

THE MAGAZINE OF LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND POLICY



S E P

BLACK KIDS PRESENT

SUMMER 2023

# Flipping the Script

How do we get athletes interested in computer science?

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### MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

#### DEAR FRIENDS,

Developmental psychologists use the term “transitional object” to refer to toys, teddy bears, or even imaginary companions to which young children often form intense attachments. As they transition from an early stage of dependence within the family to greater autonomy in a broader world, children establish short-term relationships with these objects.

Through the process, they practice interpersonal relationship skills that may serve them well in years to come. What transitional objects really do, however, is help successfully move people from point A to point B on life's journey.

I guess I am a transitional object at SESP!

As we welcome incoming dean Bryan Brayboy to the school, my short but rewarding experience leading SESP as interim dean is akin to that of a transitional object. Over the past year, I helped move us from one era to the next. But in my case, the emotional dynamics of transitional objects are mainly reversed. The direction of the intense positive attachment I feel goes mainly from me toward SESP, as if the stuffed animal were the one with strong feelings toward the child.

During my short time as dean, I established new and deeper relationships with SESP students (through events like Dine with the Dean), advisory board members, alumni, and especially the SESP staff. I also continued to enjoy what I believe to be very positive interactions with my newly deferential faculty colleagues who suddenly wanted to meet for coffee or dinner—we'll see if this continues once Dean Brayboy officially takes over!



In a broader sense, the idea of transition is central to our SESP mission. In focusing on human learning and development in context, we are all about understanding and promoting positive transitions in people's lives and in the lives of communities, neighborhoods, and schools.

Mesmin Destin's work, for example, looks at how hearing certain messages at critical moments in life can offer hope and keep people inspired to work toward their goals. Marcelo Worsley uses a unique approach to narrow the diversity gap in computer science by teaching children how to transfer one skill set to another. Both professors are highlighted in this issue, along with Matt Easterday's powerful research on civic engagement and stories of alumni like Emily Hittner and Joe Kennedy who are passionate about their work.

Change brings both risk and opportunity. What unifies our work is investigating how people cope and learn to thrive with this uncertainty. My own transition will bring me back to projects that I'm excited to dive into and has left me with a renewed sense of purpose and hope.

Wishing you all happy transitions!

With SESP Love,

Dan P. McAdams  
Interim Dean



## Brayboy Named New SESP Dean

Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy began on June 1 as dean of the School of Education and Social Policy. He succeeds David Figlio, who stepped down in May 2022 to become provost at the University of Rochester; professor Dan P. McAdams has served as interim dean.

Brayboy was previously President's Professor at Arizona State University's School of Social Transformation, vice president of social advancement, and senior adviser to the university's president.

"Extending efforts to build toward a more just future is part of what drew me to SESP," Brayboy says, adding that he's excited about the school's focus on the intersections between human development, teaching and learning, and policymaking.

Brayboy has also been named Carlos Montezuma Professor of Education and Social Policy. His scholarship focuses on race, diversity, Indigenous experiences in education, and the ways that knowledge systems inform higher education. He has



15 years of experience as a skilled administrator leading faculty teams and building relationships among local, national, and international communities.

A member of the National Academy of Education and a fellow of the American Educational Research Association, Brayboy has authored or coauthored more than 100 scholarly documents, including 9 edited or authored volumes, dozens of articles, book chapters, and policy briefs for the US Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, and the National Academy of Sciences.

Brayboy, a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, earned his bachelor's degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and his master's and doctoral

degrees at the University of Pennsylvania. His spouse, Doris Warriner, is a linguistic anthropologist of education whose research focuses on processes of mobility and displacement in relation to language, literacy, and learning.

Read more about Brayboy in the next issue of *SESP Magazine*.

## A New Era for MAPSCorps

SESP has launched a new iteration of MAPSCorps, the national model for training and hiring high school and college students to work as community data scientists in STEM fields. The initiative trains young people from underserved communities to collect, analyze, and use data to make their communities healthier and more vibrant.

MAPSCorps began in 2008 and grew out of the South Side Health and Vitality Studies, led by Stacy Tessler Lindau at the University of Chicago. It's now part of the Digital Youth Network lab of Nichole Pinkard, the Alice Hamilton Professor of Learning Sciences at SESP.

"We'll continue to train our youth to gather high-quality data about a wide range of community assets. That information will drive key decisions and policies across education, employment, and other sectors," Pinkard says. "It's an end-to-end solution, with youth at the helm, for deeply understanding communities and identifying points for meaningful intervention."



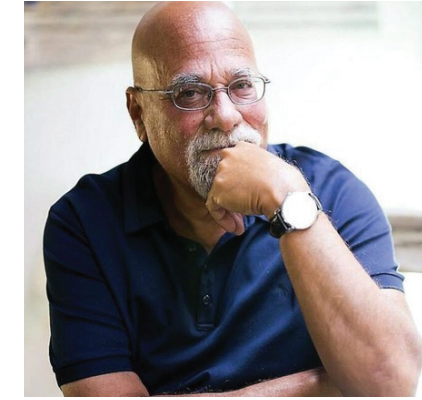
## Schwandt Finds Pandemic "Baby Bump"

Working from home may have boosted fertility among college-educated women, according to a National Bureau of Economic Research working paper coauthored by economist Hannes Schwandt, associate professor of human development and social policy. The subtle "baby bump" in the US caught researchers by surprise, as early forecasts had predicted a crash in birth rates at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The quick economic recovery and the rise of remote work may have changed the trajectory, the authors said.

An economist who studies the relationships among health, wealth, and overall well-being, Schwandt has a keen eye for important societal trends. His research has investigated everything from how air pollution affects fetal development to the effects of school shootings on mental health and of unemployment on fertility.



## In Memoriam: Roger Schank



Roger Schank, the outspoken theorist and researcher in artificial intelligence and cognitive science who helped create the field of learning sciences, died on January 29 at age 76.

Schank founded the interdisciplinary Institute for the Learning Sciences at Northwestern in 1989,

and his pioneering ideas led to the nation's first doctoral program in learning sciences, at SESP. The PhD program, founded and directed by former dean Roy Pea, has since been replicated and is now offered by 65 universities around the world. In 2016 SESP became the nation's first school to offer learning sciences at the undergraduate level.

Schank was known for visionary and provocative views, including on his aptly titled *Education Outrage* blog. In his book *Teaching Minds: How Cognitive Science Can Save Our Schools*, he argued that cognitive abilities are more important than subjects like algebra and chemistry.

"We need to begin teaching people to reason well enough to make sensible political and life choices," he wrote in 2012. "This is a very important idea in a democracy."

## New Research on Navigating the Risks of Party Rape

Women who have experienced sexual violence at fraternity parties have often been blamed for what happened to them. But new research on an elite college campus suggests that women in sororities are becoming less likely to fault the victim and more inclined to hold institutions accountable.

Women on that campus (not named due to research ethics and confidentiality rules) viewed institutional structures within the National Pan-Hellenic Council and the university as responsible for creating risky party environments conducive to sexual assault, according to a new study led by associate professor Simone Ispa-Landa (right).

"The big surprise for me was the absence of victim-blaming narratives and the focus on institutions as the source of the problem," Ispa-Landa says. "We also uncovered tactics women use to protect themselves and others. Instead of shaming young people for wanting to socialize at parties, we should be creating safer conditions for them."

The study, published in the journal *Sociology of Education*, is based on findings from interviews with 68 sorority women, including 53 rank-and-file members and 15 who had special roles tasked with making parties safer. "Navigating the Risks of Party Rape in Historically White Greek Life at an Elite College: Women's Accounts" was coauthored by Sara E. Thomas (PhD20), a research associate at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine.





# First Dual Master's Cohort Graduates



Above: The inaugural cohort of students took an architectural tour along Lake Michigan and the Chicago River to learn more about the city. Right: Jiayi Xie (left) and Ruihan Liu received awards for academic excellence at the graduation reception.

The world's first cohort of students to earn dual master's degrees in applied economics and social and economic policy received their diplomas in early December during a ceremony at Northwestern highlighting the importance of cross-cultural understanding.

The Master's in Social and Economic Policy program, a joint effort between Northwestern University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, was launched in August 2020. Events at the time—a worldwide pandemic that caused economic uncertainty and strained trans-pacific relations—underscored the need for new leaders who understand economics and policy from multiple perspectives, according to program founders David Figlio, former SESP dean, and Zhang Junsen, professor emeritus at CUHK. The program's international connections and cultural exchange are designed to help forge partnerships and set students up for careers as economic analysts,

**“The unique experience of learning to adapt to two cultures on two separate campuses will help you see this world with a pair of critical eyes.”** —Michelle Yin

researchers, and policymakers.

“We made it through this unpredictable process together,” program director and associate professor Michelle Yin told the 43 graduates. “The training you received and the unique experience of learning to adapt to two cultures on two separate campuses will help you see this world with a pair of critical eyes.”

The program's first cohort began in August 2021 in Sha Tin, Hong Kong, where students spent 10 months taking quantitative courses taught by faculty from both institutions. In June 2022, students transitioned to Northwestern's Evanston campus for 7 months of coursework and extracurricular activities, including a Chicago Cubs game, an architectural tour along the Chicago River, and a weekend session with students in SESP's learning and organizational change master's program. Several graduates said walking along Lake Michigan or waking up before dawn to see the sun rise over the water is something they will never forget.

The program, now welcoming its second cohort, unites two cultures and education systems while leveraging each institution's strengths. CUHK is known for theoretical and empirical work in economics, while SESP helps students develop strong policy design and evaluation skills, giving the program a practical component.

“In Hong Kong, the classes are more like lectures,” says graduate Tianzong Lu. “Students receive the ideas from the professors. However, in the United States, the professors encouraged us to express ourselves. So it was very different, but I think we did a good job adjusting to the system here.”

For graduate Suyash Mohan, who was raised in India and Hong Kong, the program blended his interests in international trade and economic development. In addition to earning the program's Excellence in Professional Development Award, he found time



to work on Breer, an upcycling startup he cofounded that makes craft beer from surplus bread.

Interim SESP dean Dan P. McAdams praised the students for their energy and enthusiasm. “By simply being here and offering your perspectives, you have enriched us,” McAdams said. “You have made us a better school and a better community.”



Matt Easterday



Fortunate Kelechi Ekwuruke



Michael Horn



Stephanie Marin



Jolie Matthews



Dan P. McAdams



Kenneth Powers



David Rapp



Victor Ray



Diane Schanzenbach



Tara Westover



Michelle Yin

## IN BRIEF

Connor Bain (PhD21), Matt Easterday, Stephanie Marin (MS21), Kenneth Powers (BS95), Diane Schanzenbach, and Lilah Shapiro were named to the Associated Student Government Faculty and Administrator Honor Roll for their teaching, dedication, and care for students.

Fortunate Kelechi Ekwuruke, a human development and social policy graduate student, was one of six scholars to receive \$4,000 each for pre-dissertation research as part of the Graduate School's 2022 Dissertation Proposal Development Program.

Michael Horn received the 2023 Daniel Linzer Award for Faculty Excellence in Diversity and Equity for blending music and coding.

Jolie Matthews was promoted to associate professor of learning sciences, and labor economist Ofer Malamud was promoted to professor of human development and social policy. Faculty members Sally Nuamah, Sepehr Vakil, and Marcelo Worsley received tenure and were promoted to the rank of associate professor, effective September.

Tara Westover, author of *Educated*, delivered the Loeschner Leadership Lecture in conversation with interim dean Dan P. McAdams. She was featured in the newly revised sixth edition of *The Person: A New Introduction to Personality Psychology* by McAdams and William Dunlop. The textbook uses case studies ranging from Lady Gaga to Salman Rushdie and Steve Jobs to illustrate key areas in personality psychology.

Nichole Pinkard was named a fellow of the American Educational Research Association.

David Rapp was named the Walter Dill Scott Professor of Education and Social Policy, effective September 1, 2023.

Sociologist and author Victor Ray discussed his latest book, *On Critical Race Theory: Why It Matters and Why You Should Care*, for the SESP Equity Book Club.

Brian Reiser, with other Northwestern researchers and collaborators, received a \$7.5 million grant to develop an innovative research-based science curriculum for elementary school classrooms with professional learning resources for teachers.

Seven junior scholars from around the world attended the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement's 2023 congress in Chile, thanks in part to a new fellowship program made possible by professor and ICSEI president James Spillane. His 2022 Spencer Foundation Mentorship Award, honoring his decades-long support of new generations of scholars, provided him with resources to help establish the program.

Economist Michelle Yin received a \$4.29 million grant from the US Department of Education to assess a Virginia intervention designed to end the practice of paying less than the minimum wage to people with disabilities.

*“In a journal our project's soon out across studies there's really no doubt money matters at school to refute you're a fool here's clear evidence we can now tout.”*

Doctoral student and poet Claire Mackevicius tweeted in rhyme about new research with professor Kirabo Jackson that was conditionally accepted by the *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*.





# The New MVPs

## *Turning athletes into computer scientists*

**M**arcelo Worsley wants to close the troubling diversity gap in computer science. His approach? Stop asking kids if they want to be computer scientists. Instead, see if they have dreams of becoming athletes. Or artists. Inventors or entrepreneurs. Then show them how using data and computer science can help them get better at doing what they love.

While the job market for computer scientists is projected to grow much faster than for other occupations over the next decade, Black adults are less likely to earn degrees in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, according to a report by the Pew Research Center. Worsley's ambitious Black Kids Predict initiative, which focuses on Black children but reaches those of all backgrounds, is an effort to introduce middle and high school students to scientific disciplines through a back door: the world of sports.

"We want Black kids to use data as a creative superpower," says Worsley, assistant professor of learning sciences at SESP and of computer science at Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering. "Data isn't a single career path. It's a literacy."

At all levels, Black students are less likely to have access to a computer science class at school. Despite efforts to expand the pipeline, just 3.5 percent of Black US college students earned bachelor's degrees in computer science in 2022, down from 3.8 percent in 2013, according to the Computing Research Association.

Worsley created Black Kids Predict as a partnership with the City of Evanston, local schools, SESP colleagues, and several professional sports teams. Its 6-to-10-week curriculum for middle and high school students can be used in or outside the classroom and includes research-based activities, field trips, and special events. Led by college-aged students from diverse backgrounds, the program emphasizes the practical uses of a STEM education and learning to see data differently.

"Only 6 percent of computer science students are interested in sports," Worsley says. "So why not get athletes interested in computer science?"

So far, more than 500 students have completed the curriculum, which is broken up into modules, through Evanston public schools, the Chicago Park District, Boys and Girls Club programming, and smaller organizations like Camp Kuumba, a summer program designed to give Black Evanston students





Marcelo Worsley explains how a wearable device can help basketball players improve their shooting accuracy.

equitable opportunities. More than 1,500 additional children have participated in Black Kids Predict via pop-up sessions in Chicago and Evanston parks and community centers and basketball tournaments, during which children can test out sensor-enabled sports equipment while they're not watching or playing.

Black Kids Predict can also be adapted to different environments and used with younger students. The sports wearables curriculum model introduces students to popular technology athletes can wear, such as activity trackers and smartwatches that monitor recovery, sleep, and training. The course was successfully piloted at an Evanston elementary school and later incorporated into the district's computer science curriculum for those grade levels.

Fifth graders created warm-up exercise programs in the Scratch coding language, learned about sensors (both the human body's senses and electronic devices) and tiny computer processors, and brainstormed future uses for sensor-enabled

sports equipment, says Mindy Perry, a coding teacher and librarian at Dawes Elementary School.

"The students coded a micro:bit [pocket-sized computer] to track how many steps and laps they were doing while running the mile," Perry says. "They loved understanding how wearables relate to their everyday lives and how they enhance sports performance."

A 2022 report by the Aspen Institute estimates 70 percent of young people participate in organized sports; another report by the Afterschool Alliance says fewer than 20 percent take part in out-of-school experiences related to STEM fields. Worsley's early research suggests that reaching students who are already doing something they love, and emphasizing how data and tech can help sports performance, can better engage them and spur interest in STEM.

A 2020 study in *Computer Science Education* examined a summer camp Worsley's lab designed for second through sixth graders that integrated sports with

**"We want students to recognize how athletics can contribute to their learning . . . and how computer science can enhance their athletic performance."**

—Marcelo Worsley

technology. After five days, students demonstrated "significant changes" in how they connected technology with athletic performance. Those who weren't interested in sports were still "highly engaged in the experience," according to the study, coauthored by doctoral students Stephanie Jones and JaCoya Jackson.

"Particularly within the Black community, there can be tension between athletics and academics," Worsley says. "We want students to recognize how athletics can contribute to their learning about data science and technology and how computer science can enhance their athletic performance."

+ + +

**B**orn in Brazil, Worsley attended elementary school in Belgium and high school in Michigan, where he was a state-ranked sprinter for the track team but also loved soccer and other sports. One thing he wasn't wild about? His high school computer science classes, in part because they focused on learning a programming language.

That changed at Stanford University, where he ran track and studied chemical engineering and Portuguese. While teaching an elective class at a charter high school in Redwood City, California, about the engineering of entrepreneurship, he began exploring how to create an online tutoring platform to pair students from East Palo Alto with Stanford students for help in any subject.

Worsley also participated in the National Society of Black Engineers Pre-College Initiative Program, working on activities inspired by the popular MTV show *Pimp My Ride*. "Ours was P.I.M.P.—Program In Math and Physics—My Golf Cart, where youth learned about engineering by working on an old golf cart," he says.

After graduation, he worked for several years at Accenture Technology Labs. Then, for his doctorate in learning sciences, Worsley returned to Stanford. There he he was advised by SESP alumnus Paulo Blikstein (PhD09), now associate professor of communications, media, and learning technologies design at Columbia University. During the second year of Worsley's doctoral program, he was admitted to the master's program in computer science.

"Many of those projects during the master's program were geared toward getting youth excited about engineering through hands-on projects," Worsley says, like "creating radio-controlled cars, doing physics demos with Nobel Prize-winning physicists, and adding custom technology to golf carts."

Worsley's effectiveness with youth stems from insights that come from his involvement with the community as a parent, coach, and volunteer, says colleague Nichole Pinkard, who studies educational ecosystems and is also a volunteer coach for Black Kids Predict. His familiarity with where the children of Evanston learn and play sparked several unique events, including a workshop for the girls' basketball team Pinkard coaches that began with an activity to design wearables and ended with a hoop-shooting improvement session in the gym.

"Making it possible for young people to try STEM activities in familiar spaces with friends lowers the barriers to engagement," says Pinkard, the Alice Hamilton Professor of Learning Sciences at SESP.

Meeting professionals in the field—like athletes and people working in tech—is another key part of the curriculum. Last August, 40 Black boys went to a Chicago Bears training camp for a firsthand look at the tech the pros use. Another group attended an Indiana Pacers basketball camp, where they played with Home Court, a computer-vision technology platform that tracks shooting progress and provides a shooting heat map.

Worsley also brought inventor and former basketball player Kayode Vann to speak to his Northwestern class on sports technology and learning. Vann created the SmartShotInventor basketball training aid; while in Evanston, he also held shooting workshops at Haven Middle School and Evanston Township High School and talked to students about his career.

"Many of these students came into this program thinking computer science was not for them, but that shifts after they go through some of our activities," Worsley says. "When they get to the point where they're thinking, 'Yeah, designing sports technology is something I would actually be interested in doing'—that's when I really get hopeful."



*The Black Kids Predict curriculum for middle and high school students consists of a range of activities that defy the notion that studying computer and data science leads to geeky desk jobs.*

#### WEEK ONE

An intro to the power of sensors, modeled after our own human senses. What is a sensor? What sensors do we have already, and how does technology make them more powerful?

#### WEEK TWO

Exploring the promise of wearables, each child gets an activity tracker to start testing and understanding through a series of activities.

#### WEEK FIVE

A limitations module encourages questioning sensors and artificial intelligence by challenging students to trick their wearables.

#### WEEK SIX

Participants design custom sports wearables and discuss such topics as Black women's contributions to technology design.



# CHANGING A CHILD'S FUTURE

## Messages that matter

### WHEN MESMIN DESTIN WAS

16 years old, he was getting straight As at his college prep school and feeling good about his future. But when he told his guidance counselor that he hoped to study biology, piano, or psychology at Northwestern University, the response was underwhelming.

"He told me it would cost a lot of money and they don't let many people in," Destin said during a TEDxChicago talk. "That was pretty much the end of the conversation."

Pondering this interaction, he began thinking about how his experience compared with what others might be going through. His family was supportive, and he ultimately followed the path he envisioned, becoming a social psychologist. But what about those who weren't so sure about their direction in life? Or who didn't have the resources they needed?

Now Destin seeks to answer those questions as an associate professor of psychology and of human development and social policy. Also a fellow with Northwestern's Institute for Policy Research, Destin studies how the timing and delivery of messages can influence young people's lives and trajectories, for better or for worse. His revealing

**"Key messages at critical moments can keep people inspired by possibility."**

experiments over the last 15 years have asked whether messages can change people's lives by expanding their identities.

Destin explains that the messages themselves can be embedded into how we teach important and challenging topics in such areas as science, language, math, the arts, and history. They can also be central to mentoring, enrichment programs, and other activities outside the classroom.

"People are constantly made to feel smaller than they might otherwise be by the people in the systems around them," Destin says. "This holds us back from seeing and reaching where we might be. But key messages at critical moments can keep people inspired by possibility." His research on the impact of messaging has led him to develop the SESP Leadership Institute and other initiatives centering on personal strengths.



I see who you could be

Having to work harder can lead to all sorts of skills that contribute to success

Maintain your connections and relationships while you strive

There are resources and opportunities to get to college

There is a path to the life that you are imagining for yourself

People who are seen as having less can gain valuable connections and perspectives

### Messages and opportunity

Can instilling a sense of opportunity change how children respond when asked what they see themselves doing in life?

**The message:** A teacher or counselor says something that opens possibilities, such as "College can cost a lot of money. But there's this thing out there called need-based financial aid. There are resources and opportunities to help you get there. Tuition can be low or even free if you set yourself up to get to the right places."

**Destin's findings:** Children who hear a message of opportunity are 30 percent more likely to believe they could get into college than those hearing the message "here's the cost of college, end of story," according to the study "An Open Path to the Future: Perceived Financial Resources and School Motivation," published in the *Journal of Early Adolescence*. A statement that opens possibilities will also change what the child does to get there. Destin's work shows that after getting such a message, children are seven times more likely to complete and turn in an assignment.

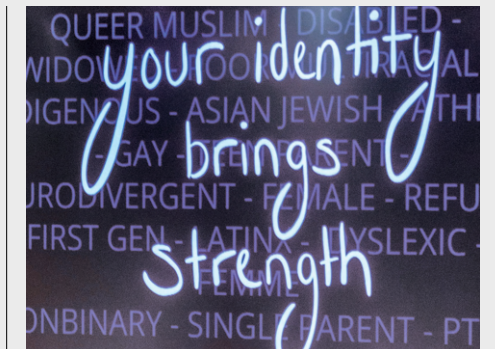
### Messages and identity

Can recognizing strengths reinforce a child's identity and motivation to work toward a long-term goal?

**The message:** A teacher discusses identities, focusing on strengths instead of weaknesses. For example, people from low-income backgrounds or who are seen as "having less" may gain specific advantages from their experiences. These skills and perspectives can be key to contributing to school and society.



**Destin's findings:** Hearing that their identity offers special skills or traits can boost youths' self-esteem and increase their persistence. For example, juggling a job with caring for a younger sibling while a single mom works can help a child build time-managements skills. Just knowing this fact is beneficial. Children getting this message are almost 10 percent more likely to continue working amid school or homework challenges compared with those who didn't get that message, according to "From Deficit to Benefit: Highlighting Lower-SES Students' Background-Specific Strengths," a 2021 study in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.



Hearing that their identity offers special skills or traits can boost youths' self-esteem and increase their persistence.

### Messages and relationships

Can young adults improve their physical health by forming bonds with people who may share some of their identities, experiences, and backgrounds or by staying connected to home, family, and culture?

**The message:** In collaboration with health research labs, Destin's team randomly provided young people with an encouraging message showing how to cultivate and maintain relationships while pursuing their goals. Others in the study received a message focused only on achievement.

**Destin's findings:** Over the course of a year, an increased emphasis on connection and relationships led to a 25 percent decrease in inflammation, according to a 2021 study in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*. As Destin notes, "Expanding identities and keeping them connected to close relationships can help young people find achievement and health at the same time."



# Revolutionary Civics

*Don't confine democracy to the ballot box*

By Julie Deardorff

**E**vanston residents have no shortage of ideas about how to spend a tidy \$3 million sum in federal COVID-19 relief funds. Protected bike lanes? Affordable housing? What about revitalizing the downtown area, improving mental health services, or fixing sidewalks?

More than 1,200 such suggestions have been made as part of the city's pilot participatory budgeting program, which lets community members—rather than elected officials—decide how to spend part of the city's budget. Ultimately, anyone who lives, works, or studies in Evanston—including teenagers, people who are undocumented, and those who were previously incarcerated—will vote on a final list of proposals. The city is responsible for implementing the winning ideas.

As some people raise concerns about the future of democracy, municipalities across the US and around the world are experimenting with participatory budgeting to increase transparency, strengthen community ties, and restore trust in government. Supporters say it also creates more equitable policies and trains future leaders.

It's also a lot of work. According to Northwestern researchers, direct democracy demands time, a solid infrastructure, and participation. The process is often misunderstood. More research is needed, meanwhile, to assess whether public

budgeting is reaching the traditionally disenfranchised and having the desired long-term effects, such as creating more resilient communities.

"Low participation is one of democracy's biggest challenges, and people need more opportunities to learn the skills to get involved," says associate professor of learning sciences Matt Easterday, a technical adviser to the City of Evanston.

**"Low participation is one of democracy's biggest challenges, and people need more opportunities to learn the skills to get involved."** —Matt Easterday

"Participatory budgeting has a huge educational benefit, because it teaches people about policy, government, outreach, community issues, and how to become civic actors."

First used in Brazil in 1989 to empower working-class and low-income residents, participatory budgeting reached the US in 2009 when Chicago alderman Joe Moore introduced it to allocate \$1 million in public funds. It has since spread

to more than 3,000 cities, from Budapest to Boston. Both the White House and the World Bank have supported community budgeting practices.

Critics argue that people with more resources and time are the ones who get involved, so it's easy for the process to be co-opted by small groups on the extremes. Others say that elected officials make more-informed decisions than the people they represent, since that, after all, is their job.

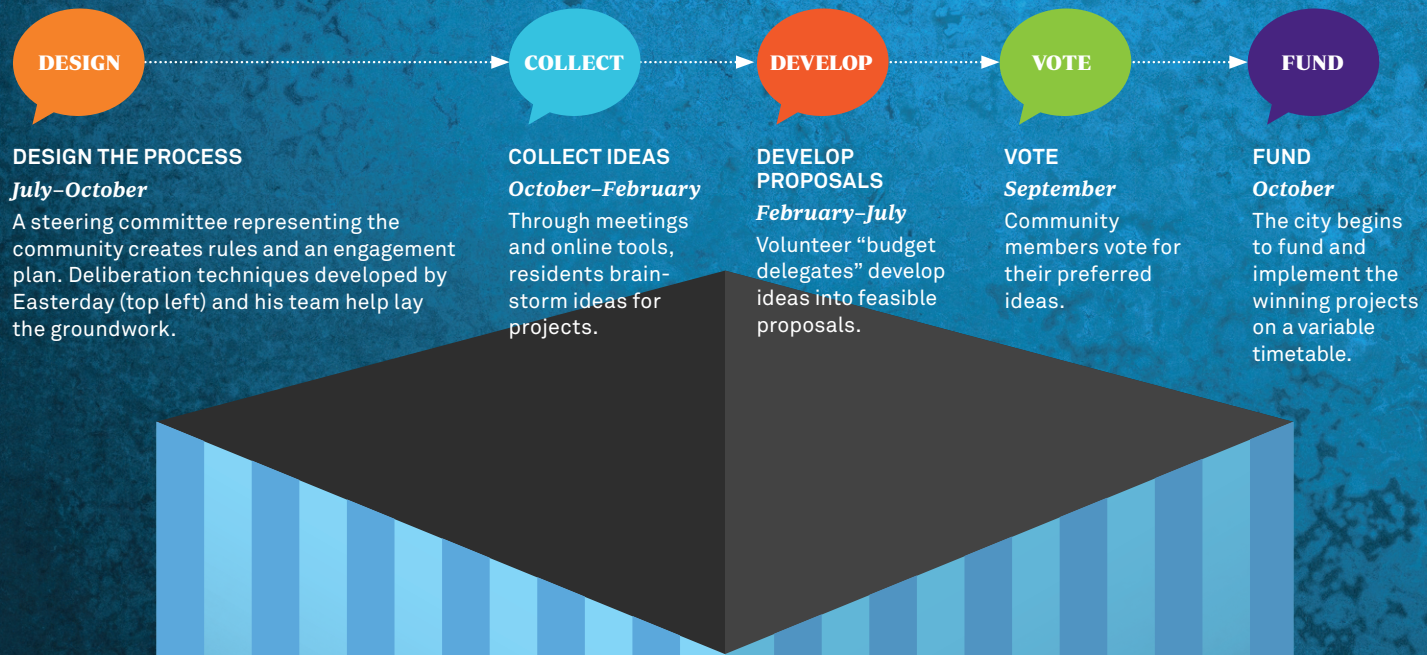
Easterday counters that the process allows partisans less influence "because participatory budgeting provides the







★ HOW IT WORKS ★



support for anyone to participate, not just citizens who know how to work the system.” In Evanston, 51 percent of those attending idea-collection events or expressing opinions to elected officials had never done so before, according to surveys his team conducted. “It’s about as democratic a process as we can currently design,” he says.

It was also never meant to replace the regular budgeting system or the jobs of elected officials. Evanston’s pilot program apportions less than 1 percent of the city’s total annual budget, not including overhead and administrative costs, says city council member Jonathan Nieuwsma, also a member of the council’s participatory budgeting committee.

“It would be ridiculous to ask 78,000 Evanston residents to weigh in directly on every contract for pothole repair, snow-plow purchase, or software upgrade,” Nieuwsma says. “The few people who may feel strongly about those things have channels for input, and I often seek input from constituents with particular expertise in certain areas.

“This is an experiment,” he adds. “Let’s see how it works, what lessons we can learn, and if and how we might be able to build a participatory budgeting component into our regular annual budget process.”

**The hidden process of organizing**

The planning phase began in late 2021, when the city council approved using American Rescue Plan Act COVID-19 relief funds. It created a steering committee and hired a full-time participatory budgeting manager, a field manager, a part-time coordinator, and advisers from Northwestern.

The Northwestern team, led by Easterday, includes graduate students Kristine Lu, Gus Umbelino, and Morgan Wu and an army of more than 20 volunteers, most of whom are undergraduates pursuing certificates in civic engagement.

“What’s been rewarding and surprising is, when it hits right and you see people engaged in the process, how excited and hopeful they are.” —Kristine Lu

They oversee the technical aspects of the entire project—everything from training volunteers on informing the community to running events and designing a system to develop ideas into proposals.

“There’s a hidden process of organizing and advocacy,” says Lu, who with Easterday has been researching ways to increase civic engagement since 2017. “These things don’t just appear out of the blue. It takes a lot for a city to build up the necessary resources, skills, and motivation to ensure its community members can pull off participatory budgeting.”

Over several months, Evanston held 12 idea-collecting sessions in community centers, restaurants, and other locations, targeting a wide cross section of the public. Volunteers contacted more than 1,000 people face-to-face, reaching 2 percent of Evanston voters, Easterday says, and people also submitted ideas online.

**Civics in action**

At one brainstorming session, held at Evanston Township High School and organized by high school senior Emmett Ebels-Duggan, teenagers and community members sat four per table, eating free pizza, enthusiastically discussing ideas and writing their favorites on an easel pad.

Some students came because they were civic-minded, says Ebels-Duggan, a member of the steering committee. Others were simply committed to a certain idea, such as installing table-tennis tables around the city. “It showed that people with one or two ideas who have no further involvement can be part of participatory budgeting,” he says.

Students also tried to solve problems

that adults may not be aware of. Senior Amira Grace wanted to improve a “shortcut”—a rough path that many use to walk to school. Ebels-Duggan, a competitive cyclist, liked the idea; he also supported a two-way, curb-protected bike lane to be built down the length of a major north-south thoroughfare.

For more than an hour the ideas kept pouring in: What about a program that connects seniors to young people? Dedicated pickleball courts? Or turning the abandoned Harley Clarke mansion into a community center?

“What’s been rewarding and surprising is, when it hits right and you see people engaged in the process, how excited and hopeful they are,” Lu says. “At the core, civics is not just about voting and learning the three branches of government. It’s about building relationships with other members of the community, talking to people you don’t know, and finding shared interests.”

During the proposal development phase, volunteers fleshed out the ideas received, a process shaped by research from Easterday’s team and interviews with community members, policy researchers, and others. The final vote, which will likely include between 14 and 26 proposals, is scheduled for fall 2023.

“We’ve really gone into this unexplored space of training students how to do things like canvassing and getting people excited to come to civic events,” says Lu, whose dissertation explored the paradox of participatory democracy. “As wonderful as democracy is, it requires people having the ability to participate in it. And that’s not a given.”



# Today's Practice Has Been Canceled

Alumnus Joe Kennedy wants college athletes to make civic engagement a habit

All Vote No Play, a new movement to help athletes “see, flex, and grow their civic muscles,” uses language its audience understands. There’s a playbook, civic engagement drills, and video snippets—or “chalk talks”—from everyone from basketballer Stephen Curry and coach Steve Kerr of the Golden State Warriors to former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice.

The initiative, which promotes voting and civic engagement among college athletes, was cofounded by **Joe Kennedy** (BS07), Oregon State University basketball coach Eric Reveno, and Lisa Kay Solomon, a designer in residence at Stanford’s school of design. Following protests in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, Reveno tweeted that Election Day should be a mandatory NCAA off day.

“We must empower, educate, and guide our athletes to be part of the change,” he said. Three months later, the NCAA passed student-driven legislation giving athletes Election Day off for voting and community service. The NBA jumped on board, declining to schedule games on Election Day in the name of civic engagement; nearly 2,000 college and pro coaches have followed suit. Today, All Vote No Play is a program under the Team, a new nonprofit focusing on integrating civic engagement into college athletics.

“More than 500,000 college athletes are largely overlooked by most traditional civics programs, yet they are often some of the most influential leaders on their campuses,” says Kennedy (pictured above right). “We increase civic engagement by harnessing the power of athletes.”

The organization was driven by volunteers until last fall, when Kennedy stepped in as executive director to help create organizational structure, raise



**“All these things they’ve learned as an athlete—competing and working under pressure and with a team, being a leader—these are the skills they need in life.”**

funds, and grow the movement. It was a natural step for the social policy major, who played basketball for the Wildcats, served as team captain his senior season, and was a three-time Academic All-Big Ten honoree.

In 2010, Kennedy returned to Northwestern as director of men’s basketball operations; in 2013, he moved on to Oregon State and in 2016 joined College of the Holy Cross.

“We’d talk to our guys about life after basketball,” Kennedy says. “All these things they’ve learned as an athlete—competing and working under pressure and with a team, being a leader—these are the skills they need in life.”

Three-quarters of college athletes say they want more opportunities for civic engagement, according to an NCAA survey. It “makes the invisible become visible,” says SESP student Jacob Rosner,

a member of the men’s swimming team who interned with Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and his Democracy Summer Program. “We get caught up in our own life, and civic engagement challenges us to escape the bubble and work for others.”

Athletes, for example, could volunteer to work at a local polling center, sponsor a game day for foster kids, or raise funds to support a player-run sports camp for underprivileged youth. Those with less time could watch the documentary *The Assist*, which details how the WNBA and the Atlanta Dream helped organize, inspire, and mobilize voters for the 2020 Georgia senate race.

Kennedy believes that if students develop civic habits in college, they’ll be more likely to vote and feel a sense of commitment to the community as they grow older.

“The youth voter participation rate jumped from 39 percent in 2016 to 50 percent in 2020,” Kennedy says. “But we wouldn’t be thrilled with a 50 percent free-throw shooting percentage. Let’s get it to 90 percent.”

## ALUMNI NEWS

# The Love Scientist

Emily Hittner draws on her SESP doctoral research on relationships and emotions to design an app you want to delete.

As an emotions researcher, Emily Hittner (PhD19) used to joke about working for a dating app. But the longer she thought about it, the more that it seemed like a goal worth pursuing. Now vice president of research at Hinge, the dating app “designed to be deleted,” Hittner leads a user experience team that researches how to help people connect more meaningfully. It’s a perfect fit, she says, because she uses her skills in affective, health, and relationship science to study everything from the users who’ve found love to features that help daters better express themselves.

While earning her doctorate in human development and social policy and her master’s in statistics, Hittner worked in the labs of professors Emma Adam and Claudia Haase. Now living in New York City, she talked with us about how she landed at Hinge and what she loves about her job.

### The problem

Hittner was happily building a research career because she loves investigating problems, solving difficult challenges, and helping others understand what she learns. She had thought she’d become a professor because, during grad school, she had few models for careers outside academia. Working for a think tank was one option, but she didn’t see it as a good fit. Her statistics degree led her to consider data science, but she knew she’d miss her passion for survey design and interacting with people.

### The influencer

The first time she heard of user experience research was when her friend

At SESP, Hittner (pictured) studied emotions using a variety of methods, including facial coding. She’s able to glean information by analyzing the minuscule movements of some of the face’s 42 muscles.

Ryan Svoboda (PhD19) surprised her by applying for an internship at Facebook. “I was like, ‘Ryan, what are you doing?’” she says. Svoboda ended up getting the internship and worked as a research manager at Meta; for Hittner, it was an influential moment. “He was a good friend with a similar background, similar interests, and it was in line with what we already did,” she says. “It was helpful to see a friend model a career path that I didn’t know about but already seemed familiar—it felt very encouraging.”

### The constraints

Hittner wanted to keep researching relationships and emotions because of the effect they have on people’s lives—and because the research was always interesting, changing, and relevant. “I really loved the teaching and mentoring part of research” she says. “I wanted to find a role where I could build stronger and more meaningful relationships.”

### The idea

When Hittner read more about Hinge’s focus on helping people go on great dates, she knew she wanted to work there.



“Hinge’s tagline, ‘Designed to be deleted,’ reflected a place where I felt research would have impact,” she says. “How do we use insights to make Hinge work so well that people delete it? It is a problem I wanted to invest my time to solve.”

### The research

Hittner and her team study the relationship journeys of Hinge daters, from download to date to deletion, so they can fine-tune the elements that make a difference. She routinely draws on past research she

conducted in the SESP labs of Adam and Haase. “The foundations from affective and relationship science directly apply to how we are thinking about the problems that daters are facing today,” she says.

### The love

Hittner cites Hinge’s values of authenticity, courage, and empathy as helping sustain a culture that makes her proud to come to work each day. “I get to work in a space that is helping spread love, building relationships across the globe, and working with a community of passionate, bold, and caring people,” she says. “What more can you ask for?”



## Tennis Great Inducted into Hall of Fame

**Georgia Rose Munns** (BS09), whose Northwestern career brought incredible success to the women's tennis program, was one of eight Wildcats inducted last September into the Northwestern University Athletics Hall of Fame.

A four-time All-American in singles and doubles, Munns was the second student in Northwestern history to qualify for the NCAA Singles Championship in all four years of her college career. She earned four All-Big Ten awards and was named the 2006 Big Ten Freshman of the Year and 2007 Big Ten Player of the Year.

Munns concluded her career with 125 singles wins, including a 29-2 record in the Big Ten. She was named the 2009 ITA Midwest Regional Senior of the Year, ending the season ranked 21st nationally in singles as well as 13th in doubles after advancing to the NCAA Championship quarterfinals with partner Lauren (Lui) Statman (BS09).

Now married and a mother of two, Munns is associate head coach at the University of Washington, whose women's tennis team made its third NCAA championship appearance in 2022.

"My four years were filled with learning challenges, failures, development, a lot of fun, and so much growth," Munns said during the induction ceremony. "I appreciate the relationships Northwestern gave me and the sense of community."



## Scanlon Heads Back to China

**Ruby Scanlon** (BS22), one of the nation's best mock trial competitors and currently an international antitrust specialist at the US Department of Justice, is headed to China on a Schwarzman Scholarship, one of the world's most selective graduate programs. She previously studied political economies and Mandarin at Peking University in 2019.

Designed to build better relationships between the US and China, the Schwarzman program enables scholarship recipients to pursue a one-year master's program in global affairs at Beijing's Tsinghua University. The 150 scholars of the 2023–24 cohort were selected from more than 3,000 applicants.



### Scanlon was the first Northwestern student to compete in Trial by Combat, a competition for the nation's best mock trial competitors.

Scanlon hopes to eventually serve in the US State Department to help improve how the US leverages international institutions to support developing countries. At Northwestern, she studied international relations and social policy as a Posse First Generation Leadership Scholar. She interned at the State Department's International Organizations Bureau and also worked at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the Council on Foreign Relations.

A national mock trial and debate champion, Scanlon led Northwestern's mock trial team to eighth place at last year's American Mock Trial Association National Championship Tournament—the squad's best finish since 2015. She also won an individual attorney award, making her an All-American, a tournament honor conferred on the country's best attorneys and witnesses. Last summer, just before embarking on a monthlong backpacking trip in Colorado, she became the first Northwestern student selected to compete in Trial by Combat, an intense competition for the nation's 16 best mock trial competitors that gives them just 24 hours to prepare a case.

# Gayle Kricke

*Kricke (BS07) is director of primary care operations at Northwestern Medicine and an assistant professor of internal medicine and geriatrics at the Feinberg School of Medicine*

**I worked at a funeral home** in high school and part of college—I wanted to study mortuary science and become a funeral director.

**After my practicum in older adult programs** at Rush University Medical Center, I decided I wanted to intervene earlier in people's lives. At the funeral home, I saw how survivors' experiences with end-of-life care influenced how they grieved.

**SESP was the foundation of everything I've done since.** It changed my direction and gave me the resources I needed to follow that different path. I was in human development and psychological services, but I draw on what I learned in learning and organizational change and social policy all the time.

**My passion has always been health-care quality** and, specifically, working with older adults, especially those with multiple chronic conditions.

**I became the second person in the nation** to earn a doctorate in health-care quality and patient safety, offered through the Feinberg School of Medicine's Health Sciences Integrated PhD Program.

**Professor Dan Lewis** hammered it home that you can't change a person—can't put

them back in a broken system and expect it to stick. You have to intervene at all levels.

**I look for the gaps** between people and settings: between patients and providers, between clinicians and academics, and between hospitals and communities.

**I am a caregiver.** My husband was born with hydrocephalus—his brain can't drain his own spinal fluid. When he aged out of pediatrics, there weren't a lot of places for him to go as an adult. Why do we have the pediatric system keeping patients alive but then the adult healthcare system isn't ready to take them? I'm constantly thinking, "Is this a gap I can help close?"

**Systems are where my passion lies.** It's also where I have the greatest chance to affect how people experience health-care. So often we run into the mentality that "we can't do it this way because we've never done it that way." But that's rarely true.

**I love to learn.** I love tackling new problems and trying to learn about different things that I don't already know. That's why I went to Northwestern in the first place.

**Primary care is so often the front door** of healthcare, the place where people have

long-term relationships and where they go when they need help. It's the setting where patients have the most constant and consistent relationships.

**But primary care is also in a bit of a crisis.** We're aware there's an issue with the supply of physicians. The other piece is trying to figure out how you make the job more desirable for those who are in it.

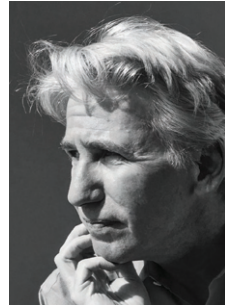
**I teach in the new** Master's in Healthcare Administration program at the School of Professional Studies. It's a class on designing healthcare that is centered on patients and meets their care goals. I love teaching as much as I love learning.

**What anchors me** is that how well you do at the end of life does not just depend upon what happens at the end of life. It depends on the lead-up, the relationships with people who know you, who you trust, and who can help you negotiate some of the decisions.

**Every road leads back to older adults.** If I go back to being solely focused on the end of life, I'll do it knowing more about how people got there in the first place, which I think makes me more able to make the changes that improve the end.

AS TOLD TO JULIE DEARDORFF





Gary Rivlin



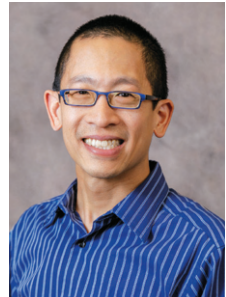
Shana Hazan



Carrie Murphey



Mollie McQuillan



Elvin Chan



Valerie Hwang



Kate Schultz



Ella DeBode



Naomi Blaushild



El Da' Sheon Nix



Corbin Bryant



Sean Radford



Melody Pabón

## 80s

**Gary Rivlin's** (BS80) book *Saving Main Street: Small Business in the Time of COVID-19* recounts his two years following a group of small-business owners struggling to survive the pandemic. He chronicles the personal and financial challenges confronting owners amid a contentious presidential election, confusing government aid programs, and contradictory safety guidelines. In 2017, he was part of the team that won the Pulitzer Prize for reporting on the Panama Papers.

## 90s

**William Hook** (BS90), principal of the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, was appointed to the Illinois Committee for Agricultural Education.

**Sophia King** (MSEd90) ran for Chicago mayor in 2023. She represented Chicago's Fourth Ward on the city council from 2016 until this year.

**Elvin Chan** (MSEd98) is a senior financial analyst at the City Colleges of Chicago.

## 00s

**Arnaldo Rivera** (BS02, MSEd07) was appointed by Illinois governor J. B. Pritzker as chairman of the Illinois Tollway Board. He is chief administrative and equity officer for Navy Pier.

**El Da' Sheon Nix** (BS04) is Northwestern's new director of Evanston community relations in the Office of Neighborhood and Community Relations. He was previously community relations manager for Tutoring Chicago and has worked in nonprofits for two decades. A

former member of the Wildcats football team, he was honored at Northwestern's fall game against Iowa and is one of more than a dozen alumni who returned to campus for Professor Dan Lewis's last seminar.

**Joe Curnow** (BS05) is assistant professor at the University of Manitoba, where she studies learning, identity development, and youth-led social change.

**Shana Hazan** (MSEd05), a former teacher and nonprofit executive, was elected in November to the San Diego Unified School District board, where she is now vice president.

**Ashley Koester** (BS05) is a staff veterinarian at the VCA animal hospital in Manhattan Beach, California.

**Lauren Parnell** (BS07) is a research associate at the World Bank. She earned her doctorate from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 2015.

**Anna (Schaefer) Scallet** (BS07) is a special project coordinator with the Washington, DC, Department of Housing and Community Development, where she underwrites gap financing and equity investments in affordable housing projects.

**Melanie Kahl** (BS08) is a 2023 Mira Fellow at the London-based Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, where she is exploring how leaders design transformative experiences.

**Jessica Fain** (BS09) is head of core products at Brightwheel, a preschool and childcare software company.

**Valerie Hwang** (BS09) is a clinical ayurveda practitioner based in Long Beach, California. She founded the private practice Intrepid Ayurveda in 2020 after seeking holistic solutions for mental health. "My undergrad major in human development and psychological services has served as a strong foundation for my approach to patient care today," she says.

**Kelly Kirkpatrick** (BS09) is director of investor relations at SOSV, a global venture-capital firm focused on human and planetary health. She is also executive director of the O'Sullivan Foundation, which provides philanthropic support for a variety of nonprofits.

**Hilary (Bowen) O'Dougherty** (BS09) is assistant athletic director at Seattle Academy, where she also coaches lacrosse. She was previously a coach at Mount St. Mary's University and the University of Southern California, where she started the lacrosse program. At Northwestern, she led the women's lacrosse team to four national championships and in 2016 was inducted into the Athletics Hall of Fame.

**Stacy Pancratz** (BS09) is a research scientist at Meta, focusing on demography and survey science.

## 10s

**Corbin Bryant** (BS10), a former nose tackle in the NFL and on the Wildcats football team, is director of events and marketing for athletics at Emory University.

**Rebecca Komarek** (MSHE10), an associate director in the College of Engineering and Applied Science at the University of Colorado Boulder, was recently named outstanding staff member by the mechanical engineering department.

**April Faith-Slaker** (MA12) is executive director of Detroit's newly established Office of Eviction Defense.

**Carrie Murphey** (MSHE12) is director of student affairs at the School of Medicine at the University of Nevada, Reno.

**Michelle Hoda Wilkerson** (PhD12), associate professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley, earned tenure in 2021. She researches computer-integrated learning experiences in science and mathematics education, with a focus on student authorship. In 2022, she cochaired a workshop on the foundations of K–12 data science education for the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. She has two sons, born in 2018 and 2021.

**Kate Schultz** (Comm09, MSHE13) is developing and expanding educational programs and training for Mayo Clinic physicians, clinicians, and researchers to implement artificial intelligence, machine learning, and analytics in their practice and research. Schultz teaches the proseminar course series in the premed/prehealth postbaccalaureate program in Northwestern's School of Professional Studies and is faculty director of

its new online undergraduate degree program in health sciences, which will launch this fall. She recently earned her doctorate in health sciences from Northern Illinois University.

**Jacqueline Gaines** (MSHE14) is a founding staff member and student affairs administrator at the University of Chicago's new department of race, diaspora, and indigeneity.

**Brendan Bond** (MSHE16) is director of college counseling at Woodlands Academy in Lake Forest, Illinois. He is also the assistant varsity basketball coach.

**Kara Falcone** (MSEd16) is the state director of Best Buddies Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

**Sean Radford** (MSLOC16), chief human resources officer at HALO Branded Solutions, was appointed to the board of directors of AIDS Foundation Chicago.

**Carly Shagrin** (BS16) works on strategy and special projects in the Office of the CEO at Google.

**Karen Halverson Cross** (MSHE17) published "Deregulation and the 'Gig Academy'" in the *Wayne Law Review*. Cross is a law professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Bridget O'Connell** (MSHE17) is associate dean of the Chicago Center of Excellence in Engineering and Computer Science at Wilbur Wright College.

**Nichole Beardsley** (BS18) is assistant women's lacrosse coach at the University of Colorado Boulder. She previously coached at the University of Massachusetts and was director of operations for lacrosse at Northwestern when the team made two Final Four appearances (2019, 2021) and claimed the 2019 Big Ten Tournament championship.

**Alexa Brown** (MSHE18) is a recruiter at University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, which manages the National Center for Atmospheric Research on behalf of the National Science Foundation.

**Mollie McQuillan** (PhD19) received the Emerging Scholar Award at the American Educational Research Association's national meeting. An assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, she studies educational policy, social relationships, and the health of gender-expansive students and educators.

## 20s

**Hayley Krolik** (BS20) had a chance to return to Colombia, this time as a senior consultant in human capital for Deloitte in Bogotá. She previously taught English through a Fulbright in Villavicencio.

**Peter Meyerhoff** (PhD20) is cofounder and CEO of Chicago-based education company 10story Learning, where he leads a team of teachers and designers in creating dynamic, project-based math learning programs.

**Ella DeBode** (BS21) is a project manager at WildLandscapes International, a nonprofit land conservation organization that partners with diverse stakeholders to preserve large connected landscapes.

**Naomi Blaushild** (PhD22) was named a 2023 Community for Advancing Discovery Research in Education Fellow. She will join a group of education researchers focusing on STEM education, educational equity, and social justice.

**Lucas Davison** (BS22) advanced to the quarterfinals of the heavyweight class of the NCAA Wrestling Championships in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**Melody Pabón** (MSLOC22) is a human resources consultant supporting corporate functions at Microsoft. While at Northwestern, she earned an equity and inclusion certificate along with her master's degree. Her capstone research explored the impact of mentorship on the career advancement of women of color.

**Carlotta Esposito** (MSSEP23), a member of the inaugural cohort of the world's first dual-degree master's in applied economics and social and economic policy program, is a knowledge management fellow at the Great Lakes Protection Fund.



Please send all news updates and address changes to [sespalums@northwestern.edu](mailto:sespalums@northwestern.edu).

Or share your update and tag us with #SESPLove on Facebook (SESPNU), Twitter (@sesp\_nu), or Instagram (@sesp\_nu). For more class notes, visit [sesp.northwestern.edu](http://sesp.northwestern.edu).



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## WHO LET THE DOGS IN?

Roz, a 150-pound English mastiff, was one of three Alliance of Therapy Dogs special guests that visited Annenberg Hall to help students de-stress at the end of winter quarter.