meat a "luxury" because sustainably farmed meat is hard to come by, and pricier than conventional meat. "We always have our desserts to rope people in."

Though The Flying Beet would ideally love a space of their own, a lounge, a place to have a meal with friends, Arky says "first and foremost, we want to be able to provide an entirely sustainable menu." Lunch and dinner menus would reflect the seasonal offerings of the Columbia farmer's market. CoreFoods would sell nonperishable products. FeelGood's grilled cheese would be an everyday staple.

Opening a café is no easy task, Arky says. Some of the hurdles they face include getting their kitchen certified, appealing to CU administration, and lining up volunteers to staff the café. Yet that does not mean that it won't happen—nine people have already stepped up to help write the business plan, and many more have expressed interest in taking on leadership roles and cooking. If the groups are able to secure a space big enough for leisurely dining, Jurburg believes, "it would have a big impact on our lives. We see eating as a quality of life thing—an instrument of social change." ●

Novel Ideas

anna quindlen on feminism, undergraduate life, and post-9/11 literature

BY NICOLLETTE BARSAMIAN
ILLUSTRATION BY JIIN CHOI

Anna Quindlen, BC '74, has taken the New York literary scene by storm. A former writer for the New York Post, the New York Times, and Newsweek, Quindlen went on to become a full-time novelist. Not only did three of her best-selling novels become movies featuring A-list actors, but her column, "Public and Private," won her a Pulitzer Prize. Now, Barnard students study and learn in a room in the Diana Center named after her. Quindlen, who also serves as a member of the Barnard Board of Trustees, sat down with The Eye to discuss her current work and how her time Barnard fits into it all.

You have honorary degrees from Smith, Mount Holyoke, Dartmouth, and many other colleges. What do you believe is so enticing about the undergraduate experience?

A small liberal arts college, like this one, invites people to change their plans. You think you're going to be pre-med, and then you take your first poli sci course. You think you're going to major in political science, and then you take art history. I think it's so exciting when that

"I NOT ONLY LEARNED HERE THAT I WAS ENTITLED TO A PLACE AT THE TABLE, I LEARNED THAT I WAS ENTITLED TO SIT AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE."

happens. I hear about it over and over again from Barnard students. "I had this plan to... And then I..." I think that's the whole essence of education: to learn not only what you don't know, but what you didn't know you wanted to know.

Are you working on anything currently?

I am. I'm almost done with a memoir about aging that will come out next year, when I turn 60. And unfortunately, I don't have a title for it yet. I keep coming up with one dreadful title after another, so I'm hoping that inspiration is going to strike in the next couple of months.

The creator of AnnaQuindlen.com wrote:
"Almost every time I read one of her columns,

I have the feeling that she has climbed into my head, pulled out my jumbled thoughts and rearranged them onto the page so that they make sense." What draws you to writing nonfiction? Is it really just "Thinking Out Loud," like the title of your "Public and Private" collection?

For years, I was a reporter, so I wrote non-fiction as part of my job. But in terms of becoming a columnist, you know, there's an old quote from H. L. Mencken about his work: "To afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted." And I really like that aspect of being a columnist: being able to reveal the shortcomings in our government, the needs of our people, the aspirations we ought to have, the ways in which we've fallen short of those aspirations. It's an amazing opportunity to say to people, "Come on, now, we're better than this."

Your novel *Rise and Shine* falls into the post-9/11 NYC genre, like Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*.

He's [DeLillo] one of my favorites.

Next semester, an American studies seminar will be offered on the topic. What do you think about post-9/11 works being studied in an academic context?

I think it's a really interesting way to study literature, but I'm not entirely certain if it's useful to classify something as simply a "post-9/11 novel" because so much else comes into place in the 10 years from now and then, including the election of the first black president, the precipitous crash of the markets, and our uncomfortable relationship with the rest of the world in general. But it's certainly something interesting to explore: the time before we took our shoes off at airports.

You're speaking today as part of Women's History Month for the Power Talks at the Athena Center for Leadership Studies. Do you think leadership skills can be taught?

I think some aspects of leadership can be taught. But a big piece of being a successful leader has to do with confidence and fearlessness. And I don't think just the Athena Center teaches that to Barnard women. I think Barnard teaches that to Barnard women. And it's why they are so successful in the world.

And do you feel Barnard did that for you?

Absolutely. No question about it. I mean, I realized, once I got out into the world, that I was materially different in some ways than some of my colleagues. And they were really smart and really talented, but somehow they hadn't absorbed this sense that they were entitled to a



place at the table. I not only learned here that I was entitled to a place at the table, I learned that I was entitled to sit at the head of the table.

You wrote in your 2003 essay, "Still Needing the F Word": "Now young women find themselves facing not one, but two societal, and self-imposed, straitjackets. Once they obsessed about being the perfect homemaker and meeting the standards of their male counterparts. Now they also obsess about being the perfect professional and meeting the standards of their male counterparts." How do you believe that this problem can be remedied? Is embracing the title "feminist" enough?

No, we have to do much more than just embrace the title "feminist." First of all, we have to build an entire generation of egalitarian males from the ground up. And women and men do that as parents. I consider raising feminist sons to have been one of the greatest challenges of my life. It's only two guys among many, but if enough people do it, the environment changes.

What advice do you hope young women will take away from your Power Talk tonight?

It's hard to communicate to young women how much work there is still to be done because they look at the world and it looks on the surface like it's pretty egalitarian. I hope that younger women can see below the surface to all the work that there is still to be done because if Barnard women don't do it, I don't know who's going to do it. ●

A Battle of the Wills

debate over shakespeare's true authorship explored in professor's new book

BY SASHA LEVINE

ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHANIE MANNHEIM

What do the events following Kennedy's assassination, 9/11, Princess Diana's death, and the moon landing tell us about contemporary culture? The simple answer: that we live in a world of conspiracy thinking. Surrounding each and every one of these events is a slew of alternative explanations, paranoid speculations, and extremely heated emotions. But, perhaps one of the most interesting conspiracies—and certainly one of the more long-standing—is the centuries-old conviction that someone else wrote the plays and poems of William Shakespeare. Like the others, it's a controversy rife with forgeries, fakes, elaborate justifications, and "cypher stories." Among many others, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Malcolm X, Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, and Helen Keller have all proposed authors for Shakespeare's work, and none of them include the canonized bard from Stratford we all know as Will.

The condensed story is that the controversy became full-fledged in 1850—a date which the historically minded will recognize as a relevant cultural condition to make the conspiracy possible. As many scholars like to point out, both during Shakespeare's lifetime and two hundred years after his death, no one questioned the authorship of his sonnets or plays. In fact, it wasn't until the development of Romanticism in the late 18th century that the idea of authorial genius and self-expression changed the way people read and wrote. The movement generated the tendency to examine works of literature biographically, inspiring the search for an author's inner essence that was believed to be embedded within the text.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, MALCOLM X, MARK TWAIN, SIGMUND FREUD, AND HELEN KELLER HAVE ALL PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE AUTHORS.

Though the movement as a whole cannot be chided for its unquestionable contributions to art and literature, the unfortunate consequence of its legacy include an anachronistic application of the method to the texts of Shakespeare—an inclination as popular then as it is now. As English and Comparative Literature Professor James Shapiro explains, "The 20th and now the 21st century [are] marked by self expression in writing—poetry, plays, and fiction [are] autobiographical. So people think if it's that way now, it must have always been that way. In Shakespeare's day, it wasn't." This subject, and much more about the issues surrounding the controversy, is what Shapiro investigates in his book, *Contested Will* (2010).

Earlier this week, the book won the Academic



Awards Committee's Lionel Trilling award. The award is given to one Columbia professor's book published in the past year. Committee co-chair (and *Eye* senior design editor) Cathi Choi says, "everyone who came in after reading it basically said...they couldn't put it down. They were just completely engrossed."

What this text primarily adds to the already established literature on the subject are reader-friendly insights on who, how, and why people even raise the authorship question. The reason for some, is that Shakespeare's humble origins belie his ability to have written such brilliant works: it had to have been someone else. The two most prevalent and recent contenders have been Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, and Sir Francis Bacon. While support for the latter has waned, the former is growing with the Internet as its catalyst. The consequences are highly visible: "The tentacles of this [anti-Stratfordian] movement have spread really widely in our society," Shapiro says, with the controversy moving mainstream amid the proliferation of propaganda in the form of young adult novels like Elise Broach's *Shakespeare's Secret* (2007) and a blockbuster-in-progress by director Roland Emmerich (*Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow*). Both Emmerich's pending film and Broach's fiction champion the Oxfordian explanation, which supports that the true author was de Vere—an aristocrat assumed to be both the illegitimate son and lover of Queen Elizabeth. Barnard English professor Peter Platt's response to the theory: "And you think we [the scholars] are the ones with an elaborate story?" This is not the only issue he and other academics take up with this theory.

Besides the fact that the Earl of Oxford died in 1604—twelve years before Shakespeare's own death and several years ahead of the completion of plays like *King Lear* and *Macbeth*—the foundation of the Oxfordian model is intrinsically elitist: "There's a refusal to believe that these canonical things were written by a glover's son...there's a classist element there," Platt says. "You don't have to have lived any of this stuff to

write about it. That's the great thing that authors do: they make up worlds." Essentially, the theory entirely discredits the prowess and fecundity of one modest man's imagination—the very thing that Shakespearean scholars loyally seek to defend.

It's important to note that the conspiracy exists entirely outside the academy and that within it, scholars collectively agree on the author's identity. "If you spend any amount of time studying the culture and history, then you quickly discover that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare," says Shapiro. So, if the authorities agree, why do so many others think otherwise? Shapiro explains, "There are people who argue that we're all on the doll ... that we put new patches on our tweed suits because of this check that arrives every month or two."

Silly as it sounds, the thought demonstrates how at the root of this issue lies a larger problem—one that is indicative of the way scholars currently deal with the subject, which is to avoid it. Since within academic circles there is no authorship question, there is little need to engage in the debate. The result: "The academy is not set up in a way to address the kind of questions that ordinary people ask," explains Shapiro. To this writer, his confession seems highly problematic. But even Platt admits, "We need to do a better job of pointing people to the very clear documents that do exist that establish his existence." Scholars need to invest in the education of the masses before the seduction of conspiracy takes over.

Regardless, at the heart of the controversy lie deeper questions about the relationship between art and life, imagination and biography. As a paradigm, it tells us about the way we read, the way we think, the way we desire to know more about the works we encounter, and identify with the authors who write them. So whether you're dealing with Tupac, Elvis, or William Shakespeare, Shapiro gives us some advice: "Think about what your assumptions are, about what evidence is, about how history works, about how the past is the past." ●

Unpopular Mechanics

the inner workings of student council—and whether or not we should care

by Sarah Ngu

illustration by Colin Sullivan

It's a Friday morning. Five students are sitting around a small table on the fifth floor of Lerner Hall, holding an executive board meeting for the Columbia College Student Council.

One of the members, Learned Foote, has a 70-page thesis due on Monday and is contemplating skipping the meeting next Sunday. The catch is that he is president and is in charge of running that meeting. A half-serious debate ensues on who should lead it in his place.

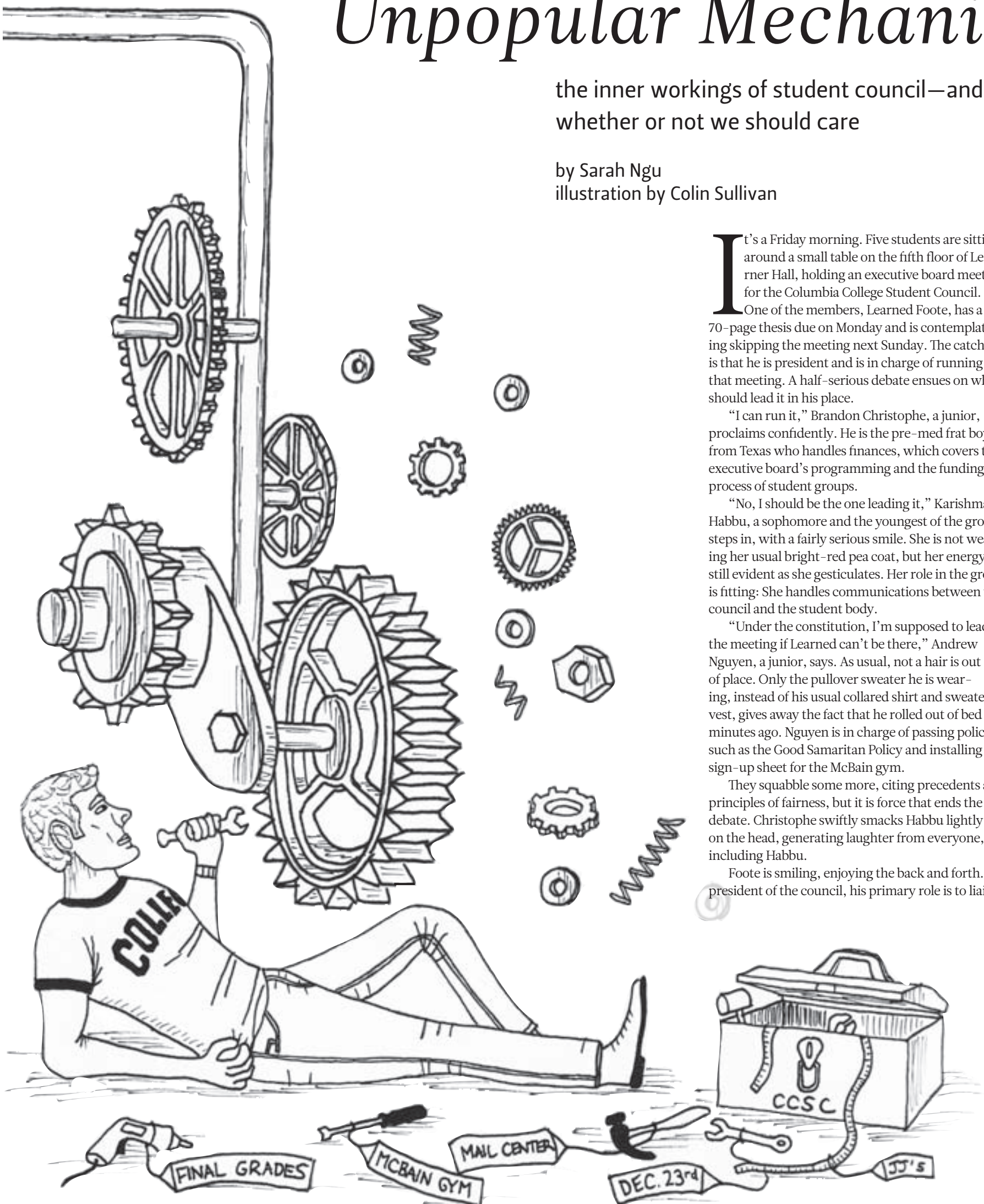
"I can run it," Brandon Christophe, a junior, proclaims confidently. He is the pre-med frat boy from Texas who handles finances, which covers the executive board's programming and the funding process of student groups.

"No, I should be the one leading it," Karishma Habbu, a sophomore and the youngest of the group, steps in, with a fairly serious smile. She is not wearing her usual bright-red pea coat, but her energy is still evident as she gesticulates. Her role in the group is fitting: She handles communications between the council and the student body.

"Under the constitution, I'm supposed to lead the meeting if Learned can't be there," Andrew Nguyen, a junior, says. As usual, not a hair is out of place. Only the pullover sweater he is wearing, instead of his usual collared shirt and sweater vest, gives away the fact that he rolled out of bed 10 minutes ago. Nguyen is in charge of passing policies, such as the Good Samaritan Policy and installing a sign-up sheet for the McBain gym.

They squabble some more, citing precedents and principles of fairness, but it is force that ends the debate. Christophe swiftly smacks Habbu lightly on the head, generating laughter from everyone, including Habbu.

Foote is smiling, enjoying the back and forth. As president of the council, his primary role is to liaise



between the council and the administration. Nguyen often gives him proposed policy changes to bring up in his weekly meetings with administration. Finally, Foote ends the playful bickering. Depending on how his thesis goes, he says, he'll see if he can make the meeting (he ends up missing it and Nguyen runs it) and proceeds to spit out the agenda from memory. Business resumes as usual.

In a few weeks, after elections are over, a new board will occupy this room. The competition is more heated than in past years, with three tickets vying for the executive board. But the increase in competition might very well translate, for most students, solely to increase in annoying flyers with smiling people and increase in empty campaign promises—essentially, an increase in media to tune out. The walls of the meeting room that separate the executive board from the rest of student body are more than physical. The student body's general apathy toward student government, which the executive board presides over, is well known. Perennial complaints remain: Student government is an elite institution that is disconnected from the student body. Student government is a glorified party planning committee. And if ever they wanted to do more than just plan parties, they would be unable—student government has little power in this labyrinthine bureaucracy where graduate students outnumber undergrads.

In January, curious about how valid these three main complaints were, I began attending meetings and interviewing current students and alumni. Undergraduate student government includes all four undergraduate schools, but I focused my questions on Columbia College, the largest of them all, and its executive board. Should we care about student government? And what has this board done over the past year?

Complaint #1: Student Government is Disconnected from Student Body

Disconnect between a government, consisting of a small number of people, and the public, consisting of everyone else, is inherent to some degree in any political system. Still, the disconnect at Columbia seems particularly severe, seeing as only 34 percent of Columbia College students voted in last year's election. The responsibility of facilitating dialogue between the council and the student body falls under Habbu, who leads the communications committee.

When a recent Spectator editorial, "Counsel for the Council," criticizing the council's lack of communication to the student body, is brought up at the meeting, Habbu immediately speaks up.

"Okay, I have something to say about that editorial," she says, launching into a point-by-point explanation of where the editorial erred, stressing that council members have in fact sat in Butler and Lerner every week, trading cupcakes for student ideas, as part of the CCSC Cafés initiative, which began last year. Given that the initiative had poor results—averaging only 25–30 "fluffy" responses per week—it was nixed this semester.

This semester, to replace the Cafés, the communications committee met with 18 student groups to determine their biggest complaints. They forwarded the top three concerns to the policy committee. CCSC further facilitates dialogue between students and administration through monthly Admin Connects, which serve free lunch and provide an hour of discus-

sion with an administrator.

On an institutional level, this year's Council has created liaisons for sustainability, club sports, Greek life, and Community Impact. Three resolutions relating to sustainability and club sports have been passed, due largely to input by liaisons. Although attendance has improved, liaisons are present at CCSC meetings inconsistently, with about half of the liaisons absent regularly.

Lastly, online outreach has been successful, especially when many students are already passionate about an issue. Around 750 students filled out a dining poll sent through the Weekly Growler, filling up a total of 25 single-spaced pages with comments. Meanwhile, Foote receives around 10–15 emails a week from students after he sends out his Weekly Growler, and he reads Bwog and Spectator religiously. But while outreach to students has certainly benefited the council on the policy side, campus life and finance still lack feedback. Only 64 students filled out a poll about campus life events.

"There's a frustrating disconnect between the planning of student life events and what Columbia students actually want to see, as much as we try [to assess students' opinions through various avenues]," Andrea Folds, a junior and VP of Campus Life, says.

This gap between government and public runs the other way as well: The student body is generally uninformed of the activities of the council. Public ignorance fosters a public lack of interest in student council, meaning lower voter turnouts.

This year's communications committee has tried to confront the problem by revamping the CCSC website, flyering, and, as all hip organizations do nowadays, tweeting extensively to its 148 followers. Informing nearly 5,000 Columbia College students on what its council is up to, however, is understandably and legitimately not high on the council's priority list. The council ought to focus on enacting change: The responsibility for informing the public of those changes falls on the campus media. Occasionally, a big story, like gender-neutral housing, is covered intensely, but otherwise, updates on student government mostly consist of soporific lists. There are no mid-year or end-of-the-year progress reports on ongoing policies, partly because reporters do not attend policy meetings, they attend general council meetings where fully-formed policies are voted on. But do the council's activities merit more coverage in the first place?

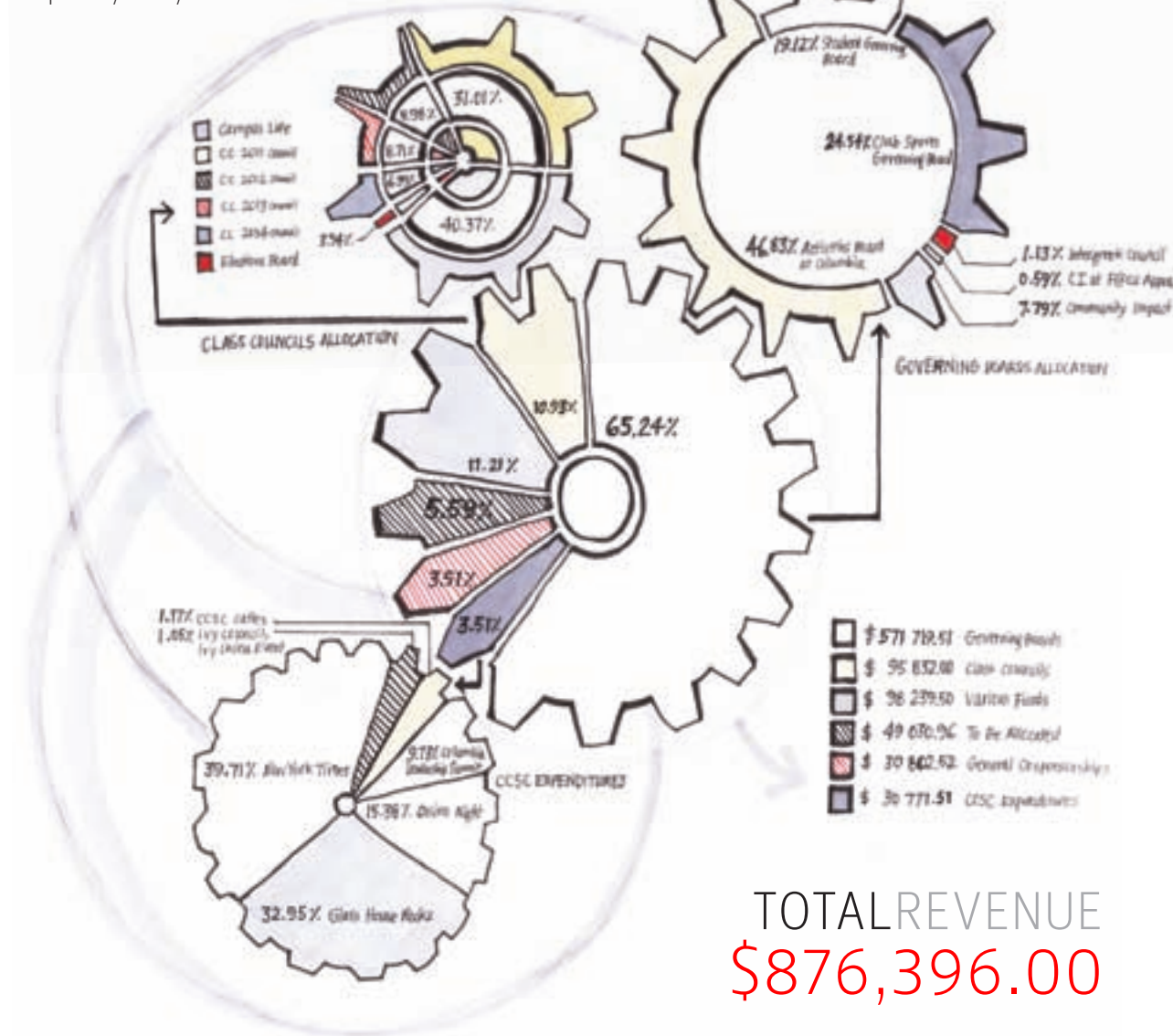
Complaint #2: Student Government is a Glorified Party-Planning Committee

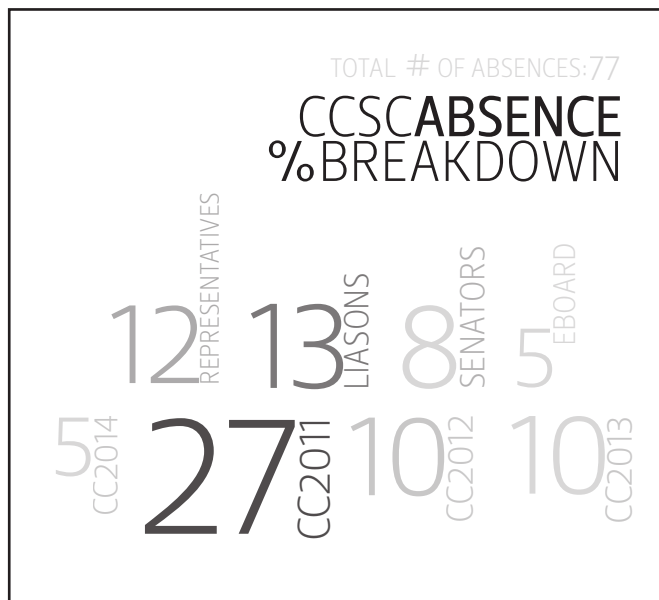
Some parts of student government, namely the class councils and the campus-life committee, certainly plan parties. Their work is distinctly different from the work of the policy committee, whose historic accomplishments include keeping Butler Library open 24 hours and encouraging gender-neutral housing. Under the current stewardship of Andrew Nguyen, the policy committee hasn't yet successfully pushed for any equivalently earth-shattering initiatives, but it has been quite active, with 14 passed resolutions, seven of which have already been implemented.

Nguyen begins his policy meetings at 4 p.m. on Sunday, holding a document detailing all the campaign promises his party has made. Though these campaign promises are important, many of this year's policies issues, such as the sudden appearance of long lines at Lerner Mail Services, could not have been an-

CCSCBUDGET

Statistics from Brandon Christophe, VP of Finance
Graphic by Cindy Pan





Undergraduates live on campus, so Columbia doesn't feel graduate-dominated—except on the University Senate floor. Since 2006, out of the 69 resolutions passed by the USenate, 44 of them solely affect graduate students while only 13 of them affect undergraduates. There are about three graduate students for every undergraduate student, so the distribution is brutally fair.

What is less apparently fair is the disproportionate weight that non-students have in the University Senate. Faculty members hold 59 percent of senate seats, despite students outnumbering faculty 6:1, probably because faculty generally hold their positions for a far longer time than students. Most of the time, however, the overruling weight of the faculty is barely felt, as they don't always show up to committee meetings. At least one undergraduate is also present in highly important committees, such as the executive committee, which sets the agenda of the University Senate, the budget review committee, and education committee. But when an issue affects the interests of faculty, such as last year's academic calendar debate, the faculty constituency shows up in full strength.

During that debate, students wanted to start school before Labor Day so that finals would not end the day before Christmas Eve. There was resistance from faculty who put forth various objections, mainly the cost of childcare, according to Alex Frouman, a junior in CC and a CC Senator. Because New York City schools start after Labor Day, faculty would have to pay for childcare if college began before that date.

"To be honest I don't think it would've required so much of a ... higher level of effort, it's just that people were comfortable with status quo position, and would begrudgingly welcome any change," says Sue Yang, president of CCSC from 2009-2010.

To insist on proportional representation is to insist on idealistic democratic principles—principles that, Frouman points out, don't quite belong in the University.

"This is something interesting that's come out of the ROTC debate: there's nothing democratic about a university, an American university. No issues at Columbia are decided upon democratically. The whole purpose of it is there's leadership such as deans, faculty, president that make decisions and that guides where the university goes. ... At the end of the day it's the trustees. It's more like a privately run company than a government," Frouman says.

The academic calendar debate ended in a compromise. The calendar remained untouched, but if

students' finals fell on Dec. 23, they could petition to have them rescheduled. Although the council contributed to the debate by providing research that demonstrated the benefits of shifting the academic calendar and how we stood in comparison to the other Ivies, ultimately it had very little decision-making power.

The University Senate only has to deliberate amongst itself before it passes a resolution that becomes law. The councils, on the other hand, must collaborate with administration and faculty to build relationships and shape resolutions together if they want to see them implemented. "Student government" is quite a misnomer—student council is better understood as liaisons between the student body and administration.

The collaborative nature of the relationship between students and the administration is a recent shift, according to Yang, and has been precipitated by incoming new administrators such as Terry Martinez, Dean of Community Development. The administration is not a monolithic enemy—housing and dining, in particular, work very closely with the Council.

The dependence on the administration for the realization of policies, however, creates a weak link between resolution and effect. For example, a few weeks into the semester, the council asked the administration to change the blocks of time so that first-years could swipe into meal halls three times a day instead of twice. The Council assumed that dining services had already implemented the changes, only to discover a month later that a technological problem had prevented the change.

STUDENT COUNCIL IS BETTER UNDERSTOOD AS LIAISONS BETWEEN THE STUDENT BODY AND ADMINISTRATION.

When it comes to academics, the council is not quite a collaborator and more of a recommender, a position it currently has found itself in as the Global Core committee, consisting of all faculty members, is revamping the sprawling nature of the Global Core.

The one sphere of influence that all councils have complete autonomy over is the budgets of the five governing boards, which oversee and fund all student groups, and the relationships between all four councils. The creation of the inter-council co-sponsorship committee, the dining report, and the creation of a student committee to allocate permanent spaces for clubs on campus are all indications that the relationships between all four councils are strengthening.

Nevertheless it's clear that, even outside of the curriculum, there is room for students to have more institutional power and input. Nguyen cites the process of allocating the brownstones as something he'd like student council to influence. Yang believes that many of the conflicts over space allocation of large rooms like Roone Arledge could be avoided if students had institutionalized channels to negotiate with one another.

"While the University gives us the forums for voicing our thoughts and opinions, it's hard for us to actually take on the action ourselves. ... There's a significant room for students to be entrusted more in making sort of decisions on what student life kind of

looks like on campus," Yang says.

The question of the council's power extends beyond the council and the senate: what role do undergraduates have in this University, period? Currently, students do have a voice in some, but not all, areas of student life. There is student representation in committees on the Core, dining, judicial and disciplinary affairs, public safety, health services, athletics, and sexual assault prevention, but there are very few institutionalized channels of communication between students in those committees and the council, creating a decentralized pattern of student engagement with administration.

The Verdict

The first complaint—that student council is a head disconnected from the rest of the student body—has some validity. Campus media outlets have to step up and provide policy-centered coverage. Furthermore, although the council has actively solicited feedback from the student groups, the "public's voice" is by and large funneled through student groups, meaning that there are few policies that directly affect the majority of students. This year's creation of more liaisons is a step in the right direction, but they aren't mandated to serve in committees where they would have more influence than in general council meetings.

The second complaint—that student council does little more than plan parties—is to mistakenly take the work of class councils to be the work of student council as a whole. Instituting gender-neutral housing, pushing administration to speed up the removal of loans for families with income under \$50,000, and keeping Butler open for 24 hours are examples of the historical range of the council's influence.

That said, the charge that this year's council focuses on small-scale policies, rather than large-scale ones, appears accurate. Foote shines best as a problem-solving, consensus-building technocrat—strengths that lend themselves to a pragmatic rather than a visionary approach. It is rather disappointing to see little, substantive progress made on community service consolidation on campus, given that it was the top priority of this year's ticket. The age-old trade-off between breadth and depth will remain the same throughout the years unless a fundamental restructuring of duties and resources occurs.

The third complaint—that student council has little say in this bureaucratic, graduate-heavy University—is the most serious one, but is often contingent on the issue under discussion. University-wide initiatives like the academic calendar, smoking ban, and ROTC are all decided by the University Senate, but the council has pushed to play a role nevertheless.

There are still many areas in student life, from CUIT to financial aid, where there is no institutionalized representation of students. The responsibility falls on the council, as the student group that administration listens to and respects the most, to carve out these permanent spaces for student input and to better centralize overall student engagement—whether between councils, governing boards, or committees with administration and faculty. It is this type of structural change which, perhaps, out of all possible policies, is the most meaningful. It is a change which will require a council that has an old-timer's familiarity with Columbia's bureaucracy and a new-timer's freshness of vision. Perhaps only then will more students believe that they have a relevant stake in the council's operations. ■

Anna Nicole's Habanera Moment

london blockbuster revives opera's tawdry roots

BY ANNELIESE COOPER
ILLUSTRATION BY MADDY KLOSS

We all know the story: an ingénue is swept up into the highfalutin' world of flashbulbs for her fifteen minutes—only to be spat out, drug-addled and chain-smoking, her former glory gone until she expires into infamy. It's the oldest cycle showbiz has to offer—now brought to life daily in be-sunglassed snapshots on every newsstand—and, as of this past February, it's even breached London's Royal Opera House in the form of *Anna Nicole*, an opera about the life and times of Anna Nicole Smith.

Like many of the celebrities who grace today's headlines, Smith was perhaps most famous for being famous: ultimately, her notoriety snowballed far beyond what might be called a career, as scandal begat scandal, and the public eye refused to avert its gaze. Born Vickie Lynn Hogan in a small Texas town, Smith dropped out of school during tenth grade and, in the years that followed, married Billy Smith and gave birth to her son, Daniel, while stumbling through a series of odd jobs—from Jim Krispy's Fried Chicken Shack to gentlemen's club Rick's Cabaret. There, she met Texas oil billionaire J. Howard Marshall II, age 88, who would soon become her second husband. With his support (and a boost of silicone), Smith rocketed to national fame as Playboy's 1993 Playmate of the Year, even replacing Claudia Schiffer as the face of Guess Jeans.

Though Smith did enjoy a fair amount of professional success, looking back, one might call her a model the way John Wilkes Booth was an actor: chances are, when you say her name, the images conjured aren't her tasteful black and white clothing ads. Rather, her legacy lives on in the rainbow of terrycloth tracksuits from her short-lived E! reality show—or the stale beige of the courtroom footage, as we watched her fight for over a decade to gain retro-active inclusion in Marshall's will.

It would seem, then, that upon learning this tawdry tale had transcended to the operatic stage, one might respond with a bemused head tilt, a raised eyebrow—all told, a general expression of: come again?

Honestly, it's difficult, upon first glance, not to view the mounting of so scandalous a production as some kind of publicity stunt. With a 16+ rating for "extreme language, drug abuse, and sexual content" and a libretto that includes lines about "Jimmy Choo shoes on a red carpet," *Anna Nicole* seems almost written to scandalize. Indeed, as the Royal Opera House website advertises, "Anna Nicole Smith's life made the news—you can bet this world premiere will too."

Still, there may be something artistically legitimate lurking behind the flash and controversy; as much as *Anna Nicole* stridently breaks convention, there's a way in which its pop and scandal are returning opera to its roots. "Opera is now perceived as lofty and very elevated, but in the nineteenth century, it was viewed as kind of trashy by a lot of people,"

explains Juliet Forshaw, an opera scholar and PhD candidate in historical musicology at Columbia's School of the Arts. "It's quite in keeping with opera's roots to deliberately write a story about something shocking and even tawdry." Indeed, as Forshaw says, many famous operatic heroines "defied the sexual morays of their time," like the brazen seductress at the center of Bizet's *Carmen*.

Of course, the mere salaciousness of Smith's tale, though certainly shocking, is almost less so than her "trailer-trash" stigma—her tabloid relevance, her fame for fame's sake. What, then, could qualify her for the operatic stage?

"I think one of the questions you have to answer is, 'What makes an operatic subject?'" says Gordon Ostrowski, Director of Opera Studies at the Manhattan School of Music. "Usually those subjects are people or situations that are bigger than life. Ultimately, I think, if you really look at Anna Nicole Smith's life, she's a tragic figure. She was trying to find wealth or fame or happiness and ultimately, used all of these things that didn't really supply her with any of that, but ended up in her demise."

This latent tragedy was what originally attracted the opera's creators to Smith as a subject: as librettist Richard Thomas (whose previous credits include *Jerry Springer: An Opera*) recently justified to the UK Metro, "If you put 'vicomte de' and 'baron de' in front of everybody's names, and set the same story in the 19th century, you'd think it was from a classic French novel."

WHAT, THEN, COULD QUALIFY HER FOR THE OPERATIC STAGE?

Thomas's jab hits home. Even today, many contemporary operas use historical source material—and, though these pieces echo their predecessors in style and subject, opera's cultural relevance may be getting lost in translation. "The 19th century was the age of the novel, so to base an opera on a novel back then was a logical choice, but I think it's not anymore," says Forshaw, noting that in those days, novels ran serially in newspapers, building anticipation chapter-by-chapter like today's best TV shows.

"We tend to forget that opera, when it was created, was a contemporary art form," said Ostrowski. "It was written in the moment and performed in the moment frequently, and some operas were even inspired by real people"—like the heroine of Verdi's *La Traviata*, who was based on an actual Parisian courtesan.

In recent years, operas like John Adams' *Nixon in China* and *Doctor Atomic* have taken on more current subject matter. However, *Anna Nicole* casts aside the saving grace of political import, instead promising glitz and raunch, relevance with a splash of sleaze.

Though risky, this potentially explosive cocktail hit the spot with many a critic: as New York Times reviewer Anthony Tommasini recounts, "The London audience ate it up. But so did I, because in the end



this is a musically rich, audacious and inexplicably poignant work."

Despite its surprising artistic success, *Anna Nicole* may have run into some unintended legal controversy. The London Daily Mail reported on Feb. 18 that Larry Birkhead, the father of Smith's daughter, is "considering legal action" against the Royal Opera House in the name of her estate. He may have a point. It's tough to argue that stage-exaggerated breasts swerving around a stripper pole in commemoration of one recently deceased are somehow a product of good taste. Indeed, one has to wonder at a culture that delights in razing the once-celebrated—and then, in turn, profits from the artistic re-rendering of that very demise.

And yet, it's possible that this opera represents the kind of canonizing Smith would have wanted. As far back as her first Playboy centerfold, she expressed a desire to be "the next Marilyn Monroe"—a fate almost prophetic in its accuracy. Anna Nicole was, after all, a blonde bombshell for the tabloid era, sparkling briefly, salaciously, and fading all too soon. Still, unlike Monroe, who was an actress first and a sensation second, Smith picked up all of the style without much of the substance, leaving her notoriety at the mercy of gossip headlines. Perhaps this, ultimately, is why her story ought to be told: to remind us of the tragic cycle of fame, the devastating and sometimes fatal fall that awaits those suspended on the wax wings of infamy.

With any luck, this diva counterpart might surpass her original—become, in prestige and content, a sort of *Carmen* for the 21st century. At the very least, *Anna Nicole* promises a heroine who snatched at opportunity and refused to let go, a sobering look at celebrity, a saucy regrounding of operatic relevance, a small piece proof that the American Dream can still thrive, in all its headline-grabbing glory, even on a stage across the Atlantic—belting its zaftig heart out for six sold-out shows, just waiting to "blow you all... a kiss!" ●

Editing Erotica

student journalists bring sexy back with a slew of new magazines

BY VALERIYA SAFRONOVA
ILLUSTRATIONS BY THUTO DURKAC SOMO

College students' interest in sex is clear—just check out almost everything marketed to us. If we aren't having it, we want to have it, and if we don't want to have it, we're almost certainly curious. So the past decade's boom of campus sex magazines—written by and for students—undoubtedly makes sense. “Sex is an exciting and interesting part of life that shouldn't be stigmatized,” says Jenn Levya, a junior in CC. “Sex magazines are a good way to publish ideas and experiences about sex that are not limited to explicit, shunned areas of public life.”

According to Dan Reimold, assistant professor at the University of Tampa and the author of *Sex and the University*, covering sex isn't just exciting; it's also important. “Student journalism is leading the way on coverage of sexual issues in this country. Sexual issues, behaviors and trends are incredibly significant and relevant factors in our lives. Student journalists have figured this out. Professional journalists should follow their lead.”

However, despite several efforts, sex magazines at Columbia haven't succeeded. Although 2006's

“STUDENT JOURNALISM IS LEADING THE WAY ON COVERAGE OF SEXUAL ISSUES IN THIS COUNTRY. STUDENT JOURNALISTS HAVE FIGURED THIS OUT. PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS SHOULD FOLLOW THEIR LEAD.”

Outlet and 2008's *C-Spot* debuted to great media attention, each stopped publishing after several issues. Now, with a new attempt, *The Morningside After*, set for a late-April premiere, and *C-Spot* slated for a rebirth, it's time to ask: why have sex magazines at Columbia failed? What do students want from them? And will they get it?

A Brief History

Outlet, an online publication, debuted to intense interest, with mentions in the *New York Sun*, *New York Magazine*, and numerous blogs. However, much of this attention was negative: *New York Magazine* characterized *Outlet* as “Pornless Porn,” filled with “vaguely intellectual

undergraduate musings,” “in a decidedly un-sexy Courier New Type” font.

Although *Outlet*'s second issue, which featured a review of the big-budget porn film *Pirates*, a firsthand account of working at Playboy TV, and a quiz to determine the personality type of the reader's vagina was better received, *Outlet* ultimately folded.

The next attempt came in October 2008, with *C-Spot*, created by Jessica Tang, CC '09. Like *Outlet*, the magazine attracted media attention, with pieces on ABC and Fox News for its racy photography, and articles on topics like YouPorn.com, professional nude modeling and an online adultery service. Despite the coverage, however, *C-Spot* had a low profile on campus.

“What is *C-Spot*?,” says John Bubar, a junior in CC. “I guess they don't advertise well.” Mike Hu, also a junior in CC, feels similarly. “I don't think I really knew about it. I never noticed it.”

Tang thinks that the lack of recognition is understandable. “As *C-Spot* is still a relatively new organization, I can understand if some students still haven't heard of it. Also, when *C-Spot* was being printed, we only had enough money to produce 2,000 copies, and the copies always went very quickly,” she says.

However, those who did get to read *C-Spot* were often critical of it. As one anonymous Bwog commenter wrote, “I thought they might have something interesting to say. One article was essentially a sex-story, no better than any you would find on a porn website, and another was typical ‘Oh society, look at me defy gender norms by being a slut.’” Diana Clarke, a sophomore in CC, felt similarly. “I was intrigued by the idea of students talking about sex in a public forum,” she says. “The problem was, I didn't like the writing that much. The erotic pieces never struck me as erotic.”

Leena Charlton, a junior in CC, and a founder of *The Morningside After*, thinks that *C-Spot* was difficult to relate to. “The pieces contributed to *C-Spot* sometimes addressed very foreign or imaginative areas, mostly through fiction, without any explanation or attempt to orient the reader in the world they were creating. Because there was no help from the writer for the reader, only certain people were interested in actually reading the articles,” she says.

C-Spot hasn't published this year, as Tang converted it to a digital format, a decision sparked by Tang's desire to spread the magazine to other campuses and to avoid high printing costs. This temporary disappearance has left Columbia without a sex magazine.

Up and Comers

Into the void step Margaret Kieu, Erin Flynn, and Leena Charlton, juniors in CC, and *The Morningside After* editors. They hope to produce two

themed issues per semester, with the first—consisting of eight non-fiction and fiction pieces—focusing on virginity. In addition to the articles and creative pieces, they hope to include sex education and student confessional sections, along with product review guides. “We want to steer clear from being a magazine with all sorts of random

“PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO CONNECT. THE WRITER AND THE STORY ALSO SHOULDN'T BE SELF-INDULGENT, AND SHOULD LEAVE ROOM FOR THE READER TO REACT.”

stories flanked by sexy pictures,” says Flynn. “We want the writing to be quality, and we want to make it organized. We want to publish stories that the writers won't mind attaching their names to.”

“Our content aims to be well-written and relatable to different groups of people, whether they are gay, straight, bisexual; come from traditional or liberal sexual backgrounds, are virgins or not, men, women,” says Charlton. “*C-Spot* definitely did push boundaries ... we just want to make sure that people will be able to follow us as we push.”

In addition, *The Morningside After* will throw parties similar to *C-Spot*'s, which aimed to “give students a safe space to explore their sexualities and to enhance their romantic lives,” according to *C-Spot*'s official website. However, Charlton hopes that *The Morningside After*'s parties will be better attended. “The problem with *C-Spot*'s parties was them not wanting to advertise widely. *The Morningside After* will be having parties very similar to *C-Spot*'s, but hopefully will be able to hit a wider range of people. We don't want people to feel as if they can't attend because they weren't invited or can't find out enough information about it because it seems like part of a secret society,” says Charlton.

“We want to get that sort of enthusiasm going with this magazine, but we don't want it to be so underground,” says Flynn.

With these lofty goals in mind, Flynn, Kieu, and Charlton prepare to publish their first issue. Meanwhile, Tang has plans for a newer, more user-friendly *C-Spot*.

Tang hopes to launch a new, entirely digital *C-Spot* at the end of May. She wants to be able to include music, sound clips, and video works, along with the standard visual and written pieces. “With the new site, students from across the nation can have their works published, without hav-

ing to wait for *C-Spot* to ‘come’ to their campus,” says Tang. “By giving students the power to upload their work directly to the site, *C-Spot* can make available a lot more content, much more quickly.”

Doing It Differently

When asked about what they would like to see in a campus sex magazine, students gave widely varying responses.

Miriam Dastkovsky, CC '07, a former *Spectator* sex columnist, recommends that future sex magazine editors survey the attitudes and interests of the student body, and use that information to present the general interests in ways that haven't been already done.

Like Charlton, Dastkovsky emphasizes relatability. “People should be able to connect. The writer and the story also shouldn't be self-indulgent, and should leave room for the reader to react,” she says. Dastkovsky also sees a future in interactive features for writers, editors and readers, such as question and answer sessions or a Twitter feed. These sorts of ideas may be viable for the revived *C-Spot*.

Adam May, a senior in CC, hopes that future magazines raise the level of campus discourse. “[With previous magazines] it became more of a thing of trying to recognize your friends and see who did what and why instead of actually forwarding the discussion of sex and sexuality. I'd like a better balance of what they would actually want to see to change the close-minded attitudes they seem to be combating.”

Levy suggested further boundary-pushing. “A sex magazine could be a great place to talk about the fat acceptance movement, BBW, [Big Beautiful Women] and the plethora of other non-normalized bodies, and experiences with them,” she says.

Others thought that the focus should be less on titillation and more on humor. “I think sex stories are more interesting to share if they're funny. The sex story gone wrong, laughing at the humor in that ... would make me more likely to read it,” says Yonatan Gebeyehu, a senior in CC.

Opinion about the inclusion of erotic photos of students seems divided. Speaking of *C-Spot*, Vasilis Hristidis, a junior in CC says, “the racy photos were hot.” But Gebeyehu was less enthused. “I think that it's positive that the people who do the modeling are totally comfortable in their bodies, but it would be awkward to run into them in class. I've seen you naked, now we have nothing to talk about,” he says.

A campus sex magazine remains an intriguing idea—in theory. “It's such an inherent part of people's psyches, it's totally unaddressed, and it's totally fascinating,” says Clarke. Both *The Morningside After* and *C-Spot* seem to want to be more accessible, but only time will tell how well the magazines can satisfy their readers' desires. ■



Giving It The Old College Try—Again

stephanie staal returns to her alma mater to reread feminist texts

BY MEREDITH MOORE

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHANIE STAAL

In 2003, Stephanie Staal, a freelance writer and new mother, felt like she was drifting from her Barnard roots.

Piercing cries in the night from her newborn daughter and bickering with her husband made Staal rethink—doubt, even—her new life away from the city. Staal questioned her ability to be herself while doubling as a stay-at-home mom. She was away from her family and friends, and was left to resolve her questions on her own. Figuring out how to combine motherhood and feminism, she turned to books for answers. She decided to reintegrate her younger and older selves by retaking Feminist Texts at her alma mater. Her recently-published memoir of the academic adventure, *Reading Women*, compellingly tells her story with segments of literary analysis and historical background of the texts she revisited.

Classroom presence was a primary component of Staal's resolution to redefine herself through feminist texts. She smoothly reintegrated herself into the academic milieu and didn't let the age gap between her fellow students, her professor, and herself intimidate her. "I very much took the position of an observer," she says. "I never really felt like I was coming

in with any greater knowledge. I thought it was such a great opportunity to feel the energy and excitement of the classroom."

Her older age allowed her to connect with certain periods of time more so than other students; for example, when her class discussed the 1970s feminist movement, Staal felt connected to the era through early childhood memories. The age proximity between herself and some of her professors also heightened her connection with the course material. "It was really interesting to have a professor from my background," she says. "A lot of the students felt so remote from them, because [that threshold of history] seemed so far away."

Staal also took advantage of her liberty to delve further into the texts because she didn't face the constraints of being an overloaded, coffee-crazed student. She says, "I was looking at it more as a personal reading experience, where the students were concerned about being students and conforming to academic expectations, while I was doing this for my own personal edification to see how the texts fit into my life at a different place." Staal viewed her learning experience as a challenge that allowed her to reconnect with herself on a deeper level away from her everyday grind. She found that classroom discussion complemented and completed her interpretations of the texts.

"There is something very special to going back to where you went as an undergraduate," she says. "You are not only confronting the memories of yourself when you were younger, but rereading also creates a special dialogue with your younger self, and you learn how you have changed and how your thoughts have developed over time." For Staal, relating the evolution of feminism to her own evolution as a person was an empowering solution to her personal doubts. Betty Friedan's descriptions of women constricting their aspirations to fit the mold of a housewife re-invigorated Staal. "This cultural collusion against women was wrong," she says. "Suddenly, I was reminded of my old passions, my earlier convictions, and past and present collided. I sat up a little straighter."

Staal found that her return to the classroom was especially fulfilling because she was able to compare, and reconcile, both stages of her life.

Although Staal's solution was unconventional, she wasn't the first student to solve a personal crisis with class discussions and write a book about the process. She wasn't even the first Columbia affiliate. In 1989, David Denby CC '65 grew disillusioned with the fate of literature and questioned how his education was fitting into his career as a film critic and journalist. "I needed to start work on this book in part because I no longer knew what I knew," he says. "I possessed information without knowledge,

opinions without principles, instincts without beliefs." He re-enrolled in Literature Humanities and other courses at Columbia in attempts to solve the mystery of education, and explore how knowledge eludes and escapes us. The uniquely intellectual approach resulted in his self-discovery which he recounts in his memoir *Great Books*, a narrative about his re-interpretations of Western classics by Homer, Locke, and Conrad.

FOR STAAL, RELATING THE EVOLUTION OF FEMINISM TO HER OWN EVOLUTION AS A PERSON WAS AN EMPOWERING SOLUTION TO HER PERSONAL DOUBTS.

Denby craved classroom discussion at his alma mater. He wanted to have a first-hand account that witnessed how current students responded to the texts and how they were reading. He yearned for the classroom setting because he felt that reading the books on his own time would not stimulate his college self; he wanted to question his interpretations in discussions with students at a different stage in life.

"Passivity was not my ideal of a reader's response," he says, "nor could I understand how the works in question could ever have reached canonical status if they had produced nothing more than grateful acceptance." From a broader point of view, the classroom setting facilitated answers to his overall doubts about a Eurocentric curriculum: How exactly should the Western canon provide answers for a country comprised predominantly of non-westerners? Denby felt the need to re-apply his educational experience to the role of literature in academia in order to feel more assured in his work as a journalist.

"The students had grown up living in the media," he says. "What were they like? What had happened to teaching in the age of the culture debate, in a corner of the university far from the war yet obviously touched by the noise of battle?"

Staal and Denby attest to the possibility of a liberal arts education, and how educating and re-educating oneself is an ongoing process that is exponentially enhanced by the aura of the classroom. "I was looking at the objective historical background of feminism but at the same time I was looking at myself," says Staal. "Running on parallel tracks almost, to look at how my understanding of feminism had changed and how my life had changed, and stirred up memories of who I was then and who I am now." ●



Barnard, Inc.

the bejeweled thong is just the beginning

BY BRIANA FASONE
PHOTO BY JULIA MILLER

Barnard, Inc. has expanded into the undergarment market. Available at The Barnard Store is a suite of cobalt-blue thongs (and boy shorts) of Hanky Panky brand. “Did you really think I hadn’t bought a pair yet?” chirped “Alex” last June on a Barnard Class of 2009 WordPress blog. Days later a Spectrum blogger questioned why Barnard “would do this to itself,” in a post titled, “Today in Perpetuated Stereotypes.” It’s tagged in the category of “questionable decisions.” Another enthusiastic chick who hadn’t even arrived at the Barnard coop—let’s call her Panty Promoter ’14—wrote that stumbling upon the Barnard thong “was just another benefit to my already perfect school,” remembering: “I saved it, without wearing it, until my interview at Barnard.”

With high hopes and low-rise, Panty Promoter nailed her interview and received her acceptance letter shortly thereafter. “I think it’s no coincidence that using my favorite thong to link me into a legacy of bright women graduating from Barnard certainly helped my chances, secretly,” posted Miss Barnard Panty Promoter ’14. She refers to her Hanky Panky as her new “good luck charm,” and points out that the signature thong was developed by Gale Epstein and Lida Orzeck, BC ’68. In fact, Panty Promoter’s post appears not on a Barnard website, but on the Hanky Panky blog, “Thong Diaries.”

Lurking behind Panty Promoter’s precious anecdote, in light of the alumni appreciation and the cross promotion behind the sparkling Barnard-bejeweled thong, lies what I suspect to be a deep-seated conspiracy. Back at the store, I took a picture of the thong using my BlackBerry Curve and sent the image to all the non-Barnard contacts on my BlackBerry Messenger list. “A Panty for Your Thoughts?” the caption reads. The BBM responses range from the expected hackneyed jokes about women’s colleges, vague and explicit suggestions that Barnard is creepy, a consensus nevertheless: the concept of a Hanky Panky ‘college’ thong is cool—just as long as that college isn’t Barnard.

The power of the ‘college’ panty rests not in its wearability but its removability—a good luck charm of a sort we presume Panty Promoter ’14 never envisioned. No matter how many Barnard girls join sororities, attending mixers and slowly and methodically inching up their skirts, Barnard is not Duke. Barnard is not Louisiana State University or Auburn University or Washington State University; it is certainly not the University of Miami or Florida or Illinois—which is to say that Barnard isn’t represented in Hanky Panky’s new line of ‘collegiate’ low-rise thongs so advertised on the Hanky Panky website.

I return to my initial question: How do we

understand the Barnard thong? Is it appropriate to couch a bedazzled thong in a larger program of Barnard’s rebranding? I highly doubt it. Barnard, Inc. never wanted to be popular (outside of her clique of Birkenstock-wearing theater friends) and the company’s Board of Directors would approve the sale of crack cocaine before it allowed its flagship store, its veritable billboard, to sell anything that panders to frivolous party girls.

The conspiracy still ungrasped, life goes on: I go to class; I take naps; I run nowhere on the treadmill. Then, on one sparkling bright afternoon, I’m in an elevator. A mousy girl with flaxen hair gets on and she recognizes me from a Modernism class we took last semester. Obligatory small talk ensues: the obviousness of nice weather, the doomsday scenario of having bad weather. “I know what you mean,” she says as the doors open, “I hope it rains here, secretly.” The doors close. I think of how uncomfortable I am with her choice of putting “secretly” at the end of the sentence. How awkward. Then it hits me: Panty Promoter and her iconic: “I think it’s no coincidence that using my favorite thong to link me into a legacy of bright women graduating from Barnard certainly helped my chances, secretly.” Secretly. Just one silly word.

Barnard, Inc. isn’t about panties, the panties aren’t about the panties, it’s all about “bright women” who become successful businesswomen, who run things and who make love to their BlackBerry devices and who wear business-casual when they don’t really have to and who, most importantly, invent and manufacture products that they then sell to Barnard at discount prices. Athena Goddess Econ majors with banking jobs in their back pockets, the corporate minions over at the Student Government Association may remain skeptical,

but I know Barnard, Inc. manufactures women designed to sparkle only in the corporate world.

If you think these are just ravings of an unemployed English major, beset with a touch of insanity, I ask you to consider the operations of Barnard Inc.’s subsidiary company, the Athena Leadership Lab. Director Kathryn Kolbert is quoted in a blog post on “News On Women” as describing the company’s motto as such: “The lab is designed as an experiential learning environment, offering mini-courses, workshops and networking opportunities geared toward any woman, at any stage her career, who wants to be a leader.” Athena Lab and

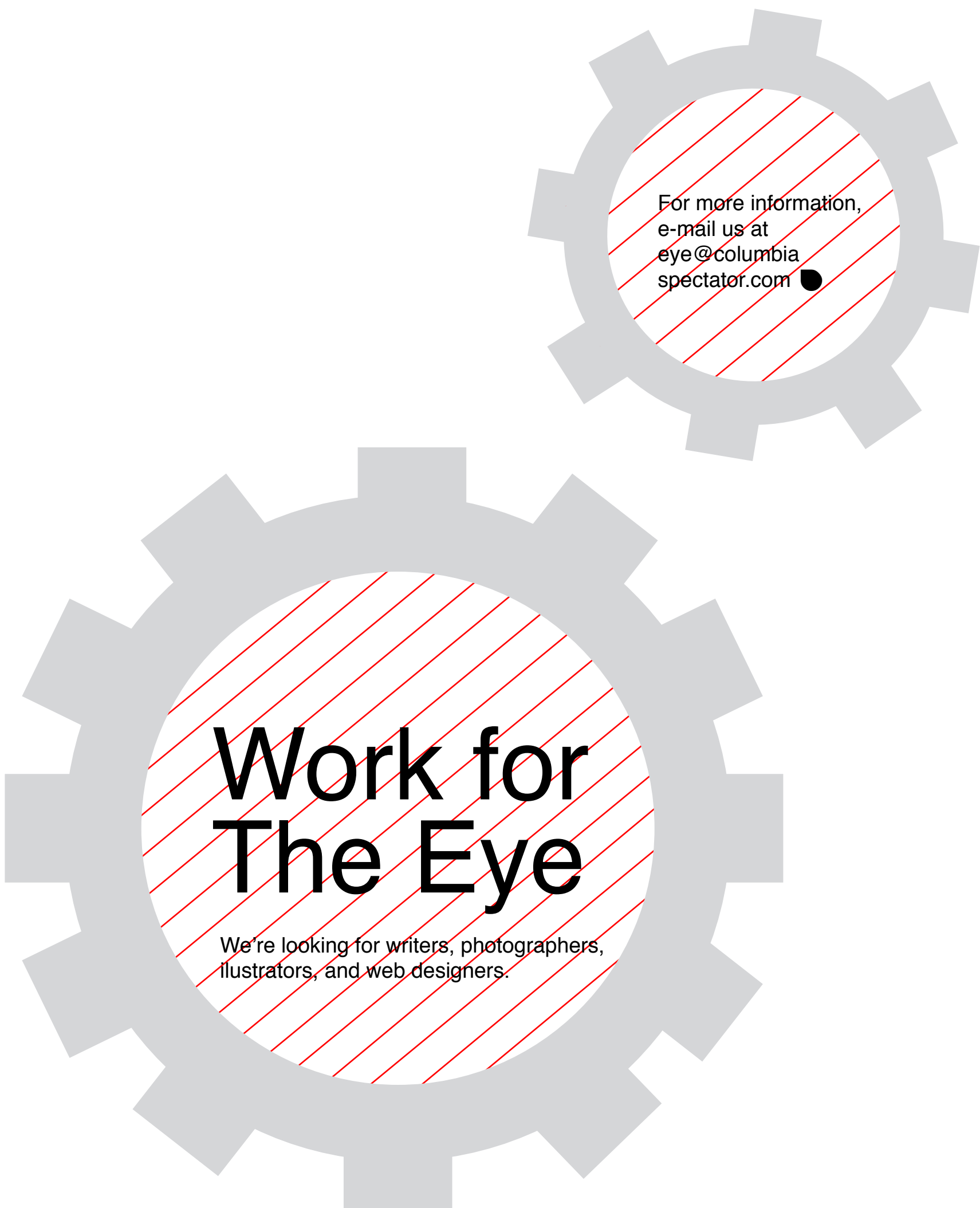
THE CONCEPT OF A HANKY PANKY ‘COLLEGE’ THONG IS COOL – JUST AS LONG AS THAT COLLEGE ISN’T BARNARD.

Co. sell “mini-courses” and “workshops” starting at a measly \$199 and going up to a very reasonable \$799. The classes focus on six areas of professional learning: Communications, Management, Financial Fluency, Negotiation, Entrepreneurship, and my personal favorite, Risk-Taking and Resilience. From 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. on Saturday, March 5th, a group of women got together and, for \$299, began a mini-course called “How to Create a Six-Figure Business Before Your 30th Birthday.” These eager beavers, for \$199, can even follow up on Tuesday, April 12, with “Getting Out: How and When to Sell Your Start-Up.”

I, however, will not be joining them. I have neither the cash nor the belief that \$299 will help me forever calm my powerful “Inner Critic”—the internal voice that thwarts my spontaneity, dampens my creativity, and holds me hostage to anxiety. (“Calm Your Inner Critic” meets on Saturday, April 2, 2011 from 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. on the fifth floor of the Diana Center.)

I refuse to buy Barnard, Inc.’s sparkling woman, just as I refuse to wear her sparkling thong. ●





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