Upon Reflection

The setting sun reflects off clouds behind Miller Library, which are in turn reflected off the roof of a car.

Photo by Elizabeth Hathaway ’11
Group Think

Students hunkered down for a study session in Miller Library. The photographer wasn’t hanging from the lights; he was shooting with a telephoto lens from a third-floor balcony.

Photo by Kyle Webner ’14
The College took a big step forward in its programs to study the environment when President William D. Adams signed an agreement with Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences to form a strategic partnership and announced plans to start a marine conservation track in the Environmental Studies Program.

“This is important for Colby,” Adams told an audience of Colby and Bigelow staff members and guests at the signing event in West Boothbay Harbor in June. “A lot of students are interested in this, and it gives us a way to deepen a very strong niche that we already have with respect to the environment.”

A gift from Elizabeth Ainslie ’87 and her family allowed Colby to establish a new position in the Environmental Studies Program. The Elizabeth ’87 and Lee Ainslie Professorship in Environmental Studies will support a faculty member in marine conservation and will initiate a marine conservation track in environmental studies beginning in the 2011-12 academic year. “In conjunction with Colby’s partnership with Bigelow Labs, the Ainslie professorship will make Colby a leader among liberal arts colleges in the area of marine conservation and science,” Adams said.

One goal of the Colby-Bigelow partnership is to increase the teaching and research collaboration between Colby (students and faculty) and Bigelow’s senior research scientists. “Our two institutions share a mutual vision about the importance of expanding educational opportunities in marine sciences,” said Graham Shimmield, Bigelow’s executive director. “We, essentially, are going to deliver education through the lens of frontline research activity.”

Bigelow faculty members taught Jan Plan courses in bioinformatics and in oceans and climate change at Colby last year, and two Colby students spent the summer as research assistants for Bigelow senior research scientists working in the Amazon and off the coast of Costa Rica. The partnership agreement calls for Bigelow faculty members to teach two courses each January for the next three years and for greater opportunities for Colby students to conduct independent research mentored by Bigelow scientists.

In September Bigelow Labs announced its third multimillion-dollar grant for new facilities—$9.1-million from the National Institute of Standards and Technology to build a new Center for Ocean Health (COH) to study ocean microbial systems. The COH will be one of three new, interconnected research centers, along with the Bigelow Center for Blue Biotechnology (supported by a $4.5-million Maine Technology Asset Fund grant in 2009) and the Center for Ocean Biogeochemistry and Climate Change (supported by a $5-million National Science Foundation grant in 2010).

Collaboration between the Colby faculty and Bigelow research scientists is not new. Dr. Frank and Theodora Miselis Professor of Chemistry Whitney King is co-investigator with Bigelow’s David Emerson on a three-year National Science Foundation grant to study water chemistry. But the partnership lays out a vision for even closer collaboration between the two institutions, perhaps culminating in the development of a semester-away academic program at Bigelow for Colby students.

Both Adams and Shimmield pointed to the pivotal role David Coit (P ’08), chair of Bigelow’s board of trustees, played in bringing the partnership to fruition. “With David’s foresight and vision,” said Adams, “we saw a way for Colby to reach out in this fundamentally new direction.”

—David Eaton
Oak Fellow Confronts Abusive Government

For years Jestina Mukoko, a former television news broadcaster, had run a group called the Zimbabwe Peace Project, documenting human rights abuses, from torture to rape to murder.

But Mukoko, Colby’s 2010 Oak Human Rights Fellow, did not expect to become a case for her own files.

In December 2008 secret police abducted Mukoko from her home outside the capital, Harare. Bundling her off in her nightdress, they held her in a secret location for three weeks, beating her with a rubber truncheon and forcing her to kneel on gravel as they tried to force her to confess to trumped-up charges of conspiring against the government and to name the sources of her group’s reports.

“I was told I had only two choices,” Mukoko said. “Either becoming a state witness or going extinct.”

Despite being tortured, the prominent human rights activist did neither, and eventually she was allowed to appear in a Harare court—but only after international pressure was brought to bear on the Mugabe government, with luminaries including Condoleezza Rice and Kofi Annan demanding her release. She was freed after three months in custody and, with increased security, immediately went back to work on behalf of the people of Zimbabwe. Mukoko and her colleagues are gearing up for elections expected to be held next spring—and for monitoring related abuses.

How does one return to the work that brought such personal trauma? “There’s no way that I can move on now,” she said. “I think that the fact that they have done this to me demonstrates the impact of the work that we are doing. I also feel that, with the assistance that I got from human rights defenders throughout the world, I need to give back in relation to Zimbabweans who suffer political violence.”

Because Mukoko worked as anchor of a national television news program, she is well known throughout her country. “They are not in the same position as me, and they might not be able to amplify their voice to be heard.”

Mukoko was honored by the Oak Institute for the Study of International Human Rights at Colby. She is teaching a course, Incarceration and Human Rights: The Challenges Facing Human Rights Defenders, examining the political climate in Zimbabwe that has led to repression of critics of the government. —Gerry Boyle ’78

For a Q&A with Mukoko in which she discusses the impact of her abduction, her organization’s mission for the future, and her impressions of Maine and Colby students, go to www.colby.edu/mag keyword: mukoko

New Majors Expand Possibilities

Recognizing that computer science is “an enabling force for creation and scientific discovery,” according to the proposal, Colby approved four new majors this year combining interdisciplinary computation with biology, environmental studies, music, and theater and dance.

For years the Department of Computer Science has tried to enable computational thinking throughout other disciplines and throughout the College community. Now these new majors create an explicit mix of computer science with the four other areas of study. Each new major explores how computation can enhance and expand the other field.

Taking the new major in theater and dance-interdisciplinary computation as an example, Associate Professor Bruce Maxwell, chair of computer science, said many people have a hard time seeing the connection. But, in fact, stage sets, sound, choreography, lighting, and other aspects of performance are now designed and often are controlled using computers.

The new major aims to take students beyond using existing computer programs. “What would be the capabilities of someone able to customize these programs to their needs?” Maxwell asked. “They’re not limited by the options that some other programmer designed into the system. ... They’ve expanded what they believe is possible.” —S.B.C.

Mobile Colby.edu

There’s a new version of www.colby.edu designed just for mobile devices. The mobile website recognizes when a visitor is using a smartphone or other mobile device and automatically formats pages for the device being used. The mobile site provides information and content that people on the go are most likely to need in a format customized for each device’s screen. Among a longer list of custom mobile-site pages are dining menus, calendars, directions to campus, directories, and athletics news and results.
Launching Into Business

Two new entrepreneurs’ groups, one for students and one linking Colby’s resources with a broader community network, were announced in September by the Career Center.

The Colby Entrepreneurial Alliance offers a one-year sequence of workshops and skill-development activities to give students tools to get started as entrepreneurs. As of the Sept. 23 announcement, 31 students had signed up for the alliance, said Director of the Career Center Roger Woolsey.

The Kennebec Valley Entrepreneurial Network is a consortium that links Colby students, alumni, the Career Center, and Alumni Relations with community institutions and resources including economic developers, local governments, successful area entrepreneurs, and other schools.

Together the two initiatives are generating enthusiasm on and off Mayflower Hill. Both were described at a Sept. 23 kickoff dinner for the Colby Alumni Network (CAN) weekend.

Speakers there included Kenneth Young ’68, executive director of the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments. “Colby provides a cachet, resources, a beautiful venue, a supply of talented young people,” Young said, speaking for central Maine economic development professionals, “... and we provide a sort of a learning laboratory.”

“We’re on the edge of something new and very, very exciting.”

Michael Duguay
Director of Development Services for Augusta, Maine

Mark G. Johnson ’96, who sold his startup web project to Conde Nast and is now senior director of travel web magazines for Conde Nast Digital, concluded: “You either are [an entrepreneur] or you’re not, and it would have been nice to figure that out at Colby.” Brandon Pollock ’10, one of two entrepreneurs who started the Blue Reserve bottle-less water cooler company while still in his senior year, credited Colby alumni, administrative offices, and professors for Blue Reserve’s successful launch.

Michael Duguay, director of development services for Augusta, Maine, suggested that the network and new efforts to nurture entrepreneurs are a paradigm change for economic development in the region. He joked that the old model was “aggressively waiting for the phone to ring,” and said, “We’re on the edge of something new and very, very exciting.”

When Natalie Collins ’97 pressed network organizers to include social entrepreneurship in the mix, Career Center Director Woolsey said a social entrepreneurs’ club being started at Colby had 75 prospective members and that he looked forward to collaboration between the social and business entrepreneurs on campus. —S.B.C.

For more, go to colby.edu/mag, keyword: entrepreneurs

Welcome Class of 2014

As has been the case for 192 years, the Colby president welcomed the new class in a formal convocation at the start of school.

President William D. Adams and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Parker Beverage spoke to the faculty and the Class of 2014 during a ceremony held in Lorimer Chapel in early September.

The 486 first-years introduced by Beverage represent the most diverse incoming class in Colby’s history. Twenty-four percent identify themselves as African-American, Latino/Latina, Asian-American, or Native American. An additional 12 percent have an international background, with 30 different countries represented from Canada and China to the Democratic Republic of Congo and, in a first for Colby, Cameroon.

The Class of 2014—the 26th class he has recruited to Colby—represents the last class that Beverage will introduce to the Colby community with his signature mix of wit and anecdote. Beverage will retire at the end of this academic year.

Prize-winning Poet

Elly Bookman ’09 won the 2010 Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize for her poem “Another Thing I’d Rather Not Know About Myself,” which was featured on the back cover of the September/October 2010 American Poetry Review. “It’s very unusual,” said Assistant Professor of English (creative writing) and poet Adrian Blevins, who noted that most poets never make the feature page of APR, and that those who do usually appear much later in their careers.

The first-ever Kunitz prize, named after the American poet who died at age 100 in 2006, was presented to Bookman, who won Colby’s Katherine Rogers Murray Prize for Original Poetry as a sophomore, according to Blevins. A native of Atlanta, Georgia, Bookman was enrolled in the highly regarded M.F.A. program at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro this fall.

To read the poem, go to www.colby.edu/mag, keyword: bookman
Fear and Reporting in Mexico

“Fear is a survival skill,” 2010 Lovejoy Award-winner Alfredo Corchado told a rapt audience Sept. 26. “If you’re not scared, you become reckless.”

Corchado covers the U.S.-Mexico border and epidemic drug violence there: one of the most dangerous journalism beats in the world. Henchmen of the drug cartels have threatened to kill him, chop his body into pieces, and dissolve it in a barrel of acid—“a common technique in Mexico,” he said in his speech.

He was honored for courageous journalism with Colby’s Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award. The Lovejoy is presented in memory of an 1826 Colby graduate who became America’s first martyr to freedom of the press after he was killed defending his press against a pro-slavery mob.

“I became a 2009 Nieman Fellow because I was scared,” Corchado confessed. And that wasn’t the first time he withdrew from the country of his birth seeking safety.

Corchado’s talk traced the arc of his emotions: from fear as he left Mexico for Harvard’s Nieman Fellowship to the numbness he felt when he returned to his beat but felt disconnected from the story. Eventually that numbness gave way to anger.

The 2010 Lovejoy winner described a gang attack that mistakenly killed students at a birthday party. The hit men, thinking they were attacking a rival gang, “stormed in and lined up and killed thirteen of the thirty-six [students]. While friends or brothers and sisters hid in closets, others hid underneath the bodies of their friends and siblings,” he said.

After covering the story, he was glad it was raining at the funeral, he said, because it hid the tears streaming down his face. “And on that sad, gray, rainy morning I broke my silence and found my voice again.” —S.B.C.

For more, including audio of Corchado’s speech and the associated panel discussion, go to www.colby.edu/lovejoy.

COOT Changes: Students Connect to Nature in Different Ways

Admission to Colby requires meeting high standards, but proficiency as an outdoor adventurer is not one of them. So when organizers looked at COOT (Colby Outdoor Orientation Trips) for the Class of 2014, they made some changes. “[Some students] want to scale the high peaks and they want to go on the raging white water—and that, for them, is how they relate to the place. But not everybody relates to place in that way,” said Director of Outdoor Education Nicole Magnan Caruso.

The common theme—connecting first-years with classmates and the outdoors—remains. But this year’s COOT offerings included organic farm stays, yoga, meditation, and cooking with local foods. “I think in the outdoor arena there can be a misperception—I have to be this really sporty, really hardcore person who has to do this thing in order to really be in the outdoors. And it’s not true,” Caruso said. “Some of the people who have the strongest connection to the outdoors don’t have those types of experiences. They’re growing their gardens, they’re meditating outside every day, they’re doing their yoga practice out there. They’ve never set foot on white water before, but their connection is really strong just the same.”

Given the changes in the student body—the Class of ’14 is Colby’s most diverse ever—the evolution of COOT became necessary. “You have students coming from all over the globe,” said Caruso. “They have a different set of life experiences, and so you have to have something that meets everybody’s needs.”

Of course Colby does attract many students who long for outdoor adventure, and the traditional COOT offerings—backpacking, canoeing, kayaking, and rock climbing, for example. And those remain. The new approach simply aims to ensure that there’s something for everyone. “It’s sort of like different learning styles in the classroom,” Caruso said. “It’s the same with the outdoors.” —Ruth Jacobs
TwitterFEED

A selection of tweets from @colbycollege.
To see links, catch up on tweets, or sign up, click the Twitter icon on the Colby homepage.

Nick Cunkelman ’11, back after studying at Oxford, has an essay in today’s Boston Globe Mag comparing US & UK higher ed.
Sept. 26

Don’t think it’s scary what pop culture is doing to girls? Read Prof. Lyn Brown and Megan Williams ’04 oped in the BDN.
Sept. 22

Philosophy Prof Jill Gordon appointed to Maine Judicial Responsibility & Disability Comm., which investigates misconduct.
Sept. 21

Prof. Cal Mackenzie is set to testify at 3 p.m. in the Senate impeachment of Judge G. Thomas Porteous. Live on C-SPAN.
Sept. 21

When Oak Fellow Jestina Mukoko (www.colby.edu/oak) went to Zimbabwe’s U.S. embassy, her visa officer was Nick Von Mertens, Colby ’05!
Sept. 17

“Makes you remember why you put up with the frustration of the game.” Steve Carroll ’14 to Echo regarding his hole in one for the golf team.
Sept. 15

For Foreign Policy feature “The List,” former Echo editor Suzanne Merkelson ’09 tackles “The World’s Worst Textbooks.”
Sept. 13

Saturday is 4th annual Hill ’n the Ville. Concerts, kids’ games, etc. on Wtvl’s waterfront help bridge town & gown.
Sept. 10

Obama Names Rouse ’68 Chief of Staff

Pete Rouse ’68, a longtime advisor to President Obama, was named interim White House chief of staff Oct. 1, succeeding Rahm Emanuel. “Pete is known as a skillful problem solver,” the president said. “There is a saying around the White House: ‘Let’s let Pete fix it.’” Rouse majored in history at Colby and earned graduate degrees from the London School of Economics and Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.

Here’s what people are saying about Rouse in the news:

“Pete’s strategic sense has played a big part in the direction of virtually every big decision that’s made inside of this White House. The type of trust that the president and others throughout this administration have in Pete is enormous.”
White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs (Associated Press, “Rouse, Insider’s Insider, To Replace Emanuel,” Sept. 30)

“He’s got a network that will serve him well as his eyes and ears. … I think this will be an ever-expanding circle of influence and responsibility.”
Former Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle, for whom Rouse served as a chief of staff (New York Times, “Filling an Aide’s Shoes With Very Different Feet,” Sept. 30)

“The president trusts Pete as much as anyone in the White House.”
Dan Pfeiffer, former Daschle aide, now Obama’s communications director (NYT, above)

“Pete was always as good as his word.”
Dave Hoppe, former chief of staff to then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (USA Today, “Obama staffer Pete Rouse hailed as ‘ultimate pragmatist,’” Oct. 4)

“People will find that if you try to build a coalition against Pete, it’s not likely to be successful.”
Mark Patterson, chief of staff at the Treasury Department (USA Today, above)

“One of the smartest things he [Obama] did after being elected to the Senate was choosing Pete as chief of staff. … That indicated to people on the Hill that he was serious.”
Jim Manley, a spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Los Angeles Times, “Low-profile Obama aide gets top spot,” Oct. 2)

“He has no interest in personal publicity whatsoever.”
Sen. Richard Durbin, for whom Rouse served as chief of staff (Los Angeles Times, above)

Textbooks That Don’t Break the Bank

Alumni don’t remember every little detail of college, but most remember this: textbooks are expensive. Used books provide a discount of about 25 percent, which only eases the pain somewhat.

But a new program at Colby, implemented this year as a pilot, takes another approach to lessen the financial burden. Students are now able to rent some textbooks for 40 to 50 percent of the new-book purchase price. “If you don’t have the money up front, it can really be a helpful option,” said Barbara Shutt, director of the Colby bookstore. Students can opt to purchase the book at the end of the semester if they decide they want to keep it (or “if they spill coffee on it or drop it in the pond or something” and don’t want to pay for the damage).

This fall the bookstore offered more than 60 titles as rentals, and students rented about 450 books. Because it was the first year, the bookstore deliberately kept the new program low-key, Shutt said. Still, it was a hit. “I think it’s only going to become more popular.” —R.J.