Commencement: More than 40,000 people braved pouring rain on May 18, 2010, to attend the 256th Commencement of Columbia University. President Bollinger’s announcement that he was exercising his executive power to cut short the ceremony was met with enthusiastic applause. Citing an old saying that rain on Commencement guarantees a fabulous life, the president joked that this and a Columbia degree “should be guaranteed.” He still took the opportunity to remind the new graduates of their legacy as Columbians, and their duty to lead public discourse and reject intolerance.

Dean Fausto-Peña-Mora, representing the Faculty of the Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science for his first Columbia Commencement, praised the candidates for degrees as “socially responsible engineering and applied science leaders whose work will result in the betterment of the human condition, locally, nationally, and globally.” He noted that they continue to fulfill one of the original missions of Kings College in 1754: to provide “everything useful for the comfort, the convenience and the elegance of life.”

Class Day: In contrast to the rain of Commencement, the SEAS Class Day on May 16, 2010, enjoyed beautiful weather. Alumna and Professor Emeritus Paul Brandt-Rauf gave the keynote speech and congratulated family members, faculty, and the graduating class. Dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Dr. Brandt-Rauf described his personal journey from engineering to public health while collecting “lots of degrees”: he holds the BS, MS, and EngSd in chemical engineering from SEAS, and the MO, MPH, and DrPH from the Medical Center.

However, Dr. Brandt-Rauf added, “I still use much of what I learned here in engineering every day. That’s because much of the improvement in the health of the public has been achieved and is still being achieved through engineering solutions.” He cited the example of Georgia Zoper, an 1899 PhD graduate of the Henry Krumb School of Mines at Columbia, who worked on the Typhoid Mary epidemic in New York City in 1907 and was instrumental in combining engineering and medical knowledge into the new disciplines of public health. “So engineering and public health have a long shared history and are actually intimately connected in that both disciplines work to build a better world,” said Dr. Brandt-Rauf.

A member of the national board of directors of Engineers Without Borders, Dr. Brandt-Rauf emphasized the need to consider “engineering as a profession and the engineer as an agent of social justice.” Citing Albert Einstein, he argued that a “new level of thinking” is required to solve the problems caused by our technologically advanced society. “This old level of thinking has made a world that is profoundly technologically efficient in a way that is equally profoundly unjust and unsustainable,” said Dr. Brandt-Rauf. Engineers, who have specialized skills in problem-solving, he suggests, should lead the way. Professional responsibility, he concluded, “is not just about knowing but about caring.”

Dean Fausto-Peña-Mora presented three awards to celebrate outstanding faculty members. Latha Venkataraman, assistant professor of mechanical engineering. This award was established by two alumni, Ana Rodriguez ’76, ’88, and her brother, Marcos Rodriguez ’83, to support the advancement of junior faculty in our School. Professor Venkataraman is pursuing research interests in the field of thermal-fluid sciences, focusing on hydrodynamic lubrication, surface engineering, and contact mechanics as applied to MEMS devices, energy systems, biomedicine, and sustainable manufacturing.

Commitment to students. Dean Peña-Mora presented three awards to celebrate outstanding faculty members. Latha Venkataraman, assistant professor of mechanical engineering. This award was established by two alumni, Ana Rodriguez ’76, ’88, and her brother, Marcos Rodriguez ’83, to support the advancement of junior faculty in our School. Professor Venkataraman is pursuing research interests in the field of thermal-fluid sciences, focusing on hydrodynamic lubrication, surface engineering, and contact mechanics as applied to MEMS devices, energy systems, biomedicine, and sustainable manufacturing.

The third faculty award, The Rodriguez Family Junior Faculty Development Award, was given to Elon Terrell, assistant professor of mechanical engineering. This award was established by two alumni, Ana Rodriguez ’76, ’88, and her brother, Marcos Rodriguez ’83, to support the advancement of junior faculty in our School. Professor Terrell is pursuing a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering, with a focus on bio-inspired design and novel materials. He is also involved in research on the mechanics of biological systems, including the behavior of bone and tendons.

Class of 2010: The Class of 2010 included a diverse group of students from a variety of backgrounds. Among the notable graduates were:

- Alumna Daniel Schiavetto ’75, ’76, president of the Columbia Engineering Alumni Association, presented Distinguished Faculty Teaching Awards to Rocco A. Servadio and Yannis P. Tsividis. Professor Servadio, an associate professor of computer science, specializes in theoretical computer science, particularly computational learning theory and computational complexity theory. Professor Tsividis is the Charles B. Schreier Professor of Electrical Engineering and is a leading expert in the field of information theory.

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