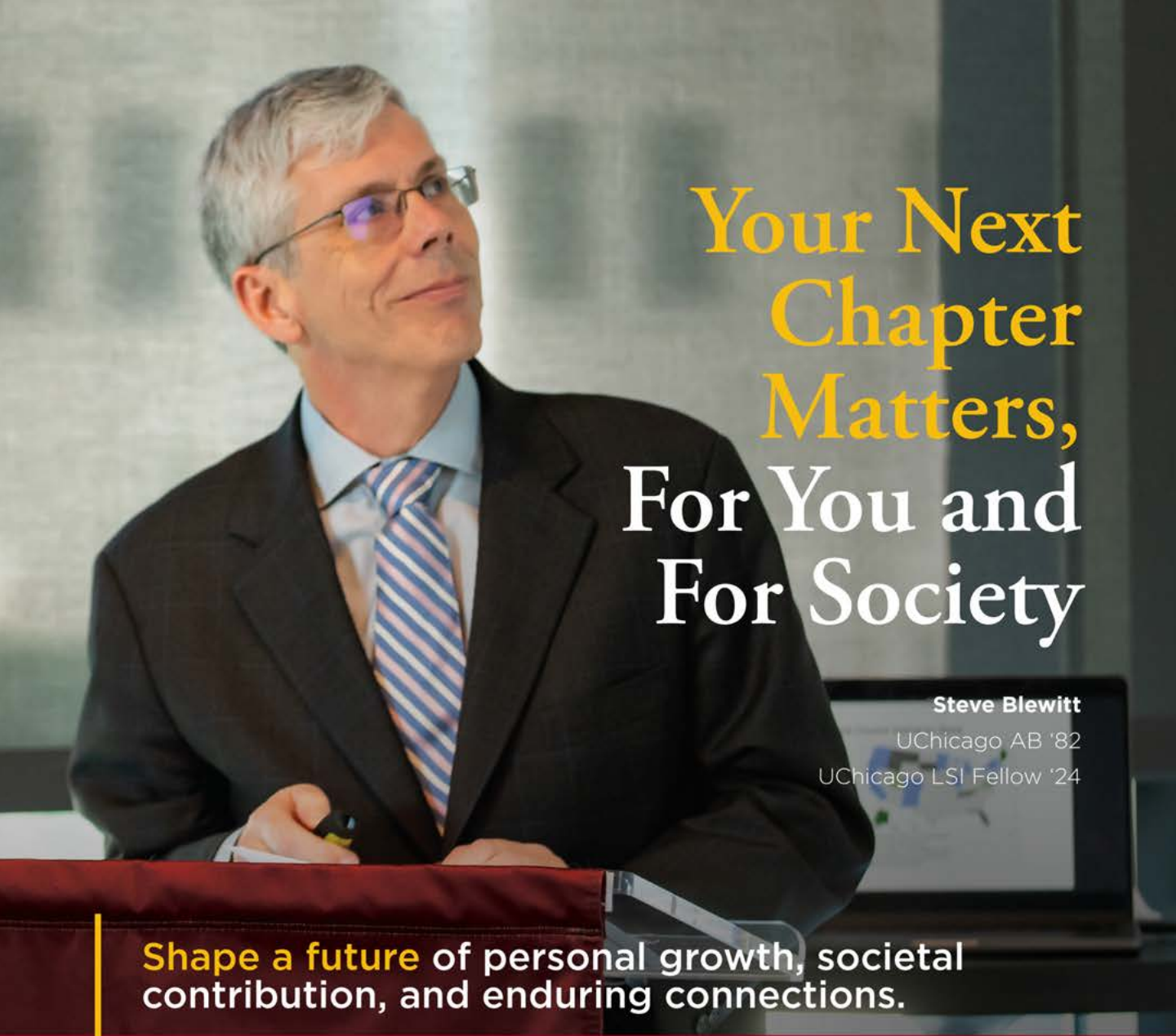


THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO MAGAZINE



SPRING 2026, VOLUME 118, NUMBER 3





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VOLUME 118, NUMBER 3, SPRING 2026

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EDITOR'S NOTES

PLAY ON

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09
GUEST EDITOR

Something I share with **Laura Demanski**, AM'94—apart from, of course, the delightful task of addressing you from this page every now and again—is a fondness for what I can only describe as desperately cute little games.

Even before I officially worked at the *Magazine*, I remember us bonding over the Japanese mobile game *Neko Atsume*. The task, so far as we could understand it, was to place goodies throughout our digital yards that would encourage neighborhood cats to visit us. (At the time, no English version was available, so I was mostly guessing about the game's rules and goals.) Thrillingly, the cats expressed their thanks by leaving silver and gold fish, allowing for the purchase of yet tastier treats and the enticement of yet rarer cats. I'm amazed I accomplished anything at all in 2015, because I absolutely behaved as though collecting cats was my primary vocation.

For someone who's never thought of herself as a gamer, I've had surprisingly intense relationships with certain games throughout my life. How many times did I play through *Rockett's New School* in 1998, attempting to engineer the perfect eighth-grade year for my digital avatar? How often did I nearly walk into lampposts hoping to catch a Dratini during the magical summer of *Pokémon GO* in 2016? How badly did I injure my thumb last winter overplaying *Stardew Valley*? The answers to these questions are “countless,” “too often,” and “pretty badly”—so maybe I am a little bit of a gamer after all.

I'm not the only one thinking about the importance of games. As you'll read in “Let the Games Begin,” page 30, the University itself has in recent years brought the study of games from the margins to the center of intellectual life on campus—a shift made manifest in the Year of Games, a multidisciplinary program that kicked off this past fall. Our writers **Chandler A. Calderon** and **Shiloh Miller**, Class of 2026, attended some of the year's many events and sent back lively accounts of how UChicagoans and games are playing together.

I hope you'll read and feel inspired to play too—and I hope that you'll tell us about how games of all kinds have shaped your life. Are you a euchre whiz? Do you spend your weekends rolling for initiative? Did you perish along the Oregon Trail? Let us know at uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu. ♦



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SPRING 2026

mag.uchicago.edu

On the cover

This open-world game can take you anywhere. Feel free to indulge in a side quest or two. See “Let the Games Begin,” page 30. Illustration by Jon Reinfurt.

This page

Throwdown: A student plays *yunnori* at the Library’s Lunar New Year Games Celebration—one of many events included in the Year of Games.

Photography by
Nancy Wong.



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Endure and evolve *By Laura Demanski, AM'94*

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Let the games begin

By Susie Allen, AB'09; Chandler A. Calderon; and Shiloh Miller, Class of 2026

UChicagoans and industry professionals have been coming together all year to celebrate the games they love, expand knowledge, and play.

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in brief



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Peer Review

What alumni are
thinking and doing

LETTERS



Overshadowed no more

I enjoyed the article about Edith Rickert, PhD 1899 (“A Storied Life,” Winter/26), which drew on Christina von Nolcken’s impressively researched book about Rickert. It did not surprise me that Rickert’s career as a distinguished Chaucer scholar, code breaker for the US government during World War I, and coauthor of English grammar and composition textbooks was overshadowed by the credit accorded to her male colleague John Manly. As an editor of the biographical dictionary *Notable American Women: The Modern Period*, which includes the stories of accomplished women who died between 1950 and 1975, I found this story sadly familiar.

What the *Magazine* article didn’t mention, however, was that one of the women’s residences in Woodward Court (aka New Dorms), which was demolished in 2002, was called Rickert Hall. When I lived in the New Dorms in 1966–67, I knew nothing about the residences’ namesakes. However, when my first-year roommate, the late Leanne Star, EX’70, AM’71 (who was a docent for the Chicago Architecture Center), led me on a tour of the campus in 2012, I was glad to see that the names of Rickert and Wallace (the house where we resided) live on in the Max Palevsky Residential Commons.

It’s pleasing that someone knew enough about the history of the University’s female faculty to honor Edith

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Rickert and Elizabeth Wallace in the New Dorms, and that the honor lives on.

Ilene Kantrov, AB’70

LEXINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Thanks for running Shiloh Miller’s (Class of 2026) article about Edith Rickert, one of my scholarly heroes since my MA Chaucer class with Arthur Norman in 1965. I learned a lot about this talented woman from the story, all very much appreciated.

Steve May, AM’64, PhD’68

TUCKER, GEORGIA

Dunes love and lore

As someone who has lived near the Indiana Dunes, whose neighbors were employed by the steel mills in the 1960s, and who has sped past the Calumet Region by train and by car (my brother by bike!), I was interested in reading “The Beauty of Slag” (Winter/26.) I found the cover intriguing and appreciated learning about how the area has responded to the effects of industrialization.

Thank you for summarizing research on urban ecology; the role played by Henry Chandler Cowles, PhD 1898; and the marvelous complexity of this natural area.

Pamm Collebrusco, AB’72, AM’74

RIVERTON, ILLINOIS

Shoptalk

I became a PhD student in the Department of Biophysics in 1965 and began a rotation in the lab of Humberto Fernandez-Moran in the summer of 1966 (“Cogs in the Machine,” Alumni News, Winter/26). He had been funded by NASA to construct a lab that was a Type I clean room—appropriate to study rocks when they were brought back from the moon, years in the future. NASA needed to test the

technology and authorized an experiment that would go up on a rocket from Ames Research Lab in California during the Perseid meteor shower.

How to construct a device that would open and close in space? I was told to get help at the Machine Shop, located at one end of the Research Institutes near the accelerator. I boldly went where no biologist had gone before and met John Hanacek and Bud Gibson. I think both had worked on the Manhattan Project in the 1940s,

This was the same area of the building that housed the IBM 7094, that mysterious machine capable of great feats.

and they were brilliant designers and wonderful craftsmen. I would like to say that I designed the device, but it would be more accurate to say that I gave them an idea of what the device was meant to do, the approximate dimensions, and a crude diagram. They then designed and built a terrific piece of equipment in about three weeks—and it worked flawlessly in space, drawing kudos from NASA personnel. This was one of the first times that uncontaminated material from space had been collected and studied. I later asked them for help building or modifying other equipment, because this was a time when virtually all of our equipment was built in-house. They were terrific staff members, and we developed a great working relationship.

As an aside, this was the same area of the building that housed the IBM 7094, that mysterious machine capable of great feats (I think with 32K

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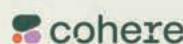
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of RAM). I learned Fortran and would dutifully take a stack of cards to the high priest, bow appropriately, and some days later wonderful results would be returned.

Lou Sherman, SB'65, PhD'70
WEST LAFAYETTE, INDIANA



Quiz kids

Several days ago I received the latest issue of the *Magazine*, and like most alums, I suppose, I was flipping through class notes for years I was there. The first thing that caught my eye was a picture where the most prominent face looked like Jim Gillespie, AB'81, whom I knew. That slowed me down. I looked behind him, and to my total surprise, there was *me* ("Bowled Over," Alumni News, Winter/26).

And an accurate story! Alas, the only person in the picture I kept in touch with was David Rubin, SB'81 (back row, second from right), who passed away in 2024.

As a hobby, I am more involved with quiz games than ever. One of the few benefits of lockdown in 2020 was that all of us quizzers discovered Zoom. Soon we had leagues all over the world. Just keep your hands in view (no cheating) and understand English (questions are inevitably in English; answers provided in many languages).

Lorin Burte, MBA'81
VERNON HILLS, ILLINOIS

I first visited the University of Chicago for a tournament hosted and organized

by the University of Chicago College Bowl team (ACF Regionals, February 1995). I fell in love with the campus when I first stepped foot on the quad. I was audacious enough to apply to UChicago for graduate school and fortunate enough to get accepted. I later played for the UChicago College Bowl team.

I participated for two seasons (1996 to 1998), during which I played in 10 intercollegiate tournaments, encompassing four tournament wins and three national championship tournament appearances. I also wrote a style guide for quiz questions that punnily combined my surname and a certain Chicago book: "The SZCZicago Manual of Style."

Among the memorable questions during my playing time: correctly guessing Eugene Debs from the question that began "Born in Terre Haute, Indiana"; correctly getting all six parts of a bonus question to identify the language certain phrases were spoken in, with the last part being in Klingon; and getting 20 points on a 30-point bonus about the philosophy of science after I sat in on Jim McCawley's (SM'58) class on linguistics and the philosophy of science.

Games of knowledge should raise awareness of new ideas, new facts, new horizons—and be a mini education unto themselves. I am grateful that College Bowl introduced me to the University of Chicago and deepened my love for the life of the mind.

Mitchell Szczepanczyk, AM'98, SM'03
CHICAGO

Language lessons

I didn't keep any physical objects from my days at the U of C, but every day I keep and benefit from what I learned from some remarkable teachers ("Coastal Unshelving," Editor's Notes, Fall/25). I did a master's and had many classes with Marshall Sahllins. To this day, whenever I hear someone use a saying or a cliché that has long lost its value and effectiveness, I quote Marshall: "You can take a horse to water, but you can't make it bark." Seems simple, witty, and perhaps unimportant, but it's still a reminder to me of the need to think about what one articulates.

I had the privilege to work at the

Games of knowledge should raise awareness of new ideas, new facts, new horizons—and be a mini education unto themselves.

Orthogenic School under the leadership of Jacquelyn Sanders, AM'64. Inter alia, I learned so much from her about listening to the language of others if you want to understand them. Two remarkable people and teachers.

David Lerner, AM'76, AM'82
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, ENGLAND



From blue ...

I very much appreciated "Colorfast" (Fall/25) by Tori Lee, AB'13, and Louise Lerner, AB'09, which honors the work of artist Amanda Williams, LAB'92 (above); chemist Amanda Brewer and her team of student researchers; and scientist and educator George Washington Carver. As a scholar of children's literature, I learned of Carver's blue pigment in reading Marilyn Nelson's poem "Egyptian Blue," which appears in her wonderful book *Carver: A Life in Poems*. Like Nelson's poetry, my scholarship seeks to bring to the fore neglected histories such as this story about Carver. It is a pleasure to see *The University of Chicago Magazine* doing this kind of work.

Karen Chandler, AB'84
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY



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LETTERS

... to Green

I worked in Green Hall in 1945 ("Work Studies," Alumni News, Fall/25). I was a graduate student dishwasher there and for the adjacent women's dormitories. The food was good. The fringe benefits were excellent!

Walter J. Levy, AM'45

DALLAS

Heroic aims

Regarding the Aims of Education lectures ("What Are the Aims of Education?" *The Core*, Fall/25), I was one of the entering freshmen privileged to hear Wayne Booth's (AM'47, PhD'50) Aims of Education speech in 1970. He challenged the entering class to reiterate to him, in essay form, the substance of his address—and offered a prize of \$50, a substantial sum then, to the best such essay.

After several attempts, I found it

impossible to organize my thoughts in prose, so I submitted my entry in the form of two sonnets with a heroic couplet as the title. Booth awarded me the prize—and, indeed, he referred to it when delivering his speech at our commencement four years later. He also awarded a second prize of equal value to a more traditional essay but expressed his appreciation to me personally, in a letter, for my unconventional submission.

Daniel Abraham, AB'74

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Seeking reflections

When I think of my undergraduate years, there's one experience that shaped my career trajectory in a way no academic course or adviser could have: my time in Mrs. Capinegro's first-grade classroom at Dulles Elementary. I joined the Neighborhood Schools Program (NSP) in October of my first year, long before I'd understand the complexities of terms like *turnaround schools*, *student-based*

funding, and *schools slated for action* (i.e., closures). My experience at Dulles is what led me to pursue economics and public policy majors and, much later, a master's in public policy from Harris Public Policy. For the past 10 years, I've had the privilege of guiding thousands of tutors as NSP's associate director, and in 2026 it's an absolute honor to be celebrating our program's 50th anniversary!

If you were part of the Neighborhood Schools Program or any of its special initiatives, I'd be thrilled to hear from you. If you have any photos, videos, or memories you'd like to share, or if you'd like to be involved in our 50th anniversary celebrations, it would be an honor to connect with you. You can reach us via email at nsp50@uchicago.edu. NSP's impact on and support of our South Side schools is possible because of student efforts like yours, so let's honor and celebrate all who've made the past half century possible.

Mónica Luna, AB'13, AM'20

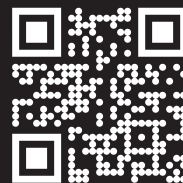
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RESEARCH AND NEWS IN BRIEF

MAD FOR PLAID

The Arley D. Cathey Learning Center at Harper Memorial Library was updated in 2024 with new seating, lighting, and carpeting.

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New York*

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*Romance
fiction*



Dan Bulla, AM'07, plays keyboard for Adam Sandler at *Saturday Night Live*'s 50th anniversary show. The two cowrote an unexpectedly tear-jerking song celebrating the show's legacy and cast members.

ARTS

Funny business

With his music-driven digital shorts, Dan Bulla, AM'07, has made his mark at Saturday Night Live.

BY JON GREENBERG, AM'07

It was 2013 and **Dan Bulla** couldn't sleep.

He had worked his way up the Chicago comedy ladder to a *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) showcase—a kind of pre-audition for the show hosted by local venues—and he'd just bombed. He was nearing 30 and the thought that he had blown his one chance was keeping him up.

"I had that feeling of like, this was the moment I dreamed of my whole life," he says. "In my mind, everything is so sports based. It's the bottom of the ninth, it's the World Series. I'm at the plate and I struck out—are you kidding me?"

Twelve years later, Bulla, AM'07,

found himself in a tuxedo, sitting at the keyboard at Studio 8H while his friend Adam Sandler sang a song they cowrote for SNL's 50th anniversary show.

Written less than a week before, the song turned into the emotional center of the night. The star-studded studio audience gave them a standing ovation. Fans watching around the world shed tears.

After six years of working as a writer on SNL, that was Bulla's first time on TV on the main stage.

How did an SNL fan from Darien, Illinois, go from a bombed showcase to one of American comedy's biggest nights?

It all started about two years after finishing the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities, when a coworker of Bulla's asked him if he wanted to take a class at Second City. Bulla took to comedy writing immediately and integrated himself into Chicago's improv community. Then, after years of working a day job as an editor and knocking around the city's stages, he and his wife, Emily, moved to Los Angeles at the end of 2013 for her job and his dream.

"It took me a long, long time to figure out what I actually wanted to do and to admit to myself what I wanted to do," he says. "I think part of me wanted to be a musician. I think part of me wanted to be a really literary writer. In college I made some short films, things that were funny. It was sort of a soup of aspirations."

In 2014 Bulla landed a Los Angeles-based manager at Brillstein Entertainment Partners.

Brillstein also had a client named Adam Sandler. The comedy legend had just signed a production deal with Netflix and needed writers. Sandler also needed someone to help write some songs for various gigs.

So instead of just sending a packet of writing, Bulla set out to do something original. He slowed it down and recognized that, like his showcase, this was another big at-bat in his life.

"If Adam Sandler's looking for songs, I'll write him a song," Bulla says of his approach. "I know Adam Sandler's voice—I grew up on that stuff. ... So I did that and then sent this song to him through the managers. I think I sent it on a Friday and on Monday morning

Photo by: Todd Owyang/NBC

when they gave it to him, I got a call immediately. ‘He loves it, he wants to meet you. Can you meet him today?’”

When Bulla left that meeting, he figured at least he could tell a story about that time he played his guitar with Adam Sandler. But Bulla kept sending songs, and the next thing he knew he was writing jokes on location for one of Sandler’s movies. And then another movie and another, in various countries. He became part of Sandler’s retinue. When Sandler went on tour again, Bulla was by his side playing the keyboard.

And then another break happened. In 2019 Sandler went to host *SNL* for the first time since being fired in 1995. He brought Bulla with him to write.

“I really did not have any designs,” Bulla says. “I was not treating it like an audition or anything. I was just going there to have a good week and wanted the show to be amazing.”

He’s still not sure why he was offered a permanent job at *SNL*—he assumes Sandler suggested it to Lorne Michaels—but he moved with his wife and baby daughter to New York in the fall of 2019.

During the 2019 season, Bulla got his first sketch on the air. It was a pretaped video starring Will Ferrell and a bottle of ketchup. (You’ll have to look it up.)

That started a run of successful videos, some starring big-name celebrities

and many based around songs.

Given *SNL*’s schedule, he’s often writing and producing a short film in less than a week, sometimes finishing up edits within minutes of the show airing.

One of Bulla’s biggest hits came last season when he did a video called “My Best Friend’s House” with Ariana Grande, which includes a very dark twist about a minute and a half in. This was also the first video that carried his own branded title card at the end.

“I don’t really get nervous too often, but ... in that first minute of slow burn, I was like, ‘I think my hands are sweating.’ I was really nervous that when the turn happened nobody was going to care,” he says. “So when that got a laugh, I was probably the most relieved I’ve ever been at the show.”

Bulla shares an office with *SNL* performer Sarah Sherman. He thinks that no one would have pegged them as future collaborators when she joined the cast in 2021, but they found kindred spirits in each other.

“Dan has that magical ability to figure out people’s thing/vibe/energy/aura and write to the height of their ability,” Sherman wrote in an email. “That’s a very rare quality! This is why I think he would make an amazing director, but that’s a conversation for another day.”

“If he were just a great sketch writer he would be set for life, but he’s also a



Dan Bulla, AM’07.

great songwriter and musician,” *SNL* cast member James Austin Johnson wrote in an email. “That sense of rhythm, of pop songwriting’s structures, feeds into everything he does. It gives each moment of his sketches drama and dynamism. It’s the secret sauce. Because he gives a damn about what makes music good, it makes his comedy even better.”

Bulla is in his second year as a supervising writer on *SNL*, which means he helps guide some of the newer writers during the week, but his partnership with Sandler continues. He accompanied Sandler on a national tour this past fall, which meant doing two jobs for months. Not that he’s complaining.

“If I had known that working in entertainment was a lot more achievable than I think it seemed like it was, I probably would have set my sights on that when I was 17 years old,” he says. “But I didn’t grasp that it was a thing people actually could do.” ♦

ANTHROPOLOGY

Northern exposure

A new study led by **Zeresenay Alemseged**, Donald N. Pritzker Professor of Organismal Biology and Anatomy, published in *Nature* in January, explores the discovery of a 2.6-million-year-old partial jaw fossil in the Afar region of northeastern Ethiopia. The fossil is from the genus *Paranthropus*, an ancient ancestor of modern humans. Prior to this finding, researchers had unearthed hundreds of fossils in the region representing all early hominin species except *Paranthropus*. Many paleoanthropologists had concluded that the genus just hadn’t traveled that far north—possibly because *Paranthropus* was unable to compete with bipedal *Homo*, which had larger brains and used sophisticated tools, or because *Paranthropus* facial anatomy, with its large molars and powerful jaw muscles, required a specialized diet not found that far north. However, this discovery shows that the genus was just as widespread as other early hominins and provides new information on how it adapted to environmental conditions and interacted with other ancient human ancestors.—*R. L. S.* ♦

QUICK STUDY

What animals feel

Gordon Burghardt, SB'63, PhD'66, has dedicated his career to understanding other species' inner lives.

BY GEORGE SPENCER

As a child, **Gordon Burghardt**, SB'63, PhD'66, tended a menagerie that at different points included turtles, snakes, and lizards as well as a parakeet, a raccoon, and a skunk. He was fascinated by the rich array of wildlife in his hometown of Milwaukee and amazed that so many kinds of animals could thrive there.

Fittingly, he became an ethological psychologist, a scientist who investigates animal behavior. Over his 60-year career, Burghardt, Alumni Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience and the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has conducted groundbreaking research into the consciousness of animals.

Burghardt has long been fascinated by what he calls the “private experiences” of animals. In his studies, he teased out insights into their emotional lives and even the degree to which they play, an activity once thought to be something only humans did.

When Burghardt was a young professor in the 1970s, he knew he wanted to explore animals' mental and emotional states. It was a radical decision, influenced in part by his time studying under Eckhard Hess, a UChicago biopsychologist who did foundational work on imprinting—the attachments animals form to the first organisms or objects they see.

When Burghardt was beginning his academic career, many experts believed that “any attribution of mental processes and emotions in animals was anthropomorphic,” he recalls—and a “cardinal sin” in the field at the time.

He attended conferences with researchers who, he says, were doing “cruel, outrageous things” to lab animals and seemed unbothered by “the consequences of what they were doing in terms of the animals' feelings and sentience.”

His scientific intuition, as well as his compassion, showed up in his research and his relationships with the animals he studied—among them, an iguana named Emma who became his lab's mascot. “She would tuck her head and want to be scratched just like a cat,” Burghardt recalls. Reptiles “don't have the kind of vocalizations that mammals do, like whimpering or crying, or facial expressions that would allow us to make the same comparisons with them the way we would with, say, a dog. ... But they have almost all the same brain characteristics as mammals, including in the limbic system, involved in emotional responses.”

Over the years his restless scientific imagination increasingly led Burghardt to study whether animals do things for enjoyment. He spent two years at what

is now the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute, giving balls, sticks, and rubber hoops to 60-pound Nile softshell turtles and watching them chew and tug the objects in what seemed like fun ways. Observing a female Komodo dragon at the same zoo, he watched her chomp and shake a sneaker in her jaws, as a dog would.

Burghardt and Harry Greene, a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Cornell who earned his PhD under Burghardt, went to Slothia, an islet off Barro Colorado Island in Panama, to learn more about the behavior of newly hatched green iguanas. The young lizards frolicked together instead of each going their own way, as scientists had long presumed. The hatchlings grouped together and even slept atop one another.

“Gordon and I sat in our blind saying, ‘Nobody's ever seen anything like this before,’” Greene recalls. *Science* magazine honored their finding by putting it on the cover of a February 1977 issue. Thanks to the pair's discovery of young



Tortoises just want to have fun: Research by reptile expert Gordon Burghardt, SB'63, PhD'66, has revealed that animals of all kinds engage in play.

istock.com/Dale Fornoff

iguanas' social complexity, researchers now believe such behavior speeds their growth and discourages predators.

"From the experimental side, the rigor of his science is excellent, and the design of his experiments is shrewd," says Stephen S. Hall, author of *Slither: How Nature's Most Maligned Creatures Illuminate Our World* (Grand Central Publishing, 2025). "It's legitimate to think of Burghardt as kind of the philosopher-king of the field."

Burghardt spent years getting up close and personal with mammals too. In 1970 rangers found two motherless black bear cubs in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Burghardt named them Kit and Kate and kept them in his home for several weeks until a suitable enclosure could be built in the park. He then spent four years studying them. Through close, long-term observation, Burghardt and his graduate student Ellis Bacon discovered that black bears see in color and that their up close vision is sharp.

(Not long after, he also fostered a lion cub named Meg for what is today known as Zoo Knoxville. During Meg's stay, a burglar broke into Burghardt's home but took nothing—presumably terrified by the sight of a lion bounding down the stairs.)

One of Burghardt's defining mo-



Gordon Burghardt, SB'63, PhD'66.

Over the years his restless scientific imagination increasingly led Burghardt to study whether animals do things for enjoyment.

ments came with the 2005 publication of his book *The Genesis of Animal Play: Testing the Limits* (MIT Press). It had "a revolutionary effect," according to Sergio Pellis, a play behavior expert and professor of neuroscience at the University of Lethbridge in Canada who has collaborated with Burghardt.

This comprehensive interdisciplinary work documents play in a surprising array of creatures as different as frogs, insects, and sharks. What's more,

Burghardt uses its pages to reveal his five criteria that define play in animals (including humans)—it must be voluntary; unlike other behaviors; repeated; done when the animal is healthy and unstressed (though researchers have since learned animals also play to reduce mental tension); and "not fully functional." In other words, it appears to be done for amusement and not for survival. This framework has had "an enormous impact on the wealth of comparative data we have now," says Pellis.

Burghardt also developed the concept of critical anthropomorphism. Some researchers had been criticized for proposing that the causes of animals' behavior paralleled human experiences. Burghardt contended that scientists are justified in using their own experiences as biological beings to understand animals' activities, so long as they use their knowledge of other species' physiology, sensory abilities, and behavior patterns to make scientifically based hypotheses.

He demurs when asked to predict what future research might reveal about animals' inner worlds. "We are probably never going to know completely, because experiences are very rich. It's the same thing with humans," he says. "Will we ever really know what's going on inside another person?" ♦

MEDICINE

QUICK STUDY

Carotenoids in cancer treatment

Researchers led by **Jing Chen**, the Janet Davison Rowley Distinguished Service Professor of Medicine, have found that a plant-derived carotenoid called zeaxanthin supports cells' immune response against cancer. (Carotenoids, which are known to promote eye health, include red, orange, and yellow pigments found in some algae, plants, fungi, and bacteria.) The team screened a large number of blood nutrients and found that zeaxanthin enhanced mouse T cells' ability to fight melanoma cells. When zeaxanthin alone was given to mice as a dietary supplement, it slowed tumor growth; when it was administered to mice in combination with immunotherapy, zeaxanthin significantly boosted the efficacy of the treatment. In laboratory experiments, the researchers found that zeaxanthin also improved human T cells' ability to fight several kinds of cancer cells. The results were published in September in *Cell Reports Medicine*. While clinical trials are needed to assess whether zeaxanthin supplements can improve outcomes for human cancer patients, this research opens the door to new opportunities in nutritional immunology.—C. C. ♦



Associate Professor Benjamin A. Saltzman was struck by the averted gazes of onlookers in Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808*. The act of turning away—and what it represents—is the subject of Saltzman's new book.

ARTS AND HUMANITIES

Don't look now

A new book explores the complex meanings of turning away.

BY ELLY FISHMAN, LAB'06, AB'10

Benjamin A. Saltzman has developed a scholar's version of a curse. For the past several years, the associate professor and director of undergraduate studies in the English department has been perpetually on the lookout for a single, easily missed gesture in pictures and texts. It's subtle yet recurs with striking consistency across centuries of art and literature, from classical philosophy to medieval manuscripts to Renaissance frescoes to contemporary photography.

The gesture Saltzman can't help

noticing is the act of turning away: an averted glance, a hand raised to the face, eyes shielded, the body angled aside from something overwhelming or unbearable. In *Turning Away: The Poetics of an Ancient Gesture* (University of Chicago Press, 2026), Saltzman follows the gesture across art and literary history, unpacking what he finds to be one of the most densely meaningful ways humans respond to what we can't fully face.

What's so special about turning away? Part of his argument, Saltzman says, is that it's "the most ambiguous gesture because it often entails covering up the face, and the face is a source of expression, a source of information." That makes this action, he writes in the book, "a uniquely indeterminate one, uniquely evocative yet resistant to communication, uniquely conspicuous yet obscure."

What's more, turning away isolates the turner and yet, Saltzman argues,

it is also intensely interrelational. In the gamut of strong emotions that it expresses—pity, grief, shame, disgust—turning away shows the "permeability of the self" to the suffering of others.

Saltzman's interest in ancient texts took shape during his undergraduate years at Pace University in Manhattan, when he accidentally enrolled in a literature course and eventually found himself drawn to a small but vibrant group of medieval studies scholars working across New York. He began learning Old English, sought out mentors at nearby universities, and immersed himself in a field that was both rigorously technical and unexpectedly open-ended. He was especially interested in "the parts of language where there is ambiguity."

That same interest in the ambiguous became the engine of *Turning Away*, which lets the gesture lead rather than exploring a particular emotional response it expresses. Saltzman begins

Francisco Goya, *The Third of May 1808 in Madrid: The Executions on Principe Pio Hill*, 1814, oil on canvas, 268 cm x 347 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Public Domain

each of the book's five chapters with a scene or motif that he likens to a pebble thrown into the water, whose outward ripples he then tracks through periods, artists, and thinkers. In chapter 2, "Ambivalence," for example, a scene from Plato's *Republic* spills into discussions of Charles Darwin's writings on disgust, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thoughts on the nature of pity, and contemporary journalist Philip Gourevitch's reflections on his own response to the Rwandan genocide.

The final chapter, "Retroversion," harkens back to the earliest germ of the book idea. A decade or so ago, Saltzman was studying an illustrated Old English poetic translation of the book of Genesis from around the year 1000 in which Adam and Eve cover their faces rather than their bodies. "I just thought this was interesting and strange," he recalls, "and contrary to how I had imagined what their gestures might have been."

Once Saltzman began looking for it, the gesture seemed to appear everywhere across the visual and literary canons. He traces it in *The Republic*, when Leontius recoils from a pile of corpses before giving in to the urge to look, and

in *The Third of May 1808*, by Francisco Goya, which depicts Spanish civilians shielding their eyes from a firing squad during the Peninsular War. It appears as

The gesture Saltzman can't help noticing is the act of turning away: an averted glance, a hand raised to the face, eyes shielded, the body angled aside from something overwhelming or unbearable.

well in a 1938 Works Progress Administration poster showing a couple with their heads bowed in shame beneath the warning, "Syphilis: False shame and fear may destroy your future. Have your blood tested." Saltzman also finds shielded eyes and averted gazes in portraits by queer Nigerian British photographer Rotimi Fani-Kayode depicting nude Black men covering one or both of their eyes, their expressions at once vulnerable and defiant.

Saltzman cites these far-flung examples, among many others, to show how widely turning away can operate: as moral conflict, self-protection, vulnerability, fear, and despair. The precise meaning varies but the gesture is "never

insignificant," he says. "It's always there to signal, 'This is serious.'"

And the gesture's ambiguity, Saltzman argues, is precisely what makes it ethically charged. Turning away is often condemned as indifference, especially in a culture that treats attention as virtue. In the aftermath of World War II, he argues, the language of moral failure hardened around aversion: *Do not turn away*. Attention became a guardrail against atrocity.

"There is truth to that," reflects Saltzman. "A world where no one is paying attention suddenly is a world truly where atrocities will thrive." But the logic has limits: "We can't humanly pay attention to all of the terrible things that are happening."

In the same way a word carries many meanings, Saltzman says, the act of turning away "also draws on its full range of meaning." The book, he adds, seeks to "understand the human complexity of this gesture" and to encourage readers to ask why we return to it. Because when we are willing to investigate that question, he says, "we can have a more nuanced relation to ourselves and to the world." ♦

PSYCHOLOGY

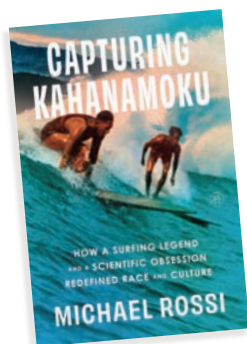
QUICK STUDY

Palace intrigue

One tool to improve recall is a memory palace—a mental image of a familiar location where you can “place” information for later retrieval. **Nicholas Chiang**, SB’24, and **Akram Bakkour**, assistant professor in the Department of Psychology, studied how memory palaces interact with emotion, which has also been shown to help with memory. Their findings were published in January in *Emotion*. Using the sandbox game *Minecraft*, the researchers built two memory palaces—one to evoke positive emotions (a light-filled house with lush flower beds) and one to evoke negative emotions (a dark house covered in overgrowth)—and recorded a video tour of each house. Participants were divided into three groups: positive, negative, and the control group, which did not use a memory palace. All three groups were asked to memorize a list of words, with the two test groups watching the video tour and “placing” the words around their memory palaces for retrieval during a recall test. Participants who used the negative memory palace remembered the most words, and those who used the positive memory palace remembered more words than those in the control group. This research could lead to methods to enhance recall and reduce cognitive load, which may be especially useful for neurodivergent populations.—*R. L. S.* ♦

Fresh ink

A selection of recent books by UChicago faculty members.

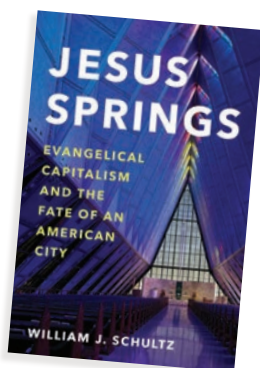


Capturing Kahanamoku: How a Surfing Legend and a Scientific Obsession Redefined Race and Culture
HarperOne

By Michael Rossi

Associate Professor in the Department of History and the College

Duke Kahanamoku brought modern surfing to the world. But while the Hawaiian Olympian and surfing legend was making history, he also became the object of a scientist's obsession. Paleontologist Henry Fairfield Osborn, president of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, took a surfing lesson with Kahanamoku during a trip to Hawaii in 1920. Osborn, an ardent eugenicist, saw Indigenous Hawaiians—and Duke Kahanamoku and his brother David in particular—as perfect examples of the “pure racial type” he wanted to study and preserve. **Michael Rossi** details how Osborn's obsession, and the events it sparked, changed the conversation about race, culture, science, and what makes us human.



Jesus Springs: Evangelical Capitalism and the Fate of an American City

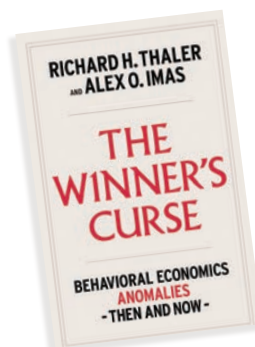
University of North Carolina Press

By William J. Schultz

Assistant Professor in the Divinity School and the College

More than any other military-dependent city, Colorado Springs, Colorado, courted evangelical institutions after World War II.

William J. Schultz takes the city, sometimes called the “Evangelical Vatican” or “Jesus Springs,” as a case study to understand how American evangelicalism evolved over the 20th century. Established at a time when Christianity and American nationalism were seen as inseparable, the market-driven evangelical organizations in Colorado Springs worked to enforce and preserve a specific Cold War-era ideology grounded in the belief that there are invisible forces working to harm American society that must be fended off. Benefiting from postwar defense spending, Colorado Springs became the organizational center of American evangelicalism. But, Schultz argues, as the evangelical movement shifted focus in the 1990s from saving souls to securing political and economic power, tensions formed in the city. Understanding Colorado Springs' history, he explains, can help shed light on Christian nationalism today.



The Winner's Curse: Behavioral Economics Anomalies, Then and Now

Simon and Schuster

By Richard H. Thaler

Charles R. Walgreen Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Behavioral Science and Economics, and **Alex O. Imas**, Roger L. and Rachel M. Goetz Professor of Behavioral Science, Economics, and Applied AI and Vasilou Faculty Scholar at Chicago Booth

Almost 40 years ago, **Richard H. Thaler's** Anomalies column in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* introduced readers to behavioral economics. Today Thaler revisits this body of work with **Alex O. Imas**. Each chapter of *The Winner's Curse* opens with an anomaly from the original series; from there, the authors provide updates to the case studies, assess how the findings have held up, and discuss how the field of behavioral economics has changed over the past three decades. Aimed at economics novices and experts alike, the book shows that though much has changed, these stories of human behavior have enduring relevance and can help readers better understand their own decision-making and the choices of others.



Poetry After Barbarism: The Invention of Motherless Tongues and Resistance to Fascism

Columbia University Press

By Jennifer Scappettone

Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature and the College

Increased urbanization and mobility in early 20th-century Europe caused languages to collide. But even as many people experienced multifaceted linguistic environments, fascist movements promoted a myth of pure national languages and sought to eradicate foreign words and neologisms. **Jennifer Scappettone** reads the work of several World War II and postwar avant-garde poets who broke down linguistic systems through the use of multiple languages, fragmented syntax, and awkward or ungrammatical structures. Scappettone argues that these poetic experiments tapped into the reality of 20th-century linguistic experience and, in doing so, exposed and countered the fascist myth of pure mother tongues. By defying linguistic boundaries, she writes, these authors fostered a kind of citizenship in literature that transcended borders. Turning to the present day, she shows how contemporary authors have built upon this legacy to create space for international kinship.—C. C.



January 28, 2026

A student feels the thrill of the stacks at RegFest, the Regenstein Library's annual open house featuring crafts, games, and prizes.

For the record



NEW STUDIES, NEW SHORES

Two College fourth-years, **Logan Hanssler** and **Elijah Jenkins**, have been selected as 2026 Marshall Scholars to study in the United Kingdom for two years. Hanssler, who is interested in space-to-ground data transmission, will pursue a master's degree in optics and photonics at Imperial College London and then a master's by research in physics at Durham University. Jenkins is interested in global policy, especially in the Pacific. He plans to pursue a master of studies degree in global and imperial history at the University of Oxford and then a master's of philosophy in development studies at the University of Cambridge.

FERMILAB LEADERSHIP

Norbert Holtkamp was appointed director of Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, the premier particle physics and accelerator laboratory in the United States, effective January 12. The laboratory is operated and managed by UChicago for the US Department of Energy. Holtkamp served as deputy laboratory director at SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory from 2014 to 2022. In that role he oversaw the laboratory's enterprise risk portfolio, including more than \$2.5 billion in construction activities. Holtkamp previously worked at Fermilab from 1998 to 2001.

SCHOLAR OF LANGUAGES

Andrew Ollett, associate professor in South Asian Languages and Civilizations, was awarded the Infosys Prize 2025 in Humanities and Social Sciences in recognition of his work as a philologist, linguist, and intellectual historian of India, and especially for his scholarship on how the Prakrit languages have interacted with Sanskrit and Indian vernaculars over time. Established in 2009, the Infosys Prize is given annually across six disciplines "to

elevate the prestige of science and research in India and inspire young Indians to choose a vocation in research."

HUMANITIES EVOLVING

In January the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society launched its Future of the Humanities project to assess the present and future of the humanities in higher education. Supported by a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation grant, this interdisciplinary initiative will bring together scholars and nonprofit and government representatives over two years to articulate defining principles and core qualities of humanities work, including strategies for adapting to recent shifts in political discourse, public perception, and the research and teaching landscape.

CLOCK-WATCHERS

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists announced on January 27 that the



Doomsday Clock—a representation of how much time humanity has left to avert global catastrophe—moved forward four seconds and now sits at 85 seconds to midnight, the closest the symbolic clock has ever been to apocalypse.

The Bulletin cited expiring nuclear treaties, climate change, and artificial intelligence and disinformation as major threats that have worsened in the past year.

SCIENCE ADVISERS

Nadya Mason, dean of the UChicago Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, the Robert J. Zimmer Professor of Molecular Engineering, and interim vice president for science, innovation, and partnerships, and **Supratik Guha**, a professor in PME and senior adviser to Argonne Physical Sciences and Engineering, have been named to the newly created US Department of Energy Office of Science Advisory Committee, which combines the functions formerly handled by six committees. It will provide independent guidance on scientific and technical challenges across the Office of Science.

BIOELECTRONIC PROMISE

Chemistry professor **Bozhi Tian** received the 2026 Marian and Stuart Rice Research Award, a \$100,000 award from the Physical Sciences Division for intellectually exciting and innovative ventures that enable new research directions. Tian is a materials scientist whose work integrates semiconductor science, electrochemistry, and living systems to develop sustainable bioelectronic platforms for nongenetic, drug-free medical interventions. His team plans to pursue fundamental surface chemistry studies at semiconductor-cell interfaces.

SCHWARZMAN SCHOLARS

Two UChicagoans were selected as 2026 Schwarzman Scholars in January. The Schwarzman Scholars program is designed to create a community of leaders with a broad understanding of China's changing role in the world. **Joe Zhang**, a fourth-year in the College, and **Samuel Levy**, AB'24, will both pursue master's degrees in global affairs at Tsinghua University in Beijing later this year. Zhang, an economics major originally from Beijing, plans to do legal work related to global institutions. Levy, who studied political science and global studies in the College, with a focus on East Asian affairs, will use his time in Beijing to deepen his understanding of China while building policy decision-making skills.

HONORING MLK

Jacqueline Stewart, AM'93, PhD'99, the Edward Carson Waller Distinguished Service Professor in Cinema and Media Studies, delivered the keynote address at the University's Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Celebration on January 28 in Rockefeller Memorial Chapel. She discussed King's strategic use of the media. "He leveraged media, especially photojournalism and television, to raise awareness and empathy, to bring evidence in front of indifferent and even hostile White audiences," she said.





INTERVIEW

Hearts and minds

Paige Reynolds, AM'90, PhD'99, thinks romance fiction has something to teach us.

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

Paige Reynolds, AM'90, PhD'99, is a scholar of Irish literary fiction, but romance fiction has always been close to her heart. Reynolds, Stephen J. Prior Professor of Humanities at the College of the Holy Cross, married the two interests in *Happy Ever After: Falling in Love with Irish Romance Fiction*, an exhibition she curated at the Museum of Literature Ireland in Dublin. (The museum often goes by its acronym MoLI, pronounced “Molly”—as in Bloom.) *Happy Ever After* takes a broad view of a misunderstood genre, examining both its historical origins and contemporary expressions. An online version of the exhibition is set to launch in late March. Reynolds's comments have been edited and condensed.

How and when did you first develop an academic interest in romance fiction?

I've been a casual romance reader since middle school, when I discovered Kathleen Woodiwiss's—in retrospect, deeply problematic—bodice rippers at the same time I discovered *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Pride and Prejudice*.

When COVID arrived, I was writing about Irish experimental women's fiction, and I needed something distract-

ing. Romance became my version of the sourdough starter during COVID. The pleasure of the predictable happy ending was a lovely counterpose to what was happening in the real world and in my intellectual world.

But then it started morphing into a critical interest. It was exciting to me to see the ways in which, over centuries, Irish romance has intervened in social issues—whether it's Marian Keyes looking at abortion or Maeve Binchy looking at intimate partner abuse or Adiba Jaigirdar looking at the contours of racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in Ireland.

What makes Irish romance fiction distinctive?

One thing is a tradition of explicit political engagement, starting even in 1693 with *Vertue Rewarded; or, the Irish Princess*, which uses a marriage plot across political lines to imagine how we might reconcile difference. There's a really noisy political bent from that moment into the present day.

There's also a primacy of friends and families. The notion that a romantic relationship happens in a bubble between a superhot guy and a superhot woman... well, romance fiction in Ireland has

always stressed that any relationship requires a scaffolding of other people.

Not surprisingly, given moral strictures of the Catholic Church and the stranglehold that it had on Ireland well into the 21st century, Irish romance tends to be less graphic in its representations of intimacy. Even now, it's not in-your-face, although that's starting to change a little bit.

You included Sally Rooney in the exhibition, which might surprise some people.

Rooney is a really interesting test case, because she is, at her core, a romance fiction writer but has also been able to breach the literary-fiction, romance-fiction divide. If you boil down her books, romance is the central engine of the plot. But Rooney is fiddling with the traditional narratives of the “happily ever after” ending.

It made people uncomfortable that we included her in the exhibition. And it's not just the anxiety about women writers representing the female experience. I think there is a kind of anxiety about the taint of commercial success. What's great about Rooney is that she's actually been able to undermine that clichéd, tired, and reductive narrative.

Why do you think romance fiction is enjoying so much popularity right now?

Romance takes you into places that are private and can act as a kind of how-to: how to be in a relationship, how to overcome difficulty, how to connect with people. These models are positive, and right now we're living in a world where everything is the worst possible news.

What I love about these books is they give us a counternarrative of what good things are possible. That's one of the reasons I like to advocate for romance fiction—because these narratives can help you imagine better things. ♦



READ MORE AT MAG.UCHICAGO.EDU/REYNOLDS.

ENDURE AND EVOLVE

President Paul Alivisatos, AB'81, reflects on preserving, renewing, and expanding what makes the University of Chicago vital.

BY LAURA DEMANSKI, AM'94
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON SMITH

In March, University of Chicago President **Paul Alivisatos**, AB'81, answered questions from the *Magazine* about where the University finds itself as he approaches his second term leading the institution. In his responses, Alivisatos affirmed both the imperative to sustain key aspects of UChicago's singular culture and ethos from its beginnings and the imperative to evolve—with the challenges society faces, with the tools at scholars' disposal, with

modes and methods of seeking knowledge.

What emerged was a vivid picture of the institution's ambitions for the near- and long-term future. Alivisatos discussed the University's unique ability to address the world's most urgent and complex challenges through distinctive, powerful approaches to education and research; why the time to press its ambitions is now; and how alumni and other readers of the *Magazine* are essential to realizing this far-reaching vision.

This coming fall will mark five years that you've led the University of Chicago. What do you know now that you didn't know then?

Every day, since my return, I love experiencing how deep the culture of truth seeking is here. It is the throughline that animates the whole of the University of Chicago, at every level and in every program and area. Faculty, students, staff, alumni, and friends all share in the ethos of passionately pushing against their own and others' ideas because they genuinely want to understand. The most honored person here is a devoted, rigorous, and relentless truth seeker whose actions in pursuit of knowledge sharpen the thinking and uplift the experiences of others. While I sensed this as a student, in my role today I see the depth and breadth of this commitment to intellectual excellence. It is inspiring.

Looking back a little further, you were a student here some 45 years ago. How has your view of the institution changed since then?

The University of Chicago has kept its essential character, derived from our devotion to the cultivation of great minds. In a few weeks I will follow in the long tradition of presidents of this University by joining the UChicago Press to announce the annual Gordon J. Laing Award to a faculty author of great distinction. Every year I enjoy this moment of celebrating the many years of scholarship that one of our faculty members has put into creating a book of substantial quality, depth, originality, and consequence. The award

ceremony stands alongside several other key moments each year as a time when we come together to celebrate the standards to which our faculty aspire and the rigor with which they pursue the truth. This continued commitment to intellectual inquiry and excellence across the University is something we should be proud of.

Yet the institution as a whole has also become better in so many ways since I was a student.

We are stronger partners to our students and their families. We have kept true to our commitment to cultivate the deepest minds that will shape the world, even as we have broadened and elevated student experiences inside and outside the classroom. Today we do so much more to offer a multitude of career treks, internships, and entrepreneurship opportunities that help students take their first steps after they graduate.

We have expanded the scope of our research—for example, in the arts, public policy, molecular engineering, and quantum—even as we have kept hold of our devotion to foundational knowledge exploration. This university is built on the notion that all the areas of human knowledge thrive through dialogue with each other, so our expanded range of inquiry serves to elevate the whole.

We have also become stronger partners with our neighbors and with the city of Chicago. That includes deepening our long-standing commitment to delivering medical care on the South Side with the new cancer care facility that will open soon, advancing biomedical research in collaboration with Northwestern and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign through the Chan Zuckerberg

Biohub, and helping lay the foundation for a quantum economy in this region.

In quantum, especially, the University has played a decisive role in thought leadership in fundamental science *and* in translating that to regional economic benefit. Beyond the confines of campus, we have played stewardship roles promoting excellent quantum programs at Argonne National Laboratory and Fermilab, and we have forged strategic partnerships with IBM, Google, and IonQ. We are working closely with the state and the University of Illinois on the launch of the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park, which will bring jobs right here to the South Side. Taken together, these efforts reflect a broader conviction that as a great university, we should not only generate new knowledge but also work with others to translate discovery into opportunity for our region's long-term prosperity.

I'll also note that our global footprint has expanded enormously since my time as a student, bringing more diverse talent to our campuses and increasing the opportunities for learning and research for all of us.

Let's turn from the past and present to the future—10 years from now, 20, or longer. What are some specific milestones, areas of discovery, or measures of success you hope the University will achieve during that time?

We are becoming global leaders in a number of interdisciplinary, field-defining frontiers where UChicago can help shape entire areas of inquiry. These areas bring together great potential for discovery and improved understanding with demands from Americans and people everywhere for our greatest universities to help address major societal challenges. The work of the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Growth is a good example.

Already it has become a distinctive gathering place for faculty across disciplines, with pillars that span markets and policy, climate systems engineering, new energy technologies, and new educational programs. I see similar coordinated efforts now underway in the study of algorithmic public policy, in the foundational understanding of how institutions serve societies well, and in areas such as therapeutics discovery. As a new era of artificial intelligence advances, I am especially interested in how inquiry

will be advanced by the partnerships between the greatest minds and the newest machines that aid them. Look to see us grow programs in the area of mind and machines. All of these will be areas where our faculty and students excel, resulting in regional, national, and global benefits.

Ten years from now, and certainly 20, I would hope that people will say the University saw clearly what this moment required and built accordingly.

What is the vision for education and for innovating in that aspect of the University's work?

We should always hold fast to teaching students how to think, not what to think. This is a moment of profound change and great opportunity in this regard. In the years ahead, we will excel at teaching students to think *with* machines and to never lose sight of how to think *without* them.

With artificial intelligence, we are entering a period in which computational and statistical modes of thought will shape and indeed accelerate nearly every domain of inquiry. To be educated in this era means learning to use computational and statistical modes of thought well enough to deploy them ethically, skeptically, and ambitiously. This is where the work of educating students about how to think with machines and how to think without them becomes so critical.

Our task is to teach students not simply to use these tools but to understand them deeply enough to judge them critically, deploy them creatively, and preserve the distinctly human habits of mind that make genuine inquiry possible.

Some courses will integrate these tools deeply, and in some cases help students develop new ones. Other courses will deliberately set them aside. The point is that faculty should be able to design the right intellectual environment for the learning they are trying to cultivate, while students learn to move ethically and intelligently across those different settings.

What about innovating in research?

For me, the first principle is to protect the conditions for free inquiry. The greatest innovation happens when outstanding scholars are free. Sometimes they



will work individually, often in small clusters, but they must always be free to pursue difficult questions, free to challenge settled assumptions, and free to follow discovery where it leads.

I get so energized welcoming our new faculty members each year. They represent such hope, ambition, and promise. When I meet them, I feel that they are extraordinary and that they will in due course become some of the greatest intellects in our storied history. A few may well join the more than 100 UChicago scholars who have won Nobel Prizes for their scholarly work. (I have had the privilege of serving as president when two of the current faculty won Nobel Memorial Prizes in Economics!)

We must always be able to balance holding on to what is truly great about the intellectual traditions that so many here strive to cultivate and steward with not being afraid to add or modify the directions toward which entirely new lines of inquiry might unfold. In these dual endeavors, faculty need two essential things. One is a collaborative community that truly values the production of knowledge, and the other is the freedom to pursue it with rigor and imagination. Those conditions are vital, and preserving them is one of the University's most important responsibilities toward innovating in research.

What must the University do now to lay the groundwork for some of those objectives?

One essential task is financial stewardship. Ambition only matters if it can be sustained, so we have to ensure that every dollar does multiple things in service of our most vital assets: our people, our places, and our programs.

We should take pride in the fact that we are highly ranked across schools and divisions, including the College, even though our endowment is a substantial factor smaller than those of the peers we are often benchmarked against. We certainly punch above our weight—and are rightly recog-

nized for our intellectual rigor and achievement. We have worked hard together to improve the structural budget, and we are on track to secure more solid financial footing in the years to come. Doing so puts us in the best position to keep pushing the boundaries of human knowledge and understanding while welcoming top faculty and students to the community year after year.

As we continue to make progress on reducing the deficit, we are continually benefiting from record-setting philanthropic support from our alumni and friends. I am so grateful. Now is the time to focus on this to secure our support for faculty, students, and the infrastructure that serves as the underlying edifice supporting the whole of the institution.

We are at a moment when the engagement of UChicago's worldwide community with our mission is at a historic high.

How can the members of that community reading this interview—including alumni, families, faculty, and friends—be part of the work you've described and go even deeper in helping the University realize its ambitions?

Our community is such an asset, and the individual and collective contributions of its many members are so important. Whether you are moved to support UChicago philanthropically, serve as a representative of the community in helping us recruit the next generation of students, or volunteer your time and effort to help our alumni navigate the job market, you stand to make a meaningful difference for our university.

That we are all connected to this special institution is a precious thing. I think if you're taking the time to read this, you probably value that connection in some way, and it is my hope that you tend to those connections with active engagement and a spirit of enthusiasm so that UChicago will thrive for generations to come. ♦

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a black headband, a black t-shirt, and a bright yellow safety vest, is crouching on a concrete ledge. She is smiling and gently placing a dark-colored turtle into a shallow pond. The pond has a rocky bottom and some green algae. In the background, another person's legs and feet are visible, suggesting a group activity. The scene is outdoors with trees and foliage in the background.

CAMPUS

HOW TO REBUILD A POND

A beloved campus landmark enters a new era.

BY LOUISE LERNER, AB'09

An early photo of Botany Pond.
Opposite: Facilities project manager
Lindsay Haskins returns a turtle to
the pond.



Opposite page: Photography by Arne Ryan. Above: UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-0114, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

This past fall five turtles poked their snouts back into the waters of the University of Chicago's Botany Pond.

While their surroundings might have seemed familiar, the nearly 125-year-old pond they were encountering had noticeably changed. The water was much clearer, tinged a healthy light green by algae and phytoplankton and filtered by deep layers of crushed rock. Native aquatic plants swayed in the gentle current that circulated water from one end of the pond to the other. And tiny native fish darted in the shallows.

Over the past several years, Botany Pond has undergone a substantive restoration to rework its circulation system and shore up its century-old bridge. The physical construction was only the first step,

however. After refilling the pond, the next task was to reintroduce the pond's inhabitants.

But the restoration team—led by UChicago landscape architect **Katie Martin Peck**, with guidance from faculty experts—didn't want to simply return the pond to the way it was before.

Instead they wanted the pond to be a more self-sustaining ecosystem—one that nodded to the original pond's biodiversity but could maintain itself with as little human intervention as possible. They also sought to honor the pond's origins as a sanctuary shaped by scholarship.

"There wasn't really a blueprint for this kind of project," says Martin Peck. So with help from UChicago biologists, outside consultants, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, she and her colleagues at UChicago Facilities set out to rebuild the pond's ecosystem from scratch.



Botany Pond was originally designed in 1902 by half brothers John C. Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., sons and successors of famed American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., in collaboration with Professor John Coulter. It initially was envisioned to host exotic species collected by the botany department.

But over a century later, the pond's purpose and uses had changed from research to recreation—and it needed refurbishment. By the time the restoration began, the pond had nearly four feet of sediment built up at the bottom, including surface runoff and years of waste from ducks.

The restoration started from the ground up—literally. Botany Pond's new filtration system begins with five feet of varied sizes of crushed rock at the bottom of the pond, designed to capture debris and sediment for easy removal every few years. A series of pumps pull the water down through the rocks, and jets create a light current, oxygenating the water through the depths of winter and ensuring it doesn't fully freeze. This provides the structure for the pond's inhabitants to thrive.

To remake Botany Pond as a fully functioning ecosystem, UChicago Facilities recruited expert consultants and faculty biologists, including **Michael LaBarbera**, professor emeritus in the Department of Organismal Biology and Anatomy,

who told them they needed to start at the very bottom of the food chain.

When we think about pond life, we tend to focus on the creatures we humans know and love, such as fish, turtles, and ducks.

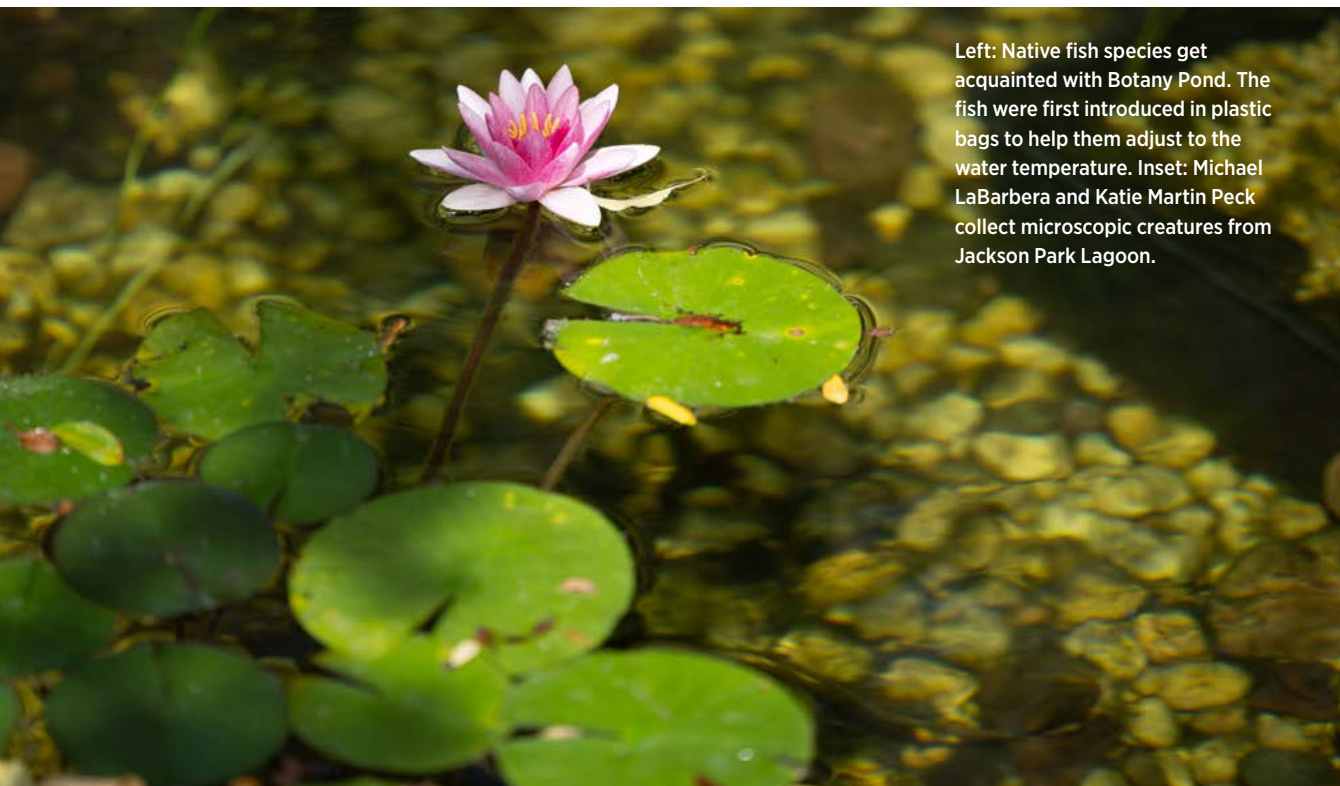
But any pond's ecosystem rests on organisms largely invisible to us. At the bottom of Botany Pond's food chain are bacteria—billions of them—introduced during the restoration by transplants of mud from nearby bodies of water. The bacteria float alongside single-celled plants, algae, and phytoplankton.

These microscopic creatures feed the next layer, which is LaBarbera's favorite: zooplankton, tiny swimming creatures that are just barely visible to the naked eye.

Last year LaBarbera and Martin Peck traveled to nearby Jackson Park Lagoon to collect a small sample of local mud, bacteria, and zooplankton to seed the pond.

LaBarbera has spent a lot of time in Jackson Park. For decades he took his classes there to track wildlife, so he knows the good spots for collecting zooplankton.

For this trip, that meant the southern end of Wooded Island. There LaBarbera rigged up a very fine mesh net in a pulley system, which al-



Left: Native fish species get acquainted with Botany Pond. The fish were first introduced in plastic bags to help them adjust to the water temperature. Inset: Michael LaBarbera and Katie Martin Peck collect microscopic creatures from Jackson Park Lagoon.

lowed him and Martin Peck to stand on either end of the bridge to the island and pull the net back and forth between them, gathering microscopic swimming creatures.

After a few rounds, they hauled up the net and gently poured the contents into a clear container. LaBarbera tilted the jar to peer inside.

“Oh, look! See these little swimming white spots? Those are copepods. They’re in the crustacean family. And some of them, you’ll see a dot where the body joins the tail—those are egg sacs. So this looks really good,” he said, pleased. “They’ll populate the whole pond very quickly.

“Most people don’t find copepods terribly charismatic,” LaBarbera said. “I do—I think they’re very cute. I could watch these guys all day.”

In addition to a couple thousand copepods, the jar also contained rotifers (“Strange little things. They look like little R2-D2s with hairs,” LaBarbera said) and water fleas, among other creatures.

LaBarbera was adamant about including the zooplankton for more than their cuteness. A key food for baby fish, these zooplankton are an essential element of the ecosystem.

“The pond would acquire these eventually—on the feet of migratory birds like ducks, perhaps—but it might take several years, and until then the fish will have a hard time,” LaBarbera explained.

“The adult fish can probably live. But if they spawn there, their larvae would not have anything to eat.”

With the bacteria, plankton, and zooplankton established, the pond was ready for the next step—fish.

The team consulted with faculty and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to select native species at different levels of the food chain.

“There’s actually quite a lot of interesting, diverse fish in the streams and ponds here in Illinois—more than 50 species of minnows alone,” says **Mark Westneat**, a professor of organismal biology and anatomy who studies fish.

In the end they settled on six species: channel catfish, golden shiner minnows, fathead minnows, creek chubs, pumpkinseeds, and white suckers.

The success rate for establishing fish populations is better in the fall, thanks to the cooler temperatures. So, on a drizzly September day, a truck arrived on campus and unloaded bags of wildly swimming fish.

Martin Peck and UChicago Facilities project manager **Lindsay Haskins** carefully lowered the bags into the water to let the temperature equalize, which helps reduce the shock to the fish. Then the pair cut the bags open and allowed the fish to pour out in a flashing stream. The catfish cruised lazily



beneath a clump of water lettuce, but the minnows immediately darted to all corners of the pond.

“More than 700 native fish have been added to the pond so far,” explains Martin Peck. “Look closely in the deep end and you’ll see schools of the different species swimming around.”

Next came the turtles. They had been removed when the pond was initially drained and handed over to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, who assessed the turtles’ health and kept them safe over two winters while the pond construction was completed.

The turtles will forage for plant life, small fish, and insects. When the temperatures start to drop, they will burrow down into the mud and crushed rocks at the bottom of the pond for the winter.

Botany Pond’s beloved ducks, on the other hand,

are wild migratory animals that come and go as they please. The team planted a stand of native sedges, grasslike plants that ducklings particularly like to nestle in, and placed a series of stepped stones to help them easily enter and exit the pond.

One effort remains for the pond’s restoration team. This spring they will add snails, crayfish, and tadpoles of native frog species, such as leopard frogs and spring peepers.

“You’ll also start to notice dragonfly larvae, little aquatic beetles, different species of algae—so that the whole food chain fills out,” says Westneat.

In addition to its fauna, the pond is now home to 11 different species of aquatic plants, including a fragrant water lily, an American species of lotus, a blue iris, and several kinds of rushes.



**WE KNOW THIS IS A
REALLY BELOVED AND
MEANINGFUL SPOT
FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE.**

The land plants surrounding the pond are a mix of native and introduced species, designed to offer color and interest throughout the year to human and wildlife visitors. Native wild geraniums bloom in spring with periwinkle-colored flowers; roses pop in summer; bright purple asters and cheerful pink Japanese anemones follow in fall. Around the flowers, native ferns and sedges shelter wildlife and offer a lush backdrop.

“We wanted to parallel the original plan for the pond,” says Martin Peck. “It’s not a showcase for exotic species anymore, but we wanted to nod to its past with a very biodiverse mix of plants. We have a lot of variety between the perennials, shrubs, and trees, with just enough repetition to create a curated look.”

The new design includes viewing patios and

seating for humans but also islands in the middle of the pond for animals to retreat to when they need to feel safe.

And the bridge, a gift from the Class of 1922, remains—reinforced for another century of curious visitors, excited children, and photo ops.

With these adjustments, the team hopes the refresh will offer years of enjoyment to the campus and Hyde Park community.

“We know this is a really beloved and meaningful spot for a lot of people,” says Martin Peck. “People seem to love to see it revived, and we think it’ll be fun for visitors to watch the ecosystem evolve.” ♦



**Download an illustration of the
flora and fauna of Botany Pond.**

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

*UChicagoans and industry professionals
have been coming together all year to celebrate the games
they love, expand knowledge, and play.*

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09; CHANDLER A. CALDERON;
AND SHILOH MILLER, CLASS OF 2026

June 6, 1984. Elektronika 60

Opposite: Alex Seropian, SB'91 (right), discusses his love of *Tetris* with journalist and podcast creator Simon Parkin in his keynote conversation at the Year of Games Kick-Off Symposium. Right: Students play on a vintage arcade machine in the Weston Game Lab's Retro Bay.



When I first came to UChicago about 15 years ago, this event just would've been pretty unthinkable," said **Patrick Jagoda**.

It was mid-October, and Jagoda was welcoming guests to the kickoff symposium for the Year of Games—a University-wide celebration of games and play spanning the 2025–26 academic year, spearheaded by the Division of the Arts

& Humanities and the University of Chicago Library.

Back in 2010 the general attitude toward games at the University was characterized by a "kind of skepticism," recalled Jagoda, William Rainey Harper Professor in the Departments of Cinema and Media Studies and English Language and Literature and the College. What little scholarly attention had been given to the topic was mainly focused on the relationship between video games and violence.

Over time the wariness began to give way. Students packed courses on critical video game studies, leading to the creation of a media arts and design minor and then a major (now one of the most popular in the Division of the Arts & Humanities). New infrastructure—the Media Arts, Data, and Design (MADD) Center; the Weston Game Lab; Fourcast Lab—gave students and faculty space to explore games together. Research projects on games proliferated.

The Year of Games represents a new phase in the relationship between UChicago and games: wholehearted embrace. The idea for the initiative emerged "several years ago—long enough that 2026 seemed impossibly far away," recalls **Chris Carloy**, PhD'18, assistant instructional professor in the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities and the Department of Cinema and Media Studies and chair of the Year of Games steering committee.

It all started with University Librarian and Dean of the University Library **Torsten Reimer**, a gamer himself, who convened a meeting of like-minded people on campus. Reimer floated the idea of a large-scale project that would

highlight the many ways UChicago students, faculty, and alumni are engaged with play.

The organizers took an intentionally broad view of their chosen topic. Classic board games? Elaborate live-action role-playing games? Video games? Puzzles? For the Year of Games, it all counts. "If you think of yourself as somebody—or even if you might wonder whether you *should* think of yourself as somebody—who does things related to games and play," Carloy says, you're eligible to join the fun.

That expansive vision is reflected in the wide-ranging programming. The Year of Games events calendar is packed with ways to play, learn, and create: a *Minecraft* study break, game design opportunities, weekly mah-jongg and bridge sessions, a Doc Films series about games.

These get-togethers surround tentpole events, including the Year of Games Kick-Off Symposium and the Spring Carnival, which is planned for May 16. "Imagine the main quads taken over with live performances and bouncy houses and schoolyard games," Carloy says. "If you haven't played Red Rover in a long time," well, send yourself right over.

The symposium, held over three days at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, brought together scholars, industry bigwigs, game enthusiasts, and students who will shape the future of game design and study.

The event was a reminder of how much the multibillion-dollar industry—which has the largest market share of the entertainment sector—shapes culture. Games and play are part of everyone's lives, even those who don't think of themselves as gamers. "Why do we talk about games like there's gamers and then there's not-gamers?" asked MIT professor D. Fox Harrell in a discussion of games and the academy. "We don't do the same thing with music. We don't say there's musickers and non-musickers." We just ask people what kind of music they like. We could, he said, ask the same question about games: "What kind of game do you like?"

In other words, games are for everyone. So pass go and read on for some of what the year has had to offer.—S.A.

FEAST FOR THE EARS

Four sound designers discuss their craft.



PANELISTS:

- Ben Babbitt, composer at the independent game studio Cardboard Computer
- Joanna Fang, senior Foley artist at Sony
- Chris Granner, audio director at Zynga
- **Takashi Shallow**, MFA'18, interdisciplinary artist, DJ, and a lecturer in media arts and design

MODERATOR: **Julianne Grasso**, PhD'20, assistant professor of music theory at Florida State University

Everyone in this room can remember the sound of your parents walking up to your locked door,” Joanna Fang (above) told the crowd gathered in the Logan Center auditorium for a panel discussion the first day of the Year of Games Kick-Off Symposium. It’s her job as a Foley artist to evoke hyperspecific soundscapes in the studio—the crunch of snow under hesitant steps, the metallic rush of a sword unsheathed for battle, the soft rustle of an expensive leather jacket—using materials like toilet plungers, old shoes, and cantaloupes.

Fang was joined onstage by three other artists who work with sound. All classically trained musicians, the panelists eventually found a home in games, creating the scores and sound effects that bring games to life.

Sound is essential to supporting a director’s intent, the panelists agreed. They described the careful awareness of the associations between genres and sounds that they bring to this work. Decisions to follow or deviate from a common pairing—like first-person shooter games and electric guitar—can be significant. Shallow brings this challenge into sound design classes, encouraging students to explore unexpected music and genre pairings. Fang also spoke about how she negotiates expectations and authenticity in sound, giving the example of prosthetics. In real life, prosthetics are typically designed to move noiselessly, but in games, players and studios alike often expect them to make distinctive sounds.

At the end of the event, Fang gave a live Foley demonstration with supplies she had gathered from the Logan Center throughout the day—shoes, colanders, music stands, a few pieces of 3D-printed waste, and a deflated yoga ball perfect for replicating the sound of creaky leather (“You have *The Matrix* in this one prop,” she said). And the pièce de résistance? A soaking wet chamois, or “shammy.” Wrap it around a couple pieces of manicotti, twist, and you have the most shudder-inducing bone break you’ll ever need. Using these sounds to make the audience feel a certain way, she said, is “like weaponized ASMR.”—C. C.

Photography by Sarah Larson.



AMONG US (2018): **Nathan Blau**, AB'14, worked on content strategy and design.

BUNGIE: Studio founded by **Alex Seropian**, SB'91, and **Jason Jones**, EX'94.

CARDS AGAINST HUMANITY (2011): Cocreated by **Eliot Weinstein**, AB'11, MPH'25.

DANCHI DAYS (2026): Codeveloped and produced by **Melos Han-Tani**, SB'13.

ESCHVR (undated): Developed by **Tallon Hodge**, SB'23.

FIRST MONDAY IN OCTOBER (2026): Designed by **Talia Rosen**, AB'04.

GAMING ISLAM: Research initiative led by **Alireza Doostdar**, associate professor in the Divinity School and the College, and **Ghenwa Hayek**, associate professor in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies.

HAVEN (2024 and 2025): Developed by UChicago scholars and students.

INDIGENOMICON: AMERICAN INDIANS, VIDEO GAMES, AND THE STRUCTURES OF DISPOSSESSION (Duke University Press, 2025): Book by **Jodi A. Byrd**, professor in the Department of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity.

JOURNEY (2012): Produced by **Robin Hunicke**, AB'95.

KOEHNE'S GAMES: Board game company founded by **James Koehne**, AB'19.

PLAYING, FOR KEEPS

Panelists discuss why and how we preserve games.

PANELISTS:

- Andrew Borman, director of digital preservation at the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York
- Simon Parkin, journalist and podcast creator
- **Torsten Reimer**, University Librarian and Dean of the University Library
- Josh Tsui, studio founder and director of innovation at DePaul University's Jarvis College of Computing and Digital Media

MODERATOR: Kent Lambert, associate director of MADD Center Arts Labs (Hack Arts Lab and Weston Game Lab)

I'm a historian. ... I'm currently playing *Cyber Punk 2077*, and in 500 years I want a historian to be able to play this and say something profound about culture today," Torsten Reimer said on the first day of the Year of Games Kick-Off Symposium. Two days later he and others dug into the challenges and opportunities of game preservation.

The game industry has historically treated each new release as inherently better than the previous version. As a result, the speakers agreed, companies have not taken as much interest in preserving their own archives, as, say, film studios have. Game studios do tap into their history, occasionally releasing new versions of retro games or consoles. But these attempts to "monetize on nostalgia," as Simon Parkin put it, aren't the same as preserving the originals.

"It needs to be a society-wide conversation on preserving what made us who we are and what will be important for

those who come after us," said Reimer.

Most game preservation has been done by private institutions, individual collectors, and fans. And approaches vary widely. UChicago's Weston Game Lab, for example, prioritizes playability over preservation, explained Kent Lambert. Each time students play on the consoles in the lab's Retro Bay, there is risk to the condition of these objects, but the lab decided that the experience of playing vintage video games was worth it.

Andrew Borman explained that his institution takes a broad approach, making an effort to preserve everything around games, including marketing materials, focus testing records, and industry magazines. But there's always a question of how much the circle should be expanded, said Borman. Would you preserve an interactive screensaver or advertisement?

"Preservation isn't an accident, but survival often is," said Borman. There are many game-related materials that have simply been lost, that there won't be the opportunity to preserve. To create the documentary *Insert Coin* (2020), about arcade game manufacturer Midway Studios, Josh Tsui said he relied on records that were on the way to the dumpster when Midway was closing, as well as materials he and other employees had saved on their own.

The speakers urged the aspiring game designers in the audience to help preserve this history. "Keep a diary," said Parkin, who has conducted oral histories of the game world. Tsui encouraged everyone to keep copies of their work and to make sure nothing gets thrown away.—C. C.

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS (2009): **Noor J. Amin**, SB'23, works on game design.

MANIFOLD GARDEN (2020): Developed and published by **William Chyr**, AB'09.

NINJA GAIDEN for Atari Lynx (1988): Held in the UChicago Library's games collection.

OPENENDEDGROUP: Digital art studio cofounded by **Marc Downie**, associate professor of practice in the arts in the Department of Cinema and Media Studies, Media Arts and Design, and the College.

PLANT-LAND (undated): Developed by **Alvin Shi**, SB'21.

QIX for Nintendo Game Boy (1990): Held in the UChicago Library's game collection.

RULES: A SHORT HISTORY OF WHAT WE LIVE BY (Princeton University Press, 2022): Book by **Lorraine Daston**, visiting professor in the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG: Title and subject of Spring 2026 course taught by assistant instructional professor **Chris Carloy**, PhD'18.

TWILIGHT'S END (2025): associate content production by **Kat Waterman**, AB'25.

THE UNSEEING EYE (2023): co-creation, art direction, and design by **Eren Slifker**, AB'24.

VIDEOGAMES AND GENRE STORYTELLING: Spring 2026 course taught by **Ian Bryce Jones**, PhD'15, lecturer in Cinema and Media Studies and Media Arts and Design.

WESTON GAME LAB: Space to collaborate on the research and development of games (part of the MADD Center).

XBOX (2001): Console held in the Weston Game Lab's Retro Bay.

YARS' REVENGE for Atari (1981): Held in the UChicago Library's game collection.

ZYGOTE GAMES: Tabletop game company founded by **Diane Kelly**, AB'90, and **James Cambias**, AB'88.



WHAT'S OLDE IS NEW AGAIN

For a weekend, medievalists became game designers.

What makes medievalists special, and what unique perspectives can they bring to the table as game designers? These questions, posed during the first afternoon of the three-day Medievalists Design Games symposium on a chilly Friday in December, helped warm up the room of scholars, some of whom had come into the weekend of board game creation with little to no game design experience. The event was organized as part of the Year of Games by medieval scholar **Thomas C. Sawyer**, a writing specialist in the University's Writing Program.

Suggestions were slow to come at first, but soon ideas—and Latin phrases—were flowing. Games were a huge part of daily life in the Middle Ages, one participant volunteered: Many documents from the time include lists of games and rules (sometimes in the form of poetry). One attendee suggested that after the fall of Rome, Europe was in a period of reinvention, a good fit for the open-endedness and world-building involved in games. (The conversation was briefly derailed here by a scholarly spat, with another professor arguing that at this time most Europeans still saw themselves as Roman.) Medievalists are “consistently the most eclectic group of weirdos,” someone admitted, and perhaps liable to bring weird and eclectic approaches to game design.

There could even be a medieval game that isn't set in medieval times, suggested a participant. Others agreed: Why couldn't you communicate something essential about life in the Middle Ages from a game set in contemporary Chicago? Now they were starting to think like game designers.

By Sunday afternoon, after two days of discussions, mentorship from game designers, and workshoping, the medievalists were ready to show off some board game prototypes. In the MADD Center, each of the four teams had a game board sketched on a giant writing pad, plus an array of playing pieces, dice, cards, and tokens.

As participants had discussed on Friday, one problem

with existing medieval games is they often borrow the aesthetics of the Middle Ages without teaching players anything about what it was like to live in the period. Two teams took on the challenge of making daily life their subject.

The game *Healers and Heretics* attempted to replicate the inherent danger of being a doctor many centuries ago: Players do their best to treat patients, but there are elements of chance that may cause a patient to die, even if their ailments do not seem life-threatening (maybe they come in to have a tooth pulled but catch cholera from the patient before them). As the doctors weather these events, they begin to accumulate infamy tokens, reflecting the growing suspicion of the townspeople. Late in the game a witch hunt begins, at which point you'd better hope you're the least infamous doctor in town—or that you've healed enough patients who can vouch for you.

The last team to present kept the name of their game covered. Imagine that your child was injured by your neighbor's pig, one team member prompted. Rather than blaming your neighbor, you hold the animal responsible. For his crimes, you decide to put the pig on trial. A teammate removed the piece of paper covering the gameboard with a flourish. “THE PIG MUST DIE,” it read. In this game, players are members of a medieval community putting animals on trial—a common phenomenon in those days—for crimes ranging from defecation to eating the Holy Eucharist. In an attempt to replicate how the trials could impact the morale and mindset of townspeople, the game takes place over four trials and four seasons, during which time players track the humors of the townspeople: More sanguine humors would lead the community to feel energetic and inclined to take action, but a phlegmatic mob would be more inclined to apathy.

After the presentations, some of the students who had been playing video games nearby joined conference attendees to test out these new games—and maybe get a new perspective on medieval history.—C. C.

PLAY TO WIN

One theme, nine teams—and \$3,500 in total prizes.

Over the Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday weekend, UChicago students competed in the third annual Winter Game Jam, sponsored by Career Advancement and the recognized student organization UChicago Game Design. The challenge: Build a video game from scratch in 72 hours.

The MADD Center opened early over the weekend to accommodate competing teams. Around the room students wrote code, sketched out ideas on sheets of notebook paper, and drew visuals on tablets, with teams dividing roles based on skill sets.

First-year **Elaine Jiang** was in charge of story writing for her team. “It’s similar to writing a play,” she said. “You’ve got to think about what happens on the screen, and then you have to allocate lines to different characters.” She wrote for a bit longer, then looked up with curiosity. “Alumni are going to see this?” she asked. “If anyone’s looking for interns in their game company ...”

The next week students displayed their games at a showcase in Ida Noyes. Games were judged on craftsmanship, originality, and adherence to this year’s theme—inverted perspective—by four Chicago-based game developers, including UChicago researcher **Ashlyn Sparrow**, senior research associate at the Weston Game Lab.

At the showcase students and industry professionals bounced from table to table, donning headphones, crowding over computer screens, and discussing gameplay. Team members offered encouragement. “You got this, bro,” Jiang said

to a player attempting her team’s game. “It took me 12 tries.”

Each of the nine teams took the theme in a different direction. One game involved playing as the narrator, another as the game’s developer, and another as the constructor of a dungeon—a subversion of the “dungeon crawler” genre, in which a player must navigate a treacherous, mazelike environment.

After an hour of mingling, Career Advancement liaison **Joey Velez** announced the winners. The first-place team was composed of third-year **Ravi Mangar** and second-years **Kin Ching Ip** and **Elijah Tan**. Their game, *I Want the Click*, in which you play as a button in a video game wondering why it never gets pressed, was developed after an epic brainstorming session that weekend in the basement of Kent Chemical Laboratory. “On our drawing board we had some references to, like, *Gilgamesh*,” Mangar said. “Catholic religious imagery,” Tan added. All three team members—but really, everyone there, on every team—had a palpable belief in the power of games to have a cultural impact.

When asked about what makes a great game, the team grew thoughtful. “If a game subverts your expectations, it subverts your expectations in real life,” Ip said at last. “It makes you think about your life in relation to the game in a different way.”—*Shiloh Miller, Class of 2026* ♦



TO READ MORE, VISIT [MAG.UCHICAGO.EDU /YEAROFGAMES](https://mag.uchicago.edu/yearofgames).

Opposite page, from left: Thomas C. Sawyer (right) talks through board game design with a fellow medievalist in Crerar Library’s MADD Center; Year of Games Kick-Off Symposium attendees enjoy a discussion of game preservation. Right: Medievalists and experienced game designers put their heads together to create board game prototypes.



Opposite, from left: Photography by Anne Ryan, photography by Jason Smith. This page: Photography by Anne Ryan.

TALKING OUT OF BOTH SIDES OF YOUR MOUTH

A linguistics class puts humor and deception under the microscope.

BY CHANDLER A. CALDERON

Pinocchio is bullshitting. Not wanting to reveal his friend's location, but also not wanting to trigger the telltale sign that he's lying, the *Shrek the Third* character talks in circles to avoid telling an angry Prince Charming where his rival, the ogre Shrek, is. "Well, uh, I don't know where he's not," the would-be boy begins.

Then he really begins to dazzle: "On the contrary, I'm possibly more or less not definitely rejecting the idea that in no way with any amount of uncertainty that I undeniably do or do not know where he should probably be, if that indeed wasn't where he isn't." The linguistic gymnastics continue until one of the three little pigs gets so annoyed that he blurts out what Shrek is up to.

With this scene, projected on three screens at the front of a Harper Memorial Library classroom, **Jason Riggle** kicked off a mid-October lecture for The Language of Deception and Hu-

mor. It turns out that humor and deception are two sides of the same coin, and both have a lot to tell us about how we make meaning and interact with others. Students explored how the two modes interact in literature, philosophy, popular culture, developmental science, and more.



Jason Riggle.

On one level, "almost all humor involves some kind of deception, involves some kind of trickery, some kind of misdirection," Riggle, an associate professor of linguistics who uses they/them pronouns, said in a Zoom interview. "So you might say humor is a flavor of deception, but that would be really reductive."

To start with the obvious, humor is intensely prosocial. "We delight in messing with each other, in being messed with by other brains," they said. And when someone gets a joke, it shows shared understanding. "Humor is this sort of magic flash that reveals the insides of other people's minds."

Children develop the ability to tell jokes relatively young, Riggle explained in an early November class on cognitive development. By age 4, most children begin to move from a sense of humor that relies on deviations from expected norms (like a caregiver making a funny face or acting as if they're going to feed a child with the wrong end of a spoon)

Top: ©Paramount/courtesy Everett Collection. Left: Illustration by Daniel Hertzberg.

to humor that takes into account shared knowledge and assumptions.

Riggle told students a joke they heard from their young child: “Why do sharks swim in salt water? Because pepper water makes them sneeze!” It’s a fairly sophisticated joke, Riggle said, one that relies on a couple of analogistic leaps. The joke teller must know that the audience thinks of salt and pepper as a pair, that the existence of salt water could imply pepper water exists, and that pepper makes you sneeze. As children gain this awareness of what other people know and how they think, they also learn how to lie.

Deception, too, can be prosocial, Riggle argued in another class session. Hence our wealth of terms for almost-lies. Since calling someone a liar is such a serious social judgment, we are careful to distinguish between kinds of deception that might not convey the same level of betrayal as a lie: white lie, bullshit, innocent misunderstanding, noble lie, trolling, prank, bluff, ploy, dupe. We might not consider someone who engages in these a liar.

Riggle explained that research has even shown that people tend to find those who lie for prosocial reasons—for example, telling white lies to avoid hurting others’ feelings—as more honest rather than less honest.

Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition! And certainly not in the middle of a linguistics class. But there it was, the famous Monty Python sketch, serving as an example of how a tragic topic becomes fodder for a joke. Humor, like horror, Riggle explained, can allow audiences to process fear or anxiety by twisting expectations in an entertaining way.

“It’s a good class to teach, because it gives you all the dopamine, getting to laugh,” Riggle said over Zoom. The *Shrek the Third* scene and the Monty Python sketch were among many short videos students were asked to consider. To tease apart nuances between humor and almost-humor, students analyzed jokes that could easily go sideways. A stand-up clip by Matthew Broussard

about whether it’s OK to say the word *Jew* walks a fine line: “So long as it’s a noun,” the comedian quips. “It’s the adjectives and verbs that will get you into trouble,” he says, before giving an egregious example. Riggle asked the class why the joke works. “He’s not making fun of Jewish people for being the stereotype, he’s making fun of the fact that the stereotype exists,” suggested one student. “He in-groups the audience,” added another, pointing out how Broussard breaks character to tell the audience why the joke is so tricky.

Another example of almost-humor involved a contest organized by a bar manager in 2001: The server who sold the most beer in a month would win a Toyota. The winner didn’t receive a car, but rather a “toy Yoda.” It turned out the contest had been announced on April Fool’s Day. Was this funny? Not for the winning waitress, who decided to sue. Riggle asked the class if anyone knew what the judge decided. “If I remember right,” ventured one student, “they said that she did deserve an actual Toyota.” “Trick question!” replied Riggle. The case was settled out of court.

There was a lot to process, between these examples, a handful of mini cognitive tests, and the assortment of memes, gifs, and font colors Riggle uses on their slides. “People can absorb multiple channels of information simultaneously,” they later said. For Riggle, this means thinking about how to make the lecture, the words on the screen, and other visuals work to-

gether to help students pay attention and retain key points.

The course took a more sober tone in the final weeks of the quarter, diving into manipulation, persuasion, contagious deception, and moral panics. These topics have become increasingly relevant over the decade Riggle has taught the class, but the same dynamics of misinformation and collective panics have been with us for a long time. Humor and deception interact in interesting ways here.

“Humor is the magic key that opens up people’s defenses and allows you to get at what they really think, which can be used for evil to manipulate them, but it can also be used for good to free them from other manipulations,” said Riggle. To combat misinformation, humor can work “better than any kind of corrective information. Why? Because when we’re in that state of going along with the joke, we let all our defenses down. ... Understanding how that works is important to all of us.”

But Riggle was not above a little manipulation herself, it turned out. They revealed in one class session filled with comedy clips and memes that research has shown people absorb more from lectures that involve humor than those that don’t, even if slides used in a lecture are out of order. This suggests that after experiencing humor, the mind is better able to draw connections. Students glanced around, amused that they might have been tricked into learning something. ♦

SYLLABUS

Meeting twice a week, students in *The Language of Deception and Humor* covered topics including “Too many meanings,” “Why is language like this?,” “Contagion,” “Persuasion,” and “Wisdom.” Assigned readings stretched back to early 20th-century writings by

René Magritte (“*Les Mots et les Images*,” 1929) and Jorge Luis Borges (“*Funes the Memorios*,” 1942). Students also read recent cognitive science papers with such seriously unfunny titles as “What Makes Things Funny? An Integrative Review of the Antecedents of Laughter

and Amusement” (Warren et al. 2021); “Perceptual, Categorical, and Affective Processing of Ambiguous Smiling Facial Expressions” (Calvo et al. 2012); and “Contagious Yawning, Empathy, and Their Relation to Prosocial Behavior” (Franzen et al. 2018).—C. C.

GLIMPSES

MONEY TALKS

Vivian Tu, AB'16, wants everyone to feel confident managing their finances.

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09



There's a line **Vivian Tu**, AB'16, repeats in nearly every financial advice video she posts for her followers—all 6.5 million of them—across Instagram and TikTok: "I'm Vivian, your rich BFF, and your favorite Wall Street girly."

Before she was the internet's BFF, Tu, who spent two years at J.P. Morgan and later worked in ad sales for BuzzFeed, was giving money-

management advice to her own friends. "They were all smarter than me," she remembers thinking, "but it was so amazing to me that they didn't understand even the most basic financial concepts."

She realized she had a knack for breaking down complex topics in funny, relatable ways, a skill she brings to her growing media operation, which includes social media, a podcast, and two books. *Rich AF: The Winning*

Photography by Jenny Anderson

Golden girly: Posting as Your Rich BFF,
Vivian Tu, AB'16, shares easy-to-understand
financial advice on social media.

Money Mindset That Will Change Your Life (Portfolio/Penguin, 2023) covered the basics of saving, budgeting, and investing, while her new title, *Well Endowed: The Secrets to Strategic Spending, Building a Financial Foundation for You and Your Family, and Creating Lasting Generational Wealth* (Harper Wave, 2026), prepares readers for the next season of their financial lives, with advice on marriage, children, and retirement. Her comments have been edited and condensed.

Many people feel too anxious, uncomfortable, or embarrassed to talk about money. Where does your comfort with the topic come from?

Bluntly put, I'm new money. I didn't grow up with it. I have two Chinese immigrant parents. And in the Chinese culture, one thing that's different from American culture is that talking about money is quite common. When you would go to Thanksgiving at your family friend's house, if they had a new TV, immediately the parents would be like, "How much was that TV?" I found it strange that other cultures didn't have these conversations.

If you grew up with generational wealth, there's a little bit of a hush-hush country club mentality. Whereas when you're new money and tacky—I don't have those same social handcuffs. I'm going to talk about whatever I want to talk about. Whoever likes it will stick around, and whoever doesn't, won't. But I think a lot more people needed to have this conversation than were willing to admit it.

You have an inclusive perspective about wealth. You're unafraid to want it, but you clearly want other people to have it too. How did that mindset emerge?

For a long time, especially in my early career, I had a scarcity mindset—and it came from a rational place, let's be clear. When I interned at J.P. Morgan, they hired three interns for my desk and only one of us was getting a job. So I was raised in an environment where it did feel like for me to get a win, someone else had to take an L.

That said, I think I had this idea from my parents that the harder you work, the more you will succeed. It did feel that way in college, for a while. But then it became clear in the

real world, the workforce, it's not about being the smartest person in the room. You have to have connections. You have to network. Your dad has to know somebody else's dad. It didn't necessarily feel like a meritocracy anymore.

I came to the conclusion that I want to do well, because I work so hard and I deserve to, but it doesn't necessarily need to come at the expense of someone else. And we all have enough room to win. My ethos now is that I hope the more time you spend with me, the better you become, whether that's smarter, richer, or feeling more stable. I want to leave people better than I found them.

Is there a money-related topic you've changed your mind about?

Prenups. I think they are a very powerful financial tool. When I was younger and just dating for fun, I always thought a prenup is what you get if you don't trust your partner and you think you're going to get divorced. But when you get married, the government will write you a prenup, and you're just going to have to live with the terms they assign you. I don't care if you're left, right, or center—you probably don't trust the government to know you and your partner as well as you know you and your partner.

A prenup is a way to, essentially, have relationship insurance. You buy health insurance, car insurance, home insurance, and you don't plan on getting sick, getting into a wreck, or having your house blow away in a tornado, but you still do those things to protect yourself.

What's the best financial decision you've ever made—and the worst?

The best, and I got this from my mentor, was to invest early and often. When I got to J.P. Morgan, I knew what I was doing in my actual day job, trading on behalf of these billion-dollar hedge funds, billion-dollar asset managers. But I didn't really know how to manage my own money. One day my mentor asked me, "Are you contributing to your 401(k)?" And I was like, "Yeah, a couple dollars." She was like, "Are you joking?" She came over, made me log in to my employee portal, and changed all of my allocations.

I was so annoyed she had done that, because I realized

**I want to do well,
because I work so hard
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MAROON MEMORIES

FAVORITE CLASS: Easy. **Clayton Harris III**, AM'21 [lecturer in the Harris School of Public Policy], Process and Policy in State and City Government. He was not only my favorite professor but also my thesis adviser, so I have to give him a huge shout-out. He taught me a new way of thinking.

DAILY BREAD: I don't even know if this still exists, but in Hutch there was the pizza place that sold the breadsticks? There was one class that I and a couple of my roommates took, and after that class, we would always go get breadsticks and then talk about what we had learned or do the assignment. I remember sitting at those tables and just being with friends, and it was a lot of fun.

FEED THE SOUL: I lived a block away from the Med, and I kid you not, I ate there probably four to five times a week.

STUDY SPOTS: If I'm pretending to study, I'm on the A level, I'm chatting with friends, I'm eating chips. I don't know if that's even allowed, but I was definitely sneaking chips in the library. If I'm actually studying—like, it's finals week, I am not messing around—fourth-floor stacks. There was one window that I would always sit at because it was so far back, and I knew there was no cell service.

STEEL SHARPENS STEEL: I do think that UChicago made me a more critical thinker, because when you're surrounded by that caliber of student, it forces you to question your beliefs. Having debates in class, a lot of perspectives that I never would have considered were thrown in my face. I had to acknowledge that other people are allowed to be smarter than you and you may have to think about things more deeply. I just loved it, and I'm grateful.



my paycheck was smaller every two weeks. But looking back, that was how I built some of my wealth very quickly.

She really set me up for success, and had she not changed those allocations, I might not have what I have today. I was able to make some bigger career leaps because I had a nest egg, and I knew that I was safe. Those investments really did provide me a parachute.

Now, worst financial decision I've ever made. This is a fun one. When I was in college, I had this rinky-dink credit card. When I started working I was like, "Oh, I'm big-time now, it's time for the really good credit cards." I got all of the cards that have some heft when you throw them down on the dinner table, and I thought, "Now that I have these good credit cards, I don't need this crappy one from college," so I closed down that card, and I saw my credit score drop by 60 or 80 points the following day.

As it turns out, even though it was a crappy card, it was my longest line of historical credit, and length of credit history is one of the criteria that you're graded on. There was absolutely nothing I could do but just wait it out. Unfortunately, that was a lesson I had to learn the hard way. I hope other people can learn from my mistake.

What's something about working on Wall Street that people wouldn't expect, and something about being a content creator that people wouldn't expect?

Working on Wall Street is less glamorous than people think. On shows like *Industry*, they're partying and doing drugs and going out. That wasn't what I was doing. I was at that desk at 5:45 in the morning, and then I would go home and go to sleep immediately. There are some glitzy things—you get taken out to a couple of really nice steak dinners, and you make good money—but mostly it was a grind.

I think there's a lot of misplaced rage, especially in the current socioeconomic climate. I promise you, the 22-year-old financial analyst is not your enemy. I have nothing but respect for the people who do it, because I know how hard it is.

For being a content creator, I would say creating the content you see is only probably 20 percent of the job. I am very much thinking about search engine optimization, writing copy, writing scripts. I'm spending time

I'm grateful that I get to educate and that people see me as a form of edutainment versus someone whose life they need to know every detail about.

to write the book or outline things for my podcast or come up with pitches for TV shows, or I'm working on my app, Ask Dolly. Most of the stuff happens behind the scenes.

Do you feel like there's a divide between your private self as Vivian and your public self as Your Rich BFF?

My personality online is very similar to my personality in real life. I'm still chatty, I still overshare, I still do all those things. But I am so grateful not to be a lifestyle creator or influencer because I know the people who do that work, and I don't think I could do that. I don't want to have to share every single thing I do. Every meal I consume does not have to be photographed.

I'm grateful that I get to educate and that people see me as a form of edutainment versus someone whose life they need to know every detail about.

What's been most challenging and most rewarding about becoming a public figure?

The worst part, if I'm honest, is that I can't be a normal person in public. I always joke with my husband that I can't pick my nose in public anymore. But the negatives certainly are outweighed by all of the great positives.

The most rewarding is when I get to meet BFFs in real life, especially when I go on tour. I will never forget this: I was speaking at the University of Delaware, and at the end of the event, this woman ran up to me and said, "I had a \$5,000 medical bill, and because of a video you made, I applied for charity care at the hospital, and they wiped the entire bill. I just want to let you know you saved my life." It makes me tear up a little bit now.

Sometimes it feels like the work I do is so ridiculous. I put videos on the internet. When you just say that part, it sounds stupid and inconsequential. But to hear from somebody that their life was positively changed in a way that is going to dramatically improve both their emotional and financial health, that's huge. I'm so proud that I get to do that.

People will tell me, like, you're the reason I have a Roth IRA, you're the reason I asked for a raise. It feels like the work I do is impactful. It has meaning. And I don't know if I've ever had another job that made me feel that way. ♦



SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE MEASURE OF AN IDEA

*James A. Robinson won acclaim showing how institutions shape nations.
Now he's asking what shapes the institutions.*

BY LUCAS MCGRANAHAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON SMITH

James A. Robinson speaks at the Keller Center, home of the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, at an Alumni Weekend event last year.

Why do some countries flourish and others fail? This question has taken economist and political scientist **James A. Robinson** from England to Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and beyond, championing a now-influential theory: that institutions, not geography or culture, determine the fate of nations.

“If you don’t understand the political institutions in a society,” Robinson says, “there’s no way to make sense of the economic outcomes that they generate.”

A University Professor with appointments in the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and the Department of Political Science, Robinson has spent decades making the case for this perspective, alongside MIT economist Daron Acemoglu. The frequent coauthors are perhaps best known for their acclaimed book *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (Crown Publishers, 2012), which has been translated into dozens of languages.

Robinson contrasts his view with a different approach in academic social science that is exemplified, he says, by Jared Diamond’s popular book *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (W. W. Norton, 1997). If you ask Diamond why the Democratic Republic of the Congo has poor development outcomes, he will point to tropical disease, isolation from trade routes, and other geographic factors. But ask Robinson and Acemoglu, and they will point to institutional factors such as authoritarian rule and monopolies on natural resources.

“Geography doesn’t decide anything,” Robinson says. “It creates constraints and opportunities, yes, but what societies do with those constraints—that’s institutions.”

When Robinson talks about institutions, he doesn’t mean organizations so much as the rules and practices that govern political and economic life: who can own property, who can vote, who has access to markets, and the like.

Why Nations Fail challenged both geographic and cultural explanations that treat history as destiny; Robinson and Acemoglu shifted attention to institutions as the products of live political struggle. Some of Robinson’s latest work presses the argument further, asking how political ideas about legitimacy, obligation, and authority shape institutions from the inside. In his account, institutions determine the fate of nations—and ideas help determine which institutions take hold, endure, or collapse.

The power of ideas is a point he is passionate about: “I think we massively underestimate the role of ideas in shaping human society.”

For his colleagues, grounding big claims in a rich body of evidence is key to Robinson’s appeal. **Ethan Bueno de Mesquita**, AB’96, dean and Sydney Stein Professor at Harris Public Policy, calls Robinson’s research “a model of the sort of scholarship I and so many of my peers aspire to do: work that grapples with the most fundamental questions while treating theory, evidence, history, and the real world with the utmost seriousness.”

Taking the real world seriously, for Robinson, means going into the field. “If you’re sitting in your office,” he says, “you can convince yourself of all sorts of things.” Fieldwork is crucial, he says, “because you’re endlessly challenging your preconceived ideas.”

While Robinson was speaking from his office chair on the second floor of Keller Hall, he is serious about the need to get out from behind a desk. He first conducted fieldwork in Colombia in 1992, “mostly because I just felt I didn’t understand anything.” He went on to teach in Bogotá every summer for 28 years, where he was “as much a student as a professor.” Along the way, he visited other parts of Latin America and traveled to Africa.

Robinson has an inborn curiosity about human diversity that he says he shares with Acemoglu. What they find most fascinating is the human capacity to adapt to new environments.

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“When ants got to Canada—a sort of barren, rocky, cold place—they speciated to adapt to this new environment,” Robinson says. “When humans spread out from East Africa and they got to Canada, they didn’t speciate. They invented igloos, a taste for seal blubber, and the skill of ice fishing.”

This empirical bent made Robinson something of an outlier in the field of economics, leading him to become a political

scientist in the late 1990s. Although he still works closely with economists and draws on his economics training, he makes a point of critiquing his field of origin.

“Economists think they understand everything,” he says. “They think they have a theory which is like Newton’s laws of gravity, but in my experience, that’s just not right.”

To Robinson, economists rely too much on abstract models. This disciplinary orientation may have shifted somewhat since the 1990s. Robinson and his Harris colleague **Michael Kremer**, a University Professor in economics, have each received the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel in part for their novel empirical methods—historical comparative analyses of institutions in Robinson’s case, and randomized controlled trials used to test development interventions in Kremer’s. Even so, the field remains short on dense descriptions of local conditions, at least for Robinson’s taste.

Part of the issue is conceptual. For example, Robinson is bothered by what he describes as a common exercise in economics courses: calculating optimal financial policies in the

abstract and then treating political factors as a kind of externality or added constraint on optimal functioning.

“You have a benchmark of a politics-free world,” he says. “That’s totally the wrong way to think about politics.”

In Robinson’s view, politics is not a constraint on the economy but the mechanism through which any economic results, whether positive or negative, are delivered. Politics is how anything gets done. The main problem, from this point of view, is not to work out an ideal model but to figure out why, in concrete detail, specific countries deviate from anything resembling ideal.

“If you start working in Colombia or Sierra Leone or whatever, it strikes you that policies are very far from optimal—simple things don’t happen.”

Robinson emphasized this point at a talk he gave at the Keller Center during Alumni Weekend in May 2025, telling the audience they should drop the economic fantasy that we can “cauterize or abolish politics” in favor of a world of pure production, consumption, and markets. “The problem,” he said, “is to change the nature of politics.”



An economist and political scientist, Robinson has spent years teaching and doing research in Latin America and Africa.

For Robinson and Acemoglu, changing the nature of politics means, first and foremost, getting institutions right.

Some of their examples in *Why Nations Fail* make the point starkly. North and South Korea were one country before 1945. They share a language and a peninsula. They didn't start out with radically different cultures or access to resources. South Korea's much higher standard of living today is explained, Robinson and Acemoglu claim, by institutions like secure property rights, open markets, and civic freedoms, especially after the country began to democratize in the late 1980s.

Institutions like these are what they call inclusive; that is, they promote broad-based prosperity. In contrast, institutions that serve elites at the expense of ordinary people are extractive. Think serfdom, state censorship, and the banning of opposition parties.

One of Robinson's favorite examples of an inclusive institution is the patent system, which is enshrined in the US Constitution. Patents draw on the ingenuity of the entire population, encouraging what he calls "creative destruction," or the challenging of existing interests with new ideas. This system was radically different from extractive systems of monopoly in colonial Britain and elsewhere, in which innovation by people not already embedded in elite patronage networks was ignored or actively punished.

While studying how institutions foster economic prosperity (or don't), Robinson and Acemoglu have grown increasingly interested in political ideals such as freedom and liberty. In their follow-up to *Why Nations Fail*, titled *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty* (Penguin Books, 2019), they claim that genuine liberty—the capacity to make choices, participate in society, and influence how one is governed—emerges when a capable state is constrained by an equally empowered society. In this view, liberty is an ongoing balancing act rather than a stable destination a country can arrive at.

The book shows how extraction and

inclusion appear differently in different contexts. For example, if the state dominates society, as in China, you can get extractive authoritarianism characterized by centralized power with no independent press, judiciary, or civil society; but if the state weakens or collapses, as in Somalia, you can get extractive domination by informal authorities such as clans, militias, and warlords. *The Narrow Corridor* also emphasizes that widespread liberty, not just economic prosperity, is a defining feature of inclusive institutions.

This interest in the value of liberty for its own sake is another way in which Robinson's work aligns more closely with political science than with economic approaches that tend to model behavior primarily in terms of material self-interest. After *The Narrow Corridor*, Robinson and Acemoglu have continued developing the notion that people—and even institutions—are moved by a willingness to defend and act upon ideas that matter to them, regardless of what economic spoils those ideas may bring.

This talk is going to be about the determinants of institutions," Robinson told his audience at the David Rubenstein Forum last spring during the Nora and Edward Ryerson Lecture, an annual event that honors one UChicago scholar for producing work of enduring value. He was signaling a shift in emphasis: Instead of focusing on the consequences of institutions—the work that made him famous—he was examining how institutions themselves emerge and change.

Robinson had already begun to address this question through the framework of colonialism. In *Why Nations Fail*, for instance, Robinson and Acemoglu show how postcolonial societies have taken up or reformed the institutions of their colonizers—a significant topic, given that most people alive today reside in a country that declared independence from a European power during the 20th century.

A pair of examples from the book shows contrasting postcolonial paths. After El Salvador gained its independence from Spain, an elite landowning class continued coercing labor from peasants and Indigenous communities, fueling civil conflict and war. In contrast, after Botswana gained its independence from Britain, leaders curtailed elite corruption and channeled diamond wealth into public investments in infrastructure, education, and health.

So institutions are inherited—and often externally imposed—yet they are plastic. What decides whether they

THE PROBLEM IS TO CHANGE THE NATURE OF POLITICS.





bend toward extraction, as in El Salvador, or inclusion, as in Botswana?

The hypothesis Robinson defended while standing in front of the towering red stage curtains in Friedman Hall was a very UChicago one: Ideas make a difference.

To argue the point, Robinson described an in-progress research study he is undertaking with a group of colleagues. Their case study for this argument isn't a contemporary postcolonial state but a turbulent historical era of Robinson's home country of England. Drawing from parliamentary debates, political treatises, and popular discourse from the 17th century, they are examining the role that ideas—about liberty, sovereignty, and legitimacy—played in shaping the foundations of Britain's modern political institutions.

In much of modern social science, Robinson said, explanations of political behavior tend to focus on how economic incentives shape action. Culture, when it appears, is often treated as background: slow-moving, inherited, and rarely modeled as something actors deliberate about in moments of political action. What gets left underexplored, Robinson suggested, is how ideas operate as explicit reasons that motivate people to act politically.

For instance, a conventional account of England's 1688–89 Glorious Revolution, in which King James II was deposed, holds that merchants excluded from royal monopolies—like those James II granted to the East India Company—were motivated to support regime change to open up new trading opportunities. To understand human behavior and historical change, follow the incentives.

WHAT GETS LEFT UNDEREXPLORED IS HOW IDEAS OPERATE AS EXPLICIT REASONS THAT MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO ACT POLITICALLY.

It's a sensible form of explanation, one which Robinson has often used himself. But his point in the Ryerson Lecture was to suggest that it wasn't just wrangling over material self-interest that limited the monarchy and empowered Parliament during this period. These changes were also caused by persuasive arguments about what kind of political order was just and desirable. Ideas made a difference, in and of themselves.

The study's main contribution to thinking about historical change, Robinson said, is a new way of “measuring ideas and trying to investigate their impact on people's actions.”

This new approach has involved using large language models like ChatGPT to go hunting in the historical record for instances of two influential 17th-century arguments about political authority: John Locke's argument for popular sovereignty in his *Second Treatise of Government* and Sir Robert Filmer's argument for the divine right of kings in his *Patriarcha, or The Natural Power of Kings*. Does political authority flow from the people, as Locke argues, or does it flow from God to the single person of the monarch, as Filmer would have it?

First the team rewrote the two arguments in a clear logical form that ChatGPT could easily analyze and detect. Then they prompted the chatbot to seek out similar arguments in vast troves of historical texts, including parliamentary records. (Their method for determining the similarity of arguments, Robinson said, is the “crux of the technical contribution.”) With these historical examples in hand, the team is now comparing the actions—like voting—of those who echo

Robinson at his Hyde Park home in the wee hours of October 14, 2024—right after he learned he had received the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel.

Locke's argument and those who echo Filmer's to see if they put their political money where their philosophical mouth is.

"If I make a Lockean type of argument," Robinson said, "does that make it more likely that I'm going to vote against the king?" And does it still look this way after controlling for relevant economic and cultural factors, like being a merchant or sharing James II's Catholic faith?

Robinson's preliminary answer, while recognizing that there are remaining technical and conceptual problems to solve, is yes: Ideas matter, at least in this case.

Robinson came to the University of Chicago from Harvard in 2015, when he was hired as a University Professor. This highly selective honor is given to UChicago faculty members whose work has proven to be of the utmost significance, earning global renown. Only 10 professors currently hold the title, and only 23 have ever been named.

For a researcher like Robinson, who draws on multiple fields, UChicago provides a unique environment for collaboration. He approvingly cites the University's long tradition of interdisciplinary research in the social sciences, going back to the founding of the Committee for Social Thought in the 1940s and the extension of economic tools to politics and sociology by Gary Becker, AM'53, PhD'55, among other examples.

"I think that intellectual life is really a priority here," Robinson says. "It might surprise you to think that's not true of every top university, but it isn't."

The study on ideas in 17th-century England is one example of interdisciplinary collaboration. The research team includes Robinson and Acemoglu; Northwestern business professor Leander Heldring; **Steven Pincus**, the Thomas E. Donnelly Professor of British History and in the College; and Santiago Torres, an economics PhD student at MIT who studied with Robinson as a predoctoral scholar at Harris.

Robinson is dedicated to mentoring young researchers like Torres, says **Jennifer Pitts**, chair and David and Mary Winton Green Professor in the Department of Political Science and the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought. "He's generous with his time and ideas, especially with younger scholars," she says. "A number of our colleagues have appreciated his mentorship, going back decades."

"I work a lot with my former PhD students nowadays," Robinson says. "To start with, they always expect you to tell them what to do. And there's this beautiful moment at some point where they take over."

But his most prized collaboration is still with Acemoglu. Born to an Armenian family in Istanbul, Acemoglu moved

to England for college and remained there through graduate school. Both he and Robinson passed through the London School of Economics at different stages of their training, but they didn't meet until later, when they were both early-career scholars working on questions of institutions and economic development. In one of their early copublished articles in 2000, Robinson and Acemoglu describe how political elites can block economic development that threatens their own power, research that set the stage for the pair's later work on extractive institutions.

Of their longtime collaboration, Acemoglu says, "He and I have been working together for three decades because we are not just coauthors but friends."

"We talk on the phone probably every day," Robinson says. "There's a reason why great works of philosophy are written as dialogues."

Nevertheless, for the first time, Robinson is writing a new book as a solo venture.

"Daron and I, we sort of share everything," he says. "But Africa is my obsession, my passion."

Robinson has spent decades working on the continent, where he is a fellow at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria and at the African Economic Research Consortium in Nairobi, Kenya.

His new book, *Wealth in People* (Random House, forthcoming), argues that African societies have historically understood wealth not as material assets but as social ties, networks, and human capital. He aims to show how this principle shaped political and economic institutions long before colonialism and continues to influence contemporary African life today. Seen this way, political power and economic life are organized less around accumulating things than around building, maintaining, and mobilizing relationships across families, communities, and generations.

Robinson acknowledges the weaknesses of this model of wealth—like a tendency toward patronage politics and diffusion of power—while also stressing its overlooked strengths, like adaptability and social mobility.

The book fits a broader theme in Robinson's work, from his writing on institutions to his latest efforts to understand how social ties shape human life: Economic incentives are important, but they aren't everything. Freedom matters. Ideas matter. Relationships matter. According to African principles, the goal is not to "maximize income or maximize wealth ... but to maximize your social connections," he says. "It's the key which unlocks African history for me." ♦

THINK PIECES

*Join a faculty tour of Chicago Booth's
astonishing contemporary art collection.*

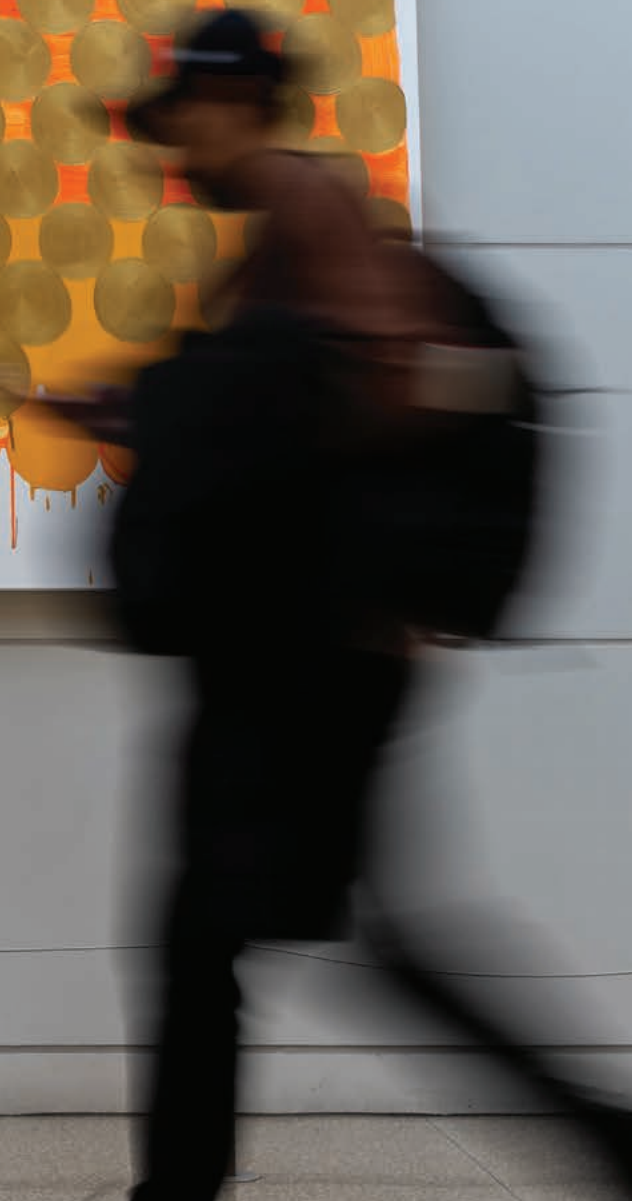
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH

Chicago Booth's Harper Center is like a small secret museum of contemporary art. More than 650 artworks are installed throughout its six floors: in the hallways, the waiting rooms, the study areas. There's even a sound piece that plays in a stairwell.

But it's not a museum, it's a school, which brings two pervasive threats.

By day, it's bags: "People brushing by things, scraping into stuff," says **Canice Prendergast**, W. Allen Wallis Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at Chicago Booth, who oversees the collection. By night, it's vacuums and dustcloths: "I refer to this as Midwestern vandalism," because the well-intentioned cleaning staff "are just trying to help." Sculptures are more easily damaged than works that hang on the wall; that's why Booth has so few.

In 2008 the school was renamed the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, in recognition of a \$300 million



gift from **David Booth**, MBA'71. Booth's gift specifically set aside an endowment for art. (Some of David Booth's own contemporary art collection can be glimpsed in the 2023 Errol Morris documentary *Tune Out the Noise*: "Very similar to my view of economics and investing," Booth says in the film, "I like simple ideas, well executed.") The gift led to some prickly negotiations with the Harper Center's architect, Rafael Viñoly, who had forbidden art because he considered the building itself to be art.

Prendergast is explaining all this to a group of 20 or so Booth faculty members, none of whom seem to know much about contemporary art. "You can ask me literally anything," he offers.

A microeconomist, Prendergast is probably best known for his work on using markets to improve the efficiency of food banks, but he has a side interest in art and art markets. "I got into this because my sister's an artist," he explains. (Kathy Prendergast is a London-based artist whose work includes sculptures, drawings, and installation art.) "I always describe myself as the family disappointment who became an economist."

He's equally fascinated by the machinations of the art market. His academic work includes the 2019 paper "The Distribution of Contemporary Art" in *Portable Gray* and the unpublished manuscript "The Market for Contemporary Art." "Beneath its glossy veneer," he writes in the latter, "the market for contemporary art is as opaque as can be."

But the point of Booth's collection is not to speculate in art, or to display wealth, or even just to be decorative. It's didactic. It's intended to inspire thought and discussion.

"We think of higher learning as having some level of abstraction," Prendergast explains at the tour's first stop, two photographs by Ori Gersht on the fifth floor. "The whole idea of the collection, and much of the idea of contemporary art, is it's just another language to think about the world."

Many of the artists "are actually thinking about relatively similar things to the ones that we do," he tells his colleagues, "but in a totally different way. So largely it's just meant to ask people to be curious."—*Carrie Golus, AB'91, AM'93*



These excerpts from Prendergast's tour have been edited and condensed.

JUDY LEDGERWOOD

Early Afternoon (Daylight Burning), 2007
(previous page)

This is probably the most popular piece in the collection—students like this more than anything else. It's by a Chicago artist, Judy Ledgerwood. If you ask her about this piece, she will tell you the colors used here are overtly meant to be feminine. It's essentially meant as an antidote to successful male artists who tend to work in very dark, serious colors, while women are not taken seriously because of the palettes they use.

SERGEJ JENSEN

Ohne Titel (Streifen), 2009 (above, pictured behind Canice Prendergast)

This is something we bought very early, by a guy who lives in Denmark called Sergej Jensen. This is what I would steal if I were to take something.

Partly it's because of the texture. It's burlap. And partly it's the contrast between the colors and where they stop. The color doesn't go all the way down. It just has a sense of stopping at the right place. And that would probably make no sense to you, but if you've seen a thousand of these pieces of minimalism, you know the obvious move is not to do this.

You know how there are some economists who are just really good at modeling? They know what assumptions to make, what not to make. This is like the analog of that, with an artist.

**THE REASON WHY
WE BOUGHT THEM
IS BECAUSE THE
EXPRESSION “FOREIGNERS
EVERYWHERE,” FOR US,
IT’S EVERYTHING THAT’S
GREAT ABOUT BOOTH.**

CLAIRE FONTAINE

Foreigners Everywhere (Spanish), 2008

For those of you that don’t speak Spanish, this means “foreigners everywhere.” There’s one in Mandarin that also says “foreigners everywhere.” To give you a sense as to, luckily, how prescient we’ve been, the biggest art show in the world every two years is the Venice Biennale. And the Venice Biennale in 2024 was called *Foreigners Everywhere*. It’s based on these pieces.

The reason why we bought them is because the expression “foreigners everywhere,” for us, it’s everything that’s great about Booth. But to many people in the current political environment, it’s actually to do with what they would call illegal immigration. So it’s this totally ambiguous thing, and I’ve had people pick up on both.

The word in Mandarin for foreigners is the same word that’s used for strangers, with the connotation of people you should not trust. We had a group of Chinese students go to the dean’s office. They thought it was a service announcement about people who might steal your possessions. They wanted to know, “Why are you only telling the Chinese students?”

EXTRAÑEROS EN TODAS PARTES



**IT'S ABOUT THE
BLURRING OF
MEMORY, THE FEAR
THAT WE FORGET
EVENTS THAT ARE
SUPER IMPORTANT.**

ORI GERSHT

White Noise #1, 2001 (above)

White Noise #2, 2001 (left)

If you ask people in the art world who is the greatest living artist, probably the most common name—and the correct name—is a German painter called Gerhard Richter. He's largely known for two things. One is the relationship between painting and photography: What's the role of a painting, when we can all take a pretty good iPhone photo? The other is that so much of his art is about Germany's sense of shame after World War II.

These two pieces of art here look like paintings, but they're photographs by an Israeli photographer, Ori Gersht. To anybody who's seen a Richter painting, these look almost exactly like it—in fact, a gallerist from New York came here a few years ago, and he said, “You have a Richter?” So in the same way Richter is using painting to think about photography, this guy is doing it in the opposite direction.

These photographs were both taken on the train on the way back from Auschwitz. Gersht's father-in-law was a survivor. It's about the blurring of memory, the fear that we forget events that are super important.



TOMOKO YONEDA

Hill – View of Serbian front-line during the Siege of Sarajevo, 2004

This photograph was taken just outside Sarajevo, and it's actually where snipers would shoot from during the Bosnian War. As you know, we have one faculty member who's Bosnian [**Emir Kamenica**, Richard O. Ryan Professor of Economics]. So before we purchased this, I said to

Emir, "Look, if this upsets you, I'm not going to do it."

As it turns out, Emir is probably the second most arty person in the building. He'd actually seen this piece at the Venice Biennale. He said, "This was taken close to where I grew up, so not only do we have to buy it, but you have to put it outside my office." That's why it stays there.

And again, it's thinking about what we remember and what we forget.



STEPHEN G. RHODES

Excerpt (gray), 2007

Excerpt (green), 2007

Excerpt (turquoise), 2007

This guy lives in Berlin now, but he grew up in New Orleans. A lot of his art is about the way people perceive the Southern states of the US. So the backdrop in these three photographs looks like the French Quarter, but actually it's the French Quarter in Disneyland. Fake New Orleans, compared to what New Orleans actually is.

Superimposed are these post-Katrina images. And then spray painted over that is the X they put on abandoned buildings after Katrina.

These are not the most cheerful objects, and I'm moderately sensitive to people's preferences, so I made sure not to put them outside anybody's office, because they're just too miserable. But people keep asking for "The X's." I'm really bad at working out what people are going to like.

This [*Excerpt (turquoise)*] is the one piece in the collection that's been damaged. Obviously somebody's bag scraped across the X here. And of all the luck, the artist says to me about five years ago, "I'd love to come see my work installed." So he shows up and looks and then says, "Oh, it's way better with the scratch." ♦

THE ARTIST SAYS TO ME ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO, "I'D LOVE TO COME SEE MY WORK INSTALLED." SO HE SHOWS UP AND LOOKS AND THEN SAYS, "OH, IT'S WAY BETTER WITH THE SCRATCH."



SEE MORE FROM THE COLLECTION
ONLINE AT MAG.UCHICAGO.EDU/BOOTHART.

PEER REVIEW

WHAT ALUMNI ARE THINKING AND DOING

YOUNGER THAN SPRINGTIME

Students enjoy an
enchanted evening in the
Loop in the early 1950s.

SHUBERT
PULITZER PRIZE MUSICAL PLAY
"SOUTH
PACIFIC"
JANET RICHARD
BLAIR EASTHAM
IRENE BORDONI
RAY WALSTON

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RECOVERED CRAFT

*An alumna connects with
historical art forms—
and revisits her own past—
through clay.*



Maria Porges, MFA'79, made ceramic sculptures in graduate school. But when the artist and writer moved to the San Francisco Bay Area after graduation, with ambitions to be a fine artist, she became convinced that as a woman, if she worked in clay, she would be “classed as a craft artist.” So she pursued assemblage, the style she has become known for: three-dimensional compositions that include found objects or wax shapes, often incorporating text.

A professor at California College of the Arts, Porges has recently returned to ceramic sculpture. Her interest in it was rekindled in 2020 while she was teaching a course on the history of ceramics going back 20,000 years. She was especially intrigued by ancient vessels from Central and South America, and after the class ended, she made a series of drawings inspired by them. She then decided to make clay pieces based on the drawings, feeling that “there are some of them I want to recover and bring back into the world as a liv-



Opposite page top, left to right: *Con/Re/Straint 1*, 2024, ceramic, 9.5 × 9 × 3 in., and *Con/Re/Straint 7*, 2025, ceramic, 12 × 11 × 3 in.

Above, left to right: *Imaginary Vessels 11*, 2023, ceramic, 16 × 11 × 4.5 in., and *Imaginary Vessels 17*, 2024, ceramic, 11.5 × 8.5 × 3.5 in.

Opposite page bottom, left to right: *Con/Re/Straint 2*, 2024, ceramic, 9 × 10 × 3 in., and *Con/Re/Straint 6*, 2025, ceramic, 13.5 × 11 × 3.5 in.

ing shape.” In the work that came out of this, her *Mashups* drawings and sculptures (2021–present) and her *Imaginary Vessels* (2023–24), she shapes the clay by hand or uses press molds repurposed from previous projects. She leaves the vessels unglazed, rejecting a finish she views as utilitarian.

Porges wasn’t sure at first how to build on her renewed interest in ceramic art. She eventually looked to a group of figurative artists who had been active in Chicago in the decade before her time at the University—the Chicago Imagists,

known for their stylized, colorful depictions of the human body. Christina Ramberg’s paintings in particular suggested a new direction for Porges. She drew inspiration from Ramberg’s depictions of bound female forms for the series *Con/Re/Straint* (2024–25), objects that blend the shapes of *Imaginary Vessels* and earlier works with nods to the female body. Hair, a recurring texture throughout Porges’s work, appears in these pieces as well, a source of power to be held back or set free.—C. C. ♦

NOTES

A SELECTION OF ALUMNI WHOSE NAMES ARE IN THE NEWS

DISTINGUISHED INTELLECTUALS

Leon Kass, LAB'54, SB'58, MD'62, Ad-die Clark Harding Professor Emeritus in the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought and in the College; **Anthony Grafton**, AB'71, AM'72, PhD'75, Henry Putnam University Professor Emeritus of History at Princeton; and **Charles Butterworth**, AM'62, PhD'66, professor emeritus of government and politics at the University of Maryland, were among 10 recipients of the 2025 Barry Prize for Distinguished Intellectual Achievement from the American Academy of Sciences and Letters (AASL) at the November 12 award ceremony in Washington, DC. The AASL's top recognition for scholarship, the Barry Prize "honors those whose work has made outstanding contributions to humanity's knowledge, appreciation, and cultivation of the good, the true, and the beautiful."

ON AIR

In September **Ryland Barton**, AB'09, was named an anchor for National Public Radio, where he will be responsible for writing, producing, and delivering hourly national newscasts. Barton joined NPR in 2023 after years of working in public radio around the country. First serving as an editor for the States Team on NPR's National Desk, he most recently worked as NPR's overnight editor, working with reporters in the Middle East, Ukraine, Russia, China, and India. He also reported on funding cuts to NPR and PBS, the legal battle to stop the deportation of Mahmoud Khalil, and the politics of state abortion restrictions.

INTERRUPTED MUSICAL

Girl, Interrupted (Turtle Bay Books), Susanna Kaysen's 1993 memoir about her time in a psychiatric hospital, has been adapted into a stage play by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright **Martyna Majok**, AB'07. Scheduled to premiere in May at the Public Theater in New York City, the play will be directed by Tony Award nominee Jo Bonney and will feature original music



DOCUMENTARY SUBJECT

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist **Seymour Hersh**, AB'58, is known for exposing government cover-ups of events including the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War and the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq. His career and legacy are the subject of the Netflix documentary *Cover-Up*. Released December 26 and directed by Academy Award winner **Laura Poitras** and Emmy winner **Mark Obenhaus**, the film follows Hersh through a half century of reporting on US military and intelligence agencies. Using Hersh's notes, primary sources, and archival footage, the documentary brings to life the drama of investigative journalism.

by Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter **Aimee Mann**.

REVOLUTIONARY WRITER

Geoffrey C. Ward, LAB'57, is the scriptwriter for *The American Revolution* (2025), a documentary series on PBS by Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein, and David Schmidt. He also coauthored the accompanying book, *The American Revolution: An Intimate History* (Knopf, 2025). Two hundred and fifty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the series and book offer a reappraisal of the Revolutionary War, highlighting the reality of violence and disease; the extensive debates and division among Americans; the often-overlooked roles played by women,

African Americans, Native Americans, and recent immigrants; and the war's impact on the world.

MATERIAL WORLD

An experimental short film by **Tina Wang**, MFA'23, was shown as part of *Materials and Processes for an Expanding World*, a group exhibition held in Los Angeles in December. Curated to highlight "the ways artists create their own universes through movement, experiment, and intentional accidents," the exhibition featured works by 37 artists and included video, works on paper, and ephemera. Wang's film was one of nine from the original Los Angeles exhibition shown at a screening event in Chicago on January 31.—C. C.

RELEASES

ALUMNI BOOKS, FILMS, AND RECORDINGS



THE WAR ON TENURE

By Deepa Das Acevedo, AM'09, PhD'13, JD'16; Cambridge University Press, 2025

Tenure at American universities is the subject of much debate, but what often gets lost in these conversations, writes **Deepa Das Acevedo**, is that tenure is an employment protection. Reframing tenure as a contractual agreement makes the practice easier to understand, writes Acevedo, who is an expert in employment law. It also offers a concreteness that other discussions of tenure, which rely on more abstract values like free expression, may lack. Acevedo combines empirical data and individual stories to clear up common misconceptions about life as a tenure-track faculty member. She defends tenure as an important counter to at-will employment, which prevails in the United States.

INTERNSHIPS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR: HOW YOU CAN FIND, PREPARE FOR, AND THRIVE IN THEM

By Charles A. Fishkin, AB'82; University of Chicago Press, 2026

Drawing on his four decades working in global capital markets and mentoring young professionals, **Charles A. Fishkin** guides college and graduate students through their first internship. Focusing especially on structured programs run by recruitment departments at major employers in the private sector, Fishkin provides concrete advice on how to find the right fit and successfully apply for

internships. He goes on to show readers what to expect from an internship, how to build the skills most valued by employers, and how to turn what they learn from the internship into a rewarding career.

BIND ME TIGHTER STILL

By Lara Ehrlich, AM'04, CER'07; Red Hen Press, 2025

Many years ago the siren Ceto gave up her tail to live on land as a human. She built Siremland from a roadside curiosity into a thriving theme park and trained other women to work there, performing in a mermaid burlesque and posing for seaside photo ops with eager tourists. When **Lara Ehrlich** introduces readers to these characters, Ceto is doing her best to maintain dignity and control over her little kingdom. But her 15-year-old daughter, Naia, has begun to chafe against the confines of this world and to question her mother's authority. Then a death occurs at Siremland, and everything becomes uncertain.

THERAPEUTIC INEQUALITIES: MOOD DISORDER SELF-MANAGEMENT IN CHICAGO

By Talia Rose Weiner, AM'07, AM'11, PhD'17; New York University Press, 2025

Self-management, a clinical modality that enables patients to control their own symptoms, originated as a treatment for physical ailments like arthritis but has since been promoted for the treatment of psychiatric illness. While it can be empowering, **Talia Rose Weiner** argues

that self-management is not always a realistic way to treat illnesses like mood disorders. In an ethnographic study of the mental health care landscape in Chicago, Weiner follows patients and therapists engaged in various forms of self-management. This approach is often treated as apolitical, but Weiner shows that it is in fact heavy with political, socioeconomic, and historical assumptions and, as a result, has disparate outcomes for patients based on context and class. Once we identify the limits of self-management, Weiner argues, we can begin to imagine more effective systems.

IN THE MOOD FOR TEXTURE: THE REVIVAL OF BANGKOK AS A CHINESE CITY

By Arnika Fuhrmann, PhD'08; Duke University Press, 2026

Set primarily in 1960s Hong Kong, Wong Kar-wai's 2000 film *In the Mood for Love* was actually shot almost entirely in Bangkok. **Arnika Fuhrmann** uses the film as a jumping-off point to study the cultural exchange and aesthetic blending between Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Shanghai today. As Thailand's capital undergoes major transformation, architects, designers, and advertisers are adopting the Western-inflected aesthetics of 20th-century Shanghai and Hong Kong. Focusing on hotels, bars, clubs, film, and literature from Bangkok, Fuhrmann explores the different ways Chineseness manifests across Southeast Asia.—C. C.

ALUMNI NEWS

FROM THE CLASSES, SCHOOLS, AND DIVISIONS

To protect the privacy of our alumni, we have removed the class notes from this section. If you are an alumnus of the University of Chicago and would like to receive a PDF of Alumni News, please email uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu.

What's new? We are always eager to receive your news, care of the Alumni News Editor, *The University of Chicago Magazine*, 5235 South Harper Court, Chicago, IL 60615, or by email: uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu. No engagements, please. Items may be edited for space, clarity, civility, and style. As news is published in the order in which it arrives, it may not appear immediately. We list news from all former undergraduates (including those with UChicago graduate degrees) by the year of their undergraduate affiliation. All former students who received only graduate degrees are listed in the advanced degrees section.



Bookstacks: In June 1920 holdings from the John Crerar Library await the shelves of their new home. The library, which opened in April 1897, was originally located in the Marshall Field building on North Wabash Avenue but later moved to a new location on East Randolph Street. The Crerar Library merged with the University of Chicago in 1984, but before that it was a privately endowed public library established by Chicago businessman John Crerar after his death in 1889. Crerar left few guidelines about the kinds of books and periodicals he wanted there—just that “all nastiness and immorality be excluded.” But he went so far as to add this: “I mean that dirty French novels and all skeptical trash and works of questionable moral tone shall never be found in this Library.” To distinguish its collections from the arts-and-humanities-focused Newberry Library and the Chicago Public Library’s general interest collections, the Crerar Library prioritized holdings related to the sciences and technology. (Photography by Chicago Architectural Photographing Company, UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-01945, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)



Little boxes made of ticky-tacky: At the Laboratory Schools in 1951, Olga Adams's (PhB 1924, AM 1932) kindergarten class builds a cardboard city as part of a city planning unit. After construction was completed, the students filled the buildings with furniture and played in the structures. (Photography by Mildred LaDue Mead, UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-09524, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

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Trivial pursuit: From left, UChicagoans Neal Johnston, AB'60; Roger Downey, EX'59; Leonard Friedman, AB'63; and Elliot Lilien, AB'61, compete in the General Electric College Bowl in December 1959. The show was hosted by Allen Ludden (far right) and aired on CBS. In each episode, two colleges or universities—one a returning champion—competed in a 24-minute trivia contest with questions such as “What president said, ‘I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor?’” and “If you heard someone refer to the Arlberg method, would he be talking about biological research, Willie Mays’s batting stance, or a ski technique?” The Maroons bested the University of Miami in their first matchup but lost to the University of Kansas in their second. Nevertheless, they took home \$2,000 in scholarship and grant money for the University and got to enjoy “two week-ends of New York luxury,” as this magazine put it. (UChicago Photographic Archive, apf1-10634, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

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Seventies salon: Math professor Izaak Wirszup, PhD'55 (seated in the white chair), and his wife, lecturer in Russian Pera Wirszup (standing, center), longtime resident masters in Woodward Court, chat with students over drinks in 1971. Did you spend time with the Wirszups while you were on campus? Share a story at uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu. (Photography by Sandi Kronquist, UChicago Photographic Archive, apf1-11450, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)



Monsters of the Midway: Nick Varsam, AB'83 (front right), shared this photograph of his intramural (IM) football team celebrating on the Midway around November 1980. "I believe we were only one pitcher of beer into our IM football championship celebration," Varsam writes. Other team members pictured here include Larry Wilt, AB'84; Craig Peters, EX'83; Charles Episalla, AB'83; Kenny Davis, AB'83; Larry Mendelsohn, AB'83; Krikor Topouzian, AB'82; and Barry Peterson, AB'83. Did you play intramural sports at UChicago? Throw us a memory at uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu. (Photo courtesy Nick Varsam, AB'83)



Democratic discussions: Fourth-year Renato Mariotti, AB'98, introduces former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell at the Challenge of Modern Democracy conference in April 1998. The three-day conference, which Mariotti co-organized with classmate Rohit "Ro" Khanna, AB'98—now a member of Congress (D-CA)—also featured speakers including former Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and CNN anchor Bernard Shaw. Who was the most memorable politician you heard speak on campus? Tell us about it at uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu. (Photography by Dave O., Copyright 2026, The Chicago Maroon. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.)



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LAST WISH

I'll never forget the night I heard John
Coltrane in person with his boys (McCoy

Tyner et al.) in Minneapolis,
when I was barely twenty at the Art

Center halfway through the sixties. You ask,
What did they wear? Suits & turtlenecks so dark

green they looked black. *What did he say?* Crickets.
Before I knew it, I awoke one morning

to my peaches-&-cream clock-radio
on the South Side of Chicago & heard

he'd died. When my time comes for last wishes,
I want his "Blue Train" there to take me home.

—Randy Blasing, *AM*'66

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DEATHS

FACULTY AND STAFF

Harold Sanders, a former senior research associate in the Enrico Fermi Institute and head of the University's Electronics Development Group, died September 1 in Chicago. He was 94. Trained as an engineer at the City College of New York, at Columbia University, and in the US Army, Sanders began his career in high-energy physics at the Princeton-Pennsylvania Accelerator Laboratory. Joining the Electronics Development Group in 1977, he contributed to landmark discoveries related to the top quark and Higgs boson, among others, before retiring at age 77. Sanders enjoyed sailing and world travel. He is survived by his wife, Deloris; three children, including **Karen Sanders**, LAB'80, and **Lisa Sensat**, LAB'83; and three grandchildren. **Willard I. "Bill" Zangwill**, professor emeritus of management science, of Bethesda, MD, died October 14. He was 87. A US Navy veteran, Zangwill completed graduate degrees in statistics and operations research at Stanford. Prior to joining the Chicago Booth faculty in 1978—where he stayed until his retirement—he held positions at the University of California, Berkeley; at the University of Illinois; and in the federal government. Zangwill published four books and more than 50 papers on the theory and application of operations research and management science. His research led him to create algorithms and processes to improve decision-making as well as software for decision-making that has been widely applied in business and for homeland security. He also consulted for General Electric, the RAND Corporation, IBM, and other companies. Survivors include his wife, Julia; two children; a brother; and four grandchildren.

1940s

Andrene P. (Granquist) Heathcote, PhB'47, died February 22, 2025, in Dowagiac, MI. She was 98. With her master's degree in teaching from Michigan State University, Heathcote taught middle school math in Lakeshore Public Schools from 1964 to 1986. She traveled the world after retirement, settled into her home on Indian Lake, and was a member and volunteer at Silver Creek United Methodist Church in Dowagiac. Survivors include two sons, six grandchildren, and a great-grandchild. **John H. "Jack" Bennett**, PhB'48, MBA'55, died January 12, 2025, in Saratoga Springs, NY. He was 96. Bennett joined the Dow Chemical Company in Chicago and later

moved to Midland, MI, in 1962. During his six decades in Midland, he volunteered at the Midland Center for the Arts, Habitat for Humanity, and the local hospital. He and his wife were also active members of Trinity Lutheran Church. He is survived by a daughter, a grandchild, and two great-grandchildren.

Bruce Sagan, EX'49, died September 21 in Chicago. He was 96. The longtime owner and publisher of the *Hyde Park Herald*, Sagan was a force in Chicago journalism and civic life for more than seven decades. After buying the *Herald* in 1953 at age 24, Sagan turned the struggling neighborhood weekly into a platform for investigative reporting and built one of the country's largest community newspaper groups. He also chaired the Illinois Housing Development Authority and cofounded the Hyde Park Federal Savings and Loan. In 2022 President Joe Biden awarded Sagan a National Medal of Arts—the highest award given by the federal government to artists and arts patrons—for his contributions to Chicago's Joffrey Ballet, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Printers Row Lit Fest, and many other cultural institutions. He is survived by his wife, Bette Cerf Hill; two sons, including **Paul Sagan**, LAB'77; three stepdaughters; 12 grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

Richard Harry "Dick" Allen, AB'49, AM'56, of Lincoln, NE, died June 22. He was 96. After graduating from the College and earning a master's degree in German at UChicago, Allen completed a master's in library science as well as a doctorate in German at the University of Michigan. He taught German at the University of Nebraska for seven years before becoming a public librarian in Beatrice, NE, and worked as a consultant for the Nebraska Library Commission from 1977 to 1994. Active in many civic and book discussion groups, Allen was instrumental in starting the Nebraska Center for the Book. He is survived by his wife, Mary Rabenberg; three sons; and his grandchildren.

Renata Vitzthum Shaw, AM'49, died August 10 in Washington, DC. She was 99. Born and raised in Finland, Shaw studied art history at UChicago, where she met her husband, Russell Ramon Baskin Shaw, EX'50, who died in 2002. After earning a master's degree in library science in 1962, she joined the Library of Congress, where she worked for 28 years in the prints and photographs division and received a Meritorious Service Award in 1975. A polyglot and lifelong learner, Shaw took fine arts and language classes in retire-

ment and enjoyed swimming well into her 90s. Survivors include two children, a brother, three grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

1950s

Eugene "Gene" Pollack, AB'51, of Castro Valley, CA, died August 8. He was 93. Pollack graduated from the College at age 19 and attended New York University School of Medicine. After serving as a medical officer in the US Air Force, he completed his surgical residency and moved to Southern California. Pollack treated patients at Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center as a general surgeon from 1963 until his retirement in 1997 and lived his last years in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is survived by a daughter, a son, a stepdaughter, a stepson, and a grandchild.

Charlie Rosen, AM'51, of Dedham, MA, died July 10, 2024. He was 96. A US Army veteran, Rosen started Plywood Ranch, a New England home improvement supply store, in 1954. After growing the business to 30 stores, he sold it in 1985 to work in real estate development. For many years Rosen spent winters in Longboat Key, FL, and summers in Falmouth, MA, enjoying tennis and golf. He is survived by his wife, Elaine; two daughters; five grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

Saul Mendlovitz, AM'51, JD'54, died March 29, 2024, in New York. He was 99. Mendlovitz was the Dag Hammarskjöld Chair of Peace and World Order Studies at Rutgers Law School from 1956 to 2023, where he taught until age 98. As the founding director of the World Order Models Project and chair of the International Steering Committee of Global Action to Prevent War, Mendlovitz promoted the abolition of war and fostered the development of plans for world peace. He represented the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms at the United Nations and wrote and spoke extensively on international law and a just world order.

Donald Baker, JD'54, of Kenilworth, IL, died November 3. He was 96. In 1954 Baker joined his father and two brothers at Baker & McKenzie, a law firm his father had co-founded to serve clients internationally. Donald Baker helped open the firm's first overseas office in Venezuela and went on to build the firm's foreign trade and international tax practice. After he retired in 1994, he launched a start-up airline; invested in real estate, bioscience, and oil and gas exploration; and treasured summers at the family ranch in New Mexico. Survivors

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include his wife, Gisela; a daughter; two sons; and five grandchildren.

Barry Targan, AM'55, of Greenwich, NY, died November 12. He was 92. A writer, Targan taught at several universities and directed the creative writing program at Binghamton University, State University of New York. His published essays, novels, and short story collections include *Harry Belten* and *the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto* (1975), which won the Iowa School of Letters Award for Short Fiction. Targan was a prolific artist in ceramics, weaving, painting, and woodworking, building 17 wooden boats. Survivors include two sons, three grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Daniel P. Kunitz, AB'55, AB'56, AM'61, of Newton, MA, died March 31, 2025. He was 90. Kunitz was a passionate public school teacher for more than 50 years and was involved in several community charities. His wife, Joan (Molner) Kunitz, EX'57, died in 2018. He is survived by three children, including **Laurel J. Simkovich**, AB'79; eight grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren.

Dan M. Moose, AM'57, of Cleveland Heights, OH, died December 26, 2024. He was 95. A Purdue University graduate, Moose studied economics at UChicago. He served in the US Army Reserves from 1950 to 1962 and developed a lifelong love of trains from his time in the Army Transportation Corps. Working and raising a family in Cleveland Heights, Moose was active in Communion of Saints Parish and enjoyed ice-skating, hockey, sailing, and spending summers at the family cottage on the shores of Lake Erie. He is survived by his wife, Geraldine; six children; nine grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

William "Bill" Stoddart, MBA'57, died December 5, 2024, in Burlington, Ontario. He was 93. Stoddart attended the University of Manitoba and worked in finance for Great West Life and Telco in Canada. Pivoting to a second career in education, he taught classes and headed the business department at Mohawk College until his retirement in 1993. With his interest in woodworking and architecture, Stoddart helped design a modern cottage for his family on Pigeon Lake in central Ontario; he also enjoyed running, hiking, and crafting furniture. Survivors include his wife, Janet; four children; five grandchildren; and a great-grandchild.

1960s

Jeremy E. Baptist, SB'60, PhD'66, of Overland Park, KS, died August 31. He was 85. Baptist completed medical school at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and became an allergist and immunologist. Over his 40-year career, he first practiced at Speer Clinic and later founded, owned, and served as medical director of Allergy Link in Overland Park. Following the dictum "Treat the cause, not just

the symptom," he helped patients with complex medical issues such as allergies, asthma, fibromyalgia, and autism spectrum disorder. Baptist was also active in his church. Survivors include three children, three stepchildren, four siblings, and 13 grandchildren.

Cynthia Whitsell, AM'61, died August 20 in San Francisco. She was 91. Whitsell studied theater at Northwestern University and literature at UChicago. She performed at Chicago's Happy Medium nightclub and in summer stock productions before being hired, in 1983, to teach in and run the drama program at Katherine Delmar Burke School for girls in San Francisco. During her 29 years in that role, Whitsell often adapted or created plays to give more students opportunities to be on stage. She enjoyed swimming and time with extended family living in Mexico, Texas, and Virginia. Survivors include her husband, Charles; two daughters; a stepdaughter; a sister; two grandchildren; and two step-grandchildren.

Donald H. Sanborn Jr., AB'61, AM'64, died May 16, 2025, in Elgin, IL. He was 87. Sanborn studied humanities and philosophy at UChicago and taught those subjects for 32 years at the City Colleges of Chicago—first at Wilbur Wright College and later at Harold Washington College. Sanborn also served on system-wide planning and curriculum committees and was a founding member and past president of the Association for Development of Philosophy Teaching. Survivors include a son and two grandchildren.

Earl Burdette "Burt" Olson Jr., SB'61, of Madison, WI, died September 12. He was 85. With his doctorate in biochemistry, Olson joined the University of Wisconsin-Madison's medical school pediatrics faculty, moving later to the population health sciences department. His research focused on lung development and how the brain controls breathing. Olson also taught students in environmental toxicology and public health, retiring in 2008 but teaching until 2018. He was an active member of Bethel Lutheran Church for more than 55 years, serving on the church council, leading Bible studies, volunteering for service trips, and more. He is survived by three daughters, including **Jill de Jong**, AB'90, associate professor of pediatrics; a son; five siblings; six grandchildren, including **Derek de Jong**, LAB'19, **Jacob de Jong**, LAB'23, and **Liam de Jong**, LAB'23; and three step-grandchildren.

Judith MacBain Alter, AB'61, died July 13, 2024, in Fort Worth, TX. She was 85. The author of more than 100 books, Alter earned a master's degree in education from Truman State University and a PhD in English from Texas Christian University (TCU), concentrating on literature of the American West. She wrote award-winning fiction and nonfiction titles for young adult and adult readers, often dealing with Texas history, stories, and people.

From 1982 to 2009 Alter served as editor and then director of TCU Press, and she continued publishing books in retirement. She is survived by four children and seven grandchildren.

Jan Grayson, SB'62, MBA'65, of Louisville, KY, died October 19. He was 84. Grayson, a US Army veteran and former Chicago Public Schools math teacher, worked at the consulting firms now known as Deloitte and PricewaterhouseCoopers before governor-elect Jim Edgar tapped him in 1990 to lead what is today the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Grayson later established his own consultancy and served on numerous nonprofit boards, including those of what is now the Chicago Architecture Center, which he chaired, and Court Theatre as well as the Actors Theatre of Louisville after his move there in 2014. He is survived by a brother.

Han-Kyo Kim, AM'57, PhD'62, of Cincinnati, died October 17. He was 96. Born in what is today Daegu, South Korea, Kim studied at Seoul National University and worked as a translator and journalist during the Korean War. Sponsored by an American benefactor, Kim left Korea to earn an undergraduate degree at Swarthmore College prior to his graduate studies. As a longtime professor of political science at the University of Cincinnati, Kim focused his teaching and scholarship on Korean politics and history and mentored many graduate students. Survivors include two daughters and five grandchildren.

Richard J. "Dick" Shaker, SB'62, SM'63, PhD'68, of Annapolis, MD, died September 14. He was 83. With three degrees in mathematics, Shaker spent 26 years at the National Security Agency, where he was chief mathematician. He won two Mathematics Society Awards for his technical papers and later received the NSA's Cryptologic Literature Award and the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Service. Founding Shaker Financial Services in 1995, he pioneered the quantitative strategy of discount capture using closed-end funds. Shaker achieved Bronze Life Master status as a bridge player and invested in two successful Broadway musicals. He is survived by his wife, Roberta; a daughter; two sons, including **Richard J. Shaker Jr.**, SB'86; and five grandchildren.

Carole Ann Hughes, AB'63 (Class of 1964), AM'65, JD'67, of San Francisco, died July 26. She was 83. With an MA from what was then the School of Social Service Administration, Hughes enrolled in the Law School. A member of the State Bar of California since 1969, Hughes worked at Pacific Gas and Electric Company and the US Postal Service. In the mid-1970s she represented two former flight attendants in a sex discrimination lawsuit against United Airlines in the District Court for the Northern District of California, one of many such cases that led to the eventual reversal of the airline industry policy pro-

hibiting married women from working as flight attendants.

Stanley Luis Vodraska, AM'63, died October 15 in Lancaster, NH. He was 90. A US Navy veteran, Vodraska graduated from St. John's University through the GI Bill. He continued his education as a Fulbright Scholar in Belgium and as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow at UChicago. For 40 years Vodraska taught philosophy at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY, specializing in the philosophy of the family. During that time he also completed his PhD in philosophy at the Warburg Institute, University of London. Survivors include two daughters; a son, **Adam Vodraska**, AB'85; and five grandchildren.

Jerry McBeath, AB'63, AM'64, of Fairbanks, AK, died November 18, 2024. He was 82. Earning his PhD in political science at the University of California, Berkeley, McBeath taught at the University of Alaska Fairbanks from 1976 to 2014. A pioneer in the study of Alaskan and circumpolar Northern politics, he published on topics including environmental governance and East Asian politics. McBeath was active in local and state politics and served as a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar, a visiting professor at several Chinese universities, and a board member of the American Association for Chinese Studies. He is survived by his wife, Jennifer; two children; a brother; and two grandchildren.

L. Keith Brown, AM'61, PhD'64, died July 24 in Honolulu. He was 92. An Iowa State University graduate and US Marine Corps veteran, Brown studied anthropology at UChicago. During his 40 years on the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh, Brown served as anthropology department chair and director of Asian studies; he was also awarded Japan's Order of the Sacred Treasure for his contributions to Japanese studies. He is survived by three children, five grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

Troy Lee Armstrong, AB'65, of Sacramento, CA, died February 25, 2025. He was 82. With his doctorate from Boston University, Armstrong became a professor of anthropology at California State University, Sacramento. He dedicated his professional life to the field of criminal anthropology—teaching, consulting, and publishing books on the topic while advocating for youth in the criminal justice system. Outside of academia, Armstrong was a devoted home winemaker and Chicago sports fan. He is survived by his wife, Judy; two children; and a grandchild.

Mary Jo Pugh, AB'66, died February 9, 2025, in Roseville, CA. She was 80. Pugh discovered her life's work as an archivist at the University of Michigan, where she earned master's degrees in history and library science. In California Pugh became a consulting archivist with the Smithsonian Institution, Eugene O'Neill Foundation, and Bank of America. She taught archival administration at three universities,

published *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts* (2005)—still used in the field today—and edited *The American Archivist* journal. She also loved the outdoors, especially hiking in the Mission Mountains of Montana. Survivors include two children, four siblings, and a grandchild.

Orlando T. Coryell, MBA'67, of La Grange, IL, died May 30, 2025. He was 93. Coryell took night classes at three universities while he worked for an insurance company, earning enough credits to obtain his undergraduate degree from Northwestern University. He enrolled at Chicago Booth, continuing his day job and also teaching at a local technical institute once a week. Coryell moved to La Grange in 1972 and was active in the local community. Survivors include his partner, Cynthia; a daughter; and two grandchildren.

James N. "Jim" Williams Jr., JD'67, of Jeffersonville, IN, died December 7, 2024. He was 81. Williams was a lawyer for 45 years who practiced with two Louisville, KY, firms: Wyatt, Grafton & Sloss and later Middleton & Reutlinger. In 2001 he was appointed to the Indiana State Ethics Commission. He also served on many church and community boards, such as the Louisville Orchestra and the Clark County Youth Shelter. Survivors include his wife, Barbara; two sons; and four grandchildren.

F. Carlene Bryant, AB'67, of Sebastopol, CA, died September 7, 2024. She was 79. Bryant studied anthropology in the College and at Cornell University, where she received her PhD. She dedicated most of her career to helping build a company that provided consulting and development services in the power and energy field. Bryant brought an anthropologist's eye to her daily life, and enjoyed sharing her insights about American culture with family and friends. She is survived by her husband, Harry; two sons; and three grandchildren.

Jerry Alan Yarbrough, MBA'67, of Fort Smith, AR, died January 27, 2025. He was 86. Trained as a chemical engineer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yarbrough worked first at Sinclair Research Laboratories and later at Crane Company in Chicago while pursuing his MBA in financial analysis. Moving back to Fort Smith—his hometown—Yarbrough held various positions at Arkansas Best Corporation (now ArcBest) from 1968 to 2004, including director of economic analysis and senior vice president of operations. He is survived by his wife, Mary Suffudy; a daughter, **Margaret "Greta" Yarbrough**, AB'86; a son; a sister; and a grandchild.

L. Jorn Dakin, JD'64, MBA'66, EX'68, died September 24 in Pittsburgh. He was 84. A lifelong scholar, Dakin graduated from the University of Michigan, earned two professional degrees and studied economics at UChicago, and completed an LLM at George Mason University in his retirement. He taught at the University of Kan-

sas and the University of North Florida before settling into a career as an attorney with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in Washington, DC, where he also volunteered with the Universalist National Memorial Church. Survivors include two children, a sister, and two grandchildren.

David Kwok-Wing Lo, PhD'68, of Ellicott City, MD, died November 10. He was 85. With chemistry and physics degrees from the University of Hong Kong, Lo came to UChicago on scholarship, where he received his doctorate in organic chemistry and met his wife through the Chinese Student Association. As an analytical chemist at Westvaco Corporation—a Maryland paper company—Lo developed three patents, worked on the US Postal Service's first self-adhesive souvenir stamp sheet, and designed processes for paper recycling. He was also a stamp collector, writer, and translator. He is survived by his wife, **Tzee-Nan Kuo Lo**, SM'64, PhD'66; three children; a sister; and five grandchildren.

Naomi (Maizel) Berne, PhD'68, died March 26, 2025, in New York. She was 83. Berne, a Brooklyn College graduate, earned her doctorate in clinical psychology and received postdoctoral training at New York University. She worked as a clinician in private practice and at the Abbott House, Allcott School, Pleasantville Cottage School, and Pathways Children's School, all in the state of New York. Berne was recognized with the 2005 Friend of the Child Award from Pathways and the Robert Maslow Excellence in Practice Award from the Jewish Child Care Association. Survivors include her husband, **Bruce Berne**, PhD'64; two sons; and two siblings.

J. Christian Kennedy, AB'69, of Fairfax, VA, died February 17, 2025. He was 77. After studying Romance languages and literatures in the College, Kennedy spent a decade in Colombia teaching English and running a binational center in the city of Bucaramanga. Joining the foreign service in 1980, he served in Mexico, Guyana, Poland, and Washington, DC, and was appointed US ambassador and special envoy for post-Holocaust issues in 2006. In retirement Kennedy and his wife lived in Colombia and the Washington, DC, area, and he volunteered with the Defiant Requiem Foundation and other organizations promoting tolerance and education. He is survived by his wife, Luz-Marina; two daughters; a son; and two grandchildren.

John Wasserstrass, SB'69, died July 10, 2024, in Beloit, WI. He was 76. Wasserstrass studied mathematics in the College before serving in the US Army in Vietnam; he later obtained master's degrees in math education and engineering. For 26 years he worked as a software engineer at Beloit Corporation, retiring in 1999. He also taught high school and college math in Wisconsin, Illinois, and South Carolina. Outside of work, Wasserstrass enjoyed playing and coaching volleyball and playing the violin. He is sur-

vived by two daughters, two siblings, and three grandchildren.

1970s

Guy J. Bacci II, MBA'70, of Vero Beach, FL, died December 9, 2024. He was 98. Bacci served in the US Navy during World War II and graduated from the Illinois Institute of Technology in industrial engineering. At International Harvester, he became manager for manufacturing engineering and later retired from the company to launch Amacon, an engineering consulting firm. Bacci was a lifelong golfer and a member of the Vero Beach Elks Lodge. He is survived by his wife, Angeline; a son; a brother; five grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Michael Abbott Grossman, EX'70, of Massachusetts, died on July 15. He was 81. Grossman, who served in the Army Corps of Engineers in Vietnam, studied applied and theoretical mathematics at UChicago and Stony Brook University, State University of New York. After teaching at Babson College and Boston University, Grossman became owner and president of Strategic Advantage, a company supporting the design, analysis, and interpretation of clinical studies for medical device and pharmaceutical clients. He was a member of Temple Emanuel in Newton, MA, and Temple Beth Elohim in Wellesley, MA. Survivors include his wife, Louise, and a daughter.

Gordon Lee Kipling, AM'66, PhD'71, died July 24 in Minneapolis. He was 82. With his doctorate in English literature, Kipling joined the UCLA faculty in 1969 and remained there—except for research trips abroad—for more than four decades. A specialist in medieval and Tudor drama, Kipling received a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Fulbright scholarship, as well as the David Bevington Award for his book *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (1998). After retiring in 2011, Kipling relocated to Minneapolis with his wife, Janet, to be closer to family and the Guthrie Theater. He is survived by his wife, three daughters, and six grandchildren.

Richard Earl "Dick" Wayman, MBA'71, died February 14, 2023, in San Diego. He was 88. Trained in accounting, Wayman held positions at Arthur Andersen, TransUnion, the *Chicago Tribune*, and Amway Corporation during his business career. Living in Illinois, Michigan, and California, he was active in local churches, state and local library organizations, and the American Library Association. A longtime library volunteer, Wayman helped raise funds to build the Ramona Library in San Diego County, where the technology center bears his name. Survivors include his wife, Joan; two sons; three grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Stanley Thomas Fischer, JD'72, of Anchorage, AK, died September 20. He was 82. Fischer was a first-generation college

student and US Army Intelligence Corps veteran. Early in his legal career, he helped establish the consumer protection section of the Alaska attorney general's office. Fischer opened a private law practice in Kodiak, AK, in 1978. He later headed the Anchorage attorney general's office. In retirement he earned a master's degree in teaching and taught English in Alaska and China; he also ran marathons and loved camping, fishing, hiking, and biking. Survivors include his wife, Jeanne.

Christopher P. Knight, AB'73, of Saratoga Springs, NY, died September 9. He was 73. Following his undergraduate studies, Knight spent several years on archaeological digs in England, and the remainder of his career working in banking technology in New York City.

David Robert Stevenson, AB'74, died December 6, 2024, in Portland, OR. He was 72. Stevenson studied mathematics at Stanford and moved in 1991 to Springfield, OR, where he and his wife established a commercial blueberry farm. The couple enjoyed the company of their six dogs and loved music and travel. A long-distance runner, Stevenson completed more than 100 marathons and eight 100-mile races. Survivors include his wife, Lynnor.

Roy Klein, MBA'74, of Schaumburg, IL, died June 27, 2024. He was 84. With his electrical engineering degree from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and his Chicago Booth MBA, Klein had a long career in electronic engineering management at various Chicago-area companies. As a young engineer at General Time Corp. in Rolling Meadows, IL, from 1963 to 1965, he led the team that designed the central timing equipment for the Apollo 11 moon landing. He is survived by his wife, Kay; three sons; and five grandchildren.

Deborah J. "Deb" Bodeau, SM'76, died December 6, 2024, in Bedford, MA. She was 71. With her mathematics training, Bodeau spent her career at MITRE, a company that operates federally funded research and development centers. A specialist in computer security, privacy, and resiliency, Bodeau became senior principal cybersecurity engineer for the company and continued working on projects after her retirement in 2016. She taught adult education courses and served on the board of the First Parish Church in Bedford; she also did beadwork and collected Tarot card decks. She is survived by her husband, **Doug Muder**, SB'79, PhD'84, and a sister.

Christine "Chris" Tanz, LAB'61, AM'70, PhD'76, died October 11 in Tucson, AZ. She was 81. Born in Poland during the Second World War, Tanz moved to the United States with her family and attended Harvard before pursuing graduate work in psychology. She taught psychology at the University of Arizona for several years and published two books—one on children's language acquisition and the other a children's picture book. Shifting her focus to art, Tanz designed nearly a dozen site-

specific public art projects in Tucson and throughout Arizona. She is survived by a son; a brother, **Mark Tanz**, LAB'65, AB'69; and two grandchildren.

Martin J. "Marty" Findling, MBA'79, of Carol Stream, IL, died December 4, 2024. He was 88. Findling studied electrical engineering at Valparaiso University and served in the US Navy Reserve from 1953 to 1968. After working at International Telephone and Telegraph, Motorola, and the Natural Gas Pipeline Company, he became a certified energy manager and a registered professional engineer in Nebraska, Iowa, and Illinois. Findling was deeply involved in his church, and he was active in the Lions Club as well as International Partners in Mission for more than 50 years. He is survived by his wife, Carol; three children; and seven grandchildren.

Peter Coe, PhD'79, of St. Charles, IL, died May 16, 2025. He was 83. After attending Syracuse University on wrestling and lacrosse scholarships, Coe was drafted into the US Army and later volunteered to serve in Vietnam. With his doctorate in clinical psychology, he treated patients—among them veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and other service-related issues—for more than 35 years. Active in the Unitarian Universalist Church in Geneva, IL, Coe devoted himself to supporting veterans, mental health initiatives, and a local homeless shelter. He is survived by his wife, Beverly; a son; two stepchildren; and three step-grandchildren.

Douglas F. Reed, MBA'79, died July 13, 2024, in Libertyville, IL. He was 75. With his chemistry degree from Purdue University, Reed worked for General Electric and Baxter Healthcare's Fenwal Division. Settling in suburban Chicago, he worked as a project manager for Abbott and then Hospira Pharmaceutical (now Pfizer). In retirement Reed enjoyed cycling, live music, sailing, and craft beers. He is survived by two sons; a sister; and his partner, Jane.

1980s

Harry Spiegelberg, MBA'80, of Appleton, WI, died July 13, 2024. He was 88. Spiegelberg began his career with Kimberly-Clark Corporation in 1959 and retired in 1996 as the company's vice president, acquiring numerous patents along the way. He was honored as a distinguished alumnus of his undergraduate alma mater, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and held a doctorate from the Institute of Paper Chemistry. In 1992 Spiegelberg cofounded the Paper Industry International Hall of Fame—which inducted him in 2024—and belonged to the First Congregational United Church of Christ and the Rotary Club of Appleton. He is survived by his wife, Bonnie; four children; two sisters; nine grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Maria Lynn Rafa, EX'80, died October 18 in Chicago of cancer. She was 67. A Chi-

cago native, Rafa studied geography at UChicago before graduating from DePaul University, where she studied computer science. She pursued a long career with JPMorganChase, where she rose to vice president, consumer banking product manager and deposits subject matter expert. She enjoyed traveling, especially to New York and Paris. An animal lover, she raised miniature dachshunds and worked with neighbors in Pilsen to foster feral cat litters. Survivors include extended family.

Craig Gordon Savage, EX'81, died December 6 in Chicago. He was 71. With his bachelor of fine arts in metalsmithing from Arizona State University, Savage moved to New York City to work in a studio designing and creating jewelry for stores such as Tiffany and Co. and Neiman Marcus. After his art studies at UChicago, Savage embarked on a 25-year career as a flight attendant—for Midway, Northwest, and Delta Airlines—fulfilling his goal to see much of the world, especially East Asia. Survivors include his husband, Dusan “Dusko” Stefoski, and three siblings.

Marilyn Janice Grow-Maienza, MST'74, PhD'81, of Palm Desert, CA, died December 4, 2024. She was 91. While raising a family in River Forest, IL, Grow-Maienza earned graduate degrees in education. She later taught and conducted research on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota as well as in Indonesia and South Korea. As an education professor at Truman State University, she focused her research on adapting the Korean mathematics teaching model for elementary school students in a Western curriculum. She is survived by her husband, Charles Chamberlain Frost; three sons; four grandchildren; and a great-grandchild.

Frank S. Plimpton, MBA'80, JD'81, died April 13, 2025, in Naples, FL. He was 71. A Harvard graduate, Plimpton applied his business and law education to roles as a litigation and bankruptcy lawyer at Milbank Tweed, an investment banker at Paine Webber and Salomon Brothers, and a partner at the private equity firm MatlinPatterson. Plimpton cherished time at his house and farm in Maine's Muscongus Bay. He was a photographer and long-distance cyclist who also enjoyed skiing, bird-watching, and cultivating berries to make homemade jelly. He is survived by his wife, Kathy; three children; and six grandchildren.

Robert Joseph “Bob” Mislevy, PhD'81, died May 22, 2025, in Severna Park, MD. He was 74. After studying mathematics at Northern Illinois University, Mislevy received his doctorate in behavioral sciences. During his nearly 30 years at the Educational Testing Service, where he held the Frederic M. Lord Chair in Measurement and Statistics, Mislevy became a leading figure in educational measurement and assessment design. He taught at the University of Maryland and served as president of the Psychometric Society. Among other honors, he earned awards

from the American Educational Research Association as well as the National Council on Measurement in Education. He is survived by two children, a brother, and three grandchildren.

Clyde A. Shuman, AB'82, died July 16, 2024, in Alpena, MI, after an extended illness. He was 63. Shuman studied biology in the College and attended medical school in Belgium before obtaining a law degree from St. John's University. As an intellectual property litigation partner at Pearl Cohen in New York City for nearly 20 years, he gained extensive experience in patent, trademark, and copyright litigation. Survivors include a daughter.

1990s

Paula Kleine-Kracht, PhD'90, died October 31 in Louisville, KY. She was 79. Kleine-Kracht entered the Ursuline Sisters religious order in 1965. With her doctorate in education, Sister Paula—as she was known—made her mark on Catholic education. In Louisville, after teaching and serving as principal at Angela Merici High School and Sacred Heart Academy, she cofounded and directed Nativity Academy at St. Boniface, an urban Catholic middle school. Her many honors include recognition by the Archdiocese of Louisville and by Bellarmine University, her undergraduate alma mater. She is survived by extended family.

Bryan William Lockett, AB'96, of San Marcos, TX, died September 3. He was 51. He had lived with multiple sclerosis for a number of years. Following his studies in the College and at UCLA, he was an educator for 12 years. Survivors include his mother and brother.

Bernard Jacob “BJ” Schwartz, AB'97 (Class of 1995), of Los Angeles, died September 25. He was 52. A history major and student marshal in the College, Schwartz later graduated from Stanford Law School and worked at law firms in California and New York. Drawn to storytelling, he earned a master's in film studies at the University of Southern California in 2007 and cofounded a virtual reality production company and a firm that developed technologies to enhance internet privacy and security. Schwartz returned to practicing law in 2022 as an independent legal consultant. He is survived by family and friends.

Nikki Walter, MPP'97, died September 4 in New Brunswick, NJ, of pancreatic cancer. She was 58. Walter worked as a legislative aide in Montana and as an English teacher in France before studying public policy with a specialization in finance. Moving to the East Coast, she worked for more than two decades with Deloitte, first as a strategy and operations consultant and later as a managing director for global initiatives, based mostly in New York City. She lived with her family in Metuchen, New Jersey, and became a deacon at the town's First

Presbyterian Church. She is survived by her husband, David Fenner; two children; and three sisters.

Johnathan Barnes, SB'98, of Hendersonville, TN, died October 27 as the result of a car accident. He was 49. As a mathematics student in the College and research assistant in the Enrico Fermi Institute, he helped collect data samples from NASA's Mars Pathfinder mission—the first in situ analysis of rock from another planet. A programmer and analyst, Barnes was employed most recently as a senior enterprise architect for Humana. He was also an active member of the Masons and held many leadership positions in the fraternity. Survivors include two daughters and a sister.

2000s

Lea Faye Schweitz, AM'00, PhD'08, died September 24 in Oak Park, IL, of lung cancer. She was 50. A graduate of Luther College, Schweitz pursued studies in divinity, philosophy, and theology at UChicago. For a decade she taught at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and directed its Zygon Center for Religion and Science. Schweitz's next chapter included grant writing and contract work, teaching theology to incarcerated people, and helping individuals navigate end-of-life planning through her podcast, monthly meetings, and Substack *Playdates with Death*. She is survived by two children, her mother, and a sister.

2010s

Ryan Kirk, JD'10, of Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, died December 1, 2024, of cancer. He was 43. Kirk graduated from the University of South Carolina and later became an associate attorney at Garfunkel Wild and Weil, Gotshal & Manges, where he provided legal counsel to health care entities and represented clients in corporate matters. He volunteered as a legal advocate for refugees in Tanzania, taught English at a middle school in China, and taught social studies from 2016 to 2021 at Scarsdale and Mount Vernon High Schools. He is survived by his wife, Jessica Paige Conn; two daughters; his mother; his stepmother; and two brothers.

James Coleman Howes, MPP'15, of Bowling Green, OH, died May 7, 2025. He was 36. Howes grew up in Bowling Green but made frequent childhood visits to Salzburg, Austria, where his/their father directed a study-abroad program. After graduating from Bowling Green State University, Howes worked in Ohio as a political and community organizer and then earned a master's degree in public policy at UChicago. A project manager for tech start-ups in the Midwest and California, Howes also painted and wrote poetry and was a talented drummer and vocalist with various bands. Survivors include his/their parents.



THE UCHICAGOAN

Alex Seropian, SB'91

*Questions for the video game
producer, College parent,
and 2013 UChicago Alumni
Professional Achievement
Award recipient.*

What would you want to be doing if not your current profession?

Architecture—I love the combination of design, engineering, and aesthetics. It shares a lot in common with game design.

What do you hate that everyone else loves?

I'm not a hater.

What do you love that everyone else hates?

Dates, the fruit. In my house I am the only one who eats them.

What was the last book you finished?

Blood in the Machine by Brian Merchant. A history of the Luddites (with not-so-subtle comparisons to today's challenges with big tech).

What UChicago course left the biggest impression on you?

Mathematics Analysis with **Diane Herrmann**, SM'76, PhD'88. This was the class that made me decide to major in math. Math: I get you.

What book changed your life?

Foundation by Isaac Asimov. It kindled a lifelong interest in science fiction, world-building, and storytelling.

What person, alive or dead, would you want to write your life story?

My wife, **Laura Seropian**, AB'91. She knows me best and occasionally laughs at the jokes.

What did you learn at UChicago that still benefits you today?

Always consider the source. We take in so much information—today more than ever. Where that information comes from is often more important than the details themselves.

What's your most vivid UChicago memory in two sentences or fewer?

So many great memories: meeting my (to-be) wife for the first time, studying at the Reg (fourth floor!), soccer on the Midway, Harold's Chicken ... But probably the one that takes the cake is going on a late-night trip to the Checkerboard Lounge and dancing on the tables with the regulars.



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