ON THE COVER:
In Professor Dennis Cao’s chemistry courses, he wants students to understand that forgetting material is more than just okay—it’s a natural part of the learning process.

PHOTO: DAVID J. TURNER

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MACALESTER TODAY (Volume 110, Number 2)
is published by Macalester College. It is mailed free of charge to alumni and friends of the college four times a year.
Circulation is 32,000.

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Formative faculty

In “The Professor Who Changed My Life” (Winter 2022), we invited readers to continue the conversation by sharing their own reflections.

“Hands down, Professor Mahmoud El-Kiti! I serve on the National Board of the NAACP, served as president of the Boston NAACP, and have dedicated my entire adult life to civil rights, justice, and equity. Professor El-Kiti gave context for so much of the world around me, and ignited a passion for service.”

“Dr. Michal McCall for teaching me the value of commitment was palpable. I am so proud to read this exchange and learn the current status. Congratulations on all that is been achieved by this grassroots effort.”

—Anne Lewis ’72 P ’03

In memory

On January 19, former Macalester professor Charles M. Norman passed away from a brief illness. I had the fortune to work with him fail. Charles was an inspiration as a writer and mentor. Most importantly, I was able to spend a great deal of time talking to and learning from this man who had an enormous intellect, very sense of humor, and a passion for literature, writing, teaching, and mentoring. He dedicated twenty-five years of his life to Macalester and its students—and had an outsized influence there. If during the course of our lives, we come across a professor or mentor who inspires us, believe in our promise—and is also a friend—we are so lucky. I know that dozens of alumni feel as fortunate as I do to have been part of a small part of Charles’s life. He knew how to bring out the best in people. He was generous, authentic, and loved by so many. On behalf of Macalester alumni, I offer my deepest condolences to his family.

—Michael Curry ’91

“Professor Andrew Latham changed my life. He introduced me to more conserva­tive perspectives without trying to force them upon me. He was more than just a mentor—I consider him a role model.”

Emily Allen ’91

Fifty years of Family Tree

I remember laying the tile in the space on College Hall that was from a patient advocate and a blood donor. Came back again as a medical student. Fifty years has gone by so fast.

—Desmond Runyon ’72

CONNECT WITH US

Visit Mac’s social media hub at macalester.edu/mac saliva and join in by using the #mymacalester hashtag when you post on Twitter or Instagram.

CORRESPONDENCE POLICY

We invite letters of 300 words or fewer. Letters should be submitted online, in style, and space and will be published based on their relevance to issues discussed in Macalester Today. Share your thoughts:

• Email: mactoday@macalester.edu
• Tweet: @macalester using the hashtag #mactoday
• Mail: Macalester Today, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105

Macalester has an amazing heritage of in­credible humans who have passed through the campus. The recent deaths of Jon West­eby ’84 and Andrew Latham provided a great deal of support and comfort for me. I am so grateful for this experience as a writer and mentor, and it extends long after they enroll.

—Wendy Steglich Meyer ’91

Stephan Barnes ’85

Longmont, Colo.

While the college’s commitment to access is unwavering, the challenge of meeting student needs is something we cannot overcome without the generous assistance of alumni and friends.

—Dr. Suzanne M. Rivera is president of Macalester College.
How We Show Up:
Accountability and Action

Dr. Alina Wong started her student affairs career at Macalester in 2008, as the assistant director of the Department of Multicultural Life at Leppard-Suzuki Center. Now she’s guiding the college’s approach to advancing equity and justice. After working at Barnard College, Swarthmore College, and most recently Penn State, Wong came back to Mac this winter to serve as the college’s inaugural vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

“I feel like I’m coming full circle,” says Wong, who joins President Suzanne Rivera’s senior leadership team. “So much of what I learned about diversity, equity, and inclusion on a college campus, I learned at Mac.” Shortly after Wong returned to campus in February, she talked with Rivera about their vision for the new role and the college’s next steps.

President Rivera: There’s already so much work happening at Mac with regard to advancing equity and justice. What excites me about this role is your ability to help us be more strategic and coordinated in the way we undertake these initiatives. We’re identifying existing gaps, or overlaps where we’re stepping on each other’s feet inadvertently. Then we’ll build programming to meet the needs we’ve identified.

Dr. Wong: Macalester has been doing this work for a long time—it’s not new. But if we all sit in silos, our progress will be limited. And we still face many barriers. Macalester lives in a world where discrimination, oppression, power, and privilege are invisible. How we respond is what makes Macalester unique. Do we say that’s just the way the world is and do our best, or do we say that’s not how it has to be? What’s my responsibility for change, and what’s my accountability for action? I want to build collaborative partnerships with faculty, staff, students, and alumni to identify the changes that we need to make internal to Macalester to embed and operationalize equity and justice principles in our work—and also to imagine how the knowledge, experiences, and relationships that we build within Macalester will help us to have an impact on broader social issues and concerns.

Rivera: I love how you’re framing that we all have a responsibility to think about the different ways we show up for this work. It’s an opportunity for people to assign themselves the task that’s right for them at that time.

Wong: There are so many arenas where the work needs to be done. You don’t have to be out front, marching. For some folks, it might happen in the classroom or lab. It might be in a tight task or lobbying. It needs to be this collective encompassing and wide breadth of action.

Rivera: I’m going to ask you about a “spicy meatball” of a topic. Some people think that initiatives around inclusion, equity, and justice are in conflict with free speech and freedom of expression. It’s one of the challenges on a liberal arts campus. Of course we want to promote freedom of expression, but we also want this to be an environment in which people feel not just safe but actually included. How do you think about this challenge?

Wong: People have a right in our constitution to express themselves. I believe that right does come with responsibility and is not free of consequence. That’s where we need to enact our community principles. Are we a community of listeners and learners? Then, if I said something—intentionally or unintentionally—that hurt somebody, we talk about it. I’m going to listen. I learn from it. At the same time, we do have policies around discrimination and harassment. If someone is using speech to cause violence, to create harmful or ineffective learning environments, we do have ways to address that.

Rivera: It’s a challenge in our society in general to talk about hard topics without using hurtful words. We see examples all the time of people using words as weapons. I think one of the really important things that can happen on a college campus is for us all to learn how to communicate in a way that’s felt by everyone in the room but isn’t attacking?

Wong: Yes, I also recognize that there’s a lot of hurt in the world. There’s a lot of anger, rightfully so. How do we support one another in feeling that, and then recognize ways that we also need to heal? How do we also make space so that someone can express anger in a way that’s felt by everyone in the room but isn’t attacking?

Rivera: You’re arriving at Macalester at a time when we’re relearn- ing and reimagining how to be together in person, in community. Obviously we want our students to have the best possible experience, and the experiences they have in college are really important to us. But we also want to make sure that we’re using words as weapons. I think one of the really important things that can happen on a college campus is for us all to learn how to communicate in a way that’s felt by everyone in the room but isn’t attacking?

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ATHLETICS  THE NIGHT before the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference men’s basketball tournament began, Gabriel Ramos ’22 (Dorado, Puerto Rico) didn’t sleep well. It’s not that he was new to the MIAC—in fact, Ramos led the Scots with one hundred career appearances, a sharp contrast to the rest of a young team that included thirteen first-years or sophomores among the roster’s seventeen players.

It was Ramos’s first playoff game, though, and the first playoff game for the men’s basketball program since 2005. Ramos could feel a different energy churning in the Leonard Center during warmups, when fans started filing in earlier than usual. By the time he launched the ball across the court to leading scorer Caleb Williams ’24 (Wild Rose, Wis.) for a dunk late in the first half, more than a thousand people cheered in the stands. “It was the loudest I’ve ever seen the LC—the floor was shaking,” Ramos says. “And when we won, everyone rushed the court. I was ecstatic.”

But the team’s story didn’t end there. After the 79-66 win over St. Scholastica in the first round, the Scots upset Carleton in Northfield, 70–56. Then they rallied from a thirteen-point second-half deficit to beat Augsburg 76–74 in the semifinal to advance to the tournament championship against top seed Saint John’s, the first time in tournament history that a sixth-seed had made it to the final. Mac students traveled by bus and helped pack the stands at all three road games.

In front of 1,800 fans in Collegeville, the Scots came up just short, dropping the conference championship game 75–71. “It hurts to be that close,” says fourth-year head coach Abe Woldeslassie ’08, who was named D3hoops.com’s Region 9 Coach of the Year and leads the team with assistants Conner Nord and Bridge Tusler. “But when you step back and look at the season overall, it’s clear that we’re right there. There’s a real buzz around this program, and it’s earned.”

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The support from the Mac community gave us memories we’ll never forget.”

Strategic Planning Themes

Throughout the “Imagine, Macalester” strategic planning process, the Mac community—on campus and around the world—has shared big ideas about the college’s future through surveys, town halls, email messages, and group-listening sessions and one-on-one conversations with Strategic Planning Champions. In late March, President Suzanne Rivera and Provost Lisa Anderson-Levy shared four broad emerging themes from that input:

**Reimagine the residential liberal arts experience.** Create a joyful, educational journey that balances academic, social, and practical skills within a supportive community that removes barriers to interconnectedness across identities and viewpoints; that challenges students to grow; and that prepares students to be global citizens.

**Build sustainable and enduring approaches to access and equity.** Transform Macalester by aligning our educational mission, equity principles, and resource allocation practices in order to facilitate the holistic learning and growth of all Macalester community members.

**Fuel community well-being and flourishing.** Foster a campus environment and culture that supports the well-being of all community members by creating shared experiences and recognition that cultivate belonging.

**Create signature Mac experiences for students.** Distinguish Macalester by putting our values; our urban location; our reflection about identity, agency, and responsibility in the world; and our relationships with alumni and community partners at the heart of all we do.

Strategic Planning Champions and the senior leadership team will continue to incorporate community feedback leading up to the May Board of Trustees meeting and the finalization of the plan this fall. Additional opportunities for feedback will be announced as the process unfolds.

Share your perspective
strategicplan@macalester.edu

Learn more
macalester.edu/strategic-plan
Why take this class?
To better understand the processes behind natural hazards (or as I like to call them, the many ways the planet can kill you) and the intersections between hazards and society.

Course description
An introductory course for students of all backgrounds aimed at 1) understanding the geology behind disasters, including earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, sinkholes, landslides, climate change, asteroid impacts, and changes in Earth’s magnetic field; and 2) investigating the intersection of risk with society and at a personal level. Also includes one field trip to view sinkholes and landslide debris and speak with the Twin Cities.

Geohazard tip
If you find yourself face to face with a tornado (one of the main hazards we contend with here in Minnesota), take shelter in a ditch or gully, lie down, and cover your head with your hands. Do not seek shelter beneath a highway underpass!

Building community
We spend a lot of time cross-pollinating in this class. Examples include maintaining a class blog (“hometown (geo)hazards,” where students describe where they came from and the hazards they have faced or the potential hazards affecting their home), holding student-led poster sessions on sociopolitical issues pertaining to hazards and disasters, and critically evaluating disaster movies (e.g., San Andreas, Dante’s Peak, and Don’t Look Up) as a class.

Lessons learned
Students will be empowered to recognize when tectonic hazards (e.g., volcanoes and earthquakes), atmospheric hazards (e.g., hurricanes and tornadoes), and surface hazards (e.g., landslides, flooding) are present in their surroundings and respond accordingly. By not buying a house on a floodplain, knowing what to do in a lightning storm, and learning how to ride out an earthquake.

Outside of class, you’ll find me:
Seeking type 2 fun via trail running or cross-country skiing.

From left: Sarah Beth Hobby ’24, Casey Moerer ’23, Dipakshi Sarma ’24, Joe McMurtrey ’22, Paul O’Connell ’22, and Ethan Glass ’25

Ethics Bowl Team Wins National Title

“In Ethics Bowl you can be comfortable being unsure about a topic, or even being wrong,” says Casey Moerer ’23 (Santa Cruz, Calif.), a Macalester Ethics Bowl team co-captain. “Countless times I’ve come into an issue with my own perspective and have been gently and constructively challenged by my teammates.”

This winter, Moerer and teammates spent two months getting ready for the 26th Annual Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl national competition after qualifying at the regional level last fall. They prepared arguments for seventeen real-world ethical dilemmas, including facial recognition technology, hate speech regulation, drone warfare, and hybrid human-monkey embryos. And their hard work paid off. Competing remotely from campus in February, the team was crowned the 2022 national champion.

The national competition followed the traditional Ethics Bowl format, in which teams prepare arguments without knowing the question beforehand and are given only a minute or two before each round to prepare their thoughts. Competitors are judged on the clarity, nuance, and logical soundness of their arguments—and, unlike other debate competitions, teams can agree with one another.

“Ethics Bowl contests the idea that contemporary ethical dilemmas are merely two-sided disagreements, instead believing that there is a wider array of questions to ask and considerations to examine,” says director of forensics Beau Larsen. “We asked to contemplate the relevant values, frameworks, and stakeholders of an issue while formulating ethical arguments.”

At the national competition, Moerer, Paul O’Connell ’22 (Bebap- topol, Calif.), Joe McMurtrey ’22 (Valparaiso, Ind.), Dipakshi Sarma ’24 (Dundas, Australia), Sarah Beth Hobby ’24 (South Pittsburg, Tenn.), and Ethan Glass ’25 (Pittsburgh, Penn.) represented Mac against thirty-six opposing teams. Co-captain Sarah Falkovic ’22 (Chapel Hill, N.C.), Sarah Gotbetter ’22 (Weston, Mass.), and Eli Schue ’24 (Ashland, Wis.) assisted the team as student coaches and researchers, alongside Larsen and program alumni and volunteer coach Nathan Viohl ’18.

The team also won the national Bioethics Bowl in 2021 and was preparing to defend the title as this issue went to press. That annual competition focuses on a narrower range of ethical issues in science, medicine, and public health. But for students, competition is only one meaningful aspect of the Ethics Bowl experience.

“The Forensics Department really has created a community that fosters alumni connections,” Falkovic says. “It’s something that lasts much longer beyond our time in Ethics Bowl. We had a lot of conversations with alumni over the summer at social gatherings and on Zoom calls, and it was so fun to have this sense of timeless belonging and bonding. It’s a wonderful place not only for what you do while you’re here, but also for the community you gain once you graduate.”
Mandi Masden's puzzle company fills a cultural gap in the jigsaw market.

By Victoria Carter

In the midst of the pandemic, many Americans took up an old pastime that was perfect for home isolation: jigsaw puzzles.

They sorted through hundreds or thousands of pieces to assemble scenes of American landscapes—Windmills. Dogs (so many dogs). Smiling white people. Sailboats. Artwork curated for a narrow section of consumers—specifically, white ones.

Mandi Masden '08 knows these genres well. Growing up in Cheyenne, Wyoming, Masden was, in her words, “a puzzle boss.” She even had a designated puzzle table in her room. But gradually her hobby faded to the background. After majoring in theater, English, and American studies at Macalester, she earned an MFA in acting at the National Theatre Conservatory in Denver and launched a successful career on stage and screen in New York City. She has acted on Broadway and appeared in popular shows including Law and Order, S.V.U., Blue Bloods, and Madam Secretary, as well as commercials for Snickers and U.S. Bank.

By the time she worked on a performance piece in 2019 that drew on puzzles structurally and metaphorically, her enthusiasm surprised a friend who had never heard her talk about puzzles. She came to a sudden realization.

“I hadn’t done a puzzle in a long time because I hadn’t seen anything that I’d wanted to do.”

Later that year, Masden’s friend set out to find her a puzzle that she would actually want to do, with a subject that had something to do with who she is—a Black woman. Such a puzzle was surprisingly hard to find. He eventually ordered a custom puzzle, using a painting by Atlanta-based artist Charly Palmer as the subject—a piece of art Masden loved so much that she had tried to buy it earlier in the year but couldn’t afford the price.

She started imagining a line of puzzles that showcased contemporary artists of color, allowing puzzle enthusiasts to engage with fine art in an accessible and affordable way—and addressing the gap in accessibility to collecting fine art that blocks people from participating in art culture. And to Masden, the underrepresentation of people of color in puzzles was connected to the lack of diversity in fine art as a whole. As her idea took shape, she learned about a cultural gap in the jigsaw market.

“Even when I lost the manufacturer I was like, ‘Okay, that’s a closed door, I’ll find an open one.’” Rather than allowing a seemingly huge obstacle to derail the dream, Masden took it in stride. Through networking with existing puzzle makers whose offerings she admired, she was able to secure a new overseas manufacturer.

Instead, she launched a crowdfunding campaign. Masden set a goal of $10,000 in thirty days—a target she reached in only five days, largely through the support of Mac students and alumni who helped the campaign ultimately raise $40,000.

Victoria Carter is a writer based in northern California. Her writing focuses on the intersections of race and just about anything else.
Mac to the Future

A longtime history professor asked a generation of students to imagine the rest of their lives.

BY PAUL SOLON

Macalester is a wonderful place, and no one knows that better than someone like me lucky enough to have spent not just four years but indeed four decades here (in the History Department 1970–2009).

Through good times and bad I was blessed with a constant stream of marvelous students whom I remember with affection in all their youthful ardor and promise. One unusual memento I still treasure: their obituaries. Not real ones, of course, but those written as a thought exercise in my course, “The Future as History.”

We spent a semester considering history as the process of change through time so the future became every bit as much the province of the historians as the past. I asked students to project their own futures in imagined obituaries. They were, to paraphrase Mrs. Malaprop, “to... cast all our retrospection to the future” and speculate on how their lives might turn out, taking into account their personal prospects and the “expert” projections of the future we had studied such as the Club of Rome study and Preparing for the Twenty-First Century. I intended the assignment to be fun; certainly the results were a pleasure to read. Collectively these roughly 150 “obituaries” offer an intriguing snapshot of a generation of Macalester students spanning the years from 1976 to 2005.

What is striking is their general optimism in anticipating peaceful, prosperous lives. No one was killed in war and domestic violence was rare, though one presciently imagined being assasinated by an anti-immigration terrorist active in an anticipated 2020 MAA movement (Make America America). Most expected happy, albeit small, families. Virtually all projected marriage, only two foresaw divorce, and the current decline in family size was fully anticipated.

My students envisioned financial security but not great wealth (aspiring oligarchs probably took econ rather than history). The single most popular career was rock star. Such aspiration probably reflects the allure of stardom and its promise of financial security. Two thirds of the students saw themselves as “diplo-california” politicians who “finally” unionized Walmart to mayors, governors, and members of Congress.

Most hoped to be diplomats and peacemakers, but domestic politics loomed large with proposed careers ranging from the first algal cell theory professor to a political science professor who “managed to be fun.” Technological progress was eagerly but never confidently anticipated (one terrific exception planned on being the first ambassador to Alpha Centauri). Instead of “warp speed” they predicted a full Malthusian Crisis around 2140 and another the fall of the Berlin Wall, an African American president of the United States, a woman vice president (to be fair there was one prediction of a woman president in 2042), gay marriage, a peaceful end to apartheid, fracking, streaming, even cell phones.

I like to think that collectively these essays moved beyond compliance not merely into planes but on to aspirations. Some obituaries were perfunctory but most were wonderfully honest, imaginative, and even joyfully insouciant as one wrote, “I can’t be real here about my future ...if I knew what I wanted to do with my life why would I be at a liberal arts college?”

However little we learn about the future, we surely learn about the one-time hopes and dreams of a generation of current Mac alumni. As I read them, what runs through these essays from the late baby boomers through the early millennials is that students came, as I hope they still come, to Mac with both hope and determination to prepare, to succeed, and to make a difference. They sensed, and acted, on the reality that their future would not just “happen,” they would make it. Surely this is reassuring for partisans of a small but lively liberal arts college.

What better place to prepare for a future we can only feebly predict and never really know in advance?

Paul Solon is an emeritus professor of history at Macalester. I intended the assignment to be fun; certainly the results were a pleasure to read. Collectively these roughly 150 “obituaries” offer an intriguing snapshot of a generation of Macalester students spanning the years from 1976 to 2005. What is striking is their general optimism in anticipating peaceful, prosperous lives. No one was killed in war and domestic violence was rare, though one presciently imagined being assasinated by an anti-immigration terrorist active in an anticipated 2020 MAA movement (Make America America). Most expected happy, albeit small, families. Virtually all projected marriage, only two foresaw divorce, and the current decline in family size was fully anticipated.

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What better place to prepare for a future we can only feebly predict and never really know in advance?

Paul Solon is an emeritus professor of history at Macalester.
Kelsey Grinde knows how important it is to think broadly and creatively about teaching. It wasn’t just that the assistant professor of mathematics, statistics, and computer science had trained to be a high school mathematics teacher, and that she’d learned plenty of techniques to help students find their footing. It was also that she herself had benefited from teaching that went beyond lectures and included plenty of personalized attention. “I was fairly shy in class as a college student, and sometimes I was one of the only women in the room,” she says. “The kinds of active learning techniques that I use now are the ones that really worked for me as a student. They helped me get a lot further in math and statistics than I ever thought I would have.”

Grinde isn’t alone. Creative teaching can crack open even the toughest subjects. It can spark a student’s passion and fuel work for a lifetime.

FLIP THE CLASSROOM

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR of mathematics, statistics, and computer science Kelsey Grinde had been using a traditional lecture format in the first statistics classes she taught before arriving at Macalester in 2019. But when the pandemic hit partway through her first year at Macalester and classes moved to Zoom, she realized that she needed to rethink her approach. “I didn’t really want to be on Zoom talking at students for a long time, for everybody’s sanity,” she says. So she teamed up with department colleagues Brianna Heggeseth and Leslie Myint to create a series of five- to fifteen-minute videos that teach concepts like linear regression models, or show how to interpret data sets linked to smoking and lung function. Students watch them in their own time, study the text, then ask questions and work through problems during class. This approach, known as a flipped classroom, offers Grinde a chance to more clearly understand when students have mastered an idea and when they need a bit more help.

Now that students are back in person, she’s kept this flipped classroom in place. Students watch the videos on their own, then work in groups to solve problems in class. Grinde walks around the room, dropping in on groups to check on their progress. Oftentimes, she uses a Google doc to monitor how the class is doing overall with group discussion prompts. The new approach has added significantly to Grinde’s workload. Creating the videos is extraordinarily labor intensive—she and her collaborators spent most of their summer working on the videos, rather than other research and projects. But she’s also been particularly happy with the way that it has transformed the classroom. She loves it when she can see students talking animatedly with each other about concepts or helping one another with specific knotty problems.

Grinde is also delighted to have more time to get to know her students on a personal level. During class, “I’m not an authority figure standing up at the front. I’m sitting down next to them and helping them work on something,” she says. “This allows me to have conversations with students who—if they just came to class and didn’t come to my office hours—I might otherwise never have really met.”

She’s hopeful that the approach will open up statistics to more people who might otherwise have stopped after a single course. “For many people, there’s a lot of internal dialogue about how they’re terrible at math, or they’re not good with computers. I hope that this is one way to get more people to realize how cool statistics is—and that they can do it,” she says.

Macalester faculty members find creative ways to help students learn even the most challenging concepts.

BY ERIN PETERSON
PHOTOS BY DAVID J. TURNER

Macalester faculty members find creative ways to help students learn even the most challenging concepts.

BEYOND the Lecture

Macalester faculty members find creative ways to help students learn even the most challenging concepts.
I tell students all the time that yes, I’m throwing them into the deep end—and that’s how it should feel. I don’t want to go shallow.”

Embrace the Forgetting of Learning

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR of chemistry Dennis Cao teaches what is often considered one of the toughest courses at Mac: organic chemistry. The class, essential for pre-med hopefuls, includes lessons on molecular geometry and electron flow that can scramble the brains of otherwise accomplished students.

Cao has one message he wants all of his students to hear before they give up: The work is supposed to be difficult. “I tell students all the time that yes, I’m throwing them into the deep end—and that’s how it should feel. I don’t want to go shallow,” he says.

That might seem like cold comfort, since Cao himself long ago mastered the material. But as a novice in other areas of his life, he intentionally throws himself into the deep end—and that’s how it should feel. “I think languages are a fun thing to learn, but I used to get so annoyed when I couldn’t even remember three words—what’s the point?” he says. “But that is the point. You can’t remember three words, so you have to just keep doing it, and doing it, and doing it.”

Instead of getting frustrated about the time and repetitions required to understand a concept and establish it firmly into long-term memory, students can instead acknowledge it, plan for it, and doing it.”

When students internalize this approach to learning difficult subjects, it pays dividends: Cao reminds pre-med students in his class that this is the warm-up: In medical school, they may be taking five classes that are all as tough as organic chemistry in different ways, and once they know what it takes to succeed in a very difficult class, they will be ready for the new challenges of medical school.

Cao says that students who learn to embrace the challenges of organic chemistry often find that the approach benefits them broadly. “Most of my students don’t go on to be organic chemists, but I have bad students come back and tell me that doing the work in my class helped them in another totally unrelated class,” he says. “I find a lot of gratification in knowing that, in the long term, this approach helped.”

Keep going: Read more about Cao’s views on teaching and learning on Twitter at @denniscao.

BY THE time that students enter assistant professor of sociology Erika Busse’s upper-level course, “Qualitative Methods,” they’ve spent plenty of time learning from research that uses qualitative research methods such as observations and interviews. In Busse’s classroom, they finally have the chance to employ those qualitative methods in their own original research.

Busse has her students design a project to understand an aspect of race and ethnicity more deeply by choosing a single intersection near campus and studying social dynamics in it over the course of a semester. Students have chosen to study everything from ways to create community to the ways advertising differs for drivers, pedestrians, and public transit users.

Busse says that preparing to do ethnographic research can provide anxiety in students who are used to burrowing into books and acing tests. Instead, they have to adjust to a more fluid and uncertain process of observation, interviews, and study: “They want to know: What am I going to say? What should I do? Should I take out a notebook or take notes on my cell phone?” she says. “They’re used to being challenged intellectually in the classroom or with their friends, but they’ve never gone out themselves to observe and collect data. That can be disorienting.”

Busse encourages students to be open to the messiness of the process, and she has them regroup in class to share their experiences, troubleshoot, and even provide advice to others. One of her great joys is seeing the growth that they experience as they move from idea to research to finished paper.

And although not all students end up loving the process, they do gain a greater appreciation for the challenges of research that aren’t fully visible in a published journal article. “If you want to actually learn social dynamics, you have to be open to the idea that you won’t always have control. You’ll always depend on other people,” she says. “Learning that? It’s priceless.”

Get Outside the Classroom

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CREATE STANDOUT SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS TO HIGHLIGHT IMPORTANT ACADEMIC IDEAS

IN THE summer of 2020, assistant professor of psychology Morgan Jerald was contemplating changes to her upper-level seminar, “The Psychology of Black Women,” against the backdrop of the uncertainty of the pandemic and the grief and rage erupting in the Twin Cities over the murder of George Floyd.

That summer, she’d begun noticing a trend dubbed “Power Point activism”—slideshows on Instagram that paired distilled insights with compelling graphics to make a persuasive point. She realized that they could also be a launching point for her students who wanted to bridge the divide between academic research and wider impact, so she developed a short, powerful Instagram project.

She asked each student to write an op-ed about any issue related to the psychology of Black women. Then, students created an Instagram slideshow, complete with images, based on the content of the op-ed.

Even students well-versed in the social media platform’s nuances found the project one part thrilling, one part hair-raising. It’s anything but easy to convey complicated concepts in an engaging and visual way. “Having to distill something into a really short format is sometimes even harder than having no word limit at all,” Jerald says. “It requires you to communicate really clearly.”

Students created slideshows on topics ranging from health care disparities to segregated neighborhoods to education. They carefully sequenced the slideshows to start strong, build arguments, and provide resources for viewers to learn more. Jerald says that the projects gave students essential practice in communicating effectively to non-academic audiences about important issues.

The work has already earned significant external praise. Last year, the project received an Action Teaching Award from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, a group of three thousand scientists who seek to apply theory and practice to today’s critical problems.

Jerald says she wanted the project to remind students that they can have a voice in issues that are important to them. “I hope that my classroom and assignments can be used as a space for students to process what’s happening and feel more empowered to act on it,” she says.

Check it out: See students’ Instagram projects at @mac_psyc394.

WALLACE PROFESSOR of Art Ruthann Godollei knows that Mac students are driven and passionate about a variety of issues. In her “Dissent” course, she requires students to channel that energy into creating meaningful art that goes beyond the craftsmanship in order to say something larger about a social or political cause.

In the course, she teaches students about art linked to dissent and protest throughout history and around the world. Then, she has students create their own works based on the ideas that are important to them. Over the years, students have made stickers about immigration, linocuts to propel fundraising efforts, and specialty cards for Bike to Work week. “I want them to do their ideas, not my ideas,” she says.

Art offers a particularly kinesthetic learning experience, says Godollei: “So many of us are stuck in virtual realities. Art helps people get back into their bodies, back into the material of their hands.” It’s also a way for students to find another way to take action on something they care about.

Godollei says that when students transform their ideas into tangible artwork, they see their own abilities, and the world they inhabit, in a new way. “It’s a wonderful feeling when you’ve got a whole classroom of students getting their hands inky, exclaiming with each other over what they’re making,” she says.

And regardless of what they pursue in their lives later, they have a deep understanding of the challenges of creating art designed for impact. “It also helps them appreciate the labor of art, the human intelligence behind it, and the real struggles that people have gone through.”

Erin Peterson is a Minneapolis-based writer.
In a digital timeline, Andie Walker ‘23 knits together a history of Mac’s student housing.

BY TALIA BANK ‘23

As Walker settled into her temporary home, she started to wonder about the history of the Veggie Co-Op, as well as the nearby two dozen other student housing options on campus that range from traditional residence halls to language and special-interest housing. She turned her questions into an independent study for her digital communications major, delving into Macalester’s archives and creating a digital timeline to visualize the history of student housing. We asked her about the process—and what she learned.

We asked Andie to share five chapters of student housing in Mac’s history that stood out to her.

1940
LIFE AT WALLACE HALL

“Many halls in Macalester’s history practiced self-government. Students often elected their leadership: A 1940 Wallace Hall constitution explains that a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer will govern the hall, in coordination with faculty and staff. The constitution also features bylaws for living in Wallace, including quiet hours after 10:15 p.m. every night, during which residents should wear ‘bedroom slippers with soft soles’ and avoid practicing musical instruments.”

1943
THE HOME MANAGEMENT HOUSE

“The Home Management House was established as a new option for female students who, according to The Mac Weekly, helped to cook, clean, and manage the house. At the time, Macalester offered a major and minor in home economics, and a home management class in the department served as a prerequisite for living in the house. The house continued to be an option for students through 1950.”

1946
MACVILLE

“After the end of World War II, Macalester had an influx of veteran students. In 1946, the Federal Public Housing Administration constructed several temporary homes, meant to house thirty-two married and thirty-two single veterans attending Macalester as part of an effort to accommodate the growing student body.”

1964
STUDENTS FED UP WITH DORM RULES FOR WOMEN

“Since Wallace Hall’s opening, women living in campus housing were required to return to their dorms by specific times at night. By the 1960s, many students were fed up with the policy. In 1966, The Mac Weekly conducted a survey of seventy female students, 90 percent of whom said they were in favor of changing the restrictions. Any woman twenty-two years old certainly can’t be emancipated when she has to be in at 12 on weeknights, argued one respondent.”

2003
GENDER-BLIND HOUSING PROPOSED

“In fall 2003, the college proposed a pilot program that would test gender-blind housing in order to provide increased support for LGBTQ students. News of the proposal caught the attention of alumni and reporters across Minnesota and nationally, with some in favor and others against.”

What materials did you use to compile the timeline?

I started by looking at the college catalogs, which was a tedious process, but each catalog’s PDF is searchable. Any time housing information changed, I would make a note of what was added or what happened. That took a long time, but then I had a good understanding of what halls even existed—lots of buildings don’t exist anymore, so we never talk about them and wouldn’t even know to look them up. After that, I visited the archives and looked at old photographs and newspaper clippings. I also looked at The Mac Weekly database. There would be tons of letters to the editor in every edition. It seems like it was more how the college communicated, whereas now that happens mostly on the internet, and I thought that was really cool.

How does your timeline project align with your academic interests and major?

In my sophomore year, I decided to design my own digital history communications major. I really enjoyed my history classes and my computer science classes, but I didn’t see a lot of opportunities to combine them. I took a very interdisciplinary class called ‘Intro to Data Storytelling’ and it got me thinking about designing a major that had to do with using software to do research, but also communicate history in a way that’s more accessible to the public.

Why did you choose a digital format for the project?

The internet has often been used just for converting analog versions of media like books into web pages—a huge block of text that you just scroll through. But there are other options for communicating that are more suited to being online, or actually designed to live on the internet, for example, clicking through an interactive map or exhibit. I thought that would be a really interesting avenue to go down for history.

Check out Andie Walker’s full digital timeline, including more than three dozen moments in Mac’s history: tinyurl.com/studenthousingtimeline.
When theater companies went dark and auditions for voice work dried up in the early days of the pandemic, Katharine Heller ’98 was glad her living room was already equipped for podcasting. The New York-based actor, writer, producer, and voiceover artist had been hosting the slice-of-life podcast *Tell The Bartender* since 2013. During lockdown, the interviews she conducted via platforms like Zoom and Skype in her de facto home office—which includes a large computer monitor, several microphones, a mixing board, and two ergonomic chairs that protect her back during hours of editing—became her lifeline to others.

“I love listening to people talk, and inviting those voices into my home really helped with isolation during lockdown,” Heller says.

Heller’s idea for *Tell The Bartender* came from the eight years she spent tending bar in Brooklyn and listening to patrons share their stories. Now, as a podcast host, she invites ordinary people to talk about their lives in a setting that is as confessional and intimate as the bar, treating her guests and their stories with humor and care. In the past nine years, she has recorded 115 episodes, including some personal favorites, such as the episode, “I Didn’t Know I Was Nugent,” about a restaurateur who discovers his birth father is rocker Ted Nugent, and “Cabbage Patch Dreams,” during which Heller and her sister dissect their 1980s obsession with Cabbage Patch dolls.

From 2014 to 2020, Heller also co-hosted *The Struggle Bus*, an advice podcast about self-care and mental health, which at one time made it to No. 7 on Apple Podcasts’ Top 10 chart. In 2016, she founded The Podcast Shop, a boutique company offering pre- and post-production and consulting services for podcasters.

“Podcasting is personal,” Heller says. “It’s a balance of journalism, improv, and performance, and I genuinely want people to feel comfortable doing it.”

Although they’ve only been around since 2004, when media personality Adam Curry launched an audio recording of his everyday life called Daily Source Code, podcasts—downloadable episodic audio programs—are here to stay. (According to Edison Research, 51 percent of Americans aged twelve and older listened to a podcast in 2021, with 32 percent listening at least once a month.) The medium is effective and portable, and a podcast’s often vivid and moving content can create a sense of intimacy between creators and listeners.

By Marla Holt
Illustrations by Israel Vargas

THE POWER OF Podcasting

How alumni and faculty are embracing the medium of audio storytelling.
Listen Up
Alumni Isabella Kulkarni, Rolando Rosas, Davy Gardner, Katharine Heller, and Curtis Gilbert enjoy creating podcasts as well as creating them. Here are a few of their favorites; find them on your chosen platform.

Home Cooking
Heated by Hirshkush Hirway, the creator of the popular podcast Song Exploder, during which musicians dissect their songs to tell the story of how they were made, and Samin Nosrat, chef and author of Salt Fat Acid Heat, a James Beard Award-winning cookbook. The pair provides creative inspiration in the kitchen.

“It’s a show that anyone can enjoy regardless of the level of their cooking skill. You learn Samin’s trade secrets, but more importantly get to hang out with two people who clearly find joy in each other.” —Isabella Kulkarni

Slow Burn
This narrative podcast examines watershed moments in history, such as Watergate, the Clinton impeachment, and the police beating of Rodney King and the L.A. riots that followed.

“It’s the best kind of immersive storytelling because you get the sense that you’re there.”

—Rolando Rosas

Giving voice to stories
Isabella Kulkarni ’13 first discovered a knack for audio storytelling during her first job after Macalester. She was conducting intake interviews with refugees and new immigrants to the Bay Area for the International Rescue Committee, an organization that helps people who are recovering, and rebuilding their lives. At the time, she was also listening to a lot of long-form journalism, such as Radiolab and This American Life.

“I realized I was already doing the work of looking for stories and voices to amplify,” she says, but didn’t yet have enough training in radio production. “I didn’t know how to make the leap into creating actual podcast stories.”

Kulkarni later earned a master’s of science degree in journalism from Columbia University. One of her first radio pieces—about the Mister Softee ice-cream truck jingle that is an earworm for many New Yorkers—aired on NPR’s Marketplace while she was in graduate school. She has since created and produced podcasts for Gimlet, the New York Times, The Ringer, Radiotopia, WNYC, and Futuro Media Group’s Latino USA program. She has also taught the fundamentals of audio reporting and writing at Columbia.

The Work Week—After Hours
The hosts delve into issues that affect the workplace, from leadership to career innovation to bad bosses.

“These guys are very good at covering topics that all workers can relate to.” —Davy Gardner

Podcasting 101
The generally accepted view of what qualifies as a podcast—a blend of iPod and broadcast—is an episodic series of digital audio files available for downloading and listening to at any time on a personal device. (Remember: Serial and its slowly unfolding investigation of Maryland teenager Hae Min Lee’s murder and the subsequent arrest and conviction of Adrian Syed? That podcast’s compelling 2014 first season, often cited as an audio game-changer, was many people’s introduction to podcasting.)

Podcast consumers can subscribe and listen for free on any number of platforms, from Spotify and Google Podcasts to Stitcher and PodBean. The medium is particularly disruptive, given its potential for retailers to reach customers through smaller and more targeted ad buys.

Some podcasts are carefully scripted; others are improvised. Producers can record one at home or in a professional studio. Some are supported by corporations, sponsors, and individual donors, with targeted ad buys. Some are supported by corporations, sponsors, and individual donors, with targeted ad buys. Some podcasts, which currently aren’t regulated by the FCC the way TV and radio are, are considered social media.
Macalester held a campus-wide celebration of audio storytelling with its first-ever Podcast Week in early April. Events included:

- A competition for the best student-created podcasts, with finalists broadcast on WMCN Radio.
- A panel discussion with professional podcasters; presenters included Emanuele Berry, executive director of This American Life, and Andrew Beck, co-creator and co-host of The Daily Show.
- Discussions with faculty and experts on the pedagogy of podcasting.

Learn more: macalester.edu/podcastweek

Celebrating all things podcasting

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Learn more: macalester.edu/podcastweek

Podcasting as digital marketing

Podcasts can tell stories, contextualize the day's news, or provide how-to lessons for practically any skill. The medium is also a useful business marketing tool, says Rolando Rosas ’96, the founder of Global Teck Worldwide, which sells office technology products such as headsets, speakers, and webcams. “We help people sound and look their best while using these devices,” he says.

The company has always offered real-time tech support. But the work-from-home boom introduced an unprecedented demand for home-office technology and, with it, a dramatic increase in customers need for support. Rosas saw an opportunity to use podcasting as a way to address clients' needs quickly and interactively.

Global Teck Worldwide launched What the Tech? on YouTube, during which he and his guests review products, identify trends, and troubleshoot office-technology problems.

“He says, “With podcasting, they learn to write and communicate in a logical way, to share information in a logical way.”

Podcasting helps students build digital literacy skills while learning to communicate information to a broader, more general audience, rather than a strictly academic one, Perlman says.

With a valuable experience for the students in “Neotropical Landscapes,” taught by assistant professor of geography Xavier Haro-Carrión. The course explores human-environment interactions, including conservation efforts, in biomes and ecosystems from southern Mexico to Chile, and students create case-study podcasts focused on a geographically small area. Their podcast topics—based mainly on a review of scholarly literature of the area they’re presenting—have included endangered hummingbirds in an Ecuadorian national park, conservation in the Brazilian savannas presented through music, and Indigenous peoples’ use of plants from the Amazon.

The students learn to present their findings and tell a story of a particular geographic area in a new way, which they find entertaining and interactive, Haro-Carrión says. “I was very pleased with the high quality of their work. Students play with aesthetics, adding appropriate texture from the location they are study-

Students aren’t going to read twenty research papers written by their peers, but they’ll listen to a classmate’s ten- to fifteen-minute podcast,” he says. “It’s a compelling way to engage an audience, and it forces students to pick an interesting topic, to be clear with terminology, and to share information in a logical way.”

American Public Media correspondent Curtis Gilbert ’92 and Anne Baetsirayo, an editor at the Wall Street Journal’s daily podcast The Journal, co-taught narrative journalism at Macalester in 2020 and 2021. Gilbert also hosts Send Away, a podcast about Ghana’s teen treatment industry, and previously reported for the Peabody Award–winning investigative podcast In the Dark.

Students in the narrative journalism course write for both print and audio, which strengthens their overall communication skills. “They learn something about writing in any given style by writing in a different style,” he says.

The host tries to fix the tone of the show in a way that makes sense, Gilbert says. “If you’re going to do a show that’s really well done.”

This show delivers a satisfying narrative every time—it’s both funny and tender. Who doesn’t love a well-thought-out show that makes you laugh, cry, and feel all the feelings?” —Isabella Kulkarni

Podcasting as storytelling

“Podcasting is a step toward helping people, though he’s unqualified to do so in an attempt to change a moment from their pasts.”

The students learn to present their findings and tell a story of a particular geographic area in a new way, which they find entertaining and interactive, Haro-Carrión says. “I was very pleased with the high quality of their work. Students play with aesthetics, adding appropriate texture from the location they are studying, such as the sound of waves, birds, or musical instruments.

Because students were so enthusiastic about the project, Haro-Carrión plans to continue assigning podcasting in future courses. He found the students enjoyed listening to each other’s work and participating in an end-of-term podcast showcase to learn more about their peers’ process—sort of like an end-of-term “go back a page” or rewinding.”

Gilbert notes that many students used the pandemic as a hook or inflection point for their podcasts. One student created a podcast series about her mother, who was a health care worker in the Bronx during the height of the pandemic. “I was captivated by a portrait photographer who was capturing his subjects through windows and doorways,” Gilbert says. “A powerful and emotive instrument, and it can really pull people into a story they want to listen to. Gilbert says. “Audio communication fills a unique niche for people, who podcast in particular lending itself to engaging and deeply investigative storytelling.”

Maria Holt is a freelance writer based in Owatonna, Minn.
When Sokhary Chau ’96 first came to Lowell, Massachusetts, as a fourteen-year-old Cambodian refugee in 1986, politics were the furthest thing from his understanding. He never imagined that he would one day become the city’s mayor, let alone the first Cambodian American mayor in the United States.

Now, thirty-six years after his arrival in Lowell, a city of 110,000 thirty miles north of Boston, he leads the most diverse city council in its history. Out of eleven city councilors, three are Cambodian refugees. Together, they represent the second-largest Cambodian refugee population in the United States.

Within his first two months in office, Chau invited friends and family to a cultural ceremony—typically held as a private gathering—at City Hall. The event marked the one hundredth day since the death of his mother, who lived long enough to cast her ballot for her son but died before Inauguration Day on January 3, when the city council voted unanimously to elect Chau as mayor.

In Cambodian culture, the one-hundred-day ceremony is a special occasion to end the first mourning period for a loved one. For his mother’s, Chau invited her friends and their family, and held the ceremony in the mayor’s office, where he hung pictures of his mother and father to honor their journey: Chau’s father, a captain in the Cambodian Army, was executed by the Khmer Rouge regime, and his mother helped all seven of their children escape Cambodia in the late 1970s.

For Chau, holding his mother’s ceremony in an unconventional location speaks to one of his goals as mayor: to make City Hall a more open and inviting place for its citizens, especially for members of the many diverse immigrant communities that reside in Lowell. Chau says he was motivated by his own experience as an immigrant before he held office. “I’m a pretty confident person, but walking into City Hall was intimidating,” he says. “Imagine other immigrants, right?”

Chau’s life in the United States started in Pittsburgh in 1981, where his family was first sponsored by a Catholic church. But better-paying factory jobs drew the family to Lowell, along with many other Cambodian refugees in the 1980s.

Chau was too young to work, so school became his focus, and that opened opportunities. In middle school, Chau’s teachers encouraged him to apply to private school, and he earned a scholarship to attend Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. There, he found an interest in service, which led him to Macalaster, where he received a scholarship for students committed to civic engagement. Chau, who majored in economics, was also heavily influenced by the college’s emphasis on internationalism.

“When I heard the terminology ‘the global village,’ I felt for the first time like I might want to do something that could tie the US and Cambodia or southeast Asia,” he says. “I always felt like I could do more because of the experience I had just surviving the Khmer Rouge. When we first came here, we were all on welfare. And then I went to two of the best schools in my opinion. With all the amazing people around me, I always felt like I had to do more with the opportunities given to me.”

After college, Chau came back home. He found steady work in Lowell and started his own mortgage company before the mortgage crash closed it in 2008. After that, he worked at law firms, but he always felt something was missing. “I think it quietly worked itself through my conscience somehow that I just wouldn’t be happy with not giving back to the world, not doing something more for the community,” he says.

His first foray into politics was helping two Cambodians in his community get elected to office. one to the Lowell City Council and another to the Massachusetts House of Representatives. When another council seat opened in 2017, Chau decided to make a run. Although his first attempt was unsuccessful, he decided to try again with the support of his community and won in 2019. And it was the same community support that launched him into the mayor’s office this year. One of his key goals is to diversify the city’s staff. “Lowell is very diverse,” he says. “So we want the staff at City Hall, the police department, the fire department, public works, and the schools to reflect the people that we serve.”

Chau says he wants Lowell’s residents to feel comfortable engaging with their elected leaders and demanding more from them. And along the way, he said he hopes his actions will inspire the next generation to pursue their own dreams. “I want to do a good job and be a role model to the younger generation,” he says. “I want to show them that there’s a pathway.”

Soreath Hok is a journalist at Valley Public Radio in central California.
Building a More Inclusive Economy

BY DIGITIZING LENDING PROCESSES FOR NONPROFIT AND COMMUNITY LENDERS, NICK ELDERS ’01 IS EMPOWERING THE NATION’S SMALL BUSINESSES.

BY DANIEL P. SMITH

How did a kid from rural Washington land at Macalester?
I came with my mother from Lake Quinault to play football, though I didn’t know how elusive football success had been for Mac.

And how did you decide to major in economics?
It was a completely serendipitous choice inspired by teammates. Then it seemed a sensible path to a good job.

And what was CRF’s work?
Originally, CRF purchased loans from other nonprofits, pooled them together, and then connected private capital to purchase the assembled pool. We were an intermediary connecting Wall Street to Main Street and the technology we built streamlined this process. When the recession hit, though, CRF’s business model morphed from a behind-the-scenes intermediary into a direct lender making Small Business Administration loans. Erik Swenson ’00 and I started a project to create technology to simplify the SBA process, which had been widely known as slow and cumbersome.

Is that SPARK’s origin?
Yes. During the recession, we saw financial technology companies like OnDeck, CAN Capital, and even PayPal getting into business lending, which made it easy yet expensive for small businesses to borrow. Their pitch was “Apply online now and get your money in minutes, not months.” It essentially became payday lending for small businesses.

Isn’t that a rough path for small businesses?
Absolutely, because the rates and terms are so high. We thought nonprofit and community lenders, with their products and services, could offer an even better experience—they were just missing a technology partner.

And what was your solution?
We created the software to help them originate loans, then sold it to as many as we could find. We built a similar experience to fintech and offered it to community lenders so they could better compete. The initiative was so successful, we ended up spin- ning it out of CRF as a separate, standalone business. Today, our lenders create more sustainable, contemporary models with our technology as the backbone for their lending, while the businesses don’t have to choose between speed and price. Our lenders grow with their small businesses, not from them.

What do you do for CRF?
I started in a fundraising role, but quickly became the IT manager. CRF had a progressive outlook regarding technology and its ability to solve problems. Back in the early 2000s, there wasn’t software on the market to do the work we needed, so we built custom solutions ourselves.

And how did you find your first professional job?
I contacted my Mac economics professor Karl Egge and asked him if he knew of anything. He mentioned a little Minneapolis nonprofit called the Community Reinvestment Fund (CRF) that needed help on a data project.

What was your solution?
We spent 2012 to 2020 dialing in our product and gaining incremental market share, making about two thousand business loans and crossing the $1 billion threshold in late 2019. We felt good about that. When COVID-19 hit and [Paycheck Protection Program] loans emerged, we made some minor modifications to our technology and pushed out a PPP product immediately. Over three months, our platform processed 45,000 PPP loans totaling $7 billion.

What did you do for CRF?
I joined the company as a public benefit corporation, which gives us the freedom and flexibility to make decisions that maximize social benefit, not solely shareholder value. We’re contributing to a more inclusive economy by working with lenders who target underserved populations, and we hope eventually to systematically connect banks and nonprofit lenders so small businesses can access the variety of lending options both offer. That’s the moonshot.

Where does SPARK go from here?
We’ve built for something bigger. We structured the company as a public benefit corporation, which gives us the freedom and flexibility to make decisions that maximize social benefit, not solely shareholder value. We’re contributing to a more inclusive economy by working with lenders who target underserved populations, and we hope eventually to systematically connect banks and nonprofit lenders so small businesses can access the variety of lending options both offer. That’s the moonshot.

And a noble aim.
We think so. If a small business is trying to access capital and they qualify for a bank loan, great. If not, we’re trying to connect them with their local nonprofit lender so they’re not going outside this sphere and getting hurt by predatory lenders. We offer a systemic solution that uplifts both businesses and communities.

Daniel P. Smith is a Chicago-based freelance writer. 
How is it that people’s perceptions of reality can be so different sometimes?

In psychology, the tendency to see the things that go along with what someone’s beliefs or expectations are is known as confirmation bias. If you spend most of your time in one place having expectations that are based on those experiences, if you have more experience with people from all different walks of life, expectations are different. Our way of perceiving the world is the result of our combined experience across our life span. That’s how people can have very different perspectives on the same thing.

What is it about Japanese cuisine in particular that makes it well suited to explore sensation and perception?

There’s a philosophy behind Japanese cuisine called wasabi, which not only means the food of Japan, but harmony of flavors. It has to do with combinations of five items constantly repeating over and over again. The five different tastes, for example salty, sweet, bitter, sour, and umami. Five different ways of preparing things, five different textures, multiple colors—meals are supposed to have these combinations in order to promote health and well-being. Rice, soup, three side dishes—it’s a nicely organized cuisine, and it’s delicious. We also draw focus on umami, a hallmark taste in Japanese cuisine, and investigate how that sensation correlates closely with the neurotransmitter glutamate.

How does glutamate work in our brains?

Glutamate is the most important neurotransmitter. Glutamate is a big part of the nervous system’s heavy lifting. And for excitation—increasing the likelihood that connections are activated—glutamate is the most important neurotransmitter. Glutamate is a big part of what makes you sit up during a conversation and look at the person while you listen and nod. A large source of glutamate in American diets is parmesan cheese. And glutamate is the source of umami, which helps explain why our brains recognize it as a delicious taste.

The underlying purpose of having all these sensory apparatuses is to actually promote us as effective members of our species. And it’s really interesting to think how the structure of the nervous system has put in reward mechanisms—neurochemical relationships such as our attraction to umami and glutamate—that give us great pleasure if we are achieving our ecological niche.

How can we heighten our mind’s sensations of food?

Put away the cell phone and spend time enjoying your meal. Each time I teach this course, we make a class cookbook, and I put this concept on the cover: There is only this moment. If you allow a food experience to be what you’re about at that moment—and maybe care a bit more about the meal’s appearance or ritualize it in some way—it’s going to be more enjoyable. There’s a reason meals over candlelight and music have existed in romantic literature forever, because all the senses mark this as a special moment. And that’s really living, being in the moment.

In pursuit of deliciousness, what can we learn about ourselves?

In terms of the visual aspects of something being delicious, or the sound or smell or taste, whatever combination resonates with us tells us about what kind of an individual we are. We are things that we find delicious.
The Alumni Board represents Macalester’s broad, global alumni community, and strives to connect alumni with one another and with the college. Each board member supports those efforts by joining a working group focused on athletics, career connections, or diversity.

Over the past two years of building alumni programs in virtual spaces, the Alumni Board’s diversity working group has explored a range of formats, from formal panels to bustling breakout room discussions guided by alumni experts. This year, Andrew Kauflin ‘01 and diversity working group chair Karen Codjoe ‘74 decided to try something new: facilitate conversations between two alumni from diverse backgrounds, with a goal to embrace the college’s tenet of multiculturalism and celebrate inspiring alumni stories and paths through dialogue.

Their creation: Between Two Maples, a thirty-minute interview series inspired by comedian Zach Galifianakis’s show Between Two Ferns. The series launched in December with Wipro brand marketer Will Clarke ‘07 interviewing educator and activist Jesse Hagopian ‘01. Read on for an excerpt of their conversation in May.

WILL CLARKE: At Macalester, students do all kinds of things and follow different passions. You came to Mac thinking of yourself as an athlete. How did that change?

JESSE HAGOPIAN: Before Macalester, my life revolved around baseball and soccer. But at Mac, I finally started to connect with and find a purpose in education. In my sophomore year, I took film studies with Clay Steinman, and he was instrumental in helping me learn to analyze society and write about it. The Black Experience Since World War II class with Mahmoud El-Kati blew my mind. And the mentorship I got from Leola Johnson and Duchess Harris changed my life. These education stories were so compelling that they became a part of my identity.

CLARKE: It’s important that you could communicate some of these ideas to kids; to make education relevant to their lives a lot sooner than it happened for me, to help them understand they’re more than a score, to explore ideas of race and power in society. In my first job in Washington, DC, the first project I assigned got destroyed because of a hole in the ceiling. Students created these beautiful posters about someone from history they admired, and before they could present them, the posters were completely destroyed by the rain coming through the ceiling. I knew then that I not only had to be an antiracist teacher in the classroom, but also had to figure out how to organize collectively to transform the conditions of public education, if I was really going to meet the needs of my students.

CLARKE: What is something you want to be a teacher?

HAGOPIAN: For most of my life, I knew that I would definitely never be a teacher. But I went through a transformation at Macalester and wanted to think about how I could communicate some of these ideas to kids: to make education relevant to their lives a lot sooner than it happened for me, to help them understand they’re more than a score, to explore ideas of race and power in society. In my first job in Washington, DC, the first project I assigned got destroyed because of a hole in the ceiling. Students created these beautiful posters about someone from history they admired, and before they could present them, the posters were completely destroyed by the rain coming through the ceiling. I knew then that I not only had to be an antiracist teacher in the classroom, but also had to figure out how to organize collectively to transform the conditions of public education, if I was really going to meet the needs of my students.

CLARKE: What kind of things did you find antiracist to be? How did that change?

HAGOPIAN: When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

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CLARKE: What is something you want to be a teacher?

HAGOPIAN: That’s easy. An Accidental Life. Not to make a big deal of it or anything, because every- thing turned out pretty much okay, but things I aimed at, planned for, dreamed of—pretty much all fell apart, while the best re- sults came from events and actions I un- intentionally or with little thought fell into or became involved with. Kind of like the Zen kōan, “If you want to find something: stop looking for it.”

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Gretchen Logler ’94, Woodquaker: Crafting a Sustainable Rural Life (Trinity University Press, 2022)

Marlon James, Moon Witch, Spider King Riverhead Books, 2022)

“In the second book of his Dark Star trilogy, James coaxes beauty from dark thoughts, leaving readers with a concaved, mystical, and African-inspired world that begins in free-fall.

“In the beginning I thought I’d need a reserve of ideas to keep this up,” she says. “But over time, I realized draws. “In the beginning I thought I’d need a reserve of ideas to keep this up,” she says. “But over time, I realized draws. “In the beginning I thought I’d need a reserve of ideas to keep this up,” she says. “But over time, I realized draws. “In the beginning I thought I’d need a reserve of ideas to keep this up,” she says. “But over time, I realized draws. “In the beginning I thought I’d need a reserve of ideas to keep this up,” she says. “But over time, I realized
In 2011, Emily P.O. Erickson ’08 wanted to join a book club for Twin Cities Mac alumni. The trouble was, no such group existed—so she started her own.

Now her creation, MacReads, is celebrating ten years with a blend of long-term regulars and newcomers who joined when the group moved online during the pandemic. “MacReads is absolutely the best of why I went to Macalester and why I love Macalester people,” says Kate Baxter-Kauf ’02, a member since the group’s third meeting. “It’s smart people in a room discussing something in depth and with feeling, knowledge about the subject and excited to dig in together.”

Intrigued about starting a book club where you live? We asked a few MacReads members for their advice:

“It’s tempting to pick current bestsellers, but your meeting will be limited to those who can go out and buy the book. One of the things that I really appreciate about Emily’s construction of MacReads is her focus on making sure that the books we read will be accessible, with numerous physical and/or e-books in local libraries.” —Sarah Dickes ’09

“Translation can be an issue when choosing foreign language books. The first time I chose a book for MacReads, I chose Yevgeny Zamiatin’s We (1924), a Russian dystopian novel. I didn’t realize that We had been translated into English many times, and the different translations give the reader a substantially different idea of the story.” —Everett Beek ’06

“Consider the MacReads model! Because it’s open to all alumni, we’ve had a core group of folks as well as others who come in and out based on their availability and interest. It’s great for keeping discussions interesting, always having enough people, and creating lasting relationships. And don’t be afraid to have a book club where everyone really does read the book.” —Kate Baxter-Kauf ’02

“Include people you don’t know. That’s how this group started. This was a big vision and kind of brilliant—there are so many commonalities between different classes over the years.” —Ken Dossor ’87

“A food theme related to the book for in-person gatherings is always enjoyable.” —Alme Thomsen ’94

In December 2021, the dream finally became a reality, when Perelman, as co-founder, was part of the team that launched Carnegie Hall+, a premium subscription on-demand channel on the Apple TV app. A partnership among Carnegie Hall and German production company Untel, Carnegie Hall+ will launch on other platforms later this year.

“I’ve been fortunate to be surrounded by people who believed in dreams and took chances on me,” Perelman says. We asked the entrepreneur what he’s learned so far.

**Put your heart out there**

*My parents always encouraged me to take risks. “You want to meet someone and accomplishment something?” Write them a letter.” That’s maybe the most valuable lesson I’ve learned: to put your heart out there and make a statement. But I didn’t want to bother them. “No, I didn’t want to bother them.” It’s great for keeping discussions interesting, always having enough people, and creating lasting relationships. And don’t be afraid to have a book club where everyone really does read the book.” —Kate Baxter-Kauf ’02
IN MEMORIAM

1939  Frances Tripp Bell, 104, died Jan. 26, 2022. She volunteered around the Twin Cities and taught at a local nursery. She was a first-year Macalester alumna in her extended fam-
ily and in 2019 attended her high school reunion in Mankato. Survivors include her dau-
ghter, Donna Bonebrake '70 and Mary Bell Wolff '76, and her sons, David Bell '65 and Rick Bell '68.

1946  Margaret Dukes Hoy, 97, died June 18, 2020.

1945  Elaine Gatter Pinon, 94, died July 19, 2021. She is survived by three sons (including Bradley Pinon '73 and Timmy Pinon '80), ten grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

1949  Robert L. Ramstad, 98, died Nov. 29, 2021. He served as a Navy pilot in the

20th century and supervised the development of the first space shuttle's heat shield, and held several patents for his designs. He later launched a home construction company and was named St. James’ Person of the Year in 2002. Eppeland is survived by his wife, Myrna, three daugh-
ters, a son, seven grandchil-
dren, a brother, and sister Karla Eppeland Vondra '72.

1950  Jennie Borsakski Skrien, 97, died Jan. 26, 2022. She served as a Navy pilot in the Pacific and worked at St. Paul Fire and Marine (later Travel-

ers) until his retirement in 1983 as director of new products. Ramstad was the oldest living campaign volunteer for Macalester’s Alumni Golf Tournament. He is survived by a daughter, two sons, three grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and brother Donald Ramstad ‘53.

1951  Stafford W. Gadge, 91, of Roch-

practicing internal medicine in Mankato, Wis., Gadge joined the Mayo Clinic internal medi-
cine staff in 1963. He retired as assistant professor of medicine at Mayo Medical School in 1993. Gadge is survived by his wife, Nancy, five children (including William Gadge ’77), eleven grandchildren, eleven great-
grandchildren, and two sisters.

1952  Betty Donaldson Cheeley, 90, died Jan. 29, 2022. She taught elementary school and led seminars as an early proponent of Math Their Way. She is sur-
vived by four children, eleven grandchildren, ten great-grand-
children, and two sisters.

Robert V. Howison, 91, of Shakopee, Minn., died April 18, 2021. He served in the US Army and supervised the develop-
ment of numerous projects in the Twin Cities, including the IDS Center in Minneapolis. How-
ison is survived by his wife, two sons, and a grandson.

William L. Hedberg, 93, of White Bear Lake, Minn., died Nov. 27, 2021. He served in the

Navy during World War II and the Korean War. Hedberg later worked for American Can Company in Minnesota, Illinois, New Jersey, Texas, and Con-
necticut. He is survived by four children, nine grandchildren, and a brother.

Kathryn Miletz Miller, 89, died Nov. 18, 2021. She was more than twenty years old as the executive secretary for the principal of Thousand Oaks High School’s district secretary for special education for Calabasus Valley School District. Miller is sur-
vived by her husband, Maynard Miller '92, four children, and five grandchildren.

Patricia L. Jensen, 70, died Jan. 26, 2022. She taught in public schools in Minneapolis and worked as an elementary school principal in the St. Cloud, Minn., public school system. She retired in 1986. Jensen is survived by her hus-
bond, John Mark, four children, and a granddaughter.

Helmut Lutse, 94, died Jan. 29, 2022, near Hudson, Wis. A native of Estonia, Lutse assisted with the Berlin Airlift and emigrated to the United States in 1949. He served in military intelligence at Fort Bragg during the Korean War and worked as a chemist and scientist for JM for more than thirty years in private, military, and government laboratories in the United States and Italy. Lutse is survived by his wife, Lital Lutse, 92, two daughters, two grandchildren, a sister, and a brother.

Athena Margarolo Seale, 90, of Glen

Haven Drive, Minn., died Nov. 26, 2021. She was a special education teacher in St. Paul and a professional drummer. Villars gave lessons and per-
formed with many ensembles, including the US Navy Band, the Comeaux Pop Concert, the Twin Ci-
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grandchild, and a brother.


James W. Peter, 86, of Min-
neapolis died Nov. 20, 2021. He operated a certified public accounting firm in Minneapolis for many years, working on en-
gagements involving ValleyFair and the Minnesota Vikings. Peter also served as a board member and treasurer for numerous

A LITTLE BIT OF MAC, WHEREVER YOU ARE

From book clubs to trivia challenges to museum tours, Macalester alumni are many ways to connect with alumni. The Regional Engagement Volunteer Committee helps foster community through online and in-person programs in cities around the US and worldwide.

GET INVOLVED:
• Join the new Regional Engagement Volunteer Committee at macalester.edu/groups.
• Check out your region’s Facebook page.
• Log in to MacDirect and join a regional group at macalester.edu/macdirect.

macalester.edu/alumni/groups

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IN MEMORIAM

at LaRabida Children’s Hospital and in human resources for the City of Chicago’s Department of Cultural Affairs. She is survived by three daughters.

John H. Olson, 79, died Nov. 12, 2021. He was a science teacher in Roseville, Minn., for twenty-five years and was the founder and director of Cryogenic Laboratories, Inc. He died in 2002. Olson is survived by his wife, Lois, two children, ten grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Karen Rognes Wilkinson, 79, of Bloomington, Minn., died Dec. 1, 2021. She worked with the Minneapolis Public Schools for thirty-five years as a school psychologist. Wilkinson is survived by her husband, Ron, three children (including Todd Wilkinson ’96), five grandchildren, and a sister.

1965

Richard D. Eldridge, 78, of Vadnais Heights, Minn., died Nov. 4, 2021. He served in the US Army and taught junior high physical education in Brooklyn Center, Minn., for almost thirty years. A Minnesota State High School League Hall of Fame inductee, Eldridge was also an athletic director, a referee, a track and field official, and a clock operator at University of Minnesota football and basketball games. He is survived by his wife, Karen; four children, four grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, two sisters, and a brother.

1966

Dale W. Johnson, 77, of Rockwall, Texas, passed away, Minn., died Jan. 14, 2022. He worked with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation as a federal bank examiner and retired as CEO of a bank in St. Cloud. Minn. Johnson is survived by his wife, Patricia, a daughter, and a granddaughter.

Katharine Hess Jolin of Milwauk ee died Jan. 25, 2022. She worked for twenty-nine years as a nurse. Jolin is survived by two sons and three sisters.

1967

Linda Yerxa Petsch, 74, of Min neota, Minn., died April 7, 2020.

1968

William G. Swanson, 75, of Brooklyn Center, Minn. died Dec. 16, 2021. He pursued a career as an attorney in Brooklyn Center. He is survived by his wife, Barbara; Hoganson Swanson ’77, a son, two granddaughters, and sister Linda Swanson Svidal ’70.

1969

John W. Crabb, 74, Nov. 27, 2021. During his forty-four years as a teacher and school administrator, he worked in Minneapolis, Washington, D.C., and Ohio, and spent the last thirty years of his career at Phoenix Country Day School in Arizona. Crabb is survived by his wife, Elaine; a son, two grandchildren, and a brother.

1970


William K. Schultz, 72, Jan. 25, 2022, in St. Paul. He worked in sales and ran a small business focused on packaging and media supplies. Schultz is survived by two daughters, six grandchildren, and a brother.

1973

Mary L. Chamberlain, 70, died Dec. 14, 2021. She worked and in Germany, and later worked for HUD in Ohio.

Brenda E. Davis, 70, died Nov. 14, 2021. While living in the Twin Cities, she taught ballroom dancing and in 1990 retired for a public relations agency and the University of Minnesota’s public relations office. After moving to Boston in 1985, Davis was an executive assistant at Bain Capital and Bain & Company. She is survived by her brother, Dwight Davis ’75.

1976

Susan Adams Johnson died March 6, 2020. She is survived by her husband, Henry Chambers ’71, and two sons.

1977

Helen C. Subialka, 63, of Emily, Minn., died Dec. 16, 2021. She worked as a licensed clinical social worker at Aurora Sinai Medical Center, a brain injury support group, and served on the Minnesota State Board of Dentistry. Subialka is survived by her husband, Robert; children, Jennifer and brother Thomas Hardy ’69.

1978

Ian Elliot, 70, died Dec. 11, 2021, in New Jersey. A cultural leader in Billings, Mont., Elliot ballroom dance, and was an expert in leadership and social justice. He is survived by four children, and a brother.

1979

Lynda M. Steltz, 63, of Hastings, Minn., died Jan. 16, 2022. She was a social worker at Aurora Sinai Medical Center, and worked in human resources for the University of Minnesota’s public relations office. After moving to Boston in 1985, Davis was an executive assistant at Bain Capital and Bain & Company. She is survived by her brother, Dwight Davis ’75.

1980

Jennifer Wegler-McNelly, 52, died Dec. 17, 2021. After her ordination in the Presbyterian Church in 1994, she served churches in California, Mass., and New York state. She also served as a president of the denomination’s General Assembly. After earning a Ph.D in international relations from Columbia University and serving as a fellow at the University of Minnesota’s public relations office, Wegler-McNelly Warshaw, Law established the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce. She is survived by her husband, Kirk Wegler; a son; two great-grandchildren; and a sister.

1981

Raul Quintanilla, 64, of St. Paul died Nov. 10, 2019.

1982

Ronelva Cloud Gustafson, 86, of Old Agency, Minn., died Nov. 24, 2021. She was a social worker with Leech Lake Child Welfare and a work-
INVEST IN HOPE

Making a gift to the Macalester Fund is a declaration that you believe in Macalester students and in the future.

Support Mac by directing your Macalester Fund gift to:

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- Program Support
- Faculty Support
- Racial Equity Support
- Athletics
- Student Emergency Aid
- Support It All

With these options, you are able to direct your gift toward what matters most to you.

Macalester’s fiscal year ends May 31. Make your gift today at macalester.edu/giving

As Andie Walker ’23 built a digital timeline of Macalester’s student housing (p. 20), the Macville chapter of the college’s history caught her attention. After World War II, enrollment surged, and veterans and their families lived in temporary homes constructed by the Federal Public Housing Administration on the south end of campus, near the corner of Smeling and St. Clair avenues. Pictured here: Kirk resident Dorothy Otness preparing a home for a Macville couple who had become parents a few days before they were ready to move into the new quarters.
In the campus center, three student bands performed “over a sea of glow sticks and dancing concertgoers,” wrote Abby Bulger ’24 in The Mac Weekly of the Saturday night scene. From left: Julia Ricks ’22, Ha Do ’23, and Alec Deegan ’23.