

THIRTY YEARS  
IN THE FIELD  
ANNUAL REPORT  
TO THE FACULTY

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS  
ON HIGHER  
EDUCATION XXVII

THE COLLEGE  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF  
CHICAGO



*An early version of this essay was presented as the Annual Report to the Faculty of the College on October 25, 2022. John W. Boyer is the Martin A. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of History and the College, and Dean of the College.*

## THIRTY YEARS IN THE FIELD

### ANNUAL REPORT TO THE FACULTY

**T**his will be the final annual report that I have the honor to deliver to the Faculty of the College. From the very beginning of my deanship in the fall of 1992 I gave annual addresses, and I will return to the first of these talks at the end of today's remarks, but the first report of a more extensive and monographic nature came in the fall of 1996 and was reprinted as the first essay in the small book, *Three Views of Continuity and Change*.<sup>1</sup> (Copies of that book are available to you today on a table at the rear of the room.) That address in 1996 took up the then deeply controversial issue of the size of the College; the others that followed<sup>2</sup> addressed a series of equally important policy and curricular issues relevant to the future prosperity of the College and our students.

This is the twenty-seventh such report in the context of this genre, and it is for me the last of its kind.

In thinking about how to conclude this series, I thought that it would

1. See John W. Boyer, *Continuity & Change: The College as a Member of the Wider University*, Occasional Papers on Higher Education, vol. 1 (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, Oct. 22, 1996).

2. *The College as an Advocate of Curricular Innovation and Debate*, vol. 2 (Oct. 21, 1997), and *The College as a Sponsor of Research*, vol. 3 (Oct. 20, 1998).

be valuable to be keenly retrospective and also cautiously, but visibly prospective as well.

The identities and the reputations of America's great research universities derive from many sources, including the distinguished scholarly work of their faculty, the educational effectiveness of the curricula they provide to their students, and the positive memories and deep loyalties of their alumni. In recent years some of the most powerful social forces shaping these identities have also come from complex public policy issues, such as the ability of students of all socioeconomic backgrounds to gain access to the universities, the financial cost of attendance, cultural controversies involving campus climate and free speech, and the perceived value of their academic degrees for postgraduate career outcomes. From our dedication to the primacy of scholarly work arose our parallel commitment to academic freedom and free expression and our sharp intolerance of intellectual mediocrity of any kind. All of these issues acknowledge the vital role of universities in today's world as agencies for mass social mobility, professional advancement, and economic progress. But they also highlight the complex challenges of managing and operating universities in the twenty-first century.

The University of Chicago lives from its reputation as perhaps the most intellectual and one of the most rigorous universities in the United States. Numerous commentators have sought to give words to this ethos, but perhaps the most effective was our founder, William Rainey Harper. In June 1896, on the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the University, Harper asserted "that it is the nature of a university to occupy the advanced positions; that a university, if it will justify its name, must be a leader of thought, and that however cautious or conservative may be the policy of such an institution, the great majority of men are accustomed to follow far behind. It cannot be expected that such will sympathize

with those whose responsibilities force them to the forefront in the great and continuous conflict of thought."<sup>3</sup> Harper thus insisted not only in the fundamental mission of the University to focus on the development of new knowledge, but he also admitted that such leadership would often encounter puzzlement and even misunderstanding from the wider public. It is a fascinating question why and how this peculiar combination of intense scholarly intellectualism, sturdy faculty prerogative in defense of the honor, dignity, and freedom of the academy, a profound conviction in the intrinsic value of new knowledge for the enrichment of modern life, and an almost abstemious disregard for public opinion that might compromise the deep intellectualism of Chicago came to mark the genesis of the early University. But it did so, and this bundle of identities has had an inexorable impact on the institution for the last 130 years.

The last thirty years or so have seen that reputation for the rigorous, uncompromising cultivation of new knowledge as the primary mission of the University become even more illustrious. But reputations, what professional marketeers would call "brand," arise from the aspirations of everyday academic life and from everyday cultural beliefs in the zeal of learning, from the uncompromising curricular practices and standards of the faculty, and from the welcome receptivity of our students to share in those scholarly aspirations and values. Harper rightly stressed the need for what he called a "unity of spirit" among the full community of the University, highlighting not only the scholarly prowess of our faculty but also the "bold and courageous" students who were given "a large liberty ... in the effort to adjust the curriculum to [their] needs rather than to adjust [them] to a fixed curriculum."<sup>4</sup>

3. William Rainey Harper, "The Quinquennial Statement of the President," *University Record* 1, no.16 (July 17, 1896): 254.

4. *Ibid.*, 255, 259.

Much change has also occurred at the University over the past thirty years, and the College has been at the center of many of these transformations. We have expanded the College twofold, from 3,500 to slightly over 7,000 students, while dramatically improving our selectivity and driving up our yield. In 1992 we had an acceptance (selectivity) rate of 72 percent and a yield rate of 31 percent (indicating the percentage of those who accept their offers of admission). This past year we enjoyed an acceptance (selectivity) rate of 5 percent and a yield rate of 85 percent, a tribute to the efficacy of our remarkable intellectual culture, to the effectiveness of our curricular traditions, to the vibrancy of student life on our campus, to the dedication of our faculty as teachers, and to the impressive communication strategies and organizational efforts of our wonderful colleagues in Admissions.

We have done this by investing in many new and exciting academic programs and by protecting our venerable traditions of general education. But we have also massively invested in improving the total experience of our undergraduate students with resources that include a completely new residential housing system (four new residential commons constructed since 2000, with a fifth residential commons in planning stages, to open in 2026–27); a radically distinctive set of faculty-taught international study programs; major investments in student research and fellowship opportunities under the College Center for Research and Fellowships; the many new career advising and internship programs run by Career Advancement (the fifteen “Chicago Careers in” programs, the Jeff Metcalf Interns, the Lawrence A. Kimpton Fellows, the Susanne H. Rudolph Scholars); major new investments and initiatives in the arts and student artistic performance, epitomized by the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts; and enhanced programs in athletics, student wellness, and engagement with the great city that is our home. While investing in these

and many other programs, we have also protected the core curricular values and educational practices of the University. Indeed, our general-education (Core) sequences for first- and second-year students remain signature features of our curriculum, but our curricular offerings for third- and fourth-year students have also seen a remarkable explosion of creative innovation: since 1992 the faculty have added nineteen new and largely interdisciplinary majors to the array of subject areas our students may elect to pursue.

Let me speak briefly of the special importance of the general-education Core curriculum in defining Chicago’s educational culture and traditions of rigor for its undergraduate students. In challenging our students to engage large areas of human knowledge and discovery, and to do so at a high level at the beginning of their careers, general education has contributed to the intellectual seriousness with which we endow the whole of our curriculum. And in teaching students how to differentiate good from bad ideas, sound from faulty reasoning, and precise from imprecise arguments, general education has had a powerful seeding effect in training generations of young undergraduates in the skills of the scholar: intellectual engagement, dispassion in the midst of controversy, and courage in the face of intellectual uncertainty.

We are now among the most selective private universities, much sought after by brilliant students from around the world. From a somewhat marginal element in the imaginary political economy of the University, the College is now the largest unit of the University, standing at its center and bringing together faculties from across the disciplines and schools of thought. It is filled with truly amazing, talented, and disciplined students who understand the primacy of rigorous thought, who treasure our traditions of transdisciplinary general education, liberal learning, and free expression, who will bring great distinction to the University over

the course of their adult lives, and who as alumni may provide a dedicated and unfaltering cultural foundation for the University's welfare in the distant future.

This transformation has been perhaps the most powerful of all the changes that have shaped the University of Chicago in the last half century. As our former President Hugo Sonnenschein said in July 2020: "The College is now clearly central to the work of the University and this transformation has occurred without in any way diminishing the 'essential character' of the University. We remain 'serious' and more committed to 'inquiry and thought' than any of the other universities in this country that balance the Arts and the Sciences.... The 'place' of our College is now where it deserves to be, and this is a most powerful force for promoting the long run success of the University."<sup>5</sup>

While such encomiums are well taken, we must be clear-eyed about the challenges that we still face culturally and institutionally in properly supporting a College of seven thousand students. Our peers in the Ivy Plus attained their current enrollment sizes over the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, often on the basis of expanding their applicant pools to include female students. This meant that they came to have large college enrollments nested into existing and stable graduate and professional school structures, and both the collegiate and the graduate sides could grow accustomed to each other in a slow-moving, evolutionary manner. Also, with the exception of Columbia, they did not have distinctive and highly structured general-education curricula; they could instead rely on more flexible systems of distribution requirements, where logistical requirements for educational breadth could be accommodated in routine departmental teaching structures, often to cover popular subjects by

5. Email from Hugo F. Sonnenschein to the author, July 11, 2020.

deploying large-size classes of one hundred or even two hundred students or more. In contrast, we have seen a very recent and substantial expansion of the demographic size of the College built upon a commitment to maintaining a relatively large Core that is deliberately *not* a part of any department or departments and that continues to value intellectually intensive, seminar-style classes of very modest sizes. Moreover, these changes have taken place in the context of equally radical changes in the budgeting and demographic structure of our graduate programs in the humanities and social sciences. A university and a faculty that was once most well-known for its very large doctoral cadres (admittedly, with sizable numbers of PhD degrees never completed) now finds itself—as do most of our peers—in a kind of identity crisis in some key fields as it relates to the future of doctoral education. The reorientation of our institution and culture toward the education of undergraduates and the rewarding work of mentoring of these students has thus taken place in a much more compressed timeframe compared to our peers in the Ivy Plus. We see these pressures in the value assigned to student life and, to be very frank, in the relative fragility of those essential bonds that must join the ambitions of our regular faculty with the vital presence of our undergraduate students on campus.

In 2012 President Robert J. Zimmer articulated an intriguing way of thinking about the mission of the University in five world arcs of opportunities and challenges: the College, the Natural World, the Social World, the Human World, and Outward Engagement.<sup>6</sup> Looking to the future, we might think about five parallel domains of opportunity and challenge facing the College and the University more generally.

6. Robert J. Zimmer, "Eminence and Impact: Balancing Strategic Opportunities and Risks in the Coming Decade," *Report to the Deans and Board of Trustees*, Mar. 2012, 11–30, College Archive of the University of Chicago.

**CHALLENGE ONE:  
FACULTY OWNERSHIP OF AND INVESTMENT  
IN THE WORK OF THE COLLEGE**



What does the image of the College as the center of the University mean in the context of our instructional resources and curricular traditions?

One of the most telling sentences in my first report in 1996 referred to the older tradition of what were called “College-only” appointments (tenure-track appointments made by the College without the involvement or approval of an academic department or division), where I mentioned that it would be virtually impossible to secure the approval of appointments of such brilliant teachers like Christian Mackauer or Gerhard Meyer or Joseph Schwab in our time, given the staunch opposition of the central administration.<sup>7</sup> This comment was much noted by alumni leaders in the 1990s, and although they often decried that reality, they appreciated my candor in making it. Why were they so upset? In their view, usually based on deep personal experiences, to study with a magnificent teacher who was also a tenured professor, who would come to know them, and who, from a cultural perspective, saw collegiate teaching as her or his *primary* professional mission, was an ideal situation for a young College student. As the young Leon Botstein (now the long-serving president of Bard College) wrote of his experience in studying with Christian Mackauer, he “has given his many students a clear and profound historical understanding... Mr. Mackauer is a ‘mirror bearer’ to his students, leading them with energy and devotion to a sharp, critical analysis of their work.”<sup>8</sup>

7. Boyer, *Continuity & Change: The College as a Member*, 32–33.

8. Leon Botstein and Ellen Karnofsky, eds, *Essays in Western Civilization in*

And yet, as one category of distinguished faculty teachers has passed into the annals of history, other and newer categories have emerged within the ambient teaching culture of the College. One of the most dramatic shifts has been the increased number of excellent faculty teachers drawn from the professorial ranks of the professional schools who now work with our students. The growth and transformation of the College has been joined in profound ways with curricular changes in our professional schools, particularly Booth (business), Crown (social work), and Harris (public policy), which have provided exciting new opportunities for the interaction of our students with their professional-school faculties. Our newest professional school, the Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering, has further encouraged this trend.

We have made much progress in opening the College up to a diversity of scholarly/professional approaches and I hope, looking to the future, that we will not back down or retreat into forms of narrow jurisdictionalism or beggar-thy-neighbor territorialism.

All that said, close personal interactions between tenure-track faculty and undergraduate students, in the classroom and beyond, must become a more critical and defining feature of the College. Sixty years ago, in his now classic *The Uses of the University*, Clark Kerr predicted a worsening of the quality of undergraduate teaching by regular faculty in major research universities. Citing the allure of federal research monies and the secular trend toward a reduction in faculty teaching loads, he insisted that “how to escape the cruel paradox that a superior faculty results in an inferior concern for undergraduate teaching is one of our more pressing

*Honor of Christian W. Mackauer* (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, 1967), v.

problems.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Roger Geiger and Donald Heller have warned that large public universities face severe financial pressures that “have forced an ‘unbundling’ of university tasks: universities have increasingly utilized non-tenure track faculty for undergraduate teaching so that regular faculty can engage in research, scholarship and advanced instruction.”<sup>10</sup> Such trends would have devastating consequences for the long-term intellectual welfare and cultural coherence of the private American universities, and none more so than the University of Chicago. Our long-term health requires that our tenure-track faculty take primary responsibility for the teaching in the majors and that they provide strong leadership of the general-education Core sequences, while also acknowledging that our full-time lecturers and instructional professors are outstanding teachers. It is also critical that more tenured faculty serve as research mentors for undergraduates, for this is an important measure of how engaged we are in the full, scholarly, and personal development of students, especially the juniors and seniors of our College. It is also equally essential that we find new, systematically structured ways for the faculty of the departments and interdisciplinary committees who sponsor our majors to play more central roles in the academic advising of our juniors and seniors in the College.

The work of bringing students into the enterprise of knowledge creation is a way of testing and amplifying the preparation they receive in their formal courses of study and, hence, an ideal opportunity to bridge the gap between faculty and students. Recently the College established

9. Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 5th ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 49.

10. Roger L. Geiger and Donald E. Heller, “Financial Trends in Higher Education: The United States” (working paper no. 6, Center for the Study of Higher Education, Pennsylvania State University, Jan. 2011), 16.

the College Center for Research and Fellowships to facilitate opportunities more systematically, and there are strong benefits to expanding these opportunities for students, faculty, and our institution as a total community. The demographic trends of the last twenty-five years have diminished the population of doctoral students in the humanities and social sciences who were the traditional partners for faculty research; in many cases, and with proper training, the remarkably talented and ambitious students in the College can serve ably in these roles. The positive impacts of undergraduate research are already evident across all student populations, with demonstrable benefits for their intellectual growth, success with graduate-school applications, and placement in highly competitive postgraduate fellowships that prize research as an indication of academic excellence.

#### CHALLENGE TWO: HOUSING AND ACADEMIC AND CAREER SUPPORT

I recently came across a report from 1985 about the state of student life in the College in the 1980s. It was commissioned by the then dean of students in the College, Herman Sinaiko. The author was a psychiatric social worker, Joanna R. Gutmann, who did extensive consulting work at the University. This was the world that I first encountered as a young faculty member. Gutmann was blunt in her criticisms.<sup>11</sup> She described the student culture in a rapid-fire string of impressionistic quotes from students themselves, who described campus as “cold and heartless,”

11. Joanna R. Gutmann, “The Undergraduate Support System at the University of Chicago,” Mar. 1985, College Archive of the University of Chicago.

“tough and gloomy,” “where you have to study all the time,” “students just don’t have time for anything else in their life,” a place where “there is no social life,” and “socially it’s a real wasteland.”<sup>12</sup> These are clearly stereotypes, but it is telling that a confidential report from Admissions in the early 1980s noted that more than half of the students who rejected our offer of admissions did so because they felt that the “social environment” was a “highly negative factor.”<sup>13</sup> Many other reports from these decades confirm the serious cultural problems. Assistant Dean of Students James Newman reported as early as 1963 that “few adults would choose to live in a social milieu which offers as little emotional support to the individual as does the College. Yet our students endure this psychological assault at a time in their lives when they are most in need of the social support that is lacking here.”<sup>14</sup> A comment from a prominent alumnus in 1999 about his experiences in the College in the late 1960s is thus apt: “Too few of us attended our thirtieth reunion.... Many of us wrote to friends, and often we received distressing responses. Classmates complained of bitter memories or unhappy times, and preferred distance to healing. No one thought the University had ever embraced them.” The high drop-out rates that we experienced well into the 1980s and the striking unwillingness of many of our own alumni to encourage their children to attend the College even in the 1990s (a state of affairs that has radically changed in the last ten years) were perhaps the best evidence of a noble academic culture with many student-life liabilities. Gutmann

12. Ibid.

13. Jonathan Z. Smith, “Report of the Dean of the College, *Minutes of the College Council*, Nov. 24, 1981.

14. John W. Boyer, *Three Views of Continuity and Change at the University of Chicago* (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, 1999), 25.

cited these data, and many others, to urge serious reforms. She called for a “supportive system which is comprehensive, facilitative and communicative, with easily accessible services, provided with flexibility and respect for student autonomy.”<sup>15</sup>

Gutmann’s report was followed eleven years later by an equally searching report authored by Susan Kidwell in 1996 on behalf of the Task Force on the Quality of Student Experience. Kidwell’s committee undertook an even more detailed exposé of the state of student life, and the results were not gratifying or encouraging. She found a student culture in which “10 percent of the students withdrew by the end of their first year.” Citing research undertaken by Richard Taub, she also reported that “35 percent of our current undergraduates report that they have taken some step to leave [the University] during their College careers.” Kidwell paid particular attention to the lack of career advising and a failure to encourage various professional outcomes, describing a campus culture that lacked support structures to encourage solidarity and social interaction: “The appearance of a single-minded focus on academic success sends a message that the institution values only a subset of the students’ talents and interests.” She also called attention to the fact that most students felt their residential experience to be the equivalent of commuter students, discouraging strong group social ties and robust connections to campus life: “Virtually all of our students describe themselves as commuters.... The commuter lifestyle creates feelings of isolation for many others as well as a certain inefficiency (transit time, bus-stop waiting time, etc).”<sup>16</sup>

15. Gutmann, “The Undergraduate Support System.”

16. “Report of the Task Force on the Quality of Student Experience,” *University of Chicago Record* 30, no. 5 (May 23, 1996): 2–11.



Much has changed since those days—our first-year retention rate is now 99 percent and our six-year graduation rate is 96 percent (as late as 1992 the latter was 81 percent)—but it is important to remember the challenges that our predecessors faced and worried about greatly in the 1980s and 1990s. Of particular import in changing or at least mitigating this culture of social alienation has been the evolution of our curriculum to balance the rigor of the Core with greater opportunities for individual intellectual exploration and a stronger sense of empowering self-direction by expanding the role of free electives; the transformation of the College’s housing system to create an extensive and supportive platform for sociability and friendship formation; the creation of a stunning array of new career programs and internships; the value that the faculty now sees in a multiplicity of professional careers; and stronger programs of advising resources, which we have worked to reimagine and recreate.

Student life benefited from the reform of the Core curriculum that the College Council approved in 1998 and that served to increase the space for free electives, giving our students more self-directed control over their own intellectual ambitions. The previous curriculum, in which the Core accounted for twenty-one requirements (literally half of the total number of courses required for a bachelor’s degree), had the effect of pushing many general-education courses into the third and even fourth years of undergraduate study and, thereby, weakening students’ ability to choose to encounter broad new areas of knowledge beyond the introductory level. This contradicted the logic of general education as preparation for higher-level work and often resulted in deeply unhappy graduating seniors. The new plan that emerged from years of serious and very contentious debates between 1994 and 1998 reduced the size of the Core to fifteen courses, fulfilled by two-quarter Core courses in place of yearlong sequences in the biological sciences, humanities, civilizational

studies, and the physical sciences, and by replacing the existing course-based foreign language requirement with a test-based competency requirement.<sup>17</sup> These changes allowed students to complete their Core requirements in the first two years of study and gave them freedom to explore more advanced courses taught by regular faculty in their third and fourth years. Now, rather than dominate the curriculum, general education claims roughly a third of a student’s curricular plan, and encourages students to take a broader range of elective courses, even at the graduate level, in addition to their chosen major.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the College also argued vigorously that the University needed to make major investments in the transformation of our residential system, to dispose of old, outlying buildings and to construct a series of modern, on- or near-campus residential facilities that students could easily reach on foot and without taking buses around the neighborhood. In a word, to eliminate the commuter syndrome of our campus culture and to replace it with stronger, holistic communitarian values. To do this, the College formulated a radical plan to reimagine residential life on the campus by constructing new housing and dining facilities within easy walking distance to the central quadrangles. Between 1998 and 2019 the Board of Trustees approved the construction of four major residential facilities: the Palevsky Residential Commons with 712 beds (2001) on land surrounding Regenstein Library; the Renee Granville-Grossman Residential Commons with 811 beds (2009), adjoining Burton Judson Courts on South Campus; Campus North, a stunning residential

17. See John W. Boyer, *A Twentieth-Century Cosmos: The New Plan and the Origins of General Education at Chicago*, Occasional Papers on Higher Education, vol. 16 (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, Oct. 31, 2006), 149–53; Ethan Bronner, “Winds of Academic Change Rustle University of Chicago,” *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 1998.

complex of 800 beds (2016) in place of Pierce Tower on 55th Street and University Avenue; and Woodlawn Commons, a fourth large residence hall with 1,200 beds (2020) on the corner of Woodlawn Avenue and 61th Street on the South Campus. A fifth new residential commons is now in planning stages, most likely to open in 2026–27. In 2019 the College also implemented a mandatory two-year housing requirement and further strategies to encourage more third- and fourth-year students to stay on campus as well.

Since the 1990s College leaders have argued that housing and residential life should lie at the center of efforts to foster solidarity, affinity, and cohesion within Class cohorts and support for current students, beginning at the point of matriculation and continuing through graduation.<sup>18</sup> Houses are sites for academic and personal development, where students form intellectual and social bonds, build their scholarly confidence, and consider ways to apply their education to the world beyond campus. The work of resident deans, senior faculty, and their families who reside in a hall and direct its residential life has been critical to this vision, while the return of the housing system onto the central campus has provided new opportunities to integrate academic and residential life. As before, resident deans can welcome students into their homes and foster community through creative programming, but now, in close proximity to the University's distinguished faculty, libraries, and campus activities, they can sponsor more dynamic connections between faculty, the student body, and the resources of the city.

The College has also implemented several initiatives to capitalize on

18. See John W. Boyer, *"The Kind of University We Desire to Become": Student Housing and the Educational Mission of the University of Chicago*, Occasional Papers on Higher Education, vol. 18 (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, Oct. 28, 2008), 115–18.

the diverse benefits of a campus-based, residential system for our students. Common spaces in the halls and the apartments of resident deans regularly host a wide range of activities to create informal access to features of campus life, from faculty research talks and roundtables to academic informational sessions, career and fellowship advising, and arts programming. To reinforce early academic engagement in general education with the sociability of residential life the Humanities Collegiate Division began, in the summer of 2020, to group first-year students in the various Humanities Core sequences by their house assignments. Since 2017 the houses and the resident deans have also played a critical role in University Convocations by way of the College diploma-distribution ceremonies. Whereas the diploma ceremony had previously taken place as one event in the main quad, the new system created eight smaller, concurrent ceremonies organized by each residence hall and presided over by the resident deans. This more intimate format has allowed our graduating students to celebrate their achievements with the same community that welcomed them into the College and to be recognized in a deliberate way by the University officials and staff who know them best. The residence halls in this way have become immediate points of contact as our undergraduate students become our newest alumni.

Yet, with all this progress, challenges still remain. As more students remain on campus for years two, three, and four, we need to develop strategies to strengthen the house and hall communities in which upper-class students are not only supported but encouraged to function as leaders within the College community. The new novelty of our structures involves not only our students living on the central campus, but with more of our students of all years living together. This means that we have to think about creating more traditions and customs appropriate to such integrated communities, where older students give back to the community

and mentor younger students, and where faculty and academic programs are more deeply embedded in residential life. These traditions do not yet exist here with the thickness and synergies that we see at other institutions in our peer group.

The recent history of our housing program has been a great success story relative to the 1980s and 1990s. This was a massive and appropriate investment in the success of our students, whose ultimate benefits will need further commitment and planning. While we have made enormous gains in building new support infrastructure, student needs have changed in ways that require us to make full and better use of that infrastructure.

Parallel to the transformation of housing was the invention of a completely new model of career support as one important response to the problem of social climate and environment in the 1980s and 1990s. Acknowledging the malaise engendered by our then *laissez-faire*, semi-Darwinian attitudes about student career planning and career success, beginning in the late 1990s the College focused on creating robust career planning and professional advising programs and internship opportunities. Over the next twenty years, Chicago developed one of the most coherent and ambitious sets of career support programs in the United States by investing heavily in internships and mentoring programs and by engaging alumni and faculty from across the University (including the professional schools) to help students think about and prepare themselves to fulfill their professional ambitions. The success of our career programs is directly linked to the widespread support they have come to enjoy among the faculty, for which our students are extremely grateful.

As in other areas of College growth, a thriving program, with improved rates of postgraduate employment, recruiting, partnerships, and advising, could not happen by decree, nor all at once. The first vehicle for growth was the Jeff Metcalf Internship Program, which began to offer paid

summer opportunities to undergraduates. The number of paid internships has grown correspondingly, from 8 internships in the inaugural year of 1997, to 108 in 2004, to 1,000 in 2014, and to 4,200 in the 2021–22 academic year. The 2022 internships took place in 250 US cities and nearly 50 countries abroad and represented participation from almost 57 percent of the undergraduate student body.

Our career advising has also responded to differences in student experiences and outcomes. The major demographic changes attendant in the growth and increasing diversity of the College require new kinds of student support, particularly as regards our Odyssey scholars and students who are from low-income families or are the first generation to attend college and who may lack the kinds of professional socialization that accrue more naturally to their peers. The striking success of the Odyssey Scholarship Program, launched in 2009, revealed an equity gap of preparation and achievement just five years later, which called for earlier interventions that would provide these students with more options and time to build skills and to level the playing field for all our students over their four years of study. In response, the College reweighted its career advising resources toward early engagement and, particularly, toward the first and second years.

Today, in 2022, Career Advancement in the College is widely recognized as a best-in-class career program in the Ivy Plus that contributes powerfully to the para-curricular experiences of our students, to the satisfaction and enthusiasm of our alumni, and to the reputation of the University. A system of support has taken shape that, as in other domains of the College experience, departs from models seen at peer institutions and draws inspiration from our unique institutional culture, history, and structure. Far from competing with the College's intellectual student culture, our career advising programs have enhanced our programs of study

by leading our students to test, reconsider, and ultimately enrich what they learn in the curriculum in applied environments, a process of cultivation that comes back to campus in the form of sophisticated undergraduate research, BA theses, and upper-level coursework and other contributions to our campus intellectual culture. The basic logic of these programs was to protect the liberal arts culture of our College by showing students and their parents (the Class of 2022 had a 98 percent placement rate upon graduation) that a rigorous curriculum of general and liberal education, when supplemented by strong career support services, was the best way to prepare students for successful and fulfilling professional careers.

I want to stress that these programs are not only utilitarian. Responding to Kidwell's critique, they send an equally strong symbolic message to our students that the University cares deeply about their personal growth and values a broad variety of professional attainments. These programs broaden the measure of academic success beyond just imagining that all of our College students must view themselves as younger versions of advanced doctoral students.

Academic advising has been a third area of considerable concern. Advising is a confounding problem for all peer institutions with dynamic curricula and ambitious students. In the last ten years, and particularly since the start of the pandemic, the labor market for the recruitment of talented student-life personnel has changed in ways that exacerbate this problem: while a growing and ever more diverse student body enters the College and faces a more complex and stimulating landscape of majors, minors, and other curricular choices than ever before, we must also come to terms with a labor market that is more fluid, more hyper-competitive and less predictable, particularly with regard to filling early-career staff positions.

We have expanded the number of professional advising staff, enhanced

their resources, and provided them with a new advising center home at 56th and Woodlawn. Yet, historically, the basic paradigm undergirding our advising system was set in a time when the College was much smaller and put an enormous and privileged premium on general education in the Core over specialized education in the departments. Majors and free electives were also less esteemed than they are today. As we think about the future of our advising program, we need to face the question of how to best serve seven thousand students in a holistic way across all four years of the College and how to involve faculty in the departments and in the majors in more appropriate and tangible ways in the advising of our students. This means that we need academic guidance to be more closely connected to real faculty expertise about the curriculum, thus creating a richer knowledge among our faculty colleagues of how individual students are doing in the many domains of their campus academic life. More one-on-one or small-group cultural interactions between faculty and students within the framework of our academic culture could also play a very helpful role in enhancing student personal development.

### CHALLENGE THREE: GLOBAL TIME AND SPACE

**H**ere we confront the importance of refining and reimagining but also reaffirming our strategies in the face of a world that looks very different than it did ten or fifteen years ago.

The University of Chicago's distinctive traditions extend beyond the Hyde Park campus. Since the University's founding, its faculty scholars have collaborated with researchers and leaders around the world, working in partnership with a vast network of international peers and institutions.

The University's global strategy since 2000 has in many respects been deeply influenced by the College. Beginning with the establishment of the Center in Paris in 2003, the University's new international centers in Europe and South and East Asia and other new international partnerships have provided facilities for extensive undergraduate teaching programs along with enhanced support for faculty research abroad and for faculty collaborations with colleagues in other research centers around the world. These centers thus represent a new model of joint programming, both for teaching and research and public outreach activities. Our faculty-taught civilizational studies programs in Africa, Europe, East and South Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East have engendered a remarkable level of support from literally hundreds of College faculty members, and they have been deeply appreciated by many thousands of Chicago undergraduates—all the more so because these academic programs are an integral part of the Core curriculum.<sup>19</sup>

What in the end is our strategy trying to accomplish? I believe that our largest goal should be to give the University a powerfully recognized, scholarly and cultural *institutional* impact in the world beyond the United States. This means providing more resources for our faculty to pursue their own brilliant work in collaboration with international colleagues, on the individual, small-group, or institute level, and to make sure that the University and its many research units also play a central leadership role within existing and emerging international research networks. We also need to continue to strengthen the opportunities for our undergraduate

19. See John W. Boyer, "We are All Islanders to Begin With": *The University of Chicago and the World in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Occasional Papers on Higher Education, vol. 17 (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, Oct. 30, 2007). A revised version of this monograph was published in Oct. 2020.

and graduate students to have meaningful educational and social experiences in situ within different national cultures. Doctoral and College students volunteer, intern, conduct research, and study abroad in programs offered in nearly forty countries and on every continent. This goal also means additional creative programs to cross the divide into more public-facing domains for public policymakers, national media leaders, and generally educated citizens.

The University's longstanding commitment to East and South Asia and to Europe as major educational partners underlies our global strategy. To this end, the University's centers in Paris, London, Beijing, Delhi, and Hong Kong build upon more than a century of collaboration and scholarship with colleagues across Europe and Asia. Our global centers and programs support new forms of scholarly engagement and foster the establishment of international partnerships to address the pressing intellectual, scientific, cultural, and humanitarian issues that we face as members of a global community. These issues transcend not only geographic but also political boundaries, and in seeking answers to questions both contemporary and classical, we are reminded of the critical role that universities play in connecting our nations and bettering our shared world.

Yet, in spite of these noble goals, we find ourselves perplexed by the state of the world. For example, the civic world in which we opened our center in Hong Kong is no longer the same world of relatively unfettered political freedom that obtained in that city even five years ago. The political universe in which we are constructing our new European center in Paris has been profoundly affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, by the structural and financial disruptions of Brexit, as well by the governance stresses on the member states of the European Union wrought by the rise of harshly right-wing, anti-immigration political forces.

Domestically, there is no solid assurance that the return to the global stage that commenced with the 2020 presidential election will endure in 2024. This prospect is worrying to our allies in Europe and East Asia and is deeply consequential for the ambitions of our global centers. What are now sites of free collaboration in a global system of research and education, which reinforce and benefit from diverse, but generally tolerant political currents, could quickly become defensive spaces for assertions of principle and solidarity on behalf of democratic intellectual values.

Given the unsettled terrain for academic freedom in China and its virtual destruction in Russia, a reemphasis on stronger scientific and educational partnerships with universities in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, South Asia, and Africa may be fortuitous. The new center in Paris will play a critical role in enriching but also expanding our global presence in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. On the other hand, given the enormous investments that leading Chinese universities have made over the last twenty years in strengthening their capacity for high-quality empirical scientific research and given the scholarly caliber of many thousands of younger and mid-career researchers in these institutions, it will be essential for Chicago and other top US universities to maintain close ties with individual scholars and research groups in China, regardless of the pressures that current geopolitics may dictate. Our global strategy must be strategically institutional, taking the long view and acknowledging that international engagement will happen at various levels and will manifest sequential changes.

Finally, the global as the local. One of the fascinating consequences that we discovered in creating a deep network of faculty-taught international study programs was that many of our students were graduating with a deeper understanding of major cities in other nations than of their campus hometown of Chicago. This was all the more ironic, given that

so many of the vital cultural phenomena and transformational urban global processes that characterize our century are evident within ten miles of our campus in Hyde Park. In response, the College established in 2008 the Chicago Studies Program as a pendant to our many international study programs beyond the United States. Imaginative in design, Chicago Studies has no equivalent at peer institutions in the Ivy Plus, for its ventures beyond the template of programs in urban studies or service learning, working with faculty to connect the resources of the city to the curriculum and cocurricular experiences of students in every program of study. It supports a rich menu of place-based courses, research mentorships, excursions, and events that empower the ambitions of our students and our faculty and that make it possible for students to gain a deeper and more expansive knowledge of our home city. In so doing, it opens the powerful benefits of the city for our students and trains them to engage critically and respectfully with the people and institutions of Chicago. But engagement with the city, for all its benefits, still remains uneven across the faculty and departmental programs of study, and many of the potential contributions of Chicago to our curricular and para-curricular offerings remain to be realized. This is certainly a fruitful and happy task for the future.

**CHALLENGE FOUR:  
THE INTELLECTUALLY OPEN AND  
NONPARTISAN CAMPUS**

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ree expression is an ongoing challenge for our campus as for all campuses.

Universities are widely seen as institutions that create significant opportunities for social and economic advancement for large segments of the American population—for sustaining what the journalist Herbert Croly once termed in 1909 “the promise of American life.”<sup>20</sup> Because of these civic ambitions and their large national footprint, universities are subject to high levels of public scrutiny over their social impact and cultural efficacy in areas well outside of the traditional domains of scientific research and academic learning. And, given their role as crucibles of lively ideas and debates, they inevitably become contested sites for intellectual and even ideological controversies.

Over the last decade much discussion and commentary has taken place in reference to free expression. In 2017, when I reprinted an earlier monograph on the history of academic freedom at Chicago, I observed that the center of gravity of concerns seemed to have shifted in the American academy from external attacks from outside the universities to tensions and stresses within the universities themselves.<sup>21</sup> Along with this

20. See Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1909). See also John W. Boyer, *The Universities and the Promise of American Life*, Occasional Papers on Higher Education, vol. 24 (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, Oct. 24, 2017).

21. See the revised version (2016) of John W. Boyer, *Academic Freedom and the Modern University: The Experience of the University of Chicago*, Occasional Papers on Higher Education, vol. 10 (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, Oct. 29, 2002), 1–7.

shift in vectors of pressure is the fact that our University and others like it have been urged to weigh in on social and even political issues in recent decades in ways that have sometimes been deeply divisive for our community. The line against corporate political engagement set by the Kalven Report is, in the minds of some critics, becoming increasingly blurry and hard to find or, put differently, easier to exploit.<sup>22</sup>

Chicago enjoys a long tradition of open and free discourse, built on the heroic work of generations of the past. It has also consistently defended the proposition that the University is a neutral agent, refusing to take ideological or political sides, however congenial or momentarily convenient it might be to do so. These norms have not only defined the external image of the University, but they have given rise to a campus culture that is more powerful and efficacious because it holds as a fundamental principle that the best idea should win and that our habitual response to notions that such and such an idea “is of course true” or that such and such a normative proposition “must of course be morally affirmed” has been the venerable motto of the Chicago Schools, namely, “prove it.”

It is extremely important, for the sake of the distinctive norms that have traditionally defined our community, that we are prepared to speak with candor and frankness in confronting tough and even intractable issues and to credit our conversation partners with the same right, the same responsibility, and the same freedom to be able to speak freely for themselves. Over time the University would suffer if we accept that certain ideas or frames cannot be subjected to interrogation. Our teaching would become less dynamic, new ideas and approaches would be slower to enter the curriculum, and the student body would notice that we are

22. See “Kalven Committee: Report on the University’s Role in Political and Social Action,” *University of Chicago Record* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 3, 1967): 2–3.

accepting as foundational truths things that seem to clash with their own lived experience. William Rainey Harper thought that searching for truth was the equivalent of searching for the Divine. But Harper also knew that universities can only search for truth by the hard, cold, and unrelenting search for evidence. As our former colleague and the distinguished classicist Arnaldo Momigliano once put it: “The historian works on evidence. Rhetoric is not his business.”<sup>23</sup>

**CHALLENGE FIVE:  
THE LOYALTY OF OUR ALUMNI AND  
MEMORIES OF LIVES OF PROMISE  
AND VIRTUE**

**M**y final challenge has to do with the importance of creating and sustaining closer ties to our alumni communities. Very early in my deanship (1994) President Hugo Sonnenschein and I conducted an interesting experiment. We invited fifteen of our most academically successful College seniors to have dinner with fifteen doctoral students in various arts and science departments at Chicago who had attended one of the other top-ranked Ivy Plus universities as undergraduates. In the latter group were students who had graduated from, among others, Princeton, Yale, Brown, Dartmouth, and Stanford. Stereotypes quickly emerged: the Chicago students spoke with admiration and pride about the Core, about the intellectuality of their fellow students, and about the pathbreaking research of the faculty, but the doctoral students—who were, after all, professors *in spe!*—spoke

23. Arnaldo Momigliano, “History in an Age of Ideologies,” *American Scholar* 51, no.4 (Autumn 1982): 506.

fondly of their warm personal friendships with individual faculty members in their colleges, about how supportive and caring their colleges had been, and about their intense personal loyalty to their fellow alumni communities. One young doctoral student who had attended Princeton eloquently described how she and her classmates felt themselves to be full citizens of that great university, welcomed and celebrated on all sides. Our students—classic, hard-bitten Chicago intellectuals not given to excessive sentimentality—looked on with some astonishment. The differences in perspectives were amazing; Hugo and I were stunned.

We have worked mightily over the past twenty-five years to change this situation, acknowledging how difficult it is to change a culture, and also knowing full well how doing so can lead to unexpected, unintended, and even unwanted consequences. Chicago’s no-nonsense dedication to sheer, unbridled intellectuality underpins our sense of our community as the fulsome home of free expression and evidence-based learning. If one has free speech and the Core, who needs friendships, fun, social solidarity, and even occasional gestures of generosity and sentimentalist loyalties? The evidence from the Gutmann and Kidwell Reports, mentioned earlier in this talk, shows what happens when the latter qualities are not taken seriously, not only for our students in their role as students but for their later role as alums.

We have graduated many Classes since 2000 who have much more positive views of their experiences in the College and the University. Caring about our alumni means taking their membership in our community seriously. Over the last thirty years the College has invested massively, involving many millions of dollars, in creating new career programming, new research opportunities and mentoring opportunities, new housing resources, new programs and facilities in the arts, and new faculty-taught global study programs for our students, not to mention the enormous



social impact that our various Odyssey scholarship programs have had on the lives of thousands of our students—those initiatives and many others have been valuable in enriching the individual welfare and success of all students of our community. But if we do not now find ways to build on this era of good feelings to create stronger bonds between our alumni and the University, a historic second chance that the University now has with the College and its living legacies will have been squandered.

We need to stay in touch with our former students and to celebrate their future personal and professional successes. We have an extraordinary chance to do something truly culturally redefining for the future welfare of the University as a whole, if we have the courage and the discipline to do so.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

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et me conclude by thanking you for your support of the College and our students. In the first report that I had the privilege to give to the faculty in October 1992, I observed that

if any common logic runs from Harper through Hutchins and on to Levi and to the more recent leaders of our university, it is surely this: that the University's self-understanding as "one University," which has dominated our presentation of ourselves over the past century, depends on the presence of a strong, vibrant liberal arts College at its center. As we stand at the beginning of our second century, therefore, it may be wise for us to remember that things are not predestined and that inclination to oneness, that dedication to academic excellence and to the happy and fruitful transgression

of boundaries between and among the disciplines to which Chicago has grown happily accustomed may not be natural, just as the continued presence of wonderful students should not be taken for granted. Past generations of colleagues merited these exceptional opportunities and exceptional students, in part because they were lucky, but much more because they worked to deserve them.<sup>24</sup>

May we continue to deserve these extraordinary students. May we continue to foster a culture of passionate learning, of unalloyed free expression, and of strong social solidarities and may the faculty of the University welcome and embrace the critical and central role that collegiate liberal education now plays in the future welfare of our community.

Thank you.

24. John W. Boyer, "Report of the Dean of the College, October 20, 1992," *Minutes of the College Council*.



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