



# SIPA MAGAZINE

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## Teaching Civil Discourse in Polarized Times

SIPA teaches students and faculty the art  
of holding frank and honest discussions about some  
of the most charged issues of our time. **p. 18**



**SIPA MAGAZINE Vol. XXXVIII • 2026**

*SIPA Magazine* is published annually by Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs' Office of Communications and External Relations.

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Two by Sixteen, TwoBySixteen.com

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**2026 ISSUE**

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Photo by Shahar Azran

# Dear Friends,

**A**t a moment when the news cycle never pauses and the geopolitical landscape can shift overnight, SIPA's mission has never been more vital.

This issue of *SIPA Magazine* features a cover story that speaks directly to one of the most urgent challenges of our time: how to engage constructively across deep disagreement. At SIPA, we believe that the ability to listen, reason, and engage across sharply divergent viewpoints is not a soft skill but a core competency for effective leadership, and one of the most important and difficult capacities we seek to develop in our students.

In the pages that follow, you'll see how SIPA's recent work translates purpose into impact. They will offer a glimpse behind the doors of the IAB and into just a few of the transformational developments unfolding across our community. SIPA is more than a policy school; we are a connector between the worlds of academia and policy, translating rigorous research into creative, evidence-based solutions to some of the world's most complex challenges.

You'll read about SIPA's bold curriculum redesign—the first in decades. In fall 2025, we launched a new STEM-designated MPA degree and a globally immersive MIA program, both designed to equip our students with sharper analytical skills and deeper international experience as they navigate a rapidly evolving global job market.

Our Institute of Global Politics (IGP) is shaping policy conversations in Washington and around the world, convening some of the most influential scholars and practitioners of our time. Last year saw the launch of the American Democracy Initiative, led by Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, as well as the release of three major policy reports on global challenges spanning from New York City's childcare and housing crises to the global fight for women's rights.

Inside, you'll meet ambitious students and inspiring alumni, from those organizing around the UN's Summit of the Future to innovators whose startups are reshaping how young Latinas and other marginalized communities plan for a more sustainable future. You'll also find a feature on SIPA's distinctive PhD in Sustainable Development program and the groundbreaking work being done by its graduates.

These stories represent only a small fraction of what defines SIPA: a community where scholarship and practice meet, where ideas are tested, and where lifelong relationships are forged. It is a place where future presidents, CEOs, and other innovators are being prepared to lead with vision, purpose, and integrity.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and I thank you for being part of SIPA's global community.

Warmly,

**Keren Yarhi-Milo**

*Dean, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs  
Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Relations*

# InBrief

ALUMNI & STUDENTS



L-R: Riya Yingran Guo MIA '25, Maria Jimena Jurado MPA '25, Sam Dumesh MIA '26, Corentin Donatien MPA '25, Miriam Triassi MIA '25. Photo by Diane Bondareff

## ENERGYONE WINS SIPA'S 2025 GLOBAL POLICY CHALLENGE

On April 24, 2025, SIPA celebrated the winners of its Annual Global Policy Challenge, a competition that encourages students to develop innovative solutions at the intersection of technology, data, and public policy. The first-place prize of \$25,000 was awarded to EnergyOne (pictured), an AI-driven financial modeling platform dedicated to facilitating renewable energy investment in emerging markets and developing economies.

## SIPA Student Interns Meet World Bank President

SIPA students interning at the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation met with World Bank President Ajay Banga during the organization's 80th-anniversary celebration in July 2024.

*"A major highlight was meeting Ajay Banga, the World Bank president, in a one-on-one meeting! He was incredibly generous, and he shared his perspective on how IFC will be able to increase the portion of equity investments."*

**KENTO MORI MIA '25**



L-R: Kim Vidal MPA-DP '25, Ibrahim Alangari MIA '25, Ajay Banga, Kento Mori MIA '25, Nabila Levinsohn Mourad MIA '24, Cierra Wells MIA '25, Chen Sun MPA '25

## SIPA Student's Startup Helps Young Latinas Plan Their Financial Futures

*"I took a class taught by Sarah Holloway, Creating a Social Enterprise, which introduced me to the Columbia entrepreneurship ecosystem—including SIPA's Global Policy Challenge, which helped me get my startup off the ground. My project, Tesoro (formerly known as Tanda), won the Global Policy Challenge in 2024. Thanks to the challenge and all of the entrepreneurship resources available at SIPA and Columbia, Tesoro is now a wealth management platform focused on helping young Latinas from immigrant families plan for their financial futures."*

**SARA GOMEZ HORTA MPA '25**



Read an interview with Sara.



Photo by Brittney Couture Photography



Photo by Don Conahan / USUN

## International Fellows Meet with UN Officials at Annual UN Day Event

SIPA's International Fellows Program (IFP) hosted its annual UN Day on November 15, 2024, bringing together distinguished diplomats and UN officials with emerging leaders. The daylong program, held at various locations including the Foundation for the Global Compact, the US Mission to the UN, and the UN Secretariat, featured high-level discussions with key diplomatic figures.

## PROMOTIONS

In January 2025 New York City Mayor Eric Adams appointed **Michael Sedillo MPA '16** as Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Nonprofit Services.

**Piyush Singh MPA-GL '25** was appointed Ambassador of India to the Republic of Paraguay in February 2025.

**Pedro Francisco Vormittag MIA '22** became Chief of Staff to State Congressman Eduardo Cavaliere at Rio de Janeiro's State Legislature.

**Christopher Walker MIA '01** joined the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) as vice president.

*For more alumni news and achievements, check out Class Notes on page 32.*

## KUDOS

**Erica Berenstein MIA '08**, deputy editor in chief at *Business Insider*, took home two awards at the 46th Annual News & Documentary Emmy Awards in June 2025.

**Pieter Bosmans MPA '24** and adjunct professor **Frederic de Mariz MIA '05** were selected as the winners of the *Journal of Risk and Financial Management (JRFM)* Best Paper Award for “The Blue Bond Market: A Catalyst for Ocean and Water Financing.”

**Kelsey Chin MPA '23** was named among the 2025–26 Schwarzman Scholars to pursue a master’s program at Tsinghua University in Beijing designed to build a global community of future leaders who will serve to deepen understanding between China and the rest of the world.

**Mustapha Dukuly MPA '25** wrote the 1990 Institute Prize runner-up essay in the 2024 *China Focus* Essay Contest. He submitted the essay “The Future of the U.S.-China Educational Exchanges,” which was published in *China Focus*. Dukuly was also a winner of this year’s Raphael Smith Memorial Prize. (Read his essay on page 22.)

**Laura Gonzalez MPA-DP '16**, executive director of Marea Verde, was awarded the 2025 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Innovation for the organization’s groundbreaking approach to tackling plastic pollution.

**Benjamin Greenstein MPA '25** was named an Excelsior Service Fellow in the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s Office of Climate Change in September 2025.

**Sabrina Habib MPA-DP '16**, cofounder and chief exploration officer of Kidogo Early Years, was named a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader for 2025.

**Angela Jhanji EMPA '17**, managing director at EQT Group, was named among *Private Equity International’s* 2025 40 Under 40: Future Leaders in the Operators category.

**Joseph Nyangon MPA-ESP '12** and **Goksenin “Goksi” Ozturkeri MIA '16** received the 2024 William K. Bowes, Jr. Award for Leadership, which recognizes Climate Corps alumni who are leaders in their field and working to drive positive environmental change.

**Aghnia Rochmawati MPA '26** was named one of the 2024 Women of the Future 50 Rising Stars in ESG.

**Talia Rosenberg MIA '25** was named an Excelsior Fellow with the New York State Department of Public Service.

**Sumant Sinha MIA '92**, CEO of ReNew, was recognized as a TIME100 Climate 2024 leader in the Catalyst category.

For more alumni news and achievements, check out *Class Notes* on page 32.



Photo courtesy of Liam Lau MPA '26

## SIPA Students Engage in Summit of the Future Action Days at UN

In late September 2024, global leaders, policymakers, and experts from civil society gathered in New York City for the highly anticipated Summit of the Future at the United Nations. A group of SIPA students organized a new initiative to ensure their voices were part of this global conversation by participating in the summit’s conferences and actively engaging in discussions.

“As students, especially at an institution like SIPA,” said **Rustam Baratov MPA '26**, “we have the unique opportunity to not only learn about global governance but also to actively participate in shaping it.”

## SIPA Alumnae Win 2024 Elections

**Elissa Slotkin MIA '03** won a Michigan US Senate seat. Slotkin, who has worked at the CIA and the Defense Department, had previously represented Michigan’s Seventh Congressional District since 2019. In California, **Sara Jacobs MIA '12** won reelection to the US House in that state’s 51st Congressional District. She had previously represented the 53rd Congressional District from 2021 to 2023.



SIPA student participants at the 2025 GPPN Conference. Photo by Tsuya Yee

## SIPA Hosts 20th GPPN Conference

On March 5–7, 2025, Columbia SIPA welcomed students, faculty, and deans from around the world as host of the 2025 Global Public Policy Network (GPPN) Conference—organized by SIPA’s Office of Student Affairs in an effort led by **Tsuya Yee**, associate dean for student affairs, and **Haniya Rizwan**, assistant dean. The gathering marked the 20th anniversary of the international policy education consortium. The conference brings together the next generation of public leaders to present innovative policy proposals addressing today’s most pressing global challenges. Students have a unique opportunity to showcase their projects to the deans of eight leading public policy schools and connect with peers from around the world.

## SIPA Boot Camps Connect Students to Finance and Tech Careers

On October 24, 2025, SIPA held its 15th Annual Finance Careers Boot Camp, drawing 110 students to Scandinavia House in New York City. The event was sponsored by Peter Marber MIA '87, managing director at Global Evolution, a Danish investment bank. Three weeks later, on November 14, SIPA hosted a Careers in Tech event at Google’s New York City headquarters, attracting 80 students. Alumni panelists from across the tech sector discussed topics including “Digital Government/Public Sector Tech,” “Human Rights and Democracy,” and “AI Governance and Ethics”—underscoring SIPA’s commitment to preparing students for diverse career paths in both finance and technology.



Marina Piacente MPA '23 (center) of the Soros Economic Development Fund at the finance boot camp. Photo by April Renae

# InBrief

FACULTY &amp; STAFF



Top, L-R: Wally Adeyemo, Alice Albright MIA '85, Hon. Roy K. Altman, Derek Chollet, Salam Fayyad, Jon Finer, Avril D. Haines, Mary Kay Henry  
Bottom, L-R: Amos Hochstein, Karine Jean-Pierre MPA '03, Nikolay Mladenov, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Mike Pompeo, Ai-jen Poo, Juan Manuel Santos, Kadri Simson

## IGP Welcomes Third Cohort of Carnegie Distinguished Fellows

The Institute of Global Politics' Carnegie Distinguished Fellows for the 2025–26 academic year comprise a diverse mix of high-profile practitioners from around the globe, representing a range of sectors—former high-ranking policy officials, diplomats, groundbreaking activists, and more.

**Wally Adeyemo \***

Former US Deputy Treasury Secretary

**Alice Albright MIA '85**

Former CEO of the Millennium Challenge Corporation

**Hon. Roy K. Altman**

Judge, US District Court, Southern District of Florida

**Derek Chollet**

Former Chief of Staff to the Secretary of Defense and Counselor of the US Department of State

**Salam Fayyad**

Economist and Former Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority

**Jon Finer \***

Former Assistant to the President and Principal Deputy National Security Advisor

**Avril D. Haines**

Former US Director of National Intelligence

**Mary Kay Henry**

Former International President of the Service Employees International Union

**Amos Hochstein**

Former White House Senior Advisor to President Biden; Managing Partner, TWG

**Karine Jean-Pierre MPA '03**

Former White House Press Secretary and Senior Advisor to President Biden

**Nikolay Mladenov**

Former UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; Director General of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy

**Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**

Director-General of the World Trade Organization

**Mike Pompeo**

70th US Secretary of State

**Ai-jen Poo**

Executive Director of Caring Across Generations and President of the National Domestic Workers Alliance

**Juan Manuel Santos**

Former President of Colombia; Chair of The Elders

**Kadri Simson \***

Former European Commissioner for Energy

\* Denotes a Center on Global Energy Policy Fellow

## SIPA Celebrates Its 2025 Distinguished Teaching Award Winners: Stephen Biddle and Robert Walsh



The 2025 Distinguished Teaching Awards—presented on SIPA Class Day—were awarded to **Stephen Biddle**, professor of international and public affairs, for his lecture course Foundations of International Security Policy and **Robert Walsh**, adjunct professor of international and public affairs, for his seminar Transforming the Urban Economy. Both professors were selected by popular vote from SIPA's graduating class, underscoring their influence in and beyond the classroom.

## Julian Gewirtz and Zongyuan 'Zoe' Liu Join Columbia SIPA's Institute of Global Politics as Senior Research Scholars on China



**Julian Gewirtz**, an author, historian, and former diplomat who served in senior China policy positions in the White House and State Department, and **Zongyuan 'Zoe' Liu**, an author and leading expert on China's foreign monetary and financial policies, have joined SIPA as senior research scholars, with an Institute of Global Politics (IGP) affiliation. Both Gewirtz and Liu returned to Columbia as former postdoctoral China and the World Fellows who had worked closely with **Thomas J. Christensen**, the James T. Shotwell Professor of International Relations and director of the Columbia-Harvard China and the World program.

## IGP Launches American Democracy Initiative

Led by **Alexander Hertel-Fernandez**, the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government in the Faculty of International and Public Affairs, IGP's American Democracy Initiative convenes leading scholars and practitioners to collaborate with SIPA and Columbia faculty to produce original research, facilitate high-level dialogues, and translate their insights into actionable solutions for lawmakers, civil society groups, leaders, and the wider public.



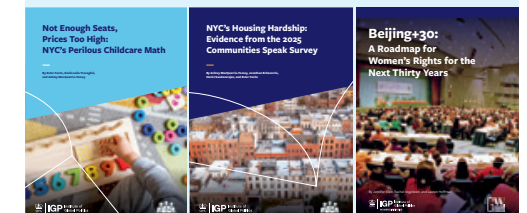
## Nicole Peisajovich Joins the SIPA Faculty to Lead New Ethics in Public Policy Requirement



Columbia SIPA welcomed **Nicole Peisajovich**, lecturer in the discipline of international and public affairs, to the School to lead its newly introduced Ethics in Public Policy core requirement. Beginning in the 2025–26 academic year, all MIA and MPA students are required to complete a 1.5-credit course in ethics, part of SIPA's recent curriculum revision to ensure graduates are prepared to confront the complex moral and political challenges inherent in public policy leadership. (See page 14 for more on SIPA's new curriculum.)

## IGP Publishes 3 Major Policy Reports on Global Challenges

The Institute of Global Politics (IGP) released three groundbreaking policy reports addressing critical issues. Drawing on Columbia University research and expert analysis, the reports provide evidence-based recommendations on affordable childcare access, housing hardship among vulnerable communities, and a comprehensive roadmap for advancing women's full and equal participation 30 years after the landmark Beijing Platform for Action.



## FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS

**Richard K. Betts** was honored with the 2025 Notre Dame International Security Center Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his “outstanding contributions to the theory and practice of international security affairs.”

President Joe Biden named **Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton** among 19 recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, at a January 4, 2025, White House ceremony. The Medal of Freedom is “presented to individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public, or private endeavors.”

**Glenn Denning** was named the 2024 Alumnus of the Year by the University of Queensland (UQ) for his outstanding leadership and impact in international agriculture, food security, and sustainable development.

**Jason Healey** received the 2025 Ecosystem Champion Award from the Cyber Threat Alliance for his “efforts in advancing the art of threat intelligence.”

**Dean Emerita Merit E. Janow** received the Foreign Policy Association Medal, the highest honor bestowed by the FPA, recognizing individuals who demonstrate responsible internationalism and work to expand public knowledge of international affairs.

**Erica Lonergan** was awarded the 2025 Amos Perlmutter Prize for her article in the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, “Minding the Gap? The Strategic Logic of Cyber Coercion in Theory and Practice.” Drawing on empirical case studies, Lonergan’s piece examines the disconnect between academic and practitioner perspectives on the feasibility and utility of coercion in the cyber domain.

**Marcelo Medeiros**’s book *Os ricos e os pobres* (The rich and the poor) (Companhia das Letras, 2023) received honorable mention for 2024 Best Scientific Work from the Brazilian Social Sciences Association.

**Tamar Mitts** and a team of researchers at Princeton University and Cardiff University in the UK were awarded a multiyear grant from the Defense Department’s Minerva Research Initiative in August 2024 for an Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) project to research the evolution of foreign state information operations and their impact on political decision-making.

**José Antonio Ocampo** was appointed by the Spanish government to chair a group of experts advising on the presentation of the fourth United Nations Conference on Financing for Development, which took place in Seville in mid-2025.

The Single Parent Resource Center (SPRC) recognized **Jeri Powell**, adjunct associate professor of international and public affairs and New York Junior League (NYJL) president, with its Volunteer Recognition Award in fall 2024. Powell was also named to *City & State*’s 2025 Above & Beyond: Women list.

**Elizabeth N. Saunders**, professor of political science at Columbia University, was named Director of the Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies effective July 1, 2025.

**Joseph E. Stiglitz** was awarded his 60th honorary doctorate by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, commonly referred to as the University of Athens. He also received the title of Doctor Honoris Causa from the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

**Harold Stolper MPA ’06** was named a Provost’s Senior Faculty Teaching Scholar for the 2024–25 academic year.

**Alan Taylor** was appointed an external member of the Bank of England’s Monetary Policy Committee effective September 2024.

**David Turk**, distinguished visiting fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy (CGEP), testified on April 9, 2025, before a full committee hearing of the US House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce.

### Secretary Jacob J. Lew Returns to SIPA and IGP

Following the conclusion of his term as US ambassador to Israel under President Joe Biden, **Secretary Jacob J. Lew** rejoined the Columbia SIPA faculty in January 2025 as a professor of international and public affairs. He serves as faculty policy director at SIPA’s Institute of Global Politics (IGP) and will teach graduate courses on diplomacy, geopolitical stability, international economics, fiscal and trade policy, and a range of other public policy issues. Lew initially joined the SIPA faculty in 2017, after serving as secretary of the treasury under President Barack Obama.



Photo by Shahar Azran

### Yumiko Shimabukuro MIA ’03 Wins Columbia’s Prestigious 2025 Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching

**Yumiko Shimabukuro MIA ’03**, founding director of the Urban and Social Policy concentration for the Executive MPA and core faculty of the Picker Center for Executive Education at Columbia SIPA, received Columbia University’s prestigious Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching during the University Commencement in May 2025. She is only the fourth SIPA professor ever to receive this University-wide honor.



Photo by Brian Miller

### SIPA and IGP Welcome Policy Experts Jennifer Klein and Rachel Vogelstein to the Faculty



Columbia SIPA and the Institute of Global Politics (IGP) announced that **Jennifer Klein** and **Rachel Vogelstein**, formerly of the White House Gender Policy Council, joined the faculty in spring 2025 and assumed leadership roles. Klein is professor of professional practice and together with Vogelstein is leading IGP’s Women’s Initiative, developing evidence-based strategies to advance equality in the United States and around the world. Vogelstein joins SIPA as associate professor of professional practice and is also leading SIPA’s Human Rights, Gender, and Equity concentration, along with **Yasmine Ergas**, senior lecturer in international and public affairs.

### SIPA Professor’s Research Shows Indoor Air Monitors Could Save the UK Billions



A groundbreaking study co-authored by SIPA’s **Robert Metcalfe**, professor of energy policy and international and public affairs, and Sefi Roth of the London School of Economics and Political Science reveals that tackling indoor air pollution through government-subsidized monitoring could save the UK economy up to £40 billion annually. This research represents one of the largest field experiments on indoor air pollution ever completed in the developed world. It has been published as a working paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research and is under review for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

### In Memory of SIPA Professor Takatoshi ‘Taka’ Ito



It was with profound sadness that Columbia SIPA announced in September 2025 the passing of our distinguished colleague **Professor Takatoshi “Taka” Ito**. A leading economist, devoted teacher, and generous mentor, Ito’s scholarship and character left an indelible mark on SIPA and the wider community at Columbia.

“Taka brought the world into our classrooms. He combined academic rigor with real-world insight, and he did so with warmth and humility,” said SIPA Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo. “We will all miss his keen mind, his deep commitment to public service, and his unwavering dedication to our students and to Columbia.”

ANNIE LIANG-ZHOU MPA '13

## Building Bridges Through Heritage

Annie Liang-Zhou MPA '13 shares how her work in entrepreneurship, clean energy, and cultural heritage led her to cofound the Junior Board of the World Monuments Fund and help launch its China office.

INTERVIEW BY CLARA CARLOTTA REINER MPA '25

Annie Liang-Zhou MPA '13 weaves together her experiences as a founder, investor, and global nonprofit leader to create a unique approach that blends diplomacy with sustainable development and cultural preservation. After helping to launch a cleantech private equity fund, she cofounded the Junior Board of the World Monuments Fund (WMF) in 2020, and in 2024, she led the launch of the organization's China office. Now pursuing her third master's degree, in historic preservation, at the University of Pennsylvania, Liang-Zhou reflects on her journey from impact investing to global cultural diplomacy.

*The following conversation with SIPA Magazine has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

**Let's talk about your time at SIPA.**

**What experiences had a lasting influence on your career direction?**

I loved my experience at SIPA—it was truly formative, both academically and personally. Some of the courses that had a lasting impact on me included my economic development course with Miguel Urquiola, which deepened my understanding of global growth dynamics, and a business leadership course with Bill Eimicke, which gave me valuable tools for cross-sector management. I also greatly enjoyed Dan Rosen's China

and the Global Economy course, a class that was especially meaningful, as I've stayed in touch with him over the years. Each of these classes helped shape my interdisciplinary approach to policy and leadership.

**What extracurriculars or internships were most meaningful to you during your time at SIPA?**

My Capstone workshop with the Brookings Institution helped me to understand how a major think tank approaches global issues, dialogue, and rigorous research. My participation as the MPA career and alumni affairs chair in SIPASA, which was deeply meaningful, and my research assistantship with Professor Elisabeth Lindenmayer were the most enriching parts of my extracurricular time at SIPA. I am still in touch with Professor Lindenmayer, and she has had a profound influence in my life and career with her strong moral character, her strength as a peacekeeper, and her endeavors to fight for peace in conflict zones around the world.

**You've founded businesses and helped launch a private equity fund. What were some of the biggest challenges and rewards in taking on such entrepreneurial roles?**

When I was invited to join a new private equity fund investing in sustainable technologies, I was very grateful

for the public policy and government relations skills I learned at SIPA, which helped me to grow the fund and navigate important policy and cross-border challenges and opportunities. SIPA also equipped me with the tools and courage to pursue my own company and helped me to build a network around the world.

**How did you transition from finance and tech into the field of cultural heritage preservation?**

I am still involved with impact investing but have transitioned much of my nonprofit and philanthropic commitments to cultural heritage preservation. I was serving on the board of three other nonprofits but decided to step down to focus on heritage because it is such a critical time to leverage the power of culture—especially through architecture, arts, monuments, and storytelling—to encourage understanding and collaboration. In a time of geopolitical uncertainty and risk, it is crucial to highlight the beauty of culture to allow people to develop empathy towards each other and to see past differences. I believe there is still a way for culture to play an important role in diplomacy.

**In 2024 the World Monuments Fund officially registered its China office. What motivated this expansion, and how did you lead the process?**



**“I always say that what you receive from the program in terms of friendships and knowledge and wisdom is a direct result of the time that you commit to enriching your career and life.”**

WMF has been working on projects in China since 1996 but never had an opportunity to formally register there as an international NGO. When one of the major sites in Beijing, the Central Axis, was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2024, WMF was invited to register formally and conduct more preservation projects in China. I was asked by the CEO of WMF to lead our efforts there and have now built a small network of people who are passionate about the arts and culture.

**How has your work with WMF deepened your understanding of international cooperation?**

Sometimes we are naive to think that the arts and culture should be natural ways for nations to cooperate, when often they can be used as tools to further nationalism or certain ideals. However, WMF's work spans across borders and now has more than 700 projects in 112

countries. I am grateful for the opportunity to help lead their efforts in China and hope that through our tangible work in heritage conservation, craftsmanship training, advocacy, and public education, we can be a beacon of light and hope for many to see the positive outcomes of our work: in providing preservation jobs, restoring cultural confidence, conserving important historical monuments, and promoting peace within and between nations.

**You're pursuing your third master's degree, in historic preservation. What motivated that decision?**

One of the most meaningful aspects of my work in preservation is being able to bridge history with contemporary relevance—restoring cultural heritage not just for its aesthetic value but as a way to foster cross-cultural understanding and community pride. Because of my deep passion for the work of WMF, I

thought that it would be immensely helpful for me to gain hands-on, academic, and practical knowledge about preservation, with a concentration in conservation science. Now when I speak about my work with WMF, I feel like I can have a targeted and informed dialogue around the subject.

**Looking back, what advice would you give to current SIPA students?**

Immerse yourself in the SIPA experience and try to get involved in as many projects and student organizations as you can. I always say that what you receive from the program in terms of friendships and knowledge and wisdom is a direct result of the time that you commit to enriching your career and life. Don't spend all of your time studying, but instead work to experience the program in its full capacity. ●

TAMAR MITTS

## How Extremist Groups Navigate the Online Ecosystem

In a groundbreaking book, SIPA professor Tamar Mitts reveals how extremist groups strategically navigate across different platforms to thrive despite content moderation efforts.

INTERVIEW BY MIRANDA WANG MPA '25

When extremist groups face restrictions on major social media platforms, what do they do? That question drove Tamar Mitts, associate professor of international and public affairs, to investigate how more than 100 extremist organizations navigate the digital landscape.

Her findings, published in her recent book *Safe Havens for Hate: The Challenge of Moderating Online Extremism* (Princeton University Press, 2025), challenge conventional wisdom. In this conversation, Mitts explains why platforms' fragmented moderation policies actually enable extremist resilience and what it would take to create more effective solutions.

*The following conversation with SIPA Magazine has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

### What inspired you to write *Safe Havens for Hate*?

When researching extremist movements on social media, I noticed a very consistent pattern in the way hate groups adapted to content moderation efforts. What I found was that adaptation strategies are closely tied to the structure of the online information ecosystem—an ecosystem shaped by strategic interactions between national governments and tech companies. The book tells how the competing incentives of these actors produce an information environment that actually makes it easier for harmful content producers to build resilience to content moderation.

### You define “online extremism” broadly, as ideas that “diverge from the views of the majority.” Couldn’t this lead to labeling minority viewpoints as extreme?

This is a great question. I offer three definitions to show different analytical approaches scholars have taken. The broad definition can seem problematic, but it’s important to understand that this is precisely how national governments and tech companies often treat extremism when making content moderation decisions.

I take this broad approach not because I endorse it but to study how those in power use it. That’s a central tension I explore. However, the most commonly invoked definition ties extremism to calls for physical harm against people or property—groups labeled “extremist” not only because their views differ from the majority but also because they promote real-world violence.

### How do extremist groups exploit gaps between different social media platforms?

A common assumption is that moderation just pushes extremists from one platform to another in a whack-a-mole dynamic. But their migration isn’t random; it’s highly strategic. Extremist groups use smaller, less moderated platforms for internal communication, mobilization, and organizing. But they don’t abandon big platforms. They continue using Facebook, X, or YouTube to circulate more innocuous content and reach broader audiences.

This reflects the structure of the online environment. Larger platforms face more

pressure to moderate harmful content, while smaller platforms often operate under different incentive structures and are more permissive. What emerges is a fragmented ecosystem where extremist groups strategically allocate different content types to different platforms. Rather than being pushed around by moderation, these groups actively navigate a tiered ecosystem to maintain both operational capacity and public visibility.

### What mechanisms could help platforms create more effective solutions?

Perfect convergence across platforms isn’t realistic, but greater coordination can help. This is partly what the Christchurch Call to Action tried to do. Third-party initiatives such as ROOST (Robust Open Online Safety Tools)—an initiative incubated at SIPA’s Institute of Global Politics (IGP)—aim to provide open-source software and shared databases to help platforms better identify and remove harmful content known to incite real-world harm.

### How does the global nature of the internet complicate anti-extremism efforts?

Different governments define harmful content in very different ways, making it difficult for tech companies to create unified policies. Platform policies are sometimes tailored to specific jurisdictions, while others apply globally. The downstream consequences of this variation in how harmful content is defined—and how moderation is implemented across regions—create the fragmented ecosystem that extremist groups exploit.

### Were there surprising patterns in how these groups stay active online?

The most interesting pattern was how similar extremist groups are to one another in adapting to content moderation—even across very different ideologies, cultures, and regions. When they face restrictions, their responses follow the same playbook. This consistency doesn’t stem from the groups themselves, but from the structure of the online environment. The way platforms are governed and the lack of coordination across them shape how extremist actors behave online.

### What do you hope readers will take away from your book?

I hope the book helps readers understand that online extremism isn’t just about bad actors posting harmful content; it’s about how the information ecosystem’s structure enables those actors to persist, adapt, and thrive. For policymakers, that means moving away from reactive, platform-by-platform approaches and treating this as a systemic problem. We need more coordination: shared standards, transparency, and support for smaller platforms that lack resources to enforce rules. The focus should be on closing enforcement gaps—investing in better tools, ensuring platforms use them, and helping users understand the problem.

### What’s your next research project?

I’m researching the strategic use of information in conflict zones. I’m especially interested in how armed actors use social media and digital tools to shape beliefs and behavior during wartime, whether to signal strength, suppress resistance, or influence international opinion. This builds on core themes from the book but shifts focus to conflict settings, where information stakes are even higher. ●



Read the full interview.



Photo by Shaked Doron

# School News



Photo by Ian DiSalvo

## SIPA Unveils Major Curriculum Redesign to Meet Global Challenges

New STEM-designated MPA and globally immersive MIA programs reflect the School's commitment to preparing leaders for an evolving world.

SIPA launched its most comprehensive curriculum overhaul in decades, introducing a new STEM-designated master of public administration (MPA) degree and a more globally immersive master of international affairs (MIA) program starting with the fall 2025 incoming class.

This ambitious restructuring, led by Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo and Dean Emerita Lisa Anderson, represents an evolution of SIPA's academic offerings designed to address today's complex global challenges.

### A More Analytical MPA

In recognition of the revised MPA's enhanced focus on leadership, management, and quantitative analysis, the program has now been assigned a STEM designation. The redesigned curriculum features intensive coursework in economics, data analytics, budgeting and financial management, and business management.

"Today's global challenges are characterized by unprecedented scale, complexity, and urgency that demand analytical, interdisciplinary approaches," says Sarah Holloway EMPA '03, the newly appointed MPA director. The STEM designation also provides practical benefits for international students, extending their Optional Practical Training eligibility to work in the United States to three years total after graduation.

### An Enhanced Global Focus for the MIA

The revamped MIA builds on SIPA's reputation for excellence in global affairs while providing integrated coursework across politics, policy, international law, and leadership. Students choose between two core tracks broadly differentiated by their degree of emphasis on economics and data analytics.

"This restructured degree offering will uniquely prepare graduates to engage in diplomacy, humanitarian action, business management, and other foreign policymaking pursuits at the very highest levels," says Rumela Sen, the newly appointed MIA director. The global immersion component includes advanced language studies, regional studies, and internships.

*"Both programs feature a more flexible core curriculum delivered in a new six-week modular format, allowing students to tailor pathways based on their academic preparation and professional goals."*

### A More Flexible Core and New Concentrations

Both programs feature a more flexible core curriculum delivered in a new six-week modular format, allowing students to tailor pathways based on their academic preparation and professional goals. The concentration system has been reorganized around eight contemporary policy domains: Climate, Energy, and Environment; Data Science for Policy; Development and Governance; Human Rights, Gender, and Equity; International Finance and International Economic Policy; International Security and Diplomacy; Technology Policy and Innovation; and Urban and Social Policy.

The revised curriculum removes the previous specialization requirement, giving students more freedom with electives and the ability to pursue a richer combination of subjects with the selection of new, optional minors. The changes reflect SIPA's commitment to equipping graduates with both timeless policy skills and cutting-edge analytical capabilities to address 21st-century challenges. ●

## IAB Elevators Complete Long-Awaited Overhaul

After years of patient waiting (and occasional complaints), the International Affairs Building's notoriously sluggish elevators have finally received the comprehensive upgrade they desperately needed.

Facilities and Operations completed the replacement project in September 2025, having taken the building's four elevators out of service two at a time throughout the summer. The project included complete mechanical system rebuilds, aesthetic improvements to the elevator cabs, and—perhaps most exciting for daily commuters—new "destination dispatch" technology that uses algorithms to group passengers by floor, reducing wait times.

While the 24/7 construction schedule brought increased noise and disruption over the summer months, the completed improvements have transformed the IAB experience. For alumni who remember the old elevators' quirks and delays, this upgrade represents a long-overdue investment in daily quality of life at 420 West 118th Street.



Photos by Eileen Barroso

# Calculating the Social Math of Climate Survival

Scholars from SIPA's PhD in Sustainable Development program are showing how the burdens of a hotter planet fall unequally across societies.

BY KATHERINE NOEL

**W**hat are the social costs of climate change? Solomon Hsiang PhD '11 should know. From 2023 to 2024, he served as the first chief environmental economist at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. He has also published widely on the human toll of a warming planet and is internationally recognized for his pioneering work quantifying the social costs of a warming planet, especially in relation to mortality and worsening inequalities.

The urgency for this kind of expertise cannot be overstated. As climate change intensifies, its effects reveal not just environmental vulnerabilities but profound inequities in how societies respond and adapt.

Now at Stanford, Hsiang is just one of the leading voices revolutionizing our understanding of climate science to hold a PhD from Columbia SIPA's Sustainable Development program.

Established in 2004, the program became the first in the country to bridge the natural and social sciences. SIPA's program is truly interdisciplinary, combining rigorous economics

training with deep expertise in engineering and environmental sciences. And its small cohort size—generally four to six per class year—allows doctoral candidates to partner closely with faculty and focus on understanding how natural and social systems interact. Students are taught to approach pressing sustainability challenges like climate change, public health, and resource scarcity as both scientific and societal issues.

"The biggest global problems [in sustainable development] are not just science problems or social problems," says John Mutter, the program's director of graduate studies and professor of earth and environmental sciences and of international and public affairs. "These issues exist at the critical nexus of multiple disciplines—physics, politics, policy—and to truly tackle them, researchers really need to be fluent in both natural and social sciences."

Students take PhD-level courses in both economics and a natural science field, such as ecology or atmospheric chemistry, along with integrative seminars in sustainable development.

The program emphasizes not just technical and academic rigor but also research with real-world policy impact. Take the research of Anna Papp PhD '25, another graduate of the program whose recent paper on the gig labor economy has drawn lots of attention. Her paper provided a striking case study of what happens when climate adaptation strategies—those meant to shield people from environmental harm—end up transferring that harm to vulnerable populations instead.

She examined transaction and labor data from food delivery services in Mexico, Germany, France, and the UK to analyze how the health burdens of extreme heat shift from richer consumers to poorer gig workers when temperatures soar. Like much of Hsiang's research, Papp's work highlights a stark reality facing policymakers: the ability of states and societies to adapt to climate change is highly unequal.

Students in the program often take classes in the University's medical and public health schools. The goal is to educate researchers who do not just understand complex global systems but effectively communicate and develop solutions across disciplinary boundaries. Tomara Aldrich, the program's coordinator, notes that one of its core strengths is preparing students to bridge disciplines, explaining that natural scientists and economists often overlap in the subjects they study but do not attend the same

conferences or use the same methods. "There's just not a lot of cross-pollination between those two disciplines," Aldrich says. "They're not talking to each other; they have different languages."

That was partly the motivation behind a recent study led by R. Daniel "Danny" Bressler PhD '25, Andrew Wilson PhD '24, and SIPA associate professor Jeffrey Shrader. They analyzed mortality data from Mexico and wet-bulb temperature measurements, revealing that extreme heat disproportionately increases mortality among young people. Their findings, which showed that people under the age of 35 accounted for 75 percent of heat-related deaths, challenge traditional protective policies, which typically focus on safeguarding the elderly.

"One of the biggest challenges to understanding this issue is that relevant health and mortality data simply don't exist in many places where we most want to study this question," Shrader says. "This is a major public health tragedy. In places across sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia that are very hot, humid, and have many people exposed through their occupation or otherwise, we just don't have complete vital records to understand this issue."

Graduates of the PhD in Sustainable Development program go on to secure high-level placements across academia, nonprofits, and international organizations. Others, like Kyle Meng PhD '13,

have also brought their expertise into the upper echelons of government. Meng, now an assistant professor at UC Santa Barbara, served as senior economist for climate, energy, and environment at the White House Council of Economic Advisers during the Biden administration.

**"The way that this program amplifies and has an impact globally on how we think about the relationships between humans and development and the environment is pretty astonishing."**

Scott Barrett, Lenfest-Earth Institute Professor of Natural Resource Economics at SIPA, describes the program's students as "innovators" at the frontier of research. "Our graduates are changing how other people are thinking about this kind of work, so it's not just the work our people are doing, but the work the graduates are inspiring in the profession at large," he says. "The way that this program amplifies and has an impact globally on how we think about the relationships between humans and development and the environment is pretty astonishing." ●

## SIPA's PhD in Sustainable Development Program Announces 2025 Placements

SIPA's PhD in Sustainable Development program announced eight recent graduate placements: **R. Daniel "Danny" Bressler** (Bentley University), **Tristan Du Puy** (Columbia/Sciences Po), **Tarikua Erda** (NYU Stern/NYU Abu Dhabi), **Gabriel Gonzalez Sutil** (Amazon), **Nicolas Longuet Marx** (Stanford/UC Berkeley), **Marguerite Obolensky** (Northwestern/University College London), **Anna Papp** (MIT/UC Santa Barbara), and **Isabella Smythe** (Rhizome).



2025 PhD graduates with their faculty advisers. Photo by Fanyu Wang



# Teaching Civil Discourse in Polarized Times

BY JANE GREENWAY CARR

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNELISE CAPOSSELA

SIPA teaches students and faculty the art of holding frank and honest discussions about some of the most charged issues of our time.

Following the Hamas attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, two SIPA students from vastly different backgrounds found themselves in the same course. After grappling with some sensitive course material, one invited the other to meet up outside class, and during their conversation, they started sharing their own experiences from the parts of the world they call home. They came to recognize that despite their disparate perspectives, their aspirations for a better future had much in common. For both of them, those goals were what had brought them to SIPA in the first place.

In 2017, *The New York Times* hired conservative columnist Bret Stephens, whose first column about global warming drew criticism as “classic climate change denialism.” Rather than joining growing calls for Stephens to be fired, Jason Bordoff—founding director of the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs—took a different tack, inviting Stephens to Columbia for a substantive conversation with climate experts.

In summer 2025, a group of more than two dozen SIPA students visited Israel on a trek—a student-organized trip that combines sightseeing with meetings with policymakers and business leaders—planned by the SIPA Israel Club. According to Benjamin Kava MIA ’25, an American who was one of the trek’s organizers, “We knew there were going to be differing opinions.” So Kava and the other organizers incorporated “purposeful breaks in the itinerary,” he says, “... so that we could sit and reflect and just talk.”

None of these experiences took place in a SIPA classroom or occurred as part of the School’s public events. And yet, they illustrate how SIPA seeks to foster dialogue and create an environment that values exchange across cultural differences, pedagogies grounded in the academic inquiry and rigorous scholarship that define the School’s classrooms and convening spaces. This approach is also reinforced by students and faculty in everyday interactions and choices: the decision to engage a classmate for a one-on-one conversation, to reach out instead of jumping on a social media bandwagon, to sit and speak with intention among travel mates who may or may not share one’s own views.

## Holding Difficult Conversations

These anecdotes—and SIPA’s commitment to civil discourse in the classroom and beyond—stand out all the more during our current political moment, a time of intensifying polarization and partisan discord in the United States, rising tensions between the United States and Global South nations, and protracted conflicts worldwide. Even when such work is difficult, many SIPA students and faculty alike are committed to the principles of constructive engagement and recognize that those principles apply to both cross-cultural dialogue and a robust approach

to international relations. As SIPA Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo has put it, “Reaching a political solution requires that we ... have difficult conversations, allow ourselves to be a little bit uncomfortable, question our assumptions, and be in a dialogue with people we disagree with.”

For those who study conflict itself, the stakes of these principles are always high. “We study war and peace, and violence, and terrorism, and human rights abuses, and genocide, and with all of these things, we’re always dealing with difficult issues,” says V. Page Fortna, the Harold Brown Professor of US Foreign and Security Policy, who concluded her term as director of SIPA’s Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies in June 2025. “And part of dealing with difficult ideas is making mistakes, saying things that then somebody pushes back on, and then you think, ‘Okay, I see your point. That’s not what I meant to say,’ or ‘I see why I should change my mind.’”

Anyone who researches conflict has to “listen to different sides of the story,” Fortna says, citing her fieldwork in Sri Lanka, where she interviewed both Tamil civilians who had been bombed by the government during the country’s civil war, as well as government ministers who had ordered the bombing.

Fortna, in partnership with Alexander Cooley, a Saltzman Institute executive committee member and the Claire Tow Professor of Political Science at Barnard College, curated a series of discussions about the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine with support from the Columbia provost. In organizing the series, one major concern was, in Fortna’s words, “how we continue to be empathetic members of a community that has diverse and opposing views but not succumb to fear.” Even when it’s hard, engaging across differences, Fortna says, is “what happens in our classrooms. That’s what happens in our seminars. That’s the whole academic endeavor.”

That endeavor isn’t accomplished simply or easily, but according to Jean-Marie Guéhenno, director of SIPA’s Kent Global Leadership Program on Conflict Resolution, “One important role of a university is to take students out of their comfort zone. I believe that in difficult times, we should nurture a sense of ethics so that the students have a good compass as they navigate situations which may confront them—and all of us—with moral dilemmas.” Part of the Kent Program’s process, he says, is to “bring together diplomats with radically different backgrounds, take them out of their professional experience, and confront them with issues that are new to them.” When it comes to teaching conflict resolution, Guéhenno notes, “there is a real risk that the fear of offending could lead to self-censorship. We must not shy away from difficult and controversial issues, and there is nothing wrong with being passionate about them.”

## Bridging the Partisan Gap

For the Institute of Global Politics (IGP), which was launched only days before the attacks of October 7, a commitment to cross-viewpoint dialogue and mutually respectful engagement across the political divide was built into its core mission from the very beginning. Former Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew, IGP’s faculty policy director, describes IGP’s

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founding principles as “bridging the academic world and the world of policymakers so that knowledge and perspective can be shared freely between the two, and promoting civil discourse across a broad range of ideological and political views.”

Lew commends IGP for working since its inception to counter the “many attempts to silo political and ideological views” by annually convening a new cohort of Carnegie Distinguished Fellows whose backgrounds span the political spectrum and who engage meaningfully with students and faculty alike, and by planning programming like its Across the Aisle series, which has featured high-profile conversations between figures such as Democratic New York Governor Kathy Hochul and Republican former Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, and former White House Chiefs of Staff Ron Klain, who worked for Joe Biden, and Mick Mulvaney, who served during Donald Trump’s first term. Additional Across the Aisle conversations have included US Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA), speaking about their work as cochairs of the Senate Bipartisan Paid Family Leave Working Group, and Hon. Roy K. Altman, US district judge for the Southern District of Florida and IGP Carnegie Distinguished Fellow, alongside Hon. Steve Higginson, circuit judge for the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, talking about the purpose and function of the judiciary in American democracy.

“Too many people fall into echo chambers, and they do their work with people who are like-minded,” says Lew, who also served as US ambassador to Israel, among other senior government positions, “so we’re working very hard to bring in voices of the right and the left on controversial issues, people who have very different policy views.”

Even if people come out still in disagreement, he says, events like Across the Aisle model a “civil environment where it doesn’t become destructive of basic social norms. ... There’s almost a hunger for doing more of this to start repairing the damage in the fabric of our democratic institutions.”

Lew adds that he doesn’t think the academic world is different from society at large in having to battle siloed thinking to get people who disagree to engage in conversation. But, he says, “I think we have a space where we have the ability to address it.”

Historical examples and personal testimony have a role to play as well, as shown in a for-credit IGP workshop conducted by Ghaith al-Omari

and Gideon “Gidi” Grinstein in December 2024. They served as the secretaries of the Palestinian and Israeli delegations, respectively, to the Camp David Summit in 2000. The workshop used the permanent-status negotiations for Palestinian statehood as a case study to understand conflict resolution and engage in meaningful dialogue.

The workshop, which was offered again in fall 2025, covered the history of the two-state solution, providing an insider’s perspective on the Camp David Summit. The conveners imparted principles of successful diplomatic negotiations and asked attendees to work in small groups to analyze the implications of contemporary events for the prospect of creating a pathway to a Palestinian state. Looking back on the workshop, one student attendee says, “The way the two facilitators shared respectful disagreement publicly was really admirable and very much needed in today’s world. Doing this workshop opened my mind to the fact that there are just so many more ways to see things than I could ever imagine, that it’s not worth labeling my fellow students as anything but my fellow students, even if I disagree with them deeply, and that through constructive dialogue, we can get to a different place.”

In fall 2025, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, an IGP Carnegie Distinguished Fellow, taught the minicourse Indo-Pacific Security Dynamics: North Korea in Strategic Context. Students examined the North Korean nuclear program within the broader landscape of the Indo-Pacific region and participated in a National Security Council crisis simulation.

S. Khalilullah Anwari MIA ’27 found the experience valuable preparation for understanding how different political perspectives can coexist in public service. “You can never really grasp the complexities of decision-making at that level with such high stakes unless you have actually stepped into it,” he says. “I think the human element behind the strategy was very evident, based on the examples and the anecdotes that Secretary Pompeo was sharing.”

On November 12, 2025, Pompeo and former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, chair of IGP’s Faculty Advisory Board, participated in an Across the Aisle conversation, moderated by Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo, as part of the IGP event “The Geopolitical Chessboard: Implications of the Current Global Ferment.” Both secretaries shared insights for

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students entering careers in public service. Pompeo encouraged them to return to foundational principles and maintain clarity about their mission. Clinton urged students to define their values, resist the narrowing effects of social media, and “overcome the idea that there’s ‘us versus them.’”

## Learning to Listen Actively

Transforming disagreement into meaningful dialogue takes philosophical commitment aided by historical examples and personal experience, but it also requires practical skills. Seth Freeman, an adjunct associate professor at SIPA whose teaching on negotiation and conflict management has garnered awards from students, says he trains his students to use a simple method—*paraphrase, praise, probe*—to “bring courage and curiosity to bear, but to do it in a gentle and loving way.”

First, he explains, “you listen actively—which, by the way, is how hostage negotiators do what they do. ... Then you praise; you intentionally flag and share with them something you heard that you can really affirm, that you can truthfully affirm, that’s not trivial. And the third thing you do is you probe, meaning you ask a question to better understand and maybe gently challenge. And then you just do this two or three or four times, and by this time you’ve built such goodwill and you understand the other person well, and you haven’t wandered into some minefield.”

Freeman brought these practical skills to students in October and November 2024 as part of the Leading and Learning Lunch Series, the second iteration of workshops hosted by Jilliene Rodriguez, associate dean for student life and community engagement. His late-October sessions—“How to Talk About Hot Topics with a Classmate, Colleague, Friend, Roommate, Family Member, Adversary” and “How to Talk Politics More Persuasively with Someone You Disagree With”—proved especially timely heading into the 2024 US election season. Professor Yumi Shimabukuro, lecturer in the discipline of international and public affairs, continued the series with “Facilitative Leadership: Guiding Dialogue, Learning, and Collective Action” shortly thereafter.

For Rodriguez, these workshops and symposia throughout the year provide crucial opportunities to facilitate listening. “We’re in here to hear each other,” she says, “and everybody in the room is really here because they care.”

Another important example of this commitment to community dialogue is the SIPA Listening Tables initiative, cosponsored by the SIPA Student Association (SIPASA) and the Community Engagement Leadership (CEL) Cabinet. These gatherings provide a supportive opportunity to hear directly from students and strengthen the shared community at SIPA.

Reflecting on the workshops he led, Freeman echoed the metaphor of hunger offered by Lew: “I think there is a deep hunger for real engagement, a real hunger for going beyond one’s own bubble and for critically thinking and connecting with people.” In a public policy school, Freeman says, “the ability to talk with someone you disagree with about something of importance is not optional. It’s essential.” ●



Photo by Barbara Alper

THE RAPHAEL SMITH MEMORIAL PRIZE 2025

# From Tarmac to Hospital Room: An Unforeseen Journey of Cultural Exchange

BY MUSTAPHA DUKULY MPA '25

The air at Roberts International Airport was thick with salt and farewell. On July 30, 2017, as I stood on the tarmac, the Atlantic breeze carried not just heat but the weight of departure—one that families across the Global South know intimately. My siblings clung to me, their small hands wrapped tightly around mine as if their grip could stall time. My father, usually stoic, stood still, the slight tremor in his right hand undoing the calm he tried to project. My mother pressed her weathered hands into mine and whispered, “Take care of yourself.” No grand speeches. Just the dignified choreography of sacrifice: fear beneath pride, prayers beneath breath.

I was leaving to wave the flag for Liberia at the 20th Session of the UN Youth Assembly, held at UN headquarters in New York City from August 9 to 12, 2017. For me, this trip represented a leap into greater purpose—carrying my family’s dreams and my nation’s heartbeat across borders.

On the plane, I sat beside Kwame, a Ghanaian businessman, who shared how, during his first visit to the US, he tried tipping a Manhattan police officer. “The officer stepped back like I’d offered him something illegal,” he said with a laugh. “Nearly arrested me!” His tale eased my anxiety, but it also made me reflect: What bridges do our shared stories and laughter truly build in these fleeting encounters? We went on to swap memories of beloved Ghanaian and Liberian traditions—our debates over whose country made the best jollof rice, our mutual obsession with football, and the similarities in our family structures. At 30,000 feet, our commonalities outshone our differences with little effort. But would these threads of connection be enough to anchor me in the unfamiliar world that awaited below?

Landing at JFK Airport on July 31 felt like immersion into a new syntax. From August 1 to 5, I explored Manhattan methodically. Yellow taxis weaved between pedestrians; vendors shouted prices in Spanish, Bengali, and Arabic; and the scent of diesel and roasted peanuts filled the air. New Yorkers moved in tacit coordination, performing rituals of speed and solitude. I observed the city as an ethnographer might, decoding its tempo.

Monrovia, by contrast, pulsed with relational rhythms—market women calling out greetings, the sizzle of plantains, the music of bargaining. Both cities stretched to accommodate their people, but their codes of engagement were incompatible. Was I adapting to New York or translating myself into its idiom? In these moments, I learned that identity is not fixed but negotiated.

The subway was my crucible of cultural adjustment. “Stand clear of the closing doors, please,” echoed daily. No one acknowledged anyone else. Yet everyone made space. It was orderly, silent, and disorienting. In Monrovia, proximity meant intimacy; here, it meant anonymity. But in that anonymity, I discovered a paradoxical freedom. In Liberia, I was the son of a third-grade dropout, burdened by inherited limits. In New York, I was a delegate, my name badge a passport into dialogue. Identity, I realized, is not inherited but performed, reshaped by context.

At the Assembly, I encountered a different kind of diplomacy. Between sessions on youth leadership and climate resilience, I met Aissatou from Senegal. She sketched water conservation trenches on a napkin, explaining how her village reduced erosion by 40 percent through community innovation. “You could adapt this for coastal Liberia,” she said, drawing concentric circles. Her knowledge was not academic; it was ancestral. Her presence challenged the vertical flow of development knowledge and embodied what

scholars term “horizontal knowledge exchange.”

The Assembly ended on a triumphant note, but on August 13, the narrative ruptured. A cough, once trivial, turned severe. My host, Mr. Kenneh, rushed me to the emergency room at Bronx-Lebanon Hospital. The diagnosis landed like a verdict: mycobacterium tuberculosis. My flight home, my plans, and the policy ideas I had hoped to implement all dissolved into the sterile stillness of a hospital room.

There, illness became a portal. The hospital was no longer a site of retreat but of immersion. Nurse Gloria from the Philippines became my anchor. As she changed my IV, she taught me Tagalog for “Thank you”: *Salamat po*. I taught her how to say my name, Mustapha, in Liberian cadence. One night, she admitted, “Sometimes I feel split between two worlds.” Her words resonated. Migration, I realized, is not always movement; sometimes it’s the stillness of suspended belonging.

Carlos, a respiratory therapist from Ecuador, asked about Liberian cuisine. I described cassava leaf stew, rich with palm oil and hot peppers. The next day, he brought a warm empanada. “Different ingredients, same comfort,” he said. These

were not just gestures of kindness—they were acts of cultural diplomacy. The hospital became a third place—what sociologist Ray Oldenburg calls a place of informal public life. Here, care was reciprocal, not hierarchical.

These encounters dismantled the hierarchy of observer and observed. In the Assembly, I was the voice. In the hospital, I was the body. My vulnerability created space for authenticity. In Gloria and Carlos, I saw not just caretakers but cultural interlocutors. We were no longer navigating differences; we were building intimacy across them.

When I was discharged, 50 pounds lighter but metabolizing meaning, I stood at the hospital entrance. A taxi driver called, “Where to, my friend?” His Bengali accent—once undifferentiated to my ears—now rang clear. As we drove through the Bronx, I realized I had become what cultural theorist Homi Bhabha calls a “translated being”—not just adapting, but transformed.

My journey from Monrovia’s tarmac to a Bronx hospital bed was not simply a trip; it was a reconstitution of self. Kwame’s cautionary tale, Aissatou’s concentric wisdom, Gloria’s *Salamat po*, Carlos’s empanada—each moment translated me further. This odyssey taught me that the borders we navigate go beyond physical boundaries; they are invitations to embrace change and discover our commonalities. I left Liberia as a delegate. I became a carrier of worlds. Liberia lives in my blood, America in my breath, and between them, the language. ●

“The diagnosis landed like a verdict: mycobacterium tuberculosis. My flight home, my plans, and the policy ideas I had hoped to implement all dissolved into the sterile stillness of a hospital room.”



Photos courtesy of Mustapha Dukuly MPA '25



THE RAPHAEL SMITH MEMORIAL PRIZE 2025

# It's Still 2:46 in Fukushima

BY ADALÍ FRIAS DENIZ MIA '25

Humans grasp the concept of time as the progression of existence, a measure that doesn't discriminate against age, gender, or nationality. But in the Japanese prefecture of Fukushima, the divide between past, present, and future blurred out after 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011. A trifecta of disasters—an earthquake, a tsunami, and a nuclear meltdown—scarred Japan, though for those who call Fukushima home, an open wound remains.

I arrived in Okuma, Fukushima, a few days before the 13th anniversary of those disasters. A Japanese friend, who had organized an educational trek for several Columbia students, had arranged for us to enter one exclusion zone—an area where accumulated yearly radiation remains too high for humans to live permanently. Ironically, I was one of the first to express interest in visiting Fukushima, despite being terribly afraid of radiation.

Having grown up in Mexico—a country with ample tectonic activity—I empathized with Japan's complicated relationship with earthquakes, though I couldn't say the same about nuclear-related disasters. I equated radiation with danger. However, in science, it's all about perspective. For radiation to be deadly, one would need to absorb at least four sieverts—units for absorbed doses of radiation. Again, scientific perspective comes in: Our group would've needed to stay two weeks in Fukushima's exclusion zone to absorb

one millisievert, which is one-thousandth of a sievert. Simply put, it would take several years of remaining within the exclusion zone for any radiation poisoning symptoms to appear. Despite being aware of these facts, fear nonetheless kept me in a chokehold.

To make matters worse, a conversation with my parents heightened my anxiety. "Are you sure? Won't it be dangerous? Can you back out?" Their valid questions, which came from a place of loving concern, managed to persuade me. Days before the trip, I told my friend that I would not visit the exclusion zone, which was scheduled for our last morning in Fukushima; instead, I and those who had decided not to enter would stay at a nearby location. That day, as we drove toward a meeting point where we would split into groups, my family's questions reverberated in my head, intrusively trying to keep me from changing my mind again.

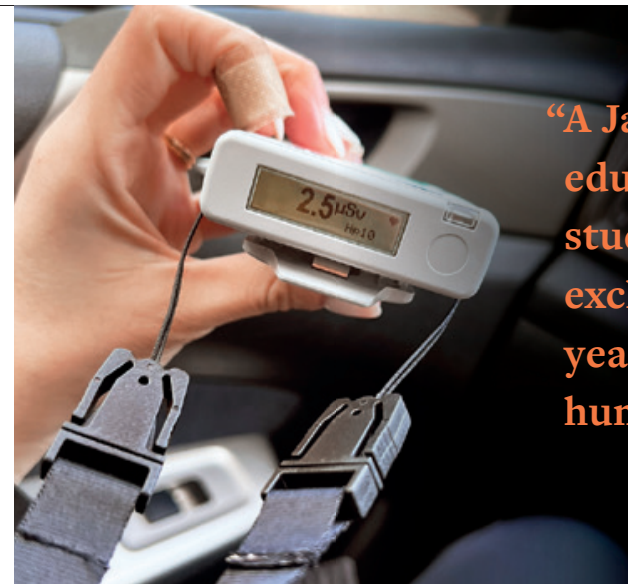
Yet somehow, in the blink of an eye, I verbalized: "I'm sorry. Can I still join you?"

My friend laughed. "Are you serious?"

"*Sumimasen onegaishimasu* (Excuse me, please)," I said. I found myself saying "sorry" and "please" in Japanese while expecting a flat no for an answer.

I was wrong, though. "*Hai, daijoubu* (Yes, no worries)," a man, who turned out to be our excursion guide, answered politely in agreement to my request. He introduced himself as Kimura-san.

With permission obtained, my group was given individual radiation dosimeters to track millirems—units of radiation exposure—as well as hazmat suits. While dressing up, my adrenaline



**"A Japanese friend, who had organized an educational trek for several Columbia students, had arranged for us to enter one exclusion zone—an area where accumulated yearly radiation remains too high for humans to live permanently."**

Kimura-san pointed to Yuna's desk, her belongings left untouched since that day. Authorities had prohibited any entrances to the building, leaving Kimura-san to grieve his daughter through her belongings from a painful distance. Standing by the classroom's window, I pictured the glass acting as a time portal, partitioning yet connecting the present and the past. At that moment, all my anxiety toward radiation units felt foolish and selfish. I realized that these doses meant nothing in a place where time was basically frozen. Kimura-san didn't care for hazmat suits or radiation. The only thing he wanted was to feel close to his daughter, even if it meant just looking at what she left behind.

As we left, I noticed the turret clock from the school's main building, its hands displaying the time: 2:46 p.m. I comprehended then that in Fukushima, radiation is not what people like Kimura-san are afraid of. What they fear is the passage of time turning into amnesia—victims left forgotten. Today, 14 years after that fateful earthquake, those who remain in Fukushima continue advocating for the world to see them as a cautionary tale. I no longer associate Fukushima with units of radiation, but with a powerfully resilient community instead, one that strives to be defined, not by tragedy, but by the desire to heal its wounds.

On the train to Tokyo, I texted my mom to share about my change of heart. "I kind of figured you would do it anyway," she confessed with a smile emoji. I was smiling too. ●

spiked as my mind quietly calculated how many millirems our bodies would receive in the next hour. Meanwhile, Kimura-san hadn't put on a suit himself; it turned out that he had been inside the zone so many times without falling ill that he found it pointless to wear protection. His decision left me somewhat relieved.

With our individual dosimeters hanging from our necks like necklaces, we ventured into the grounds of an abandoned elementary school. "*Mite kudasai* (Please look)," Kimura-san signaled and asked us to look at his dosimeter, which he placed near the ground. The screen showed 24 microdose rates per hour. I mentally calculated again: *One thousand microsieveverts equals one millisievert per hour...*

Our attention switched to a nearby classroom, a window separating us from the contents within—wooden school desks with books on top, notebooks scattered across the floor, and a blackboard with the date written in kanji: March 11. This wasn't just any classroom—this was the place where Kimura-san's daughter Yuna had once studied. After the earthquake, Yuna's class evacuated the school grounds to safety. She was later picked up by her grandfather, who was unaware of the incoming tsunami. They both returned to Kimura-san's home by the sea where they lived and were never seen alive again. Yuna's remains were found five years later, thanks to the persistence of Kimura-san, who to this day refuses to sell what's left of his property to the Japanese government as a form of protesting and demanding that Fukushima not be forgotten.

Photos courtesy of Adalí Frias Deniz MIA '25



# Notable Events

SEPTEMBER 2024–NOVEMBER 2025



Whether in our recently renovated event space on campus or live streamed around the world, SIPA's events bring our community face-to-face with some of the world's most influential leaders.

**01** The focus of the September 21, 2024, Bollinger Convening was to discuss how universities can translate their scholarship into societal impact to end global hunger. **Professor Glenn Denning** (left) led a panel discussion with **Lazarus Chakwera**, president of Malawi; **Garry Conille**, then-acting prime minister of Haiti; and **Ambassador Ertharin Cousin**, founder and CEO of the nonprofit Food Systems for the Future.

**02** SIPA and the Institute of Global Politics (IGP) welcomed **Abdallah Bou Habib** (right), Lebanon's then-minister of foreign affairs, to campus on September 23, 2024, for a discussion with Columbia **Professor V. Page Fortna**, then-director of the Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, about Lebanon, Israel, and what it will take to achieve peace in the region.

**03** SIPA's Sustainable Investing Research Initiative (SIRI) convened global leaders and scholars at Columbia University on September 24–25, 2024, during the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and Climate Week NYC. Keynote speaker **Anjali Bansal MIA '97** (pictured), founding partner of the Avaana Climate and Sustainability Fund, discussed how blended finance can help foster sustainable economic, environmental, and social development in India.

**04** On November 1–2, 2024, SIPA and IGP hosted a two-day academic conference, "New Thinking in Industrial Policy: Perspectives from Developed and Developing Countries," convened by **Joseph E. Stiglitz** (pictured), IGP Faculty Advisory Board member, Nobel laureate, and University Professor, and **Professor Eric Verhoogen**, IGP Affiliated Faculty member and codirector of the Center for Development Economics and Policy.

**05** Columbia SIPA and the State of New York cohosted the inaugural Conference on Cyber Regulation and Harmonization on November 13–14, 2024, gathering experts and leaders for two days of in-depth discussions, including an IGP-sponsored Spotlight Interview between **Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton** and **Kathy Hochul**, governor of New York.

**06** **Randi Weingarten**, president of the American Federation of Teachers, delivered the keynote address at the 25th Annual David N. Dinkins Leadership and Public Policy Forum on December 4, 2024.

**07** The Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, along with multiple cosponsors, hosted "Directions Forward for Psychology in International Relations: The Third Annual Conference in Honor of Robert Jervis" on January 30–31, 2025. **Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton** spoke with **Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo** in a fireside chat hosted by IGP.



**08** IGP's March 12, 2025, event, "Addressing 21st-Century Challenges to Gender Equality: Beijing+30," brought together international and US leaders to address worldwide progress on and backlash against women's rights and gender equality through a series of panels organized under the leadership of IGP's Women's Initiative directors **Jennifer Klein** and **Rachel Vogelstein** (right, moderating the "Forging the Path: Young Leaders Advancing Gender Equality in the 21st Century" panel).

**09** The Columbia Global Energy Summit 2025, hosted by the Center on Global Energy Policy (CGEP) on April 9, 2025, addressed myriad issues at the heart of today's complex geopolitical, environmental, and economic landscape and featured a fireside chat with **Jake Sullivan** (right), former US national security advisor, and **Jason Bordoff**, CGEP's founding director.



## RAPID RESPONSE

IGP's Rapid Response webinars examined the most urgent issues of the day, including the India-Pakistan conflict, tariffs and trade policy, governmental attacks on civil society, and ongoing developments in Ukraine, Venezuela, and the Middle East.

Watch IGP's Rapid Response webinars.

**10** On April 9, 2025, IGP and Columbia's Office of the President cohosted an installment of IGP's Across the Aisle series examining the role of the judiciary in American democracy. **Hon. Roy K. Altman** (right), US district judge for the Southern District of Florida and IGP Carnegie Distinguished Fellow, spoke with **Hon. Stephen A. Higginson** (center), circuit judge for the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, in a conversation moderated by **Professor Jamal Greene** of Columbia Law School.

**11** On November 10, 2025, 30 years after the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, IGP, the Kraft Center for Jewish Student Life, and Columbia/Barnard Hillel convened leaders, diplomats, scholars, and students to reflect on Rabin's legacy and Middle East peace. The event featured remarks by President Bill Clinton and a panel with **Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton**, **Secretary Jacob J. Lew**, **Ambassador Dennis Ross**, and journalist **Nadav Eyal**, moderated by **Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo**.

**12** On November 12, 2025, IGP convened leading diplomats and scholars for a wide-ranging examination of today's shifting global landscape. The event, "The Geopolitical Chessboard: Implications of the Current Global Ferment," culminated in an installment of IGP's Across the Aisle series: a conversation between **Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton**, IGP Faculty Advisory Board chair, and **Secretary Mike Pompeo**, IGP Carnegie Distinguished Fellow.

*Photos by Barbara Alper (10), Eileen Barroso (4), Diane Bondareff (5, 7, 8), Dannie Dinh (1), Michael DiVito (3), Timothy Lee (9), Brian Miller (12), April Renae (2, 6), and Sirin Samman (11)*



## SIPA Celebrates the Class of 2025

SIPA celebrated its Class of 2025 on May 20, conferring degrees on nearly 700 students in an afternoon ceremony at Columbia University’s Baker Athletic Complex. More than 5,000 family and friends traveled from around the globe to applaud the graduates.

Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo emphasized the vital role of universities in today’s world, describing SIPA as an “engine of research and innovation” and expressing her “stubborn belief that higher education can still be a force for good in a messy world.” She encouraged

graduates to carry forward SIPA’s mission of civil discourse into their careers, highlighting the School as a unique space where students from around the world test theories with real stakes, where disagreement is necessary, and where hard questions are expected. Yarhi-Milo reflected on how graduates’ SIPA memories will evolve over time, suggesting that the most uncomfortable moments—those that stretched and challenged them—may prove to have been most valuable for learning leadership and self-awareness.

The ceremony’s featured speaker was Dr. Rajiv Shah, president of the Rockefeller Foundation and former USAID administrator during the Obama administration. The architect of some of the decade’s largest development projects, he spearheaded the American response to the Ebola crisis. In his remarks, Shah warned that extraordinary achievements of the past century—including the greatest increase in human prosperity and longest era without large-scale global conflict—now face threats.

Shah offered the graduates a powerful message about seizing opportunity amid uncertainty. “It’s precisely in these moments that we can seek to solve some of our toughest problems,” he said. “Today, if inspired by ambitious, bold ideas for the future, coalitions of the willing—including public, private, and philanthropic partners—can solve problems like never before.”

The ceremony recognized outstanding faculty, including **Yumiko Shimabukuro MIA ’03**, founding director of the Urban and Social Policy concentration for Executive MPA students, who received Columbia University’s prestigious Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching. She is only the fourth SIPA professor ever to receive this University-wide honor.

The student speaker, former student body president **Felix Wang MIA ’25**, delivered a rousing speech encouraging classmates to “move forward, not with cynicism, but with conviction.” Acknowledging how campus experiences and career fields had been destabilized by events beyond their control,

Wang appealed to his fellow graduates to “keep caring—when it’s hard, when it’s thankless, when the world constantly tells you not to.”

“What begins as caution can calcify into apathy, and over time, curdle into a resignation that the system will never change,” he said to loud cheers.

The celebration continued with an evening reception on Ansell Plaza, as SIPA’s Class of 2025 joined the 26,000-strong alumni community spanning over 160 countries. ●

**01** Graduates of SIPA’s MPA in Global Leadership celebrate with **Professor Mauricio Cárdenas** (center).

**02** Featured speaker **Dr. Rajiv Shah**, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, addresses the Class of 2025.

**03** Graduates of SIPA’s MPA in Development Practice celebrate.

**04** **Alexa Chan MIA ’25** and **Angela Chea MPA ’25** celebrate near the gates of Columbia University’s Baker Athletic Complex.

**05** **Oluwadamilola Oke MIA ’25** receives the well wishes of loved ones.

**06** Former student body president **Felix Wang MIA ’25** was the student speaker.

**07** **Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo** emphasized the vital role of universities in today’s world.

**08** **Ruth Tekleab Mekbib MPA ’25**, **Ruweida Kulane MPA ’25**, and **Xavier Ibrahim MPA ’25** enjoy the sunny afternoon ceremony.

**09** **Gabriella Danielle Ramirez MIA ’25** (right, with **Paul Lindberg EMPA ’21**, vice chair of the SIPA Alumni Association) received the Campbell Award, established by the University Trustees and the Board of the Columbia Alumni Association (CAA) for a graduating student at each school who shows exceptional leadership and Columbia spirit as exemplified by the late **Bill Campbell ’62CC, ’64TC**, chair emeritus of the University Trustees and CAA cofounder.

**10** SIPA graduates celebrate at Columbia University’s Baker Athletic Complex.

*Photos by Barbara Alper (1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9) and Diane Bondareff (2, 4, 6, 10)*



Members of the Class of 2020 enjoy the reunion dinner in Low Library.  
Photo by David Dini MPA '14



Jennifer Morris MIA '97, Anna Coatsworth '01BUS (accepting the award on behalf of her father, John), and Sabrina Habib MPA-DP '16.  
Photo by Diane Bondareff



Katie Day Benvenuto '03CC, '12BUS and Maria Ressa.  
Photo by Diane Bondareff

## Generations of SIPA Graduates Gather for 2025 Alumni Day and Reunion Dinner

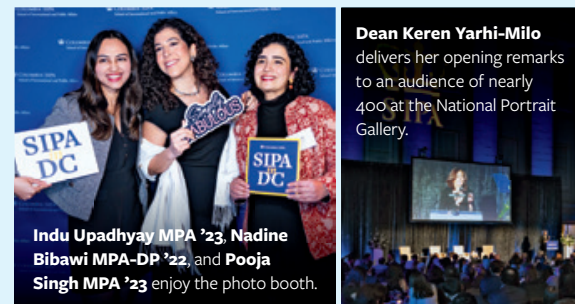
Graduates spanning six decades returned to campus for the annual SIPA Alumni Day and Reunion Dinner on March 29, 2025. The program included a keynote conversation between **Maria Ressa**—professor of professional practice, IGP Inaugural Carnegie Distinguished Fellow, and Nobel laureate—and **Katie Day Benvenuto '03CC, '12BUS**, associate dean for development and alumni relations. **Jennifer Morris MIA '97** and **Sabrina Habib MPA-DP '16** received the Distinguished Alumni Award and the Emerging Leader Award, respectively, and **John H. Coatsworth**, the John Mitchell Mason Professor of the University and provost emeritus, received the Service to SIPA Award for his tenure as dean from 2008 to 2012. More than 300 graduates representing 20 countries across six continents attended a reunion dinner in Low Library's Rotunda.

## SIPA Alumni Association Strengthens Global Community Through Volunteer Leadership

The new board and committees of the SIPA Alumni Association (SAA) had a successful and productive year. Alumni volunteers engaged in opportunities to support current and prospective students, and coordinated regional activities to strengthen the global SIPA alumni community.



L-R: **Paul Lindberg EMPA '21**, SAA chair; **Habib Enayetullah MPA '91**, SAA chair 2023–25; **Tracy Wilson MIA '86**, Global Engagement Committee chair; **Ashish Badjatia MIA '97**, Global Engagement Committee and regional ambassador for Philadelphia; **Beatriz Fritschler EMPA '08**, Alumni-Student Connections Committee and SAA secretary; **Carlos Cuevas MPA '12**, Alumni Recognition and Awards Committee chair and SAA vice chair. Photo by Diane Bondareff



Indu Upadhyay MPA '23, Nadine Bibawi MPA-DP '22, and Pooja Singh MPA '23 enjoy the photo booth.



Dean Emerita Merit E. Janow (right) moderates the panel "Economic Statecraft" with Secretary Jacob J. Lew, Wally Adeyemo, IGP Carnegie Distinguished Fellow and former US deputy treasury secretary; and Edward Knight, executive vice chairman of Nasdaq.

Photos by Coverd

## SIPA in DC Event Brings Together Alumni, Faculty, and Practitioners for a Special Evening

Columbia SIPA gathered nearly 400 alumni, faculty, and guests for SIPA in DC on February 10, 2025, at the National Portrait Gallery. The evening featured policy discussions on economic statecraft, global leadership, and energy, with panels moderated by **Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton**, SIPA **Dean Emerita Merit E. Janow**, and **Claire Shipman '86CC, MIA '94** (who now serves as the University's acting president). Faculty speakers included **Secretary Jacob J. Lew**, Nobel laureate **Maria Ressa**, and **Michael A. Nutter**, former mayor of Philadelphia.

# Bookcase

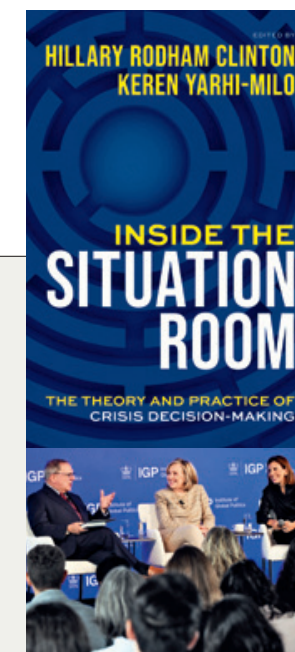
## Hillary Rodham Clinton and Keren Yarhi-Milo (editors)

*Inside the Situation Room: The Theory and Practice of Crisis Decision-Making* (Oxford University Press, 2025)

*Inside the Situation Room* combines decades of diplomatic experience with world-renowned scholarship to illuminate how world leaders make decisions in times of crisis. **Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton** and **Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo** have created this groundbreaking work, building on their innovative class at Columbia SIPA.

Few people get to witness the inner workings of leadership during crises, leaving theory and practice frustratingly separated. This book addresses that challenge by bringing together insights from nearly two dozen leading policymakers and scholars, offering readers a master class in global policy and crisis management.

Contributors address the psychology and mechanics of threat assessment, the crucial role of advisers, the dangers of groupthink, and the importance of trust, and recount real diplomatic stories, including covert operations. The book also examines how women have influenced peace and security decisions, and explores the impact of public opinion on leadership choices.



Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton and Dean Keren Yarhi-Milo in conversation with *The New York Times*' David Sanger at the September 17, 2025, book launch. Photo by Diane Bondareff

## FACULTY AND SCHOLARS

### Eduardo Albrecht

*Political Automation: An Introduction to AI in Government and Its Impact on Citizens* (Oxford University Press, 2025)

### Vojislava Filipcevic Cordes

*The Politics of Sanctuary* (Cornell University Press, 2025)

### Adam Day

*The Forever Crisis: Adaptive Global Governance for an Era of Accelerating Complexity* (Routledge, 2024)

### Edward Fishman

*Chokepoints: American Power in the Age of Economic Warfare* (Portfolio, 2025)

### Stuart Gottlieb

#### (anthology editor)

*Debating Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Conflicting Perspectives on Causes, Contexts, and Responses*, 3rd ed. (Bloomsbury, 2025)

### Diana Hernández

#### (with Jennifer Laird)

*Powerless: The People's Struggle for Energy* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2025)

### Arvid J. Lukauskas and Yumiko Shimabukuro MIA '03

*Misery Beneath the Miracle in East Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2024)

### Allan M. Malz

*Contemporary Finance: Money, Risk, and Public Policy* (Wiley, 2024)

### Lincoln A. Mitchell

*Three Years Our Mayor: George Moscone and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (University of Nevada Press, 2025)

### Tamar Mitts

*Safe Havens for Hate: The Challenge of Moderating Online Extremism* (Princeton University Press, 2025). (See page 12 for a Q&A with Professor Mitts.)

### José Antonio Ocampo

#### (with Jonathan Malagón MPA-EPM '11 and Andrés Narváez)

*De la equidad al crecimiento: Anhelos y frustraciones en la era del bienestar social* (Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2025)

### David Sandalow

#### (lead author)

*Artificial Intelligence for Climate Change Mitigation Roadmap*, 2nd ed. (ICEF, 2024)

### Joseph E. Stiglitz

*The Origins of Inequality, and Policies to Contain It* (Oxford University Press, 2025)

## ALUMNI

### Yunis Gurbanov MPA '24

*Geopolitics and Energy Diplomacy in the Caspian Region: Developments After the Downfall of the Soviet Union* (Columbia University Press, 2025)

### Karine Jean-Pierre MPA '03

*Independent: A Look Inside a Broken White House, Outside the Party Lines* (Legacy Lit, 2025)

### Filip J. Scherf MIA '15

*The Lost Land: A Story of Modern Russia* (Host, 2024)

# ClassNotes

Submissions received during the months of August 2024 through July 2025



## What's your SIPA story?

Submit your SIPA milestones, achievements, and experiences for consideration to be featured via the School's social media, website, and publications. Class notes are published annually in *SIPA Magazine*.

## 1965

**ROGER BUNKER** writes: "Now retired and living in Bloomfield, CT, with my wife of 60 years, Judi. I remain active in the community and continue to demonstrate in support of our vision for the United States, one not reflected by the current administration. I worked in international and commercial banking until 1991, when I entered law school and later practiced children's law, focusing primarily on special education."

**MEL GURTOV** published his 33rd book, *China Inside and Out: International Relations in a Changing World Order* (Bloomsbury Academic), in February 2026.

## 1966

**MICHAEL M. GUNTER** writes: "My coauthored book *Abdullah Ocalan and the Kurdish Issue: A Political Biography* has been accepted for publication by Routledge Press. I recently published or copublished

*Forgotten Exile: The Deportations of Azerbaijanis by Armenians* (Brill, 2025); *Heydar Aliyev and the Foundations of Modern Azerbaijan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024); *Erdogan's Path to Authoritarianism* (Lexington Books, 2024); *The Karabakh Conflict Between Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); and *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict* (Routledge, 2022). I also delivered the keynote speech at the international conference on Kurdish identity at Sulaymaniyah University in April 2025, among others."

## 1971

What does a SIPA alum do after a 40-year career as dean and professor at three business schools in the US and abroad? From his perch in Carmel, CA, **BILL PENDERGAST** developed and maintains a website, [www.mychansonfrancaise.com](http://www.mychansonfrancaise.com), devoted to the study and practice of classic French chansons.

## 1972



**J. BOYD H. BLACK** was reelected as the Northern Ireland representative on the UK Labour Party's National Policy Forum.

## 1973



**RICHARD BOUDREAUX** writes: "I am a prize-winning journalist who retired from *The*

*Wall Street Journal* in 2024, concluding a 54-year career covering major stories across Latin America, the former Soviet Union, the Middle East, and Southern Europe. My wife and I have settled in London, where

we launched a company that provides editing and mentoring to young independent journalists aiming to get their work published."

**GUY GUGLIOTTA** completed his fourth book, *Grant's Enforcer: Taking Down the Klan* (University of Georgia Press, 2025), which recounts the brief but eventful career of Reconstruction-era Attorney General Amos T. Akerman, the first lawyer to prosecute hate crimes and civil rights violations in federal court. His legal team sent the first iteration of the Ku Klux Klan into oblivion in 1871-72 in a six-month campaign by focusing federal law enforcement on a single county in South Carolina.

## 1975

**DEAN HARRIS** writes: "I am the CEO of a plant-based wellness business and have just launched a CBD coffee that addresses pain and anxiety. It tastes great and has no hemp taste or aroma. Our Sigh brand CBD coffee delivers a promised dose of CBD in the brewed cup as measured by an independent testing lab. This is an excellent application for CBD as 73 percent of Americans drink coffee every day, and there is a fair degree of anxiety and pain in the world."



**HARUT SASSOUNIAN** writes: "I am the founding president of the Armenia Artsakh Fund since 1989, which has donated to the Republic of Armenia \$1.06 billion of humanitarian aid. I am also the publisher of *The California Courier*, founded in 1958, and I was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor."

## 1979



**SUSAN ZELONY BREEN** writes: "My new novel, *Merry*, was published by Alcove Press on September 23, 2025."

## 1981

**GARY PICKHOLZ** writes: "This is my fifth administration, both Dem and GOP, starting with the Columbia brain trust going to DC for Jimmy Carter as an MIA student. An important point is that I returned after 20 years as an expat, precisely to lend the perspective of 'those who drive on the left' and prevent an 'everyone is from Washington/Wall Street' common concept bubble risk."

## 1982

**REED D. AUERBACH** writes: "As part of the 2025 University Commencement ceremonies, I was honored to be 1 of 10 alumni to receive the Alumni Medal, the highest honor bestowed by the Columbia Alumni Association for distinguished service to the University."

**LYNN ELLSWORTH**, founder of Friends of Duane Park, the Empire Station Coalition, and Humanscale NYC, wrote *Wonder City: How to Reclaim a Human-Scale Urban Life* (Fordham University Press, 2025). The book examines themes including architecture, historic preservation, urban planning, and the political economy of housing in NYC.

**GORDON GRAY** writes: "I teach courses on diplomacy, North Africa,

and US foreign policy in the Middle East at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. I recently had the very good fortune to reconnect at an Elliott School event with **FERIAL SAEED**, a friend from International House, SIPA, and the Foreign Service."

## 1983

**GLENN KESSLER**, fact checker for *The Washington Post*, was awarded the 2025 Nellie Bly Award for investigative reporting by the Museum of Political Corruption.

**CHARLES A. SANTANGELO** writes: "I am honored to receive the Federal 100 award for my role as the DHS representative to the Federal Acquisition Security Council (FASC), an OMB-led interagency council that combats significant supply chain risk in the acquisition and use of federal information technology, including IT products provided by adversarial nations."

## 1984

**KATE GRIFFITH** writes: "We celebrated the 25th anniversary of our winery, Flying Goat Cellars. My husband/partner was named 2025 Vintner of the Year by the Sta. Rita Hills Wine Alliance. Flying Goat was also honored with a Spirit of Small Business Award by *Pacific Coast Business Times*."

## 1989

**LENA PAPALEXOPOULOU** received the Columbia Alumni Association (CAA) Alumni Medal, the highest honor given by the CAA for distinguished service to the University, at the 2025 University Commencement.

## 1992

**SONIA DACCARETT** published *The Roots of the Guava Tree: Growing Up Jewish and Arab in Colombia* (Simon & Schuster, 2025), a debut contemporary memoir about a young woman

struggling to understand her identity as the daughter of a Jewish mother and Christian Palestinian father while coming of age in Colombia as increasing violence and the instability of the 1980s engulf her country.

## 1993



**BRENT DUCKOR** is a professor at San José State University's College of Education and executive director of its Center for Innovation in Applied Education Policy. A national leader in K-12 assessment for learning, he specializes in educational measurement, psychometrics, and formative assessment practices. His scholarship appears in leading journals, and he coauthored *Mastering Formative Assessment Moves* (ASCD, 2017) and *Feedback for Continuous Improvement in the Classroom* (Corwin, 2023). His



## 1995

**ERIC GARCETTI** (*right*) writes: "While serving as US ambassador to the Republic of India, I was visited in 2024 in New Delhi by my old classmate and fellow ambassador **Jonathan Henick '93**, who has had an outstanding career as a diplomat with the US State Department, most recently as US ambassador to Uzbekistan. After completing my service, I was able to visit Jonathan and his wife, Dominique, in Tashkent and stay with them for several days.

"I think if you told 21-year-old Eric and 21-year-old Jonathan that we would be serving together in a couple of countries halfway around the world from New York, we would have laughed—but as fate would have it, life brought us alongside one another three decades later. We both had SIPA grads in our missions and have a sense that SIPA really prepared its grads for the work of the world, which has never been more complex or more critical.

"I returned home to Los Angeles last summer to work as a subnational ambassador for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change through the Brazil COP30, representing 13,000 cities and regions across the world taking bold climate action. Jonathan continues his service as ambassador in Tashkent and is doing an amazing job."

forthcoming book, *AI for Deeper Learning*, will be published by Harvard Education Press in 2026. Duckor also focuses on international business and consults globally through his firm, Validity Partners.

**RICHARD GREENWALD** writes: “I have cofounded NosTerra Venture Capital, a firm investing at the intersection of data centers and energy. This venture builds on my experience as both a student and adjunct at SIPA and my work in public-private partnerships addressing national challenges. It also connects to my time at NosTerra Ventures, a Menlo Park-based non-profit focused on energy, education, and democracy.”

## 1995

After graduating from SIPA, **KLAUS FAMIRA** continued his studies at Oxford in England and joined the Austrian Foreign Service. He holds a PhD in European Union law. His career has included postings in Rome, Brussels (NATO), and Berlin. He is now the ambassador in charge of host country affairs for some 50 international organizations based in Vienna. Famira is married and has a son (14) and a daughter (9).

## 1997

**LAWRENCE LEWITINN** is managing editor for North America at *The Block*, where he leads coverage of crypto, financial markets, and regulation. In addition, Lewitinn has been organizing and digitizing the artwork and archives of his great-granduncle, Landès Lewitin—a mid-century abstract artist whose work was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art and who was part of the vibrant postwar New York art scene. This past year, Lewitinn was also elected to the board of education in Tenafly, NJ. He is a proud dad of two young

children and completed the TCS New York City Marathon.

## 1999

**MICHELLE “MIMI” MURPHY** began the next chapter of her life by starting Harvard Business School’s executive education program on aligning strategy and sales in May 2025. She completed a certificate in creating brand value, which she is using to start an LLC that promotes brand management nationwide for small businesses.

## 2000



After graduating from SIPA, **SHOMWA SHAMAPANDE** became a marketing and communications professional. He served as the chief spokesperson, speechwriter, and communications adviser to former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s UNDP Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor. Shamapande also worked as a producer on projects that earned seven Emmy nominations and four Emmy wins.

## 2001

**LAURANCE PASCAL** writes: “In early 2025, I completed a novel under the pen name Owen Greer called *The Hunter*. It is available for purchase on Amazon in print or Kindle format. The story follows a man’s journey as he risks it all for a sacred friendship

between a soldier and a translator. It begins at the end of the war in Afghanistan and spans across different continents, interfacing with Mexican drug cartels.”



Twenty-four years after graduating, **NARRIC ROME** continues to work in government affairs, first in the creative sector and now in K-12 education policy, working with a group of state education agencies on strengthening their high-dosage tutoring programs. Rome found time to meet up with fellow SIPA MPA alums **PATTY HSIEH** (left) and **KARYN RICHMAN** (center), who are also in the DC area.

## 2002



**FRANCESCO PAGANO** has 25 years of experience in large international corporate and startup settings, with a focus on sales and marketing and leading large direct and indirect teams across the globe. He wrote seven books (about tech and leadership), invested in five profitable and growing startups, successfully exited one, and produced three videocast

series with the business publisher Il Sole 24 Ore (Italy, 5 million unique visitors per day). Pagano is a speaker and moderator, and he loves theater and good Italian food.



**HEIDI ELIZABETH PHILIPSEN-MEISSNER** writes: “While at SIPA, I was interning for director Wim Wenders’s film company Road Movies GmbH in Berlin, which influenced my passion for social impact filmmaking. Since then, I’ve made several of my own movies, including my most recent film, *Love & Vodka* (*Lyubov & Horilka*), a romantic comedy with a Ukrainian-American transatlantic twist. It won the Women Film Critics Circle Award for Best Film at the Socially Relevant Film Festival in NYC in March 2025 and is supporting Razom, a 501(c)(3) organization supporting Ukraine.”

## 2003

**CLAIRE ADIDA** has been a professor of political science at University of California San Diego for 15 years. Adida researches immigrant integration and exclusion, from West Africa to France and the US. She tries to understand what exacerbates and reduces outgroup prejudice. She teaches on the politics of multiculturalism and immigration. In July 2025 Adida moved to Stanford University as a senior fellow in the Center for Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law and a professor of political science. She writes: “My wife and I have two kids, in 10th and 8th grades. We love to travel, hike, run, explore, and be with family and friends.”



**DARA ERCK** is the founder of SAM+LEO, a teen wellness brand focused on mental health. In September 2025 SAM+LEO launched in regional Whole Foods Market stores as part of the retailer’s Local and Emerging Accelerator Program (LEAP), which selected just 10 brands out of more than 1,600 applicants.

**DAE LEVINE** writes: “After visiting India in October 2024 to see fellow SIPA alum **Eric Garcetti ’95**, I returned to the LA airport department—only to be activated by Mayor Bass as a disaster service worker during the wildfires, serving as a communications liaison at the Emergency Operations Center. After three months there, I transitioned back to City Hall, where I now serve as senior communications adviser to Councilmember Katy Yaroslavsky, chair of the Budget Committee, during one of LA’s most consequential budget years.”

## 2004



**DIANA YOUSEF** is founder and CEO of change:WATER Labs, a mission-driven cleantech venture to extend

safe water and sanitation access to poor and vulnerable communities around the world. Yousef’s career spans the arenas of academic life sciences research, international economic development, strategy consulting, finance, and private equity investing. Her work has been recognized globally and covered in publications such as *Forbes* and *Bloomberg*, and she has spoken at events, including at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit.

## 2006

**LUDOVIC HOOD** has over two decades of experience in the US and multilateral foreign policy spheres, most recently as chief of staff and counselor to the presidential envoy for Russia and Ukraine, General Keith Kellogg, in 2025.



**AMIT SARAOGI** coleads Oorja, a social enterprise that provides solar irrigation services and climate-smart agricultural advisory to smallholder farmers in India. Oorja secured \$1.5 million in the pre-series A funding round, which attracted \$1.2 million in equity finance from impact investors Acumen, elea (a family trust advised by Artha Impact), Echoing Green Signal Fund, Partners Group (via its employee-run impact investment association PG Impact), and 1to4 Foundation, as well as \$300,000 in non-dilutive funding from the Swiss Re Foundation.

## 2008

**LEIF HOLMBERG** writes: “As of January 1, 2025, I am serving as board cochair of the Green Climate Fund, the world’s largest public fund dedicated to climate action. The GCF operates under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and allocates billions of dollars to support global climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.”



**AIGERIM KASSYMBEKOVA** writes: “At SIPA, I walked into a classroom full of strangers from five continents—and left with a global family. From late-night policy debates to spontaneous dance lessons in the student lounge, every moment reminded me that solving the world’s toughest problems starts with connection, courage, and coffee.”



**DAN SHEPHERD** authored the article “Why Urban Trees Matter—Visualizing the Impact of Tree Equity on Los Angeles Children,” which was featured in the nature-focused fifth issue of the Data Visualization Society’s *Nightingale Magazine*. His article delves into the important insights in one of his highly regarded data storytelling projects.

## 2009

**ANNE YTRELAND** writes: “At the end of 2024, after almost a quarter

century studying and working in the USA, I left my position at USAID and moved back to my home country, Norway. Here, I am working to expand NORAD’s strategic partnerships with the private sector, bringing lessons from USAID’s many innovative approaches that make foreign aid more sustainable and inclusive. It has been an odd and difficult period witnessing the dismantling of the world’s largest and most influential aid agency. My heart goes out to my many friends, colleagues, and partners affected by this destruction. At the same time, it is heartening to see that those of us who are working on international solidarity are staying positive and finding new ways to make the world better.”

## 2010

**ALEJANDRO ROSALES MAYR** joined Miami-based Frontera Capital Advisors as a senior director, advising companies, private equity firms, and financial institutions investing and operating in Latin America and the Caribbean. He focuses on M&A, capital raising, and turnaround/restructuring services, helping clients navigate the region’s complex markets and achieve their objectives in the region.

**CONNIE TOOKER NUÑEZ** was named New Mexico’s 2025 Remarkable Women winner. For nearly two decades, she has been working in the nonprofit sector as an advocate, positively impacting the lives of at-risk youth and families.



**GORDON ZHAO** writes: “I am the executive chairman, Huntington Education at Charterhouse Lagos, the most prestigious British private school in Africa.”

2012



**EDWARD REYNOLDS** writes: “In May 2024, I graduated from Georgetown University Law Center as a Business Law Scholar and with exceptional pro bono pledge recognition. I was sworn in to the Massachusetts Bar in November 2024 and the New York Bar in June 2025, and am an associate at Latham & Watkins.”



**RICHARD C. REYNOLDS** writes: “I graduated from Georgetown University Law Center in May 2024 and received exceptional pro bono pledge recognition for completing over 200 hours of service. I joined Latham & Watkins in September 2024 and was sworn in to the Massachusetts Bar in November 2024 and the New York Bar in June 2025.”

2014



**DARIELA SOSA** was part of the team behind Operación Retuit, winner of the 2025 King of Spain International Journalism Award for International

Cooperation and Humanitarian Action. Amid rising persecution in Venezuela, the project used AI-generated avatars to publish sensitive news while protecting journalists’ identities. Produced by the investigative platform Connectas and over a dozen newsrooms, it reached 41 million users through 30 episodes in Spanish and English, countering censorship with bold, collaborative storytelling.

**LAURA SUNDBLAD** was named Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Finland in Dakar, Senegal, in 2024.

2015



**AL-DAANA AL-MULLA** is a senior diplomat and attorney with over 14 years of experience in international law, international relations, and conflict resolution. She represented Qatar at the United Nations, leading negotiations on human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2024 Al-Mulla delivered the keynote speech at the Georgetown University Model UN Conference to a record 863 students. The Middle East Policy Council recognized her twice, in 2023 and 2025, as an influential diplomat shaping US-Middle East relations.



**FILIP J. SCHERF** writes: “After 10 years of field research, my first book, *The Lost Land: A Story of Modern Russia* (Host, 2024), was published, becoming a bestseller

longlisted for Magnesia Litera, an annual book award presented in the Czech Republic since 2002. This journey began at SIPA, where I graduated thanks to the generosity of **Marc St. John ’85**, donor of the Robert Legvold Fellowship, and the International Fellows Program. At Columbia’s Harriman Institute, I was inspired by Alan Timberlake, Peter Clement, Stephen Sestanovich, and a remarkable team I’ll always cherish.”

2016



**JULIANA A. CARDOSO** has over 10 years of government experience across the environmental, agricultural, and economic sectors. She is the deputy secretary of economic development for the State of São Paulo, leading key structural programs such as Facilita SP (economic freedom), Trampolim (inclusive employment), and SP Produz (regional industrial policy). An environmental engineer with an MBA from FGV and a specialization in entrepreneurship from Babson College, she is also a Lemann Foundation Fellow and a RenovaBR Leader committed to inclusive, high-impact public policy.

**JENNIFER KANYAMIBWA-BIGGS** writes: “I am the COO of Plant Lady Juice Co., an urban farmer-founded wellness brand deeply connected to nature. In addition to our wellness services, we provide handcrafted juices, teas, elixirs, cleanse kits, and a new apothecary line. Our mission is to offer natural, sustainable, and effective plant-based wellness prod-

ucts that heal and elevate the mind, body, and spirit. We grow our own herbs and source seasonal produce from fellow farmers, ensuring that everything we make is fresh, nutrient-dense, and crafted with care.”



**SAMUEL PIERRE** is managing partner and senior executive at SMP Global Consultants, a business management consulting firm specializing in helping minority- and women-owned enterprises develop business and secure government contracts. The firm also partners with urban cities to boost economic development and help local communities thrive. With over 10 years of experience across local, state, and national government, Pierre has built relationships that support projects and programs for religious, nonprofit, and private organizations. He is also an adjunct faculty professor at St. Francis College, teaching Introduction to Entrepreneurship to first- and second-year students.



**MICHAEL SEDILLO** was appointed by Mayor Eric Adams to lead the NYC Mayor’s Office of Nonprofit Services. In this role, Sedillo serves as the chief liaison between the city and nonprofit partners who deliver essential services to New Yorkers.

Regional Ambassador Spotlight

**Maria Paula Gutierrez MPA ’14** (left), SIPA’s regional ambassador in Germany, met with her student mentee, **Maria Bejarano MPA ’26**, when she visited campus in May 2025.

Regional ambassadors play a vital role in welcoming and supporting the next generation of public service leaders as they prepare to join the SIPA alumni family.



Learn more about becoming a regional ambassador and other volunteer opportunities.



2017



**MONICA JOHNSON** writes: “I started playing tackle football at the highest level women are able to play in 2022 with the San Diego Rebellion in the Women’s National Football Conference. I never played a team sport in my life, due to depression, until I was 36 years old, when the owners of the San Diego Rebellion invited me to try out after a team workout. After my second season, my teammates voted me Most Improved Player in 2023.”



**OLA MOHAJER** is a former senior expert at the US Institute of Peace. Drawing on her experience as a refugee and survivor of war, along with her work on peace processes at the institute, she founded Transcend, an applied-AI, purpose-driven startup pioneering how violent conflicts end and peace is made. Transcend is an AI platform that provides strategic solutions on matters of peace, security, and risk, serving governments, international organizations, and businesses with commercial interests in conflict zones. Despite the challenges faced by the US Institute of Peace in 2025, Mohajer says she continues her work because wars persist and many rely on her insight, advice, and technical support. She is married to the love

of her life, whom she met at SIPA, and is a proud mother of two daughters, ages 4 and 1.



**DHRUV PANDEY** writes: “My journey isn’t about scale—it’s about the spark in a child’s eyes when they see change is possible. From Teach For India to Dalberg and Enabling Leadership, I’ve seen education and policy transform lives. Columbia SIPA armed me with tools to turn idealism into action. Now, as CEO of Make-A-Wish India, I believe a wish is more than joy—it’s hope, strength, and a reimagined future. Let’s create transformative moments, one wish at a time. Join me.”

**MARCOS PAYA** is a partner and director of the Mexico City office of Dalberg, where he leads teams and clients in solving some of the world's most pressing development challenges. He coleads the company's global finance and investment practice, working extensively on addressing the financing gap for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through sustainable capital allocation. Paya is also a leader in Dalberg's Latin America practice. Previously, he worked for the Eurasia Group, led projects for the Inter-American Development Bank, and was a senior consultant for the Monitor Group.

## 2018



**MARIO PONSELL** completed the Plant-Based Culinary Arts career program at the Institute of Culinary Education in Manhattan in summer 2025, aiming to launch a culinary arts-focused career transition program for veterans. In fall 2024 Ponsell began his culinary journey and simultaneously became the teaching kitchen program manager for FamilyCook Productions, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that licenses culinary and nutrition curricula to schools, hospitals, and community centers nationwide.

**LOBSANG SALAKA**, a US Army veteran, is a foreign affairs specialist with the Department of the Air Force. An expert in public policy and law with

a focus on political-military and economic issues, he supports US government international engagement activities. His military experience and graduate studies in international economic policy prepared him for federal service and doctoral-level research, culminating in a doctorate in law and policy from Northeastern University.

**JAYANT SHARMA** writes: "On May 28, 2025, I launched a new publication, *Generations Hence*. It is a systematic and longitudinal effort to map AI prophecies and AI's actual impact, real and foreseen, that might shape our foreseeable and distant future. It's an exercise in collective sense-making. What if the key to understanding AI's impact isn't found in any single prediction or piece of emerging evidence, but in the constellation of prophecies and evaluations from economists, technologists, historians, biologists, sociologists, entrepreneurs—those on the receiving end of transformations, among others?"

## 2019

**JASNEET HORA** concluded his government service as deputy director of speechwriting for Vice President Kamala Harris and as speechwriter and special advisor to Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, for whom he supported major policy rollouts on cybersecurity, emerging technology, global health, and China policy. He now partners with leaders and organizations across the business, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors to advance their policy priorities through speeches, op-eds, and other strategic communications.

**KATRINA NIEHAUS** joined Evercore as senior managing director to lead the structured capital solutions group.

## 2020

**SOPHIE CAPSHAW-MACK** was selected to exhibit her new media installation at the Chen Zekun Long River International Art Gallery in Jingzhou, China, where her work is now part of the permanent collection. She had the honor of giving a speech at the opening gala, representing the international artists in attendance. Capshaw-Mack continues to explore global impact through technology, environmental ethics, and artistic experimentation.

**PETE ZHENG** was named among the 2024 Gaingels 100, a collection of amazing, accomplished, and inspiring LGBTQIA+ venture-backed entrepreneurs.

## 2021



**MIKE BENEVENTANO** writes: "Since graduating from Columbia SIPA, I have been building my career as a bank supervisor at the New York Fed, focusing on consumer protection risk and financial innovation. I am now married to a wonderful wife with two beautiful children."

**DRASHTI BRAHMBHATT** is the inaugural director of equity planning and technical assistance and training for the New York City Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice. She is at the forefront of combating income and racial inequities.



**JUNTAO LIU** previously worked at the Bank of China's New York branch and now works on the country risk team of a top Chinese investment bank, CITIC Securities, in the embassy district of Beijing. His research group won the Outstanding Paper Award from the Securities Association of China.

## 2022



**MADDIE BAKER** serves as operations manager for two of New York City's largest business improvement districts, Bryant Park Corporation and the 34th Street Partnership. In 2022 she was tasked with eliminating rats from New York's renowned Bryant Park, and over two years, she was able to reduce measurable rodent activity in the park by over 75 percent and has been consulted as a resource by various city agencies and other BIDs. At the first National Rat Summit, held in September 2024 at New York City's Pier 57, Baker was invited to present on the challenges to successful rat mitigation, specifically how these challenges manifest in public parks.

## 2023



**RWODAH ALNAIMI** was appointed Director of Investment at the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), bringing over seven years of experience in sustainable development, innovation, and strategic finance. She leads the integration of financial sustainability with high-impact development, deploying innovative instruments and aligning investments with Qatar's national and global development goals. Her background includes leadership roles in strategic partnerships and digital innovation.



**ANNE IFEOMA CLARKE** writes: "In many parts of Nigeria, emergency services are delayed, inaccessible, or entirely unavailable, costing lives simply because bystanders lack the skills or confidence to help. To change this, I founded Empowered Futures Africa, a nonprofit dedicated to integrating CPR and emergency response education into Nigerian schools. Our goal is to equip students with lifesaving skills and the confidence to act. We're not just teaching procedures, we're raising a generation of lifesavers."



**CHRISTIAN KÖNIG** ran as the Green Party candidate for the German national parliament in his home constituency in February 2025. Challenging a long-standing incumbent, he achieved the best first vote result for the local Greens in a federal election to date.



**YANG NI** writes: "Since graduating, I have founded Symbiotic Future, an AI-driven education and mental health startup committed to advancing social equity by democratizing human-centric data. Fueled by my passion for equal access, we transform research and design into accessible AI products. In recognition of our impact, I received the 2025 *Forbes* China Innovative Impact Award in International Education and was invited to present at the Third International Digital Mental Health and Wellbeing Conference in Spain."

**YELIM SHIN** writes: "I am pursuing a PhD in political science at Ohio State University. My research interests center on international relations, particularly nuclear security and regional security dynamics in East Asia and the Korean Peninsula."

## 2024

**ALI YAWAR ADILI** coedited the book *Afghanistan and International Relations* (Routledge, 2025) with William Maley (of the Australian National University) and Paul Lushenko (of the US Army War College).



**RALPH EL JALBOUT** writes: "I launched GéoPoly Global as a research and advisory platform where recent graduates can develop their portfolios and transition into the professional world. It served as my professional anchor when I presented my paper on AI governance at the UN in Geneva in March 2025, an experience that inspired me to extend the platform to my peers. I envision GéoPoly becoming a trusted bridge for future graduates moving from academic work to policy consulting and strategy."



**LAURA SETRAKIAN-ADANALIAN** writes: "My latest personal update is that I had my first child on April 9, 2025. Sebastian Chahé Adanalian is a healthy little boy, and we are incredibly excited to welcome him into our family."



**DOMINIC MISIOLO JR. SOFE** writes: "I began my Executive MPA at Columbia SIPA in 2022, inspired by my wife and driven by being the first Samoan at SIPA. Balancing new fatherhood, career changes, and my mother's passing during global crises tested me deeply. Yet SIPA offered growth, connection, and purpose. I carry forward knowledge and determination to amplify the voices of small island nations like mine on the world stage."

We express our condolences to the families and friends of these members of the SIPA community who have recently passed away. Should you have news of a classmate's death, please contact us at [sipaalum@sipa.columbia.edu](mailto:sipaalum@sipa.columbia.edu).

Michael Armacost  
IF '61, PhD '65

Dore Gold CERT '79

Michael L. Hummel  
MPA '97

Patrick Leahy MIA '89

Ambassador Angela  
Missouri Sherman-Peter  
MIA '04

Marian Lillian Weber  
EMPA '07

Hongzhuo Xie MIA '27



# James Profestas EMPA '14



**James Profestas EMPA '14** is head of special situations at Alta Fox Capital Management. Previously he worked at various investment funds, including Verition Fund Management, Junson Capital, Litespeed Partners, and Huff Asset Management, as well as in the Portfolio Management Group at Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG) and in Morgan Stanley's Fixed Income Division.

He received a BA in economics from Boston University, a diploma of credit analysis from New York University, an MBA in finance from Cornell University, and an EMPA in international finance and economic policy from SIPA.

Profestas serves as a mentor for SIPA students and as a member of the Columbia Alumni Global Sustainability Network and the Columbia University Club of New York's Board of Governors. He previously served on SIPA's Alumni Association Board and cochaired its Admissions Ambassadors Committee, and was a member of the Career and Mentoring Committee and Columbia's Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing.

*The following conversation with SIPA Magazine has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

### Why did you decide to attend SIPA, having already completed your MBA?

I felt, especially going back to the Great Recession and the various sovereign debt crises, that many global markets were increasingly driven by government actors. To be a good underwriter of companies and their businesses, you need to understand how governments act and the macroeconomic drivers, and there was no better place to learn that than SIPA, a global powerhouse and leading economics and global policy school. I was also really drawn to the School because of its amazing economics faculty and coursework, as well as being part of the broader Columbia University network.

### How did your SIPA education inform the work that you went into after graduation?

I worked within the hedge fund industry both during SIPA and after, but SIPA helped me take a more global view when I think about investing. SIPA also taught me to appreciate drivers behind companies' actions beyond the financial, such as social drivers that push companies to make decisions not purely on financial merit but also because of reputational impacts.

Interpreting government and political drivers is also crucial. We're seeing that today—that many of the actions of the government are having direct implications on the private markets. Understanding and forecasting this makes anyone who's gone through the SIPA program a better investor.

### You've been very involved as an alumnus, including extensive mentoring work. What advice are you giving students in today's challenging environment?

My suggestion is to be focused. Have an idea of what you want to do, the different roles that interest you, what best suits your background, and then what training you can take at SIPA to build on that. It's a very competitive environment—any job posted through SIPA will be highly selective. Columbia opens the door, but you must train yourself to interview well, discuss technical aspects, and impress interviewers to get offers.

The employer also wants to hear that you want to work for them, you want to work within their particular group, and you have the skills to do the job and to learn to do the job even better.

The sooner you have a concrete plan the better, especially in this job environment. You need to target a lot of firms and speak with alumni.

### Why would you encourage other alumni to stay involved with SIPA?

There's a host of reasons. It's great to give back and keep this flywheel going, where you perpetually help the system grow.

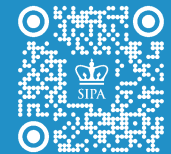
I also view it as a symbiotic relationship—helping students and staying involved gives me the opportunity to continue learning, support the School, and strengthen my network. The students I've advised have placed into great jobs and stay in touch. I also stay involved to continue coming to campus and learning.

Alumni Day provides opportunities to hear from amazing faculty and industry leaders. To be a successful professional, you need to continuously improve and learn, and SIPA provides that through Alumni Day, the Institute of Global Politics' programming and webcasts, and other events throughout the year. Being part of the conversation with industry leaders makes you better prepared to navigate your career. ●



### HOW TO GET HIRED AND HAVE AN IMPACT IN NYC GOVERNMENT

**Annika Lescott-Martinez MPA '15** (pictured), CFO and executive vice president of finance at the NYC Housing Authority, joined a panel of alumni, organized by **Professor Ester Fuchs**, that highlighted career opportunities for SIPA students in state and city governments. The April 22, 2025, convening was cosponsored by the Institute of Global Politics (IGP), the Career Advancement Center, and the Urban and Social Policy concentration.



Read more about the panel discussion.

Photo by Michael DiVito

Columbia University  
School of International and Public Affairs  
420 West 118th Street, Mail Code 3328  
New York, NY 10027

## SUPPORT FUTURE POLICY LEADERS!

“I am deeply grateful for the fellowship support I received, which made my studies at SIPA possible. As a Brazilian committed to driving positive change in public policy and development, my SIPA experience was invaluable in equipping me with the skills and global perspective needed to create meaningful impact.”

**RONALDO RODRIGUES ALVES BRAGA MPA-DP '25**



The world needs SIPA-trained leaders who are working to better the world and make a difference. Please consider a gift to SIPA today to support financial aid for our next generation of students.

