

# The Quadrangle



## TRAILBLAZERS

First-generation students rely on determination, campus resources, and loved ones to succeed at college [↗](#)



## In this issue

### 1 News from LAS

Recent images and news from faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

### 5 LAS@Work

LAS alumna Stephanie Hare explores the technologies intended to make life easier.

### 6 Faculty awards

Maria Todorova honored for a career dedicated to understanding history and culture.

### 8 A new home for greater understanding

The Illinois Neurobehavioral Assessment Laboratory becomes a respected community resource for mental health.

### 11 LAS Experts

Amy Marshall-Colon explores the genetic switchboard of plants.

### 12 Research in LAS

Research images and news from faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

### 16 Trailblazers

First-generation students rely on determination, campus resources, and loved ones to succeed at college.

### 19 A minute with the Dean

Venetria K. Patton talks about the future of LAS.

### 20 The night spot

New projects, planning, and deep appreciation keep the Observatory looking upward.

### 22 Where are they now?

Dawn Riley Duval channels her athletic prowess into a career—and comes full circle.

### 24 Green gateway

Inside the Plant Biology Conservatory and Collections.

### 26 LAS in History

Originally called the Agriculture Building, Davenport Hall helped define LAS and the layout of campus itself.

### 28 LAS by the numbers

Measuring the Main Quad.



## *The spirit of the mighty past*

The imposing architectural features of Altgeld Hall, designed by Nathan Ricker and James White, were intended to reflect unshakeable commitment to fundamental principles of progress, or, as longtime art professor Newton Wells declared soon after the building opened, "the spirit of the mighty past."

# NEWS FROM LAS

## Professors receive high honors for teaching, service, and research



The College of LAS held ceremonies last fall in honor of **Christopher Freeburg**, professor of English, who was named the John A. and Grace W. Nicholson Professor in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, and **Carla Cáceres**, director of the School of Integrative Biology, who was named the G. William Arends Professor in Integrative Biology.

## U of I launches interdisciplinary undergraduate degrees in data science

The College of LAS is helping offer a new series of **interdisciplinary undergraduate degrees in data science** which will prepare Illinois students to lead society's digital transformation. The university began accepting applications for the Fall 2023 admissions cycle in Astronomy + Data Science (offered by the College of LAS), Accountancy + Data Science and Finance + Data Science (Gies College of Business), and Information Sciences + Data Science (School of Information Sciences [iSchool]).



## 10 LAS alumni and students part of record-matching Fulbright list

Ten students and young alumni from the College of LAS were offered Fulbright grants to pursue international education, research, and teaching experiences around the globe. They include Amanda Oversen, Folashade Olumola, Damir Vucicevic, Janani Comar, Ksenia Polyarskaya, Carolina Bieri, Ariel Burtley, Jan Balan, Owen MacDonald, and Sophia Ebel. They were among 16 students and alumni from the U of I offered grants through the program, which matches the highest number selected in the university's history.



Clockwise from upper left: Amanda Oversen, Folashade Olumola, Damir Vucicevic, Janani Comar, Ksenia Polyarskaya, Carolina Bieri, Ariel Burtley, Jan Balan, Owen MacDonald, and Sophia Ebel.

## Turning over a new leaf

When a leaky fountain in the **Psychology Building atrium** was more serious than expected, the project turned into a symbolic makeover for the popular spot. Workers overhauled the original plantscape with more than 360 new plants and other upgrades. "We are getting back to a new normal after the pandemic and we have a brand new vista in our atrium," said Diane Beck, interim head of the Department of Psychology. "We are looking forward to enjoying this space for years to come."





## Department of Mathematics collaborates with Spurlock Museum to preserve math models

Faced with the question of what to do with hundreds of iconic math models during the renovation of Altgeld Hall, the Department of Mathematics created a plan to preserve some of them and put the items back on display when the renovation is complete. Faculty members and students will work together to carefully examine the models and determine which ones they want to keep. They will be assisted by **Christa Deacy-Quinn**, senior collections manager at Spurlock Museum. [↗](#)

## Ralph Nuzzo named Kavli Prize Laureate in Nanoscience



**Ralph Nuzzo**, G.L. Clark Professor Emeritus of Analytical Chemistry at Illinois and professor emeritus of chemistry, is one of four recipients of the 2022 Kavli Prize in Nanoscience. The prize honored four pioneers whose work transformed surface science and led to applications shaping our daily lives in areas from medical diagnostics to semiconductor devices. The scientists, including Nuzzo, created molecular-scale coatings for surfaces which enable unprecedented control and engineering of surface properties. [↗](#)

## New database catalogs police shootings in Illinois to improve accountability



*U of I student Sruthi Navneetha, part of SPOTLITE's student research team, compiles data and scans news articles for police uses of lethal force.*

Campus researchers, including those at the **Cline Center for Advanced Social Research**, have developed a statewide registry on the use of lethal force by police officers in Illinois to improve accountability and rebuild the public perception of law enforcement. The Systematic Policing Oversight Through Lethal-Force Incident Tracking Environment project, called "SPOTLITE," identified more than twice as many police-involved shooting incidents than previously reported by the Illinois State Police. [↗](#)

## A gift for advanced learning and scholarship

**Martin Camargo** grew up on the East Coast, but a fellowship drew him to U of I for graduate school. That's why, years later, the emeritus professor of English at U of I and his wife, **Sandy**, a retired lecturer, have made a deferred gift commitment for graduate student fellowships in the Department of English. "I got the tools for my career here, and it's a career that I've loved," said Camargo, who retired in 2021. "I want to help future graduate students earn their degrees without being burdened by debt."



## Milestone moment for medieval studies

The **Program in Medieval Studies** is no stranger to hosting lively and interesting events, from 24-hour readings of Dante’s “Inferno” to Medieval Movie Knights. It recently celebrated a particularly significant one: its 20th anniversary. Where did this small but spirited and groundbreaking program come from? To be precise, although the program was formally established in 2001, medieval studies has been a field of research and instruction at the U of I since the late 1800s. [↗](#)



## Gender and women’s studies supports unique postdoctoral role



**Sawyer Kemp** has completed their role as the inaugural Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Transgender Studies, the first fellowship of its kind in the country. This

standing position was created with support from the chancellor’s office. “I saw this as an opportunity for our department and campus to really be a leader in centering this set of ethical, political, and methodological questions that trans studies brings to the forefront,” said **Mimi Thi Nguyen**, chair of the Department of Gender & Women’s Studies. [↗](#)

## Summer learning, from math to Arabic

Two summer youth outreach programs, the **Summer Illinois Mathematics Camp (SIM)** and **Arabic High School Program** returned to their in-person format after two years of virtual meeting. The SIM Camp, hosted by the Department of Mathematics, taught college level math concepts. Students in the Arabic High School program chatted with a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, among other activities. “The feedback from parents is something that has kept us going,” said **Eman Saadah**, teaching associate professor and director of the Less Commonly Taught Languages Program in the Department of Linguistics. “They tell us that their kids are better when they come home.” [↗](#)



High school students enrolled in Camp Epsilon at the Summer Illinois Mathematics Camp solve problems in Altgeld Hall.



## The lessons of opportunity

If you drove past Zahnd Park in Champaign before the fall football season, you would have seen **Tailon Leitzsey** leading a small army of kids through a series of drills. The communication and management major started the free, day-long, Orange and Blue football camp last year, and it’s been a success. Leitzsey, a defensive back who joined the Fighting Illini as a walk-on and earned a scholarship, created the camp to give kids an opportunity to play the game around people who could be positive influences. [↗](#)



## In remembrance of the professor-coach

You can't quite say that **Stephen (Steve) Douglas** did it all, but he came closer than a lot of people. His accomplishments include: NCAA basketball player in the Final Four, coach of the Malaysian national women's basketball team, and first women's basketball coach at U of I. Douglas also served as a professor of political science for 35 years before retiring in 2000. He passed away surrounded by family on April 22, 2022, at age 83. [↗](#)

*Steve Douglas, at right, during his playing days at Kansas State University. (Courtesy of Kansas State Athletics.)*

## Writing for discovery

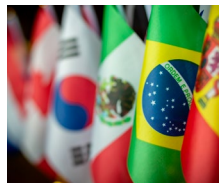
"Writing for Discovery: Self, Public, and Community," a new pilot course offered through the Odyssey Project, a free college program at the U of I, was taught last summer by **Ángel García**, professor of English, poet, and author of award-winning "Teeth Never Sleep." He said the class allowed him to engage the community in a new way. "There are not many other opportunities I've had to work with non-traditional students," he said, "and it was truly a blessing to learn from the students." [↗](#)



*Danyla Nash takes part in a poetry reading during the writing course. (Photo courtesy of Humanities Research Institute.)*

## Illinois Global Institute centers receive almost \$13.2 million in Title VI funding

Six area and global studies centers within the **Illinois Global Institute** will receive almost \$13.2 million in competitive Title VI federal grants during the next four years to advance educational opportunities, programming, and public engagement. The University of Illinois was one of this year's top Title VI funding recipients in the country. Part of the funding will come from the centers' designation as Title VI National Resource Centers by the U.S. Department of Education, and the centers will also receive Foreign Language and Area Studies grants. [↗](#)



## Online bachelor's degree completion program moves forward

A new **Bachelor of Liberal Studies program** will provide an opportunity for students who have started, but not completed, a four-year undergraduate degree to complete their studies online. The fully online and non-residential program will offer flexibility in course scheduling along with reduced cost and time to completion. The program recently received funding from the U of I's Investment for Growth program and is anticipated to begin in spring or summer 2024. [↗](#)

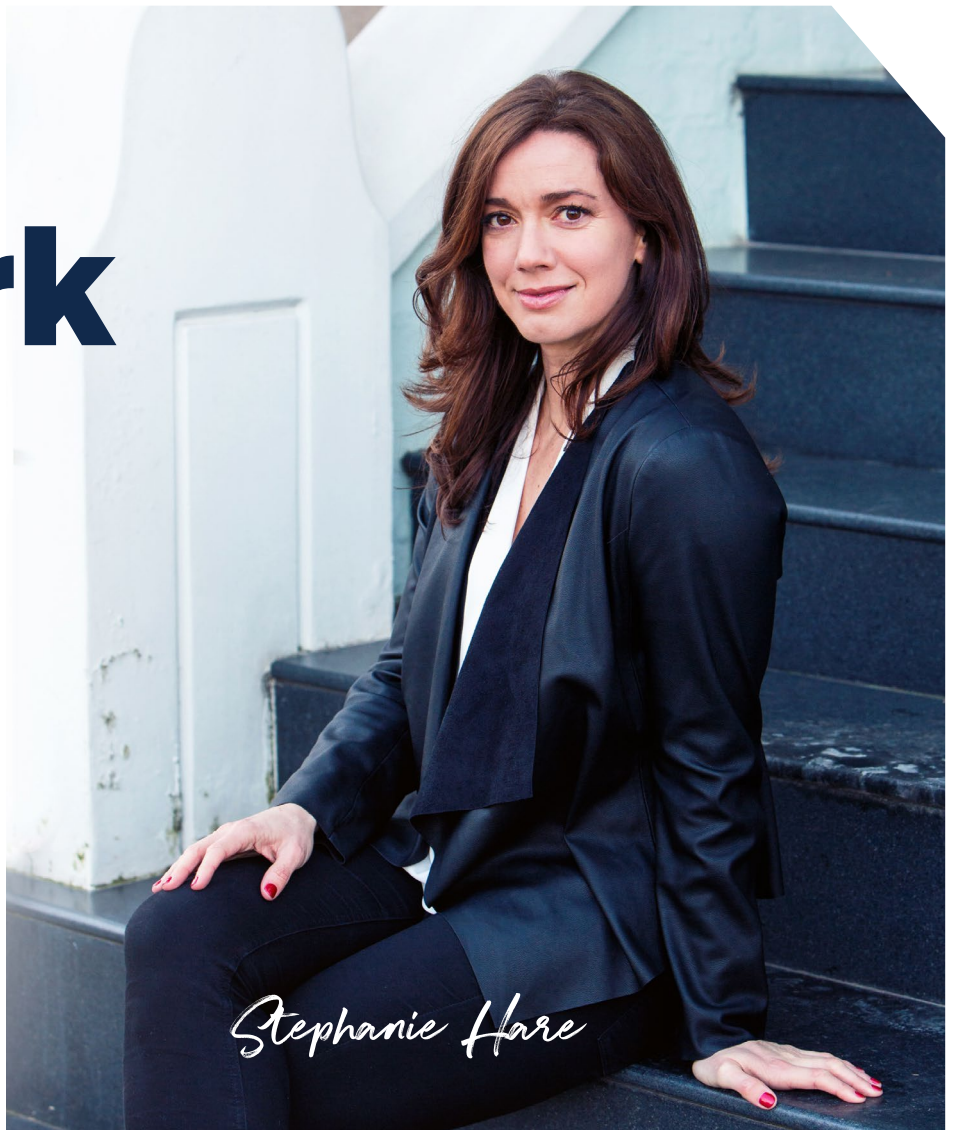


*So much to share—so little space. For more about these LAS news stories and others please visit our website. [↗](#)*

# LAS @Work

## Alumna explores the technologies intended to make life easier

**Stephanie Hare** (BA, '97, French)—an independent researcher, broadcaster, and author—has found non-stop learning to be the connection in her day-to-day. In her first book, released in 2022, “Technology Is Not Neutral: A Short Guide to Technology Ethics,” Hare applies expertise in history, technology, and political science to consider the ethical problems of new technologies that are intended to make life easier.



### ““ What’s a typical workday like?

I wake early and compose a rough plan for the day while caffeinating and checking the news. However, it can’t be too rigid because my day can, and often does, change in an instant: I might be invited at short notice to interview with the media or need to jump on a call with a new or existing client, but other times I will throw the plan out the window because the writing is going well.

### ““ What about college best prepared you for your life and career?

An open-mindedness towards approaching any subject, regardless of whether it is related to my specialism or strengths.

### ““ How did your major prepare you?

Thanks to UIUC’s excellent professors and the junior year abroad program at the Sorbonne in Paris, I graduated with strong language skills and a solid base of cultural knowledge that have allowed me to work well in France and with French speakers. This didn’t just prepare me for my career; it changed my life.

*By Kayleigh Rahn*

[Check out more alumni profiles](#) 

# EXPLORING THE POWER POLITICS OF EUROPE

## Maria Todorova honored for a career dedicated to understanding history and culture



You may have heard the term “Balkanism.” It was coined by **Maria Todorova**, Edward William & Jane Marr Gutsell Endowed Professor Emerita at Illinois, as a way to explain how the Balkan region in Southeastern Europe is perceived as Europe’s “other”—an area that is seen to exemplify European backwardness and

political unrest. Countries that were once part of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia, are now constructed as less than a part of “civilized” Europe. 📖

Todorova’s examinations of these dynamics are among the reasons she was recently one of only seven historians nationwide elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, one of the oldest honor societies in the nation. She also received the Distinguished Contributions to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Award, which she terms a lifetime achievement award from the Association for Slavic, East European, and

Eurasian Studies, a scholarly association that aligns with her work at the intersections of modern Balkan, Ottoman, and European social and cultural history.

Her 1997 book, “Imagining the Balkans,” examines her theory. “When the Yugoslav war happened (1991-2001), the stereotypes of irrational, aggressive, intolerant, barbarian, savage, semi-developed, semi-civilized, semi-oriental countries began floating as explanations for the war,” Todorova said. “I knew the literature about how the Balkans were perceived throughout the ages. What I was able to show was that these stereotypes, which journalists attempted to explain as ‘ancient hatreds,’ had crystallized relatively recently—at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.”

Has Balkanism subsided? “With the branching out of the European Union, the Balkans, with the exception of the newly devised area of the ‘Western Balkans,’ are effectively part of Europe,” Todorova said. “The Balkanist rhetoric no longer serves power politics, although it is there, conveniently submerged but readily at hand. It is like claiming racism does not exist because one does not use the N-word.”

She added: “I am pleasantly surprised that, to this day, young people are writing to me, from all over the world. ‘Oh, I read your book. I’m proud now that I am from the Balkans.’ There is something emancipatory in what I wrote. Even young people who left the region in the 1990s feel the stereotype, and they can see





Stari Most, also known as Mostar Bridge, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (iStock photo).

that they can deconstruct this stereotype. They are not ashamed of their background. This is liberating.”

Her scholarly output is immense, covering Ottoman, modern Balkan, and imperial Russian history.

**“I chose history because I loved literature and mathematics,” Todorova said. “I felt that historical analysis would envelope both. I was trained as an Ottomanist, and I wanted to bring in quantitative methods.”**

Her book “Balkan Family Structure and the European Pattern” (1993), utilized demographic techniques to examine a Balkan family formation, the *zadruga*, undermining Western stereotypes of the European family. Her latest book, “The Lost World of Socialists at Europe’s Margins: Imagining Utopia, 1870s–1920s” (2020), looks at the “golden age” of the socialist idea through the lens of the Bulgarian socialist movement in the late 19th century.

“I was working on this book while a fellow at the Remarque Institute on 5th Avenue in New York,” she said. “I found it interesting to write about socialism from 5th Avenue.”

By examining “memoir documents” of early socialists, she was able to produce a historical ethnography that took into account the problem of generalized ideological descriptions that rely on the silencing and erasure of peripheral movements.

“The book shows the emancipatory history of socialism through various historical approaches,” Todorova said. “I hope to have shown that scales of analysis require different methods and are based on different sources, and that the different scales of observation are all legitimate.”

Although she retired from Illinois in 2021, Todorova still has graduate students and serves on committees. She has contributed to what is

considered one of the strongest programs in Southeastern Europe globally. Her graduate students form what is often referred to as the “Todorova school” and work in academic institutions such as the Max Planck Institute, Boston College, UCLA, The Ohio State University, College of William & Mary, European University Institute, the University College London, the University of Illinois, the University of Groningen, and the University of Pittsburgh. Her home in Urbana became a favorite destination of the University’s East European Reading Group.


Todorova’s retirement does not mean that her prodigious output has ended. “I’m toying with the idea of yet another project on Balkan history,” she said.

*By Maeve Reilly*

To check out a running list of award-winning LAS faculty members, visit our website. [📄](#)



# *A new route* to **BETTER** **UNDERSTANDING**



*The Illinois Neurobehavioral Assessment Laboratory becomes a well-respected community resource for addressing psychological issues*

Launching any new enterprise is difficult. Launching it in a pandemic is even harder. Just ask **Kathryn Leskis**, clinical director of the Illinois Neurobehavioral Assessment Laboratory. The lab, which offers a wide range of psychological testing and evaluation, saw its first client at the end of 2019, and was on track to have a great full first year. Then COVID-19 hit, and the entire world shut down. “It was at that point we knew we should do something,” said Leskis.

Fortunately, they already had a great idea in the works.

“We wanted to offer easily accessible assessment services to everyone, not just those who require comprehensive services after meeting criteria for medical necessity,”

explained Leskis. We wanted people to think about assessment as a way to better understand themselves and their loved ones. So that’s why we came up with digital screenings.”

These simple, online tools provide screening for common issues like ADHD and dyslexia, although they’re not designed to be a substitute for comprehensive testing. “Basically,” said Leskis, “it’s a first step for those who are just starting to wonder whether these things are an issue for themselves or their child.” If they are, INBAL can follow up with a full slate of services including further assessment, testing, and consultation.

To introduce themselves to the world, INBAL provided the digital screenings free for a limited time. The idea proved to be a hit. Within a week, their inbox was flooded with inquiries, and

(From left) Maya Marder, Joy Akindulureni, Kathryn Leskis, Crystal Newman, and Katie Duitsman work for the Illinois Neurobehavioral Assessment Laboratory. (Photo by Carly Conway)

by mid-December 2020, 90 clients had completed nearly 225 screenings. It was an early display of innovation from a university initiative that was designed to be different from day one.

For starters, INBAL is located in a modern suite in the M2 building downtown Champaign, with lots of natural light and parking. And it owes its genesis to a new campus initiative called the Investment for Growth Program, which, in fiscal year 2019, provided several million dollars to help a number of innovative projects get off the ground.

In addition to Leskis, the current INBAL staff includes **Crystal Newman**, supervising clinical psychologist; **Katie Duitsman**, clinical psychometrist; as well as a few graduate student clinicians. It's a relatively small team, but they hope to expand in the near future.

The lab is the brainchild of three different faculty members from the Department of Psychology at Illinois: **Wendy Heller**, executive associate dean for social and behavioral sciences in the College of LAS;

**Neal Cohen**, then director of the Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Institute; and **Brent Roberts**, who directed the Center for Social and Behavioral Science. All of them believed that INBAL could serve an important role, advancing research at the university while making clinical assessment more readily available to the community.

"The three of us co-wrote the proposal, which was really the culmination of many conversations about a vision to share the unique expertise coming out of our various fields with the community and the rest of campus," said Heller. "We wanted to bring our tools to people who didn't necessarily have them and support research on campus by helping them in whatever way we could. So, you could, for example, contract with us to administer tests of depression or anxiety or some other aspect of personality or behavior that you might not know how to measure."

INBAL can also help researchers refine various aspects of their study. For example, if someone is doing a study of anxiety and they believe it might impact working memory, INBAL can help identify the best way to test that.

The goal was to make the lab both a sponsor of and an advocate for cutting-edge research. Currently funded projects aim to measure and assess critical qualities necessary for the advancement of pioneering and ethical science and involve collaboration with domestic and international partners such as the National Center for Principled Leadership and Research Ethics (NCPRE),

Howard Hughes Medical Institute, and the NOMIS Foundation.

"There's also a wonderful program based in Michigan called Mood Lifters, which is a peer-led psychological treatment program for

wellbeing, depression, and anxiety," said Heller. The program was founded by LAS alumna **Patty Deldin** (MA, '90; PhD, '96, psychology), and INBAL is hoping to bring it to the local community.

All of those innovations could change the future of clinical analysis. But Leskis joined the program because she wanted to make a difference in the community, here and now. That passion was born out of her experience in the private sector. For more than a decade, she worked in healthcare, where she often saw a gap between those who needed assessment and those who were able to receive it.

"A lot of managed healthcare companies are becoming increasingly restrictive about their psychological testing policies," said Leskis. This means that those needing testing often face a long list of preauthorization requirements and other barriers that make it difficult to obtain. INBAL provides another option for those needing help, and a powerful resource for the organizations serving them.

**Jeanne Kramer**, director of The Autism Program at the University of Illinois, is one of those who relies on INBAL's clinical expertise. "What makes it beneficial is

**We wanted to bring our tools to people who didn't necessarily have them and support research on campus by helping them in whatever way we could.**

the complete neurobehavioral assessment that comes along with the autism assessment,” said Kramer. “When we have a child come to us who has a complex presentation, which most people on the spectrum do, Dr. Leskis is very gifted in assessing all the different aspects of cognition and focusing in on why we’re seeing the behaviors we’re seeing.”

Unfortunately, those issues aren’t just restricted to autism. For 50 years, The Reading Group has helped both children and adults overcome the challenges of dyslexia and other learning disabilities. And every day, they see new clients arriving with a broad range of needs.

“Sometimes the issues are so challenging from a psychological standpoint that we simply can’t handle it here,” said **Jim Jones**, executive director of the local not-for-profit.

Without INBAL, those cases would have to be referred to Chicago or St. Louis. But thanks to this innovative partnership between the university and the local community, they’re available just a few minutes from his office. “That’s invaluable,” said Jones, adding that parents often return to thank him for the assessment their children received.

Heller hopes to make that scenario permanent. “We’re trying to create a sustainable organization with an actual footprint in the community,”

said Heller, explaining that, all too often, exciting campus initiatives are based on temporary grants or faculty that leave, giving them a transitory nature. “The more help they are to the community, the more painful it is when they disappear,” said Heller. Which is why INBAL is actively seeking contracts with local schools and campus units to ensure that it continues to serve the community and university for many years to come.

INBAL has already secured a contract with U of I’s Department of Intercollegiate

relationship.” Marder said it’s also helpful to see how a small clinic is run from an administrative standpoint.

“It’s a good learning environment from many different angles,” she said.

Future clinicians like Marder will be pivotal to organizations like The Reading Group, who are on the frontlines of a mental health crisis that’s only been made worse by a global pandemic. “I wish this community at large understood the criticality of the number of people that really and truly need help,” said Jones, adding that he’s seen children so



**I’m there from start to finish with every client, which allows me a great opportunity to understand the flow of the clinical relationship.**

Athletics to help student athletes with a wide range of needs. The benefits go both ways, with the arrangement also providing an excellent opportunity for grad students looking to develop their diagnostic skills in the real world. Psychology students like **Maya Marder** are required to complete an internship as part of their graduate training.

“INBAL does a great job of providing opportunities,” said Marder, who’s assistantship at INBAL will make her more competitive in the application process. “I’m there from start to finish with every client, which allows me a great opportunity to understand the flow of the clinical

traumatized by their learning disabilities and lack of support that they have to be coaxed out from underneath the table before their lesson can begin. And there’s only one thing that can be done to change that. “You have to make sure that you’ve got qualified people—and enough qualified people to provide the services that we need.” Which is exactly what INBAL is hoping to do.

For now, however, Jones says he’s very glad to have Leskis and the rest of her team available with their expert help whenever it’s needed. “Without this level of service, I don’t know where we’d be sending people, if you want to know the truth.”

*By John Turner*

# Exploring the genetic switchboard of plants



How can we help our crops survive in an increasingly unpredictable environment? **Amy Marshall-Colon**, a professor of plant biology at the U of I, thinks that by looking into gene structures, scientists can help plants help themselves.



## What is your area of expertise?

I study the molecular mechanisms that contribute to crop resilience to climate change using systems biology and mathematical modeling. I'm really interested in understanding what causes genes to turn on and off, like switches, in response to signals from the environment. If we can figure out that complex switchboard inside of the plant, we might be able to act as operators and leverage their natural mechanisms to help them keep pace with our rapidly changing climate. ”



## What impact will your work have on your field and the community?

Most of the projects I work on are collaborative, and I believe that all the small things each of us work on will come together to make a more

significant contribution to the field and the community. All of my collaborative projects are aiming to create crop ideotypes, or ideal plants, that can thrive under stressful environments. Some of our discoveries may eventually be translated into crops that growers want to grow, and I hope that they prevent yield loss under future climates. ”



## What do you enjoy most about teaching?

My favorite part of teaching is to hear from a student that something I taught them is helping them in their own research. ”

*By Dave Evensen*

---

For more faculty profiles, visit our website. [🔗](#)

# RESEARCH IN LAS

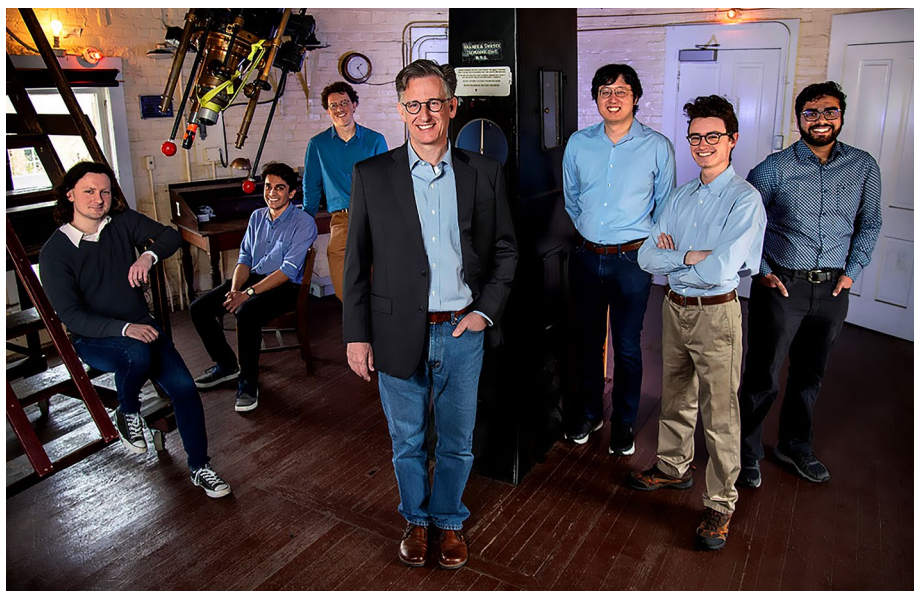


## Big fang theory

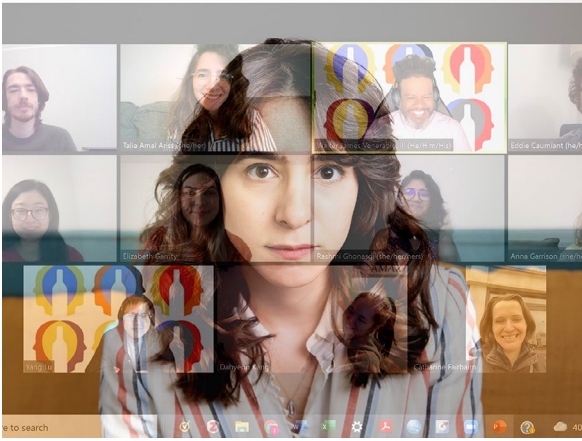
Researchers have created a model that can calculate the energetics involved when one organism stabs another with its fangs, thorns, spines or other puncturing parts. The model will help scientists and engineers compare many types of biological puncturing tools and develop new systems to efficiently pierce materials or resist being pierced. “The idea behind this was to come up with a quantitative framework for comparing a variety of biological puncture systems with each other,” said **Philip Anderson**, a professor of evolution, ecology, and behavior. [↗](#)

## Illinois astronomers help capture first image of Milky Way’s black hole

A team of U of I researchers led by astronomy and physics professor **Charles Gammie** is part of a large international collaboration that unveiled the first image of the supermassive black hole at the center of the Milky Way. This result provides evidence that the object is indeed a black hole and yields valuable clues about the workings of such giants, which researchers think reside at the center of most galaxies. Researchers produced the image using observations from a worldwide network of radio telescopes. [↗](#)



Illinois researchers, from left, Ben Prather, Vedant Ketan Dhruv, Michi Baubock, professor Charles Gammie, David Lee, Nicholas Conroy and Abhishek Vidyadhar Joshi. (Photo by Heather Coit.)

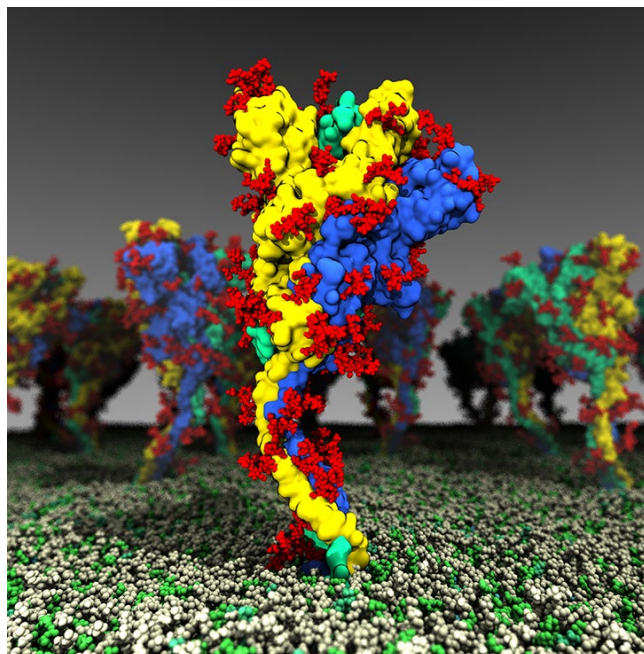
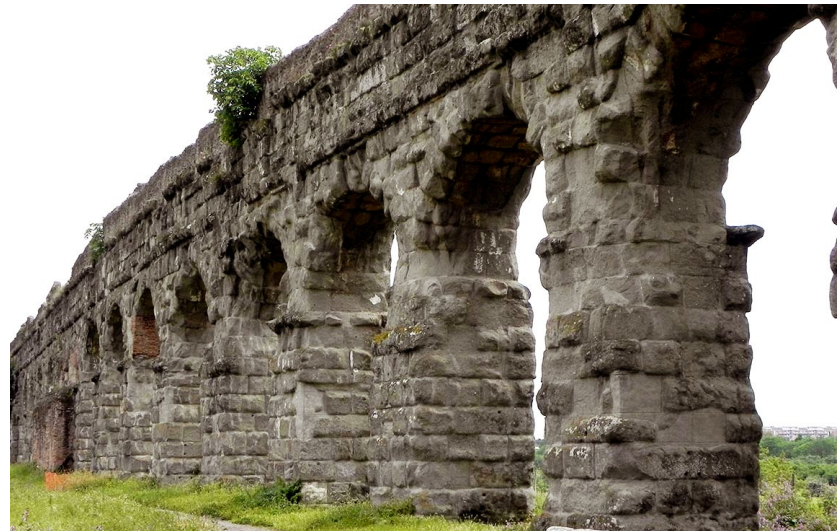


## Staring at yourself during video chats may worsen your mood

A new study finds that the more a person stares at themselves while talking with a partner in an online chat, the more their mood degrades over the course of the conversation. Alcohol use appears to worsen the problem. Reported in the journal *Clinical Psychological Science*, the findings, produced by doctoral student **Talia Arliss** and psychology professor **Catharine Fairbairn**, point to a potentially problematic role of online meeting platforms in exacerbating psychological problems like anxiety and depression. [↗](#)

## Roman aqueducts help researchers learn about anti-gravity growth ripples

Waters originating from the Apennine Mountains flowed through ancient Rome's Anio Novus aqueduct and left a detailed record of past hydraulic conditions. Two studies are the first to document the occurrence of anti-gravity growth ripples and establish that these features lend clues to the history of ancient water conveyance and storage systems. A team led by geology professor **Bruce Fouke** posits that the Anio Novus travertine crystals precipitated, grew, and accumulated in the flowing water of the aqueduct—independent of the forces of gravity and aided by microbial colonies—to form what they call “travertine crystal growth ripples.” [↗](#)



## COVID-19 virus spike protein flexibility improved by human cell's own modifications

When the coronavirus causing COVID-19 infects human cells, the cell's protein-processing machinery makes modifications to the spike protein that render it more flexible and mobile, which could increase its ability to infect other cells and to evade antibodies. The researchers, including biochemistry professor **Emad Tajkhorshid**, postdoctoral researcher **Karan Kapoor**, and graduate student **Tianle Chen**, said this is the first study to present such a detailed picture of the protein that plays a key role in COVID-19 infection and immunity. [↗](#)

### U of I to provide key insight for \$25 million climate science study

The **U.S. Department of Energy** has awarded a team of academic and community leaders—including the U of I—\$25 million over five years to advance urban climate science. The U of I team, led by **Steve Nesbitt**, associate head of the Department of Atmospheric Sciences, along with atmospheric sciences professors **Deanna Henc** and **Karen Kosiba** and civil and environmental engineering professor **Marcelo Garcia**, will contribute key observational data and modeling of extreme weather in Chicago. [↗](#)



*The cave with an ancient tooth of a Denisovan girl was found on P'ou Loi Mountain in northern Laos. (Photo by Fabrice Demeter).*

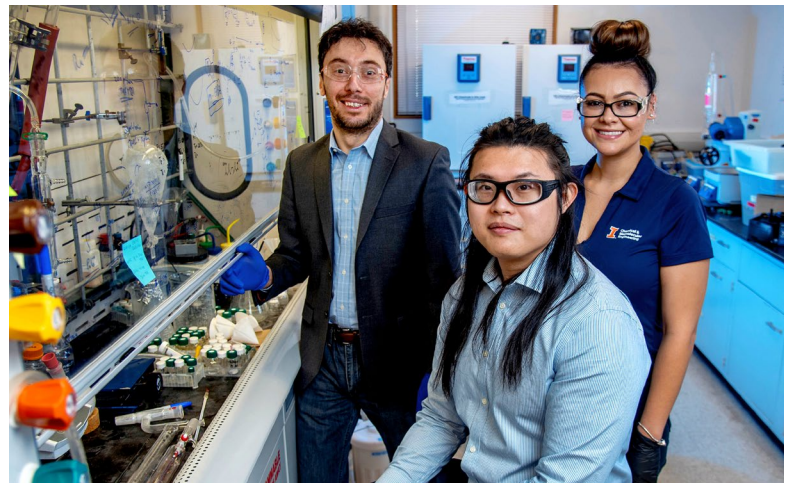


### Ancient tooth helps define a chapter in human history

Professor of anthropology **Laura Shackelford** and her colleagues were digging for fossils in northern Laos in 2018 when they discovered the tooth of a Denisovan girl who lived some 131,000 to 164,000 years ago. “It gives some idea of the adaptability of the Denisovans,” Shackelford said, of the extinct hominin species. “They lived in the cold arctic temperatures of Siberia... and now we know they were also living in the tropics of Southeast Asia... Denisovans could adapt to extreme environmental conditions.” [↗](#)

### Scientists create upcycling process to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

Scientists from the U of I, University of California, Santa Barbara, and Dow have developed a breakthrough process to transform the most widely produced plastic (polyethylene) into the second-most widely produced plastic, polypropylene (PP), which could reduce greenhouse gas emissions. “Now we have proved that it can be done experimentally in a way that is scalable and potentially applicable to current industry demands,” said co-lead author **Damien Guironnet**, a professor of chemical and biomolecular engineering. [↗](#)



*Chemical and biomolecular engineering professor Damien Guironnet (left) and graduate students Nicholas Wang and Vanessa DaSilva, demonstrated a new scalable process that can upcycle plastics. (Photo by Heather Coit.)*





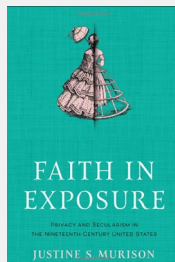
## Books in LAS



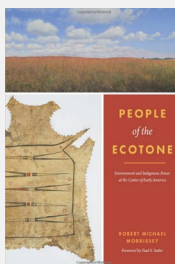
### Study explores sentiments of people who oppose COVID-19 vaccinations

**Tim F. Liao**, a professor of sociology, analyzed the content of images with anti-vaccination themes that were published online by news media on Nov. 4, 2022, the day that President Joseph Biden announced COVID-19 vaccine mandates for larger businesses. Liao located and collected images containing text with the keywords “anti-vaccine,” “protest,” “U.S.,” and “America” and found that three major themes emerged: Support for individual freedom/rights, opposition to government control, and anti-science misinformation or disinformation. [↗](#)

Read more about research and scholarship in the College of LAS [↗](#)



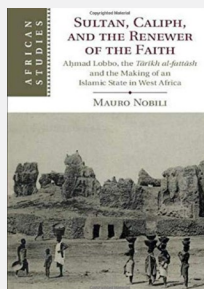
**“Faith in Exposure: Privacy and Secularism in the Nineteenth-Century United States,”** by **Justine Murison**, professor of English, shows how, over the course of the 19th century, our culture’s understanding of privacy both underpinned thinking about sexual and reproductive rights but also undermined them in the name of religious freedom. (University of Pennsylvania Press)



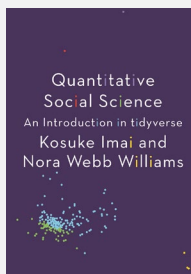
**“People of the Ecotone: Environment and Indigenous Power at the Center of Early America,”** by **Robert Morrissey**, professor of history, weaves together a history of Native peoples with a history of an ecotone to tell a new story about the roots of the Fox Wars, among the most transformative and misunderstood events of early American history. (University of Washington Press)



**“Rare Stuff,”** by **Brett Ashley Kaplan**, professor of comparative and world literature, takes readers on a multilayered, mysterious journey through a series of interlocking clues. An intriguing search for a missing person moves through real and magically real universes in New York, Chicago, and glass houses under the sea constructed by Yiddish-speaking whales desperate to save our endangered planet. (Spuyten Duyvil)



**Sultan, Caliph, and the Renewer of the Faith: Aḥmad Lobbo, the Tārīkh al-fattāsh and the Making of an Islamic State in West Africa,”** by **Mauro Nobili**, professor of history, examines and challenges existing theories on the Tārīkh al-fattāsh, arguing that much of what we have presumed about this important source for the history of pre-colonial West Africa is deeply flawed. Making extensive use of previously unpublished Arabic sources, Nobili demonstrates that the chronicle was in fact written in the 19th century by a Fulani scholar. (Cambridge University Press)



**“Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction in tidyverse,”** by **Kosuke Imai** and **Nora Webb Williams**, a professor of political science, is a practical introduction to data analysis and statistics in the social sciences and allied fields, including business, economics, education, political science, psychology, sociology, public policy, and data science. (Princeton University Press)



# TRAILBLAZERS

## First-generation students rely on determination, campus resources, and loved ones to succeed at college

**In** 2022, the University of Illinois was named a First-  
gen Forward institution

by the Center for First-generation Student Success, an initiative of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and The Suder Foundation, for its efforts to improve access to students who are among the first in their families to attend college.

A large number of those efforts occur at the College of LAS, which currently enrolls roughly 1,500 first-generation students. We asked a few of them to share their stories about arriving

on campus and pursuing a degree.

### A make or break moment

**Itzel Rivera** is soon to be the first person in her extended family to graduate from college. Given that neither of her parents attended school past the sixth grade, her attendance at the University of Illinois was unlikely.



*Itzel*

Rivera's parents immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico before she was born. Both of them had to leave school early to help

their families at home. Realizing what they missed, they made education a priority for Rivera and her two sisters and brother. That's why, after living most of her life in California, she moved to the Midwest for college.

She attended Black Hawk College in Moline, Illinois, where a professor inspired her to major in political science when she transferred to the University of Illinois. She is also minoring in anthropology and Latina/Latino studies. While she was determined to work hard, Rivera said that coming from a different culture made some things more difficult.

For example, she had no idea the importance of networking for success in college and after graduation. She was able to grasp these things with help from people at the university, however, and she is happy with the way things turned out.

“It means a lot to my parents, but I think it means a lot more to me,” Rivera said. “They immigrated to this country, they didn’t know the language, they didn’t know how to do anything, but they pushed through barriers. I feel like it was up to me to either continue that momentum or break from it. And I’m proud of myself for finishing college.”

### A new country, a new school, and a new major

On her first day of classes at the University of Illinois, **Judy Chiang** didn’t know what to expect, so she came prepared. She read and copied the lecture notes before class and showed up 30 minutes early to make sure she got a seat. She’d soon learn that she didn’t need to arrive quite that early—but that spirit of preparation has made her college career rewarding so far.



Judy

Chiang, a native of Taiwan and the first in her family to attend college, adapted to not only a new country when she came to Urbana-Champaign, but university life itself. She’s close to her mother, who is very supportive, Chiang said, but she couldn’t help with academic-related questions. For that, Chiang learned to rely upon campus resources.

Chiang originally majored in Earth, society, and environmental sustainability, but she decided to

pursue mathematics instead. Academic advisors, coaches at the Career Center, and teaching assistants helped her switch majors. A math professor gave her meaningful words of encouragement.

Now a graduating senior, Chiang pursues mathematics wholeheartedly, partaking in research through the Illinois Geometry Lab and the Illinois Combinatorics Lab. She is also a volunteer for the Association of Women in Math and has joined two research projects over the past two summers: the MIT Summer Geometry Institute and the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Combinatorics and Algebra REU.

She reflects on the people who helped her during her freshman year, including her residential assistant in University Housing and staff in the Office of Minority Student Affairs (OMSA). The help she received was inspiring, and now Chiang is a residential advisor. She’s also a student ambassador for OMSA, where she organized an academic major information session during the COVID-19 pandemic. She wants to someday become a math professor.

“There are so many resources and places for me to get involved and achieve what I would like to do,” Chiang said.

### A family accomplishment

At one point in **Gina Jagminas’** life, just leaving home to live somewhere two hours away was a big deal. Leaving home to attend the University of Illinois was momentous.

Jagminas was raised in the same house where her mother was raised, which is the same house where her grandmother was raised. No one in her immediate family has graduated from college. Now a junior studying history, Jagminas

is forging a new path. There have been some revelations along the way.



Gina

“I was just a little surprised that a lot of people had things—or it seemed like they had things—figured out more than I did,”

Jagminas said of her impressions upon arriving at college. “It wasn’t, necessarily, a bad thing. I like the fluidity that I went in with.”

Fortunately, her brother, who attended college for a year, and her parents were heavily involved in her process of choosing a school and a major. As a result, today her family shares her feeling of success and perseverance. Her attendance at the University of Illinois has felt like a family accomplishment.

“Every time they come down to visit, they wear their Illinois gear, their sweatshirts, their t-shirts, and they’ll post on Facebook too,” Jagminas said. “There’s a sense of pride that comes with being (an alumna or alumnus) and your kid goes here, but my parents have been able to adopt that because I go here. They consider themselves Illini by proxy.”

### “I’m still surprised by myself”

When **Jason Melland** started college, he was, in his own words, “completely blind.” Though he came from a big family in the Chicago suburbs, none of them had chosen to attend college.



Jason

In high school, Melland struggled in honors classes and started looking at colleges too late to apply to a four-year university. So when he made the dean’s list at Moraine Valley Community College,

which he attended before transferring to the University of Illinois, he was happily surprised.

“I was like, holy cow,” said Melland, now a senior in Earth, society, and environmental sciences. “I didn't believe I could do it myself. Even coming here to the University of Illinois and taking these extremely hard classes compared to my community college classes, I'm still having success.”

Melland credits his success to a new sense of responsibility that's he's gained as a college student and to his advisors at both Moraine Valley and the University of Illinois. They've helped him find opportunities for growth.

Now, Melland's success has inspired his younger cousins, who have begun to see him in a different light. A few have even asked for his help to follow in his footsteps. That, Melland admits, makes him feel pretty good.

“If I went back in time and told my high school self what I've already accomplished, I'd be like, ‘Nah, you're crazy, get out of here, you're lying,’” Melland said. “I'm still surprised by myself every day, and honestly completely shocked by the opportunities that come my way.”

### The flower of the future

As a child, **Maya Moutry** gained a respect for education from her mother, who'd tell her, “Knowledge is power. If it's at your fingertips, why not take advantage of it?”

Her mother passed away last year, leaving Moutry more determined than ever to attend



## College and university offer extensive support for first-generation students

There are several avenues of support in the College of LAS for first-generation students, including the **LAS Access and Achievement Program (AAP)**. [📄](#) **Kristy Valentin**, director of AAP, said that some 55 percent of students in the program identify as first generation, and through the program they have access to various retention and enrichment services to help navigate the University of Illinois. The college also offers transition classes for students, including transfer students who make up a significant number of the first-generation students in LAS. The university's Student Success, Inclusion & Belonging office has also created a new first-generation student program.

college. With a 4.63 grade point average in high school, she had no shortage of options (she was accepted at 26 schools) but being the first in her family to go to a university was still daunting.

Along the way, she learned that the University of Illinois offers many resources and networking opportunities.

“I would say the biggest challenge that I'm dealing with, being a first-generation student, is just learning how to learn in college,” said Moutry.

Moutry, now a psychology major on a pre-med track, receives support from her father, younger sister, and close friends, but she had to learn about college life on her own. To do that, she became involved. Moutry became a member of several registered student organizations (RSOs), including Black Business Network and Wishmakers. She and five other African American students started a student organization called The CommU.N.I.T.Y., and Moutry also started a podcast to help students talk about their college experiences.

“You can literally grow into anything,” Moutry said. “I think of college as the soil of your life. It's really what you use, and it's your foundation. When you meet the professors and when you go to RSOs and you meet new friends, those are the rain and sunshine and nutrients that you need to grow. And the flower is your future. That's what I really feel like college is.”

*By Christian Jones, Olivia Vamos, and Dave Evensen*



# A MINUTE WITH THE DEAN

»» **Venetria K. Patton** has been busy in her second year as Harry E. Preble Dean of the College of LAS. We asked her about it.

## What's been your favorite thing to work on during the 2022-23 academic year?

It's hard to pick just one, especially considering the size and diversity of the College of LAS. I'm still enjoying getting to know everyone through our collegewide open houses, faculty receptions, staff meet-and-greets, and meetings with students, including my favorite "Cookies with the Dean" event. I'm also excited about the new **Marjorie Roberts Professorships** which we hope to fill this spring with some of our amazing faculty. These professorships are a great way to recognize our talented faculty while also setting them up for national honors. ”

## What are some areas of progress in LAS during the past year?

Much progress has come in enhancing the student experience. We opened the Paul M. Lisnek LAS Hub, supported by a gift from **Paul M. Lisnek** (BA, '80; MA, '80; PhD, '86, speech

communication; BA, '80, political science; JD, '83), which provides students with easy access to college advisors and peer mentors who can help them connect with opportunities. We're also creating more access for non-traditional students with the newly funded Bachelor of Liberal Studies program. This is an online program, scheduled to begin in 2024, for students who started, but have not completed, a four-year undergraduate degree. It will offer flexibility and reduce the costs and time necessary to earn a degree. ”

## What are some goals for the next year?

We want to continue working hard to improve access to LAS through scholarship programs like the Lincoln Scholars Initiative. We also have plans to help develop teaching methods, and of course we're looking forward to significant progress on the Altgeld and Illini Hall Project and other infrastructure projects. ”

*By Dave Evensen*

Submit a question for Dean Patton, and she may answer it in the next magazine. [↗](#)



# THE NIGHT SPOT

New projects, planning, and deep appreciation keep the Observatory looking upward

**On** a typical day, thousands of students, faculty, and staff crisscross campus, hustling from one class, project, meeting, and building to another. During daylight hours, crowds flow in and out of major destinations like Lincoln Hall, the Union, and the Library.

It's only when the sun sets and the sky darkens that the Observatory becomes a hub of activity. While the building is no longer used for research, it still plays a vital role in learning and serves as a popular destination for lovers of astronomy.

One crisp night early in October, dozens of undergraduate students streamed in to perform observations for their Introduction to Astronomy course using the Observatory's original 12-inch Brashear refracting telescope, installed in 1896, while students in an advanced lab class used more modern instruments set up behind the building. A few days earlier, The Astronomical Society held an open house, attended by about 300 people who came to view Jupiter at opposition, the point at which the planet is directly opposite the Sun from the perspective of Earth. That night Jupiter and Earth were

closer than they had been in 59 years, and the skies were clear.

"We had a gorgeous view of the moon, Jupiter, and Saturn," said **Bryan Dunne**, professor of astronomy and director of the Observatory. "The Observatory was hopping! If you happen by in the day, you might think it's dead, but come by at night. You'll see how active the place can be."

**Michael Svec** (BS, '88, physics), a professor of education at Furman University and active member of The Friends of the University of Illinois Observatory, credits the human scale of the Observatory and its telescope for that popularity.

"The telescope was designed for the human hand and the human eye," he said. "Most modern telescopes are designed for the digital eye. It's well designed for learning, because the student actually interacts with the universe through their senses, not through the computer screen."

Preserving that experience for students and visitors means preserving the Observatory structure, no small challenge for the 127-year-old National Historic

Landmark. In 2020, the University listed the Observatory as one of several campus buildings in need of roof renovations, and water infiltration also has been an issue.

It was members of the Friends of the Observatory who first flagged the Save America's Treasures program as a potential way to fund much-needed work on the Observatory. Administered by the National Parks Service, the program provides grants to support preservation of significant properties and collections that are connected to the nation's heritage.

LAS administrators, the Department of Astronomy, and University Facilities & Services pulled together to make a case for the Observatory as a worthy project. In fall 2022 the university was awarded a \$500,000 Save America's Treasures grant, which will be matched by an additional \$500,000 from the campus deferred maintenance fund, providing a total of \$1 million for critical renovations to the Observatory.

**Derek Fultz**, senior director of facilities and planning for the College of LAS, said the timeline and scope of the work are still being determined, but he hopes to

**Open houses for open skies** – Monthly open houses at the Observatory allow visitors to explore the building and view the night sky through various telescopes, including the building’s iconic 12-inch Brashear refracting telescope. The open houses are hosted by the University of Illinois Astronomical Society, a registered student organization, along with faculty and staff. (Photos by Carly Conway.)

address issues with the dome, roof, windows and doors, and foundation.

“That’s one of the reasons this grant is so critical—it takes care of that unglamorous but essential building envelope work and shows a commitment from the campus and the college to preserve this great building,” Fultz said. “We want to make sure that it’s around forever.”

### Preserving dark skies

Another challenge to preserving the Observatory experience: light.

“When the Observatory was built, it was on the south edge of campus, near a farm field,” Dunne explained. At the time, the buildings that now ring the Main Quad didn’t exist yet. Altgeld Hall was under construction almost a half mile from the Observatory site; Davenport Hall was planned but ground had not yet been broken. The Observatory was alone in the dark, just the way astronomers needed it to be.

But the university grew, and over the next 127 years buildings rose on all sides of the Observatory—Foellinger Hall in 1907, Smith Hall in 1917, the Undergraduate Library in 1969, and the Woese Institute for Genomic Biology in 2006. These modern upstarts diluted the darkness.

*Learn more about the historical importance of and groundbreaking research that has taken place at the Observatory.*

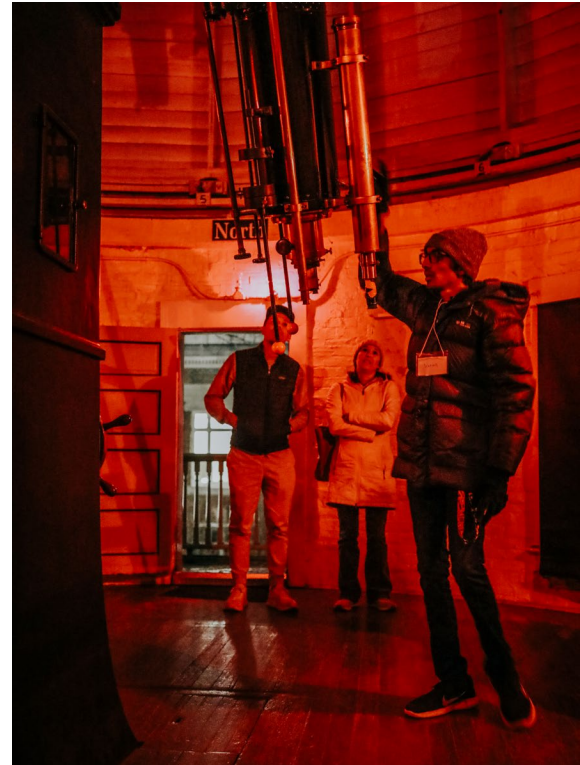
“We would not put an observatory there today if we were building one,” Dunne said.

The planned transformation of the nearby Undergraduate Library into a space for archives and collections, which began in spring 2022, raised concerns among astronomers; renderings showed the new glass entryways shining like lighthouse beacons. Fultz said the possible light intrusion from the library sparked a renewed effort by astronomers, campus facilities and landscape architecture staff, the library renovation team, and others to develop a comprehensive solution.

“Everyone involved has been very good about wanting to keep the Observatory operational,” Fultz said. “It’s definitely a team effort, which is really rewarding to see.”

Sometimes fixes are straightforward, like installing blinds on a window at Smith Memorial Hall. The entryway lights at the renovated library can be scheduled to avoid impact on the Observatory. Lights for a nearby walkway are slated to be converted from globe fixtures that send 50 percent of their light into the sky to downward-directed dark sky-compliant fixtures.

“Handling light responsibly does not mean compromising safety,” Dunne said. “Dark-sky friendly lighting illuminates the path, and none of it is going straight up into the sky. You save money by providing the light where it’s needed on the ground.”



All of this collaborative effort is designed to preserve the Observatory so Illinois students and visitors can continue to be starstruck.

“We need those special places where we can connect with the natural world around us,” said Svec.

**Editor’s note:** Donor opportunities for future Observatory projects are available through the **Friends of the University of Illinois Observatory Fund**. [↗](#)

*By Trish Barker*



## *Dawn Riley Duval channels her athletic prowess into a career—and comes full circle*

**D**awn Riley Duval arrived on the University of Illinois campus in 1992, ready to begin a track career that, 30 years later, would lead to her induction into the Illinois Athletics Hall of Fame. But her story began far away from Champaign-Urbana.

Riley Duval (BA, '96, English), an eight-time All-American and seven-time Big Ten champion who competed in the 100 meter hurdles, triple jump, and relays, is a fifth-generation Coloradoan, born and raised in the Park Hill neighborhood of northeast Denver. The historically Black neighborhood has birthed several collegiate and professional athletic stars, such as track standouts Caryl Smith Gilbert and Yolanda Johnson, NBA player and coach Chauncey Billups, and NFL tight end Daniel Graham. It was here that Riley Duval first developed her love for track and her drive to help change the world for the better.

“I’ve always had this confidence, a pride in my community and culture, a belief in myself, and a belief that individuals can effect change,” Riley Duval said. “These beliefs were cultivated in Denver and in Park Hill community more specifically. I carried that on to the University of Illinois and have carried that confidence and pride and faith and strength throughout my life.”

Despite humble beginnings, Riley Duval said she’s always seen a wide range of what is possible. Her grandfather, born and raised in Colorado, was a U.S. Army veteran who fought in the Korean War and then worked in tech in Silicon Valley. Riley Duval’s father was a special-ed teacher at a predominantly Black high school in Denver and her mother a social worker for many years before she became a professor at the University of Denver.

**A NEW  
FORM OF  
STRENGTH**



*Dawn Riley Duval recently returned to training and competition (far right). In 2022 she returned to the U of I with her daughter, Amaya (shown to the right of Dawn at right), to be inducted into the Illinois Athletics Hall of Fame. (Photos courtesy of the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics and Dawn Riley Duval.)*

These influences, along with her attendance at Shorter Community A.M.E. Church in Denver, which she describes as a social justice congregation, have guided her during her career. After graduating from the U of I, Riley Duval began as a newspaper reporter and moved into the ministry.

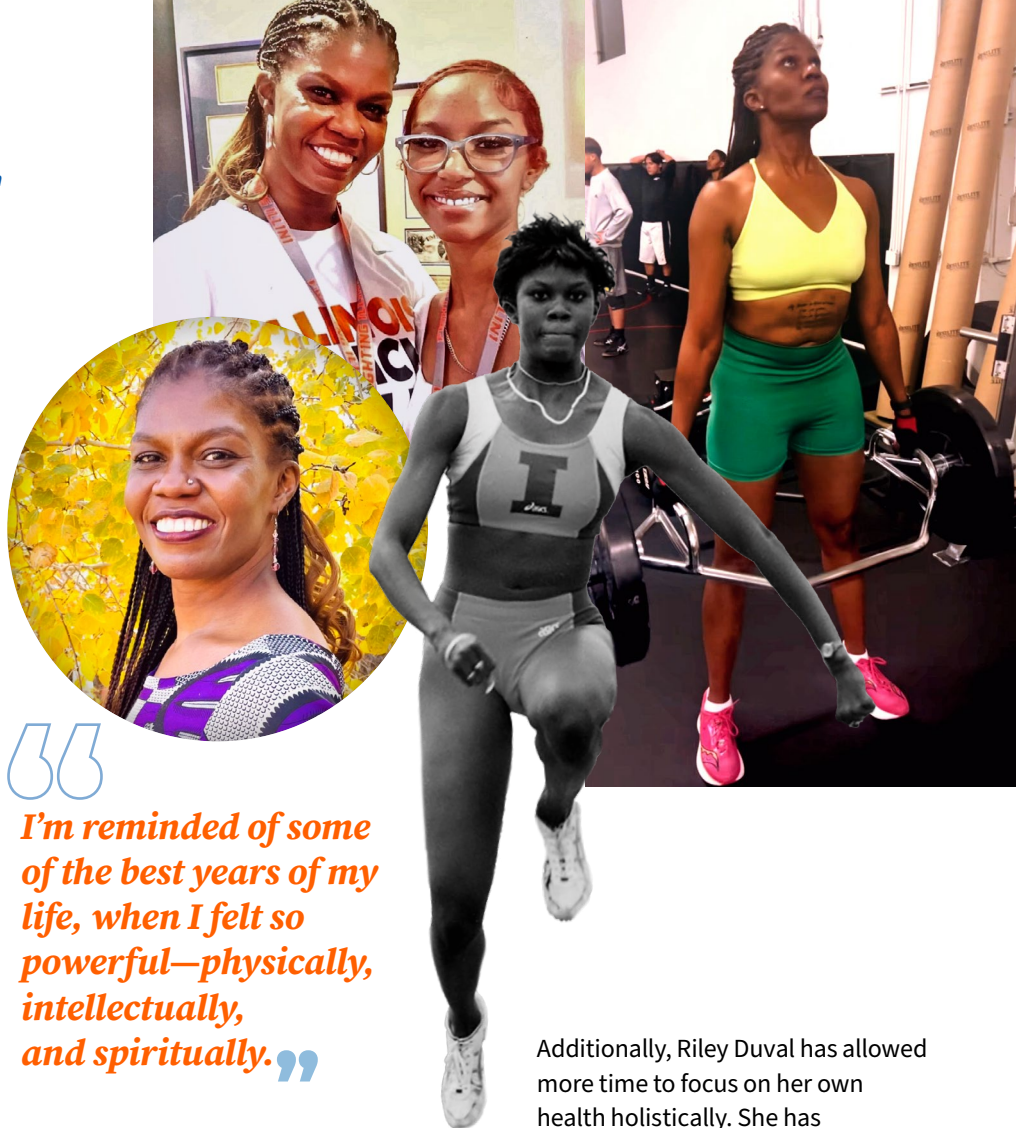
“I was a journalist with the Rocky Mountain News, but I found that I didn’t want to just write about issues. I wanted to help people and help resolve problems in our communities,” Riley Duval said. “I’m still trying to figure out how I can best help people given my interests and expertise. I give myself permission to evolve.”

An English rhetoric major in undergrad, her fascination with words and her desire to understand others and be understood led to journalism. Her love for people, God, justice, and public speaking influenced her to move into seminary. For the past seven years, Riley Duval has been the founder and executive director of a non-profit organization that fights against anti-Black violence and for voting rights and reproductive rights for women.

In 2018, the non-profit made headlines when it received an anonymous \$200,000 donation. It came from the descendant of former slave owners looking to make reparations. This came as a huge shock, Riley Duval said.

“For years and years, we were teaching about reparations, and I thought the results would be little more than conversations for at least my lifetime,” Riley Duval said. “I was stunned and so, so grateful when the generous reparationist gave substantive reparations to the non-profit.”

Riley Duval’s views on racism have evolved with time. When the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, made national headlines in 2014, Riley Duval had little



***I’m reminded of some of the best years of my life, when I felt so powerful—physically, intellectually, and spiritually.”***

patience for people who didn’t understand the problem of anti-Black racism. Over time, however, her approach became based more in cultivating mutual compassion and understanding.

“I really aspire to have fruitful conversations, impactful conversations, that will lead to loving changes in behavior, practices, liberative changes in systems and structures...and I remain very direct,” Riley Duval said. “In all ethnicities there is a learned anti-Blackness that we have to liberate ourselves from to have healing.”

Very aware of the global, national, and personal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as she enters what she calls her “junior elder years,” Riley Duval will soon begin working at an organization that solely focuses on improving the health of Black people.


Additionally, Riley Duval has allowed more time to focus on her own health holistically. She has rediscovered her athletic abilities, training in fall 2022 potentially to compete in masters competitions. She found joy in the fact that she can still run a curve and clear a hurdle. The induction into the Illinois Athletics Hall of Fame was an added bonus.

“To be inducted in 2022, exactly 30 years after arriving on campus, feels so significant to me. I’m reminded of some of the best years of my life, when I felt so powerful—physically, intellectually, and spiritually,” Riley Duval said. “As much confidence and faith and power that I had coming in, it was magnified while I was at U of I. I’m so deeply grateful. And I’m determined to regain or exceed that level of power in this phase of my life.”

*By Christian Jones*



# GREEN GATEWAY

It's always growing season inside the Plant Biology Conservatory and Collections, which feature dozens of plants from around the world for public viewing. The Conservatory, pictured here, is undergoing changes to make the peaceful space more informative and interactive. Follow them on Instagram at [uiucplantbiogreenhouse](#) 

*Photo by Carly Conway*



# Two acres at the root of university history



DAVENPORT HALL - 1901

## *Originally called the Agriculture Building, Davenport Hall helped define LAS and the layout of campus itself*

There are walks in the park and then there are walks that affect the course of university history for the next 128 years, and the campus tour that a botany professor named **Thomas Burrill** gave to **Eugene Davenport** in 1895 was one of those. Nobody knew it at the time, however.

Davenport was a talented, 30-something professor from Michigan being wooed to lead agricultural studies at the University of Illinois. The problem? Agricultural studies at Illinois, at that time, were virtually non-existent: The program was confined to a couple of classrooms and an assortment of neglected livestock pens and farm fields south of Green Street. Only nine students at Illinois were enrolled in agricultural studies.

If there was one person who could convince Davenport to take the job it was Burrill, the magnetic longtime professor who by then was regent of the university. He was most renowned for his groundbreaking studies of plant pathology in the College of Science, a predecessor of the College of LAS.

“As we stood by the dilapidated fences and pens (Burrill) remarked, ‘It’s pretty bad, isn’t it, Professor Davenport?’” wrote Davenport later, in a memoir. “I assented with emphasis. ‘But,’ said (Burrill), sweeping the horizon with his arm and that wonderful eye of his, ‘this is Illinois, and Illinois is an imperial state able to do anything that she considers worthwhile for her welfare.’ No promise. No bombast. But it was that gesture and that vision together with the possibilities of such a state that decided me to cast my lot with Illinois, a decision I have never regretted even in the darkest days that were to come.”

Davenport joined Illinois as dean of the College of Agriculture, and over the next few years he relied heavily upon the friendship, advice, and what he called the “prophetic vision” of Burrill as he reversed the fortunes of agricultural studies. This included winning the trust of Illinois farmers, who, still angry that the university had dropped its original name of Illinois Industrial University, were skeptical of the university’s commitment to agriculture. Davenport eventually turned these skeptics into stout supporters who advocated for the university at the state legislature.

Davenport also faced skeptics at the university, particularly President **Andrew Draper**, who believed that agriculture could be taught as a vocation. Davenport, however, was a firm believer that future farmers needed not only technical knowledge but a solid, four-year degree that included science and even literature.

“(The university) exists not for the service of men only but for women as well; not for personal service merely but for the development of the industries and of the state,” Davenport wrote in an essay, “The spirit of the land-grant institutions.”

The construction of Davenport Hall also ushered in a new era for the campus layout. Aside from the Observatory (which opened in 1896), Davenport Hall stood virtually alone on what was then south campus. The building, however, fulfilled the eastern outline of what planners had been envisioning, in one form or another, for a few years: an expanse of lawns and open space for students to unwind and relax. In 1902, the New Chemical Laboratory (later Noyes Laboratory) went up immediately to Davenport’s north, and in 1905 campus built the Women’s Building (later renamed the English Building) some 200 feet to the west. The Auditorium (later Foellinger) was built in 1907 to the southwest of Davenport, thus—with Natural History Building, Harker Hall, University Hall (later replaced by Illini Union), and Altgeld Hall forming the north edge—completing the outline of the Main Quad.

**Upon completion, Davenport Hall occupied 2 acres of floor space and consisted of a main building, 250 feet long, and two wings, each 116 feet long.**

It held space for dairy manufacturers and household science, farm machinery, and veterinary science and stock judging, with the main building holding classrooms, laboratories, the state entomologist, and the agricultural experiment station, and a 500-seat assembly room.

Ironically, the building soon proved too small for agricultural studies, particularly as farm machinery grew in size and scope. By the early 1920s, campus began adding new agriculture buildings on south campus and planned to turn over Davenport Hall to the College of LAS. That transition took place over the span of decades, but today the building is entirely occupied by LAS, with classrooms, offices, and laboratories devoted to geology, geography and geographic information science, anthropology, and chemical and biomolecular engineering. More than 6,300 students per week pass through Davenport Hall.

Over the years buildings sprung up all around Davenport Hall, so much so that, back in 1895, Burrill and Davenport wouldn’t have recognized what the once forlorn landscape would turn into. In fact, now, if you enter Davenport Hall, you can embark upon a maze of walkways, connected space, and underground tunnels that connect a succession of some of the most important scientific buildings on campus: Chemistry Annex, Noyes Laboratory, Roger Adams Laboratory, Chemical & Life Sciences Laboratory, and Morrill Hall. At the very end of the walk you’d enter another landmark building that anchors the opposite end of the interesting journey: Burrill Hall.

*By Dave Evensen*



*Growing up: Two photos taken from the same angle more than 100 years apart show how much campus has changed since Davenport Hall was constructed. (Photo at left courtesy of the University of Illinois Archives; color photo by Brian Stauffer.)*

“(The university) no longer confines itself to teaching approved courses in stock knowledge to the young,” he wrote, “but is active, even aggressive, in the discovery and application of new truth wherever it can be useful in the development of the state, material as well as human, economic as well as social.”

In 1899 the state legislature approved not only \$150,000 for the construction of a new agriculture building but also directed additional annual funding from the Morrill Acts to agricultural studies. When Davenport Hall was completed in 1901 (it was initially called the Agriculture Building, only to be renamed in 1947), it was called the largest university building devoted to the study of agriculture in the United States.

# LAS BY THE NUMBERS

## Measuring the Main Quad

It's the most iconic spot on campus, but how well do you know the Main Quad? We dug up some numbers.



Sources: *Applied Technologies for Learning in the Arts & Sciences*; *University of Illinois: Virtual Campus Tour*; *Student Affairs*; *Facilities & Services*; *staff reporting*

**190,820** Area (in square feet) of the Main Quad



**122**

Years since the University of Illinois imported squirrels to help improve “university life” and “the feelings of students.”



**26,232**

Number of students who take class each week in Lincoln Hall, the Main Quad's busiest building



**11 a.m. Wednesdays**

The busiest time on the Main Quad, when 4,925 students have class in buildings around the space

**1908**

The year students were first allowed to use the Main Quad lawns

**13**

Number of buildings that frame the Main Quad

**620**

Number of registered student organizations present during 2022 Quad Day

**25**

Number of doors that open to the Main Quad

Check out our video series, **940 Feet**, featuring Q&As between professors and students as they stroll around the Main Quad!



## Join the growing LAS community on LinkedIn

- »» Stay up-to-date on the latest happenings in the college
- »» Create professional connections with fellow LAS alumni and others
- »» List the College of LAS as your educational unit and showcase your pride in your alma mater!

## Shop LAS merchandise!

Display your college pride with College of LAS apparel and accessories available through the new online store. Shop a range of casual and professional attire, warm outerwear, and accessories.





# ENABLING ENDLESS OPPORTUNITY

*For more than 100 years, the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences has helped students find their paths and launch their careers.*

Do you know a student looking at colleges? Ask them to consider LAS, where they can benefit from a broad variety of ideas and perspectives and enjoy enriching opportunities inside and outside the classroom. With more than 70 majors and endless opportunities to choose from, LAS provides the foundation for long-term success.

[Learn more](#) 

**Editor** Dave Evensen  
**Graphic Designers** Carly Conway and Heather Gillett  
The Quadrangle is published for alumni and friends of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, by the Office of Communications and Marketing, 2040 Lincoln Hall, 702 S. Wright St., Urbana, IL 61801, (217) 333-1350. The college also publishes a monthly email newsletter, LAS News. Please direct all inquiries about either publication to the editor at [laseditor@illinois.edu](mailto:laseditor@illinois.edu) or at the above address.

This publication is available in an accessible electronic format at [www.las.illinois.edu/news/magazine](http://www.las.illinois.edu/news/magazine). Or, contact us via the email address above to request the magazine in a different accessible format.

Copyright © 2023 Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

**Editorial Board**  
Matthew Ando, associate dean for life and physical sciences  
Tricia Barker, director of communications  
Carly Conway, senior graphic design specialist  
Stephen Downie, associate dean for curricula and academic policy  
Margaret Edwards, associate director of constituent engagement  
Dave Evensen, lead editorial specialist  
Derek Fultz, senior director of facilities and planning  
Heather Gillett, senior graphic design specialist  
Wendy Heller, executive associate dean  
Randy McCarthy, interim associate dean for technology and online learning  
Isabel Molina-Guzmán, associate dean for student academic affairs  
Lloyd Munjanja, interim associate dean for diversity and inclusion  
Venetria K. Patton, Harry E. Preble Dean of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences  
Curtis Perry, interim associate dean for humanities and interdisciplinary programs  
Brad Petersen, executive director of communications and marketing  
Deanna Wisthuff, associate dean for advancement