

THE MAGAZINE OF LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND POLICY



FALL 2021

Imposter Syndrome? Welcome to the Club.

School and work can fuel feelings of self-doubt.
Can opening up about it help?

Northwestern

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY

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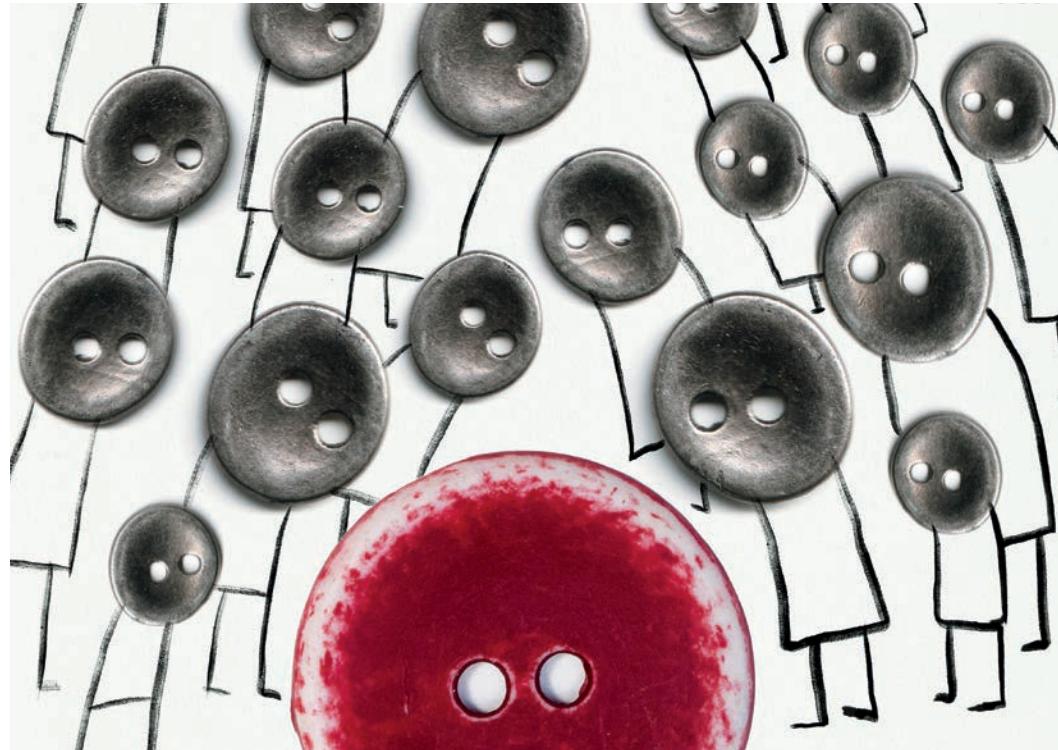
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ON THE COVER



Media artist and graphic novelist **Özge Samancı** is an associate professor in Northwestern's School of Communication. Her graphic novel *Dare to Disappoint* uses inventive collages to tell her story of growing up on the Aegean Coast in Turkey. Her drawings have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Slate*, and many more publications.

SESP FALL 2021 VOL. 22, NO. 1



7

Imposter Syndrome

Maybe it's not you. Maybe it's the environment.



11 Upending Conventional Wisdom

Economist Kirabo Jackson shows how spending on students now pays off later.

21 Hailstorm USA

Triathlete

Haily Danz (BS13) reflects on coming out and medaling in the Paralympics.



MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

DEAR FRIENDS,

SESP is famously Northwestern's happiest school—a claim that resonates for us all, I hope. At the onset of the pandemic, when forced to stay physically apart, we had a hard time making that assertion.

Now that I've returned to walking to campus, I'm seeing signs of reconnection everywhere: we're making eye contact again, gathering at the candy bowl in the student affairs office, and thriving on the creative energy that is best generated when we're together.

What keeps us the happiest school? I have a few theories. One hinges on SESP's faculty, globally recognized for their expertise in improving learning at all ages and in all contexts. My colleagues represent just two percent of Northwestern's faculty but account for more than five percent of those consistently receiving University recognition for their honors and awards. (As one example, almost two-thirds of our full professors are elected members of the national academies; read more about our NAE members on page 6.) And since our areas of study directly relate to supporting human learning and well-being, it's no wonder that student satisfaction and engagement with SESP classes have trended high throughout the pandemic, even while student and staff morale has sagged elsewhere.

But as an education economist who has long studied what makes college students successful, I know what matters even more than our accolades: our personal relationships.



"We're all newcomers." Dean Figlio greets students during Wildcat Welcome 2021.

SESP's class size triples from first year to senior year as word spreads about our tight-knit community, innovative classes and programs, and devoted academic advisers, faculty, and staff. Our alumni are constantly giving back—whether it's Alex Sims (BS10), who spoke to the graduating class of 2021 and delivered this fall's Loeschner lecture, or the alumni who gave up a Friday afternoon to meet with students at our annual homecoming reunion lunch.

Still, high satisfaction rates don't mean we have our heads in the sand. You can feel "SESP Love" and simultaneously feel frustration and want to change things. We can do better in lots of ways, and we must always be held accountable for building a more equitable, inclusive, and effective SESP.

This year, in a way, we are all newcomers: some sophomores have never taken a course on campus, and juniors and seniors have had to improvise and adapt in ways our faculty and staff know all too well. But we are happily rebuilding SESP's special culture. I welcome you to play a part in any way you can.

David Figlio
Orrington Lunt Professor and Dean

P.S. In October came the announcement of Northwestern's next president, Rebecca Blank. I'm overjoyed that a decorated social policy expert—herself an elected national academy member—and a once and hopefully future SESP faculty member will be succeeding Morty Schapiro, an esteemed education economist who's also an NAE member.



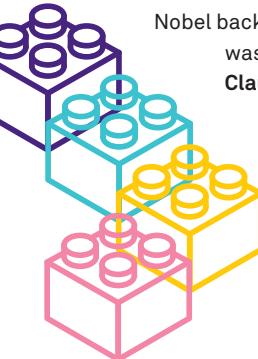
Helping Build the Credibility Revolution

The pathbreaking work of faculty members Larry Hedges, Kirabo Jackson, and Diane Schanzenbach was cited multiple times in the scientific background document justifying this year's recipients of the Nobel Prize in Economics.

Laureates David Card, Joshua Angrist, and Guido Imbens showed that many of society's big questions can be answered by using so-called natural experiments—real-life situations that resemble randomized controlled trials.

The empirical evidence used in natural experiments comes from work by Hedges, Jackson, Schanzenbach, and countless others—including graduate students. One of

Jackson's studies, cited in the Nobel background document, was coauthored with Claudia Persico (PhD16), who was then Jackson's student.



Program Receives Prestigious Accreditation

SESP's Executive Learning and Organizational Change program has been accredited by the International Accreditors for Continuing Education and Training, the top certifying body in the continuing education field.

Launched in early 2019, ELOC attracts leaders with at least 15 years' work experience and builds on the learning and organizational change master's degree curriculum that SESP pioneered.

Professionals from the business,

education, design, nonprofit, and other sectors hone their capacities to lead impactful change at both the individual and organizational levels.

Course topics include coaching, leadership development, change management, and organizational design. ELOC classes in both in-person and online formats offer flexible learning opportunities to help participants quickly and efficiently build new skills.

Learn more at eloc.northwestern.edu.



Practicum Passion: Zumwalt Acres

Julia Borland (second from left), a fourth-year social policy major with a deep interest in the environment, won a \$10,000 Projects for Peace award to incorporate food-justice issues into a sustainable farming project.

As part of her SESP practicum, Borland cofounded the Zumwalt Acres apprenticeship program (zumwaltacres.org), which selects 10 young adults to live and work on a farm in Sheldon, Illinois, for three months. Apprentices write grant applications, get their hands dirty in organic garden beds, research sustainable soil management, and more.

"Material from my social policy and economics courses translates well to the work," Borland says. "But being on the farm feels so real—like we're really making an impact."

Borland's plans include offering a yearlong apprenticeship (starting in fall 2022) and adding resources and opportunities that address political, social, and cultural issues in farming. Apprentices will attend workshops such as Soul Fire Farm's Uprooting Racism in the Food System and gain exposure to other leading forces in environmental justice in US agriculture.

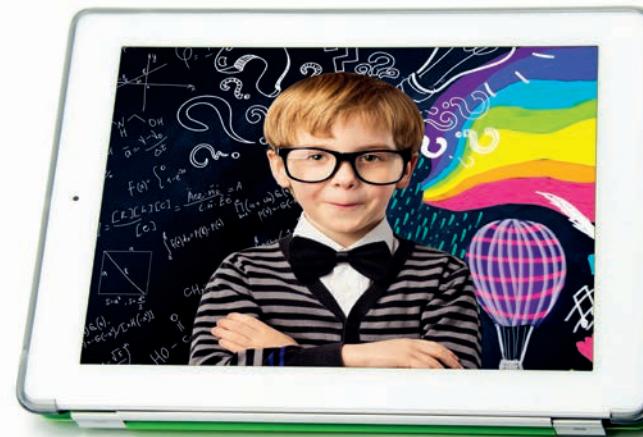
From the Mouths of Babes

Early-childhood care and education policies could be improved by paying attention to how very young children perceive the world, according to new research by **Terri J. Sabol**, assistant professor of human development and social policy at SESP, and **Andrea Kinghorn Busby** (PhD21), assistant professor in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University.

Their study "A Critical Gap in Early Childhood Policies: Children's Meaning Making" argues that major advances in psychological science and technology can enable researchers to measure the perceptions of children as young as four years old.

In the past, researchers rarely consulted children between the ages of four and eight, partly because children that young were deemed unreliable narrators. But Sabol, Busby, and their team devised an interactive, tablet-based app for measuring children's perceptions and used it to gauge kindergarteners' notions of a college savings account.

Their findings showed that the children could grasp what college is or what they might do in college, a "first step toward assessing young children's meaning-making at scale using technology-assisted measurement tools," they wrote.



The Double Bind of Multiple Identities

Tabitha Bonilla received a Daniel I. Linzer Grant for Innovation in Diversity and Equity to develop a new undergraduate course framed around the idea that overlapping identities—or intersectionality—can contribute to discrimination or disadvantage.

In a TED Talk shown on the first day of class, pioneer of critical race theory Kimberlé Crenshaw defines intersectionality and discusses the double bind facing victims of simultaneous racial and gender prejudice.

Black women, for example, experience both racism and sexism that are expressed differently than either the racism experienced by Black men or the sexism experienced by white women.

Researchers are grappling with the meaning of intersectionality and its impact on everything from environmental and reproductive policy to COVID-19, says Bonilla, assistant professor of human development and social policy. "Mounting research underscores how important it is to think about identity more comprehensively and completely," she adds.



Keeping Leaders in the Classroom

When lawyers are promoted to partners, they don't stop practicing law. So why should teachers have to leave the classroom to rise through the ranks?

SESP's new Teacher Leadership Program offers educators a different way upward. Leading to a master of science in education in teacher leadership or a certificate of advanced study, the program's combination of workshops, conferences, and short courses allows talented teachers to grow as scholars and leaders while they continue to work with students.

Teachers in the program learn how to navigate today's most pressing social and cultural issues by drawing on SESP's expertise in the learning sciences, human development, and social policy. "We want leaders who can foster equitable and social justice-based learning environments, engage with communities, and enrich learning and development," says program director Tim Dohrer.

Learn more about the Teacher Leadership Program at sesp.northwestern.edu/teacher-leadership.



Emma Adam

IN BRIEF

Professor **Emma Adam** has been named associate vice president for research in Northwestern's Office of Research.

Faculty members **Tabitha Bonilla**, **Claudia Haase**, **Regina Logan**, and **Quinn Mulroy** received 2020 Daniel I. Linzer Grants for Innovation in Diversity and Equity.

Cynthia Coburn was named a 2021 Charles Deering McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence.

Faculty member **Danny M. Cohen** (PhD11) was appointed cochair of the Illinois Holocaust and Genocide Commission.

Senior associate dean **Coleen Coleman** (BS88, MS91) received the 2021 Jean E. Shedd University Citizenship Award for her leadership, empathy, and capacity for solving problems under pressure.

Social psychologist **Mesmin Destin** was named a 2021 Guggenheim fellow and won Northwestern's Department of Psychology Invaluable Mentorship Award.

Developmental psychologist **Claudia Haase** was promoted to associate professor of human development and social policy.

Professor emeritus **Carol Lee** received the McGraw Prize in Education, the 2021 National Council of Teachers of English James R. Squire Award, and the Distinguished Contributions to Research in Education Award from the American Educational Research Association, the premier acknowledgment of outstanding achievement and success in education research.

Assistant professor **Jen Munson** launched Multiplicity Lab, which works to connect innovative research in the learning sciences to the daily practices of math educators.

The Urban Affairs Association named assistant professor **Sally Nuamah** the 2021 Marilyn J. Gittell Activist Scholar. Her book *How Girls Achieve* was recognized with the Comparative and International Education Society's Jackie Kirk Award and the American Educational Studies Association Critics' Choice Book Award.

The Psychology of High Performance: Developing Human Potential into Domain-Specific Talent by Center for Talent Development director **Paula Olszewski-Kubilius** won Book of the Year from the National Association for Gifted Children.

Faculty members **Eleanor O'Rourke** and **Marcelo Worsley** received Early Career Award Development (CAREER) Awards from the National Science Foundation.

Shirin Vossoughi, who was recently promoted to associate professor of learning sciences, won the International Society of the Learning Sciences' inaugural Early Career Award.



Coleen Coleman



Mesmin Destin



Carol Lee



Sally Nuamah



Eleanor O'Rourke



Marcelo Worsley

Designing for—and with—People with Disabilities

A college design course that critically evaluates the field of "making" and partners students with people with disabilities can promote accessibility in computing, according to new research by **Marcelo Worsley** and **David Bar-El** (PhD21).

The Inclusive Making course is a preliminary blueprint for scholars who want to adapt it for their own accessible design classes, Worsley and Bar-El wrote in the journal *Computer Science Education*.



"Making" is a form of computing that connects digital and physical technologies. Students in the course—meant for upper-level undergraduate and graduate students studying engineering, education, or both—are challenged to design a tool or activity that solves an accessibility problem.

"By including critical discussions of the field and authentically collaborating with the community, we can develop better designs and change perceptions about what a valuable computing experience is," says Worsley, assistant professor of computer science and learning sciences.

Equity Book Club Hosts Innovative Thinkers

The SESP Equity Book Club features speakers who have studied and written about justice or equity issues. During 2020–21, the club hosted **Bettina L. Love**, author of *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, and **Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy**, whose scholarship focuses on the role of race and diversity in higher education.

The club arose in 2019 from student and staff conversations spearheaded by Claire Mackevicius, a human development and social policy doctoral student, and Shelenia Johnson, a former senior academic adviser. The club's speakers series "challenges us to be a better version of ourselves and to be more consequential in our communities," Dean David Figlio says.



"Change must be purposeful and intentional. It must be rooted in freedom and sovereignty, with the goals of creating the conditions for all children to learn, free of systems that limit, hinder, surveil, and control."

Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy | President's Professor in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University

"If all you know about Black folx is our pain and our trauma, you can't do social justice work . . . because our history does not start with this pain, and we do not fight and find our way out of it because of it. It comes from a joy, a love, creativity, and ingenuity."

Bettina L. Love | Georgia Athletic Association Professor in Education at the University of Georgia



Use These Guides to Help Fight Misinformation



David Rapp

Michael Spikes

Professor **David Rapp** and graduate student **Michael Spikes** have lent their expertise to efforts to build critical-thinking skills around COVID-19 and media literacy issues.

Rapp, professor of psychology and learning sciences, was among more than two dozen scientists from around the world who contributed to the *COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Handbook*. The user-friendly resource, which links to a wiki, demystifies COVID-19 vaccines and offers advice on how to accurately challenge misinformation. Spikes served as a national adviser for the American Library Association's *Media Literacy in the Library*, a guide that helps library staffers respond to misinformation and other media literacy issues.

SESP Faculty Elected to the National Academy of Education

In 2021, Northwestern University professors **Megan Bang**, **Jonathan Guryan**, and **Brian Reiser** were elected to the prestigious National Academy of Education for their stellar contributions to education scholarship and research. It is the first time in school history that three faculty members were elected in the same year. The School of Education and Social Policy now has 15 NAEd members.



Megan Bang (2021), Professor of Learning Sciences and of Psychology



Jonathan Guryan (2021), Lawyer Taylor Professor of Education and Social Policy



Brian J. Reiser (2021), Professor of Learning Sciences



Cynthia E. Coburn (2020), Professor of Education and Social Policy



Kirabo Jackson (2020), Abraham Harris Professor of Education and Social Policy



Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach (2019), Margaret Walker Alexander Professor of Human Development and Social Policy and Director of the Institute for Policy Research



David Figlio (2017), School Dean and Orrington Lunt Professor of Education and Social Policy and President of Northwestern



Morton O. Schapiro (2017), Professor of Economics and Ann W. Olin Professor in Learning and Organizational Change



P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale (2013), Frances Willard Professor Emerita of Human Development and Social Policy



Douglas L. Medin (2012), Professor Emeritus of Psychology and of Education and Social Policy



Penelope Peterson (2011), Former School Dean and Professor Emerita of Education and Social Policy



Carol D. Lee (2007), Professor Emerita of Education and Social Policy and of African American Studies; NAEd President (2021–25)

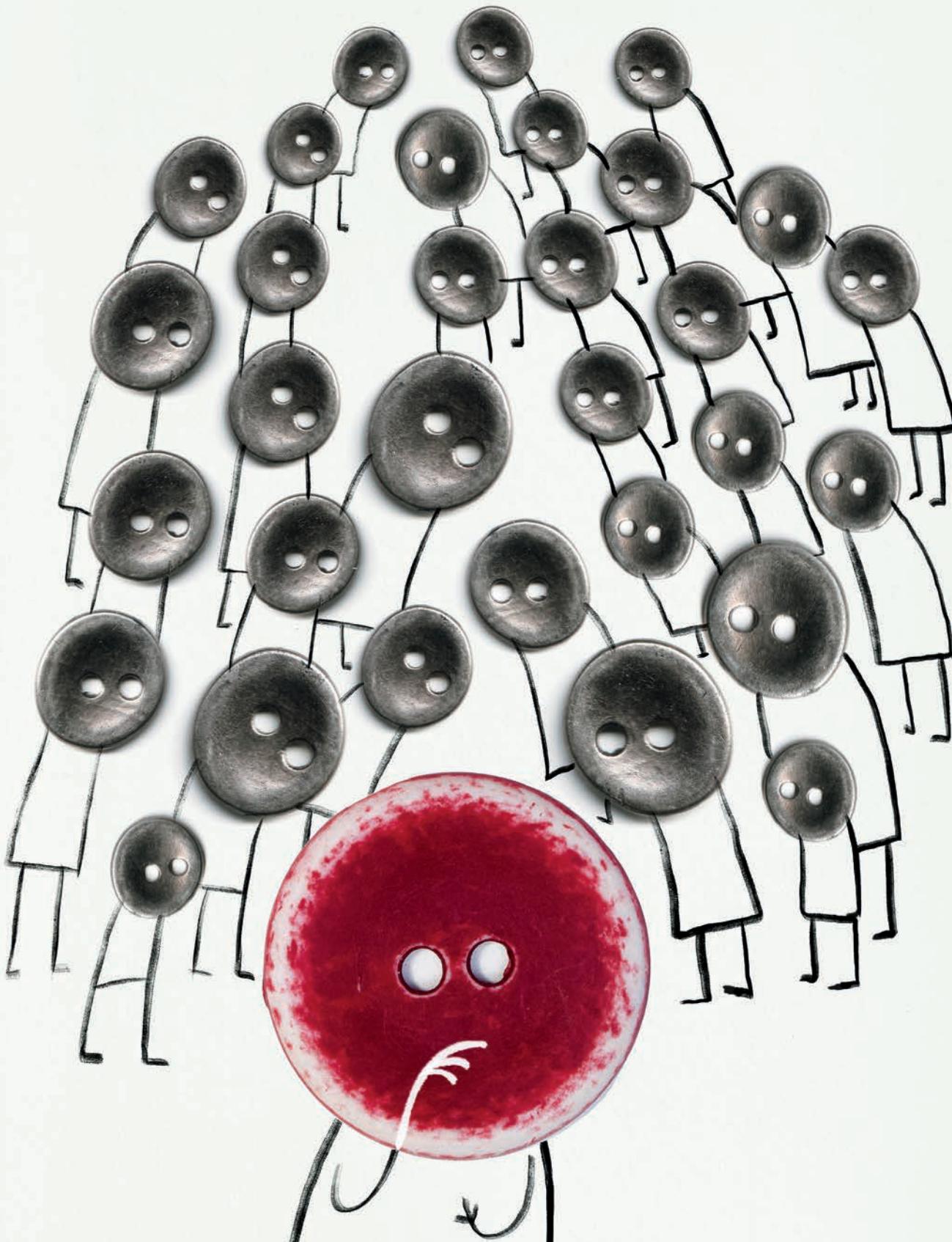


Larry V. Hedges (1996), Board of Trustees Professor of Statistics and of Education and Social Policy



Allan Collins (1992), Professor Emeritus of Education and Social Policy

FEELING LIKE A FRAUD?



YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

Yes, imposter syndrome is real. And common.

Here's how to make peace with it.

Her résumé can only be described as stellar: Cofounded a nonprofit in high school. Got into Northwestern. Won a Fulbright scholarship. Earned a PhD. And she currently works as a pediatric psychologist—a job she loves—while running a small consultancy.

Yet for all her professional success, Aria Fiat (BS13) can't shake the feeling that she'll eventually be found out.

"When does imposter syndrome end?" she recently mused on Twitter. "Asking for a friend."

The outpouring of responses to Fiat's tweet—ranging from "Maybe never" and "Not until you get your second PhD" to "When you stop marching to other people's drum and start marching to your own"—reflected both the syndrome's near-universality and the promise that opening up about it can provide some relief.

The online conversations have been eye-opening and even life-changing for some, who say they once believed their suffering was a personal failing. But growing evidence from psychologists and human resource management experts suggests that imposter

syndrome flourishes in particular environments—a finding that may lead to strategies for preventing it in the first place.

Who is susceptible?

Imposter syndrome—that unsettling feeling that you've landed a plum job or opportunity because of an oversight and that you'll be ousted any day now—was first described in 1978 by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes, who called it "impostor phenomenon." Describing the feeling as "intellectual phoniness," they noticed it in a sample of high-achieving women professionals—women not unlike Fiat.

But over the last few decades, the syndrome has been documented in both men and women, among multiple ethnic and racial groups, and in many settings from academia to medicine, according to a *Journal of General Internal Medicine* literature review published in 2020.

Fiat says her imposter syndrome flared up after arriving at Northwestern. She kept telling herself it would vanish if she just cleared one more hurdle. But the hurdles kept coming: "First it was 'If I just get into Northwestern,'" she says. "Then it became 'If I win this award, if I graduate with a 4.0 GPA, if I start a PhD program,' and on and on."

Meanwhile, celebrities from Tom Hanks and Michelle Obama to Maya Angelou have also reportedly wrestled with it.

"No matter what we've done, there comes a point where you think, 'How did I get here?'" Hanks said in an interview on the NPR program *Fresh Air*. "When are they going to discover that I am, in fact, a fraud and take everything away from me?"

Feeling like an imposter is not identified as a disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the bible of psychiatric illness, and there's no evidence that it can be treated or that it declines with age, according to the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* review.

Yet there's no shortage of self-help books and breezy online articles on how to get over imposter syndrome and the worst problems associated with it—burnout and impaired performance.

In her book *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer, cites studies suggesting that women experience imposter syndrome in part due to their generally lower self-confidence. She tells women, "Give yourself credit for your achievements rather than brushing them off," "stop internalizing failure," and "be yourself in the office."

Other advice and purported solutions typically focus on fixing the individual and treating coexisting conditions such as depression or anxiety with therapy and coaching.

However, in their February 2021 *Harvard Business Review* article, "Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome," Ruchika Tulshyan and

Imposter syndrome has been documented in both men and women, among multiple ethnic and racial groups, and in many settings from academia to medicine.

Jodi-Ann Burey contend that the concept of imposter syndrome "took a fairly universal feeling of discomfort, second-guessing, and mild anxiety in the workplace and pathologized it, especially for women."

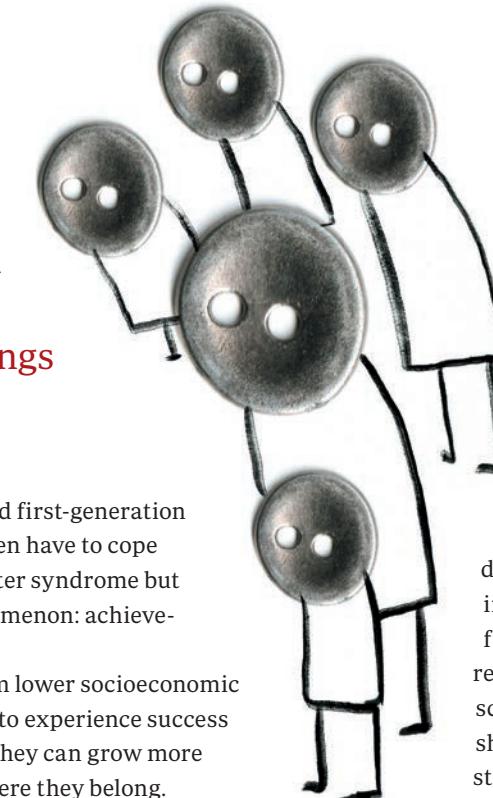
The self is not to blame

In the article "Contextualizing the Imposter 'Syndrome,'" which appeared in *Frontiers in Psychology* in 2020, an international team of psychologists and human resource management experts argue that imposter syndrome is not a dysfunction that arises within people. It's not a diagnosis. Instead, it's a response to one's surroundings.

They go on to suggest that "examining the role of society, culture, organizations, and institutions [in perpetuating imposter syndrome] has the potential to lead to systemic change, which will create an environment where everyone feels as though they rightly belong."

Graduate student Julissa Muñiz, the first in her family to graduate from college, has wrestled with both imposter syndrome and achievement guilt. It was only after receiving two major national awards—the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship and the Spencer Dissertation Fellowship—that imposter syndrome began to wane, she says.

"I feel like I should have realized the strength of who I am as a scholar before that," says Muñiz,



now a postdoc at the University of Texas at Austin. "Clearly, external eyes were recognizing that. So when was I going to?"

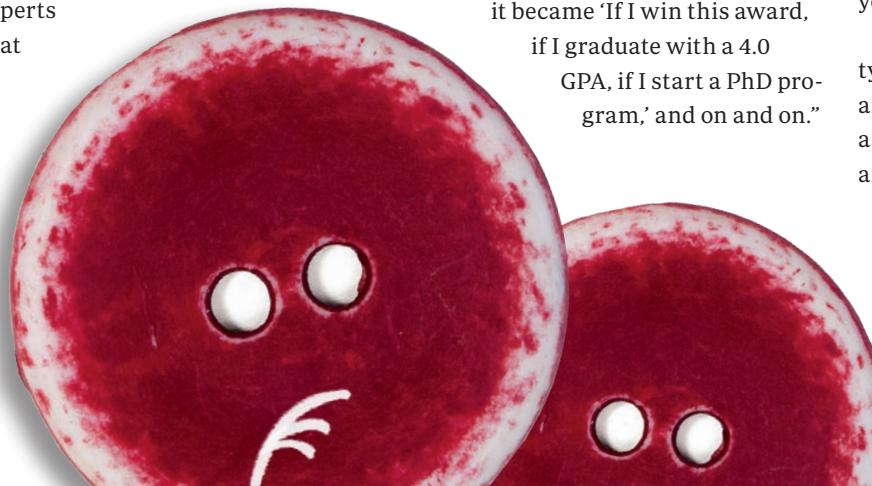
Muñiz, the daughter of Mexican immigrants, was the first teenage mother to return to her high school; two years later she became the first student at her high school to be accepted to the University of California, Berkeley. She earned a master's at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she was selected as her cohort's Intellectual Contribution Award recipient.

Along the way, however, imposter syndrome loomed large. Muñiz questioned whether she belonged and wondered if she was seen as a token student.

"Is my story so exemplary that they feel like, 'Yeah, OK, she's someone we can let in?'" she asks.

"But I realized that was also unfair of me. I'm not a token, even if others try to make it out that way," she says. "I've also worked really hard for a long time for these moments, the accomplishments, and the trajectory I'm on."

At Northwestern, imposter syndrome workshops and webinars are routinely held by students, schools, and divisions, from the Feinberg School of Medicine and Counseling and Psychological Services to



“Organizations need to take ownership of the culture and settings they create.” —Michelle Albaugh

the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Support Circle.

Laurice Sherven Adegunwa (MS18) and Jen Allen (MS16), both consultants at Slalom consulting, gave a workshop on imposter syndrome during the class Learning and Organizational Change in the Field. Their workshop was funded by a Northwestern University YourLife Wellness Grant.

“Organizations need to take ownership of the culture and settings they create,” says Michelle Albaugh (PhD15), associate director of coaching in SESP’s Master’s in Learning and Organizational Change Program. To combat imposter syndrome—whether it’s where you work or where you learn—“focus on

You have imposter syndrome.



learning over pure performance, visualize success, and have a growth mindset,” she says.

So does the feeling ever end?

Fiat loves what she does at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center—providing behavioral health prevention and intervention services to young children and their families. Supplies for Dreams, the nonprofit she cofounded in her teens, is thriving, and she serves in an advisory capacity as vice president of its board of directors.

There are still times when she wonders to herself, “Do I belong here? Am I a phony? Will they realize they made a mistake in choosing me?”

To Fiat’s credit, she says she is learning to regard her self-doubts not as symptoms of a chronic syndrome but as “occasional imposter thoughts.”

And it helps a great deal, she says, to have supportive colleagues and mentors who “remind me that discomfort is a sign of growth.”

STORY BY JULIE DEARDORFF
ILLUSTRATED BY ÖZGE SAMANCI

Institutional and social contexts matter

Everyday racial microaggressions, such as the presumption that one is less intelligent or accomplished, can play a role in imposter syndrome, says SESP professor Emma Adam, a developmental psychologist whose research suggests that stress associated with racial discrimination adversely affects both physical and mental health in adolescents and young adults.

Helping adolescents develop positive feelings about their identities can reduce the stress from discrimination and improve both their health and their success in school. “A strong ethnic or racial identity may be an important source of feelings of social acceptance and belonging,” Adam says.

Institutions that help young people recognize their backgrounds as strengths rather than liabilities

encourage more equitable student experiences, according to research by SESP’s Mesmin Destin and Shirin Vossoughi, associate professor of learning sciences. Their study “Elevating the Objectives of Higher Education to Effectively Serve Students from Diverse Socioeconomic Backgrounds” appeared in *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

Kirabo Jackson’s Quest to Reframe the Returns on School Spending



“It’s no panacea, but investing in children early and often pays off during adulthood, especially for kids from low-income families.”

When Kirabo “Bo” Jackson first heard the axiom that school spending doesn’t matter, he was a young PhD student in economics at Harvard. It was the early 2000s, and the conventional wisdom was that money played a minor role in a student’s success.

Jackson wasn’t so sure. Over the next decade, as he applied new research methods to dig deeper and question long-held assumptions, he began to show that money can matter, reigniting a national debate on school finance.

“School spending really can affect a child’s future,” says Jackson, the Abraham Harris Professor of Human Development and Social Policy at SESP. “It’s no panacea, but investing in children early and often pays off during adulthood, especially for kids from low-income families.”

A labor economist, Jackson has long been interested in how people are affected by systems. In addition to public school funding, his work largely explores how college prep programs, ability tracking, single-sex education, and other practices

can benefit or hurt students long after they’ve left school.

Some of his most original and influential new research tackles the question of what makes someone a good teacher and casts doubt on whether test scores are the best way—or only way—to assess how well students do in school.

“When people look back on their most important teachers, the social aspects of their education—learning to take risks, set goals, or simply believe in themselves—are often what they recall,” Jackson says. “I want to know what skills students need to become productive adults and which teachers can build these traits.”

Roots around the globe

As for his own most important teachers, Jackson could say that one of them was his upbringing on three continents. Before he

earned two Ivy League graduate degrees and joined the Northwestern faculty, his education had been part Caribbean, part West African, part East African, and part British.

The youngest of June and Clement Jackson’s three children, Jackson was born in 1980 in the Chicago suburb of Hinsdale. When he was two years old, the family moved to Jamaica, where his mother taught mathematics at the University of Technology, and his father, an economist, worked as director of the Planning Institute of Jamaica. In 1989 the Jacksons moved to Sierra Leone, where Clement began working for the United Nations. Then, after civil war broke out in Sierra Leone, the family relocated again, this time to Tanzania, in 1992. Jackson later attended boarding school in England and returned to the US for college.

As an undergraduate at Yale University, Jackson nearly double-majored in music and economics and even flirted with film scoring as a possible career; ultimately he earned a bachelor's degree in ethics, politics, and economics. His next stop was Harvard, where he completed his doctorate in economics in 2007.

"Getting an education is one of the few things people can do to really improve their lives," Jackson says. "I've always seen it as a vehicle through which economies and societies develop. It's a mechanism for social justice."

When Jackson joined the SESP faculty in 2010, he found the multidisciplinary environment of the school and the Institute for Policy Research electrifying. Exposure to the ideas and research

"Students who attend schools that emphasize social-emotional learning are more likely to attend college and have a reduced chance of entering the criminal justice system."



methods of statisticians, sociologists, psychologists, historians, and others from different fields changed the types of questions he asked and "definitely deepened my thinking," he says. "I wanted to learn a whole new tool kit and bring those insights into economics."

Now 41, Jackson just became one of the youngest members of the exclusive National Academy of Education. His growing collection of accolades includes the 2020 David N. Kershaw Award and Prize, among the most prestigious and largest awards recognizing contributions to public policy and social science. He is also a National Bureau of Economic Research-affiliated scholar and is a coeditor of *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*.

Renowned Harvard economist Raj Chetty calls Jackson "an outstanding scholar, committed mentor, and visionary leader" whose work "has greatly impacted education science and practice and will surely continue to define these fields moving forward."

What really makes a good teacher?

Borrowing from psychology and sociology and devising and applying innovative tools that can measure hard-to-quantify traits like motivation, Jackson is helping to uncover what really makes a good teacher.

The ability to boost standardized test scores is just part of the picture, Jackson says. The power to motivate and engage students also matters—but how can that be measured?

To find answers, Jackson turned to a database that tracked the academic performance of 464,502 North Carolina ninth-graders from 2005 to 2011. Using data on attendance, suspensions, and grade point average, he devised a way to measure students' noncognitive abilities, or the social-emotional traits known as soft skills. The resulting study, published in the *Journal of Political Economy*, came to the attention of Paul Tough, bestselling author of *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*.

"Jackson's new index measured, in a fairly crude way, how engaged students were in school—whether they showed up, whether they misbehaved, and how hard they worked in their classes," Tough says.

What is more, Tough continues, Jackson's "noncognitive proxy was, remarkably, a better predictor than students' test scores of whether the students would go on to attend college, a better predictor of adult wages, and a better predictor of future arrests."

In other words, the long-term benefits of improving students' social-emotional development tend to outweigh those linked to improving their test scores. Yet teachers who excel at raising test scores



Renowned Harvard economist Raj Chetty calls Jackson "an outstanding scholar, committed mentor, and visionary leader."

justice system," Jackson says. "Our work shows that these surveys can be used alongside test scores to give us a more complete picture of how schools prepare students for the future."

School funding matters

The idea that money is not directly connected to student achievement took root when it appeared in an influential government publication from 1966

known as the Coleman report. The assertion endured for decades.

But as Jackson points out, much about the Coleman report has been called into question, including the adequacy of the research that informed it.

"Spending decisions have not been grounded in enough evidence," Jackson says. "It's not that people in the 1960s, '70s, '80s, and '90s were wrong or ignorant; it's that they didn't have the methodology or the computing power to do the type of research we can do now."

When he set out to address the school funding question, Jackson went beyond examining standardized test results and instead studied school spending's impact on students' life trajectories.

In one study, published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Jackson and his coauthors—Claudia Persico (PhD16) of American University and Rucker Johnson of the University of California, Berkeley—showed that court-ordered increases in US school funding in the 1970s were

associated with lower poverty rates in the future.

Their models suggested that a 10 percent funding increase across all 12 years of schooling can raise students' graduation rates and boost their income as adults, particularly for low-income students.

"Overall, every additional dollar spent on schools generates a \$2 return on investment in the form of higher earnings down the road," Jackson says. "This means we should spend more now to benefit students and society for years to come."

In a separate study, "Do Spending Cuts Matter? Evidence from the Great Recession," published in *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* last May, Jackson and his coauthors showed that, on average, a \$1,000 reduction in per-pupil spending reduced average test scores in math and reading and the rate of students going to college.

Testing his own ideas

Jackson's breakthroughs often come from approaching problems from unexpected angles and beta testing ideas on platforms like Twitter.

Another source of honest feedback: his wife, Shayna Silverstein, an ethnomusicologist and assistant professor of performance studies at Northwestern. They met while she was finishing her dissertation at the University of Chicago.

"She'll ask me why something I'm working on is interesting," Jackson says. "It forces me to think about whether what I'm saying makes sense to a broader audience."

The couple have two young children and share a love of music, Jamaican curried goat, and martial arts. "I also appreciate his love for karaoke," Silverstein says. "He takes decompression very seriously."

“I Am a Woman with a Trans Background”

Q&A with Karen Topham

In 1998 Karen Topham (MS79) became the nation's first openly transgender teacher to transition on the job. From 1983 until her retirement in 2016, she taught English and drama and directed 37 plays at suburban Chicago's Lake Forest High School. Currently a theater critic and transgender advocate, she spoke with SESP magazine about coming out publicly and taking pedagogical risks.

What was it like to transition in the late 1990s?

In 1998 I had three little kids under age 12. The word “transgender” had basically just been invented, and most people didn’t even know the previous word, “transsexual.” Those who did know it usually had confused and negative reactions. My colleagues at the high school uniformly said, “That’s wonderful and we support you, but you can’t [transition] here.” I thought they were probably right. It was big news at the time. Oprah wanted me on her show, but I turned her down to protect my kids.

How did you announce it?

I let friends and colleagues know individually at first. Even after I was publicly out, there were pockets of my life where I was not. One was at church. When my daughter Julianne was 13, she gave a presentation in church on LGBTQ identities while I sat in the congregation. I was so embarrassed that I was still hiding my identity that I called her down from the podium and said, “Honey, call on me. I’m going to do this.” She said, “Are you sure?” I said, “Yeah. I’m sure.”



You learned about transgender identities by age 11. At that point, what did you decide to do?

I had known my own identity from age 3, though I only discovered at 11 what to call it. Still, I felt I needed to live as a guy because I didn’t have any choice. I was really bad at being a guy, but I was a good parent and teacher and I got by. But in my 30s, everything broke down. Someone I had known as a woman transitioned to a man. Just meeting him opened the door. I began devolving into an anxiety- and depression-ridden mess. Finally, when I was 39, I had a massive epiphany: the problem was this gender dysphoria that I thought I had under control.

You have a transgender child. Did your experience make it easier or harder to accept?

My instant reaction was not to believe him. I was fueled by the knowledge of how hard this thing is when you do it publicly, and I just couldn’t want that for my child. I was so scared that it would destroy him, that he

wasn’t strong enough because of other emotional issues. So I said, “OK, that’s fine. You’re trans. I’ll work with that, but I’m not going to fully accept it until you’re 24.” I pulled that number out of a hat. I accepted it long before that.

What were you like as a high school teacher?

I was an experimenter in the classroom. I had always been skeptical of the value of grading and spent the last two years of my career working in a gradeless classroom.

How did that work?

I gave my students a huge end-of-year project that allowed them to focus on whatever interested them, made them happy, or was part of them. Those projects—they rocked my world!

How were the projects ultimately assessed?

They told me what grade they thought they deserved at individual conferences. If they were able to justify it, that’s the grade they got. Most undervalued themselves. But the one student who said to me, “I deserve an F,” was right. He failed himself.

Do you have a favorite classroom memory?

After my students and I watched a video of their end-of-year presentations, I asked them to talk about what they gained and to fill out class evaluations. At the end of class, when I was saying goodbye, they stood up and spontaneously applauded. That was huge to me! It told me how well that kind of classroom situation—where you’re not focused on arbitrary grades but on individual students learning what they can learn—can work.

How do you identify yourself now?

I like the phrasing, “I am a woman with a transgender background,” because it was a background, something that is now over and done. I like that the prefix “trans” means moving beyond.

From SESP to Showtime

It’s no coincidence that **Dan Perlman** (BS12) plays a teacher in Showtime’s off-kilter comedy series *Flatbush Misdemeanors*. School settings and the tangled relationships among students, educators, and communities have long influenced his writing and comedy.

“The show emphasizes the community aspect,” says Perlman, who cocreated, writes, and stars in the series with fellow comedian Kevin Iso. “We’re all coexisting and interconnecting, which forces the characters into relationships and dynamics they wouldn’t otherwise have.”

Flatbush Misdemeanors tackles race, gentrification, and mental health in a rapidly changing New York neighborhood. Described as “raw” and praised for its authenticity, the 10-episode series follows fictionalized versions of Perlman and Iso as they try to carve out their place in the city.

The characters have “at least three sides” to their personality and are deliberately complicated, Perlman says. It’s a perspective that he honed while studying human development and social policy at SESP.

“People play multiple roles in seemingly unrelated worlds within their own lives,” Perlman says. “But we’re all linked in some way. SESP helps encourage that kind of thinking, understanding, and empathy.”

At Northwestern, Perlman tutored, produced shorts for Northwestern Sketch Television, and completed several independent projects with SESP professor Dan Lewis. He researched and wrote about suburban homelessness and learned to take field notes—a skill he still uses today—during his practicum.

“Dan was a great student, and now he is a funny and insightful performer,” Lewis says. “His ability to observe the human condition with grace and empathy shines through in all his work.”

In 2014, Perlman and Iso, who met at a New York open mic night, started posting short YouTube videos they called “Moderately Funny.” Then, on virtually no budget, they produced three web episodes of *Flatbush Misdemeanors*. The first installment won the 2018 Florida Film Festival’s Grand Jury Award for best narrative short.



Dan Perlman cocreated, writes, and stars in Showtime’s *Flatbush Misdemeanors*, which has been renewed for a second season.

Perlman, who also performs stand-up comedy, released his debut standup album, *Emergency Contact*, in May 2020. He also wrote and directed the short film *Cramming*, which won an audience choice award at the 2020 Brooklyn Film Festival and first prize at the 2020 Rhode Island International Film Festival.

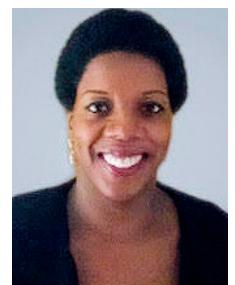
Cramming follows eighth-graders Alex and Yan Bo, whose friendship is threatened when they’re accused of cheating off each other. The film grew out of a conversation Perlman had with Alex, his tutee at the time.

“I tried to go into it with the skills that SESP teaches: not being insensitive with the content you’re making, asking hard questions, doing research, and talking to people to find out the best way to be creative and still drive the story,” he says.

Perlman showed reporting chops from an early age. As a 12-year-old, he wrote letters to famous comedians, asking them how to do stand-up or to name their favorite performers. (Bob Newhart wrote back.) Each received a different question because “I was afraid they all knew each other,” he says.

Perlman also wrote jokes, which he told to “exactly nobody” or hid under his bed. “It took years of working up the courage to try it,” he says. “But I’ve also always enjoyed education and public service—the kind of stuff that makes you feel like you’re leaving something a little better than you found it.”

He feels slightly guilty for not pursuing education professionally, so “pretending to be a teacher is the next best thing,” he says. “Also, making my character a lousy teacher feels funnier and more honest, so it’s not self-congratulatory. My character’s not saving anyone. But hopefully people laugh.”



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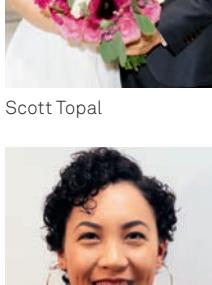
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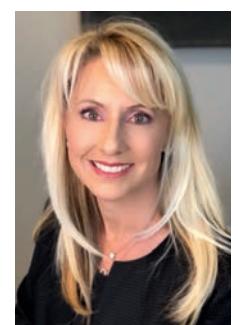
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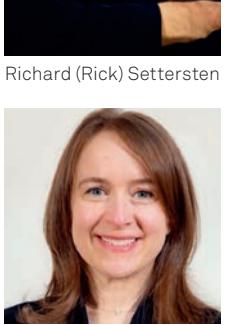
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60s

Roycealee Wood (MS62, MS64), regional superintendent of schools in Lake County, Illinois, retired after a 50-year educational career.

70s

Ernie Adams (BS75), the New England Patriots' director of football research, announced his retirement, "capping a 46-year career in football, in which he has both seen and done it all," *Sports Illustrated* reported.

80s

John Fiacco (BS83, MBA86) was appointed chief growth officer at AVIA, a digital transformation partner for healthcare organizations.

Ken Graboys (BS85), CEO of the Chartis Group, was appointed strategic adviser at Riordan, Lewis & Haden Equity Partners, a middle-market growth equity investment firm.

Aryka Radke (BS89) moved across the country after she was appointed Vermont's deputy commissioner of the family services division of the Department for Children and Families within the Agency of Human Services. She was previously vice chief administrative law judge for the Industrial Commission of Arizona.

Phillip Styles (BS89) was appointed Inclusive Partner Network specialty practice leader at consulting firm Mercer.

90s

Karen Cunningham (MSED90), an award-winning educator at suburban Chicago's Glenbrook North High School, died on September 20 after a four-year battle with lung cancer. Even after her diagnosis, she continued to live life to its fullest, teaching, traveling, laughing, learning, and raising awareness about lung cancer among nonsmokers.

Nadine Moore (BS90), managing director at Boston Consulting Group, was named to the board of directors of the Northern Illinois Food Group.

Jeanne M. VanBriesen (BS90, McC93, McC98), the Duquesne Light Company Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering and of engineering and public policy at Carnegie Mellon University, was appointed to lead the chemical, bioengineering, environmental, and transport systems division at the National Science Foundation.

Bryan Saltzburg (BS92) was named chief operating officer of Aspiration Inc., a fintech company offering sustainable banking and investing products and tools. He was previously a global president for Trip Advisor.

Richard (Rick) Settersten (PhD92) was named University Distinguished Professor of Human Development and vice provost for faculty affairs at Oregon State University. He is the lead author of the new book *Living on the Edge: An American Generation's Journey through the 20th Century*, written with Glen Elder and Lisa Pearce.

Erin Allen (BS93) joined Franklin Madison, a provider of insurance products and marketing services, as enterprise sales regional vice president.

Mary Anne Talotta (BS96) was appointed senior vice president and chief development officer of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. She has spent over 23 years in arts fundraising, most recently at the Guggenheim Museum. Prior to that, she was with the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs.

Deborah W. Brooks (BS97) stepped back into the role of CEO of the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research. She cofounded MJFF in 2000 and served as CEO until 2007 and subsequently as executive vice chairman.

Jimmie Sanders (BS97) is executive director of the Pre-College TRIO Programs at the University of California, Berkeley, which provide low-income, first-generation-to-college students with academic preparation and support services. Last year he received the University of Notre Dame's inaugural Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, Distinguished Contributor Award. "My SESP education was key in making me the successful access and equity activist that I am," he says.

Allyson L. Bear (BS99), a global health expert, was named regional vice president for West Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa at the research company Abt Associates.

00s

Dilara Sayeed (MSED00), founder and CEO of peer mentoring platform vPeer, will serve on the Illinois Commission on Discrimination and Hate Crimes.

Hazeen Y. Ashby (BS01) was appointed senior vice president for congressional and inter-governmental affairs and White House liaison at the Export-Import Bank of the United States.

Aaron Hosmon (BS03, MSHE07) is associate executive director for compliance and governance at the Ivy League. Previously he worked for 16 years in a variety of roles at Northwestern, including as director of compliance and ethics.

Mark Thompson (MA03) was named interim CEO for the Gage Center of Forensic Excellence, an operation center within the state of Washington's Department of Social and Health Services that will provide state-of-the-art mental health services.

Bobbi Burgstone (MSED04) was appointed executive director of Literacy DuPage, one of Illinois's largest volunteer tutor literacy organizations.

Erica Halverson (SOC97, PhD05), professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, published *How the Arts Can Save Education: Transforming Teaching, Learning, and Instruction*. As an undergraduate, Halverson codirected Griffin's Tale Children's Theatre Repertory Company. The experience provided the foundation for her research and teaching. Her new book calls for a change in what counts as good teaching and learning, redefined by building learning environments with the arts at the center. She will be speaking on campus on April 13, 2022.

Patrick McGrath (MSED06), president of Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Illinois, was named pastor of Old St. Patrick's Church in Chicago's West Loop Gate neighborhood.

Kristin Yates Thomas (MSED07) is director of communication for the On Your Feet Foundation, a nonprofit that provides support for people who place their children for adoption.

Emily Machado (BS09) was appointed assistant professor of early childhood education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

10s

Scott Topal (BS10), director of operations at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, married Sarah Ariel Attermann on December 10, 2020, in Bethesda, Maryland. Attermann is director of youth and family engagement at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park, Illinois.

Jacob Schmidt (BS11, MSHE17) has been promoted to director of football operations at Northwestern. Schmidt, a former Wildcats running back, has been with the program's personnel department since 2012.

Kim Waller (MS11) joined Korn Ferry as a senior client partner in the firm's organizational strategy practice. She is based in the Chicago area.

Kristine McKinney (MSLOC13) was named COO of global intellectual property law firm Fish & Richardson. She oversees operations of the firm's 14 offices in the US, Europe, and China. McKinney previously served as the firm's first chief legal talent and inclusion officer.

Kristin Vonder Haar (MS13) was named assistant superintendent of teaching and learning for Mount Prospect School District 57 in Illinois.

Iva Aminuddin (MSLOC17), head of the Learning Future Group in the Civil Service College of Singapore, was named to the Agile 50 list of the most influential people revolutionizing governance. The list celebrates politicians, civil servants and entrepreneurs driving agility in governments all around the world. Aminuddin has two sets of twin boys.

Caroline Gholson (MSLOC19), a senior recruiting and development manager for the law firm Kirkland & Ellis, married Andrew Fallon on March 6 in Austin, Texas.

20s

Gabby Nicholas (MSHE20) is assistant director of the Center for Cultural Liberation at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois. She joins **Lisa Malvin** (MSHE14), Dominican's new assistant director of career programs and internships, and **Jamie Shaw** (MSHE14), executive director of career programs and employer relations in the university provost's office.

Eric S. Wohl (CERT20) was appointed chief human resources officer at National CineMedia, the largest cinema advertising network in the US.



Send your news to managing editor Julie Deardorff at sespalums@northwestern.edu.

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Alumna Receives Shinae Chun Prize

Northwestern alumna **Rocio Mendez-Rozo** was awarded the \$20,000 Shinae Chun Prize to begin her studies in SESP's Master of Science in Higher Education Administration and Policy Program this fall.

Mendez-Rozo, one of three student speakers at Northwestern's 2017 Commencement, had a distinguished undergraduate career as a student leader and activist, scholar, and community builder. In addition to winning a Mellon Mays Fellowship, the English and Latina and Latino studies double major completed a senior honors thesis, assisted faculty with research, and volunteered both on and off campus.

Mendez-Rozo chose SESP's MSHE program over comparable programs at Harvard, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Michigan. She plans to use her degree to advocate for underserved populations, particularly women of color, who are some of the most vulnerable students on college campuses.

"The SESP program immediately felt like community, and I really wanted that, along with a one-year master's program," she says. "I wanted to make sure the dean, advisers, faculty, and staff were invested in me as a student. And it felt like they were really going to cheer me on throughout the process."



For her first internship—a critical piece of the MSHE program—Mendez-Rozo will work with Student Enrichment Services on programs for lower-income Northwestern students, including the Compass program, a yearlong peer-mentorship initiative for incoming first-generation, lower-income, and undocumented students.

Mendez-Rozo was herself a first-generation, lower-income student at Northwestern. Her mother, who immigrated from Colombia, worked as an elementary school clerk for Chicago Public Schools and

was "a relentless investigator and advocate for her children," Mendez-Rozo says. "My parents were invested in trying to give me the best education possible."

During her second internship, Mendez-Rozo will be working on

strategy and policy in the provost's office. "That opportunity is a big deal for someone like me who could see themselves working in policy someday," she says.

The Shinae Chun Prize honors the late Shinae Chun (MA71), who shaped policy in leadership roles in state and federal government. She was director of the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau from 2001 to 2009, where she led the only federal agency charged with advocating on behalf of women in the workforce.

SESP alumna **Carol Adele Gaetjens** (PhD91), a teacher, social worker, and tireless advocate for accessibility and inclusion, died on February 27 in Fayetteville, Arkansas. She was 76.

Gaetjens was among the School of Education and Social Policy's most beloved instructors from 1999 until 2010, when she relocated to Arkansas. Students flocked to her classes on adulthood and aging, observing human behavior, and moral values in human development, which usually filled up an hour into registration.

"I've always been interested in the art of teaching," she told SESP in 2009. "When it's going well, you feel like you're the orchestra leader and everyone is playing in tune."

Gaetjens taught history at New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois, and spent a decade working as a social worker at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston. She earned her doctorate in human development and social policy with a focus on psychosocial development in later life and went on to direct the gerontology program at Northeastern Illinois University.

Diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in her 20s, Gaetjens championed accessibility issues for both the Northwestern and Evanston communities, where she led efforts to make a local church accessible. She also pushed to include a disability studies elective in the curriculum.

Later, she continued working to improve accessibility and inclusion in Fayetteville and "opened herself and her home to others, especially adolescents and young adults who needed a boost," her obituary read.

Hailey Danz

"Brace yourself. It's going to be good."

Diagnosed with bone cancer in middle school, Hailey Danz (BS13) had her leg amputated a few weeks into high school. She won her second silver medal in women's triathlon at the Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

I don't know if I actually enjoyed swimming, biking, and running when I first started 10 years ago. I do know I loved the Dare2Tri community [of triathletes with physical disabilities], so triathlon was at first just my vehicle for spending time with cool people. Then when I crossed the finish line of my first race, that feeling was so empowering and I gained so much confidence that I knew I wanted to keep doing it.

I pedal with one leg. My residual limb fits inside a housing affixed to the top of the bike to give me more leverage and allow me to get into a more aggressive, aerodynamic position.

I ran for eight years on a prosthesis with a circumductile (circular) motion. Even though it didn't look pretty, my way of using it was incredibly economical. When I maxed out what could do with it, I switched to a new prosthetic knee. Because it's significantly heavier than the old prosthetic, it took a really long time for me to trust it and build up the muscular endurance I needed to fully to kick it out. Now, I'm nowhere near my limits.

People think paralympics is a participation event, that anyone can do it. Actually, you have to put so much work into it, take risks, surround yourself with a support team, show up every day whether you want to or not, have faith in yourself, and be good enough to win. The real story is in the hard training and managing the psychology, nutrition, and physiology. Paralympians work just as hard as the Olympians—and we're doing it with a physical disadvantage.

After surviving cancer, I instinctively knew that the decision to amputate my leg would lead to something great. I told my 14-year-old self, "Brace yourself. It's going to be good." It wasn't until I got to college and started meeting people who didn't know my background that I really began to process the trauma. It was the first time that I felt different and that my disability was part of me.

At Northwestern, not only was I was processing my identity as someone with a disability, I was also realizing I was gay. The disability seemed easier to work with, so I put my energy into that and put the other stuff on the back burner. There was more shame around coming out than around the disability.

I now feel a sense of confidence that I never felt before. Some of it comes from the consistency I've had in training to become a triathlete. But it's also from being who I am and not having to hide any part of myself. I didn't realize how much energy I was expending on that until I didn't have to do it anymore. And waking up every day to do something I love—yeah, it's amazing.

During the isolation of the pandemic, I didn't feel like I was living. In Tokyo, I lived. I laughed until I was sore, cheered until I lost my voice, and cried until there was nothing left. And after the tough times we've all had since the pandemic, I can't think of a more powerful gift.

AS TOLD TO
JULIE DEARDORFF



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NEW IDEAS ONLY

"I've always liked the idea of transparency and looking at things as if through an x-ray," says SESP student **Jordan Walker**, a fashion artist studying premed and learning and organizational change. "Transferring this concept into the fashion realm, I played with the idea of the beauty of a coat being its insides rather than its exterior design. I first thought about stuffing a transparent jacket with green leaves but ultimately decided on roses." See more of Walker's creations on her company's website, neour.com (pronounced "newer").