



# Internationalism Evolves: Columbia and the Global Centers

BY ALEXANDER GELFAND

**From his office on the fourteenth floor of the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), Paul LeClerc, Ph.D. '69 and director of the Columbia Global Center | Europe in Paris, straddles two major periods in the history of Columbia's engagement with the wider world: one of them rooted in a model of internationalism that stretches back to the early days of the 20th century, the other arising from more recent notions of global interconnectedness and interdependency.**

The Paris site is part of a network of eight Global Centers that serve as hubs for University activities across a broad geographical swath. (The other seven are located in Amman, Beijing, Istanbul, Mumbai, Nairobi, Rio de Janeiro, and Santiago and represent the Middle East, East Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Latin America.)

Mark Wrigley, dean of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, whose own worldwide network

of Studio-X facilities is closely integrated with the Centers, views each site as a “broadband platform for supporting every possible kind of interaction between Columbia and a region,” and as a “high-level exchange node that accelerates and facilitates new forms of collaboration.”

That very modern model represents the extension, one might even say evolution, of an earlier approach to

internationalism. SIPA, for example, was one of many University institutions that grew out of the need for foreign intelligence during World War II and the subsequent Cold War demand for regional expertise, phenomena that led to the field of area studies as we know it today. SIPA's offices are just a short walk from Deutsches Haus and the Maison Française—the oldest foreign-language or cultural houses in the United States.

Both were inaugurated in the early 20th century by University President Nicholas Murray Butler, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who advocated for what he called “the international mind”: a habit of regarding “the few nations of the civilized world as free and co-operating equals in aiding the progress of civilization, in developing commerce and industry, and in spreading enlightenment and culture throughout the world.”

Such institutions continue to play a vital role in the life of the University and of many students and faculty. LeClerc himself is chair of the advisory board for the Maison Française, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2013.

Yet as director of one of eight Global Centers located on four continents, LeClerc is also part of a very different kind of international initiative: one that focuses less on exporting knowledge than on accruing it; one that uses area studies to understand the relationships between participants in a larger global system; one that is less interested in bringing the world to Columbia, and more interested in expanding Columbia's presence in the world.

Expectations are high. Administrators expect that activity across the network, in the form of communication and collaboration among the Centers, will become at least as important as activity within the Centers themselves, creating what Wrigley calls an “intellectual framework” along which ideas will spread in unexpected ways, like plants along a trellis. Ultimately, he muses, the entire structure may come to resemble a “thinking machine that will begin to think in ways that we can't predict.”

At the moment, however, Wrigley's vision is just that. First announced in 2008, the network is still in its infancy, and even its staunchest supporters cannot predict with any certainty what the future will hold. The initiative was almost immediately

criticized for a perceived lack of planning and forethought, and there remain concerns over whether the University can maintain its values—academic freedom, freedom of expression, freedom from discrimination—in parts of the world that do not necessarily share them. The very existence of the network also raises a number of fundamental questions. How, for example, will the Centers serve Columbia? Why pursue this particular approach to extending the University's reach? And what exactly does it mean for a place of higher learning to go global, anyhow?

## GLOBAL MYTH VS. GLOBAL REALITY

The idea of the university as an actor on the international stage is hardly new. Ben Wildavsky, a senior scholar at the Kauffman Foundation and author of *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World*, points out that American research universities were inspired by the nineteenth-century German model developed by Wilhelm von Humboldt—a model that was copied by the hundreds of American scholars who visited Germany in the years following the Civil War. And one need only visit the website of the Office of Global Programs to appreciate the number

of opportunities already available to Columbia students who wish to study, work, or conduct research abroad. As Kenneth Prewitt, Carnegie Professor for Public Affairs at SIPA and former vice president for Global Centers, puts it, “The University has been international for a very long time.”

As a result, says Kris Olds, professor of geography at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and author of the blog *GlobalHigherEd*, it's “a bit of a myth” to suggest that globalization in higher education, whether at Columbia or elsewhere, “is entirely new and transformative in a way that's never been seen before.”

“The rhetoric has been ramped up,” says Olds. “Everybody and their dog wants to be known as a more globally oriented institution of higher education—in part to keep up with the Joneses, in part because of student demands, in part because of competition.”

Yet no one disputes that things are not quite as they once were. The number of global initiatives at colleges and universities has increased significantly. Students and faculty have become more mobile, and cross-border research has become more common. Even university rankings



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have gotten into the act, with organizations like *U.S. News & World Report* and *The Times Higher Education* publishing influential lists of the top universities not only in America but around the world.

Such changes are hardly surprising. They reflect the impact on higher education of the same forces that have led to what the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman famously dubbed a “flat world”; forces that are not exactly new, but which have gathered considerable momentum in recent years. “The world has been interconnected since ancient Rome, at least,” says LeClerc, who also serves as a visiting scholar in the Department of French and Romance Philology. “But the dimensions of interconnectedness that we have in the world

today are staggeringly complex, and affect the lives of people around the world on a continual basis—and not in a way we’ve ever seen before.” Consequently, university administrators have come to the realization that while traditional approaches to internationalization (recruiting foreign students, establishing study abroad and exchange programs, promoting area studies) remain valuable, they are no longer sufficient.

But what is the best way to apprehend this altered global landscape? And what is the best way for an institution like Columbia to engage with it?

## GETTING IT RIGHT

For many American universities, the answer is simple: build branch

campuses in other parts of the world. A recent census by the UK-based Observatory on Borderless Higher Education counted 200 such campuses, 78 of them operated by American universities, many of them located in developing countries in Asia and the Middle East. There are many flavors of overseas branch campus: a 2009 survey by the American Council on Education found that some receive full or partial funding from their host governments, while others receive none; some offer only graduate or undergraduate programs, others both; and some partner with foreign universities, while others go it alone.

All, however, offer degrees bearing the imprimatur of their parent institutions; all have a significant physical



presence in their host country; and all seek to replicate the educational experience offered back home through various means, such as recreating a core curriculum or flying in faculty to teach classes. High-profile examples include NYU in Abu Dhabi, the cluster of branch campuses (Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University) in Qatar’s aptly named Education City, and the Yale–National University of Singapore, slated to open in 2013.

Universities often embrace branch campuses in order to advance their reputations for internationalism, or because they hope to increase revenue through foreign enrollments. Host countries, meanwhile, welcome such outposts as a means of enhancing their own higher-ed credentials while providing role models for local institutions—what Olds calls the “demonstration effect.” Yet Columbia, unlike many of its peer institutions, has resisted this particular approach to expanding its global footprint. At a roundtable discussion held during the World Leaders Forum in September, University President Lee C. Bollinger told a group of undergraduates and graduate students that when asked to explain what the Centers are, he finds it easier to explain what they are not. And what they are not, Bollinger said, are branch campuses.

There are many reasons for this. For one thing, the long-term viability of the branch campus model remains in question. “A lot of branch campuses haven’t done that well,” Olds says. Many have suffered from underenrollment, and a few, including George Mason University in the United Arab Emirates and Michigan State University in Dubai, have collapsed entirely. Faculty are often unwilling to uproot themselves and their families for a year or more in order to serve abroad, and it can be difficult to attract the same quality of student at a branch campus—all of which, in turn, can dilute the quality of a university’s brand.

For another, some academics object to the very notion of exporting an American approach to higher education in order to make money off the backs of students in the developing world—a practice that raises the specter of the dreaded “i” and “n” words. “The whole point of the Global Centers is to follow an approach that is not imperialist and neocolonial,” Safwan Masri, director of the Global Center | Middle East in Amman, Jordan, said when he took the floor after Bollinger at the September roundtable.

“The branch campus model is really about parachuting in, teaching students, and then getting out,”

Masri, who was named vice president for Global Centers this past summer, later elaborated. “There’s nothing about the host country or region benefiting from the experience in a way that is sustainable, in a way that helps it become independent, and thus a net contributor.” By contrast, the Centers were never meant to serve as one-way channels for “spreading enlightenment and culture throughout the world,” to use Butler’s phrase.

As an example, Masri points to the Queen Rania Teacher Academy, an independent Jordanian institution housed within the Amman Center that was established in partnership with Teachers College under the patronage of the Queen. With the Center’s help, the Academy offers teacher-training programs tailored to the Arab world; thus far, it has reached more than 2,500 educators. “We’re helping the Academy, we’re helping the country, we’re helping the region develop expertise,” says Masri. “We want to create organizations that will not only be partners with us in this transfer of knowledge phase, but that will be peers for us in the future.”

A principal goal of the Centers is to foster new relationships across the various schools and disciplines represented within the University. In keeping with that



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—KENNETH PREWITT

aim, the Amman Center has also established an Institute for Sustainable Development Practice in collaboration with the Jordanian Ministry of Planning and the Earth Institute, a Columbia-based organization led by Professor Jeffrey Sachs that joins with local governments, the United Nations, and others to find solutions to pressing global issues such as poverty and climate change. The Center is also helping to advance public health and social work in the region through partnerships with the Mailman School of Public Health and the School of Social Work. Similar cross-disciplinary and capacity-building programs coexist alongside the more traditional research activities undertaken at the other Global Centers.

“Our model is about learning. It’s about a two-way exchange of knowledge and skills,” says Masri, who like his fellow directors alternately describes the Centers as platforms for interdisciplinary research, vehicles for new educational opportunities, and instruments for seeking solutions to global problems.

Nonetheless, when the Global Centers first came into being, it wasn’t entirely clear *what* they were supposed to be.



## FLEXIBLE ROOTS, RAPID GROWTH

“The fundamental idea from the beginning was that there was no such thing as a Global Center,” Prewitt says. In 2005, President Bollinger announced the creation of the Committee on Global Thought, led by Nobel Prize winner and University Professor of Economics Joseph Stiglitz, whose official purpose was to “reconceive, and find new ways to support, the project of making Columbia University a genuinely global university in the century ahead.” The committee, itself the product of an earlier Task Force on the University and Globalization, introduced new courses and research initiatives and enabled what

Masri describes as “globally focused conversations” on campus. The Centers comprised the next logical step in Columbia’s path toward globalization: a physical and intellectual infrastructure for global studies that would push beyond the boundaries of New York City. And their conception occurred with astonishing rapidity—some might even say haste.

“This did not start with a two-year-long planning process, where there was a major faculty committee deliberating and articulating the rationale for [the Centers] and where they ought to be,” says Prewitt, who was asked in 2009 to make the network a reality. “Should we have? Sure. Could we have? They wouldn’t have been built yet.”

*Queen Rania of Jordan, right, inaugurates the Queen Rania Teachers Academy at the U.S. Columbia University Global Center in Amman on June 14, 2009. The academy will train professionals in Jordan and the region through a partnership with Columbia University in the United States. Photo credit: KHALIL MAZRAAWI/AFP/Getty Images*

The essential idea was to establish a web of interconnected facilities in major world regions, as opposed to a clutch of isolated satellite campuses, and to ensure that all of those centers would be accessible to, and in fact used by, the entire University. The rest was largely up for grabs. Locations were selected because the University had an alumni donor base in the area (Istanbul), other potential sources of support (Amman), or an existing presence through the Earth Institute (Mumbai, Nairobi)—considerations that led to choices that Prewitt describes as “idiosyncratic” and “opportunistic,” but “not random.” Even the numbers were indeterminate: when Bollinger asked Prewitt how many Centers he thought there ought to be, Prewitt’s response was, “more than six and less than ten.”

The lack of a formal planning process, and of clearly delineated guidelines for everything from funding arrangements to conflict-of-interest policies—not to mention minor details such as what the Centers ought to look like, or what exactly they ought to do—led to early concerns that the whole enterprise lacked focus and perhaps even a reason for being. But according to both Prewitt and Masri, at least some of that initial fuzziness was intentional—the reflection of a desire to remain flexible, rather than a sign

of sloppy thinking. “We had some idea of what we wanted,” says Masri, “but we left a lot open.”

“It’s not like there’s a big design someplace,” says Prewitt, who adds that he’s “glad we didn’t do a blueprint, because we would have gotten it wrong. We’re not smart enough to figure out all these questions ahead of time. Universities don’t transform themselves through blueprints; they transform themselves through trial and error.”

The network has grown rapidly, from two Centers in 2009 to eight in 2012, with schools from Mailman to GSAPP engaging in joint projects. “Would any of us have thought we’d have come that far in three years? No. But it happened because it was the right idea,” Prewitt says.

It is also an idea that continues to evolve. At the September roundtable, which capped a weeklong Columbia Global Centers Directors’ Summit, each of the eight directors was seated at a table full of students. Karen Poniachik (M.I.A. ’90), the SIPA alumna who directs the Global Center | Latin America in Santiago, pressed her tablemates relentlessly on what might raise interest in, and awareness of, the Centers on campus and how they could be made more accessible to students. Masri

said that he intended to use the feedback gathered at each table to generate new initiatives—“marching orders,” as he put it—and hoped to recruit some of the attendees to serve on a student advisory council.

Along with such efforts to improve and refine the Centers, attempts are being made to routinize at least some aspects of the network. In his first year as vice president, Masri, who is an expert on operations management, aims to standardize such things as branding and governance—albeit without hindering innovation or breeding conformity. “How we do things needs to be uniform across the Centers, but what we do should not be,” he says. (Other goals include broadening engagement with the various schools within the University; developing a set of global themes, such as health and education, that the Centers can work on together; and designing a standard business model for the Centers, which are currently funded through a mixture of project funds and donations from foreign alumni and friends of the University.)

## TO EACH THEIR OWN

Given their present level of diversity, there seems little chance that the Centers will become overly homogenized.

The Amman Center, which serves as a model for the others in terms of the range of its programs and partnerships, occupies a 45,000 square-foot building with its own auditorium, conference rooms and classrooms, and offices for 24 full-time staff. An upstairs wing houses the Amman Lab, GSAPP's local Studio-X facility—this past summer, 20 students from the United States, Jordan, and Turkey gathered there and in Istanbul for a two-week workshop on designing public spaces—and the site has its own teaching annex, information technology office, and communications team.

The Paris Center, meanwhile, occupies 23,000 square feet in Reid Hall, a former porcelain factory on the Left Bank that has served as the University's foothold in France for more than half a century. "It has been an extension of Columbia for 60 years," says LeClerc. "It is an academic center, and it's a center of study. You can do an entire M.A. program there. You can do *two* M.A. programs there. Over a thousand Columbia students have gone and spent a semester or a year there." In August the Center, which employs 14 people, announced that it would be the first in the network to host a group of postdoctoral fellows. In September it was named the home of the Secretariat

of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, an Earth Institute-affiliated project that aims to mobilize experts in academia, civil society, and the private sector to help solve global problems.

Contrast that with the Santiago Center, which was launched in March 2012, takes up 4,000 square feet of office space, and employs one full-time staffer in New York and a single part-time assistant in Chile. "It's me, the computer, and the coffee machine," Poniachik says.

Despite being one of the youngest and leanest of the Centers, however, the Santiago site sees plenty of activity. The Center shares a faculty steering committee with its counterpart in Rio, and a number of committee members have visited over the past year, doing research, teaching at local institutions, and advising the Chilean government. "They have a lot of expertise in the region in different areas—human rights, political science, trade—and they can provide a lot of contacts in Chile and in the region," Poniachik says.

Poniachik herself is pretty well connected: a former minister of mining and minister of energy in Chile who also served as the country's special envoy to the Organization for Economic Cooperation

and Development, she has contacts in government, business, and academia. So far she has helped establish a partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Earth Institute's International Research Institute for Climate and Society to respond to extreme weather such as floods and droughts; assisted in brokering an agreement between Columbia and the Chilean government over scholarships for Chilean graduate students accepted to the University; and facilitated a partnership between SIPA and the School of Economics and Business at Universidad de Chile to offer a summer executive training program on regional and international finance topics.

The Center also coordinates field placements in Chilean mining communities for students in the Master of Public Administration and Development Practice program run jointly by SIPA and the Earth Institute. Caroline Ocampo-Mayo, one of two students who traveled to the Andean mining town of Andacollo last summer to identify sustainable development opportunities for Teck, a Canadian company that operates a large copper mine in the area, credits Poniachik and the Center for helping her make the most of the ten-week-long research trip. Ocampo-Mayo says that Paula Pacheco, the Center's



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assistant in Morningside Heights, arranged meetings with Teck managers in New York, and with officials in Chile, while Poniachik played the role of in-country academic advisor, “helping us to navigate the system, establishing an interesting agenda, and helping us open doors and meet people.” Poniachik even provided feedback on the team’s final research paper, which included specific recommendations for creating new educational and employment opportunities that would benefit both the mining company and the town.

The Africa and South Asia Centers, meanwhile,

coalesced around a clutch of preexisting Earth Institute projects and remain closely associated with them. As Joanna Rubinstein, assistant director for international programs at the Institute, explains, what ultimately became the Nairobi Center in September of 2012 had for some time been the Institute’s own beachhead in Africa for advancing the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, which include halving hunger and extreme poverty, ensuring environmental sustainability, and providing universal primary education. Today the MDG Center for East and Southern Africa is formally housed within the Global Center | Africa,

which operates MDG-related projects in 14 different countries.

According to Center director Belay Begashaw, a former minister of agriculture for Ethiopia, the Nairobi site focuses on finding technical solutions to local problems, like using bed nets to fight malaria in Malawi, and then helps sell those solutions to national-level policymakers. Three countries have already adopted measures recommended by the Center, and Begashaw believes that the transition from Earth Institute venture to networked Global Center “will really change significantly the programs here, and

Columbia’s visibility in Africa.” A number of University units, from Mailman to the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Environmental Biology (EEEEB), are undertaking programs with Center support: a group of EEEEB students will arrive in January for a three-month seminar on tropical biology and sustainability led by faculty from both Columbia and Princeton University, and the latter has shown interest in establishing a joint research program.

## GLOBAL REACH, GLOBAL ISSUES

Yet if each Center has a unique personality, each

## Paul LeClerc, Ph.D. '69, French and Romance Philology

By Alexander Gelfand

If Paul LeClerc’s retirement hasn’t turned out quite the way he’d planned, he can blame it all on lunch with Nicholas Dirks, executive vice president and dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and chancellor designate of the University of California at Berkeley.

When LeClerc stepped down from his post as president and CEO of the New York Public Library in 2011, he had already enjoyed the equivalent of several successful careers: as a highly respected scholar of French literature (a specialist on Voltaire, he has been awarded the French Legion of Honor and a brace of honorary doctorates); a high-level academic administrator

(provost of Baruch College, president of Hunter College); and head of one of the largest public library systems in the United States (the New York Public Library). He planned to spend his newly found free time writing a book about money, power, and sex in 18th-century France, a project that had already attracted the interest of two publishers.

Then came that fateful lunch. When LeClerc told Dirks about his book, Dirks insisted that LeClerc write it at Columbia and offered him a visiting scholar position in the Department of French and Romance Philology.

“Then he said, ‘Would you by any chance consider becoming the director

of the Global Center for Europe?’” LeClerc recalls. “And I said, ‘My God, I don’t know!’”

When LeClerc finally accepted the offer, it was for two primary reasons.

On the one hand, he liked the idea of a network of small, low-cost centers designed to broaden the educational and cultural experiences of the Columbia community, as opposed to branch campuses that were merely intended to boost foreign enrollments. On the other, he was attracted to the Paris Center’s regional focus. “This is a center not just for French studies but for European affairs,” LeClerc says. “The problems that Europe faces

one also presents unique challenges. A month after the Africa Center was launched, Prewitt told the *Columbia Spectator* that homophobia in East Africa was a matter of concern. “We don’t know if we can completely protect you if you went to northern Kenya,” he said. When asked, Begashaw said that the Center has yet to see examples of discrimination based on sexual orientation. But, he added, “You can’t rule out this kind of thing—it might come up anytime, anywhere.” Which raises the vexing question of how the University will uphold and promote its core values in places that don’t necessarily share them.

“I’d be lying if I told you that it’s not something I worry about,” says Masri, who adds that protecting the University’s values without giving offense or appearing high handed can be difficult. “You never want to compromise the principles of academic freedom and the values that we hold dear at Columbia University. But we do have to be sensitive to the fact that we can’t impose our values on the rest of the world, and that we have to respect local cultures.”

The preparations for President Bollinger’s visit to the Beijing Center in early November illustrate just how delicate that balance can be.

The Center had been without a permanent director for nearly two years when Joan Kaufman, an expert on public health in China, assumed the reins in September 2012. A former professor at Brandeis who had previously worked in the country for both the UN and the Ford Foundation, Kaufman inherited a site that had been functioning in what she describes as “interim mode”: maintaining existing programs like the Summer Palace Dialogue, which brings together economists and policymakers from China and the United States to tackle problems in the global economy; providing a local base for

the China/India Global Scholars Program, which allows undergrads to study urbanization in Beijing, Shanghai, and Mumbai; and supporting Columbia faculty who do research in the region.

Kaufman would now like to transform the Center into a think tank that brings together Chinese scholars and members of the Columbia community to address significant global issues. As an example, she points to the Urban China Initiative, a joint effort by the Center, Tsinghua University, and the consulting firm McKinsey and Company that aims to assess the dynamics of rapid

today”—e.g., sovereign debt, the integration of non-European cultures—“are really big, really interesting, really important,” and the Global Center for Europe offers Columbia students and faculty a “great laboratory” in which to explore them.

LeClerc’s own interests run to the effects of globalization on local cultures. “Oftentimes, when one talks about globalization, there are the standard, very significant topics: migration, integration, environmental sustainability, economic equality,” he says. But what about the influence that dominant global cultures exert over indigenous ones? Do they, LeClerc asks, have a liberating effect “in societies where freedom of

expression is neither the norm nor the desired state of affairs?” Or are they more likely to “snuff out local cultures that go back thousands of years?”

The line of inquiry might be new, but LeClerc’s interest in world affairs is not. Given his personal and professional background, that’s hardly surprising.

Raised in a Franco-American household—his ancestors emigrated from France to Canada in the middle of the 17th century, and his grandparents migrated from Quebec to New England at the turn of the 20th—LeClerc



urbanization in the country; in time, Kaufman hopes to use the UCI as a launching pad for a broader “smart cities” initiative.

There are limits to just how daring the University and its representatives can be in China, however. Bollinger’s November trip coincided with the run-up to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party, and the country’s first change in leadership in ten years. Kaufman stands firm on Columbia’s commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech—“that’s who we are, and I don’t think we ever compromise on that,” she says—but given the circumstances, a certain

degree of diplomacy was required.

“Were we going to have a public forum on freedom of speech in China during Bollinger’s visit while the Party conference was taking place?” she asks. “No, of course not. But that doesn’t mean we won’t discuss it behind closed doors.” At a cocktail reception at the Peninsula Beijing hotel, Bollinger spoke instead about global education, a subject that Kaufman says was “chosen on the basis of what would be less sensitive politically, but no less valuable to the mission of the University.”

Such considerations may necessitate the formulation of new policies and guidelines—something Prewitt sees as part of the process of becoming a global university, a process he likens to the one that long ago transformed Columbia from a small college to a modern research institution. In 1860, Prewitt says, a visitor to Columbia College would have found three principal subjects being taught: natural history, classics, and “some kind of moral philosophy or religion.”

He continues: “Somewhere between then and a hundred years later, Columbia

became a research university,” a change that was characterized by, among other things, the creation of new departments and disciplines, the establishment of “cross-cutting centers and institutes,” and the decision to grant the Ph.D. Virtually every aspect of Columbia’s current institutional identity—who gets tenured, what courses we teach, what students we take in, what degrees we offer—can be traced to that metamorphosis.

By the same token, Prewitt expects that one day, every aspect of Columbia’s identity will derive at least

## PAUL LECLERC, CONTINUED

spoke a distinctive patois of French-Canadian French and American English as a child. After attending Catholic school in Queens, he enrolled at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he came under the sway of Father Alfred Desautels, a Jesuit professor who was himself of French Canadian descent. It was Desautels who introduced LeClerc to Voltaire (*Candide* was on the church’s index of prohibited books at the time, and LeClerc had to petition the Bishop of Worcester for permission to read it); who advised him to study at the Sorbonne for a year after graduation, and to do his graduate work in French literature at either Columbia or Yale; and who inspired him to become a French professor at a small liberal

arts college—in LeClerc’s case, Union College, in Schenectady, New York.

LeClerc went on to a series of academic and administrative posts at the City University of New York—“I wanted to work for a city university dedicated to providing access to underserved groups,” he says—before taking the reins of the NYPL in 1993, leaving a trail of international programs in his wake: he directed study-abroad programs in France while at Union; established student exchanges between Baruch, Hunter, and various French schools; and helped to create the CUNY-Universités de Paris Exchange Program—the first large-scale exchange between an American public university system and

a European one, and one of the few accomplishments in which LeClerc will admit to taking pride, mainly because it gave students of modest means the opportunity to study in Paris at no extra cost. At the NYPL, LeClerc forged special relationships with institutions in Russia and Brazil, and mounted exhibits in New York with help from the British Library in London and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.

He has similar plans for the Global Center I Europe. In addition to maintaining Reid Hall’s historic focus on teaching and research, LeClerc would like to create a “whole new generation of programs having to do with European affairs”—programs that need not take

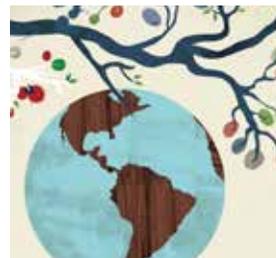
in part from its status as a *global* university. “We’re about where the University was in 1860 with respect to becoming a research university,” he says. Within 25 years, Prewitt believes that Columbia will be one of a half-dozen truly global American universities; within 50, “we will take for granted that our students will have experiences around the world.”

The Centers represent but one part of that transformation. But they have a crucial role to play, and their potential has yet to be fully realized. Those involved with the Centers typically stress that the

most powerful aspect of the network is that it is, in fact, a *network*; yet they have only just begun to leverage the system as a whole. Amman and Istanbul might hold a joint workshop; Beijing and Mumbai might both participate in the Global Scholars Program. But these are limited collaborations, whereas Masri and his fellow directors envision much more ambitious exchanges involving multiple Centers. Wrigley, at GSAPP, believes that such exchanges will help turn the University from a place where “brilliant people and ideas come together and are sent off into the

world” into an institution characterized by the kind of “distributed intelligence” that is more relevant to a globalized world.

“I think the Global Centers are quietly putting in place the beginnings of what could be an almost explosively rich series of forms of teaching, of exchanging knowledge, of learning, of laboratory work,” he says. “Over time, very beautiful things will come out of this.”



*Prewitt expects that one day, every aspect of Columbia’s identity will derive at least in part from its status as a global university.*

place in Paris but might instead involve working with archives and institutions across the Continent. For example, students interested in exploring the European financial crisis could, with Center support, gain access to the finance ministries of Germany, Greece, and Spain.

LeClerc would also like to mount public programs similar to those he encouraged at NYPL, and to engage in collaborations with other Global Centers. In a move that would scratch both itches at once, he is currently planning a global writers’ festival for October 2013. He has already approached the Bibliothèque nationale about cosponsoring the festival and asked the directors of the other seven

Centers to suggest prominent authors, making the event “one of the first products of the entire network.”

In the meantime, LeClerc intends to confer with the Center’s faculty steering committee to produce a strategic plan for the latest iteration of Columbia’s presence in Europe. “The academic enterprise is owned by the faculty,” he says, sounding like the veteran scholar that he is. “I need them to decide what they want to do with this place over the next five years.”

It sounds like a lot of work, and a hefty commitment, for a man who just a year ago thought that he was retiring in order to write a book. But when Dirks made his lunchtime offer, it was evidently

one that LeClerc, who speaks of his “immense gratitude” to Columbia, felt he couldn’t refuse.

“I never would have done this if any other university had asked me,” he says.

