JAMES A. WILLIAMS '77 Has Never Let Go

‘Planted at Mac,’ the actor tackles classics from William Shakespeare to August Wilson.
FEATURES

James A. Williams ’77 Has Never Let Go
“The seeds for my life got planted at Mac, and that’s why Mac is my heart,” says the renowned actor.

A Look Back at Unfiltered
College is a time of change and growth. *Unfiltered* is an effort to capture a snapshot of that student transformation.

The Future of Therapy Is ...
In the wake of some of the most collectively challenging years of our lives, four alumni practitioners weigh in.

Mactivism
Student activists have long helped shape Macalester policies—and have learned lasting lessons from their advocacy.

The Business of Cannabis
Former prosecutor Jim Shorris ’82 now leads compliance at the world’s largest cannabis company.

Room for Improvement
Business owner Zoe Kardasis Sturtz ’96 helps families fall in love with their houses again.

The Art of Costume Design
Theater and Dance Department professor Sarah Bahr offers students a real-world experience in the backstage drama of costume design.

ON THE COVER: James A. Williams ’77 as Lear in Marcus Gardley’s adaptation of King Lear with Oakland’s Cal Shakes theater in 2022.
PHOTO: KEVIN BERNE
Remembering Agieb Bilal

I’m writing to share a remembrance of my distinguished classmate, Agieb Bilal ’74, who died January 10, 2023.

Born in Harlem, Agieb came to Macalester in 1969 with Dr. John Warfield, the newly appointed director of the Expanded Educational Opportunities (EEO) program at Macalester. Agieb was hired as an associate counselor. His responsibilities included ushering in, counseling, and mentoring the first class of EEO students, who subsequently graduated in 1973.

Agieb wrote, “My first introduction to EEO students was a roll call in the chapel. In this first assembly I explained their presence on campus was a result of a protracted struggle of our people; that for institutions such as Mac it represented ‘fire insurance’ amidst the surrounding social turmoil, whereas for Black students an opportunity to acquire necessary ‘tools’ for Black Liberation. To squander such an opportunity would be an unforgiven betrayal and crime against the aspirations of Black people!”

A Vietnam veteran, Agieb joined the Nation of Islam (NOI) upon discharge from active duty. After leaving Macalester he served as assistant national secretary of the NOI in Chicago. He later became an administrative assistant to Warith Muhammad and was instrumental in transforming the NOI into Orthodox Islam.

After leaving the NOI, Agieb served as principal at Muslim and Islamic schools in Maryland and Florida. He also founded the first Muslim school in Pasig City, Philippines. As chairperson of the Council of Islamic Schools in North America (CISNA), he established accreditation standards for Muslim schools, and served on the Armed Forces Review Board in 1991 to help facilitate the “accommodation” of Muslims in the Armed Forces, including the installation of the first Muslim chaplains, uniform dress standards, and Muslim dietary standards as well as the requirement of a dedicated space for prayers.

Agieb lectured and taught history, education, and Islamic studies at colleges and universities in the US and around the world. At the time of his passing, he was principal of an Islamic school in Albania.

—Broderick “Rick” Grubb ’73

Musicircus and Other Cutting-Edge Performances

NPR’s September 15 Composers Datebook podcast celebrated the birthday of American composer Henry Brant and his composition Northern Lights Over the Twin Cities, commissioned by Macalester College to celebrate its hundredth anniversary.

The podcast breathlessly described Brant’s cutting-edge “spatial composition,” involving several groups of performing ensembles separated by space. At the premiere, Mac’s chorus and orchestra, jazz band, and bagpipes took part.

The composition wasn’t as cutting edge as the podcast implied. In 1970, working with the Walker Art Center, composer John Cage staged Musicircus, a spatial composition, at the Macalester Field House.

Cage’s piece was less structured than Brant’s. He invited a number of groups to come together and perform simultaneously. He didn’t direct anything, but instead wandered around the Field House eating popcorn, according to a Minneapolis Tribune account.

Monte Mason ’71 organized one of the groups. He invited twenty singers to perform choruses from Handel’s Messiah.

“We stood and held our scores as we merrily sang with great finesse and artistry,” he recalls. However, Mason had “instructed the singers not to sing but merely move their lips. We were the only group that no one could hear performing. Some people who stood by to ‘listen’ caught on to what we were not doing, and ‘sang’ along as silently as possible.”

My own memory of Musicircus—although no one seems able to confirm it—was of performing madrigals as part of a group that tossed beach balls back and forth. Singers sang their notes when they caught the ball, then stopped when they tossed it to the next singer.

The event, Mason says, was “cheerfully cacaphonic” until about 9 p.m. “The sounds began to organize themselves into distinct, throbbing waves, washing over the interior of the Field House. These sonic patterns lasted for about fifteen minutes until they dissolved back into the sonic chaos of no discernible form.”

For someone who was part of the Cage production, it was fun to learn that music at Mac is still cutting edge after all these years!

—Kris Amundson ’71

CONNECT WITH US

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

CORRESPONDENCE POLICY

We invite letters of 300 words or fewer. Messages may be edited for clarity, 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 #maclesterday
• Mail: Macalester Today, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105

MACALESTER TODAY
Some of my favorite Macalester moments happen when I step out from behind the president’s desk and participate actively in campus life. Our students, faculty, and staff know that I love to drop in for lunch at Café Mac, show up at student capstone presentations, cheer on our Scots at sporting events, and attend faculty lectures and student performances. Being present for these activities allows me to support the incredible work happening on campus and to marvel at our community’s many talents. Even as I jog around our campus on a Sunday afternoon, I’m reminded: this is a special place.

This year (unlike the previous two), I also have been able to travel extensively and meet more alumni, parents, and friends of the college in person. Being on the road has allowed me to understand the global Mac community in a new way. I’ve experienced firsthand how the Macalester spirit extends way beyond our campus boundaries. I see it when I find myself in a sea of blue and orange at an “away” baseball game in Phoenix. I feel it viscerally when I hear Macalester’s Pipe Band (including my spouse) compete at the Highland Games in Waukesha. I’ve experienced it in action at gatherings all over the world: at a restaurant in London, on a pickleball court in Boston, with a Presbyterian church choir in Havana.

When I’m with Mac people, I feel the college’s unique spirit—and it energizes me to no end.

There is an incredible diversity of perspectives within our alumni community, across the generations and many eras of the college’s history. Yet, in all of the conversations I’ve had and stories I’ve heard, what stands out to me most is the fabric that unites us because we share Macalester in common. It’s woven of certain threads: an orientation toward optimism, the courage to dream, a shared belief in a future that’s better than the past, and the sense that it’s our responsibility to help build it.

The values that first brought alumni to Macalester as students—who, during their time on campus, form a community of learners determined to create a more just and peaceful world—continue to shape their work and inform their worldviews years, even decades, after graduation. I see evidence of this across the wide range of career paths and initiatives our alumni undertake. (See for yourself in the Class Notes section of this magazine!)

I’m also inspired by how Mac alumni across the globe seek out opportunities to engage with the current campus community, and with one another, to give back. They host events in their cities, connect with faculty to participate in a class by Zoom, contribute to the Mac Fund, and serve on the Alumni Board, on Reunion committees, and in other groups—all to support the college’s mission and people.

Soon, we will have a Commencement celebration, at which we’ll send the Class of 2023 off into the next big chapter of their lives. They will embark on adventures near and far, across the country and around the world. Some will find homes in the Twin Cities, close enough to meet for coffee with a faculty mentor, give an informational interview to a student, attend a theater performance, or watch a game in the stadium. For many others, Mac will become more distant, at least in physical proximity.

But I’ve learned that geographic separation needn’t diminish our connections. It’s become easier to stay in touch across the miles. And there’s no limit to new relationships that can be formed within our global Mac community—virtually and in person, whether you graduated last year or fifty years ago. I urge all alumni to lean on and lean in to this Mac community. Of course, that includes a close circle of college friends and mentors. But it can be so much more than that. The Mac community—loved ones, acquaintances, people you haven’t met yet, all of it—is yours for the rest of your life.

So, reach out to someone on Mac Direct (macdirect.macalester.edu), join a Mac book club, attend an alumni gathering in your city. These experiences will connect you, teach you, challenge you, and energize you. (Who knows? I’ve even heard of Mac love stories that began years after graduation!) As I’ve seen over and over while on the road this year, these connections will bring you joy and foster hope in the future we’re building together.

Dr. Suzanne M. Rivera is president of Macalester College.
Beginning this spring, Macalester students have access to an advanced research-quality optical telescope in southern Arizona, equipped with instrumentation that allows exploration of astrophysical phenomena like never before. "This new observing facility is transformative," astronomy professor John M. Cannon says. "Students and faculty now have guaranteed access to a superb telescope that will support classes and enable sophisticated research projects that can result in peer-reviewed publications. The data quality is exquisite and the images are simply dazzling."

Macalester leads the newly formed Macalester-Augustana-Coe Remote Observatory (MACRO) Consortium. In the spirit of discovery and with mutual interest in education, research, and collaboration, Macalester, Augustana College (Rock Island, Ill.), and Coe College (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) established MACRO in order to take over stewardship of the Robert L. Mutel Telescope, a fully robotic telescope system located at the Winer Observatory.

The telescope is named after its founder, Dr. Robert L. Mutel, professor emeritus of astronomy at the University of Iowa. Over the past twenty-five years, Mutel has been a pioneer of the "remote observatory" model, in which a telescope facility is located in a superior observing site and then operated from afar. Mutel’s Iowa Robotic Observatory is a nationally recognized example of a successful remote observatory designed primarily for undergraduate students.

Upon Mutel’s retirement, three of his former students envisioned a consortium to take on the telescope’s management and operation. Professor Cannon worked alongside Augustana’s Dr. William Peterson and Coe’s Dr. James Wetzel to bring the MACRO Consortium to life.

Each of the three MACRO institutions share the majority of the observing time on the telescope, and the University of Iowa also will continue to have access to the facility.

Compared to Macalester’s on-campus telescope (located on the Olin-Rice Science Center’s rooftop), the improvements in sensitivity are dramatic. "I’m really thrilled for our students, who now have the opportunity to obtain science data with a telescope and supporting instrumentation that far surpasses what we have been able to do before at Macalester," says Brian Adams, laboratory supervisor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. "Our current observatory always has afforded valuable hands-on experience, where students have direct control of the telescope and instrumentation. However, as convenient as our location is for the students to conduct their observations for class projects, we still are hampered by the climate and light pollution of the Twin Cities metro area. The Winer Observatory is located at a higher altitude, far from city lights, with drier, more transparent air, that will allow us to observe much fainter targets and to see farther into the universe than we are able to from our observatory in St. Paul."

The telescope will be used by astronomy students, staff, and faculty in support of specific classes such as Observational Astronomy and also to enable student-faculty research projects. Students began using the telescope this spring in Remote Observatory Observations, co-taught by Cannon and visiting distinguished professor John Gallagher. Adams and assistant professor Anna Williams also are actively collaborating with the class. Williams says, "From the remote capabilities to the intercollegiate collaboration, the students are going to get a truly authentic observing experience, very similar to what professional astronomers do day-to-day."

In addition to strengthening classes and re-envisioning curricula, each institution’s faculty leads will work to enable new observational capabilities and to provide immersive experiences to students. These include student visits to the telescope, consortium meetings to bring together students and faculty from the MACRO institutions, the commissioning of a sophisticated fiber spectrograph, and more.
Richmond Sarpong came to Macalester from Botswana in 1991 on a pre-medicine track. That didn’t last long.

“I fell in love with chemistry,” he says.

Sarpong switched his major to chemistry and continued down that path, taking a particular interest in organic chemistry. Now a chemistry professor at the University of California–Berkeley, Sarpong came back to campus in February to reflect on his journey and current work with a lecture made possible by a Jean Dreyfus Lecture- ship for Undergraduate Institutions grant.

He spoke about his upbringing, time at Macalester, and scholarship at UC–Berkeley, particularly his research into creating less addictive painkillers using compounds inspired by others found in the natural world, to a packed audience in Kagin Ballroom.

At Berkeley, his lab conducts research on natural compounds that can be used in drug development. “The research we do is focused on how we can improve the way in which we make medicines,” Sarpong says. “About 50 percent of medicines are inspired by natural products, which are chemical compounds that are found in nature.”

Sarpong’s fascination with medicine, and later using chemistry to improve health outcomes, comes from his childhood in Sub-Saharan Africa. He saw the impact of Ivermectin, an antiparasitic drug, on communities he was living in to treat river blindness. Coming to Macalester, he learned how such drugs are made using chemical processes.

“To me, molecules are like architectural masterpieces,” he says.

With a newfound passion for organic chemistry, Sarpong continued on to Princeton where he earned a PhD in organic chemistry and became a professor at UC–Berkeley in 2004. Sarpong said his time at Macalester uniquely prepared him to enter the world of research.

“Macalester provided me with a personal infrastructure to learn how to learn,” he says. “It also gave me this appreciation for diversity, internationalism, and having a global mindset, which I think has been important in my role as a chemistry professor. Macalester gave me the ability to engage, interact, and find common ground with people from all sorts of different cultures and countries.”

His two days on campus were funded by a grant the Chemistry Department received from the Camille and Henry Dreyfus Foundation. The grant provides funding to host a speaker and support two undergraduates in summer research.

During his visit, he reflected on the promise of the students he met: “The future passes squarely through Macalester.”

—Catherine Kane ’26
SHELF CONSCIOUS

Ever wonder about all those books lining professors’ offices? We’re with you.

Professor Christina Esposito is chair of the Linguistics Department. She studies and teaches phonetics.

Any standout books you’ve read recently?
I have a nine-year-old son, so a lot of my reading right now is guided by books that we pick together and that interest us both. Right now, we are reading The Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Barnhill. It’s a book about an evil witch, and as the story progresses, it turns the traditional fairy tale story on its head. The book deals with themes of good versus evil, censorship, and control.

Has reading with your son been enlightening for your literary taste?
I don’t think I’ve gone to the library and checked out a picture book since I was a child myself. I had spent all these years only reading novels. When I had my son, I was reintroduced to the world of children’s literature and there are some really beautiful, interesting, and amazing children’s books. If anything, the thing that I learned the most is that regardless of our age, we should go and check out any and all books, whether written for kids or adults.

What’s one of your all-time favorite reads?
I revisit J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings frequently. Tolkien was a philologist, which is very similar to being a linguist, and he studied the historical aspects of language. As a linguist, I find his books interesting and fun to read because they’re full of linguistic concepts.

What book is crucial to understanding your academic niche?
The book that’s most easily accessible to people outside of the field of phonetics is Sounds Interesting by John Wells. He talks about how people pronounce words differently, like “caramel” and “pajamas.” In one of my classes, I give an assignment based on Sounds Interesting in which students read some of Wells’ thoughts and then think about a word they have puzzled over.

What is something you love to read that we might not expect?
When I go home, I like reading cookbooks and craft books.

—Catherine Kane ’26

Whose shelf should we visit next?
Email mactoday@macalester.edu.

Imagine, Macalester

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

In October of 2022, Macalester’s Board of Trustees approved the college’s new strategic plan, Imagine Macalester, which focuses on amplifying what makes us distinctive.

Three new working groups are helping to foster implementation of the strategic plan’s goals. The groups, composed of students, faculty, staff, and alumni, are organized around these goals:

• Creating a student-ready campus
• Fostering employee well-being
• Immersing alumni in the intellectual life of the college

Working groups are responsible for producing a set of options, along with strengths and limitations for each option, for advancing the strategic plan goal(s) as outlined in the working group’s charge.

Each group member has made a one-year commitment to the work, which began this spring and will ramp up over the summer. Participants will receive a stipend for their work.

We invite you to visit the strategic plan website at macalester.edu/strategic-plan, and to send questions, suggestions, and comments to strategicplan@macalester.edu.
On March 3, the Macalester community celebrated Founding Day with pushball matches on a snowy Great Lawn, a Founding Day dinner, and a Student Showcase featuring the Groove Group, Pep Band, and Mac Swing.
Caleb Williams ’24 (Wild Rose, Wis.) was selected to the Division III Academic All-America first team for men’s basketball by the College Sports Communicators (CSC) in March. Williams is one of six student-athletes named to the first team, and he is the first Macalester men’s basketball player to be named an Academic All-American in the history of the program.

“An amazing and well-deserved honor for Caleb,” head coach Abe Woldeslassie ’08 says. “He strives for excellence in all that he does and we are grateful to have Caleb at Macalester.”

Williams has a 3.91 grade point average as a physics major at Macalester. Last year he earned a spot on the Academic All-MIAC team before making the CSC Academic All-District team last month.

On the court, Williams has emerged as one of the top players in the MIAC and region, earning All-MIAC honors twice while leading the Scots in scoring in each of the past two seasons. This season he averaged 21.5 points per game to rank 23rd in Division III and 3rd in the MIAC. His 74 three-pointers are the second-most in the MIAC, and he also is second in the conference with 1.8 steals per game. In just his 53rd game as a Scot, Williams became the 24th men’s basketball player in the program’s history to score 1,000 career points. He currently ranks 17th all-time at Macalester with 1,066 points.

The Scots finished another strong season 15–11 with a tough loss of 56–54 to St. Olaf in the MIAC quarterfinals.
Macalester’s Live It Fund, a program of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Department, provides funding for driven, globally minded students who identify an opportunity or problem and propose an innovative solution. Successful proposals are awarded up to $2,000 during winter break, with an opportunity to apply for summer funding of $6,000, plus a $500 per-project expense reimbursement. Eleven projects were funded this winter.

‘Dare to Begin It’

Two of the Live It Fund’s winter participants share their once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Student: Abdi Bille ‘25 (Wajir, Kenya)
Project: ‘Bridging the Gap’

Tell us about your project. Bridging the Gap aimed to create awareness about scholarship opportunities for a group of high school graduates in Wajir, a marginalized area in Kenya. Apart from conducting a one-week mentoring program for the students, I met with education stakeholders, specifically the Wajir County Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Education, Hon. Ahmed Wardere. It was an honor for me to discuss with him a myriad of things concerning the youth in the area, such as increasing mentoring programs.

How has the Live It Fund helped you think differently about what is possible for yourself? The Live It Fund not only allowed me to experience what I can do for the community, but it also expanded my network by giving me the opportunity to interact with some of the policymakers in my community, something that wouldn’t otherwise be possible.

What skill have you most developed during your project? Curiosity and creativity allowed me to create my own community-based organization, and this allowed me to meet with Secretary Wardere by showcasing what I did. This enabled me to advocate for issues that I believe are important for the youth.

What did you learn about yourself? I was a little fearful of how my project would go, but I realized that once I laid my hands on it, everything took shape. The lesson is to just dare to begin it.

What’s next for you? This project fueled my interest in community empowerment activities. I would like to get involved in more through my newly founded community support organization, Bridging the Gap (a name I borrowed from my project).

Student: Aliya Nadeeva ‘24 (Kazan, Russian Federation)
Project: “Koy”

Tell us about your project. The Turkish term “koy” translates to “cove” in English—a secluded location for ships to dock while they wait out dangerous storms. These places of refuge are what Turkey, Fethiye in particular, became for thousands of immigrants from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. In my project, I organized cooking events to introduce refugees and immigrants to Turkish culture.

How has the Live It Fund helped you think differently about what is possible for yourself? It was an amazing opportunity to interact with such different people and understand their needs.

What skill did you most develop during your project? Adaptability, because the situation for immigrants changes all the time and I had to adapt to legal and social changes.

When you think back to your project, what are you personally most proud of? For not giving up, when I thought that I can’t make it.

How did your project change or grow? I learned to be less scared to interact, and to trust people I don’t know.
James A. Williams ’77, then a sophomore, enrolled in Professor Glen Wilson’s Voice and Diction class in the Theater and Dance Department. A so-called “tough” professor with a reverence for the classics, Wilson demanded his students learn how to breathe for the stage, and also, how to speak the King’s English. It was 1975, at the height of America’s Black Power movement, and while Williams was more interested in making art that reflected his experience as a young Black man, he felt motivated by his professor. “It was the desire to show you that I can do your stuff as well as you,” he says. “What I got from [Wilson] was discipline.”

That theater class at Macalester laid the foundations for Williams’ powerful diction, voice, and his ability to command a stage—all techniques he would go on to employ nearly fifty years later as Lear for his most recent role in Marcus Gardley’s adaptation of King Lear with Oakland’s Cal Shakes theater in 2022. The play is a modern translation of the original, set in San Francisco during the 1960s in the city’s historically Black Fillmore District. Williams credits Professor Wilson specifically as his motivation for studying Shakespeare.

But this wasn’t Williams’ first time performing Shakespeare. Over the years, as a member of Minneapolis’ esteemed Guthrie Theater, he has played roles in its productions of King Lear and Romeo and Juliet.

And Williams’ accomplishments extend far beyond Shakespeare. He has held off-Broadway stints in Jitney and The Piano Lesson, two works by legendary playwright August Wilson. His commitment to community, a large part of his identity as an actor, has led him to leading workshops at Brown University, Colby College, and the International School of Kenya, among others. Minneapolis’ Star Tribune named him Artist of the Year twice.

For Williams, it all started at Macalester. “I never knew that I was a creative until I got into Macalester and got a chance to be one,” he says. “That’s what Macalester’s theater department did for me.” Williams elaborated on how the tutelage of Professor Wilson helped him see his potential. “You started out with Robert Frost, moved on to Gerard Manley Hopkins, and then a bunch of old dead white poets,” he continues. But at the end of the semester students were allowed to present works of their choosing. “I chose Paul Laurence Dunbar,” and for his final project he chose works from the Harlem Renaissance so that Williams could teach his professor something in exchange. “I wanted to hit him with voices he never heard before.”

It wasn’t only the professors at Macalester that helped Williams realize his dreams, but his cohort of theater students at the college. Jack Reuler ’75, who founded Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis, asked Williams to be a part of the company. “From there,” he says, “another friend, Lou Bellamy, told me he was starting a theater in St. Paul and asked if I would like to be a part of it.” That theater, where Williams became a founding member, is Penumbra, where Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson got his start.

The 1970s were something of a renaissance for theater in the Twin Cities, and Williams found himself as its beating heart. “It’s one of the great joys of my life that one of the greatest writers to ever live wrote words for my mouth and that I got to say them first,” Williams says of August Wilson. “He picked me.”

Later, in 2004, the two would work together again. “He saw me do Two Trains Running and told his casting agent to have me submit an audition tape.” That audition tape landed Williams the role of Roosevelt Hicks in the world premiere of Radio Golf at the Yale Repertory Theatre, and, later, a run on Broadway. “I have been blessed to do the thing that people say can’t happen. No one goes from a regional stage in Kansas City to Broadway,” he says. “That’s what I mean when I say that Macalester taught me a lot of things.”

Part of what made Williams’ time so special at Macalester was that the college was piloting a program called Expanded Educational Opportunities (EEO), which brought students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the majority of them Black, to study at the college. This program coincided with the country’s Black Power movement. “Discovering what it meant to be Black was such a new concept that everyone was trying to participate in it,” he says. Williams was coming from St. Louis, Mo., where he had been a bright and precocious kid. Because he was bullied, he dropped out of high school and spent his days holed up in a local library. A teacher in his school saw his potential and enrolled Williams in a program called Upward Bound which helped the young man secure a seat at Macalester, though he was admittedly a little lost.

“I didn’t know who I wanted to be and where I wanted to be,” Williams says of himself when he started as a first-year. “The seeds for my life got planted at Mac, and that’s why Mac is my heart,” he continues. “It gave me a determination to not give up. When I grabbed onto theater and acting, I was like Jacob in the Bible. I grabbed onto the angel and said ‘I will not let you go until you bless me.’ And I still haven’t let go. And I really don’t know if I ever will. There are times when I tried and it grabbed me back,” he says of trying to stray from theater. “So that’s my Mac life.”

Collier Meyerson ’07 is a writer living in New York.
As part of the Unfiltered project, we asked a group of Macalester students the same five questions every semester, beginning in fall 2019, following along on their college journey.

- What class are you most excited about right now?
- What’s one recent triumph (large or small)?
- What have you learned lately?
- What do you wish you had known six months ago?
- What’s one thing you want to do in the next six months?

College is often a time of change and growth. New challenges, triumphs, and experiences both inside and outside the classroom influence how we see the world and live our lives. Unfiltered is an effort to capture a snapshot of that transformation.

This spring, our first Unfiltered cohort is graduating. We asked them how they have changed throughout their time at Mac, and what it was like to look back at their responses.

For Ross Relic ’23, a physics and music double major from Crystal Lake, Ill., Unfiltered serves as a time capsule of sorts. Some goals, like composing new music and spending time with friends, show up time and time again in his responses. But he also mentions reaching new milestones and taking time to recognize his needs as a college student. From mental health awareness to dating, a social media hiatus, and weight loss, Relic has been candid about the highs and lows.

“A lot of people deal with that stuff. In my mind there’s no reason to not be vulnerable and talk about those sorts of things,” Relic says. “Another motivating factor is it’s just not interesting if it’s not vulnerable and true to your life. There’s just not much substance otherwise.”
Fall 2019

Class of 2023 students begin classes on Sept. 3, 2019.

Hannah Scharrer ’23, an international studies and Latin American studies double major from Tacoma, Wash., thinks of Unfiltered as an exercise in reflection. Especially during her sophomore year, with classes taught virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it encouraged Scharrer to identify some positives and explore what she truly values.

“It was definitely hard answering those questions during sophomore year, but I think it also helped me reflect on what I am actually excited about and sort of pulled me out of despair,” says Scharrer. “It’s just really nice to have this method to make you take stock of what has been changing or what has been constant in my life and what I’m enjoying and what I’m not.”

Carter Rutherford ’23, a geography and Asian studies double major from Alexandria, Va. and Santiago, Chile, likewise appreciates the ability to contemplate a challenging time in his life and ponder the takeaways of his college experience as a whole.

“It seemed like a great way to reflect on my college experience as it was happening,” he says. “I never imagined the pandemic would happen, and having this small record of what was on my mind as I navigated college and life over the past few years has been really helpful. I would give myself a warning: college is going to be more challenging than you could possibly imagine. Keep being yourself, show yourself lots of compassion, and continue to be curious and adventurous no matter what.”

Inspired by looking back over her time at Macalester, Scharrer also gave the following advice to her first-year self, and others embarking on their college journey:

“This is an exciting time of your life. Just throw yourself into whatever you want: Be liberal arts. I took a statistics class my freshman semester and I loved it, though I was not planning on being a statistics minor,” says Scharrer. “Don’t force yourself to do everything, but try to get to know yourself and other people and get to know what you like to do. Exploration is the best way to achieve that. And if you don’t have the answers, that’s fine.”

Read some of the responses from our Unfiltered students’ journeys as they navigated college and lived and studied through a global pandemic. Look for their final Unfiltered responses in May.

Talia Bank ’23 is a political science, legal studies, and Spanish major at Macalester.

Spring 2020

Classes begin on Jan. 23, 2020. Shortly after Ross, Hannah, and Carter shared these responses, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the college to switch to remote instruction beginning in March 2020.

ROSS I wish I knew that I didn’t have to worry about the depth of my friendships in college. People can make extremely strong, deep friendships surprisingly quickly, and I wish I knew that I wasn’t an exception.

HANNAH I’ve learned the importance of taking brain breaks from my homework. Taking a little pause to go on a run or see an on-campus speaker puts me in a better headspace to do my work. I’ve been able to enjoy the amazing fall in St. Paul on my runs and have gone to some really interesting talks, so those breaks are truly invaluable.

CARTER I wish I had known how to navigate the complex world of health insurance in the United States.

ROSS I have recently started to lose a lot of weight. At the time of writing this, I have lost thirty-seven pounds in the past three months! I’ve still got a ways to go but I’m really happy with how far I’ve come.

HANNAH I learned how to meter poetry in Spanish, which is a lot less self-explanatory than you would think!

CARTER I really want to return to St. Paul, hopefully for a part of the summer or at least for next school year. I’m really bummed that I won’t get to be in Minnesota when it gets warmer.
I’ve learned how much I block myself into certain routines or ways of living purely because I convince myself that doing so is somehow “necessary” or “inevitable.” Like, I recently deleted all social media off of my phone, which was a huge (but very positive) change for me. But while reassessing my relationship with my phone and social media, I realized that one of the main things entrenching me into that way of living was this illusion that social media was just a fact of life. That although I had an unhealthy relationship with it, I still needed it because social media is so central to modern culture. But it’s not necessary and that realization can really free you from so many things. —Ross

Since we’re about to start the next module, I’m mostly just excited to take two new classes, but right now I’m taking epidemiology. It’s obviously very relevant right now! —Hannah

I would really like to visit my grandparents. I don’t know if it will be possible because of the pandemic, but I would really like to find a way to safely visit them. —Carter

I’ve recently learned how much I block myself into certain routines or ways of living purely because I convince myself that doing so is somehow “necessary” or “inevitable.” Like, I recently deleted all social media off of my phone, which was a huge (but very positive) change for me. But while reassessing my relationship with my phone and social media, I realized that one of the main things entrenching me into that way of living was this illusion that social media was just a fact of life. That although I had an unhealthy relationship with it, I still needed it because social media is so central to modern culture. But it’s not necessary and that realization can really free you from so many things. —Ross

Since we’re about to start the next module, I’m mostly just excited to take two new classes, but right now I’m taking epidemiology. It’s obviously very relevant right now! —Hannah

I would really like to visit my grandparents. I don’t know if it will be possible because of the pandemic, but I would really like to find a way to safely visit them. —Carter
I recently started dating people for the first time and I’ve learned that the pressure that dating can put on you emotionally can really expose your weaknesses or places you have yet to grow. It’s really difficult and vulnerable, but it’s an excellent opportunity for learning about and working on yourself. —Ross

During my study abroad experience in Spain, I’m learning to become more independent. It’s definitely a process and a challenge, but it’s also exciting to be able to figure out travel and how to navigate a new city by myself. —Hannah

I was hired as a Chinese tutor at Macalester for the spring semester. I’ve been learning Mandarin for six years now and I’m really enjoying the job. —Carter

The class I’m most excited about taking is Jazz Advance! It’s wonderful to learn such a detailed history about how jazz formed and developed! —Ross

I’m doing an internship for credit with The Advocates for Human Rights and it is such a rewarding learning experience. —Hannah

This semester, I’ve learned a lot about caste in India and the rise of Hindu nationalism. I’m currently taking Political Geographies of South Asia with visiting professor Rupak Shrestha and attended a talk by Yashica Dutt and a screening of Anand Patwardhan’s film Vivek on campus. —Carter
As child clinical psychologist and clinical director for outpatient psychiatry and behavioral medicine at Seattle Children’s Hospital, Hilary Mead ’01 has spent years deeply involved in the treatment of adolescents prone to self-harm and suicidal ideation. Even in stable times, it’s a challenging specialty, but the pandemic added entirely new complications. “It made many mental health concerns much more severe,” Mead says, noting that she’s still seeing an impact three years after COVID-19 first hit. Her hospital’s emergency department continues to be flooded with patients needing mental health care, its inpatient unit is taking only the most severe cases, and its outpatient care also has faced skyrocketing demand. “We’re feeling it on all sides,” she says.

The trends she notes in her own specialty are mirrored in broader statistics: a study published in The Lancet medical journal estimated that global cases of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorder increased by more than 25 percent in 2020 alone. The CDC reports that more than one in five Americans received treatment for their mental health in 2021.

While Mead is the first to admit the difficulties that come with this spike in demand, she also notes the creativity that it has inspired among professionals in the field. For example, she and her colleagues have experimented with new “intensive outpatient” models that require more patient involvement each week, but that may span half as many weeks as a traditional program. They’ve strengthened their telehealth offerings. They’ve even advocated successfully for more resources from governments and insurers. “There’s been a lot of innovation, and that gives me optimism,” she says.

Indeed, the field of therapy itself has seen significant change since 2020, and its future is coming into sharper focus. To learn more about the ways that therapy has been transformed—and what’s next—we talked to Mead and three other Macalester alumni in the field.
Cyrus Hair ’15
Title: Clinical supervisor and therapist for the Wilder Foundation at Intermediate District 287-SEC in the Twin Cities

As a therapist based at South Education Center, a specialized services school in Richfield, Cyrus Hair works with second-, third-, and fourth-grade students who struggle with issues including physical aggression. He helps them build skills including emotional regulation and trauma processing.

In addition to his work with students, he meets with their parents, all of whom have volunteered to participate in their children’s intensive outpatient program.

Hair appreciates working holistically with students and their families, because everyone involved is eager to pursue growth that can change the trajectory of their lives. “Every time a parent says to me, ‘This was how I was parented, but I want to do something different,’ I get chills,” he says. “I love it when parents are so engaged, and when they’re there to seek help for their kids and themselves.”

Cal Klingensmith ’10
Role: Private practice psychotherapist in Manhattan

Cal Klingensmith started therapy his junior year at Macalester, an experience that proved so transformative that he knew almost immediately that he wanted to pursue it as a career.

In his own practice, he tends to work with trans and queer individuals, including many who struggle with eating disorders and substance use issues—seemingly unrelated challenges that often have the same root cause. “In some cases, when someone has struggled with gender identity issues for a long time, it will manifest through eating disorders, because they’re uncomfortable with their body,” he says. “The same can be true with substance use, because they want to dissociate from themselves—to not be ‘of body,’” he says.

The insights Klingensmith hopes his clients will gain in their sessions with him are the same ones he tries to apply to his own life. “Therapy forces me to be in touch with myself and my emotions,” he says. “It’s a job that involves a ton of self-growth and reflection all the time.”

Jo Trigg ’08
Title: Family and couples psychotherapist and behavioral health and wellness training coordinator at JCCA (the Jewish Child Care Association) in Brooklyn

As an extrovert who thrives in the bustle of crowds, Jo Trigg admits that they don’t fit the pop-culture stereotype of the reserved, note-scribbling therapist. But as a couples and family psychotherapist, their more outgoing nature is a boon. “When you’re working with a high-conflict couple on the verge of divorce, you can’t be timid,” they say. “You’ve got to speak up firmly.”

Trigg loves the challenge of digging into complex relationship dynamics in ways that lead partners to connect more meaningfully to one another. “People sometimes come in expecting me to change their partner,” Trigg says. “But oftentimes, the real work is around finding ways that they can accept one another more.”

Hilary Mead ’01
Title: Child clinical psychologist and clinical director of outpatient psychiatry and behavioral medicine at Seattle Children’s Hospital

While Hilary Mead was in the midst of her residency at the University of New Mexico’s Health Sciences Center in 2009, she noticed that she was drawn to kids who presented with emotional dysregulation—those who experienced extremely high highs and low lows, for example. “I related to them,” she says. “Temperamentally, I am very sensitive and have big emotional responses.”

That experience eventually led her to her current work at Seattle Children’s Hospital, which includes leading programs that treat suicidal and self-harming adolescents.

Although the field has notoriously high burnout and turnover rates—Mead notes that churn rates in her area reached 80 percent in the inpatient unit at her own hospital at one point during the pandemic—the rewards are significant. “There’s nothing quite like getting to the end of a person’s treatment,” she says. “It can be life-changing for them.”
The future of therapy is **inclusive and diverse.**

Recent surveys suggest that about three-quarters of therapists are white and three-quarters are women—but that doesn't reflect the demographics of the patients themselves. That can be a problem, since patients often benefit from working with a therapist who shares their identity.

Take Cyrus Hair, a Black man, who has a waiting list that's months long. He says that his identity has played a role in that demand. "People want clinicians who are representative of them or their interests," he says, noting most of his elementary-age clients are Black boys. For now, there are relatively few therapists who look like him.

Jo Trigg says they’re seeing more evidence that educational institutions that champion diversity are putting their money where their values are. For example, at the Ackerman Institute for the Family, where Trigg was trained, BIPOC and LGBTQ individuals can apply to get a range of its clinical training at no charge.

Hilary Mead and her colleagues, meanwhile, are finding ways to serve more patients and families who don’t speak English. Her team recently launched its first Spanish-language dialectical behavior therapy group program, an approach that pairs techniques with emotional regulation with skills in areas such as mindfulness.

It’s one of many changes her hospital made in the wake of 2020 protests against racial injustice. "The Black Lives Matter movement had a huge impact on our field," she says. "It led us to listen to more voices that we hadn’t been listening to, and to people who hadn’t felt safe enough to raise their concerns."

The future of therapy is **celebrated.**

A generation or two ago, therapy tended to get a bad rap, and patients often felt shame about getting treatment. But national studies have found a significant decrease in public stigma toward major depression in the past twenty-five years, and one survey found that 87 percent of those in Generation Z feel comfortable talking about mental health with others.

In his own work, Cal Klingensmith says he sees that stigma replaced with a more positive—and accurate—understanding of therapy’s role in individuals’ lives. "In the same way that people might say ‘I go to cycling classes,’ people talk about going to therapy," he says. "Instead of being a thing of shame, therapy is recognized as a tool that helps people navigate their lives."
The future of therapy is **online**.

In 2019, just 5 percent of the services provided by Hillary Mead’s clinic in Seattle were offered online. Today, even as more people return to in-person work, a solid 70 percent of the services continue to be conducted online.

Mead says that adolescents, weary of the pandemic’s online platforms and ambivalent about therapy recommended by their parents, often benefit more when they can be at in-person sessions. At the same time, the convenience of online options has increased access for people who otherwise couldn’t fit sessions into their days. “Online parent groups exploded during the pandemic because they could find ways to take an hour out of their workday to join us; they didn’t have to find childcare or travel to the clinics,” she notes. “I don’t think we’ll ever go back to all in-person care.”

The future of therapy is **in-person**.

Cal Klingensmith started his private practice in February 2020, timing that turned out to be good for business but bad for in-person therapy.

While early pandemic-era studies indicated that virtual therapy was as effective as in-person, other data has suggested that both patients and therapists are more prone to distraction in an online environment.

These days, Klingensmith splits his time evenly between online and in-person work, but he often nudges clients to come to his office, even when therapy by screen is more convenient. “There’s something sacred about that human-to-human connection that I don’t think can be replicated by technology,” Klingensmith says. “It does require commitment. But it’s also, I believe, how the best work gets done.”
The future of therapy is **gamified**.

Child therapists have long used dollhouses and sandboxes as ways to help children create narratives that reveal important details about their lives.

Cyrus Hair says he sees video games like *Minecraft* and Roblox as new tools that can play surprisingly similar roles for therapists and their patients. "Like dollhouses and sand trays in play therapy, games can serve as child-led pursuits that give them opportunities to share themes of separation, nurturance, and protection," he says. "And these are games that unlike physical toys can be used in telehealth."

A 2018 report by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing found that 42 percent of Americans believed that cost and poor insurance coverage were the top barriers for accessing mental health care. Changes are opening up new options for more people.

In Hilary Mead’s home state of Washington, for example, millions of dollars have been poured into expanding and developing programming for mental health support. Federal programs supporting mental health have also gotten hundreds of millions of dollars in funding boosts, and a new hotline was launched specifically for mental health emergencies.

Mead notes that these changes are partly the result of tireless advocacy by her colleagues in the field. "Because of the pandemic, there’s much more pressure on people who hold power—insurance companies, Medicaid, and the government—to listen to us and reconsider what they’re willing to reimburse," says Mead.

The future of therapy is **financially supported**.

Therapy is just one part of the robust health care support—both mental and physical—that Macalester provides for its students.

For much of the past decade, mental health has been the top reason that students seek medical care at Macalester, according to medical director Steph Walters. (During the most acute phases of the pandemic, COVID-19 care took the top spot.)

All students have access to individual counseling sessions, group counseling, a 24/7 line for acute counseling help, and next-day appointments at no cost, says Jen Jacobsen, executive director of the Laurie Hamre Center for Health & Wellness. "For one-on-one counseling, Macalester uses a flexible care model," she says. "Instead of having a set number of appointments of a certain length, the student and the counselor collaborate at the end of each session to decide whether to meet again, and if so, how soon and the length of the session."

The result is a more tailored experience that helps meet students’ needs—and reduced waiting time for those who are scheduling a first counseling appointment.

Jacobsen also notes that Macalester aims to support systemic changes and programs that can benefit all students’ mental health. For example, the college encourages all faculty to schedule early evening project deadlines to prevent students from pulling all-nighters, which can contribute to anxiety and depression. A popular campus therapy dog program, PAWS@Mac, has brought joy to students (and to the campus community) for more than a decade.

Erin Peterson is a Minneapolis-based writer.
For decades Macalester’s mission has emphasized a commitment to internationalism, multiculturalism, and service to society. Together, these values attract students who aren’t afraid to challenge the status quo. “Activism has always been a big part of what Macalester is all about,” says Jim Bennett ’69.

Students change during their time at Macalester, and they have, in turn, pushed Macalester to change, too. Over the years, issues that have captured the nation’s attention also have played out on campus, and students have urged Mac to use institutional power in service of justice. Students who have advocated for changes to the college’s policies have learned that making real, sustainable change is often a long game that requires commitment and stamina.

During their time at Mac, students have protested the Vietnam War, taken part in the Civil Rights Movement, and pressed for the recognition of the rights of immigrants and people across the gender spectrum. We asked six alumni across generations to reflect on their activism at Mac and how it has influenced their lives.
Expanding opportunities

When Jim Bennett ’69 arrived on campus in the fall of 1966 as a member of the varsity basketball team, there were just a handful of other Black students in his first-year class. He had graduated from an all-Black high school in Texas, and even now he remembers the culture shock. “Given the stark cultural change, if it had not been for basketball,” he says, “I probably would have gone home for Thanksgiving and never come back.”

“There were advantages to a Macalester education, but it was difficult for me to understand why, as a Black student, I had to give up who I was to be successful at Macalester. That was the motivation for talking with some other Black students and starting the Black Liberation Affairs Committee (BLAC).”

Black students were starting Black student unions at colleges across the country. “We wanted something to represent what we believed, as young people, was the right thing to do,” he remembers.

After the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, a collaborative group of students, including representatives from BLAC, student government, and others, met with President Arthur Flemming. Bennett says, “We asked the question, ‘Given what has happened with the assassination of Dr. King, and cities burning across the country, couldn’t and shouldn’t Macalester do more?’”

These conversations with the president resulted in the creation of the Expanded Educational Opportunities program, or EEO, which provided scholarships for full tuition and books. In the fall of 1969, it brought to campus seventy-five students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the majority of them Black.

The EEO was funded initially through the college’s endowment, and later through federal funding. Funding challenges eventually led to its demise in 1984, but over the course of its fifteen-year run the program helped diversify the racial makeup of the student body.

Bennett also led the college’s new Black Education and Cultural Center, or Black House, which also launched in 1969. Black House served as a hub of social and cultural activity, with a fully stocked third-floor library, community dinners, and African dance and drumming classes.

“I guess I didn’t really look at it as activism at that time,” Bennett says. “I would have perceived it as survival.”

Macalester’s Black Education and Cultural Center, or Black House, Launched in 1969.

After Macalester, Bennett earned a master’s in interdisciplinary studies at Mankato State University and a PhD in higher education administration at the University of Washington. He eventually served as vice president of equity and pluralism at Bellevue College, a public institution near Seattle.

“If the true meaning of education is to lead out of ignorance, then our responsibility is to not only understand the students who come to us,” he says, “but to try to learn from them in ways that we can be better stewards of the educational process.”

Bennett says founding BLAC and Black House and advocating for the EEO program laid a solid foundation for his future career. “I learned a lot about being an administrator in a higher-education setting. That’s where it started.”
Learning to negotiate

When Linda Kennedy ’72 was a student at Mac, student activism focused on the Vietnam War. But things changed for her, for her classmates, and for students across the country in late April 1970, when the nation learned that President Nixon had lied about American forces being in Cambodia.

“There was sort of a groundswell,” she remembers now. “We felt we needed to make a statement that was bigger.”

As part of strikes happening across the country, Macalester students occupied Grand Avenue. “I was in the crowd, and it was thrilling and important and exciting and like breathing,” she says. “It was vital that we work to end this war and that we make others aware that we needed to stop it,” she says. “So we hauled a bench from a bus stop out into the street between Dupre and the dining commons. And then we shut the school down. We refused to go to class.”

The college closed for a week in early May. Because the semester was almost over, the college opted to give students grades of “incomplete.”

Students pushed back against the college’s grade policy and negotiated an alternative with professors: students would receive grades based on the work completed. Kennedy remembers that working with professors to give grades instead of incompletes was a turning point for her and her classmates. And for her male classmates, passing grades were no insignificant achievement, since good grades would help them avoid being drafted.

“It was the first time I negotiated something with an adult,” Kennedy says. “Growing up when I did, I was always taught to give great respect to adults.” She says the experience, with both parties displaying mutual respect, gave her confidence later as a broadcast journalist, when she was frequently the only Black woman in the newsroom.

Ultimately, joining the anti-war protests, then negotiating grades with the college gave Kennedy something more than a complete semester. “It’s not confidence; it’s not self-esteem. It’s having that sense that you have power, too, that you can reply, you can respond, and get the desired result.” —Linda Kennedy ’72
Divestment from South Africa

Macalester’s reputation as a center of activism against the Vietnam War attracted Doug Tilton ’82 to the college. But at the time he didn’t know anything about the growing international movement against apartheid in South Africa.

That changed one rainy night during his first year, when he was taking a break from working on a paper in Doty Hall. “I went down to the lounge to buy some candy and out of the rain comes this Norman Watkins ’79 saying, ‘Does anyone want to see a film about South Africa?’ That sounded more interesting than my paper.” Tilton followed Watkins over to the chapel basement, where the student group Macalester Anti-Apartheid Coalition (MAAC), was showing the film Last Grave at Dimbaza.

Afterward, Watkins issued a call to action: We’ve got to do something about this. Tilton, who describes himself then as “an activist looking for a cause” was in. Saying yes that night changed the course of his life.

Divestment involves withdrawing money invested in certain industries or funds to protest a particular policy. Since the early 1960s key political voices across the world had been calling for divestment from South Africa in protest of apartheid. College and universities, the National Council of Churches, and the NAACP, among other groups, joined in the divestment movement.

Macalester’s Board of Trustees formed a committee to look at the issue, and Tilton served as the student representative. Some members of the committee opposed divestment, on the grounds that Macalester had recently endured a rough financial patch. But Tilton remembers that MAAC had a lot of faculty support. “This was not a faculty movement, but there were a number of faculty members whose moral support and encouragement built our confidence and made us feel like what we were doing was important.”

Ultimately the committee and the trustees recommended limited divestment. As it turned out, Mac didn’t have many investments that were directly connected to South Africa. Tilton welcomed the outcome, but saw it as incomplete.

The Presbyterian Church, which played a role in the divestment campaign in the US, was also a significant force in Tilton’s life: his father was a minister, while his mother worked in the national offices. Tilton later interned in the Washington, D.C. offices of the Presbyterian Church (USA) focusing on anti-apartheid work there. He completed graduate work on South Africa. Today he lives in Paarl, South Africa, and works as regional liaison for Southern Africa for World Mission of the Presbyterian Church (USA).
Bobbi Gass ’10 became co-chair of Queer Union (QU) during her sophomore year, and started working to create gender-neutral bathrooms on campus.

“The college was touted as a queer-friendly campus but we were quick to point out that it wasn’t so much for trans or nonbinary students,” she says.

Gass and other QU members met with campus administrators to advocate for gender-neutral locker rooms and restrooms in the new athletic center. Although the Leonard Center plans were already finalized, Gass says QU’s efforts led to other discussions about making life easier for trans and nonbinary students by designating some bathrooms in residence halls and in the basement of the Campus Center as gender neutral. Those conversations led, in turn, to a consideration of all-gender housing.

By Gass’s junior year, Mac’s first all-gender housing option opened in Kirk. “It was a pretty quick turnaround, now that I think about it,” she says. “But it felt like it was the direction the college needed to go.”

Since graduating, Gass has continued to fight for queer issues and trans people in the Twin Cities. She earned a master’s of public health from the University of Minnesota, and works in harm reduction for Hennepin County. The experience of working with college staff and fellow students at Mac gave Gass more confidence in her ability to transform the world around her, especially for the queer community. “It made me feel like my voice mattered and that it is possible to make change happen,” she says now.
When Jocelyne Cardona ’14 joined ¡Adelante! as a first-year student in 2010, the on-campus cultural organization dedicated to creating awareness around Latin American identity, culture, and history, was focused on advocating for farmworkers and labor rights. Student activists engaged people by offering education, and “inviting them into the conversation, regardless of where they’re coming from,” she says.

The following academic year ¡Adelante! took the same approach when it supported the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, a federal legislative proposal to permanently protect people who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”

In 2012, Congress passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, policy, which provides some temporary protections to some immigrants who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”

In 2012, Congress passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, policy, which provides some temporary protections to some immigrants who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”

In 2012, Congress passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, policy, which provides some temporary protections to some immigrants who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”

In 2012, Congress passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, policy, which provides some temporary protections to some immigrants who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”

In 2012, Congress passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, policy, which provides some temporary protections to some immigrants who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”

In 2012, Congress passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, policy, which provides some temporary protections to some immigrants who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”

In 2012, Congress passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, policy, which provides some temporary protections to some immigrants who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”

In 2012, Congress passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, policy, which provides some temporary protections to some immigrants who came to the US as children. Originally introduced in 2001, at least eleven versions of the bill have been introduced in the last twenty years. Cardona says the group’s goal was to educate the college about why ensuring access to an education at Mac was so important. “We wanted the end of that campaign to be with the college itself adopting and endorsing the DREAM Act, and taking a political stance.”
Former prosecutor Jim Shorris ’82 now leads compliance at the world’s largest cannabis company.

BY DANIEL P. SMITH
Ask Jim Shorris if he ever envisioned working for a cannabis company and the 1982 alumnus chuckles.

“Absolutely not,” Shorris says.

In fact, Shorris spent almost five years in the 1980s as a prosecutor with the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office. During that time, Shorris tackled numerous criminal cases, including some connected to America’s war on drugs, which then included cannabis.

“Even though I thought some of it was a little silly,” Shorris says, “we treated cannabis like every other street drug when it had some legitimate, valued uses.”

As Shorris advanced in his legal career, however, the nation’s views on cannabis evolved. In 1996, California became the first state to approve cannabis for medical use. Within a decade, nearly a quarter of states had followed suit. Then, in 2012, Colorado and Washington broke ground as the first two states to legalize the recreational use of cannabis. Today, three-quarters of the nation’s states permit the use of medical cannabis while nearly half allow for recreational use. And each year, both numbers grow.

The rapid legalization of cannabis, albeit under strict regulatory watch, spurred the rise of cannabis retail operations from coast to coast, including budding enterprises like Curaleaf Holdings.

Founded in 2010, Massachusetts-based Curaleaf is the world’s largest cannabis company, operating 145 dispensaries and 29 cultivation sites across 21 states at the start of 2023. And in an unforeseen career shift for a man who once prosecuted cannabis-related drug offenses, Shorris is now one of Curaleaf’s key executives.

As Curaleaf’s chief compliance officer, Shorris ensures the 6,000-employee company follows all federal, state, and local laws related to cannabis. These include 24/7 video surveillance in dispensaries and manufacturing facilities as well as packaging and testing guidelines.

“I see the legitimate uses of cannabis and want to see it available to people in safe, legal ways,” he says.

Shorris admits people are often taken aback when they discover he works for a cannabis company. Shorris, after all, is a buttoned-up legal pro with a decorated résumé that includes serving as the enforcement chief for the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, where he managed a staff of more than 260 attorneys, investigators, forensic specialists, and others at the securities industry’s self-regulatory organization.

When he was first contacted about the compliance role at Curaleaf, Shorris dismissed the inquiry. He presumed the company wanted someone with a pharmaceutical or manufacturing background, neither of which Shorris possessed. But the more Shorris learned about Curaleaf, its mission of safe consumption, and its chief compliance role, the more he lobbied for the position.

“Curaleaf is a young, dynamic company focused on setting the standard for the industry,” says Shorris, a New York native who earned his law degree from Case Western Reserve University. “Though this was certainly different from the compliance work I had done elsewhere, so much seemed transferable.”

When Shorris started at Curaleaf in March 2020, just as COVID-19 overtook the country, he inherited a mighty task: to build Curaleaf’s compliance program from its relatively rudimentary origins into a sturdy outfit.

Unlike the well-established financial services field where Shorris had spent the bulk of his career, cannabis lives within a complex and ever-evolving compliance environment. Medical programs carry a different set of rules than recreational programs; public precedent is nearly nonexistent given the industry’s youth; and, most notably, each state has its own regulatory guidelines. In each state, Shorris notes, Curaleaf essentially operates its own business with cultivation, production, and retail operations adjusted to local laws. (Toss in county and city regulations and the regulatory plot thickens further.)

As a result, Shorris sets the company’s compliance strategies and goals nationally before working with local compliance programs to ensure professional execution on the local level. This includes efforts such as transparency in labeling and advertising as well as the physical setup of retail operations. The effort demands constant collaboration, a focused eye on the details, and devotion to clarity, skills Shorris first developed while working on the news desk of the Mac Weekly as an undergraduate.

“That’s where I learned how to ask questions, get facts, and explain things in clear terms,” the political science major says.

In leading compliance at a $1 billion company, Shorris is constantly seeking a balance between following regulations and pursuing business objectives. His goal is complicated by a changing regulatory environment as well as accelerating competition from retail rivals and a still-strong illicit market that creates an imbalance between cannabis supply and demand. And then, of course, there is the fact that cannabis remains a Schedule I controlled substance alongside heroin, LSD, and ecstasy.

Because cannabis remains illegal on the federal level, Curaleaf cannot secure loans from federally licensed banks or deduct expenses against revenue for tax purposes. Its Schedule I classification also makes it tough to overcome still-prevailing societal taboos. While Shorris says federal movement to reschedule cannabis would help signal the product’s legitimate uses, that effort is not his concern. Rather, he remains dedicated to the efforts he can control as Curaleaf’s compliance chief.

“In ensuring safety, truth in labeling and advertising, and being transparent with buyers, we can break down taboos associated with cannabis and introduce it to a wider market,” he says. “I believe cannabis has a place in society and hope to continue seeing acceptance of those valid uses.”

And with more states each year permitting cannabis for medical or recreational use, Shorris is getting his wish—and more compliance work.

“It’s a whole new set of regulations to account for,” he says, “but that’s the role I play here.”

Daniel P. Smith is a Chicago-based freelance writer.
ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Business owner Zoe Kardasis Sturtz ’96 helps families fall in love with their houses again.

BY LAURA BILLINGS COLEMAN
If you’ve been watching too much HGTV or wondering about building a guest room above your garage, you’re not alone. Since the start of the pandemic, home spending has spiked, as Americans stuck at home have started digging into repairs, diving into renovations, and pondering more efficient ways to fit family, work, and leisure into 2,000 square feet.

"The novelty of working all day at the dining-room table has definitely worn off, and we’re all looking for ways to make our houses handle all of the roles they have to fill now," says Zoe Kardasis Sturtz ’96, co-founder of Edit Design Build Studio, a home-renovation firm based in Minneapolis’s Prospect Park neighborhood. "People have such a strong connection to their neighborhoods in the Twin Cities that helping families stay where they want to be, in spaces that work better for them, is something I really love."

A Massachusetts native, Kardasis Sturtz first came to the Twin Cities on a prospective student visit to Macalester in the fall of 1991. "It was the day of that famous Halloween snowstorm, and the campus closed, but I just fell in love with the people, and I knew this was the place," she says, noting that Mac’s unique urban setting was a big part of the draw. "I remember doing a project in one of [geography professor emeritus] David Lanegran’s classes where we spent time studying the neighborhoods around Macalester, and that felt so personal to me. I’ve always been interested in city living and urban design, but another layer of my interest had to do with the people in those buildings and how they live."

After graduating from Macalester with a degree in urban studies, Kardasis Sturtz worked in a variety of fields, from event planning to personal finance. But watching the crew she hired to help renovate her first home inspired her to go back to school at Century College for a certificate in kitchen and bath design. "I found I just loved the whole process," she remembers. "You’re buying space you can’t see until it’s done, which is such an interesting challenge."

She learned the ropes as a designer for a small but fast-growing firm, but when the Great Recession hit in 2008, she was laid off just as her husband, architect Ryan Sturtz, lost his job in the construction bust. "That was really terrifying, both of us unemployed, in the same industry. But we just made lemonade out of lemons and launched our own business in 2009," she says. "I don’t know how we were so brave—sometimes you don’t have a choice."

Since then, Edit Design Build Studio has carved out a niche remaking and remodeling homes in the Twin Cities’ historic neighborhoods, making nineteenth- and twentieth-century homes work better for twenty-first-century families. While she and her husband have earned many awards in the remodeling industry, Kardasis Sturtz says she’s even more focused on earning the trust of their clients. "Remodeling is a huge financial decision, and we have to earn the trust of our homeowners in a short period of time," she says. "When we’re tearing off the back of your house to put up a $400,000 addition, you have to believe me when I tell you I’ve got your back."

Although the mess and stress of a home renovation can be hard on homeowners ("Sometimes I feel like a marriage counselor," she admits), Kardasis Sturtz and her husband have managed to work side by side through nearly one-hundred remodeling jobs. "My advice is, if you’re starting a project, you have to be good communicators and forgive each other when problems arise, because they always arise." Having watched many homeowners go through the complex emotional ups and downs as the remodel moves from tear-down to completion, she adds, "Drywall is when the emotional barometer really drops—once you get through it, everything will feel better."

Zoe’s Home Remodeling Advice

Use HGTV for entertainment.
The time-elapsed home renovations popular on TV and TikTok leave out the messy stuff. "In the same way those reality dating shows are nothing like dating in real life, remodeling shows have nothing to do with the reality of a major renovation," says Kardasis Sturtz. Most projects take months or even years from concept to completion, "so don’t use HGTV as research—it’s really for entertainment."

Rethink an addition.
Multipurpose spaces today’s families want don’t always require an addition. "People will sometimes say they want to ‘pop off’ a roof, which is actually a very big undertaking," says Kardasis Sturtz, who recommends looking for extra space in your basement, which are common to homes in the Midwest. "That can sometimes be a terrific way to add 700 square feet of living space that can make a huge difference for a family."

Don’t Google it.
Google isn’t a great predictor of project costs. "If the information is too easy to get, it’s probably not that reliable," says Kardasis Sturtz. If you need ballpark figures for a project, sources like Remodeling magazine’s annual Cost vs. Value Report can show you what average kitchen, bathroom, and other projects really cost in your zip code.

Beware of trendy finishes.
"I’m personally not a fan of sliding barn doors, and shiplap wall paneling that was all the rage just a couple years ago is already passé," Kardasis Sturtz says. She recommends finding inspiration in existing materials, from using the same wood species and hardware finishes to matching historic millwork. "Even if you’re aiming for something modern, finding a way to at least nod to the historic features in your home can help take your house through another couple of generations."

St. Paul writer Laura Billings Coleman is a frequent contributor to Macalester Today.
In life, fashion choices can say a lot about who someone is, whether the choices are intentional or not. Onstage and onscreen, however, what the performers wear very intentionally conveys meaning. In fact, every button, boot, and beret is usually the result of meticulous research and creative design. As a professional costume and scenic designer with dozens of productions under her belt, Theater and Dance Department visiting assistant professor Sarah Bahr offers students a real-world experience in the backstage drama of costume design.

**What is the role of the costume designer in a production?**

Our role is to define a character. We make a lot of design choices that tell the audience something about that character before they even speak any words, dance any movement, or sing any songs. Something about the costume signals to the audience that this is their personality, their occupation, or their status. It also can be psychological. Sometimes audience members are not going to be able to articulate what they saw, how they felt, or why, but we’re making choices like using a muted color tone to help lower the mood, for example.

**What are the fundamental skills that a costume designer must have?**

Script analysis and character analysis, being able to take a story and have a personal relationship with it. You also have to be collaborative and possess the flexibility to shift your design choices to best tell the story and support the characters. You can’t have an ego in theater, because at its heart, theater is a collaborative art form that brings a variety of artists with specialized skills together to tell stories and inspire audiences.

Then there are the design basics: how line, texture, color and shape all work together to create a design and say something about the character.

A lot of costume design classes teach costume or fashion history, but it’s quite a broad topic. It’s also Western- and Euro-centric, so I teach students how to be good researchers instead. Being a good researcher means you can go into any project and say, “Yep, I know exactly what I need to learn more about.”

**As a professional who has worked on all different types of productions, how do you make sure to remain authentic to a culture that is not your own?**

When I’m approached to work on a project, I trust that a director believes I have the research, communication, and design skills to tell the story authentically and in the right way. I make sure to ask ques-
tions and utilize my resources, which sometimes includes a cultural consultant, to support and uplift the characters and cultures.

**How do you teach students about cultural appropriation?**

We talk about how cultural appropriation in theater has been going on for centuries and is still going on. We look at the different ways that appropriation has been done in theater and fashion, and also talk about ways to approach the work where you’re not appropriating, but rather you’re uplifting and having a cultural exchange.

For example, if you’re designing a play set in the Elizabethan era, the cast of actors will most likely be diverse with varied cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds, along with gender identities that don’t align with the characters in the script. Your research needs to be representative of your actor so that they can see themselves in the character and time period. A more in-depth research journey will create a more nuanced and inclusive costume design.

**What skills does costume designing teach that are useful both on and offstage?**

Collaboration is key. In any other aspect of your life, you’re going to be working with other people. If you learn how to communicate and share your work in progress, you can be a good collaborator.

In the theater or any other workplace, you can’t just come to the table with a final product and say, “I’m done, that’s it.” Being part of a team that comes up with a final product that you’re all proud of, that’s what students gain from this class.

**How do you know when you’ve done a great job?**

I love going to opening nights. There’s an excitement in the air with seeing the first real performance where the design, the acting and the blocking are set, and now we’re going to put it all together in front of an audience for the first time. I like to sit in the back of the theater and just observe people’s reactions and take in the entire stage picture. I’m always proud of that moment, even if there are little details that we didn’t get to refine or if I’m questioning whether I made the right choices. Once it’s opening night, you don’t change it. You just let the artform be itself. At that point, I feel like all the collaborators should just celebrate. We did this. We made this together.

Note: The work pictured above is by Kitty Jiang ’24 (Lacey, Wash.). The sketch and rendering are for the Character Design Project in which the students chose a short story and developed designs for a character in three drastically different styles. Kitty chose “Hansel and Gretel” and one of her concepts was designing Gretel’s costume in the style of a horror movie/dark fairy tale.

SPRING 2023 / 35
YOUR GIFT TODAY MAKES FOR A BETTER FUTURE

You already know the impact a single person can have on a community and the impact that community can have on the world. Your contributions are part of a legacy of philanthropy, generosity, and progress, and we hope you will consider a gift to the Macalester Fund.

Choose how your Macalester Fund gift is directed to elevate the programs and causes closest to your heart, or choose to support it all.

Give by May 31 at macalester.edu/giving or by calling 866-814-0640.

LAST LOOK

Springfest

A survey to plan 1992’s Springfest declares: “People do wear their Springfest T’s after Springfest. Check out the designs from past years. Last year’s has a neon green ‘sun’ on the front. 1990 was an Aztec theme, 1989 was the naked people, and 1988 was little stick figures partying on a big Springfest logo. Please send us your ideas for this year’s shirts. How many people want a tie-dye and do you want it premade or do you want to have a tie-dye workshop so you can make your own?”

Macalester has only two Springfest T-shirts in its archival collections. Please consider donating your Springfest T-shirt to the archives.

What are your memories of Springfest? Share them with us at archives@macalester.edu!
The Macalester Pep Band invited members of the Mac community to play with them and help cheer on the men’s basketball team at a winter game in a loud and lively Leonard Center.