WRITING: LIFE’S NECESSARY ART:
ALUMNI WRITERS RETURN TO LEAD U-HIGH’S FIRST DAY

GOOD CITIZENS, RICH LIVES: A Q&A
WITH UCHICAGO PROFESSOR MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

IN THE HALLS: LAB FACULTY AND STAFF GO TO THE (SHOW) DOGS

LAB NOTES: CLASS NOTES & ALUMNI NEWS
Dear Friends,

In an earlier stage of life, I wouldn’t have believed that a decade would go so quickly. Yet here we are, Y2K and all of us — authors, artists, and leaders — ready to embrace the new era. This time around, we are even more prepared to take on new challenges and adventures.

You have put so much time and effort into preparing for the new year. I am confident that your efforts will bring us even more success in the future. I wish you all the best with your new projects and goals.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
Form, function, fun

Inspired by the horizontal lines of Frank Lloyd Wright and the undulating curves of Antonio Gaudi, fourth-graders are becoming designer/architects themselves. Lower School art teacher Gina Alicea is leading the way, inspired by a professional development trip to Spain this past summer. Now in her fourth year at Lab, Ms. Alicea, a practicing artist, spent a month doing an artist’s residency outside Barcelona. She also visited museums and cultural sites to develop new curriculum ideas based on Gaudi’s architecture. “I’ve never seen it, and I teach an architecture unit every spring to the fourth grade,” she says.

Visiting Casa Batlló, a home that Gaudi remodeled with Jules Verne’s 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea in mind, Ms. Alicea had a revelation. “The whole thing is curvilinear, and there are seashell shapes; everything just spins and turns and it’s completely the opposite of [Wright’s] Robie House.”

“I took so many pictures that my camera died,” she laughs. “I’d never seen it, and I teach an architecture unit every spring to the fourth grade,” she says. “I’d never seen it, and I teach an architecture unit every spring to the fourth grade,” she says.

Last fall, Ms. Alicea’s fourth-graders created model chairs based on their studies of furniture designed by Gaudi, Wright, and other famous architects. “To spark students’ imaginations, Lab parent Richard Wright invited them to his Chicago auction house, which specializes in modern design.”

On the field trip, they learned about the form and function of chairs, held a mock auction, and examined originals by Frank Gehry and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. “They’re never going to see a chair the same way again,” says Ms. Alicea. And this spring, Ms. Alicea’s students will design and build their own chairs—a new unit devoted to furniture design. "The performance was a rare chance to hear Ms. Reid, described as "a remarkably versatile player," perform jazz standards. During Duke Ellington’s “In a Sentimental Mood,” Mr. Reich wrote, “the same long, luxuriant phrases that Reid...”

Students write text booklets for Tanzania

Students in Tanzania face many challenges: dodging lions on the playground, crossing rivers to get to school, and trying to learn without the aid of textbooks. Lab Middle School science teacher Debra Kogelman, in many Tanzanian schools, teachers must conduct lessons with nothing more than a blackboard and some chalk. So, last spring, Ms. Kogelman railed her two eighth-grade science classes to create earth-science booklets to distribute in Tanzanian schools.

The project was born of Ms. Kogelman’s work with Mwangaza Education for Partnership, an organization that fosters collaboration between secondary teachers in Tanzania and the United States and is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in both countries. After Ms. Kogelman heard about Mwangaza through her church in 2006, she volunteered on a three-year project to send surplus American textbooks to Tanzanian Lutheran schools. (Although Ms. Kogelman has never been to Tanzania, she is currently applying to Mwangaza’s program, through which U.S. teachers visit Tanzania for two weeks to train teachers.)

While working on the textbook project, Ms. Kogelman knew there simply weren’t enough textbooks for each student to have his or her own. She thought, “What if we made booklets in class that Tanzanian teachers could copy and give to their students?”

To kick off the project, Ms. Kogelman invited a Partnership board member to speak to her classes about life in Tanzania and the “insurmountable things that the students deal with to get an education.”

Inspired, the Lab students used Microsoft Word’s brochure template to make booklets based on their research into volcanoes, plate tectonics, and rivers. The booklets are intended for Tanzanian high schools, but since Tanzanians don’t learn English until the eighth grade—“their native language is Swahili—the vocabulary had to be relatively simple. Ms. Kogelman also encouraged students to include examples from Africa and lots of illuminating pictures. Ms. Kogelman is currently in the final stages of editing the booklets before sending them to Africa.

“Teachers in Tanzania have cried when they received a single piece of paper to teach from. So I can only imagine what the impact of this will be,” she says.

Ms. Alicea visited museums and cultural sites to develop new curriculum ideas based on Gaudi’s architecture.

Tribune heralds music teacher Tomeka Reid as “luminous”

In the September 10 issue of the Chicago Tribune, music critic Howard Reich gushed about Lower and Middle School music teacher Tomeka Reid, who performed with her trio at the Museum of Contemporary Art’s Tuesdays on the Terrace series. “Chicago has a knack for producing distinctive voices in jazz,” Mr. Reich wrote, “and one of the most promising belongs to cellist...”

The performance was a rare chance to hear Ms. Reid, described as “a remarkably versatile player,” perform pictures that Reid often lavishes on music of the South Side avant-garde emerged to seductive effect in a jazz classic. Better still, Reid wanted to time reinventing the famous theme, embellishing it, substituting key notes, crafting alternate melody lines.”

Mr. Reich’s only quibble was in some respects a compliment: “What happens to be a demure presence, declining to assert herself away from her cello,” he wrote. “A few spoken phrases would help listeners understand that they’re witnessing the emergence of a potentially major figure.”

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U-High to change class schedule for first time in nearly five decades

Next year, Lab will implement a new schedule in the High School. Developed by the faculty and approved by a majority vote, it will be the first significant change to the schedule in at least 46 years—as long as anyone on the faculty can remember.

The U-High faculty had already been discussing how to update the schedule when Matthew Horvat joined the High School as principal in 2006. Although the current U-High schedule has been in place for many years, the teachers agree it isn’t perfect. There are concerns that the amount of instructional time in most subjects—180 minutes a week per class—is less than what comparable independent schools provide, and teachers have long believed that their work in the classroom would be greatly enhanced by additional contact time.

Further, there’s no dedicated time for coming together as a community to accommodate an assembly a class period simply has to be canceled.

The teachers developed a plan that lengthens the school day slightly and provides time for each class to have one extra-long period—75 minutes—each week. With 45-minute periods each week, there are 45 minutes per day of extra time available in the schedule for each class period. The new schedule will also include a dedicated period during students’ midmorning break that can be used for assemblies.

While some parents may be apprehensive about the change, Mr. Horvat thinks that they’ll like the new schedule as they become more familiar with it. As for students, he notes that they’re surprisingly resistant to change. Current students may grumble, but, he says, “In three or four years if I say, ‘We’re going back to the old schedule,’ students will say, ‘What are you doing? You can’t go back!’”

Scheduling at Lab is much more complex than at similar high schools, says Mr. Horvat. U-High shares art and physics facilities and some teachers with the Middle and Lower Schools, making scheduling a tricky affair. But he sees light at the end of the tunnel: U-High scheduling will become much easier when proposed new classroom facilities are built as part of the Schools’ planned $100 million construction project.

More information and answers to frequently asked questions are online: http://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/schools/high school.

Don’t drop the pickles...and other lessons in business

Summer Link expands beyond science

Last year, U-High expanded its Summer Link internship program beyond science labs and into the world of business. Over the summer, 11 students, all rising sophomores or juniors, worked with UChicago professors, including Nobel laureate James Heckman and Freakonomics author—and father of four Lab students—Steven Levitt.

Summer Link, a partnership between the University and the Laboratory Schools, began officially in 2008-09 placing U-Highers in research jobs in Department of Biological and Physical Sciences labs. U-High history teachers Chris Janus and Andrea Martonfy organized the new business portion of the Summer Link program, working with a half dozen University professors, several of whom are Lab parents. The program included weekly seminars at the University for a faculty sponsor presented research to the entire group.

Jenifer Nathan Eckstein was one of six students working with economics professor John Romalis. The interns spent most of their time at stores throughout the city, where they scanned products and recorded their countries of origin. The painstakingly collected data will be used, according to Professor Romalis, to understand “the impact of rising imports on the cost of living of households with different income levels—for example, poor households versus rich households.”

The interns (like all Summer Link students) had agreed to work for minimum wage but—as one would expect from an economics professor—Professor Romalis offered a per-scan bonus and an accuracy bonus, “It was a really effective incentive,” says Nathan.

For Nathan, the internship provided an unintended education: “I went to places I’d never been to, like Pilsen and Bridgeport,” he says. “He got a cultural education as part of it, noticing the very limited selection available to a shopper at a Family Dollar store, compared with the enormous selection of things like jams and jellies at the much more upscale Treasure Island in Hyde Park.

He and his partners also honed their diplomatic and technical skills. The most stressful aspect of the job was not the inevitable discussion with a store manager who was ready to kick them out, but scanning breakable items: “I dropped a jar of pickles once,” Nathan says. And replacing batteries in the decade-old bar code scanners proved a bit nightmarish—installed incorrectly, the data was destroyed.

Professor Levitt’s interns, juniors Kristine Wald and Molly Petchenik, worked on a variety of projects—soccer, soccer, and pollution. For the soccer research—done for Professor Levitt’s consulting firm, The Greater Good—Kristine and Molly looked at customers’ reactions to an Internet poker site. They analyzed comments and then graphed the data to show which features were popular or unpopular.

They also did research on countries that had won the World Cup, which ended up in Professor Levitt’s New York Times blog in June. While South American teams win often, they are low in the FIFA rankings of best teams, showing a possible “European bias in how teams are ranked,” Professor Levitt wrote.

“We weren’t treated like high schoolers,” says Molly. “We were treated like actual researchers. He really wanted us to find out things on our own. We got a feel for doing research and not just being students in a classroom.”

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A new kind of learning tool is popping up all over Lab. The Promethean Board, an interactive whiteboard with the display capabilities of a computer screen, is a major techno-upgrade to the traditional classroom blackboard or dry-erase board.

The interactive whiteboards work both as a display and an input device. They have an electromagnetic backing that lets teachers use a special metal pen to control and interact with the image that is projected onto a 78-inch-wide screen.

Their uses are limited only by a teacher’s imagination. They can “navigate computer menus, make and save annotations, select pre-made templates of maps, geometric shapes, and graphics, or import their own,” says Curt Lieneck, Lab’s director of technology education. Teachers can also use them with document cameras to enlarge books or other small objects for their classes.

The interactive whiteboards aren’t entirely new at Lab. The Promethean Board includes new technology that has been accepted in the Middle and High Schools started using them in 2003. But with the addition of 15 new boards in the last two years their use has exploded, particularly in the Lower School and language classes. Mr. Lieneck counts 23 classes using such boards already installed across the divisions and expects the number to grow.

Island in the Halls
Science Department Chair David Derbes recommends, Teach Like A Champion, by Doug Lemov

Last March The New York Times Magazine published “How to Build a Better Teacher,” featuring Doug Lemov, a former teacher and principal who’d spent several years traveling around the country videotaping classes. As a consultant, Mr. Lemov was trying to find out why some of the best teachers succeed while others fail, even in the same schools, and often with the same students. The best teachers could successfully cover a year and a half of material in a single year, the worst might manage only a third of that. Why?

Mr. Lemov hasn’t figured it all out, but he has found a set of tactics that many of the best teachers use. I mentioned the article to my daughter, Catherine Derbes, ’09, then in her first year of a Teach for America tour in New Orleans, and she said, “Oh, everyone in TFA uses Lemov’s stuff; we have his taxonomy.” I was a little envious; I wanted to read his work, but at the time it was not available. Now it is. Teach Like A Champion is an economical and very practical set of teaching techniques. Rather than a philosophical treatment of best practices or an abstract discussion of what ideal teaching is supposed to be, Mr. Lemov’s book resembles a drill sergeant’s instruction manual for raw teaching recruits, including his teaching from Department Chair Katy Sinclair: “Teach the kids first, and music second.”

The winners of the Williams Award have used the honorarium for a diverse range of professional development activities. Most famously, Blue Balliett, the first winner in 2000, took time off to work on a children’s novel, which became the best-selling Chasing Vermeer (2004). French teacher Vicki Schneider, honored in 2005, budgeted so well that she still has not exhausted her award money. She used some of it to trip to Morocco: “There’s so much about Francophone Morocco in the textbooks,” she says, “but the French teachers had ever been there.”

She plans to use the rest to complete a book project that she began in 2008 when she took a year off from teaching. The book (working title: A Year Off for Art) will include interviews with French and American museum visitors as well as her musings about the experience of viewing art.

“I’m a better teacher if I can remain a student myself,” says Ms. Schneider, who teaches units on film, Surrealism, and Impressionism as part of her French classes.

Lower School teacher Lisa Sukenic devotes significant class time to helping her young students develop their own creative writing voices, and her 2008 Williams award activities support that. She attended writer’s workshops at the Interlochen School for the Arts and the Georgia O’Keeffe Ghost Ranch. The award also helped Ms. Sukenic earn a creative writing certificate in poetry at the University’s Graham School.

Williams Award winners reinvest in their teaching

In September, Middle School librarian Cynthia Oakes became the 12th winner of the School’s Mary V. Williams Award for Excellence in Teaching, which includes a $5,000 honorarium for professional development. “I haven’t used it yet,” says Ms. Oakes. With characteristic enthusiasm, she adds, “I’m still trying to comprehend that I even received it!”

Mary Williams, a Lower and Middle School teacher, died unexpectedly in March 2000. “I had so many great teachers at Lab, but she was my favorite,” says Dan Rudolph, ’74, who endowed the award. As a sixth grader in 1968, Mr. Rudolph was in Ms. Williams’ very first class at Lab. “She was tough, but we knew she loved us,” says Mr. Rudolph, who kept in touch with Ms. Williams after graduating and often visited her when he was in Hyde Park. “It was a thrill for me to be able to remember her in his way.”

The award recognizes a faculty member who shares the spirit of Ms. Williams’ pedagogy, including a teaching style that speaks to the whole child, respect for students’ individual qualities, and a sense of humor.

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Recommended reading

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At a November reception held in the Student Union theater, current Lab Board Chair Michael Turner and Tina Umansky each signed a “National Letter of Intent” to attend Northwestern University. Michael plans to be a part of the men’s basketball program. Tina joins a select group of Lab students to sign a “National Letter of Intent” to attend Northwestern University. Tina placed ninth at the NCAA Division 3 North American Cup. Open. Nationally, Tina placed ninth at the 2009–10 Girls Volleyball State Final Four. She also earned the 2009–10 first place medal at the Maine West H.S. Girls Volleyball Regional Championship. The sectional championship was won by the Lab, and Sylora and the sectional finalist were Laura Anderson/senior Rachel Sylora and the sectional finalists. Seniors Thomas Aquino and Robert Meyer and sophomore Sarah Curci qualified for state. Sarah was named ISL Runner-of-the-Year. The girls team won the ISL Championship and the boys won their fourth consecutive regional championship.

Other sport highlights:

Cross-Country
Senior Thomas Aquino and Robert Meyer and sophomore Sarah Curci qualified for state. Sarah was named ISL Runner-of-the-Year. The girls team won the ISL Championship and the boys won their fourth consecutive regional championship.

Golf
Junior Alkia Ranold made school history when she became U-High’s first female golfer to advance to sectionals. She shot a 94 to advance to the Homewood-Flossmoor Coyote Run Sectional. Senior Jack Burns qualified to the state finals. And U-High sent a full team of six girls to compete in the AA Regional tournament.

Girls Tennis
The sectional championship doubles team of sophomore Laura Anderson/senior Rachel Sylora and the sectional finalist team of Leslie Sibener/Brianna Soblia (both juniors) qualified for state. The Maroons won the ISL Championship for the second straight year, and sophomore Laura Anderson was selected ISL Player of the Year.

Girls Volleyball
The team won the 3A Regional championship—only the second sectional championship in school history.

Whether they’re betting out a solo, attempting a penalty kick in soccer, or sweating through the SAT, Lab students strive to do their best. Yet sometimes even high-achieving students perform poorly when it matters most, says Sian Beilock, the author of Choke: What the Secrets of the Brain Reveal About Getting It Right When You Have To (2010). The trick is learning to manage stressful situations so you can “show what you know.”

Ms. Beilock is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Chicago and an expert in cognitive science. At the Laboratory Schools, she’s done research on how test anxiety affects student performance and whether small-scale interventions can help. She is also studying the ways that teachers convey their knowledge and how these affect student learning. “Lab is a place that gives students an amazing educational environment, but with those opportunities come pressures to succeed,” says Ms. Beilock. Students who adapt to the pressure are better prepared for future challenges, including college. But those who fail due to stress or worry can find their confidence undermined, leading to missed opportunities and fewer chances down the road.

Parents should realize that choking under pressure has little to do with intelligence but relates instead to how the brain works, says Ms. Beilock. “Students in stressful testing situations often start worrying—about the outcome, about what others might think of them, about what happens if they don’t perform well,” she explains. “These worries essentially zap the cognitive resources of the brain power, that they could otherwise use to reason and think successfully through the test.”

Anyone can choke, even stellar students. When we talk about choking or bombing the test, we’re not talking about someone who doesn’t have a mastery of the material and isn’t performing well. We’re talking about kids who know the material but get into that testing situation and just aren’t able to pull it out,” she says.

Ms. Beilock’s research goes well beyond young students. Her work has explored why top athletes, actors, or musicians botch a crucial performance, and what one can learn from the related brain science. In essence, her work shows that by paying too much attention to detail and attempting to control physical movements that are normally “unconscious,” players can freeze or make basic mistakes, even in front of a supportive crowd. Ms. Beilock calls this “paralysis by analysis.”

The good news for kids and parents is that choking, while common, isn’t inevitable. The same tips and tricks that help adults perform their best in high-stakes situations work well for high-school students, says Ms. Beilock. “By knowing the science behind why choking happens, you can find the right technique to improve your performance.”

HERE ARE A FEW STRATEGIES TO ENSURE SUCCESS UNDER PRESSURE IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS, ADAPTED FROM MS. BEILOCk’S BOOK.

> Reaffirm your self-worth. Before a big test or presentation, spend a few minutes writing about your many interests and activities. Draw a map or diagram of everything that makes you a multifaceted individual (one test score doesn’t define you!) to help take some of the pressure off.

> Write and/or meditate about your worries. Before a test, write about your anxieties to help banish them. Train your brain, through meditation, to harness all your cognitive horsepower for the task at hand.

> Think differently. Think about yourself in ways that highlight your propensity for success. Remind yourself that you have the tools to succeed. If you get sweaty palms and your heart races under pressure, interpret these signs positively (“I am amped for the test!”) rather than negatively (“I am freaking out!”).”

> Pause, outsource, organize. Walking away for a few minutes from a challenging problem can help you find the most appropriate solution. Write down the intermediate steps of a problem rather than trying to hold everything in your head. Before a test, come up with a way to organize information to take the burden off your “working memory,” or cognitive horsepower.

> Remember the Obama effect. Thinking about examples of people who defy common stereotypes about race, sex, and ability can help to boost the performance of people in stereotyped social groups.

> Practice under pressure. Studying under the same conditions that you’ll be tested under—in a timed situation with no study aids, for example—can help you get used to what you’ll experience on test day.

> Techniques for improving sports and stage performance vary, and are also discussed in her book, Choke.
Author and former Lab teacher Blue Balliett returns, sharing tales and inspiration

Two pony-tailed sixth-graders sat on the edge of their seats, waiting for the October assembly with best-selling author and former Lab teacher Blue Balliett to begin. The last time Ms. Balliett (who taught third and fourth grade at Lab for more than a decade) spoke in Judd Hall, “she told us the steps that go into writing a story,” recalled the taller of the two. “Yes,” her friend chimed in. “You think, you imagine, then you get to express it.”

Ms. Balliett’s most recent mystery, The Danger Box, published only in September, is about a 12-year-old, sight-impaired boy in Three Oaks, Michigan, who discovers a stolen notebook that originally belonged to Charles Darwin. And while neither girl had yet to read the newest tome, they had both raced through her previous young adult novels: Chasing Vermeer, The Wright 3, and The Golden Cage. And just like Ms. Balliett, who knew she wanted to be an author when she was eight, the two Middle Schoolers had been scribbling stories since they were little. “I would love to be a writer,” says one of the girls. “Me too,” the other agrees. They weren’t alone. When Ms. Balliett asked in a class she was teaching, she posed the question, “How do you look at art?” In The Danger Box, she wants to inspire readers to have faith in their own powers and the confidence to listen to their own ideas. “Adults underestimate just what powerful thinkers kids are,” says Ms. Balliett. “I want kids to know that their voices are valuable.”

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With a tasting of nine different wines selected and organized by parent Dan Sachs, proprietor of Chicago’s Bin 36, a wine store and restaurant, more than 150 parents and alumni had a chance to mix and see architectural models of Lab’s new Arts Wing and the Early Childhood Campus to be built on Stony Island Avenue.

The Dewey Founder’s Society recognizes alumni, parents, and friends whose cumulative annual gifts to Lab total $2,500 or more. The DePencier Society recognizes alumni who have contributed $1,000 or more to the Schools.

Alumni on the Road—New York and four Chicago-based events brought scores of alumni (and teachers) together this fall. Hosts Felix Baker, ’87, and Julian Baker, ’84, welcomed more than 60 people to Felix’s Manhattan home—among them, graduates from the classes of 1943 to 2006. Back in Chicago, with help from the Alumni Leadership Committee, Labbies faced off against Parker alumni on the soccer field, and more than 60 gathered at the Packer Schopf Gallery to celebrate the work of Louise LeBourgeois, ’81.

See more photos of these and other alumni events on Facebook: www.facebook.com/laboratoryschools.
Early childhood facility named for alumnus Earl Shapiro, ’56

IN JANUARY, THE LABORATORY SCHOOLS AND the University announced the naming of Earl Shapiro Hall on the planned Early Childhood Campus to be built on Stony Island Avenue. Named in honor of the late Earl Shapiro, ’56, the landmark addition to the Laboratory Schools will be designed specifically for children from nursery through second grade. Among other benefits, the state-of-the-art facility will allow students outdoor access from classrooms, indoor spaces suited for a range of simultaneous activities, and thought-provoking settings that enhance the flexible interactions at the heart of the schools’ educational philosophy.

Earl Shapiro Hall is a key component of the Schools’ Lab+ Campaign, an initiative that will help maintain the diversity so central to the Lab community while allowing for transformative improvements to every aspect of the Schools’ programs and campus. “This is a rare opportunity for an institution like the Laboratory Schools to tailor its facilities to its nationally recognized educational programs,” says University President Robert Zimmer. “The Shapiros have been leaders in educational philanthropy, the family has held to values that reflect the importance of education, and the focus on giving back to the institutions that are important to you.”

By Joe Valero of Valerio Dewalt Train and FGM Architects as the architect of record, Earl Shapiro Hall has been planned to optimize the Reggio Emilia approach to learning—educational models that share some of the ideas of Lab founder John Dewey. In that approach, the learning environment is meant to be another teacher, stimulating natural curiosity and providing room for independent action. Construction of the Early Childhood Campus is scheduled to begin next fall, with completion projected for the summer of 2013.

The expansion will allow the schools to continue to maintain a diverse student body at a time of unprecedented demand both within the University community and among families from the neighborhood and across the city. Mr. Magill notes that as Lab becomes one of the largest independent schools in the nation, it will also have the scale to invest in more specialized programs for students.

This building and the entire Lab+ project, as organizations thrive only if there is constant reinvestment,” says Matthew. “This building represents a reinvestment in not only the Schools but the University, Hyde Park, and the city of Chicago, all of which the Shapiro family holds dear. Associating our father’s name with one of the finest educational institutions in the country is befitting of the man that he was.”

Earl Shapiro Hall has been designed to allow the Schools to meet the goal of having 100 percent of families participating in the Campaign: “Michael and Ling’s contribution will be an important means of encouraging many other families to step forward to participate at whatever level they can. Listening to them tell their story, one can see a family that has been won over by the unique experience that is Lab. We hope all will follow suit.”

The Markovitzes’ daughter, Sarah Qing, is now a sixth grader. But when they enrolled her at Lab as a nursery-scholar, the classroom experience came as a bit of a shock to these parents, who’d had very different educational experiences. “And because many hands make light the load,” adds her husband, “we have set up our gift as a match to encourage others to join with us in developing this school we all care about so deeply.”

To find out more about how your gift can be matched as part of the Markovitz challenge, please contact Beth Wittbrodt in the Office of Alumni Relations and Development, 773-702-2844, bwittbr@ucls.uchicago.edu. 
writing: life’s necessary art

ALUMNI WRITERS RETURN TO LEAD U-HIGH’S FIRST DAY

BY BROOKE O’NEILL, AM’04

Catching up with friends, braving new classes, and tackling the “What I Did This Summer” essay have long been staples of the American teenager’s first day of school. But analyzing newspaper clips with an award-winning investigative reporter? Discussing the supernatural horror flick Carrie with a professional screenwriter? >>>

Left to right: Carlo Rotella, ’82; Margo Jefferson, ’64; David Kovacs, ’69; Kate Grossman, ’88; Lily Koppel, ’99; Adam Simon, ’80.
THE POWER OF LANGUAGE
Alumni writers expounded further on their expertise during hour-long workshops that followed the panel. Each U-High student attended one of 20 sessions led by a guest writer. Lab teacher, or other member of the Lab community. Students were matched to their interests based on a survey each took in the spring.

The selection format, says Ms. Koenen, reflected a broader Lab philosophy. “It’s about empowering students to make educational choices, to think about what they want to study.”

In U-High 103, Mr. Rotella’s group debated the moral ambiguity of writing about violence. In his essay collection Cut Time: An Education at the Fights, a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, he describes bloody bouts and the lessons they impart. “I’m implicated in the hurt business,” he told the class.

As a boxing writer, Mr. Rotella explained, his word choice determines whether brutality in the ring comes across as meaningful or meaningless.

To illustrate the point, he gave students two battle scene excerpts: one from J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings, an excerpt from Joe Abercrombie’s The First Law trilogy. Comparing the former’s world of good versus evil with the latter’s portrayal of violence as something “bitter and pointless,” said Mr. Rotella, it quickly became clear how much power the writer wields through his or her language.

Meanwhile, over in Judd 126, Ms. Simón grilled students on why people enjoy horror films. “Why would you want to have this unpleasant experience?” he asked the group of roughly 50 students.

“The rush,” responded one boy. “You just feel so alive all of a sudden.”

The “suspense,” chimed a girl seated next to him.

Playing off those answers, Mr. Simón encouraged students to think about how today’s horror films provide us a catharsis, just like Sophocles’ Oedipus did in its day.

“That show was the biggest hit in Athens,” he said. “It’s a transforming experience.”

THE PLACE WHERE IT STARTED
Horror movies and Oedipus weren’t the only transformations discussed at First Day. For many of the alumni, the event was an opportunity to revisit a place that significantly shaped who they are today.

“My friends and colleagues are so tired of hearing how important Lab was to my education,” said Mr. Simón. “No one policed your enthusiasm.”

As part of the Lab community, said Rotella, “you’ll know years later how treasured you are here.”

“The panels reaffirmed what our students always hear: this place is going to stay with you forever,” says Ms. Koenen. “You’re always going to feel like a Labbie.”
There are essential avenues of communication and understanding that we bring people together across lines of class, race, and economic advantage in a kind of discourse of the kind that's a crucial part of what it is not just to be a good citizen but to have a rich life. I mean, the rest of your whole life is going to be working at your job, and so now is when you get to develop things that make life a whole lot easier.

With regard to citizenship, no one can just say, "Oh, well, I'm going to get a job and let citizenship take care of by other people." We all citizens of somewhere.

Parents should also realize that what businesses are looking for is people who have liberal education, who are flexible, and who are imaginative. Our economy is very rapidly changing and it's just obvious that if you have technical skills, those might be yesterday's technical skills. But if you have a trained imagination and a good logical mind, that's going to be with you everywhere.

The skills of reasoning are, in a way, based on education. That kind of highly ramified and curious questioning about projects that you're undertaking is something these schools do very well. Lab already introduces children into the rudiments of different religious beliefs and different global cultures in a way that's very nice. And I'm less sure of this, but probably such schools teach critical thinking and argumentative skills in a progressive way, and they all use the arts.

What is your response to a parent who says, “What my kid really needs in this fast-moving world is something that makes them superhuman?”

The truth is, I think the decent education of children ought to start local. I talk a lot about the Indian educator Rahindranath Tagore in my book. I think one of the things he did right was not even allow children to learn English until they were fourteen years old, because he wanted their education to have roots in the local community. He wanted them to read things from their linguistic tradition, and rightly so. Any prescription of a single text would have that problem.

Now, some place along the line, it's not a bad idea to read Plato's Apology and get the idea of what Socrates was about and why he led the examine life. Maybe in high school, everyone should read that. But to cultivate the imagination, I don't think there's a single book or musical work.

How can families without financial resources promote the arts and humanities at home?

Money is a very small part of it. Time is the main thing. And I'm not at all sure that the richer families do better on the time front, because obviously, they're very pressed for time in this fast-moving world. Here's one thing President Obama has said right: read to your child a certain number of hours a day. But I would also add, you could imagine singing with your child or putting on a play with your child.

I used to drag my parents into putting on plays, and I think I was the instigator, and I'm still kind of instigator of plays here at the University. I get my colleagues to take roles in Shakespeare. But if the child isn't doing it, the parent can do it. Just do something expressive and artistic. And if you're reading, don't just read to the child, have the child read to you. My daughter read Crime and Punishment aloud to me.

How old was she then?

She was about sixteen. Often, at the end of the day after lecturing, my voice was tired, so I said, “All right, now you can read to me.” Reading can be shared and it can be theatrical, and it can involve different people taking different roles—and it's much more fun that way.

School of the University of Chicago, has long defended liberal education at the university level. In a recent interview with Liberty, she spoke about the importance of the humanities for children of every age.

How does putting the humanities at the center of K–12 education make children better citizens of their countries and of the world?

I don't suggest demoting the arts, which have a lot in common with the humanities. Both teach rigorous argument; they teach imagination. But there are three things that I think the arts and humanities contribute, and the first is the old Socratic ability to lead the examined life; to really think rigorously about issues; to examine the things that tradition and peer culture have brought your way and ask, “Is this really what I want to stand for?” and “Is this really what I want to stand for?” and “Is this really what I want to stand for?”

Both teach rigorous argument; they teach imagination. And if you're reading, don't just read to the child, have the child read to you. My daughter read Crime and Punishment aloud to me. Reading can be shared and it can be theatrical, and it can involve different people taking different roles—and it's much more fun that way.

Third, and woven through it all, is the ability to put yourself into the position of someone who is different, to see how that person sees the world. On every issue in a pluralistic society, understanding how the world looks from that other's point of view is the first step in having an adequate debate. That's fostered by lots of different parts of school: the pedagogy and membership of the classroom, and, of course, the curriculum.

How do you think independent schools do best with promoting Dewey’s ideas?

What opinion do you have of the Obama administration's education policy?

I'm sure President Obama, having studied at Occidental College and Columbia University, has a lot of thoughts about what a well-rounded education for citizenship would be. What I find distressing is that he doesn’t put those thoughts out in his speeches.

When he speaks about education, it’s always about national growth. It’s also about equality of access, which is important. But beyond that, he doesn’t have any curricular thoughts, and he is always praising Singapore in ways that seems to me really quite unfortunate. Some countries that are viewed as highly successful in education—like China, Singapore, and India—are really downgrading the humanities or lopping them off pretty completely.

If President Obama were to look abroad, he might well look to Finland, which actually has the needs on things that he cares about—the reading skills and the math skills—but they also have managed to do this compatibly with having a lot of play, a lot of arts, and so on.

What do you think is the first step in having an adequate debate?

I think is to make some effort to get to know the history, knowing at least the rudiments of the major world religions. It also means knowing something about the different groups in one's own country—the ethnic and racial minorities, the way that women have contributed to the history of the country—having a kind of vouched for understanding of the complexities of the world we’re in. As children get to high school, they also should be learning some economics. They should learn the structure of the global economy and how it influences us all. Third, and woven through it all, is the empathetic imagination: learning how to put yourself into the position of someone who is different, to see how that person sees the world.
This is the story of a very extended Lab family. It is a story that spans seven decades of relatives whose lives are interwoven with the history of the Laboratory Schools. And most importantly, it is the story of a family that values education as one of life’s most precious gifts.

“The only thing they can’t take away from you is your education.” This family proverb has been an inspiration for the Wirszup-Tatar-Rosenbacher families, who share a commitment to education with their relatives in the Grossman-Kimball clan.

“I remember saying it when Izaak had his last birthday,” says Pera Wirszup, the family matriarch and widow of the famed University of Chicago professor Izaak Wirszup, PhD’55, who died in 2008 at the age of 93. Mr. Wirszup was a founder of the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project, which went on to become the nation’s largest university-based mathematics curriculum program for K–12 students and includes the *Everyday Mathematics* texts used by Lab Lower- and Middle-Schoolers.

After the war, they returned to their hometown, Wilno (now Vilnius), Lithuania, which for centuries had been the home of a strong Jewish community. There Pera and Izaak, childhood acquaintances, re-connected and married. Izaak did advanced graduate work in mathematics and was a lecturer at the State Technical Institute—an education that would make it possible for the family to start a new life in the United States.

Creating a New Life in Chicago

After they married in Wilno, Pera and Izaak moved to Paris with Pera’s daughter, Marina D.W. Tatar, ’54, AB’59. But their stay in France was short-term: in 1949 Antoni Zygmund, a professor of Izaak’s from Wilno who had become a professor at the University of Chicago, invited Izaak to join him at the University. It was a request the couple couldn’t turn down; they left for the United States that year.

Pera had already committed enormous energy to educating her daughter. Because they spent much of the war trying to avoid detection, Marina’s school enrollment was spotty. As a result, Pera became her teacher, reading Russian poetry to her little girl until Marina learned to read it herself (Pera went on to teach Russian at the University for 28 years—while also working for Michigan Avenue fashion retailer Peck & Peck.)

Says Marina of her studies with her mother, “All of sudden, the words became
T eddy Grossman, ’84; and T ony Grossman, of their school years: Kate Grossman, ’88; sent their three children to Lab for the majority lived in Hyde Park and went to school with Schools. Joel Rosenbacher, ’81, and his brother, forging its own roots at the Laboratory Meanwhile, the Rosenbacher family was Carolyn T atar received an MBA in 1986. Audrey Tatar received an MD in 1988 and daughters all went on to earn graduate degrees, With their own children, Marina and counseling, and became a high school college education helps you feel confident to take on. “It’s given me the ability to think on my feet, to go forward, to make good decisions,” says Joe. “In our society, many people are just followers, but I think having a good education helps you feel confident to take on responsibility and to think critically,” he adds. David Rosenbacher agrees that Lab and U-High gave him leadership and communication skills—a permanent part of someone’s own personal capital.” “I certainly have to make presentations to top companies. Having had a good education at Lab, I have the confidence I need to make the presentations, and I have the ability to handle them well,” he says. “It’s always fun to watch basketball,” Matt Hanessian explained. “I remember watching Magic Johnson’s Lakers take on Larry Bird’s Celtics. Many U-High athletes agree: They owe an everlasting debt to those who paved the way for the heroes of today to ascend to new heights in every area of life, as they gave them the goals they aspire to. “I am trying to learn a large arsenal of moves.” —Max Rothschild, freshman

For sports heroes, look no further than U-High teams

Ilinois State Champion of Girls Tennis, Parker’s Elizabeth Epstein. Or, look at Nick Kogelman, Class of 2007, the first U-High golfer to make the Illinois High School Association State Tournament.

Each athlete has his or her own hero. Some screamed “and Jordan wins it!” at the imaginary clock wound down and the basketball buried itself in the net. “He does everything, and he is clutch,” Max explained. “I remember him playing with Shaq, I remember...”

An editorial from the Midway Tuesday, December 14, 2010

Manhattan

Matt Hanessian Sports commentator

...from the Midway

“THE ONLY THING THEY CAN’T TAKE AWAY FROM YOU IS YOUR EDUCATION.”

THIS FAMILY PROVERB HAS BEEN AN INSPIRATION FOR THE WIRSZUP-TATAR-ROSENBAKER FAMILIES, WHO SHARE A COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION WITH THEIR RELATIVES IN THE GROSSMAN-KIMBALL CLAN.

CARRYING ON A FAMILY’S PASSION

Marina graduated from Lab High College with an AB in 1959, earned a master’s degree in counseling, and became a high school college counselor, a job that helped her guide students to their value in education. With their own children, Marina and her husband, Dr. Arnold Tatar, stressed the importance of education and also exposed them to the rich world of art and culture. “Education is about learning to appreciate those things,” she says. The Tatars’ three daughters all went on to earn graduate degrees, two of them from the University of Chicago. Audrey Tatar received an MD in 1988 and Carolyn Tatar received an MBA in 1986.

TWO LAB FAMILIES UNITE Meanwhile, the Rosenbacher family was forging its own roots at the Laboratory Schools. Joel Rosenbacher, ’81, and his brother, David Rosenbacher, ’79—both Lab lifers—lived in Hyde Park and went to school with their cousins. Their aunt, Fran Rosenbacher Grossman, ’82, AM’77, and her husband, Bob, sent their three children to Lab for the majority of their school years. Kate Grossman, ’88; Teddy Grossman, ’84, and Tony Grossman, ’86. Kate, a journalist, has returned regularly to Lab to speak, most recently as part of this year’s U-High First Day Program. But wait, there’s more: at the wedding of two other Lab grads, Tony was introduced to 1981 U-High grad Allison Kimball, whom he later married. The Tatar and Rosenbacher families came together when Carolyn Tatar married Joel Rosenbacher, and—not surprisingly—their two sons now attend Lab. But a love of learning is strong on both sides of this complex family tree: “When I think of the importance of what Pera said about education being something no one can take away from you, I think about how it’s provided me a basis for being successful in my life,” says Joe, who owns a custom packaging company in Chicago that employs 300 people.

...from the Midway

“He has a large repertoire of moves, and I am trying to learn a large arsenal of moves as well.” Senior Soccemman Amir Hay also tries to integrate some of his favorite players’ moves into his game. “It’s always fun to watch Ronaldinho, play,” Amir explained. “He is very skilled, and the way he plays is mesmerizing to me. He is always smiling, and it looks like he is not trying. I have tried some of the moves that he does, but nothing really comes out of it,” Amir said. “Ronaldinho puts in so much work.”

Before a hero is made, a hero is watched. Kobe Bryant grew up watching Magic Johnson’s Lakers take on Larry Bird’s Celtics. Many U-High athletes agree: They owe an everlasting debt to those who paved the way for the heroes of today to ascend to new heights in every area of life, as they gave them the goals they aspire to. “I am trying to learn a large arsenal of moves.” —Max Rothschild, freshman

how they always had chemistry between them on the court.” Max said the tries to emulate Kobe’s style of play on the court.

...from the Midway

...from the Midway

...from the Midway
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ALUMNI WEEKEND
EXPANDED FOR 2011: JUNE 2–5

This year’s Thursday–Sunday event will take advantage of some UChicago-sponsored activities and feature a new alumni basketball game.

All classes are invited to attend Alumni Weekend 2011. Special activities will be held for the “milestone reunion” classes:

1946 1971 1991
1956 1976 1996
1961 1981 2001
1966 1986 2006

OTHER KEY EVENTS INCLUDE:

Friday, June 3
All-Alumni Reception

Saturday, June 4
U-High Jazz Brunch

Saturday, June 4
Class reunion gatherings

Look for registration materials in the mail in March. Contact Kerry Tulson for more information at alumni@ucls.uchicago.edu or 773-702-3789.

Connections, Lab’s annual gala
March 5
Grand Ballroom at Navy Pier

Alumni on the Road—San Francisco
April 2011
Details to come. Check your email and our website soon.

Grandparents/Grandfriends Day
Fall 2011
Grandparents and special “grandfriends” of students in grades N–4 are invited for this special morning of activities. Details to come.