On Campus

# Local News

Journalism students on the neighborhood beat.

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**Ascending in 1902** to the Columbia presidency that he would hold for 43 years, Nicholas Murray Butler offered in his inaugural address a view of the university's place in society: "The university is not apart from the activities of the world, but in them and of them. It deals with real problems and it relates itself to life as it is." A university, he said, is "bound by its very nature to the service of others." In the intervening century, Columbia at times turned inward, away from Butler's model. But today the University is committed again to more extensive outreach to the world beyond its ivied walls. Among the most visible programs immersing students in the community are those at the Graduate School of Journalism.

In their introductory reporting classes, for example, j-schoolers fan out across New York City to dig up stories, while local events and street scenes offer grist for the mills of aspiring photojournalists. The student-run Web site NYC24 provides a home for feature reporting on the City, and the Columbia News Service syndicates student-written stories to audiences elsewhere in the country.

Heading into neighborhoods in all five boroughs, students learn "how communities function—how to talk to, and gain access to, people who don't look like them, who don't speak the same language, who don't have the same beliefs," explains David A. Klatell, academic dean and professor of professional practice at the j-school. "It's part of the process of journalists learning to get outside themselves."

On an extended tour of one locale are the second-semester students who produce *The Bronx Beat*, a weekly newspaper. Under the direction of Visiting Assistant Professor of Journalism Addie M. Rimmer '78JRN, a longtime working journalist, two

dozen students publish the 8- to 12-page newspaper during the spring semester. By focusing on Bronx neighborhoods that receive limited attention from other publications, the paper provides a valued service to area residents. Covering issues such as health, immigration, and the environment, students report and write all the stories in addition to taking photographs, designing the layout, and making general editorial decisions.

A high school robotics team preparing for a science and technology competition. Photo by Bronx Beat reporter Jenna Cho ’04JRNRobin Hindery ’04JRN recalls researching a story that sent her to pharmacies all over the Bronx to compare prescription drug prices: “It was one of the best glimpses of life in the Bronx that I have been exposed to. Like barbershops, the local mom-and-pop pharmacies are places where people discuss the issues that are affecting their daily lives—whether health-related, job-related, or family-related. Sometimes just sitting and listening to people talk to one another about what’s important to them and what they’re concerned about is so much more valuable than going to press conferences or even doing one-on-one interviews.”

Reporting for the newspaper is a lot of responsibility, according to Elizabeth Slovic ’04JRN, who also thoroughly enjoys her forays into the Bronx. “Readers hold us accountable not only for articles we write,” she says, “but for stories written by previous classes too.” Julia Glick ’04JRN underscores the importance of accuracy as well as locating primary sources: “For one story, I had to find someone who was a refugee. I couldn’t fall back on experts to tell me what that experience is like.” She adds that all the City’s varied neighborhoods are fertile ground for budding journalists. “There are too many opportunities to cover too many subjects,” she says. “To have the chance to report a story about human rights in Colombia from Jackson Heights, Queens—you can’t do that anywhere else.”

Somewhere, President Butler is smiling.

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