Lessons from Liberia
Reconsidering international development, scholarship, and engagement

In June 2008, Emory’s Institute for Developing Nations (IDN) organized a workshop on the persistent problem of gender-based violence in Liberia, a nation in the process of rebuilding after fourteen years of civil war. Around the table were researchers, international development practitioners, and representatives from a variety of Liberian government ministries, organizations, and institutions. “There was lots of energy in bringing together people from law, history, women’s studies, public health, non-governmental organizations, the Liberian government,” says Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, IDN director and a specialist in sub-Saharan Africa and women in politics. “Rural women offered accounts of influencing customary authorities to support [Liberia’s] new anti-rape law. Their initiatives raise many questions about the limits of the judiciary, the possibility of harmonizing customary and civil law, and the women’s ways of influencing social change.”

But at the final session, as they outlined their next steps, discussion ground to a halt. “An influential Liberian government...
representative said, ‘We have a plan; we just need more resources for our plan,”’ Ranchod-Nilssen recalls. “Here we come up against the political reality that what is being funded, what the government is committed to, is the civil legal system.”

That experience illustrated for many academics present the complexities of what Ranchod-Nilssen calls “engaged” research and international development. “It’s not enough just to say, here’s the information, here’s the analysis—now go do it.”

**OBJECTIVITY FETISH?**

The IDN, a joint venture with The Carter Center established in 2006 as part of the university’s strategic plan, has set out to promote research that redefines both the scholarship and practice of international development.

“We’re at a moment where there’s a lot of disillusion with development studies and practice,” says Ranchod-Nilsson. “The theoretical frameworks and principles of practice that have guided development activities for the past fifty years have not yielded the intended outcomes. So there is a need to re-think them on multiple levels—with the university, non-governmental organizations engaged in development, policy makers who work on foreign aid, and also with counterparts in developing countries. Our job is to bring university researchers’ expertise, development practitioners’ experience, and the perspective of local researchers, policy makers, and communities into the same conversation.”

It is not always an easy conversation. “The center’s capacity to partner is linked to how beneficial an activity will be to the Liberian people,” says Tom Crick, associate director of The Carter Center’s Conflict Resolution Program. “If it benefits scholarship and Emory students, that’s good too. But there’s a tension: if you’re conducting research, you need to keep the distance of a researcher, and so, in effect, you can be working hard not to have an impact.”

The immediacy and unpredictability of engaged scholarship requires a disconcerting shift for many researchers. “At its best, it tests your theoretical knowledge and shows you its limits,” says theology school professor Liz Bounds, who with her students has gotten involved with the Liberian diaspora in Atlanta.

“It also raises serious questions about the ongoing struggle with what scholarly objectivity really is,” Bounds continues. “Objectivity is a lens that we’re always accountable to. We constantly bring it in to check our own work. But we’ve made a fetish of objectivity, so that it precludes any engagement at all. And for scholars in those parts of the world where there is not the same economic privilege of academic life that we have here, that kind of complete objectivity is neither possible nor desirable. Engagement doesn’t mean unthinking partisanship, but we’ve gone too far in the other direction. It’s a delicate balance.”

For women’s studies and African studies scholar Pamela Scully, who has an IDN-funded project in Liberia, finding that balance has changed her understanding of what constitutes scholarship.

“What has come repeatedly from people all over Africa,” she says, “is that capacity is not extraneous to research. It might be that building capacity is the most important thing we can do in partnership. I want to think about ways of building capacity that aren’t necessarily about spending money so that an institution is stressed. For example, how can we work with the University of Liberia to help construct courses or really enhance their students’ ability to develop their skills over the long term?”

**SUSTAINED INVOLVEMENT**

For the Carter center, the IDN offers the potential to complement its work in places where it has sustained involve-

“Our job is to bring university researchers’ expertise, development practitioners’ experience, and the perspective of local researchers, policy makers, and communities into the same conversation.”

—Sita Ranchod-Nilsson, Institute for Developing Nations
and identifying social changes that support peace building—these are issues that have engaged a number of Emory scholars.

Professor of Law Paul Zwier is one such scholar. He first traveled to Liberia in 2006 with the group Lawyers Without Borders to help with a training program for magistrates, prosecutors, and defense lawyers. “At the end of it they were very grateful for the training,” he says. “But I’ll never forget this one fellow: his eyes welled up with tears, and he said, ‘This is all well and good, but it’s just not realistic.’ The corruption in the system is completely endemic.”

Zwier returned from that trip “overwhelmed by what Liberia is facing,” he says. “We saw competition between formal legal structures and traditional community leaders and mediators to form a kind of triage between those cases that really do need the criminal justice system and those that could be resolved at the informal, local level.”

POWER AND RESOURCES

The IDN aims to facilitate faculty collaborations with in-country non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and African scholars in ways that are “reciprocal and mutually beneficial” and that produce both policy outcomes and scholarship that is publishable in top-tier journals.

As noble as it is, this goal can raise uncomfortable questions around power and resources. For instance, anthropologist Bruce Knauft, executive director of Emory’s Institute for Critical International Studies, co-led an IDN-supported workshop in Liberia in June 2008 with Liberia Democracy Watch, a small, government watchdog NGO in Monrovia. Twenty-two attendees—professionals from Liberia-based NGOs and scholars from the University of Liberia—held lively discussions on challenges to their own professional lives, dissatisfaction with international funding for their organizations, and tensions between Liberians who remained during the civil war and those who went abroad. Toward the end, however, several participants carefully voiced a question: Who controls these ideas? If all twenty-two participants are brainstorming and helping formulate a research proposal, how do they share in its ownership?

There are no clear answers. “The exact way they would be put together in a research plan, I don’t know,” Knauft said at the workshop. “But ultimately as a researcher at Emory University, I have to be responsible as the principal investigator to sign off on a grant that comes through the university.” Yet as Ranchod-Nilsson has written, “Too often funding is linked to power to define research agendas, select project participants, and specify outcomes. In these circumstances, partnerships can reproduce colonial hierarchies, albeit in subtle ways.”

Scully is also just beginning to test the agility of these newly defined partnerships. She will also host an IDN-sponsored workshop in Monrovia this spring. “I thought it would be very interesting to get a conversation together...”

“Objectivity is a lens that we’re always accountable to. We constantly bring it in to check our own work. But we’ve made a fetish of objectivity, so that it precludes any engagement at all.”

—Liz Bounds, Candler School of Theology

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The theoretical frameworks and principles of practice that have guided development activities for the past fifty years have not yielded the intended outcomes.

— SITA RANCHOD-NILSSON, DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPING NATIONS

Academic Exchange: Why was the IDN established?
Sita Ranchod-Nilsson: We’re at a moment where there’s a lot of disillusion with development studies and practice. The theoretical frameworks and principles of practice that have guided development activities for the past fifty years have not yielded the intended outcomes. Some see “development” as a neocolonial enterprise dominated by Western expertise and development experts. Others are critical of what has become a development industry, characterized by short-term projects, approaches that overemphasize economics, and a lack of meaningful input from experts and community groups in poor countries. So there is a need to re-think it on multiple levels—the university, non-governmental organizations, policy makers, and the developing countries—in ways that cross-boundaries within the university and beyond. It’s a good moment to engage development at Emory for many reasons: we have scholars from many disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives with on-the-ground research experience in developing countries; our strategic plan envisions a university that is internationally engaged and committed to positive social transformation and courageous inquiry; and we have a unique opportunity with The Carter Center, an internationally respected NGO that focuses on fighting poverty and building a more secure world.

AE: How did the Liberia interest emerge?
SRN: The Carter Center was invited in by the Liberian government to help build rule of law following Liberia’s civil war. The issues raised in this process—the colonial legacy of dual legal systems, building justice systems and state structures with local legitimacy, and identifying social changes that support peace building—engaged a number of Emory scholars. The Carter Center’s program in Liberia confronted issues related to gender-based violence in all aspects of its work, so they invited IDN to organize a working group to help them understand its roots in Liberia.

To go into a post-conflict state that is wrestling with all of this in real time with real-world consequences, was a compelling opportunity. I didn’t have to change who I was to be relevant.

— PAMELA SCULLY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF AFRICAN STUDIES AND WOMEN’S STUDIES

Academic Exchange: How did your interest in Liberia begin?
Pamela Scully: IDN and African studies co-sponsored a lecture series called Making a Difference to try to get people from The Carter Center and Emory in conversation about topics that could generate research and practice—to have people in the field at The Carter Center talking to those of us doing research and thinking about these issues and to encourage academics to think more broadly about the significance of research. Tom Crick from The Carter Center gave a talk on the rule of law in Liberia. He spoke about the issue of gender-based violence and how difficult it was even given the changes in Liberian law around rape and inheritance to change practice in the rural areas. I started talking about what little I know about customary law in Africa and colonial heritage. When the British, for example, encountered customary law they tended to speak to the male elders of the villages and say, how does the law work in your society? The men gave answers of what they kind of wished was the case, and the British took it as fact. So one of the arguments has been that customary law was actually a colonial invention and that it was much more hostile to women than precolonial practices, which were much more messy and flexible. I don’t know whether this was the case in Liberia, but as a historian to go into a post-conflict state that is wrestling with all of this in real time with real-world consequences was a compelling opportunity. As an historian of colonial laws and sexual violence, I didn’t have to change who I was to be relevant. I’ve come to think that my next book is really a project about talking to the importance of history in the present of post-conflict, how historical understanding particularly around gender and violence might help us think in more creative ways about how to build a post-conflict society in which men and women can flourish.

When I went to Liberia on the gender-based violence working
and how programs in other parts of the continent address it. Bringing those concerns and that expertise to this new context has shaped the research agendas of several Emory scholars. Faculty who have not previously seen themselves as working on development are finding that they can make important contributions. They find the many challenges for building a more secure society in Liberia compelling and intellectually engaging.

**AE**: *What does that activity look like?*

**SRN**: At an IDN conference on research collaboration, we learned that researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and communities need to work together to conceptualize research problems, determine what outcomes are valuable, and decide how research should be done. For example, I’m talking to several universities in Liberia about collaborating on a curriculum that would address building capacity in NGOs. It might be three or four courses that would bring in some of the academic literature on NGOs, civil society and development, gender issues relevant to the context in Liberia. It would also address proposal writing, project management, evaluation, and assessment. We have to open up our thinking about what outcomes are valued. Top-tier journals are one outlet, but they are one among many. And depending on the agenda of our partners, that all has to be negotiated.

**AE**: *Can you outline the partnership with The Carter Center?*

**SRN**: The IDN was the brainchild of President Jimmy Carter and Emory President Jim Wagner. They saw the opportunities for synergy between The Carter Center, with programs in the areas of building democracy, human rights, conflict resolution, and health, and Emory, a top-tier research university with expertise in areas that fall under the rubric of “development.” IDN receives financial support from Emory and The Carter Center and IDN’s Academic Advisory Board includes senior faculty as well as executives from the center. The goal of this partnership is to transform development research, influence policy makers, and change teaching about development.

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group trip in March 2008, I was teaching a course in feminist theory and human rights. It was very legally oriented around the debates within feminism on how you put rape and domestic violence into international human rights law. It’s very difficult because they are seen as domestic, private issues, and international law tends to deal with the state. Then after the trip, I couldn’t stop talking about Liberia. Toward the end of the class, my graduate students came and said, Can we change what we’re writing on? We all want to write on Liberia. Can’t we do something that would actually engage with Liberia? So one wrote on the new rape law in Liberia from a feminist theory perspective. Somebody else wrote on how to make feminist interconnections with computing in Liberia. Somebody else wrote on religious-based programs and how they could be used to address domestic violence.

**AE**: *Can you explain some of your thinking about gender-based violence?*

**PS**: There’s a wide variety of understanding about what it means. But it seems in general to mean violence against women, including rape, domestic violence, inheritance laws, female genital mutilation, et cetera. One of the things that troubled me is I think it’s really re-animating an older question of who is vulnerable and needs protection. It’s not that women don’t need protection. But what happens is silence around sexual violence visited on men. We know that a lot of these conflicts—particularly in northern Uganda, the Congo, I think Sierra Leone but I’m not sure because nobody talks about it—young men are also being raped. Men are also made to rape their mothers and their children in front of soldiers. That is surely a form of sexual violence against the men.

Our analytic categories cannot cope with this blurring of perpetrator and victim. We don’t know what to do with it, so we keep them separate: we make men the perpetrators and women the victims. I don’t want in any way to suggest that women aren’t victims of appalling violence, because they are. But I worry about these theoretical frames. What I’m finding is that it isn’t just theoretical conversations; they have real implications. I read in a report somewhere that “gender” doesn’t translate into many languages. Often it’s translated as “women.” But really talking with someone about sexual violence against women is a different analytic concept from gendered violence. I would say that men are raped in wartime because either they refuse to fight and they’re being made into women who don’t fight, or they’re being raped or made to rape to humiliate them. It’s a really important analytic level to have, and it’s not one that is easily developed.

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**T H E  A C A D E M I C E X C H A N G E**
Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition
The Concept of Vulnerability

MARTHA A. FINEMAN, ROBERT W. WOODRUFF PROFESSOR OF LAW

FOR CENTURIES, the concept of “equality” in Western thought has been associated with John Locke’s philosophy of liberal individualism and the creation of the liberal subject. In this model, all human beings are by nature free and endowed with the same inalienable rights. Although this vision of equality has inherent radical potential, in the United States today we have come to understand “equality” narrowly as the requirement of sameness of treatment, a formal anti-discrimination mandate primarily enforced through the courts. We all know the litany of protected categories found in the equal protection doctrine: race, sex, religion, national origin, and so on.

Our current understanding of equality has been shaped in part by the twentieth-century history of the use of the equal protection doctrine as a tool to fight blatant forms of discrimination focused on race, sex, and ethnicity. In particular, feminist legal reformers during the latter part of the century were suspicious of any difference in treatment, even if it was designed to favor women.

The problem with this formal model is that “equality” is reduced to sameness of treatment or a prohibition on discrimination. Formal equality leaves undisturbed—and may even serve to validate—existing institutional arrangements that privilege some and disadvantage others. It does not provide a framework for challenging existing allocations of resources and power, and it also fails to disrupt persistently forms of inequality. If we look at American society, we see a long and growing list of material and social inequalities; we have no guarantee of basic social goods such as food, housing, and health care, and we have a network of dominant economic and political systems that not only tolerate but justify grossly unequal distributions of wealth, power, and opportunity. It is as though existing material, cultural, and social imbalances are the product of natural forces and beyond the ability of the law to rectify.

In contrast, I want to claim the term “vulnerable” for its potential in describing a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition that must be at the heart of our concept of social and state responsibility. Vulnerability can be a powerful conceptual tool to define groups of fledgling or stigmatized subjects, designated as “populations.” Vulnerability is typically associated with victimhood, deprivation, dependency, or pathology. For example, public health discourse refers to “vulnerable populations,” such as those infected with HIV-AIDS. People living in poverty or confined in prisons or other state institutions are often labeled as vulnerable populations. Children and the elderly are examples of more sympathetic vulnerable populations.

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In contrast, I want to claim the term “vulnerable” for its potential in describing a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition that must be at the heart of our concept of social and state responsibility. Vulnerability can be a powerful conceptual tool to define the state’s obligation to ensure a richer, more robust guarantee of equality than the current equal protection model affords.
Vulnerability initially should be understood as arising from our embodiment, which carries with it the ever-present possibility of harm, injury, and misfortune from mildly adverse to catastrophically devastating events, whether accidental, intentional, or otherwise. Individuals can attempt to lessen the risk or mitigate the impact of such events, but they cannot eliminate their possibility. Understanding vulnerability begins with the realization that many such events are ultimately beyond human control.

Our embodied humanity carries with it the ever-constant possibility of dependency as a result of disease, epidemics, resistant viruses, or other biologically based catastrophes. Our bodies are also vulnerable to other forces in our physical environment: there is the constant possibility that we can be injured and undone by “natural” disasters such as flood, drought, famine, and fire. These are events beyond our individual control to prevent. Our bodily vulnerability is enhanced by the realization that should we succumb to illness or injury there may be accompanying economic and institutional harms as a result of disruption of existing relationships.

Because we are positioned differently within a web of economic and institutional relationships, our vulnerabilities range in magnitude and potential at the individual level. Undeniably universal, human vulnerability is also particular: it is experienced uniquely by each of us. This experience is greatly influenced by the quality and quantity of resources we possess or can command. Significantly, the realization that no individual subjects have the ability to negotiate contract terms—to assess their options and make rational choices. They consent to such agreements in the course of fulfilling society’s mandate that they assume personal responsibility for themselves and for their dependents. Privacy principles that restrain the state and its institutions from interfering with the liberal subjects’ entitlements to autonomy and liberty depend on this presumed competence and capability.

Vulnerability analysis, however, suggests that the vulnerable subject is a more accurate and complete universal figure to place at the heart of social policy. There have been many critiques of the liberal subject, most of which focus on autonomy. For instance, feminist scholars have scrutinized and criticized the ways in which dominant theory and popular politics idealize notions of independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency that are empirically unrealistic and unrealizable. Some feminist critics have offered a model of interdependence in which the liberal subject is enmeshed in a web of relationships and perceived as dependent upon them.

A vulnerability critique builds on these insights, but it differs in several ways. Vulnerability is a more encompassing concept, and for that reason, analyses centered around vulnerability are more politically potent than those based on dependency. Because dependency is episodic and shifts in degree on an individual level for most of us, mainstream political and social theorists can and often do conveniently ignore it. In their hands, dependency, if acknowledged at all, is merely a stage that the liberal subject has long ago transcended or left behind and is, therefore, of no pressing theoretical interest. In addition, society has historically dealt with dependency by relegating the burden of caretaking to the family, which is located within a zone of privacy, beyond the scope of state concern absent extraordinary family failures, such as abuse or neglect. Thus largely rendered invisible within the family, dependency is comfortably and mistakenly assumed to be adequately managed for the vast majority of people.

By contrast, if it is understood as a state of constant possibility of harm, vulnerability cannot be hidden. Further, while institutions such as the family may provide some shelter, they are unable to eliminate individual vulnerability and are themselves vulnerable structures susceptible to harm and

I want to claim the term “vulnerable” for its potential in describing a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition that must be at the heart of our concept of social and state responsibility.

Continued on page 11
A recent article from Reuters about a Muslim creationist in Istanbul got me thinking about a conversation I recently had with Lobsang Dhondup, a Tibetan Buddhist monk in Dharamsala, India. The article describes the Muslim creationist Adnan Oktar. Oktar, a Turk who writes under the pseudonym Harun Yahya, got the attention of hundreds of European and North American scientists and teachers when he mass-mailed them his tome, Atlas of Creation. The Atlas, available on line (www.harunyahya.com/books/darwinism/atlas_creation/atlas_creation_01.ph), is written in plain English and is full of illustrations, and it contains many of the usual attacks on Darwin heard from Christian fundamentalists in this country. The author does and perspective strike me, especially the sharp contrast to that of a young monk with whom I spoke recently. Oktar and those with similar ideas are about refuting, disproving, and attacking evidence to segregate themselves and demonstrate why their ideas are best. Dhondup and his fellow Buddhists are about integration, exploration, and engaging evidence to enrich their own understanding and make their ideas better.

Dhondup is part of a project several colleagues and I have recently embarked on. The Dalai Lama asked Emory to lead an effort to develop a comprehensive science curriculum that over the next five to ten years will eventually be taught to all the thousands of Tibetan monks and nuns in exile in India. In the pilot program that we just completed, several professors and graduate students (including folks from anthropology, biology, psychiatry, physics, philosophy, and the graduate school) taught thirty-three monks and five nuns life sciences, neuroscience, physics, math, and science philosophy. An amazing experience.

Evolution was the first life sciences topic my co-teachers (Rustom Antia and Alex Escobar) and I decided to focus on. For my section, the monks developed an experiment to test the hypothesis—a small piece of Darwin’s pie—that the environment affects organisms’ life characteristics. We went outdoors to three different elevations in the foothills of the Himalayas and studied the animal and plant life and their surrounding water, air, and soil. It was as we were walking down the mountain from the highest elevation that I started talking with Dhondup (several of the monks and nuns are fluent in English). I asked him why he was participating in this project and how he handled issues that came up that were at odds with his Buddhist beliefs.

“I am studying modern science because I believe it can help me understand my Buddhism better,” Dhondup said. Read that again. I was left momentarily speechless. I tried to imagine anyone I knew—anyone from the West, Christian, Jew, or Muslim—making such an assertion. Just think of the dramatic difference in worldview, tone, and perspective in approach to life and life’s challenges that Dhondup’s thought represents—how different it is from Oktar’s. I was stunned.
I was walking down a mountain in India with a guy wearing a robe and sandals, a guy from an ancient world easily perceived as irrelevant, who had a wisdom beyond any I had previously experienced. Buddhism suggests significant rearranging of some modern Judeo-Christian ideas. In Buddhism, experience and reasoning come first, and then scripture. As we wandered down the path of broken rock fragments, Dhondup told me that when he encounters something that disagrees with his beliefs, he tests the new idea with logical evidence and approaches, and then if it holds up, he accepts it. This is what the Dalai Lama means when he says that if modern science presents good evidence that a Buddhist idea is wrong, he will accept the modern science (he gives the example of the Earth moving around the sun, which runs counter to Buddhist scripture). Perhaps creationists think they are using logic and experience to disprove Darwin with exhibitions like those in creationist museums and statements from Oktar’s Atlas, such as, “Facts can no longer be concealed and swept aside, as was the case in Darwin’s time. Genetics, microbiology, paleontology, geology, and all other branches of science constantly reveal a truth that Darwin and the supporters of Darwinism never wanted and perhaps never expected—the fact of creation.” I don’t know.

Of course, all Westerners of faith aren’t like Oktar. Nor is it true that all creationists reject science (see, for example, a recent New York Times piece about Darwinists for Jesus: www.nytimes.com/2008/06/15/magazine/15wwln-essay-t.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=science%20religion&st=cse&oref=slogin). I’m not saying any religion is better than the other. But this idea of being open to all knowledge because it could potentially enrich your own beliefs, no matter who you are or what you believe—that’s something to think about.

This essay is adapted from one appearing in Religion Dispatches, an online magazine that explores the intersections of religion, values, and public life, nationally and globally.
Emory University Strategic Plan Update
What is happening and why we should care

Earl Lewis, Provost and Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs;
Fred Sanfilippo, Executive Vice President, Health Affairs;
And Makeba Morgan-Hill, Director of University Strategic Planning

Since its adoption in 2005, Emory’s strategic plan, Where Courageous Inquiry Leads, has begun to change the intellectual landscape of the university. Two new doctoral tracks—one in Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding and a second in Religion and Health—are a result of the Religion and the Human Spirit initiative. A third new interdisciplinary doctoral program results from a grant received by the Predictive Health and Society initiative. And eleven new courses in the curriculum address social inequities—a direct result of the work of the Race and Difference initiative. These developments are just a few examples of the way the strategic plan has begun to affect the lives of faculty, students, and staff.

In the context of a significant financial realignment, it is important to take stock of these and other accomplishments at Emory in the last few years. Even though the ongoing economic downturn will force some adjustments, we have made significant strides.

Emory’s strategic plan lays out a blueprint from 2005 to 2015 for achieving Emory’s vision to become a destination university internationally recognized as an inquiry-driven, ethically engaged, and diverse community, whose members work collaboratively for positive transformation in the world through courageous leadership in teaching, research, scholarship, health care, and social action. The plan is based upon the strategies and activities of the individual schools and units, organized by a framework that consists of five crosscutting university-wide themes and five implementation strategies.

The strategic plan emphasizes both priorities that span the university and those particular to schools and units. They include recruiting endowed chairs, redesigning the curricula of key programs, strengthening collaboration across schools and initiatives, and developing academic programs. Even in the midst of a new fiscal reality, Emory will continue to develop new organizational solutions for initiative support and structure, improve measures and indicators of strategic plan success, and adjust goals and strategies on an ongoing basis to meet current needs.

The overall goals of the strategic plan have not changed, however. The emphasis continues to be on people—faculty, students, and staff. For example, the Faculty Distinction Fund, part of the “Strengthening Faculty Distinction” theme, assisted with a net faculty growth of 317 (12 percent) since 2005 and the election of ten Emory faculty to national academies. The new Academic Leadership Program is designed to strengthen academic leadership across the university and establish a leadership pipeline for succession planning, and the Center for Faculty Development and Excellence was created to support development in research, teaching, and scholarly writing and to foster Emory’s intellectual community. Through the new Emory Advantage Program, the university has provided $3.5 million to attract and retain 447 new and returning Emory undergraduates. And Emory’s signature undergraduate experience, Preparing Engaged Scholars, has been established to prepare students for lifelong ethical leadership and active engagement in civic life.

It is important to know that the strategic plan does not focus exclusively on the six initiative areas. Its reach also extends to activities within the schools and units of the university. For example, Emory libraries have benefited from the plan—such as the recent acquisition of the archives of Pulitzer Prize-winner Alice Walker.

Much progress has been made, and more will come. We can look forward to a model for a new Work-Life Resource Center to develop programs to improve the work-life balance for all members of the Emory community. The Creativity and the Arts initiative will continue to enhance our environment as well. Currently, the School of Medicine’s new education building is serving as gallery space for “Art by the Emory Visual Arts Faculty,” the first in a series of compelling art installations developed to reach future doctors and the professionals who train them. Then there are the cranes on campus. Construction has allowed for new residence halls, new academic buildings such as the Candler Theology and Center for Ethics building, the new psychology building, and the expansion of the Rollins School of Public Health. All initiated construction will be completed, but in the current economic climate, no new projects will begin until further assessment.

Challenges and Implementation

As a community, Emory has embarked on a long road to achieve its vision of becoming a destination university of international reputation. Now more
than ever, implementing Emory’s strategic plan requires flexibility, openness to opportunity, and commitment to fiscal responsibility.

The world of higher education is facing nearly unprecedented challenges. These include the impact of the world economy; state and federal budget fluctuations; the effect of the declining housing market on faculty recruitment; rising tuition costs and competition for middle class families; decreasing applications to private universities; expected increases in the number of faculty who retire; increasing government oversight and assessment of learning and research outcomes; rising healthcare costs and related legislation; and the growing emphasis on environmental stewardship, local community involvement, and campus security.

The Strategic Implementation Advisory Committee, with representation from across the university, continues to develop priorities, review achievements, and guide strategic implementation activities. Over the past six months, a process to conduct a mid-point review and update of the strategic plan was established. The plan’s mid-point, 2010, is an ideal time to assess progress toward achieving university-wide strategic goals, changes in the internal and external environment, and the impact of the strategic plan on Emory’s strategic position. The Strategic Plan Executive Committee, which consists of the executive vice presidents for academic affairs, health affairs, and finance and administration, will assess the progress, trajectory, and long-term sustainability of each strategic theme, initiative, and implementation strategy and make adjustments as needed. The school and unit plans, which are the foundation of the university-wide plan, expire in 2010 and must be updated for the next five years (2010–2015).

Over this academic year, all components of the strategic plan will be evaluated. This is an elaborate process that seeks feedback from all. Consequently, the next phase of the plan may look different. We are in the middle of this process presently, and an update is expected to be available in fall 2009.

For more information on the strategic plan, please www.emory.edu/strategicplan. Monthly updates are provided on the Academic Exchange website at www.emory.edu/ACAD_EXCHANGE/strategicplan.html.

Liberia
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experience it. But my on-the-ground work is sitting in archives, reading cases and criminal records. This is extremely new for me, to speak to living people.”

Vulnerability
Continued from page 7

change. Because vulnerability is ever-present and enduring, institutional as well as individual, it suggests a critique of dominant modes of thinking about inequality that is at once complementary to but more powerful than dependency. My argument is not for vulnerability to supplant dependency, for they each reveal different and important things. Rather, the assertion is that vulnerability analysis may ultimately prove more theoretically powerful.

In addition, the vulnerability perspective calls attention to another problematic characteristic of the liberal subject: s/he can only be presented as an adult. As such, the liberal subject stands not only outside of the passage of time, but also outside of human experience. The construction of the adult liberal subject captures only one possible developmental stage—the least vulnerable—from among the many possible stages an actual individual might pass through if s/he lives a “normal” lifespan. We must confront this foundational flaw in the liberal model if we are to develop legal and social policies that reflect the lived realities of human subjects.

The vulnerable subject approach does what the one-dimensional liberal subject approach cannot: it embodies the fact that human reality encompasses a wide range of differing and interdependent abilities over the span of a lifetime. The vulnerability approach recognizes that individuals are anchored at each end of their lives by dependency and the absence of capacity. Of course, between these ends, loss of capacity and dependence may also occur, temporarily for many and permanently for some as a result of disability or illness. Constant and variable throughout life, individual vulnerability encompasses not only damage that has been done in the past and speculative harms of the distant future but also the possibility of immediate harm.

We are beings who live with the ever-present possibility that our needs and circumstances will change. On an individual level, the concept of vulnerability (unlike that of liberal autonomy) captures this present potential for each of us to become dependent based upon our persistent susceptibility to misfortune and catastrophe.

Equality must be a universal resource, a radical guarantee that is a benefit for all. We must begin to think of the state’s commitment to equality as one rooted in an understanding of vulnerability and dependency, and that recognizes that autonomy is not a naturally occurring characteristic of the human condition but a product of social policy.

A cross-campus Vulnerability Studies Project (sponsored by the Race and Difference Strategic Initiative) was launched last semester. A reading group and a works-in-progress group each meet once a month. For more information, contact Martha Fineman (mlfinem@emory.edu) to be included on the mailing list.
The curative arts
The philosophy behind these [nineteenth-century American mental] institutions really stressed providing a kind of total sanitive environment for the patients, and they placed a great emphasis on patients’ cultural lives and their creative expression. Things like writing poetry and acting in stage plays were not just diversions or amusements to the patients; they were actually part of the treatment. The doctors had no real medical training in diseases of the brain but were often kind of upstanding gentlemen of their society. One reason they were chosen to lead an asylum was for their moral values and the cultural bearing that they themselves could model, with the proper deportment and modes of expression that patients were supposed to aspire to. As a person with literary training, I found a fascinating deployment of literature and culture in these institutions. Some of my remarks may seem as if I feel nostalgic for this, or that these were happy places. Let me assure you there were all kinds of terrible things that happened in these buildings. . . . There’s a certain kind of utopian belief that mental illness is the responsibility of the entire society that I think to some degree we’ve lost, and it’s worth recapturing.

—Benjamin Reiss, Associate Professor of English, Emory, commenting on his book Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture, November 11, 2008, sponsored by the Office of the Provost and the Academic Exchange

Michelangelo’s theory of art
Three fifths of Michelangelo’s works were left unfinished, and people have debated this to a great extent. Michelangelo found time and time again that the sublimity of his ideas lay beyond what he was really trying to say and that the concepts in the brain are so rich that it is really not possible for an artist to concentrate it all on a single work of art. So he brings it to a certain point of finish and leaves it to the spectator, the viewer, to project its content. Why do I say that? Let me quote to you one of the last lost sonnets of Michelangelo . . . :

“I now know how fraught with peril was that vivid imagination that made art my idol and my king. No brush, no chisel can quieten the soul once it turns to contemplation of divine love of He who from the cross outstretched his arms to take us unto Himself.”

—Semir Zeki, professor of neurobiology, University College, London, from his talk “Ambiguity in Art and in the Brain,” October 21, 2008, sponsored by the Office of the Provost and the Emory Creative Arts Strategic Initiative