Entrepreneurial Adventurers

How two Mac grads turned a side business into a $450 million deal with Google.

SEE PAGE 34
Macalester Today

WINTER 2013

Features

Why Big Data is a Big Deal 10
Macalester enters the brave new world of exploring and understanding giant sets of data.

School Starter 14
Remembering the need in Kenya, Jim Cummings ’86 started a nonprofit to develop and build schools in Africa.

Not-So-Risky Business 16
How crowd-funding is changing the way Macalester alumni finance their creative projects — from games to films.

Art, Amplified 22
Macalester breaks ground on a renovation and expansion of the studio art building.

One Night at Macalester 26
A visual tour of campus on a busy November evening

The Winding Road to Wildfire 34
Entrepreneurs Victoria Ransom ’99 and Alain Chuard ’99 turned a side business into a multimillion-dollar Google deal.

We have an app for that.

Been wanting to access Macalester Today on your iPad? Now you can. Just go to the App Store and search for Macalester Today. You’ll enjoy all the stories from the print edition plus video, audio, and photo extras.

ON THE COVER: Alain Chuard ’99 and Victoria Ransom ’99 in the Wildfire offices. (photo by Robert Houser/roberthouser.com)
Departments

Letters 2
Household Words 3
Summit to St. Clair 4
Scots watch, sky saver, girl power, and more

Class Notes 36
Mac Weddings 40
In Memoriam 46
Grandstand 48
Public art on campus

Thank you for the coverage of public art on campus (“Art all over,” Fall 2012). The person most responsible for encouraging the addition of art to public spaces on campus is Joan Adams Mondale ’52, arts advocate and Macalester trustee from 1986 to 2007. As a member of the Trustee Buildings and Grounds Committee she continually spoke of the importance of public art in enhancing the Macalester experience for all. We owe her a great debt of gratitude for her foresight.

Alexander G. Hill ’57 P ’85
Minneapolis, Minn.

Rising Tuition

Is there any hope for getting tuition increases under the rate of inflation? I just heard of an impressive and admirable list of Macalester accomplishments. But I also know the college had a 3.9 percent tuition increase this year. That doesn’t sound too odious until you ponder that the year-over-year increase in CPI-U for September was 2.0 percent. Does anyone care that tuition increases are running nearly double the rate of inflation? Or care what happens when these increases are compounded over many years? As it is, Mac is headed in the direction of serving only the rich (who can afford it) and the poor (who get financial aid). The middle class will be nonexistent.

Dan Brindell ’78 (via LinkedIn)
Philadelphia, Penn.

The economist William Baumol addressed Baumol’s cost disease in the 1960s. The CPI rate of inflation is an average. Some items will increase slower than inflation; others will grow faster. Baumol’s work showed that labor-intensive service industries (e.g., healthcare, education) cannot take advantage of as many technological improvements as other industries (e.g., manufacturing) to lower costs. In practice, our donations to Macalester help keep a customized, labor-intensive service affordable to the next generation of donors.

Joel Goldstein ’87 (via LinkedIn)
Greensboro, N.C.

Correction

I was surprised and appreciative when I saw the Class Notes piece about my recent work with the U.S. Olympic fencing team in London, where the women’s epee team won the bronze medal. However, as much as I enjoyed seeing it, I must make a correction. I did not coach the team in Sydney team at the 2000 Games. Can’t take credit for someone else’s work. But thanks for the notice on our win in London. That was a great day.

Ro Sobalvarro ’80
St. Paul, Minn.

20 Smartest Colleges

Business Insider included Macalester in its November list of the “20 Smartest Colleges in America.” A posting of that inclusion on Facebook yielded 233 likes, 101 shares, and 10 comments, mostly of the “Go Mac!” variety.

First job after college?

I was a teacher for two years. I learned very quickly that teachers are not valued by society and that education is viewed as overhead and not an investment in our future.

Jack Cluth ’82
Portland, Ore.

I served in AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps based in Charleston, S.C. I learned the importance of adapting to new situations, working with diverse communities and individuals, and how much inequality and need exists within the U.S.

Beth Azuma-Moy ’03
Chicago

I spent the summer after graduation as a Cave Resource Technician for GeoCorps in the Tongass National Forest on Prince of Wales Island, Alaska. Loved it. I learned that some personalities clash in a work setting. My field partner and I both thought that the other was super-adventurous and not cautious enough. I learned that I enjoy working in a situation where teamwork and collaboration is essential.

Andru Peters ’63
Lake City, Minn.

LETTERS POLICY

We invite letters of 300 words or fewer. Letters may be edited for clarity, style, and space and will be published based on their relevance to issues discussed in Macalester Today. You can send letters to llamb@macalester.edu or to Macalester Today, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105.
Among many people, the phrase "strategic planning" inspires roughly the same level of enthusiasm as does the phrase "driver’s license renewal." This is unsurprising. Too often strategic planning exercises are slow, overly complicated, and unfocused, and their results cautious and vague, sacrificing clarity and boldness for broad palatability. Such exercises can consume an institution’s most precious resource—time—and yield few meaningful results.

This need not be the case. Properly conceived, strategic planning is a chance for the members of an organization to sharpen their understanding of that organization’s mission and to adopt the right strategies for carrying it forward. It’s a chance to strengthen and excite a community by identifying and supporting the best ideas its members have to offer. It’s a chance to address challenges before they become crises and to turn opportunities into advantages.

Here, in my view, are the wrong reasons for the Macalester community to embark on a new round of strategic planning: because we haven’t done so in a while; because we’ve recently completed a major capital campaign; because we’re only a few years away from our next accreditation review. All of these things are true and typically cited as bases for strategic planning, but if they are the chief drivers of our work the process is likely to be mechanical and the outcome unsatisfactory.

Here are the right reasons: because to thrive as a college we need to become better as a college; because we’re in the midst of a period of dramatic challenges and changes to higher education and particularly to high-cost residential liberal arts colleges; because we must figure out a way to make difficult choices informed by a shared sense of mission and purpose; because it will benefit our society if Macalester and places like it succeed in educating young people at the highest level. These are the drivers that have the potential to make strategic planning meaningful and truly important.

Because Macalester is by virtually any measure a strong institution, our planning can move forward with a sense of confidence in the college’s future. It should also, however, move forward with a sense of urgency, given some clear signs that the world within which we will operate will afford little room for error. This year, for the first time on record, the discount rate for the entire student body will exceed 50 percent. This suggests a level of financial need and price sensitivity among prospective students and their families that we have not previously seen. Almost daily, stories appear in the popular and academic press about the growing problem of student debt, the growing influence of “massive open online courses” (MOOCs) developed by top-tier universities, and the broad defunding of higher education at the state level. Were our confidence to become complacency, we would be making a serious mistake.

This spring we will begin a process of strategic planning at Macalester. Though the structure of that process hasn’t been determined, it seems only fair for me to articulate its basic parameters. I expect it to proceed at a pace that is not rushed but expeditious. I expect it to allow for extensive community discussion and input, but also for a group of manageable size to discuss difficult issues extensively and in confidence. I expect it to result in a plan for moving forward that can be broadly embraced but that is focused on a finite set of critical issues and includes tough choices.

Among the questions such a process must seriously consider are these: What changes to our practices and priorities seem most likely to place Macalester on a sustainable economic path? How can and should technology alter the way we do our work? What set of curricular and co-curricular programs will best prepare students for personal, economic, and civic success? How should our mission as a globally focused institution and our location as an urban college affect the choices we make?

I would encourage all who care about the college to pay careful attention as this planning process unfolds and to engage with it when opportunities present themselves. This is important.

We have volumes of information about what Macalester is today. The central question before us now is both basic and enormously complex: What at heart do we want Macalester to be tomorrow?

BRIAN ROSENBERG, the president of Macalester, writes a regular column for Macalester Today. He can be reached at rosenbergb@macalester.edu.
SAVING NEW MEXICAN SKIES

AKILAH SANDERS-REED ’16 was only 15 when she began organizing events to raise awareness of climate change. She was 17—still too young to vote—when she filed suit against the governor and State of New Mexico to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and protect the atmosphere over the state.

Ever since hearing a speech by environmentalist and author Bill McKibben, Sanders-Reed has been an activist—organizing events, speaking to student groups, and leading service projects like cleaning up the banks of the Rio Grande. That river runs through Albuquerque, near her mountain hometown of Sandia Park, N.M.

“Climate change is our generation’s defining issue,” says Sanders-Reed. “This is not abstract for us; it will absolutely impact our lives and we have a moral imperative to act.” Even if humans could survive climate change, she says, “We don’t have the right to take the polar bears and coral reefs down with us.”

Her lawsuit is based on the public trust doctrine, the principle that government is obligated to preserve certain resources for the public good. It was filed in May 2011 by Sanders-Reed “by and through her parents” along with WildEarth Guardians, a conservation organization focused on the American West.

The defendants filed a motion to dismiss, but last summer Judge Sarah Singleton denied their motion. She also allowed the plaintiffs to submit interrogatories, including questions for the State about the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and how factors like drought, wildfires, and the economy were considered when the state repealed its greenhouse gas emissions regulations in 2012.

Sanders-Reed’s lawsuit is part of a larger climate litigation strategy through which youth plaintiffs have brought legal actions in nine other states and at the federal level.

“I’ve always had a soft spot for the environment,” says Sanders-Reed. “I was the kid who wouldn’t let other kids step on an anthill.” Now she lives in the mountains and loves to ski, but she fears, not only for the landscape, but also for the New Mexico’s cultural heritage—such as Native American communities and old haciendas—threatened by drought and fire.

Not surprisingly, Mac’s strong Environmental Studies Department was a big draw for Sanders-Reed, as was its urban location (“great for grassroots organizing”) with easy access to the outdoors. By the end of her first semester, she was already working with MPIRG, 350.org (founded by McKibben), and the Sustainability Office. She hopes to soon take up public speaking with student groups, as she did in New Mexico.

What headline would Sanders-Reed most like to wake up to? “U.S. Signs Binding Commitment to Reduce CO2.” Until then, she’s organizing youth, speaking out, and suing her home state. “Youth,” she says with absolute conviction, “have the moral authority and the drive to change things.”
Mac's first online course

Macalester will pilot its first online course this summer, offering calculus to students of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM). Details aren't yet worked out, but one thing is certain: It won’t be a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)—noncredit courses aimed at large-scale participation.

The class, to be taught by Mac math professor Chad Topaz and St. Olaf College math professor Tina Garrett, is an experiment. According to Provost Kathleen Murray, ACM top administrators wanted to see if there might be a distinctive platform for small residential liberal arts colleges in the world of online learning. Because colleges were aware that some students choose to take a required calculus course at home over the summer, says Murray, “We wanted to see if we can offer a better option.”

Logistical details, such as registration and fees, are still being determined by an ACM advisory committee. But rather than delay the course, “We decided to ‘build the bicycle and ride it at the same time,’” says Murray. “Thankfully, we have two fabulous faculty members designing the course. I know they believe it could actually be more effective than a traditional classroom experience.”

One of those details is class size, but the thinking is the online class will probably enroll 20 to 25 students rather than the thousands who might take a MOOC. Also, unlike in MOOCs, students will receive academic credit at their home institutions.

“I am thrilled to be a part of this project,” says Topaz. “It’s not technology for technology’s sake. It’s a chance to provide a service to our students. Offering calculus in the summer may help students who have schedule constraints, such as those who are pre-med, have double majors, or plan to study abroad.”

Topaz anticipates offering interactive online office hours and weekly online tutorials, adding virtual face time to the online learning experience.

“I don’t think ACM colleges will ever have a huge number of online offerings,” says Murray, “but if this experiment shows us that we have a distinctive voice in the online world, I expect the consortium will build additional courses. We’re exploring the question of whether there’s a way to offer online instruction that is true to our educational values.”

Shiny New Bookstore

Mac’s textbook store, formerly on second floor Lampert, and its Highlander store, formerly in the Campus Center’s lower level, moved together into one newly remodeled bright space on the first floor of the Lampert Building. Located next door to Garrison Keillor’s Common Good Books, the Highlander store sells snacks, school supplies, and logo wear, as well as textbooks.
“EVERYTHING IN THIS COURSE has shady areas that can be ethically and morally debated. I love this since I can argue for a long time,” says Guillermo Vera ’16 (Caracas, Venezuela) of his first-year course Biotech and Society.

Covering such hot topics as stem cell research, genetic testing, and genetically modified foods, this class is designed to expose students to the science behind these issues, while also engaging them with the moral and ethical issues involved.

“You open up the newspaper and every day there is some new issue related to genetics/molecular biology,” biology professor Mary Montgomery explains. “I want my students to be able to read the newspaper without taking what’s said at face value, and to have a deeper understanding of what’s involved in these applications of genetic technology so they can make informed decisions when these technologies affect their lives.”

A course highlight comes during the unit on genetically modified food, when Montgomery takes the class to the St. Paul Farmers Market. Everything that’s sold at the downtown market is produced on small farms located within 50 miles of the city. However, not all the produce sold there is raised on organic farms, which allows the students, says Montgomery, to “actually talk to real farmers about why they are or are not organic farmers.”

This outing is particularly popular with students. The idea of local farmers using chemicals was surprising to Olivia Sparks ’16 (Eldon, Mo.), who comes from an area with a large Mennonite population. “Where I come from I’m used to getting organic vegetables from the Mennonite farms,” says Sparks. Not all of the day’s surprises were related to questions of organics, however. “I saw fresh Brussels sprouts and wild cranberries for the first time that day. Talk about culture shock!” laughs the South American Vera.

The residential component of this course undoubtedly plays a role in its atmosphere. Many of the students arrive early for class and lively conversations regularly ensue on everything from other courses to what they did the previous weekend. The upbeat atmosphere carries throughout the hour. “People in this class know each other better than in my other classes, which makes it more entertaining because of the inside jokes,” says Vera.

Another strength of residential courses is the potential to meet like-minded students. “As a pre-med major, I enjoy getting to know other people with similar majors and interests,” says Sparks. Montgomery enjoys the friendlier atmosphere as well. “It’s just fun. You find out who is roaming with whom and you get to know the students better and potentially for four years,” she says.

As expected given the nature of the issues Biotech and Society addresses, discussion plays a large role in the course. “Prior to Macalester, I’d never spent an entire class on pure discussion. It’s great to engage in these talks with my peers,” says Vera. “The ability to think critically and express my opinions has never been challenged as much as it has been here at Macalester.” —Donovan Kavish ’13

Living together
About two-thirds of the 33 first-year courses offered at Mac last fall were residential ones. Now the college has statistics showing that students who share a dorm floor as well as a first-year class stay enrolled at higher levels than those who don’t—93.7 versus 89.9. Living together, it turns out, is good for more than just fun.

Fourth meal: A convivial group enjoys a new addition to Macalester’s dining program—fourth meal, served twice a semester at Café Mac between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m.
On her way to becoming a French teacher, Hannah Warman ’13 (Vancouver, Wash.) has twice visited Africa. Her first journey to that continent came in a fairly typical way for a Macalester student: She spent fall semester last year in Cameroon on a social pluralism and development study abroad program. But when she returned to Africa in July, it was to devote six weeks to working alongside French professor Jean Pierre Karegeye, researching representations of women in post-genocide literature. Although Warman spent a good deal of her time reading and taking notes from books, she had more than a few memorable Rwandan experiences outside the library walls.

First, to get a context for their work, Warman and Karegeye traveled around the country, visiting genocide sites and meeting survivors. Warman also met with several women’s organizations in the capital city of Kigali, interviewing their leaders to better understand the situation of women in post-genocide Rwanda.

“It was amazing,” says the French and educational studies major. “I learned so much but there is so much more to know. It’s a very interesting and complicated region.”

Meeting author Yolanda Mukagasana, a genocide survivor and memoirist, was a highlight of her trip, says Warman. Another unforgettable experience was taking part in a genocide denial conference, where Warman translated and assisted Karegeye, who spoke at the conference.

The summer research in Rwanda, enriching as it was, wasn’t the first time Warman had collaborated with Karegeye, however. A paper she wrote for his class on child soldiers was recently published in Peace Review, a social justice journal put out by the University of San Francisco. Her topic: The ways in which comic strips and French graphic novels, called bande dessinée, treat serious subjects such as child soldiers. “It was unexpected to get a journal article published as an undergraduate,” she says.

As her time at Mac draws to a close, Warman is quite pleased at having had the chance to collaborate with a faculty member while in college. “I knew it was possible to work with professors, but I thought an opportunity like that would take more seeking out on my part,” she says. “Professor Karegeye has been great, passing along translation jobs and helping me secure the faculty/student research grant that allowed me to travel to Rwanda. I’m so thankful for the experience.”
A mentor can make a big impact on a child. Just ask Bailey Rehnberg ’14 (York, Pa.), who founded the Athletic Department’s Little Scots program this semester.

Rehnberg has never forgotten her own mentor (“I basically worshipped her”) from a hometown program that matched female college athletes with local girls. That experience gave her the idea to start a similar program at Mac.

The idea caught on quickly, both with her Mac peers and the elementary school girls Rehnberg connected with through local grade schools and faculty and staff members. Because of the budget allocated by student government, Rehnberg planned to limit the program to 20 pairs but ended up matching 35 girls with mentors and turning away 15 more. There’s certainly room to grow in the future, she says, but her priority was to have a successful start with quality experiences—and whenever possible, to match each kid with a Mac athlete who plays that kid’s favorite sport.

Her timing was right for another reason, as well: the 40th anniversary of Title IX, the legislation that broadened athletic opportunities for women and girls. “We’ve been talking a lot about Title IX on my volleyball team and even in my classes, and in Little Scots we’re fostering relationships in which we can talk about what Title IX means today,” Rehnberg says.

By year’s end the mentors had hosted two events, with two more planned for spring. In November the pairs met to watch a women’s swimming and diving meet, and in December they watched the women’s basketball team beat St. Olaf. Program participants got Little Scots T-shirts, ate pizza, and played games together during halftime.

The relationships Rehnberg was hoping to develop have started to form, she says. “It’s not really anything I can make happen on my own,” she says. “When a little kid is with a big kid and they’re talking and having fun—that’s just a really valuable thing.”
Scots Watch

• Real Food: Last fall Macal-ester became the first Min-nesota college to sign the national Real Food Campus Commitment. The pledge promises that the college will purchase at least 30 percent “real food” by 2020. Real food is defined as community based, ecologically sound, humanely produced, or fairly traded. (The standard com-mitment asks for 20 percent real food, but Mac was already sourc-ing more than that.)

• Mac at Nite: A late-night event combining free pizza, ice cream, and tie-dye was one of the hit events in the college’s new Mac at Nite program. Toppers and Tie Dye drew 350 students to Bateman Plaza on a warm September night, following a Campus Center showing of The Avengers. It’s part of the college’s intentional increase in late-night programs over the past year, in response to student interest.

• Global Ambas-sadors: To help prospective interna-tional students learn more about Mac, the Admissions Office has started a Global Ambassa-dors Program. It creates a more structured system of worldwide recruitment, with current and past international students speaking to high schoolers in their home countries when they return for visits. “It’s great to go back and show students at your old school, Look, this is where I’ve ended up, this is what you can achieve too,” says Vincent Siegerink ’14 (Utrecht, Netherlands).

One of the beauties of a liberal arts college is the way it allows students to discover them-selves—and their abiding interests—while still in college.

At Macalester this has certainly paid off for Patrick Snyder ’13 (Versailles, Ky.). Although he’s majoring in Hispanic and interna-tional studies, in the last two years he has become fascinated by Arabic and global health, areas that will likely influence his fu-ture career. “I have a lot of interests pulling me in all sorts of directions,” he says, “but I’m starting to see how they might coalesce.”

The exciting political developments of Arab Spring motivated Snyder—who’d already studied German as well as Spanish—to take on Arabic too. He began his studies while studying abroad in Seville, Spain, in fall 2011, and has continued learning the language ever since.

Last summer he was among a small group of U.S. students to receive a U.S. State De-partment Critical Language Scholarship. Snyder spent the summer in Tunis, Tunisia, where he learned an entire year’s worth of Arabic in two months.

In Tunis he lived with a host family in a suburb by the sea, studying Arabic for many hours a day and attending cultural outings in his free time. Despite the challenges, he loved living in Tunisia, an experience that took him from a beginning Arabic speaker to an ad-vanced one.

“People were excited to meet an American who spoke their language,” he says. “It’s the last thing they expected, and a great way to foster understanding among people.”

Back at Macalester, Snyder is also pursuing his interest in global health. A class on Poverty, Health and Development taught by Institute for Global Citizenship Dean Christy Hanson, piqued his interest in the topic. He has since participated in a WHO conference on neglected tropical diseases and is publish-ing a paper from that conference with a group of fellow students.

Snyder also serves as Mac’s student body president, a time-consuming yet rewarding involvement he calls “a great lesson in leadership and communicating across differences.”

Snyder’s post-graduation plans are uncer-tain, though he has applied for fellowships in Egypt and Morocco and with the Global Health Corps.

Ultimately he hopes to pursue a career in public health, possibly in the Middle East. “The two things I’m most interested in, Arabic and public health, I stumbled onto only a year ago,” he says. Although he admits it hasn’t been easy to fit in all his academic passions since then, he wouldn’t have it any other way.
WHY BIG DATA IS A BIG DEAL

Macalester enters the brave new world of exploring and understanding giant sets of data.
BIG DATA IS GIVING SCIENTISTS ENTIRELY NEW WAYS to understand ourselves and the world around us. Thanks to a new grant, Macalester students will get a jump on this important scientific movement.

When the U.S. Human Genome Project began in 1990, it took scientists 13 years to determine the sequence of all 3 billion chemical base pairs that make up human DNA. Last February, a company in the United Kingdom announced that its technology could finish the same task in an afternoon. The speed at which we are generating new data is staggering. And there’s no question that our world is awash in data in ways that would have seemed inconceivable just a decade or two ago, from Google searches that turn up billions of results to millions of newly digitized health records.

These large, complex data sets are too big to handle with typical database tools such as spreadsheets, but they offer tantalizing opportunities for new discoveries and innovation. Indeed, the U.S. government recently committed $200 million to focus on big data projects. But the data itself means nothing without the ability to understand and interpret it. Unlocking the power of these numbers—finding trends, sussing out quirks—requires programs and tools that go beyond the typical quantitative skills traditionally taught in the college classroom. But that needs to change, says biology professor Paul Overvoorde. “To handle these increasingly complex and big data sets, students need to be able to
manipulate, reformat, recategorize, and explore them,” he says. “This is going to be a fundamental skill they’re going to need as they move forward in their careers.”

Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) is betting on Macalester to develop curricula and programs that do just that—and not only for its own students but potentially for schools across the nation. HHMI, known for providing science education grants to schools that pursue large and challenging ideas, recently awarded Macalester a four-year, $1.3 million grant to develop ambitious teaching and research programs linked to big data. “You could call it venture capital,” says Helen Warren, director of corporate and foundation relations. “With fewer restrictions [than other grants], we have the chance to experiment. But we’ll do so using ways of learning that have been proven over time.”

Macalester will be one of the first schools in the nation to bring cutting-edge data computation classes to all its science majors. And through additional fellowships, more than 50 students will be able to use those skills on real-world research projects located around the globe. With several other top liberal arts schools looking on, Macalester’s work has the potential to have national impact.

**TEACHING THE GRAMMAR OF DATA**

Twenty years ago, science students could get by with a working knowledge of a spreadsheet program. Those days are long gone, says Danny Kaplan, DeWitt Wallace Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science. “Excel isn’t going to cut it,” he says. “In today’s world, students can’t escape big data. Though it won’t be easy to teach it, it will only get harder as they move into their professional training.”

To that end, Kaplan and computer science professor Libby Shoop have developed a one-credit class called Data Computation Fundamentals, which is being offered beginning this semester. Though Kaplan doesn’t pretend the course can address all the complexities of specific software packages, he does hope it will provide a framework that students can apply when they come across databases or data-reliant programs in biology, chemistry, and physics. “We believe we can give students that grammar of data that they need to use these modern capabilities,” he says.

For example, a student who wants to compare the results from a genome-scale experiment done with yeast to those in a large, public database will need an understanding of data structure to do so. They will be able to download data, analyze the information, and then draw conclusions based on the comparisons.

Building a course like this may seem only logical, but so far, few have tried. Most computational courses today are graduate-level courses designed for specialists, so Macalester’s smaller and more generalized approach is unique, according to provost Kathleen Murray. “The way we’re thinking about approaching the course could become a model for other schools,” she says.

Indeed, five other schools, including Smith and Grinnell Colleges, have signed on as members of the Computation and Visualization Consortium, a project led by Macalester that will help faculty from all the colleges develop, refine, and share computation course ideas and materials. Kaplan is also developing the data computation fundamentals course...
with an eye toward online learning, so that students at Macalester and elsewhere could take the class when it’s most convenient for them.

The goal, says Overvoorde, is to develop courses that will last long beyond the four years of grant funding. “When you build a network of colleagues like this, it not only increases the innovation, but improves the chances of sustainability,” he says.

**BIG DATA, BOLD RESEARCH**

To help students make the most of new coursework, Macalester has developed four new research opportunities with the help of HHMI grant funding. As a result, dozens of students will have the opportunity to apply their computational knowledge to research on campus, in the Twin Cities, and halfway around the world.

Perhaps the most ambitious is the Global Health Scholars Program, led by biology professors Liz Jansen and Devavani Chatterjea. It began last fall with an upper-level biology and chemistry course called Projects in Global Health, in which a dozen students studied topics ranging from tuberculosis diagnostics to meningitis. They each tackled a specific project—such as differing rates of tuberculosis infection among HIV-positive and non-HIV-positive patients—by analyzing current data and primary literature. They hope to come up with new insights based on their research.

In January, the students headed to Uganda, where they presented reports to a group of physicians, scientists, and government officials. Students’ work, believes Jansen, will have a real impact. “Our collaborators may have access to the same literature we do, but our students have the time to do a deep dive into the technical literature and synthesize it in a way that hasn’t been done before,” she says. In future years, students may tackle some of the reams of data that these same experts have on paper—but haven’t yet been committed to electronic databases.

Meanwhile, the Macalester–HHMI Data Researchers program will allow rising juniors and seniors to do big data summer research. Although the work can be done at Macalester or any major research institution, says Overvoorde, some students may choose to pursue, for example, work already underway at Macalester’s Katharine Ordway Natural History Study Area in Inver Grove Heights. There biology professors Mark Davis, Jerald Dosch, Mike Anderson, and Sarah Boyer are working on a collaborative project. “Students collect data about tree size and growth to look at the rates of carbon sequestration and the impact, potentially, on global warming,” he says. Combined with the work of researchers from more than 50 other schools, the Ecological Research as Education Network database provides a rich source of information that can be mined in many ways.

Another program, the Hughes Young Investigators program, is designed to give on-campus research opportunities to a diverse group of students the summer after their freshman year. The Academic Health Sciences Summer Research Program will send students planning to attend medical school to the University of Minnesota, where they’ll team up with physicians who also run independent research labs.

**SCALING UP**

Creating and exploring big data sets offers one of the most irresistible opportunities for innovation and discovery in the sciences today. But it’s clear that the work being done now is just scratching the surface of possibility. From the Census to Facebook to Amazon, the ways we can learn from the deluge of data are growing.

Today, the focus on teaching big data skills is intended primarily for science students, but as time goes on there will likely be interest from other fields as well. Social scientists, including sociologists, economists, and anthropologists, are starting to use these tools as well. And a small but growing interest in the “digital humanities” also may find increasing value in big data projects, says Murray. “The notion of how we think about data is going to permeate all of higher ed,” she says. “And the work we’re doing through the grant will prepare a whole cohort of students for the kind of analysis that will be necessary in the work they do beyond Macalester.”

*Minneapolis writer ERIN PETERSON is a regular contributor to Macalester Today.*

**Big Data Primer**

- **RESEARCH.** Big data is the next frontier for innovation, competition, and productivity. [bit.ly/tE7fiZ](http://bit.ly/tE7fiZ)
- **GOVERNMENT.** Big data is a big deal. [1.usa.gov/134aPT4](http://1.usa.gov/134aPT4)
- **NEWS.** Datanami is a news portal dedicated to providing insight, analysis, and information about emerging trends in big data. [datanami.com](http://datanami.com)
The Benjamin School in North Palm Beach, Florida, is an elite private institution that offers Mandarin Chinese, more than 20 Advanced Placement classes, and sends graduates on to some of the country’s most prestigious colleges. For most of its history, the Ebusiloli Secondary School in rural Kenya had no running water, no electricity, and students who walked hours every day just to get to class.

It would be hard to find two institutions with a greater resource gap between them. Yet one critical bit of human capital they’ve shared is Jim Cummings ’86, a history teacher who has leveraged his connections in both communities to broaden the global perspective of students in America, and the lifelong prospects of students in Africa.

It started in the late ’90s, when members of the Benjamin School cross-country team, which Cummings coached, wanted to hold a run to build camaraderie and raise money for charity. “I realized I knew just the place that could use their help,” says Cummings, who often spoke to his students of the two years he’d spent as a World Teach volunteer in Kenya after graduating from Macalester with a history and international studies degree.

Cummings took the funds he and his team raised and started returning to Bunyore, Kenya, in the summers, supervising improvement projects at Ebusiloli’s primary and secondary schools, researching future needs, and returning with stories for his Florida classrooms.

“Seeing how much we could accomplish with just a little money became kind of addictive,” says Cummings, who brought books and science equipment to the schools as well as planted trees, added solar power, and improved the buildings. Enrollment skyrocketed.

The entire venture was so compelling that in 2002 Cummings created an official 501c3 nonprofit, Kijana Educational Empowerment Initiative (kijana is Swahili for youth), recruiting three Macalester classmates—Robert Gass ’85, Helga Ying ’87, and Mark Madison ’86—to serve on his board.

Relying on email, Skype discussions, and the deep friendships that Cummings has nurtured in Kenya for more than a decade, KEEI in 2005 added a second project in the town of Mwituha, about eight kilometers away, where there was no secondary school. Kids had been walking for six hours each day to attend school. In Mwituha KEEI converted two abandoned schoolrooms into a campus for nearly 300 secondary students, built a library, amphitheater, and science lab, stocked classroom shelves with thousands of books, and provided shade by planting hundreds of trees. According to Gass, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Togo currently working in Thailand, the organization’s investments in more than 25 schools have been powerful proof that “well-equipped schools can be put in place at relatively low cost.” Madison, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service historian, estimates that creating the entire Mwituha Secondary School campus cost only $125,000,
Remembering the need in Kenya, Jim Cummings ’86 started a nonprofit to develop and build schools.

adding, “That’s probably what most schools would spend on their sports facilities.” (The final Mac board member, Ying, is senior director of government affairs for Levi Strauss & Co.)

Another factor that has kept KEEI “insanely cost efficient,” as Madison puts it, is Cummings’s own commitment to empowering African students through education, and connecting them (via Skype and summit-style discussions) with students in the U.S. “Basically, because of Jim’s altruism we have zero overhead,” says Madison.

In 2009 Cummings resigned from the Benjamin School to run KEEI full time, funded by his personal savings. He hopes to soon create a sustainable financial base that can support and staff the nonprofit’s growth. “It’s been a big leap of faith and the jury’s still out on whether he’ll succeed,” Madison says, though the Kenyan school communities KEEI has invested in clearly appreciate the effort. “There are buildings named after me…,” Cummings admits, “and children.”

With more time to spend in Kenya, Cummings has been working closely with the local governments that run the schools, and he’s especially proud of the schools’ surging enrollment and test scores, highly qualified local teachers, and graduates who’ve gone on to universities from Nairobi to Arkansas. “We don’t just want to build schools—we want great schools,” he says. “There’s an incredible amount of human wealth and capital in Kenya. There’s a future Steve Jobs, a future Bill Gates out there in rural Kenya. The world is losing out if we don’t help these people get access to education.”

It’s a message he’s sharing not only with potential American donors, but with Kenyans as well. “The economic growth that parts of Africa have enjoyed in recent years is probably one of the untold stories in the world right now,” says Cummings. The west, he adds, is just beginning to notice the country’s progressive embrace of technology and mobile money systems like M-Pesa, where an estimated third of Kenya’s Gross Domestic Product is transferred among mobile phones every year. “So one of our goals is to find financial support through small contributions from Kenyans, maybe right on their cell phones.”

Also on the list of priorities is exploring whether KEEI’s model could be expanded beyond the Bunyore region, to Tanzania, Uganda, and other communities that have taken note of KEEI’s success. “It’s something we may look into,” he says. “Though there’s a lifetime of work right here.”

And then there’s one pipe dream that Cummings believes Kenya’s growing economy could really use. “There are more students who want to go to university than there are places for them, but one thing they don’t have is a liberal arts college,” he says. “I guess you could say Macalester made a big impression on me because someday I’d really love to see a school like that in Kenya.”

St. Paul writer LAURA BILLINGS COLEMAN is a regular contributor to Macalester Today.
Not-So-Risky Business

How crowd-funding is changing the way Macalester alumni finance their creative projects—from games to films.

Creative people come up with ideas for projects—cool things to make, do, and perform—all the time. Sure, some ideas stink and deserve to quietly fade away. But artists and innovators spend a lot of time developing the good ideas, and then often struggle to find the financing to complete their projects. Unfortunately, that means some artistic endeavors never move beyond inception—and thus never get shared with the rest of us. That’s where crowd-funding—the idea that people will pay for something they want to see created—comes in. For creative entrepreneurs,
Kate Ryan Reiling ’00 surrounded by pieces from her Morphology game. She used Kickstarter to successfully fund a children’s version of the game, called Morphology Jr.
Kickstarter.com is the crowd-funding website of choice, connecting them with potential funders and providing the cash their projects need to succeed.

The Kickstarter formula is simple. An artist seeking funding for a project—in one of 13 categories, such as art, fashion, food, and technology—pitches it with an engaging sales video. The artist sets a fundraising goal and a deadline, usually 30 to 60 days. Then you and I—the crowd—pledge to donate money to support the project. It’s all or nothing: If the project meets its goal, it gets funded. If not, no money changes hands.

Backers backing a project on Kickstarter doesn’t buy you ownership rights or a say in how the project is done, but you do get something in return—a reward from the artist, typically tied to the size of your gift. It might be a copy of the thing they’re proposing to make—such as a magazine or box of artisanal chocolates—a shared experience, or a role in the creative process. At the very least, it’s a thank you on the project’s Facebook page.

Kickstarter started in 2009 and has grown rapidly, with slightly more than $274 million pledged to date. Its first successful project raised just $35 for an artist with a simple idea: Tell me what to draw and I’ll draw it for you. Three years later, Pebble Technology raised more than $10 million for a smart watch using electronic-ink technology. But that large sum is unusual by Kickstarter’s standards. The typical project raises less than $10,000, backed mostly by the project creator’s friends—or friends of friends. The success rate hovers around 45 percent.

“Every day someone is starting a project and Kickstarter is their platform,” says Kickstarter CEO Yancey Strickler, who spoke about Kickstarter’s impact on the arts last fall at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. “We fit a real need for people who like to share creative ideas with people who like to see creative things exist in the world.”

Other crowd-funding sites, such as Indiegogo and RocketHub, have followed Kickstarter’s lead, although both are open to a greater range of projects and allow fundraisers to keep whatever money they raise, regardless of whether they meet their goal.

Although crowd-funding makes the artistic or start-up process personal by encouraging a connection between entrepreneurs and their supporters, contributing to projects on Kickstarter isn’t entirely risk-free.

If you give cash toward a project for which you were promised a copy of the end product and it never materializes, you aren’t guaranteed a refund. Kickstarter doesn’t mediate between creators and investors. But such defaults are rare, says Strickler. “Because so much crowd-funding is done through social media, social forces push artists to be accountable to their backers,” he says.

Giving money to an artist is a risk you have to be willing to take for more art in the world, and Kickstarter is betting there are plenty of us out there willing to do so. Read on to learn how a handful of Macalester alumni are using crowd-funding to keep their creative ideas alive.

Kate Ryan Reiling ’00

Project: Morphology Jr. board game
Amount raised: $15,240

Morphology Jr. is the children’s version of the board game Morphology, also invented by Reiling. Players build words for teammates to guess using quirky objects such as small wooden blocks, glass beads, and string. Reiling and a few friends, bored and stuck inside on a snowy night, stumbled upon the idea for the game when they started combining Jenga® blocks and Pente® pieces to make words out of a Spanish-English dictionary. “There was that moment when I thought, ‘oh my God, this is a cool idea,’” Reiling says. “It has a sticky quality to it.” She spent years developing a prototype, did some play testing, took the idea to business school, and launched Morphology in 2009. It was named the #2 Toy of the Year by Time magazine in 2010, and when fans started clamoring for a kids’ version, Reiling turned to Kickstarter to get it done.

How Crowd-Funding Helped: Reiling relied on her own money and support from friends and family to launch Morphology. “At one point, I had friends with MBAs putting together games for me,” she says. “It was very smart labor.” She decided to use Kickstarter last spring to fund Morphology Jr. production costs and help spread awareness of the game. “Kickstarter is a new fundraising model,” she says. “It helps me meet my goals for my business, but I can also support different products, companies, and ideas in exchange for goods in a unique marketplace.” The money Reiling raised helped Morphology Jr. move quickly from prototype to market.

Funder Gifts: $25 got funders a Morphology T-shirt; $35 earned them a copy of the game; $500 yielded a Morphology expansion pack.

What’s Next? Reiling’s game design company, Morphology Games, is conceptualizing other creative board games for children and adults. “We want to develop games that challenge the imagination and build creativity,” she says.

Learn More: morphologygames.com

Erica Rivera ’01

Project: Food truck called MILF and Cookies.
Amount to be raised: Rivera was seeking $69,000

Rivera bakes delectable sweet treats, including six-inch stuffed cookies—imagine a chocolate-chip cookie stuffed with s’mores or a peanut butter one with a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup inside. She hopes her truck will complement the overabundance of pulled-pork, taco, and sliders already available at downtown Minneapolis food trucks. “We thought about a pie truck, but pies are pretty labor intensive and messy to eat on the street,” she says.

How Crowd-Funding Can Help: In early winter Rivera was seeking $69,000 on RocketHub.com to purchase a truck and pay for licensing, permits, equipment, and kitchen rental. As of early December she’s only raised about 1 percent toward her goal. “I like that crowd-funding leaves the artist in complete creative control,” Rivera says. “You can maintain artistic integrity without having to go to the big man for funding. I also like that our customers are the ones supporting us from the start.”

Funder Gifts: Gifts ranged from a cookie for $10 donors to an original cookie recipe following donor-suggested ingredients for $500.

What’s Next? Rivera also hopes to use the truck as a “pull right up to the event” dessert-buffet catering business, offering truffles, pies, breads, and other sweets at weddings and corporate events.

Learn More: www.milfandcookiesmn.com
Erica Rivera '01 and her husband, Sam Hardman, are hoping to raise many thousands of dollars to buy and outfit a cookie truck.
**Paul Cantrell ’98**

*Project: A CD of Cantrell’s original composition*

*Amount raised: $3,026*

Cantrell wanted to make a CD of his composition for bass clarinet and piano titled “The Broken Mirror of Memory.” Bass clarinetist Pat O’Keefe performs the four-part piece, accompanied by Cantrell on piano. The composition takes advantage of the bass clarinet’s enormous range of expressive possibilities and forces the listener to “slow down, pay closer attention, and truly listen to the music,” Cantrell says. The work won first prize in the 2012 International Clarinet Association’s composition competition, and premiered at its annual ClarinetFest.

**HOW CROWD-FUNDING HELPED:** “I wanted to make a CD of the piece so that it wasn’t just the festival audience who got to hear it,” Cantrell says. He and O’Keefe recorded, mixed, and mastered the music in Cantrell’s home recording studio, and then raised $3,026 last fall on Kickstarter to cover printing, distribution, and publicity costs. Cantrell appreciates how crowd-funding—beyond its practical aspects—connects him with contemporary music lovers: “With each CD, I send a reminder that it isn’t just something they bought, but something they made happen.”

**WHAT’S NEXT?** Cantrell continues to compose new music. Also a freelance software designer and programmer, he and brother Andy Cantrell ’02 are collaborating on the development of a free interactive calculus textbook.

**FUNDER GIFTS:** A mere $8 won funders a CD of Paul’s music. For $512 he’d compose a short piece for the instrument of the funder’s choice.

**LEARN MORE:** innig.net/music

---

**Rachel Garber Cole ’07**

*Project: A short experimental fictional film*

*Amount raised: $4,171*

Cole’s film is called *Pregnant and Dying*. Cole is a New York City–based actress who writes, directs, and performs in her own pieces, both theatrical and on film. *Pregnant and Dying* is about a young woman who discovers she has cancer while she’s pregnant and how she and her family conflict over her decisions about her body. With the exception of a doctor, Cole plays all seven characters in the film, which was shot with rear screen projection.

**HOW CROWD-FUNDING HELPED:** Kickstarter helped Cole raise $4,171 last winter for *Pregnant and Dying*, enabling her to rent a warehouse space needed for filming, as well as a projector and lights. She also was able to pay and feed her crew—“food is really important in the film industry when people are getting paid very little,” she says—and cover costumes, props, and makeup. “Making my little video about the film to inspire backers on Kickstarter also helped me clarify what the film was about,” Cole says. “It’s good to know I have 119 supporters who are excited to see it.” As of press time, the film was in post-production and close to completion.

**FUNDER GIFTS:** A $10 gift got funders a thank you in the film credits, $50 earned them a DVD of the film plus a personalized thank you video, and with $500 a funder became an associate producer and earned two tickets to the film’s New York screening.

**WHAT’S NEXT?** In addition to developing a new short film and a solo performance piece, Cole is working on the screenplay for her first feature-length film with producer Sara Kiener ’06.

**LEARN MORE:** rachelgarbercole.com

---

MARLA HOLT is a freelance writer living in Owatonna, Minn.
Paul Cantrell ’98, shown here in his Minneapolis home, raised enough on Kickstarter to make a CD of an original musical composition.
Art, Amplified

New entrance into Commons
The Lowe Dayton Commons, part of the project’s first construction stage, provides an inviting entrance to the arts at Mac.
Macalester breaks ground on a renovation and expansion of the studio art building.
It’s a great time for Mac painters, potters, and printmakers. Renewed energy first hit the Art and Art History Department last fall when the initial stage of renovation of the Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center brought the department a new art gallery, visual resources library, and art history classrooms.

This winter, with construction of a studio art wing beginning—and expected to be completed within a year—there’s even more buzz. Art faculty and staff have met regularly with Minneapolis’s HGA Architects and Engineers to plan the project and customize the studios and teaching and meeting spaces.

Project highlights include spacious studios, a 2D design suite, a student gallery, and a new third floor. “These are crucial, much-needed renovations that signal our college’s deep commitment to the arts,” says President Brian Rosenberg.

People are taking notice, says art professor Chris Willcox. “Art students, faculty, and staff are excited and hopeful about this significant investment in arts programming,” says Willcox, who teaches painting. “I’ve had many prospective students talk to me about taking studio art classes because of this higher degree of exposure and visibility.”

Back in the ’60s when the Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center first opened, Mac’s art program was significantly smaller, Willcox explains. Thus in recent years the department has been forced to retrofit its space to accommodate more students than were ever imagined half a century ago. “Students have been crowded in the current studio spaces, and some are turned away each semester because of space restrictions,” she says. “We hope to retain the smaller class sizes that Macalester is known for, while also slightly expanding enrollment in individual classes to accommodate student demand.”

In addition to bringing more students into the spaces, a studio for senior art majors and state-of-the-art technology throughout the building will enhance the quality of the overall student experience. Says professor and printmaker Ruthann Godollei: “We have wonderful students, and this will give them the space and facilities to do their best work.”

REBECCA DEJARLAIS ’06 is a staff writer for Macalester Today.
North view (OPPOSITE TOP)
The studio art building’s first floor creates a welcoming space for the entire campus community. An outdoor plaza (shown on page 22) provides a natural gathering place.

Printmaking studio (OPPOSITE MIDDLE)
The second floor houses three studios for advanced students: printmaking, painting, and drawing.

Drawing studio (OPPOSITE BOTTOM)
The second-floor drawing studio

3D design studio (THIS PAGE TOP)
The two-story workspace for 3D sculpture features separate spaces for wood, metal, and welding.

Student art gallery (ABOVE)
This gallery, devoted solely to showcasing student artwork, will be part of the new studio art building. Macalester’s other gallery, The Law Warschaw Gallery, opened last fall in the new art commons space of the Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center.

WEB CONNECT: macalester.edu/studioart
Many students are attracted to Mac because it’s one of the few top-notch liberal arts colleges located in the midst of a vibrant urban area. They imagine attending Guthrie Theater productions and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra concerts, seeing bands at First Avenue, dining at Afghan and Japanese restaurants, hitting major league ball games.

But the panoply of offerings found in Minneapolis and St. Paul doesn’t mean that things are slow on campus. Most weekend nights, in particular, life at 1600 Grand is very busy indeed.

To prove it, we sent out two photographers to capture one November night, when the campus was hopping with everything from a German student film festival to a production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

So yes, Mac students can head downtown any time they like. But they can also find plenty to do right here, in a few magical blocks between Summit and St. Clair.
One Night at Macalester

Evening scenes at Mac (clockwise from top left): Students stroll the quad on a brisk November Friday night; Romeo and Juliet fight scene; boarding a bus to a Minneapolis Timberwolves basketball game; the art building; the Leonard fitness center; soccer on Shaw Field.

A visual tour of campus on a busy November night.
This page (clockwise from top): Humanities Building computer lab; a student at the library; students discussing misappropriation of Native American culture at a Cultural House event; (facing page, clockwise from top left): shooting pool in the basement of the Campus Center; waiting for the basketball bus; German professors (from left) Rachael Huener, Linda Schulte-Sasse, and Brigetta Abel dressed up for the Deutsches Filmfest awards; Huener showing off the giant Gummi bear prize for best German student film; audience at the film.
Despite the dreary November evening outside, Café Mat was buzzing with warmth and activity.
Facing page: (top) El Kati Distinguished Lecturer Mark Anthony Neal, a Duke University professor, and (below) his rapt listeners; this page: an appreciative audience and some enthusiastic dancers at the annual Bodacious Showcase in the Ruth Stricker Dayton Campus Center.
The Winding Road to 

Life and entrepreneurial adventurers Victoria Ransom ’99 and Alain Chuard ’99 turned a side business into a $450 million deal with Google.

Business can be a grand adventure. There’s the risk and reward, sure—but there’s also a strong element of the unpredictable. Victoria Ransom ’99 and Alain Chuard ’99 have had an abundance of all three.

In the summer of 2012, these business and life partners sold their four-year-old Silicon Valley social media marketing company, Wildfire, for $450 million to Google. They couldn’t predict that their entrepreneurial travels would lead them to the Googleplex in Mountain View, Calif., but that openness to the unexpected may be a key reason why they’ve come so far.

Their life adventures started just getting to Macalester. Ransom, a native of rural New Zealand, earned a scholarship to study at the United World College in New Mexico; Macalester recruited her from there. Chuard, who grew up in Switzerland, snowboarded professionally for two years after high school before getting wind of Macalester and coming to St. Paul.

Upon graduation, Ransom and Chuard started out on “very traditional career paths,” says Ransom. She went to London to work as a business consultant, later taking a job with investment banking firm Morgan Stanley in New York; Chuard was employed in the same city and industry, toiling in Solomon Smith Barney’s mergers and acquisitions department. “After two years of investment banking, we realized that it wasn’t something we wanted to do long term,” Chuard says. “It was important to do something we were really passionate about.”

That passion was travel. They quit their banking jobs in 2001, headed to New Zealand, and started an adventure travel company that organized snowboarding and skiing trips to the south island of Ransom’s homeland; before long, Access Trips was running 40 tour packages in 18 countries. Within a few years, craving new challenges, the partners hired a manager to run Access Trips and headed to business school—Ransom to Harvard, Chuard to Stanford.

While in school, they got wind of Facebook’s launch of fan pages for businesses. Both saw a fan page as a demographically ideal venue for marketing Access Trips. They built one, and wondered how they could lure and keep people coming to it. They’d had success getting the word out about Access and building their mailing list by giving away trips on their website, and thought they could do likewise on Facebook.

That’s where they hit a roadblock: No application for converting fan pages into a more powerful marketing vehicle existed. So they created their own—a simple business decision that took Ransom and Chuard in an unexpected new direction. “We decided whilst solving our own needs to build a product that other businesses could use,” Ransom recalls. “We pretty quickly found that there was a lot of interest in that.”

In essence, their solution combines the kind of ads that appear on the right-hand side of the feed with links to sweepstakes, contests, and other campaigns—a simple concept, but one that had never been fully developed before. “When we started noticing that larger brands wanted to use the software, that’s when we saw that there was a real opportunity,” Chuard says. Gap, KFC, and professional sports teams became customers. Facebook itself signed up.

They had a new passion. In July 2008, he and Ransom left the travel business and kindled Wildfire in their living room. Chuard developed the original Wildfire application and managed product development; Ransom oversaw the business. “We were very disciplined and focused that we were going to be a technology company, not a service company,” Ransom says. “We could have easily turned into an agency”—that is, creating the fan pages rather than selling software—which doesn’t scale as effectively and tends to have lower margins.

“We grew to 400 employees despite having raised a small amount of capital relative to other similarly sized startups,” she adds. “That was because we had a product that we were able to scale to a large user base without hiring and needing a large support team.” The partners point to another factor propelling their success. “We have talented, hardworking, smart, but humble people,” Chuard says. “And I think that really reflects who Victoria and I are. We’re all rowing in the same direction.”

Now Wildfire is riding the whitewater with Google. The search engine giant saw in Wildfire something it needed. “The world of marketing is changing,” Chuard says. “Everyone knows that Google is a strong player in the paid advertising, the digital advertising side. But as technology evolves and more and more users use social networks, tying content to ads becomes more and more important. We provide that social content platform that we’re hoping to integrate with Google’s advertising technology.”

That said, “I would say that we’re given a lot of autonomy,” says Ransom, who remains Wildfire’s CEO, while Chuard continues to manage product development. “We’re all still sitting together and in many respects, it’s just business as usual. We’re looking at ways to collaborate and really add to Google’s objectives and to scale our business through the relationships that Google has.”

Will Ransom and Chuard continue to camp around Wildfire? For now, at least. The adventure continues.

Gene Rebeck is a former senior editor of Twin Cities Business magazine. He lives in Duluth, Minn.
Alain Chuard ’99 and Victoria Ransom ’99 in the Wildfire offices on Google’s Mountain View, Calif., campus.
1. Ahna Minge ’08 and Mitchell Skinner ’05 were married on Aug. 17, 2012, in St. Paul. Joining them were (from left): Michael Cosimini ’05, Amelia MacRae ’05, Erin Petersen ’05, Graham Miller ’05, Zack Youmans ’05, Maureen McCarthy ’05, Brooke Skinner Drawz ’00, Christopher Haugen ’07, Sarah Cledwyn, Lloyd Cledwyn, Will Howell ’08, Clare Ryan ’08, Lucia Marincel ’10, Jake Levy-Pollans ’09, and Emily Seddon ’08.

2. Mary Hale Meyer ’60 and Susan McLeer were married in New York City on Jan. 22, 2012, their 20th anniversary.

3. Jeff Zethmayr ’05 and Sarah Zethmayr were married July 29, 2012, in McKinleyville, Calif. Present at the ceremony were (from left): Andres Haladay ’05, Mike Cosimini ’05, Amelia MacRae ’05, the newlyweds, Jess Hasken ’07, and Will Conrad ’05.

4. Carly Androff Paz ’00 and Francisco Paz were married in Hawaii on March 17, 2012. In attendance (from left) Josh Crabtree ’98, Onallee Elsberry-Crabtree ’00, the bride and groom, Kristin Cover ’00, and Kate Ryan Reiling ’00.

5. Keon West ’06 and Zoe Norridge were married on June 23, 2012, in York, England. Kacy West ’08 was also in attendance.

6. Jessica Arck ’06 and Tom Kleczewski ’05 were married on July 28, 2012, in Minneapolis. Mac alumni in attendance were (from left): Rachel Sullivan Cohen ’06, Parker Cohen ’06, J.T. Viele, Aaron Meyers ’05, Brendan Viele ’05, Matthew Arck ’09, Heather McKerrow ’05, and Peter Bartz-Gallagher ’05.

7. Former trustee Roy Gabay ’85 and Martin Fahy were married on Oct. 7, 2012, in Brooklyn, N.Y. In attendance were Moira Muccio ’85, Elisabeth Boylan ’85, Fred Tessler ’84, J.P. Cheuvront ’86, Karren Lundegaard ’89, Eric Muschler ’87, David Heide ’83, and Nick Norman ’84.

8. Helen Divjak ’01 and Evan Jones were married July 1, 2012, in Jackson Hole, Wyo. Pictured (from left): Annie Silverstein ’01, Susannah Sharp, Ying Kiratibhongse ’01, the bride, Jenna Conrad ’01, Niki Moltumyr, Kathleen Manley ’01, and Emily Gaynor.

9. Annika Schilke ’06 and Zebulon Beilke-McCallum were married on June 23, 2012, in DeSoto, Iowa. Alumni in attendance (from left) were Rachel Wiken ’06, Helen Peil ’06, and Patrick McGarrity ’07.
1. Meghan Greeley ’02 and Rob Kazmierski were married on Sept. 15, 2012, in Laconia, N.H. Joining them were (from left): Susanna Fioratta ’02, Aaron Ritz ’02, Jenny Epstein ’02, and Brendan Mayer ’02.

2. Natalie Paul ’02 and Roo Collins were married on Sept. 6, 2012, in London. Attending were (from left): Julie Hanus ’02, Zeia Lomax ’02, the bride and groom, Emily Philipp ’02, and Nick Berning ’02.


4. Zara Bohan ’08 and Andrew Nesheim ’08 were married Aug. 11, 2012, in Minneapolis. Pictured (from left): Emily Dunn Wartman ’08, Jakob Wartman ’08, Lauren Appelwick ’08, Andy Ver Steegh ’09, Annalee Levin ’08, Anna Peschel ’08, Moeko Crider ’08, Sonia Hazard ’08, the newlyweds, Kimberly Wortmann ’07, Matt Arck ’09, Emily Gadek ’08, Marlene Johnson ’68, Liz Russ ’72, Dillon Teske ’09, Jenna Harris ’08, Professor Michael Nelson, and Professor Nanette Goldman.

5. Emmy Matzner ’05 and Dan Higgs were married Sept. 2, 2012, in Stillwater, Minn. Joining them were (from left): Melanie Roberts ’05, David Kruger ’04, Lizz Hutchinson ’05, Elisa Berry Fonseca ’05, Kohl Hames ’05, Anna Cavallo ’05, and Sarah Wanless Abiya ’05.

SEE MORE PHOTOS: download our iPad app at the iTunes store
BOOKS

Samuel Báez ’57, Gotcha! The Last Days of Bluefish (Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, 2012)


Ernesto Capello, history and Latin American studies professor, City at the Center of the World: Space, History, and Modernity in Quito (University of Pittsburgh, 2011)

Courtney Dicmas ’06, Harold Finds a Voice (Childs Play Library, 2013)


Stanley Miller ’64, The Night Before Easter (Tate Publishing, 2013)

Kim Nielsen ’88, A Disability History of the United States (Beacon, 2012)

Jeremiah Reedy, former classics professor, Seven Lean Years: Macalester College from 1968 to 1975 (Xlibris, 2012) and co-translator with John Kronen, Francisco Suarez: Selections from De Anima (Philosophia Verlag, 2012)


Anthony Weston ’76, Mobilizing the Green Imagination: An Exuberant Manifesto (New Society, 2012)

From A Disability History of the United States by Kim E. Nielsen ’88 (BEACON PRESS, 2012)

A week or two after signing the contract for A Disability History of the United States, and after I’d been in the field for over a decade, my then 16-year-old daughter suddenly became seriously ill. As a result she became a disabled young woman.

Being a historian, a feminist scholar, and a disability studies scholar makes this both easier and harder for me. My daughter struggles with how to reconcile her own desire not to be a wheelchair user, not to be different, with her own experiences of people with disabilities as normative human beings who live full lives. As do I . . . I’m experiencing how disability profoundly affects an entire family. And I’ve learned that an unexpectedly large number of strangers feel it is appropriate to ask, “What’s a pretty girl like you doing in a wheelchair?”

This experience has affected A Disability History of the United States in tangible and intangible ways. Most immediately, it delayed and prolonged the writing process. Intellectually and emotionally, it deepened the book and made it better. Most profoundly, I expect, it significantly but subtly altered the questions I ask.

FOOD, FAMINE AND FARMING: Can We Feed the World Sustainably?

Sufficient calories are produced every year to feed the world, so why are 1 in 7—a billion people—still hungry? Global food prices have been rising and hunger, or food insecurity, is a pressing issue in the developing world and parts of the U.S.

Do the answers lie with international agribusiness? Small, local farms? Food banks? Distribution networks? Changes in agricultural policy?

Join us for a 2-1/2-day discussion as Macalester and guest faculty take an interdisciplinary approach to the critical question of how to feed the world sustainably.

Faculty Convener: Bill Moseley, Professor and Chair of Geography

Participating faculty:
Amy Damon, Economics
Mark Davis, Biology
Ryan Edgington, Environmental Studies
Jonathan Foley, director, Institute on the Environment (IonE), University of Minnesota
David Laneager, Geography
Michael Zis, Political Science

To register: macalester.edu/alumnicollege

Contact: Gabrielle Lawrence • Director of Alumni Relations • lawrence@macalester.edu • 651-696-6315
Macalester alumni traveled through Turkey last fall, a journey through ancient ruins, lunar landscapes, and modern cities. It was a tour group, but not the Bermuda shorts-wearing, trinket-buying assembly that comes to mind. Imagine instead a group of 28 lively and curious traveling companions who share certain experiences and values, participating in an international learning experience.

Turkey is a proudly held secular democracy spanning two continents and grappling with a newly influential Islamist movement some fear threatens the very foundation of the country’s hard-won success. It’s a country of contrasts, with modern cities thronging with young people glued to cell phones and quiet villages where families tend ancestral olive trees. For more than 8,000 years, civilizations have emerged, come to glory, and fallen, leaving the remnants of cities, temples, and theaters.

We arrived to consider the lessons of civilizations so old and storied that they contain the myths and heroes of Western culture. We walked through the ancient hippodrome in Istanbul, imagining chariot races. We visited sites sacred since the time of Alexander, where temples had become churches had become mosques. We strolled through the palatial grounds of the Topkapi Palace, where the glories of the Ottoman Empire were displayed: emeralds as big as eggs, ordinary jars, basins, and swords, thick with diamonds and gold filigree.

We visited the ruins of ancient cities, some built by the Greeks and rebuilt by the Romans. The breathtaking ruins suggested the grandeur of the ancient regimes, where beautiful cities were planned with precision and exacting symmetry. We traveled the long columned roads in Ephesus and imagined the apostle Paul preaching in the enormous amphitheater to thousands. So much of the Western canon is based on stories and mythology born here that these ancient civilizations are at times more familiar to us than those of our own country.

One afternoon the women of the group went to a Turkish bath, called a hamam, an ancient rite overseen by tiny, sharp-eyed women. We stripped down, were each given a tiny towel, and entered a steamy marble room with a large circular marble stone—the navel stone—in the center. Imagine a dozen alumna of a certain age encircling the stone, heads together, navels down, giggling like we were staying up too late in Bigelow Hall. After a series of alternately rough and bubbly scrubbings and a vigorous massage, we staggered back out into the narrow, windy streets of the old city, agreeing that bonding on the navel stone was unforgettable.

We traveled right before the presidential election, happy to miss the last-minute media onslaught, but also missing the World Series, Hurricane Sandy, and election night. We observed our country’s historic moments through the lens of Turkey’s celebration of its own young democracy. The brilliant red Turkish flag was hanging from every window, and nearly every flat surface was plastered with images of Mustafa Kemal Attaturk, the country’s national hero, whose vision and ambition sparked the country’s transformation from sultan-ruled Ottoman empire to modern, secular state.

At one point our guide remarked, “We can’t have free speech in Turkey. It would be dangerous; we are not ready.” We were shocked to hear this, but it prompted a thoughtful conversation about the increasing influence of Islamic political parties, unresolved ethnic conflicts, and the looming shadow of Turkey’s difficult neighbors—Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, and Russia.

As this anecdote suggests, travel connects us to new cultures, new ideas, and new friends around the world. Traveling with Macalester alumni provides even more: a rich, common experience and memories that last longer than any souvenir. Join us on our next trip.
In Memoriam

1934
Helen Johnson Patterson, 99, of Las Vegas died Oct. 29, 2012. She specialized in research at the Honeywell Engineering Library in Minneapolis during the 1960s. Mrs. Patterson is survived by two daughters and a grandson.

1936
Mary Calhoun Pribyl, 98, of Tracy, Calif., died Oct. 6, 2012. A native of Albert Lea, Minn., she moved with her late husband, David S. Pribyl, in 1944 to California. Mrs. Pribyl is survived by two sons, two daughters, and five grandchildren.

1938

1939

1940
Evelyn Sargent Klecker, 95, died Sept. 12, 2012. She was a social worker and Girl Scout leader. Mrs. Klecker is survived by three daughters, a son, four grandchildren, and a sister.

1941
Monte A. Mason, 95, of Chanhassen, Minn., died Oct. 12, 2012. He became the youngest newspaper editor in Minnesota when, as a 19-year-old, he took over the Fertile Journal after his father’s death. He owned and operated the Monticello Shoe Company, and owned and operated the Monticello, Minnesota, Times, and worked for Webb Publishing Co. Mr. Mason is survived by his wife, Betty Dunkelburger Mason ’41, daughter Merry Mason Whipple ’69, two sons (including Monte Mason ’71), and four grandchildren.

1942
Laon Solie Hammer, 90, of Bloomington, Minn., died July 14, 2012. She is survived by two daughters (including Marnie Hammer ’71), a son, three grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

1943
F. Keith Hunt, 91, of Grand Marais, Minn., died Oct. 12, 2012. He served in the Pacific during World War II and worked in publishing and advertising until his retirement in 1983. Mr. Hunt is survived by two sons, six grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, and his brother.

1944
Carol Bohn Hulterstrum, 90, of Baraboo, Wis., died June 22, 2012.

1945
Alice Dunnavan Norris, 88, of Westfield, N.J., died Nov. 5, 2012. She was a director of nursery schools in Plainfield and Roselle Park, N.J. Mrs. Norris is survived by two daughters, four sons, nine grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

1946
Louise Page Marvin, 87, died Sept. 9, 2012, in Rochester, Minn. She was an elder and Sunday school teacher at her Presbyterian church and an officer in the League of Women Voters. Mrs. Marvin is survived by two daughters, 27 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren, and a sister.

1947
Donald A. McCartin, 87, of Bass Lake, Calif., died Sept. 15, 2012. He served in the Navy during World War II and the Korean War. He practiced family law in Costa Mesa, Calif., from 1957 until 1978, when he was appointed to the Orange County Superior Court by California Gov. Jerry Brown. Mr. McCartin, who presided over nine death penalty cases, came out against capital punishment after his retirement in 1993. Mr. McCartin is survived by his wife, Karen, 4 sons, 11 grandchildren, a great-grandchild, and former wife Ruth MacDougall McCartin ’47.

1948
Jean Milligan Dozark, 86, of Edina, Minn., died Sept. 1, 2012. She was vice president of her family’s business, Design Development Inc. Mrs. Dozark is survived by her husband, Cletus, a daughter, and a son.

1949
Morton Geller, 85, of St. Paul died Oct. 27, 2012. A veteran of World War II, Mr. Geller is survived by a daughter, a son, and his partner, Doris Olmchew.

1950
Carl F. Nielsen, 83, died Sept. 1, 2012. He served in the U.S. Army and retired from Modern Electric Company as water superintendent. Mr. Keeler is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and a sister.

1951
Joyce Crooks Dimond, 82, of Tucson, Ariz., died Oct. 23, 2012. Mrs. Dimond is survived by her husband, John, two daughters, a son, and four grandchildren.

1952
Robert G. Bratcher, 81, died June 12, 2009, in Orchard Park, N.Y. He was a Navy veteran and owned a home building company in Orchard Park. After retiring he earned a captain’s license and taught sailing on Lake Erie. Mr. Bratcher is survived by his wife, Barbara, a daughter, and a son.

1953
Elaine Malcolm Collins, 81, died Nov. 17, 2012, in Isanti, Minn. She taught in Hopkins and Cambridge, Minn., and supervised Bethel University’s student teaching program. Mrs. Collins is survived by her husband, Virgil, a daughter, a son, eight grandchildren, a sister, and a brother.

1956
Marilyn Borseth ‘51 and Ramona Borseth Carpenter ‘52, and a brother.

1957
Lois Wilson Yaeger, 82, died Oct. 19, 2012. She is survived by a daughter, two sons, five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, and a sister.

1958
Arthur E. Keeler, 85, of Spokane, Wash., died Oct. 21, 2012. He served as a substitute teacher, and gave piano lessons. Mrs. Swanson is survived by a daughter, a son, four grandchildren, four sisters (including Marilyn Borseth Fiaikowski ’51 and Ramona Borseth Carpenter ’52), and a brother.

1959

1960

1961
Gloria Borseth Swanson, 85, of Hallock, Minn., died Oct. 20, 2012. She taught school in several Minnesota communities, worked as a substitute teacher, and gave piano lessons. Mrs. Swanson is survived by a daughter, a son, four grandchildren, four sisters (including Marilyn Borseth Fiaikowski ’51 and Ramona Borseth Carpenter ’52), and a brother.

1962
Arthur E. Keeler, 85, of Spokane, Wash., died Oct. 21, 2012. He served as a substitute teacher, and gave piano lessons. Mrs. Swanson is survived by a daughter, a son, four grandchildren, four sisters (including Marilyn Borseth Fiaikowski ’51 and Ramona Borseth Carpenter ’52), and a brother.

1963
Elaine Malcolm Collins, 81, died Nov. 17, 2012, in Isanti, Minn. She taught in Hopkins and Cambridge, Minn., and supervised Bethel University’s student teaching program. Mrs. Collins is survived by her husband, Virgil, a daughter, a son, eight grandchildren, a sister, and a brother.

1964
William G. Kuban, 81, of Minneapolis died March 7, 2012. Mr. Kuban is survived by Ruth Holdridge, four daughters, nine grandchildren, and two great-grandsons.

1965
Mabelle L. Lerstad, 103, died Nov. 7, 2010, in Mesa, Ariz. She is survived by a daughter.
Candace Dornblaser Steele, 80, of Boise, Idaho, died Sept. 29, 2011.

1954
Frank J. Gibbs, 84, of Bloomington, Minn., died Aug. 20, 2012. Mr. Gibbs is survived by his wife, Marilyn, two daughters, a son, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

1955
Harvey D. Mielke, 79, died Oct. 18, 2012. He worked for Graybar Electric for 47 years. Mr. Mielke is survived by his wife, Janet, three children, five grandchildren, and two sisters.

Carol Solland Oyen, 78, of Plymouth, Minn., died Jan. 18, 2012. She is survived by her husband, John, three children, four grandchildren, and a sister.

1956
Prudence Lane Granagan Cameron, 78, of Duluth, Minn., died Sept. 24, 2012. She was active in Minneapolis Democratic-Labor Party politics. She was also a former member of Macalester’s Alumni Board and a recipient of the college’s Distinguished Citizen Award. Mrs. Cameron is survived by four daughters (including Rebecca Cameron Gonzalez-Campoy ’83), a son, eight grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, sister Virginia Lanegran ’53, and brother, Macalester geography professor David Lane Granagan ’63.

Janet Peterson Ranheim, 78, died May 13, 2012. She is survived by her husband, Ted, a daughter, three sons, six grandchildren, and a brother.

1957
Carolyn L. Mett, 82, died in October 2012. She was a schoolteacher in Iowa and California and worked as a designer. Ms. Mett is survived by a sister.

James E. Van Drumen, 78, died in September 2012. He taught English in the Minneapolis Public Schools for 30 years. He also taught English as a foreign language in Moscow and Minneapolis. Mr. Van Drumen is survived by his wife, Nancy, a daughter, and a brother.

1958
Theodore B. Spanner of Hibbing, Minn., died Oct. 14, 2012. He owned Range Firestone, Range Motors, and Modern Motors, and established the Spanner Family Foundation. Mr. Spanner is survived by his wife, Sherry, two daughters, four grandchildren, and a sister.

1959
Judith Hammerstrom Katzung, 74, died Sept. 21, 2012, in Baltimore. She taught English and Spanish served as a librarian for schools in South and West St. Paul, and later became supervising librarian at U.S. News & World Report. Mrs. Katzung is survived by her husband, Phillip, a daughter, a son, two grandsons, and a sister.

1961
James D. Falk, 74, died Oct. 1, 2012, in Reno, Nev. He was a U.S. Army veteran, a businessman in Olympia, Wash., and the St. Paul area, an engineer, and a tree farmer. Dr. Falk is survived by his wife, Beverly, a daughter, two sons, seven grandchildren, and a sister.

1963
JoAnn Becker Paulsen, 71, of Mound, Minn., died Oct. 26, 2012. She was a medical technologist at Waconia Ridgeview Hospital for more than 30 years. Mrs. Paulsen is survived by two sons and a brother.

1964
H. Alan Burns, 70, died Nov. 11, 2012, in Minneapolis. He is survived by four daughters, seven grandchildren, a sister, and brother Mark Burns ’67.

1965
Richard C. Gustafson, 68, of Hudson, Wis., died Sept. 27, 2012. He was a retired high school teacher and choir director at Mt. Zion Lutheran Church.

1967
Sharon Swanson Fonseca, 66, died April 2, 2012. She is survived by her husband, Joe, and a brother.

Judy A. Paulsen, 65, died April 27, 2012. She was a teacher in the Minneapolis Public Schools.


1968
Benjamin H. Benjamin, 82, of Houghton Lake, Mich., died Oct. 2, 2012. A veteran of the U.S. Navy during the Korean War, Mr. Benjamin taught biology, owned and operated Sunset Bay Resort in Houghton Lake, and retired as a real estate associate. Mr. Benjamin is survived by his wife, Marjorie, and a daughter.

Marion E. Gillquist, 92, died Oct. 6, 2012. She was a teacher in the Minneapolis Public Schools. Ms. Gillquist is survived by three daughters, a son, five grandchildren, and a sister.

1969
Mary Stemm Shojaei, 66, of San Diego died Sept. 30, 2012. She worked at San Diego State University for 37 years, most recently as director of student disability services. Mrs. Shojaei is survived by a daughter, a son, a grandson, her father, a sister, and a brother.

1970
Timothy T. Welch, 64, died Nov. 18, 2012. He was a musician, carpenter, and teacher for more than 10 years before becoming a lawyer. Mr. Welch practiced with Leonard, Street, and Deinard, serving for six years as chair of the law firm’s real estate department. Mr. Welch is survived by his wife, Melodie, two daughters, two sons, his father, three sisters, and two brothers.

1971
Elaine A. Cuddy, 77, died April 18, 2012. A Macalester alumna and former administrator, Mrs. Cuddy was an emeritus member of the Macalester College Board of Trustees and served as its chair from 1971 to 1974. Says President Brian Rosenberg, "It is no exaggeration to say that John was among a handful of individuals who rescued the college from very dire financial straits during that time, and for that and his many years of service and generosity, we all owe him an enormous debt.”

1972
Anne Berg Schrader, 59, of La Crosse, Wis., died Aug. 29, 2012. Mrs. Schrader is survived by her husband, Mark Schrader ’75, two sons (including Andrew Schrader ’01), two granddaughters, two sisters, and two brothers (including Jonathon Berg ’72).

1973
Kenneth B. Wright, 59, died June 13, 2011. He was a labor relations specialist with the city of Madison, Wis., for 26 years. Mr. Wright is survived by his wife, Gretchen, a son, and a sister.

1974
Elfen Finch-MacLeod, 60, died May 14, 2012. She is survived by her husband, Don, a son, a granddaughter, two sisters, and a brother.

1975
Gregg H. Hegman, 61, of Burnsville, Minn., died Aug. 14, 2012. He is survived by a sister and a brother.

1976
Jonathon Berg, 57, of Carlsbad, Calif., died June 4, 2012. Mr. Millimet is survived by his father, a son, and two sisters.

1977

1983

W. John Driscoll, 83, of Sunfish Lake died Dec. 22, 2012. John was an emeritus member of the Macalester College Board of Trustees and served as its chair from 1971 to 1974. Says President Brian Rosenberg, “It is no exaggeration to say that John was among a handful of individuals who rescued the college from very dire financial straits during that time, and for that and his many years of service and generosity, we all owe him an enormous debt.” He is survived by Lee, his wife of 58 years, two sons, two daughters, and 11 grandchildren.

Cleo Thibege ‘16, a Macalester exchange student from France, died unexpectedly after being hit by a car near the Macalester campus in late August. She is survived by her parents, a sister, and a brother.

Other Losses

WINTER 2013 | 47
"GIVE ME TEN WEEKS. I will teach you enough French that they will be nice to you over there."

Here is how it would work, my would-be French teacher said. He would come to my house every week and give me the skills to communicate—to actually participate in French culture on my upcoming three-week vacation. Having previously traveled through France in a bubble of language separation, I was anxious to have a more authentic experience this time. At minimum, I hoped to be a competent navigator for my husband and two daughters.

True, I had found the French teacher on craigslist. But he had wholesome exuberance and can-do attitude to spare. I was sold.

The first lessons were simple. I had taken one year of high school French and, once triggered, “to be,” “to have,” and other common verbs emerged through the mists of time and I was soon chanting their conjugations without difficulty.

As the weeks passed, I entered unknown territory. Our Monday evening lessons began with intense grilling about my weekend. “Qu’est-ce que vous faites?” he’d inquire. I’d responded with fascinating conversational nuggets like, “I go to a movie” or “I do the housework.” I found myself silently narrating my everyday activities in rudimentary present-tense French, noting what I could reasonably report at my lessons.

Conversing with my teacher, I gained a window into his life. His car broke down a lot. He went out dancing and met nice ladies. The verb tomber, “to fall,” works for love as well as car problems, I learned.

Our hours speaking in French, and sometimes English, provided their own cross-cultural flavor. Born in Paris but raised in Mali, my teacher scoffed when I asked about a famous Malian singer who’d found it difficult to perform in her own country. “Women have run for president in Mali. Women have rights.” It’s not the culture that holds back women, he said, but the fathers.

“In Mali, if I wanted to marry your daughter it would be up to your husband,” he said. “If your husband said ‘no,’ that would be it.” Our eyes wandered to my 14-year-old daughter in the next room. After a moment of silence we resumed our verb conjugations.

My teacher recognized that, even after 10 years in the United States, he still had trouble navigating the culture. He’d learned to use with caution the verb “do” when describing interactions with people, and found that it was not the best idea to enthusiastically compliment one’s pregnant boss.

On my last lesson, three days before departure, my teacher declared me ready. I was armed with many irregular verbs, knew my numbers, and had expunged the casual “tu” form from my vocabulary. I was set to formally greet people when approaching them with a question, rather than just marching up and demanding: “Where are the toilets?” I had the capacity to use the past imperfect tense and the wisdom to say, “I have a cold” rather than “I am cold.”

Swaying groggily in a packed train from the Charles De Gaulle Airport to downtown Paris, I made an inaugural attempt at tuning into the foreign hubbub around me. I strained to pick out verbs I understood in the rapid-fire shouts of the nearby teenage boys. Their talk seemed to be dominated by versions of “to eat” and “to buy.” Was that possible?

When we arrived in our rental apartment and I checked with our British landlord, he confirmed it with a laugh. “People talking about food and shopping? Welcome to Paris!”

Traveling through budget Paris, Normandy, and Brittany, I was the family spokesperson, stopping people on the street for directions to the post office, asking if there was anything on the menu without ham, and, on one occasion, trying to explain to a clerk that the chip we’d purchased for our phone wasn’t working.

People were nice to me. And I did have one lengthy, two-way conversation in French—covering topics from road repairs to school holidays—with a Japanese cabdriver.

Now that I’ve been home awhile, it’s occurred to me that even though my travels had yielded many eye-opening international experiences, I’d actually learned a great deal working with my French teacher right in my own home. I’d also gained a lasting appreciation for the subtlety of language.

I still cringe thinking of the amused smiles that met my stumbling attempts to communicate. The sting of being inarticulate remains fresh. So when my daughter brought home a letter from her Tanzanian pen pal who expressed the desire to see American currency by writing, “I love you, I need you, give me your money,” I only laughed a little. And I understood.

Sarah Johanneson Clark ’86 is a communications and development consultant living in St. Paul.
You’ve planned your day, your weekend and your next adventure. Leave it to Mac to help with your planned gift.

Theresa Gienapp, Director of Planned Giving
gienapp@macalester.edu / 651-696-6087
macalester.edu/plannedgiving
We have an app for that.

_Macalester Today_ is now available on iPad—just head to the iTunes App Store and search for _Macalester Today_.

---

PHOTO: DAVID J. TURNER