

THE OBSERVER'S

# THE EDUCATED OBSERVER

Winter 2010



## GUIDE TO UNIVERSITY EVENTS

YOU DON'T NEED A  
TO BE A STUDENT TO  
ENJOY CAMPUS LIFE

### SCHOOLS OF THE STARS

A MAP OF A-LIST  
ALMA MATERS

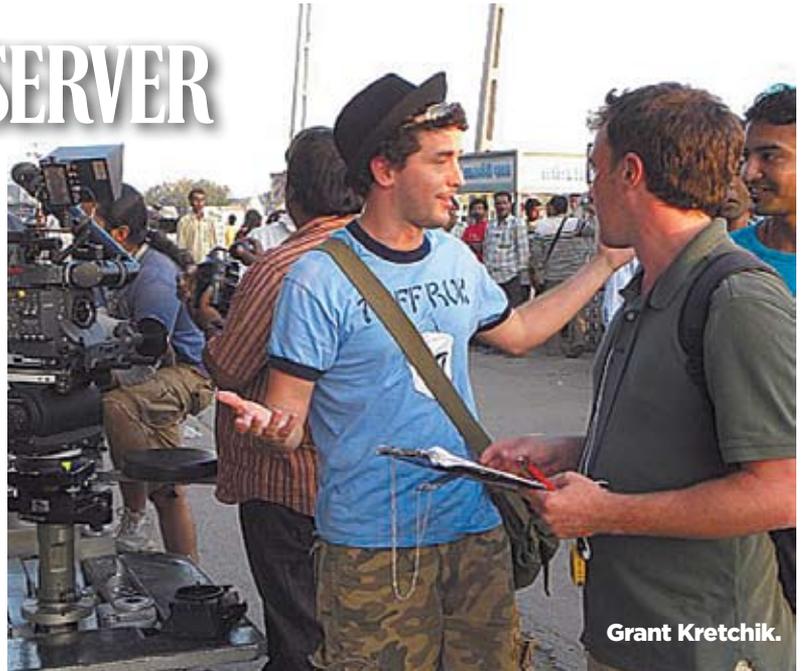
### TEACHING WITH A PASSION

THREE TOP PROFESSORS  
SHARE THEIR SECRETS

### UNDERGRADUATE APPLICATIONS

ESSAY ADVICE FROM  
THE EXPERTS

# Teaching With Passion



Grant Kretchik.

A closer look at how three professors are bringing their passions into the classroom—and getting results.

## Grant Kretchik, Pace University

Growing up, Grant Kretchik was lured to the stage by the glitz and glamour of the entertainment industry. But it soon became clear that acting, like any job, could be both tiring and difficult.

But, Kretchik, 31, was undaunted.

“To me, this work is like oxygen,” he said. “It’s like my family or friends; it’s the place I’m most comfortable; it forces me to be more aware.”

Kretchik graduated from Pace University in 2002 with a Bachelor’s degree in Speech Communication, Media Studies and Theatre, and in 2005, from the New School University with an MFA in Acting. Having guided drama projects for friends and underclassmen throughout his student life, he was easily able to combine directing and teaching with his acting career.

While serving as the head of Pace University’s BFA Acting Program and a full-time tenure track Assistant Professor, Kretchik is also responsible for spearheading the Performing Arts department’s travel course to Greece and Italy. Now, Kretchik tries to channel personal mentors like veteran theatre director, Stuart Vaughan, while reminding his students that acting is not merely a “degree or career, it’s a lifestyle.”

“I try to raise their awareness about the community at large,” said Kretchik, a resident of Jersey City. “In order to do that through art, they need to understand and create a personal relationship with it.”

Kretchik believes that his position makes him responsible for encouraging his students to contribute to their communities. To this end, he makes every effort to bridge the gap between the classroom and work place and also looks into opportunities for outreach programs through partnerships with organizations such as Broadway Green Alliance.

Having recently returned from the Austin Film Festival where he celebrated the world premiere of a recent project, a romantic comedy titled “When Harry Tries to Marry,” Kretchik is spending up to 15 hours a day in rehearsal in addition to his teaching schedule. He is currently assisting stage director, producer and Tony-nominee Michael Greif, in preparation for the first national Broadway tour of *Next to Normal* starting on Nov. 28, while also directing an adaptation of “A Christmas Carol” with Pace University’s undergraduate performing arts and dance majors, which is scheduled to debut on Dec. 8 at the Schimmel Theater.

When asked to name a favorite project, Kretchik replied, “It’s really whichever one I’m working on, at the time.”

## Alice Chun, Parsons The New School for Design

From an early age, Alice Chun’s relationship with her father, an architect, and her mother, an interior designer, cultivated a deep-rooted appreciation for the creativity involved in the design process.

Today Chun, 45, a practicing architect, leads design studios in Master of Architecture and Master of Fine Arts in Interior Design programs at Parsons The New School for Design, where she is also an Assistant Professor of Design, Material Culture and Fabrication, and the Director of the Angelo Donghia Materials Library and Study Center.

After graduating with an MA in Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1993, Chun happened upon teaching when a professor she was for as a Teaching Assistant was forced to spend several months recuperating from an accident. A successful semester flying solo in the classroom resulted in her being invited back to teach her own design studio.

“My role is to help students become aware of their own potential,” she said. “By creating a dialogue with them, I want to be a threshold for



Alice Chun.

MATTHEW SUSSMAN/THE NEW SCHOOL

my students to see what they're capable of."

A proponent of connecting academia and professional practice, Chun advocates rethinking the education meted out to today's youth.

"Why not create our own projects, empower ourselves and our students, and reach out to clients rather than waiting for projects to come to us?" she asked.

According to Chun, her belief in humanitarian design, adaptable architecture and cross-disciplinary relationships amidst different branches of design make her somewhat of a radical. Today, much of her work is centered on aiding crises-ridden communities through initiatives that offer long-term progress via housing, education and health infrastructure.

With the aim of creating a "broader-reaching educational and professional experience," Chun partnered with graduate students from Columbia University and set up a non-profit organization called Studio Unite. Rather than merely providing housing or a sole health clinic, the team functions as a "design platform connecting vulnerable communities with a high level of design expertise and resources," serving as a catalyst for the growth of sustainable communities worldwide.

Chun is currently teaching a design studio at Parsons that is focused on creating vocational school in Lagos, Nigeria, to be built as a project of Studio Unite.

"I'm driven by a sense of empowerment and am really inspired by helping communities," she said. "I want my students to also experience that."

On Nov. 18, Chun is organizing a fundraiser integrating fashion, architecture and humanitarian design, which involves Studio Unite, Parsons The New School for Design and United Nude, a shoe design company. Patrons can expect silent auction items donated by designers such as Marc Jacobs and Diane von Furstenberg.

## Charles Merguerian, Hofstra University

Charles Merguerian is fascinated by rocks.

"The texture, the colors, the minerals, the density," he said. "There's just something special about them."

At the age of four, when Merguerian's family moved to Queens, rocks in the nearby fields caught his attention. What started as a childhood hobby of became the foundation for a successful-35 year career as a professional geologist.

Merguerian, 61, Chairman and Professor of Geology at Hofstra University and the Director of Duke Geological Laboratory in Westbury, NY, believes that rocks are "portals into the history of the earth."

Despite publishing a fair amount of geological data about California and Connecticut, Merguerian's area of expertise is the geology of New York City, an interest that he has nurtured since his childhood.

"I work on the oldest rock layers which are about a billion years old up to the most recent soil layers which are 10,000 years and younger, mostly formed during the glacial periods," he said.

Merguerian first taught as a Boy Scout master and then transitioned to academic teaching at CUNY in 1972. Since then, he has taught at CUNY, Columbia University, NYU, The New School, and Hofstra.

Based on his experience as a professional jazz and blues musician, Merguerian likens teaching to performing in front of a crowd.

"There is no point in knowing something if you can't present it," he said. "The ability to present things well is very important to me, so as a result I spent a lot of time on that."

At Hofstra, Merguerian teaches a course called Cartographic Techniques in which students learn how to draw diagrams and maps, create power points and construct attention-grabbing presentations with embedded audio and video.

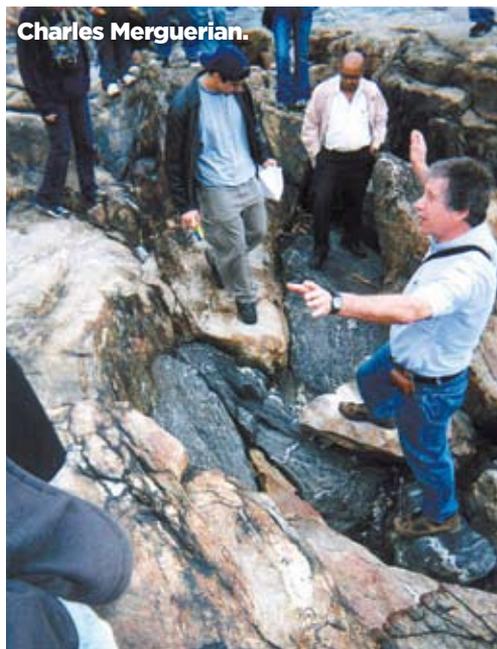
"I always tell my students that you want to be known for the quality of your work," he said. "That's my basic mantra."

Along with instruction, Merguerian makes every effort to be a role model for his students, whom he considers no different from his own children, and provides emotional support and understanding. He also ensures that his courses include fieldwork, complete with opportunities for effective research and report preparation.

Merguerian is interested in the excavated World Trade Center site because it allows a peephole into Manhattan's rock formation. The lack of naturally exposed rock south of 59th Street makes the information obtained from drilling and building excavations a novelty, he says.

Soon, Merguerian will be mapping out areas in Isham Park as part of his involvement with the electricity-transmitting Con-Edison tunnel connecting Yonkers and the Inwood section of Manhattan. His passion feeds his productivity.

"I don't work; I just continue to do what I enjoy," he said. "I don't need motivation. If you are passionate about the things you do, even if it's selling hot dogs, it makes life much better."



Charles Merguerian.