

## News in Brief

## Legislative Report

### In Search of a New Energy Source



Right here in the Plasma Physics Laboratory is a machine committed to developing a commercially viable way to use nuclear fusion for energy.

The machine, known as the stellarator, confines electrons for an extended time, allowing scientists to conduct tightly controlled experiments. Thomas Sunn Pedersen, in the department of applied physics, designed and oversaw its construction in 2004.

Although the sun and stars are fusion reactors, the production of useful controlled fusion on earth has not yet been achieved, despite decades of effort. One of the hurdles is in confining the plasma long enough for appreciable fusion to occur.

Pedersen says recent results show that more than 100 billion electrons can be confined in the Columbia Non-Neutral Torus experiment under way using the stellarator. Ordinarily, such a cloud of electrons suspended in a vacuum would fly apart in a fraction of a microsecond.

Pedersen says this is only the beginning. "As we get to understand these plasmas better, we expect to increase the confinement time in the stellarator by at least another factor of a hundred," he says.

For his vision and work in plasma physics, Pedersen has received the National Science Foundation's most prestigious award to the early career-development activities of teacher-scholars who most effectively integrate research and education with the mission of their organization. The \$800,000 award will be allocated over five years and begins this month.

For more information on the stellarator, go to [www.ap.columbia.edu/CNT/](http://www.ap.columbia.edu/CNT/)

### Year Begins with Budgets Unfinished

By Ellen S. Smith

Most scientific and education funding has not yet been finalized for federal fiscal year 2006 (10/01/05-9/30/06). Congress has thus been working on a stringent continuing resolution to ensure that agencies can continue to function at least through early November.

Budget hawks have proposed a number of cut-backs in anticipation of having to fund relief for Katrina victims and Gulf reconstruction costs, currently off-budget. All of the proposed cuts will face stringent opposition; nevertheless, we can expect to see reductions in many programs of interest to the higher educational community.

Both House and Senate committees have passed a three-month extension of the Higher Education Act and have also marked up a multi-year bill setting the "blueprint" for annual funding. The bill includes Pell grant increases, additional loan borrowing capability for graduate students and further reporting provisions for colleges and universities related to safety, costs of higher education and international education.

In other news: Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has appointed a new Commission on the Future of Higher Education to address skills needed for the 21st century. Members include American Council on Education President David Ward, former MIT President Charles Vest and former University of Michigan President James Duderstadt.

### Diplomatic Historian to Lead "Global Institutions" Project for American Assembly

Francis J. Gavin, assistant professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, and a diplomatic historian by training, has been appointed as the director of the "Next Generation Project: Creating Better Global



Francis J. Gavin

Institutions for America." The project is a new initiative sponsored by the American Assembly, a national public affairs forum founded by Dwight D. Eisenhower in affiliation with Columbia University.

The Next Generation Project is designed to stimulate new thinking about the international

institutional framework that has served the United States for more than 50 years but may need to change to adapt to the new century's challenges. It will engage the next generation of emerging U.S. political, academic, professional and civic leaders with senior experts who have played a role in shaping American international policy. The project will include a series of national assemblies preceded by regional assemblies across the country, cosponsored by several of the nation's leading public policy institutions and universities.

"I am very honored to be working on such an exciting project with the American Assembly, one of the most distinguished public policy forums in the world," Gavin said. "Calling together the nation's best talent to study how best to improve both our national and global institutions is of vital importance to our future prosperity and security."

For more information on Gavin and the project, go to [www.utexas.edu/lbj/news/fall2005/gavin.btml](http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/news/fall2005/gavin.btml).

### Hollywood and High Fashion at Columbia?!

Once upon a time, it was a case of "never the twain shall meet" between an Ivy League university like Columbia and the world of high fashion and Hollywood glamour. Nowadays, however, the two worlds are being bridged, with more and more celebrities taking part in CU life and Columbians venturing into the celebrity world.

Female celebrities in particular seem to be drawn to Columbia. Fashion editor Anna Wintour was here recently for a reception with journalism students—an experience she recounted in her letter in the September *Vogue*, mentioning that the students had wanted to know how she stays excited at her job after so many years (answer: the chance to work with the best writers and photographers in the business).

Columbia is now a preferred destination for the growing numbers of young stage and screen actresses seeking degrees from top universities. A recent *New York Times* article cited several prominent examples: Julia Stiles, Amanda Peet and Maggie Gyllenhall. (Christina Ricci and Katie Holmes were admitted to Columbia but did not attend.)

Columbians for their part are no longer shy about entering the celebrity world. MTV is "thinking global" thanks to the efforts of Earth Institute director Jeffrey Sachs. Sachs was joined by Hollywood actress and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie for an MTV special on global poverty, which aired on Sept. 14 to coincide with the opening of the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals.

While Sachs was touring Kenya with Jolie, Columbia College graduate Brian Corridon was putting the skills he picked up from his psychology courses to the test as a contestant on *Survivor*, the popular NBC reality series. Corridon has to successfully navigate the Guatemalan jungle to win the \$1 million prize.



### A Philosophical Exhibition on the Art of 9/11

Arthur C. Danto, Johnsonian Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, is the curator for a new exhibition on "The Art of 9/11," featuring works that show how art embodies grief and how artists dealt with the attack. The exhibition is being held at Apexart, 291 Church St., and will run through Oct. 15.

In his accompanying essay, Danto wrote that one of the truths he'd discovered in the early aftermath of the 9/11 attacks was that "even the most ordinary people respond to tragedy with art." He recalled that among the many unforgettable experiences of that time was the "unprompted appearance of little shrines in front of doors, on windowsills and in public spaces everywhere."

Gradually, he came to realize that many of his artist friends had created works in a similar "spirit of piety"—

an idea he explored in his writings for *The Nation*, where he's been an arts columnist since 1984. (Reprints of his *Nation* articles on 9/11 and art appear in his latest book, *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap between Art and Life*.)

Danto says he thought the topic would make an "interesting philosophical exhibition" and approached Apexart, an arts organization in lower Manhattan, with the idea of staging the exhibition on the fourth anniversary of 9/11.

Among the works on display are Barbara Westman's haunting photo of the blue lights commemorating the Twin Towers; Leslie King-Hammond's shrine to the "warrior spirits" of 9/11; Mary Miss's "wreath" for Ground Zero; and Jeffrey Lohn's exploration of the photos of missing persons that went up all over the

city, showing their disfiguration from rain and dirt.

The show also includes works that don't immediately appear to relate to the grief surrounding 9/11 until you know their context. Take, for instance, Audrey Flack's painting of fishing boats in Montauk Harbor. Upon discovering that her help wasn't needed at Ground Zero, Flack felt compelled to go to Montauk and paint. Another example is the clown series created by Cindy Sherman, featuring riotous make-up and digitally produced backgrounds, which grew out of her bereavement at the destruction of a beloved city.

**ON THE WEB** | [www.apexart.org/exhibitions/danto.btm](http://www.apexart.org/exhibitions/danto.btm)  
Danto's essay for the exhibition: "9/11 Art as a Gloss on Wittgenstein"