YEARS AFTER HIS PARENTS had left Eastern Europe for a new life in the United States, the late Herman C. Bernick, AM’38, graduated from his Denver, Colorado, high school as class salutatorian. While he gave his commencement address, his mother listened from the front row, understanding not a word of it (she spoke only Yiddish), but proud nonetheless. Bernick pressed on to the University of Chicago, knowing that he needed a scholarship to attend, but not waiting to hear if he had secured one. The scholarship came through, and four years later he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and moved on to graduate work at the University.

A course with Mortimer Adler, the philosophy professor and, most famously, Great Books of the Western World editor, changed the course of Bernick’s future. It turned him from a likely pre-law major into a humanist who then earned his master’s and started a PhD program at Chicago. Bernick even worked as one of the editors of the Syntopicon, Adler’s list of “101 Great Ideas” that served as an index for the Great Books.

Bernick eventually became a businessman—one who, his son David Bernick, AB’74, JD’78, says, applied Aristotle’s Categories to property analysis with great success. Later, Herman reconnected with Adler and the Encyclopedia Britannica in an academic-business venture that had its roots in the Great Books project. They captured materials from some of the great research university libraries on microfiche, then sold the microfiche collections to smaller institutions that couldn’t afford the books. Herman “traveled around the country putting these libraries together,” David says, “and marketing them as well to small colleges in different parts of the country.”

Nearly 75 years after Herman enrolled in the College, David has endowed the Herman C. Bernick Family professorship in the College.

Family Ties

David Bernick honors his family’s rich UofC history by establishing an endowed professorship.

Like father, like sons: two generations of Bernicks (clockwise from top) Reuben Bernick, AB’72; Herman Bernick, AM’38; David Bernick, AB 74; JD 78; Herman Bernick (back row, second from right) with his fraternity.

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The name commemorates both his father and the Bernick family’s many multi-generational ties to the University of Chicago. And it supports a faculty that, David says, caused him and other alums in his family “to engage in the same enterprise as the great thinkers—not only to learn what they had to say, but also to participate in their world.”

The Bernick family story at Chicago has two parts, David says: his mother’s side as well as his father’s side. David’s mother, Joan Schutz, AB’40, was already part of a family tradition at the U of C. Her mother, Rose Maremont Schutz, TC ’1912, PhB 1936, MAT 1939, had been one of the first female graduate students in the social sciences, and her uncle Arnold Maremont, PhB’24, JD’26, had attended the Law School. Joan’s sister also married a Chicago alum, Leon Gabinet, PhB’50, JD’53.

After meeting at Chicago, Herman and Joan married, settled in Glencoe, and raised three sons: Reuben, David, and Daniel. Like his parents and older brother Reuben Bernick, AB’72, David chose the College for his undergraduate studies. “I left New Trier after my third year of high school as part of the early admissions program,” says David, “which was sort of a carryover from the Hutchins College,” when students as young as 16 were admitted. A philosophy course during his first quarter inspired him to enroll in the Ideas and Methods program, which he describes as “challenging and inspiring—a philosophy program with a broader ambit.” In 1974 he matched his parents’ and brother’s achievement of graduating Phi Beta Kappa.

After receiving a JD from the Law School, David accepted a position at Kirkland & Ellis; he’s been there ever since. A trial lawyer and longtime firm partner, he represents companies grappling with complex, far-reaching problems that have financial and public-relations implications. He’s traveled the country trying cases, and his work has been featured in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and other publications.

David credits his success as a litigator to his education in the College. “My practice of law,” he says, “has been based on understanding and applying concepts in a way that’s both rigorous and persuasive, and I learned the fundamentals of that in the College.” The same experience inspired him to endow the professorship and designate it for the College. “It’s not just about the faculty who receive the endowed professorship,” he says, “it’s about what it represents—support for what has, and I hope always will distinguish the College: commitment to training the mind. The whole focus of liberal arts is on knowledge, not in the sense of a repository of information, but knowledge in the sense of how to think. If you are taught that, it brings richness to whatever it is you decide to do—I use it every hour of every day.”

Naming the professorship in honor of his father’s family seemed appropriate because “really, I had the opportunities that I did through my father and my mother and their families.” The first holder of the professorship is classics professor Peter White, who was Reuben’s Greek instructor at the College. “The Bernick family has accumulated three generations’ worth of experience with the University of Chicago, and the College is clearly important to them,” says White. “It is a privilege to hold a chair established by a family for whom the College means as much as it does for me.”

Today a new generation of Bernicks is carrying on the family tradition at the University: David’s son Evan, AB’08, is a student at the Law School, and Reuben’s daughter Vanessa is completing her first year at the College. “The Bernick family has accumulated three generations’ worth of experience with the University of Chicago, and the College is clearly important to them,” says White. “It is a privilege to hold a chair established by a family for whom the College means as much as it does for me.”

Donation to new residence hall marks “four wonderful years”

FOR ERIN NITTI, AB’08, the day she moved into Max Palevsky Residential Commons set the tone for the rest of her time at the College. Within the first 24 hours, “I met all of the people I stayed close with through all four years,” she says. “There’s a picture I have from the very first night and a picture from graduation, and it’s literally all the same people.”

Living in the dorms “is such an important part of life at college,” says Nitti. “It’s a different experience to be living and studying with people at the same time. It’s a great social setting to meet people, talk about your work … talk about anything but your work. I really enjoyed it.”
Erin’s experience at Chicago was spectacular from the first moment. It was the place she belonged,” says Nitti’s mother, Gail O’Brien. “She loved the rigor, she loved the Core curriculum.” O’Brien and husband William Nitti are helping to make that rigorous Chicago education available to others by contributing to the Odyssey Scholarship Challenge in a new way—naming a room at the new South Campus Residence Hall after their daughter.

“Ever since Erin was a first-year, we wanted to give as much as we could to the University of Chicago,” says O’Brien. “When we heard about the opportunity to name a room, we thought it would be a great way to commemorate the four wonderful years that Erin had there. We asked her if she minded having a plaque with her name on it over a door … Erin Nitti, AB’08. She said she thought it would be wonderful—a fun idea.”

The 800-bed residence hall, which will become the largest undergraduate dorm, is scheduled to open this fall. Dorm rooms can be named for anyone—a family member, influential professor (retired only), favorite author, or a College class, for example. Gifts will be recognized by a permanent plaque on the door of the room. Students who live there will receive a short biography about the person or people their room is named for, as a means of learning about philanthropy.

All dorm room naming gifts will be directed to the Odyssey Scholarship program, which helps reduce or eliminate loans for lower-income College students. “I think that giving for education is the best kind of giving there is,” says O’Brien, who also serves on the Parent and Family Leadership Council. “We want the money we give to go for scholarships, so we were very pleased that the Odyssey Scholarship program was created.”

For Erin Nitti, her Chicago education has already paid off—literally. She’s now working at Merrill Lynch, and “one of the reasons she got the job was because she had gone to the University of Chicago,” says Bill Nitti. “Her University of Chicago resume immediately made its way to the top of the pile.”

“At Chicago I learned to think analytically in the broadest sense,” says Erin Nitti, “and for that I’m very grateful.”

Want to name a room, but not sure what name to choose?
Here are some ideas...

» Morpheus, Greek god of dreams
» R.E.M.
» Winsor McCay, creator of Little Nemo in Slumberland
» Nathaniel Kleitman (1895–1999), PhD’23, pioneer in sleep research

If you are interested in making a gift to name a dorm room or any other space in the new South Campus Residence Hall, please contact Susan Rossetti, AB’89, at 773.702.6097 or e-mail srosetti@uchicago.edu.
The Main Reading Room of Harper Memorial Library—with its 39-foot ceiling and enormous chandeliers—is widely considered one of the most beautiful spaces on campus. But a century after the cornerstone of the building was laid, its historic rooms “give the clear appearance of being down on their luck,” says John Boyer, dean of the College. “We want not only to restore their luster but also to transform the library into a technologically advanced center for learning and study.”

After its renovation, the Harper Memorial Library College Learning Center will serve as a centrally located, 24-hour destination for undergraduates—many of whom, beginning in 2009, will live south of the Midway in the new South Campus Residence Hall. The library will be home to a non-circulating, permanent reference collection, focusing particularly on books used in writing, foreign language, and Core courses. With no circulation desk needed, that space will be converted into a café and gallery for student artwork.

The bookshelves currently occupying the middle of the Main Reading Room will be taken out to make room for more study space. The rooms west of the Main Reading Room will be outfitted as integrated group technology spaces, with updated computer and audio-visual equipment. The behind-the-walls mechanics of the building will also be upgraded: no more dim lighting or inexplicably loud white noise.

In the library’s North Reading Room—actually the third floor of adjoining Stuart Hall—the current cubicles will be replaced by group study carrels that will open up the space and restore the room to its original grandeur. “The library will accommodate the ways our students learn today,” says Boyer, “independently and collaboratively, using old books and new media.”

Old books and new media
Out with the circulation desk, in with the art and coffee at Harper Memorial Library

If you are interested in supporting the Harper Memorial Library renovation project, please contact Susan Rossetti, AB’89, at 773.702.6097 or e-mail srossetti@uchicago.edu.
This April, third-year economics major Evan Dreyer found out he will be traveling more than 7,000 miles to get to his summer job. Dreyer has won a Metcalf internship at Eastern Networks, a provider of payment, security, and money-laundering-prevention services for financial institutions, based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. During the internship Dreyer will review and revise all of the company’s marketing materials, including its Web site.

“I never even dreamed I would have an opportunity like this,” says Dreyer. “I get more excited every time I talk about it. I had hoped to be able to work abroad after graduation, but it’s amazing to be able to do it even before graduation.”

The Metcalf internship at EastNets came about because its CIO, Lina Hediah, is the parent of a first-year student in the College, Nabila Abdelnabi. When Hediah accompanied her daughter to registration, she stopped by the Parents Program table.

Hediah discovered that “there are a lot of options for parents to get involved with the College and take an active role,” she says. “I was particularly interested in internships. There’s a lot of value in exposing the young generation to a different region—to give them a clear picture of how things are on the other side of the world.”

EastNets usually has one or two interns every summer from local universities, Hediah says, such as the American University in Dubai or the American University in Sharjah. This will be the first time the company hosts a student from the University of Chicago.

The EastNets job was one of the most coveted Metcalf internships this year: Dreyer was chosen from among 40 applicants. Luckily for Hediah, EastNets did not have to process all 40 applications. “The CAPS office does the initial screening with the help of alumni and parents. Then they forwarded to us the final four candidates. We had an hour-long phone interview with Evan, just to make sure he was the right fit,” she says. “It was a very tough choice, because all of the finalists were so excellent.”

Language was not a prerequisite for the internship; in the United Arab Emirates, “the language of business is English,” says Hediah, “though I’m sure Evan will pick up a few Arabic words.” The company has arranged a place for Dreyer to live, as well as transportation, and is even contributing to the cost of his airfare. Dreyer will be working a regular business week, except that the weekend is Friday and Saturday, in keeping with Arab custom. “I have no idea what my life is going to be like there,” says Dreyer. “That’s one of the most exciting parts about it. I won’t know anybody for several thousand miles in either direction.”

The UAE is “a highly culturally diverse community—a real microcosm,” Hediah says. “There are people from Britain, Germany, South Africa, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, as well as all over the Arab world. In our company, which is not very big, we have about 40 different nationalities.” Dreyer spent a month in London last summer but has never been to the Middle East. “I’m really looking forward to learning more about it,” he says. “Dubai is really the financial capital of the entire region. It’s a tremendous opportunity for me. I’m very grateful.”

Sponsor a Metcalf internship

The College is seeking more parents to host or to sponsor a Metcalf internship. Employer hosts provide a substantive, paid summer internship; sponsors provide funding to support an internship at organizations unable to fund the position themselves. For more information, please contact Marthe Druska at 773.834.1739 or e-mail mdruska@uchicago.edu.
Five Things I’ve Learned in Paris
(Besides French)

Nora Radtke is a third-year planning to major in political science and international studies, “with a potential minor in French if I have the time,” she says. Radtke spent the fall quarter at the University’s Center in Paris, where she was enrolled in the Civilisation Européenne program. Near the end, she says, “I had this moment in a French class when I realized that ten weeks was not enough. I literally did my application to stay on for another quarter that night.” During winter quarter, Radtke was enrolled in the International Studies program. The program includes a lecture series on international organizations at the Center, as well as Introduction to European Issues, held at Université Paris-Dauphine.

During her second quarter, we asked Radtke by e-mail: so what have you learned over there?

1 To dress like a Parisienne. My raincoat that I brought over from the States is bright pink, but I would feel totally embarrassed and touristy if I wore it around. So I bought a new coat here that is more fashionable and black. I came over with two scarves, and now I own nine, in every color and style imaginable. In the winter almost every girl my age is wearing the three same things: black coat, black boots, and a scarf. I’ve definitely adopted that.

2 To be more confident. Who cares if I’m going to say something in French completely wrong? I might as well try. I was a bit annoyed when I first got here and everyone spoke English to me. I would go to the supermarket or the bookstore, and I wouldn’t even get a chance to practice. Now I insist on doing everything in French. I’ve also become more independent. I took a trip all around Spain and Portugal by myself, and I never had a problem.

3 To cook. At first I made pasta every night because that’s all I knew how, but I’ve become more adventurous. I use a lot of fish—it’s fresher here. I’ve tried pâté and escargot and want to try frog legs before I leave. I haven’t really picked up wine drinking, but I have become more of a cheese snob.

4 To eat in the French way. I do a conversation exchange with a French student on Sunday nights. I go over to his house and help him with his English for an hour or so, then I stay and eat dinner with his family. They eat every meal together, no matter what, and it is always in multiple courses at the formal dining table. The French eat so late. I have yet to be acclimatized to that.

5 To drink coffee from a machine. There are machines at home and at school that sell coffee for 40 cents. The coffee may be awful, but it’s so cheap and so convenient that I can’t not drink it. Now I don’t know if I can go back to the States and drink normal coffee.

Mark your calendars

On October 2, 2009, the Center in Paris will celebrate the fifth anniversary of its dedication. The anniversary will be commemorated with a special event featuring David Nirenberg, the Deborah R. and Edgar D. Jannotta professor of medieval history and social thought. All alumni, parents, and friends of the University are invited. For more information, please visit the University Center in Paris Web site at centerinparis.uchicago.edu.

Join the Friends of the Center in Paris

The Friends of the Center in Paris was launched last year as a community of donors from across Europe and all over the world. All it takes to join is a yearly gift to support the Center’s activities and great experiences like Nora’s. Many members join at the Chicago Society level with a gift of $2,500. Donors who make gifts of $10,000 or more join the Director’s Circle. For more information, contact Gwen Jessen at 773.702.7343 or g-jessen@uchicago.edu.
“This is our University, in hard times as well as good.”


Every summer since 1996, John W. Boyer, dean of the College and Martin A. Ryerson distinguished service professor of history, has written a paper on a different aspect of University history—from its early financial struggles, to the pitched battles over curricula, to the campus unrest of the 1960s. In 1999 the College began publishing his essays as part of its Occasional Papers on Higher Education series. This summer Boyer plans to research and write a history of the arts at Chicago.

Free copies of Boyer’s books are available from the Dean’s Office. For a full list, e-mail Carol Baker at cbaker@uchicago.edu.

Pedal Power

First-year Daniel Zhong rides a bike, which turns a lower-voltage charger. The gadget was one of many on display April 24 during the University’s EarthFest—an outdoor party with music, organic food, and information about what students and community members are doing to “green up” their lives.