

Features

Index

**After winning public recognition or professional renown, many prominent figures turn to academic life for new opportunities: freedom for inquiry and reflection, influence on young minds, a bully pulpit. Columbia faculty known for outside achievements comment on their new view from the Heights**

## Beyond the spotlight, they shall see light

**Lauren Walker**



George Stephanopoulos with Pres. Rupp

**A**RE RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES the intellectual health spas of the power elite? Once you've spent time building a career in politics, the arts, or industry, is the academy a place to catch your breath? Hardly, according to Columbia faculty members who first made their marks on the world in non-academic roles. Former Senior Advisor to President Clinton on Policy and Strategy and Columbia alumnus [George Stephanopoulos](#), for instance, is [coming back to his alma mater](#) as a visiting professor in political science. He sees this transition not as a retreat but as a set of new challenges. "From what I can tell about being in a classroom," Stephanopoulos says, "facing students every week seems like you're putting yourself on the line."

Former New York mayor [David Dinkins](#), who hosts a twice-weekly radio show, sits on many corporate and charitable boards, and continues to practice law in addition to teaching at Columbia's [School of International and Public Affairs](#), says: "I'm more busy now than I was before. The difference is now I choose what I do."



David Dinkins

Academic life provides a sober alternative to the

pressure cooker of politics, substituting the subtler and deeper rigors of scholarship for the immediate demands of public service. Stephanopoulos -- who will also be a consultant for [ABC](#) and is writing a book -- says he hopes to have "time to reflect" at Columbia after leaving the White House.

"Especially in such a fast-paced media environment, we need the academic counterbalance to encourage reflection," he says. For Dinkins, too, Columbia



Milos Forman

provides more flexibility to pursue his many interests. "In government, one has to think of the magnitude of the city and the job of being mayor. You truly do work around the clock; you're on call always. Here, there's more freedom."

### The classroom as idea-incubator

ARTISTS AS WELL as politicians find the opportunity to take a longer view at Columbia while remaining engaged in creative processes. Director [Milos Forman](#), whose most recent film, "[The People vs. Larry Flynt](#)," opened in December, values

the [School of the Arts](#) for providing a place where both students and teachers can be immersed in thinking about film. "The most important thing for me is to have this time where you are responsible only to yourself, to chisel your own artistic vision. The process is almost subconscious, the result of spending time talking and arguing about movies," Forman says.

Even a seasoned journalist can enjoy the chance to add theory to practice. "In a university people think ideas are important," adds former Associated Press chief Middle East correspondent [Terry Anderson](#), an adjunct at the [journalism school](#). Anderson's documentary, "[Return to The Lion's Den](#)," about his return to Lebanon, where he was held hostage for nearly seven years, aired on [CNN](#) in December. "I have strong ideas about journalism. I think it's important work. I am quite passionate about its high purpose, its role in the maintenance of a free society. I believe in those things very deeply, and I think those are good things to teach to aspiring journalists."

Along with the focus on ideas comes its flip side, the responsibility to avoid isolation. Stephanopoulos values an energetic exchange between the academic world and the larger one. "Academics is the training ground for people who get into politics, obviously. But also, it's an extension of politics, if you take the broadest view of politics, which is the life of society." "The university needs to engage the outside world," says [Bernard Tschumi](#), the



internationally renowned architect best known for his revolutionary [Parc de la Villette](#) in Paris, who was named dean of Columbia's [School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation](#) in 1988. "At the same time it has to keep a certain degree of autonomy, not to become completely immersed. It needs to be both inside and outside.



Terry Anderson

"Architecture is never isolated; it's part of the history of ideas," he adds. "One of the great things about the university is the discussion about the development of these ideas." That interaction is most direct in the classroom. Teachers gain a variety of benefits from the contact with students. "The extraordinary thing with students is they don't take anything for granted. They're constantly questioning. It creates an unbelievably fertile ground," Tschumi says.

Stephanopoulos, too, looks forward to two-way communication with students. "I want to learn more about their attitudes and relationships toward the political system, their involvement with the political system, and their hopes for it," he says. "I want to be able to help a new generation of people getting involved with politics understand it and, I hope, get excited by it."

Theater director [Anne Bogart](#), whose recent production, "The Medium," is a meditation on the works of media prophet [Marshall McLuhan](#), says students help her research artistic trends and new ideas. "They keep me up to date. It's how I know what's going on in music and popular culture." Students refresh her creativity, she says. "I can always look at a student I'm working with and say, 'How can light be emotional?' and they'll come up with whole new answers that I could never think of."

Novelist and School of the Arts professor [Maureen Howard](#), whose latest work is *Almanac: A Winter's Tale*, compares her students to "cohorts, colleagues, and friends" but warns that teaching is demanding. "The downside is that you have to be very careful to preserve any time for your own writing. It's hard to carve out time for one's own interiority." Howard, contracted to teach half-time, taught a full load last fall so as to take the current semester off to write. Others, like Forman, take leaves of absence or keep their class loads small to make time to research and execute their creative works.

### Visibility, leverage, and standards

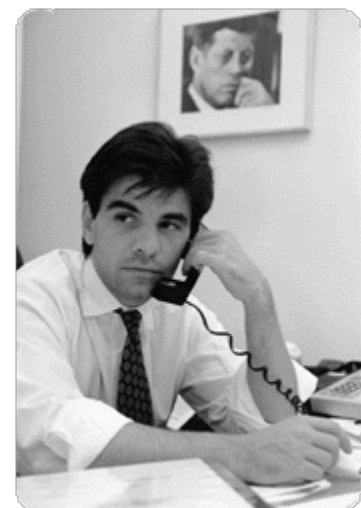
THE COLUMBIA CONNECTION provides a forum from which researchers can continue to influence their chosen fields. [Gary Sick](#), senior research scholar, is probably best known as principal White House aide for Iran during

that nation's revolution and the U.S. hostage crisis. At Columbia, he's founded the [Gulf/2000 Project](#), which sponsors conferences and an online library on the Persian Gulf region. "I think when you're in a job in Washington, you're dealing with all the daily crises, the things that come up every 15 minutes, and you seldom have a chance to sit back and think seriously. We still follow the crises here, but in a more objective way. We're able look at the situation and draw conclusions from it."

As executive director of Gulf/2000, Sick maintains a presence in Persian Gulf policy. This working community of Gulf scholars has opened new lines of communication between countries with strained diplomatic relations. Sick intervened when the [National Science Foundation](#) wanted to deprive Iranian scholars of Internet access and uncovered the story when Jordan's King Hussein first met with the Iraqi opposition to Saddam Hussein. "In some ways," says Sick, "I can accomplish more here than I did in Washington." Alfred Aho spent nearly 30 years working for [Bell Labs](#) (birthplace of UNIX) and [Bellcore](#) before becoming chair of Columbia's computer science department. He sees his position as a platform from which he can improve the practice of software development in industry. "One of the things I noticed when I was in industry was the haphazard state of software technology," says Aho. "I visited the nation's leading software vendors and got an appreciation for the best current practices in software engineering. My thought was to take this knowledge and turn it into teaching materials that would improve the state of software engineering education. I also thought I could use this knowledge to help create a more scientific foundation for software engineering on the belief that the best theory is motivated by practice, and the best practice is motivated by theory."

Joan Konner was producing public television programs with Bill Moyers when she accepted the call to serve as dean of the Graduate School of Journalism. "I just decided I would do it -- that the school was an important institution in American journalism and I could try to restore it to its former unchallenged position as the leader in the field." Konner says the school strengthens journalism by giving reporters "the professional armature -- good training, a solid ethos of service and responsibility to the public, and high standards -- on which to shape a career."

Above all, these luminaries praise the university for giving them room to choose and develop their own endeavors, on their own terms. "The academic environment allows you to be more selective in terms of the work you accept, taking on only the projects one feels are important,"



George Stephanopoulos



says architect Tschumi. "One tends not to take the most commercial project, the most predictable project."

"I'm busy doing a lot of things," says Dinkins. "But among the most fun things I do is [working] at Columbia. I speak before a lot of groups, and what I say to audiences is that now that I've been elected a private citizen, I go where I wish. I'm delighted with Columbia."

"Teaching is something I've always wanted to do," Stephanopoulos says, "and Columbia was a perfect place for me because it's my alma mater, it's very strong in politics and history, and I love New York. I can't wait to get back."

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**PHOTO CREDITS:** Joe Pineiro (Stephanopoulos, Dinkins), University Public Affairs (Forman), Lena Lakoma (Anderson)

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