Lab's Mission

The Laboratory Schools are home to the youngest members of the University of Chicago’s academic community. We ignite and nurture an enduring spirit of scholarship, curiosity, creativity, and confidence. We value learning experientially, exhibiting kindness, and honoring diversity.
Dear Lab community

This past year has been a great one at Lab, and we have watched our community come together in wonderful ways.

As Lab looks to its future, we recognize how much we build on our past—as a school grounded in some of the most innovative approaches to learning; as a school connected to one of the most outstanding universities anywhere; as a school that has at its core a group of people passionate about learning and ideas; as a community whose rich diversity is central to how we teach and learn and inspires us to be our best and kinder.

We have spoken often about learning into our past because when we do, we can also look forward to our future. This past year has been a great one at Lab, and we have watched our community come together in wonderful ways.

> With the volunteer leadership of many involved families, Lab successfully launched the annual Parents Fund Drive in October 2016. Families responded with generosity to this more focused, fun, grassroots effort.

We will focus on ensuring a robust financial aid program that helps allow outstanding students to join Lab regardless of ability.

We will expand the many ways we work with our community and build new partnerships. Our work with the filmmaking team from American Pie is a wonderful example of how history, technology, music, and community intersect. And we look forward to welcoming the filmmakers when they visit Lab this year as our first Koonsbroker Family Artists in Residence.

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> Our alumni are staying ever more connected to Lab and to each other. Alumni Weekend drew record attendance—529—and our alumni are contributing to Lab more consistently than ever, both through philanthropy and their presence on campus and in our classrooms.

As we look forward to the rest of this school year, we continue to seek ways to engage our community and to build upon Lab’s great strengths.

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> The inaugural Dewey Dance attracted new faces with a much more casual night of community—500 guests raised almost $190,000 through gifts, tickets and raffle to fund a new mini bus and Lab Logs playground equipment.

> Parents of the 2017 graduates raised more than $150,000 to establish the Class of 2017 scholarship.

> Lab’s participation in “UChicago Giving Day” generated record results.

> More than 570 people attended Alumni Weekend 2016 to reconnect and reminisce.

> More alumni donors than ever renewed their gifts. Lab hit 70% alumni donor retention.

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Philanthropy at Work

Ignite someone’s future with financial aid

Financial aid changes lives by providing the means for outstanding students to attend Lab, and when our classrooms are filled with outstanding students the experience is improved for all. Nearly one in 10 students of Lab receives some type of financial aid—apart from any tuition benefit a family might see the different mentality but it’s very interesting to see the difference mentality between someone who grew up in a middle class family and someone who grew up in a working class family.

“Money is not a thing people like to talk about, but it’s very interesting to see the different mentality between someone who grew up in a middle class family and someone who grew up in a working class family. I know money is not a thing people like to talk about, but it’s very interesting to see the different mentality between someone who grew up in a middle class family and someone who grew up in a working class family.”

Carol Guzman, “13, says, “Being at Lab was unlike anything else. It was very diverse. I went to a school where it was mostly a Hispanic population. So I had never gone to school with people from so many different races, so many different cultures, so many different family backgrounds.”

Ms. Guzman graduated from the University of Richmond and is now working for the Jewish United Fund in Chicago. She came to U-High after having been part of the High Jump program, which provides academic enrichment for talented middle schoolers from families of limited financial means, and which has partnered with Lab for years.

“For me,” she says, “I had the best time of my life. It prepared me for everything in my life.”

Every Lab teacher participates in some form of professional development. In 2017, Lab funded more than $140,000 for specially-requested professional development activities. Six teachers attended the EdTech Teacher Innovation Summit in San Diego where a major theme around “iteration” emerged. Two presenters in particular, says computer science teacher Jeremy Schwartz, “provided me with the most lasting and meaningful set of new ideas and challenges to bring into my pedagogy and Lab’s developing program.”

He’s talking about the executive director of the Teaching Systems Lab at MIT, who ran a session on design thinking in the classroom, and a “maker movement pioneer.” They emphasized that innovation is often the result of iteration and that “linking” is a nonlinear approach to reaching a goal. Lab’s expanding makerspaces are allowing students exactly this kind of hands-on experience.

Enrich the student experience with educator education

The idea of the makerspace has taken root in the very short time that Lab has had its new and restored spaces.

“Much like a design-thinking or cooperative learning mindset, the makerspace moves beyond the traditional shop experience of using tools to craft something with user-centered design principles, helping students think more broadly about design and the world.”

At Earl Shapiro Hall, Lab’s youngest learners are exploring, building, refining, and tinkering to make things work from designing and assembling wooden plant boxes to crafting complete Rube Goldberg machines.

> Lower School classes used cardboard and creativity to build interactive arcade games—anything they could think of—as part of a global Cardboard Challenge.
> High School musician-engineers formed Ike salad bowls into elements of an electronic orchestra.

Today’s maker experience moves well beyond the traditional shop experience for many adults may recall from their youth. Maker work crosses the lines of technology, music, computer science, art, math, and science integrating many modes of thinking and problem-solving. And, as Lab expands its maker program more formally into the Middle and High Schools, more is to come. Lab teachers and students are literally holding of learning.

In its second year, the Internship for Civic Engagement paired Labbies and UChicago Charter School students and placed the teams in a number of nonprofit and government offices around Chicago’s mid-South Side. By connecting academic skills learned in the classroom with the needs and expertise of the community, students better understood local social, political, and cultural issues. It’s been extremely opening seeing the impact that we can all have on communities, and the impact that one organization can have in changing individuals’ lives,” says Lab sophomore Constantin Cargian.

Inspire a broader perspective through partnerships

Experience the maker movement (think shop class for the 21st century)

Parents’ Association

Helping connect a growing community

> 113 mentor families recruited to help welcome 104 new families at 22 summer neighborhood parties, and 130 parent orientation events across four divisions
> Provided ongoing parent support through mandatory Parent-to-Parent meetings, Restaurant Week outings, Mrs. & Misfits, Lower School tours to ESH parents, Directory Committee meetings, and Parent Nights
> 1,300+ members of the Lab Community and 100 volunteers came together to celebrate the year at Lab at theRecipe of May
> $15,000+ awarded in faculty and student grants across multiple disciplines, helping virtually every grade. Introduced Community Service to homerooms in grade N+ to enhance students’ awareness and participation in the world outside Lab
> A new Volunteer Fair encouraged parents to get involved. Volunteerism up 25%.

Hosting prominent thinkers through the PA Speaker Series

> Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, MacArthur prize-winning sociologist and the Emily Harriet Fisher Professor of Education at Harvard University. Her work examines the culture of schools, the broad ecology of education, and the relationship between human development and social justice.
> Robert T. Michael, UChicago, Elakim Hastings Moore Professor Emeritus and Evan Dumont, Senior Fellow, NORC. Prof. Michael addressed “The Five Life Decisions” critical decisions all face about college, career, partners, health, and parenting.
> Eboo Patel, founder and president of the Interfaith Youth Core and member of President Obama’s White House Faith Council, on making interfaith cooperation a social norm. “The question of how people from around religions differently, or interact with one another, whether that be based on conflict or cooperation, will be one of the most engaging questions of the 21st century.”

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“Giving someone the ability to afford a great education when they don’t have the means to do so is the most valuable gift you can give anyone.”

—SAM VAN LOON, ’15

“Our parents made real sacrifices for us to attend Lab and to have so many opportunities.”

—ANDREA AND OLIVIA JOHN, BOTH CLASS OF 2003, WHO NAMED THE THOMAS AND ANITTA JOHN SCHOLARSHIP IN HONOR OF THEIR PARENTS