On Campus

Silence in the Quads

The cancellation of classes — and commencement — has left the Columbia campus eerily empty.

By
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|
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Bill Drummy

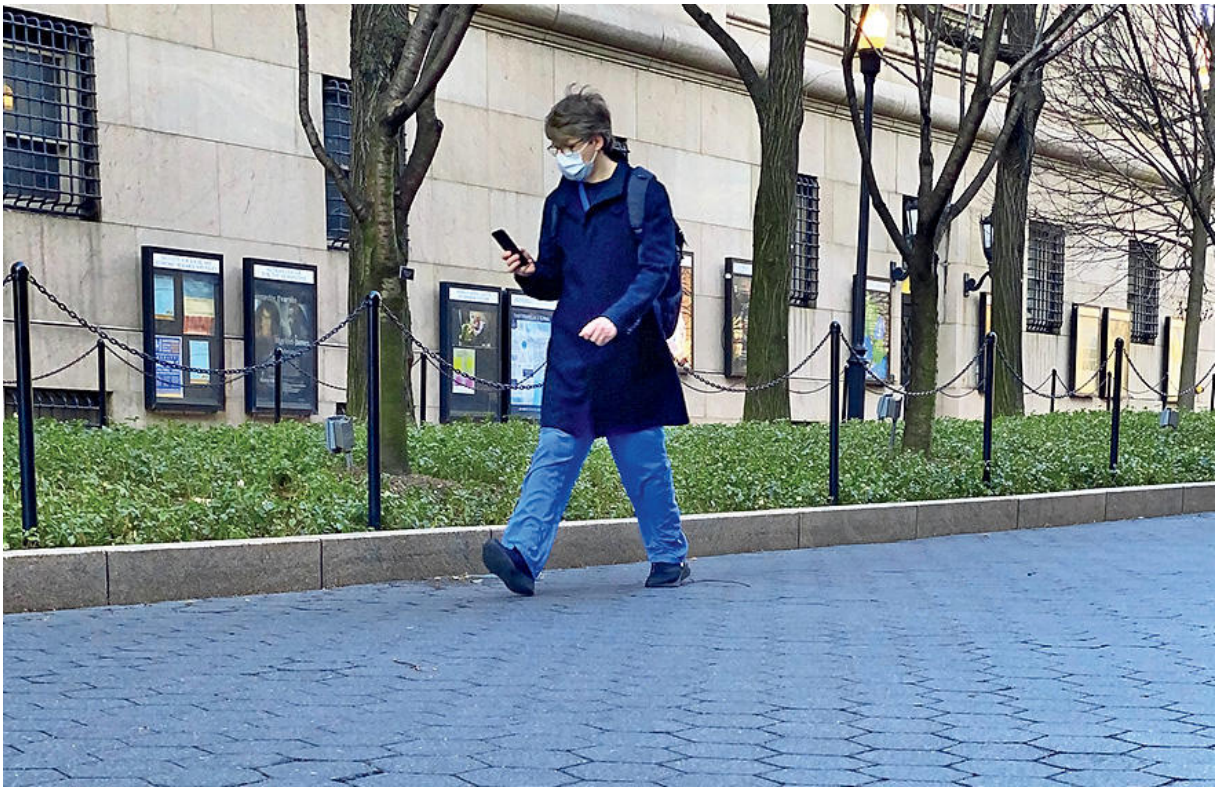
This spring, as the coronavirus pandemic surged in New York City, the Morningside and Manhattanville campuses were a study in silence. With classes moved online and faculty and non-essential staff following work-at-home protocols, the campus

had “an eerie and uncharacteristic stillness about it,” as President Lee C. Bollinger observed in a letter to the Columbia community. He noted the sharp contrast with the medical campus uptown, where Columbia physicians, nurses, technicians, administrators, medical and public-health researchers, maintenance personnel, and security guards — some of whom moved into the vacated Morningside residence halls to ease their commutes — faced a deluge of patients stricken with COVID-19.



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In that same letter, Bollinger offered his deepest thanks for the sacrifice and commitment of those frontline workers while lamenting the “heartbreaking” decision to cancel the May 20 University-wide Commencement ceremonies. Not since King’s College was closed during the American Revolutionary War had the ritual failed to proceed. Instead, plans were made to record the ceremony and share it virtually.



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Though no light-blue caps would be tossed in Low Plaza, Bollinger hoped to find a way to honor 2020 graduates in person, when the time was right. “There is no academic ceremony I love more,” he wrote, “and I expect to love this one the most.”



Eileen Barroso

This article appears in the Spring/Summer 2020 print edition of Columbia Magazine *with the title "Quiet Contemplation."*

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