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TRICENTENNIAL PROJECT

by **Ellie Hansen**, **Mariel Sander** and **Bob Pollack**

MARIEL SANDER

The Tricentennial Project began in the Mudd café.

Bob told the RCSS he was working on a book and asked if anyone like to talk to him about it; having always been a bookworm, I reached out. I entered our first conversation a little awed by Bob, as many of us are. I also felt skeptical—I wondered if despite his claim to support truly student run projects, he still believed in the hierarchy of student to faculty at his core.

But even in that first conversation, I remember leaving with a sense of wellbeing, of hope, the sense that I think many of us have when we leave a conversation with Bob. I felt I had really been listened to.

Over time, that dynamic conversation drafts of his book proposals were more and more blunt, more and more unfiltered. I saw that he really did value my thoughts and feedback, and, most of all, my questions.

Over time, the questions became more oriented towards one larger question: what do you want to say and why are you the one to say it?

Together, Bob and I found that what embodied Bob's goal for his book, more generally, wasn't a conversation, or a set of conversations. And what better than an RCSS project to embody this?

On a personal level, seeing how Bob approached his own book project with the same humility and genuine trust as how he approached RCSS projects is what showed me he was, for lack of a better word, legitimate. And seeing someone who so genuinely lived that approach to life made me feel more able to engage in other projects, in my classes—built my confidence in a way that I saw affected my work in the morgue, as an EMT, in my current job. Because of this project, when I asked if I could call Dr. Pollack Bob: I still vividly remember how it felt when he said yes.

ELLIE HANSEN

I first learned about the Research Cluster on Science and Subjectivity shortly before the pandemic in Spring 2020, after meeting with former scholar Mariel Sander to discuss taking over a project she had begun her senior year. Mariel, in a discussion with RCSS head Dr. Robert Pollack, came to realize the importance of intergenerational discussions on climate change. The project got its name, the Tricentennial Project, from the idea that students and faculty should imagine what Columbia's tricentennial may be like in the face of climate change. Inspired by her idea, I advertised the Tricentennial Project as a new student group looking to creatively address climate change.

By Fall 2020, I was met with an exciting and creative group of people with incredible ideas. We decided on a four-part event series to explore different facets of climate change in conjunction with Columbia faculty. Thanks to their efforts, we hosted Dr. Diana Hernandez to discuss designing climate solutions in conjunction with affected communities, Dr. Lisa Dale to explore resilience to climate change, particularly forest fires, and Dr. Jeffery Shrader, to discuss how we conceive of climate prediction changes the results. Finally, the Tricentennial Project's goal was to have a meeting between faculty and administration of the newly developing Columbia Climate School and undergraduate student groups. During the event, student groups were able to present their ideas on what the new Climate School should look like, before breaking into groups to discuss their ideas more informally. I was continuously impressed with the diversity of ideas and commitment shown by my fellow members, and extremely grateful to the RCSS for providing us with a platform.

While still working on the Tricentennial project in Spring 2021, I also began to think often about a course on Classical Rhetoric that I had taken in the English department my sophomore year. A section of the course was dedicated to the Rhetoric of Science, or how language factors into both the development and communication of scientific knowledge. I had long wanted to expand this into a course on the Rhetoric of Science proper.

I was inspired by my own experiences in psychology research, where consideration of language, both in developing concepts and in writing research reports, is crucial to our field but almost never directly taught. I brought this idea to fellow RCSS scholar Kimia Heydari, who also took the Classical Rhetoric course and shared my interest. We further agreed that science communication also had fraught political connotations, especially during a pandemic. By creating an undergraduate course on the Rhetoric of Science, we hoped to both offer future scientists humanistic tools to address their own discipline, and modes of communication to help improve public discourse around science.

BOB POLLACK

Trust and hope, linked together, form the heart of my religious sensibility, and also, my way of seeing the gift of a tenured professorship. I trust my students who wish to be intern-scholars, and I hope

that in helping them we will together bring about an improvement, however slight, in the future. This trust led me to share a shock to my pride with Mariel, in hopes of saving the huge amount of work I had done that had led nowhere. I had worked for many months to produce a book proposal, to tell the story of my life, and how I came to be able to trust and hope, but only later in life. Publishers and agents agreed: I am not important enough to warrant an autobiography, and so my proposal withered on the vine.

I asked Mariel to be my advisor, and to suggest changes that might make my proposal viable. She agreed to be my advisor, a perfect flip of the expected hierarchy. And it worked, in an unexpected but unsurprising way. The rewritten proposal still did not warrant a contract. But in our conversations, we saw that it would be Mariel, and not me, who would have to deal with the consequences of a world that did not respond to trust, nor to hope, but only to utility and success. That's where the Tricentennial true collaboration.

ABOUT THE SCHOLARS



Mariel Sander (CC '20) studied Neuroscience and English. She is now the Global Engagement Officer at the Healthy Brains Global Initiative. Her current favorite color is a bright sunset orange and she loves to travel!

Ellie Hansen (CC '21) a graduating senior majoring in Psychology and her favorite color is tropical blue. After graduation, she will be beginning a position in the NIH in DC conducting research on developmental psychopathology.

