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SESP

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Meeting the Moment

Educational innovators like Northwestern's Nichole Pinkard know that learning can and should happen everywhere—in school, out of school, and online. Amid a pandemic, the imperative has never been more urgent.

Northwestern
SCHOOL OF **EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY**

Dean
David Figlio

Senior Associate Dean
Coleen T. Coleman (MS91)

Associate Dean
Kavita Kapadia Matsko (MS97), Teacher Education

Assistant Deans
Jeanne M. Hughes, Research
Susan Olson, Student Affairs
Amy Pratt, Community Education Partnerships

Managing Editor
Julie Deardorff
julie.deardorff@northwestern.edu

Publication Design, Editing, and Production
Office of Global Marketing and Communications

Illustration
Henry McGill

*Photography**
BlackCAT/Getty Images, Victoria Chukarov, Shane Collins, Steve Drey, Evanston Township High School District 202, Movement Law Lab, Stephanie Nikolas, Northwestern Athletics, Rawpixelimages/Dreamstime, Earl Richardson, Valentin Torres

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sespalums@northwestern.edu
847-467-3147

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**All photos, except on page 1, were taken prior to the pandemic.*

ON THE COVER

An expert on learning ecosystems, associate professor of learning sciences Nichole Pinkard (PhD98) developed a digital infrastructure that helps children and families find educational programs and activities online and across their communities.

DEAR FRIENDS,

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched us all—but its health and economic burdens have not been borne equally. Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian people have been hit especially hard, exacerbating inequities that these communities have endured for generations.

Still, my message to you is one of hope and opportunity. From research and course instruction to our social mission, SESP has been rethinking and revamping our approach to meet the moment head-on.

Our school is fortunate to support research areas that focus on human development and learning modalities in an era of ubiquitous computing. Thus, we've been able to tap into vast in-house expertise on teaching both with and without technology, inside as well as outside of school spaces. When COVID-19 sent us home, we staffed every remote class with an IT professional. We Zoomed in ways that spawned new pedagogies, more equitable classrooms, and better discussions.

When their research agendas were upended, our faculty nimbly adapted methods and protocols and launched new studies. It hasn't been easy, but by breaking from the constructs of time and place, we found surprising gains—such as working with 1,000 (instead of 100) study participants at once.

Our greatest challenges and opportunities emerge as we consider our social mission. I have long believed that universities should be doing things *with* communities more than *for* them, and certainly never *to* them—and more so when engaging with communities of color, whose expertise and agency are often ignored. In 2017 we started the Office of Community Education Partnerships (OCEP) with this in mind. When we work with others, the result is not only impactful service but also stronger research and teaching.

For instance, not long after the pandemic shuttered schools, Nichole Pinkard, faculty director for OCEP, debuted STEAMville—an online platform that enables deeply mutualistic and enriching STEM and arts programming—to reach any and all children but especially those in underresourced communities (see story starting on page 6).

The OCEP-facilitated work of Pinkard and others is just the start. The literacies SESP holds dear have prepared our students to be especially successful at this time, and SESP graduates continue making a positive difference in our organizations, our communities, and our world.

Alumni often tell me, "I'd love to be able to engage with current students." Now you can. As of 2019–20, about 40 percent of our undergraduate courses are new—more timely, relevant, and responsive—thanks to a curriculum overhaul; this is creating opportunities for guest teachers and lecturers to share their experiences with our students.

Also revamped is the practicum, so that our students now have access to many more of the real-world settings in which SESP alumni are succeeding.

While I do not know all the ways our graduates will go on to change lives for the better, I'm certain they will. As students, faculty, staff, and alumni—the entire SESP family of change agents—we are more galvanized than ever to meet the challenges of today to create a better tomorrow.

David Figlio
Orrington Lunt Professor and Dean

Above: Dean David Figlio (left) and Evanston Township High School superintendent Eric Witherspoon receive a shipment of 50,000 masks donated by SESP advisory board member Qiyong Chen.

Thank You, Jan Schmidt!

When **Jan Schmidt** recently retired from the Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, the thank-you cards poured in. As one of SESP's longest-serving and most beloved practicum supervisors, Schmidt was a mentor, leader, teacher, and friend to dozens of Northwestern students.

A clinical educator for more than three decades, Schmidt welcomed interns to work in the hospital's psychiatric department, which cares for children with emotional and behavioral disorders, learning differences, and other challenges. Well known for her positivity and compassion, Schmidt taught students how to confidently navigate an often stressful clinical setting.

"They're all trying to figure out what they want to do. I took enough time to say, 'Hey, what do you *really* want to do?'" Schmidt says. "I tried to foster an environment that would allow them to explore, practice, question, and learn not only about the work but about themselves."

Jan Schmidt (right) with Hannah Davison

A native Californian who made her career in Chicago after attending Mundelein College and Northeastern Illinois University, Schmidt began working with Northwestern students in the mid-1990s. Over the years, Lurie Children's has hired more than 20 students from the internship program, including **Hannah Davison** (BS19), a professional soccer player for the Chicago Red Stars who works at the hospital in the off-season.

Davison, now a part-time milieu therapist on the unit, hadn't planned on pursuing a career in child psychiatry. But experiencing Schmidt's philosophy in action opened her eyes to a "new side of medicine and the importance of kindness," she says.

The 63-year-old Schmidt, an avid water-skier, basketball player, and musician, lived on a couple acres with her dogs near Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, and would commute to the city. Just before the pandemic hit, she left the Midwest to rejoin her family in California and help care for her 89-year-old mother.

"Not a day goes by that I don't think of someone or miss something from my work at Lurie Children's," Schmidt says. "We had good camaraderie, great professional rapport, and a friendly, caring environment. But it was time to return home."

Pandemic doesn' t Hinder the Nurturing of Young Talent, Inventive Teaching

A leader in distance learning for more than 30 years, SESP's Center for Talent Development expanded its online curriculum in response to the pandemic, helping both teachers and academically talented pre-K through high school students discover surprising benefits inside a virtual classroom.

For CTD instructor Nishat Ali, a fourth-grade teacher at Chicago's Ogden International School, the experience helped make her a stronger, more reflective educator.

"What's brilliant and different about CTD's specialized programs is that they're so focused," says Ali, who taught CTD's Math, Puzzles, and Games class and led its new Global Leadership Intensive, a weeklong course for grades four through six focusing on recycling, climate change, and other global issues.

During the regular academic year, students spend only limited time each day on a range of subjects; in contrast, Ali says, "CTD teachers and students spend hours exploring a single topic from many angles."

CTD's online classes during the pandemic provide self-directed learning opportunities and help students build communication skills, she says. Students make live presentations at the end of the class, and prerecorded presentations filmed at home often involve the whole family.

"The need to go online actually ended up being incredible. I felt I became much more intentional as a teacher," she says, "and the kids were having fun."

The Global Leadership Intensive was especially well received because it gives students the chance to use their voices and develop confidence. As Ali says, "It builds their self-esteem and tells them that one person can make a difference." —*Ross Middleton*

MSLOC Students Partner with Peking University

The Master's in Learning and Organizational Change (MSLOC) program received a $3,000 international classroom partnering grant to deepen the global experience for Northwestern students.

The award, from the Office of the Vice President for International Relations and the Buffett Institute for Global Affairs, allowed MSLOC faculty to collaborate with faculty at Peking University, a partner institution of Northwestern, to enhance the course Leading Global Change.

"The call for leaders with the perspectives and capabilities to address global challenges has never been stronger," says MSLOC associate director **Diane Knoepke**, who assisted with the cross-school partnership.

Leading Global Change explores how to design and deploy organizational change plans in contexts that involve people and teams of diverse backgrounds and that straddle international boundaries. Through discovery interviews and other data-gathering components of the course, MSLOC students connected with executive MBA students at Peking University's Guanghua Management School.

"Our students conducted country-level cultural analyses, participated in cross-cultural virtual collaborations, and delved into global case studies," says **Lina Deng**, co-instructor for the course. "These learning activities draw out the teamwork challenges and tensions typically experienced among people from Western and Eastern cultures."

Toward the end of the course, students created hypothetical but viable plans for change in a multinational organization. After watching the Netflix documentary *American Factory*, they used case materials to develop a global change plan for the Ohio-based, Chinese-owned manufacturer featured in the film, Fuyao Glass America.

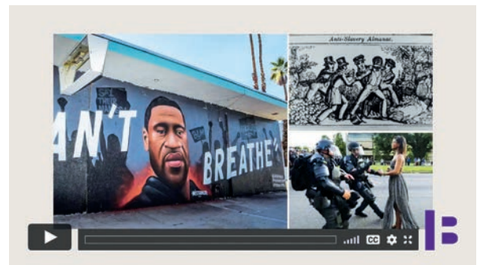
Jeff Liu, the automotive glass company's president and CEO, attended the final class presentations, offering feedback on and high praise for the students' work. "All the teams did a fantastic job," he said during the class. "We need young, talented people like this."

Student Films Explore Race, Power, Technology

Three documentary films by high school students examining the ethical and social impact of police surveillance technologies premiered last spring in an online event organized by SESP and the Block Museum of Art.

The student filmmakers participated in the Young People's Race, Power, and Technology project, an after-school STEM program directed and codesigned by assistant professor of learning sciences **Sepehr Vakil** and supported by Vakil's National Science Foundation Early CAREER Award.

The program was developed in partnership with Evanston Township High School, Family Matters, Endangered Peace, and the Lucy Parsons Lab and involved Northwestern undergraduates as well as the high schoolers and community members. Raphael Nash, an independent producer and director and adjunct faculty member at DePaul University, and SESP learning sciences doctoral student **Jessica Marshall** were among the program's other key contributors.



The student films examined aspects of surveillance technology: facial-recognition systems, gang databases in Chicago and Evanston, and the use of social media by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The students' efforts demonstrated a key point of Vakil's work designing STEM education programs—that young people have strong political identities or, as Vakil says, "the part of themselves that deals with issues of right and wrong and equality and social justice."


Emma Adam


Lindsay Chase-Lansdale


Mesmin Destin


Kirabo Jackson


Jen Munson


Julissa Muñiz


Yang Qu

IN BRIEF

Emma Adam, the Edwina S. Tarry Professor of Human Development and Social Policy, was selected as a fellow of the Association for Psychological Science for her outstanding research, teaching, and service contributions to the science of psychology. She was also named president-elect of the International Society of Psychoneuroendocrinology.

Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, the Frances Willard Professor of Human Development and Social Policy, returned full time to the SESP faculty after stepping down as Northwestern's first vice provost for academics.

Professor **Cynthia Coburn** won Northwestern's Ver Steeg Distinguished Research Fellowship for her work on improving relationships between education researchers and schools.

Professor **Mesmin Destin** won the Outstanding Early Career Award from the International Society for Self and Identity.

Learning and organizational change faculty member **Mindy Douthit** became SESP's practicum director, succeeding **Dan Lewis**.

Kirabo Jackson, the Abraham Harris Professor of Education and Social Policy, and professor **Cynthia Coburn** were among 15 US scholars who joined the prestigious National Academy of Education last year. Northwestern was the only institution to have two inductees this year, and SESP now has 12 NAEd members overall. Jackson also received the 2020 David N. Kershaw Award from the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management.

Professor emerita **Carol Lee** was named president-elect of the National Academy of Education. *Handbook of the Cultural Foundations of Learning* (2020), coauthored by Lee, includes work by SESP faculty members **Megan Bang**, **Reed Stevens**, **Sepehr Vakil**, and **Shirin Vossoughi**.

The Strange Case of Donald J. Trump: A Psychological Reckoning, the latest book by SESP psychology professor **Dan McAdams**, was released last March.

National Academy of Education/Spencer fellowships were awarded to assistant professor **Jen Munson** and graduate students **Cora Wigger** and **Julissa Muñiz**.

Human development and social policy faculty member **Yang Qu** received a National Science Foundation Early CAREER Award and was named a 2020 Rising Star by the Association for Psychological Sciences.

Learning sciences faculty member **Shirin Vossoughi** won the 2020 Ver Steeg Graduate Faculty Award.

From Rural Ireland to the Pinnacle of Academe

Professor **James Spillane** was one of eight Northwestern faculty members elected to the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2020. He joins SESP's other AAAS members: **Larry Hedges**, the Board of Trustees Professor of Statistics; **Carol Lee**, professor emerita of learning sciences and education; and **Doug Medin**, professor emeritus of education and psychology.

Spillane, the Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Professor in Learning and Organizational Change, is one of the world's top thinkers on school leadership issues, change within organizations, and policy implementation at the state, school, and classroom levels. Known for his collaborative work and ability to bridge disciplines, he studies how leaders build education systems and make decisions.

The oldest of six children, Spillane grew up on a 21-acre dairy farm near Bantry in West Cork, Ireland. He first arrived in the US as an exchange student at California State University, Chico, where he earned a master's degree.

In 2013 he was awarded Northwestern's Dorothy Ann and Clarence L. Ver Steeg Distinguished Research Fellowship. That same year, he was elected to the National Academy of Education.

A gifted conversationalist, Spillane brings a passion and urgency to his work that inspires junior colleagues, says Rebecca Lowenhaupt, associate professor of educational leadership at Boston College, who coauthored *Navigating the Principalship: Key Insights for New and Aspiring School Leaders* (2019) with Spillane and was a postdoctoral fellow at SESP.

"As we reimagine schooling in the context of the COVID-19 disruption, the skills of principals are particularly relevant," she says.

Work on Equity and Excellence Expands

The Northwestern-Evanston Education Research Alliance (NEERA) received a $650,000 Institutional Challenge Grant to support new research projects related to racial and economic equality and expand collaborative partnerships between the University and Evanston schools.

Along with helping researchers launch additional projects, the grant funds new NEERA research fellows and brings informal, out-of-school learning partners into the alliance.

The William T. Grant Foundation, Spencer Foundation, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation have pooled resources to fund the grant in an effort to address critical social issues.

The grant was awarded to SESP dean **David Figlio**, a principal investigator with NEERA and the Orrington Lunt Professor of Education and Social Policy; Eric Witherspoon, superintendent of Evanston Township High School District 202; and Devon Horton, superintendent of Evanston/Skokie School District 65. The grant will support new endeavors by SESP faculty members **Megan Bang**, **Mesmin Destin**, and **Simone Ispa-Landa**, among others.

While Evanston school districts are among the highest-achieving in the nation, they also have some of the largest racial disparities in academic achievement. The initial grant-enabled projects will help teachers support developing their students' identities and smooth transitions from middle to high school.

In addition, the projects' research findings will be used to help design and assess the professional development materials that teachers use to improve how they support students.

SESP and its alumni have received half of all the Institutional Challenge Grants awarded to date. Previous recipients include **Rachel Dunifon** (PhD99), the Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean of the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University, and **Mimi Engel** (PhD08), associate professor in the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education's Research and Evaluation Methodology program.

First-of-Its-Kind Dual Master's Program to Debut in 2021

Leaders and leaders-to-be from both sides of the Pacific will learn how to forge deep and mutualistic partnerships through an innovative applied economics and social policy dual master's program offered by SESP and The Chinese University of Hong Kong's Department of Economics.

The rigorous 17-month program is the first to address important policy questions through a transpacific lens, says SESP dean David Figlio. Students will learn technical and practical skills to evaluate policies and programs in Chinese and US contexts.

"We're building a new generation of decision-makers who will feel confident and comfortable in multiple contexts, which will lead to better organizations, better policies, and better lives," Figlio says.

The program bridges two cultures and education systems while tapping each institution's salient strengths. Northwestern and CUHK are top-tier universities with strong global reputations, multicultural student bodies, and international alumni networks. CUHK is known for theoretical and empirical work in economics, while SESP's emphasis on strong policy design and evaluation skills lends the program a practical component.

The program begins in August 2021 with classes taught by both CUHK and SESP faculty on CUHK's campus in Hong Kong's Sha Tin District. After 10 months in Hong Kong, students will come to Northwestern to complete seven months of additional coursework to earn their degrees.

Picking Up STEAM

Amid COVID-19 closures, a learning ecosystem flourished, powered by digital resources and community mentoring. Free programs and activities in science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math reached children in new ways, thanks to long-standing and resilient partnerships.

Last March, just days after health concerns related to COVID-19 closed all local schools, libraries, and parks, Northwestern University learning sciences professor Nichole Pinkard (PhD98) was flooded with calls and emails from panicked family and friends who asked, "How do we keep our kids engaged?"

Pinkard, a computer scientist and one of the world's leading experts on building informal educational ecosystems, sprang into action.

First, she created STEAMville.org, a digital platform featuring content developed by Northwestern researchers that helps children discover free activities and programs in science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM).

Then Pinkard helped launch a virtual version of STEAMbassadors, transforming what was to be an in-person mentorship program into one that could flourish online.

STEAMville and the STEAMbassadors program illustrate how SESP's Office of Community Education Partnerships (OCEP)—led by the dynamic duo of Pinkard and assistant dean Amy Pratt—nimbly pivoted to serve the community during a crisis (see page 10).

The OCEP team was able to rise to the occasion in large part due to the long-standing relationships with community partners that had been formed and cultivated decades before the global pandemic struck.

"STEAMville's content is the result of years of education research, relationship building, and working with schools and community organizations," Pinkard says. "Now we're collaborating in ways that would be difficult or impossible during normal times."

STEAMville, which is curated by a team of curriculum designers, former teachers, and software developers within SESP, offers everything from music mixing and robotics to 3D design. The content is organized into playlists, each with a series of activities and projects connected by a central theme or topic. It includes links to Northwestern-developed resources—such as TunePad, a tool that SESP learning and computer scientist Mike Horn devised for creating music with the Python programming language, and the STEM and design challenges of FUSE, an inventive learning infrastructure created by SESP learning scientist Reed Stevens—for use in middle schools and informal learning settings.

STEAMville also includes content from partners like Project Exploration, a Chicago-based youth program that features interactive online workshops and livestreamed sessions on science topics led by trained mentors.

"It's a connected learning community," Pinkard says. "We're trying to improve access to high-quality STEAM education for underserved children by linking families and educators with learning opportunities across schools, the neighborhood, and online."

Powered by mentoring

Programs on STEAMville are facilitated by college students who have participated in the STEAMbassadors program, the ambitious community mentoring initiative that OCEP was set to launch in person in March 2020, just prior to the start of the pandemic. The program prepares Black and Latinx young adults from two- and four-year colleges to engage elementary and middle school-aged youth in STEAM-related activities.

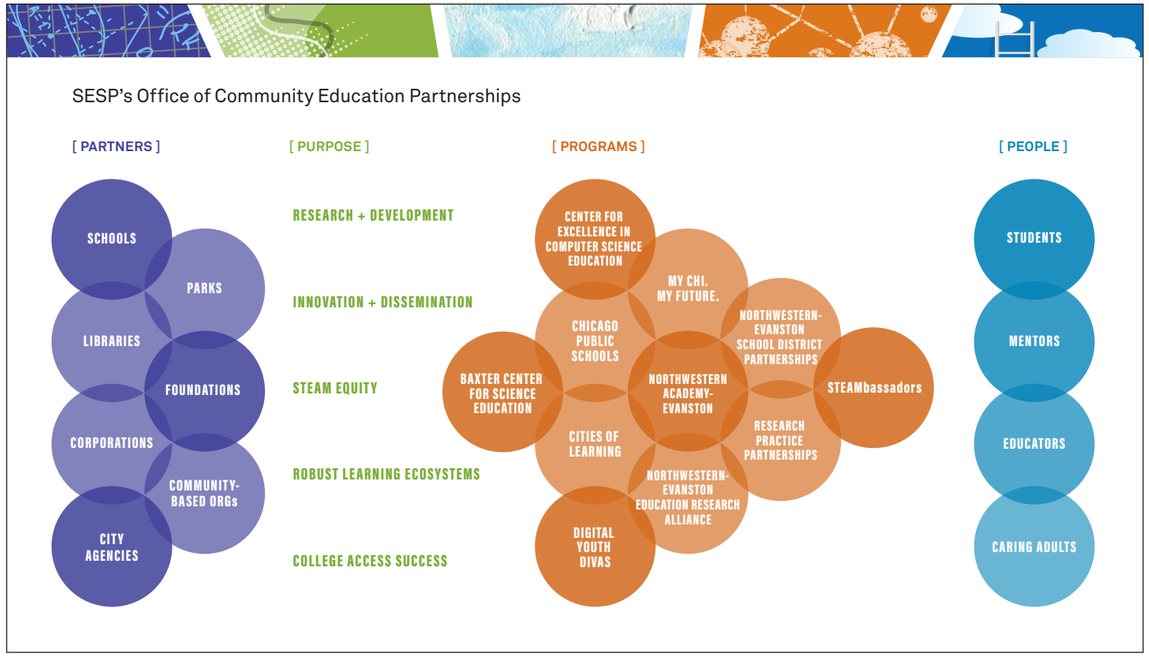
As the program's website announced last spring, "STEAMville will come alive with STEAMbassadors as DIY creators, makers, coders, instructors, mentors, community builders, (virtual) tour guides, assessors, and coaches focusing on the STEAM interests and superpowers of the youth of their communities."

From their training, the college students gain foundational computer science skills, including coding, digital making, and computational thinking. They're also exposed to a network of partners and an ecosystem of professional learning opportunities for added growth. Beyond technical skills, the STEAMbassadors program gives young adults the confidence and drive to give back to their own communities as role models.

"This is a movement," says Shawn Jackson, president of Harry S Truman College, part of the City Colleges of Chicago and a lead STEAMbassadors partner. "It's something that many of us have dreamed of but never seen actualized. Now we know the power of what we've created, and this gives us a great opportunity to build on."

Cultivating STEM identities

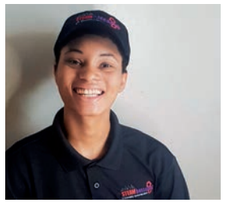
Research suggests that young people working as mentors develop a strong "STEM identity," the ability to think of themselves as science learners, science users, and even as contributors to science. This identity makes them more likely to continue to cultivate science literacy or persist on educational pathways toward science careers or STEM-related professions, says Kristen Perkins, partnership coordinator of the Northwestern University–Evanston Township High School partnership office.



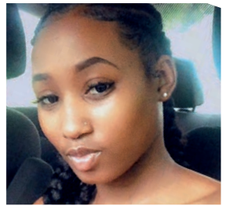


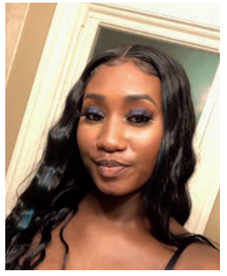













"I know how valuable mentors have been in my life. I joined STEAMbassadors because if I could become that valuable to someone else, it would be awesome," says DePaul University graduate student Marianella Osorio, who majored in user experience design as an undergraduate.

At the same time, "if a middle school girl is not participating in STEM activities like robotics or coding club, the data suggest that no matter how she does academically, she won't decide to pursue a STEM major in college," Pinkard says.

"I cried a little bit"

OCEP's STEAMbassadors program is part of Chicago Youth Service Corps, a signature component of Mayor Lori Lightfoot's My CHI. My Future. initiative, which, like STEAMville, connects young people to meaningful learning opportunities.

> "Someday I want to have my own agency where kids can get help from me and have someone to look up to."
>
> —STEAMbassador Sharif King

Through a partnership among the City of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools, DePaul, and Northwestern, Pinkard and her OCEP team also created the digital infrastructure for My CHI. My Future.

Several program participants say the experience clarified what they hope to do in the future. Sharif King, a social work major at Truman, calls his STEAMbassadorship his training wheels: "Someday I want to have my own agency where kids can get help from me and have someone to look up to," he says.

Perhaps the clearest sign that STEAMbassadors can start changing lives came during Zoom calls: nearly all the STEAMbassadors added "mentor" to their screen names, and soon the middle schoolers followed suit. When mentor Malik Madkins saw a screen full of children with "mentor" as a part of their names, he grew emotional.

"I never knew I could do that much to inspire the kids to change who they are, to be a role model," Madkins says. "I cried a little bit, but they didn't see the tears."

How OCEP Pivoted during the Pandemic

SESP's Office of Community Education Partnerships improves learning and well-being in Northwestern's home communities of Evanston and Chicago—and beyond. When schools were forced to go remote last spring, the OCEP team adapted and even expanded several key programs.

STEAMBASSADORS

MISSION: To help college students discover and strengthen their STEAM interests and share their passions with youth through mentorship and creative activities.

PANDEMIC PIVOT: All training for STEAMbassadors and all youth programming went virtual. STEAMville's playlists—including faculty projects like TunePad, FUSE, and Digital Divas—were critical resources. The program borrowed 170 laptops including 50 from Northwestern's Center for Talent Development and 20 from the Center for Excellence in Computer Science Education. The City Colleges of Chicago also loaned laptops. After the summer program ended, nearly 20 STEAMbassadors successfully found jobs in Evanston and Chicago to support STEAM learning.

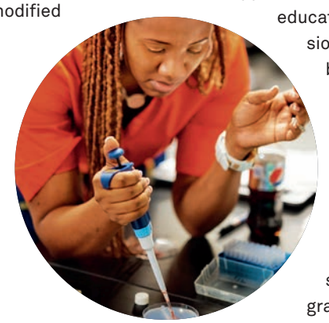
OCEP PARTNERS: City Colleges of Chicago, led by Truman College; DePaul University; Chicago Park District; Project Exploration; and dozens of community organizations and nonprofits including the Evanston Public Library, Chicago's Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, creative writing and tutoring center 826 Chi, and AeroStar Avion Institute, a nonprofit that promotes awareness of aviation career pathways.

BAXTER CENTER FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

bcse.northwestern.edu

MISSION: To provide direct support for science educators, including free classroom supplies and professional development programs.

PANDEMIC PIVOT: The Baxter Center created a weekly teacher virtual learning series to discuss research-based principles for online learning and the challenges of moving to remote classes. The Baxter Box Program, which provides teachers with free lab equipment, was modified for at-home use; the new Baxter Box@Home program allowed teachers to borrow a demo version of the Baxter Box, which includes pipettes, a gel box, a thermocycler, and an entire classroom set of lab reagents.



OCEP PARTNERS: Baxter International Foundation, Lindblom Math and Science Academy in Chicago's West Englewood neighborhood, and Round Lake High School in Chicago's northern suburbs.

DIGITAL YOUTH DIVAS

MISSION: To support a learning ecosystem of college-age mentors, resources for families, and community support by offering a research-based weekend STEAM program for girls beginning in fourth grade, with outcomes tracked through high school.

OCEP PARTNERS: Computing and technology professors Sheena Erete and Denise Nacu of DePaul University's College of Computing and Digital Media.

PANDEMIC PIVOT: Mentors used the program's existing online platform to deliver narrative stories that follow a virtual Digital Youth Divas group as it overcomes various challenges.

CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN COMPUTER SCIENCE EDUCATION

cecse.northwestern.edu

MISSION: CECSE addresses the inequities in coding and computer science learning opportunities, from programming education for youth to professional learning and skill building for teachers. With a focus on advanced computer science courses, the center provides free professional development for educators and supports computer science and coding programming with city and community partners across Chicago.

PANDEMIC PIVOT: CECSE supported One Summer Chicago's app-development program for youth as it transitioned to an all-virtual experience, providing training and resources for its 21 instructors and supporting its end-of-summer virtual showcase of the apps and documentary shorts created by participants. CECSE also helped facilitate the donation of nearly 7,000 Osmo hands-on learning games to children, educators, and community organizations in Evanston and Chicago.

OCEP PARTNERS: Lane Tech College Prep on Chicago's North Side and Chicago Public Schools.

Ahead of His Time

Uri Wilensky's Radical Vision Takes Root

Uri Wilensky realized more than 40 years ago that knowing how to frame problems with a computer is no less a core skill for school-aged kids than reading, 'riting, or 'rithmetic.

He envisioned teaching this approach to all students, not just those enrolled in computer science classes—a select few in American K–12 schools of the 1980s. Then, as he waited for the world to catch up to this unusual idea, he began to make it happen.

Today Wilensky, the Lorraine H. Morton Professor of Learning Sciences and Computer Science at SESP and the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science, is the father of a worldwide movement to harness the power of computer modeling and simulations and foster the mindset known as "computational thinking." The intellectually voracious son of two university professors has drawn on his life experiences, international upbringing, and thirst for usable knowledge to motivate, teach, and empower students from pre-K to graduate school—and beyond.

His programmable NetLogo modeling environment has helped hundreds of thousands of students, teachers, and researchers tackle complex ideas ranging from the formation of crystals and galaxies to the patterns of wealth distribution, inequality, and segregation in a city.

ACTIVE BEATS PASSIVE

Rather than memorize equations and apply formulas to solve problems, people using Wilensky's computer programs create, explore, and test simulations. An active experience, as opposed to a passive one, imparts context and meaning to learning, says Wilensky. "In order to solve societal problems—such as epidemics or traffic jams—we need to understand the world as thickly connected, as composed of networks, random events, and emergent phenomena," he says. The more abstract the idea, the more likely we are to deem it genius, he continues, but often "abstract ideas are hard to grasp because the knowledge is represented in an incomplete way."

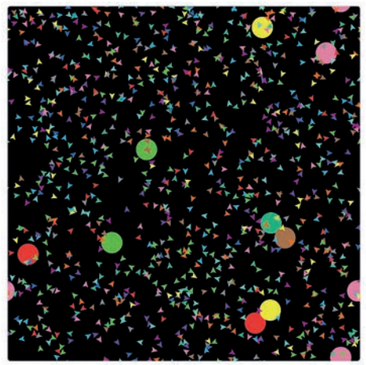
Computational representations—or the depiction of knowledge as computer code—help illustrate how complexity emerges when elements in a system interact, which in turn "reveals more of what's actually going on," Wilensky explains. To keep our ecology in balance, for example, we need to see how global transportation networks can allow a random plant or animal to arrive in a foreign ecosystem, invade it, and dominate it.

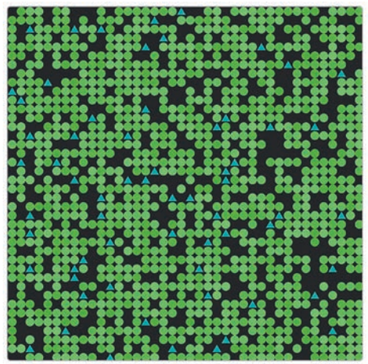
Wilensky also believes that education is most effective when lessons are based on students' interests and intuition. Or in other words, "We should have logic on tap, not on top"—to quote the late Seymour Papert, the renowned learning theorist, mathematician, and educational technology visionary who was Wilensky's doctoral adviser at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Wilensky and Papert's groundbreaking work involved studying the historical development of representations and technologies to see how introducing more powerful systems impacts learning and knowledge.

Prior to the 14th century, for example, the use of Roman numerals made it hard for most people to do basic math. As society gradually moved to the current Hindu-Arabic system, even young children could learn how to multiply, divide, and more.

Wilensky and Papert hypothesized that novel ways of representing ideas can fundamentally alter how people learn—what they can grasp and do—and who is capable of doing it. The duo coined a term, calling such transformations "restructurations" of knowledge. With the advent of powerful computation, they said, representing ideas as computer code could improve computational literacy in the same way that moving to the Hindu-Arabic system increased the power and accessibility of arithmetic.





Sample models from NetLogo's programmable modeling environment library

NETLOGO

NetLogo, designed by Wilensky in 1999, was the vehicle he and Papert needed to test their theory. NetLogo helps users understand and visualize complex and interconnected phenomena, from the spread of diseases like HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 to the ways species interact and compete in stable ecosystems.

The software enables users to control the actions of agents—infected people, predatory animals, and so forth—in a simulated setting. A student using NetLogo would tell the agents how to behave, then watch what happens as they interact.

"NetLogo is not just software and not just a programming language. It's an environment that changes the way you think," says Wilensky's colleague Mike Horn, associate professor of learning sciences and computer science.

Wilensky, who came to Northwestern in 2000, has long argued and demonstrated that when younger students learn conceptual science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) content through a computational modeling approach, they can grasp the material as well as college students do.

His research also suggests that it's easier to train teachers in computational thinking in their subject areas, such as chemistry or history, than to train and retain full-time computer science teachers, who are in short supply. This strategy of including many subject areas ensures that more students, including traditionally underrepresented groups, will have opportunities to learn computational thinking.

In the 1980s, however, the precursors of what would become NetLogo could only run on multimillion-dollar experimental research computers. People also doubted that children could learn difficult concepts with the help of computers in general. But after more than two decades of continuous development, Wilensky's free, open-source tool is now the world's most widely used agent-based modeling software.

URI WILENSKY BY THE NUMBERS

More than $40 million in grant money raised

Over 350 scholarly publications

Over 400 validated computational models

His book *An Introduction to Agent-Based Modeling*, coauthored with William Rand and first published in 2015, has been reprinted five times.

NetLogo is not just software and not just a programming language. It's an environment that changes the way you think.

"REALLY, REALLY GOOD TEACHERS"

Wilensky's path to academia was perhaps preordained, yet he at first resisted the calling.

His father, Mordecai, convinced of an impending Nazi invasion, left Poland in 1934 as a teenager and settled in the Palestine/Israel region (then under the British mandate); his family later perished in Nazi death camps in Poland. Mordecai eventually received the first PhD awarded by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and went on to teach history at Harvard, Oxford, and Haifa Universities and Hebrew College of Boston, among others.

Wilensky's mother, Sarah, the daughter of a rabbi, grew up in Tzfat, a small city in northern Israel where girls generally didn't attend school past eighth grade. She successfully lobbied her parents to let her enroll in a high school in Jerusalem, and she later attended Hebrew University. After meeting and marrying Mordecai, moving to Boston, and receiving a hard-won doctorate from Harvard, she eventually became a trailblazing philosophy professor and a long-serving department chair at Haifa University.

Wilensky spent most of his early childhood shuttling between Boston and Israel, where his parents settled when he was 14. They sent him to study at a yeshiva, hoping he might continue the family's rabbinic line. Although his days were devoted to prayer and Talmudic study, Wilensky loved literature, psychology, philosophy, mathematics, science, and science fiction. "I questioned a lot of my teachers' ideas—not to refute but to poke," he says. "That didn't go over very well."

After graduating from Brandeis University with degrees in math, philosophy, and theater, Wilensky questioned whether academia was his destiny. He began designing commercial computer-aided design systems, collaborating with high-flying architects such as I. M. Pei, which convinced him that humans and computers can develop partnerships—and that these alliances were the way forward for science, society, and learning.

But Wilensky never forgot his parents' dedication to their students. "Both of my parents were really, really good teachers, and I caught that bug," he recalls. He returned to school, earning his PhD at MIT, and never looked back.

LAUNCHING LABS AND CAREERS

In the 21 years since NetLogo's debut in K–12 classrooms, Wilensky has inspired scores of graduate students to pursue careers in learning sciences and computational modeling. He is the founding director of the Center for Connected Learning and Computer-Based Modeling, a research group that develops tools, learning environments, and curricula. He also founded and codirects Northwestern's joint computer science and learning sciences doctoral program—the first of its kind in the US—and was a cofounder of the Northwestern Institute on Complex Systems.

Working with Wilensky had such a strong impact on postdoctoral fellow Sharona Levy, she switched fields to study learning complexity.

"My first impression of Uri was of a whirlwind of creative engagement with the understanding of ideas," says Levy, now senior lecturer at the University of Haifa and director of its Systems Learning and Development Lab. "I was totally amazed by Uri's ability to take any topic and ask pertinent, careful questions to get at the underlying structures."

Inside Wilensky's lab were people who were "passionate about the quality and depth of learning theories, educational technologies, and artificial intelligence," says Paulo Blikstein (PhD09), a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College.

"We cared about student empowerment, about building knowledge by actively constructing things in the world," Blikstein says. "Uri was adamant on those principles. We cared about public education and social justice. It wasn't just research for its own sake. It was also part of a larger idea of making schools more equitable and less oppressive."

Beyond the work, however, Wilensky "creates a social environment that grows people to unexpected heights and results in people becoming fast and true friends," Levy adds. "Uri's unbound love of life, his always searching for—and finding—wonderful ways to experience the world, are a constant inspiration for me."

BY LISA STEIN

NetLogo BY THE NUMBERS

Millions of users worldwide

Over a million student users

Thousands of scientific research users

Over 2,000 scientific articles on studies using NetLogo across all disciplines

Teachers Learn How to Add Computational Thinking to Their Classes

Longtime Chicago Public Schools special education and biology teacher Sue Juhl has a self-described "unhealthy fear of computers and any kind of programming."

But after just four weeks working with Northwestern learning and computer scientists and curriculum developers, Juhl unveiled a timely and relevant new class that combines computer models, data, and algorithms with social-emotional learning to help students recognize and mitigate the risk of COVID-19.

Juhl was among the more than 70 educators who have learned how to incorporate newly acquired computational tools and skills into their curricula through Northwestern's Computational Thinking in STEM program (ct-stem.northwestern.edu).

The free, four-week professional development summer workshop brings teachers together with the CT-STEM team to brainstorm ideas and cocreate curricula that teachers can use in the coming school year.

Even after the official training ends, the Northwestern team supports teachers in the classroom and online. The codesigned curricula are then reviewed by instruction design experts and made available for public use on the CT-STEM website.

Led by SESP professors Uri Wilensky and Michael Horn, the CT-STEM program builds on a decade of work with high school science teachers. Wilensky and Horn also codirect the world's first joint PhD program in computer science and learning sciences.

"The partnership is truly 50-50, with the Northwestern team using computational tools to help teachers make what and how they teach more powerful and engaging," Wilensky says.

"Every scientific discipline—biology, chemistry, physics—heavily uses computational methods and tools," says Horn. "Computer coding is how scientists deal with large and small amounts of data. We're trying to bring high school science in line with real science and bring it alive."

Students use Wilensky's NetLogo computational modeling environments and Horn and Wilensky's NetTango blocks-based interface to explore an array of questions, including how diseases spread, how lines move at the grocery store, and how quickly forest fires burn.

Juhl and one of her codesign partners modified a NetLogo model to create a COVID-19 pandemic simulation (right) that lets students control the number of people infected who remain symptom-free. Modeling shows how the virus spreads when parameters regarding infectiousness and behavior are changed.

Juhl's curriculum, designed for special education and English-language learners, includes seven lessons that can be used for students in grades six through ten.

"COVID-19 is more than just a scientific phenomenon," Juhl says. "It is also a social, financial, and emotional one. So we built this into the model to personalize it and help kids discuss it."

Salt & Light: A Healing Coalition

Izabel Olson (PhD14) was teaching a women's yoga class at Chicago's Cook County Jail when she learned that many of her students were survivors of sex trafficking.

How was it, she wondered, that she hadn't gone down the same path, given that her own early life paralleled those of some of the incarcerated women?

That question became the catalyst for the nonprofit Salt & Light Coalition (saltandlightcoalition.com), a program Olson founded to "heal, educate, and empower" survivors of human trafficking. Drawing on both her personal experience and the learning sciences doctorate she earned at SESP, Olson designed a holistic yearlong curriculum around health and wellness, spirituality, job training, and entrepreneurship.

"My own early life was a struggle: I experienced homelessness. My father was in jail. I was a single mom by 18," Olson says. "I realized why I had not been trafficked: education, community, yoga, and faith. I recognized that if Salt & Light could bring those protective factors to women, we could help them heal."

Addressing trauma and vulnerability

Although the underground nature of trafficking makes exact figures hard to obtain, evidence suggests that at least 16,000 women and girls in Chicago are involved in the commercial sex trade each year, according to the Illinois Department of Human Services.

Olson's all-volunteer Salt & Light Coalition, which takes its name from a Bible verse, began in 2017 in Chicago with a cohort of five women. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was accepting 40 women a year and preparing them for careers in the wellness sector. Participants received a Chicago transit card and a stipend to help them avoid the leading causes of recidivism: financial pressures and lack of job training.

"Poverty, immigration status, and previous abuse or assault are key risk factors," says SESP assistant professor of human development and social policy Tabitha Bonilla, who studies public understanding of human trafficking and what efforts to fight trafficking look like in communities. "By addressing trauma and basic life needs, Olson is chipping away at what made these women susceptible in the first place."

"By addressing trauma and basic life needs, [Olson] is chipping away at what made these women susceptible to this in the first place." —Tabitha Bonilla

Under nonpandemic circumstances, the women of Salt & Light gather twice a week in a cozy two-room space in Chicago that formerly housed a yoga studio. The program's first six months include trauma-sensitive yoga, reflection, and meditation to help the women reconnect with their bodies and reduce anxiety and stress. They also learn about the crucial roles of nutrition and exercise in both physical and mental health.

Yoga changed how Taylor Holm viewed her body. "I didn't see it as a temple, or anything important," says Holm, 23, who completed the program in 2018 and now teaches yoga. "My body was something to be used, a tool to get something I wanted. Through yoga, I started becoming aware of how every part of my body felt. Certain positions brought up emotions and trauma, but this helped me start to heal."

The program's second six-month phase emphasizes education and job training. Women work with mentors and start yoga teacher training—not necessarily to prepare them to teach yoga but to rebuild their ability to communicate. About 20 percent of the women do go on to teach yoga, Olson says.

"Women who are trafficked are often told not to speak," Olson says. "When they come into the program, they learn to be communicative through yoga."

The women also practice key workplace skills like communication, leadership, and empathy and start thinking about longer-term goals such as getting a degree or starting a business. Personal stylists and life coaches help them gain confidence to reenter the work force. In a role-playing exercise, volunteers act like employers and listen to mock elevator speeches.

During the program's final month, women entrepreneurs give presentations on how to create a business, and the women in the program compete in a *Shark Tank*–like competition. "The goal isn't to launch a company or get an MBA," Olson says. "Rather, it's to stress the point that something is possible if they dream."

It's a fact:

Sex or sex and labor trafficking accounted for nearly 80 percent of the Illinois trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2019.

A nimble transition

Olson's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the statewide shelter-in-place orders was swift, multilayered, and a testament to the strength of her partnerships and her stable of volunteers.

To maintain community and stability, she transitioned Salt & Light's programs to all-virtual or hybrid formats; a church partner donated tablets to help ensure that participants could have online access.

Each woman attended a weekly teletherapy session and received frequent check-in phone calls from Salt & Light staffers. Olson's partners, including a restaurant and another church community, both based in Chicago, helped deliver groceries and restaurant-quality meals twice a week—along with flower arrangements on Mother's Day.

In the spring Olson developed Pass the Salt, a series of webinars in the form of dinner conversations on various facets of the human-trafficking problem. The series, which included powerful personal testimonies from women in the program, also helped families learn how to recognize signs of trauma and discussed the role of faith in moving forward.

There were, of course, serious challenges to transitioning the program to a

StreetWise Magazine named Izabel Olson one of its 20 most inspiring Chicagoans in 2020. In 2017 she received the Illinois Secretary of State's Latina Humanitarian Achievement Award.

hybrid model, where half of the participants are on site with masks and the other half take part via Zoom. "We've had issues with the offline-versus-online dynamic, but we're trying different equipment to see if we can find the right balance," Olson says.

Overall, the online component has worked better than she expected. "The phone check-ins may have made the difference," she says. "The structure helped the women get through the quarantine."

The switch to online delivery was also a "great opportunity to understand the impact of a different medium on our outcomes and attrition rates." Olson says. An online module that could expand her healing model to reach women across the country is in the works.

From Rio to Evanston

As a teenager in Brazil, where most of her extended family still lives, Olson found herself in an abusive relationship. By 18, she was alone and pregnant with her son, Gabriel. It was a hard road, she says, but one that prepared her for what she is doing now.

She credits her mother's unflagging belief in education—and a strong conviction that her daughter could accomplish whatever she set her mind to—with helping turn her life around. "I had no choice but to believe I could succeed, because she was so passionate in believing I could do anything," Olson says. "Because of her, fear was never part of my psychology."

Before starting her SESP PhD program in 2009, Olson earned bachelor's and master's degrees in linguistics and teaching by attending night school in Rio de Janeiro. She spent her days working as a teacher in wealthier parts of the city and volunteered after work in the *favelas*, the poorer areas on the outskirts of town.

Her learning sciences dissertation, which won an American Education Research Association award for best student paper in 2013, examined the relationship between cognition and culture and looked at how favela dwellers' social experiences affect their thinking about complex situations.

Although Olson loved her graduate work, she wasn't feeling a natural flow to her life. "There's a sweet spot between working hard and finding the path of least resistance," she said in a Q&A on the website Seriously Badass Women. "I call that my rhythm of grace. If that energy is not there in my work, I stop and reassess."

Olson hit her stride once she began talking about launching a nonprofit. She had no experience, but "it was like I spoke it into being," she says. When she met Rosemary Grant Higgins, a retired Chicago criminal courts judge who had presided over commercial sexual exploitation cases for two decades, things began falling into place.

Higgins helped her set up partnerships and meet key people. Olson sat down and wrote the curriculum, drawing on her doctoral training and her experiences in the antitrafficking community. "I noticed gaps that needed to be filled if the cycle of trafficking was to be broken," she says.

The curriculum includes a research component, which Olson calls the program's backbone. The women complete surveys both when they arrive and when they leave. The exit interview allows the women to give feedback, enabling the program to better serve the next cohort.

Still, about half of the women drop out before finishing, Olson says. "Many of the women have experienced a level of brokenness that doesn't allow them to believe we are here to support them," she says. "Others have issues beyond our control: housing, childcare, several deaths in the family—you name it."

"Many of the women we work with have experienced a level of brokenness that doesn't allow them to believe that we are here to support them." —Izabel Olson

COALITION VOLUNTEER NATASHA VASAN

SESP undergraduate Natasha Vasan wrote Salt & Light's first successful grant application during her summer practicum, an experience that changed her life. She now hopes to study law "to fight for those whose voices are taken from them, who are born without a voice, or whose voices are inherently quieter or less likely to be heard," she says.

The women of Salt & Light taught Vasan that "the inescapable victimhood, mental and physical abuse, and subjectification of being trafficked not only made speaking up impossible, it caused them to believe that no one would listen," Vasan wrote in her application to law school. "I saw firsthand how oppression and subjectivity are agents that mute. It is not fair—or acceptable."

Although her practicum has ended, Vasan is still volunteering as a grant writer for Salt & Light. "It was a really good feeling to do something outside of school that made an impact," she says.

It's a fact:

94 percent of Salt & Light's women have histories of substance abuse, and 77 percent have had mental health issues.

It's a fact:

88 percent of Salt & Light graduates secure a job at the end of the program.

Moving toward the light

Even though she already has her PhD in learning sciences, Olson has returned to school to pursue a master's in counseling through Northwestern's Center for Applied Psychological and Family Studies.

Meanwhile, she wants Salt & Light's future direction to be set by the coalition's community. Two graduates, Holm and Patience Roberts, have worked as peer support specialists. Graduates also sit on the advisory board, and their input has helped shape the job-training curriculum.

"I'm more than just a support system. I hold them accountable," says Holm, who meets regularly with the women. "They see me a little bit different because I've been through what they've been through. I call and say, 'Did you get your driver's license yet?' If not, I'll pick them up or meet them. I'm there to help them start doing things."

Olson's data also suggest that the program is working, at least initially. In a recent poll of those who had graduated at least a year earlier, 80 percent were still part of the workforce a year following graduation.

"I work three or four jobs, but it feels so much better working hard for my money than doing something that's destroying me on the inside," says Holm, who wants to become a certified alcohol and drug counselor or a life coach. "I'm so grateful for my life now."

BY JULIE DEARDORFF


Jack Leese


Joey Cuden Miller

Heather Foster


Kristi Daeda


Saliha Nelson


Victor Lee


Hernando Sevilla-Garcia


Kathy Kelley Barger


Rich Elliott


Shazia Rafiullah Miller


Rebecca Komarek


Kimani Isaac


Rachel Dunifon


Michael Alperin


Darrin Thornton

Carrie (Heath) Phillips


Megan Joyce, Jake Hershman


Alyssa Spada

50s

Rita Mandel Lurie (BS53) says that when her granddaughter, Dana Lurie, graduates from SESP in June, she'll represent the third generation of Luries with Northwestern degrees. Rita's late husband was William Lurie (WCAS52, KSM54, L55), and their son Jay Lurie (WCAS84) is Dana's father.

John W. "Jack" Leese (BS57, MS58) was named the Illinois Wrestling Coaches and Officials Association's 2018 Person of the Year. He is a member of five halls of fame, including the Ken Kraft Midlands Hall of Fame, where he is the senior tournament coordinator. A Northwestern football and basketball season ticket holder for three decades, Leese is a member of NU Loyal and an honorary N Club member. Georgia, his wife of 65 years, isn't a Northwestern alum, but "she certainly acts like one!" Leese says.

60s

Kathy Kelley Barger's (BS65) book *How Guinness Found His Family* was launched at a Colorado Animal Rescue (CARE) event to benefit CARE and Colorado Mountain College. She is working on a Spanish translation and a children's play adapted from the book.

70s

Michael W. O'Hern (MS77) is retired and serving on a number of boards, including La Salle University's board of trustees. He is president emeritus of Christian Brothers Investment Services Inc.

80s

Rich Elliott (MSEd81) is the author of *Duck and Cover*, a collection of 11 short stories about kids growing up in the 1960s. His next book, *What Mad Pursuit: Short Stories about Runners*, is due out in April.

Darrin Thornton (BS89) was named interim associate dean for academic affairs and outreach at Penn State College of Arts and Architecture. Among his research interests are teacher preparation and professional development, learning in ensemble settings, and lifelong music engagement. Thornton is also a performing percussionist, conductor, and church musician.

90s

Sara Freed Shacter (MSEd90), a former teacher and an active member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, wrote *Just So Willow* (2019), the story of a polar bear who likes things just so—until she realizes it makes her miss out on all the fun.

Wendy Vergoz's (MSEd90) latest book of poetry, *The Unbinding*, chronicles a woman's survival of a 20-year marriage rooted in domestic violence.

Nadine Day (BS92) received USA Swimming's first-ever Women in Swimming Award. She is past president of US Masters Swimming.

Anne Marie Suarez-Davis (BS92) was elected to the Northwestern Alumni Association Board of Directors in September. She became vice president of US snacks marketing at Kellogg's in 2017.

Jobi Cates (BS93), executive director and founder of Restore Justice, was appointed to the Illinois Youth Budget Commission.

Joanna "Joey" Cuden Miller (BS95) is a licensed clinical social worker who has spent the past two decades providing acute crisis intervention and individual and couples counseling. Her book *Rebirth: The Journey of Pregnancy after a Loss* combines her clinical experience with narratives from 25 former patients, providing readers with a road map through bereavement.

Saliha Nelson (BS95) is working on her doctorate in education at the University of Miami, focusing on applied learning sciences. She is executive director of Urgent Inc.

Carlee Alm-LaBar (BS98) was appointed president and CEO of United Way of Acadiana following a second-place finish for mayor-president of Louisiana's Lafayette Parish. She was also named a Vanguard Fellow, which honors rising urban innovators working to make change in cities.

Shazia Rafiullah Miller (WCAS89, PhD98) joined independent social research organization NORC at the University of Chicago as senior vice president of education and child development in 2017.

Rachel Dunifon (PhD99) was appointed the Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean of the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University.

Betsey Frank (MS99) was named chief learning and development officer at law firm Greenberg Traurig.

Jesse Purewal (BS99) was appointed head of the high-tech industry sector at Qualtrics, an experience management company.

Sean Radford (BS99, MS16) was hired as executive vice president and chief human resource officer at HALO Branded Solutions.

00s

Carrie (Heath) Phillips (BS02, MSEd03) became the first senior director of school improvement for NWEA, a Portland, Oregon–based nonprofit that develops pre-K–12 assessments and professional learning offerings.

Heather Foster (BS03), a political strategist and expert on race and public policy issues, was among three alumni honored by the Northwestern University Black Alumni Association during its annual meeting. Foster, senior director of policy engagement and strategic partnerships at Lyft, also was recognized by *InStyle Magazine* as one of "50 Women Making the World a Better Place in 2021."

Christine Choi Moore (BS03) was appointed Manulife Investment Management's director of asset management for the Midwest region.

Victor Lee (PhD09), associate professor of learning sciences and technology design at Stanford University, began his term as president of the International Society of the Learning Sciences. He recently prepared a web-based visualization (see back cover) of Northwestern learning sciences PhD students and their dissertation committee chairs.

10s

Rebecca Komarek (MSHE10) received her PhD from the University of Colorado Boulder last May. Her dissertation was titled *Exploration and Assessment of Leadership Development in Engineering Students*. Komarek is assistant director of the Idea Forge at CU Boulder.

Michael Alperin (BS11) was appointed executive director of the Brookline (Massachusetts) Housing Authority.

Jonathan Ben-Isvy (MSEd11) is managing professional learning for Chicago Public Schools' Curriculum Equity Initiative.

Megan Joyce (BS14, MS16) and **Jake Hershman** (MS16) were married on May 19, 2019, in Wilmington, Delaware. They met on the first day of class in Andrea Bueschel's higher education policy course. They now reside in Philadelphia, where Jake is assistant director of strategic analytics at Temple University, and Megan is advanced programs coordinator at Thomas Jefferson University.

Casey Talbot (MSHE15), assistant director of student leadership development at the University of Chicago, received the university's Outstanding Newcomer Award.

Carraig Athy (BS16), a marketing operations manager at Kin Insurance, was named to Chicago Inno's 2019 "25 under 25" list.

Kristi Daeda (MSLOC19) was promoted to president at the Family Business Consulting Group.

Hernando Sevilla-Garcia (MSHE19), senior diversity relations manager at IES Abroad, received the Association of International Educators Region V Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in International Education Award.

20s

Kimani Isaac (BS20) was one of four students to receive an inaugural Jazzy Johnson Waw-jashk Student Award from Northwestern's Division of Student Affairs. The annual award recognizes the work of student activists.

Alyssa Spada (BS20) has started a master's program in counseling at Northwestern.

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Blogging about Better Masculinity

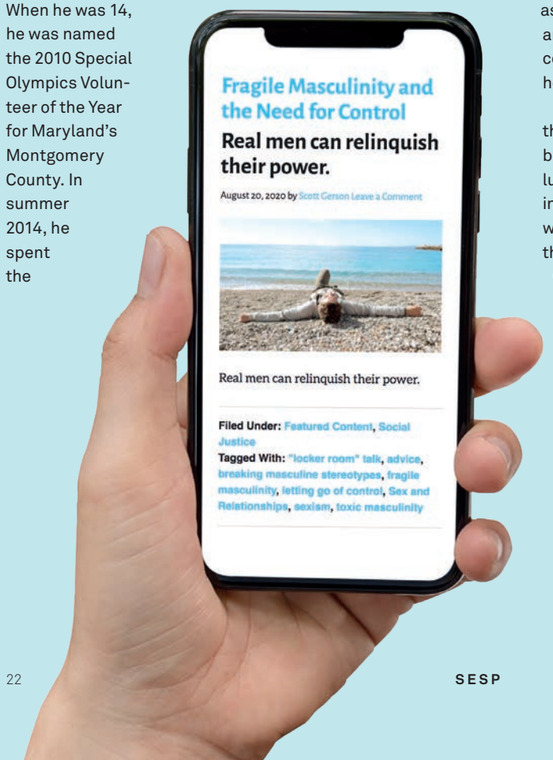
Scott Gerson (BS18) is on a mission to get men and boys talking—about masculinity, intimacy, and the importance of the "cuddle huddle."

Every week Gerson writes a short post on these topics and more for the Good Men Project, a blog designed to spark cultural conversations about manhood. Launched in 2009, the blog collects stories about the defining moments in men's lives.

Gerson, a global youth engagement specialist with the Special Olympics, began writing "The Scott Spot" in January 2020 and now has a regular column. His pieces cover everything from how to use male privilege for the benefit of others to why men need to hug each other.

Gerson says his personal experience with inclusivity helped him see the full spectrum of human abilities. As a 10-year-old, Gerson began volunteering for a Special Olympics Unified Sports tennis program that joined people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team.

By middle school, he was coaching Special Olympics teams. When he was 14, he was named the 2010 Special Olympics Volunteer of the Year for Maryland's Montgomery County. In summer 2014, he spent the months before he arrived at Northwestern as a director at Camp PALS, a sleepaway camp for teens with Down syndrome.



Until he reached college, Gerson didn't identify with having his own disability: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. At Northwestern, Gerson began to advocate for himself as a member of the disability community. He and **Carrie Ingerman** (BS19) cofounded the student group Beyond Compliance to push for "tolerance, inclusion, and radical acceptance" of people with disabilities.

At SESP, Gerson took courses in human development and psychological services, which he says increased his emotional awareness even more and helped him build empathy in the classroom. "The therapist skills that came from classes, as well as my friendships and relationships during college, were extremely helpful," he says.

His decision to write for the Good Men Project was born of a New Year's resolution. Instead of distancing himself from men who were doing or saying things he disagreed with, Gerson says he was resolved to engage with them.

"I don't just have the opportunity to do it, I have the responsibility to work with men and boys on their own masculinity and what we need to do better," he says.

"Accountability can feel like an attack. It's less alienating if you frame it as a call to action—a 'call in' instead of a callout—to modify and reframe behaviors and change perspectives."

So far, Gerson has created a simple guide to help men know whether chivalry is welcome. He also called for the recent body-acceptance movement to extend to men and boys. And he gently encourages readers who have male privilege to use it for good. "Take your extra credibility and use it to start conversations around misogyny and gender inequality," he says.

Northwestern alumna Lydia Rohde is a big fan. She says she shared the articles with her three brothers and dad because she feels they might hear this message better from another man. "Women have been saying some of these things consistently for a very long time, but sometimes the message just doesn't seem to get through," she says.

Read Gerson's column at goodmenproject.com/author/scott-gerson.

Letter-by-Letter Lessons in Silicon Valley Lingo

Loren Girimonte (MSLOC11) is always thinking of the next big idea. The one that occurred to her while watching the comedy series *Silicon Valley* spawned a side hustle that eventually landed her a book deal for *U Is for Unicorn: The ABCs of Silicon Valley*.

The witty alphabet book about the lingo of the Bay Area tech industry was a labor of love for Girimonte, who has a demanding day job in human resources, two children under of seven, and, until recently, exactly zero publishing world connections or know-how.

"I just had a good idea and lots of gusto," says Girimonte, who used LinkedIn to find editors and publishers to target with her pitch. And that pitch? It was written in 45 minutes while one of her children was napping.

"I want to show other working moms who feel stuck that you don't need connections, an agent, a huge social media following, or any publishing expertise to get an actual book deal," she says. "You can break through."

The book, which features illustrations by freelance designer Jasmine Wibbens, has a specific audience: employees at tech companies like Facebook and Google. Using disruptive marketing tactics before the COVID-19 pandemic hit—such as opening a pop-up shop on the Menlo Park campus of Facebook and touting the book as a baby shower gift or as swag for new hires—she received orders for 600 copies before the book's 2021 release.

Her publisher, Chronicle Books, reports that only about half of the preorders came from parents or parents-to-be; other buyers wanted the book to celebrate graduations, birthdays, and new jobs.

U Is for Unicorn isn't Girimonte's first book, however. As a SESP student in the Master's in Learning and Organizational Change program, she and her team wrote *Percival Perkins, the Particular and Picky Eater* for the class Discovering and Designing Innovation.

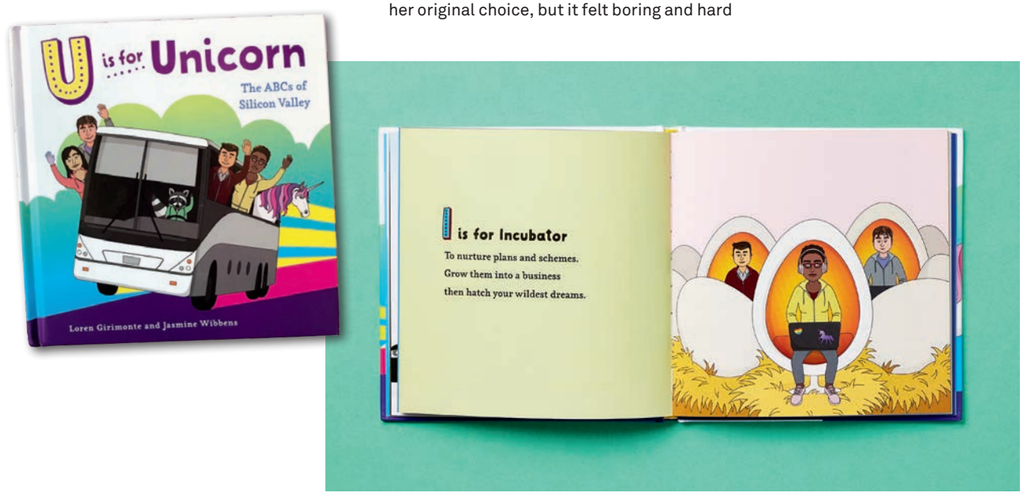
That book, designed to persuade kids to choose a green pepper over a Cheeto, was distributed free to schools and was primarily an exercise in using books to spread information. It put children's-book writing on Girimonte's radar.

An alphabet book seemed perfect for exploring Silicon Valley's unique lingo and language rituals, some of which are "ridiculous and bizarre but a real part of the culture," she says.

While the idea came in a flash, it took Girimonte a year to pick the perfect pairings for all 26 letters. *U* was easy: *unicorn*. *F* obviously had to be for *fail fast*, a philosophy that rules Silicon Valley. The letter *C* was originally for *cofounder* until her colleagues at Electronic Arts, the Redwood City, California–based video game company where she is a people practices lead, coaxed her to change it to *cryptocurrency.*

M almost made her give up. *Monetize* was her original choice, but it felt boring and hard to illustrate. Finally, she heard the word *moonshot* during a work meeting and scribbled it down. She wondered if the word was part of the cultural zeitgeist. When she kept hearing it around the office over the next few weeks, she knew she'd found her word.

"This project is my moonshot," she says. "And I am so glad I reached for the stars."



Why an All-American Pitcher Couldn't Throw to First Base

She was just 13 years old that day, and a good softball pitcher. When that late-inning ground ball bounced toward the mound, she fielded it handily, then overthrew first base. The batter just kept running, running all the way home.

"I basically lost the game for our team," she remembers even now, though the loss dates to the last century. "It hit me so hard. I let everyone down."

She would grow up to pitch for the 'Cats; to earn All-American honors twice and All Big Ten honors four times; to toss three no-hitters and one perfect game and to post 28 strikeouts in an 18-inning game against Minnesota; and to play softball professionally in the United States and Japan and win three gold medals with the USA National team.

But that moment of overthrowing first base had hit her so hard, never again would she field a ball and throw it overhand. **Eileen Canney** (BS07), you see, had the yips, a neurological condition that can make even the simplest of acts feel impossible to do.

Some 20 years later, Canney is married to Andrew Linnehan (J05), who works in Northwestern's undergraduate admissions office, and together they're raising two kids—a six-year-old daughter and a three-year-old son—in Lincolnwood, just outside Chicago.

Professionally, Canney is both a private pitching coach and a consultant to others afflicted with the yips—that condition that bedeviled her for so long. Yips sufferers, she explains, tend to be perfectionists, people-pleasers, and deep thinkers. "When they mess up once, or simply start fearing not living up to expectations, they can't stop thinking about it," she says.

That was certainly true in her case, and the solution was learning how to ask for help. Canney's teammates and coaches Kate and Carly Drohan, Tori Nyberg, and Amanda Rivera provided a safe space for her to be herself. She also was aided by **Darcy Sengewald** (BS08), who played third base and promised to field all the bunts that were dropped, and by Garland Cooper (SOC07), who, from her position at first base, "was going to catch anything I threw. And that's what I needed to hear," Canney says now.

In the classroom, where perfectionism also lurked, Canney recalls the ministrations of **Susan Olson**, SESP's assistant dean of student affairs and an adviser to students in the human development in context concentration. "She helped me find my own voice and passions," Canney recalls. Still, even after wins, Canney would "feel really alone."

In 2013, as an assistant women's softball coach at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Canney decided to bare her soul at a national coaches convention. She recounted her experiences with the yips and advised her peers on how they could help yips sufferers.

"They've got to understand it's a real thing," she says, that can manifest itself in myriad ways: a pitcher's inability to throw a strike, an outfielder's inability to hit the cutoff, an infielder's inability to make the easy toss to first base. (Once, back in 1999, New York Yankees second baseman Chuck Knoblauch had the yips so bad, he fielded a grounder and threw the ball into the stands.)

> That moment of overthrowing first base had hit her so hard, never again would she field a ball and throw it overhand.

Inevitably, she began receiving calls from other coaches and players who have the yips.

She talks to them about accepting themselves, about recognizing that their search for perfection is "not reality." She may give them mantras to repeat as they take the field and exercises to do that will trigger the brain into letting them perform.

"You are not alone," Canney always tells them. Then comes "the sigh," she says. "I feel this pressure being released over the phone. There's no describing it."

BY SKIP MYSLENSKI

Purvi Shah

Using Law to Create Social Change

Shah (BS02), who majored in social policy and political science, founded the Movement Law Lab to seed a new generation of lawyers who can tackle some of the nation's toughest justice challenges.

My parents were the first in their families to come to the US. As a first-generation American, I witnessed the injustice of America up close—in my home, school, and city. I grew up keenly aware of how opportunity is not meted out equally and how "making it" depends on your zip code, your skin color, where you were born and how well you speak English.

At Northwestern, the world opened up and I began to put words and theories to what I had seen as a young person. I had the great fortune of being a student of [sociologist] Aldon Morris and was deeply moved by the struggle for Black freedom and the civil rights movement. From the stories of Ella Baker, the Freedom Riders, and Fannie Lou Hamer, I learned that ordinary people doing extraordinary things is what has often changed the course of history.

My father planted the seed for law school when he jokingly told me, "You argue quite a bit, so maybe consider going into law." I did go on to study law, but my most powerful lessons came from being a community organizer working alongside low-wage workers, families of people in prison, and young people living on the margins. Organizing taught me that the people closest to problems often have the best ideas for solving them.

Starting out as a young attorney in Miami, I left my desk to go to taxi stands, restaurant kitchens, tenant meetings, and housing projects to have candid conversations with clients. I learned how to weave litigation, education, media, policy, and protest into coordinated campaigns and accomplished far more than I could've ever achieved alone in the courtroom.

We termed this approach "movement lawyering." Rather than simply winning cases, movement lawyers deploy law strategically to change culture, systems, and power. We see ourselves as long-term partners to grassroots leaders and broader movements for change.

Only 3 percent of America's 1.3 million lawyers work on issues of justice and poverty, despite overwhelming need. Most of the other 97 percent represent the interests of the powerful versus the powerless. The legal profession is in a crisis of leadership, culture, and values.

I teach other lawyers how to use our skills to create social change. Over the last decade, I've run summer academies for law students, taught at law schools, and held workshops across the world. These programs are creating a new army of lawyers to work collaboratively with social movements.

Movement Law Lab intentionally invests in lawyers who come from marginalized communities. They see their role as supporting movements for justice, and they are a part of the communities they work in. We see these lawyers as the true legal visionaries for the 21st century.

If you can't imagine it and you can't believe it, you will not be able to fight for it. You have to keep imagining that it is possible for our world to look different. You have to nurture that in this work.

My desire is to be in the fight for human dignity for the rest of my life. To have longevity in this work, you've got to build intimate spaces of love and resilience and you have to be concerned with the humans in your life—not just with humanity. You have a meal with your loved ones and show up for your elders.

AS TOLD TO
JULIE DEARDORFF

Northwestern
SCHOOL OF **EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY**

Walter Annenberg Hall
2120 Campus Drive
Evanston, IL 60208-2610

sespalums@northwestern.edu
sesp.northwestern.edu
facebook.com/sespnu
twitter.com/sesp_nu
instagram.com/sesp_nu

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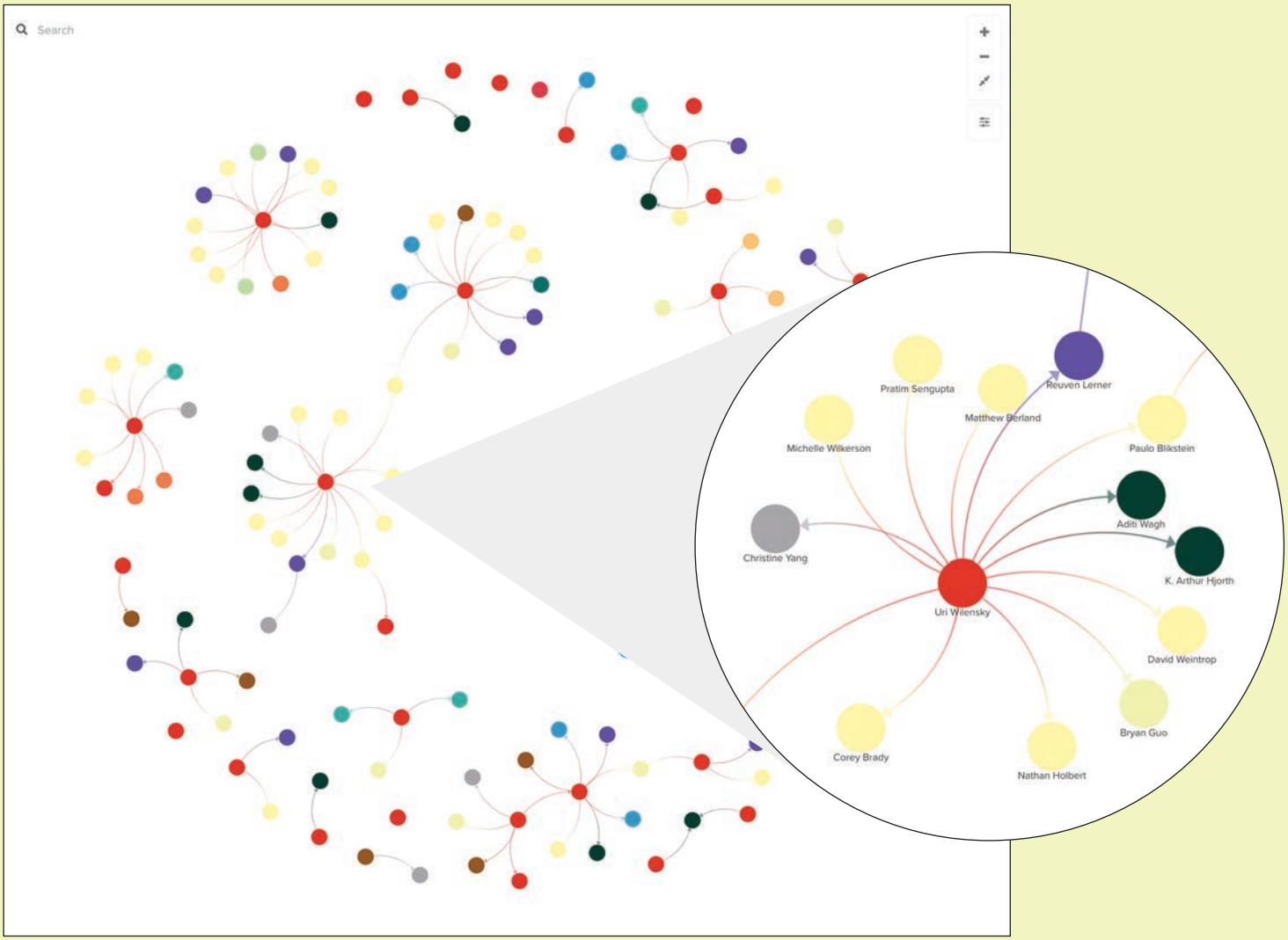

A MAP BUILT "ON A WHIM"

Victor Lee (PhD09) recently created an interactive map—"on a whim," he says—depicting interconnections among Northwestern learning sciences faculty members past and present and their PhD students. The professor at the center of the highlighted cluster above is **Uri Wilensky**, the subject of a feature story starting on page 11. To explore Lee's map, go to bit.ly/3iE0Fng.