



Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

THE CLOSURE OF NEW MEDIA AND DESIGN AND THE UNIVERSITY FINANCES: Interview with Fred Bohlen, Executive Vice President

MARY ABRAHAM

At the end of February the university announced the closure of the New Media and Design Center. To understand the financial context of this decision, *Natural Selections* has interviewed Executive Vice President Fred Bohlen, a senior member of the administration who has responsibilities in managing the university's finances.

First a budget question. Part of the issue of closure of New Media and Design was due to a projected deficit in the university budget this year?

There's an actual deficit this year. We put a plan together which the Board of Trustees approved in June that provided for a deficit of \$2.4 million in the current year. That is the first deficit budget since 1993/1994. It is real, and we have done projections going forward.

How do you do these projections and how accurate are they?

We put our budget around certain policies. For example, with the endowment, which is a major part of our income, we have a Board of Trustees policy that defines what percentage of that we can plan to use to support the budget, and that is based on the last three years. For any budget, that number is established by June, and for any given year that amount is not an estimate, it is a specific. The number that we put in the budget for grants—that is an estimate. But since these grants are typically multi-year grants, we can estimate pretty closely. I've been here for fifteen years and we have a pretty good track record of projecting a budget that we typically come within a half to one percent of filling. Now when you go out three to five years, which we have done, there is obviously more uncertainty. But we have tested our projections with multiple members of the Board, and together the administration and the Board have agreed on this set of projections as a plausible statement of what our future looks like without corrective actions. We think that left completely unattended we would have not just a two and a half million dollar deficit this year, but bigger deficits going forward.

Do grants represent the greatest variability in the budget?

No, there are a variety of factors on the

income and the expense side. On the income side, the most important factors are what you project for your investment income [the endowment], it is 25-30% of the total, and also the grants and contracts and income, because that is such a big number. We have to make assumptions about the growth of those going forward. In the case of investment income, we project an average return of 8% per year. That is pretty consistent with what other institutions project for investment capital.

When professors write grants, what percentage of the money goes to the university?

Government grants typically carry with them overhead recovery for which the university has been in the range of 67-69% of the direct costs. If you got a grant of \$100,000 directly supporting research, the university would get an additional \$69,000 to run the support facilities.

Does this income have to be allocated towards things like resource centers, or is it generally unrestricted?

It is absolutely unrestricted income and is allocated to the most critical needs that one has. Every three years we present to the federal government a picture of our finances and how they relate to the direct costs of research, and then they give us a recovery rate. The amount we actually recover through that doesn't cover the full costs of our overhead. It does cover the costs of our physical plant—utility costs, repairs and maintenance, and support services, like custodial services. It covers some portion of such things as the Human Resources department, the Finance department, but not all of that.

In the 2004/2005 financial year, \$13 million were allocated to resource centers [out of the overall annual university budget of \$240 million]. Does resource center spending usually represent a fixed proportion of the budget?

If you went back five years or even longer, we didn't have many resource centers, so that would have been a much smaller part of the budget. Beginning in the administration of Arnold Levine, Rockefeller adopted a strategy to build centralized resources in

these needed services and not to fund these services within individual laboratories. We are still pursuing that strategy.

Has it worked?

Absolutely. But in some ways a centralized service center is more challenging, because you need to build management mechanisms where you get the benefits of the scientific leaders as well as administrative direction. Resource centers are taking a larger part of our budget. They are very valuable to the science here, but they are part of the element of stress and strain that we are feeling in our budget. They are growing and they all need to be subsidized. To charge to the users what it would cost to break-even on those centers, particularly on some of the newer ones, would make the costs to the individual scientist prohibitive. Some costs are recovered through charges, but the balance of costs that aren't recovered are subsidized by the university.

Have lab costs increased as a percentage of the university budget?

Costs to the university for laboratory operations have risen because our philosophy and formulas for funding labs have related to size. If you take a five to seven year view, NIH funding has gone up during that period substantially. The university's funding has followed it, so there is no question that there is a larger allocation for lab operations today than there was three to five years ago.

Has the university looked into lowering costs by sharing resource centers? There is some sharing already, for example with the Sloan Kettering Monoclonal Antibody center.

Sloan Kettering has a certain set of resource centers for its own needs. In some cases they have excess capacity, which they are happy to have us utilize. We have built resource centers around our science and our needs. There is a willingness to share, particularly if you have a bit of excess capability, but you have to be careful if you get into a joint agreement, if it is a center in the other institution, that your people will be treated fairly.

What was the timeline in the decision to close New Media and Design?

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As recently as the late 1990's, New Media and Design was essentially a break-even operation, but changing technology had led many people to desktop publishing and a lot of people had moved their business into the lab. Most of the activities could be done on the outside. In the fall of 2002, we thought part of the problem was the leadership of the department. We decided we would seek a new leader, we brought Pam Burns in to run the place. My own view is that Pam Burns did as good a job as anybody could have done, but business declined—it simply became an expensive luxury. We are not the only institution that has reached that conclusion. Mount Sinai, three or four years ago, closed down a substantial media center for some of the same reasons.

How long did the decision process take with respect to outsourcing the New Media and Design Center?

We had an intense examination of New Media and Design organization over a period of sixty to ninety days, looking at all elements of the costs and the services and the outside alternatives.

In closing the New Media and Design Center, who actually gets involved in the decision?

We felt we got input from a variety of quarters, but I'm the chief operating officer with responsibility for oversight of all the administrative and support services. The ultimate decision rested with me.

Were all the operations in New Media and Design losing a lot of money—for example, what about the campus store?

Absolutely, it was a loser. It was a convenience, but from the university's point of view it was a subsidized operation. Everything that was outsourced was definitely losing money. Things that we have retained were things that either were more or less break-even, or that we didn't think we could outsource with confidence in both costs and reliability.

There had been an independent review of the resource centers in the summer by John Tooze...

The university engaged John Tooze, a former colleague of the president, to come in and look at resource centers in general. The thrust of his report was that resource centers are extremely valuable aspects of the environment that the university offers to laboratories. He had a variety of specific suggestions for improving their operation, which we have been pursuing.

Did he make any recommendations for closure or outsourcing?

I'm not going to get into anything more specific. In general his report was extremely supportive about the strategy of resource centers, and then made specific suggestions about how to strengthen and improve them.

It was a supportive report.

Some costs at New Media and Design were quite high—for example, when enquiring about printing *Natural Selections*, we were quoted a rate three times higher than what we are paying on the outside. Also, for scientific posters the prices seemed quite high.

If you were running New Media and Design, the challenge was overwhelming. On one hand, to keep their business they had to price reasonably similarly to Kinkos, although not necessarily exactly the same—people will pay for convenience. They tried to keep costs within some reasonable relationship to the outside. For the university, the costs are always higher. When we employ people as staff, we don't employ them on an hourly basis with no benefits. They get competitive wages, health benefits, and everything else you don't find in outsourcing. So on a comparable basis, the costs within the university will always be higher. I didn't hear a lot of complaints about the costs of individual services. At a time when we have to make a lot of very tough decisions, for example, we are making changes in the ways that we are funding laboratories, what I did hear was criticism—why are you subsidizing that [New Media] so heavily?, and that was a very good question.

Do you think there will be further layoffs or cutbacks in the department?

There is not a second wave of cutbacks anticipated.

Have there been other cutbacks or layoffs elsewhere?

In spring 2003 we reduced costs in the full range of overhead departments by \$3.5 million, and we brought the budget into balance in the year 2004. In spring 2003, not so much through layoffs, but through attrition and through elimination of staff positions, we took about twenty positions out of the total of overhead support. These were either empty positions, or people retired or left and their positions weren't refilled. We also did an across the board cut of five percent of current university allocations to laboratories. We wouldn't be doing those things unless we think that we have a real budget problem.

Does the university prefer to outsource everything at once instead of phasing things out? The closure of the DNA Sequencing Center and New Media seemed sudden.

When you reach a decision that you are going to end something, you have to end it. You can't say we are going to end something in three months because there are people involved, and it's fairer to them to have it be direct. In terms of the people with the jobs that were lost, we have taken a lot of care to work out their separation from the university.

Yet with all these cutbacks, the university

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is starting a faculty search for new labs.

The president's strategic plan for the next five years talks about the recruitment, roughly speaking, of two new heads of laboratories per year for over a five or six year period. That strategy is basically to hold the university constant because we have people retiring and leaving.

Will these new labs increase expenses? If you are recruiting a new person, there must be a lot of start-up costs and the issue of providing infrastructure?

Sure. You have to go out and raise money to attract and recruit these new labs. That is part of our financial and fundraising plan. We are very confident that we can raise the money to support this level. Since 1994 we started 37 new laboratories, all of which have all been started with private funds raised for that purpose. On the issue of infrastructure, if we were proposing to substantially increase the number of labs here, we would have additional infrastructure costs. But with the concept of pretty much steady state, we don't see big infrastructure implications. Now, there is a space scarcity, and we have very limited space to put new labs in. We have some open space here and there, and we have some old space on the north end of the campus. The president's plan emphasizes restoration of the north campus buildings, particularly Flexner and Smith, over five to seven years, and with that space coming along we will have plenty of space.

Right now in some areas of the infrastructure, the university seems to be bursting at the seams, for example with housing for students and postdocs. Is that causing extra costs, with people living off-campus in housing that the university rents?

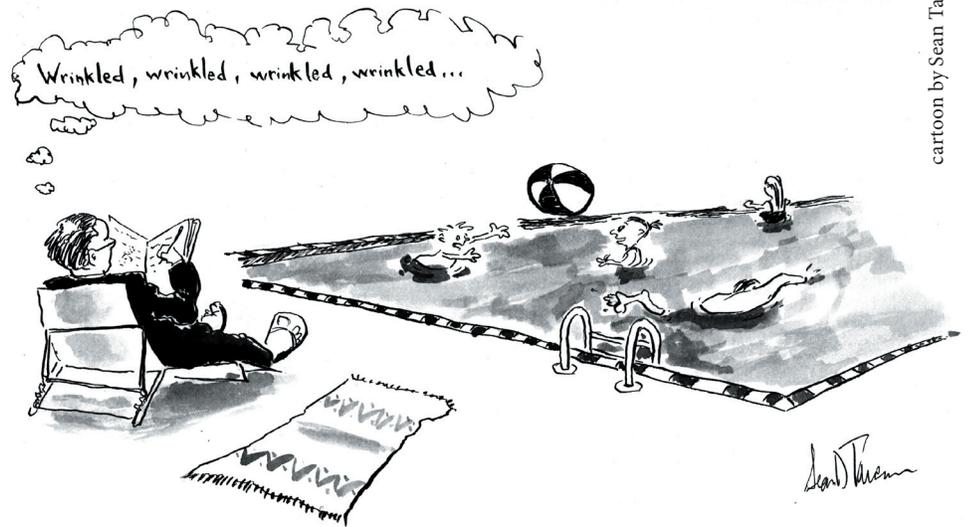
So far, the housing that we have been able to access that is owned by third parties has not required us to heavily subsidize it, any more than we subsidize housing we own. The latest figures I have seen, we have 35 individuals or families living in housing that we don't own. We are still talking about relatively modest numbers, and we have been able to arrange that pretty skillfully without a lot of subsidy. The demand for housing has plateaued over the last twelve months and is about the same today as it was for March 2004. I get numbers every month to try to judge demand. Right now it is very constant.

In general, the university size is at a comfortable level?

It is a manageable level.

Are there plans to scale back? People often raise that question.

No. We are all worried about federal funding for basic science, biomedical science. Funding may contract us a little bit, but there is no plan by the university. We are trying to come through this difficult period making reductions at the margins of things, but sustaining the main enterprise, the main programs that we have. ©



cartoon by Sean Taverna

During breaks from his work following heredity and gene pools, Gregor Mendel would often relax at the swimming pool.

Liberalizing Science: Lessons from Democracies

TIRTHA KAMAL DAS

Science and technology have brought unparalleled benefits to society. No other area of human endeavor has promoted such far-reaching changes to modern society as those fostered through science and science-allied technologies. Advances in agricultural productivity, health and medicine, transport, commerce, and more recent revolutions in mass communication and information-technology have all been propelled by discoveries in science. Aspirations of future societal prosperity—by solving problems of global poverty, disease, hunger, and health epidemics—continue with science at its core¹.

For all its past achievements and future promises, science has forged a fragile relationship with society. Society is aware of the strides it has made with the guidance of science, but does not always appreciate the future benefits science is designing. Lack of specialized knowledge plus moral conflicts with religion have prevented society from fully embracing the virtues of science. The scientific community has slowly awakened to this problem and has begun a process of democratization and liberalization to broaden public understanding of science and make society a partner to its own future. Some proponents of liberalization are unhappy with the pace of this change and believe in more active democratization by involving society in a more participatory

role. The proponents (*Shopping for Science: Paths to Science for Everyone*; *Natural Selections*, March 2005) recommend a more bilateral process, whereby society not only converses with the scientific community, but actively participates in the decision-making (akin to direct democracy) to help set future scientific agendas.

The practices of science and democracy share ideals of fairness and forward progress through general agreement, and they both influence society in a broad and long lasting way. Lessons learned in one process can be useful for the other. If science wants to embark on the path of liberalization and fulfill its objective of bringing positive benefits to society, it should learn from the attempts countries have made towards creating a functional democracy. The histories of democracies show that making science more participatory may not be a creative solution and perhaps a poor one at best. What's needed in science is not more democracy but more effective democracy, e.g., strengthening of institutions imparting scientific knowledge. A review of the history of aspiring and established democracies will point to the inherent problems of following an ideology of democracy without strengthening the institutions that make democracy more effective.

MORE EFFECTIVE DEMOCRACY...

In his book, *The Future of Freedom:*

Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad, Fareed Zakaria (current editor of *Newsweek International*; former editor of *Foreign Affairs* magazine) argues that society does not benefit if the only focus is unfettered spread of democracy. More important are the “constitutional liberties of rule of law, separation of powers, protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property.” He states that while political democracy is the process by which people choose government (free and fair elections), liberal democracy is the process by which the goals of government (upholding the above mentioned constitutional liberties) are met. The history of established and developing democracies shows that too much attention has been heaped on political democracy at the neglect of liberal democracy, and with very telling consequences.

Dictators and authoritarian regimes have often used democratic means (elections and referendums) to come to power only to starve the population of constitutional liberties and plunge societies into chaos. The Islamic revolution in Iran and the populist democracy of Venezuela were established under conditions of overwhelming popular support, but have both degenerated into authoritarian states. Central Asian countries like Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, in trying to democratize, fulfilled the first requirement

and conducted free and fair elections. But institutions that would guarantee constitutional liberties were poorly developed and improperly nourished, resulting in present conditions far from their initial democratic objectives². Following the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, Russia embarked on a quick-fix process of rapid democratization and free-market reform without properly developing strong political and economic institutions³. The result was political chaos, fragmentation of the country, and a serious decline in the economy that saw the gross national product plunge by 40% since 1991⁴. These examples, and a catalog of others, indicate that political democracy by itself doesn't guarantee the path to a prosperous society. Institutions that provide checks and balances (strong political, economic, and social institutions) in the political system and make government more effective also need to be nurtured.

Established democracies suffer from the same kind of ailments when 'spreading democracy' takes precedence over more effective governing. India has a longer history of democracy than any of the countries mentioned above. India's grassroots democracy is also more widespread—the imprint of democracy seeps into the smallest villages through a combination of village council and multi-party politics, and many millions vote to elect leaders from more than 80 different political parties to local and national assemblies. But despite the promise of this form of participatory democracy, India has struggled to advance the economic, political, and social conditions of its population. While democracy through participatory elections has spread, the process of building effective public institutions that develop important infrastructures for banking, commerce, transport, and law and order has stagnated. These infrastructures are crucial as they provide the means for assuring a good quality of life and help attract valuable foreign investment. Despite India's recent boom in attracting 'outsourced' jobs (benefiting only 1% of the Indian population) from first world countries, it has lagged far behind its Asian counterpart China in attracting foreign investment. Foreign direct investment (FDI) expands the manufacturing and employment opportunities for local populations and brings sustained long-term benefits to the economy. FDI in China and India were similar in the early 1990's, but China received twelve times more investment than India in 2004, and \$200 billion more than India over the past four years. The factors behind FDI are complex, but lack of good political, economic, and business infrastructure is the primary reason for India's poor show⁵.

What about direct democracy (which

India does not have)? Has it succeeded in channeling the 'will of the people' towards society's progress? The California legislative system is a good case study of a system where lawmaking by legislature (representative democracy) has slowly been replaced by lawmaking by referendums (direct democracy), and the consequences are worth noting. The political system in California has incorporated a surfeit of propositions to reflect public will in their decision-making. Propositions affect wide-ranging issues like taxes (proposition 62 & 218), state budget allocation (proposition 4 & 98), immigration (proposition 187), and affirmative action (proposition 209). Despite these initiatives, California's system has developed serious problems that can be directly attributed to its unique form of participatory democracy. State budgets are inflexible (85% strictly allocated, only 15% available), laws complex (innumerable propositions), and state spending undecipherable (contradictory nature of some propositions), resulting in a system that is handcuffed into budgetary commitments without any discretionary leeway. Not surprisingly, California's public services system (education, highways, power supply, etc.) and government, once described as the best in the country, are starved of necessary funding and its present state is described as being "in shambles"⁶.

Unfortunately, democracy itself (and not its goals) is often viewed as the panacea for all problems in society. Overlooked are the elements of division of labor, checks and balances, and strengthening of civic institutions that build a more effective democracy and bring its true promises to bear. The cases illustrated here argue for the need to make the democratic process more effective. They also show that direct democracy is not the yardstick by which societal progress should be measured, and not a viable solution to society's problems.

SPREADING THE VALUES OF SCIENCE

Science is fortunate to have begun its process of liberalization a bit late, after having witnessed democracy spread throughout the world during the last century. With judgment and hindsight, the scientific practice will spread by means already tested in the ebb and flow of democracy. Science should avoid prescriptions of ideology (direct democracy) and stick to means that work in reality. Formulating scientific policies by referendums and public opinion may create a brew of conditions (e.g., California legislature) that will ultimately make the pursuit of science inefficient and ineffective. The scientific community should pursue the democratic ideals of societies not by becoming the barometer of public opinion, but by making the scientific practice more effective. Strengthening of scientific institutions

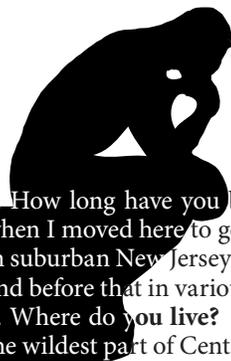
(to make science more sound), making the scientific process more transparent (to make science more accessible and credible), imparting proper science education (to increase public awareness of crucial scientific issues), and empowering the community of higher science (through better benefits and more diverse career options) are some means by which science could improve its practice as well as its public image. Better benefits are especially important as they can make the scientific career more attractive to an average citizen. It can improve science's public image from a practice that requires high investment (time and education) but provides inadequate rewards (monetary) to one where the rewards are more just.

The institution that is most capable of leading this process of scientific liberalization is the university. A significant fraction of today's society attends universities, and there is an increasing trend for students to cross national boundaries in the pursuit of good higher education⁶. By increasing public discourses (science and society seminars), community outreach programs, and internship opportunities (for high school students), the university can make important scientific issues more comprehensible to students of diverse backgrounds. By making these processes more interactive and open to local communities, public understanding of current scientific issues will also broaden. The gathering of great intellectual minds of different professions makes the university an ideal locale for any public discourse. It allows public opinion and specialized scientific knowledge to debate each other's visions, with minimal concerns of bias and/or vested interests. Freed of such constraints, society's needs and the scientific community's visions could coalesce into a powerful movement that is capable of withstanding assaults from partisan politics and religious conservatism.

In modern times, the university has become the crucible of higher education and knowledge. It should add another feather to its legacy and lead the process of liberalization of science. It should do so by spreading the values of science and by making the scientific practice more effective, not by adopting a process of direct democracy. ☉

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*This month, Natural Selections features Leslie Vosshall, Assistant Professor and Head of Laboratory
Country of Origin: Switzerland*

1. How long have you been living in New York City? Since 1983, when I moved here to go to Columbia University. Before that I lived in suburban New Jersey for 10 years in the shadow of New York City, and before that in various places in Western Europe.

2. Where do you live? Uptown in Manhattan Valley, right next to the wildest part of Central Park.

3. Which is your favorite neighborhood? I lived for many years on either side of Canal Street, and would have to say my favorite neighborhood is still that desolate part of TriBeCa where the spice warehouses used to be. The neighborhood is mostly gone now, converted to expensive apartments, but some vestiges remain. You can still smell the weird blend of spices in the air on the corner of West Broadway and Franklin Street.

4. What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated? The “new” Times Square is overrated. The whole place looks like the Las Vegas airport, complete with bad food and zombie tourists. I may sound contrarian, but I loved the seedy old Times Square we were always told to avoid as teenagers and sort of resent the people who destroyed that. Many things in town are underrated. The architecture throughout West and Central Harlem is amazing, the Mexican food is getting better, plus this turns out to be a great place to raise children.

5. What do you miss most when you are out of town? The constant activity and flow of interesting people in the streets, and access to food 24/7.

6. If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be? Bring back the \$500 a month apartment, so that young people could live here without so much financial stress. The real estate situation seems to be making this a more boring place, with fewer people having the luxury of painting or playing music. Everyone is too busy hunting and gathering to pay the rent!

7. Describe a perfect weekend in NYC. This would have to be in

April when the cherry trees are blooming and would involve walking with my husband, kid, and dog in Riverside Park near 96th Street, then going downtown for a late lunch at Florent, maybe hitting a great sale at Sigerson Morrison, and then getting an evening babysitter and escaping to play bridge with friends in Chelsea.

8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC? The most memorable (good) experience was the blizzard of 1996, which shut down the whole city. I seem to remember sledding down Suicide Hill in Riverside Park with some fellow Columbia postdocs on a discarded refrigerator door. Some mild head injuries were sustained, but it probably made us more creative scientists. The most memorable (bad) experiences were the two attacks on the WTC, the big Washington Heights blackout of 1999 in which my postdoctoral project thawed, and the blackout of 2003. Terrible disasters recently, but NYC always manages to survive somehow.

9. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be? I think I am unable to live anywhere else — I get anxious when I am away for more than a few weeks. Other places that seem livable, possibly, are Tokyo, London, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, but I hope it never comes to that.

10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker? Why? Real New Yorkers are born and raised here, and by that measure I am an imposter. However most people are fooled: I still wear too much black. ☉



Restaurant Review: Yvonne Yvonne

WENYING SHOU

My first personal encounter with Yvonne Yvonne was on my way to the doctor’s office. As I waited at the southwest corner of 71st and York Ave for the traffic light, I noticed that a tin-colored van named “Yvonne Yvonne” was parked a few steps away from me, with a nearby cooler box full of colorful juices. I recalled what my British New Yorker colleague Remy Chait told me after I described to him my adventure in a Jamaican restaurant at Union Square, “Jamaican? Ya don’t-a need-a Union Square—across the hospital on York Ave, ya’ll see a Jamaican lunch van.” I decided to check the van out even though I was already late for my appointment, because the light was not going to change any time soon.

The window was high, with small plastic boxes of rum cakes and bread puddings neatly stacked on the left side of the windowsill. To the right side of the window, small, medium, and large Styrofoam boxes were posted and labeled as “Diet Size, \$6”, “Big Strong Healthy Man, \$7”, and “Charm-

ing Polite Little Girl, \$9”, respectively. I laughed, returned to the window, and stood on tiptoes trying to peep into the dark interior. A woman turned from the kitchen bench to face me, and a warm smile lit up a youthful and dark-complexioned face. Recalling how impressed I was by the Jerk Pork from the Jamaican restaurant at Union Square, I asked, “Do you have Jerk Pork?” “Not today”, she explained, “From Monday to Friday, we offer different things. Today, I have curry goat, curry chicken, and oxtail.” I was a bit disappointed, and as I debated about which of the three I should try, the light turned green, and I said good-bye to her and crossed the street. Curry goat was too challenging—not many chefs can make the meat tender enough; curry chicken was too predictable, and oxtail—what was that, for heaven’s sake? Would it come with ox skin the way Chinese restaurants serve duck feet? On the way back from the doctor’s office, it was already three. To my surprise, the van was still parked at the same place. I



mused among the three choices again, and started to feel a bit ashamed at my cowardice toward trying new things. As I crossed the street, I made up my mind.

I walked resolutely toward the window, and the same sunny smile emerged again.

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"Oxtail, please", I said. She asked, "What size?" I flexed my arms, which were buried deep inside my winter coats, and replied, "Big strong healthy man, of course, and... you'd better believe it!" She laughed full-heartedly. As she fastened the lunch box with a rubber band and put it into a take-out plastic bag from a restaurant called Wild Ginger, I inquired whether she was from Jamaica. Her face beamed, "Yes. Have you visited there?" I shook my head. I asked her name, and she pointed at the van, "Yvonne".

The oxtail completely took me by surprise—it was rich, flavorful, and tender, not like anything that I have had before. And, as a bonus, it was skin-free. I liked it so much that instead of finishing it in one meal, I distributed it into several aliquots to add an interesting Caribbean twist into my Chinese meals afterwards.

When I stopped by Yvonne Yvonne on my next doctor's appointment, it was a Monday again. I hesitated in front of the van. Yvonne stuck out her head, looking inquiringly at me, and asked, "Miss?" I

confessed to her my dilemma, "I liked the oxtail very much, so I am tempted to order the same dish. However, I wanted to write a review about your mobile restaurant, and as a good reviewer, I ought to try something else, like curry goat. But I am afraid that I will be disappointed because goat..." Her smile enlarging and spreading across the entire face, she asked, "Are you Japanese?" I was quite struck by that question, because I doubted that any Japanese person would come even close to my bluntness. She pointed to my left outside the window, and spoke proudly, "My restaurant was reviewed in Japanese!" I looked around and indeed, there was a review written in Japanese with a picture of her radiant face. "Don't worry," she continued, "I know how to flavor goat meat." Before I had time to explain to her that it was the texture rather than the predictable flavor that I was concerned about, she had already turned her back, and packed a box within a minute.

"Which newspaper are you writing the review for?" she asked as she tied up the box and placed into, this time, a shopping

bag from the De-Chang Grocery store in Chinatown. I was amused. Pointing southeast, I answered, "*Natural Selections*, the official unofficial newspaper of The Rockefeller University." She nodded, "Very good, bring 'em all here."

I could not believe what Yvonne had packed for me in that Strong Healthy Man box—so full that it was ready to burst open at any moment. On a bed of rice laid my favorite oxtail. In addition, curry goat, curry chicken, fried plantain, steamed cabbage, and collard greens—all of generous sampler size—were crammed over the rice unoccupied by oxtail and in the two small side-boxes unoccupied by rice. The curry goat was impressively tender, and the collard greens had a zesty spice so that I actually enjoyed them rather than consuming them out of an obligation to balance my diet.

From that day on, I would visit Yvonne even on days when I didn't have a doctor's appointment, for I had found her van a convenient alternative to going to Chinatown or Queens for tasty and inexpensive meals. ☉

Italy

MAURIZIO PELLEGRINO WITH SARAH WHITCOMB

For an Italian, talking about Italy is not as easy as one might imagine. Its history, culture, people and land have milestones in different historical periods, and summarizing them is not trivial. Its convoluted history, for example: imagine living in Italy about 2,700 years ago, when only sparse tribes and small communities populated an otherwise flord land. There you meet this ambitious guy Romulus who eventually decides to found a city that is to become the capital of the world: Rome. And then he kills his brother. This is not a good start at all, not even for a legend. Fortunately, this founding act of barbarity has been redeemed by the development of art and literature over the centuries.

When people find out I am from Italy, they think it must have been a paradise growing up in a place so steeped in high culture and history. I guess it is, but I never noticed. Even walking on original Roman pavements, while looking at buildings from the 14th century and paintings from the Byzantine period, can seem pretty mundane if you have done this every day since you were four. Do not call me blind to the sublime accomplishments of my culture. It is natural to eventually grow accustomed even to the most spectacular or peculiar. Think of your life in New York. Admit it, you don't even notice those crazy people in the subway who play and sing "Under the Boardwalk" anymore, or the runners who jog in the City in shorts and shirts during the snowstorm before going to work. New Yorkers take for granted that there will be at least a Dunkin' Donuts and a Duane Reade every two blocks, just the way Romans stop noticing that the Colosseum is on their way to work.

Most people form their opinions about Italy based on their experiences as tourists, and there are many cliché jokes about Italians; all true, by the way. For example, Italians are thought to be very attached to their family; we all know the Italian machismo mama's boy. And what about the adage that we talk with our hands? Absolutely. Isn't this much easier than learning different languages? You only need to know "body language" in order to

survive in Italy. This is probably why it is such a popular place for tourists. We don't know English (if you ever tried to speak English in Italy, you know what I mean) and tourists don't know Italian; it's just a matter of fact. But no worries, because with some enthusiastic gesticulation everybody can understand your needs. After all, we are friendly people, trying to help poor tourists (especially young blonde American females) with the unpredictability of Italy: for example, we know how difficult it could be to plan a trip during the month of strikes that hits the country every year. The gesticulation is not just for style, it is sometimes a matter of necessity even among Italians. The average tourist might not notice this, but as a matter of fact, we are a country made up of 21 different cultures, as different as Alabama and Massachusetts. Our unification is actually quite recent: politically it didn't happen until 1861, but culturally we are still slowly coming together. For example, most of our grandparents do not speak Italian, but rather only a local dialect. What has really sped up the reunification was the advent of television and a national soccer league. We now have a common obsession that we can fight about in a common language.

One cannot think of Italy without considering the role that the Church has had in its development. Since the establishment of the Pope in Rome, religion has had a profound influence on the country's institutions and values and it is very much a part of modern society. Until recently, every public school had a crucifix hanging on the wall, and priests had a central role in the life of small communities. Nowadays, not so many people are practicing anymore, but churches are always packed on the major Christian holidays. The Pope is a real celebrity and everything he says and does is immediately national news: formal meetings with politicians and Church leaders, comments on world affairs, and even his skiing vacations (at least until some years ago) are part of our life.

Living in Italy is not bad at all: good food, good wine, nice people, and great sites to visit. The most common one-week trip

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Career Planning & Development Part II: Exploration of Different Career Options

TARI SUPRAPTO

Now that you've done your self assessment (see *Natural Selections'* December 2004/ January 2005 issue on this topic), you know your strengths and weaknesses, what skills you have, and most importantly, have some idea of what will make getting out of bed in the morning worthwhile (or at least a more pleasant prospect). The next logical step is to discover what options are out there and learn as much as you can about them to help you make the most informed career choice possible.

There are a number of resources published in books or on the Web that can expose you to the various career options that are available. If you'd like to learn more about a career in academia, there are books on this topic such as *A Ph.D. Is Not Enough: A Guide to Survival in Science* by Peter J. Feibelman, *Advice to a Young Investigator* by Santiago Ramon y Cajal, *At the Bench: A Laboratory Navigator* and *At the Helm: A Laboratory Navigator* both written by Kathy Barker, and *Academic Scientists at Work: Navigating the Biomedical Research Career* by Jeremy M. Boss and Susan H. Eckert. For learning about other careers, *Non-traditional Careers in Science* by Karen Young Kreeger and *Alternative Careers in Science: Leaving the Ivory Tower* by Cynthia Robbins-Roth are good launching points for this exploration. The journal *Science* also has a website called Science NextWave (<http://nextwave.sciencemag.org/>) that is educational and helpful. You will find various anecdotes from people who are in different professions and can learn quite a bit from their experience and advice.

You should also keep your eyes and ears open for career development seminars that may be offered from time to time, especially those with panels or several different speakers. The New York Academy of Sciences (<http://www.nyas.org>), The New York Biotechnology Association (<http://www.nyba.org>), local academic institutions, and other organizations often hold such seminars or symposia that are highly informative and a good opportunity to meet people with interesting careers. When you meet such people, you can try to set up a one-to-one meeting, phone call, or e-mail correspondence with them to conduct an informational interview.

An informational interview is not a request for employment; it is a powerful way for you to gather information about a potentially interesting profession. What better way to find out about the realities of a career than to interview someone who is already in that job? You are also in a position to evaluate the advice these professionals

share and you are free to ask questions that you may not be able to ask in a formal job interview. Ideally, you should ask questions pertaining to the job tasks, qualifications, work environment, and future prospects. You should also have a résumé prepared so that the person you are meeting with will be able to get a good idea of your background and your interest. At the very least, it will provide more topics for conversation!

Informational interviewing will enable you to expand the number of career options you can explore, your network of contacts, and opportunities to compare aspects of that particular job with your own interests, skills, personality, and experience. In addition, it is helpful to become acquainted with people in your field of interest when you are ready to plan your job search.

While you are in career exploration mode, it is a good idea to speak to as many people as possible who are doing things that look interesting. You can tap into your alumni network by contacting your alma mater's alumni office. Your fellow alumni are some of the easiest people to contact out of the blue because you already have something in common. Ask your friends if they know anybody; in this scenario, you'll have a mutual friend in common and expand your social circle at the same time. You can start building your own network by ensuring that with each person you talk to, you get at least one more person that they would introduce you to or recommend that you speak to next.

Here are some questions that are appropriate for informational interview and networking. There are obviously more, but these are good starting points:

- ✦ How did you get from college/graduate school to your current job?
- ✦ Why did you pick your profession?
- ✦ What is your typical day like?
- ✦ What skills are essential to your job?
- ✦ What do you like about your job?
- ✦ What don't you like about your job?
- ✦ Based on your experience, how would you recommend I start getting into this profession?
- ✦ How does one advance in your profession?
- ✦ What other jobs can I pursue from this profession?

After you have gathered all this information, you need to evaluate it in the context of who you are as an individual. This means revisiting the self-assessment process that you did in the first place, so that you can match the results of your self-assessment with the various career options you have just learned about. This time around, you'll need to ask yourself the following questions: What are you good at? What do you enjoy? Will a job in profession X allow you to excel and enjoy yourself?

This second round of self-assessment armed with the information you've gathered from others will help you to identify a career path that is best suited to you, and hopefully will lead you to find a job that you love doing. Stay tuned for the next installment of this series, Job Hunting! ◎

Supersize Me!

RUTH HARRISON

Many arrive at Rockefeller hoping that the stimulating environment here can help in reaching your true scientific potential. Yet few people realize the full magnitude of the intellectual superpowers that can be gained. The scientific community recently received an order form for the caps and gowns worn in the academic procession at the student graduation ceremony. One discreet section revealed that some Rockefeller scientists are so incredibly brainy that their heads actually grow annually. The biology underlying this phenomenon is unknown, but has become an area of active research. A suggested new university motto is, "Rockefeller University—a mind-altering experience." ◎

My cap size is same as last year: _____

My cap size is: _____

(Cap size is determined by measuring the circumference of your head in inches.)

'Beep' the Students?

HYPNOS

There is an important section of this university that has been working extremely hard to ensure that we produce the best graduate students ever seen. They make sure that the students are on their toes at all times and spend as much time as inhumanly possible in the great hallowed labs of this amazing place. Unfortunately, not all the students can avail of this facility and it is certainly not open for postdocs. Only a very select subset of the student population has been fortunate enough to be a part of this situation, and you can get a spot in this select group of students only by lottery. This facility is available only to those students who are lucky enough to get housing in the south wing of Sophie Fricke Hall (SFH). It is a step back into the glory days of the graduate program when students had maid service, meals in Welch Hall, and a round-the-world cruise upon graduation. It is very unfair that not all students can use this incredible service, not to mention the postdocs who could also certainly benefit. Some of the less fortunate students have started grumbling. Don't be surprised if in the next few days you see the unlucky ones forming picket lines around RU. In the recent past, some of those grumbling students have been so incensed at being left out that they have resorted to the use of baseball bats! The situation threatens to get out of control, unless something drastic is done to make the facility all-inclusive.

What is this facility, you ask? The RU loading dock, yes, the loading dock. Where they literally work day and night to ensure the high quality of RU students. After midnight, if for some insane reason you happen to be at your apartment on the south side of SFH, you will hear the incessant beeping and incredibly loud grumbling of the forklifts. It is amazingly loud and certainly well above the general city 'noises' to make you pine for the gentle tranquility of your lab. If on certain weekends, some lazy good-for-nothing students even think of sleeping in, the loading dock has a brilliant solution for such 'bad apples'. A huge construction crane manifests itself right outside the south side of SFH and starts working at 6:00 am on Saturday mornings. Once you get over the initial shock of seeing a massive steel column of the crane outside your window, you have no choice but to run into lab for sanctuary. The three *Nature*, two *Science*, and four *Cell* papers by yours truly would have been impossible without the good people of the loading dock. I certainly would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to them. If only there were some way for all students to make good use of the facility. Just imagine the number of high-quality papers from each and every student. Maybe we can pipe the forklift beeps and grumbles through speakers in all apartments at RU? E-mail any suggestions you might have to the author. ☉

ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY FILM SERIES

*all films are in Caspary Auditorium at 8 pm

MARIA FULL OF GRACE (2003)

by Joshua Marston
Monday April 4

SALAAM BOMBAY! (1988)

by Mira Nair
Monday April 18

ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY SMELL STUDY seeks normal volunteers (18+) to test the sense of smell. Small blood sample, 3 hour smell test. Compensation provided. Call 212-327-SMELL or smell@rockefeller.edu

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is Rome-Florence-Venice, if you want to experience some of the most wonderful cities. Rome stands as a museum by itself, Florence contains an exceptional artistic patrimony (Giotto, Cimabue, Brunelleschi, and Leonardo Da Vinci, for example), and Venice, with its bridges and palaces "floating" on the sea, is a rarity. However, to me most of the precious places are outside of the major tourist cities. Small cities and towns often offer good opportunities for art, culture, and nature lovers without the drawback of the big crowds: Ravenna, for example, with its Mausoleo di Teodorico and several churches from the 18th century is a UNESCO's World Heritage Site; Parma and Piacenza offer 19 preserved castles from the 15th century along with delicious prosciutto (ham) and cheese; and Tarquinia and Cerveteri show Etruscan art in the gentle countryside.

For those who cannot go and visit Italy, New York offers lots of opportunities to experience it. And I am not referring to that block between Canal and Broome, also known as "Little Italy." If you would like to experience some of Italy's culinary heritage, there are a few restaurants I can recommend. Close to home, Portofino and Focaccia Fiorentina, on First Avenue between 63rd and 64th Streets, are good examples of Northern Italian cuisine, while Belladonna, on First Avenue and 86th Street, has good pasta dishes (try their cappellini primavera). But we all know how expensive Upper East Side restaurants can be. For cheaper fare at a tiny authentic trattoria, try Tre Pomodori, on 34th Street between Second and Third Avenues. Why not complete the Italian evening with a visit to the Istituto Italiano di Cultura (Italian Cultural Institute, <http://www.italcultny.org>) on Park Avenue to see a movie, book readings, or a concert? ☉

Natural Selections
needs YOU!



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