# Table of Contents

1. Welcome

2. Congratulations to MLA Graduates  
   Summer and Autumn 2013

2. Become an MLA Scholar  
   Calling all MLA Alumni

3. Have You Heard?  
   News About Members of Our MLA Community

5. Alumni Weekend  
   Reunite, Connect, Learn, and Discover

6. Faculty Highlights  
   Wendy Doniger Explains the Symmetry Between Religious Rituals and New Year's Traditions in *The Atlantic* Interview

7. Faculty Highlights  
   Janice Knight and Committee on Creative Writing Acknowledged in *Newcity Lit’s* 2013 "Lit 50" List

8. Student Highlight  
   Mary Fons: A Stitchy Situation (or How I Plan to Become a Renaissance Woman)

9. Alumni and Thesis Highlight  
   Julie Marie Lemon, MLA ’07

11. Did You Know?  
    The University of Chicago is a Botanic Garden
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.

I encourage you to explore other educational opportunities as well as the many cultural offerings at the University. I hope that you will take advantage of all that is available 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
Congratulations to MLA Graduates
Summer and Autumn 2013

**Summer 2013**

**BERNARD CLARK II**
*T. S. Eliot: His Criticism and the Four Quartets*

**STEPHANIE THIES GEIER**
*Making the Case: A Beginner’s Guide to Professional Fundraising*

**WARREN GRIMSLEY**
*Thucydides, An Athenian*

**MICHAEL WITWER**
*Empire of Imagination: The Legend of Gary Gygax*

**Autumn 2013**

**KAREN KENNY**
*Feminism in Vatsayayhana’s Kamasutra: The Thematic Connections of Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique to the Modern Translation*

---

**Become an MLA Scholar**

**Calling all MLA Alumni**

Have you missed the joy of learning from esteemed University of Chicago faculty and 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; explore subjects that are entirely new
- Benefit from having student privileges, including library access, a free email account and an individual online student account at my.uchicago.edu

Check out our course offerings [here](#).

To enroll or to get more information, please call Bonni Van Eck at 773.834.2964.

We welcome you back to the program as an MLA Scholar. We hope to see you soon!
Have You Heard?
News About Members of Our MLA Community

BRANDON COURTNEY, Student, shared that his collection of poetry was selected for publication by Stanley Moss of The Sheep Meadow Press for publication in 2014. Additionally, Courtney’s chapbook, a small booklet of poems, was recently published by Thrush Press. He will also have poetry included in an upcoming issue of Cream City Review from the University of Wisconsin, as well as the Tupelo Quarterly.

RICHARD D. EASTON, MLA ’96, along with Eric F. Frazier, has written a book, GPS Declassified: From Smart Bombs to Smartphones. Robert Schaefer, a research engineer at the MIT Haystack Observatory, wrote in his review in the New York Journal of Books, “Those that have imagined a Global Positioning System (GPS) predate the dawn of the space age. Though science fiction author Arthur C. Clark predicted communications satellites in 1945 and GPS in 1956, the idea goes even further back—to the 19th century. Edward Everett Hale, the author of The Man Without a Country, in his short story ‘The Brick Moon’ proposed using satellites to measure longitude in 1870! Written in a clear and lively style, GPS Declassified provides readers with GPS development history including personal recollections from leading developers. As an introduction to GPS, its history, uses, issues and concerns, GPS Declassified can’t be beat.” The book can be purchased from major book retailers in hard or electronic copy.

GEORGE KOUPATADZE, Student, and friend Alex Nikolenko traveled to Madison, Wisconsin last spring to attend the annual 2013 BioEthics Forum. The Forum was organized and coordinated by the BioPharmaceutical Technology Center Institute (BTC Institute) of Promega Corporation. Promega Corporation is a manufacturer of enzymes and other products for biotechnology and molecular biology. The BTC Institute is a not-for-profit organization. Koupatadze and Nikolenko share an interest in psychology, consciousness research, science, and spirituality and wanted to provide coverage of the Forum as freelance journalists. The two-day event consisted of presentations of and discussions about old and new ideas on topics ranging from science, religion, and technology, to psychology, spirituality and human consciousness. Many prominent specialists were in attendance. The 2013 topic was Creative Insight: Further Studies in Human Consciousness. Sure that there would be written reports in English, Koupatadze wrote his report in Russian in order to spread the news with a Russian-speaking audience. He has friends in Russia who are professional psychologists who run web-based psychology journals and web sites related to psychology, consciousness studies, and altered states of perception. The report has been posted on Facebook and was uploaded to www.scribd.com. He plans to attend next year to explore Nature’s Wisdom and Evolution, especially because it relates directly to some of the courses the MLA program offers. Learn more here.

CHERE LAROSE-SENNE, MLA ’12, is a member of the Bohemian Theatre Ensemble board of directors. She is responsible for managing the business and affairs of the organization. In particular, LaRose-Senne was recruited to assist in the strategic planning of the organization as it celebrates its 10th anniversary. An award-winning company, BoHo Theatre’s mission is to create bold theatre and to challenge convention through innovative storytelling, uniting artist and audience in the examination of truth, beauty, freedom, and love through the lens of human relationships. Learn more here.

FRANCINE MCKENNA, Student, a CPA, had an article, “What would happen if the Big Four became the Big Three?”, published in the December, 2013 issue of the University of Chicago Booth School of Business Capital Ideas Magazine. Her article addresses what would happen if another major audit firm exited the market, its impact on businesses, and the cost of the loss.

CHIKAKO D. KUMAMOTO, MLA ’02, has presented or had published several articles, the geneses of which were papers she wrote for various MLA courses. Ms. Kumamoto’s explication of Act 4, scenes 5 and 7 of Hamlet, deriving from Renaissance coursework, was published in The Explicator (2006). Her re-worked graduation thesis on Hamlet appeared in The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association (2007). Additionally, a paper from an Iliad course eventually became an article on Coriolanus that was published in the Journal of Wooden O Symposium (2007), while another article, on Shakespeare’s heroines, appeared in Community College Humanities Review (2010). Looking forward to 2014, an article Ms. Kumamoto developed from her MLA sociology coursework on Nathaniel Hawthorne and Max Weber will be published by AMS Press in an anthology titled Nathaniel Hawthorne in the College Classroom: Contexts, Materials, and Approaches (eds. Christopher Diller and Samuel Coale). Sharing her reflections on the MLA program, Chikako wrote, “I note these writing experiences to attest to how richly felicitous and fertile the MLA program has been in creating my own personal intellectual legacy.

REBECCA GRAY SMITH, MLA ’12, taught a noncredit course for the University of Chicago Humanities Division Civic Knowledge Project titled The Echo of Eons: The Power of Printmaking in Art on the history and process of fine art printmaking in Autumn 2013, which will be offered again in the Summer 2014 quarter. The course is an unusual combination of art history and studio art in keeping with the new initiative of the Civic Knowledge Project. The triad course plan is composed of lectures on the history of printmaking from prehistoric times to the present; field trips to see the collections at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art, the Oriental Institute, and the Newberry Library;
Have You Heard?

News About Members of Our MLA Community (continued)

and the process of printmaking experienced through visits to Anchor Graphics Press at Columbia College, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago Print Studio, and the Hyde Park Art Center Print Studio, with hands-on printmaking through creation of relief, intaglio, and lithographic prints. The nucleus for the course is Smith’s MLA thesis, advised by Prof. Martha M. Ward (Dept. of Art History, University of Chicago), titled *The Perseus Paradox: The Intaglio Print: The Mirror Versus the Terror* which examined the history and process of the fine art intaglio print along with an exhibition of her special project of nineteen intaglio etchings *The Alphabet SIDA: Silent in Death Always*. In May 2014, Smith will have a solo show of her complete *Alphabet* etchings at the Bert Green Fine Art Gallery, 8 S. Michigan, Chicago, IL.

**LARRY RAY ELKINS**, CER ’03, MLA ’08, sadly passed away on September 5 in Chicago. Elkins joined the law firm of Chapman and Cutler in 1964. Specializing in corporate finance, he became a partner in 1972 and was a member of the firm’s management committee for several years. Elkin retired in 1998 and joined the board of Lincoln Park Village. He read extensively, assembling a wide-ranging library of books, and took up the challenge of mastering the game of golf. He became a student of the game, winning several awards and teaching various members of his family (and their friends) to enjoy the sport. Elkins and wife Nancy were worldwide travelers, hiking, camping, biking, and boating, never content to just sit and watch from the window. In addition to his wife of 32 years he is survived by a son, two stepchildren, and six grandchildren.

**AL FURBAY**, MLA ’06, welcomed 2014 in Puerto Vallarta at Hotel Cuatro Vientos with an elegant dinner and a magnificent fireworks display out over the bay, accompanied by wife Toni. Toni helps students with their conversational English and last year Al became a “Residente Permanente” of Mexico. Al attended the national convention of the American Culinary Federation at the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Las Vegas, then went from Las Vegas to Salt Lake City for a nephew’s wedding. Toni was already there with her sister Gloria, and they were happy to celebrate with Elliott and Dawna on the occasion of their marriage. On the way back to Guadalajara, they stopped in Dallas for a visit with Al’s daughter Kathy, plus grandchildren and a great granddaughter. In October, they went to Paris for a week. Life is busy!
Alumni Weekend
Reunite, Connect, Learn, and Discover

Every June the University invites its alumni back for an extended weekend of fun—UChicago style.

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 UChicago classroom as faculty members and alumni lecture and lead discussions on 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 architectural gems such as the soaring Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts or the innovative Mansueto 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 explore and strengthen their connections to the University of Chicago. View a calendar of Alumni Weekend events and photographs at alumniweekend.uchicago.edu. Come to Alumni Weekend and rejoin what former University president Robert Maynard Hutchins called the “Great Conversation.”

Other alumni programs and resources

Your MLA degree gives you access to alumni resources and programs to enrich your professional and personal life throughout the year. Go to uchicago.edu/alumni to see the full range of professional, social, and academic resources that are available.

Questions?
Call 800.955.0065 or email alumniweekend@uchicago.edu.

Excerpted from here and here.
**Why Getting Drunk and Making Resolutions on New Year’s are Profoundly Religious Acts**

A New Year’s Eve celebration or a religious ceremony?

If you Google the question, “Why do people make New Year’s resolutions?”, you’ll find all sorts of reasons: There’s a psychological appeal in setting goals; the ancient Romans used to offer resolutions to the god Janus, for whom January is named; humans love the feeling of hope, etc.

But there’s another explanation: New Year’s resolutions play a role similar to religious observance in our lives.

Wendy Doniger is the Mircea Eliade Professor in the Divinity School, Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, Committee on Social Thought, and the College at the University of Chicago. A prolific writer and world-renowned scholar, Doniger holds two doctorates in Sanskrit and Indian Studies from Harvard and Oxford. She is also the recipient of The Col James Tod Award, from the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation (MMCF), in Udaipur, Rajasthan. MMCF was instituted in 1996 “to honour a foreign national who, like Tod, has contributed through his works of permanent value an understanding of the spirit and values of Mewar.”

Doniger spoke with Emma Green of *The Atlantic* about the symmetry between religious rituals and New Year’s traditions. The article was published on December 31, 2013. “The idea that you’re suddenly going to change is a magical idea,” she said. “Religions are in charge of magic for most of us. This [idea] gets into the popular culture as well.” She’s using “magic” as a sort of sociological explanation for the role faith and ritual play: Religious belief is predicated on the assumption that there are forces beyond our control or understanding that influence our lives (i.e., magic, if you’re a sociologist; God, if you’re a monotheist).

Although New Year’s traditions aren’t explicitly religious for most people, many of them share the patterns of religious ritual. The theme of the holiday—that this is a time to start over and be a better person—shows up in faiths and cultures throughout history. Wearing sparkly hats, drinking champagne, and promising yourself that you’ll actually go to the gym this year may seem silly, but structurally, these acts have a lot in common with religious observance.

Take the fixation on midnight, for example. “The whole thing about ‘the magic moment’ and counting down—that’s a real religious thing to do,” Doniger said. “Things that happen at the stroke of midnight are always magical things.” This doesn’t mean that people watching the ball drop actually believe there will be magic tricks or miracles at the stroke of 12. But pinning a belief that something will happen in your life—e.g., I really will go to the gym this year—to a change in the physical world is a magical belief: It’s the conviction that cosmic changes, like the cycle of the sun, have control over what happens in people’s lives.

Doniger pointed to two examples of this in Hindu culture: Diwali, a festival of lights, which she says has become a pan-Indian holiday also celebrated by Buddhists and Christians; and Holi, a festival of colors featuring song, dance, and people throwing paint at one another. “They’re celebrations of light and of hope, but that’s in a way what we’re talking about,” she said.

She compared these festivities to Carnival, a pre-Lent season of festivals celebrated in many predominantly Catholic and Orthodox communities. The masquerades and parades of Carnival in medieval Italy were renowned; their mystery and intrigue were written about by Edgar Allan Poe, Alexandre Dumas, Stendhal, and others. Today, large-scale celebrations take place throughout Europe, Latin America, and other regions. These festivals are about indulgence and excess, filled with outrageous costumes, loud music, and rich food—all of which bears structural resemblance to the sparkly hats and dance parties of New Year’s. “The idea of being in costume—that you can be someone else, take on a different persona—is another magical idea,” Doniger said.

The idea of a “fresh start” ushered in by New Year’s also echoes theological narratives. Following the bacchanalia of carnival is the season of Lent, which is all about abstaining from these kinds of pleasures. It’s a cleanse modeled after the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert in the Bible, designed to prepare Christians for the season of renewal brought by Easter. Of course, that holiday revolves around the theological narrative of sin and redemption: Jesus dies on the cross, only to rise again three days later, thus offering a chance for people to be forgiven of their sins.

Judaism also has a holiday specifically dedicated to celebrating a new year and promising self-improvement. Rosh Hashanah takes place in the early fall in accordance with the Jewish calendar, and the focus is on closing one cycle and beginning the next. The holiday opens a period called the High Holy Days, during which Jews are called to reflect on the past year in preparation for being inscribed into the Book of Life. At the end of this 10-day period, Jews ask for forgiveness from others and from God, hoping for the chance to start fresh in the new year.

Even traditions that seem patently secular—bar-hopping on New Year’s Eve, for example—have a hint of religious flavor. “There
are lots of religions in which you get drunk in the ceremony," Doniger said. “Not Christianity particularly, but lots of other people get drunk as part of their worship. If not drunk, often drugs: The ingesting of mind-altering substances is part of many religious ceremonies.”

But if you fail to find God at the bottom of your beer mug on New Year’s Eve, fear not. “Then again, a lot of people just like to get smashed," Doniger said.

Excerpted from here by Emma Green.
December 31, 2013

Janice Knight and Committee on Creative Writing Acknowledged in Newcity Lit’s 2013 “Lit 50” List

Janice Knight is Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature and chair of the Committee on Creative Writing at the University of Chicago. She has an extensive list of publications and her teaching interests span a variety of topics including religion and literature in early America, 19th-century American literature and culture, the American West, Native American cultures, and American women writers.

Knight received the #11 spot on Newcity Lit’s 2013 “Lit 50” list for her accomplishments as Chair of the Committee on Creative Writing as well as her work on Early American colonialism, religion, and gender. The annual list recognizes leaders in the Chicago literary scene, with a special focus this year on “celebrating not so much the writers who occupy the center stage, but those who operate behind the scenes to make sure the stage itself exists.”

In addition to Knight, Garrett Kiely, Director of the University of Chicago Press, and Jack Cella, General Manager of the Seminary Co-Operative Bookstore (now retired) also received top spots on the list (#3 and #4, respectively), further proof of the University’s continuing impact on the Chicago literary scene.

Excerpted and edited from here by Michelle Neuffer.
July 19, 2013
Mary Fons: A Stitchy Situation (or How I Plan to Become a Renaissance Woman)

Mary Fons works quilting, graduate school, and performance into her life.

Graham School Master of Liberal Arts student Mary Fons is well-known in Chicago as a writer and performer, having freelanced for several years, blogged since 2006, and performed as an ensemble member with the Neo-Futurists and in poetry slams at the Green Mill. She is also a downright celebrity in the quilting world. The daughter of Marianne Fons, who hosts Love of Quilting on PBS and co-founded the magazine Fons & Porter’s Love of Quilting as well as written several popular books, Mary Fons originally considered quilting “primarily something Mom did for work” and distanced herself from it. But four years ago, while recovering from both ulcerative colitis and a divorce, she felt called into the family business. “Suddenly, making a quilt was exactly what I felt I needed to do. When life as you know it is torn into a zillion pieces, it just makes sense to tear up fabric into a zillion pieces and then sew it back together again into organized blocks with a nice French-fold binding.”

Since then, thanks in part to her theater background, Fons has become a co-host on Love of Quilting and begun Quilty, an online series for beginning quilters with an accompanying magazine. Her first book, Make and Love Quilts: Scrap Quilts for the 21st Century, is being released this spring by C&T Publishing.

Why are you at Graham?
For me, the MLA program is just as perfect as it gets. I wanted to do graduate work, wanted to learn, wanted to dive more deeply into, well, everything. And that was the problem. My thirst for knowledge and my crazy love of inquiry in general was stalling me: should I get a graduate degree in philosophy? Literature? Art history? I wanted to be a Renaissance person, good at all kinds of things. Then I found the MLA program. This program was made for me. It is so cool to realize that other people think it was made for them, too.

What courses have you taken that might influence your career?
I am not pursuing my MLA for any career-specific reason. I want to be a smarter human being, a more interesting human being, and a more interested human, too. My first course was Michael Turner’s New Cosmology. If that was the only class I ever took, it would’ve been worth applying to the program! Professor Turner is my hero. He’s hilarious. He’s a genius.

Have you been able to use your experiences as a television personality, podcaster, or writer in graduate school?
I’m in my second class right now, so I’m still new in the program—I might find more crossover as I get further in. I can say that my entrance essay and my statement were extremely gratifying to write. They weren’t for a job. They weren’t for a grade. They were for entrance into the University of Chicago, and I had the distinct impression that I took all that I know, all that I have learned in my life, and distilled it down to who I am today, what I want out of an education, and why. I love writing papers.

What should non-quilters know about the quilting community?
People don’t realize how huge and dynamic the industry is. Quilting is a $3.5 billion annual industry. A successful designer told me recently that no matter what the economy does, “women will always spend money on their hair and their hobby.” It’s true; the quilt industry isn’t recession-proof, but it’s pretty close. And the whole thing is driven by women. Very inspiring.

Excerpted and edited from The University of Chicago Magazine, a web exclusive by Claire Zulkey.
December 26, 2013
Reflections on an Unexpected Evolution

What drew me to look again at a topic, science, which I determined years ago was not going to ever be on my wavelength? A topic that I knew I did not have the skills or the talent to comprehend? What is it that brings a subject like science from the periphery of my personal, academic, and professional life, to its center? This is difficult for me to define. However, I can share what happened to me, albeit gradually, during my Master of Liberal Arts experience. I started to focus on science over a two-year span. That focus manifested itself as it evolved into the subject of my thesis: Visualizing the Invisible: The Neo-Baroque Aesthetic of Digital Landscapes in Contemporary Science. How did this shift happen—how is it that I found myself writing about contemporary science? Would I have predicted this when I began the MLA program? Absolutely not!

Before entering the MLA program, my professional career was focused on art museums—the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. In these stimulating environments I worked on interpretation, teacher training, and adult programming. Over the course of several years, I had been implementing programs that integrate the fine arts into the context in which art objects were embedded, such as social studies, humanities, sciences, and math, be it through an understanding of ancient cultures or of contemporary and popular culture influences.

Art museums are rigorous learning environments that were very beneficial to me, but I became restless. My curiosity shifted and I longed to know more about a range of multiple perspectives—aesthetic, historic, political, social, and cultural—that are embedded in artistic expression. I was looking for an experience that would open up and challenge my thinking and, at the same time, allow me to reflect and build on my body of knowledge, attained and attainable, in whatever form: arts and philosophy, science and philosophy, poetry and the creative spirit; science and philosophy. Thoreau took it upon himself to achieve in all three. "truths" emerging from the systematic accumulation of knowledge in varied disciplines. In the 1830s, when Thoreau graduated from Harvard University, there was still the ideal of a holistic approach to knowledge." As L. D. Walls stated, "For serious intellectuals of his time, such an effort might embrace human knowledge, attained and attainable, in whatever form: arts and manufacture; poetry and the creative spirit; science and philosophy. Thoreau took it upon himself to achieve in all three."

This "holistic approach to knowledge" and the ability to understand from multiple perspectives allowed me to wonder about the intertwining history of art and science. Having stopped taking science courses long ago, I did not expect what happened next. I took a sequence of MLA science courses and, although I still struggled through the subjects, I realized that without science I had cut myself off from having some idea about what lead to my current work as Program Director and Curator of the Arts/Science Initiative, which is housed in the Office of the Provost.

How did this change come about? Perhaps it was the course with Professor Bevington, the Renaissance Scholar, who rigorously guided us through “close readings” of Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Thomas More’s Utopia. It may have been the quote he shared about “what a good question does,” now installed permanently over my desk:

“What a good question does. It places the past at risk. It frames possible transforming outcomes. It introduces disorder and challenge. It marks our progress toward change. It stays with us over the lifespan.”

I consider this quote one of the many priceless gifts I received from the MLA program. In the course Person, Gender, and Culture with Professor MacAlloon, I learned the meaning of “thick description” from Clifford Geertz’s The Interpretation of Cultures. I applied this ethnographic method to observing my neighborhood dog group. However, I studied not the dogs, but the people. A study such as this revealed to me the meaning of enlightenment! This process of observing through “thick descriptions” has come to be extremely useful in producing insights in my work and my personal life.

But how did I arrive at my focus of study and topic of my thesis? I know I was strongly influenced by the astonishing course taught by Professor Paul Friedrich, where we closely read Thoreau’s Walden and the Bhagavad Gita simultaneously. I wrote a paper on the use of color and landscape description in Thoreau’s Walden. I was also inspired by Professor Friedrich’s command and passion for the subject.

It was in this course that I learned about the “holistic approach to knowledge” in the 19th century. This provided a clue to me as to how I arrived at my thesis topic, given my interest in multiple perspectives. I discovered a historical perspective which began to cause a shift in my thinking. A characteristic of 19th-century thought was a search for common, “universal” structures or “truths” emerging from the systematic accumulation of knowledge in varied disciplines. In the 1830s, when Thoreau graduated from Harvard University, there was still the ideal of a holistic approach to knowledge.” As L. D. Walls stated, “For serious intellectuals of his time, such an effort might embrace human knowledge, attained and attainable, in whatever form: arts and manufacture; poetry and the creative spirit; science and philosophy. Thoreau took it upon himself to achieve in all three.”

This “holistic approach to knowledge” and the ability to understand from multiple perspectives allowed me to wonder about the intertwining history of art and science. Having stopped taking science courses long ago, I did not expect what happened next. I took a sequence of MLA science courses and, although I still struggled through the subjects, I realized that without science I had cut myself off from having some idea about what
Julie Lemon is going on in our world—especially today’s world. Best of all, the courses were extremely compelling: Darwinian Medicine, the theory of evolution and the discovery of genetic coding with Professor Robert Perlman; Models of the Universe with Professor Rocky Kolb; New Cosmology with Professor Michael Turner. At first I was totally lost and struggling, but soon I found that I was very engrossed in learning about these subjects.

It took a month of classes in the New Cosmology course before I could even begin to understand the difference between dark energy and dark matter. It was in this course as well as in Models of the Universe that I was introduced to the stunning images from the Hubble Space Telescope. I have been invested in understanding visual images for years and through the incredible Hubble Telescope images I could grab hold of, and understand, the science behind them. I had found my way into science! I wrote a paper titled Truth and Beauty in Images from the Hubble Space Telescope, beginning my exploration into scientific visualization and how we are able to “see” what is invisible to the human eye. The exposure to astrophysics, led by two passionate teachers, Kolb and Turner, led to my thesis, which became an exploration into the aesthetic of scientific images. I had found a place where I could apply my visual knowledge to another subject—the universe. The ability to visualize the invisible phenomena comes from sophisticated technologies. Scientists can now visualize objects and patterns ranging in size from individual atoms to the outer reaches of the universe.

My exploration into this subject led to even more questions. What is the interplay of the sciences and the arts in our times and how has that been different in history? How did these two disciplines become so divided and separate, as compared to Thoreau’s time? What if the sciences and the arts were to enter into closer dialogue? From wrestling with these questions new ideas for a concept emerged that eventually evolved into the Arts/Science Initiative at the University of Chicago. This initiative, which I started three years ago, has become an active testing bed for collaborative, trans-disciplinary activities connecting the arts and sciences. Through its programs, students, faculty, and the public are engaging in a dialogue to generate, nurture, and communicate ideas.

Looking back, the courses I took through the MLA program led me on a path to a deeper appreciation of our culture and the world we live in. Ethnography, Renaissance literature, Thoreau, the Bhagavad Gita, gender and culture, Freudian psychoanalysis, Adorno’s cultural industry and Dadaism, Darwin’s evolution, as well as Watson’s and Crick’s genetic coding, and a new cosmology of the universe—created a truly inspiring experience that continues to unfold for me.

I invite you to visit the Arts/Science Initiative to learn more. Read Full Thesis

The Arts/Science Initiative cultivates, promotes, and sustains dialogue between artistic and scientific forms of inquiry through active exchange. At the heart of this initiative is a commitment to bring together voices from diverse disciplines to explore new modes of production and investigation around common themes.
Did You Know?

The University of Chicago is a Botanic Garden

**Natural History of the Site**

The University of Chicago is set in a region that possesses a distinctive natural history. Early descriptions of the site reveal how inhospitable the terrain was to initial settlement. Owing to its proximity to Lake Michigan, the University is located on what is known as a lakefront marsh ecosystem. This particular type of ecosystem is characterized by infertile soil, composed of silt and sand deposited by receding glaciers and the repeated flooding of Lake Michigan. Because the surface soil of the area was so lacking in nutrients, it could sustain only a limited variety of plant life. Prior to the University's construction, the landscape was scattered with hardy shrubbery, short scrub oaks, and large tracts of swampland. Consequently, the area of the University and its periphery were actually better suited to suburban settlement than agrarian communities. The settlement of the region was modest before the middle of the 19th century. Unlike the fertile plains of more inland regions of Illinois, Hyde Park remained sparsely populated until Chicago's growing population began to search for the tranquility of suburban life. Even today the often saturated and sterile soils remain a problem on the campus despite efforts to tame the natural ecosystem with fertile fill and drainage systems.

**Botanic Garden Initiative**

In 1996, the concept of creating a botanic garden at The University of Chicago was reborn. John Coulter approached President William Rainey Harper in the 1890s with the concept of establishing botanic gardens when the campus was in its infancy. Though the idea was dismissed at the time, President Hugo Sonnenschein heeded his advice more than a century later, and saw the possibilities that such an initiative could bring to the University.

In 1997, the University moved forward with establishing ongoing funding for the Botanic Garden Initiative. That year, the University requested and received designation as a botanic garden from the American Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboretum (now the American Public Garden Association), and has been a proud member ever since.

Our campus is one of only a few Universities where the campus itself is a botanic garden or arboretum. Swarthmore College’s Scott Arboretum, which encompasses the entire campus, has served as the model for much of the work that has taken place at Chicago. Other institutions have a garden associated with the campus, but do not consider the entire campus its garden, such as the Sara P. Duke Gardens at Duke University and the Morris Arboretum, about 10 miles from the University of Pennsylvania.

As such, our garden is unique in many ways by being located within an urban context, near Lake Michigan, and on a campus that is over 100 years old.

The campus is often described as an oasis in the middle of the city of Chicago, and the development of the campus as a botanic garden has certainly added to that notion. Within the main quadrangles of the original campus, designed as an interconnected academic village, various gardens have been introduced through the years, starting with the Kramer Beds flanking the walk to the Administration Building, to the newest gardens currently under development. But the gardens have also spread throughout the 215-acre Hyde Park campus, as new capital projects add to the variety of plant materials and garden spaces, and donor gardens enhance existing spaces. The challenges of gardening on the Chicago lakefront are many, but the variety of spaces found throughout the campus lends itself to a diverse environment, creating microclimates that allow us to grow plants not typically found in the Chicago region.

The initiative to develop the gardens was approved under the directive that whatever was installed needs to be maintained. We knew this would be the key to our success. Thus the close partnership with the Landscape Services Department began and has developed over the years, as staff have been sent to training, licensing, and are involved in the design process of every garden we propose. They are an important part of the overall initiative.

As with any garden, it is never the same from day to day or year to year. We will highlight these changes as the website is updated to showcase a specific plant on campus, a new garden under design, or we announce the seasonal transitions throughout the year. Please stop by frequently and then let us know what you think.

Excerpted from here and here.