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Dear Master of Liberal Arts Community,

I am delighted to share with you the latest news about our MLA community! The fascinating and varied experiences of our MLA students, alumni, and faculty continue to be a great source of inspiration.

To our newest graduates, congratulations! Graduation is a significant accomplishment which you have worked hard to achieve. This is the beginning of a lasting relationship with the University and Graham School community.

Among other items, in this issue you will be introduced to our new dean of the Graham School, Mark Nemec, University faculty who have joined the program this year, as well as read the latest community news in Have You Heard? You will also learn about what fuels the passion of ultramarathon runners and what it takes to build and sustain a true community in Alumni Reflections and Highlights.

I encourage you to explore other educational opportunities, as well as the many cultural offerings available at the University. I hope that you will take advantage of all that is open to you.

If you have any thoughts or would simply like to say hello, I can easily be reached at 773.702.2047 or rciacci@uchicago.edu.

Sincerely,

Raymond W. Ciacci
Program Director
Welcome Our New Dean
Mark Nemec is Appointed the New Graham School Dean

We are pleased to announce that Mark Nemec, a political scientist, higher education expert, and business leader joined the Graham School of Continuing Liberal and Professional Studies as dean this past July.

From roots in academia, Nemec turned to the use of data and analysis to help global organizations, including institutions of higher education, operate more strategically and effectively. Most recently president and chief executive officer of Eduventures, a Boston-based information services company providing research, data, and advice to the higher education community, he also earlier served on the executive team of Forrester Research, a provider of similar offerings to the technology industry.

Nemec previously taught American politics as a visiting assistant professor at Davidson College, and as an instructor at the University of Michigan, where he earned his PhD. He also earned an MA in education with a focus on higher education and public policy from the University of Michigan, and a BA in English from Yale University.


We extend congratulations to our new dean and wish him much success!

Excerpted from here.
Article by Steve Kloehn, April 22, 2014
Congratulations to MLA Graduates

Winter 2014

DEREK CHRISTENSEN
The 12th Frame: The Story of the 2009–10 Plainfield South High School Boys Bowling Team

JAMES CIESLA
Funerals for Paupers: A Static Paradigm for Policies, Practices, and Perspectives On Indigent Burials in Illinois

Spring 2014

MERILET EUGENE
The Paradoxical Nature of Control in the Kamasutra

BARBARA TAI
Vengeance, Sacrifice, and Loyalty: 47 Rōnin from Mizoguchi to Ichikawa

Welcome, New MLA Instructors

We are Pleased to Announce the Addition of New Instructors, Drawn from University of Chicago Faculty, to the MLA Program This Year

Andreas Glaeser
Meaning and Motive in Social Thought will be taught by Andreas Glaeser, Professor in Sociology and the College at the University of Chicago. Winner of the Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, Glaeser was also awarded the Gordon J. Laing Prize by the University of Chicago Press for his book Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism, which considers socialist East Germany’s unexpected self-dissolution in 1989. He works in the hermeneutic tradition of the social sciences, eager to engage empirical work and theory development in a dialectical process. His current research activities center around three topics: first, a sociology of liberation which aims to bring a normative perspective back into the social sciences; second, a study on the differences of social imaginaries across history and cultures; and third, the dynamics of economic knowledge making in the context of bubble economies.

Daniel Brudney
Medical Ethics: Life, Death, and a Few Things In Between will be taught by Daniel Brudney, Professor in the Department of Philosophy and the College; Associate Faculty in the Divinity School; Associate Faculty, MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics; and co-chair of the Human Rights Program at the University of Chicago. Winner of the Quantrell Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching, Brudney writes and teaches in political philosophy, philosophy and literature, bioethics, and the philosophy of religion. He is the author of Marx’s Attempt to Leave Philosophy (Harvard, 1998).

STEPHEN THOMAS, MLA ’08, is co-editor of a full-length biography, Lorado Taft: The Chicago Years, about the renowned sculptor Lorado Taft (1860–1936). The primary author, Allen Weller (1907–1997), who received his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1934, was a faculty member and dean at the University of Illinois from 1947 until 1971. Thomas came upon the substantially complete, but unfinished and unedited Weller manuscript while doing archival research for an essay on Taft. He then spearheaded a campaign for its completion and publication. Additional contributions to the completed Taft biography have been provided by Robert La France, newly appointed director of the Owsley Museum of Art at Ball State University in Indiana, and Henry Adams of Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. Among his many sculptures, Taft’s Fountain of Time was unveiled at the west end of Chicago’s Midway Plaisance in 1922. Midway Studios, the fine arts studios of the Art Department of the University of Chicago, was founded by Taft, who was also a professorial lecturer on art. The biography will be published by the University of Illinois Press in the fall of 2014. Thomas retired from a large Chicago law firm in 1999 after 35 years. He shared that entering the MLA program was the best decision he has made during his retirement years, which are otherwise devoted to playing keyboard with several Chicago area bands and naturalist studies.

KATHRYN WARREN, MLA ’07, earned her PhD in Education, with a concentration in Online Learning Design, from Capella University, which has one of the best programs in this field. The title of her dissertation is Agents of Change: A New Role for Learners in Online Workplace Training. Kathryn also shared, “When anyone asks me, I tell them I gained the confidence and skills I needed to pursue—and persist—in the doctoral program through my studies in the University of Chicago Master of Liberal Arts program. It was Bert Cohler who made me think I could do it, and somewhere he must be smiling, to see another soul that he inspired to reach for the stars.”

LOUISE SMITH, MLA ’10, wrote her MLA thesis on FÊTES GALAN- TES in Painting, Poetry, and Song. Her thesis and presentation underscored the inspirational relationships among music, art, and poetry. She presented this topic at the Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago in June 2014. Louise has worked as a management consultant specializing in business turnarounds in a wide range of sectors. She has also served as a corporate executive in the health insurance field. Active in the philanthropic community throughout her musical and cultural posts over the years have included service as Chair of the Board of Chamber Music America, Trustee of the Concert Artists Guild, Chair of the Board and Trustee of the Chicago Chamber Musicians, and Trustee of SongFest, an art-song festival in California. A dedicated amateur collaborative pianist and chamber musician, she is a member of the Library Society and the Visiting Committee of the Library of the University of Chicago, the Governing Board of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Music Advisory Board of Northwestern University, The Fortnightly of Chicago, The Friday Club, and the Chicago Literary Society. Louise did undergraduate work at Smith College and the University of Chicago, and earned her BA, with a major in music, from Wayne State University and an MBA in finance from the University of Michigan. In 2010, she earned a Master of Liberal Arts degree from the University of Chicago, and as a Returning Scholar, she continues coursework here. She currently does nonprofit organization consulting, with a particular interest in helping new arts organizations.

JANN INGMIRE, Student, liked the University of Chicago experience so much that she now works as a news officer in the University News Office. She began her employment at the end of 2013. Jann covers the Social Sciences Division and the School of Social Service Administration, among other areas. She particularly enjoys writing stories that are posted on the UChicago website about the faculty, their research, and events. Jann also works with the wider Chicago media community to help publicize what’s happening on campus.

FREDERICK JOHNSON, MLA ’11, and his wife, Laura, embarked this past June in a 30-foot motorhome, on what they expect will be a two-year trip. Their goal is to live out what Fred originally documented in his MLA thesis, which was the desire to leave corporate life, simplify his lifestyle, and get back to nature. Fred shared that the primary impetus for this major lifestyle change was a class he took on secular moralities and the teachings of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, which was taught by Professor Ralph Johnson in 2009. Having sold their downtown Chicago condominium and put everything in storage, they plan to spend time in all 59 of the national parks in the United States as well as visit family and friends. He also cited the PBS series by Ken Burns, The National
Parks: America’s Best Idea, and John Muir, naturalist and early advocate of preservation of wilderness in the United States, as strong influences. As he wrote in an article for the Chenoa Clipper Times in May, 2014, “Laura and I have both traveled extensively, but decided that before we travel to another distant country, there is more than enough to see right here in our own backyard, as this country’s national park system is the envy of the world.” You can follow their journey and experiences here.

MICHAEL WILSON, MLA ’12, was a speaker at TEDxPurdueU, an independently organized conference at Purdue University in Indiana in March, 2014. The theme for the conference was “Daring Greatly,” which is taken from a well-known speech given by President Theodore Roosevelt. Listeners were “urged to strive towards one’s goals—undeterred by failures, obstacles, or the status quo.” The speakers, who have lived these words, elaborated on how they have personally or professionally dared greatly to produce positive change in their own lives and communities. Michael is an adjunct professor and PhD student in the College of Engineering at Purdue University. He stressed that “it is totally possible to go on to a PhD program after completing the MLA.” His particular interest is connecting university-industry relations through entrepreneurship. Having founded two successful start-up entities, Michael enjoys exploring the scholarship and the socio-metrics of business.

REBECCA GRAY SMITH, MLA ’12, taught a noncredit course at the University, The Echo of Eons: The Power of Printmaking in Art, which focused on the history and process of fine art printmaking. Part of the Humanities Division’s Civic Knowledge Project, the class was again offered this past summer. Along with lectures on the history of printmaking, the course includes field trips and visits to Anchor Graphics Press, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago print studio, and the Hyde Park Art Center to witness and practice printmaking. Gray Smith based the course on her MLA thesis, which examined intaglio printmaking. Her faculty advisor was Martha M. Ward, Associate Professor of Art History, Department of Visual Arts, and the College. In May and June of 2014, Gray Smith had a solo show of 28 etchings at Chicago’s Bert Green Fine Art gallery.
Alumni Reflections and Highlights

Running With Darwin: Daniel Kaplan, MLA ’13, Discovers the Science Behind His Passion

It is not unusual for students to make discoveries that are not only academic, but also personal, while in the MLA program. Many have found a way to connect their liberal arts education to other aspects of their lives. For some, it has been a connection to their career or previous education, but for many it is also a gateway to personal reflection and understanding. Daniel Kaplan, MLA ’13, did not anticipate that it would be a course on Darwin that would ultimately give him the inspiration for his special project, The Evolutionary Experiences of an Ultramarathon Runner. In the article below, Kaplan documents not only his thoughts about the MLA program courses and faculty, but also the inner awakening he experienced as he researched the connection between evolution and running.

My fundamental reason for enrolling in the MLA program was for the intellectual challenge. For example, my very first course, Cannibals, Magicians, Bastards, and Others: The Renaissance as an Age of Discovery, was taught by Professor David Bevington, a world-renowned Shakespeare expert. While focusing on the world of Shakespeare and Renaissance writers, I experienced and absorbed Bevington’s passionate and contagious enthusiasm. This, coupled with the discourse and critical analysis of my classmates, was the perfect mix that finally allowed me to understand and appreciate why Shakespeare is so revered.

Each successive class in the MLA program offered new challenges that exposed me to areas of study that did not appear on my “to-do list” when I was much younger. At that time, I was hard at work earning degrees in business and law. However, Darwinian Medicine, taught by Professor Robert Perlman, provided an opportunity for self-exploration in a way I had not anticipated and for which I am most grateful. For more than 20 years, I have been a passionate—many would say obsessed—long-distance runner. Over the past 10 years I have focused on completing 50- and 100-mile ultramarathons through forests, in the mountains, or through the countryside. I have frequently been asked why I would want to run such long distances. Until I took Darwinian Medicine, the only answer I could give was that I did not know, but I just could not stop.

While writing my paper for the class, I explored the connection between evolution and running. The research presented evidence that humans have selected specialized endurance running capabilities. Some evolutionary biologists contend that these specialized capabilities may have evolved because they made our ancestors better at persistence hunting, which involved chasing animals to hyperthermia and exhaustion. With brain development, it also seems reasonable to assume that our ancestors recognized, by necessity, that they could avoid starvation if they were able to chase down animals.

This evolutionary hypothesis, while intriguing, did not fully answer why, when persistence hunting is no longer necessary for survival, many like me are still compelled to run long distances. This led to my decision to embark on special topic project that would delve deeper for answers. The written portion of my project expands upon a hypothesis that ultramarathon runners are “wired” to run. This means that physical adaptations instantiated by physiological mechanisms make running pleasurable. Several recent studies that involved brain scans provided the evidence that allowed me to explain the science behind “runner’s high.” This research led me to suggest that ultramarathon runners, because of individual circumstances and unique personality profiles, choose to develop and exploit these evolutionary adaptations. I propose that there may well be an evolutionary connection between endurance running and our innate affiliation with nature and that “runner’s high” can cause feelings of spirituality.

Recognizing that a scholarly paper was not really the best way to explain my propositions to people who question why I do what I do, I also prepared a 15-minute video that captures the real-time experience of “runner’s high” during ultramarathons, as well as training for and running in a 100-mile ultramarathon. The video took over a year to prepare and included hundreds of hours of editing. The overall response to the video has been most gratifying. Several thousand people have since watched it on YouTube. The most frequent responses from long distance runners have been similar, “I had my family watch the video. They still think I am crazy, but at least they now understand that there is a reason for it. Thank you.”

I am thankful that I developed new passions through the MLA program and grateful that I was able to finally understand and help others comprehend the passion I and many others have for long-distance running. Watch the video on YouTube.
In October 2006, George Manning opened his home in the unofficially named Austin Village, an area within the larger Austin community in Chicago, to fellow alumni, faculty, students, friends, and program staff for a unique MLA event. His home, Beeson House, is a Chicago landmark built in 1892 by Frederick Schock for the president of the Chicago Veneer Company, Frederick Beeson. The beautifully restored Queen Anne was the venue for an afternoon of Music, Lunch, and Architecture (MLA!). All enjoyed musical performances by the Sequoia Quartet, as well as a piano and violin duet by MLA program director Raymond Ciacci and Jin Zhang, MLA ’07. Attendees also had the opportunity to view a home next door to Manning’s and see the process of restoration in action in a house that once was the residence of architect Frederick Schock.

Eight years later, Manning’s home and those of his neighbors were once again the focus of attention, but this time in a very different context. In a front-page June 2014 Sunday Chicago Tribune article written by Dawn Turner Trice, “Village With a Vision,” the Austin Village enclave was featured not only for its architecture, but also what makes the Village and its inhabitants distinctive. It is a story about how, “for decades, what’s made Austin Village unique is that despite the larger community’s hardships, it has been able to attract a middle- and upper middle-class group of residents and maintain a modest interracial mix.”

George Manning’s home, as it turns out, is part of a much larger Chicago story. As Turner Trice wrote, “In many ways the area—centered around Race Avenue—tells the story of Chicago’s racially charged past, when panic-peddling of homes rapidly changed neighborhoods from white to black during the early 1970s. But it also points to what could be Chicago’s future. It’s a place where the well-to-do share the block with residents of lesser means. It’s an area that for decades has embraced gay and interracial couples when other city neighborhoods did not.” As Max Dieber, a demographer at the University of Illinois at Chicago, concluded, “It comes down to personalities and people deciding to do something and make it work.” In other words, it comes down to determination, perseverance, and the ongoing commitment of the community.

The excerpts on the following page from Turner Trice’s article focus on George Manning’s personal experience of moving to and living in Austin Village. You are invited to read the full article here.
Alumni Reflections and Highlights
Chicago’s Austin Village: George Manning, MLA ’98, His Neighbors, and Community Amid Hardship (continued)

From “Village With a Vision: Austin Neighbors Face Crime and Poverty to Hold on to Deeper Value of Community”

When George Manning, an African-American, bought a stucco cottage on Midway Park in 1974, he was a 23-year-old classically trained pianist, pipe organist, and university administrator. His father had played baseball in the Negro Leagues. His mother was a teacher’s aide and a community activist who loved entertaining.

“Around the same time the neighborhood changed; Dutch elm disease had come through and wiped out a lot of the trees,” said Manning, now 63. “My mother and I planted honey locusts along the midway that are still there to this day.”

Manning settled into his home, but the one that he coveted was down the block. It was a 6,000 square-foot Queen Anne, designed by Frederick Schock and built in 1891. It had three stories and sat on a half-acre lot. He fell deeper in love with it every time he and his neighbors banded together to clean the streets, mow the grass in public areas, and encourage people to look out for each other’s safety.

But by 1974, although the Queen Anne still looked fairly regal on the outside, like several other mansions in the area, it was a disaster on the inside.

“It had about 50 cats living on the first floor, and the second floor had water damage, and the third floor was open to the elements,” Manning said. “My real estate agent went in to look around and came out with a handkerchief over his face. He said, “This place will never again be habitable.”

Manning purchased it anyway.

When you enter Manning’s home today, you encounter a first floor that’s reminiscent of the lobby of an elegant boutique hotel. It has a grand piano, one of four in the house, several sitting areas with chess sets and fine glassware, and an oak staircase whose wall has a painting of his parents. On the third floor is a ballroom.

Manning said that when he looks around his community, imperfect as it may be, he knows that just because homes are lined up on a block, that doesn’t make it a neighborhood.

“When I look out the window at my neighbor’s house, I’m looking at my house,” he said. “I care about what’s going on over there. It’s the people who make this place a neighborhood—the people who continue to care, and who fight together. We may have come here for different reasons, but that’s what keeps us here.”
Every June, the University invites its alumni back for an extended weekend of fun—UChicago style. It is your opportunity to celebrate your connection to the broader University of Chicago community at Alumni Weekend.

Alumni Weekend’s calendar of concerts, films, lectures, wine tastings, and tours offers numerous opportunities to connect, whether you want to enjoy time with family and friends or mingle with current students, alumni, and faculty from around the globe. There are many family-friendly events planned throughout the weekend. Shuttle buses make it easy to move around campus or between campus and downtown.

The UnCommon Core, an annual favorite at Alumni Weekend, lets you relive the vitality of a Chicago classroom as faculty members and alumni lecture and lead discussions on a variety of topics of historic and current interest. Learn how University academic leaders are applying innovative methods to create solutions for society’s most complex and challenging problems.

Enjoy the beauty of the University’s historic campus in full bloom. Tour exciting recent architectural additions such as the soaring Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts or the innovative Mandueto Library. See where scientists explore high energy physics at Fermilab or dig into the ancient Near East at the Oriental Institute.

All MLA graduates are invited to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to expand and strengthen their connections to the University of Chicago. View photographs and videos from the 2014 Alumni Weekend to get a taste of what you can expect in 2015.

Come to Alumni Weekend and rejoin what former University president Robert Maynard Hutchins called the “Great Conversation.”

We hope you will make plans to attend!
Did You Know?

The Renaissance Society: Focusing on the Forefront of Visual Arts

Founded in 1915 to encourage a greater understanding of culture—in the broad sense of the term “renaissance”—The Renaissance Society set out to include Chicago in the cultural liberty and controversy of Europe. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, The Society first presented works by Picasso, Brancusi, Mondrian, Noguchi, Miro, Moholy-Nagy and Arp—often taken straight from the artist’s studios. The Society’s 1934 exhibition of Alexander Calder’s mobiles and its 1936 survey of paintings and drawings by Ferdinand Leger were the first solo exhibitions of these artists in this country. Exhibitions and events in the years that followed included Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Marc Chagall, Sergei Prokofiev, and Gertrude Stein. Such bold and early commitments to this country’s most challenging and provocative art continues to be the mission of The Renaissance Society. For nearly one hundred years it has continued in this capacity, exhibiting important and challenging work by leading contemporary artists, often early in their careers, before they are shown in major museums and galleries.

Rather than concentrate on the past, the Society maintains “bold and early commitments to this country’s most challenging and provocative art.” The Renaissance Society was one of the first museums to focus on “modern art.” Unlike most museums that measure their worth by the value of their permanent collection, the Renaissance Society is a non-collecting museum, so it devotes its energy to unique shows, much like a gallery.

Exhibitions in recent decades have delved into the young and exciting studios of America and Europe. The ’70s introduced Chicago to the work of Bruce Nauman, Joseph Kosuth and Julian Schnabel; the ’80s featured the first Ed Paschke retrospective (1981); Art and the Media, a concept-based exhibition including the work of Jenny Holzer, Cindy Sherman, and Jeff Koons (1982); and the first Midwest exhibition of German neo-expressionists Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, and A. R. Penck (1984). Solo exhibitions have featured Louise Bourgeois (1981), Phyllis Bramson (1986), and Mike Kelley (1988).

ARTstor and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago are sharing nearly 2,400 images of contemporary art and exhibition installation views in the Digital Library. This collection features painting, sculpture, installation, video, performance, and multi-media work by seminal contemporary artists who exhibited at the Renaissance Society, including Nancy Spero, Raymond Pettibon, Francis Alÿs, Eva Hesse, Kerry James Marshall, Shahzia Sikander, and others.

Today, The Renaissance Society also sponsors concerts, performances, film and video screenings, poetry and fiction readings, and lectures by noted contemporary artists, critics, and scholars. Free and open to the public, you can learn about upcoming exhibitions here.

Excerpted from here and here.
MLA Alumni: Become an MLA Scholar

Have you missed the joy of learning from esteemed University of Chicago faculty and of reading great works since you received your MLA degree?

Do you want to participate in lively class discussions?

Do you wish to interact with members of the MLA community?

If so, join the MLA Scholars Program.

Audit MLA courses and pay approximately one-third of the regular tuition.

Learn more about subjects that interest you, or explore subjects that are entirely new.

Benefit from having student privileges, including library access and a University of Chicago email account.

View our course offerings here. To enroll or to get more information, please call the Graham School at 773.834.2964.