FALL 2011

THE COLLEGE NEWSLETTER
How alumni, parents, and friends support the College of the University of Chicago

Pierce Tower Resident Masters Andrew Siegel and Patty Jones and their family. Meet all of the Resident Masters on page 6.
Last summer, three College students were granted an enviable opportunity: ten weeks to pursue a project that they loved. Allison Radomski, ’12; Emilia Kaczynski, ’12; and Zachary Conn, ’12; were the recipients of the 2011 Seidel grants, named for donor Kathleen Gilles Seidel, AB’73 (see “Show of Support,” p. 10). Each summer, the $4,000 grants support creative summer projects grounded in art history, cinema and media studies, human development, English, philosophy, anthropology, history, political science, or psychology.

Allison Radomski, ’12
MAJOR Cinema and media studies
PROJECT Documentary on American diners

“Who are Americans?” Allison Radomski wrote in her application for a Seidel grant. “Where has this nation been, and where is it now?” To get at a possible answer, Radomski proposed making a documentary video about four small-town diners in different parts of the country.

The idea for the piece, Radomski says, was inspired partly by reading Alexis de Toqueville’s meditations on American identity in Democracy in America during her civilizations Core course. The plan, she wrote in her application, was to “engage questions of national identity through an examination of the events in our lives that often pass unnoticed.”

Radomski, along with collaborator Isaac Wilhelm, AB’11, began the project at the Good Table diner in Braidwood, IL, about an hour west of Chicago. They liked the diner’s location, “sandwiched between i-55 and a cornfield,” says Radomski.

Because the grant gave them the entire summer to work on the project, Radomski and Wilhelm were able to take their time getting to know the owners and the regulars: they spent the first week just talking to people at the counter without the camera on. Radomski and Wilhelm spent four weeks shooting at the diner, driving down each time: “We did try sleeping in the car once,” she says. “But only once.”

The documentary “doesn’t have a narrative in the traditional sense,” says Radomski. Instead, they focused on capturing small moments, like the waitresses rolling silverware into napkins or the cooks peeling potatoes. Over the next few years, Radomski and Wilhelm hope to complete a feature-length documentary to submit to festivals.
Emilia Kaczynski, ’12  

**MAJOR** Anthropology and French literature  
**PROJECT** Translation of novel Le livre de Monelle by Marcel Schwob (1894)

Emilia Kaczynski first fell in love with the short novel *Le livre de Monelle* in a course on 19th-century French literature: “It contained these snippets of wisdom that really spoke to me,” she says.

Marcel Schwob (1867–1905) wrote the book while grieving the death of Louise, a young prostitute he loved. Kaczynski was inspired to translate it when she discovered that the original English translation, by William Maloney, had been out of print since 1921—and since *Le livre de Monelle* was written in 1894, it was in the public domain. She hoped to improve on Maloney’s work, which is “a bit flowery and heavy handed,” she says.

Over the summer, Kaczynski shared her work in progress with several other students from the class, who helped her see nuances and connotations in the French that she had missed. Kaczynski ended the summer with a complete rough draft.

A small publisher, Uncivilized Books, will release the first portion of her translation this fall. Kaczynski plans to continue revising her work, as well as writing a critical introduction and annotations, for her BA project.

 Fluent in Polish as well as French, Kaczynski has studied Haitian Creole and Swahili at the College, and hopes to learn Russian someday. While she had dabbled in translation before, this was her first full-length project, she says: “I have gotten to know this book better than any book I have ever read in my life.”

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**EXCERPT FROM EMLILIA KACZYNSKI’S TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK OF MONELLE**

Monelle found me in the meadow where I wandered and took me by the hand. “Do not be surprised,” she said. “It is me and it is not me. You will find me again—and you will lose me. Once again I will come among you, for few men have seen me—and none have understood me. And you will forget me. And you will recognize me. And you will forget me.”

And Monelle said once more: “I will tell you about my sisters, and you will know the beginning.”

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Zachary Conn, ’12  

**MAJOR** History  
**PROJECT** Concept album about Jewish history

“My entire life, I’ve been enamored with the past,” Zachary Conn wrote in his final report about his summer. But his relationship with history was “more than a little unhealthy. …Immersing myself in the minutiae of long-passed events guaranteed some degree of escape from myself.”

For his summer project, Conn traveled to eastern Europe, where he spent three weeks tracking down important historical sites for his family (originally from Krakow and Warsaw). Conn was particularly interested in learning more about his maternal grandfather, who died before Conn was born.

He began writing songs on the plane ride back from Europe. He spent the rest of the summer in his hometown of Baltimore and later in Chicago, where he booked five days in a studio to record his album.

The album’s working title, *Stories and Lies*, comes from a line in his song “Scarlet”: “If for just tonight only can you sweetly and slowly / help me divide the stories from the lies?” Conn, who began playing guitar at six and writing songs at 12, plays all of the guitars, including bass, which he taught himself over the summer.

As well as Jewish history, the album explores Conn’s own family history, particularly his younger brother’s chronic mental illness, an ongoing theme in his work: “A friend of mine has a joke, ‘play me that song about your brother,’” says Conn. “Because they all are.” Though the lyrics are dark and brooding, the music is not; it clearly shows the influence of Conn’s favorites: early rock and roll and Elvis Costello. Conn hopes to release the album in 2012, distributing it for free and submitting it to music labels and blogs.

“What I love is music and history and writing,” says Conn, who plans to continue playing music while pursuing graduate work in history. “I’m hoping to be able to do all three.”

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**EXCERPT FROM ZACHARY CONN’S LYRICS ON STORIES AND LIES**

Grandpa Irv

Into the past I climbed to find you, frightened that I’d only designed you. They say the people who we used to be are in the dust, encased in rust, but now I’m not so sure, because I’ve seen things beneath cathedrals in towns where we once were illegal. Down certain bombed out streets across the sea, I shrugged off time, and paid no mind To what were once the lines...

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**GIVE THE GIFT OF TIME**

For more information about supporting research grants or other summer opportunities for College students, please contact Gwen Jessen at 773.702.7343 or g-jessen@uchicago.edu.
Last academic year, the Dean’s Fund for Student Life supported 31 out-of-the-ordinary student projects—on campus, in Chicago, and beyond.

1. **ON CAMPUS**
   **$8,165 GRANT**
   The Gilbert F. White Leadership Program, named after geographer and humanitarian Gilbert F. White, SB’32, PhD’42, empowers students to develop into ethical leaders and engaged members of their community. Over three years, about 75 students participated in the program, which includes weekly workshops, an offsite retreat, and group projects.

2. **WOODLAWN**
   **$1,000 GRANT**
   More than 400 people attended Art in Action, an annual community arts festival, held Memorial Day weekend at First Presbyterian Church.

3. **SOUTH SIDE**
   **$3,678 GRANT**
   The Chicago Inner-City Development Association, a new recognized student organization, volunteered as administrators for the Canaryville Little League. The league serves more than 330 baseball and softball players from seven different Chicago neighborhoods.

4. **NEW YORK, NY**
   **$1,473 GRANT**
   Megan Frestedt, AB’11, volunteered at the College Music Journal conference, where she learned about New York’s music scene and met industry leaders.

5. **MIDWEST-WEST**
   **$900 GRANT**
   Elizabeth Topczewski, ’13, traveled around the Midwest and the West researching modern hobo culture.

6. **ATLANTA, GA, AND NORMAL, IL**
   **$547 GRANT**
7 GRONINGEN, NETHERLANDS
$1,000 GRANT
Erin Dahlgren, ’12, an AB/AM student in linguistics, worked with a linguistics specialist at the University of Groningen to develop a database for her thesis research.

8 YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON
$1,600 GRANT
Ethan Tate, ’13, served as an unpaid intern for the US Department of State. He was one of 1,200 interns selected from a pool of 10,000 applicants.

5 DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
$987 GRANT
Greg Nance, AB’11, founder of the financial literacy mentoring organization Moneythink, delivered the student keynote speech at the Education without Borders conference.

CHART NEW TERRITORY
Every gift to the Dean’s Fund for Student Life goes directly to support student projects: unconventional research or internships, travel to conferences, community initiatives, and much more.

For additional information, please contact Gwen Jessen at 773.703.7343 or g-jessen@uchicago.edu.
This is my second year living as a Resident Assistant (RA) of DelGiorno House, one of eight houses in the still very shiny South Campus Residence Hall. And living is the correct verb—while it certainly requires work, being an RA isn’t exactly a job. There are no set hours, no paycheck, and no discrete tasks to perform.

Instead, I try to make life at the College a little more fun and a little less stressful for the other students in my house. RAs quickly learn to wear several hats, sometimes at once: concerned friend, dorm constable, pastry chef, wide receiver. I plan trips into the city when the weather is nice, play board games in the lounge when it isn’t, and when I study, I keep my door open so that students can wander into my room and just chat.

Each house has Resident Heads (a graduate student family) and many have Resident Masters (a senior faculty family). Together we promote community in the house, the intangible feeling that you belong.

Who are these Resident Masters, and why would they choose to live cheek by jowl with hundreds of adopted teenagers and twenty-somethings? Here’s what I found out.

“One Sunday morning we found a student seated on our couch, with no shoes or socks, fast asleep.”

—Lawrence Rothfield
Resident Master of Snell-Hitchcock
Penny and Lawrence Rothfield
SNELL-HITCHCOCK

MASTER RESIDENCY: 11 years

“SECOND JOB”: Larry is associate professor of English and comparative literature. Penny studies painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

BIGGEST DORM-WIDE EVENT: Scav Hunt, which is less an activity than an obsession.

TOTEM ANIMAL: The armadillo carved on the swing outside the building. Someone dresses up in a full-body armadillo costume (now badly in need of dry cleaning, we are told) to welcome arriving first-years on opening day.

HOW WE GET STUDENTS TO STOP STUDYING: Penny is a painter, so we bring more people from Chicago.

WHEN A RESIDENT WALKS INTO MY CLASS ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE QUARTER: We pretend not to know each other ... seriously, it is no big deal.

MOST MEMORABLE SURPRISE VISIT: One Sunday morning we found a student seated on our couch, with no shoes or socks, fast asleep.

Joshua Scodel and Mayumi Fukui
BURTON-JUDSON

MASTER RESIDENCY: Nine years

“SECOND JOB”: Josh is the Helen A. Regenstein Professor of English and Mayumi is vice president for managed care at the Medical Center.

MOST POPULAR DORM-WIDE EVENT (BESIDES SCAV): Our Iron Chef competition is pretty popular. We get judges from the faculty, and each year we try to come up with a very U of C theme—an often elaborate intellectual raison d’être.

DEAD GIVEAWAY THAT WE’RE AT UCHICAGO: A few years back Salisbury’s president decided that (like the inhabitants of Old Sarum in England) Salisbury residents should call themselves “Sarumites.” The new name has so far stuck as the correct, traditional one.

WHAT STUDENTS DON’T KNOW THEY’RE MISSING: I try to get students to admire our art and my vast CD collection of classical, jazz, folk, and world music. A few do.

SIGN THAT WE’VE SUCCESSFULLY ASSIMILATED: It’s the rare student who censures himself or herself on our behalf.

ANOTHER SIGN: I used to always expect undergraduates to call me by my surname and reserved “Josh” for my graduate students, but I got over that a long time ago.

John Lucy and Suzanne Gaskins
SOUTH CAMPUS RESIDENCE HALL WEST

MASTER RESIDENCY: Three years

“SECOND JOB”: John is the William Benton Professor of comparative human development and psychology. Suzanne is professor of psychology at Northeastern Illinois University. Together they teach Yucateca Maya at the University.

HOW WE HOST SO MANY EVENTS WITH HOMEMADE FOOD: We have three refrigerators and freezers, two dishwashers, and a large pantry—a more elaborate kitchen than we’ve ever had before.

WHAT WORKS FOR A STUDY BREAK: Anything that ties to the seasons really grabs people. When students come into the apartment, it just feels like a home.

HOW WE ALLEViate PARENTS’ FEARS DURING O-WEEK: One couple was more comfortable speaking Spanish than English. They seemed very happy that we were able to speak Spanish and we knew Mexico City.

WHY IT’S BETTER BEING MASTERS NOW THAN IN THE 1970s: We grew up in a time when grown-ups weren’t always well received. There was a very strong sense of the youth culture, and grown-ups were outside of that. And we don’t feel that here at all.

FOR ALUMNI, PARENTS, AND FRIENDS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
And that was on their third night here.
The open mike during O-week this fall was an event.
Cathe and Lawrence McEnerney
University Writing Program and a professor in the classics department and director of the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities.

When wisdom fell on deaf ears: Somebody from Wendt House was talking about doing an ethnographic study. I said one possibility would be a study of what changes at a dining hall table when Masters sit down. She was utterly uninterested.

Best demonstration of mental athletics: The open mike during O-week this fall was an awesome evening. My favorite moment was when Esteban said he had a talent and named off all of his fellow Wendtling's. Then he told everybody it was Manuel's birthday, and two hundred people sang "Happy Birthday" to him. And that was on their third night here.

Other open mike highlights: Students reciting Chaucer and singing Disney songs.

Perks of living next door to the director of the writing program: Sometimes I have students drop by who want me to look at a paper. And that's not limited to students—I've had resident staff come too.

Perks of living next door to 800 undergraduates: The model of UChicago as "conversations from the classroom carried on into the dorm" is right. We get to be part of those conversations too, and that's endlessly interesting.

Kris and David Wray
Max Palevsky Residential Commons

“Second job”: David is associate professor in the classics department and director of the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities. Kris has worked as a financial analyst and now edits the newsletter for the Weavers Guild of the North Shore.

Exclusive Max Masters' event: Every Max Palevsky resident gets an invitation to dinner at our apartment once a quarter. These have become a dorm tradition. It's fun to see how much humanity we can crowd into our living room before people start spilling out into the hallway.

Students' reaction to seeing us in the dining hall: Sometimes we're welcomed like guests, and sometimes it's clear that we're generational trespassers.

How we get students to stop studying: Every week we hold a meditation study break in our living room, followed by socializing over Bengal spice tea.

How we make our mark on the dorm culture: In the winter quarter we hold a weeklong arts festival, MaxArts. Kris puts some of her handwoven fabric in each year’s gallery show, and we make some music together during one of the performance nights.

Messiest discussion: One of my fondest memories is an intense philosophical discussion I had with a student at one of our dinners. We were talking, over Indian food, about what Plato meant by the phrase “participating in the good.” As our disagreement heated up, he got so excited that his plate overturned and left a big yellow stain on the carpet. After several shampooings there's still a faint outline of it. It always gives me a smile when I notice it.

Andrew Siegel and Patty Jones
Pierce Tower

“Second job”: Andrew is a computational scientist at Argonne National Laboratory. Patty is pursuing an MA in comparative literature at Northwestern.

Drop by any time: Student Council meetings, faculty dinners, house mixers, etc., all take place in our apartment. We try to encourage students to feel comfortable visiting spontaneously. Some stop by unannounced to play the piano, have a cup of coffee and chat, or play hide and seek with our kids.

Favorite discussion topic: My passion for Chicago really resonates with students—its history, constantly changing neighborhoods, and cultural institutions. It's hard to imagine a better place to live.

Dorm residents in my classes: It does happen occasionally. Teaching is tremendous fun, and the chance to have someone present to corroborate my anecdotes of dorm life only enhances the experience.

Strangest roommate dispute: A few shocking ones do come to mind, but I am sworn to secrecy.

Favorite things about being an RM: When students return after graduation and tell me that an event, introduction, or trip that we sponsored ultimately impacted their lives in some significant way, or was one of the more memorable moments in their College life. To see how much they identify with their first-year house, the relationships from that community that endure many years later ... to have the opportunity to contribute to this is a huge privilege.
There’s no place like it on campus.

The new Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, opening in spring of 2012, will house an art gallery, a film screening room, two student theaters, and a 450-seat performance hall.

Now is your chance to name one of those 450 seats. For a gift of $2,500, you can name a seat in honor of a family member, a beloved professor, a favorite playwright or composer—the choice is yours.

Contributions to the seat-naming campaign will create an endowed Student Performance Fund at the Logan Center. The fund will serve as a permanent source of support for all types of student performances on stage: theater, music, dance, and more.

NAME A SEAT IN THE LOGAN CENTER AND SUPPORT STUDENT PERFORMANCE.

STANDING OVATIONS START HERE

SEAT YOURSELF.

For more information, please contact Justin Glasson at 773.702.1169 or jglasson@uchicago.edu.
Kathleen Gilles Seidel, AB’73, author of 14 novels, has won every major award given for the romance genre. Nonetheless, “a wonderful person has posted a list on Amazon.com called ‘The Tragically Unknown Kathleen Gilles Seidel,’” she says. “I love it. It makes me sound like something from one of Wordsworth’s Lucy poems.”

Seidel and her late husband, Larry R. Seidel, AB’71, MBA’72, had a long history of giving to the University. In 2010, she established the Seidel Grants (see p. 2), which fund three students a year to pursue creative summer projects grounded in these majors: art history, cinema and media studies, human development, English, philosophy, anthropology, history, political science, or psychology. “I’m an optimist,” says Seidel. “If students love something, I yearn to tell them not to turn away from this passion too early. It might work out.”

Seidel recently spoke with College Newsletter about her writing career and her unusual gift.

**When did you first start writing fiction?**
Right after I finished graduate school, I wrote a book. It was never published, and it never should be published.

It was very pretentious. The audience I had in mind was the six senior faculty members of Johns Hopkins University, where I had just gotten my PhD in the theory of the novel. The purpose was to prove myself, because I had received tenure-track offers and they were annoyed at me for not taking them. Obviously, that’s not why people want to read a book.

Editors and agents would take my cover letter and write “no” across the top and send it back. They wouldn’t even waste a piece of their personalized stationery.

**What gave you the idea to try the romance genre?**
I was teaching at a community college. My students were called in those days “re-entry housewives”—they went to college when their kids started kindergarten. Some of them were
extremely smart. I really liked them. My goal was just to make them happy.

So I had a very solid sense of purpose and audience. That’s what changed me into an author whose book sold in six days, including mailing time. The book was called *The Same Last Name*—another book I’m quite happy if nobody reads again.

**Is there a stigma attached to writing romance?**

When Harlequin bought my book, one of the first questions was, “What’s your pseudonym?” I came up with one, but then I thought, I’m proud of this book—I’m using my own name. I’ve always published under my own name.

Two things have made me so much less defensive than most romance writers. First, if you want a label on your forehead that says “smart person,” there’s nothing like a degree from the University of Chicago.

Second, and probably more significant, is that the Chicago school of criticism still dominated the curriculum when I was an English major. It focused on genre. I was comfortable thinking of books in terms of genre. I felt just as comfortable becoming a genre writer.

Readers choose genre fiction for a reason. For example, the morning after my father died, I went into my mother’s room to check on her, and she was reading one of my books. At that terrible time, she had turned to one of my books for comfort. It doesn’t get any more gratifying than that.

**Did your husband ever read your work?**

He was supportive but not very interested in the details. He read one or two. Part of the deal was, if he was going to read it, I couldn’t ask him his reaction, so I didn’t. Why complicate a marriage if he was going to read it, I couldn’t ask him his reaction, so I didn’t. Why complicate a marriage with that?

The people who are supposed to like my books like them. I don’t need anyone else to like them.

**How did you meet?**

At a fraternity rush party. He was an Alpha Delt. When he called and asked me out, I said yes, even though I wasn’t really sure who he was. I lived in Woodward Court, called the New Dorms then. In those days, the guys waited for you in the central courtyard. I had to ask a few people, does anyone remember what he looks like?

We got married in April of my senior year.

**What was the College like in the early 1970s?**

There were 500 students in my class. We were one of the smallest classes ever. You could always get whatever course you wanted. It was very easy to get a single room.

**Any particularly influential College classes?**

The Physical Sciences Common Core, though I hated it, has given me a huge range of metaphor that other writers don’t have: magnetism, entropy, other realities of the physical world.

I took a Modern Fantasy class that became very useful. I wrote a paper on *Lord of the Rings*, looking at how a reader knows that it’s going to end happily.

When I was in the College, English majors spent their junior year developing their own reading list. Once a week you met with a senior faculty member to talk one on one. I worked with Stuart Tave. We did Austen, Shakespeare’s history plays. That was superb training for my doctoral orals four years later.

**How has your work developed over the years?**

My last two books, *A Most Uncommon Degree of Popularity* (2006) and *Keep Your Mouth Shut and Wear Beige* (2008) have not been romances. They’ve been women’s fiction: “mom-lit” if you have to have a sub-genre. Those books were difficult to write, because I was so much less sure of how they would fit into my readers’ lives. Neither of them sold at all well.

I felt like I was running out of things to say about young people falling in love. And I was interested in lots of other different kinds of relationships—still love, but my life at the time was not about the courtship plot.

I’m very proud of those two books, but I think the subject matter and surface technique were at odds. I still write like a romance writer. I don’t go for the pain. I don’t leave anything ambiguous. All questions are answered, all judgments are made. If you read a book of mine, you know what you are supposed to think and feel. There’s not much for a book club to talk about.

The book I’m working on now is a romance again. I don’t have a working title yet—it’s still an organic process. Right now, it feels like a big mess. They always do at this point.

**What kind of books do you read?**

It’s hard for me to get into a romance anymore, because I’m too aware of the little man behind the curtain. I read murder mysteries, because I like genre fiction. I also like popular nonfiction, especially popular sociology.

**Why did you choose to fund scholarships supporting creative work?**

First, I want to say that the best thing to do for an institution is to give unrestricted money. That’s what institutions need. Institutions are better than donors at choosing whether they need the money to establish a named professorship or pay the heating bill.

Larry got scholarships, and he was so grateful. So we made unrestricted gifts for years and years. We did what the College would like all young alumni to do—which I think my daughter (Dorothy Seidel, AB’08) already does—give fifty dollars a year, every single year, and then gradually increase it when you’re in a position to do something more.

Having said that, setting up these scholarships, which support students doing work they love, was so much fun. When I read the students’ final statements about their projects, they were all so exciting. It was such a high. It’s been tremendously rewarding.

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**SUPPORT SUMMER LEARNING**

For information on supporting research grants or other summer learning opportunities for College students, please contact Gwen Jessen at 773.702.7343 or g-jessen@uchicago.edu.
Career Advising and Planning Services now offers eight career exploration programs to help students make the most of their liberal arts education.

The support of alumni, parents, and friends is critical to these programs’ success.

For more information, contact Marthe Druska. 773.834.1739 mdruska@uchicago.edu

To make a gift, contact Gwen Jessen. 773.702.7343 g-jessen@uchicago.edu

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