Mixing Religion and Politics

Anyone who believed the college guidebook canard that “Colby students ignore God on a regular basis” would have been set straight November 4, when Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire visited Lorimer Chapel. After the bishop spoke and took questions for more than an hour, a throng of students and other members of the community surrounded him, basking him for another hour with expressions of gratitude, questions, challenges, and, most memorably, stories about their relationships with their own churches and congregations.

As the church’s first openly gay bishop, Robinson stands at the center of a polarizing debate over the Episcopal Church’s attitude toward gay and lesbian parishioners and clergy. “We’ve always had gay bishops,” he told the Colby audience. “I’m just the first one who’s talking about it.”

Robinson’s visit came just two days after the national election, in which the issue of gay marriage was used as “the greatest weapon of mass deception,” he said, quoting Senator Barbara Boxer. He had prefaced his remarks by saying, “Tonight I’m going to do what your mother told you never to do. I’m going to mix religion and politics. And in case you hadn’t noticed, it’s been happening a lot.”

Robinson’s appearance attracted enough students to fill the chapel (balcony and all), and his remarks were the subject of intense discussion the following week. Some questioned his qualifications as an analyst of American politics, but most were impressed by his ability to connect with and inspire a large audience.

“I thought his message about finding community was very important,” said Melissa Yosua ’05 of Cape Elizabeth, Maine, a member of the Colby Christian Fellowship. But she worried that certain remarks seemed to counteract that message. “His comment about the religious right being ‘neither religious nor right’ could have come across as offensive.”

Matt Ruby ’05 from Monson, Maine, a leader of The Bridge, said students were impressed by Robinson’s ability to reach beyond his own progressive politics to accept alternate views: “especially his saying [that] he knew the bishop from South Africa, who says that gay people are lower than dogs, will be with him in heaven.”

Mark Chapman ’05, from Zimbabwe, said he took issue with some of Robinson’s talk and was upset by some comments related to the African Anglican Church, Chapman’s own religious background. Overall, though, Robinson is a pivotal figure, he said, and called it “fantastic” to have him speak at Colby. “I was particularly encouraged by his message that Christianity need not be cut off from liberal, activist, and social justice issues.” —Stephen Collins ’74 and Molly Boehmke ’05

A forum on the place of religion in our culture—and at Colby—was held on campus in November. Read about it at www.colby.edu/mag/religion.

Corporate Social Responsibility?

While corporate scandals often dominate headlines, some companies pride themselves on socially responsible business practices—and consumers are taking notice. But do companies who pledge “Corporate Social Responsibility” (CSR) really live up to their claims?

A year ago Colby students began exploring questions about CSR in Latin America in a Goldfarb Mealtime Seminar, one initiative of the new Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement. A collaboration between Patrice Franko (economics) and Ariel Armony (political science) garnered so much student interest that it continued the following fall as a one-credit course. Then, during Jan Plan, five students began the research that makes the project quintessential Goldfarb.

In the spirit of the center’s emphasis on interdisciplinary study and faculty-student collaborative research, students landed in Santiago, Chile, in early January to research how U.S.-headquartered companies in Latin America practice CSR. During the spring semester the students will share their research with Armony and Franko, in a sense introducing findings to their professors. “What they’re doing is they’re taking the lead on it,” said Franko. “We can think of it as a pilot study for our work.” In May, the student researchers will present at Colby’s Celebration of Scholarship.

Armed with the case studies provided by their students, Franko and Armony will conduct research during the summer and fall in Brazil and Argentina, respectively. All of the findings will be compiled for publication later this year—a final product that should list the students as collaborators if not co-authors.

More important, though, the project has given students—most of whom studied in Latin America as juniors—the chance to revisit old haunts with a new objective.

—Ruth Jacobs
Defending Diversity

Christina Terrell ’06 knows a lot about diversity on campus. As an officer of the Student Organization for Black and Hispanic Unity, the Women’s Group, and The Bridge, Terrell faces issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation head-on. And she hasn’t stopped with the obvious.

Last year, while planning a presentation for a student-run diversity conference, she realized something was missing: Fat Acceptance. In April 2004 Terrell established the Colby Fat Acceptance Association (CFAA) to raise awareness of issues of size. “I want to advance acceptance of your own body image and who you are,” she said, “whether you are a size two or size twenty-two.”

While Terrell doesn’t hesitate to say Colby is ahead of its peers in terms of acceptance and inclusion, she asserts that the campus community has a long way to go with fat acceptance. So CFAA is organizing events this spring to get students thinking and talking about size issues. On May 6 Colby will celebrate International No Diet Day, which—like the movement itself—encourages people to embrace their bodies regardless of size or shape. A dinner event will raise money to buy food for people in need.

Across the nation, fat acceptance groups seek to improve quality of life for fat people and to fight size-based discrimination. Some call discrimination against fat people the last form of “acceptable discrimination.” To Terrell, there is no such thing. —R.J.

Wit & Wisdom

“Nobody cares if you mess with a crustacean’s stem cells.”

Clare Boothe Luce Assistant Professor of Biology Andrea Tilden, describing her biomedical research on comparative functional genomics. She confided that, after messing with stem cells, she and her research colleagues at Mount Desert Island Biological Labs eat a lot of lobster.

“This is probably a good time to be taking the test, because colleges are still pretty confused.”

Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Parker Beverage on how colleges will assess scores when the new Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) takes effect in March.

“We launched a new Web design. That doesn’t mean anything’s done.”

Rob Clockedile, managing editor for Web communications, at a meeting on February 1, the day Colby’s new Web design went live (and the next round of revisions began).

And the Survey Says!

The editors at Colby magazine want to learn more about your opinions, beliefs, memories, and more. We hope you’ll answer our surveys—now in every issue. Then, in the following issue, we’ll share the results. Opine away.

In the fall 2004 Colby, political analyst Stuart Rothenberg ’70 said that “if Bush wins, it’s a huge boost to Senator Clinton’s ambitions to run in 2008.” Hillary Clinton has not announced a bid for the nomination. If she or another woman from either party were to run, could the country elect a woman as president?

To answer, go to www.colby.edu/mag.
When the Jerusalem virus hit the Internet 18 years ago it caused $50 million in damages over three years. In January 2003 the Slammer worm infected more than 90 percent of unprotected servers in 10 minutes and racked up a billion dollars or more in losses.

Meet Chris Ries ’05, a computer science major, math minor, and sentry in the battle for cyber-land security.

His first order? Know thine enemy. “I have hundreds of worms and viruses and Trojan horses,” he said. “They’re actually a lot easier to find and collect than you’d think.”

With the utmost care and security, Ries studies malicious agents to understand how they operate. Most new versions are actually variants of existing agents, he says. He’s concerned that current state-of-the-art defenses against attacks—experts poring over code for a week or two looking for something familiar or malicious—won’t stand up.

So, working with Assistant Professor of Computer Science Daniel Bilar, a network security expert, Ries is building a database of information about how viruses and worms interact with the host computer’s operating system. His goal is a tool that quickly and automatically identifies and classifies attacks. He plans to put his database online as a resource for academic and commercial cyber-sleuths and writers of anti-virus software.

Ries is no amateur. He spent last summer working for the National Cyber-Forensics and Training Alliance in Pittsburgh, his hometown, and he consulted with the Computer Emergency Response Team at Carnegie-Mellon about his senior-year research.

While hackers initially wrote malicious code for the intellectual challenge, they now do it for profit. “The spam world is like organized crime,” he said. “It’s hierarchical.” Malicious programmers most commonly write code to mask the origin of attack and to steal bandwidth by using host computers to send spam.

“Believe it or not, people actually do get business from spam,” he said. If you send enough, even a minuscule response rate can be lucrative. Last summer, he said, “We were investigating spammers who were three or four years older than us who had brand new houses and new cars.”

When not in the computer lab, Ries intercepts treacherous slapshots as a goalie on the varsity men’s hockey team.

Said Bilar: “He’s very driven and he’s very competent.” And, knowing the value of malicious code work, Bilar told him “he should invite me onto his yacht in four years. He has a very brilliant future.” —S.C.
Wining and Dining in Dana

When Catherine Welch '05 returned from studying in Nepal, she felt more aware than ever that college life included two types of drinking: too much or none at all. “I experienced a different culture where it was natural to have a glass of wine or a beer with supper if you so chose,” she said. She recalled from childhood seeing adults drinking small amounts of alcohol on occasion and asked, “Isn’t there a third option here we’re forgetting?”

As the student government president, Welch parlayed her concern into action, and in November Colby began a new program allowing students 21 or older to enjoy beer and wine in the dining hall on selected Friday evenings.

While many colleges have on-campus pubs, Colby’s new program is an anomaly. Beyond giving students a model for responsible drinking, it offers them a chance to learn about varieties of beer and wine as well as food pairings. At the inaugural event, one student asked about brewing techniques while another swirled the wine and checked for legs. “They’re really interested. They’re not just here for the drink,” said bartender and dining services employee Sheila Ratte.

Over the years Colby has worked hard to educate students about the risks of excessive alcohol use and to give a clear message that alcohol abuse won’t be tolerated. At the same time, administrators support this effort to teach responsible, moderate drinking among those 21-plus students who choose to partake. Welch believes this is part of the education. “They’re not just preparing us within our major,” she said, “they’re preparing us for a successful life after Colby.” —R.J.

Do It Yourself Cookbook

Colby may have some of the finest dining hall food in the country, but that doesn’t stop hungry students from creating concoctions. The urge to exercise culinary skills—or perhaps the desire for something really different—inspires some diners to do it themselves as they move through the food line. When Andrew O’Connell-Shevenell ’07 noticed the trend, he decided to document it. This spring he’ll release his “cookbook,” which reveals creations from all three dining halls. So what exactly are these ravenous students cooking up?

Recipes range from appetizing to . . . shall we say . . . unique. Picky eaters might enjoy O’Connell-Shevenell’s own stir fry. He grazes the salad bar, microwaves the veggies, tosses in a little soy sauce, and serves it with rice. “I kind of generally eat what they give me, but now that I started concocting my own, it’s kind of a fun activity—a good hobby when I’m stressed out,” he said.

Those with gourmet palates might appreciate the student-improved French onion soup. To the virgin soup add a toasted piece of bread, a mound of cheese (from the salad bar), and into the microwave it goes. And for dessert try apple crisp made from apples, granola, butter, sugar, and cinnamon, or, for the brave-stomached, there’s “Lijajulie Jubilee”—a combination of peanut butter, corn flakes, whipped cream, and coconut. Hungry yet? —R.J.

Colby Update: victor cancel ’02

Beating the odds has defined Victor Cancel ’02 since his family moved from Puerto Rico in 1992. Now he helps others beat the odds, too.

In high school, unable to speak English and thrust into working-class Lawrence, Mass., Cancel set lofty goals—and met them. His diligence paid off when he graduated among the 10 percent in his high school class to attend college.

At Colby, Cancel continued to thrive. His double major in Spanish and international studies and minor in anthropology meant he could choose how to meet his next goal. As he explained it to Colby magazine (winter 2002), “I want to do something that has some kind of personal attachment.” That personal attachment has meant working with Spanish-speaking immigrants to help them improve their lives. As a career counselor for people with mental and physical handicaps, Cancel helps individuals learn English and find jobs in the community. “Sometimes I’m able to help them find employment and increase their motivation and drive to learn more English, which is very important,” he said.

A stint west helped Cancel appreciate being near his family, and he returned to Lawrence, the community he knows so well. “I feel that I understand the people better in this area,” he said.

As much as he’s at home in Lawrence, Cancel looks fondly on his time at Colby. What does he appreciate most? “The critical thinking skills that I got from my professors and other fellow students. And the environment,” he said. “The Maine outdoors.” —R.J.
A Moving Response to Tsunami Disaster

Colby was spared a direct loss when the tsunami swept across the Indian Ocean December 26, killing an estimated 210,000 people. But in a service held in Lorimer Chapel January 11, speakers reminded the College community that the tragedy—and the overwhelming response to it—has transcended the barriers that separate humanity. That feeling of unity should be sustained and nurtured, assembled students, faculty, and staff were told.

Speakers included Joerose Tharakan ’08, whose family in southern India was spared though a seafront area they had frequented for many years was washed away by the sea. Ruani Freeman, a freelance writer and activist and wife of Mark Freeman, Colby’s director of institutional research, told of her brother’s terrifying but uplifting experience fleeing the giant wave on the coast of Sri Lanka and surviving to see both devastation and subsequent selfless sacrifice.

Nikky-Guninder K. Singh, Crawford Family Professor and chair of the Department of Religious Studies, said the tsunami tells us that we must find ways to live with nature and each other.

“We have erected narrow walls within which we function—separated from nature, history, and our neighbors across the Atlantic and the Pacific,” Singh said. “Sediments of class, caste, race, sex have kept human societies oppressed and segregated. We have had a very warped view of ourselves. The tsunami surge, with its etymological roots in the Japanese language and its hidden origins in the depths of the Indian Ocean, has violently attacked our anthropocentric and hierarchical assumptions. We humans are not the center of the universe and cannot control the awesome power of nature. Rich or poor, white or brown, young or old, man or woman, Hindu or Christian—we are all totally at her mercy. . . .”

“Rich or poor, white or brown, young or old, Hindu or Christian—we are all totally at [nature’s] mercy . . . .

Nikky Singh, Religious Studies

For Professor Nikky Singh’s reflection on the tsunami disaster, go www.colby.edu/mag/singh.

Brian Davidson ’05 covered the service for the Morning Sentinel. His story is online at http://morningsentinel.mainetoday.com/news/local/1286195.shtml.

For information about Ruani Freeman’s efforts to assist in the tsunami relief, go to www.sahanaproject.org.

Environmental Excellence

For the second time in three years, Colby received a Maine Governor’s Award for Environmental Excellence. Colby was honored for initiatives including energy efficient washing machines that save some $10,000 annually in water and energy, motion sensors that power down vending machines when no one is around, and an energy-efficient ceiling in Alfond Ice Arena. Our electricity contract, which taps hydropower and wood waste instead of coal, was credited with big reductions in nitrogen oxide, carbon dioxide, and sulfur dioxide emissions. See more at www.colby.edu/green.

All-American Takes On the World

Skier Warner Nickerson ’05 grabbed one honor after another at the 2005 FIS World University Games in Innsbruck, Austria, in January. The N.H. native earned a silver medal in giant slalom, fourth place in Super G, sixth in slalom, and ninth in downhill—all giving him a silver medal for men’s combined. The first U.S. double medalist in the competition since 1997, this All-American hopes to race for the U.S. ski team after graduating in May.