Profiles of Excellence

The 2015 LAS alumni award winners come from many backgrounds, but all are leaving a deep impact on the world.

By Doug Peterson

Editor’s Note: The following LAS alumni were honored for their accomplishments during 2015 Homecoming celebrations at the University of Illinois.

David Kranz, PhD ’82, Microbiology
LAS Alumni Achievement Award

David Kranz developed a love for biology as a child outdoors during family vacations in Wisconsin. Today the Illinois professor of biochemistry still fishes in Wisconsin, but he also co-created a technology that makes it possible to fish through millions of mutant molecules to find one that can combat disease. He has also found ways to mobilize the body’s immune system to battle cancer.

Kranz focuses on therapies that use the body’s T cell receptors—critical to the immune system’s response to foreign invaders. His lab was the first to engineer T cell receptors with a therapeutic potential, and two highly successful start-up companies resulted from this and other work.

Christina Brodbeck, BA ’01, History
LAS Outstanding Young Alumni Award

As a girl growing up near Chicago, Christina Brodbeck was business-savvy before she even knew what the word “entrepreneur” meant. But she never predicted she would be one of the earliest team members of a startup company called YouFirst.

After all, she had graduated from Illinois with a bachelor’s degree in history, specializing in Russian and Eastern European history. But she said the flexibility and freedom of an LAS degree, coupled with connections developed during her undergraduate years, changed her life completely. She now pursues her life’s passion, which is designing and investing in startup companies in the San Francisco Bay area.

Ted Brown, Professor Emeritus, Chemistry
Audrey Brown, BA ’89, Religious Studies
LAS Quadrangle Award

Ted Brown remembers one day in the late 1980s when the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology at Illinois was under construction. Brown went into the large atrium space with Arnold and Mabel Beckman, the couple that had donated $40 million for the institute.

Mabel Beckman looked around and exclaimed, in stunned delight, “Oh Arnie, what are we doing?”

“They were both so full of enthusiasm,” said Brown, who served as the Beckman Institute’s first director. The Beckmans inspired Brown and his wife Audrey to also become donors. The Beckmans established two endowments—one to support undergraduates from all LAS departments and the other to help chemistry undergraduates.

Tom Cyczota, BS ’80, Biology
LAS Alumni Humanitarian Award

A teenage girl named Kacry nearly lost her right arm at the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, but because of donated human tissue that came from AlloSource in Centennial, Colo., this woman—now 35—tells people she has two arms to hug her four children.

“That’s the power of what AlloSource is all about,” said Thomas Cyczota, president and CEO of the company. AlloSource is one of the largest tissue banks in the country, using human tissue from generous donors to create approximately 250,000 transplantable allografts (human-to-human transplants) each year.

“We deal with a sacred gift because the donor is somebody’s love,” Cyczota said.

Guy Padbury, MS ’85, PhD ’88, Biochemistry
LAS Alumni Achievement Award

Guy Padbury’s work for the Upjohn pharmaceutical company hit close to home when his father was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes.

Padbury’s team with Upjohn did the metabolism research on a molecule that went on to become the drug Actos, which helped to control his father’s diabetes, along with changes in diet and exercise.

This experience made Padbury see how the drugs they worked on were actually touching people first hand. And that perspective really enriches your motivation.

Padbury has played a leading role in getting to market a host of therapeutic drugs that treat everything from bacterial infections, HIV and heart disease to Parkinson’s, osteoporosis and diabetes.

Darsh Wasan, BS ’60, Chemical Engineering
LAS Alumni Achievement Award

In 1947, a Muslim friend warned Darsh Wasan, then 8, and his parents to escape their village because, as part of a Hindu minority in what’s now Pakistan, they were targeted to be killed. Wasan vividly remembers seeing dead bodies on train platforms as they escaped to India.

In India, Wasan’s house had no electricity, so he would study under the streetlights. This passion for learning brought him to Illinois, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering and then blossomed as a researcher and administrator at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. He is vice president of international affairs at ITI and the distinguished metallurgist professor of chemical engineering.

[Photos by Thompson McIlrath Photography]
“It was a wow moment for them,” said Lane Schwartz, an LAS linguistics professor who attended that Vancouver conference of the American Machine Translation Association in late 2014. Schwartz is a leader in machine translation, which seeks ways to use machines to automatically translate languages.

“I think people are going to look at this new technology and think this is ‘Star Trek’ come to life,” Schwartz added, referring to the “Star Trek” staple, the “universal translator,” a science fiction device that automatically translated alien languages.

Machine translation systems have a long way to go before they reach the Trekker’s dream, but Skype Translator, which is now being tested with thousands of users, does a good job translating for simple communication purposes, said Schwartz.

He said machine translation works well for “assimilation,” in which you need only a rough idea of what is being said. Google Translator, which automatically translates alien languages, was input into computer programs, becoming the data that improved the translation systems. This ultimately paved the way for systems like Google Translator and the new Skype Translator, which both work well for simple communication.

“On a clear day, I could actually see Russia from my house,” he said.

When Schwartz first arrived at kindergarten, many of his classmates were more fluent in Yupik, their native language, than they were in English.

“As I got older and looked back, I think that’s really where the seeds were sown for my interest in languages,” he said. Even today, the bookshelf in his office at the Foreign Language Building includes copies of Eskimo folk tales, with side-by-side English and Yupik text.

According to Schwartz, “machine translation is arguably the oldest discipline within computer science, with intellectual roots extending back to at least the 17th century.” In the 17th century, according to the Old Testament, God confused the languages of the people.

The next century, prior to computers, inventors tried to create mechanical translation systems, such as the “mechanical brain,” patented in 1953 in France. But the quest for machine translation really heated up during the Cold War. American mathematician Warren Weaver speculated that we might be able to adapt cryptography techniques, used to break Nazi ciphers, to translate languages.

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“In the early 1950s, you had a lot of enthusiasm in machine translation, and people thought the solution was just around the corner,” Schwartz added. One reason for the optimism is that people assumed if humans could do a certain task easily, then it would be even easier for computers. They reasoned that people are generally good at learning how to translate, so computers should be even better.

As researchers discovered, however, the opposite is often the case. Difficult tasks for humans are simple for computers, and simple tasks for humans can stymie a computer.

A computer can calculate the product of two 18-digit numbers in milliseconds,” Schwartz said. “But at the same time, a 4-year-old can do language tasks that are extremely difficult for a computer.”

As reality set in, machine translation research aimed for baby steps, and during the 1980s and ‘90s, systems became more data-driven. Side-by-side tests in different languages were input into computer programs, becoming the data that improved the translation systems. This ultimately paved the way for systems like Google Translator and the new Skype Translator, which one reviewer called “the most futuristic thing I have ever used.”

Despite the wow moments that these new systems bring, Schwartz said computer programs have a long way to go to match human translation. That’s why his work focuses on the partnership between machines and humans.

As he put it, “I don’t think machines will eliminate the need for human translators any time soon.”

Microsoft employees were setting up a demonstration of their new Skype Translator system at a conference in Vancouver at the same time that some Spanish-speaking hotel employees were in the room putting up tables. Suddenly, the Spanish workers looked up in surprise. The computer system began audibly translating from English to Spanish and back again, allowing two people on Skype to communicate across the language barrier.

“I was a Wow Moment,” Schwartz said. “It was a moment of enthusiasm in machine translation.”

LAS Professor is on a Quest for a Translation Machine

By Doug Peterson

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Fear is Effective at Influencing People, Researcher Finds

Smoking will kill you. Candidate X will destroy the economy. Someone will steal your car if you don’t lock the door. Does that grab your attention? According to a study by a psychology professor at Illinois, fear-based appeals such as these are effective ways of influencing attitudes and behaviors.

“There are very few circumstances under which (fear-based appeals) are not effective and there are no identifiable circumstances under which they backfire and lead to undesirable outcomes,” said Dolores Albarracin, who authored a study in the journal Psychological Bulletin after conducting a comprehensive review of over 50 years of research on the topic.

Researchers have long debated the effectiveness of using fear to influence opinions. To help settle the debate, Albarracin and her colleagues looked at 127 research articles representing 248 independent samples and over 27,000 individuals from experiments conducted between 1962 and 2014. They believe it is the most comprehensive meta-analysis on the topic to date.

They found fear appeals to be effective, especially when they contained recommendations for one-time only (versus repeated) behaviors and if the targeted audience included a larger percentage of women. They also confirmed prior findings that fear appeals are effective when they describe how to avoid the threat (e.g., get the vaccine, use a condom).

More important, said Albarracin, there was no evidence in the meta-analysis that fear appeals backfired to produce a worse outcome relative to a control group.

“Fear produces a significant though small amount of change across the board. Presenting a fear appeal more than doubles the probability of change relative to not presenting anything or presenting a low-fear appeal,” said Albarracin. “However, fear appeals should not be seen as a panacea because the effect is still small. Still, there is no data indicating that audiences will be worse off from receiving fear appeals in any condition.”

She noted that the studies analyzed did not necessarily compare people who were afraid to people who were unafraid, but instead compared groups that were exposed to more or less fear-inducing content. Albarracin also recommended against using only fear-based appeals.

“Most elaborate strategies, such as training people on the skills they will need to succeed in changing behavior, will likely be more effective in most contexts. It is very important not to lose sight of this,” she said.

This story is a modified version of a release from American Psychological Association.

Fear-based appeals are effective ways of influencing attitudes and behaviors, according to research at Illinois.

A BURNING PROBLEM

Study: Alaskan Boreal Forest Fires Release More Carbon than the Trees can Absorb

By Diana Yates, Illinois News Bureau

T he forests in Alaska’s Yukon Flats are burning at a higher rate than any time in the last 10,000 years. A new analysis by researchers at Illinois finds that so many forest fires are occurring there that the area has become a net exporter of carbon to the atmosphere.

This is worrisome, because arctic and subarctic boreal forests like those of the Yukon Flats contain roughly one-third of the Earth’s terrestrial carbon stores. As climate warming increases forest fires, the researchers say, the conflagrations could release more carbon to the atmosphere and enhance warming.

“Boreal forests contain vast carbon stocks that make them inherently big players in the global carbon cycle,” said Ryan Kelly, a postdoctoral researcher at Illinois who conducted the study with Feng Sheng Hu, professor of plant biology and of geology. “And the main way that this stored carbon is eventually released is through fire.”

Alaska fire records go back only to 1939, and scientists often assume that present-day fire activity mirrors that of the ancient past. The researchers on the new study instead used actual fire data from a previous study in which they analyzed charcoal fragments preserved in lake sediments in the Yukon Flats.

“We model our experiments with fire frequency in our study region on observed massive carbon losses to the atmosphere. About 12 percent of the total stored carbon has been lost in the last half century,” said Kelly, who now is a data scientist and modeler for Legitmate and Company, Inc. “Most studies of carbon cycling in boreal forests have been motivated by the fact that there’s just an enormous amount of carbon in these high-latitude ecosystems.”

This study instead used actual fire data from a previous study in which they analyzed charcoal fragments preserved in lake sediments in the Yukon Flats. In that study, they found that fire frequency is a 2,000-kilometer swath of the Yukon Flats is higher today than at any time in the last 10,000 years.

“Our model confirms our hypothesis that the recent increase in fire frequency in our study region has caused massive carbon losses to the atmosphere. About 12 percent of the total stored carbon has been lost in the last half century,” said Kelly, who now is a data scientist and modeler for Legitmate and Company, Inc. “Most studies of carbon cycling in boreal forests have been motivated by the fact that there’s just an enormous amount of carbon in these high-latitude ecosystems.”

Increasing numbers of fires are unabating the cycle of carbon capture and release, the researchers report. More carbon dioxide in the atmosphere could enhance plant growth, but it also contributes to further climate warming in the higher latitudes, Kelly said.

“Such warming would likely be attended by increased wildfire activity, which would lead to a net increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide,” he said.

The new findings challenge studies that assume that recent fire activity reflects the norm over thousands of years. Those assumptions would lead scientists to conclude that the region has been a net carbon sink in recent decades, the researchers said.

Replacing that assumption with actual fire data from the past millennium offers a starkly different picture of the carbon cycle in the Yukon Flats, they said.

“The effects of forest fires on the carbon cycle are very dramatic. Fires explain about 80 percent of the change in carbon storage over the past millennium, and a large amount of carbon has been lost from this ecosystem because of increasing forest fires,” Hu said. “This area has burned more than any other place in the boreal forests of North America. We chose the area for this study because we thought it could be an early indicator of the future.”

Researchers studied fire activity in a 2,000-square kilometer region of the Yukon Flats in Alaska. The study region lies within the white rectangle on the map. Even burned in Alaska since 1939 are in red. Graphics by Diana Yates (Alaska Fire Service data).
Chinese Journals: This painting, Peach Blossom Cove (Taohua Wu) by artist Lu Zhi (1496-1576) appeared in the inaugural issue of a new Chinese journal at Illinois. Zong-qi Cai, professor of Chinese and comparative literature, says the journals will bring together Chinese and Western scholars. (Image courtesy of Lihong Liu.)

Undeterred: A century ago there were concerns on campus that blockades during World War I would delay an addition to the Chemistry Building, which needed laboratory equipment from Germany. Under the supervision of professor W.A. Noyes, however, pictured here, construction proceeded and the addition opened less than a year later. The building was later named Noyes Laboratory in his honor. (Photo courtesy of University of Illinois Archives.)

Note: Want more photos? Check out the ‘Generations of Friendship’ photo feature on P. 20!

Songs for Homecoming: Part of the LAS Homecoming celebrations included a visit by the a cappella group No Comment, founded at Illinois in 2004. They are pictured here with Harry S. Preble Dean of LAS Barbara Wilson, also serving as interim chancellor of Illinois.

Enthusiastic Welcome: The College of LAS Class of 2019 showed up in force at the Krannert Center for the Arts for this year’s Freshman Welcome, which featured speakers, entertainment, and a chance to meet other students from various majors.

Images of LAS

Here are some popular images that showed up on social media, newsletters, and other spots around LAS during the past few months.

Family Friendly: From left, Corrie, Lucas, Mike, and Jake Taylor posed for a photo with Stephanie, Sawyer, Quinn, and Donnie Nommensen during the College of LAS Night at the Museum alumni event at the Peoria (ILL) Riverfront Museum.

Enlightenment: The sun cast a distinct light inside the English Building shortly before classes began in the fall.

Annex for an Annex: An expansion on the southeast side of Chemistry Annex is part of a roughly $25 million renovation of the building, built in 1930. The work is scheduled to be complete this year.

Lieutenant Governor: LAS Leaders (left to right) Cassidy Burke, Anushree Dighe, and Brittany Cline posed with Illinois Lt. Gov. Evelyn Sanguinetti at Quad Day. (Photo courtesy of LAS Leaders.)
Michelle Delcourt has an unusual source of inspiration— but one you might expect for a doctoral student in mathematics: a quote from the late Indian mathematician Bharati Krishna Tirthaji. “Is this mathematics or magic?” He once asked. “And we invariably answer and say: ‘It is both: It is magic until you understand it; and it is mathematics thereafter.’”

To Delcourt, the quote signifies how mathematics can be transformed from something intangible and even mysterious to a topic everyone can understand. Indeed, that’s the goal of outreach programs for children that she coordinates at Illinois.

In addition to her studies, Delcourt is outreach manager for Illinois Geometry Lab and outreach director for the Association for Women in Mathematics. She is principal investigator on two public engagement grants from the Illinois Office of Public Engagement and has helped organize, plan, and fund several math workshops for high school (Sonia Math Day) and middle school (Girls Engaged in Math and Science Workshops) girls.

“Tirthaji’s quote to me captures the spirit of what we are trying to do,” said Delcourt. “For instance, one year for Sonia Math Day we focused on Number Theory, one of the oldest branches of pure mathematics,” she said. “We brought the subject alive by teaching the mathematical principles behind various card tricks. We try to balance incorporating higher level mathematics with fun activities.”

In fact, numerous outreach programs in the College of LAS are devoted to transforming “magic” into the seeds of understanding. There are virtually too many outreach programs within LAS to list, but suffice it to say they number in the hundreds per year. There are virtually too many outreach programs within LAS to list, but suffice it to say they number in the hundreds per year.

The breadth and depth of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences provide a wide array of opportunities to reach out to people of all ages and show them diverse projects, inspirational programs and engaging activities,” she said.

Most outreach programs are centered on education and awareness. For example, the Department of Religion’s World Religions and Social Justice Day Camp was one of several LAS outreach programs highlighted during the Office of Public Engagement’s 2015 Public Engagement Symposium. The day camp is designed to help high school students develop religious literacy and examine religious perspectives on social justice.

The symposium also highlighted NetMath, an online distance learning program housed in the Department of Mathematics, and the St. Elmo Brady STEM Academy, named after the Illinois alumnus who was the first African-American in the nation to earn a doctoral degree in chemistry (in 1916).

The academy was co-founded by lecturer Jerrod Henderson and laboratory assistant Ricky Greer in the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering. It’s oriented toward underrepresented elementary school boys, whom the founders feel are falling behind in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The academy teaches the boys in these subjects by using an innovative, hands-on approach that includes engaging the boy’s fathers. Henderson received the 2014-15 Campus Award for Excellence in Public Engagement for this and other activities.

Similarly, the Illinois chapter of the Society for the Advancement of Hispanic/Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) received the prestigious SACNAS 2014 Outstanding Partnerships/Collaborations/Networks Award. In 2015, it was named Graduate Chapter of the Year out of 115 chapters nationwide, in large part for its efforts to engage with local elementary school students.

“The College of Liberal Arts & Sciences has a long standing reputation of focusing on collaborative partnerships between the University of Illinois and its external constituents – partnerships forged for mutual benefit and learning, with an emphasis on research and outreach,” said Sarah Zehr, director of operations for the Illinois Office of Public Engagement, which has highlighted and issued several public engagement grants to LAS outreach programs. “The breadth and depth of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences provide a wide array of opportunities to reach out to people of all ages and show them diverse projects, inspirational programs and engaging activities,” she said.

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LAS Alumna is Among a Small Percentage of Female Commercial Pilots

By Doug Peterson

Female pilots remain a rarity, she said, because although more and more women train in aviation, many leave when they get married or have children.

Lumbrazo worked her way up to captain for Mesa, but when she switched to Continental in 2006, she lost her seniority, as is always the case when you switch airlines. She is a first officer and hopes to eventually work her way back to captain.

Although she still loves flying as much as she did at age eight and has no plans to ever leave it, she said she still benefits from the writing and speaking skills that come with a communication degree. For instance, as one of a small number of female pilots, she is called upon to do speaking engagements, so her communication skills help her to reach out and encourage other budding pilots, including young girls.

“I am glad that I had a degree in addition to aviation,” she said. “One of the nice things about the job is that you don’t bring work home with you,” she said. “You walk off and you’re done.”

Lumbrazo married a fellow pilot last April, but she said that with her seniority, the schedule is not as difficult on relationships as you might imagine. She and her husband each average about 14 to 15 days off each month, and she is away from home about two nights each week.

“Of the nice things about the job is that you don’t bring work home with you,” she said. “You walk off and you’re done.”

Lumbrazo started her career as a flight instructor for the Illinois Institute of Aviation, and after she received her airline transport pilot rating, she began flying DC-3s for a cargo company out of Indiana.

“When I walked into that first airplane and checked its registration, I saw that it had been made in 1940,” she said. After a little digging, she also learned that the plane had even been flown into Normandy during the D-Day invasion in 1944.

“You could see behind the instrument panel and it looked like a bunch of bungee cords,” she says.

“The plane was old, but it was still flying, so I figured it must be a quality plane.”

The contrast with technology in the planes she flies today is dramatic. The new 737s have two GPS units and two inertial reference systems, and the planes have the ability to land automatically. However, Lumbrazo said they only rely on the auto-landing feature in extreme circumstances in poor weather; she has been with Continental (which merged with United) for 10 years, and she has done around 15 auto-lands during the entire time.

Lumbrazo didn’t know women could fly planes the first time she rode in an airplane at age 8. Now she flies for United Airlines.

“Besides,” she added, “I give really nice PA announcements.”
Settling the Primary Dilemma

Researchers Conclude that the Current System for U.S. Presidential Primaries is the Best Option

For every four years, the presidential nomination process in the United States comes under a great deal of scrutiny, with critics claiming that the drawn-out primary cycle, which began in February and lasts until June, affords too much influence to a small number of voters in early primary states.

But according to new research from a team of Illinois economists, the sequential election format of the primaries is the best mechanism to select the “Condorcet winner”—that is, the candidate who would prevail in a head-to-head election against any one of the other candidates (named for 18th-century French political scientist Marquis de Condorcet, who championed election formats that would grant victory to such a candidate).

“In principle, presidential primaries do not have to be organized as a sequence of state-by-state elections,” said Mattias Polborn, a professor of economics and political science at Illinois. “There have been calls by some pundits to replace the system with a one-day national primary, or to split the voting for multiple candidates at each location. However, the problem of vote-splitting in a simultaneous election would be a lot worse than the problem of coordination on the wrong candidate, as seen in the example of the case of Condorcet winner electing is the highest expected quality of the nominee, according to the paper.

That’s not to say the current primary system is flawless. It raises two distinct problems for voters, Polborn said. First, many candidates are largely unknown to a national audience, so voters still need to learn by observing the candidates’ performance on the campaign trail and their performance in national debates, both of which often play a major role in influencing voters,” he said.

“Second, different groups of voters—socially conservative Republicans, for example—have several candidates to choose from that are ideologically aligned with them. And they will be more successful if they manage to coordinate on one candidate rather than splitting their votes among all of them.”

Winning, especially in early primaries, helps a candidate because “it conveys positive information about him to voters in later states,” he said.

“To use the ‘momentum effect,’ candidates will spend a lot of time in the coming months trying to persuade voters they are the best mechanism to select theCondorcet winner,” he said.

Although sequential elections allow voters to coordinate and thus avoid a situation where a candidate wins just because his ideological opponents split the votes of their supporters among each other, their disadvantage is that, once coordination has occurred, there’s little chance to correct an error made in early elections, as candidate momentum dominates, Polborn said.

“This problem is quite large, as our empirical results show the probability of the full-information Condorcet winner dropping out after the first few primaries is substantial,” he said. “However, the problem of vote-splitting in a simultaneous primary would be a lot worse than the problem of coordination on the wrong candidate in sequential primaries.”

Polborn points to the 2010 Illinois Republican primary for governor as an example of the problem of vote-splitting in a simultaneous election.

“There were seven candidates, but only (state senator) Bill Brady came out on top. When a voter is deciding among remaining serious candidates, he said. “In other words, learning about candidate quality takes time.”

“Sequential primaries have likely facilitated the victory of candidates who were unknown to the general public, in contrast to the front-runner at the beginning of the primary season. Polborn cites Barack Obama in 2008 as one such example.

“In a simultaneous election with a large set of candidates, the candidate who would come out on top is often not the best one,” Polborn said. “By contrast, sequential elections allow voters to narrow down the field of contenders as a way of avoiding vote-splitting among several similar candidates.”

A Growing Alumni Mentoring Program in MCB is Helping Students Map Their Careers

A college education opens many doors—and sometimes, it seems, too many, as Leah Schmelkin ’81, molecular and cellular biology major at Iowa State University, might have attempted to do back in 2009, early in her undergraduate studies at Illinois. She didn’t know what she wanted to do, but then she received notice from the School of Molecular and Cellular Biology about a new opportunity to job-shadow a doctor and alumni named Richard Berkowitz ’80, ’97, biology, MD, who had made his rounds as an anesthesiologist at Community Hospital in Munster, Ind.

Schmelkin applied, and was accepted, as new, as a medical student at Mayo-Medical School in Rochester, Minn. She has the distinction of being one of the first students to go through the MCB Pathways to Health Careers Mentorship program. She’s part of a growing group, as a within a few short years the program has expanded from one founding mentor—Berkowitz—to dozens of mentors, including doctors, pharmacists, dentists, and other Illinois alumni in the health care industry who are willing to lend their time and knowledge to help undergraduate MCB students map their future.

Tina Knox, who coordinates undergraduate instruction and advising for MCB, said that the 2014 program matched 33 MCB students with alumni mentors. Some 41 students applied with essays, Knox goes through the applications, and with Knox’s help, the students are matched with mentors in their field of interest.

Response has been strong, Knox said, with alumni mentors agreeing to bring the student to work for job shadowing. When they’re not together, mentors are encouraged to keep in touch by phone or email to provide the student with career advice.

“They’re matched for a year,” she said. “But most of the mentors have agreed to see the student through graduation if the student chooses.”

Schmelkin said passing the program was one of the most important career decisions she’s made. During the program, she shadowed Berkowitz several times at Community Hospital as he worked with patients. When she wasn’t at the hospital, she corresponded often with Berkowitz as she offered her career and academic advice. Berkowitz eventually wrote her a recommendation letter that helped her get into Mayo.

Most importantly, Schmelkin added, the program helped her decide that she wanted to go to medical school. She came to that conclusion while trailing Berkowitz about his job.

“His job is very technical, but when he interacts with people he is able to connect with them on a very human level, and that’s not about science. That’s about comforting them in a time when they’re scared before surgery,” Schmelkin said. “And when I went to him for advice on the science and the human side of things, I was really excited to do that myself one day.”

Students such as Schmelkin’s have made the Pathways program one of the most well-regarded at Illinois. It was recognized as an Outstanding Established Program by the Illinois Alumni Association, and Knox was invited to make a presentation about it at the National Academic Advising Association’s annual conference in October 2014.

Richard Berkowitz, founder of a successful mentoring program, with his mentee, Pha Thaprawat, a student majoring in molecular and cellular biology.

It started when Berkowitz decided he wanted to create a way to help students find their direction during their undergrad years.

Berkowitz knew what he wanted to do because he was the son of two physiologists, so he wanted to go to college for a significant amount of time, and he felt that he had no one to talk to about it.

“My dad worked in academia, and that really helped me out, because my dad could guide them to the right mentor or guide them to somebody they can talk to,” Berkowitz said.

“The networking piece and the job shadowing experience was really so important to me,” Raucci said. “Without having the background and those experiences, I don’t think I would have been able to jump on this path.”

By Phil Ciciora, Illinois News Bureau

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Leslie Reagan is a well-respected professor of history who joined the Illinois faculty in 1992. But this past Oct. 16, she was Leah Schwartz, an outspoken, disaffected factory worker from the year 1913 who makes button holes all day. She was a lively participant at a boisterous gathering in Greenwich Village, where she struggled to draw attention to the plight of working women even as suffragettes marched for women's voting rights. 

Never mind that this actually took place at a hotel conference center near the Illinois campus, and that in contrast to the flowered hats, long skirts and other early 20th century attire worn by several in the crowd, you could also see the glow of smartphones and tablets. The assembled group was practicing a relatively new and highly effective teaching tool, and staying in character was key to the exercise.

“I have to support the working women, who are being paid pennies,” said Reagan (Schwartz), dressed in a wide velvet hat, white shirtwaist, and tie. “It’s not that I don’t support the vote. But if I have to choose, I support the workers,” Reagan countered. “I encourage you to join and get on the picket line with me is, ‘My roommate wants to know when he or she can take the tablets. The assembled group was practicing a relatively new and highly effective teaching tool, and staying in character was key to the exercise.

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The scene wasn’t just an exercise in acting (although the performances by some of the participants seemed worthy of the theater). It was a workshop for faculty and students to employ Reacting to the Past, an interactive or experiential teaching tool developed during the past few years to bring more depth and interest to the learning of history.

About 50 faculty and students from seven different colleges and universities attended the event, organized by the Department of History at Illinois. Clare Crowston, chair of the department, said a few faculty members in history have tried the role-playing tool in their classes, and the reaction from students has been so positive that they decided to help spread the idea through a two-day conference.

I teach these games, and one of the first things students say to Crowston about the experience would be very valuable outside the classroom.”

Among those attending were Raquel Escobar, a graduate student in history, women’s voting rights.

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**High Profile Visit for the Humanities**

There's good reason to be optimistic about the future of the humanities, but a sustained and innovative commitment to educational institutions such as Illinois is required to maintain them in their role as an essential part of American democracy, the chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, said during a visit to campus in October.

William Adams spent two nights on campus as part of the 50th anniversary of the creation of the NEH, which was formed in 1965 when U.S. President Lyndon Johnson signed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act into law. Since then, the agency has awarded more than $320 million to hundreds of projects—mostly research and education programs—at Illini.

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**Milestones in Excellence**

The American Society for Microbiology, the largest and oldest life science society in the world, named Illinois one of its Milestones in Microbiology sites for its “rich history of major microbiological achievements.”

The society stated that the university has been “home to many outstanding microbiologists who have made seminal discoveries that significantly increased biological understanding and advanced the field of microbiology.”

On a plaque were the images of eight “giants” whose work at Illinois during the past nearly 150 years played a major role in bringing the department the status it enjoys today. They included Thomas Barrill, Carl Woese, Abigail Salyers, Ralph Wolfe, and Nobel laureate Salvador Luria.

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**Leaders in Conservation**

High praise from campus went to the occupants and those managing conservation at Lincoln Hall and Davenport Hall, which were the first two buildings on the Main Quad to receive the Campus Energy Conservation Incentive Program award for energy advancement.

Lincoln Hall reduced energy usage by 32 percent over FY2014 (second best on campus). Davenport Hall reduced usage by 19.6 percent (fourth). Another LAS building, however, David Keiley Hall, saw the biggest drop by reducing energy usage by 49 percent. Further, Scanlan was awarded David Keiley Hall, Lincoln Hall, and Davenport Hall $53,701, $15, 961, and $160,000 respectively for their accomplishments (based on the amount of energy they saved).

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**Bridging the Digital Divide**

A four-year, $1 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation will help Illinois humanities scholars identify digital publishing options and produce new publications that will best disseminate their research.

The collaborative project involves the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, the Department of Humanities, the Department of African American studies, the University Library and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science. The grant aims to help scholars understand the digital publishing options available to them and identify those that will best meet their publication goals. One focus will be on projects funded through Humanities Without Walls, a Mellon-funded consortium managed by IPRH that links research centers at 15 universities, including Illinois.

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**Around the College**

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**Lincoln Hall Earns Frank Lloyd Wright Award in Architecture**

Most people on campus who knew Lincoln Hall before its renovation appreciate its vast improvement since it reopened in 2012. It turns out that people off campus are impressed, too.

Lincoln Hall has been awarded a 2013 Citation of Merit in American Institute of Architects Illinois’ Honor Awards program, in the Frank Lloyd Wright category. The prestigious award came in part because of how designers were able to preserve historical aspects of the building while updating it for 21st century higher education.

AIA Illinois also noted that the restored building achieved leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum certification by the U.S. Green Building Council for incorporating sustainable elements throughout the 114-year-old building. Platinum is the highest LEED certification awarded.

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**Barbara Wilson Named Interim Chancellor**

Barbara J. Wilson, the Harry E. Preble Dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, was appointed interim chancellor of the Urbana-Champaign campus while Illinois conducts a nationwide search to replace former Chancellor Phyllis M. Wise.

Wilson, who was named dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences in 2012, succeeds Dr. Richard L. Scanlan, who stepped down after three years as chancellor. Wilson will serve as interim chancellor through June 30, 2017.

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**Friends, Romans, Illini… Award-Winning Professor Brings Rome to Life**

He eventually came to the United States for his graduate work, receiving his PhD in classics from Brown University in 2003.

Augoustakis teaches intensive, small seminar classes with graduate students, as well as the mega-popular undergraduate classical civilization classes that draw thousands of students from across the campus. Even during the department’s difficult years, the undergraduate classes in mythology and Greek and Roman civilization remained some of the most popular general education courses on campus.

These classes have a long and storied tradition. Many alumni still recall the mythology lectures of the late Richard T. Scanlan from 1967 to 1998—lectures that reached a peak of about 1,200 students. Scanlan would dress in a toga as Apollo and predict the outcomes of Illini games, and he would even dress up as Jason of the Golden Fleece, Hercules, or Odysseus.

Augoustakis doesn’t dress in a toga, but he does bring in a full set of Roman armor for students to try on. He also continues the tradition of giving his class a touch of the Roman spectacle. He drives home his points by using numerous clips from contemporary films and television shows, such as the acclaimed “Rome” series and the recent “ Spartacus” series from the Starz channel. He also references older TV shows, such as “I, Claudius,” and uses music and architecture around campus to talk about the classical influences.

Meanwhile, on the graduate level, Augoustakis pushes his students to publish and present papers, and he has produced results. “Not just in the last three years, but since graduate students (about 16 at any given time) have presented 35 conference papers and published nine articles and book chapters,” Traill says. “Antony is such an effective mentor that he once encouraged a prospective student to submit a paper during her campus visit.”

The student did so, and was awarded a three-year fellowship. His graduate classes are challenging, but the students eat it up. “How Antony can sound so encouraging when he makes criticism is amazing,” said Jacqueline Schuman, a PhD candidate in classics. “I suspect that it has something to do with the fact that the criticism is made by someone who holds himself, just like his students, to consistently high standards.”

“His relaxed, welcoming teaching manner and contagious enthusiasm for classics were instantly noticeable,” added Audrey Majors (BA, ’15, English and classics), a former student.

The academic year of a mythology is tough, says Wilson. “As the students study the ancient world, students are forced to carefully examine and critically evaluate the evidence on which our discipline is based. We ask our students to consider the evidence and critically examine classical traditions.”
A HMED BORGOTO, a young African translator, stood in the midst of a crowded refugee camp in the country of Chad, with makeshift structures all around him and the brown desert stretching to the horizon. He was doing translation work for Americans shooting a documentary about the plight of refugees fleeing the brutal violence in Darfur, a region in neighboring Sudan.

“What do you want us to do for you?” the American filmmaker asked a young refugee boy, speaking through Borgoto.

“We want education, we want books,” the boy said. These words struck a chord with Borgoto, who had heard many horrifying stories from refugees, such as a man whose pregnant wife was slain before his eyes. But even in the midst of the horror, people such as this boy still craved education. Borgoto says the words helped to inspire him to become a teacher.

“That was one of the things that really pushed me,” said Borgoto, who now teaches history, writes curricula, and trains teachers in Chad. He was also one of 17 secondary teachers who came to Illinois Center for Global Studies. Last summer, secondary teachers attended daily workshops and talks, and they traveled to Boston, Washington, D.C., Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco. They also spent time with American teachers, as well host families in the Champaign-Urbana area, going to Fourth of July fireworks, visiting local houses of worship and taking in all types of cultural experiences.

“One of the things we’re trying to get across is the diversity of American culture,” said Jeremie Smith, outreach coordinator at the Center for Global Studies.

Ari Hoyssa, a high school history teacher from Finland, this lesson came through loud and clear. “I found that America has even more variety than I thought,” said Hoyssa, who also writes textbooks in Finland. In one day, for instance, he said the group took in a rodeo at Monticello, a town near the Illinois campus, followed by a blues festival in Champaign during the evening.

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American culture connected to the program. But the impact of the institute at Illinois, and program manager at the Center for African Studies. Illinois was one of three institutions nationwide selected to be part of the program in 2015, and it has done so for the past three years, building a cross-country curriculum effort between Legsir and Lykou.

For some, he said, the American dream means individuality and freedom, for others, it is material wealth, or it might be equality. Lykou, who teaches English language to high school students on the Greek island of Evia, said many people associate the American dream with owning a private home—something that is increasingly difficult in Greece, where the economic crisis makes it hard to get a loan.

Legisi, an English teacher from France, said that “for French people the American dream means that anybody can succeed with hard work.” This stands in contrast to her world in southwestern France, where she says social determinism reigns in Fumel, a village of about 5,000.

“My students come from a very isolated place, and some of them believe that because they are from a poor area, they will remain poor.” In reality, she added, “they have lots of opportunities, and part of my job is to help them be conscious of all of these opportunities. That’s why I am trying hard to open up the horizons.”

Building on their experience at Illinois, Legsir and Lykou have been developing a curriculum that focuses on the quest of African Americans for equality in the United States, from slavery to current day. They are doing it through the lens of music, particularly the blues.

Through this curriculum, “students will look for the roots of the struggle for equality in parallel with the roots of Blues music,” Legisi said.

Lykou traveled from Greece to France this past fall to present parts of their new curriculum to the French students at Legisi’s high school. Lykou talked to the students about how African Americans have used media and protest songs in their push for civil rights.

To introduce the students to Blues music, they brought in the blues artist Jarekus Singleton from Mississippi to perform and talk to the classes. Singleton is a popular performer in Jackson, Mississippi, winning the Jackson Music Award for Blues Artist of the Year in 2012 and Local Entertainer of the Year in 2013.

The cross-country curriculum effort between Legsir and Lykou is a direct byproduct from last year’s summer institute. As Legisi explained, “Not only have I met a colleague who has helped me to go further in my teaching practice, but I have also made a great friend.”

Meanwhile, for Borgoto and Hoyssa, the impact of the institute has been equally powerful.

In Chad, Borgoto said, being able to travel out of the country also went a long way to giving him credibility back home. In fact, he said you can be a genius, but if you have not traveled out of the country, “some people in Chad are not going to accept what you say.”

Therefore, seeing places such as the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and John Adams’ house in Boston were of paramount importance.

“My students studied the Boston Tea Party, but now I was going to the place where everything started,” he said. “This will be more than just teaching them from a book. My students will say, ‘Yes, he was there.’”

Chad has experienced spells of peace in recent years, but the country is still surrounded by violence—Liberia to the north, Sudan to the east and Nigeria to the west. Just last year, Borgoto’s school had to close for a month because people feared attacks by Boko Haram, a terrorist group from Nigeria that is active in Chad.

But Chadians have dreams of their own, he said. Although many want to leave the country, Borgoto seeks to inspire hope in his students and passion in the teachers he trains, and he believes the institute equipped him for this job.

“I want people to feel there is a chance to do something great,” he said.
Generations of Friendship

LAS alumnae who helped each other adjust to life at Illinois reunite in Korea – during a new chapter in their lives.

We know friendships formed at college can last a lifetime. Sometimes they even cross generations, as proven by a group of psychology alumnae from South Korea who recently gathered to take photos together with their children dressed in Illinois apparel.

Yoojin Park, Hye Yoon Choi, So Jung Lee and Hyemin Lee all met each other in 2004 when they were freshmen at Illinois. They went through some trying times together as they adjusted to life some 6,500 miles from home, but they each graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 2008. Now back in their home country, they now remain close friends as they each begin to raise families of their own.

“Spending almost four years together (at Illinois) was very special to all of us. Not only just building college friendships, but we also went through our early 20’s together,” said Park. “We were like sisters, best friends and mentors to each other… We still meet each other every laugh together!”

After Illinois, Park went to Harvard, where she earned a master’s degree in 2008. Now back in their home country, they now remain friends since earning bachelor’s degrees in psychology together at Illinois in 2008 and moving back to Korea.

In honor of where they met, the friends dressed their children in orange and blue for a photo shoot. You may recognize one from the LAS Facebook page, but they sent several—here are a couple we’ve shown you yet.

In Chicago’s Chinatown
Saturday, April 30 • 5-8 p.m.
A traditional Chinese lunch followed by Chinese medicine or walking tour. Featuring the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures.

Exploring Spurlock Museum, Illinois’ Gem
Saturday, May 7 • 1-7 p.m.
Tour the Illinois “gem of a museum.”
With Director Wayne Pivnick followed by a reception.

Meeting Mr. Lincoln at the David Davis Mansion
Saturday, June 11 • 11-8:30 p.m.
Tour the David Davis Mansion in Bloomington, Ill.
Featuring a dinner and program by Lincoln-historian Guy Fraker (BA, ’60, science and letters, ’62).

Let us know what you think!
We’re continually looking for ways to improve this magazine and would appreciate your feedback. Please visit go.las.illinois.edu/magsurvey to complete our brief survey. Participants responding by May 1, 2016, will be entered in a drawing to win a free LAS t-shirt.

For more information or to register for an open event visit: las.illinois.edu/alumni/events.

SUBSCRIBE to LAS’ Monthly E-Newsletter
Get more news, more alumni profiles, more notices of upcoming events. Visit go.las.illinois.edu/contactform or send an email to las-news@illinois.edu.

GET CONNECTED WITH LAS!
The College of LAS is social and we would love to be friends with you! Check out our pages and get the latest news and events from around the college.

facebook.com/lasillinois
instagram.com/lasillinois
twitter.com/lasillinois
pinterest.com/lasillinois
youtube.com/CollegeOfLAS
The Lincoln Scholars Initiative allowed me to come to Illinois to pursue my dream.

— Finey Ruan, Class of 2016, double-majoring in Integrative Biology Honors and Chemistry

THE LINCOLN SCHOLARS INITIATIVE launched with the renovation of Lincoln Hall, with the first batch of scholarships going to incoming students in Fall 2012. This May, Finey Ruan and seven others will become the first class of Lincoln Scholars to graduate because of alumni and friends who gave generously to this initiative and enabled these bright students to experience an Illinois education.

With your help, they’ll be followed by countless more deserving Lincoln Scholars. Make an investment today and open a world of opportunities for the next generation of LAS students.

To make a gift or for more information visit go.las.illinois.edu/LS.