On Campus

University Opens Newest Global Centers in Paris and Mumbai

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Lee C. Bollinger announces the launch of Columbia's Global Center in Europe during a March 15 Columbia Alumni Association reception for French alumni at the Hotel Ritz Paris. (Isabelle Néry)

Columbia opened Global Centers in Paris and Mumbai this spring as part of what President Lee C. Bollinger calls the University's ongoing effort to "deepen our engagement with scholars, ideas, and challenges across the globe." Columbia launched its first Global Centers in Amman and Beijing in 2009.

The Paris center was inaugurated at Columbia's Reid Hall on March 16 with panel discussions attended by alumni and European educators and administrators. In introducing the program, Bollinger stated what the Global Centers are *not*. "They are not going to be branch campuses of Columbia," he said. "We don't know exactly what they will be. They will become what our faculty, our students, and those who care about what we do make of them."

The Global Centers "should provide a base and a staff for us to be out in the world working on the great problems of our time. . . . Columbia has enormous expertise about the world and that is something we can build on."

In the initial session, Bollinger asked the panel — four leaders of European academic and research institutions — to answer the question, What is a global university? The responses were wide ranging. Participants spoke of the need for international faculty and students, a set of education norms and values, multidisciplinary research, excellence throughout the institution, global brand recognition, a way to train minds to be adaptable to new conditions, and a willingness to work with local institutions. The point that all of the participants returned to, however, was having people under the same roof. Panelist Eric Thomas, a physician and the vice chancellor of the University of Bristol, told the panel that his reading and experience had led to an observation about famously successful projects in business and government. "The single most powerful characteristic that made the teams perform was co-location of individuals," he said. "I think the issues of your Global Centers are of co-location. You will get overperforming teams if they are physically together, something you won't get with just e-mail and video."

A second panel, moderated by Linda P. Fried, dean of Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health, explored challenges in global health at a time when many of the problems of the developed world are beginning to seep into the developing world. Among the panelists was Antoine Flahault, dean of the École des Hautes Études en Santé Publique (EHESP) in Paris, with which Mailman is now working. This is the first collaboration between Columbia and another institution through the new Global Center in Paris.

The EHESP is in essence a new institution and the only one of its kind in France to have what would be considered graduate school status in the United States. It is offering France's first master's in public health, in part with courses taught by Columbia faculty.

“Dean Flahault saw Mailman as a model of what they’d like to become,” says Fried. “Our department of health policy and management is teaching some of their management courses in Paris, and in Reid Hall we are training students from both schools in cross-national comparisons of health systems. We have exchange students as well. Collaboration with the French school in particular, and with other schools across Europe, will be a potent partnership because, ultimately, the huge global issues of public health are issues that everyone is going to have to work on together.”

The Columbia Global Center in Europe is based in Reid Hall, a 200-year-old build-ing in Montparnasse that Columbia has owned since 1964. It is located near the University of Paris and other institutions. Over the decades, Reid Hall has hosted innumerable programs for Columbia and other universities. In its new role, said Bollinger, it will “provide a base for Columbia research and teaching that will encompass Europe and connect with centers across the world.”

Another jewel in the crown

The Global Center in South Asia will be housed in a 2500-square-foot offi ce space in Mumbai’s fi nancial district, Nariman Point. Located within a short walk of the University of Mumbai and several government offi ces, the center, which opens August 1, will be staffed by some 25 academics and administrators.

“If you’re doing international research, there’s a big advantage in having an offi ce where you can host meetings with local academics, government officials, or NGO leaders,” says Nirupam Bajpai, an economics professor who is a seior development adviser at Columbia’s Earth Institute and the founding director of the Mumbai center. “Columbia faculty members now have a home in South Asia.”

The Earth Institute already has a major presence in India, overseeing several large-scale research projects focused on sustainable development in the country. For instance, Bajpai and fellow Columbia economist Jeffrey Sachs are working with the Indian government to determine how best to improve maternal and child health in rural areas; environmental engineers Upmanu Lall and Kapil Narula are developing water-conservation strategies to alleviate chronic drinking-water shortages in India; and climate scientists led by Shiv Someshwar are trying to improve monsoon

forecasting so that farmers can make better- informed decisions about when to plant their crops and what seeds to use.

The new Global Center — like its counterparts in other regions — will help faculty and researchers from across the University undertake projects in India and in countries throughout the region, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Providing a physical base of operations is just a start. Bajpai and his colleagues at the Mumbai center also want to broker relationships between Columbia faculty and their local contacts. “Human networking is the whole idea,” he says. “The center’s leadership can introduce faculty to potential collaborators. We can also help them come up with entirely new project ideas by sharing our knowledge of local issues.”

Bajpai says that the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation already has plans to set up an experimental studio space called Studio-X in the region. Additionally, Teachers College, the School of Social Work, the School of Continuing Education, and the School of the Arts have all shown great interest in working with the Mumbai center. “If an Earth Institute project in India achieves a major breakthrough in watermanagement strategies, for example, people in China and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in New York, may want to hear about those advances and share their own experiences working on the problem,” says Bajpai. “And that’s how Columbia is going to become a truly global university: by bringing together people with different perspectives, based in different locations, in a shared conversation. It’s not a matter of Columbia merely engaging in two-way conversations with these overseas centers. These conversations should be three-way, at the least.”



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