The University
Collaborator or Colonist?

By Aimee Rodriguez

Colleges and universities across the nation — including Harvard, Cornell, NYU, Northwestern and Duke — are expanding their global presence by creating outposts of their unique home campuses. But what are the implications when U.S. universities venture abroad?

The Kenan Institute for Ethics and Duke Chapel will host a spring symposium, “Duke’s Global Ventures: Collaboration or Colonialism?,” to address such questions. The symposium will be held from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 1, in the Alumni Memorial Common Room at the Divinity School. The event is free and open to the public.

Until recently, the global presence of many higher education institutions took the form of study-abroad or exchange programs, research partnerships or civic-engagement programs. Now many universities are also building international branches that seek to retain the vision and identity of the university as a whole.

“These ventures raise a series of fundamental questions that become more important to address as society, and education in particular, becomes more global,” said Sam Wells, dean of Duke Chapel and the symposium’s co-moderator with Noah Pickus, director of the Kenan Institute for Ethics.

Wells described concerns that may arise when universities establish international outposts. Questions include: What is the nature of the university’s involvement and how did it come about? How does the university avoid a colonial approach to its overseas engagements? How will it respond to local cultural norms when these clash with the university’s own values?

The symposium will open with Blair Sheppard, dean of the Fuqua School of Business, and R. Sanders Williams, senior vice chancellor for international strategy for the university. The two will discuss the global ventures of their respective programs at Duke. Ranjana Khanna, director of Duke’s women’s studies department, and Karla Holloway, a professor of English and law, are also scheduled to speak. The event will conclude with a roundtable discussion and an audience Q&A.

Inaugural Poet to Speak at Duke

By Michele Lynn

“In today’s sharp sparkle, this winter air, any thing can be made, any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp, praise song for walking forward in that light.”

Capturing the essence of the moment, Elizabeth Alexander read these words from her poem, “Praise Song for the Day,” at the inauguration of President Barack Obama. Only the fourth poet in history to read at a presidential swearing-in, Alexander will bring her lyrical talents to Duke this month for a reading and reception at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 14, at the Nasher Museum of Art. The event, sponsored by Duke’s Office of the President, the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute and the departments of English and of African and African American Studies, is free and open to the public.

A poet, essayist, playwright and professor of African American Studies at Yale University, Alexander teaches courses on African-American poetry, drama and 20th century literature. As an undergraduate student at Yale, she studied with Duke President Richard Brodhead, who taught in Yale’s English department for more than three decades. The relationship between Brodhead and Alexander, as well as her acclaim for being chosen as the inaugural poet, sparked the invitation for her speech at Duke.

“When our emphasis at Duke on the arts and President Brodhead’s own personal history as a humanist, we are really interested in bringing the best and most interesting artists and writers to campus in highly visible events,” said Christina Chia, assistant director for programs and communications at the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute.

Chia said that as a scholar, poet and author of critical essays, Alexander is appealing to those interested in English, African-American studies and the humanities generally. “Given Professor Alexander’s interest in American history and the way that she weaves history into her poetry — which people got a taste of in the inaugural poem — we thought that this was the right moment for this event,” Chia said.

“Collaboration or Colonialism?”

SYMPOSIUM: Duke’s Global Ventures

Collaboration or Colonialism?
1:30 - 3:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 1
Alumni Memorial Common Room, Duke Divinity School
Information: dukeethics.org

Chapel Concerts Highlight Jewish Experience

Duke Chapel will present two concerts this month honoring key events in Jewish history: the Exodus and the Holocaust. Under the direction of Rodney Wynkoop, the Duke Chapel Choir and Duke Chorale will present “Israel in Egypt” at 4 p.m., Sunday, April 5, in the chapel. Tickets are free for Duke students, $15 for adults. Contact the University Box Office at 684-4444 or at tickets.duke.edu. The Duke Vespers Ensemble will present “With Perfect Faith,” a Holocaust cantata written by Duke Chapel assistant conductor Alan Friedman, at 2 p.m., Sunday, April 19. No tickets are required; a $5 donation to Amnesty International will be collected before and after the concert.