“I have dedicated my life to helping children attain their dreams of education. I hope never to have to look into a child’s eyes and tell her she cannot have the one thing that will help her get ahead.”

Carol Bellamy ’63 is Making a World of Difference

By Jackie Zakrewsky ’86
Photography by Alexander Armster-Wikoff ’03
After graduating from Gettysburg in 1963, Bellamy served two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala before heading to law school at New York University, where she earned her degree in 1968. “I wanted to stay in the Peace Corps, but you couldn’t do that,” she said. She applied to law school with the idea that she would later work for the U.S. Agency for International Development. She didn’t count on falling in love with corporate law and contracts, but she did. “I went to law school to save the world and went to work saving businesses on Wall Street,” she said, “but it was the 1960s. So after 16-hour days at Cravath, Swaine and Moore, she spent four hours with other like-minded lawyers building what became the biggest pro bono legal entity in the city, the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

Bellamy spent 1968 through 1971 at Cravath, became involved in politics, and spent 13 years as an elected official, including five years in the New York State Senate and eight years as the first female president of the New York City Council. She also had unsuccessful runs for mayor and state comptroller.

She was a principal at Morgan Stanley from 1986 through 1990 and a managing director at Bear Stearns & Co. from 1990 through 1993. When former President Bill Clinton tapped her for the Peace Corps directorship, she became the first former volunteer to head the organization. She directed UNICEF from 1995 to 2005. In 2004, Forbes named her one of the 100 Most Powerful Women in the World.

A psychology major who greatly admired the late Professor Samuel Mudd, Bellamy sang in the choir on campus and was involved in various musical productions. In 1973, she returned to her alma mater to deliver the commencement address. As chair of the Fair Labor Association — what she calls her “night job” — Bellamy worked with businesses and other groups on behalf of workers’ rights. Born in New Jersey, she has made Brooklyn her home since 1966.

Invited to campus this past October by Rebecca Bergren, director of off-campus studies, Bellamy spoke with various campus groups, committees, and individuals about study abroad and global citizenship. Amidst her whirlwind round of meetings and talks, she also took time out for an interview for this magazine.

Going Global

With a blend of humor, trenchant observations, and down-to-earth realism, Carol Bellamy ’63 gave an inspiring talk on global citizenship to about 100 members of the campus community. They packed an upstairs CUB room, 200 to hear her address the topic, “How U.S. Campuses Can Support the Development of Global Citizens.”

“To know what it’s like to walk in someone else’s shoes” is important, said Bellamy, “not just to make us worldly” or build our résumés, but because “it expands our sense of humanity and makes us better people and, in the long run, contributes to peace.”

On a pragmatic level, the “global- ized world we live in,” she said, “demands new competencies and technology. The world has become smaller, or as Thomas Friedman has said, flatter.” She maintains that the private sector understands this reality far better than the public sector. Case in point: education. She cited how, in 2000, two-thirds of high school students had never studied a second language. In higher education, less than one percent of undergraduates study abroad, said Bellamy, which represents about 200,000 students, the vast majority of whom study in just four Western European countries.

Noting a “widening and distressing skills gap that we desperately need to close,” Bellamy also stressed that being a global citizen is “more than just a skills set for competing effectively.” She called it “a mindset to be embraced and ‘acted upon.’” Global citizens, she argued, are “agents of change who are not afraid to speak more than their mother tongue and step out of their comfort zones.”

Referring to Oprah and Bono, whose celebrity status gives them a platform to push humanitarian causes, Bellamy said, “I am here to tell you that people who carry both a first name and a last name can make a difference. It’s about choices, not celebrity DNA.

Bellamy outlined four steps campuses can take to address “the urgency of creating an environment where people will have an opportuni- ty to have their eyes opened.” First, institutions should “embrace and engage foreign study as part of a full education,” she said. Specifically, “we need to send more students and facul- ty abroad,” she said, adding that “people need to learn to listen, to learn to care, to be tolerant of human views and to be intolerant of human suffering.”

On campus, “to open students’ eyes to global issues, courses should not be U.S. centric. I would argue every course is global,” Bellamy said. In addition, “students have to develop habits of get- ting international news daily,” which means going beyond domestic media outlets, and then discussing that news. Campuses should also have an interna- tional student body “and make sure they’re woven into campus life, just as study abroad students need to get out of the American bubble” when overseas, she said.

Finally, “don’t forget parents, alum- ni, community members — interna- tionalize them,” Bellamy, said by oper- ating lectures to the community or even holding lectures in the community. “Use the lens of citizen diplomacy,” she urged, “to do ‘more thinking less bureau’ when commenting how universi- ties can become portals for all their constituencies.”
Q. How do you think that the education you received here has helped you in your life? Have you ever really seen it at work?

A. I partly think of my education here where the way I think about my law school education, which is — and this more a reflection back rather than while I was here — that it's more creating a little box for you to stand on rather than directing, sending you in a particular direction. In other words, it wasn't so much that because I studied X here, I did Y. It was more that it made me stronger in some ways and, therefore, I was better positioned to make choices — but it didn't force the choice.

Q. You've written, "I have dedicated my life to helping children attain their dreams of education. I hope never to look into a child’s eyes and tell her she cannot have the one thing that will help her get ahead." Can you elaborate a bit on why you think education is so important?

A. First of all, as I've often said, unless women are treated as real human beings in this world and empowered — not more powerful than men, just empowered to be full participants in their particular society — as long as that doesn't happen, children will be at risk. And as long as children are at risk, then societies are going to be weak. As I've said many times, if being an advocate for girls' education is making sure that girls get an education around the world. This is not marching down the street, this is making sure that girls get an education.

Q. The right-wing press and commentators have tarred you as a "radical feminist." How do you explain that when, and where did your feminist consciousness develop?

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Q. Much of your work has this moral imperative, which, as we know, does not always move the powers or forces that be. Almost no one would argue that poverty is not a serious problem, that we need to do things, and we pretty much know it's not a question of resources. As you pointed out this morning, the whole question of children dying of diarreah doesn't need a scientific breakthrough. So how can change happen? And what is your role in trying to make that change happen?

A. This is really a hard question, and I've tried to figure it out. I think a lot has to do with leadership. Everybody has to make what their contribution is, but I think we have to continue to try to create an environment in which more attention is paid to the quality of leadership — government leadership, private-sector leadership, civil society leadership. People can engage in wars with impunity in the world today. Wars went on in parts of Africa. Meanwhile, the extractive industries keep going on. There have to be some penalties in some ways for bad behavior, and I don't know anyone who gets to that. It doesn't mean every body has to be a goody-goody two-shoe. I just think more attention has to be paid to leadership. Good leadership has to be identified and recognized in some way.