

Entrance Is Easier with Priceless Plastic

By **BENJAMIN RYAN**

Spectator Contributing Writer

Night falls over the Columbia campus. The Orgo test is over; the French paper isn't due until Monday; the air is crisp with anticipation.

It's Friday night in Morningside Heights and hoards of undergrads, the vast majority of whom are not yet twenty-one, are hitting the streets with a vengeance, many armed with the priceless piece of plastic we call the fake ID.

The setting is a popular bar on Amsterdam Avenue. Women dressed in all black, sporting platform boots and fake Prada hand

bags are taking their best shot at weaseling past the bouncer. Some are hesitant first-years new to the game. Others are abrasively forthright, such as one young woman who unabashedly hands the bouncer an "International Student's" identification card.

The bouncer protests. Asserting an inalienable right to entrance, the young woman retorts, "I'm from Manhattan. I don't drive." She is half way in the door.

From the bouncer: "How come you've got and International Student's ID if you're from



ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR—EMMY POINTER

"Identification cards" can be purchased at a variety of locations throughout Manhattan.

See IDs, page seven

Desperate to Come of Age, Students Look for Fake IDs

IDs from page one

Manhattan?"

"I was studying in England," she says flippantly.

"Hostility won't help you."
The young woman protests with greater vigilance until the bouncer is fed up.

"You know, I'm not going to let you in."
"Fine."

The bouncer said she would have gotten in if it weren't for her attitude. Floods of other hopefuls approach and pass on by. He tells of another young woman who once offered her mother's driver's license. She had pulled off the laminate and altered the birth date to make herself 21 instead of middle-aged. "She tried to tell me that she'd had a nose job since she'd had the picture taken."

And such is the game. Underage Columbia students will go to great lengths to ensure entrance to local hot spots, as well as to other downtown bars and clubs.

"My ID changed my life," says Sinson, CC '01, who, like all who spoke on the topic, did so on the condition that their real identity be protected or changed. "I'd die if I lost it."

So desperate for an identification he now considers to be "the best in the business," Sinson actually stole his older brother's passport and birth certificate and took them to the Illinois Department of Motor Vehicles to obtain a driver's license under his brother's identity. He dressed like the photo on the passport and even applied makeup and curled his hair to further the similarities. "I could have been arrested for fraud, but they bought it. Now I'm 26."

Others work in the underground underground. They find places in SoHo or Times Square that unabashedly offer so-called "photo IDs" through window signs and awnings.

These outlets, with names like Backsta Gifts, or Three Star Gift Shop, can quickly manufacture state student and the questionable "Legal non-governmental" IDs.

Mario, CC '01, recounts his own experience in one such place:

"I'll go to the store. It's lined with bongs, every type of S&M device you can think of, and every T-shirt with profanity."
He requests an ID. The man pulls out a book of examples of ID cards from Kansas to New Hampshire. The two negotiate payment:

"I'll give you \$20."
"Get out of my store!"
"Come on."
"\$70....\$50...okay \$35."
Mario pays with cash. The rest of the residents on his dormitory floor follow suit, obtaining IDs that claim they all live on Drive Way, Topka, Kansas 09831.

Some, at a loss in their search for a look-alike to give them an old ID, and dismayed by the lower quality of local options, take advantage of the high-tech resources of Adobe Photoshop. Today's scanners and laser printers can create highly accurate manipulations of some of the less complicated ID cards—such as New Jersey's, or the old New York State's. Even Microsoft Paint can do the trick, as Raj, CC'00, can attest.

"One day I was bored out of my mind and I decided to make myself a fake ID," he says. He used his friend's scanner on his Virginia Driver's License and tinkered around until he came up with something that looked, if not authentic, at least good enough to pass.

Armed with plastic, it's time to hit the bars.

Julia, CC '01, uses her sister's ID, and confessed: "We look nothing alike. She's thin. She has bangs and she's twenty-seven. It works everywhere. I can buy vodka. I can go to the bars...it's a godsend."
Alistair, CC '02, confirms this:

"In New York City, especially around the Columbia area, it doesn't matter. As long as you have something with a birth date on it," David, who bounces at the Amsterdam Avenue bar, disputes this claim: "If they're obviously fake IDs, you're not getting in," he says, citing color copies and "non-standard" IDs. He stresses his frustration with the high level of attitude he finds exhibited by Columbia hopefuls. "If someone's going to talk to me like I just crawled out from under a rock, they're not getting in."

Take note: sweet talk the bouncer. And don't forget to figure out what astrological sign you claim to be—David might ask—or the capital of the country listed on your Xeroxed passport.

Watch Ronald, a no-nonsense West End bouncer. "We only accept State ID's," he insists. "If we see something that's fake, we don't take it...We go according to what the law says."

Ronald asserts that "If you get caught in a bar with a fake ID, you are at fault." Which, according to Ronald, is highly unlikely a West End—the last police raid he can recall was long ago.

So what are the laws? Will you be incarcerated, deported, expelled? Tyler, CC '00, was caught by the police in a bar in Los Angeles with an identification card which he had procured on the city's infamous Alvarado Street. He was handcuffed and hauled off to jail and initially charged with minor in possession of alcohol, and minor in possession of fraudulent identification—material for a permanent record. Tyler "had a good lawyer," he said, and plea bargained down the charge to disturbing the peace, provided that he attend alcohol rehabilitation classes in New York.

New York State laws are a little more lenient. According to the Alcoholic Beverage Control, Article 5, section 65-b, any minor who



Fake ID's are readily available around New York City although some students make their own.

ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR—EMMY POINTER

attempts to purchase alcohol through fraudulent means may be arrested. If convicted, the court can set a fine of no larger than \$100. Even a guilty verdict is not technically considered a conviction. Mayor Giuliani must have missed this one.

In terms of the bars' liability, the law is such: [ABC Art 5, Sec 65, Note 10] "A sale of an alcoholic beverage to a [minor] is an act malum prohibitum and is not to be excused by ignorance, mistake of fact, or honorable intention." Translation: even if you've successfully fooled them, the bar is still to blame if you

are caught by the police. But not to worry—after all, this is New York City, and the night is alive with opportunity.

All of which will seem so much less exciting after the anti-climax of a twenty-first birthday. Clara, CC '01, mourned: "It will be embarrassing, because then it will be real."

Those who grab their plastic white lie to gain entry into the New York's hottest bar, a lesson from the age-old classic film, Animal House, applies: "We can do anything we want—we're college students!"