THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO MAGAZINE

WINTER 2026, VOLUME 118, NUMBER 2

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CITY, GARDEN, CLASSROOM, PARK

BY LAURA DEMANSKI, AM'94

This issue's sun-splashed cover image, taken in September, shows a clod of plant life that cropped up, quite unexpected, near where a US Steel plant once blazed and roared.

I won't spoil the backstory, which you can discover for yourself in "The Beauty of Slag," page 40, by contributing editor **Carrie Golus**, AB'91, AM'93. It was a few years ago that Carrie, possessor of a deep-green thumb and an indiscriminate curiosity, became interested in the Indiana Dunes and the Calumet Region where they sit. Her fascination was infectious.

The University of Chicago's entwinement with the fate of the dunes begins early in our history, with Henry Chandler Cowles, PhD 1898. Coming to the University as a graduate student in 1894, Cowles left only for the briefest time. You can trace his career in the library's digitized campus publications archive (campub.lib.uchicago.edu).

In the 1890s, his name pops up in the program for his convocation ceremony. In the 1900s, the *Cap and Gown* records his faculty positions as instructor, then assistant professor. By the 1910s, *The Chicago Maroon* was sharing news of his travels—now as a scholar in full bloom—to document the world's flora.

In January 1917 this magazine reported that Cowles had addressed the US Department of the Interior as a representative of a group that was working to get the Indiana Dunes, with their extraordinary variety of plants, preserved for recreation and study. That battle continued for more than a century, until 2019 when the area was at last designated a national park. (For decades it had been a national lakeshore, due in great part to the untiring advocacy of another UChicago faculty member, the economist and later senator Paul Douglas [D-IL].)

If Chicago is the "city in a garden" (its motto: *Urbs in horto*), the dunes provide a garden by the city, and more than that. The University continues to teach undergraduates there during the College's Calumet Quarter. Still holding surprises for scientists, the dunes are much the plein air classroom Cowles hoped for. ◆

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On the cover

The postindustrial landscape of the Calumet Region is home to a rich array of plant life, including this rare sedge, *Eleocharis geniculata*, once thought to be locally extinct. See "The Beauty of Slag," page 40. Photography by Jason Smith.

This page

Theaster Gates, professor of visual arts, created this site-specific installation showcasing his collection of vintage LPs and African artworks as part of his first solo museum exhibition in Chicago. *Theaster Gates: Unto Thee* is at the Smart Museum of Art through February 22, 2026. Photography by Sara Pooley.

Installation view, *Theaster Gates: Unto Thee*, 2025, Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago. Photography by Sara Pooley.

Features

LETTERS

The University of Chicago Magazine welcomes letters about its contents or about the life of the University. Letters for publication must be signed and may be edited for space, clarity, civility, and style. To provide a range of views and voices, we ask letter writers to limit themselves to 300 words or fewer. Write: **Editor, *The University of Chicago Magazine*, 5235 South Harper Court, Chicago, IL 60615**. Or email: **uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu**.

With cronies like these ...

I am amused that Professor Luigi Zingales titles his course "Crony Capitalism." The article ("Cronies with Benefi s," Fall/25) focuses on how cronyism distorts free markets, but it overlooks the irony that capitalism, in its original sense, is substantially absent from today's economy. Canonical capitalism features a person or an institution that funds a venture in the expectation of sharing in the profi s of the enterprise. This works when ownership is concentrated in a few hands. Today, however, company ownership is typically held by numerous smaller investors whose individual ability to demand a share of the profi s is so dilute as to be nonexistent. Companies no longer feel obligated to distribute profits to shareholders. Rather they dispose of excess earnings by giving inflated compensation to the managerial class, who sit on each other's boards of directors and approve salaries and perks for their counterparts that would make true capitalists blanch. There are your cronies!

Well-managed companies in the mid-20th century paid their executives 30 times the salary of a line worker and paid dividends to shareholders. Today, executives get many hundreds or thousands of times the compensation of line workers, and there is nothing left to distribute as dividends. Businesses are run more for the benefit of the executives than the ownership. A share of stock is no longer a capital investment to participate in the profits of a business, but a speculative gamble that somebody will be willing to pay you more for it at some time in the future. Even large investors, like so-called venture capitalists, intend to make money by selling their asset at a profi , not by participating in the proceeds of the business itself. By and large, "capitalists" who put up money to own shares of stock get nothing from the business operations, so why should Zingales (or any economist) characterize our economic system using the word *capitalism*?

Keith Backman, SB'69
BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

Found and kept

You asked readers to let you know what they have held on to from life at UChicago ("Coastal Unshelving," Editor's Notes, Fall/25). There are a few things I simply cannot throw away, no matter how often I move homes and offices. They include my notes from Systems I, taught by Professor Marshall Sahlins with then–Assistant Professor Sharon Stephens, AB'74, AM'78, PhD'84, and other class notes from courses that have impacted my career and life in general.

One folder always stands out: the letters and small packages sent by my dissertation adviser, Professor Paul Friedrich. Once I had taken my job, thanks to him, at the US Naval Academy, he continued to reach out to me with small notes as well as entire volumes he expected to (and mostly did) publish. And my favorite: notes on the language development of and small arguments with his very young son, Nicky. He always took my input to his drafts seriously, which I am, to this day, embarrassed about, as I realize I had so much to learn—and still do. I miss his surprise letters in my mailbox since his passing.

Clementine Fujimura, AM'87, PhD'93
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

I love your note and know well that feeling, however temporary, of having things sorted. When my mom sold our childhood home on Long Island a few years ago, going through the garage was one of the most emotionally exhausting things I have ever done. I only had a couple of days to go through it because it was in the lead-up to my wedding, so I didn't sleep for three days.

I remember how strange it felt to encounter remnants of my past self—my baby clothes and toys, childhood drawings, mortifying middle school journals, a beautiful letter from a classmate who had since passed away, photos from when my parents were still married, ticket stubs and receipts, notes and tchotchkes from my first boyfriend whom I followed to UChicago, University Symphony Orchestra programs, essays, and a lot of books published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, my first real job after college.

It was a total emotional roller coaster, and purging most of that stuff was extremely difficult—it felt like letting go of the past. But someone in my current apartment building who is now clearing out her parents' apartment reminded me that whatever was in those boxes is actually in "here"—she pointed to her heart. It's part of you already and not necessary to tote around forever. That brought me a lot of comfort.

Indeed, I have held on to so much of my life from UChicago, especially, that I returned in the summer of 2023 to get married at Bond Chapel. My five bridesmaids were all friends from UChicago, and many more alums were in attendance. I love being a part of the alumni community, and I love going back to visit campus every opportunity I get.

Amanda (Hartman) Ryan, AB'13
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

I'm avoiding using numbers when I think of my upcoming reunion with

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the College Class of 1986 crew next year. But my flotsam and jetsam from the U of C includes the following.

Reflecting my ultimate path to owning several restaurants:

- An ashtray from the Berghoff
- Assorted Harold's Chicken Shack logo items
- Matchbooks from Greek Islands and Second City
- A turquoise tiki-head glass from Cirals' House of Tiki

Reflecting the impact of Hanna Holborn Gray:

- Thermal undies with "Hannah Say Nerk" on them
- My diploma additionally signed on graduation day by the deans, HHG, and the waiter from lunch

Reflecting life in the Shoreland and the College:

- My Compton House softball jersey
- A few tuition bills
- Polaroids from graduation day

Daria Lamb, AB'86
MILL NECK, NEW YORK

I live in a Manhattan apartment with three kids, so I don't have space to hold on to much. However, I've still got the course catalog for each year I attended the University, and a pair of already-old-when-given-to-me U of C cross-country shorts the gym once kindly let me have when I forgot my mandatory shorts for gym one morning.

Elizabeth Bellis Wolfe, AB'03
NEW YORK

You asked what we held on to. I worked at the First National Bank of Chicago for 30 years beginning in 1965. I have every pay stub I received. Don't ask why I kept them!

Sal Campagna, MBA'85
LAWRENCE, MICHIGAN

Sally forth

I first met Paul Sally while working in the mathematics department as an undergraduate ("Classroom Legend," Alumni News, Fall/25). At first he was just one of the professors in the department, but something was different about him. He was direct, engaging, and had an incredible sense of humor. Obviously he was a brilliant mathematician. But during my second year, I got to know him better when I taught in the Young Scholars Program and became a student in MATH 207-208-209.

Then, in the spring of 1995, everything changed. I had to take a leave of absence from school because of financial difficulties. On the very same day I submitted the paperwork to take a leave of absence, Dr. Sally lost his first leg due to complications from diabetes. A week later he called and asked me to visit him at his apartment so we could talk.

When I arrived, he was watching college basketball. It was March, after all. As the game wrapped up, he turned to me and said, "Hey, we need to get something out of the way first. Do you want to see my stump?" Before I could reply, he unwrapped his bandage and revealed where his leg had been amputated. "It's supposed to harden up so I can use a prosthetic," he said, "but it's still pretty mushy. What do you think?" That was Dr. Sally: direct, engaging, and funny.

Then he told me he wanted me to be his personal assistant—"since I had so much free time, after all." He needed help getting to rehabilitation appointments and meetings, and with running his education programs. For the next year I was on call for him, day and night. Whenever he attended a meeting, I came along, often participating even though I didn't yet have a degree. He made sure I had a seat at the table, even when I hadn't earned one yet.

Words cannot express the gratitude that I have for Dr. Sally. There is no way I could have completed my degree without his mentorship and generosity. I learned so much in that year with him, and some of it even concerned mathematics.

Now, as a teacher, I often tell my students stories about the "math pirate," as he was affectionately known. Through those stories, I try to pass on the lessons he taught me. Life is not about how much you know, but the effect that you have on the lives of others.

Mike Kennedy, SB'96
NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

I recall Paul Sally from the early to mid-1980s.

He coached the participants of the annual Putnam Mathematical Competition diligently and very effectively. Undergraduates would meet with him in the first floor auditorium lecture hall of Eckhart Hall to drill and strategize. Mr. Sally helped the U of C team achieve excellent results.

Mr. Sally taught a Friday late-afternoon course in one of the east classrooms on the second floor of Eckhart. One Friday the fraternities across the street on University Avenue started their weekend celebrations early. The music blared loudly from the speakers, which were perched in the windows pointing directly at Eckhart. Mr. Sally was visibly annoyed, paused his lecture, and left the classroom. He returned 10 minutes later having

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Photography by Dan Dry

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achieved a ceasefire to the loud music and clutching a large glass of freshly pulled keg beer.

Mr. Sally sometimes smoked during class. One time he confused the chalk with his cigarette and took a drag from the piece of white chalk. He didn't realize his mistake until he tried to write on the board with the lit cigarette.

Ian McCutcheon, AB'91
CHICAGO

I was a student in the very first Moore method calculus class in fall 2004, which was taught by Paul Sally and Diane Herrmann, SM'76, PhD'88. I believe it was Mr. Sally who called it "Public Humiliation Calculus." It was an apt name, because many of my clearer memories are of times when I was trying to prove something on the blackboard and got it wrong. That said, I might not have been a math major if it weren't for that class. I can share a mix of some episodes and some of his more memorable quirks.

First, yes, he had a great distaste for cell phones. Over the Summer Quarter he was an instructor in the program where undergraduates taught Chicago Public Schools teachers, SESAME (Seminars for Endorsement of Science and Mathematics Educators). His rules about phones in the classroom even extended to these teachers. He was a bit more lenient; instead of destroying their phones, he confiscated them until the end of the day. Even other teachers had to follow the rules. Further, and I'm not sure I trust my memory here, I believe that if you answered a text during one of his lectures and he caught you, the punishment was that he (or a TA) would read the text or email to the class.

To my memory he never used the term *math*, always *mathematics*.

He had a habit of licking chalk before writing with it on the blackboard.

Since he was a basketball fan (and played in college, if memory serves), he would occasionally reward good questions, observations, or proofs by saying they were worth two or three points. These didn't translate into real points for grades, sadly.

For a long time, he taught the notoriously difficult Honors Analysis in Rn class (MATH 207-208-209). I didn't take the class, but while I was there, he assigned a proof equivalent to the Riemann hypothesis as an extra-credit problem. The thing was, he didn't tell the students that it was equivalent to the Riemann hypothesis (and therefore likely impossible for them to prove), and so some of them spent a lot of time trying to get it.

He was the only person I've ever known to say "Bingo bango." When walking through a particularly elegant proof, he'd say "Bingo bango!" at the end to signify that it was complete. This one has stuck with me all these years and is something I occasionally say myself.

Brian Taylor, AB'08, SM'18
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

When walking through a particularly elegant proof, he'd say "Bingo bango!" at the end to signify that it was complete. This one has stuck with me all these years.

Viewpoint viewpoint

I attended the taping of Ted Koppel's *Viewpoint* TV show that was held in Mandel Hall ("Campus Views," Alumni News, Fall/25). Your recent photo captures the back of my head quite nicely (white shirt, just to the left of the standing audience member). As the cartoonist for *The Chicago Maroon* at the time, I had the additional honor of sketching Ted as his doppelgänger Alfred E. Neuman (of *MAD Magazine* fame) for the issue after the taping.

Keith Horvath, AB'83, MD'87
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Regarding the Reg

How did the Reg change my time on campus ("Day of Reg-oning," Alumni News, Fall/25)? A lot! Then and later.

As an undergrad in 1968 I enjoyed skulking about on the Regenstein's construction site—a practice I had perfected while growing up in the mid-century housing developments in Libertyville, Illinois, and then continued in the steam tunnels between Rockefeller Chapel and International House.

I came upon a set of the Regenstein construction documents on a worktable and absolutely marveled at their beauty and precision. I noted the initials "WT" in the "Drawn By" box on the Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM) sheets and filed that information away for later use, as it turned out.

I soon left the U of C for two years of swing shift work at US Steel South Works, doing wet chemistry assays of steel coming out of electric furnace No. 2. My second year chem class definitely paid off there.

Back at the U of C for my final year in 1971, I again enjoyed skulking around in the Regenstein, by then completed and opened. Books of guitar music and archaeological history drawings were my favorites in its collections.

After graduating from the U of C and getting another degree in architecture, I walked into SOM and met Walter Netsch and started working for him. And I met the mysterious "WT"—Wayne Tjaden—who had made those lovely drawings a decade earlier. I say "mysterious" because Walter loved Wayne's work so much that he let Wayne take occasional leaves of absence from SOM to go repair organs across the Midwest.

A high point of my work in Walter's studio was visiting Algeria and

presenting our designs for the state university system.

Anders Nereim, AB'71
CHICAGO

Illustration by Annick Poirier

Cover story

I want to thank you for the cover of a previous issue featuring 57th Street Books (Summer/25). I managed the Seminary Co-op's stores for many years, and the illustration got me thinking about the store and brought the usual flood of memories. We opened on 57th Street on Saturday, October 22, 1983. The spring and summer leading up to the opening were exciting and full of challenges but definitely worth the effort.

I will limit the flood of memories to a reasonable number or the rabbit hole will be unending. Devereaux Bowly, LAB'60, the owner of the building on the southwest corner of 57th and Kimbark, called me in early 1983 and asked if the Co-op would be interested in opening a second store in the English basement of his building. I met him in the space and said yes immediately, with the proviso that the Co-op's board would have to agree and a lot of work would have to be done first on planning and financing.

Many people offered valuable advice and gave suggestions. Bob Strang, a Lab School teacher and board member, was enthusiastic, as were many customers. Ted Cohen, AB'62; Rebecca Janowitz, LAB'70, AM'08, MPP'08; her sister Naomi Janowitz, LAB'72, AM'78, PhD'84; and countless others were encouraging. The Hyde Park Bank, on the basis of a one-page proposal and a 15-minute meeting with its president, agreed to extend a two-year loan of (I think) $150,000.

Dev Bowly would pay for everything involved in getting the bare space ready: all new electric, relocation of heating pipes, etc. We would be responsible for build-out, inventory, and everything else. The board's main questions were around how to justify the enormous increase in operating expenses a second store would bring.

We on staff said that the new store would be complementary to the old location but aimed at a broader market: a general interest store in a university community aiming to be a neighborhood bookstore for an extraordinary neighborhood and, more broadly, for the South Side of Chicago. We were pretty confident that if we could manage to be that while maintaining the original store, we could attract customers from all of Chicagoland, from around the country, and indeed from around the world.

The store has served hundreds of thousands of customers, helped generations of kids develop a love of reading, hosted thousands of author events, and, I hope, been a fine neighborhood fixture. Thanks again for the cover illustration.

Jack Cella, EX'73
DULUTH, MINNESOTA

Green cuisine

The last issue of the *Magazine* invited reminiscences about Green Hall ("Work Studies," Alumni News, Fall/25). I lived there for two academic years, 1961–63.

At that time, no meals were served to residents. I and my fellow students chose Green because we were allowed to cook there for ourselves. There were four stoves and four refrigerators, each shared by 10 girls. We each had a half locker in which to keep our pots and pans, eating utensils, and supplies not needing refrigeration. It was a wonderful communal experience and a great way to save money. Five dollars a week covered all my meals, and I am still very close friends with one of my co-diners. I got

married after graduation. My mother donated the money she had saved on my food toward our honeymoon.

We each were expected to clean the oven and broiler of our stove in rotation. One girl who lived on a low floor volunteered to step in when the duty had not been performed by a certain time of the evening. The missing girl had to pay her a set amount. Both of us who lived on the fifth floor—it was a walk-up—and forgot to do the cleaning before going up to our rooms were the most common guilty parties.

The dining room still existed, complete with furniture. I decided that as a senior I should demonstrate my maturity and sophistication by inviting a faculty member to dinner. My art history professor accepted the invitation. I got a recipe for beef stroganoff. Unfortunately, I added the sour cream too early in the process and it separated. I hoped that vigorous stirring would camouflage my mistake. Fortunately, my professor was very gracious and seemed to enjoy his meal.

Nada Logan Stotland, AB'63, MD'67
CHICAGO

Orfield's field

I was so moved when I saw the picture of Gary Orfield, AM'65, PhD'68, and some of his crew from 1988 in the Summer/25 issue ("Civil Rights Scholar," Alumni News). Gary was a pivotal figure in my U of C journey.

I had the enormous honor of being a student researcher on a project he led during my junior year (1983). The project was "Latinos in Metropolitan Chicago: A Study of Housing and Employment, a Report to the Latino Institute."

I remember Gary's calm, supportive leadership and his sense of humor. He was the first professor I recall who was a social activist, and he opened my eyes to the issue of justice behind all the sociological theory I'd been consuming up until that point.

Part of my role was to run around downtown and gather up paper versions of 1980 Census data reports and then manually calculate percentages for unemployment, income, and housing for the Latino population.

It was tedious work, but I felt part of a dynamic team for the first time—so much of the U of C undergrad experience in the "un-fun '80s" felt so solitary. And Gary was a joy. On the day we released the report to the Latino Institute, he rented an old car—I remember it as a classic Cadillac (still flashy despite many years and miles)—and it seemed that seven people piled in and rumbled up Lake Shore Drive with Gary at the wheel. That's how I'll always remember him, bringing meaningful scholarship into real situations and taking generations of students along for the ride.

That experience lit a fire in me to do more than learn theory (and pore over census records)—and I decided I was going to become a social worker.

The rest is history. I've had a nearly 40-year career in human services, from direct service to advocacy to research to training to communications. Gary was a moral compass who helped me find my way.

Sheila Black Haennicke, AB'84, AM'86
OAK PARK, ILLINOIS

That's how I'll always remember him, bringing meaningful scholarship into real situations and taking generations of students along for the ride.

MAB memories

For 50 years the Major Activities Board has fought to make sure that UChicago is not a place where fun goes to die ("Totally Major," Peer Review, Fall/25). I want to reach out to the University community to ask for its assistance in commemorating the 50th anniversary of MAB by creating a more definitive archive of photos, memories, and more.

My research (aided by the Ask a Librarian service at the Reg and a review of *Chicago Maroon* articles) shows that in 1975 UChicago created the Major Activities Board—providing a one-time grant to improve social life on campus in the academic year 1975–76. It looks like the first MAB show was October 11, 1975, and featured folk artists Livingston Taylor and Bryan Bowers at Mandel Hall. The first board, led by chairperson Aaron Filler, AB'77, AM'79, MD'86, was successful in passing a referendum to provide financial support for MAB. Over 50 years there have been hundreds of MAB alumni and probably well over 100,000 event attendees.

During my years on MAB (1978–82) we were fortunate to be able to produce 10-plus concerts per year, bringing artists like U2; the B-52s; the Ramones; King Crimson; Pat Metheny; Al Di Meola, Paco de Lucía, and John McLaughlin; Tom Waits; Chuck Berry; Henny Youngman; Arlo Guthrie; John Prine; and many more to campus. Future boards brought acts including Sonic Youth, Jonathan Richman, and Youssou N'Dour, and recent shows have included Megan Thee Stallion, Phoebe Bridgers, and Carly Rae Jepsen. Unfortunately, there appears to be no definitive list of shows or any one place where MAB archives reside.

If you were a board member or attended a MAB show and have photos and/or memories to share, or if you would like to assist in this project, it would be great to hear from you. Please reach out by email to uchicagomab50@gmail.com, and we will do our best to commemorate MAB's 50th and create institutional memory. Thank you.

Bart A. Lazar, AB'82
CHICAGO

Photography by Randy Tunnell, UChicago Photographic Archive, apf1-10692, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

AN UPDATE ON FINANCES

In late 2023 the University of Chicago shared with faculty and staff a plan to reduce a budget deficit that was about to reach $288 million in FY24. Two years later, those ongoing measures have succeeded in shrinking the deficit substantially. In the following discussion, four University officers address questions about those efforts, the University's endowment, the effects of changes in federal research funding, and more.—L. D.

KATHERINE BAICKER
Provost and Emmett Dedmon Distinguished Service Professor at the Harris School of Public Policy

IVAN SAMSTEIN
Enterprise Chief Financial Officer

ANDY WARD, MBA'97
Vice President and Chief Investment Officer

ARMIN AFSAHI
Vice President for Advancement

How did the University's budget deficit come about?

Baicker For much of the past two decades, the University advanced a set of strategic investments in its long-term eminence, including signifi ant investments in faculty, financial aid for students, facilities, security, and our neighborhood. The scale of those efforts meant that the University chose to operate with a deficit. Those investments have paid off and they strengthened the University, but the deficits were never meant to continue indefinitely. We determined that now is the right time to close the structural deficit, while continuing to invest in the critical work of research and education.

The University just announced that it reduced its deficit by $128 million in FY25, lowering the deficit from $288 million to $160 million in one year. How was that accomplished?

Samstein The $128 million reduction in the deficit outpaced our plan for the year, which is a very positive development. Of course we still have a lot of work to do, but it's a great start.

The improvement we saw in FY25 is the result of work across the University to moderate spending growth and to grow revenues at a faster pace than expenses. It also refl cts high demand from students at every level. And, critically for the University's long-term vitality, donors have provided record-setting philanthropic support for UChicago's academic mission.

We are currently implementing the deficit reduction steps that President **Paul Alivisatos**, AB'81, and Provost Baicker outlined in August, which will accrue to the University's benefit in FY26 and beyond. Thanks to the work of so many people across the University, we took out a huge share of the deficit in FY25, and we're on a sound path to continue that despite ongoing external headwinds.

What is the University's strategy to eliminate the remainder of its deficit? Should we expect to see another significant deficit reduction this coming year?

Baicker This year's reduction was very encouraging, and we're taking many steps to continue addressing the deficit. At the same time, the national outlook for higher education and federal support for research is still challenging, and there is a lot of uncertainty about how that will evolve over the next few years. That's one reason that we don't necessarily expect as large a reduction in the deficit this coming year.

In terms of our strategy, the University's academic mission always comes first. We want to steward our resources to make the greatest possible impact on scholarship and education. We're also making sure that we optimize the use of our faculty members' time, ensuring that they can devote their efforts to scholarship and education, since faculty time is one of the University's greatest resources.

Our immediate tasks are to continue applying spending discipline, augmenting sources of revenue, and investing in the remarkable faculty and students at the University of Chicago. We're also working with the deans and faculty to develop additional strategies that are tailored to the goals of individual schools and divisions, keeping them at the fore-

front of their fi lds. It's crucial that we continue to invest in both our core areas of excellence and in emerging areas at the same time that we shrink the deficit.

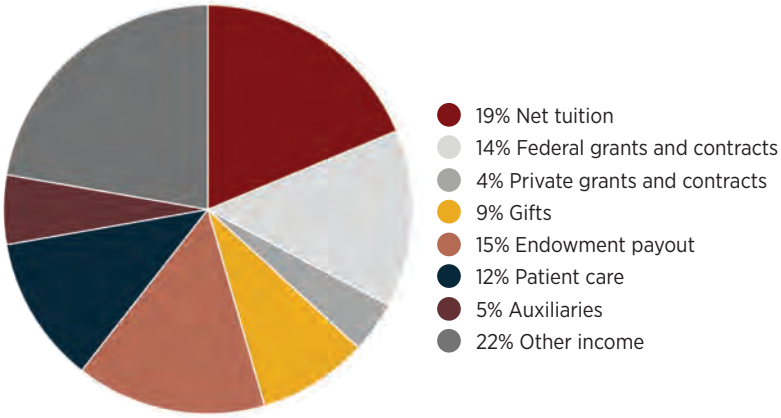
We've heard some academic units have paused doctoral admissions. What are the reasons for that?

Baicker Doctoral education is central to the University of Chicago's mission, and this past summer we asked all units to develop strategic plans for their PhD programs. Some academic divisions have paused admissions for the 2026–27 academic year while they stand up committees that will make recommendations to evaluate and strengthen their doctoral programs. The landscape for many programs is evolving significantly in the face of rapidly changing job markets and the rising cost of doctoral education. Overall, the University plans to reduce the amount of unrestricted funding dedicated to PhD students by 30 percent.

It's important to bear in mind that the University has greatly increased its support for doctoral students over the past decade: The minimum doctoral stipend as of October 1, 2025, is $46,350 (up from $23,000 a decade ago), plus University-paid health insurance. The University will continue to provide support for all PhD students in their programs.

The main reason we've asked schools and divisions to evaluate their doctoral programs is to make sure these programs are serving our students well and doing so in a sustainable way. This is a critical moment to examine UChicago's storied doctoral programs and to ensure that we are continuing to prepare the next generation of scholars and researchers for meaningful careers. Working with both the deans and faculty leadership, we have convened a faculty committee to further examine opportunities to advance doctoral programs across the University.

FY25 Operating Revenue



There have also been rumors of a shrinking faculty and negative impact on faculty-student ratios. What is the University's current approach to faculty hiring?

Baicker No, the faculty is not shrinking. The size of the faculty grew by about 20 percent over the past decade as the University hired aggressively. Our intention is to hold steady at this faculty size overall for the near term, focusing on hiring in strategic areas and hiring assistant professors.

The College has maintained an average class size of 18 students for the past 15 years; between 75 and 85 percent of classes have 20 or fewer students. Leveraging our enhanced faculty size and reducing administrative burden for faculty will help ensure that class sizes and student-faculty ratios remain at levels that support a transformative educational experience.

In the face of cuts to federal research funding across higher education, how is the University of Chicago responding?

Samstein There's no question that the uncertain outlook for federal research funding is causing concern at UChicago and at all research universities. So far UChicago's grant support has been relatively stable, with revenue from government grants and contracts slightly down in FY25, but uncertainty about research funding in the coming years is one reason that we need to calibrate our spending and revenue growth carefully.

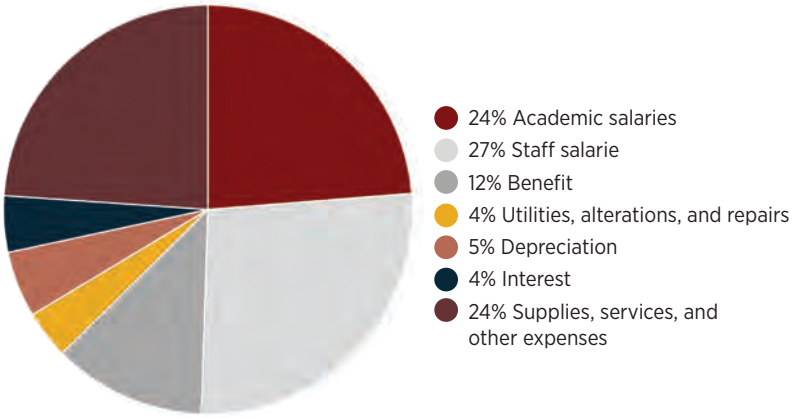
Baicker And, with this uncertainty around federal grants, it's even more important that we develop additional avenues for research support, including a broad portfolio of private foundation support and partnerships.

How does the University use its endowment to support its mission?

Ward The endowment is a permanent resource that is intended to support the University's activities over the long term, thanks to generous philanthropy over more than a century. By supplying a steady source of income to the operating budget, the endowed funds support a broad range of programs and initiatives at the University and UChicago Medicine.

Over the past decade, the University has supported several critical strate-

FY25 Operating Expenses



gic investments using the endowment, including greatly increased financial aid for undergraduate students and expanded support for faculty and graduate students.

How much of the endowment is restricted?

Samstein The vast majority of the University's endowment is legally restricted and must be used for designated purposes. That's why it's so important that we continue to focus fundraising for the endowment on enduring University priorities, such as faculty chairs, scholarships, and core infrastructure.

How much of the endowment supports the operating budget each year?

Samstein The University targets a 5.5 percent core endowment payout in recent years, with additional limited draws to support specific strategic investments. Another way to look at our measure of support from the endowment is the percentage of our operating budget derived from the endowment. In FY25 this figure was 15 percent of operating revenues for the University. This figure is much lower than most other "Ivy Plus" universities, largely because our endowment per student or per faculty member is lower relative to those peer universities.

How does the investment strategy compare to those of peer institutions? Are there differences related to the fact that UChicago's return on investments was slightly below the peer average in recent years?

Ward In the decade or so after the financial crisis of 2008–09, the University took a relatively conservative investment position. That sort of approach typically results in earnings that are lower than they would otherwise be during a booming stock market, and higher than they would otherwise be during a market downturn. UChicago thus had lower returns than some peers with less conservative portfolios during the strong markets of 2010–21. At the same time, UChicago has deployed the endowment more aggressively than some peers to support academic priorities, which has helped us to consistently compete well with universities that have endowments that are multiple times the size of ours.

What is the investment strategy going forward?

Ward The University's investment strategy is continuously evaluated and updated, and we are gradually shifting the portfolio based on evolving market opportunities. The endowment has taken steps toward a more growth-oriented portfolio, balancing risk and liquidity while maintaining broad diversification.

How does the University make and spend its money?

Samstein Here [at left] is an overall snapshot of where the University's revenue comes from and its annual expenses. One of UChicago's strengths is that we have a relatively diverse set of revenue sources, which can provide resiliency to risks. The greatest portion of spending is on the people who make this such a distinctive place of education and research.

What kind of support from alumni and friends is meaningful to the University at this challenging time for higher education?

Afsahi Alumni and friends can advance the University's mission in powerful ways during this critical period, including through philanthropy and advocacy. Philanthropic investment in UChicago provides the flexible resources needed to maintain academic excellence and support groundbreaking research.

Equally important is advocacy—sharing stories of UChicago's field-defining research, its commitment to free inquiry and rigorous debate, and the distinctive education it provides. The voices of alumni and friends help demonstrate the University's leadership and reinforce the vital role this institution plays in advancing knowledge and addressing society's most pressing challenges. ◆

UChicago Alumni

STAY CONNECTED!

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UChicago Alumni & Friends.

alumni.uchicago.edu/profile

Follow **@UChicagoAlumni** on Instagram and Facebook.

UCHICAGO JOURNAL

RESEARCH AND NEWS IN BRIEF

OLD MEETS NEW
The Game Music Ensemble performs scores and songs from video games, films, anime, and television. See "From Console to Concert Hall," page 16.

Photography by Jason Smith

"Hey! Listen!": The Game Music Ensemble's most recent concert featured music from the *Final Fantasy* series, *Hollow Knight*, and *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33*.

MUSIC

From console to concert hall

The Game Music Ensemble performs music for the digital era.

BY BRADY SANTORO, CLASS OF 2027

College orientation, in all its exhilarating newness, is highly disorienting. An incoming first-year at the University of Chicago is greeted upon arrival by an expansive, almost overwhelming range of ways to spend time. In addition to a broad array of on-campus jobs and events, there are majors (68) to declare, intramural sports (36) to play, and Recognized Student Organizations (400-plus) to join. In light of this somewhat dizzying list, you could say that the University is where fun comes to die—of exhaustion.

Ethan Koroma, Class of 2026, and **Matthew Ahmon**, Class of 2027, ran the gauntlet of academic and social opportunities and came out academically overcommitted and extracurricular-ly burned out—until they spotted a poster for a new student group that performs music from video games. Koroma, a cellist and pianist, and Ahmon, a violinist and pianist, both wanted to play music in college but hadn't previously seen any outlets they connected with.

For Ahmon, just seeing the poster gave him hope that he would continue down a musical path. He and Koroma showed up at a rehearsal and found themselves profoundly moved by the music they heard—soundtracks they had lived with for years but never performed with others. They, in turn, felt motivated to share this musical subculture with others. Two years out from their first encounter with the Game Music Ensemble, Koroma and Ahmon are now its codirectors.

Founded in 2023 by student-musicians of various backgrounds and gaming abilities, the Game Music Ensemble stands out from other student performance groups, such as the Jazz Ensemble or the University Symphony Orchestra, for its serious commitment to music from digital media. Programming from its twice-yearly concerts

Photography by Jason Smith

might feature scores and songs from video games, films, anime, and television, played in front of substantial crowds by a roster of 20 to 30 amateur and professional musicians from clarinetists to keytarists (a portmanteau of *keyboard* and *guitar*, a keytar is a portable keyboard synthesizer).

The codirectors are clear about their mission: They are freeing up orchestral music to be, plainly, fun, while simultaneously trying to correct the assumption that game music "is just a bunch of bleeps and boops," as Koroma puts it. In reality, video game and film composers have long been respected within the contemporary classical music community, and there's not a stark line between those composing for the concert hall and those working in other media. This is serious music that just happens to come from video games.

Indeed, the ensemble sits in sections around a conductor, often performing in concert black attire on a formal stage, though they may be joined by characters like Mario or Pokémon projected on a screen behind them. Incorporating the influences of folk, big band jazz, rock, modern pop, and other genres, the group's musical repertoire from previous seasons—with selections taken from media including the game *Super Mario Galaxy* and the TV show *Only Murders in the Building*—ranges from minimalist piano music to epic orchestral pieces in the style of Wagner and Mahler, complete with thundering percussion and an onstage choir.

The codirectors are clear about their mission: They are freeing up orchestral music to be, plainly, fun, while simultaneously trying to correct the assumption that game music "is just a bunch of bleeps and boops."

Koroma hopes this translation of digital media to the stage will change how video game music is perceived—and appreciated. He believes the ensemble is in "a unique position" to bridge the gap between video game music and its more established antecedents.

For Ahmon, the role of the ensemble on campus is to "contribute to the community in a way that hasn't been done yet, ... as part of a greater movement, a shift toward recognition for these genres." And they have found a loyal audience for game music in both the student body and the broader community. The ensemble has been invited to play in dormitories, at UChi-Con (the University's yearly anime convention), and at a gaming event at the Harold Washington Library downtown. They've also been approached by the steering committee of the Year of Games, a University-wide celebration of play over the 2025–26 academic year, to add to the festivities. For the codirectors, this rise in interest in digital media is "only natural" in a digitally oriented and music-loving world. In their view, says Ahmon, "this is just where music is right now." ◆

QUICK STUDY

POLICY

Private equity impacts

Hundreds of hospitals around the country are owned by private equity firms, but studies on how these acquisitions affect hospital staffing and patient outcomes are relatively few. A new paper coauthored by **Joseph Dov Bruch**, assistant professor of public health sciences, published in September in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, compares the emergency departments and intensive care units of hospitals acquired by private equity firms (the treatment group) to those of otherwise similar hospitals that did not change ownership (the control group). The researchers focused on changes to staffing and patient outcomes over a six-year period—the three years before and after hospitals in the treatment group were purchased by private equity firms. They found reduced staffing and staff alaries, increased patient transfers to other hospitals, shortened stays in the intensive care unit, and increased emergency department mortality after treatment group hospitals were acquired. The research suggests that cost-cutting measures such as staff reductions and salary decreases contribute to negative patient outcomes.—*C. C.* ◆

Syed Ahmad and Elisabeth Snyder, AB'25, are dedicated to organizing student-focused events that encourage free expression.

UCHICAGO VALUES

Fostering free expression

The Chicago Forum Student Board engages Maroons in difficult conversations through relevant, approachable events.

BY CHANDLER A. CALDERON

"I think the biggest indicator of success is when the conversation continues after the event ends," says **Elisabeth Snyder**, AB'25, a first-year Law School student and copresident of the University of Chicago Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression Student Board.

Snyder and copresident **Syed Ahmad**, a graduate student at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and at Chicago Booth, share responsibility for organizing student-focused events that foster free expression on campus. When the Chicago Forum was founded in fall 2023, Snyder and Ahmad reached out to see how they could participate. By the end of the Chicago Forum's first year, the two were helping build the student board from the ground up.

The copresidents complemented each other well. Ahmad, a consultant who aspires to run for political office one day, was excited about the "opportunity to design an organization from scratch" and remembers early conversations with Snyder as very practical ones about defining roles and reporting lines. Snyder, who wants to do legal work related to civil liberties and the First Amendment, was especially interested in how they would structure events to bring together different perspectives. The two worked with **Talia Mountjoy**, MBA'18, the Chicago Forum's director of programs, to develop a plan for student engagement that prioritizes representation from across the University and events related to various fields of study.

"The mission of the forum [is] to promote the understanding, practice, and advancement of free and open discourse," Ahmad says. Fostering this kind of dialogue, he and Snyder realized, required a multifaceted approach. In the more than 50 events they hosted for students in the 2024–25 academic year, the board aimed for a mix of programming that responded to current affairs or that allowed students to delve into niche topics related to their areas of study.

Ideas for field-specific events come from the 40 students who, along with the copresidents, make up the board, which includes representatives from each school and division plus a few special interest groups. Members are all responsible for pitching and planning events related to their areas of study. Ahmad and Snyder, with the four other students who make up the executive board, provide oversight on all programming. Board members "always have an ear to the ground for what folks might be itching for the opportunity to talk about in their school or division," says Snyder.

Last year, for example, students in the Biological Sciences Division and the Pritzker School of Medicine collaborated on an event about what, ethically, ought to be done with human remains. Another conversation, organized by the

Photography by Jason Smith

Divinity School and the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, had to do with free speech in the therapeutic space.

Understanding that not all students might be comfortable throwing themselves into difficult conversations, the board tries to ensure their events model the kind of respectful, curious debate the forum supports in general. They've discovered a few especially successful approaches, like prioritizing panel discussions that highlight speakers with diverse backgrounds and opinions, having students moderate conversations, leaving plenty of time for questions, and hosting small group dinners.

To give students more chances to debate and hone their own ideas, a board member from the Division of the Social Sciences came up with the idea of "intellectual speed dating," in which students in small groups discuss a given question for a few minutes at a time and then rotate. Ahmad describes the atmosphere of these events as "electric" and says he hopes to put on more events that allow students to interact with their peers in this way.

In addition to involving the broader student body in the mission of the forum, Ahmad and Snyder make sure that their fellow board members come away from their leadership roles with fulfilling professional experience gained by organizing events from start to finish. They point out that planning these events is an opportunity for the students, who might otherwise have little interaction with those outside their school or area of study, to collaborate across fields.

The copresidents are getting a lot out of this too. Ahmad plans to return to consulting after graduation and believes events such as intellectual speed dating have helped him build more confidence in sharing opinions on challenging topics. The business world benefi s, he says, when there are "employees who are willing to say the difficult thing when it needs to be said."

Snyder has valued learning from the forum's staff members about how to work in a professional environment to create successful programming. "It's so wonderful to observe events that we put on, and after the event is done, as the conversation is still going between students, to listen in on what they're saying and hear the passion with which they're speaking, but also the respect," says Snyder. "It makes me hopeful for the future of political discourse." ◆

This past quarter, events organized by the Chicago Forum Student Board increased in number and scope. They covered wide-ranging topics including national security reporting, the ethics of genetic engineering, the New York City mayoral election, and academic freedom in the age of artificial intelligence.

Events in the 2024–25 academic year

50+

Events in Autumn Quarter 2025

30

Attendance at events in the 2024–25 academic year

1,300+

Approximate attendance at events in Autumn Quarter 2025

987

QUICK STUDY

PSYCHOLOGY

Ostrich origins

If you've ever deliberately steered clear of knowledge that might cause you discomfort, you've exhibited what psychologists call the "ostrich effect." But when do ever-curious children become head-in-the-sand adults? A study led by postdoctoral scholar **Radhika Santhanagopalan**, AM'25, PhD'25, PhD'25, examined the emergence of information avoidance in children. Across several experiments, older children (ages 7 to 10) were more likely than younger children (ages 5 to 6) to strategically avoid knowledge that might have negative effects on their emotions, self-perceptions, and preexisting beliefs. For example, older children were more likely than younger ones to opt out of watching a video about their favorite candy being bad for their teeth—but showed no such qualms about a similar video focused on their least favorite candy. The researchers found evidence that as children grow they are better able to consider how new information may affect their future emotional states. The study was published in June in *Psychological Science*.—*S. A.* ◆

POLICY

Trial and error

Two scholars argue that the dominance of randomized controlled trials in social policy is harming nonprofit .

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

Nicole P. Marwell and Jennifer E. Mosley believe that there are many ways to measure the efficacy of social programs beyond randomized controlled trials.

In the 1940s, medical researchers began using randomized controlled trials to assess the efficacy of health interventions—new treatments, preventive measures, and devices. Then as now, RCTs involved creating randomly assigned treatment and control groups, administering the potential remedy to only the first group, and comparing how the participants fared. This method, with its promise to tease apart cause and effect, had such seductive explanatory power that other fields began to take notice.

One of these was the social policy sector, **Nicole P. Marwell** and **Jennifer E. Mosley** write in their new book, *Mismeasuring Impact: How Randomized Controlled Trials Threaten the Nonprofi Sector* (Stanford Business Books, 2025). Advocates of conducting RCTs believed the trials could bring clarity to the messy work of helping people: By measuring the outcomes of participants and nonparticipants in social programs, nonprofits and their funders could ensure that public and philanthropic dollars were well spent. Does a job training program really result in more participants getting jobs? Identify a control group and a treatment group and find out.

But as Marwell and Mosley, both professors at the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, write, this well-intentioned notion has grown so powerful that the organizations delivering social programs feel strong pressure to have their programs legitimized by RCTs. Gradually, but especially over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s, the RCT came to be seen not as one method of assessment among many but as "the only method that tells you whether or not the program works," says Marwell—and an important way for organizations to attract funding. *Mismeasuring Impact* challenges this status quo, arguing that RCTs aren't always the best tool for the job and calling for a more expansive approach to the evaluation of nonprofi social programs.

Questioning the role of RCTs in social policy took some courage. "There's a lot of support for this methodology on this campus and in this city," says Mosley. In fact, many of Marwell and Mosley's colleagues have been leaders in the movement to use RCTs to assess social programs. "But in the Chicago way," Mosley adds, "they are supportive of having lively debate on the topic."

Marwell and Mosley started the research process for what became *Mismeasuring Impact* interested in the proliferation of RCTs in the nonprofi sector but without a particular point of view about their use. However, as the pair began speaking to nonprofit employees, funders, and even the evaluators who help organizations plan and administer RCTs, they were surprised to discover how many people had developed misgivings about how the procedure was being implemented in practice.

Many of the concerns were methodological. Evaluators were especially troubled by insufficient sample sizes: Social programs are often expected to have small-scale effects or to address rare issues, such as youth involvement in gun violence. To statistically detect whether these kinds of programs are working, the organizations running them might need to enroll many hundreds of participants in an RCT. "But most youth programs don't serve that many youths at one time," Marwell and Mosley write in *Mismeasuring Impact*. "There may not even be that many youths in the neighborhood."

RCTs are also plagued by problems

with so-called control group contamination: People assigned to a control group who didn't get access to an organization's program may seek help elsewhere. This means the trial isn't comparing the treatment to nothing; it's comparing the treatment to a similar program delivered elsewhere.

These implementation problems undercut a core claim made by RCT proponents: that RCTs provide the best evidence that a program either works or doesn't. If an RCT finds that a program has no effect on outcomes, it could signal that the program is ineffective—but, Marwell says, it could also indicate that "you didn't implement the RCT according to the very rigorous methodological standards that it requires."

RCTs are also costly and time-consuming, placing a significant burden on the nonprofi s conducting them, Marwell says: "Organizations do lots of things besides the program that's being evaluated [and] the RCT evaluation that's being conducted."

Under normal circumstances, an organization that sees an emerging need or a gap in its current offerings can quickly adjust; nimbleness is a historic strength of the nonprofit sector. But, Marwell and Mosley explain, organizations conducting expensive multiyear RCTs are essentially frozen in amber—they can't change their programs once the trial is underway.

Marwell and Mosley talked to many in the nonprofit sector who worried that the dominance of RCTs was pushing organizations to offer programs with easily measured outcomes. Yet many social needs don't fit into the tidy cause-and-effect framework of the RCT. A homeless shelter, for example, provides vital services but may not on its own reduce homelessness. "If we continue down this road [where] RCTs are the only way to prove your legitimacy as a program," Mosley says, "it does devalue those programs that are never going to be able to be part of an RCT. Is that really a world we want to live in?"

Nicole P. Marwell.

Jennifer E. Mosley.

Of course "we do need to make sure our programs are effective," Mosley says. Fortunately, she and Marwell point out in *Mismeasuring Impact*, there are many tools beyond RCTs to measure efficacy. Organizations can improve their data-gathering efforts to learn more about the people they serve and what happens to them over time. Surveying program participants more regularly can yield essential information about what helps and what doesn't. "Plan-do-study-act" cycles—quick, small-scale experiments—can also help organizations improve their offerings in real time. "That's also a lot closer to what you would see for-profi organizations doing," Mosley says.

These flexible approaches allow organizations to "iterate and improve on a continuous basis," Marwell adds. That's good for all nonprofi s, including ones that will never be able to run RCTs. And what's good for nonprofi s is good for the rest of society, she says: These organizations are "such a critical part of our social safety net and a critical part of the services that help people grow and thrive." ◆

From top: Photo courtesy Nicole P. Marwell; photo courtesy Jennifer E. Mosley

QUICK STUDY

BIOLOGY

Biodiversity rebound

The Cretaceous-Paleogene mass extinction 66 million years ago, Earth's most recent mass die-off, resulted in the disappearance of more than 75 percent of species. To determine how ocean ecosystems rebounded after the event, a research team including **David Jablonski**, William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Service Professor of Geophysical Sciences, analyzed fossilized mollusks from before and after the die-off. Their data, published in May in *Science Advances*, reveal that despite the significant species loss, almost all of the ecological niches in the marine ecosystem remained inhabited. The researchers also found that a large survival pool did not guarantee a species a natural advantage down the road. These surprising conclusions run contrary to the common evolutionary model in which only the fittest species survive and predominate, offering important new information about how ecosystems rebound from mass extinction that may inform current marine conservation effo ts.—*B. S.* ◆

TRIVIA

Riddle me this

On October 9 alumni around the world came together for a battle of wits during UChicago Alumni's Global Pub Trivia Night. Couldn't make it to the event? You don't have to miss out on the fun. Here's a sampling of this year's questions, written by **Amara Balan**, AB'20; **Al Shah**, AB'20; and **Bailey Street**, AB'20. (Answers are at the bottom of the page.)—*S. A.*

Clockwise from top left: Attendees in Singapore, San Francisco, and Chicago tackled tricky questions penned by three members of the Class of 2020.

GLOBAL PUB TRIVIA NIGHT

1. The Kimberley Process is an international set of standards aimed at governing the ethics of the market for what good?

2. What word that traces its etymology to the book *Gulliver's Travels* means extremely small or of little importance?

3. Which country was formerly known as Dahomey until 1975?

4. What year was the only time the Chicago Cubs and the Chicago White Sox faced each other in a World Series?

5. Charli XCX's first No. 1 hit in the United Kingdom was her feature on the song "I Love It," performed with what Swedish duo?

6. *The Divine Comedy* follows what rhyme scheme, a form that Dante himself is thought to have created?

7. Vitamin B_2 is also known as what?

8. What phrase, named for a UChicago physicist, describes the apparent contradiction between the high likelihood that there is life beyond us in the universe and the lack of evidence for its existence?

9. What was the three-word title of Susan Sontag's (AB'51) notable 1964 essay that also inspired the theme of the 2019 Met Gala?

10. What does the *D* in University of Chicago founder John D. Rockefeller's name stand for?

Answers: (1) Diamonds; (2) Lilliputian; (3) Benin; (4) 1906; (5) Icona Pop; (6) Terza rima; (7) Riboflavin; (8) Fermi Paradox; (9) "Notes on 'Camp'"; (10) Davison

Photos courtesy UChicago Alumni

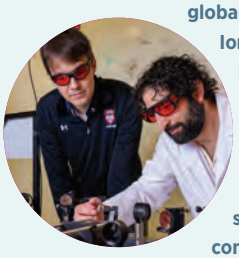
October 25, 2025

University Symphony Orchestra's annual Halloween concert celebrated masks, masques, and masquerades.

Photography by John Zich

For the record

QUANTUM PARTNERSHIP

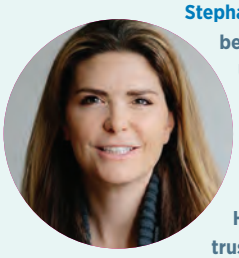


The University of Chicago will partner with global quantum company IonQ on a groundbreaking initiative to advance research and discovery in quantum science and engineering, helping develop technologies—such as quantum computers, communication networks, applications, and sensors—with the potential to improve lives. The initiative will support faculty, postdoctoral, and student researchers in fundamental quantum science at the Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering and create a sponsored research program between UChicago and IonQ. The partnership further establishes Illinois and Chicago as a global quantum hub.

PRESIDENCY EXTENDED

The University of Chicago Board of Trustees has voted unanimously to extend **Paul Alivisatos**'s (AB'81) University presidency through June 2030. In an email to the University community, board chair **David M. Rubenstein**, JD'73, and vice chairs **Barry E. Fields**, JD'91, and **Kenneth M. Jacobs**, AB'80, celebrated the president's principled leadership and his accomplishments since stepping into the role in September 2021. These include the launch of new graduate and professional programs, undergraduate majors, and interdisciplinary programs, such as the Quantum Information Science and Engineering initiative and the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Growth; the further development of a distinctive approach to computation, statistics, and artificial intelligence; and the formation of a unified Division of the Arts & Humanities.

NEW TRUSTEE



Stephanie Field Harris has been elected to the University of Chicago Board of Trustees. Her five-year term began in May. A civic and philanthropic leader, Harris has served as a trustee of the University of Chicago Medical Center since 2009, as well as on the boards of multiple Chicago-area organizations, including the Field Foundation of Illinois, the Woman's Board of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Lake Forest Open Lands Association. A Harvard alumna, Harris is also a member of the advisory board of the Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard University.

STANDING OVATION

In September Court Theatre received nine Jeff Awards, the most of any theater company in the 2024–25 season. Court received four awards for *Berlin*, two for *An Iliad*, two for *Falsettos* (a coproduction with TimeLine Theatre Company), and one for *East Texas Hot Links*. **Charles Newell** took home awards for best direction of a large play (*Berlin*) and a short-run play (*An Iliad*). And **Mickle Maher**, who adapted *Berlin* from the graphic novel of the same title by Jason Lutes, received the Libby Adler Mages Award for a new work. The Jeff Awards, established in 1968, recognize outstanding Chicago-area theater artists.

MASTERING CHEMISTRY

The Department of Chemistry is introducing a new master of science degree to prepare students for careers in the sciences and to strengthen their applications for PhD, law, or medical programs. The degree is designed to meet the growing demand for chemists who are at the forefront of solving global challenges such as developing pharmaceuticals and engineering new materials. The research-focused program will offer five specialized tracks—physical chemistry, organic chemistry, inorganic chemistry, materials chemistry, and chemical biology—and is scheduled to launch in Autumn Quarter 2026.

RHODES TO OXFORD

College fourth-year **Tori Harris** was selected as a 2026 Rhodes Scholar in November. Harris, who studies anthropology and creative writing in the College, is the 56th UChicago student to receive this honor. Raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she got her first archaeological experience excavating landmarks from the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Harris has focused on using archaeology to recover African American culture and history. She will attend the University of Oxford next fall to pursue a master of science degree in African studies and archaeology.

NEW IOP DIRECTOR

John F. Kirby, a retired rear admiral in the US Navy and former senior spokesman for the Pentagon, State Department, and White House, became director of the Institute of Politics on November 15. In addition to his nearly three decades of military service, Kirby has deep experience in Washington, DC, that spanned six presidential administrations representing both parties. He most recently served as White House national security communications adviser on foreign and defense policy issues from 2022 to 2025. Kirby succeeds former Senator Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND), who directed the institute from 2023 to 2025.

FRANKLIN MEDAL

The Franklin Institute announced November 11 that it is awarding the 2026 Benjamin Franklin Medal in Physics to **Wendy L. Freedman**, the John and Marion Sullivan University Professor in Astronomy and Astrophysics and the College. The Benjamin Franklin Medal is one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious honors in science, engineering, and business leadership. A pioneering cosmologist, Freedman has made landmark measurements of the rate at which the universe is expanding, known as the Hubble constant.

BRITISH RECOGNITION

Josephine McDonagh was elected to the British Academy in July. An expert in 19th-century British literature, particularly in its intersection with Britain's global and imperial relations, McDonagh is the Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Chair of the Development of the Novel in English, Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of English, and director of the Nicholson Center for British Studies. Most recently her work has examined the role of literature in settler colonization, migration, and emigration.

Clockwise from top left: Photography by Jason Smith; UChicago News; UChicago News

INTERVIEW

Friendlier skies

Michael Swiatek, MBA'91, is working to make air travel more accessible.

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

Michael Swiatek, MBA'91, describes himself as "a business executive who happens to be blind/low vision." Swiatek has spent much of his career in strategy roles at airlines, including United Airlines, Qatar Airways, and Air New Zealand. Today he is the chief strategy officer at the Abra Group, which owns several Latin American airlines. Swiatek is also Abra's chief accessibility officer—and, he believes, the airline industry's only chief accessibility offi r. This interview has been edited and condensed.

Did you always imagine you'd work in air travel?

I was obsessed with planes, but no, I did not know it would be my career. My father was a customer service agent for United Airlines, so that was my introduction.

When I was at the University of Chicago, I thought I would be an investment banker or a consultant or something. But I realized I didn't like investment banking and I didn't like consulting. I liked airlines.

When did you start to merge your strategy work and your interest in accessibility?

Only about four years ago. My current CEO is such a curious, empathetic, and caring guy. It was more his idea. I now have the dual title of chief strategy officer and chief accessibility officer. It has made a huge difference to have somebody in this role who sits at the executive leadership meetings and who presents to the board on a regular basis.

I don't consider myself a disability advocate. I consider myself a professional who has a disability and therefore has some life experience that's helpful in formatting the strategy to make our airline groups more accessible.

Addressing accessibility issues is often seen as expensive. How do you combat that?

We set forward six principles early on that have been a great guide for us: common sense; universal design; cooperation, not competition; shared responsibility; progress over perfection; and then the one you alluded to, low cost, high impact. So are we going to install something that's going to help one customer a year and cost us $25,000? No. Will we install something that costs $10,000 a year and is going to help 10,000 customers? Absolutely.

What are some of those low-cost, high-impact changes?

We put Braille seat numbers on about 100 of our aircraft, as well as bigger numbers with better color contrast for low-vision people. We're piloting a project with our major airport in Bogotá to have autistic people come into the airport before they fly and get familiar with the check-in, the security, the boarding area—and the aircraft itself, if we can provide it.

We operate in countries where, unlike the United States, people exit on stairs, as opposed to jet bridges, about 30 percent of the time. We changed processes so that our operations people know, "Hey, if this plane has 10 wheelchairs, and this plane has one, let's send the plane with 10 wheelchairs to the gate with the jet bridge."

I'm really proud of this one: You know the people who push wheelchairs in the airports? I had a simple observation, because I use that service when I travel. I don't need the wheelchair, but I need the escort. Usually, the gender is randomly assigned. I said, "You know, it makes a lot of sense to have males paired with males and females with females, because if I need to use a restroom and the person pushing the wheelchair is female, I'm less likely to vocalize that." I saw an airport in New York recently put this into their mandate.

Have you gotten interest from other airlines about the work you're doing?

Absolutely, and we call them as well. It works both ways. If I discover a great way to change a boarding process, let me call my friend at British Airways or Air Canada. We feel this is something that the faster the industry fixes it, the better for all of us.

It is time consuming to work cooperatively with all the pressures we have of just running an airline. But that's the good fight we're happy to fight.

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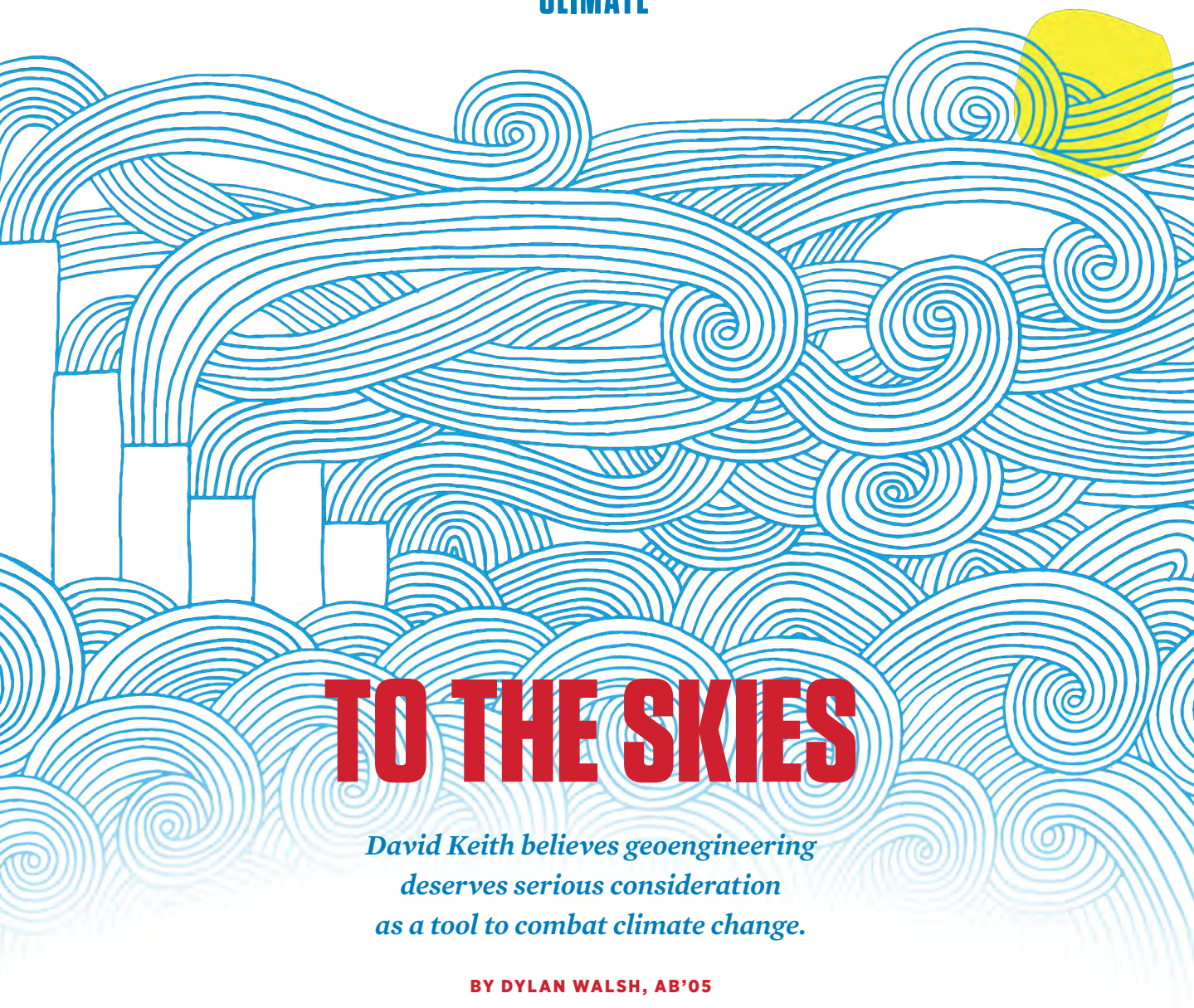
Illustration by Robert Ball



TO THE SKIES

David Keith believes geoengineering deserves serious consideration as a tool to combat climate change.

BY DYLAN WALSH, AB'05

As millions of acres of Canadian forest burned in the summer of 2025, the second-worst fire season in the country's history, smoke drifted south, settling in the Upper Midwest, prompting air quality alerts from local regulatory agencies. For several hours on the last day of July, Chicago had the dirtiest air in the world, a scumble of smoke dimming the tall-towered skyline.

During these hazy days, **David Keith**, professor of geophysical sciences at the University of Chicago, was completing the move into his new office on the ground floor of Ryerson Hall. It is a high-ceilinged space with pale wood floors and old doors large enough to ride a horse through. Keith had been recruited to the University from Harvard just over two years earlier, in April of 2023, and charged with establishing the Climate Systems Engineering Initiative.

Keith is tall, narrow, bearded, bespectacled; a loping walker; and a warm and engaged conversationalist. When he alights upon a topic of acute interest, he hunches in his chair and begins to expound while gazing at the floor.

He is a controversial figure in the field of cli-

ivetavaicule/DigitalVision Vectors via Getty images

mate science—and in the broader world of environmental policy and activism—because he has devoted nearly all of his academic career to studying methods by which humans might deliberately intervene in the climate system to mitigate the effects of global warming. Much of this work has focused on adding sulfur to the stratosphere to reduce the amount of sunlight that reaches Earth—a skywide umbrella of aerosols to cool us just a bit, just enough.

Keith came to this work sideways. He studied physics as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto. After graduation he worked odd jobs, lived in a 12-person co-op, and spent time rock climbing in New York's Shawangunk Mountains. He then went on to a doctorate in experimental physics at MIT where, under the guidance of David Pritchard, he helped build one of the world's first atom interferometers. The work was "a thrill," Keith has written, but, in some ways, hollow. If it sated his intellectual appetite, it did little else. He was troubled, too, that the Office of Naval Research funded the work: One of the interferometer's immediate applications was improving the locational accuracy of submarines carrying ballistic missiles.

Keith was doing this work in the late '80s, as global environmental catastrophe gained a public audience. The British Antarctic Survey reported on a large hole in Earth's ozone layer. NASA scientist James Hansen testified before the Senate about the warming effects of greenhouse gas emissions. These were topics that Keith engaged with, vigorously, in an informal group of students from Boston-area colleges who met to discuss environmental science and policy.

The topics enthralled him, drawing on a deep personal connection to the natural world. His father was a field biologist researching toxic chemicals for the Canadian Wildlife Service. As a teenager Keith was a member of the Macoun Club, the youth arm of the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club, alongside a handful of bookish biology students who liked to camp. He hiked the Appalachian Trail solo from Maine to Vermont as a 17-year-old, and shortly after skied alone across Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park. Climate change, as he began to learn about it, inspired complex questions in precisely the way atomic interferometry did not. It raised policy implications of the largest magnitude; it was rich with intriguing and contentious scientifi uncertainties.

Through a family connection, Keith met and talked with Hadi Dowlatabadi, a professor who was studying climate change in Carnegie Mellon University's Department of Engineering and Public Policy. It was a productive chat. In 1991 Keith moved to Pittsburgh, leaving interferometry behind to begin a postdoc with Dowlatabadi.

CLIMATE CHANGE, AS HE BEGAN TO LEARN ABOUT IT, INSPIRED COMPLEX QUESTIONS IN PRECISELY THE WAY ATOMIC INTERFEROMETRY DID NOT. ... IT WAS RICH WITH INTRIGUING AND CONTENTIOUS SCIENTIFIC UNCERTAINTIES.

Keith published his first paper on geoengineering one year later. The general idea had been around for decades. A 1965 report to President Lyndon B. Johnson—which, notably, spends a good deal of time fretting over human-induced climate change—discusses the potential of blanketing oceans in reflective particles. Soviet and American scientists in the '70s wrote about creating a "stratospheric smog" to deflect sunlight. The idea surfaces and sinks, again and again, in academic literature, in government reports.

Geoengineering is a catchall term for a set of technologies and processes that range from planting trees to launching a quilt of

David Keith has been drawn to the problem of climate change for more than 30 years.

Photography by Jason Smith

light-deflecting mirrors the size of Brazil high into orbit between Earth and the sun. But the subject, in its diversity, can be broken into two broad approaches: those intended to pull carbon dioxide from the air, and those that cool Earth but do nothing about carbon.

Among the many ways to deflect the sun—formally known as solar radiation modification, or SRM—injecting sulfur into the stratosphere is the approach that's likely best understood. Atmospheric dynamics in the stratosphere have been studied ever since scientists in the 1950s, eager to monitor nuclear fallout, used high-elevation U-2 flights to measure the concentration of radionuclides. Volcanic eruptions, meanwhile, have afforded centuries of insight into the cooling effects of sulfates in the stratosphere. Researchers have theorized about SRM aerosols that are potentially less pernicious than sulfates, which are known to deplete the ozone and cause pollution at ground level, but sulfates are "the devil we know," Keith says.

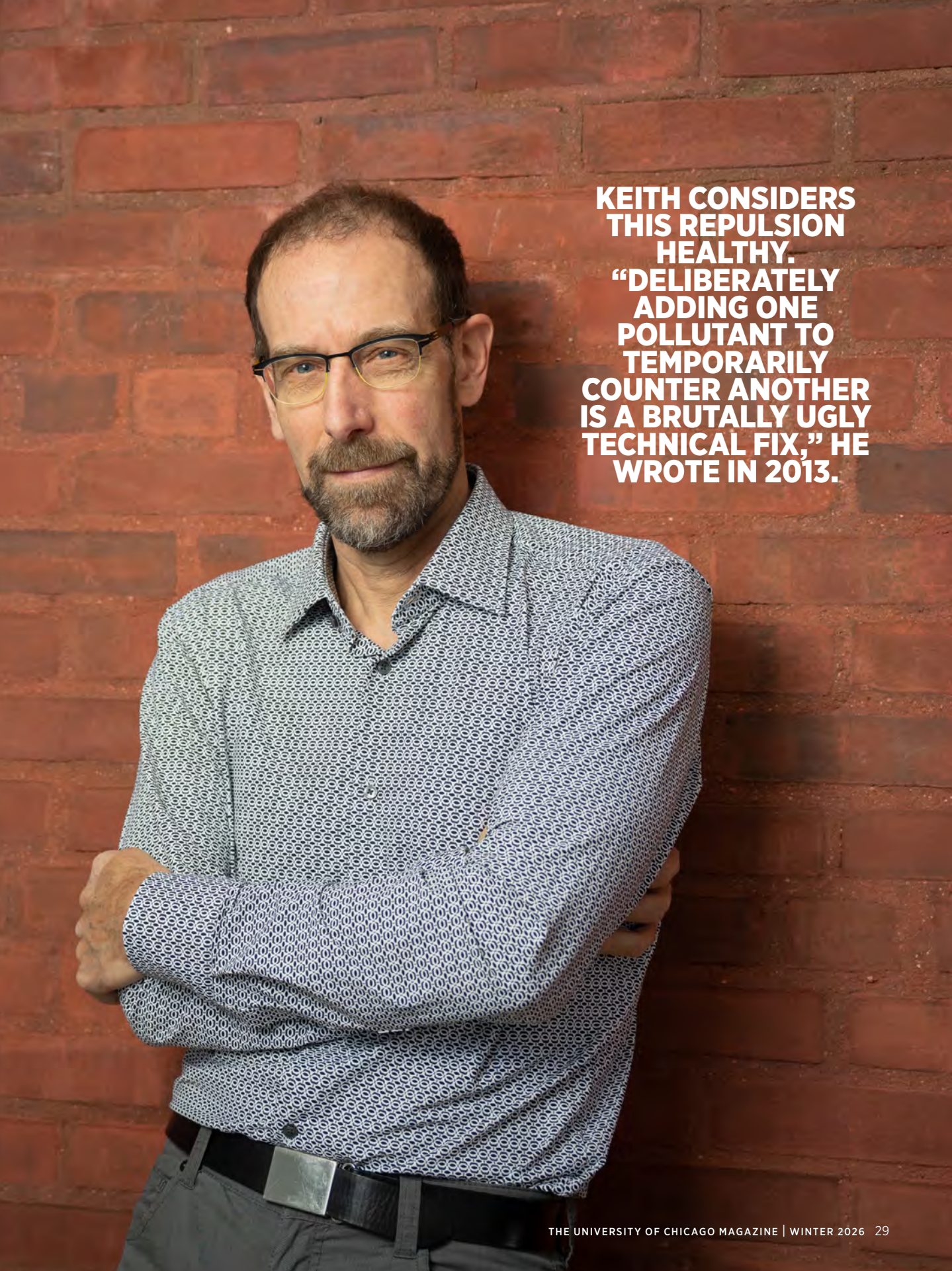
This is not to suggest we know all we should. Keith and his collaborators readily admit to the need for more rigorous assessment by a more diverse group of researchers. "It's really shocking that we don't have a federal research program moving aggressively to sort out the physics, the chemistry, and the coupling dynamics [of this technology] in the context of climate," says Jim Anderson, a climate scientist at Harvard who advised Keith during his second postdoc. "It's unacceptable. We have to attack this problem with an entirely new level of innovation and aggression."

THIS EXPERIENCE SPOTLIGHTED A WIDESPREAD VISCERAL REPULSION TO THE TECHNOLOGY—ACIDIFYING THE SKY ABOVE EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE.

But over the years, through his writing and speaking, Keith has outlined the broad shape of a potential SRM program. It would use hydrogen sulfide and begin with custom-designed aircraft that would be able to fly to roughly 20 kilometers, twice the altitude of commercial aircraft. "There's nothing that's *unobtanium* about it," Keith says. Spy planes peered from these heights during the Cold War. But to do so while carrying a roughly one-ton payload presents a novel engineering challenge. At altitude, the planes would release the hydrogen sulfide, descend, reload, fly again. The amount deposited would start out small, on the order of one hundred thousand tons annually; assuming no major problems, this figure would increase each year up to a defined plateau.

Once let loose in the stratosphere, the hydrogen sulfide molecules would undergo a process of oxidization that results in sulfuric acid. This acid binds to water and joins up with other molecules to create aerosols that spread into a near-uniform distribution around Earth and scatter earthbound sunlight. When these aerosols are about one-half of a micron across, or a thousand times smaller than the width of a human hair, they stay aloft for roughly two years before falling to Earth. For Keith and many others, this feels like the right time span: long enough to be effective and economical, not so long that it's irreversible.

The size distribution of the aerosols, according to Keith, remains one of the key technical uncertainties of the whole undertaking. If the aerosols get too big too quickly, then their weight drags them down to Earth early. Keith had hoped to bring light to this uncertainty in 2019, with Harvard colleague Frank Keutsch, by launching the Stratospheric Controlled Perturbation Experiment, or SCoPEx. To start with, the project aimed to float a balloon 20 kilometers over northern Sweden; release a common mineral dust; and then, using a gondola stuffed with scientific instruments and mounted with a propeller, direct the balloon on a sinuous return trip to collect samples from the plume. A test run without any material release was planned for 2021, but it was shut down by the Swedish government after the



KEITH CONSIDERS THIS REPULSION HEALTHY. "DELIBERATELY ADDING ONE POLLUTANT TO TEMPORARILY COUNTER ANOTHER IS A BRUTALLY UGLY TECHNICAL FIX," HE WROTE IN 2013.

Saami Council, an Indigenous group, raised concerns.

This experience spotlighted a widespread visceral repulsion to the technology—acidifying the sky above everyone, everywhere. Keith considers this repulsion healthy. "Deliberately adding one pollutant to temporarily counter another is a brutally ugly technical fix," he wrote in 2013. He openly disdains the cultural impatience, radiating from Silicon Valley, that mistakes technological gadgetry for well-researched and strongly reasoned solutions to serious problems. But he balances such circumspection against a single unyielding fact: The scale of the problem of climate change is proportional to the accumulated amount of carbon dioxide emitted. If the world collectively performed miracle upon miracle and brought global carbon emissions to zero in the next decade, we would not have solved the problem of climate change. Rather, we would have stopped making it incrementally worse. We would remain, for the next several millennia, citizens of a fundamentally altered planet, one transformed by the estimated 1.5 trillion tons of carbon dioxide we have emitted, nearly all of which remains in the air and oceans.

THERE ARE NO RISK-FREE CHOICES. … THE JOB OF A VOTING PUBLIC AND ITS POLICYMAKERS IS TO DECIDE WHICH PATH IS MORE TOLERABLE.

The value of SRM "is an aspect of climate that is so profoundly important because so many people don't understand it," says Harvard's Jim Anderson. "In fact, a lot of people directly involved in climate and energy research don't seem to understand it."

However, Keith insists that SRM cannot and should not substitute for cutting emissions. This conviction underlies his greatest concern with SRM, which is unrelated to the technology itself. He fears that research into the subject and its eventual deployment could give policymakers cover to avoid the difficult and often expensive work of emissions reductions. Instead he wholeheartedly endorses the vast majority of today's resources being spent on decarbonizing the economy. Still, he thinks SRM could be used to supplement these efforts.

Suppose, for example, the world has found and agreed to a pathway for getting net emissions to zero. It is on track to hit an average temperature of 2.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial averages. Suppose, also, that some novel governing body has decided to use SRM to turn the global thermostat down by one degree, keeping the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees using sulfur injection in the stratosphere. This process, according to several models, would lead to roughly 10,000 additional deaths per year from ground-level pollution and ozone loss. These same models predict that the reduction in temperatures worldwide would mean one million fewer heat-related deaths every year. For every theoretical death caused by sulfate pollution, SRM would prevent one hundred.

Model after model demonstrates similarly favorable outcomes. If executed properly, "I think the scientific evidence that the benefits are quantitatively much larger than the harms, measured in human lives or environmental impacts, is strong," Keith says. "And I think the evidence that the benefits would tend to go more to poor people in hot countries is strong."

Keith emphasizes that, in the end, there are no risk-free choices. Adapting to our unknown future climate without the buffer of geoengineering is risky. A world in which planes release sulfur in the stratosphere is risky. The job of a voting public and its policymakers is to decide which path is more tolerable. One step removed, Keith offers his research as a way to avoid making such consequential decisions in darkness.

There is widespread recognition that roughly 20 percent of the global economy cannot be decarbonized. It's either technologically or economically impossible on any reasonable timescale. Aviation falls into this category, as do agriculture and steelmaking. For these emis-

sions, capturing carbon is the only way to offset what gets released.

After six years as a research scientist at Harvard, in 1999 Keith returned to Carnegie Mellon as an assistant professor and embarked on an academic exercise to estimate the cost of pulling carbon out of the atmosphere with existing technologies. The work held a kernel of promise, so he continued to refine the design, innovating within the constraints of what he could buy off the shelf. In 2009, five years after he had moved to the University of Calgary, Keith invited a fellow engineer, Robert Cherry, to tell him all the reasons his approach was foolish, to highlight all of the challenges he was overlooking. Cherry did as asked, but he also suggested there was no reason Keith couldn't turn the idea, which was far from unviable, into a business.

Despite having no experience in the private sector, Keith followed Cherry's advice. He founded Carbon Engineering in 2009. The company grew and, through the continual refinement of its carbon-stripping process, the technology became reasonably economical. In 2023 Occidental Petroleum acquired the company for $1.1 billion.

This was the first company in the carbon sequestration space to sell for over a billion dollars, and, as Ken Caldeira, a climate scientist at Gates Ventures who has known and collaborated with Keith for decades, points out, it made Keith a very rich man. "One of the things about David that I find super admirable is that he made a shitload of money selling Carbon Engineering and he doesn't have to do work for anybody anymore. He could sit on the beach in Saint-Tropez if that's what he wanted to do. He has the resources to do anything, but what he wants to do is run a research center and be a university professor."

Not only that, but Keith and his wife have promised to donate most of their earnings to a range of concerns. They have already pledged $10 million to climate solutions across Canada.

"David is a deeply moral person, a deeply ethical person," says Julio Friedmann, chief scientist at Carbon Direct, who first met Keith at a conference in 2003. Friedmann went on to say that Keith did not begin research into SRM because he was a mad scientist. He did it because he recognized and wanted to explore the technology's potential to minimize human suffering. He did not start Carbon Engineering to cash in on corporate greenwashing—an accusation Keith has faced—but because he considers it a moral imperative to clean up the mess that humanity has made and preserve the world's natural splendor. "All of his work is grounded in this moral sensibility," Friedmann says. "To not understand that is to misunderstand the person."

Keith now splits his time between Hyde Park, when he's teaching, and Canmore, Alberta, a hamlet in the Canadian Rockies shadowed by sheer stone walls. He continues to rock climb. He adventures in the wilderness.

The central paradox of geoengineering is that it suggests we must alter the world to preserve it. It is easy to imagine the ways in which this goes wrong, and many people spend time doing this imagining very publicly. SRM, in particular, is readily painted as a radical and dangerous idea. But Keith would have us consider, on the other side, where we are right now, digging up hydrocarbons at an astonishing rate, burning them, dumping the product into the global atmospheric commons, changing the world in irreversible ways for a hundred generations, and leaving those generations unprotected from the very real risks of human-amplified harms: fire, drought, flood, famine. In his view, an unwillingness to face the terrifying truth of our failure and our limited options, a self-imposed blindness to technological pathways that could lead to a better future—that, too, is radical, and that, too, is dangerous. ◆

ALL OF HIS WORK IS GROUNDED IN THIS MORAL SENSIBILITY. TO NOT UNDERSTAND THAT IS TO MISUNDERSTAND THE PERSON.

Dylan Walsh, AB'05, is a freelance journalist based in Chicago who covers criminal justice and the environment.

A BROAD SPECTRUM

On UChicago Arts and Humanities Day 2025, the University threw open its doors to the city and to artists and thinkers of every stripe.

BY CHANDLER A. CALDERON AND LAURA DEMANSKI, AM'94
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN S. DYKES

For 44 years UChicago's Division of the Humanities set aside one Saturday each autumn to show off its intellectual and creative riches in an expansive set of talks and tours open to the public. In 2025 both Humanities Day and the division got updated names and broader ambitions to match. The latter became the Division of the Arts & Humanities, and it struck up a new partnership with the organization Chicago Humanities, itself recently transformed from the annual Chicago Humanities Festival into a year-round celebration of art, literature, performance, culture, and more. The Magazine *was among the day's more than 4,000 attendees, and brings you these dispatches.—L. D.*

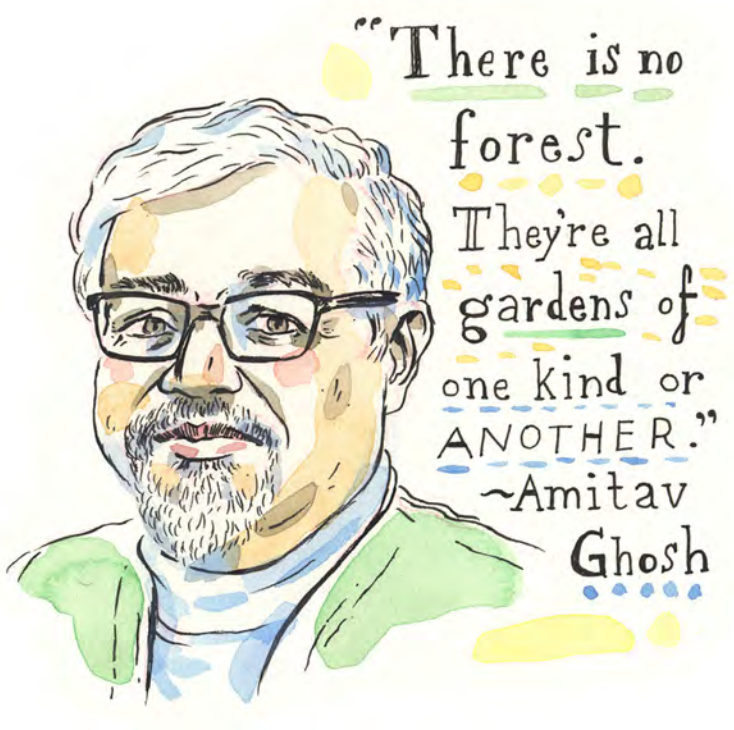
GARDEN VIEW

In conversation with UChicago associate professor of English **Benjamin Morgan**, Amitav Ghosh peppered his reflections on his prize-bedecked body of writing with contrarian thinking and the hard, bright currency of historical detail.

In more than 15 novels and essay collections, the Calcutta-born Ghosh has examined the fate of the natural world at the hands of colonial and capitalist incursion, and the fates of human beings living at the incursion sites. (Mentioned in Morgan and Ghosh's conversation were West Bengal, Bangladesh, and the Amazon rainforest.) Those abiding concerns are also at the heart of Ghosh's latest book, *Wild Fictions: Essays on Literature, Empire, and the Environment* (University of Chicago Press, 2025).

The book title's wordplay connotes Ghosh's conviction that, at least when taken to be distinct from the human world, "the wild" is a fiction, sometimes an instrumental one. He pointed to German forest policy in the 19th century, which he said reflected a view of forests as "a machine for creating timber"—a view that also influenced how the English treated India's forests and how the United States has treated its own. But the Amazon rainforest, for example, "is supposed to have had a population of nine million people, so in fact, it's not a forest," Ghosh said. "It's a garden. There is no forest. They're all gardens of one kind or another. Humans are interacting with those forests."

The midday event in Breasted Hall wasn't Ghosh's first UChicago rodeo. His 2016 nonfiction book, *The Great Derangement: Climate*



Change and the Unthinkable (University of Chicago Press), began life as the 2015 Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures at the University. In that series of talks and the resulting book, Ghosh explored why so little contemporary literary fiction had grappled with climate change, concluding that the scale of the crisis seemed too vast and improbable to effectively treat in the form of the novel.

Morgan asked Ghosh whether his perspective had changed in the succeeding 10 years, when climate change has become harder to overlook. "If I were writing that again," Ghosh replied, "I wouldn't focus so exclusively on climate change, because it's not just climate change. As Margaret Atwood famously said, 'It's everything change.'" That is, biodiversity loss, species extinction, and other interlinked crises of the environment.

Ghosh also named notable omissions in his earlier indictment of fiction for turning a blind eye to climate change. Octavia E. Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Doris Lessing (in her later works), he said, are some of the writers who have long dealt with it in their fiction—but their work has been marginalized by literary "gatekeepers" dismissive of science fiction and fantasy. Part of the problem, he now thinks, "is with the wider ecosystem of what we call literature."—*L. D.*

THE STATE OF FEMINISM

I wanted it to feel like a time capsule, like, look at how bad things were," Roxane Gay said about her essay collection *Bad Feminist* (Harper Perennial, 2014). In the book, the writer, cultural critic, and Rutgers University professor explored a new idea of feminism that embraces contradictions. She reflected there on her own attempts to live as a feminist while enjoying pleasures seemingly at odds with the uncompromising feminist ideal she had learned—coming home to a caring partner, misogynistic music, the color pink.

But 11 years on, Gay told her interlocutor, **Daisy Delogu**, Howard L. Willett Professor of French Literature, it is bitter to consider the progress society has failed to achieve for women. "We've allowed this to happen," she said, calling it "shameful," and later reflected that "our cultural memories are far too short." If she wrote the book today she would add a discussion of accountability mechanisms: "What do we do to get better?"

Gay's reflections on the years since *Bad Femi-*

nist included critiques of how women and race are being represented in media and pop culture. On the tradwife, a conservative avatar of femininity that has arisen in recent years: "As a feminist, I support your choice," said Gay in a measured tone. But ultimately, "it is not empowering to choose to disempower yourself." On the layered depiction of race and history in Ryan Coogler's 2025 film *Sinners*: "Well done, Ryan. Gold star."

There was a noticeable rustling as people hurried to scan the QR code projected onscreen to submit questions for Gay. Most asked for advice: An immigrant asked how they could take political action when they were afraid to go to protests (the suggestions: phone banking, sharing information with friends). Another attendee asked how we can pop the information bubbles people live in (Gay advised reminding people that facts do exist, and if a friend is watching Fox News, "snatch the remote and change that channel—to Lifetime"). Someone else asked how Gay finds peace (family and her Maltipoo, Max).

And what gives her hope? She took issue with the word—"hope is just deferring responsibility for creating change"—but she highlighted young people's political engagement. "The way forward," she said, "has to be cross-generational."—*C. C.*

HOW FREE IS CAMPUS SPEECH?

Saturday morning in the Max Palevsky Cinema, Law School professor **Tom Ginsburg** sat down with Law School alumnus and president of Princeton **Christopher Eisgruber**, JD'88, to talk about something on a lot of college and university leaders' minds right now: free speech.

Both came to the discussion with bona fides. Ginsburg, the Leo Spitz Distinguished Service Professor of International Law, is the inaugural faculty director of the University of Chicago Forum for Free Inquiry and Expression, launched in 2023. Eisgruber, Princeton's president since 2013, had just published *Terms of Respect: How Colleges Get Free Speech Right* (Basic Books, 2025) in September.

Ginsburg began by floating a micro summary of the book: "The kids are all right." In other words, Eisgruber seemed to him to be saying that despite how much higher education gets lambasted for unfree expression and other failings, universities are "actually getting a lot of things right."

Eisgruber agreed but added context: "What I say in the book is that we are committed as a country and on college campuses to promote both free speech and equality, and to promote them together in a way that contributes to civil discussions. ... That is a very demanding set of ideals, but we can't give up on either free speech or equality." Under the circumstances of extreme political polarization exacerbated by social media, promoting both is a hard challenge. In his eyes, higher education institutions are "getting it much more right than they get credit for."

Yes, Eisgruber acknowledged, students and faculty say things that are inadvisable. But college campuses are supposed to be "places where students are learning and making mistakes." Such places require "extraordinary freedom and

intellectual speculation, ... and that means sometimes things are going to go wrong."

Social media posts about "a professor who has said an outlandish thing or a student who has done something silly" get thousands of clicks. Less conspicuously, "we've got 2,500 colleges or universities in the country and millions of conversations, events, lectures going on at those places, most of which end up going very well."

That said, the challenges persist and they're intrinsically not easy. "We've got to protect disrespectful speech. We've got to protect even hateful speech. That's important," Eisgruber said. "But at the same time, we have to build a community where people are respecting one another."

Later the two addressed institutional speech, about which UChicago and Princeton take differing views. Ginsburg reminded the audience of UChicago's 1967 Kalven Report on the much-discussed principle of institutional neutrality, whereby universities refrain from taking positions on most issues of the day in deference to students' and faculty's freedom to have their say. Princeton, Ginsburg said, "has taken an alternative formulation," which Eisgruber calls institutional restraint.

Eisgruber said that he finds a lot to like in the Kalven Report but has reservations too. Some of the good: "It is saying universities are going to be highly upsetting institutions." Less so: the idea that this "is a good reason for me and other university presidents to refrain from taking political stands." To him, the report seems here to duck, since such position taking will "attract all sorts of incoming fire, and we've got enough incoming fire already, right?"

But universities are not neutral, Eisgruber said, quoting a predecessor, former Princeton president William G. Bowen: "'Universities are value-laden institutions, and my job as a university president is to speak up for those values.'"

That, Ginsburg countered, speaks to the exception made in the Kalven Report for occasions when the University and its mission of free inquiry are under threat. "And I don't think there's any doubt that we are in such a moment."—*L. D.*

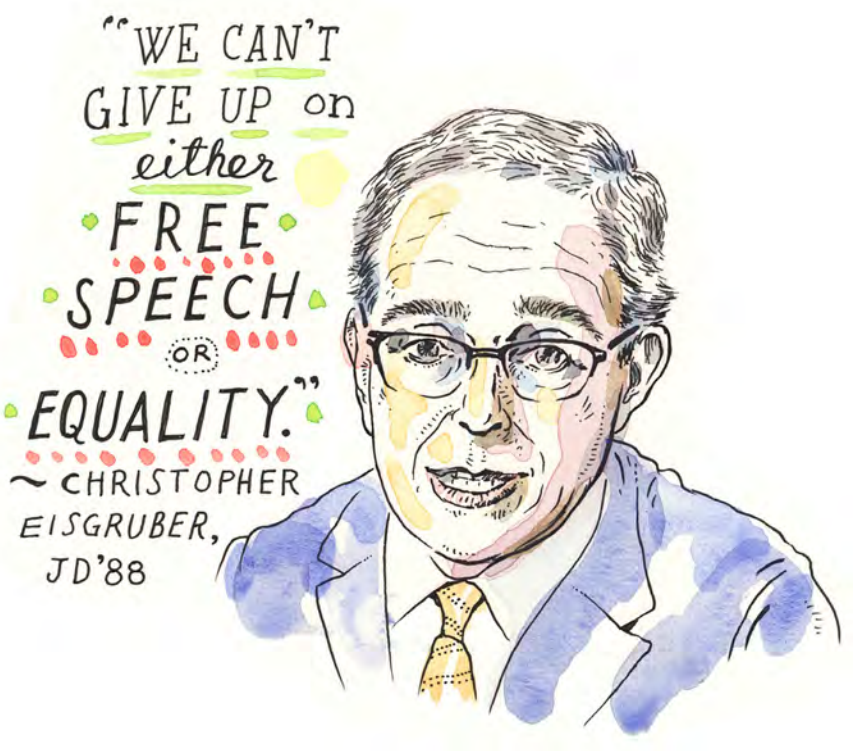


PHOTO REALISM

How do you know good art, and then what is art good for?" **Laura Letinsky**, a photographer and professor in the Department of Visual Arts, challenged Sally Mann. The renowned photographer and writer is best known for her black-and-white images of her children, sometimes pictured nude, on and around the family's Appalachian property. "Your gut will tell you what's a good picture," Mann responded. As for the second part of the question: "Roiling your gut, maybe."

The feeling that a picture you're making is real art is "a minor form of ecstasy," added Mann. Letinsky agreed, saying she struggles to find the words to describe the sensation—for her it mostly involves a lot of expletives. Mann found the words, and poetic ones at that, describing the awareness that she's about to take a great photograph as coming from "a little tuning fork in my viscera."

This instinctive recognition of art is different from artistic talent, though, which Mann said she doesn't really believe in. If there's no such thing, Letinsky wanted to know, then "can art be taught?" Mann described becoming an artist as a gradual stripping away. Just as one tries and moves away from different kinds of jobs, so too a budding artist will study the work of others and try different styles. "As you discard things, what you *do* want to do becomes clear"—and it's essential for artists to master a technique before they can break from it. "I think I can make a good picture," she said, "but I often allow myself not to."

With respect to her tools, Mann had a big reveal. She has begun using a digital camera—and photographing in color. The audience and Letinsky gasped. All leaned in to hear about the new camera and the vintage screw-on lens that Mann said "can't take a bad picture," the lens adding mystery to the already "mystical" light in the Mississippi Delta, where she's been working recently.

Aside from giving you a feeling in the pit of your stomach, Mann was sure that the purpose of good art is to challenge you and make you think. She's faced the consequences of such provocation—her pictures of her children were caught up in culture wars in the 1990s and again today. Despite the controversy, she has stuck to her vision: Art is good if it digs into difficult topics and "makes your gut sing, in the nicest way."—*C. C.*

OUT IN THE OPEN

Saturday evening in Mandel Hall, Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker was in conversation with **Jason Bridges**, associate professor of philosophy at UChicago, about Pinker's 12th and

Installation view, *Theaster Gates: Unto Thee*, 2025. Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago. Photography by Sara Pooley.

CAMPUS TOUR: CARE OF THEASTER GATES

The internationally known artist and professor of visual arts **Theaster Gates** has described himself as a "keeper of objects." The Smart Museum of Art exhibition *Theaster Gates: Unto Thee*, Gates's first major solo show in his hometown, highlights objects he has collected from the University of Chicago and other sources. On Arts and Humanities Day cocurators **Vanja Malloy**, the Dana Feitler Director of the Smart Museum of Art, and **Galina Mardilovich** led about 20 arts enthusiasts on a tour of the campus buildings from which Gates's materials were sourced.

Glass lantern slides

The first objects didn't have far to travel: It's a collection of 72,000 glass lantern slides from the Department of Art History in the Cochrane-Woods Art Center, across a courtyard from the Smart Museum, where the tour began. Malloy and Mardilovich explained that the slides were previously used in art history classes starting from the department's founding in 1902. The heavy glass slides were the first objects Gates acquired from the University, in the late 2000s, and he had to reinforce the floor of the building that would house them. (The Smart Museum also consulted with a structural engineer when preparing to exhibit them, said Mardilovich.) In *Unto Thee*, low black filing cabinets holding the slides span the wall behind which the Gates's film *Art Histories: A Reprise* plays, with images of the slides appearing in the film.

Bond Chapel pews

From the Smart Museum, the tour headed to Bond Chapel. When the chapel's original oak pews were removed to make way for more versatile and accessible seating, they came into Gates's care. The pews—the only piece in *Unto Thee* that visitors can physically interact with—sit in the darkened room where *Art Histories* plays, a setup that emphasizes the gospel and chant elements used by the Black Monks, Gates's musical ensemble, which is featured in the film.

ISAC vitrines

Outside the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, the cocurators explained that when the institute was modernized in 2019 for its 100-year anniversary, the museum staff replaced display cases from the 1930s with more modern vitrines. Gates was offered some of the old cases.

Two of the vitrines appear in *Unto Thee*. One, with a piece of masking tape labeled "FOYER" on its side, contains a jumble of the thin metal mounts that used to hold artifacts; typically out of sight, the mounts here become art objects in themselves. Gates removed the bottom of the second case and placed a masklike African object underneath it, its horns peeking up inside the glass.

Rockefeller Chapel slate roof tiles

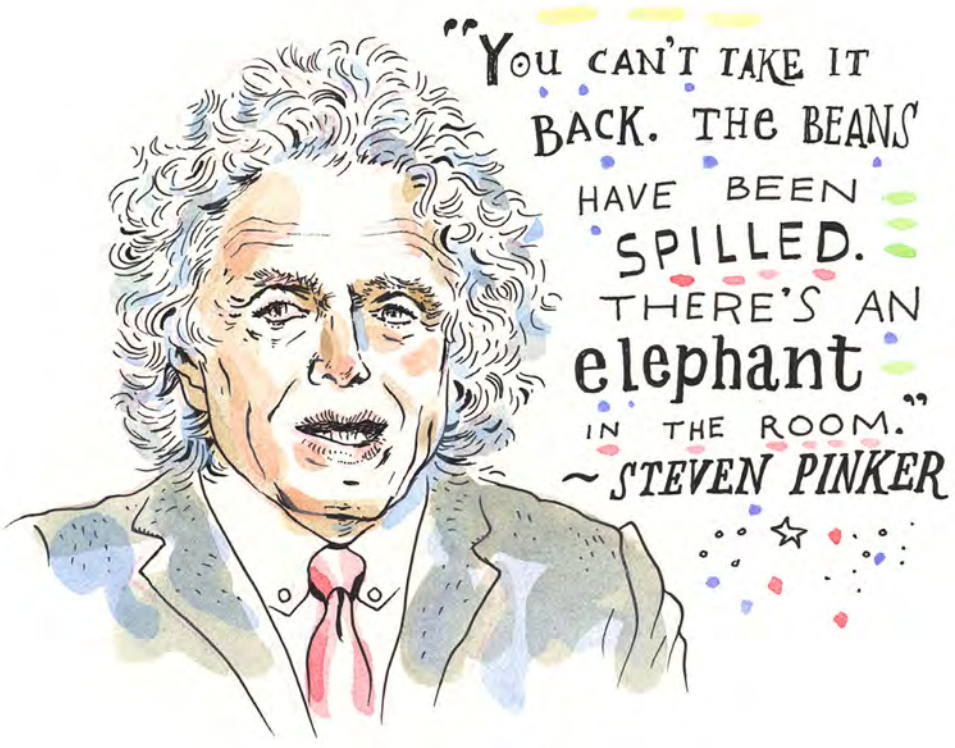
The carillon bells were ringing as the tour approached Rockefeller Chapel. The scaffolding that covered one side of the building for months had been removed, and the copper trim shone brightly around a sloped roof on the northeast side. Approximately 9,000 slate roof tiles, removed in the late 2000s during a restoration project, were eventually given to Gates. The tiles form a roof again in *Unto Thee*, displayed alongside other pieces made with roofing materials. Gates returns to roofs again and again in his work, in honor of his father's occupation as a roofer.

Lorado Taft Midway Studios concrete floor

The tour crossed the Midway for its next two stops. Lorado Taft Midway Studios was an independent art studio that became the University's fine arts studio in the 1940s and served as the workplace for artists, including one of Gates's mentors, the ceramic sculptor Ruth Duckworth. When the building was renovated in the 2010s, Gates felt guilty that Duckworth's kiln was removed, but he was able to preserve pieces of the concrete flooring that originally stood under it. Bearing stains of paint and other materials from years of use, four slabs of this concrete now support a ceramic figure of Gates's as part of *Unto Thee*.

Logan Center granite tiles

En route to the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, the tour walked across large rectangular black granite tiles. Gates was involved in the planning of the arts center, completed in 2012, the same year he joined the UChicago faculty. He acquired tiles left over from the construction project. In *Unto Thee* they are part of *African Still Life #4*, paving the raised platform that holds the ISAC vitrines, three African objects, and one of several of Gates's own wood-fired ceramic sculptures.—*C. C.*



latest book, *When Everyone Knows That Everyone Knows … Common Knowledge and the Mysteries of Money, Power, and Everyday Life* (Scribner, 2025). They began by distinguishing the book's sense of "common knowledge" from the term's everyday meaning: things that are widely known.

The kind of common knowledge examined in the book is more reciprocal. "In the technical sense, from philosophy, game theory, and economics," Pinker said, common knowledge refers to "something that is known to be known." In other words, "I know something, you know it. I know that you know it. You know that I know it. I know that you know that I know it." And so on, sometimes mind-bendingly far.

A handy example, he said, is the story of the emperor's new clothes. Everyone in the story presumably knows the emperor has no clothes on, but when the child says it out loud, everything changes. As an example of common knowledge from everyday life, he offered the signing of contracts, where "part of that very event is that it's being perceived by everyone."

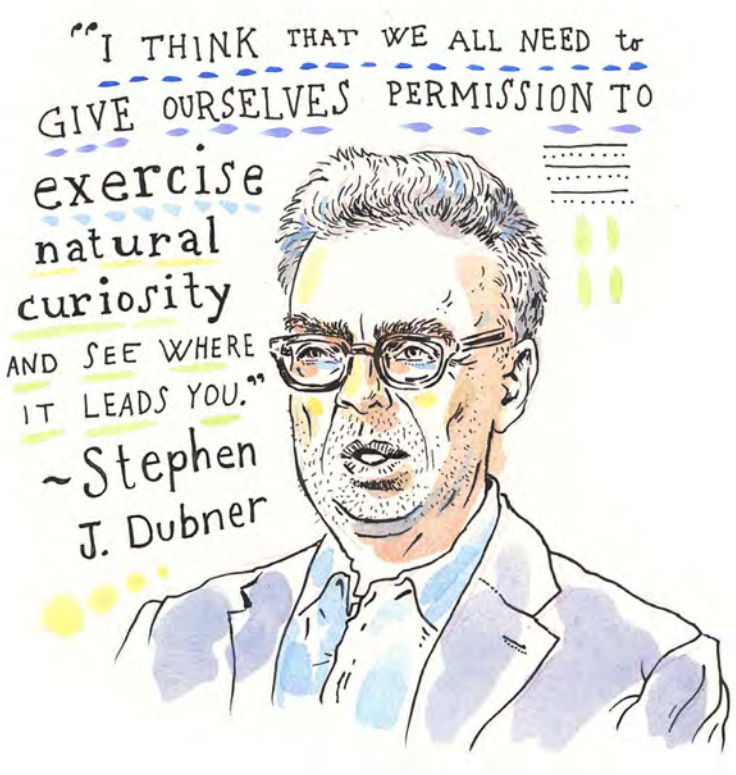
After knowledge has become so public, "you can't take it back," Pinker elaborated. "The beans have been spilled. There's an elephant in the room." For Pinker this kind of common knowledge—he also called it "joint attention" and "triangular awareness"—forms the basis for our social relationships, which depend on coordination.

And it may shed light on certain mysteries of human behavior. Although language is the primary way we establish common knowledge, we also use facial expressions, eye contact, and even involuntary body language like blushing and crying to signal what we know and to understand what others know. "Why did, presumably, evolution see fit to add a signaling system as weird as our eyes overflowing with tears," Pinker asked, "something that is not found, apparently, in any other organism?"

His surmise: to make important emotions plain to see. "It's mysteries like that that I invoke the notion of common knowledge to explain," he said. "Namely, there are some signals that have to be perceived from both the inside and the outside, together with the knowledge that they are being perceived by the other party."—*L. D.*

GET YOUR FREAKONOMICS ON

Last year marked the 20th anniversary of Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything *(William Morrow, 2005) by UChicago economist* **Steven Levitt**, *William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus, and Stephen J. Dubner.* **Deborah L. Nelson**, *dean of the Division of the Arts & Humanities and Helen B. and Frank L. Sulzberger Professor of English, sat down with Dubner for a freewheeling chat about the runaway bestseller. The following excerpts have been edited and condensed.*



Nelson If you're celebrating a 20th anniversary, you must tell an origin story.

Dubner I'd left *The New York Times* and I was on my own, a freelancer, essentially, and I had a couple other books under contract. I was probably a chapter or two into writing one when my editor at *The New York Times Magazine*, where I used to work, said, "There's this guy at the University of Chicago named Steve Levitt who just won this award called the John Bates Clark Medal."

Do you all know what the Clark Medal is? The econ people know. It's a big, big, big deal. It used to be called the Junior Nobel. I actually turned down the assignment like two or three times because I was already working on a book.

Then I happened to be in Chicago for something else, and I decided, let me look at Levitt's papers. I downloaded them all and started to read them—like, oh my god, he's just so weird and interesting.

As I was reading them, my first thought was oh, he's doing in economics what I want to be doing as a writer, which is finding areas that are less trod than normal and going deep on them. So anyway, I came out here. He tells a story that I promised I'd only be here for two hours, and I stayed for three days. I think that's slightly exaggerated. I probably told him four hours and it was four days. But anyway, I just loved his brain.

Nelson I have to notice that you're a musician and a writer and an editor, and you're doing none of that without the kind of work we teach in the Arts & Humanities Division. That tool that Stephen Levitt built is still useless unless you have a way to use a story to explain what it does and how it works.

Dubner Levitt said this to me when I first met him. He said that economics is a science with a bunch of great tools to answer difficult, challenging, unusual questions—but a paucity of good questions. And Levitt came up with very, very interesting questions and then used the tools of economics, that are typically applied to much more normal things like unemployment and the market, and applied them to small, weird micro environments.

Nelson So how do you know what an unusual question is?

Dubner For me, the secret is just curiosity. I'm just this dime-store curious person, like a child. I'm basically a child. And, you know, all children are scientists. If I drop this, what happens? Oh, it breaks. Then I get yelled at. So I just learned two things there, gravity and punishment-reward.

I think that we all need to give ourselves permission to exercise natural curiosity and see where it leads you. It will lead you to places that everybody else isn't already thinking about. ◆

THE BEAUTY OF SLAG

Maybe it's not just a brownfield or a wastescape. Maybe it's a novel ecosystem.

BY CARRIE GOLUS, AB'91, AM'93
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON SMITH

The Marian R. Byrnes Natural Area in Chicago.

An alvar is a strange, barren landscape: a flat sheet of limestone with just a sprinkling of loose soil on top. You might think nothing could grow there, and yet somehow, alvars host their own tough little communities of rare plants. Sometimes even trees. Severely stunted trees, but trees nonetheless—natural bonsai. "It's like they're growing on a parking lot," says ecologist **Alison Anastasio**, SM'05, PhD'09.

Anastasio first visited Stora Alvaret (Great Alvar) in 2008 when she was in Sweden doing fieldwork for her dissertation. The alvar had nothing to do with her research, which focused on a plant known as thale cress or mouse-eared cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*). But she was fascinated by this apparent

wasteland that was home to all kinds of plants and animals: "What a beautiful, amazing ecosystem."

A few years later, back in Chicago, she visited a less romantic landscape, the former US Steel South Works site on the southeast side of the city. It's covered with slag, a byproduct of steelmaking. Slag was dumped while it was still molten. Like flowing lava, it killed everything it touched, then hardened into a substance similar to asphalt. At the US Steel site, Anastasio found cottonwood trees growing on it.

Cottonwoods are usually enormous—100 feet tall or more. These cottonwoods were stunted down to human size, closer to six feet. They made Anastasio think of the tiny trees she'd seen on Stora Alvaret.

When she looked more closely at the vegetation, she expected to find "all crap plants"—the same invasive, non-native weeds you might see in any vacant lot. To her surprise she spotted little bluestem, a native prairie grass, as well as three species of native milkweed. And the US Steel site is "not even one of the most exciting slag sites," she says.

Anastasio had already completed her PhD and decided she did not want a career as an academic scientist. Nonetheless, a research idea was born.

THESE SLAG FIELDS HAVE ECOLOGICAL VALUE IN AND OF THEMSELVES. THEY'RE NOT JUST A PROBLEM.

That former mill site sits in the Calumet Region—sometimes called, more poetically, the Calumet Crescent. The region begins on the far South Side of Chicago and hugs the Lake Michigan shoreline into Indiana. Its ecosystems include dunes, oak savannas, prairies, wetlands, and woodlands.

The showiest part is the Indiana Dunes. In the early 20th century, faculty member Henry Chandler Cowles, PhD 1898, helped make this area internationally famous. His important early work on ecological succession (the idea that ecosystems transform into others over time) was based on his fieldwork in the dunes and around Chicago.

In 1916 Cowles testified in Senate hearings for a resolution to create a Dunes National Park. He ranked the dunes with the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Yosemite as the nation's top natural wonders. That resolution failed; the Indiana Dunes finally got its national park in 2019.

Despite the national park, natural beauty is not the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the Calumet Region. Its largest city (not

Lauren Umek (left) and Alison Anastasio, SM'05, PhD'09, search for a rare sedge in the Marian R. Byrnes Natural Area. Below: The many colors of slag, a byproduct of steelmaking.

counting the slice of Chicago) is Gary, Indiana. Seen from the Chicago Skyway, the landscape is defined by steel mills—a few still operational, but most long shuttered—and other heavy industry. When the mills closed, the slag was left, a permanent reminder of a more profitable time, with less environmental oversight.

In the Chicago section of the Calumet Region, some of these brownfields (a general term for former industrial sites) now belong to the Chicago Park District. The challenge for land managers is turning them into green spaces for people to enjoy. So how do you clean this mess up?

According to Anastasio and her research collaborators—**Laura Merwin**, SM'12, PhD'15, and Lauren Umek, who earned her doctorate at Northwestern—sometimes the answer is simple.

You don't.

Around 2018 Anastasio came up with the idea of forming a volunteer research group of urban ecologists, "a dream team of people I wanted to work with."

She knew Laura Merwin from UChicago; they had overlapped briefly in the lab of Joy Bergelson, then the James D. Watson Distinguished Service Professor and chair of the Department of Ecology and Evolution. Anastasio had met Lauren Umek, a project manager for the Chicago Park District, through local ecology groups. "Somewhere someday," Anastasio says. "We can't really remember."

She invited them to brunch to pitch her idea to research plants growing on slag. Not for any obvious career goal, just out of pure curiosity.

Anastasio had prepared a spreadsheet—"Because she knew our love language," says Umek—that outlined which skills each person could bring to the project and how each might benefit. She didn't need the spreadsheet. Merwin and Umek were excited to join her "reverse side hustle," as Anastasio calls it. (It involves a lot of work, but rather than bringing in extra money, it brings extra costs.)

At the time Anastasio was teaching environmental and urban studies at UChicago; among other classes, she taught in the College's Calumet Quarter. Merwin was teaching in the biology department at Concordia University. And at the park district, Umek's responsibilities included two sites—Big Marsh Park and Marian R. Byrnes Natural Area—where slag had been dumped. With Umek in the group, they would have access to these sites to conduct research.

Anastasio had called her spreadsheet "Slag Research Group." No one can remember who came up with their subsequent name, the Slag Queens. "You have to call the group chat something," says Umek. Later they discovered it's also the name of a post-punk band in Australia, where *slag* means something different.

Outside the group chat, the three are better known as Merwin et al. Their first paper, "Urban Post-Industrial Landscapes Have Unrealized Ecological Potential," was published in *Restoration Ecology* in 2022.

The Slag Queens (SQs for short) call this paper Slag 1. It included "very little data," Merwin says, almost apologetically. Like Cowles and other early ecologists, their primary task was to describe what they saw—namely, "considerable extant biodiversity," as the paper puts it.

Slag 1 makes a bold claim: These slag fields have ecological value in and of themselves. They're not just a problem. They're also a possibility.

When public agencies end up owning brownfields, they sometimes intervene, either by excavating the slag or by capping it and putting new soil on top. Both options—especially excavation—are expensive, and they wipe out anything valuable that might already be living there. "Rarely is the current ecological quality of brownfields preserved or even considered," Merwin et al. write, "despite the common presence of volunteer species" (species that just show up) "and ongoing ecosystem processes."

The paper makes the case for thinking of certain brownfields as novel ecosystems.

A novel ecosystem is an artifact of the Anthropocene; it's an ecosystem transformed by human activity, replacing whatever ecosystem was there before. According to the paper, there is a "growing realization" among ecologists that these sites have value. Maybe they provide shade, or habitat, or plants that pollinators like.

They might help with stormwater management, slowing the flow of water to prevent flooding. Incredibly, these sites might help sequester

carbon, keeping it out of the atmosphere, where it contributes to global warming. "Slag is good at that apparently!" Anastasio says.

In addition, Merwin et al. argue for something heretical among native-plant evangelists, that non-native species, including "problematic invasives," should be "tolerated or even encouraged on slag sites" if they are hosting pollinators, for example. (But, importantly, only if there are no high-quality remnant sites—undisturbed ecological sites—nearby, where the invasive plants might spread and threaten native biodiversity.)

Finally, Merwin et al. suggest that land managers forget whatever ecosystem was there before. Instead they should look to more similar ecosystems as a guide, for example, alvar or—closer to home—dolomite prairie. (Dolomite is similar to limestone.) Endangered plants that originally grew on dolomite prairie, such as leafy prairie clover and lakeside daisy, might flourish on slag.

The group's next paper, Slag 2, is a survey of plants growing on 12 slag sites in the Calumet Region. It's "the meaty one," Anastasio says, chock-full of data: "If I do nothing else, all I wanted to do was characterize this ecosystem."

The survey showed two basic categories of sites, wet and dry. Wet sites have a certain set of plants you see over and over again; dry sites have their own different set of regulars. "Not groundbreaking," says Anastasio, "but whoa, really interesting!" And a question no one had thought to ask.

What they had not planned on was a paper they call Slag 1.5, coauthored by Nathanael Pilla and Anastasio, which appeared in a 2024 issue of *The Great Lakes Botanist*. The SQs had invited Pilla, a botanist with Midwest Biological Survey, to help them identify plants. At one of the wet sites, Pilla spotted a rare sedge, something "no one else would notice ever, except for supernerds," Anastasio says. *Eleocharis geniculata*, commonly called capitate spike-rush, had last been recorded in Illinois in 1894 and was considered locally extinct. There it was, growing on slag.

The group's long-term project is called Slag 5, because publication is somewhere in the distant future. "It's slow science," Anastasio says.

One of the first things the SQs did when they began their research was mark a transect (a fancy science name for "line") across part of Big Marsh Park, a former industrial site on the southeast side of Chicago. Along the transect they defined both experimental and observational plots.

This part of Big Marsh is so red and crusty it's known as Mars. But it's home to all kinds of plants, including "a nasty invasive species, spotted knapweed," Anastasio says, "a little thistle-y kind of thing." The park district had planned to spray it, "but I've never seen more insects in one place," Anastasio says. On the advice of the SQs, this notoriously invasive weed was left alone.

The transect is 600 meters long, and they sample every 25 meters. The SQs also laid out "paired plots" every 50 meters. On one of the plots, they cleared away the plant matter down to the roots. The second plot, the control, was left as it was. The plan is to study the patterns of plant succession to understand what happens over time.

"Shout-out to the University of Chicago. One thing I learned that made a big impression on me from **Cathy Pfi ter** [professor of ecology and evolution]," Anastasio says: "Get that long-term data set started, because you never know what you're going to find."

On a perfect autumn evening, Anastasio and Umek have agreed to give the *Magazine* a tour of the Marian R. Byrnes Natural Area. The SQs are busy with their day jobs, so it's difficult to get all three together. (Since the group formed, those day jobs have shifted. Anastasio works as an environmental consultant at architecture/engineering firm Ramboll; Merwin has a similar role at engineering firm Sargent & Lundy.)

The novel ecosystem that has emerged in the Calumet Region is home to rare sedges (opposite) as well as tiny white orchids.

Marian R. Byrnes begins near 96th Street and Stony Island Avenue and runs along the railroad tracks to 103rd Street. The Chicago Transit Authority wanted it for a bus depot—a plan thwarted by neighborhood activist Marian Byrnes, AM'50, who fought to preserve it as green space.

Umek has an unlikely family connection to this diagonal sliver of land. Her in-laws, who grew up in the neighborhood, used to tell stories about "the Prairie." When she was assigned to work on the Marian Byrnes area, she discovered it was the same thing: "That's *the* Prairie?"

One day Umek walked it with her father-in-law and his 90-something mother so Umek could ask him about playing there as a kid in the 1970s. "A 10-year-old boy's memory of tromping through the space is the perfect ecology memory," she says.

They could catch tadpoles but not fish, he recalled. Umek's translation: "It's an ephemeral wetland, wet enough to have tadpoles, but not enough to have fish."

There were more green snakes than brown ones; the green ones "made the best necklaces." These snakes (called, endearingly, smooth greensnakes, one word) are "an indicator species" of a high-quality environment, says Umek. "And they're abundant here, and they've apparently always been abundant here."

When they played with matches, her father-in-law said, certain areas would catch fire, while others wouldn't. That told her "how much standing water there was," Umek says, as well as "what types of grasses were probably present that would easily catch fire."

"You're grounded," her father-in-law's mother told him at the end of the tour.

Marian Byrnes is one of the slag sites where the rare sedge grows. "Hi, baby!" Anastasio says, as she scoops one up for a photo.

"When Alison and Nathanael discovered these, I was like, 'I assure you, I have stepped on that 400 times,'" says Umek.

It doesn't look like much. You might say it's a sedge only an ecologist could love. And how could they spot this scrubby, nubbly thing among all the taller, prettier plants? "If you had to describe a family member or a friend, it would be the hardest thing," Umek says. "But if you saw them, you know who they are."

Marian R. Byrnes Natural Area is also home to orchids. Tiny all-white orchids, known as sphinx ladies' tresses (*Spiranthes incurva*), a common wetlands plant in Illinois. But orchids nonetheless. Growing on slag.

The SQs like to name things. Their proposed name for the landscape they study, courtesy of Nathanael Pilla: Chicago slag barrens.

A barrens is a specific type of habitat, describing a place where plant growth is sparse, stunted, or otherwise limited. "There are pine barrens, sand barrens, serpentine barrens," Anastasio says. The SQs argue that the Calumet Region's anthropogenic ecosystem belongs among these natural barrens in the classification scheme.

The work of Merwin et al. (a name that might change with their next paper, depending on who takes the lead on writing it) brings some pragmatism to the debate about what to do with brownfield sites. The idea of leaving some sites as they are, and maybe strategically adding a few native plants here and there, certainly holds allure for taxpayers.

Because of Umek's job in the park district, the SQs are in the unusual position of being able to help shape policy. Already the park district has made changes "as a direct result of this collaboration," she says. "Very real on-the-ground changes in our approach to how we manage parks."

The pipe dream of restoring postindustrial areas to what they once were is "not a realistic goal," Umek says. By the same logic, much of the lakefront would be under Lake Michigan. Instead their research centers on "these bigger questions of, 'What is it? And what can it be?'" ◆

A STORIED LIFE

Christina von Nolcken's biography of novelist, medievalist, and code breaker Edith Rickert, PhD 1899, is the product of 12 years of meticulous research.

BY SHILOH MILLER, CLASS OF 2026

During the many years **Christina von Nolcken**, associate professor emerita of English, taught a course on Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* at UChicago, she liked taking students on what she calls "little jaunts"—trips to the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center. There she would show them highlights from the library's Chaucer collection, including the famous eight-volume work *The Text of the Canterbury Tales, Studied on the Basis of All Known Manuscripts* (University of Chicago Press, 1940) by scholars and UChicago professors John Manly and Edith Rickert, PhD 1899. In discussing this scholarly work with her classes, von Nolcken began to realize she knew more about Manly—whose portrait hangs in the English department in Walker Hall—than Rickert, whose face she had never seen.

Von Nolcken went searching in Special Collections for photos but found far more. Rickert, she discovered, was beautiful, well traveled, and well liked, and her writings conveyed a kind of crackling intensity and thoughtfulness. "I thought, *This is a really interesting woman*," von Nolcken says. Her

UChicago English professors Edith Rickert, PhD 1899, and John Manly published an ambitious eight-volume edition of *The Canterbury Tales* based on more than 80 extant manuscripts.

initial curiosity moved her to become Rickert's biographer, and in 2024 she published *The "Lives" and Writings of Edith Rickert (1871–1938): Novelist, Cryptologist, and World-Class Chaucerian* (Palgrave Macmillan).

The book reveals an accomplished scholar and writer who was also partly responsible for what has been considered the most important act of American code breaking in World War I. Rickert's scholarly and cryptographic achievements are sometimes not given the same credit as those of her male collaborators, an oversight von Nolcken's biography seeks to rectify.

THE BOOK REVEALS AN ACCOMPLISHED SCHOLAR AND WRITER WHO WAS ALSO PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAS BEEN CONSIDERED THE MOST IMPORTANT ACT OF AMERICAN CODE BREAKING IN WORLD WAR I.

Rickert was born in 1871 and grew up first in the small Ohio town of Canal Dover (a place that later inspired her fir t published story, "Among the Iron-Workers," which won a competition for short fiction by college students in 1890) and later in Chicago. Her early life was happy but punctuated with tragedy—three of her six younger siblings did not survive to adulthood, and her mother died when Rickert was 21.

When she matriculated at Vassar on a full scholarship in 1887, Rickert was the firs in her family to go to college. She graduated in 1891 as valedictorian. She then returned to Chicago to teach high school and pursue a PhD in Middle English at the University of Chicago. Dissertation research called her abroad, and on her 25th birthday she set sail for Europe to explore the British Museum's collection of medieval romances. It was in London that she met medical student Kate Platt, later a distinguished physician and always Rickert's friend.

Rickert's time abroad influenced her as both a novelist and a scholar. On an 1897 trip to the Scottish island of Barra, she collected local stories that she later spun into fiction. By this point she had been publishing her creative writing for several years, but her reimagined regional lore gave her more recognition and some small compensation. Other writers would later receive more attention for folklore-inspired fiction, but, von Nolcken says, "Edith was out there on the cutting edge for this sort of thing."

Back in the United States, Rickert was appointed to an instructorship at Vassar in 1897. The summer of 1899 took her to Chicago to defend her PhD. Among her examiners was John Manly, the "brand-new whiz kid at the University," as von Nolcken describes him, and the first head of the English department. Right away Rickert "fell desperately in love," von Nolcken says. But she nevertheless decided to rejoin Platt in England and establish herself as a writer.

Rickert and Platt moved into Tibbles, a "tumbledown house" in Kent, where they integrated themselves into the local community and adopted a cat and dog. Rickert published five well-received novels, several works of scholarship, and many short stories. Although Rickert "was always hankering after the guy," von Nolcken considers those years in England the happiest of Rickert's life.

In 1909 Rickert returned to America to financ the educations of her three younger sisters. Then, when the United States joined World War I in 1917, she followed Manly to Washington, DC, to become a code breaker. She had gained some code breaking experience that same year from her work on the Voynich manuscript, a 15th-century document written in a (still uncracked) cipher, and she had picked up German at Vassar and on her firs post-Vassar trip to Europe. The US Department of Justice's Bureau of Investigation (now the Federal Bureau of Investigation) had reached out to Manly to head the Code and Cipher Section of the US Army Military Intelligence Division (also called MI-8 or the Black Chamber), and Rickert was eager to make use of her own talents.

Information about Rickert's code breaking is hard to come by because the 1917 Espionage Act

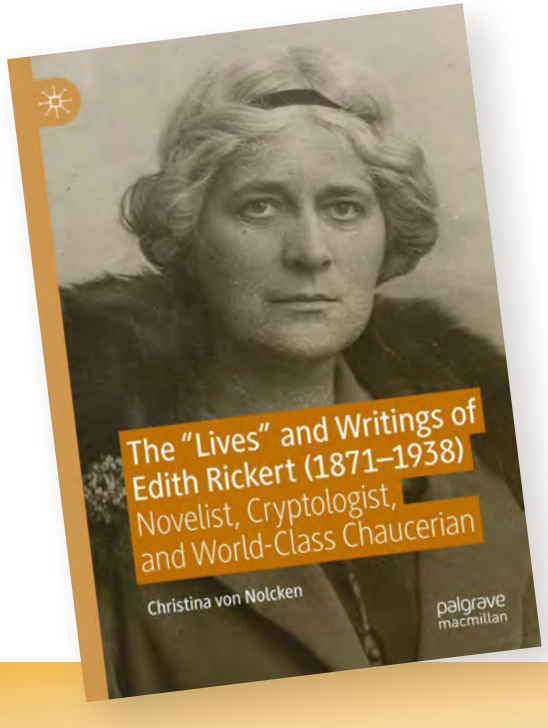
Photography by Vail Brothers, UChicago Photographic Archive, apf1-07128, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

put limits on most outside communication. But it's clear that she took to the work with diligence and zeal. Most importantly, after three days of nonstop effort, she and Manly broke the Waberski cipher, found on a paper sewn into the clothes of a German spy intercepted in February 1918 at the US–Mexico border. The decrypted message concerned Germany's attempt to ally with Mexico, reinforcing information in the Zimmermann telegram cracked by the British the year before.

Rickert's role in breaking the Waberski cipher has been largely overlooked by historians. (She is also not widely recognized for her work in the prewar years revising—and helping write—a series of English grammar and composition textbooks that bear Manly's name.) In fact, after publishing the biography, von Nolcken found a letter in which Rickert says she did all the work on the cipher. "I can believe her," says von Nolcken. For years, if Manly publicly acknowledged Rickert's contributions at all, it was as his bright student rather than a colleague. "It's only after the period in Washington that … he started going out of his way to make sure she was credited," von Nolcken says.

It is at this point, too, that Rickert's professional and personal relationship with Manly, as von Nolcken writes, "reached the equilibrium that as far as we know lasted for the rest of their lives," remaining close friends and research partners until Rickert's death.

AFTER THREE DAYS OF NONSTOP EFFORT, SHE AND MANLY BROKE THE WABERSKI CIPHER, FOUND ON A PAPER SEWN INTO THE CLOTHES OF A GERMAN SPY INTERCEPTED IN FEBRUARY 1918 AT THE US–MEXICO BORDER.



TELLER OF *TALES*

Christina von Nolcken, associate professor emerita of English, is a scholar of Old and Middle English literature, Anglo-Scandinavian relations near the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, and efforts by John Wycliffe's followers to extend religious education to the public. As her former students acknowledge in a volume compiled in her honor in 2021, von Nolcken's research contributed to a larger reassessment of medieval literature that grappled with how texts were interpreted and reworked over time by scribes and other intermediaries. Her research has focused particularly on how the Wycliffe Bible and *The Canterbury Tales*, as well as devotional texts including the *Ancrene Riwle* (a rule book for anchoresses, or cloistered nuns), have been rewrought over time. A 2003 winner of the Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, von Nolcken always especially enjoyed teaching *The Canterbury Tales*.—*C. C.*

CTBIE KHECR RNWSP CIERI AGAKH*

Found sewn into the clothes of Lothar Witzke, alias Pablo Waberski, when he was arrested while crossing from Mexico to Arizona, the piece of paper that came to be called the Waberski cipher was a significant piece of German military intelligence. It was decrypted by MI-8, the Code and Cipher Section of the US Army's Military Intelligence Division, to which Manly and Rickert were assigned during World War I. The cipher proved that Waberski, who was suspected of orchestrating multiple attacks on American cities, was a secret agent operating with a significant level of discretion.

In 1927 Manly described the process of decrypting the Waberski cipher. He does not name himself or Rickert in the description but simply refers to "the two experts."

The experts were able to determine, based on letter frequency, that the message was written in German and that it was a transposition cipher, in which existing letters are rearranged. Known patterns in German spelling, like the fact that the letter *c* is always followed by *h* or *k*, helped them identify patterns in the cipher.

Manly and Rickert thought it likely the cipher was a columnar transposition cipher, where groups of letters are arranged into columns and rows, like a spreadsheet, and a key determines the order in which to read the columns. Organizing the message into these blocks, they began to spot some likely words. The one that jumped out first was composed of two groups of four: KMEX and IKOP could be placed one after the other to form *Mexiko* (the German spelling of the country's name).

They used trial and error to determine what order of these three- and four-letter blocks would produce legible text, finding that the Waberski cipher had been through a double transposition process: Not only were the columns out of order, but the rows were, too. "Strictly Secret exclamation point"—the message finally emerged, punctuation written out—"The bearer of this is a subject of the Empire who travels as a Russian under the name of Pablo Waberski period He is a German secret agent period," it began.—*C. C.*

***The key to this cipher is 45213. Find the answer at left.**

After the war, Rickert supported herself by writing textbooks, children's books, and book reviews, though she craved a return to academic work. She got her wish around 1923, when she and Manly embarked on what von Nolcken considers "the most ambitious humanistic project of the early 20th century," their critical edition of *The Canterbury Tales*. For this they had to locate and examine every one of the more than 80 extant manuscripts of the tales, in order to reconstruct the version left by Chaucer's very first scribe.

The project meant traveling to archives in Europe. It also required funding. Relying on a new technology that they knew from their war work, Rickert and Manly needed to purchase photostats of all the manuscripts so that their assistants could collate them in what became known as the "Chaucer Laboratory" at the University of Chicago. Funding came mainly from the Rockefeller Foundation, though Rickert and Manly had to supplement what they received by teaching six months of each year. Both now taught at the University, where Rickert—like von Nolcken—became an associate professor (later a full professor) focusing on medieval English literature. "I had her job, in a sense," von Nolcken says.

After years of worsening health, Rickert died in 1938, two years before the eight-volume *Canterbury Tales* was published. While the edition is not used widely today, von Nolcken believes that "no one has edited *The Canterbury Tales* with more care."

There was another project that remained incomplete when Rickert died: "My Book," treating her own life and philosophy. Von Nolcken's biography begins and ends with Rickert's plan for this work, penciled at the very end of her life. Rickert's intellectual vibrancy and devotion to hard work ring clear. In her own words: "In this life, just as I am, physically & mentally, I have certain powers & certain opportunities not quite like those of anyone else. So with each of us. It is our business to be used to the utmost. And why, I wonder? Because stagnation means atrophy—going backward—& that is the one crime. The perpetual urge in us toward growth & grasp & power & understanding—that is God." ◆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PEER REVIEW

WHAT ALUMNI ARE THINKING AND DOING

ZERO HOUR, 9 A.M.
Members of the University Rocket Society set up a test stand and thrust motor in a snowy clearing to conduct an experiment in the winter of 1952.

UChicago Photographic Archive, apf4-03470, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

GOOD AIM

An alumnus reflects on the value of a liberal arts education.

BY XAVIER SERRANI, AB'14

The last time I had an extended visit to UChicago's campus was when I attended my class's 10th reunion. In addition to the engaging Alumni Weekend programming, it was wonderful to catch up with old friends and reminisce about our college days. I will admit, though, that after hearing my classmates' stories of goals accomplished and accolades earned over those 10 years, I couldn't help feeling a little insecure. Everyone just seemed so … impressive. I had a great weekend, but ever since leaving campus, I've had this nagging thought: Did I miss the aims of education?

We all remember huddling in Rockefeller Chapel during O-Week for the Aims of Education Address, which is intended to provoke thoughtful conversation about the goals of a liberal arts education. One can hardly imagine a more fi ting start to the first quarter at the University of Chicago. As a bright-eyed undergraduate, I was enraptured by the tradition. The solemn nature of a high-minded lecture coupled with the grandeur of the chapel bustling with my classmates made for a powerful beginning to my collegiate career.

What I took from that address was that education was about learning critical thinking skills, exploring a broad range of disciplines, and sparking a lifelong sense of curiosity and inquiry. It was about grappling with seminal texts that archive the human experience and carrying with me whatever lessons I could learn from them. That night in Rockefeller Chapel, I decided that for me, the aims of education were wide but simple: Learn to live a good life. Convinced of this belief, I started my studies.

I was a moderately successful student. My academic record was above average, but my coursework was easier than some of my classmates'. My senior thesis was a solid attempt at scholarship, albeit certainly not publishable. But I did learn how to read and write effectively.

I made modest contributions to two student organizations over the course of four years. I wasn't the president of either, but I did hold leadership positions. I didn't reinvigorate the undergraduate population with my oration or lead a student movement, but I did learn how to work with my peers to accomplish a common goal.

Like many of my classmates, I plugged myself into the available career resources, hoping to land a position with one of the several top-tier firms that recruited from the College. I performed poorly in case interviews, and none of the firms moved me forward in their process. But the interview skills I learned did help me get a job at a successful insurance brokerage company after graduation.

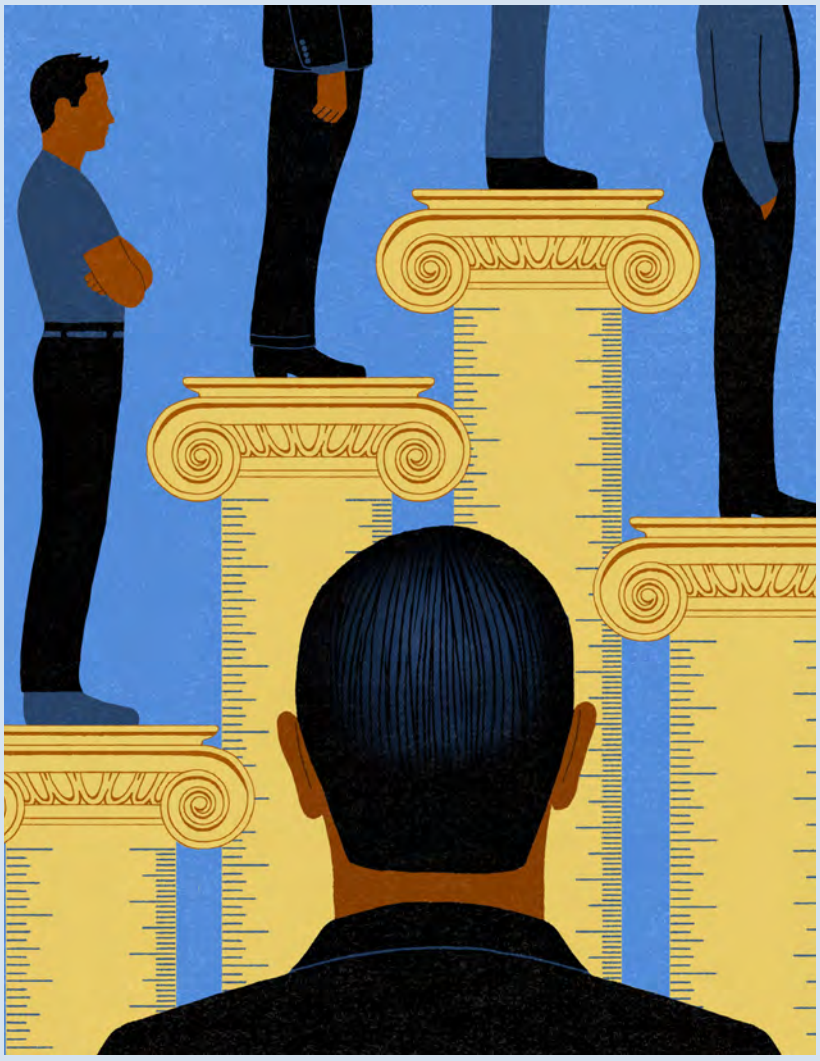
I didn't reinvigorate the undergraduate population with my oration or lead a student movement, but I did learn how to work with my peers to accomplish a common goal.

Despite steady employment, my professional career has been wholly unremarkable. I've always had a low-stress office job, rarely ever clocking more than 40 hours a week. I'm not an executive or even a manager. But I know how to speak to clients and deliver work on time.

When I'm not working my day job, I work as a sports official for high schools and colleges close to home. My fellow officials and I enjoy a rare camaraderie, especially when we're watching highlights on the local news, hoping to catch a glimpse of ourselves. That said, local news is a far cry from a nationally televised contest. Nevertheless, I have mentored younger officials on how to handle a "big game."

My wife, four children, and I live in our Midwestern hometown. It's a mid-size city you've probably never heard of. We aren't connected to an elite network of local professionals, nor are we hosting cocktail parties at a country club. But we have good relationships with all of our neighbors, and our kids have a well-established network of friends and cousins.

We take a laissez-faire attitude toward our kids' activities, usually signing them up based on the weather that season (it must be at least 65 degrees), time commitment (I like my Saturday



mornings to myself), and enrollment cost (the lower the better). The number one criterion: Are the kids having fun? Even when they show flashes of aptitude, I am not calling sought-after professionals to coach them into prodigies. But I do make it a priority to encourage my two older daughters in the interests we share: nature and coloring.

When my wife and I aren't shuttling kids to weekend activities, we trade off supervising them so we can each attend services at our parish. We've been members there for nearly 10 years—longer than any of the pastors. We certainly aren't leading a revival. But we do meet with engaged couples several times a year to help them prepare for successful marriages.

As you can see, my interests are as varied as the Core curriculum. I read books and watch movies with a critical eye; I occasionally play my guitar and (less occasionally) sing in my garage; I work with a tutor to study Japanese; I love sports but also lectures on cosmology; I enjoy a fine cocktail as much as a light beer. I've brought a fair amount of the human experience within my scope.

Books, movies, music, and booze: My life is perfectly ordinary. And I am happily content with my life exactly how it is, because even though it is ordinary, my life is good.

The education I received equipped me to build this good life. And that education pervades every aspect of my life. Without it I would not have been able to discern what I value and, more importantly, what I don't. I would not have developed the mental acuity to think critically about the world around me. I would not have fostered the sense of curiosity that has driven me to pursue such varied interests. I would not have the deeply cherished relationships I am blessed to have.

My education didn't launch me into high society, but I didn't want or expect it to. I don't have a scrappy start-up in my garage. I'm not writing the next great American novel. I don't want to be rich, and I certainly don't want to be famous.

I harness my liberal arts education every day to live a good life, to counsel my friends on how to build their own, or, most recently, to help my eight-year-old discern between the competing merits of an inflatable pool and a slip and slide. She likes the slip and slide.

Now that some time has passed since my reunion, and after composing this reflection, my sense of insecurity has subsided. Comparison is the thief of joy—whether it's with my fellow alumni or with another (nonexistent, mind you) version of myself. I wanted an education to understand a little deeper, to think a little clearer, and to listen a little better. So I am confident in this answer: No, I didn't miss the aims of education. I learned how to build a good life, and I am currently living it. ◆

Xavier Serrani, AB'14, lives with his family in Indiana.

NOTES

A SELECTION OF ALUMNI WHOSE NAMES ARE IN THE NEWS

RIGHTEOUS RECOGNITION

In July **Matthew McCarthy**, JD'08, a lawyer based in Silver Spring, MD, won posthumous recognition for two people who saved Jews during World War II. Frans Gerardus Swidde and Johanna Timmers, great-grandparents of a colleague of McCarthy's, sheltered and protected their neighbors' daughters, Rebecca and Sellie Weijl, during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. After several years of archival research, McCarthy found the fi sthand testimony from survivors required by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, to honor Swidde and Timmers as Righteous Among the Nations—non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

Jonathan Fine, AB'91, began his role as director general of Vienna's KHM-Museumsverband, Austria's largest museum association. The association consists of the Kunsthistorisches Museum (art); the Theatermuseum (theater history); and the Weltmuseum Wien (anthropology), where he was director from 2021 to 2023. In addition to his degree from the College, Fine holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Cambridge, a master's degree from Stanford, a JD from Yale, and a PhD in art history from Princeton. A scholar of African art, Fine has advised Austrian and German cultural institutions on policies regarding the care and repatriation of art and objects from colonial contexts.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR

In December **Samira Ahmed**, AB'93, MAT'93, received the Adam Morgan Literary Leadership Award at the 2025 Chicago Review of Books Awards in recognition of her contributions to Chicago's literary scene. Ahmed is the author of over a dozen books, including the young adult novels *Love, Hate & Other Filters* (Soho Teen, 2018); *Internment* (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2019); and *This Book Won't Burn* (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2024). Ahmed is also a leader of Authors Against Book Bans, a coalition of more than 5,000 people from the publishing world who work against efforts to ban books.

MUNCH AND MEDICINE

During artist Edvard Munch's life (1863–1944), X-rays, germ theory, antibiotics, and contraception were discovered, ushering in the age of modern medicine and a new medical perspective on the body. The recent exhibition *Lifeblood* at MUNCH in Oslo, Norway, curated by Allison Morehead, PhD'07, a professor in the Department of Art History and Art Conservation at Queen's University, placed Munch's work within this context. Morehead staged Munch's work, which often features medical subjects—self-portraits of the artist when he was sick, sketches of his physician father's patients—alongside materials used in medical research and treatment, like a wooden baby incubator, a "spit flask" for tuberculosis patients, and Munch's sister's silver hearing aids.

LATTER-DAY LEADER

On October 14 **Dallin H. Oaks**, JD'57, was named the 18th president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He was previously a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles—the second-highest leadership body in the Church of Jesus Christ—since 1984. Before becoming a leader in the church, Oaks served as a professor in the University of Chicago Law School from 1961 to 1971, president of Brigham Young University from 1971 to 1980, and a justice of the Utah Supreme Court from 1980 to 1984.

LOZANO IN A NEW LIGHT

Conceptual artist Lee Lozano, AB'51 (1930–99), is the subject of a new exhibition and book. *Hard Handshake*, at Hauser & Wirth gallery in downtown Los Angeles, is the first major exhibition of her work in the city. It features over 100 drawings Lozano made between 1959 and 1968, a period that spans her time at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a trip to Europe, and her move to New York, where she turned to an increasingly private artistic practice. The provocative, often humorous illustrations, many of which were rarely exhibited during her lifetime, include self-portraits, anatomical studies, and sketches for paintings. The book, *In the Studio: Lee Lozano* (Hauser & Wirth, 2025), by Lucrezia Calabrò Visconti, traces Lozano's career through her work and other archival material.—*C. C.*

Photography by Ove Kvavik, *Livsblod: Edvard Munch* installation © Munchmuseet

RELEASES

ALUMNI BOOKS, FILMS, AND RECORDINGS

THE ASCENT

By Allison Buccola, JD'11; Random House, 2025

The Fifteen disappeared without a trace 20 years ago. But one member of this cult remained—a 12-year-old child, Ophelia. **Allison Buccola** introduces readers to Ophelia, now Lee, as an adult: Fighting others' suspicions and her own paranoia, she has built a new life with a good job, a successful and caring husband, a historic row house, and a new baby. But when a stranger promises information about Lee's past, this fragile balance is threatened. Lee thinks the stranger might help her heal from the cult's disappearance, but should she be so quick to trust?

WILDFLOWERS, VOL. 3

By Kurt Elling, AM'17, and Christian Sands; Big Shoulders Records, 2025

Released by jazz vocalist **Kurt Elling**'s new record label, Big Shoulders Records, *Wildflowers, Vol. 3* is Elling's first collaboration with pianist Christian Sands. The five tracks represent an eclectic range, from the jaunty harmonies of "Glow Worm"—a tune from a 1920s German operetta popularized by the Mills Brothers in the 1950s—to frank, clear vocals on a Christian Sands original, "Song of the Rainbow People." A song from Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio* (2022), a Bee Gees ballad, and a Thelonious Monk cover round out the album, bringing unexpected material into dialogue through jazz.

THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE: DEMOCRACY AND THE CASE FOR A NEW AMERICAN FOUNDING

Osita Nwanevu, AB'15, MPP'16; Random House, 2025

The Democratic Party made much of the battle for "our democracy" during the 2024 presidential election, but many Americans have expressed ambivalence about how well the US democratic system represents average people—and the meaning of the term *democracy* itself is murky, particularly because of its usage in nonpolitical contexts. **Osita Nwanevu** argues that there is still much democracy can do for us if we are bolder in the possibilities we imagine. America is not currently a democracy, he writes, but it can become one through a transformation of our political institutions and economy.

THE WIRELESS OPERATOR: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE BRITISH SAILOR WHO INVENTED THE MODERN DRUG TRADE

By David Tuch, AB'96; Icon Books, 2025

While researching his family history, **David Tuch** came across a cousin with a surprising story. Harold Derber grew up in Manchester, England, his adolescence defined by the devastation of the Blitz. Looking for a way out, he became a wireless operator in the British Merchant Navy. After the war, his thirst for adventure launched him into a series of illegal schemes: smuggling weapons into Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, mining for gemstones in South America, running gambling cruises out of Miami, ferrying refugees out of Cuba, and smuggling drugs into the United States. The book explores the highs and lows of an almost unbelievable life.

THE BODY DIGITAL: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANS AND MACHINES FROM CUCKOO CLOCKS TO CHATGPT

By Vanessa Chang, AM'06; Melville House, 2025

Technologies have always affected our bodies, shaping how we process information, create meaning—and even move. Today the gestures involved in opening an email on a smartphone are as second nature as those we perform to put pen to paper. **Vanessa Chang** chronicles the ways our bodies and technology have interacted throughout history. She argues that in a moment when new inventions like generative artificial intelligence blur the line between human and machine, it's time to consider creative solutions that put humanity first.—*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 and would like class notes from our archives, please email uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu.

These boots are made for learnin': Young UChicagoans focus on an art lecture in 1944. This photograph was part of a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* story about the Hutchins-era policy of admitting high school sophomores to the College. The piece included observations about the daily lives of UChicago students, including what they wore. Notable outfit choices for women, according to the paper, included cuffed jeans, scuffed saddle shoes, and the boots pictured here, a popular choice for students at the time. Apparently, things got even less formal in the summer, noted the *Post-Dispatch*, when women could be seen without any shoes on at all! (Photography by Arthur Witman/St. Louis Post-Dispatch, UChicago Photographic Archive, apf4-01895, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

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.

Gears are turning: A mechanical aptitude test administered at the University's Industrial Relations Center gives a man pause. Established in 1944, the center carried out a range of research and programming related to business management and labor relations, including developing training programs, questionnaires, and surveys for companies and offering leadership programs for union officials. In 1958 a new building to house the center was completed. Named for businessman and philanthropist Charles Stewart Mott, the building was located at the southwest corner of East 60th Street and South Kimbark Avenue. Were you involved with the Industrial Relations Center? What did you learn? Relate your memories at uchicago-magazine @uchicago.edu. (Photography by William M. Rittase, UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-04317, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

Precision instrument: George L. Weid, cancer research pioneer and longtime professor of medicine (left) shows off the University's new universal recording microspectrophotometer in 1965 to three members of the Nathan Goldblatt Society for Cancer Research, which gifted the instrument. Weid, a pioneer in the field of cytopathology, used instruments like microspectrophotometers to diagnose cancer and to study the effects of disease on cellular health. (UChicago Photographic Archive, apf1-11408, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

Cogs in the machine: Previously located in the basement of the Accelerator Building, which is now undergoing demolition, the Central Shop (also known as the Central Machine Shop) housed tools and resources for the design, construction, and repair of scientific instruments for the University's Physical Sciences Division. Combining a high level of mechanical knowledge and scientific expertise, the shop's machinists, including the person pictured here in 1974, worked from blueprints to build and troubleshoot research equipment for students, professors, and physicians alike. Did you ever work with the Cen-tral Shop? Let us know at uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu. (Photography by Gary Field, Copyright 2026, The Chicago Maroon. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.)

Bowled over: Members of the University's first College Bowl team gather in February 1980. Formed in the 1979–80 academic year, this bowl team placed fifth in the national radio championships, earning the title Rookie of the Year. UChicago College Bowl was started by business school student Lorin Burte, MBA'81, who had previously led Oberlin's College Bowl team to back-to-back nationals in 1978 and 1979. With so many quiz whizzes at UChicago, the team that represented the University was selected through an intramural competition held in Ida Noyes Hall. More trivia about the team in its early days: Uniform? It varied, but they did coordinate, all wearing (for example) bowling shirts. Mascot? Jan Van Eyck, a stuffed moose. (The 1979–80 season was also notable for Harvard's unsuccessful attempt to steal Jan.) Did you participate in College Bowl? What questions stumped you? Send your stories, no matter how trivial, to uchicago-magazine@uchicago.edu. (Photography by Neal Cohen, AB'83 (Class of 1982), MBA'84;)

Encapsulated: US President Theodore Roosevelt (standing, center) participates in the dedication of Stuart Hall, the Law School's original home, on April 2, 1903. A time capsule in the form of a long squat copper box soldered shut was placed in the cornerstone. When the new Law School building was dedicated in 1958, this capsule was moved to its cornerstone, and a second capsule containing midcentury artifacts was added as well. The cornerstone was reopened in 2009 with great trouble—not the first time it had caused headaches. A September 27, 1958, note from the construction workers who laid the cornerstone at that time read, "This stone caused much concern." The 1903 capsule contained photographic portraits of early faculty members, including Ernst Freund, James Parker Hall, and Horace K. Tenney, as well as of Roosevelt and University President William Rainey Harper. The capsule also contained the Law School's annual announce-ments for the 1902–03 academic year and the minutes of the first meeting of the Law School faculty. Discover both capsules' contents for yourself at mag.uchicago.edu /lawschoolcapsules. (UChicago Photographic Archive, apf2-07847, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

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DEATHS

FACULTY AND STAFF

Jonathan L. Rosner, professor emeritus of physics, of Chicago, died May 24. He was 83. Rosner conducted research on various topics in particle physics, with a focus on the properties and interactions of quarks and leptons in the Standard Model and beyond. Educated at Swarthmore College and Princeton, he was a central figure in UChicago's Department of Physics and the Enrico Fermi Institute from 1982 until his retirement in 2011. While primarily a theoretician—he published more than 500 theoretical papers—Rosner also taught electronics courses and actively participated in experimental endeavors such as the CLEO Collaboration in high-energy physics. He was a fellow of the American Physical Society and received Sloan Research and Guggenheim Fellowships, among many other honors. He is survived by his wife, Joy; two children, **Hannah Rosner**, LAB'87, and **Benjamin Rosner**, LAB'97; and a grandchild.

Harvey M. Golomb, AB'64, the Lowell T. Coggeshall Professor Emeritus in the Department of Medicine, of Las Vegas, died August 20. He was 82. Golomb was a leading authority on the genetic abnormalities that cause various cancers and an expert on chemotherapy for leukemia, lymphoma, and lung cancer. In collaboration with cancer genetics pioneer Janet Rowley, LAB'42, PhB'45, SB'46, MD'48, Golomb conducted pivotal research defining genetic subsets of leukemia. Trained at the University of Pittsburgh and Johns Hopkins Schools of Medicine, Golomb joined the UChicago faculty in 1975 and became chief of the Section of Hematology/Oncology in 1981. He served as chair of the Department of Medicine from 1998 to 2005 and dean of clinical affairs and chief medical officer for UChicago Medicine from 2002 to 2011. He retired in 2023. Survivors include his wife, Lynne; daughter **Sara Golomb**, LAB'91; and son **Adam S. Golomb**, LAB'89.

Jonathan Lear, the John U. Nef Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought and in the Department of Philosophy, died September 22 in Chicago. He was 76. A leading scholar of ancient ethics, Lear authored *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (1988), an influential introduction to the philosopher's work. Lear's psychoanalytic training drove his later work bridging ancient philosophy and psychology, including *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (2006), informed by his time on the Apsáalooke Reservation in Montana. Lear joined UChicago in 1996 and remained on the faculty for nearly 30 years, serving as the Roman Family Director of the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society from 2014 to 2022. His accomplishments in this role included fostering collaborations between faculty and Indigenous scholars. He is survived by his wife, **Gabriel Richardson Lear**, the Arthur and Joann Rasmussen Professor in Western Civilization; two children, including current Lab student **Samuel Lear**; and a sister.

1940s

Judith B. "Judy" Daskal, LAB'46, PhB'49, MST'74, died July 30 in Mill Valley, CA. She was 95. Born in Leipzig, Germany, Daskal fled the Nazi regime with her family in 1936 and settled in Chicago. After graduating from the College, she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Northwestern. She returned to the University of Chicago two decades later to get a master of science in teaching. For 50 years Daskal specialized in tutoring children with dyslexia and worked with adults as well. After 86 years in Chicago, she moved to Mill Valley in 2022 to be closer to family. Her husband, George Daskal, LAB'42, died in 2020. She is survived by her daughters, **Elizabeth Daskal**, LAB'76, **Jessica Daskal**, LAB'78, and **Kathryn Daskal**, LAB'78, and four grandchildren.

Chen Ning Yang, PhD'48, died October 18 in Beijing. He was 103. Yang came to UChicago to study under Enrico Fermi and Edward Teller, moving to Princeton, NJ, in 1949 to work at the Institute for Advanced Study. He spent summers at Brookhaven National Laboratory, where he codeveloped the Yang-Mills theory, a cornerstone of modern particle physics. In collaboration with Tsung-Dao Lee, PhD'50, he challenged long-held assumptions about the symmetry of physical forces, and the two were jointly awarded the 1957 Nobel Prize in Physics. In 1966 he joined what is now Stony Brook University as the founding director of the Institute for Theoretical Physics, which today bears his name. Eventually relocating to China, Yang served as a professor at Tsinghua University and helped foster academic exchange with the United States. Survivors include his wife, two children, and two grandchildren.

Evelyn Graves West, SM'49, of Blacksburg, VA, died March 24. She was 102. A graduate of Vanderbilt University School of Nursing, West supervised polio units at Vanderbilt Hospital after receiving her master's degree. Moving to Blacksburg, she worked as a nurse and preschool teacher and was on the nursing faculty at Wytheville Community College for 15 years. West retired in 1989 and sold her hand-knitted and sewn items on the craft circuit; she also was a faithful member of Blacksburg United Methodist Church for nearly 72 years. Survivors include four daughters, a sister, nine grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren.

1950s

Ellen (Stano) Smith, AB'52, died March 10 in Bethesda, MD. She was 92. Raised in a factory town in rural Pennsylvania, Smith won a scholarship to the College at age 16. Smith gravitated toward the arts and literature and began her career in children's book publishing. She later joined the US State Department, taught in Bethesda elementary schools, translated classic American books for English language learners, and worked as an editor for US Pharmacopeia. Survivors include two children, a brother, and two grandchildren.

Sanfred Koltun, AB'54, MBA'55, of Chicago, died May 9, 2024. He was 90. As the CEO of Kolcraft Enterprises Inc., Koltun grew a small family-owned crib mattress and pad business into a leading children's product company. Koltun supported the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Joffrey Ballet, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He also served on the board of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. He is survived by his wife, Nancy; three children; one sibling; and seven grandchildren.

Chung Nan Lee Kim, AM'57, died February 10, 2021, in San Mateo, CA. She was 87. Born in Seoul, South Korea, Kim was the daughter of Yi Kwang-Su, a pioneering Korean novelist. Kim left the country during the Korean War to study English literature at Bryn Mawr College on a scholarship. She went on to complete master's, doctoral, and law degrees and to practice immigration and family law in San Francisco. She is survived by her spouse, Young-Shik Kim; two sons; a sister; and five grandchildren.

Richard Emmons Luthin, MBA'57, died June 14 in Freeport, IL. He was 95. A Lawrence College graduate and US Army veteran, Luthin became an accountant and auditor at Micro Switch in Freeport. In 1972 he became dean of business services at Highland Community College, serving in that role until 1992. His involvement in local government and civic organizations included eight years as a Freeport alder-

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man, service on many boards, support for conservation groups and the arts, and 59 years in the Freeport Noon Kiwanis Club. Survivors include four children; six grandchildren; a great-grandchild; and his partner, Carol Russell.

Ronald Anthony Crutchfield, AB'58, SB'59, of San Jose, CA, died March 22. He was 88. A first-generation college student, Crutchfield studied mathematics at UChicago and did graduate work at American University and the University of Rochester. His career started in Virginia with missile-defense design and ended at Lockheed Martin in California with big-picture thinking about national security strategy and geopolitics. He remained in this line of work long enough to meet his Soviet counterparts at the end of the Cold War. After retirement Crutchfield played soccer, traveled, studied foreign languages, and taught English as a foreign language on a volunteer basis. He is survived by his wife, Nancy; four children, including **Amy (Crutchfield) Boone**, AB'84 (Class of 1985); and 11 grandchildren, including **Jonathan Boone**, AB'22, and **Caroline Boone**, AB'25.

Mary Kazik Trusela, AM'58, died September 13 in State College, PA. She was 93. Trusela earned a bachelor's degree in nursing education at the University of Pittsburgh before her graduate studies at the University of Chicago, where she focused on maternal-child health and nursing. She became a pediatric nurse at Ohio Valley Hospital and Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh, and she taught nursing at the University of Pittsburgh in the Department of Pediatrics. She is survived by three children and five grandchildren.

Robert Eugene Williams, AB'58, died June 27 in Evanston, IL. He was 88. After earning his psychology degree from the College, Williams later studied calligraphy in England for a year before returning to Chicago and starting work as a book designer with the University of Chicago Press. There he designed and illustrated many books, including the first edition of *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (1976) by Norman Maclean, PhD'40. Williams cofounded and led the Chicago Calligraphy Collective, teaching calligraphy for them as well as for the Newberry Library and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Leonard Gottesman, AM'58, PhD'59, of Bala Cynwyd, PA, died August 16, 2024. He was 93. A psychologist, Gottesman specialized in gerontology and embraced approaches that addressed the needs of seniors while supporting their independence and dignity. Outside of work he enjoyed gardening, folk art, folk toys, and travel. Survivors include two sons, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Marion Deckert, DB'59, AM'65, PhD'69, of North Newton, KS, died June 6. He was 90. Deckert first graduated from Bethel College; then, after earning graduate degrees in philosophy, he taught at the University of Southern Colorado before returning to Kansas. He spent most of his career at Bethel College, serving as academic dean and teaching philosophy and computer science, and even after his retirement in 1996 he continued to take on short-term teaching assignments. Deckert served with the Mennonite Central Committee in Morocco and Indonesia; he also enjoyed biking and gardening. Survivors include two children, a sister, and two grandchildren.

1960s

Larry P. Scriggins, JD'61, died March 31 in Morgantown, WV. He was 88. A Middlebury College graduate, Scriggins was a longtime partner and specialist in corporate business law at Piper & Marbury (now DLA Piper). He served on the boards of Baltimore cultural and business institutions and chaired corporate, banking, and business law for the American Bar Association. In retirement Scriggins joined the boards of the Four Seasons Hotels and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He is survived by his wife, Victoria; a daughter; a sister, **Sheila Scriggins**, AM'72; a brother; and three grandchildren.

Walter Telesetsky, MBA'61, of Rockville, MD, died June 16. He was 87. Working in the federal government from 1970 to 2002, Telesetsky helped improve national weather forecasting systems and fostered international cooperation in atmospheric and oceanographic science. As director of the office of systems operations at the National Weather Service, he led the deployment of NEXRAD—the Doppler radar network used in severe storm detection and early warning systems—and received the Department of Commerce Gold Medal for his contributions. He is survived by a daughter.

Perry Lewis Weed, JD'61, of Annapolis, MD, died June 20. He was 89. Weed, a litigation specialist, dedicated his career to law, politics, economics, and writing. He practiced law for more than 20 years while pursuing varied interests: publishing *The White Ethnic Movement and Ethnic Politics* (1973), becoming special assistant to a US senator and a US representative, and serving as vice president of government affairs for the Travel Industry Association of America. In retirement Weed wrote commentary for the *Capital Gazette* and several other papers on economics and politics. He also founded the Economic Club of Annapolis. Survivors include his wife, **Dorothy Fisher Weed**, AB'63, AM'70; a daughter; a sister; a brother; and two grandchildren.

Robert Willey Barton, SB'62, MD'67, PhD'67, died June 11 in St. Louis. He was 84. Barton completed his residency in internal medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, a research fellowship at the National Institutes of Health, and a fellowship in gastroenterology at Washington University. Remaining in St. Louis, he established the first endoscopy lab at St. Luke's Hospital West. After Guillain-Barré syndrome left him physically disabled, Barton returned to clinical practice for 10 years and became a volunteer teacher for 30 more, winning several teaching awards. He is survived by his wife, Premsri; five children, including **Melissa Barton**, AM'05, PhD'12, **Jeffrey Barton**, MD'08, and **Grant Barton**, MD'11; and 11 grandchildren.

Robert W. Fuller, EX'62, died July 15 in Berkeley, CA. He was 88. A math and physics prodigy who never finished high school or his Oberlin College bachelor's degree, Fuller completed a PhD in physics at Princeton and later studied economics at UChicago. In 1970, after teaching physics at Columbia University and Trinity College, Fuller became Oberlin's 10th president at the age of 33, serving until 1974. Later, as a self-described "citizen diplomat," he arranged exchanges between Soviet and American scientists and authored 12 books, including *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank* (2003) and a 2013 memoir. Survivors include his wife, Claire Sheridan; a daughter; two sons; a stepson; a brother; and four grandchildren.

Naomi A. Parish, AB'63, of Kennett Square, PA, died May 21. She was 84. Following her medical studies at Temple University and her psychiatry residency, Parish established a private psychiatry practice in Pennsylvania. She worked to support women survivors of domestic abuse, with local hospitals and treatment centers, and with patients with intellectual disabilities. A fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, Parish advocated for women's rights in medicine and founded an early support group for women psychiatrists in the Philadelphia area. She is survived by her husband, **Roger Parish**, SM'64, PhD'65; two daughters, including **Rebecca Parish**, AB'91, MST'92; a sister; and two grandchildren.

Gilbert Asher, JD'64, died June 9 in Peabody, MA. He was 85. A University of Michigan graduate, Asher was a lawyer and investor in Chicago and later in Santa Fe, NM. He loved skiing, photography, and traveling. He is survived by two children, including **Whitney Asher**, AB'98; a brother; and two grandchildren, including **Arden Berg**, Class of 2028.

Joseph G. Kotzin, AM'65, died April 14 in Los Angeles. He was 86. Kotzin hitchhiked to New York City to work and immerse himself in the jazz scene after his undergraduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Later, with his master's degree in human development and psychology, he dedicated himself to public service and philanthropy. As a longtime volunteer at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Kotzin helped residents facing eviction; he also supported an adult literacy program, volunteered in public schools, and cofounded a humanistic Judaism group in the city. Survivors include his wife, **Diana Slaughter Kotzin**, AB'62, AM'64, PhD'68, and a brother.

Charles Lanski, SB'65, SM'66, PhD'69, of Pasadena, CA, died June 6. He was 81. With three degrees in mathematics, Lanski joined the faculty at the University of Southern

California, where he taught, advised students, and did research from 1969 to 2016. A lover of music, he played viola in the Santa Monica Symphony early in his career. He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; two daughters, including **Alison Lanski**, AB'04; and two grandchildren.

Michael A. Sherman, AB'66, AM'67, PhD'74, died April 8 in Berlin, VT. He was 80. Sherman earned his doctorate in history in 1974 and worked as an adjunct professor and at a humanities nonprofit before joining the Vermont Historical Society in 1985. After a decade as executive director, he continued as editor of the journal *Vermont History* and coauthored *Freedom and Unity: A History of Vermont* in 2004. He taught in the adult degree program of what was then called Vermont College, served as academic dean at the now closed Burlington College, and was deeply engaged in the community of Montpelier, VT. His wife, Nancy Grabill Sherman, AB'67, MBA'75, died in 2018. Survivors include two sons and two grandchildren.

Charles Pratt, JD'67, of New York, died May 30. He was 86. After graduating from Harvard in 1961, Pratt spent three years in the US Army as a Russian linguist. He worked as a lawyer in private practice and served as general counsel for the New York Power Authority for 20 years before launching a second career as an energy and utilities entrepreneur. Pratt spent many summers in Murray Bay, Quebec, and traveled to France and Italy to pursue his interest in formal garden design. Survivors include two sons, a brother, and three grandchildren.

Linda Leinweber, AB'68, AM'70, of Wheaton, IL, died October 21, 2024. She was 78. As a young woman, Leinweber developed a lifelong love of music and the theater and was active in the antiwar movement. Following her graduate studies in English literature, she became a researcher with Encyclopedia Britannica. Leinweber later joined Golin Harris, a Chicago-based public relations firm, as a secretary and was promoted to research analyst and corporate librarian, a role she held until 2001. She later taught composition, logic, poetry, and world literature at the College of DuPage. She is survived by her husband, Joseph; two children; and a brother.

Edward F. Zalewski, PhD'68, died May 4 in Tucson, AZ. He was 84. With his doctorate in physical chemistry, Zalewski worked for 20 years at the National Institute of Standards and Technology with the group that revolutionized radiometry through the use of photodiodes. He spent six years at Hughes Danbury Optical Solutions, receiving patents for his work on the MODIS satellite sensor program, and later was a research professor in the Remote Sensing Group at the University of Arizona's College of Optical Sciences. Zalewski is survived by his wife, Christine Porch; two daughters; two stepsons; a sister; grandchildren; and step-grandchildren.

Thomas M. Conley, PhD'69, died August 26 in Champaign, IL. He was 84. During his doctoral studies Conley tended bar at Jimmy's Woodlawn Tap, where he also met his wife, **Elizabeth Goldsmith Conley**, AM'64. As a communications professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign from 1980 to 2010, Conley became a distinguished scholar in the history of rhetorical theory. His research explored rhetorical practice across cultures and eras, leading him to write *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (1993) and *Toward a Rhetoric of Insult* (2010). He is survived by his wife, two daughters, and four grandchildren.

Salim M. "Sal" Lalani, MBA'69, of Bozeman, MT, died July 13. He was 80. Raised in Nairobi, Kenya, Lalani graduated from Swansea University in Wales. He began his finance career in the international division of Bank of America in San Francisco, working in credit, commercial, and investment banking. Lalani established an investment banking boutique, Sandown Capital Corporation, in 1987 and commuted between Montana and London to run it. He and his wife, Carol, supported arts and medical causes in Bozeman and Livingston, MT, in memory of their son, Shane, who died in 2008. Survivors include his wife.

1970s

Virginia Wright Wexman, AB'70, AM'71, PhD'76, of Altadena, CA, died March 14. She was 83. Wexman, a professor emerita of English and art history at the University of Illinois Chicago, helped shape the field of film and media studies through her scholarship. Her publications include *A History of Film* (now in its seventh edition) and the edited volumes *Film and Authorship* (2002) and *Women and Experimental Filmmaking* (2005). A past president of what is today the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Wexman edited what is now the *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* from 1982 to 1987 and served on international film festival juries. Survivors include her husband, John Huntington.

Francis A. Boyle, AB'71 (Class of 1972), died January 30, 2025, in Urbana, IL. He was 74. Boyle, a professor at the University of Illinois College of Law, published and consulted widely in the field of international and human rights law. He represented Indigenous groups in the United States and Canada and advised international bodies on human rights, war crimes, genocide, nuclear policy, and biowarfare—providing counsel, for example, to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the International Court of Justice and in Middle East peace negotiations. Boyle received his master's, doctoral, and JD degrees at Harvard and served on the board of Amnesty International. He is survived by his wife, Betsy; three sons; and five siblings. His sister, Eileen Boyle, AB'88, died April 13 (*See page 79.*—Ed.).

Margaret Vogel Sheldon, PhD'71, died August 15 in Thompson, PA. She was 82. As a doctoral student, Vogel, a Bryn Mawr College graduate, did biophysics research that contributed to early studies of gene expression and mRNA. While raising her family in Scranton, PA, she served as president of the Jewish Federation of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Temple Israel, and the Scranton chapter of Hadassah, as well as on the boards of many other organizations. Retiring to rural Susquehanna County, Vogel and her husband lived in the house his ancestors had homesteaded four generations earlier. She is survived by her husband, Douglas; three sons; a sister; two step-siblings; and six grandchildren.

James T. Hinchliff, JD'72, of Chicago, died February 20, 2025. He was 85. Hinchliff's first love was music, which he studied at Drake University and Harvard. While in law school, he taught music at Roosevelt University and sang professionally in a choir. After joining the law department of Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company and gaining expertise in utility law, Hinchliff became senior vice president and general counsel of Peoples Energy in Chicago. He supported Chase House, an Episcopal-affiliated charity, and arts and music organizations. He is survived by his wife, Margot; two children; two brothers; four grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

Kubet Emil "Kubie" Luchterhand, AM'68, PhD'74, of Ellison Bay, WI, died August 12. He was 80. An anthropologist, Luchterhand worked as a research associate at Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History from 1964 to 1988, traveling the world to find and classify fossils and early tools. He taught anthropology at Roosevelt University for 17 years and then moved to Wisconsin's Door County in 1988 to open and run an independent bookstore, William Caxton Ltd. Bookseller and Publisher, in Sister Bay. He also served with the Sister Bay Volunteer Fire Department.

Robert Keating O'Neill, PhD'75, AM'76, died August 11 in Gilbert, AZ. He was 80. A veteran of the Army National Guard of Arizona and US Army Reserves, O'Neill completed graduate degrees in history and library science. As director of the John J. Burns Library at Boston College from 1987 to 2013, he led efforts to grow the library's special collections. In 1991 the American and Irish governments honored O'Neill for his role in an international sting operation that broke up a stolen antiquities ring and returned priceless artifacts to Ireland. He is survived by his wife, Helen; six children; six grandchildren; two sisters; and two brothers.

T. David Brent, AB'70, AM'71, PhD'77, of Chicago, died August 18. He was 76. As a graduate student in philosophy, Brent—the son of Chicago bookseller Stuart Brent, EX'40—joined the University of Chicago Press as an entry-level first reader. He remained at the press for 42 years, editing many notable books in anthropology, philosophy, and psychology. As executive editor, Brent helped the press develop an African studies category and oversaw the publication of works

by French philosopher Jacques Derrida and Divinity School professor Mircea Eliade, among others. He is survived by his wife, Jataun Martin; two sons; and seven siblings, including **Jonathan Brent**, AM'73, PhD'80.

D. Garth Taylor, AM'73, PhD'78, of Harbert, MI, died May 10. He was 75. Trained as a sociologist, Taylor taught in his field, worked at the Chicago Urban League, and led the nonprofit Metro Chicago Information Center as executive director for 20 years before retiring in 2010. A passionate supporter of music education and performance—including the UChicago Folk Festival—Taylor cofounded the School of American Music in Three Oaks, MI, in 2012. He also played guitar, composed music, and wrote curricula for teaching guitar. Survivors include his wife, Sue; a son; a sister; and a brother.

Robert Earl "Bob" Washington, PhD'78, of Gulph Mills, PA, died February 17, 2025. He was 83. Washington graduated from Columbia University and volunteered with the Peace Corps in Afghanistan before undertaking his doctoral studies in sociology. In 1971 he joined the Bryn Mawr College faculty—becoming the school's first African American faculty member in the arts and sciences—and remained there until his retirement in 2020. Washington's scholarship on social theory, race relations, urban sociology, and sociology of deviance includes *The Ideologies of African American Literature: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Nationalist Revolt* (2001) and three coauthored and coedited books on the sociology of sport. Survivors include his partner, Rose A. Makofske, and two brothers.

Carol Studenmund, AB'79, died December 20, 2024, in Portland, OR. She was 67. Studenmund trained as a court reporter in Portland and cofounded a business, LNS Court Reporting, that has served legal clients for nearly four decades. An advocate for closed-captioning services to support the deaf and hard of hearing community, Studenmund taught captioning workshops and cowrote best practices for the profession that were adopted by the Federal Communications Commission. She supported Planned Parenthood and local and state political campaigns and enjoyed hiking and kayaking. Her first husband, Robert Larson, AB'79, died in 2004. Survivors include her spouse, Jay Hutchins; two children; and two siblings.

1980s

Edward John "Jack" Helbig III, AB'80, died January 28, 2025, in Oak Park, IL. He was 66. Known in the Chicago theater community as a thoughtful and sometimes sharp-tongued critic, Helbig wrote theater reviews and more for publications including the *Chicago Reader*, *Newcity*, and newspapers in Oak Park. He was also a playwright and trained improviser. With his master's degree in education, Helbig taught high school English for 17 years at Holy Trinity High School in Chicago and most recently at Rochelle Zell Jewish High School in Deerfield. He is survived by his wife, Sherry Kent; a daughter; and a sister.

Charles F. Pohl, AB'80, MBA'81, of San Francisco, died June 2 of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. He was 67. Pohl began his career at Wells Fargo Investment Advisors before joining the investment management company Dodge & Cox. As the firm's chair and chief investment officer, he helped shape its investment philosophy for more than three decades and won the 2014 Morningstar Award for International-Stock Fund Manager of the Year. Pohl published a book, *The Professional's Guide to Long-Term Investing* (2025), and mentored many colleagues; he also enjoyed global travel and tennis. Survivors include his wife, Eve Niquette, and three daughters.

John Patrick "Jack" Frestel Jr., MBA'81, died July 10 in Lakewood Ranch, FL. He was 86. Prepared by his Chicago Booth business training and studies at Marquette and Georgetown Universities, Frestel built a career in labor relations. He held senior executive positions in human resources at the Santa Fe Southern Pacific Railway and US Airways. In retirement he cofounded Dirty Dick's Crab House on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Frestel had a deep appreciation for his Irish roots and loved to travel, especially with family. Survivors include his wife, Dianne; five children; his stepchildren; and his grandchildren.

Sally Gail Hoskins, PhD'82, died July 24 in New York. She was 71. Hoskins, a developmental neurobiologist, taught at City College of New York until retiring in 2019. She won numerous grants and awards for her research and teaching and developed a nationally recognized model for science education called CREATE (Consider, Read, Elucidate the hypotheses, Analyze and interpret the data, and Think of the next Experiment). Hoskins also was a writer, crafter, and musician who created SHE (Sally Hoskins Ensemble), a women's a cappella group that supported various charities through their performances. Survivors include two brothers.

Elise Iekyung Junn, AM'85, died August 4 in New York. She was 65. Junn graduated from her Michigan high school as valedictorian and earned Harvard–Radcliffe and UChicago degrees in economics. She was a serious runner who finished 17 marathons, including the New York (nine times), Boston (three times), Chicago (twice), Berlin, London, and Tokyo marathons. In April 2025 she completed her final race, the Boston 5K, while undergoing cancer treatment. She is survived by her husband, **Al Sawyers**, JD'86, MBA'86; three children; her mother; and two sisters.

Eileen Marie Boyle, AB'88, of Chicago, died April 13. She was 66. Survivors include five siblings. Her brother Francis Boyle, AB'71 (Class of 1972), died January 30, 2025 (*See page 78.*—Ed.).

Jennifer Costello McBride, AB'88, of Princeton, NJ, died March 26 following a brief illness. She was 58. Trained at Manhattan's French Culinary Institute, McBride worked at the Consulate General of France in New York and later as a private caterer in the Princeton, NJ, area. She loved to travel, visiting Africa and China and trekking to Everest Base Camp. A Chicago Cubs season-ticket holder, McBride also kept beehives and led trivia night teams at Princeton's Ivy Inn. She is survived by extended family and her boyfriend, Benjamin Warren. (*This notice corrects information in the Fall/25 issue.*—Ed.)

1990s

Jennifer T. Strickland, AB'91, MBA'97, of Las Vegas, died August 7, of cancer. She was 56. Trained in statistics, Strickland began her career as an editor/analyst at Morningstar. She next worked for Citi Private Bank in Hong Kong and held senior positions at HBK Investments, Blue Mountain Capital, and PIMCO before joining Pretium, an investment firm, in 2020 as senior managing director and head of business development. A founding member of Women in Private Credit, Strickland created a foundation to provide mentoring and career development resources to women in the industry. She is survived by her husband, **Shawn Yang**, MBA'97, and two daughters.

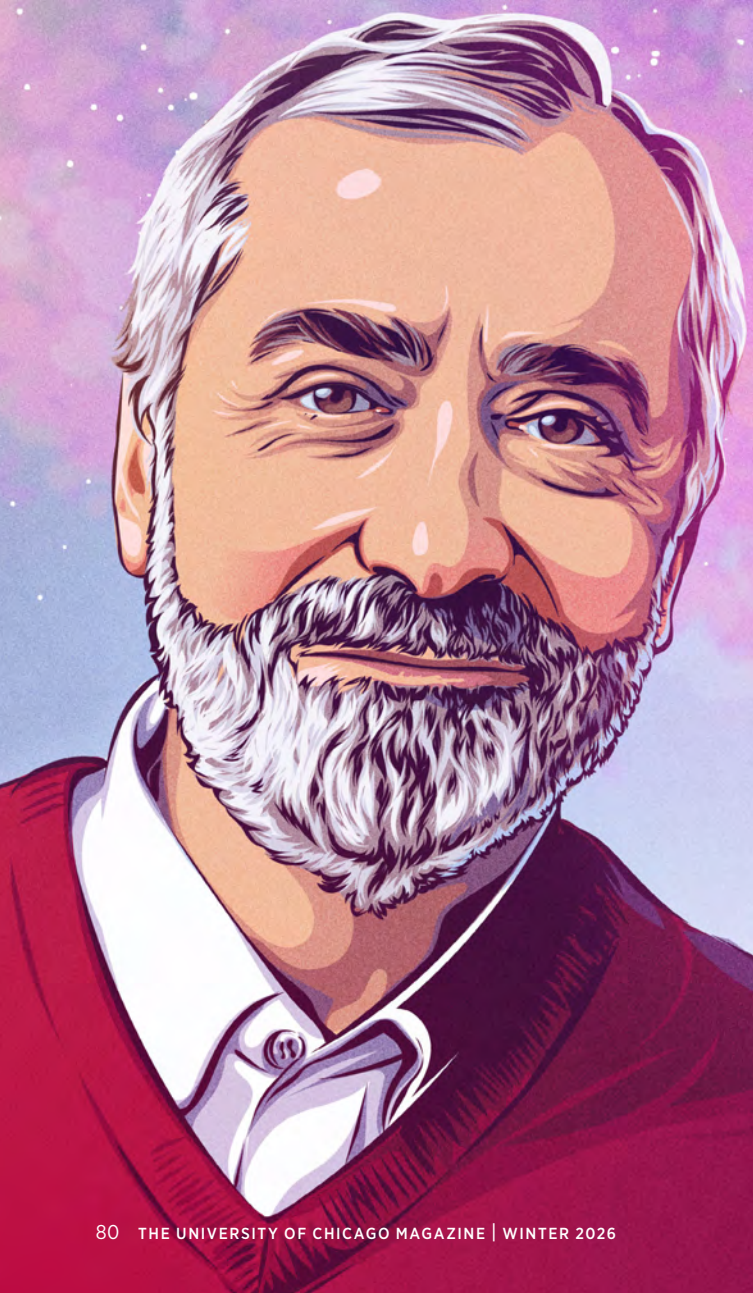
Timothy H. Steele, PhD'93, of Grand Rapids, MI, died June 14 following a brief illness. He was 66. Steele completed degrees in music education and music history at Temple University before his doctoral studies in musicology. He taught at Palm Beach Atlantic University and Covenant College before joining the Calvin University faculty, where he served from 2007 to 2025. Steele's expertise as a musicologist ranged from medieval music to progressive rock; he was a founding member of the Society for Christian Scholarship in Music, played early wind and string instruments, and directed early music ensembles. Survivors include his wife, Elizabeth; five children; two sisters; and six grandchildren.

Joan Bentley Hoffman, AM'97, died July 11 in Westmont, IL. She was 78. Before entering UChicago's doctoral program in ethnomusicology, Hoffman studied music at Goucher College and Yale. She taught elementary music in Baltimore County, MD, public schools and served as a church organist; later, as a fundraiser at UChicago, she supported the development of the Joe and Rika Mansueto Library. Hoffman enjoyed attending concerts and theater performances and was a devoted member of the Morton Arboretum. She is survived by three daughters, a sister, and five grandchildren.

THE UCHICAGOAN

Edward W. "Rocky" Kolb

Questions for the cosmologist and former dean of the Physical Sciences Division.



What surprising job have you had in the past?
As an undergraduate I paid for college by working the night shift in a New Orleans shipyard. I was a physics major by day, shipyard worker by night. I slept through a couple of morning classes.

What would you want to be doing if not teaching?
I would love to be a comedy writer. Not a performer, but a writer. Second choice, a dolphin trainer. That sounds cool. Might be a problem since I can't swim.

What do you love that everyone else hates?
Working on weekends.

What was the last book you put down before you finished it?
A few years ago I started *Atonement* by Ian McEwan, disliked it, put it down, and picked it up again a year later and loved it. Don't give up on a book!

What do you most love to teach—whether a work, an idea, a course, or something else?
I love to teach the connections between the incredibly small (the world of the quantum) and the unfathomably large (the universe of the cosmos). The connection between inner space and outer space fascinates me, and I try to convey the fascination to students.

What person, alive or dead, would you want to write your life story?
Groucho Marx, my favorite comedian and a surprisingly good writer. A life story should be told with humor. Groucho and I share a birthday, October 2.

What advice would you give to a brand-new Maroon?
When students ask, What should I do? or What should I study? I reply, do what makes your heart beat fastest. Follow your passion. A life without passion is empty.

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Illustration by Aaron Sacco

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