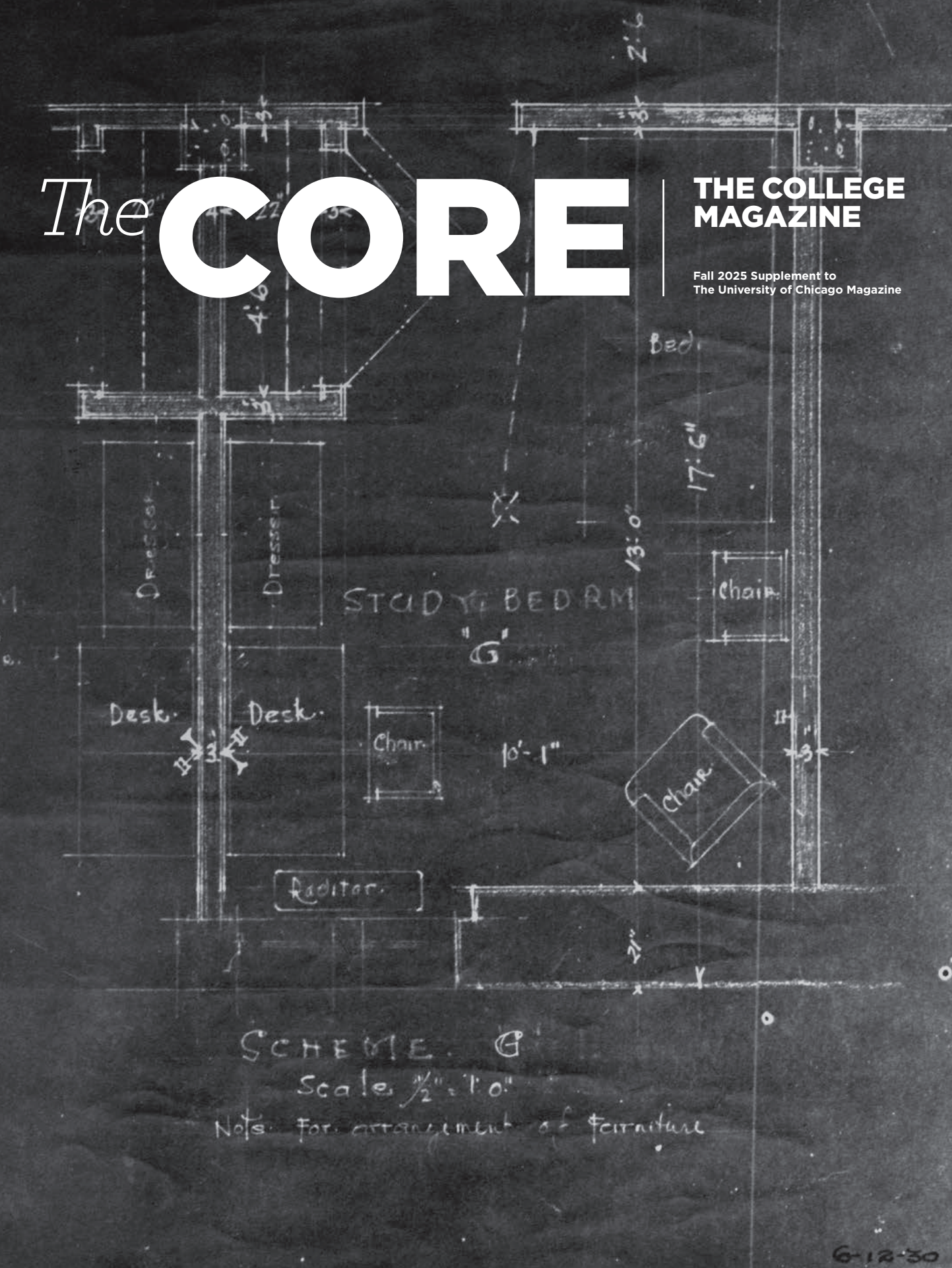
The CORE

THE COLLEGE MAGAZINE

Fall 2025 Supplement to
The University of Chicago Magazine



***Hot Air Balloons in the Skies of Luxor*, by Sarah Katz, Class of 2026, one of the winners of the 2024–25 Study Abroad Photo Contest. Katz participated in the Cairo: Middle Eastern Civilizations program.**

INSIDE

SHORT

MEDIUM

LONG

ET CETERA

Front cover: Architectural drawing of a floor plan, Burton Judson Courts, 1930; UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-01247. See "Notes on Campus," page 22.
Back cover: Undated photo of the Reynolds Club billiards room; UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-06438. See "Notes on Campus," page 22.

From the editor

YAY NEW LEARNINGS

Years ago I remarked to a colleague that I had figured out some or other technological issue. She responded, in her trademark cheery-sarcastic way, "Yay new learnings!"

Memory being what it is—random and janky—this phrase has lodged in my brain, where lines from great works of literature should probably be.

In my job I accrue a lot of random learnings. They collect like lint in my pockets. For example:

1 – The 1996 Pauly Shore comedy *Bio-Dome* (see page 2) exists and has a 4 percent rating on Rotten Tomatoes.

2 – The United States Postal Inspection Service exists and is older than the United States. (See page 8.)

3 – Some Burton Judson rooms are on half-floors. (See page 22.)

4 – The farming video game *Stardew Valley* has inspired all kinds of mods (modifications to the game) including PolyamorySweet and Cannabis Kit. (See page 31.)

5 – Crème de menthe comes in both clear and bright green, and a Green Skirt tastes pretty good on a hot summer day. (See page 34.)

Memory being what it is, the half-life of these summer learnings is unclear. I hope the Green Skirt outlasts Pauly Shore, but it's impossible to know.

—Carrie Golus, AB'91, AM'93

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Top 11

YELP REVIEWS OF THE REG

The Joseph Regenstein Library has an average rating of 4.5 stars on Yelp, based on 22 reviews. Read what some satisfied patrons have to say.

★★★☆☆
The building itself is an eyesore.

★★★★☆
I haven't had to use Interlibrary Loan for anything (okay, one thing, but only because someone destroyed the library's current copy of Bernard Williams's *Moral Luck*, probably on purpose, and they had to order a new one). And I'm the sort of person who will call the high school of my favorite writer and ask if they can send me their old literary magazines just so I can see what my favorite writers wrote when they were 14.

★★★★☆
Books? What books? Circa 2000 it was all about the second floor—frat boy and sorority girl heaven. By the time I was a senior I was in the fifth floor stacks desperately trying to complete my BA and graduate.

★★★★☆
I spent most of my undergraduate years being a loudmouth on the second floor. Back then the track team "zoomed past the shelves" dressed in nothing but stocking masks.

★★★★☆
In the decades since I frequented this amazing library, the massive card catalogs (primitive Googling, for you youngsters) have been cleared out of the first floor, making for a beautiful if underused first-floor lobby. They've also added a biodome-looking addition connecting to the west-facing side, but there's no Pauly Shore inside.

★★★★☆
Brutalist architecture. Every book in the world. The raddest Helmut Jahn underground robot-crane operated glass-and-steel extension. I love this place!

Photography by Anne Ryan; UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-06122

The Joseph Regenstein Library, offering tough love since 1970.

★★★★★
The only improvement I could ask for at the moment is the ability to send a message to the person who recalled your very specialized book in a weird subfield, so that you can ask them a) WTF? and b) out for coffee …

★★★★★
It does not have that new library smell, and that is very much appreciated.

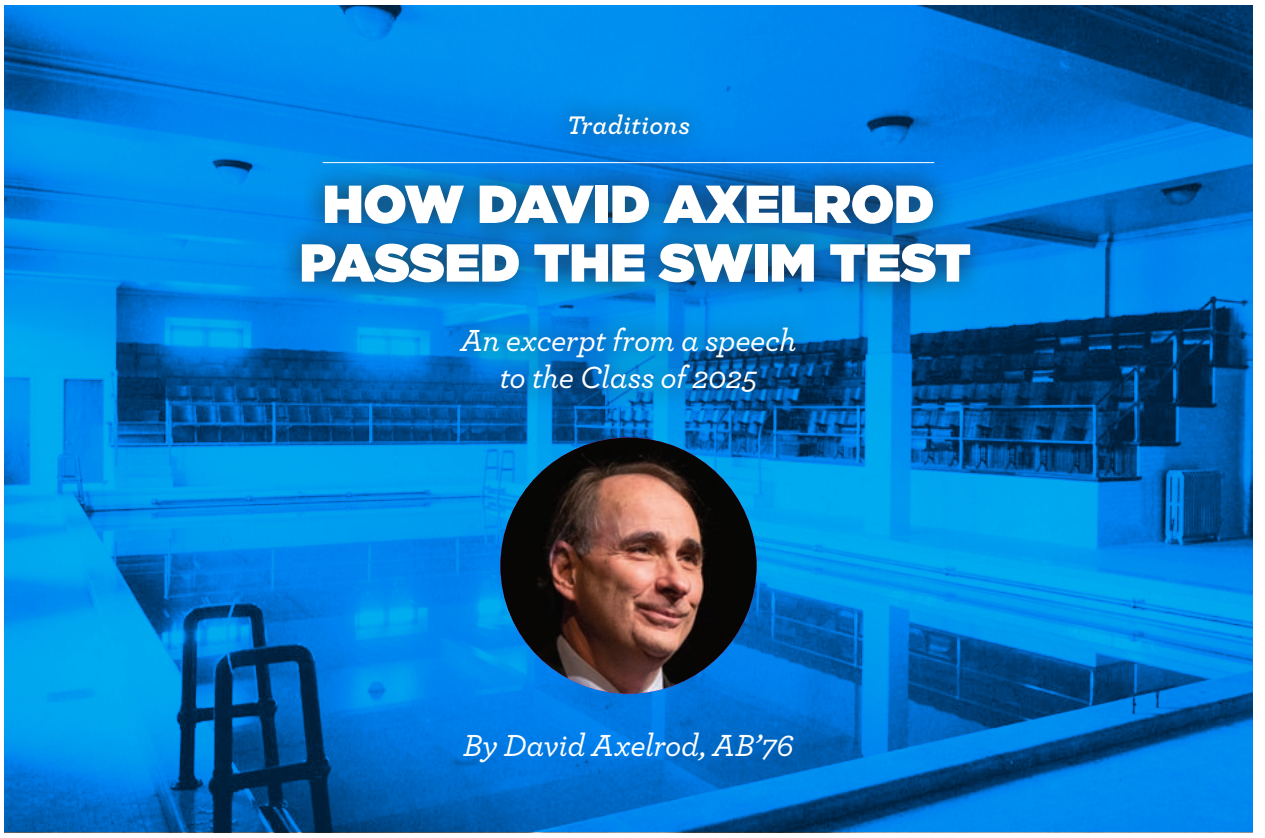
★★★★★
The place has multiple floors which dramatically increase in quietness as you go up. All of the librarians here are super sweet and nice and are more than willing to help you!

★★★★★
I hate libraries! Only over the last six or seven months have I come to love and not hate the Regenstein. Since becoming a big Regulator though, as a friend of mine calls it, I've figured this place out like the back of my hand.

★★★★★
I sleep better here than I do back at my dorm.

These actual Yelp reviews have been excerpted and edited for clarity and style.

Photography by Steven Feldman, UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-06258; photo courtesy Everett Collection



Traditions

HOW DAVID AXELROD PASSED THE SWIM TEST

An excerpt from a speech to the Class of 2025

By David Axelrod, AB'76

Thinking back to my own years as a student, I'm actually *more* than honored and humbled to be standing here. I'm also a little surprised. And I think it's safe to say my professors, may they rest in peace, would be more like astonished.

Because mine was not a stellar academic career. Looking back on those years, I was exposed to a treasure trove of important, stimulating subjects and ideas. I learned the habits of critical thinking. But I didn't take the time to fully digest or appreciate them.

Instead, as someone who grew up in the '60s, called to politics and news by the idealism and activism and profound struggles of that era, my attention was drawn more to the city than to the College. Chicago itself was the greatest attraction.

It was a time of racial, cultural, and generational divisions even greater than today's. There was rioting in the streets of our cities; the assassination of our leaders; a deeply unpopular war, halfway across the world, in which 50,000 Americans would die; and a government that lied to us about it. It felt as if things were coming apart. And Chicago—where ghettos had burned and baton-wielding police battered anti-war protesters at the Democratic National Convention—was right in the middle of it.

The College, at that time, was much more inward and monastic, focused squarely on the life of the mind. But I came to Chicago because I was focused on the life of the world. And since there was no Institute of Politics, I created my own pathways to experience it as a fledgling journalist. The problem was, I wound up spending a lot more time *experiencing* than studying—more hours covering the news and political events than hitting the books at Regenstein.

And this all caught up with me in my final quarter. In order to graduate with my class, I had to finish the work from five previous courses … *and* take four new ones. And I *had* to graduate, because two days later I was scheduled to begin an internship at the *Chicago Tribune* that I hoped would lead to a job.

I worked 24/7 to get it all done, and thought I had. But the day final grades were due, I got a message from the registrar. "Mr. Axelrod. It appears you never fulfilled your freshman swimming requirement. If you don't pass a swim test by 3 p.m. today, you won't be graduating with your class."

This really happened, folks.

So, clock ticking, I raced over to Bartlett gym and found a coach to give me the test. I wasn't a particularly good swimmer, and I told him that if I started to drown to just let me go, because I didn't want to have to tell my friends, family, and the *Chicago Tribune* that I didn't graduate because I failed the freshman swimming test. And he must have heard me, because he generously interpreted my three variations of the dog paddle as the mandatory separate strokes. I still remember staggering back to this very quadrangle on which you sit today and collapsing under a tree, depleted but triumphant.

Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." And one small reflection of this is that 49 years later, the College no longer has a freshman swim requirement.

UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-00656; photography by Lauren Gerson/Public Domain (inset)

WHAT'S NEW IN THE COLLEGE

NEW MAJORS AND MINORS

Archaeology (major and minor)

Climate and sustainable growth (major and minor)

Entrepreneurship (minor)

Haitian/Creole studies (minor)

CAREER COMPETITIONS

Rural Innovation Challenge • Fixed Income Investment Competition • APAC Healthcare Investment Competition • College New Venture Challenge • Sports Business Competition • Stock Pitch Competition • Trading Competition • Digital Assets Trading Competition • Tech Summer Showcase • Game Jam • Tech Community Challenge • Impact Competition

NEW STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

Córdoba: Crossroads of Mediterranean Civilizations

Paris: Inequality and Global Social Development (in partnership with the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice)

Florence: Drawing Through the World

Paris: On Images

Alumni memories

THE FIVE BEST THINGS ABOUT ALUMNI WEEKEND

(according to reunion volunteers)

For alumni in reunion years—1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, 30th, 35th, 40th, 45th, and 50th—reunion volunteers make the magic happen. They plan the Friday night dinner, cat-wrangle their classmates into coming back to campus, organize the class gift, and, most importantly, foster nostalgia for all things UChicago.

Reunion volunteers also have a blast. Here are the five best things about 2025 Alumni Weekend, according to some of its dedicated volunteers.

HANGING OUT IN PERSON

Words cannot describe how wonderful it was to be together after 10 years (COVID-19 prevented us from being on campus for our 35th), talk nonstop, and share memories that still feel like yesterday.

—Jennifer L. Magnabosco, AB'85, AM'85,
40th Reunion chair

The class dinner went by too quickly! There just wasn't enough time to talk with everyone. But making memories and connections—whether it was working with the reunion committee, at one of our virtual events, or at the class dinner and other activities—is just so important.

—Susan Friedman, AB'75, AM'76,
50th Reunion chair

Photography by John Zich

My heart was full seeing UChicago classmates at our 25th College Reunion, sharing the campus with my family, and spending time with friends from college. We even got to see our resident head, **Grace Chan McKibben** [AB'90, AM'90], who was attending her [35th] Reunion.

*—**Julie Patel Liss**, AB'00, 25th Reunion chair*

Chan McKibben didn't only attend her reunion—she served on the committee that helped organize it.—Ed.

SEEING CAMPUS, OLD AND NEW

Touring the Rockefeller Chapel carillon, which I had never done before.

*—**Marshall J. Schmitt**, SB'80, 45th Reunion chair*

Having a visceral reaction to the plaid carpet in Harper Library. It's bold!

*—**Lauren Riensche**, AB'15, 10th Reunion chair*

Seeing some of the new buildings on our Campus—Then and Now tour was a treat, even though when we walked by Booth, there was no discussion of Woodward Court being there and its history. Never forget!

—Susan Friedman

MEETING THE NEXT GENERATION

Getting to meet my classmates' kids—KIDS! That was just indicative of how, even though it had been 10 years, it felt like so much time and no time at all had passed simultaneously.

—Lauren Riensche

P. Sean Gupta [AB'00], who I first met over meals at Woodward Court and through SASA [South Asian Students Association], and my friend **Reetu Gupta** [AB'00] have two beautiful daughters and somehow skirted the "exhausted parent look" so many of us don these days.

—Julie Patel Liss

REVISITING HYDE PARK CLASSICS

Not wanting the night to end after our reunion party and subsequent Late-Night Breakfast. So we rounded up and headed off to The Promised Land (aka Jimmy's).

—Lauren Riensche

PLANNING TO DO IT ALL AGAIN

I enjoyed early brainstorming with committee members about our 50th Reunion, including how best to stay in touch.

*—**Paul Harris**, AB'80, 45th Reunion gift chair*

ALUMNI, MARK YOUR CALENDARS. ALUMNI WEEKEND 2026 WILL BE APRIL 30 THROUGH MAY 3.

Photography by Anne Ryan

Public service

THE SCAM STOPS HERE

Patricia Manzolillo, AB'92, came from a Post Office family—and has made her own mark on the agency.

There's an old line about families like Patricia Manzolillo's. "We like to say we have postal blue in our veins," says **Manzolillo**, AB'92, whose father, sister, grandfather, uncle, and great-uncle all worked for the United States Postal Service (USPS).

So it was perhaps not surprising that Manzolillo would find her way to the agency once led by Benjamin Franklin. Less expected, however, is exactly where within the USPS: the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), its law enforcement arm. Manzolillo has worked for USPIS since 1996, with a long stretch as director of its forensic laboratory. Two years ago, she became director of business operations.

That the postal service *has* a law enforcement arm is news to many. In fact, the Postal Inspection Service is even older than the nation it serves. Its origins date to 1775, during the Second Continental Congress. This year it celebrates its 250th anniversary.

Today the USPIS is tasked with preventing crimes that involve the mail: money laundering, mail theft, suspicious mail, child exploitation, and the illegal drug trade, among others.

As a kid, Manzolillo loved science and was enraptured by the long-running series *Quincy, M.E.*: "solving problems with science," she says. Her plan was to become a medical examiner like her television hero. She took all the premed classes, but—in true UChicago fashion—she chose an out-of-left-field major: history, with an emphasis on the ancient Mediterranean world.

Soon after graduating, she enrolled in a master's program in forensic science at the University of Alabama at Birmingham—one of the few schools at the time that offered such a program. As her knowledge of forensics broadened, a new passion emerged: document examination. "Then I found out, of course, that one of the best labs for forensic document examination was the Postal Inspection Service," Manzolillo says. She got an internship, and "from there, that was it."

Becoming a document examiner required several years of apprenticeship-style training. Manzolillo learned how to do handwriting and typewriting analysis, find signs of document alteration and counterfeiting, examine printed documents, and more. The forensic lab team also acted as advisers, helping the Postal Service develop more

Courtesy US Postal Inspection Service

USPIS plays a key role in investigating crimes committed through the mail.

The handcuffs used to arrest Theodore Kaczynski, known as the Unabomber.

A US flag faded by anthrax decontamination after the 2001 anthrax attacks.

secure forms of money orders and stamps. "I know people don't think of this," she says, "but stamps are like money … so we put a lot of security features into them."

Stamp counterfeiting was the subject of one of Manzolillo's favorite cases. ("They're all important, even the small ones," she says of the cases she's worked. But "there are some funny cases, and those are the ones that stick with me a little bit more.") A postal inspector sent Manzolillo a batch of letters mailed with ersatz stamps—evidence, he suspected, of a major counterfeiting ring in south Florida.

Indeed, the stamps looked authentic. Manzolillo quickly realized why: When stamps are sold in booklets, they typically feature a photo of the stamp on the cover. Someone had simply cut out the photo and taped it to the letter.

"So I called the inspector, and I said, 'Where are these coming from?'" she recalls. His answer: a nursing home. Manzolillo gently told him she did not think he had a large-scale criminal enterprise on his hands, but rather a group of elderly people making an honest mistake (or, at worst, committing some sub-78-cent mischief) while sending out Christmas cards.

Manzolillo spent almost eight years as a document examiner before taking on her first leadership role, as assistant lab director. "It was a huge transition, because it was no longer me making my decisions about the cases," she says. Instead she spent much of her time helping other forensic scientists, whether by providing advice or resources. Still, she couldn't resist occasionally popping down to the document examination unit to see what was going on. (Even now, when she looks at someone's handwriting, "my brain is sort of immediately analyzing it.")

She took her current role in business operations thinking it would be a short stay. "But after a few months, I realized just what an impact I could have," she says. Overseeing nearly everything administrative in the Postal Inspection Service, she suddenly had the power to fix processes and remove bureaucratic roadblocks.

Her father, who spent his entire career at the Postal Service, has watched hers with pride. "Most of our conversations now, even though he's retired, still revolve around the Postal Service," Manzolillo says.

—Susie Allen, AB'09

Who wrote this?

The subject of Manzolillo's first handwriting analysis was Santa Claus.

Every year of her childhood, she got a paper Advent calendar featuring a letter from the man himself. "And my mom says that even when I was little, I was constantly sitting there trying to figure out who was writing it."

It takes years of training to develop the skill of handwriting analysis. (A 2022 study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* found that experienced forensic document examiners like Manzolillo could reliably identify whether two written samples came from the same person; those with less than two years of study could not.)

We all have many versions of our handwriting. The one we use to scribble a grocery list isn't the same one we'd put on a thank-you card. Examiners prefer to have samples from a variety of contexts for comparison. Still, all the iterations of a person's handwriting are likely to share certain underlying traits—"handwriting habits," Manzolillo says—such as the spacing between letters and words and the degree of slant.

You can, Manzolillo says, occasionally guess someone's age or where they grew up based on their handwriting, because of variations in the way particular letterforms have been taught regionally and over time. But it's a fool's errand to try to suss out gender: "I've seen writing from what has turned out to be this huge, massive guy in prison, and you would think it's a teenage girl's handwriting with all the flowery stuff."

iStock.com/VladSt; handwriting courtesy Chandler A. Calderon

Alphine Jefferson, AB'73, in 1972. The photo was taken by Scott Campbell, AB'73, AM'75, MBA'81, his "first and only roommate," when they ran into each other in front of Bartlett Gymnasium.

Personal history

"THAT IS A TRUE STORY."

How Alphine Jefferson, AB'73, became an oral historian.

As told to Carrie Golus, AB'91, AM'93

At Alumni Weekend 2024, ***Alphine Jefferson****, AB'73, stopped by the publications table while I happened to be staffing it. Noticing the degree year on his name tag, I asked if we could interview him for a feature I was planning for* The Core*—an oral history of the College in the 1970s ("Ho-Ho, the University of Chicago Is Funnier Than You Think," Spring/25).*

Only later did I realize I had accidentally buttonholed an eminent oral historian. Jefferson has taught at Southern Methodist University (where he was recognized with the Most Popular Professor Award), the College of Wooster, and Randolph-Macon College, among others. He retired in 2022. His current projects include an essay on novelist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, whom Jefferson calls "America's first Black oral historian."—Carrie Golus, AB'91, AM'93

I stuttered severely until I had a faith healing in my Pentecostal church when I was 15 and a half. As a result of stuttering, I have always paid attention to language—people's accents, their speech patterns, and their grammar.

My introduction to oral history, as we call it now, was listening to the stories that people told. My parents were the second family in our area to get electricity. Most people had no electricity. So obviously, there was no TV. There was no radio.

But my interest in oral history *actually* began on December 4, 1969, when [Black Panthers] Mark Clark and Fred Hampton were assassinated in North Lawndale. **Judy Mitchell-Davis** [AB'73], who was from North Lawndale, took me in her car to her sister Edna's restaurant—Edna's famous restaurant where Martin Luther King Jr. had set up his open-housing campaign—and she introduced

Photo courtesy Alphine Jefferson, AB'73/photography by Scott Campbell, AB'73, AM'75, MBA'81

me to Timuel Black [AM'54, author of *Bridges of Memory*, a two-volume oral history on the Great Migration]. He and I talked that night.

I'm sure he realized that he could best get the story of Black Chicago by talking to people. I remember running into him one time at Valois on 53rd Street. I could barely get in because everybody's sitting around the table with Timuel Black.

After graduation I attended the brand-new Duke University Oral History Program, the first PhD program in oral history in the country. They aggressively recruited me.

The very first academic oral history program had been established in 1948 at Columbia University by Allan Nevins. He interviewed only politicians: governors, senators, and presidents. It was a great white men oral history program. He wanted to capture those rare moments when someone made that one unguarded remark.

So I went to Duke in 1973. In the summer of 1974, I was chosen to coordinate a group of eight Duke students, Black and white, to interview Black farmers who were losing their land throughout the South.

Two of us drove to Montgomery, Alabama. At the hotel reception desk, we told them we were Duke students who had reserved rooms for our oral history work. And the guy said, "Oh. We do not have a reservation for you." So we said, "If we have to call Duke University and say there are no rooms for us, you are probably going to have some problems. Do you want us to make that call?" So they gave us one room. We had to share.

The people at Duke had trained us—when you're in a community that you do not know—to go to the barber shop, the beauty shop, or the post office. Introduce yourself, tell them who you are and why you're there, to establish credibility.

So I went to the post office. It happened to be a Black postal worker, male. I told him I was going to interview Charles Johnson. He looked at me with horror and said, "*Which* Charles Johnson? The Black Charles Johnson, or the white Charles Johnson? Because the white Charles Johnson just shot a Black man to death last week who walked up and knocked on his front door." That is a true story.

We asked farmers about losing their land, about how they were denied loans. And it was just a sad story. In the year 1900 Black Americans owned 25 million acres of land. Right now, it's less than 1 million.

The best way to get someone to talk to you is to find that point of commonality. So I would talk about being a church boy. The family would invite me in. One of the interviews I did, the guy had no time for me, but he said, "If you ride on the back of this tractor, I'll talk to you." That is a true story.

My dissertation was on housing discrimination in North Lawndale. Obviously, I was the outsider. I'm from Virginia. People have all these stereotypes about Southerners.

There's a longtime rivalry between Black Americans on the South Side of Chicago and on the West Side. People from the South Side were supposedly more sophisticated, educated, and bourgeois. People from the West Side were directly from Mississippi's cotton fields and were less sophisticated. I was intrigued by that dichotomy.

Timuel Black introduced me to some of the elders of the North Lawndale community. I was interviewing this woman, and she said, "Boy, you don't understand the protection you have." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "It has gone out to the gang members not to bother the guy with the white-over-blue Chevy Malibu with the North Carolina plates. Do not bother that boy, because he is doing good work."

I've always been fascinated by the color line. What has amazed me is the extent to which people's stories are grounded in their ability to negotiate the contradictions in their own lives.

Jefferson in his office at the College of Wooster, where he taught for 16 years. He supervised more than 125 senior theses in history.

Photo courtesy Alphine Jefferson, AB'73

WHAT *ARE* THE AIMS OF EDUCATION?

For more than 50 years, distinguished professors have offered answers to this question.

is for Aims

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"We complain about the **indifference or lack of intelligence of American voters** and are discouraged by the **blind and unreasoning** ways in which elections are managed and national policies formulated. We bemoan the **low state of our national culture** as revealed in the movies, the radio, and the comic book. And we are alarmed by the evidence of our **scientific illiteracy** as exposed in the success of various **pseudo-scientific quackeries**."

Such was our nation's predicament in 1950, according to Clarence H. Faust, former dean of the College. The solution, he claimed: "higher general education."

But what form should this education take? And what, exactly, are students trying to achieve?

Every year since 1962, a distinguished faculty member has been invited to examine these questions in the Aims of Education address, given to incoming first-years during O-Week. Faculty members are given little guidance beyond the required title (although some of them, in their talks, have taken issue even with the title). Here is a small sampling of some great professors' thinking—contradictory, controversial, occasionally scatological, always individual—lightly edited for clarity and style.—*Carrie Golus, AB'91, AM'93*

The Rochester Bestiary/British Library)/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

is for liberal

Wayne C. Booth, AM'47, PhD'50 (1921–2005)

George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor of English Language and Literature, Committee on the Analysis of Ideas and Methods, and the College

1970: Delivered to the Class of 1974

Liberal education was originally called liberal because it was supposed to liberate men to apply their minds, their critical thoughts to the most important decisions of their lives: how to act, who or what to love, what to call good or true or beautiful.

Without knowledge we may have the illusion of free choice; we may embrace political programs and schools of art and worldviews with as much passion *as if* we had knowledge, but our seeming choices are really what other men have imposed upon us.

The chief threat to our intellectual freedom is not illiteracy, or censorship committees, or boards of trustees firing radical professors, or the heckling and shouting down of speakers without caring about what they have to say; though all of these are bad, they are openly bad, as it were, and few of us are fooled into thinking that they are good. More threatening to you and me is the subtler mental violence that occurs when men who think they are listening with an open mind actually wrench complicated or new or unacceptable messages into simpler ready-made categories of old ideas. The person who reacts passionately for or against what was not actually said or written is a slave to his own ignorance, no matter how gloriously free and spontaneous and righteous he feels as he reacts. Yet the shameful fact is that most of us most of the time reduce other men's meanings to nonsense that we *can* reject. After all, if it's shit already, I don't have to try to digest it.

is for music

James M. Redfield, LAB'50, AB'54, PhD'61

Edward Olson Distinguished Service Professor of Classics and Professor in the Committee of Social Thought

1974: Delivered to the Class of 1978

The aims of education are the aims of life; education is simply the general term we use for the process by which we become wiser than we were.

People get educated in all kinds of places—in schools, in the army, in prison, in caves in the desert, on the job, on the road, underground, and in the corridors of power. It has been said that the presidency of the United States is a great educational institution—and I guess we have learned that here, as elsewhere, some are nearly ineducable. Athletic training is a kind of education, and so is psychoanalysis.

Education is in *contrast* to life. A sign of this is the link between education and failure. When we have been involved in some total disaster—when nothing has gone as planned and it is obvious that nothing more can be accomplished—we tend to sit back and say, mournfully, "Well, we learned a lot." We don't say "we learned a lot" when things work, when we succeed. Failure challenges us, it makes us think—whereas success reassures us that we have thought enough.

A pre-condition of education is not only confusion but also hypocrisy. I can give an example from my own experience. When I was in college here many people I knew were musicians or music-lovers. Every Friday afternoon we would go down to Orchestra Hall; we attended all the concerts in the University series. I had no understanding of this music; it bored and confused me. But everyone else seemed to understand and like it, so I pretended to understand and like it too. And then, very gradually, the music began to come through the mist. I first began to know what I liked, and finally I actually came to know something about music. I am still no great musician, but this music has become an irreplaceable part of my life.

Bestiary/British Library/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

is for thinking

Leon R. Kass, LAB'54, SB'58, MD'62

Addie Clark Harding Professor of Social Thought and in the College

1981: Delivered to the Class of 1985

Liberal education is education in and for thoughtfulness. It awakens, encourages, and renders habitual thoughtful reflection about weighty human concerns, in quest of what is simply true and good.

Thinking—all thinking—seeks to liberate us from a slavish adherence to unexamined opinion and an unreasonable trust in our own perceptions and experiences.

The habit of thoughtfulness is good, even urgent, for our common life as citizens of the American Republic. Our situation late in the twentieth century finds our effort at self-government, not to say survival, increasingly dominated by technical matters requiring the advice and competence of experts—about, among other things, the economy, defense, energy, health, transportation, communication, and pollution. We steadily are acquiring ever more powerful technologies, including those which increasingly permit deliberate and sophisticated manipulations of the human body and mind.

Yet we also recognize, more than we have in some time, and perhaps due to these same dramatic new changes, that the decisions we need to make are

never merely technical. They are also always ethical. The technical expert who is liberally educated to that habit of thoughtfulness is less likely to become that most dangerous fellow, a specialist without vision, who knows how to get the rockets up but who cares not where they come down.

is for dictionary

Jonathan Z. Smith (1938–2017)

Robert O. Anderson Distinguished Service Professor of the Humanities; Professor of the Committee on the Ancient Mediterranean World, the Committee on the History of Culture, and the College

1982: Delivered to the Class of 1986

The species "liberal" of the genus "education" implies that there are other sorts of education, meant to be excluded, but which, by contrast, might help in understanding the term. Alas, in common parlance the term "liberal" has been so co-opted by sectarian politics that I would not be surprised if somewhere, someone harbors the delicious thought that "fascist learning" is the obvious antonym—but that is scarcely what is usually implied. I must confess that, at least for me, the original contrast is no less political, and in many ways more embarrassing.

Resorting again to the dictionary, that common resource of both learned speakers and authors of freshman term papers, one finds that the original contrast was between the "liberal arts" and the "servile arts," the former being: "worthy of a freeman, pertaining to persons of superior social station, i.e., a gentleman."

First prompted by the G.I. Bill of Rights (perhaps the greatest single force for innovation in the history of American higher education), the student body, its educational objectives and social niche has, in many institutions, radically changed. For almost all, the "gentlemen's agreement" has been broken, although nostalgia for it remains strongly in place.

is for map

Wendy Doniger

Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions in the Divinity School; Professor of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, Committee on Social Thought, and the College

1985: Delivered to the Class of 1989

I believe that one of the most valuable and also one of the most delightful aims of a liberal education is to nourish in each of us, whether we be scientists or social scientists or humanists, the innate curiosity and courage to take seriously what is said by the great stories told in cultures other than our own. We often assume that our own classics provide a shared communal base for all

Bestiary/British Library/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

We do not know **our own classics**.

educated members of our culture, but this assumption is unfounded: we do not know our own classics. If, however, we are willing to admit that we do not know them, we may make it possible for ourselves to possess a whole new world of classics, other peoples' classics.

In India, many people are illiterate. But we are certainly wrong if we assume that illiteracy is an indication of cultural deprivation. The oral tradition has made it possible for millions of Indian villagers to be richly, deeply familiar with their own classics.

The myths of others may present to us truths that may indeed exist in our own culture but that we tend to ignore or undervalue or resist when we encounter them in their familiar form, prophets in their own country.

A myth is never an answer to the problems it allows us to state; it merely helps us to recognize those problems as mythic, and therefore by definition impossible to solve. Yet such a myth might still make us experience our life in a different way, going on doing the same things, but viewing them differently; traveling the same road, but with a better map.

When the chemist Kekule was searching for a model to explain the strange behavior of benzene, he dreamt of a snake biting its tail, an image that functions as a symbol of infinity or eternity in many non-Western religions; he woke up and realized that the carbon molecules in benzene formed a circle. New myths move us onto new paths where we can begin to think thoughts that not only were impossible to think within our old familiar world of ideas, but that we could not even realize we had been unable to think in that world.

is for evidence

Dennis J. Hutchinson

William Rainey Harper Professor in the College, Senior Lecturer in the Law School, and Master of the New Collegiate Division

1999: Delivered to the Class of 2003

Without quibbling too much over the difference between liberal arts and liberal education, let me say that their ambition is liberation, that is, at least initially, to free men and women from dogma, comfortable choices, hasty conclusions,

the confusion of sincerity for cogency, and all of the other features of slack thinking. But that is only the beginning. Habits of mind are in play whether you are reading *ESPN—The Magazine* or St. Augustine's *Confessions*. The value of the College is that you are encouraged to apply your capacities of mind to the most fundamental aspects of your life.

One final tip: if you are absolutely struck dumb during office hours with an instructor, ask, "What are you working on?" The question is the social equivalent of "What's your evidence?" during an argument. It, too, is time-honored, reflexively respected, but, for obvious reasons, it cannot be over-used.

is for church

Robert Pippin

Evelyn Stefansson Nef Distinguished Service Professor of Social Thought, Philosophy, and the College

2000: Delivered to the Class of 2004

The Latin root, *liber*, means "free" (it is also the Latin noun for "book," an odd coincidence that supports the point I am trying to make), and the very first use of the word "liberal" in English in 1375 was as an adjective in "the liberal arts" and designated *"the objects of study worthy of a free person."* And that is what we are supposed to teach you: to enable you to become a freer person and this by

showing you (so goes that truism) how to "think for yourself."

Any formulation of such a liberal arts ideal (the view that a certain sort of learning and knowledge might enable one to lead a freer life, even if a learning and knowledge not directly connected with practical results or technical power) is an ideal often formulated in response to and as a defense against a perceived threat or attack (such as that pursuit of such an ideal is a waste of time). The very beginning of this series of lectures at the University of Chicago was understood as a "response" to such a "threat" when the then Dean of the College, Alan Simpson, wrote to the Ford Foundation in 1961 requesting funds for a lecture series on the aims of education because, he claimed, the ideal of a liberal education was "under pressure everywhere." Many of the talks presented in this series have that same tone, responding to various intellectual, economic, professional, and practical "attacks" on the attempt to achieve this liberality of mind through reading books and learning science.

There are lots and lots of reasons for this frequent siege mentality and "man the barricades" rhetoric. For one thing, suspicion of the humanistic university ideal might go *very* deep in the modern world we live in. The university, after all, is like the Roman Catholic Church or the military. Together with these, it was one of the very, very few pre-modern or feudal institutions to make it through the wrenching process of European modernization and to survive in some recognizable form into the modern world.

The Peterborough Psalter and Bestiary/Stanford/Racconish/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

is for talk

Andrew Abbott, AM'75, PhD'82

Gustavus F. and Ann M. Swift Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Sociology and the College

2002: Delivered to the Class of 2006

A full-length, formal talk on a set topic is a rather nineteenth-century kind of thing to do. Even at the University of Chicago, this is the only such oration you will get.

There is no instrumental reason to get an education, to study in your courses, or to pick a concentration and lose yourself in it. It won't get you anything you won't get anyway or get some other way. So forget everything you ever thought about all these instrumental reasons for getting an education.

The reason for getting an education here—or anywhere else—is that it is better to be educated than not to be. It is better in and of itself. Not because it gets you something. Not because it is a means to some other end. It is better because it is better. Note that this statement implies that the phrase "aims of education" is nonsensical; education is not a thing of which aims can be predicated. It has no aim other than itself.

For education is an invisible creativity that radiates from within. It is not something you have. It is something you are.

is for fish

Tanya Marie Luhrmann

Max Palevsky Professor of Comparative Human Development (2000–07)

2003: Delivered to the Class of 2007

A liberal arts education, if you use it wisely, teaches you how to make choices because it shows you how other people have chosen. Most people sit in the mud-puddle of their own fretful fears, peering out at the world through protective goggles. We all live in what the psychiatrist Jerome Frank called "assumptive worlds," sets of assumptions we make about the world that seem so natural, so commonsensical, that their very existence as assumptions fades until they become as real as concrete.

As the old saying has it, fish can't tell you much about the water. They don't know it's there. But the courses you take here can give you the tools to clamber out of the puddle, or at least to see the water, if you treat the authors you read

Bestiary/British Library/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

as people like yourselves, struggling to make sense of the world, desperately trying to figure out what kinds of moral and intellectual commitments are worth making, what kind of life is worth living. Nearly everyone you read in the Core was once an anxious eighteen-year-old.

At the heart of a liberal education stands the oldest human paradox: that the more deeply and intimately you understand other human beings—the more you understand their unique predicaments and their idiosyncratic pain—the more clearly you will see yourselves. If you would follow the inscription at Delphi—to know thyself—know others first.

Fish can't tell you much about **the water**. They don't know it's there.

is for poet

Andreas Glaeser

Professor in the Department of Sociology and the College

2005: Delivered to the Class of 2009

You have all come here to get what is called "an education." Taken seriously, education is self-transformation. If *you* are serious, you have come here to become—to become something, or better, to become someone. If this is so, then how about becoming a poet?

It is an invitation to all of you! For I believe there are poets in every human pursuit—in every profession, including law, medicine, and business. And I don't mean physicians or lawyers or businesswomen who write poetry on the side. I mean people who are poets as surgeons, as judges, as managers.

Poetry was arguably the first human practice of making or remaking symbols in a self-conscious fashion, that is, in a way which is cognizant of the *process of making* itself. In fact, in ancient Greek the verb *poiein* means "to make or create." Seen in this way, poetry can be understood as the art of making meaning, the art of charging worn symbols with new meanings, or the art of inventing new symbolizations which again give us orientation in the world. Let us call the practitioners of this art "poets." Would it not be marvelous if you could learn to be a poet?

Ashmole Bestiary/Bodleian Library/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

M is for moment

Jonathan Lear

John U. Nef Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought, the Department of Philosophy, and the College

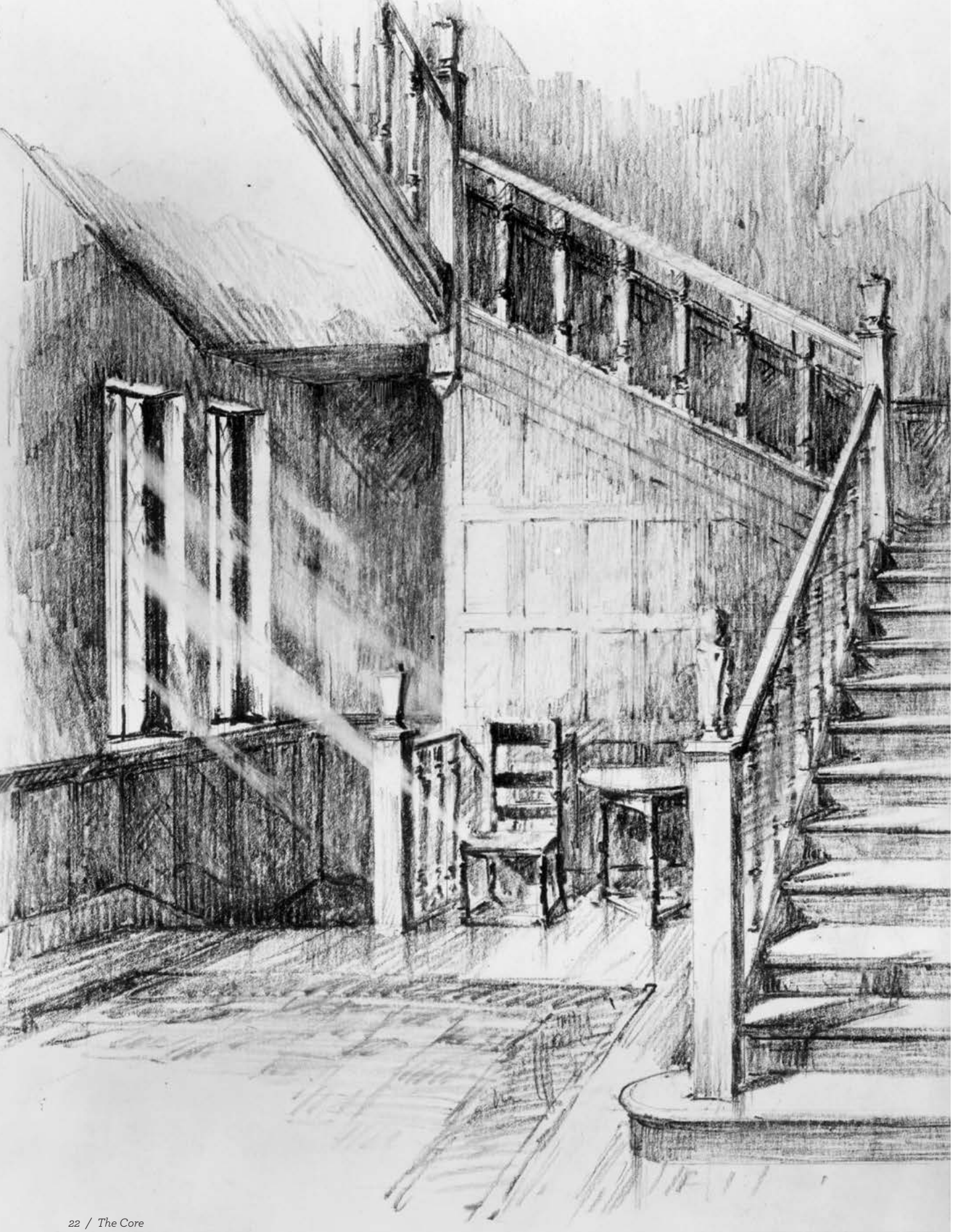
2009: Delivered to the Class of 2013

It is actually easy to say what does make this University great: conversation. In this community we not only have some of the best minds in the world—leading experts in virtually every field of inquiry—but we also value talking things out with each other.

Enduring conversations about how things are—and how they might be—are as vulnerable as they are precious. I have seen universities where there are great minds but no conversation. This seems to me a living form of death, a university only in name.

Even worse, I have witnessed conversations where there is pressure to conform to a particular point of view, as though right thinking requires agreement with current fashion. In the not-too-distant future, you will be sitting in a classroom, or on a student committee; you will hear the group coming to a consensus that you think is mistaken, and you will feel internal pressure to keep quiet. It is natural that you should feel this; the question is how you will act on it. Be warned: it is from such seemingly small moments that cowards are born.

Excerpts and professors' titles are from college.uchicago.edu/student-life/aims-education. Explore the web page to find the speaker for your class.



Notes on campus

On living in and out of the moment.

By Shiloh Miller, Class of 2026

1

I came to Chicago three years ago. I liked it immediately. Every week I'd take the red line downtown and listen to the train chime and shudder. On warm days I'd try to do work on the quad and end up sitting sun-drunk on the grass, a closed book next to me, doing nothing but looking around at the world and its endless hours.

2

Above the doorway of Cobb Café, in the bowels of the oldest building on campus, written in cursive: "An exercise in nostalgia." Lets you know what you're in for. Cobb Café used to be called Mandala Coffee Shop, a name that phased out of the student body's collective brain decades ago. It now lives on only in stranger, narrower places—newspaper archives, bygone legal records, the subconscious of long-graduated alumni.

3

My first time in Burton Judson, my old dorm, was not during move-in but on an admitted students' weekend five months prior. The host student I was staying with lived in the University's newest dorm, Woodlawn, but a text from her friend that night prompted a spontaneous trip to one of the study rooms on BJ's second floor. What was to my host student an unremarkable walk to the neighboring dorm I perceived as a capital-*J* Journey, the kind that Odysseus might have made. I followed at her heels as we swept through labyrinthine halls, shadowy corners and staircases materializing and then vanishing beside me, and, as we emerged into the study space, I remember thinking that I couldn't find my way out if I tried. A year later, after having lived in BJ for some time, familiarity had snuffed out mystery. I knew that the dark staircase led to the laundry room, that the shadowy corner housed a printer. But when I walked up the stairs to the study room, I could still somehow call to mind my impression of the place when it was wholly unfamiliar—mysterious, disorienting—and I'd get a strange kind of double vision, where I sensed the space as larger than it ever was.

UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-01398

An architectural rendering of a staircase in Burton Judson Courts, built in 1931.

4

Jai Yu, assistant professor of psychology, studies memory. He says: "You think about memory as if we are recording on tape all of our experience, and then replaying that section of the tape to recall that experience. But maybe that's not how memory works. Maybe memory is more about you having an experience, deconstructing it into all of its components, and then somehow building it again based on those components." The same neurons in the brain that fire when you have an experience fire again as you recollect it. "Almost as if you're conjuring it up," he says. The word *conjure*, with its connotations of magic and trickery, is apt. "Memory is not just a process of recollection; it's also a process of construction," Yu says.

5

In the winter I took a class on spiritual, psychedelic, and visionary writing. The class was in Midway Studios, a drafty Frankenstein of a building made from the merger of a brick barn, its additions, and a Victorian house. Our professor stood at the head of a concrete room, the light fading outside as the sun went down. "When you burn your hand on the stove," she said, "you don't think about the stove. You just feel incredible heat." Some of the work we were reading, she proposed, was attempting something similar—to convey what something was like in immediate perception rather than in cognition.

6

My sister has memories so tender and delicate that she purposely doesn't revisit them often, like paintings at museums hung behind a black shroud to keep them from being damaged by the light.

7

The "reminiscence bump" is the phenomenon of adults having a disproportionate amount of memories from their adolescence and early adulthood. There are a number of theories as to why this is. The cognitive account proposes that experiences at this time of life are often new, and new things are easier for the brain to remember. There's also the narrative explanation, which is that the experiences you have when you're young form the adult brain that looks back on them. As one psychology paper put it: "It is this time when an individual engages in activities and relationships that define who the person will finally become, and how they narrate the stories of their lives."

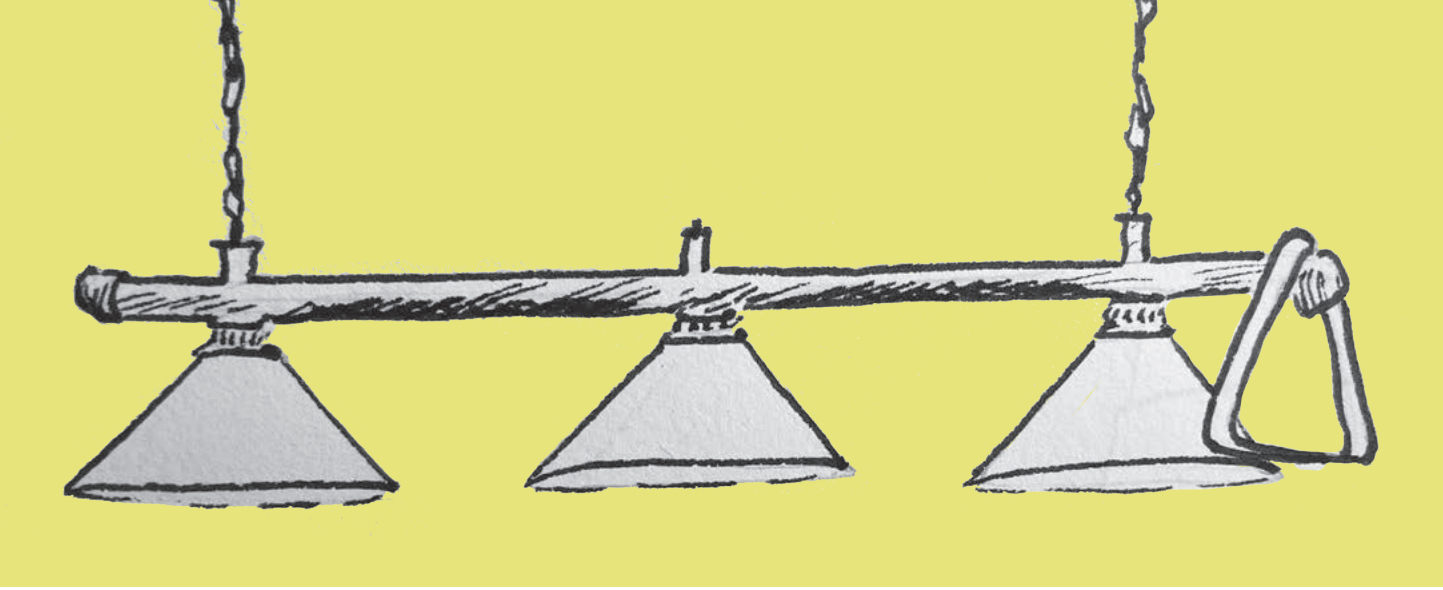
8

Memory: the tottering plinth on which we balance our identity. I ask Yu how we are supposed to understand our sense of self when our memories molt into new shapes. "It still is you," he says, "but you are just creating these narratives based on your own components of those experiences." In this perspective, the self lies deeper than the memories that adorn it; what we lose defines us as much as what we keep.

9

A 1973 *Maroon* ad for *Cap and Gown*, a defunct yearbook, capitalizes on the fickleness of memory: "How much will you remember from this year? Are you taking pictures? Saving old calendars? Writing a diary? Would you like someone to record the happenings here for you?"

Illustrations by Shiloh Miller, Class of 2026



10

A disproportionate chunk of my college memories take place in Hallowed Grounds, the coffee shop on the second floor of the Reynolds Club. I had a professor who worked there in the 2010s who said he hadn't been back since he was a student. Worried the memories might knock him flat. I was drawn to Hallowed at the closing of the day by an almost subconscious drive, like how a salmon returns to fresh water to die. I spent time at Hallowed long after the friends I used to see there began frequenting other venues. I've passed so many hours there that when I walk in, no particular emotion comes to the fore—my multitude of associations with the place have merged into a kind of soft-edged familiarity, like those blurred portraits made out of the average of a hundred faces.

11

And just like that, third year is over. There is more behind me than there is ahead. It's a true (if trite) observation that college is life in miniature—we enter knowing next to nothing, and at the end we cross a threshold and can never go back. Most of my friends and I have one more year of college left—we are reckoning with the fact that we do not, in reality, have all that much time left to do the things we wanted or hoped or planned to do.

12

I have a friend who studied abroad for three consecutive quarters. I have a friend who isn't studying abroad, because she is saving money to travel in her 30s. My friends have taken up Frisbee, guitar, Catholicism; have given up alcohol, triathlons, computer science. Have almost given up rowing but changed their minds. I know people who are applying to law school or joining the Peace Corps or moving to Italy to learn to make violins. A friend and I stay up late in the living room of my apartment, talking about how our world one year from now is more or less visible—thesis presentations, graduation photos, tulips in bloom—but where we'll be two years from now is a mystery so total it's almost comic. I have a friend who says that sometimes, despite being 21 and not yet a father, he thinks of his future kids and feels overwhelming pride.

13

Wilma Bainbridge, associate professor of psychology, studies memory. Bainbridge's research focuses on what qualities of images make them more or less memorable. "It's not just about you or your abilities or your strategies, but it's the images themselves that have power over you," she says.

I don't play much anymore, but I remember that pool at Hallowed was a kind of dance. It was close quarters. You'd have to look behind you to make sure you didn't hit people studying at neighboring tables with the cue. I remember circling around a game with one or two or three friends, everything in constant motion, picking up coffees put down on the table's lip, the triangle dangling not from the hook below the table but from the swinging light above it. The balls were chipped, and the felt was peeling, and the tables were so skewed that the balls would settle on one side. This was not really important. Like any game, pool at Hallowed was primarily a social activity, just another register to access the ancient human dynamics of friendship and love and revenge. I remember a few historic shots (one time the cue ball bounced up and rolled along the rim of the table, almost escaping, before clopping back down) but mostly I remember the friends I've played with, and the way we used to move.

My friends and I have a way of getting through days when everything feels like a slog, which is to pretend that we have died and asked God to let us spend just one more day on earth laden with grocery bags and essays.

I was talking to an alum who went to college 50 years before I was born. He mentioned the half-floors in BJ: regular stairwell landings with a few dorm rooms in a smaller hall. So you could live on floor 2, but also on floor 2.5. I realized that I had forgotten about them. The floors that I walked past every day for two years. It is baffling to me that aspects so essential to the daily mechanics or texture of a life—schedules, shoes, the path of light shifting across the wall in the mornings—are forgotten so easily. Even later in life, after our routines and spaces settle, I think if we were to go back just two or three years, we would feel as disoriented as an actor dropped onto an unfamiliar set. The costumes, the props—all different—all the characters showing up with forgotten hairstyles and habits, all the little things changed, down to the brand of soap in the bathroom.

My favorite spot in Hallowed is the cushioned benches next to the windows that look down at the first floor of the Reynolds Club, where the University seal is. I curl up there like a cat. From this vantage point I can see both the whole coffee shop and the people milling around downstairs, which feels like a kind of omniscience. It took me a year to learn that the benches doubled as a lost-and-found chest, that I was sitting on top of forgotten items.

"There's no known capacity limit to our longer-term memories," Bainbridge says. "It's not like you run out of space to remember songs. But at the same time, there are clear limits, like, 'Wow, I can't even remember what I had for dinner last Thursday.'"

Illustration by Shiloh Miller, Class of 2026

One of my most distinct memories from my time in BJ was nothing outwardly significant—finals had ended, and I was bringing a friend a plant that she'd offered to take care of over break. A song was playing from somewhere deep in the building. I knocked on her door, cradling the plant in my other arm, and in the moments before she answered a liminal feeling rose up around me. Most everyone had left for vacation, and the whole dorm was suffused with the uncanny stillness of abandonment, and a song—"California Dreaming," I could tell now—was playing, muffled, from someone else's room. For a moment the song was the axis the whole world turned on.

Last quarter I had a professor who had been studying Goethe for twice as long as I've been alive. One cold morning he peered out at our faces and said, "Years later you'll feel nostalgic for Chicago. For the winter. You'll miss it."

I liked living in BJ. I liked how old it was, I liked that I had to use a real key. When I moved out for good, I had the vague intention of commemorating my time there by hiding a note in my room to be found by its future resident. But in the dust and disorder of move-out day, the sound of bins on wheeled pallets rattling across the courtyard, borrowed cars idling on the curb, I forgot. And then I was standing outside BJ in the grass with my bags, my key turned in to the front desk, and that was that. Behind me and up the stairs was my old room, doors and windows closed, the dust already settling back on the desk. I'd left it as bare as it was when I arrived, nothing to prove I was there but the chipped-off paint on the ceiling from when I taped up balloons for my twentieth birthday party.

No matter how meticulously I document the minutiae of experience, I know there are things that have been lost. There are memories that run like underground rivers in my subconscious, intricate and imperceptible. But even for the ones that stick around, there is only so much that writing can do. For a long time I worried about the damaging power of putting something into words. I believed that the story we told ourselves about any given experience was told in lieu of its reality. But when I look at an old journal entry and unearth a forgotten crop of memories, when I realize the reality of a certain month or season diverged wildly from my impression of it, or when, despite my records, I cannot place with accuracy when small habits or arrangements or events began or ended, I feel that it is time to throw up my hands. I can write my years here down in journals, logs, calendars, try to figure out what it all meant, but at the end of the day, all I can say with any certainty is that it happened.

"There's a lot of work to suggest that as time goes by, your autobiographical experiences lose detail but gain a 'gist'," Yu says. "You're seeing this transformation of what you remember into more of the essence of those experiences, rather than the minute details."

Three years ago I knew nothing here. Now I have memories in a hundred rooms.

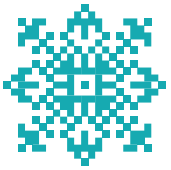
GROWTH MINDSET

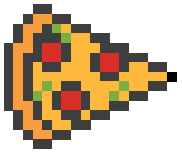
Over the summer a cohort of students lived together in Campus North, conducted research, and laid the groundwork for their future careers.

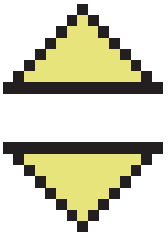
By Benjamin Recchie, AB'03

Image from *Stardew Valley: Big Ag* courtesy Katherine Buse; not an official *Stardew Valley* product

A screenshot of the mod *Stardew Valley: Big Ag*, which two of the students in the Summer Research Residency helped build.







iStock.com/invincible_bulldog, iStock.com/Iryna Palmina, Laura Lorenz

IT IS SUMMER IN HYDE PARK.

The sun is low, the sky is golden, the pavement is happily reradiating all the infrared radiation it absorbed earlier. The interior of the Campus North Residential Commons, however, is shady and air-conditioned. A score of undergraduates spending their summer doing research have a date with their peers—and pizza.

This summer 55 students are taking part in the pilot year of the College's Summer Research Residency program, which offers undergrads doing summer research a more formalized structure. The residency includes housing in North Campus—so the College students can meet others who are doing the same thing—as well as career-building events.

Tonight, for example, **Andrew Karas**, director and assistant dean of undergraduate research, is here is to give the undergrads some idea of how to make the most of their research days, this summer and in the future.

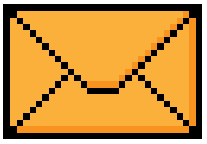
Now, one could argue that an event blessed with free pizza can never *truly* be judged to have gone wrong, but it seems the room's HDMI cable has left for summer vacation. Not a problem; Karas pivots, telling the students the event will be less of a lecture and "more informal, more conversational."

He starts with a quick poll: "What year are you?" (Most students are rising second-years.) "What field are you working in?" (Biological sciences takes the plurality, followed by physical sciences and social sciences.)

"Research is a social enterprise," Karas says: Your success building a career as a researcher depends on your network of peers and mentors. "Make a conscious goal to build relationships over the summer" with the people you encounter, he advises.

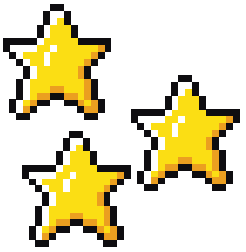
Next comes the importance of the elevator pitch. He challenges the students to find an efficient way to address the questions *What problem are you studying? What do you do day to day? What will answering this research question mean?* He asks the students to practice on each other; they pair off, happy to have any excuse to describe their work. Nobody seems shy. Karas is impressed: "It's clear to me you don't need any tips on how to talk about your research with your peers."

The summer has just started, but Karas advises the students to start thinking now about what comes next. Don't just politely say, "Let's keep in touch"—figure out ways to continue the relationship with your summer mentor, such as a wrap-up meeting and planned future check-ins. Just as important: Share the results of your summer projects, whether within the University at the Undergraduate Research Symposium in April ("*All* of you should present—do it!") or at a professional conference—Karas's office offers grants to defray the cost of attendance, he notes enticingly. Then there are competitive fellowships, such as the Rhodes and Fulbright scholarships: "I want you all to consider yourself candidates."



Karas also suggests that the students direct some of their inquiry inward. There's a "risk of hopping from experience to experience without taking time to reflect on it," he says. "What were your initial hopes and goals? What did you learn about yourself? What are your goals for the rest of your time at the University of Chicago?"

THERE'S NO ONE WAY undergraduates who want to participate in research come by it. They might respond to a posting on a bulletin board or a notice from an electronic mailing list. They might knock on doors in department offices and ask around, or tap into their network—former teachers, mentors, parents, friends of friends … whatever it takes.



They might do whatever it was I did—seriously, I no longer remember. One day I was an aimless physics major, and the next I was working for **Donald G. York**, PhD'71, the Horace B. Horton Professor of Astronomy and Astrophysics and the Enrico Fermi Institute. York had an army of undergraduates in his lab, but my cadre was focused on gathering clues about the diffuse interstellar bands (DIBs)—mysterious lines visible in the spectra of stars that appeared to be caused by an unknown substance or substances in interstellar space. I spent a year and a half working for York, probably the most fulfilling period of my entire College education. And given that only a tiny fraction of the DIBs have been explained in the intervening quarter century, there's room for a lot of other students to find their bliss as well.

Although the program is called the Summer Research Residency, it's not just for future scientists. The goal is to support students in "research and other forms of intellectual production," as **Melina Hale**, PhD'98, dean of the College and the William Rainey Harper Professor of Organismal Biology and Anatomy, terms it.

Summer housing is a big draw. And the residence hall has another advantage: a built-in community. "We love to




The discussion was animated at an evening panel discussion on research and careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). The panel included faculty members as well as researchers in industry and not-for-profits.

see students meeting new friends and having support of peers who are also in research programs," Hale says.

In addition to career events, the residency's organizers have invited speakers from the sciences as well as from the arts and humanities. There are also purely social events, just like during the regular academic year.

THE 55 STUDENTS IN THE RESIDENCY come from a variety of disciplines: biological sciences, sociology, and English, to name a few. There's **M'Kaia Trent**, Class of 2026, who is screening a library of proteins for potential treatments for spinocerebellar ataxia type 6, a degenerative neurological disease. There's **Jack Getz**, Class of 2027, and **Jacob Felsenthal**, Class of 2026, who are working with Katherine Buse, assistant professor in the Department of Cinema and Media Studies, on a modification to the popular farming video game *Stardew Valley*. The mod, *Stardew Valley: Big Ag*, which Buse describes as "a critical degrowth mod for your favorite agricultural life simulator," rewards players for doing less to promote agriculture, not more.

Mansha Nigam, Class of 2028, is spending her summer working with **Richard Kron**, professor emeritus director, Dark Energy Survey, of astronomy and astrophysics, to digitize century-old photographic plates of the heavens taken at Yerkes Observatory (built and long operated by UChicago, but now an independent institution) by Edwin Hubble, SB 1910, PhD 1917. Kron's group is examining how the light from quasars—extraordinarily bright, extraordinarily distant galaxies—has varied over the intervening century by comparing Hubble's plates to more modern digital

Photography by Jason Smith

images. “These plates are physical records of the sky from over a hundred years ago,” Nigam says, “and by digitizing and analyzing them, we’re both preserving that legacy and extracting valuable data.”

(As a side note, I lived at Yerkes for a year after graduation, and at one point proposed to the director that I try to digitize the plates in question. Unfortunately, at the time the observatory didn’t have a working scanner with high enough resolution, so I went back to measuring the DIBs for Don York. I was glad to hear someone eventually picked the project up, especially since with hindsight I can see I would have been in way over my head trying it solo.)

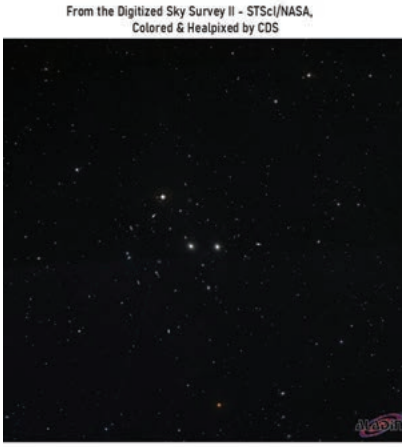
Nigam’s project isn’t just rote copying and pasting of digital files. To provide an accurate comparison of the new and old images, she first needed to model how light traveled through the optics of the original telescope, which took a fair bit of self-study. “It was a great surprise, though, because it gave me the chance to apply a lot of what I’d learned in my physics class last quarter in a real research setting.”

Olivia Kuang, Class of 2027, works on a variety of projects in economics. On the upside, she gets to connect theory to actual real-world human behavior: “I especially enjoy working with datasets from field experiments designed by our team. Analyzing those real-life results and drawing economic insights from them is both intellectually satisfying and practically meaningful.” On the downside: coding. Before starting this project, Kuang says, “I had very little exposure to coding, so it was all brand-new. But I pushed myself to pick up the skills I needed and, over time, I was able to independently write and execute code for our analyses.”

Kuang had already lined up her position when she learned about the residency. For her the biggest surprise of the summer has been the atmosphere created by working with her faculty mentor, **John List**, the Kenneth C. Griffin Distinguished Service Professor of Economics and the College. List is “incredibly approachable and open to everyone’s ideas and updates,” she says. “We even play song-guessing games during all our weekly meetings—this was something I never expected.”

Jiayi Wang (now AB’25), who double-majored in English and economics, is working with English professor **Elaine Hadley** on the historical causes of homelessness in Chicago. Wang’s research looks at both vacant houses and people experiencing homelessness—that is, homes without people and people without homes. She’s excited to explore the origins of the modern housing crisis, including “the possibility of uncovering overlooked narratives and connecting policy decisions to lived experiences on the ground.”

Staying on campus is a plus for Wang, who is working on her research while taking the last course she needs



Now and then: A contemporary image of the same section of sky that Edwin Hubble, SB 1910, PhD 1917, shot in 1915. Mansha Nigam, Class of 2028, helped digitize Hubble's original photographic plates.

Images courtesy Mansha Nigam, Class of 2028

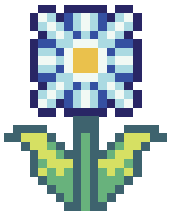
Students in the Summer Research Residency stayed in Campus North Residence Hall, designed by well-known architect Jeanne Gang.

for her bachelor's degree. This fall she starts a master's degree in public policy at UChicago's Harris School of Public Policy, which she plans to follow with law school. Her chosen specialty: "a focus on employment law and landlord-tenant law."

Spending the summer in Campus North is a different experience from the more typical summer sublet (like the sweltering, dimly lit hovel I lived in one summer that smelled perpetually of natural gas and insecticide). "Some of my fondest memories have been made after research hours," Nigam says. "Watching the NBA finals with friends over chocolate pancakes made by the RAs, hanging out on the 15th floor common room during weekends while snacking and catching up on work." Campus in the summer is a new experience, too. Nigam tries to do her work in a different spot every day. The Logan Center for the Arts and the Kersten Physics Teaching Center are her favorites.

Kuang notes the collegiality of her residency neighbors. Whenever she has stopped by the study lounge in North, "there was almost always someone else there working, which created an encouraging and productive atmosphere," she says. "Being surrounded by other motivated researchers helped me stay focused and energized on my own projects." Another bonus: the slower summer pace of campus is "refreshing."

Wang agrees that it's motivating to know her neighbors are also focused on research. "That shared sense of purpose creates a quiet, focused atmosphere," she says, "a space for serious academic work."



THE SUMMER RESIDENCY is Dean Hale's initiative, and she's deeply invested in it. But she's a scientist first and foremost.

That means treating the first year of the program as one data point in an experiment. "If it works out the way we think it will, I would love to see it grow and become just a regular expectation of the University in the summer," she says.

And if Dean Hale could get a message back to the University administration in, say, the year 2002, so I could have a chance to participate, well, *that would be great*.

Photography by Tom Harris; iStock.com/Natalia Kosheleva

THE GREEN SKIRT

Signature cocktail of Gerri Major, PhB 1915

In Harlem in the 1920s and '30s, invitations to soirées hosted by Geraldyn Dismond, PhB 1915 (1894–1984), were much coveted. Dismond, known as "Harlem's Hostess," was a journalist and society columnist for Black newspapers as well as a radio announcer.

She wrote society columns for several newspapers under different titles, including "New York Social Whirl," "Through the Lorgnette," and "Between Puffs by Lady Nicotine." In one of her columns she shared her own signature cocktail, the Green Skirt: two-thirds gin, one-third crème de menthe, a dash of lemon juice, and a minted cherry.

In 1953, by then known as Gerri Major, she was recruited by Johnson Publishing Company, which sent her to England to cover the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Major was less interested in the English royals than in the Black guests from Africa and the West Indies: "The 16-year-old Princess Goinapi from Swaziland," Major noted, wore a coronet "of red feathers plucked from the wings of the Liqwalaqwala bird—feathers which only members of the Swazi Royal Family are allowed to wear."

Major worked as an editor for *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines for more than 30 years, writing the weekly column "Gerri Major's Society World." "There is little about the state of the black nation-within-a-nation that society editors don't know—and much that they can't print," she wrote in *Black Society* (Johnson Publishing Company, 1976).

Major was so well traveled, she was nicknamed "Gerri-Go-Round." *Ebony* magazine described her as "a 'jetsetter' before there were jets," someone who "celebrated her birthdays in such romantic places as Nassau, Paris, and Cairo." Her one regret was that she had never had the chance to visit China.

She filed her final column at age 90, just days before she died. "Throughout her lifetime," her obituary in *Jet* noted, "parties were an important part of her living."—*Carrie Golus, AB'91, AM'93*

Photography by Carl Van Vechten, PhB 1903/Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

GREEN SKIRT

- 2 ounces gin
- 1 ounce crème de menthe
- Dash of lemon juice
- Minted cherry
  (see accompanying recipe)

Combine gin, crème de menthe, and lemon juice. Serve over crushed ice. Garnish with a minted cherry.

MINTED CHERRIES

- 1 c. water
- 1 c. white sugar
- 1 c. fresh mint leaves
- 1 c. fresh cherries

Combine water, sugar, and mint in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, stirring until sugar dissolves. Simmer for 1 minute. Remove from heat and let steep for 30 minutes. Strain mint leaves. Allow syrup to cool.

Put cherries in a flat bowl, stems up. Pour over enough syrup to cover the fruit, leaving the stems sticking out. Refrigerate overnight to allow flavors to infuse.

Photography by Laura Demanski, AM'94

Poem

Ø

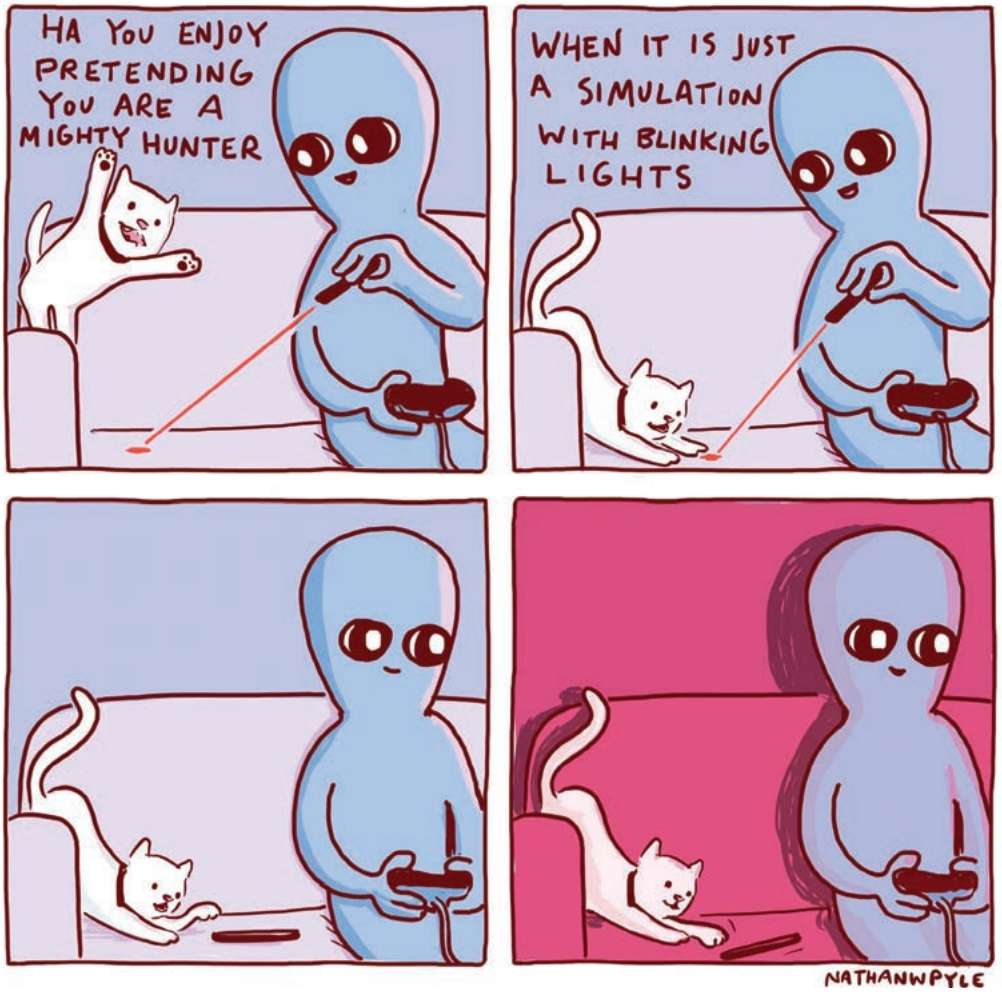
By Miles Cayman, AB'24

I think your name
is less like itself
is more like your middle name
and most like the way you've held
your pencil ever since you practiced
cursive, and the ridge of callus
precisely on your finger that it made.
Known more to the ring than the lover.
Known as in tell, tell not as say.
A little muteness rubs against
a thousand loopings of your name.

Miles Cayman, AB'24, studied Arabic at the University of Chicago. His poetry and translations have been published in *Subnivean*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Gasher*, *The Paris Review*, and *ArabLit*. "Ø" was originally published in *Gasher Journal*.

Strange Planet

By Nathan W. Pyle



Ibidem

BILLIARDS ROOM, REYNOLDS CLUB, UNDATED

The balls were chipped, and the felt was peeling, and the tables were so skewed that the balls would settle on one side. This was not really important. Like any game, pool at Hallowed was primarily a social activity, just another register to access the ancient human dynamics of friendship and love and revenge.

—From "Notes on Campus" by Shiloh Miller, Class of 2026