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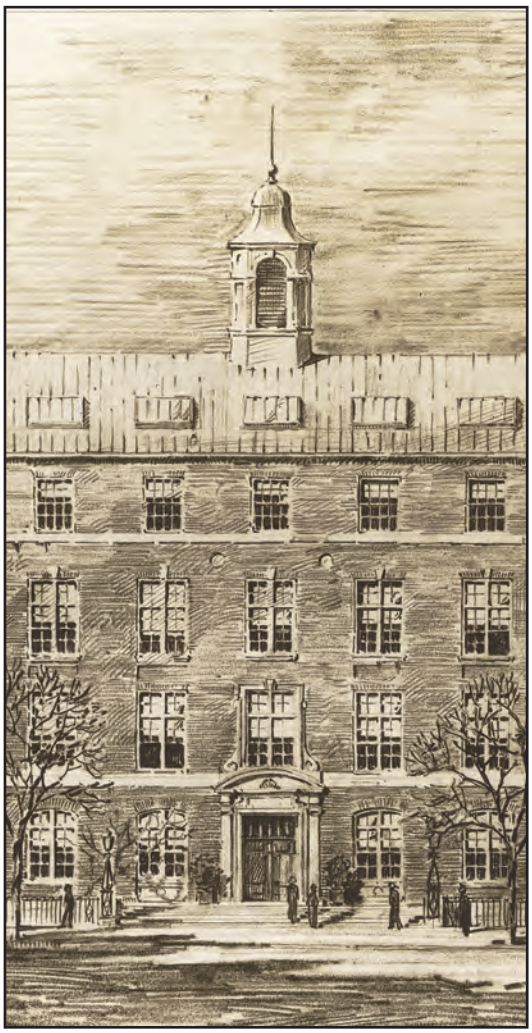

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A Century of Discovery

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briefcase

Behavior Impacts Language Development

Malathi Thothathiri (center) with student researchers

A YOUNG CHILD'S ABILITY TO regulate behavior—a component of executive functioning, the cognitive process that helps with planning, focus and self-control—is related to how they process and acquire language, according to a new study led by Professor **Malathi Thothathiri** from Columbian College's Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences and researchers from the Max Planck Institute.

While executive function and language development have long been considered interconnected, there has been limited evidence demonstrating how they are linked. The research provides the first solid evidence connecting the two.

"Our study suggests a virtuous spiral during a child's development in which executive function can help develop more language skills, which can in turn help develop executive function, and so on," Thothathiri noted.

SOLVING BUTTERFLY'S EVOLUTIONARY MYSTERY

A STUDY BY GW AND UNIVERSITY of Cambridge biologists revealed how how an unexpected genetic mechanism influences the evolution of butterfly wing coloration. **Luca Livraghi**, a GW biology postdoctoral scientist and the research team discovered that an RNA molecule, rather than a protein as previously thought, plays a pivotal role in determining the distribution of black pigment on butterfly wings.

Precisely how butterflies are able to generate the vibrant patterns and colors on their wings has fascinated biologists for centuries. The new findings not only challenge long-standing assumptions about genetic regulation but also open new avenues for studying how visible traits evolve in animals.

Painted lady butterfly with genetically altered wing patterns

An Arctic road built on thawing permafrost

ARCTIC PERMAFROST RAPIDLY SINKING

FROZEN GROUND KNOWN AS permafrost is sinking at an alarming rate across high-latitude and high-altitude cold regions of the Arctic, according to research led by Professor of Geography and International Affairs **Dmitry Streletskiy.** The study, based on data from regions across North America and Eurasia, found that thaw subsidence (TS)—the sinking or settling of frozen ground, also known as permafrost—is widespread and happening at accelerating rates.

The findings have serious climate implications, including potentially devastating damage to ecosystems and infrastructures and severe landscape disruptions. In addition, wildfires and human activities like construction accelerate the process. The research indicated that improving TS estimates by field studies, remote sensing measurements and advanced modeling is critically needed to provide better understanding of permafrost degradation and its consequences.

BOOTCAMP TARGETS COLLABORATIVE DATA SCIENCE

THIS SUMMER, A DIVERSE cohort of GW students partnered with their counterparts from local minority-serving institutions at a four-week data science bootcamp designed to strengthen essential data science skills in a collaborative environment that encourages social justice and community engagement.

Led by Professors of Statistics **Huixia Judy Wang** and **Tatiyana Apanasovich**, the bootcamp included collaborative activities and interdisciplinary team exercises mentored by faculty, graduate students and local experts. The project was funded by the Public Interest Technology University Network Challenge.

WNBA'S JONES INSPIRES CLASS OF 2025

GW BASKETBALL HALL OF FAMER and WNBA superstar **Jonquel Jones**, BA '19, a former CCAS criminal justice major, inspired the Class of 2025 during a joyous Commencement ceremony on the National Mall in May.

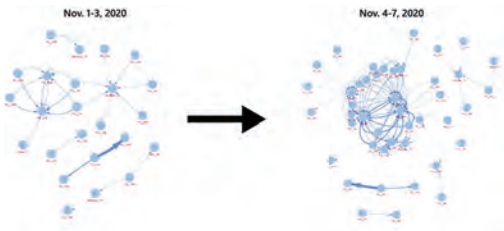
Jones, who pairs her athletic accomplishments with her advocacy work as a role model for young women athletes, encouraged graduates to "trust your instincts" to guide them through the life decisions and pivotal moments ahead. Recalling her own choice to come to GW, she shared her resolve "to lean into my gut—reminding me that the voice inside you is not just noise. It's wisdom."

Jonquel Jones, BA '19

ELECTIONS UNITE ONLINE HATE COMMUNITIES

THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL election not only incited new hate content in online communities but also brought those communities closer together around online hate speech, according to a study led by Professor of Physics **Neil Johnson**. His research team developed a powerful new tool to take a closer look at the online world and the hate content spreading there, building an "online telescope" that maps the cyber hate universe at an unprecedented scale and resolution.

The research detailed the broad implications for better understanding how the online hate universe multiplies and hardens around local and national events such as elections. It also reveals how smaller, less regulated platforms like Telegram play a key role by creating and sustaining hate content, particularly around hot-button issues like immigration, ethnicity and antisemitism.



Online networks before and after election day, 2020

Saw Honored with CAREER Award

Jimmy Saw studies microbes in extreme environments, like this hot spring in Utah.

IN HIS MICROBIAL DIVERSITY Lab, microbiologist **Jimmy Saw** explores the diversity, ecology and evolution of microbes in extreme habitats—like hot springs, caves and hydrothermal vents near volcanoes or along the ocean floor. Studying microbes that continue to live billions of years after they first evolved can offer glimpses into the evolution of more advanced organisms.

Saw's work as a junior CCAS faculty member was recognized by the National Science Foundation with a prestigious CAREER Award, which will help advance his research with funding over five years. The award not only recognizes Saw's work but also his potential to serve as an academic role model to lead future scientific advances.

Lauren Nicole Pincus

PINCUS RECEIVES SUSTAINABLE FUTURES GRANT

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF Chemistry **Lauren Nicole Pincus** received the Sustainable Futures Initiative Grant, awarded to scientists involved in developing transformative green chemistry strategies that address U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.

Pincus' research focuses on finding sustainable solutions for photovoltaic (PV) waste management. As the use of PV technology continues to quickly expand, green chemistry scholars are identifying new avenues to address end-of-life PV waste, which is expected to reach about 80 million tons by 2050. Pincus' group is designing materials to selectively mine endangered elements from PV waste. Their efforts will also focus on the recovery of the mined elements, building towards the overall goal of utilizing recovered endangered elements as raw materials in the PV manufacturing process.

BEAT THE CLOCK

NEUROSCIENCE PHD CANDIDATE **Natalie Boyle** sprinted to victory at GW's seventh annual Three Minute Thesis (3MT) Competition. The high-speed contest challenged students to swiftly summarize their research in just 90 seconds in language that was engaging and appropriate to a non-specialist audience.

Boyle won for her project, "Rewiring the Brain: Motor Training as a Therapy for Rett Syndrome," which involves treating a severe neurodevelopmental disorder that impairs neural communication. "As a scientist, we tend to use very technical terms, which do not necessarily translate to a broad audience," Boyle said. "Changing the way I think about my project and how to present it outside of the scientific community was a great exercise in science communication—and allowed me to think about the big picture of my work."

3MT winner Natalie Boyle

PHD STUDENTS RECOGNIZED FOR RESEARCH, ADVOCACY

FOUR COLUMBIAN COLLEGE PhD students joined a network of preeminent scholars from across the U.S. as the latest inductees into the Edward Alexander Bouchet Graduate Honor Society, which celebrates diversity and excellence in doctoral education.

The students were cited for research that included nutrition interventions for chronic disease prevention, dopamine's role in coping with stress and evolutionary adaptations of salamanders that climb trees and fishes with suction cups. They were also recognized for their advocacy efforts as volunteers and mentors.

Former CCAS Associate Dean for Graduate Studies Chad Heap (left) and CCAS Dean Paul Wahlbeck (right) with, starting second from left, Bouchet inductees Jonathan M. Huie (biology), Kailyn Price (neuroscience), Tatiana Ruiz (public policy and public administration), Ashley Bastin (biology) and Jasmine Charter-Harris (public health)

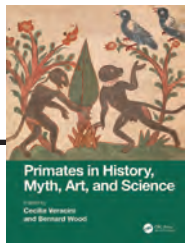
ADHD LINKED TO AUTISM IN ADULTS

EXAMINING A COHORT OF more than 3.5 million adults enrolled in Medicaid, a study led by Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences' **Gregory L. Wallace** found that attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was elevated among autistic adults compared with a random national sample.

The findings provide crucial health insights into the intersection of autism and ADHD in adulthood, suggesting that co-occurring ADHD persists to a greater degree in autistic adults

than the general Medicaid-enrolled population and treatment of ADHD may impact health outcomes. The study underscores the need for targeted healthcare strategies and policy reforms to better support this population.

A Sampling of Books by Faculty



PRIMATES IN HISTORY, MYTH, ART, AND SCIENCE

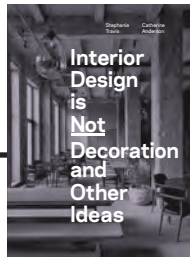
Non-human primates play a special role in human societies, especially in regions where modern humans and primates co-exist. They have been featured in myths, legends and traditional indigenous knowledge. Explorers observed them in the wild and brought them at great cost to Europe. They were even valued as pets, put on display and featured in art and architecture. University Professor of Human Origins **Bernard Wood** co-edited this volume of essays featuring contributions from an international team of historians and natural scientists that integrate different perspectives to show how primates helped humans better understand their own place in nature. From Ancient Egypt to Medieval Europe to our current understanding of the relationships among modern humans and great apes, the book frames the place of non-human primates in science, art and culture.

REBRANDING NORTH KOREA: CHANGES IN CONSUMER CULTURE AND VISUAL MEDIA

"Everything for the people, everything according to the people!" That's the slogan of North Korea dictator Kim Jong Un. And in this in-depth examination by Associate Professor of Korean Literature and Culture Studies **Immanuel Kim**, the implications of a thoroughly modernized North Korea for its citizens and the world are balanced against the goals of the country as it strives to find a role in the global community. Kim traces two parallel trajectories in North Korean consumer culture: the expansion of modern urban development projects and increased social amenities, alongside its technological advancements, particularly in visual media. These changes, Kim argues, illustrate the transition from the politics-centric society of the Kim Jong Il regime to the consumer-centric one under his son Kim Jong Un.

NIGHTMARE IN THE PACIFIC: THE WORLD WAR II SAGA OF ARTIE SHAW AND HIS NAVY BAND

Bandleader Artie Shaw didn't carry a weapon into World War II. He carried a clarinet. Shaw abandoned his civilian celebrity to lead a colorful Navy band on an island-hopping odyssey to raise military morale—and found himself playing frontline gigs from Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal. Tapping a trove of Navy personnel files, medical records, court documents and archival materials, Media and Public Affairs Professor **Michael Doyle** narrates the unconventional wartime experiences of Shaw and the musicians he recruited into a hard-swinging band known as Shaw's Rangers. Combining musical and military history, Doyle recounts how a troop of civilian artists risked their lives to support Allied fighting forces.

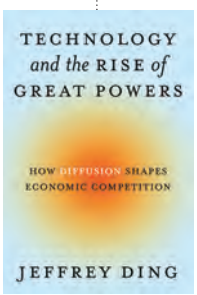


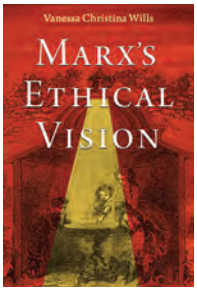
INTERIOR DESIGN IS NOT DECORATION AND OTHER IDEAS

Associate Professor of Interior Architecture **Stephanie Travis** and Assistant Professor of Interior Architecture **Catherine Anderson** deliver an illuminating exploration of the many factors architects and interior designers consider when creating or styling a room. Going beyond paint colors and accent cushions, Travis and Anderson examine aspects like contrast, lighting, patterns and sensory balance to explain how interior design is an important practice that affects all our lives. Using 100 illustrated entries, they cover varied topics—such as how architects research the history of a location, how they use sketches and 3D models to generate ideas and how they work with plumbing engineers to ensure that pipes fit the sewer systems.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE RISE OF GREAT POWERS: HOW DIFFUSION SHAPES ECONOMIC COMPETITION

Why are some nations more successful than others at adapting to and embracing new technologies? Assistant Professor of Political Science **Jeffrey Ding** takes a deep dive into how technological revolutions affect competition among great powers. In addition to statistical analysis, he draws on historical case studies—including Britain's rise to prominence in the First Industrial Revolution; America's and Germany's overtaking of Britain in the Second Industrial Revolution; and Japan's challenge to America's technological dominance in the Third Industrial Revolution. He illuminates the pathways by which these revolutions influenced the global distribution of power. Along the way he discusses how emerging technologies such as AI could influence the U.S.-China power balance.





MARX'S ETHICAL VISION

Does Marxism have anything to offer moral philosophy? In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx himself seemed to put that question to rest by declaring, "The communists do not preach morality at all!" But in *Marx's Ethical Vision*, Assistant Professor of Philosophy **Vanessa Wills** argues that Marx actually held nuanced views about the role that morality played in political struggles. In Wills' reading of Marx's texts, she finds apparently ethical views about human nature and the conditions necessary for human flourishing. Marx issued both trenchant critiques of "bourgeois" morality and thundering condemnations of capitalism's "vampire-like" destructiveness. Wills maintains that Marx's bitterly despised commodity-exchange for its ability to corrode the way we value one another for who we are—as moral people and not tradable products.

Eye of the Storm: Climate Change Fuels Havoc

By Brook Endale

AS CLIMATE CHANGE ALTERS weather patterns, hurricanes, tornadoes and other natural disasters like wildfires are becoming more frequent and intense. Geography Professor Emerita **Lisa Benton-Short** explained how climate change is fueling these extreme weather events and impacting communities.

Q: Why are we seeing a trend of stronger hurricanes in recent years?

A: Climate change has been increasing ocean temperatures and air temperatures. This can result in larger, stronger hurricanes. Because the warmer the ocean waters, the more energy the storm can absorb since warmer air and water temperatures allow more evaporation of water vapor into the atmosphere.

There is also a very predictable geography to hurricanes because they need warmer ocean temperatures, they tend to form in parts of the Atlantic Ocean along the equator. The Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) is a band of thunderstorms and showers that form near the equator where the trade winds of the Northern and Southern Hemispheres meet. The ITCZ is a major factor in the Atlantic hurricane season and can help create the thunderstorms that develop into hurricanes. The Gulf of Mexico is even more shallow than the Atlantic, so it also warms up quicker and to even warmer ocean water temperatures. This is why hurricanes that reach the gulf…can intensify, as Milton did in 2024.

Q: What is the humanitarian impact?

A: The more our cities expand in the hurricane zones, the more people, buildings and infrastructure are at risk. At the same time, we can predict and monitor hurricanes more accurately than ever before, so we can alert people to the risk so they can take precautions or evacuate. As a result, the loss of life in the United States tends to be small, but the cost of recovery and rebuilding is very high because of the damage to buildings and infrastructure.

Q: Will other natural disasters such as tornadoes and wildfires also increase in frequency and intensity?

A: Yes, tornadoes may also increase with climate change. This is because warmer, more humid conditions can lead to more instability in the atmosphere, which in turn may create the conditions that produce tornadoes. This tends to occur in the summer but ends in the fall. We may see a longer season for tornadoes, where the "season" may extend beyond the summer.

Wildfires are becoming more frequent and intense, particularly in regions that experience extreme dryness during the summer months, which creates ideal conditions for fires to ignite and spread. In addition, wildfires are increasing in size and intensity, with some experts now calling them "firestorms." Increased wildfires are occurring not just in the U.S. but around the world. Canada has had massive wildfires in its remote areas, something that has not happened to that degree before.

Q: Extreme flooding has become a growing issue, particularly in mountainous communities. What does this indicate about changing weather patterns?

A: As hurricanes increase in size and intensity, all that water they absorb needs to go somewhere: down to Earth. We've seen several recent hurricanes move slowly once they make landfall, and this can result in an enormous amount of rainfall occurring in a given area.

As that area absorbs rainfall, it eventually saturates and the grounds can't absorb any more rain, so water begins running towards rivers and creeks. Hurricane Helene's rainfall was torrential in western North Carolina, with some areas receiving 8-16 inches of rain in a day or two. This amount of water overwhelmed the ground's ability to soak it up. As the streams and creeks filled up quickly, the amount of water that moved down the mountains was enormous. Many communities lived in proximity to the river. The result was catastrophic as very quickly moving water created floods without enough time for people to prepare or evacuate. That is also one reason why the death toll in the mountains was so high, such events are not typical in the region. But with climate change, nothing is typical anymore.

Before the Blaze: Students Highlight Disaster Preparation

By Brook Endale

LAST FALL, A GROUP OF GRADUATE students from Columbian College's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration (TSPPPA) teamed with GW alumni crisis management experts on a project that underscored the critical importance of disaster resilience.

For their capstone project, TSPPPA students (now graduates) **Yolanda Heman-Ackah**, **Hannah Markus**, **Facundo Pibida** and **Sarah Gimont** worked with alumni at SPIN Global to identify communities across the U.S. in urgent need of impact funding to address vulnerabilities to natural disasters. The team also examined why Los Angeles is at such high risk for wildfires.

"We are trying to reduce the impacts of a disaster before it ever happens," said **Joel Thomas**, MPA '08, CEO of SPIN Global, a public benefit company dedicated to mitigating the impact of disasters at both the local and national level.

As part of their work, the capstone team was tasked with identifying unmet needs in communities designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as Community Disaster Resilience Zones (CDRZs). These zones are based on a community's risk for natural disasters, as well as its ability to prepare for, adapt to and recover from such events. The students focused specifically on wildfires, which are among the most pressing threats in states with high numbers of CDRZs.

The team created a decision matrix to guide investments in counties at risk of natural disasters, especially wildfires. The matrix evaluated factors such as local laws, the economy, infrastructure and community involvement to pinpoint areas most in need of investment. They then tested their system by applying it to four counties at high risk for wildfires: Los Angeles; Miami-Dade; Gila, Ariz.; and Elmore, Idaho.

"Wildfires typically spread quickly when humidity is low and winds are high—factors that contributed to the wildfire in L.A., where wind gusts reached up to 100 mph," Heman-Ackah said. "Buildings not made with fire-resistant materials are more likely to ignite, and the presence of vegetation and other combustible materials near structures, roadways and power lines further fuels the fire's spread through communities."

The team, noting the health dangers linked to smoke that affects air quality long afterward, proposed protecting communities through the development of "resilience hubs," which are safe, indoor spaces designed to keep people secure during emergencies. These hubs would provide clean air, heating and cooling while being fire-resistant, offering protection to vulnerable populations such as the elderly or those with health conditions that make evacuation difficult, explained Heman-Ackah.

Camila Tapias, MPA '20, a disaster resilience expert at SPIN Global and a member of the GW Board of Trustees, said the students demonstrated that by prioritizing careful planning, community engagement and targeted investments in resilience, it is possible to significantly reduce the devastating impacts of disasters like wildfires.

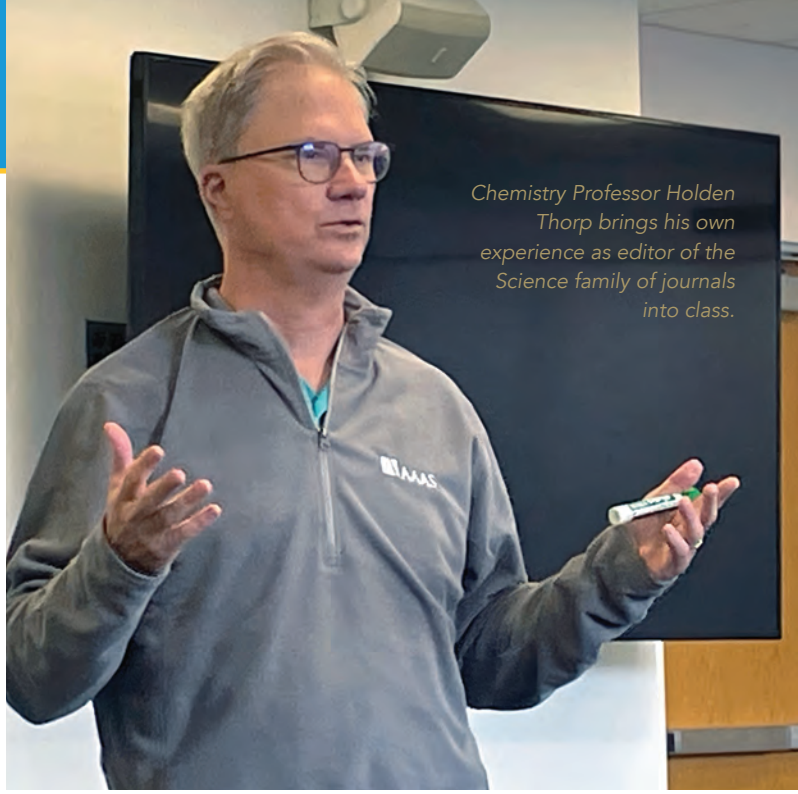
"We want to reduce suffering and loss of life," Tapias said. "We want to prioritize preparedness through training and planning, but also it takes policy. It's about policy change and systemic investments in vulnerable communities. Public-private partnerships are key to creating long-term solutions."

TSPPPA Director **Mary Tschirhart** noted that it was important for these students to build on the knowledge and analytical tools from their coursework to create practical recommendations that help clients and communities respond to real-world emergencies and situations.

"For decades, our capstone teams have identified opportunities for positive change and concerns, such as communities at risk of natural disasters like Los Angeles for wildfire, and offered evidence-informed ideas to clients who have the resources to respond," she said.

Unreasonable Doubt

From Galileo to COVID, science breakthroughs have been shadowed by science deniers. Chemistry's Holden Thorp teaches students how to read their playbook.



Chemistry Professor Holden Thorp brings his own experience as editor of the Science family of journals into class.

AT THE HEIGHT OF THE PANDEMIC, SCIENTISTS often found their mission to understand and contain COVID-19 blocked by hurdle after hurdle.

They could isolate the virus, they could create a vaccine, they could draft health guidelines to keep millions of people safe.

But they couldn't convince a significant chunk of the public to believe them.

Whether flouting mask and social distancing protocols or promoting debunked horse tranquilizer and ultraviolet light treatments, many people were in the grip of a different kind of virus: science denial. Rather than trusting health organizations around the world, they latched on to conspiracy theories and partisan politicking.

And for the most part, the science world was caught by surprise. Even Francis Collins, the former director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) admitted they had underestimated "the problem of hesitancy."

But Professor of Chemistry **Holden Thorp** doesn't buy it. As he tells undergraduate students in his class Unreasonable Doubt, he believes they should have seen it coming. "Anyone who has read the history and social science behind [science denial] should not have been surprised," he said. "These patterns keep repeating—over and over again."

From Galileo to the tobacco industry, from climate change to COVID, Thorp tells his class that history is rife with efforts to undermine science from all sides of the political spectrum. And as the editor-in-chief of the *Science* family of journals who has testified before Congress on COVID misinformation, he uses his own experience—along with the opinions of the journalists, researchers and thinkers he brings into his class—to give students a window into science denial strategies.

"His expertise allows us to dive deep into all the topics we cover. How often can you watch your professor testify at a congressional hearing? How often is your professor a chief editor of the world's top research journal?" said **Raven Belson**, a biology major who took Thorp's course as a first-year student

Part science symposium and part public policy forum, Thorp has welcomed as many political science students into his class as chemistry and biology majors. Throughout the semester, he guides them through the role of major public research institutions like NIH and the National Science Foundation and outlines the mechanics of scientific research—from how it's funded and disseminated to the role it plays in public discourse.

Thorp's class equips first-year students to recognize and combat science denial. From left, Grace Santos, Maria Walley and Nicole Morris.

Along the way, he outlines the signs and signals—the "historical checklist," as he puts it—many denial campaigns have in common, such as questioning researchers' integrity and insisting well-established science is still unsettled.

"As someone who's not used to combining my science focus with public policy and history, [the class] has been the perfect opportunity to push my academics in new directions," Belson said.

Indeed, as the next generation of science scholars, Thorp aims to equip his students with the tools they'll need to recognize and combat denial—because, he said, it may be getting worse.

"Given how divided people are, the impact of the pandemic and the overall decline in trust in institutions, it's hard to see a time in my life where it has been worse," he said. "Maybe if we train future scientists in ways we didn't in the past, we can make it better."

Inside the Denial Playbook

In most cases, Thorp tells his class, science denial scenarios apply the same playbook—steps followed, for example, by the tobacco industry to curtail smoking regulations and chemical companies to block action on chlorofluorocarbons and ozone damage.

First, create ethical mistrust, Thorp explained. Target the character of scientists by accusing them of tailoring their findings to fit their funding agenda.

Next, flood the airwaves with so-called experts whose questionable scientific credentials are often in unrelated fields. This, Thorp said, sets up a bogus "both sides" debate that journalists follow to appear fair.

Science denial often appears in times of crisis, like this 2020 Trafalgar Square protest against COVID-19 restrictions. (Photo: Brian Duffy/Shutterstock.com)

Then, cast doubt by elevating minor research footnotes to headline status. "Think about tobacco companies saying a lot of smokers never end up getting lung cancer," Thorp said, or pandemic pundits asserting that more people die from the flu than COVID.

Finally, throw up your hands and conclude that the science is unsettled—and more research is needed.

"Watching the same things happen in each scenario, from how the ozone hole was handled to climate change, is both scary and fascinating," said political science major **Nicole Morris**. "Since I now know the strategies of how people can attack science, I hope to bring that into whatever field I end up going into."

A significant portion of the class covers the pandemic, tackling denial campaigns that have already affected students' lives—sometimes tragically. **Nikita Guarrera**, who took Thorp's class as a first-year student, lost her grandfather to the virus in 2021, even as he himself was persuaded by denials. "Despite the refrigerated trucks full of dead bodies just three blocks away, he had doubts about the severity of COVID," she recalled.

At the same, Thorp noted that scientists often sabotage their own goals. Each misstep—like overstating their own research findings—adds fuel to conspiracy doubters. And while their research may seem airtight in the laboratory, they often struggle to communicate it in public forums. "Scientists need to recognize that as wonderful as we think [the research] is, we haven't explained it in a way that brings everybody in," he said. "The science sounds great if you live in a university town where you're surrounded by other scientists. But huge numbers of people have a hard time seeing how it's relevant to them."

By the end of the semester, Thorp hopes students will understand that the world of science is far from infallible.

"Science is a living, breathing process carried out by human beings," he said. "You can make it as reductive and quantitative as you want. But you're never going to take the humanity out of it."

> "It's hard to see a time in my life where [science denial] has been worse. Maybe if we train future scientists in ways we didn't in the past, we can make it better."
>
> — HOLDEN THORP, PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY

Inside Ancient Toolkits

A cross-disciplinary team of anthropologists and physicists are working in forest field sites and campus computer labs to fill a blank page of the archaeological record.

A young male chimpanzee in the Taï Forest of Côte d'Ivoire cracks Coula edulis nuts using a stone hammer and a wooden anvil. (Photos: Lydia Luncz, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology)

HIKE DEEP WITHIN THE TAÏ FOREST OF CÔTE d'Ivoire and you may see wild chimpanzees using large tree branches like hammers to crack open nuts.

Then travel to the Phang Nga National Park in Thailand to catch long-tailed macaques wielding the same type of makeshift wooden tools.

That's the itinerary Professor of Anthropology **David Braun** is chronicling as part of a National Science Foundation (NSF)-supported research collaboration with colleagues and graduate students from GW's Anthropology and Physics Departments, as well as researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.

But Braun and his cross-disciplinary partners aren't just interested in primate meal prep. Using a combination of investigative fieldwork and complex machine learning calculations, they're matching the chimps' modern toolkits to fossilized wood samples from millions of years ago—and they may be transforming our understanding of human technology along the way.

"Wooden tools, so far, are almost entirely absent in the early record of human material culture," Braun noted.

The oldest currently known wooden tools date back about 500,000 years—as opposed to better-preserved stone tool evidence from approximately 2.5 million years ago. But, since both modern human societies and nonhuman primate species use plant materials far more often than stone, Braun said there's good reason to suspect that simple pounding wooden tools predate sharp-edged ones.

"It makes sense that [primates] used wooden tools—we just have no evidence of it," said Braun, the director of the Koobi Fora Field School which, in partnership with the National Museums of Kenya, offers students on-the-ground

> "We're trying to extract unique patterns from two kinds of woods. In one, someone actually saw chimpanzees using them. The others are 2 million years old. Nobody is around who saw it!"
>
> — CHEN ZENG, PROFESSOR OF PHYSICS

> "Wooden tools ... are almost entirely absent in the early record of human material culture. It makes sense that [primates] used wooden tools—we just have no evidence of it."
>
> — DAVID R. BRAUN,
> PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY

paleoanthropology experience at its Kenya field site.

But, as Braun explained, researchers face a two-fold challenge in adjusting the archaeological record to include wooden tools: First, they must uncover wooden fossils that have survived damage from factors like natural decay, acid rain and fungus and insect boring. Then, they need to devise a foolproof method for identifying them—"a methodological shortfall," he said, that has so far eluded them.

That's exactly what Braun and his team—including CCAS Professor of Physics **Chen Zeng**—are setting out to change. The team is observing and documenting modern primate wooden tool-use from West Africa to Southeast Asia. At the same time, they are gathering fossilized wood from the Koobi Fora field site in Kenya's Lake Turkana basin.

As an undergraduate student at the Koobi Fora site, **Victoria Rainis**, BS '23, MS '24, collected fossilized wood with signs of behavioral use. Now a PhD student in Braun's lab, Rainis explained that the goal of the project is to not only find these fossilized wood tools but also to understand how old they could be. That "is why we tried to find fossilized wood tools that were in situ—within a sediment layer—which would allow them to be dated."

From Field to Lab

The field team ships 3D models of both modern and fossil wooden samples back to Foggy Bottom where Zeng's lab is developing computer vision and machine learning models that can reliably diagnose tool-like percussive damage—both on the surface of wooden tools and within their internal cellular structure.

"We're trying to extract unique patterns from two kinds of woods," Zeng noted. "In one, someone actually saw chimpanzees using them [as tools]. The others are 2 million years old. Nobody is around who saw it!"

While the research is in its early stages, the team believes it may confirm that our lineage of technological capacity stretches at least a million years longer than previously thought.

"The multidisciplinary approach—combining direct observations of tool use in living primates with archaeological artifacts found in deep time together with AI pattern recognition—will allow us to gain new insight into our early cultural evolution," said Max Planck Institute group leader Lydia Luncz, one of the primary partners with the anthropology team.

At the outset of their research, Braun and his team traveled to Côte d'Ivoire in 2022 where they identified 57 wooden tools at 30 different sites, including wooden hammers and anvils with damage patterns consistent with tool use.

The three-year $300,000 NSF grant helps expand both the field and lab portions of the project, including a trip to Thailand to observe primate tool use firsthand. The project is also using controlled experiments—including a robot arm that simulates primate hammering action—to pinpoint how variables like moisture content in the wild or the percussive force of different species alter wooden samples.

Long term, Braun said the research holds potential implications for everything from rethinking technology evolution to perhaps a new understanding of human brain development. For now, Braun is confident that the team is filling a blank page in the archaeological textbooks.

"This is a big part of the geological record that we just don't have," he said. "We're opening up possibilities that extend as far back as we can find them."

Chimpanzee wooden tool: A branch from a tree in the Taï Forest showing evidence of the damage caused by cracking nuts. The team is looking for this same damage on fossilized wood from Kenya.

Imagine That: Professor Pictures Unique Mind's Eye

Psychology's Sarah Shomstein was skeptical of aphantasia, a phenomenon where people lack mental imagery. Then she looked inside her own head.

PICTURE THIS—IF YOU CAN.

About five years ago, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience **Sarah Shomstein** attended a brown bag research lunch hosted by the Psychological and Brain Sciences Department at the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences.

During a graduate student's presentation on perception, the audience of faculty and students were asked to close their eyes and imagine a green apple. After a few moments, the student instructed them to rate how vividly they pictured the apple in their mind—from detailed colorful hues to pitch-black nothingness.

As her colleagues described seeing shades of light across the apple's pale green skin, Shomstein, the Thelma Hunt Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience and now the chair of the department, was confused. What were they all talking about?

"I didn't see anything," she recalled.

Shomstein could describe an apple. She knew its shape, its texture, its taste. But when she tried to picture one in her mind, she said, "It was just...black."

It's a phenomenon known as aphantasia, an inability to bring an image to mind in visual form. And it may affect more than 2 percent of the population—including Shomstein who, ironically, is a renowned perception scientist and once dismissed aphantasia as "baloney."

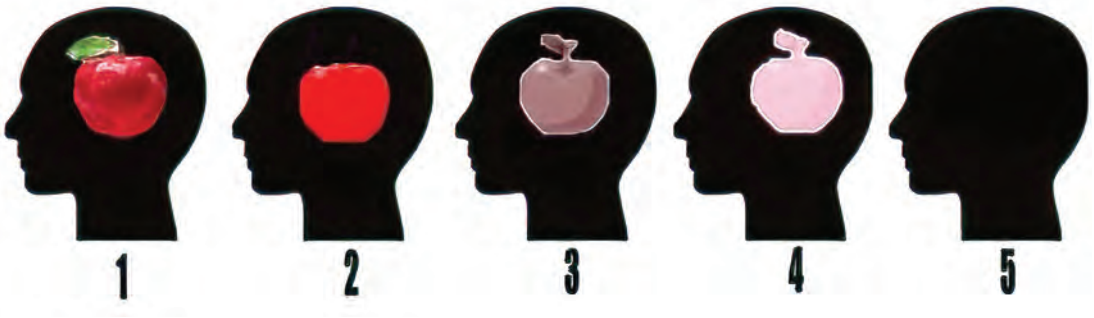
"I was skeptical," she laughed. "I thought people were making it up."

Some call it a variant, some call it a phenomenon. Either way, little is known about aphantasia. It was identified less than a decade ago when neurologists named it after Aristotle's term "phantasia"—or "mind's eye." Early research indicates that it may involve weak connections between the regions of the brain that control vision and memory. (A cousin occurrence called hyperphantasia seems to be an opposite phenomenon where people experience extra vivid mental imagery.)

Scientists agree that aphantasia doesn't appear to be a cognitive deficit. There's no evidence that it interferes with perception or memory and, so far, it hasn't translated into any difficulties with other behaviors.

And while aphantasia has made Shomstein a hit at campfires and conferences when she plays the green apple game with astonished friends and colleagues, it's also spurred her research curiosity.

The head of GW's Attention and Cognition Laboratory and a fellow of both the Association for Psychological Science and



Aphantasia tests involve scales of how vividly people create mental images of objects like apples—from 1 for life-like details to 5 for no image at all.

> "I'm a perception scientist with aphantasia. And I don't know what's happening inside my own brain."
>
> — SARAH SHOMSTEIN, THELMA HUNT PROFESSOR OF COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE

Cognitive Neuroscience Professor Sarah Shomstein studies how the brain perceives images. But her own brain sees things differently.

the international Psychonomic Society, Shomstein has led research on how the human brain processes images. Her work doesn't directly relate to aphantasia, but she's consulted with other perception experts about collaborating on projects to understand what goes on inside aphantasic brains.

"The fascinating thing is we don't really know" the answer, she said. "I'm a perception scientist with aphantasia. And I don't know what's happening inside my own brain."

Traffic on the Neural Highway

Clues may lie somewhere along the brain's labyrinth pathways. Shomstein explained that there are different neural routes for seeing objects and imagining them—or "mentalizing," a term Shomstein prefers.

During sight, neural signals travel from the light our eyes pick up to the back of our brains where they are processed in the visual cortex. That information then flows forward to the region which controls memory, essentially allowing us to understand the object we're looking at.

But imagination travels in the opposite direction. Think, for example, of the last time you ate at a restaurant. You can bring to mind the smell and taste of the food and the sounds around you. But you're not looking at an image. As Shomstein explains, you are pulling memories using your frontal cortex and engaging memory structures. "This is not visual. It's not sensory or auditory. It's conceptual," she said. While imagining the restaurant, that conceptual "baggage," as Shomstein puts it, travels backward in the brain to the visual cortex where it is reconstructed as an image.

Seemingly, an aphantasic brain would have issues in the visual cortex. But early imaging studies show that the cortex fires normally. For some reason, Shomstein hypothesizes, in aphantasia the visual cortex simply refuses to perform its role in the imagination chain. "The memories are brought together but then the visual cortex, which is working just fine, never contributes," she said.

Nevertheless, researchers are drawing a picture of aphantasia that looks different for different people. Some seem to have been born with it while others said their visual imagery has changed over time. Most dream in images, some can't. Some report weak autobiographical memories and some experience flashes of mental imagery.

For her part, Shomstein believes she has always experienced aphantasia—even when she didn't know it. "This is the way I have always imagined things," she said. And she is equally astonished by people who experience vivid imagery. "It's mind-boggling to me," she laughed. "Don't you get confused? How do you know what's real?"

Her own research—much of which centers on how our brains process and interact with the visual environment—isn't actually affected by aphantasia. As she teaches in her cognitive neuroscience classes, mental representations are as dependent on knowledge and experience as they are visual imagery. "My research transcends whether you can create images [in your mind] or not," she said. "If you have a concept [of an object], whether it comes with an image doesn't matter."

Meanwhile, Shomstein has been inundated with emails by others with aphantasia. She's heard from chemists, physicists and artists who say her experience has opened their own mind's eye.

In fact, Shomstein suggests her way of seeing things may be a benefit. She cited speculation that academics may have a higher prevalence of aphantasia—perhaps finding greater mental focus without visual distractions.

"If I can do everything you can do without the image," she said, "then why have it?"

The Art of Uncertainty: In Stats Class, Probability Is a Passion

In his Dean's Seminar, Professor Hosam M. Mahmoud turns stories into statistics as he finds the elegance in equations.

DON'T TELL PROFESSOR OF STATISTICS **HOSAM M. Mahmoud** that numbers aren't beautiful. The whiteboard in his Dean's Seminar on The Science of Uncertainty may look like a scrawl of fractions and formulas. But where many of us see only indecipherable equations, Mahmoud sees philosophy, music, politics, even sports.

Leading his class of 13 first-year students through columns of binomial distributions, he sprinkles in words like "elegance" and "art." As he points to one stream of variables and coefficients, he steps back from the board and beams, "Isn't that pretty?"

"You have to admit—mathematical formulas can be very pretty," Mahmoud said. "A mathematical formula often starts out ugly. But as you go through it and reduce all the sums and polynomials to very simple symbols, at the end, it is a thing of beauty."

> "Every class is an opportunity to learn something new—for my students and myself. I find joy in learning."
>
> — HOSAM M. MAHMOUD, PROFESSOR OF STATISTICS

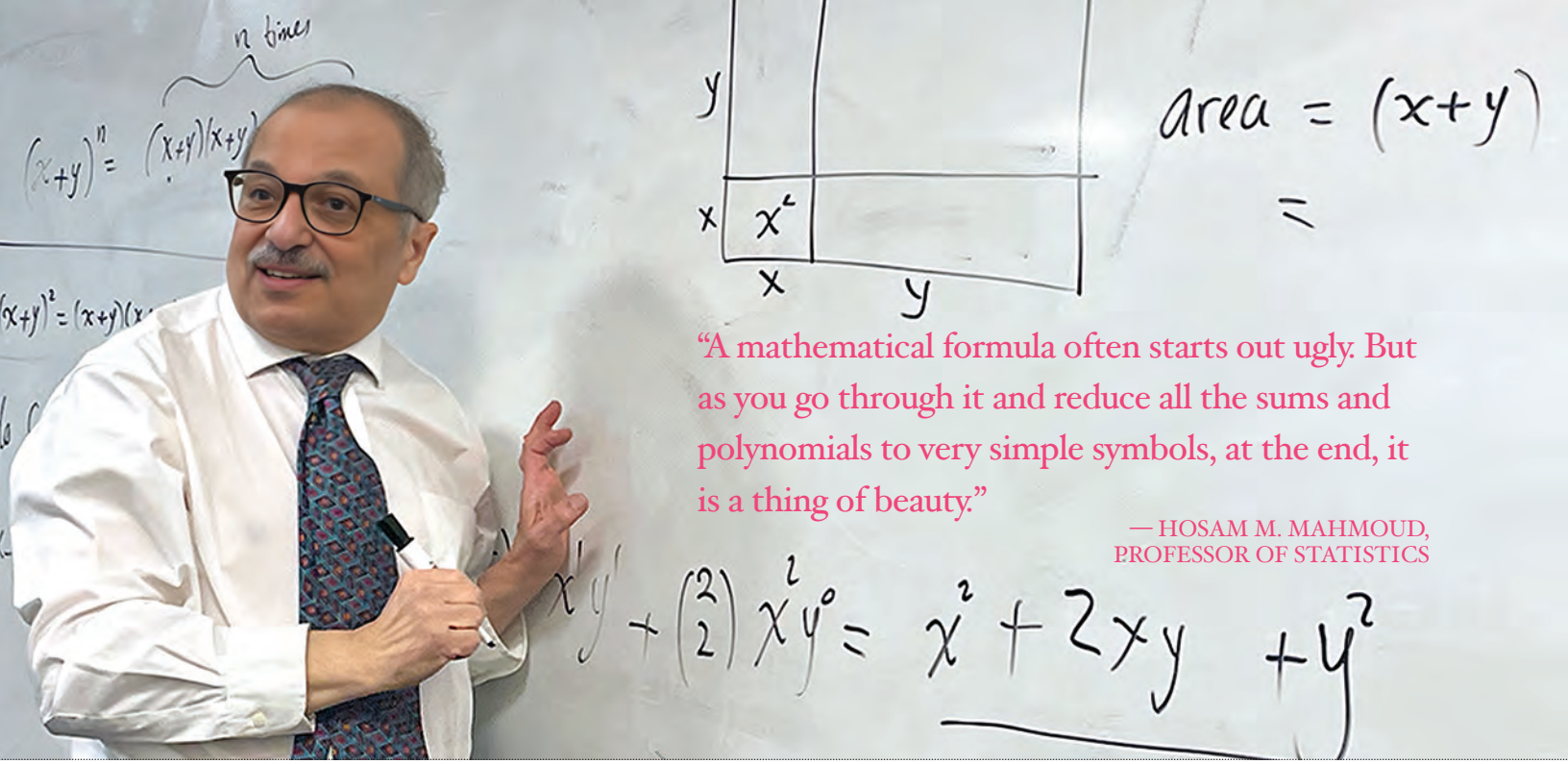
On one level, Mahmoud's course serves as an introduction to probability and the calculus of chance. Like all Dean's Seminars within the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, it offers first-year students an in-depth look at topics relevant to the issues of our time. In Mahmoud's classroom, his students gain a strong foundation in the laws of probability and the elements of stochastic behavior. But they're also as likely to hear about Aristotle and LeBron James as Isaac Newton and Erwin Schrödinger.

It's all part of his strategy to make statistics less intimidating and more accessible. Mahmoud creates concrete scenarios—stories—as entry points for theoretical equations. "There are two parts to a study like this: First, there's a story. Then it's up to us to extract the science out of it," he said.

In a single lecture, Mahmoud quoted Winston Churchill, Voltaire and Mr. Spock from *Star Trek*. A typical hour may find students calculating the probabilities of scoring a hat trick in soccer, rolling snake eyes with dice or striking the opening notes of *Frère Jacques* on random piano keys. At his students' request, he once spent a class and a half drawing the odds of every possible poker hand.

In his lessons, he frames probability less as a complex formula than a series of paths that can lead to different outcomes. "There's a past that brought us to this point. But there are many futures ahead of us," he explained. "What are the different chances of this future versus another future? That's what probability is."

With a heavy math background, political science student **Charles Calvert** said it took him time to adjust to Mahmoud's



In his Dean's Seminar on The Science of Uncertainty, Statistics Professor Hosam M. Mahmoud teaches students that even the most complicated mathematical formula is "a thing of beauty."

"storytelling approach." Eventually, he appreciated how Mahmoud moved the class beyond mechanical problem solving into "seeing the beauty in numbers and visualizing the way they are affecting us in real life, seeing the evolution in not only theory, but the very methods of human thought."

Uncertain Outcomes

Mahmoud takes full advantage of the CCAS Dean's Seminars' emphasis on lively and engaging discussions. In the four years he's taught the class, he's frequently tailored his curriculum to fit his students' interests. A past sports-obsessed class calculated L.A. Laker LeBron James' free-throw percentage. When another class included several biology students, Mahmoud created scenarios around lab animals' dietary habits. With his 2025 class featuring political science and history majors—but no math or statistics students—Mahmoud designed a politics-heavy lesson plan, leaning on election probability examples such as projecting results before the votes are counted.

Over a 42-year teaching career with the CCAS Department of Statistics, which celebrated its 90th anniversary this year, Mahmoud has frequently shared his passions in his classroom. His uncle, renowned Egyptian philosopher Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, introduced him to thinkers like David Hume and Bertrand Russell—many of whom show up in his lessons on logic and paradoxes. A Real Madrid fan, he often teaches soccer stats like World Cup-winning odds. When one class showed an interest in basketball, Mahmoud, who admits to not knowing a Nugget from a Knick, gave himself a crash course on the NBA Draft, learning the probabilities of each lottery team securing the top pick.

"Every class is an opportunity to learn something new—for my students and myself," he said. "I find joy in learning."

Mahmoud stresses his teaching method isn't designed to make statistics easier. Sharp math skills are still required to work through his whiteboard. But rather than focusing on simply solving equations, he encourages students to reduce the probability of a host of outcomes—until only the most likely one is left.

"It's certainly been a learning curve for me in Professor Mahmoud's class," political science student Calvert said. "But then you understand that through the anecdotal stories and Voltaire references, [he] is inspiring us to see statistics and probability in the same way he does."

Indeed, Mahmoud hopes students will embrace not just the uncertainty of statistics, but also the beauty behind them. In one of his favorite anecdotes, he imagines a conversation between *A Tale of Two Cities* writer Charles Dickens and physicist Schrödinger, author of a famous uncertainty principle. In Mahmoud's telling, Dickens repeats his classic first line: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Schrödinger nods knowingly at the duality and smiles, "Nice."

Students "can walk away hating everything about my class—the desks, the furniture, the facilities, the instructor," Mahmoud said. "But they can't walk away hating the subject. I want them to love the subject."

Time to Shine: CCAS Showcase Highlights Student Research

More than 200 undergraduate and graduate students across disciplines displayed their scholarly work at the third annual CCAS Research Showcase.

FROM STUDYING WILD CHIMPANZEES IN TANZANIA to examining food security in Central America, from improving the forensic science of drug analysis to uncovering the economic roots of happiness, an array of graduate and undergraduate student research was on display at the third annual Columbian College of Arts and Sciences Research Showcase.

Nearly 200 students presented posters from research projects across 31 disciplines. Their work covered a gamut of topics including the historical struggle to ratify the U.S. Constitution, the complex role of proteins in wound-healing and the secret government strategy to shift public opinion on nuclear energy.

"These projects speak to the extraordinary breadth and depth of research happening across our college," said CCAS Dean **Paul Wahlbeck**, who was among the more than 500 visitors at the day-long event. "From the sciences to the social sciences, arts and humanities, this work reflects our commitment to fostering a rich, interdisciplinary learning environment."

For students, the event represented the culmination of months—even years—of data collection and analysis. Geography

"These projects speak to the extraordinary breadth and depth of research happening across our college. From the sciences to the social sciences, arts and humanities, this work reflects our commitment to fostering a rich, interdisciplinary learning environment."

— PAUL WAHLBECK, CCAS DEAN

Art therapy master's student LauraChioma Jones (right) explains how she helped a client write a new chapter in her self-identity therapy through narrative journaling.

master's student **Emma Haggerty** spent several summers taking permafrost measurements in the Arctic as part of her project on how climate change is affecting northern transportation routes. As a three-time CCAS Showcase presenter—twice as an undergraduate student—Haggerty said the feedback she's received each year has helped her research evolve.

"I've talked to people who know a lot about [the Arctic] and have provided real insight, and I've talked to people who know nothing about it but offered important little suggestions like making the lines on my poster darker," she said. "Everything is helpful for a project like this to keep growing and changing."

Many of the research presentations reflected students working closely with people throughout the community.

LauraChioma Jones, an art therapy master's student, spent 25 weeks visiting a D.C.-area woman suffering from complex post-traumatic stress disorders. Jones used a narrative approach to the therapy sessions, asking her client to keep a journal of both her positive and negative thoughts. Eventually she literally tore away her self-critical pages. "It gave her the opportunity to rebuild herself and write her own story," Jones said. In fact, Jones and her client agreed that presenting her research at the showcase was a fitting debut for her new narrative. "This is what she dreams of doing with her experience—sharing it with others," Jones explained.

Many projects highlighted understudied arts and cultures. **Sandra Koretz**, a rising senior majoring in art history and

Cellular and molecular biology major Christopher Petrarca, describing his research on wound-healing proteins to CCAS Dean Paul Wahlbeck, chose his topic due to his family's risk of diabetes. It "hits close to home," he said.

journalism and mass communication, explored a secret society of West African women who wear elaborate masks to represent ideals of feminine beauty. Koretz, who received a CCAS Luther Rice Undergraduate Research Fellowship, learned of the Sande Society of Sierra Leone in a class with her faculty mentor Assistant Professor of Art History **Clement Akpang**. "I fell in love with the Sande story, and I knew that I had to delve deeper," Koretz said. For her research, she studied an actual Sande mask on display at the CCAS Corcoran School of the Arts and Design.

Dayna Bailey, a graduate student in Chinese language and culture, took on an arduous translation of a palindromic poem by a 5th century female Chinese poet. A 29X29-character grid originally woven into a garment, Su Hui's "Map of the Armillary Sphere" presents near innumerable readings—horizontally, vertically and diagonally. "Very likely no two people will ever read it in exactly the same way," Bailey said.

Reaching Across Disciplines

Some students had deep personal connections to their showcase topics. Sophomore cellular and molecular biology major **Christopher Petrarca** chose his examination of the wound-healing protein GPR84 partly due to his Dominican family's higher risk of diabetes. "They struggle with obesity and diabetes. So this [research] hits close to home," he said.

Similarly, economics graduate students **Anmol Purbey** and **Riya Varghese** were drawn to their study of global climate reform strategies because their native countries—Purbey is from Nepal, Varghese from India—are among the hardest hit by environmental vulnerabilities.

Their 182-country database, designed to help policymakers enhance institutional preparedness, determined that targeted interventions are more effective than widespread strategies for reducing emissions. "As economists, this research is very important to us and to our countries back home," Varghese said.

As a senior biology major, **Mohammad Nawal**, BS '25, had his own personal connection to Associate Professor of Biology **Keryn Gedan**'s research into the environmental deterioration of the Chesapeake Bay. He fondly recalled childhood summers visiting relatives along the waterway's Virginia outlets. His project examines coastal transition zones—ecosystems where freshwater and saltwater meet—which he described as "patient zero for the pandemic of damaging saltwater intrusion."

> "Interacting with other researchers is inspirational. They can give you new ideas and new ways of seeing things. We all leave here with stronger final products."
>
> — MARIELLE CORNES, BA '25

To highlight stereotypes of athletes, art history and fine arts major MC Daubendiek, BA '25, a GW Women's Volleyball Team member, conducted a performative postgame interview, staying in character for GW President Granberg.

In addition to presenting their own research, students said the highlight of the event was comparing notes with classmates.

History major **Marielle Cornes**, BA '25, found her presentation on the historical evolution of women in American politics situated between projects by two other seniors: American studies major **Isabella Kumar**, BA '25, presented a poster on art and architecture in Adams Morgan and dance major **Ana Arledge**, BA '25, crafted an appreciation of choreographer Merce Cunningham. Across disciplines and poster boards, the three undergraduates traded tips and praise.

"Interacting with other researchers is inspirational," Cornes said. "They can give you new ideas and new ways of seeing things. We all leave here with stronger final products."

Professor of Physics **Evangeline J. Downie**, CCAS associate dean of research and strategic initiatives, highlighted the growing student participation in the event and applauded the CCAS community for supporting student scholars.

"Moments like this give us a chance to reflect on the great impact that our research has, not only on the students and postdocs who engage in it as they grow their skill sets, but also on the outside world," she said.

Facing the Music: Campaigns Tune into Voters' Notes

By Greg Varner

From FDR to Trump, candidates have reached voters through playlists of musicians like Irving Berlin, Dolly Parton and Beyoncé. Corcoran's Loren Kajikawa unpacks their greatest hits.

Political campaigns have used songs such as I Like Ike, *Stevie Wonder's* Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours), *Lee Greenwood's* God Bless the U.S.A. *and Beyoncé's* Freedom.

WORDS, SAID SONGWRITER E.Y. Harburg, make you think. Music, he continued, makes you feel.

But when they're together in a song, they make you feel a thought.

Harburg composed classic tunes like *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?* and *Over the Rainbow*. But he might as well have been speaking about political campaign songs. As Associate Professor of Music **Loren Kajikawa** points out, politicians have long sent messages through music. Whether it's FDR using *Happy Days Are Here Again* to signal recovery from the Great Depression or Bill Clinton playing Fleetwood Mac's *Don't Stop (Thinking about Tomorrow)* to project images of a prosperous future, campaigns often try to tap the synergistic power of songs to forge and strengthen connections with voters.

"I don't think a campaign song is going to change somebody's mind about voting for a particular candidate," said Kajikawa, head of the Music Program at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design. "But a good campaign song can help to energize the constituency for a candidate and help them feel together in the moment. Music can be really effective for creating a sense of community."

In an interview, Kajikawa explained how politicians carefully-packaged songs to encourage voters follow their electoral tune.

Q: What were some of the best or most effective examples of the use of music in political campaigns?

A: One of the classic examples would be Barack Obama's 2008 campaign. There were so many questions swirling around him and he was not the expected presidential nominee. People expected it to be Hillary Clinton that year. Even within the Congressional Black Caucus, there were questions: Who is this guy?

One of the things Obama did very effectively in 2008 was to use music to establish his identity and create a kind of song biography, which focused heavily on Motown hits of the 1960s and '70s. So, Stevie Wonder's *Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)* played as Obama came on the stage at rallies and featured prominently in his playlist.

If you want to go back further, in the 1950s, Dwight Eisenhower's campaign used music effectively. Irving Berlin adapted one of his songs, *They Like Ike*, from the musical *Call Me Madam*. The new version was called *I Like Ike*. In that case, the lyrics of a tune from a Broadway show were changed. Since then, in the late 20th century and certainly into the 21st, campaigns are using more pre-existing popular music, rather than making original songs or parodies of existing songs.

There was an exception to that at the 2024 Republican National Convention. Rapper Forgiato Blow and model Amber Rose did a music video which was a parody of Vanilla Ice's *Ice Ice Baby*, changed to *Trump Trump Baby*, in support of Donald Trump. And then there was a copyright claim from Sony Music because (like *Ice Ice Baby*) it sampled the song *Under Pressure* by Queen and David Bowie.

Q: What made *Signed, Sealed, Delivered* so effective for Obama?

A: I think it's a combination of things. You could look at the lyrics and talk about the chorus: "Here I am, signed, sealed, delivered, I'm yours," as a

"A good campaign song can help to energize the constituency for a candidate and help them feel together in the moment. Music can be really effective for creating a sense of community."

— LOREN KAJIKAWA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF MUSIC

Loren Kajikawa

celebration of Obama's relationship with the electorate. But I think more than that, it's just the feeling of the song. It's the melody, the rhythm, the upbeat, energetic nature of the song and Stevie Wonder's incredible voice and performance that just makes listeners feel good.

The music of the modern civil rights era, even if it wasn't explicitly political all the time, resonated with the feelings and the politics of the era. A sense of togetherness was really important for how people mobilized politically. Stevie Wonder's music can still carry a lot of those same connotations. Obama was clearly centering the civil rights generation as one of his main target audiences.

Q: Kamala Harris used Beyoncé's *Freedom*. What was it meant to indicate?

A: *Freedom* is pretty serious as far as campaign songs go. It has this really uplifting, powerful chorus. Beyoncé is a strong Black woman making a strong statement about freedom and the African-American community. It's commenting on the ways in which the United States has failed some of its most vulnerable citizens. And I think it telegraphed a desire on Harris' behalf to represent vulnerable communities and be a champion for those who have not always been well represented by the government.

Q: Pop songs are popular in campaigns. What about rap songs?

A: Obama...was the first presidential nominee to make overt gestures towards hip-hop music and culture. For example, in a campaign speech, when addressing criticism that he was receiving from other politicians, he brushed his shoulders off, which was a clear gesture to a Jay-Z song called *Dirt Off Your Shoulder* from *The Black Album* (2005) and the gesture that Jay-Z makes in the video. So that was a nod and a wink to the hip-hop generation, which was significant because prior to Obama, neither political party would have wanted to be associated with hip-hop.

At the same time, Obama was quick to distance himself from some of the more problematic aspects of hip-hop and its mainstream perception. For example, when Kanye West interrupted Taylor Swift at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards, Obama was quick to call Kanye a "jackass," demonstrating that he was not uncritically embracing hip-hop.

Q: Talk about Donald Trump's use of music during the 2024 campaign.

A: There [were] multiple instances of Donald Trump choosing music to play at campaign rallies or other political events and being asked not to use that music or being threatened with legal action. I don't know if that really hurt or helped Trump in any way. There may be ways in which, for Trump's audience at least, those cease-and-desist orders actually contributed to strengthening his anti-establishment identity.

The fact that hip-hop culture is also popping up in conservative spaces reflects how long hip-hop has been at the center of American popular music. A generation of voters has come of age with hip-hop as the soundtrack of their lives. And, of course, some of them are going to be conservative and some of them are going to be liberal or progressive. It would be naive to think that any one political party could claim ownership of the genre.

Q: What new trends do you see in the use of music today?

A: We're seeing more fan-created content than ever before. Technology and how we consume and connect with music has changed a lot. We've gone from what was on Obama's iPod in 2008 to a world in which everything is streaming. You can create videos with music on TikTok or Instagram for the world to see. It's not only campaigns putting out ideas about music and the connection between music and their candidates, but fans and voters are creating their own content and sharing it on social media. Campaigns are not totally in control in the social media environment we're living in.

Q: What would be on your "top five" playlist built around campaigns and music?

A: *Signed, Sealed, Delivered. Freedom.* Dolly Parton's *9 to 5* was used by Elizabeth Warren. Trump used *God Bless the U.S.A.* by Lee Greenwood. Reagan tried to associate himself with Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A.*, and then Springsteen made public statements about how Reagan must have been misunderstanding his music. Later, Obama connected with Springsteen and his audience. Obama didn't connect with just Motown and hip-hop, but also to the rock 'n' roll generation, mainly through his relationship with Springsteen.

A Century of Discov

Corcoran Hall Marks 100 YEARS of Science Mi

An original sketch of Corcoran Hall circa 1923. The building that has housed generations of scholars and students turned 100 in 2024.

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Corcoran Hall celebrated a centennial anniversary as a historic hub of science landmarks—from the Big Bang theory to modern breakthroughs.

IT WAS THE FIRST BUILDING CONSTRUCTED ON GEORGE Washington University's Foggy Bottom campus—and maybe its most historic. It's been the site of some of the greatest breakthroughs in fields like physics and chemistry, the spot where George Gamow devised the Big Bang theory and Niels Bohr announced the dawn of the Atomic Age. The bazooka was even developed in its basement.

It's Corcoran Hall, the brick and limestone home to generations of scholars and students. And in 2024, the science landmark on 21st Street turned 100 years old.

Today, the building—which is listed on the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places—primarily houses Columbian College's Department of Physics. For nearly 90 years, the Department of Chemistry was also based there before the opening of Science Engineering Hall in 2015.

"This building has a very rich history. Some, [quite] literally, world-changing things have happened here—and great things are still happening here," said Physics Chair and Associate Professor **Alexander J. van der Horst**. "We continue to have great opportunities for students. And we continue to do the kind of research that puts this place on the map."

Indeed, throughout the historic building—in the same spaces where pioneers like Gamow, Edward Teller and chemist Charles Naeser investigated science's wonders from the nucleus of the atom to the genetic code of life—GW scholars have carried on a legacy of innovation.

Physics Chair Alexander van der Horst seated outside Corcoran Hall where, he said, "literally world-changing" discoveries were made.

Under Construction: The building blocks of Corcoran Hall, circa 1923.

Physicist George Gamow (left with GW students) first devised the Big Bang theory at Corcoran Hall.

At Corcoran Hall, for example, Professor of Chemistry **Akos Vertes**, a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors, began his early work on protein molecules; Professor of Physics **Chryssa Kouveliotou**, a National Academy of Sciences member, pioneered advancements in high-energy astrophysics; and Professor of Physics **Neil Johnson**, a fellow of the American Physical Society, has unlocked complex systems that influence activities from social media behavior to artificial intelligence use.

Gamow's original desk—where, according to legend, he had his Big Bang "eureka!" moment—is still on display for visitors to see. And Assistant Professor of Physics **Axel Schmidt** actually works at Teller's desk, delighting his friends who saw the "Father of the Hydrogen Bomb" portrayed in the movie *Oppenheimer*. "It's a weighty thing to sit at his desk," Schmidt said. "But it's also the first thing I tell people."

In the same spots where Oppenheimer-era physicists explored the building blocks of the universe, today's students conduct their own experiments in the hands-on SCALE-UP classrooms. And in the same basement birthplace of the bazooka, the award-winning GW chapter of the Society of Physics Students (SPS) organize their activities and outreach.

"The [building's] history is definitely something I think about," said former SPS President **Quinn Stefan**, BS '25. "It's a cool feeling to know that you are a part of such a rich legacy—and you're adding to it."

Center of Science

Not long after the October 28, 1924, dedication of Corcoran Hall, the building became the center of the science universe. Gamow, already renowned for his foundational work on quantum theory and nuclear particles, was recruited to GW in 1934. He had two conditions before joining the physics faculty: He asked to bring friend and colleague Teller along and he wanted to organize yearly physics conferences.

Those annual meetings—or "witches Sabbath" as Gamow dubbed them—brought some of the most prominent scientific figures of the time to Foggy Bottom, including Enrico Fermi and Robert Oppenheimer himself. At the 1939 conference, Nobel Prize winner Bohr announced the splitting of the uranium atom—ushering in the Atomic Age.

Gamow would go on to advance significant physics principles from his desk at Corcoran Hall, including early work on unraveling the DNA structure codes for proteins.

Belgian priest and physicist Georges Lemaitre first heard about astronomer Edwin P. Hubble's research at a Corcoran Hall meeting of the American Astronomical Society in 1925—leading to their groundbreaking law on the expansion of the universe. And during World War II, government contracts supported the development of new technologies like the bazooka—based on work by Chemistry Department head Charles Edward Munroe, the inventor of smokeless gunpowder.

"There [were] some amazing things that [occurred] during the years the Department of Chemistry resided in Corcoran Hall," said Professor Emeritus of Chemistry **Michael M. King**, "from the contract work prior to and during World War II, the many veterans who returned to campus after the war, the bumpy years of Vietnam War protests and generations of amazing students and incredible discoveries."

"This building has a very rich history. Some literally world-changing things have happened here—and great things are still happening here."

— ALEXANDER J. VAN DER HORST,
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PHYSICS

"A Special Place"

Even van der Horst wasn't fully aware of the building's history when he joined the department in 2015—but he found out soon enough. "From day one, everybody talked about it," he said. "It is part of the fabric of the department." Stefan learned about the milestones in van der Horst's astrophysics classes, "I remember thinking 'Wow, [Gamow] worked on these incredible theories that advanced the field in this very building. Meanwhile I'm struggling through an undergraduate class in here,'" she laughed.

Not all aspects of the century-old building were remembered with nostalgia. Before its 2016 renovation, Vertes recounted crawling through Corcoran Hall ceiling panels to string coaxial cables; King recalled "the incredibly quirky ventilation systems... and an elevator that shook"; and van der Horst described the bazooka basement as "creepy."

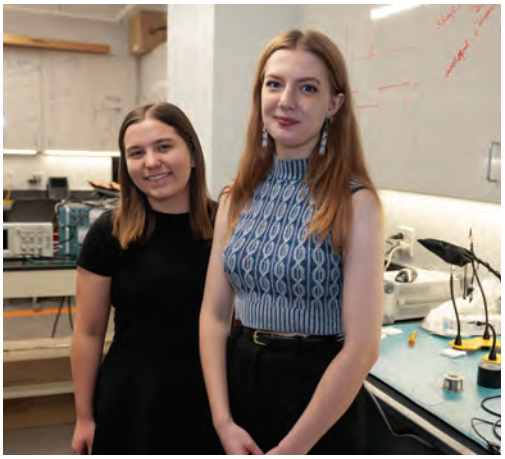
But since reopening in 2018, the building added a cutting-edge Innovation Lab and the interactive SCALE-UP classrooms where students perform real-time experiments. In addition to SPS, Corcoran Hall also houses GW's Physicists of Underrepresented Genders (PUG), which promotes "the inclusion, participation, and success of underrepresented genders in physics," noted PUG president **Olivia Nippe-Jeakins**, a rising senior astronomy and astrophysics major.

"The community is why this building is such a special place," Stefan said.

Meanwhile, the Physics Department continues building on Gamow's legacy, van der Horst said, particularly in the famed physicist's main focus areas: nuclear physics, biophysics and astrophysics. Van der Horst isn't making any predictions about the next 100 years at Corcoran Hall—but he noted that faculty and students are always exploring emerging fields like quantum computing, AI and machine learning.

"I can't foresee the many accomplishments that will happen here 10 years from now—let alone 100," he said. "But whatever the next big thing is, the faculty and students in this building will be ready for it."

Assistant Professor of Physics Axel Schmidt (right with junior physics major Abdalla Hassan) works at physicist Edward Teller's desk at Corcoran Hall.



New faces of science: Undergraduate physics majors (from left) Quinn Stefan and Olivia Nippe-Jeakins in the building's modern Innovation Lab.

Alexa Alice Joubin (second from left) joined a panel of experts at the QS Summit on AI and Higher Education in Washington, D.C., in 2024. (Photo: QS Summit)

Ghost in the Machine:

Can the Humanities Learn to Love AI?

Artificial intelligence is transforming university classrooms and changing our relationship to technology. English's Alexa Alice Joubin explains how the humanities can lead the way.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) ISN'T JUST ON ITS way to humanities classrooms—it's already here.

Students are asking philosophy questions to ChatGPT. Professors are using AI platforms for sharpening writing and research skills. And AI is transforming the humanities world every bit as much as it's changing computer science labs.

Despite fears that it may encourage cheating or erode basic skills, some humanities scholars are seizing AI's classroom potential—like self-proclaimed AI "early adopter" **Alexa Alice Joubin**, professor of English, theatre, international affairs, East Asian languages and cultures and women's, gender and sexuality studies.

Alexa Alice Joubin has been an "early adopter" of AI in the classroom.

Joubin has made AI a centerpiece of her scholarship. She's an affiliate of the National Science Foundation and National Institute of Standards and Technology's Institute for Trustworthy AI in Law & Society, a faculty member of the GW Trustworthy AI Initiative, founding co-director of the Digital Humanities Institute and an inaugural GW Public Interest Technology (PIT) Scholar.

In the classroom, Joubin has embraced AI as a technology tool that can be as instructive to the humanities as an encyclopedia—or even the written word itself. And to reluctant colleagues, she stresses that the technology is here to stay.

"AI will always be in the classroom. Instructors who cannot pick up on that may feel frustrated and may not acknowledge it—but it'll still be there," Joubin said. "The other alternative is to actively engage with AI as one of many promising learning tools."

In her courses, Joubin uses AI platforms to help students learn how to ask quality questions, conduct in-depth research and refine their critical questioning skills. As a PIT scholar, she's pioneering trustworthy AI projects, including creating an open-access AI tutor based on her own teaching model. And she also champions the technology's potential to promote a more inclusive classroom for international students who may struggle with English and students with varying learning needs. "It's an empowering tool if you deploy it responsibly," she said.

"AI will always be in the classroom. Instructors who cannot pick up on that may feel frustrated and may not acknowledge it—but it'll still be there."

— ALEXA ALICE JOUBIN, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

Art-Tech Relationship

Joubin's scholarship has long explored the relationship between art and technology. In a way, she believes, technology relies on art—with each new advancement creating a new narrative. "Artistic imagination brings forth new technologies," she said.

At the same time, she said, art has always leaned on new technologies—from the quill pen to the printing press to personal computers. Ancient Greeks, for example, theorized about machines that could operate autonomously. In the 20th century, mathematician Alan Turing devised his famous Turing Test to explore if consciousness existed in computers.

"This didn't start with ChatGPT," Joubin said. "It's one famous iteration over a long history."

To Joubin, AI is a natural fit in the humanities landscape. As scholars debate its uses, she's been enthused by the interest AI has ignited in questions about free will, mind and body and moral agency. "When people talk about ChatGPT, they talk about these questions," she said. "That's why the humanities are front and center in this debate."

Joubin eagerly "jumped on" generative AI in 2022, she said. She admitted to some initial disappointment with its early limitations. But she has steadily incorporated AI into her lessons and urged her students to approach the technology realistically and critically.

"It's not a devil, and it's not an angel," Joubin said. "But AI is in our mix, and it's not going away."

Indeed, within the classroom, Joubin encourages her students to view AI not as a creator of new knowledge, but as a repository of social attitudes. "I teach my students to treat it like a shadow image of society. It allows you to think at a meta-level about your role in a society and how society reacts to certain things," she said.

"It's not a devil, and it's not an angel. But AI is in our mix, and it's not going away."

— ALEXA ALICE JOUBIN, PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

For example, when she teaches *Romeo and Juliet* in her drama class, her students invariably want to update the play to a modern setting. AI can generate visuals for the scenes they describe in their heads—like recasting Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers as Black or Latinx or a queer couple.

"It forces them to rethink how they phrase their questions and their default assumption," Joubin explained. "It's an extremely fun and eye-opening exercise, but it also helps us examine our unspoken, unconscious racism or sexism."

Raising the Bar

Joubin knows that many in her field are reluctant to adapt their teaching to AI. Along with fear and uncertainty around the technology, she has observed indifference—as if AI has no bearing on the humanities' world.

"[This] can lead to a shunning of AI, and that translates into an unhealthy classroom," she warned. "We know students are using it. When they graduate, they are expected to have literacy in it. And writing, critical thinking and meta-cognition are becoming all the more central because of AI's challenges. The bar is being raised."

In opening doors to critical discussions about our relationship to technology, Joubin said AI has revitalized classic philosophical questions—from what makes us human to how we define consciousness. "Free will has suddenly become an important topic," she said.

At the same time, she noted that humanities scholars are well-equipped to consider questions of trustworthiness surrounding AI—issues such as transparency, ethics and accountability.

"Humanities is particularly good at exploring these critical theories in complex domains that deal with open-endedness," she said. "Humanities scholars know that there's no single universal morality. It depends on perspective. And a key humanities contribution is the ability to entertain ambiguity and multiple perspectives at once."

Indeed, Joubin urges her humanities colleagues to put aside their technology fears and experiment with the open access version of ChatGPT. "Just fool around with it, gain a concrete sense of what it can and cannot do," she said. "It's all theoretical until you actually try it."

Cooking Up Culture Italian Style

From the classroom to the kitchen, students explored Italy's culture and history through the lens of its rich culinary traditions.

From left, undergraduates Noah Troppe, Leana Kahwash, Krish Sadhwani and Emma Hodgson carved up lessons in Italian cooking and culture at the GW Culinary Medicine Program's Seva Teaching Kitchen.

IN ONE OF THEIR LAST CLASSES OF THE SEMESTER, senior neuroscience major **Diana Black** minced garlic on a cutting board as political science major **Ava Holtzman** stirred a pot of rice for a mushroom risotto. Nearby, journalism and mass communication classmates heated a custardy Italian sauce to top a tiramisu.

For these Columbian College of Arts and Sciences students, this wasn't a typical classroom. In fact it was a kitchen—the off-campus Seva Teaching Kitchen, home of the interdisciplinary GW Culinary Medicine Program.

And chopping onions and simmering saffron wasn't a lesson in a cooking course—it was an assignment in Italian culture.

In the Culture and Conflict in Italian Foodways class, undergraduates use food as an entry point to examine critical moments in Italian literature and history. Taught by Professor of Italian **Lynn Westwater** and Visiting Assistant Professor of Italian **Alessia Mingrone**, the class is a wide-ranging recipe for understanding the special relationship between cuisine and culture in Italian society.

"We're exploring how deeply Italian foodways are enmeshed in other aspects—politics, regional divides, migration, labor practices," said Westwater, chair of the Department of Romance, German and Slavic Studies and an affiliate faculty member of the Global Food Institute. "Students come into the course thinking, 'I love Italian food! This will be fun!' But we also want them to realize how the food they love has very deep historical and cultural roots."

"We're exploring how deeply Italian foodways are enmeshed in other aspects—politics, regional divides, migration, labor practices."

— LYNN WESTWATER, PROFESSOR OF ITALIAN

Part of the food leadership minor, the class transports students from the medieval era to the present, mixing a menu of favorite dishes with academic ingredients like gender, class and sustainability. The syllabus serves up Dante and Boccaccio side-by-side with pasta and pizza.

In the classroom, students address motifs from the symbolism of bread in *The Divine Comedy* to Mussolini's war on spaghetti. They were treated to guest speakers like D.C. chef Joe Farruggio, whose restaurants include Georgetown's il Canale. The class also welcomed Mingrone's own father for a taste test of the fresh olive oil he manufactures from his home in Calabria, Italy.

In the kitchen, the course culminates with a student-prepared feast of mushroom and saffron risotto, fresh salad and tiramisu—shared in a classic Italian family-style meal.

"The kitchen experience ... allowed [us] to connect with the themes and pieces of gastronomic history we learned in class," said Holtzman, who graduated in 2025 with a political science major and a minor in sociology and sustainability. "And it isn't often that I get to cook for 20 people and eat communally with classmates!"

La Dolce Vita

Many cultures have their own special culinary connections. But from its San Marzano tomatoes to its Tuscan olive oil, Italy seems to hold a particularly romantic allure.

"That's the million-dollar question: What is it with Italian food? Why do we feel such an attachment to it?" Mingrone said. "It's probably the first thing people who don't even know much about Italy at all think about."

Indeed, while some of the 44 students in the class' two sessions have visited Italy—like Holtzman, who performed in an opera near Tuscany when she was 10—others were drawn to the class for the menu. Junior neuroscience major **Yasmine Dakak** calls herself a die-hard "gnocchi person." **Mariana Corrales**, a sophomore majoring in journalism with a minor in nutrition, "savored many Italian dishes" when she worked at an Italian restaurant in her Charlotte, N.C., hometown, including what felt like "an endless variation" of pasta.

Within the class, food is the "vehicle" for sharing cultural lessons, Mingrone said. Bread, for example, appears in Dante's work, with the unfamiliar taste of salted bread in faraway lands standing in for the loneliness of his exile from Florence. Likewise, in one class text, foreign bread represents the hardship of Italian American immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "In America," read an immigrant's letter home, "the bread is soft, but life is hard."

Other lessons relate food to Italian politics—like Mussolini's propaganda campaign to promote rice over pasta and reduce the nation's dependence on imported wheat. The plan failed as working-class women defied the regime's policies and pasta became an anti-fascist symbol.

For their final projects, many students presented "un-essays" with unconventional platforms like TikTok cooking videos. Dakak, whose family is from Lebanon, created artwork that compared shared Sicilian and Arab culinary traditions. And Black tied her project into her neuroscience major. She explored how Italian ingredients like fermented cheese and extra virgin olive oil may support dietary interventions for improving mental health.

But for most students, the highlight is the kitchen session, which Westwater described as "a lab section in a humanities class." Westwater stressed the importance of including a hands-on activity to reinforce the knowledge and skill behind Italian cooking. "It makes the class a 360-degree experience that I hope will enrich their lives going forward," she said. Professor of French **Masha Belenky** brings her Cultural Politics of Food in France class to the Seva Kitchen for a similar session.

Meanwhile, the Culinary Medicine faculty instructed the Italian Foodways students on everything from knife skills to whipping a classic zabaglione for the tiramisu. The session inspired Holtzman to make the mushroom risotto recipe as part of her family's Thanksgiving dinner. "This class tied together everything we've been learning about joy and culture," she said, "and the importance of eating good food!"

Students turned up the heat as they cooked a classic Italian family-style meal.

"The kitchen experience ... allowed [us] to connect with the themes and pieces of gastronomic history we learned in class."

— AVA HOLTZMAN, POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJOR

Life-or-Death Decisions: Philosophy Student Weighs Ethics of Organ Transplants

Luther Rice Fellow Seyeon Moon, BA '25, is applying philosophical insights and bioethical research standards to understanding who receives scarce organ transplants—and who doesn't.

IMAGINE TWO PATIENTS IN NEED OF A HEART transplant. One is a young athlete with a congenital heart defect. The other is an older man with heart failure due to a lifetime of unhealthy choices.

Who should get the transplant?

It seems like a question for doctors, donors, family members and even spiritual advisors. But **Seyeon Moon**, BA '25, a philosophy major and recipient of the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences' Luther Rice Undergraduate Research Fellowship, argues there's another important voice with insights on the life-or-death debate: philosophers.

Her Luther Rice research project on the ethics of organ donation tackles the profound moral quandaries surrounding the nation's complicated organ transplant system. With more than 100,000 people in the United States needing organ transplants—and as many as 22 a day dying as they wait—Moon consulted medical guidelines, transplant surgeons and bioethicists to untangle the critical questions looming over how we allocate scarce organs.

Should children move to the head of the line? What do we owe to prior living donors? Should we deprioritize people based on behavior—like alcoholism, chronic smoking or even incarcerated individuals—in favor of those who society deems more deserving?

"The moral questions surrounding medical decisions are among the most complex and nuanced," Moon said. "Philosophers and ethicists know how to ask the right questions."

For nearly 40 years, the organ donation system in the United States has been run by the national nonprofit United Network

for Organ Sharing (UNOS). Under contract with the federal government, the network maintains the transplant waiting list while coordinating with hospitals and organ procurement organizations to match candidates with donated organs.

But that system is very much in flux. Congress recently conducted hearings on alleged UNOS shortfalls and mismanagement. Plans are in place to overhaul the system to include multiple contractors and improve accountability and transparency.

Even as transplant guidelines are being restructured, the waiting list criteria still lean on compatibility and viability—factors including medical urgency, blood type, body measurements and how quickly more perishable organs like hearts and lungs must be transplanted.

And while an UNOS ethics committee plays a role in drafting guidelines, Moon said it remains unclear exactly how complex moral questions are resolved. Her Luther Rice research isn't intended to rewrite the transplant guidelines, she said, but to highlight the system's ethical tightrope—and balance the factors that influence critical decisions.

"Ethics lie at the core of everything we do and in determining what we ought to do," she said. "Given that healthcare touches millions of lives every day, it feels imperative that we strive to make the right and just choices in every decision we face."

Philosophy's Real-World Impact

Moon didn't plan to major in philosophy at GW. Her interests ran toward public health and medicine, and even today she hopes to pursue a career in law. But after taking a bioethics course with Elton Professor of Philosophy **David DeGrazia**, she was introduced to the impact philosophy can have on public policy concerns—from AI in healthcare to debates over euthanasia to advancing animal welfare.

"I didn't find that human aspect [in science]. It didn't answer my questions," said Moon, who is also a GW National Churchill Fellow. "Philosophy clicked for me. It teaches me a lot about critical thinking."

Indeed, Associate Professor of Philosophy **Laura Papish** and Moon's Luther Rice faculty adviser, noted that philosophy research can be as scientifically rigorous as other disciplines. The faculty in the Philosophy Department, she stressed, cover a gamut of theoretical and empirical expertise.

"We have people who work on more theoretical questions like the nature of consciousness, and we have faculty who are very much interested in how philosophical thinking can be brought to bear on practical questions," she explained. "Our students often have empirical or practical concerns and they're interested in how philosophy can be used to help clarify or resolve them."

For her Luther Rice project, Moon formulated arguments based on real-life data and brought scientific reasoning to questions about transplant utility, justice and autonomy—UNOS' three guiding principles. In addition to scouring policy and statistics, Moon consulted with a transplant hospital in her native Hawaii and bioethicists in D.C. And each conversation raised more ethical dilemmas.

Do patients' physical location, for example, impact prioritization because they can quickly reach a hospital when racing the clock for a perishable organ? Or, Moon asked, does it penalize people whose limited financial means block access to numerous transplant facilities?

"These are murky waters," she said. "As ethicists, we want to demand and propose the perfect, ideal solution. But as bioethicists, we need to deliver results, which means that our proposals have to be realistic."

Moon's project is "challenging because it straddles the theoretical and the practical," Papish said. "It requires her to master various philosophical points of view about the nature of harm and benefit. But then she has to consider these hard, more empirical questions about how public opinion should factor in and which allocation criteria can be practically implemented. It's a very complicated, interdisciplinary project."

Moon, who has presented her work at conferences, hopes to publish her research in a peer-reviewed journal. At some point, she said, she'd like to show her findings to the UNOS ethics committee.

"This is an emotional topic, and these are incredibly hard questions, which are very consequential to individuals and to community members," she said. "I'm empathetic to the people who have to make these life-changing decisions. As a philosophy researcher, I'm passionate about ensuring fairness and equitable access for all."

Seyeon Moon

"The moral questions surrounding medical decisions are among the most complex and nuanced. Philosophers and ethicists know how to ask the right questions."

— SEYEON MOON, BA '25, LUTHER RICE FELLOW

In Brief: Impact & Engagement

Scholarship recipient Amelia Lindsay-Kaufman

ENDOWMENT TARGETS ENVIRONMENTAL SCHOLARSHIP

COLUMBIAN COLLEGE'S Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration (TSPPPA), in partnership with the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI), launched a new graduate-level scholarship endowment that reflects a dedication to environmental sustainability and seeking solutions to crises such as climate change.

Established by an anonymous benefactor in EESI's name, the new endowment will support TSPPPA graduate students with the goal of fostering the next generation of environmental scholars shaping future climate science and policy. Environmental and sustainability policy graduate student **Amelia Lindsay-Kaufman** is the inaugural recipient of the scholarship.

CCAS LAUNCHES ACADEMY FOR ALUMNI

LAUNCHED THIS SPRING, THE Columbian College Academy is designed to engage alumni through a dynamic platform showcasing the creative scholarship of faculty across multiple fields. Alumni are invited to participate in an online class in which professors teach on topics relating to their current course material.

To date, three classes have been held: Professor of Chemistry **Holden Thorpe** examined the history of science denial; Associate Professor of Interior Architecture **Stephanie Travis** explored three iconic houses representing the modern architectural movement; and Assistant Professor of Anthropology **Andrew Barr** discussed the evolutionary impact of climate change.

IDDP BOOSTED BY KNIGHT FOUNDATION

THE INSTITUTE FOR DATA, Democracy & Politics (IDDP), housed within Columbian College's School of Media and Public Affairs, continues to lead critical work at the intersection of technology, democracy and public policy. Knight Foundation recently awarded IDDP a $3 million renewal grant—building on its initial $5 million investment in 2019—to further advance the institute's mission and vision.

Last fall, IDDP hosted "Defending Democracy: A Conversation" featuring former Rep. Liz Cheney and Knight Foundation CEO Maribel Pérez Wadsworth. The event gave the GW community a candid look at the urgent challenges facing democratic institutions and the work needed to protect them.

Maribel Pérez Wadsworth (left) with Liz Cheney.

HIPPO'S SKULL FINDS NEW HOME

MICHAEL THACHER, BA '70, AND his wife, **Rhonda Rundle**, provided support to the Department of Anthropology that allowed for the purchase of a hippopotamus skull, which will be housed in GW's Center for the Advanced Study of Human Paleobiology Center for use in research.

This latest gift exemplifies Thacher's philanthropy in support of his many interests. These include endowing the first student prize in the fast-growing Data Science Program, three endowed scholarships as part of the Third Century Endowment Match and his long-time support of the Department of Philosophy as a former philosophy major. Thacher also volunteers his time as a longtime member of the Dean's National Council of the Arts and Sciences.

Michael Thacher (right) and Anthropology Professor Andrew Barr examine the hippopotamus skull.

Stanley Cohen with his Personnel and Industrial Psychology class on the quad in fall 1979.

GIVING BACK: A LIFELONG COMMITMENT

THROUGH A GENEROUS PLANNED endowment gift, triple alumnus **Stanley Cohen**, BA '63, MA '66, PhD '71, and his wife, **Jeanne Cohen**, will establish a fellowship fund to support future generations of graduate students. This gift augments a lifetime of giving back to GW through expertise and philanthropy—support inspired by his GW experience as a student and the faculty mentorship that he received.

In addition to being an alumnus, Cohen has deep GW connections. Early in his career, he taught psychology students as an adjunct instructor and, later, regularly hired alumni to work in his company, Human Systems Technology, which he co-founded. In 2000, Cohen honored his mentor and colleague, Professor **James N. Mosel**, by endowing a scholarship and funding a dissertation award to support PhD students in industrial organizational psychology. Most recently, Cohen lent his expertise in a roundtable discussion with university leadership on GW's future direction.

Nana Agyemang, BA '16, is the visionary behind EveryStylishGirl.

Empowering Future Leaders

Nana Agyemang, BA '16, is using her platform, EveryStylishGirl, and an endowed scholarship at GW to help lift the next generation.

By Lisa Conley-Kendzior

DON'T WAIT FOR A SEAT AT THE TABLE—BUILD your own.

For **Nana Agyemang**, BA '16, this isn't just some Instagram-worthy motivational quote; it's the doctrine she lives by.

Today, Agyemang has not only built her own table—she's making sure there's plenty of room for the next generation to join her. A former journalism and mass communication major at Columbian College's School of Media and Public Affairs (SMPA), she turned her ambition to work in the fashion world into a mission to dismantle the barriers women of color face in fashion and media.

She is the visionary behind EveryStylishGirl, a digital platform that provides media and business support, career advice and other resources to empower young Black women navigating industries that have long excluded them. And, in her commitment to encourage others to pursue their dreams, she established the Nana Agyemang Media Scholarship to support SMPA students.

"I hope what the scholarship can do is bring diverse perspectives and fresh ideas to the media landscape and new voices that didn't think they would be heard before."

— NANA AGYEMANG, BA '16

"It feels incredible to be able to contribute in such a meaningful way to an institution that contributed to me in such a meaningful way," said Agyemang, who's one of the youngest GW alumni to create an endowed scholarship. "I wouldn't have been able to take a majority of my internships if it wasn't for my scholarship [support]."

Agyemang always dreamed of becoming a fashion journalist, and during her time at GW, she worked tirelessly to turn that dream into a reality.

"I used to email 10 to 20 people—whether they were editors, contributors or writers at fashion publications—asking if I could buy them a coffee and chat," she recalled. "I did that every single week."

That persistence paid off when she connected with an assistant to the editor in chief of *Harper's Bazaar*, paving the way for her first job in the fashion industry. However, she soon realized that it wasn't going to be smooth sailing from there.

"Once I broke into the industry, then I started dealing with some cultural misunderstandings," she said. "I remember really struggling to show my unique perspectives and ideas. I didn't really feel like they were valued or understood."

Instead of waiting for the fashion world to change, Agyemang took matters into her own hands. What began as an Instagram account during her GW days blossomed into EveryStylishGirl. "I noticed a gap in representation," Agyemang said. "And I really wanted to create a space that celebrated voices like mine."

Today, EveryStylishGirl is more than a digital hub; it's a community that hosts global fashion and beauty summits for those looking to start their own businesses or grow in the corporate world. These events aren't just about style—they're about breaking barriers. Attendees gain practical skills, from salary negotiation to entrepreneurship, all wrapped in Agyemang's core message: Nothing is out of reach.

"We're really giving you the tools and exact steps and details that you need to succeed to the next level," she explained. "The only way to break down these barriers is by not gatekeeping."

The Nana Agyemang Media Scholarship goes beyond providing funds and extends Agyemang dedication to uplifting others. She plans to mentor students, helping them flourish in industries that have historically overlooked them.

"I know how tough it can be to even get your foot in the door, and I want to make that path easier for others," she said. "I hope what the scholarship can do is bring diverse perspectives and fresh ideas to the media landscape and new voices that didn't think they would be heard before.

"The challenges I faced made me who I am," Agyemang added. "But I don't want other women to go through the same struggles. It's time for us all to rise together."

Nana Agyemang said without her scholarship support, "I wouldn't have been able to take a majority of my internships."

Ten Years of Transformation: Cisneros Institute Celebrates a Decade of Empowering Student Leadership

Since its founding in 2015, the Cisneros Institute has built communities, spearheaded scholarship and made students' dreams come true.

WHEN SHE APPLIED FOR COLLEGES IN 2020, **Annabelle Manzo**, BA '24, MA '25, had every reason to feel optimistic. She had great grades, strong test scores and a track record of leadership inside and outside the classroom.

Instead, Manzo remembers that period as "a very uncertain and scary time, not knowing what the future held."

Due to financial hardships, she was worried not only about getting into college—but also about being able to afford it.

But good news was on the way: Manzo was accepted into GW—her top choice. And she was offered a scholarship from the Cisneros Hispanic Leadership Institute at the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences—an award that would turn her dream of studying in the nation's capital into a reality.

Founded through the philanthropy of California Congressman **Gilbert Cisneros**, BA '94, and his wife, **Jacki Cisneros**, in 2015, the institute aims to provide talented students like Manzo, dubbed Cisneros Scholars, the financial, academic and social support needed to thrive in college and beyond.

As a Cisneros Scholar, Manzo, who describes herself as "steadfast in my dedication to social justice, equality and community organizing," would not only see her financial problems eased. She found a pathway to nurture her passion for advocacy and research.

> "It's hard to find a way that the Cisneros Institute hasn't touched my life and impacted me positively. I wouldn't be where I am today without the institute."
>
> — ANNABELLE MANZO, BA '24

Manzo fully embraced her opportunities. When she graduated in 2024 with a degree in women's, gender, and sexuality studies and political science, she'd won a slew of accolades—including the 2023 Overall Student Employee of the Year Award and the 2024 CCAS Undergraduate Studies Award. She was even the CCAS flagbearer for the 2024 Commencement on the National Mall. Along the way she served as a research assistant and later the project coordinator for Cisneros Institute-led studies funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In 2025, she received her MA in public policy from GW and continues to work with the institute as a full-time program associate.

"It's hard to find a way that the Cisneros Institute hasn't touched my life and impacted me positively. I wouldn't be where I am today without the institute," she said.

Manzo is a Cisneros Institute success story—and she's not alone. Over the last 10 years, while advancing its mission to cultivate citizen scholars and innovative research, the institute has changed the lives of scores of young people and their families, while supporting the next generation of leaders and scholars. Roughly 1,000 students have been part of its varied leadership programs—including more than 100 Cisneros Scholars.

"The Cisneros Institute was created to be a home away from home where students can find the resources, support and community needed to thrive at GW and to develop as citizen scholars," said **Elizabeth Vaquera**, the institute's executive director and a CCAS associate professor of sociology and public policy and public administration. "As we move into the next decade, I see a real opportunity to expand our footprint on- and off-campus."

Among its core initiatives, the institute hosts Caminos al Futuro, a residential summer program that brings high school seniors to Foggy Bottom for a firsthand view of the college experience and public leadership in the nation's capital. Meanwhile, it continues to spearhead interdisciplinary research projects, partnering with affiliate faculty on GW's campus and across the country to study the well-being of Latinos within the United States, while also creating hands-on opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students.

"It's both a big commitment and a real privilege to be able to touch so many aspects through this work—from working directly with students to collaborating across virtually all levels and units at GW to engaging with national leaders," Vaquera said. "This is a role I never imagined when I started my career as an academic!"

Making a Difference

Like many of the young people who benefit from the institute, Cisneros himself was a first-generation college student. A political science major, he studied at GW on an ROTC scholarship. When he and his wife founded the institute through a multimillion-dollar gift to his alma mater, Cisneros envisioned "a program where we could not only provide scholarships but also provide a support infrastructure for students to ensure they would be successful," he said.

Cisneros Scholars and graduate fellows outside the D.C. home of the Cisneros Institute in 2023 (Photos: Cisneros Hispanic Leadership Institute)

Gil Cisneros and Elizabeth Vaquera speaking at the annual welcome event for new Cisneros Scholars in 2022.

Watching the first cohort of Cisneros Scholars graduate "was probably one of the most exciting moments for me," Cisneros recalled. "I like to think we are making a difference in the students' lives."

Vaquera joined the institute as its inaugural director in 2016. A scholar of immigrant and Latino youth, she initially saw the position as a way to translate her decades-long research on student engagement into actual programs. "Looking back now, it really was an only-at-GW opportunity to build something innovative with the strong support of a passionate donor and academic leadership," she said. "I still very much feel that way today!"

Also a first-generation student, Vaquera was inspired by the mentors who saw her potential as a young scholar and wanted to offer the same kind of support for GW students. "It is always so heartwarming to see students cross the finish line at graduation and to share those moments with their families," she said. "In a way, I feel like I'm paying it forward."

Indeed, Vaquera said that, according to internal assessments, many of the Cisneros students consider dropping out or transferring schools at some point but attribute their decision to stay at GW to their experience with the institute. More than two-thirds of Cisneros Scholars graduate with honor distinctions—along with a 100 percent placement rate in jobs or graduate schools within six months.

Cisneros Scholars and student researchers (from left) Annabelle Manzo, Jacqueline Dioses, Georgette Encinas and Christopher Flores-Moreno

A Decade of Success Stories

In 10 years, the institute has produced two Fulbright finalists and plentiful success stories, including **Cristiana Barno**, BA '25, who was part of a team that presented a 2023 case at the U.S. Supreme Court. "The guidance and mentorship my supervisors and role models provided me has taught me invaluable lessons that I couldn't have learned solely in the classroom," she said.

Nicolas Rios, BA '22, participated in the Caminos al Futuro program as a high school student in 2017. Later he was part of Comunicadores for the Future, an internship program that teamed students with PR and social marketing firm Vanguard Communications, founded by alumna **Maria Rodriguez**, BBA '82. That opportunity led to an internship as a communications fellow at the League of Women Voters and then to his current role as a consultant at the international law firm Crowell & Moring LLP.

"The Cisneros Institute was the backbone of my undergraduate experience, Rios said, noting that he stays

> "The Cisneros Institute was created to be a home away from home where students can find the resources, support and community needed to thrive at GW and to develop as citizen scholars."
>
> — ELIZABETH VAQUERA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CISNEROS HISPANIC LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

in touch with his Cisneros classmates through his professional network. "It was refreshing to be in a community where everyone was always trying their hardest to succeed."

Jennifer Garcia, BA '22, was originally turned down for a different scholarship when a GW admissions officer told her about the institute. During her years at GW, she lived in Casa Cisneros, an on-campus living and learning community founded by the institute. She participated in Comunicadores for the Future and helped create the Cisneros Alumni Network to engage program alumni.

"All of these opportunities gave me the chance to learn from others, grow core skills necessary for the workforce and, overall, just enjoy an experience with some of my best friends while I was so far away from home," she said. Today, Garcia is studying for the LSAT through the SEO Catalyst program, a pipeline initiative for underrepresented communities in the legal sector.

"Our scholars come to us as already incredibly smart young people. The crucial aspect of this work is then to confront the barriers to their success that often exist outside of the classroom and to help them build the critical skills and tools to lead in whatever they choose to do," Deputy Director **Trey Johnston** said. "The favorite part of my job is getting to see them achieve something they are passionate about, they are proud of and that lets them practice their skills."

In recent years, the institute has added to its long list of achievements. It's hosted special opportunities like the Immigration Film Fest, the Puerto Rican Diaspora Summit and the Im/migrant Well-Being Conference. It's partnered with major nonprofits like the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) and the National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders (NALCAB) to create specialized leadership programming for participants from the early career to executive level. Along the way, it's given students once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to engage with policymakers and influencers, including actress and producer Eva Longoria, Supreme Justice Sonia Sotomayor and First Lady Michelle Obama.

Into the next decade, Vaquera said the institute remains committed to developing student scholars while increasing its impact at GW and beyond.

"We are really excited to remain engaged with our growing alumni and to continually adapt our evidence-based workforce development, research and leadership programming," she said, "to meet the needs of now and tomorrow."

Jacki Cisneros (left) met with GW President Ellen M. Granberg in 2025.

Joe Gidjunis, with his son, Gabe

Alumnus Helps Dads Learn to be Grown Ups

In his PBS television series, Joe Gidjunis, BA '04, teaches men to parent-with-purpose to fully embrace every aspect of fatherhood.

By Greg Varner

WHEN **JOE GIDJUNIS**, BA '04, BECAME A FATHER seven years ago, he knew he wanted to be more than simply a disciplinarian and breadwinner.

He wanted to be a positive presence for his son, Gabe. But when he asked other fathers how they approached being a dad, he was saddened by the response of many: "I just do the opposite of what my dad did."

Realizing that other fathers could benefit from the kind of guidance he sought, Gidjunis—who majored in journalism—created the PBS television series *Grown Up Dad*.

"When I kept getting the same answer, almost word for word, I knew I was on to something," Gidjunis said. "Fathers need to talk about this, and we're not socialized to have these conversations. That's why it's so important." Too often, he added, mothers are seen as "the real parent" while fathers are merely providers or, at best, the babysitter.

Each half-hour episode of *Grown Up Dad,* which is streaming on PBS Passport, explores a different challenge facing today's fathers—from the shifting definition of masculinity to the impact of screen time, mental health and digital misinformation. The main question Gidjunis asks is what it means to be a good father.

Throughout the series, he interviews a range of men and women, in the United States and abroad, to learn their advice—including experts, artists, social media personalities, thought leaders and influential creators. In the first season, he spoke with former U.S. Army Secretary Patrick Murphy on leadership

> "I found more joy and fulfillment in being a father than I have in anything in my life. No one told me it would be joyful … and now I tell that to everyone."
>
> — JOE GIDJUNIS, BA '04

and resilience; Common Sense Media Vice President Merve Lapus on raising children in the digital age; and Chef Danny Freeman on connecting with kids through cooking.

"Between important discussions on toxic masculinity and evolving gender roles, defining good fatherhood has never been more complex," he said. "How do we blend strong and compassionate and embrace the modern while acknowledging the contributions of the past?"

In *Grown Up Dad*, Gidjunis said, "I'm trying to figure this out."

Dog Tales

A shining example for dads, he believes, is shown in *Bluey*, the popular Australian cartoon about a family of dogs. Bluey's father, Bandit, Gidjunis said, is "the most authentic dad" he's ever seen on TV, and a great role model. There are T-shirts and online support groups asking "What would Bandit do?"

"My dad was a provider," Gidjunis said, "but I missed a lot of experiences, I think, because he wasn't around much. The role models I saw on TV and in the media were like Al Bundy on *Married … with Children* and Tim 'the Toolman' Taylor on *Home Improvement*. They're lovable and funny, but they're bumbling. They're not someone I wanted to emulate. It's funny, but with *Bluey*, my TV role model became an animated cartoon dog."

The most important lesson he learned watching *Bluey*, he said, has been intentionality—to parent with purpose. But episodes of *Bluey* are only seven minutes long, and one of the biggest criticisms levied against the show is that the parents are too perfect.

"It's not that they're perfect," Gidjunis countered. "It's that they're great parents for seven minutes. When I'm exhausted and don't think I've got it in me to make it to my son's bedtime, I think, 'Can I be a good dad for seven more minutes?' And then I can think about it in those short bursts."

Finding Joy

Some of the topics covered in *Grown Up Dad* include the particular challenges faced by blue-collar workers and those deemed "essential" employees; issues relating to social media, video games and cell phones; and the high costs of having children.

Social media presents different challenges for sons and daughters, Gidjunis said, with parents of boys generally trying to monitor the amount of time their sons are interacting online, while parents of girls are more focused on messaging and how damaging it can be in terms of bullying and image.

"Parents are trying to navigate a really difficult process," Gidjunis noted, "because screens are in front of our kids all the time at home and even in school. Trying to find a healthy balance of screen time with other activities is difficult, and every kid is different."

Sometimes ideas of good parenting conflict with common notions of manliness. Qualities like compassion, care and sacrifice are often attributed to moms, but may be perceived as unusual in fathers. The main message Gidjunis wants to get across is that there are different ways to be a good father, and that it can be the best part of life.

"I found more joy and fulfillment in being a father than I have in anything in my life," Gidjunis said. "It is life-affirming and joyous, and that's a message I never got about becoming a dad. No one told me it would be joyful. I was sad that no one said that to me, and now I tell that to everyone."

In the pilot episode, Gidjunis talks with Jeremy Givens, president of the Black American Dad Foundation, about similar advice each heard from other men about fatherhood: "You don't have to worry about the loving or the caring. That's what mom does."

Hair-Raising History: How Coifs and Cuts Styled an Era

Artist Hans Heinrich Bebie depicted an 1870s hairstyling session in his painting Conversation (Group of Baltimore Girls). (Courtesy the Maryland Center for History and Culture)

The post-Civil War hair boom entangled everyone from socialites to enslaved people. In her book, art historian Elizabeth L. Block, BA '94, explains how hair helped fashion a nation.

The 19th century "was an exciting moment of change in the country—and in hair. Hair was central to Americans and especially to women's lives."

— ELIZABETH L. BLOCK, BA '94

FOR WOMEN IN THE MID-TO-LATE 19TH CENTURY, a bad hair day might involve singing your split ends with a lit candle—and hoping you didn't set your head on fire.

For men, an 1800s pomade could include bear grease, lard or mutton fat—along with a generous squeeze of apple juice to mask the rancid smell.

Today, the era's hair obsessions might seem silly even for generations that endured mullets and mohawks. But to art historian **Elizabeth L. Block**, BA '94, the post-Civil War pompadours and Gibson Girl bouffants stood for more than just frivolous fashions.

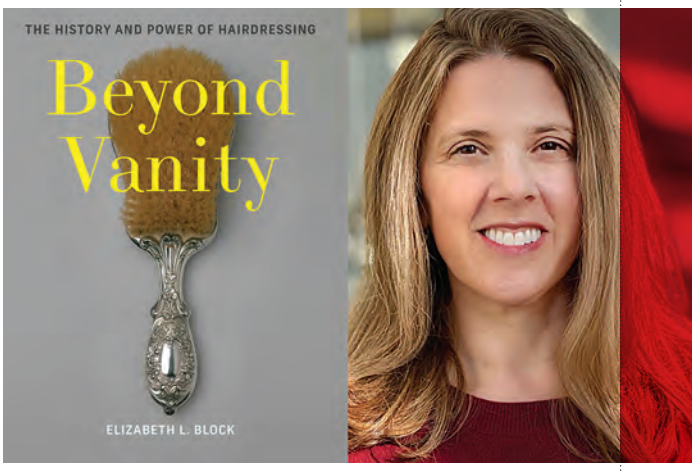
In her latest book *Beyond Vanity: The History and Power of Hairdressing*, Block, a senior editor in the Publications and Editorial Department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, combs through the complex cultural meaning of 19th-century hair. Against a backdrop of high society salons—then called "hair rooms" or "saloons"—she uncovers the stories of often Black and mixed-race business owners forging independent paths in the burgeoning hair industry.

"It was an exciting moment of change in the country—and in hair," said Block, a former English major and art history minor. "Hair was central to Americans and especially to women's lives."

Indeed, Block said hair was entangled in the social strata of the post-war nation, influencing everything from ideologies to economies. On stages, trendsetting actresses like Sarah Bernhardt and Lillie Langtry modeled the latest styles. At parlors and parties, wealthy dynasties like the Astors and the Vanderbilts fussed over meticulously groomed coiffures.

But the hair world also blurred class and racial lines. In shops, hairstyles signaled newfound freedoms for women entering the workplace. And in enslaved people's quarters, Black women endured the indignities of caring for white people's hair—while foreshadowing their economic empowerment as pioneers in the hair industry.

The era's hair revolution wasn't restricted to "upper-class white women in the Northeast," Block emphasized. "I was looking at women of all classes, of multiple races. There are stories from the Midwest, the West Coast, New Orleans and throughout the South. In this historical period, hair covered a wide repertoire."



Elizabeth L. Block, BA '94, authored the book Beyond Vanity: The History and Power of Hairdressing.

Art and Fashion

As a student, Block fell under the spell of 19th-century American painters like John Singer Sargent and Mary Cassatt—often in classes taught by Professor Emerita of Art History **Lilien F. Robinson**. While at GW, she interned with the National Gallery of Art, which led to her first post-graduation job as an editorial assistant at the Hirshhorn Museum in D.C. and eventually her current position with New York's Metropolitan Museum. She received her PhD in art history at the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

As she moved through the professional art world, she was fascinated with depictions of fashion in paintings—even writing a book on French couture titled *Dressing Up: The Women Who Influenced French Fashion*. The more she viewed figures like the young socialite in Sargent's *Madame X*, she wondered why art historians had written so much about her black satin dress—but almost nothing about her flaming red hair.

This 1870s hair care advertisement reflects how Black women both cared for the hair of former enslavers while also finding their own success in the new hair economy. (Courtesy National Museum of American History)

Some art experts "were covering fashion but nobody was covering hairstyles," she said. "I kept asking myself: Why is hair always last? Why is it viewed as frivolous?"

One reason, Block surmised, is that historians saw over-the-top coifs like outlandish 18th century Marie Antoinette wigs as "preposterous"—a sentiment she doesn't deny. "The hair of yesteryear—the Bridgerton hair that people are latching on to right now—really is kind of absurd," she laughed.

But Block set out to reclaim the cultural context of hair, particularly within the 19th century rise of the American hair industry. As the hairdressing profession took off, newly manufactured hair products—styling creams, serums and restorers—promised miracles from eliminating gray to patching bald spots to adding shimmer and gloss.

Actresses' hairstyles set the cultural tone—not unlike how Jennifer Aniston's "Rachel hair" in *Friends* moved the needle for modern audiences, she noted. Socialites relied on lengthy hairdressing sessions to prepare for a night at the opera or a ball. "The power hairdressers held was extraordinary," Block explained. "The sought-after ones were booked hour-to-hour. Their [wealthy] clients wouldn't leave the house unless their hair was styled."

Across Class and Race

One of the era's most popular styles—the Gibson Girl bouffant—became a hallmark of the independence women garnered in the period, Block said. Its light, airy appeal symbolized new societal freedoms—from advertisements of bouffant-wearing women riding bicycles and playing badminton to its popularity with women working in shops and salons. "As a symbol, it's a powerful hairstyle," Block said.

Block also examined the complicated relationship between Black women and the era's hair boom. She imagines the experiences of Black women caring for the hair of their enslavers. "If a Black woman was working in a white woman's home, one of her main responsibilities would be to style her hair," she explained. "What must it have felt like to put your hands into her hair—to help her wash it and style it—when the opportunity to style your own hair was so limited?" she asked.

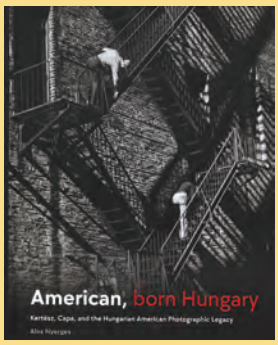
But Block also highlights Black entrepreneurs who became the period's hair pioneers. New England's Christiana Carteaux Bannister, for example, marketed her own products and owned salons. Likewise, Harriet E. (Hattie) Wilson, a former indentured servant to a white family and one of the first African American novelists in the United States, sold hair care products door-to-door before establishing her own line across multiple cities. "Their lived experiences are the inspiring and incredible part of this story," Block said.

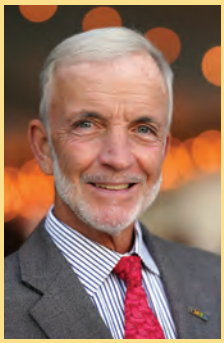
Block also appreciates the era's more outrageous fashions—like the taxidermized kitten headdress socialite Kate Fearing Strong wore to a Vanderbilt party. Likewise, she pointed to Brooklyn designer's Mademoiselle Louise's dead bird hair-topper, which featured actual sharp-beaked fowls perched in a "nest" of fiber.

And Block herself is tempted to try a popular 19th-century egg yolk shampoo recipe that calls for three broken eggs, castor oil and an apple juice sweetener. "I'm working up the nerve," she laughed. "But for now, I'll stay an observer of trends—not a participant."

More Alumni Books

In addition to Elizabeth Block's book, here's a sampling of other books by CCAS alumni:



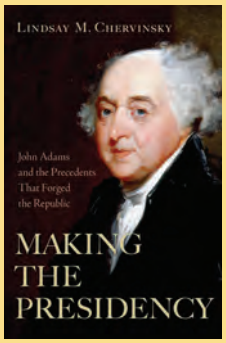


AMERICAN, BORN HUNGARY: KERTESZ, CAPA, AND THE HUNGARIAN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHIC LEGACY

In the book *American, born Hungary*, **Alex Nyerges**, BA '79, MA '82—the director and CEO of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts—offers an expansive look at the significant role of Hungarian immigrants in shaping American photographic culture and practice in the 20th century. He explores the cultural conditions for photography in Hungary at the time and the exodus of groundbreaking Hungarian artists, many of whom journeyed to Berlin, Paris or London before settling in the United States.

Nyerges, who has more than 40 years of experience as an art museum director and was named a GW Monumental Alumni in 2021, has authored books on exhibitions highlighting photographers like Edward West and Ansel Adams *American, born Hungary* accompanied a critically acclaimed exhibition that opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, in 2024.

The publication's essays introduce readers to the complex legacy of more than 30 Hungarian-born photographers and reflect on their journeys to the U.S. in the context of Hungarian emigration over 150 years. The book explores the photojournalism of the Capa brothers including Robert Capa's famous Spanish Civil War coverage; the deeply experimental work of artists such as László Moholy-Nagy and György Kepes; and the portraits of cinema icons by André de Dienes, including Marilyn Monroe, which helped fuel Hollywood's Golden Age.



MAKING THE PRESIDENCY: JOHN ADAMS AND THE PRECEDENTS THAT FORGED THE REPUBLIC

Lindsay Chervinsky, BA '10, the executive director of the George Washington Presidential Library at Mount Vernon, provides an authoritative account of the second president of the United States in her book *Making the Presidency*. She shows how John Adams' leadership and legacy defined the office for those who followed and ensured the survival of the American republic.

A renowned presidential historian, Chervinsky is the author of the award-winning book *The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution* and co-editor of *Mourning the Presidents: Loss and Legacy in American Culture*. She is a regular commentator for national TV and radio and often writes for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time Magazine*, *USA Today*, CNN.com, *Washington Monthly* and *The Washington Post*.

In *Making the Presidency*, Chervinsky describes Adams as one of the most qualified presidents in American history—a legislator, political theorist, diplomat, minister and even vice president. Quixotic, stubborn and following in the imposing shadow of Washington, Adams would rely on his own ideas about executive power to navigate the hurdles of the office and guide the country through a critical period. He defended the presidency from his own often obstructionist cabinet, protected the nation from foreign attacks and instilled trust and dedication to election integrity and the peaceful transfer of power between parties—even though it cost him his political future.

Donor Opens Up New Worlds

INSPIRED BY A CAREER AND PERSONAL life filled with adventures across dozens of countries, a Columbian College alumna has provided significant funding support to help students participating in faculty-led Short-Term Study Abroad Programs (STAP) that occur every year over spring break. The gift opens up unique experiential learning opportunities for students, immersing them in the historical sites, artifacts, cultures and people at the center of their studies. While away, these students often embark on research projects and service initiatives that evolve into presentations for departmental and college-wide events—something that the donor, who chooses to remain anonymous, hopes will continue.

This past spring, faculty-led cohorts of students went to Spain and Portugal to assess how old European cities are adapting buildings to meet modern sustainability standards; to France to study the changing nature of communications media in a global environment; to Oman to expand Arabic language capacity and cultural proficiency; to Mexico to collaborate with speech-language pathology clinicians; and to Normandy and Great Britain for hands-on immersion in the history of World War II.

Students at a market in Querétaro, Mexico

"I feel like a lot of Americans don't get the opportunity to go abroad and I think, if it was easier for people to go abroad, the world would be a much better place."

—MATTHEW BOTTORFF,
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES AND GEOLOGY

Students visit UNESCO's world headquarters in Paris, France.

"This opportunity not only deepened my understanding of global approaches to sustainable design, but also reinforced my passion for creating healthier more human-based spaces in the built environment."

—**MAEGAN WARNER**, INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

Speech-language pathology graduate students (from left) Kyleigh Graham, Samantha Levinson and Hope Connelly in Mexico

Undergraduate student Aina Bandele in Portugal

"[Traveling to Oman] was the most incredible curated opportunity to explore a new part of the world."

—**ALEX TAPIA**, ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Economics and political science major Alex Tapia (center) at Al Jalali Fort in Oman

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