

THE MAGAZINE OF LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND POLICY

SESP

SPRING 2025

Learning to Love

Twenty-five years after its
launch, Marriage 101 is still
drawing crowds



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MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

DEAR SESP COMMUNITY,

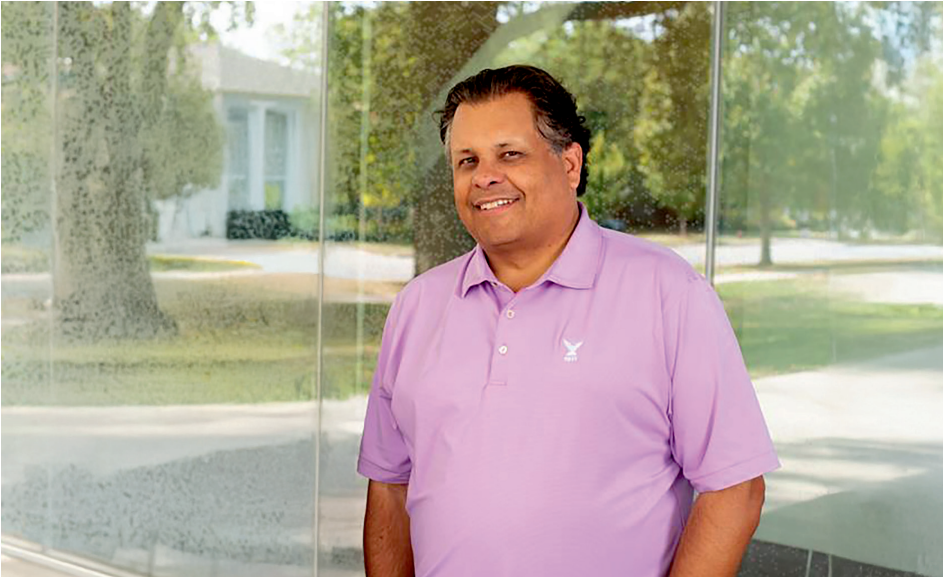
In 2021, then-US Senate candidate JD Vance outlined his vision for higher education, telling the audience at the National Conservatism Conference that “we have to honestly and aggressively attack the universities in this country.” He ended his speech by saying there was wisdom in Richard Nixon’s decades-old quote that “the professors are the enemy.”

This portrayal of universities is deeply troubling—and an aberrant reading of what universities, and their community members, are. And even as I write this, I must ask myself if doing so will endanger me, SESP, or Northwestern.

As the dean of one of the world’s most respected schools of education, I want to say the obvious: Institutions of higher education, and the faculty, students, and staff within them, are not the enemy. SESP exemplifies what higher education is meant to be: a community dedicated to learning, challenging ideas, and finding better solutions for society. SESP and its students, staff, and faculty give me hope about the world and our future.

Here we hold a variety of viewpoints. But what unites us is a shared commitment to our students and to making the world a better place. Our faculty members—many of whom are renowned experts—are among the best in their fields and disciplines. They include fellows of prestigious academies and award recipients who conduct research that improves lives and communities. Their work often goes unnoticed, but it touches nearly every aspect of our daily lives.

Our faculty have advised presidential administrations on economic issues, shaped state and federal education policy, and worked on initiatives that improve



education, health, and societal well-being. Their research spans a wide range of topics, from the impact of fake news to the science of human relationships and cognitive development.

And our alumni are leaders in a wide range of fields. They are journalists, CEOs, lawyers, stay-at-home parents, teachers, reporters, and entrepreneurs who understand the power of people and possibility.

The contributions of higher education are often invisible, but they are essential. Thanks to universities, our roads are safer, our air and water are cleaner, and our children are smarter. Universities have developed medical advancements, provided us with great literature, and formulated policies that tackle some of the world’s most pressing issues. It is not hyperbolic to suggest that much that’s taken for granted in our daily lives is made better because of what higher education inspires, produces, and creates.

Unfortunately, universities haven’t always been effective at communicating

the value they provide. This magazine is a small attempt to share the positive impact of our work.

So my request to you is this: When people criticize universities, ask them what they don’t like. Listen. And help them understand the incredible individual and societal benefits of a robust system of higher education. And let us know: How did it help you?

Thank you for your continued engagement, enthusiasm, and support of SESP. Every day I feel lucky to be part of this extraordinary school and university.

Warmly,

Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy
Dean and Carlos Montezuma Professor of Education and Social Policy

Gears, Gadgets, and Game-Changing Learning



Chicago middle school students explored virtual welding, robotics, and more at the FUSE Futures celebration of science, technology, engineering, arts, and math programs and career paths at Richard J. Daley College. The seventh- and eighth-grade students, who participate in FUSE through grants from Boeing, rotated through stations including laser cutters, programmed robotic arms, and Daley’s virtual welding machine.

FUSE is a hands-on, choice-based learning environment that has been in Chicago-area schools for more than a decade and has now spread to 20 states. Students work on challenges that “level up” like those in video games.

In the Boeing Design to Fly Challenge, which FUSE devised with Boeing engineers, students designed and refined custom controllers for a flight simulator. Men-tors from Boeing then demonstrated “flying” using some of the student-designed devices.

“Giving kids choice and freedom based on their own interests can create a really lively classroom culture of peer learning and teaching,” says FUSE founder and learning sciences professor **Reed Stevens**. “Students truly enjoy working and learning together.”



FUSE designer and digital media producer Gabe Cerda Nelson (right) facilitates the Boeing Design to Fly challenge.

OpenSciEd and Northwestern Launch High School Chemistry Course

In one unit of a new high school chemistry course from OpenSciEd, slow-motion videos of lightning help students explore what causes such strikes and why some structures are safer than others in a storm.

“Our goal at OpenSciEd is to open up science to all students,” says **Brian Reiser**, SESP’s Orrington Lunt Professor of Learning Sciences. “We want students to see science as relevant to their lives and communities.”

OpenSciEd develops free, high-quality science curricula aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards. The new chemistry course integrates earth and space science and was created in partnership with Reiser’s Next Generation Science Story-lines project, the University of Colorado Boulder, and teachers nationwide.

Each unit starts with real-world phenomena that drive student questions. In the lightning unit, students investigate molecular interactions and energy transfer. Other units examine global issues such as sea-level rise and sustainable resources. Learn more and find free materials at opensci.ed.org.



Pinkard, Tipton Named to National Academy



Pinkard



Tipton

Nichole Pinkard, professor of learning sciences, was among 22 exceptional scholars elected to the prestigious National Academy of Education. Also elected was **Beth Tipton**, who holds a courtesy SESP appointment as professor of human development and social policy and codirects Northwestern’s Statistics for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice Center.

Pinkard is the 18th SESP faculty member to join the academy. A quality her friends and colleagues especially love is her ability to bring out the best in everyone. “I picture her up at 5 a.m. thinking, ‘How can I get this person—who I think has so much unrecognized potential—into a better position?’” says **Michael Horn**, associate professor of learning sciences and computer science. “‘How can we move this other person so that she can thrive?’ She sees the value in people. Then she amplifies it in a way I’ve never seen anyone else do.”

Global Practicum Program Expands

Beginning this summer, undergraduate students can complete their practicum through the **Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI)** study abroad program, giving the practicum a more global reach. In addition to GESI options—including programs in South America and Asia—undergraduates can study in Sydney, Milan, or Dublin as part of SESP’s Global Practicum Abroad offerings.

Both GESI and Global Practicum Abroad allow students to fulfill practicum and global experience requirements concurrently. Students who choose GESI work with small groups, which are paired with NGOs. In Sydney, Milan, and Dublin, students are individually matched with organizations.



Integrating Social Justice into Organizational Change

An innovative digital anthology project led by SESP’s **Kimberly Scott** (right) explores how social justice principles can be woven into organizational change. Scott describes the expansive online Social Justice in Organizational Change initiative as an “experiment with intellectual activism.”

To date, 40 people have contributed. Edited by Scott, the anthology features work from several alumni, faculty, and coaches affiliated with the Master of Science in Learning and Organizational Change program, including **Dorie Blesoff**, **Nicole Dessain**, **Sonya Kaleel**, and **Ngoc Nguyen**. The resource is continually expanding, and new contributors are welcome. Scott, assistant professor of learning and organizational change and associate dean, is integrating its content into a graduate course she coteaches, Exploring Sustainable Development for Organizations.

“It’s a collective effort to learn together,” she says. “We’re challenging ourselves to rethink change research, practice, and pedagogy.”

Learn more about the project, which received support from Northwestern’s Race and Justice Collaborative seed fund, at sjoc.pubpub.org.



The Challenge of Unrealistic Expectations

Novice computer science students often think it’s a bad sign to restart a problem, ask questions, or take time to plan. But these practices are normal, even for experts, and that’s a message students need to hear, according to an award-winning study by SESP professor **Eleanor O’Rourke** (right) and graduate students **Melissa Chen** and **Yinmiao Li**.

The study, which won an award for best paper at the International Computing Education Research 2024 conference, suggests that less-confident students have unrealistic expectations and feel unprepared for setbacks. Asking questions or planning often makes them doubt their abilities.

“Our data revealed the power instructors have to accurately set expectations and to model practices like debugging,” says O’Rourke, associate professor of learning sciences and computer science and an expert on how beliefs about programming shape learning. “Being more deliberate about the inherent difficulties could reduce negative self-assessments and course dropouts.”



New Center Explores Technology, Society, and Policy

Building smarter tech by putting people first



SESP received a \$1 million gift from the Kapor Foundation to establish the **Center for Technology, Policy, and Opportunity**. It will lead a range of initiatives, beginning with a new interdisciplinary graduate program designed to address challenges at the intersections of technology, society, and policy.

Launching this fall, the **Master of Science in Technology, People, and Policy** (MTePP) program is built on the idea that to serve humans, new technologies need to put people first. Courses will help students navigate such issues in areas including artificial intelligence, environmental sustainability, and human development.

“The program’s power comes from putting learning scientists and computer scientists together with experts in policy and human development,” says SESP dean Bryan Brayboy. “We’re preparing professionals for challenges and opportunities related to education, policy, legislation, and corporations—from job displacement and ethical dilemmas in AI to a host of other concerns.”

“The program’s power comes from putting learning scientists and computer scientists together with experts in policy and human development.”

—Bryan Brayboy

The MTePP program is the first of several initiatives to be supported by the new center. Building on work related to education ecosystems led by **Nichole Pinkard**, the Alice Hamilton Professor of Learning Sciences, the center will serve students in high school and community college in addition to undergraduate and graduate students.

The flexible, hybrid master’s program can be completed in one year, while part-time students can finish in two years. Most courses will be offered in person and virtually, though orientation and the capstone symposium require in-person participation.

Tech policy experts **Nicol Turner Lee** and **Nik Marda** will be among the instructors.

The center’s work will include

High school electives

Programs for Chicago-area schools will introduce students to computer science, tech ethics, and tech policy principles in ways that reflect students’ experiences. Students can receive certificates from Northwestern.

Undergraduate microcredentials

Certificates, badges, and other symbols of expertise can be collected to prepare students from Northwestern and partner institutions, including community colleges, for careers in technology policy.

Graduate certificates and degrees

Flexible interdisciplinary graduate programs aligned with cutting-edge research and policy needs, including those related to AI and emerging technologies, will be offered.

Lee is a researcher and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who writes about unequal access to technology; she is coeditor in chief of its *TechTank* and author of *Digitally Invisible: How the Internet Is Creating the New Underclass*. Marda is technical lead for AI governance at Mozilla, where he helps developers make AI more open, public, and trustworthy. He is former chief of staff for the technology division of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and served as a policy adviser in the National AI Initiative Office.

“The questions of technology are inescapable at this point,” says **Sepehr Vakil**, associate professor of learning sciences and the center’s faculty director. “New technology brings both tremendous opportunities and significant challenges. How we think about regulating and intervening with technology has big implications for inequality, equity, ethics, and society.”



Megan Bang



Tabitha Bonilla



Quinn Mulroy



Bryan Brayboy



Ahmmad Brown



Ritu Tripathi



Musa al-Gharbi



Paul Goren



Sheila Merry



Dan P. McAdams



Lois Trautvetter



Michelle Yin

IN BRIEF

Northwestern’s Center for Native American and Indigenous Research, directed by professor **Megan Bang**, was honored by the Evanston Preservation Commission.

Professor **Tabitha Bonilla** published “The Influence of Partisanship on Assessments of Promise Fulfillment and Accountability” in the *American Political Science Review*. With professor **Quinn Mulroy** and **Jennifer R. Cowhy** (PhD24), she published “Reconceptualizing Parents as Policy Agents Within Special Education” in *Educational Researcher*. Mulroy and **Heather McCambly** (PhD21) published “Constructing a ‘Quality’ Education Crisis” in a special issue of *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

American Anthropologist’s most-read article of 2024, “Ethnographic Methods: Training Norms and Practices and the Future of American Anthropology,” was written by SESP dean **Bryan Brayboy** and a team of cultural, biocultural, and linguistic anthropologists.

Professors **Ahmmad Brown** and **Ritu Tripathi** received the \$10,000 first prize in the University of Michigan’s 2024 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Global Case Writing Competition for prompting students to think about the difficulties of implementing new equity policies in global organizations.

Sociologist **Musa al-Gharbi**, author of *We Have Never Been Woke: The Contradictions of a New Elite* and assistant professor at Stony Brook University, discussed the challenges of ideological diversity in academia during SESP’s annual Ray and Nancy Loeschner Lecture Series on Leadership.

Paul Goren, director of SESP’s Center for Education Efficacy, Excellence, and Equity, and **Sheila Merry** (BS77), former executive director of Evanston’s Cradle to Career initiative, were recognized by Cradle to Career’s Equity Champion Awards.

Research by professors **Jonathan Guryan**, **Kirabo Jackson**, and **Diane Schanzenbach** informed the annual *Economic Report of the President*, coauthored by Jackson, who returned to SESP last fall after a year on the White House Council of Economic Advisers.

Professor **Claudia Haase** coauthored “Unraveling the Experience of Affection Across Marital and Friendship Interactions” in the journal *Affective Science*.

Professors **Larry Hedges**, Jackson, **Carol Lee**, Schanzenbach, and **James Spillane** were named to the 2025 Edu-Scholar Public Influence Rankings, the sixth consecutive year all five have been cited.

Professor **Dan P. McAdams** coauthored “Narrative Identity in Context: How Adults in Japan, Denmark, Israel, and the United States Narrate Difficult Life Events” in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Instructor **Nancy Roter**, mayor of Highland Park, Illinois, received the Alumnae of Northwestern University’s 2024 Alumnae Award.

Globetrotting professors **Lois Trautvetter** and **Michelle Yin** attended the Council on International Educational Exchange Global Internship Conference in London; they also presented at the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education in Delhi.

Professor **Sepehr Vakil** joined Northwestern’s Institute for Policy Research.

Human development and social policy doctoral student **Kanika Dhand** received an International Dissertation Research Travel Grant to pursue her fieldwork in India.

Adrija Bhattacharjee, a higher education administration and policy graduate student, led an online discussion about student-led antigovernment protests in her home country of Bangladesh.

Undergraduate **Kaylyn Ahn**, a social policy and legal studies major, won a prestigious 2025 Marshall Scholarship to study public policy at the University of Oxford. She is the first SESP student (and 29th from Northwestern) to be named a Marshall Scholar.

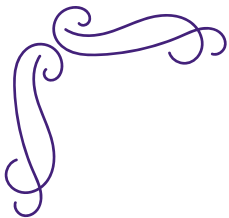
Undergraduate **Aimee Resnick** received the 2024 Future Industry Spotlight Award from the American Road and Transportation Builders Association for her leadership as an intern with the Colorado Department of Transportation.



PARTNERINGUP

A quarter century after the launch of Marriage 101, the class is still drawing crowds each spring.

By Alina Dizik



Nearly 10 years after Haley Pilgrim (BS15) took the class affectionately known as Marriage 101, she emailed instructor Alexandra Solomon to tell her the course had been life-changing. One of Pilgrim’s takeaways—which she eagerly shared with her partner—was that it’s never too early to begin working on a relationship. After just three months of dating, the two started counseling. Her partner says it was that early couples therapy “that led us confidently down the aisle,” wrote Pilgrim, who married him in 2022. “We owe this strong foundation to the lessons I learned from you.”

Long before the internet turned romantic relationships into a maze of swipes, curated profiles, and status updates, SESP launched a ground-breaking course called Building Loving and Lasting Relationships: Marriage 101. Twenty-five years later, it’s still the most popular undergraduate offering at Northwestern, with its coveted 110 slots filling up in minutes each year.

Despite the course name, long gone is the assumption that everyone is going to get married. This is especially true given plummeting rates of marriage and an increasingly diverse outlook on what makes successful intimate relationships, says clinical psychologist Alexandra Solomon (MA98, PhD02), a SESP lecturer, author, and podcast host who leads the class every spring with the help of master’s students. “The heart of the class is helping students understand their own relationship to relationships,” says

“The heart of the class is helping students understand their own relationship to relationships.”

—Alexandra Solomon

Solomon, who also shares insights with her more than 220,000 Instagram followers. “It’s a class about relational self-awareness—helping you understand who you are in the context of romantic relationships.”

The course has evolved with the times, covering such issues as conflict, relationship boundaries, breakups, and parenthood. “Now we talk about long-distance relationships, dating apps, hook-up culture, and polyamory—the topics are expansive and inclusive,” Solomon adds.

The class encourages students to get into the nuts and bolts of modern relationships. Students interview couples, including their own parents. Breakout

groups are led by graduate students studying to become marriage and family therapists.

“It was a mix of standard lectures on psychological theory but also small group discussions about actual relationships and what those were like,” says

Barry Goldberg (BS05), a writer

and editor at the Partnership for Public Service, who took the class in 2004. “Parts of it were very intimate—you had to be really comfortable sharing personal things with people you didn’t really know. There was value in that, but I hadn’t expected it going in, and I wasn’t ready to share stuff.”

In one class, Goldberg got the lowdown on the early days of parenting after hearing from a sleep-deprived couple with a newborn baby. “I was 20 and had an idealized view of what relationships should be like,” he says. “It was good to hear people cut through the fairy tale.”





Another couple, when asked how they dealt with conflict, said to the delight of the class, “We just get naked,” recalls Ellen Slater (BS06), a couples therapist in Winthrop, Washington. “The class brought a lot of humor to learning about relationships,” says Slater, who brings to her practice the conflict resolution skills she learned in the course. “It taught me that marriage is very hard and to not be caught up in delusion. This was a standout course—even my family knows about it.”

No one talks about the challenges Arthur Nielsen, a couples therapist and clinical professor of psychiatry at Northwestern’s Feinberg School of Medicine, launched the course with SESP professor Bill Pinsof in 2000 (when Solomon was a doctoral student). They had spent an entire year designing it, reviewing literature, and interviewing 15 couples therapists in preparation. The therapists had observed in their work that when parents didn’t know how to manage conflict, their

“It taught me that marriage is very hard and to not be caught up in delusion. This was a standout course.”

—Ellen Slater (BS06)

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children likewise often didn’t learn those skills—thus missing out on life lessons essential to healthy relationships.

Nielsen, who is also on the faculty of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute, noticed that most people had few role models outside of family. He felt that bringing the science of relationships into an academic setting could change that.

Students were asked to focus on themselves and keep a journal related to their own relationships. One exercise prompted student pairs to argue while their classmates looked on and made suggestions. “Some would try to say the wrong things to see what would happen,” Nielsen says.



Timing was important, too. Giving college students—those presumably not yet thinking about marriage—the skills to thrive in relationships before they found their mate was a draw, he says. “We tried to get people before they were married, because they often end up with precisely the wrong person. In college, they’re at an age when they are capable of really learning from ideas presented in class.”

“Mom, why did you marry Dad?”

Goldberg, who hadn’t really talked to his parents about their relationship, interviewed them separately for the class. He realized they married at age 23, and “both said they didn’t feel like fully formed adults” at the time and had changed a lot since. He ended up marrying when he was 38. “I wanted to straighten stuff out for myself before sharing my life with another person,” he says.

The course is slightly more popular with women and students who have come from challenging family environments,



Haley Pilgrim and her husband (pictured at their wedding) benefit from what Pilgrim learned in her Marriage 101 class, taught by Alexandra Solomon (pictured giving talks and above right with colleagues).

Solomon says. But rather than provide students with frameworks, the class almost immediately helps them deploy tools in their own relationships.

“They learn there’s a higher ceiling for what’s possible in a relationship, especially students from families that struggle or those who had a front-row seat to divorce,” she says.

After Pilgrim took the class, she thought some lessons were so important that she forwarded her notes to her closest friends. Simply knowing one tidbit—that breakups can affect people chemically, like drug or alcohol withdrawal—helped her cope during her dating years. But the most valuable lesson was that “a happy marriage isn’t finding the perfect person—it’s about showing up as best you can for your spouse,” says Pilgrim, who now works at consulting firm Publicis Sapient. “It’s about understanding your own triggers so you can be a better partner.”

EMOTIONAL MYSTERIES

Work by associate professor Claudia Haase sheds light on understanding emotions within relationships.

Relationships are hotbeds of emotion, says Haase, a developmental psychologist. “Emotions don’t happen in a vacuum. We feel them most strongly in relationship with others.”

Haase, who teaches the class Emotional Mysteries, is particularly interested in real-time interactions between two people—as they discuss a conflict in their relationship, things they enjoy doing together, or simply how their day went—to understand how emotions can transform relationships. Over the years, she has studied marriages, friendships, and, more recently, parent-child relationships.

Some of her findings point toward patterns. One study showed that people with a particular genetic variant were more likely to smile and laugh, suggesting that emotional reactivity may partly lie in a person’s DNA. Another connected emotions to physical health after researchers found that angry outbursts can be tied to heart problems. Conversely, partners who stonewall—or shut down during conflict—have an increased risk of developing backaches or muscle tension.

On the other hand, her work has found that couples who experience mutual surges of warmth, humor, and affection enjoy better health prospects and live longer than counterparts who share fewer moments of “microkindness,” according to a 2022 study she coauthored in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. More recent work has shown that people who can generate more joy and happiness may be buffered from the memory decline that happens with aging.

“Emotions can move us, connect us, and drive human development,” Haase says. “In school, we get lessons in so many different subjects, but we are rarely taught how to relate to each other, be vulnerable, and have difficult conversations.”

She considers it a privilege to study couples during their emotional journeys. Dating, she says, can be a time of very high highs and low lows. There is also an assumption of “almost a deadening in the emotional landscape” once people settle down. In fact, her research has shown there are intense emotional changes throughout marriages because they are often our closest relationships and “they force us to really confront our deepest insecurities, needs, and wishes,” she says.

The good news is that as we get older, “we tend to become sweeter with each other, less hostile and defensive. There’s a lot of change toward the better when we look at emotional changes in couples.”

SOCIAL POLICY IN ACTION

By Julie Deardorff
and Grace Gormley

It's half our name and one of our most popular undergraduate concentrations. But let's be honest: People often aren't sure what *social policy* actually means.

As one of the first schools of education and social policy in the nation, we officially added *social policy* to our name and mission in 1986, under then-dean David Wiley, to reflect a universal truth: Learning is lifelong and happens in the home, the workplace, and the community.

In general, social policy addresses societal needs such as healthcare, education, housing, and employment. Read on to learn what it means to our alumni and the role it plays in their lives.



SARAH CARTHEN WATSON
Civil rights attorney

“I was really interested in how people could be helped on a mass scale.”



SARAH CARTHEN WATSON (BS15) isn’t interested in telling her clients what to do; instead, she treads lightly, listening first and asking questions.

“It’s coming into situations with a humble mentality, building organic relationships, and using my degrees to help people in the way they want,” she says. “They are the experts in their own lives, and litigation isn’t always the best tool.”

A civil rights attorney for the Shriver Center on Poverty Law’s Legal Impact Network, Carthen Watson sees social policy in much the same way. Instead of assuming policy solutions are correct because they were devised by so-called experts, “you look directly to different groups to see how they’ve been impacted by policies over time,” she says. Some policies may need to be tailored to benefit multiple groups—or rejected if they help some groups but have unintended adverse consequences for others. “For me, social policy is the interplay of public policy, sociology, and politics wrapped into one.”

Carthen Watson first explored policy drafting and analysis as a member of her Minneapolis high school debate team, where she found her voice arguing about issues like universal healthcare. During a Northwestern campus tour, her guide mentioned he was a social policy major. Curious, she later googled the term and found it named exactly what she was looking for.

“I always wanted to help people,” she says, “and I was really interested in how people could be helped on a mass scale.”

Before joining the Shriver Center, Carthen Watson worked as legal director for the Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center, where she managed a docket of more than 100 cases and represented clients in housing and eviction cases in state and federal courts, including the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

As the movement lawyer at the Legal Impact Network, Carthen Watson is helping a collective of state and local advocacy groups. While she misses litigation, she’s thrilled to be guiding strategies on critical policy issues, including housing, healthcare, and expungement—the process of erasing people’s criminal records.

The issue of corporate greed is never far from her mind. “It bleeds into everything from housing to healthcare,” she says. “I see not only the greed and self-interest but also the absolute disdain that a lot of people with money and power have for people without it.”

“People are really at a breaking point. That hurts my heart but also makes me incredibly hopeful. It means that people are ready to fight for a better world, and I’m honored to help them do so.”



RENEE WELLMAN
Executive director of Green Corps

“I am constantly inspired by the ripple effects of smart grassroots organizing.”



One day she’s strategizing; the next she’s fundraising. But whether she’s training organizers or recruiting, Green Corps executive director **RENEE WELLMAN** (BS16) is using her social policy background to help solve environmental problems.

“Social policy is at the heart of all our work because it shapes the fabric of our daily lives and the health of our environment,” she says. “People often want to avoid politics, but our system doesn’t work properly when we leave it to a small number of elected officials, administrators, and advocates. We need more engaged citizens and fewer armchair quarterbacks.”

Green Corps offers a one-year, paid training program for aspiring environmental organizers, which has been completed by more than 400 people, including Wellman. Green Corps also partners with organizations that craft environmental policies and lobby government officials, but much of the day-to-day work focuses on teaching people how to advocate for their beliefs and values.

For much of last year, Wellman’s team ran the Save Money, Save the Environment campaign to raise awareness about the financial benefits of clean energy and energy efficiency programs in the Inflation Reduction Act. This year’s priorities include advancing clean energy and reducing the use of toxic pesticides.

For Wellman, a country’s policies reflect its values. Social policy, she says, gives society a framework to “organize, govern, and allocate resources.” An environmental advocate since learning about climate change in middle school, she came to Northwestern precisely to learn how to shape policies to prevent and solve major environmental problems, earning an undergraduate certificate from Northwestern’s Paula M. Trienens Institute for Sustainability and Energy. Her classes “went beyond political theory and addressed the real impacts, costs, and benefits of policy design and implementation,” she says.

Outside of class, Wellman interned with the Sierra Club and National Resources Defense Council. She worked to change Northwestern’s food culture, campaigning for locally grown food and fair labor practices and serving as copresident of the Wild Roots campus vegetable garden.

As a member of Northwestern’s cross-country team, Wellman led an initiative to address sustainability issues among athletics teams and facilities that included a campuswide shoe drive and promoting recycling at competitions. In 2014 she received the Udall Foundation congressional scholarship award for her environmental work. Last year she earned a master’s in public affairs with a concentration in policy analysis at Indiana University.

“I do this work because I believe in what groups of like-minded citizens can do when they work together,” she says. “I am constantly inspired by the ripple effects of smart grassroots organizing.”



BEN PROTESS
New York Times investigative reporter

“I still wake up inspired to do the work of holding the nation’s most powerful people accountable.”



BEN PROTESS (BS06) wasn’t sure he wanted to be a journalist, but after he obtained a fellowship that involved working as a beat reporter for a community newspaper on Chicago’s West Side, his path became clear. Now a *New York Times* investigative reporter who covers President Donald Trump, Protes calls social policy “a window into a million other professions and opportunities,” including journalism, law, and teaching.

“My beat at the *Times* unites my Northwestern experiences,” he says. “It’s the policy and politics I was exposed to in SESP and the journalism training I received through the Public Interest Program (PIP) fellowship.”

Launched in 2005 by SESP undergraduates Jonathan Marino (BS06) and Lauren Parnell Marino (BS07), the fellowship places recent graduates at Chicago-area nonprofits or civic organizations for up to a year. Protes, who had been toying with the idea of law school, joined

the first PIP cohort in 2006 and covered local issues for the *North Lawndale Community News*.

After the fellowship, he moved to New York to get his master’s degree in journalism at Columbia University, where he now teaches part-time. He then worked for *ProPublica* and the *Huffington Post* before joining *The New York Times* as a business reporter in 2010. As the US reeled from a financial crisis, Protes produced a series of stories on Wall Street lobbyists’ influence over financial legislation. He also cowrote an investigation of the private equity industry and its expanding role in everyday American life before he shifted focus to Trump after the inauguration in 2017.

Perhaps journalism was already in Protes’s blood: His father, David, was a prominent Medill professor who founded the Medill Innocence Project, which works to free the wrongly convicted. But the younger Protes says his interest was cemented by the combination of studying the social problems people face and the on-the-ground training he received in college. Experiences during his undergraduate days, such as working at Saint Leonard’s House, which provides housing and support for formerly incarcerated men, “helped me see the interplay of public policy and how it actually impacts human life and a community. SESP was a place where I got a real-world education.”

Young, passionate journalists are needed now more than ever, Protes says, not only to do the hard work of reporting the news but also to find new ways to build audiences at a time when readers are distracted and fatigued.

“I still wake up inspired to do the work of holding the nation’s most powerful people accountable,” he says. “It’s an important responsibility, and it happens to be a lot of fun.”

Building an Early Childhood Ecosystem

Terri Sabol leads the Chicago area's first effort to connect early childhood researchers with families and providers

By Cornelia Grumman

Professor Terri Sabol presided quietly over a lively Zoom discussion focused on helping Chicago improve its early childhood education system. But the mix of undergraduate and graduate students in her research lab struggled a bit to understand some of the particulars.

Why do early learning settings have different standards from one another? How does the city let parents know which services are free? Are community-based programs considered part of Chicago's universal pre-K program?

"I guess the whole story is that policy implementation is messy," someone said as the meeting ended.

If this group is confused by the morass of acronyms, programs, standards, policies, and funding streams in Chicago's system of early childhood care and education, so is everyone else. The nation's childcare system is notoriously complex, inconsistent, and decentralized. Some politely call it a "spaghetti bowl" of programs; cynics call it a "hot mess."

Enter Sabol (pictured at right), faculty codirector of an effort called the Early Childhood Research Alliance, or EC*REACH, to help unravel the noodles. Her approach combines data, research, academic disciplines, and geographic focus; the alliance, launched at Northwestern in 2023, straddles SESP and the Institute for Policy Research to provide timely insights on Chicago's early

childhood system. The hope is that research findings will spark systemic and program-specific improvements.

"I was so jealous of my K-8 colleagues who could go to Chicago Public Schools and get a pretty clear snapshot of what's going on with children," says Sabol, associate professor of human development and social policy. "You can't do that in early childhood."

A Chicago research hub

EC*REACH, a concept incubated by the Chicago nonprofit Start Early, is the first partnership made up of researchers, city and community leaders, families, and childcare providers to focus exclusively on children from birth through age five.

"We should know far more about our early childhood system than we do," Sabol asserts. "If you drive around the city, there are tons of childcare programs. Who is going to those programs, and where are kids not getting served?"



EC*REACH partners immediately set out to develop a coherent early childhood research agenda for Chicago, synthesizing input from city stakeholders. With then-executive director Maia Connors and faculty codirector Diane Schanzenbach, the team convened 250 people from 100 organizations—a mix of program leaders, policymakers, advocates, and researchers—to begin moving that agenda into action.

"Terri has a deep personal commitment to conducting research that can improve the lives of the most vulnerable children and their families."

—John Easton

One of Sabol's current projects is helping Chicago Public Schools examine how students progress developmentally each year from preschool through second grade and how to better plan what's taught in each of those years to boost student success.

One challenge involves data. The hodgepodge of federal, state, local, and private early childhood programs leads to a mishmash of data tied to specific funding streams but not integrated with the others. Comprehensive views of early childhood systems, and the experience of young children in them, are virtually nonexistent. Policymakers are forced to make multimillion-dollar decisions on educated hunches, while practitioners are often so busy caring for children that they aren't exposed to

broader research about what they're doing and whether it's effective. And although parents may have access to information that indicates a program meets minimal health and safety standards, rarely do they know anything about the quality of experiences their children will receive in classrooms. What should be straightforward questions may often be hard to explain without sophisticated analytical techniques.

Another challenge is what Sabol calls a "constantly changing denominator." Some of Chicago's most economically disadvantaged communities have seen dramatic population drops in recent decades, leaving a glut of often unfilled early childhood slots, while other communities have low capacity and long waiting lists.

Sabol's shift from the classroom

Sabol attended the University of Michigan before spending two years teaching first grade on Chicago's South Side through Teach for America.

"It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life," she says. "I remember giving this assessment, and the device just kept beeping red: 'Your kid is behind!' The kid is, like, seven. How could he already be behind? What were all the inequities that led to that moment? Or was the assessment biased?"

The experience planted a seed that shifted Sabol's future focus. She left classroom teaching to pursue her PhD at the University of Virginia, where she would delve deeper into developmental assessments of young children. She later joined Northwestern's SESP faculty, drawn to a

Terri Sabol's students presented research findings to the Chicago mayor's office, representatives from Chicago Public Schools, and early childhood researchers

school where she could integrate child development with social policy.

"At Northwestern there are economists, sociologists, and political scientists all interested in similar policy-relevant questions, and that's how we train our graduate students," she says. By using various datasets and distinctive methodologies, researchers can provide nuanced and relevant answers to practitioners and policymakers.

EC*REACH interim executive director John Q. Easton says Sabol cares as much about delivering high-quality research as she does about developing her students. "Terri has a deep personal commitment to conducting research that can improve the lives of the most vulnerable children and their families."

For Sabol, creating a central early childhood research hub is the critical first step in answering the difficult questions that arose early in her career. "There's a lot that doesn't make sense when you're a teacher," she says. "I wanted to understand what was driving everything around me."

Though the process of collecting and cleaning messy data was long and tedious, she promised herself that if she received tenure, she'd focus on using those skills to help the city of Chicago. "Now the city will call us and say, 'Hey, we've got this question. You've got data. Can you answer it really fast?' We're lucky they want to ask those kinds of questions."

A Professor and a Comedian Walk into a Bar

What can comedy teach us about open dialogue and free speech in higher education?

By Dan Perlman

In a world where academics and stand-up comics rarely share the stage, the podcast *A Professor and a Comedian Walk into a Bar*, which launched in November, is doing something unusual: mixing scholarly insights with humor. Hosted by SESP professor Sepehr Vakil and Chicago comedian and producer Mike Knight, the podcast is a platform for open dialogue at a time when some comedians are avoiding college campuses and critics say cancel culture stifles open and vigorous debate on complicated topics.

“You don’t always have to agree with the premise or laugh at the punchline, but good comedy will always make you think.”
—Sepehr Vakil

“Comedy is often viewed as anti-theoretical or even heretical in academia,” Vakil wrote in an essay for *The Los Angeles Review*. But the culture of comedy, he argues, offers much-needed advice to supporters as well as detractors of higher education on how to listen and engage across political and ideological differences.

Produced by filmmaker and DePaul University professor Raphael Nash, the podcast pairs professors with comedians for smart, funny, honest conversations on a wide range of topics. But the format is flexible—after the 2024 presidential election, Vakil and Knight skipped having guests in favor of a candid one-on-one discussion about the election results and the stark contrast in how their fields engage with difficult subjects.

“Comedians name the elephant in the room,” Vakil says, in contrast to the



(From left) Vakil and Knight record a recent podcast with comedian Calvin Evans and University of Illinois Chicago professor David Stovall.

more reserved, formal nature of academic discourse. “And Mike Knight, with his background in stand-up, is the one who can pull out insights from our academic guests in ways that are revelatory and insightful.”

One episode paired comedian Sonal Aggarwal, a self-described “world traveler, bridge builder, and maker of mischief,” with Loyola University Chicago professor Katherine Cho, an expert on student activism. The two discussed who has more freedom when it comes to discussing topics like Middle East politics: comedians or academics.

Guests often start by emphasizing their differences but “end up discovering a lot of overlap,” says Spencer Thomas, who’s studying radio, television, and film at Northwestern. Several other undergraduates work behind the scenes, filming for YouTube and helping with logistics and postproduction.

Among the podcast’s goals is making academia more accessible. “I don’t think the broader public really gets us,” Vakil says. An associate professor of learning sciences who’s long incorporated storytelling and qualitative research into his work, he hopes the show will provide

a way to connect with audiences and regain public trust in science.

Using comedy to relate is a newer approach, but when Vakil heard comedian Roy Wood Jr. call it “a form of journalism—living anthropology in its highest form” on NPR, he thought, “Exactly.” His admiration for comedy prompted him to try improv and a few open mics himself at the Red Room in Chicago’s Rogers Park. “It’s terrifying,” he admits, but it’s also a way to experiment with a new mode of writing and speaking.

Embracing comedy in academia won’t be easy, Vakil acknowledges, and requires walking the tightrope of simultaneously respecting speech and people. “It will require recalibrating the concept of safe spaces,” he wrote in his article. “It means learning to be more comfortable with discomfort and renegotiating the academy’s relationship with the broader public.”

But the payoff, he says, is well worth the work. “You don’t always have to agree with the premise or laugh at the punchline, but good comedy will always make you think. And that’s precisely why it’s so needed in academia.”

Listen to *A Professor and a Comedian Walk into a Bar* on Apple Podcasts.

ALUMNI NEWS

Making Chicago an Ideal Place to Grow Old

Reimagining how we can live long, meaningful, and joyous lives

Americans are living longer. Some view this as a gift, others not so much. Why? Experts from a diverse range of fields discussed this question and other aging and longevity issues at the Chicago Consortium on Longevity’s inaugural summit at Northwestern.

Founded by Northwestern’s **Claudia Haase** and DePaul University’s Joe Mikels, the consortium, which is the first group of its kind in the region, connects lifespan developmental scientists—people who study human growth and development throughout life—to help make Chicago an “ideal place to grow old in America.”

“Whether we are 9 or 99, we want to be of value and be valued.”
—Claudia Haase

One of the first projects involves identifying the hopes and needs of older Chicagoans and the barriers they face as they age. This includes considering what it means for people to age well.

“Whether we are 9 or 99, we want to be of value and be valued,” says Haase, associate professor of human development and social policy and director of the Life-Span Development Lab. “Our consortium is an invitation for everyone to reimagine how we can live long, meaningful, and joyous lives.”

“The summit underscored the need to establish the field of longevity science,” adds Mikels, a professor of psychology who studies aging and longevity. “The vitality, inspiration, and energy of interdisciplinary discourse around longevity are necessary, and the time is now.”



Also participating from Northwestern were Sneha Kumar, assistant professor of human development and social policy; professor Dan P. McAdams, one of the nation’s foremost researchers in the field of narrative psychology; associate professor Yang Qu, a founder of the field of cultural developmental neuroscience; and undergraduate Lillian Fu, who works in Haase’s lab.

Kumar shared insights from her research on elder care for immigrants that shows the particular challenges faced by undocumented people transitioning into old age.

“They’ve been socially excluded throughout their lives and often lack access to critical safety nets like Social Security,” says Kumar, a social demographer, adding that language proficiency also plays a vital role. “English is important for accessing services, maintaining relationships with grandchildren, and reducing isolation in the US.”

Other talks by scholars and industry experts highlighted the importance of intergenerational connections, nourishing well-being in later life, discussing death, and learning from others.

Support the Future of SESP Through Your Estate Plans

“During my career as a teacher, I came to appreciate the profound impact that educators can have on the next generation. Through a gift in my estate plan, I will support SESP and its commitment to future educators.”
—Lynn Ferguson ’59

Lynn has included a charitable bequest for SESP in her estate plan. Once received, her gift will create an endowed scholarship fund to support students in the Master of Science in Education program and further SESP’s mission to improve lives and transform society.

The outlook for SESP is stronger thanks to Lynn’s commitment.



To explore your giving options, visit giftplanning.northwestern.edu or contact Augie Bossu at august.bossu@northwestern.edu or 847-491-7394.





Nancy Wendt Sindelar



D'Wayne Bates



Julie Emms



Alexa Herzog



Deborah Noble-Triplett



Kara Godwin



Sunny Lin



Brendan Bond



Kim Kopetz



Jon Mikrut



Spiro Maroulis



Nia Coffey



Jimmie Sanders



Leah Doane



Henna Ahmed



Kelly O'Connor

60s

Nancy Wendt Sindelar (BS66) wrote *Hemingway's Passions*, a biography that provides a unique look at how the women Ernest Hemingway loved shaped his literary legend.

70s

John Zaimes (MS73) joined the labor and employment practice of Greenberg Traurig in California. He litigates and advises clients on labor and employment issues.

Tanny Crane (BS78), president and CEO of the Crane Group, completed a 3,400-mile cross-country bike ride to raise \$100,000 for Pelotonia, a nonprofit funding cancer research at Ohio State University. She was called “one of the region’s foremost civic leaders” by *Columbus CEO* magazine.

80s

Jackie Taylor Holsten (BS87) was appointed a life trustee of Loyola University Chicago. She is senior vice president and general counsel at Holsten Real Estate

Development Corporation and board chair and executive director of Holsten Human Capital Development.

Michael Morris (BS89) is senior director of sun and body care brands at Crown Laboratories. He lives in northeastern Tennessee with his wife, Giannine Masters Morris (WCAS90).

90s

Deborah Noble-Triplett (BS94) was named provost and vice president for academic affairs at Lindenwood University.

Kim Kopetz (BS95) is president and CEO of the Opus Group, a global events and experiential agency.

Jimmie Sanders (BS97) is assistant dean of academic and enrollment services for the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at DePaul University.

D'Wayne Bates (BS98) starts in July as athletic director at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. He was also named to the board of directors of the National Federation of State High School Associations.

Rob Schnieders (Comm90, MA98) is vice president of strategic initiatives at Fairfield University.

00s

Michelle Park Michelini (BS04) is executive director of the Behavioral Insights and Parenting Lab at the University of Chicago.

Kara Godwin (MS05) joined Pomona College to establish its interdisciplinary Center for Global Engagement as inaugural senior global fellow.

Jon Mikrut (BS05) is an asset manager for ML Realty Partners, focusing on the Chicago and Dallas-Fort Worth areas. A standout shortstop and pitcher for the Wildcats baseball team, Mikrut played for the St. Louis Cardinals for four seasons and was then an assistant baseball coach and recruiting coordinator for Northwestern. Outside of work, he’s an instructor with Glenview (Illinois) Youth Baseball.

Leah Doane (MA06, PhD09) was named chair of Arizona State University’s psychology department.

Julie Emms (MS07) is associate director of the Center for Biomedical Informatics and Biostatistics at the University of Arizona. She was previously administrative director of the Center for Quantum Networks, where she was nominated for the Edith Sayre Auslander Emerging Visionary Award.

Sunny Lin (BS09) is assistant professor of medicine at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, where she researches health services and policy.

Spiro Maroulis (PhD09) has been named director of the University of Kentucky’s Martin School of Public Policy and Administration, beginning this fall. He is currently on the faculty of Arizona State University’s School of Public Affairs

Tammy Williams (BS09) advises non-profits and families for the Cooke Financial Group. She was recently ranked first on AdvisorHub’s 2024 list of 100 women to watch. Williams, a softball standout, is a member of the Northwestern Athletics Hall of Fame.

10s

Maddie Orenstein (BS10) is director of community development for the West Contra Costa Public Education Fund. She previously cofounded the Colibri Collaborative to help organizations navigate change.

Samantha Viano (MS11), associate professor of education at George Mason University, won the Jack Culbertson Award from the University Council for Educational Administration.

April Stewart (BS12) is a research, monitoring, and evaluation specialist at the Marjorie Kovler Center.

Henna Ahmed (MS13) is associate director of college counseling at Honolulu’s Mid-Pacific Institute.

Alexa Herzog (BS13) is special assistant to the chief of staff for Maryland’s Department of Juvenile Services.

Tana Didelot (MS14) is manager of recruitment at the University of Louisville School of Medicine, where she oversees pathway programs, marketing, communications, and advising for prospective students.

Daniel Nissani (BS14) is director of responsible artificial intelligence at Salesforce.

Elysse Longiotti (MS15) is director of doctoral program administration in Northwestern’s McCormick School of Engineering. She was previously associate director of career advising with the University’s career advancement office.

Brendan Bond (MS16) launched Navigating the College Journey with his wife, Maddy, to give high school students more personalized support in the college search and application process. He also leads the college counseling department at Woodlands Academy of the Sacred Heart in Lake Forest, Illinois, where he coaches basketball.

Nia Coffey (BS17) was inducted into the Northwestern Athletics Hall of Fame. A small forward with the WNBA’s Atlanta Dream, she was the fifth overall draft pick in 2017, the highest of any Northwestern basketball player in history.

Kiernan Michau (MS18) is an upper school humanities teacher at the International School of Trieste in Italy.

Justin Siler (MS18) is clubs program manager for the University of Notre Dame’s alumni association.

Amy Conn Bloom (MS19) is senior associate vice president of leadership and learning for Revantage, which serves Blackstone real estate companies and investments.

Bianca McKenna (BS19) is a management consultant at Accenture.

Samantha Oberman (BS19), a former special education teacher, is a reading intervention specialist at Redwood Literacy in Chicago.

20s

Akie Kadota (BS22) is senior manager of programs and partnerships at the Honeycomb Project, a nonprofit that connects Chicago families with service opportunities.

Jue Wu (PhD22) is assistant professor of higher education at the University of Florida.

Joselyn Chavez (BS23, MS24) is a teacher at her alma mater, Chicago’s Douglas Taylor Elementary School.

Kelly O’Connor (MS23) is a partner development manager at Ellevation Education, which provides software to help educators lead English language programs.

Kasey Tedford (MS23) is director of change management for benefits company Trustmark.

Dalia Segal-Miller (BS24) is political and policy manager with the Jewish Democratic Council of America.

Amelia Vasquez (BS24) is a research assistant at the American Institutes for Research.



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Community Service: It’s in His DNA

Standing tall in the nonprofit world

By Anne Stein

When Magic Johnson visited the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago last year, one man stood shoulder to shoulder with the retired basketball superstar: former Wildcat standout **Andre Goode** (BS85). They hadn’t seen each other since they competed against each other three decades ago in Paris, but now they were on the same team—both focused on the importance of health, wellness, and immunizations against deadly respiratory viruses.

“Magic and I have long been committed to building healthy, safe, and economically sustainable communities,” Goode says. “It was great to reconnect and see that we both continue to support folks on and off the court.”

A native of Rockford, Illinois, Goode has spent the past 20 years managing youth and family programs at nonprofits across the country, including the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee, the YMCA of San Francisco, and Covenant House California, a homeless shelter in Oakland.

“It was instilled in my sister and me that service is the rent for the privilege of living on this Earth.”

Back in Chicago with his wife, Kimberley (Crews) Goode (Medill87), the SESP graduate and father of three has stepped into a new role as vice president of economic empowerment at the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago. He was also recently elected to the board of directors of the Northwestern Alumni Association, where he’s working to connect with Wildcats around the globe. The new YMCA role has been a labor of love, says Goode, who was previously the YMCA’s vice president of community transformation. “I especially like the emphasis on equity in certain areas of the city—the South Side, Garfield Park, West Humboldt Park, Pilsen, and Little Village—where there’s been historic disinvestment.”



The Goode family (from left): Krystalyn, Kimberley, Andre, Kaylyn Sackar, and Garrison

The economic equity program, backed by local and state business leaders, is focused on four areas: workforce development, with an emphasis on getting women, veterans, and people of color into the trades; financial education; first-time homeownership; and entrepreneurship training. Community service is part of his DNA, Goode explains, because his mother, Constance, was a Rockford educator and civil and voting rights activist. A member of the local NAACP, she organized Election Day transportation and childcare and knocked on doors to explain the importance of voting.

Educators going on strike would “be at our house making signs,” Goode says. “It was instilled in my sister and me that service is the rent for the privilege of living on this Earth.”

A stained glass sculpture in Rockford honors his late mother, who was a professor at Northern Illinois University. But Constance Goode’s six-foot-nine son was a big deal in Rockford, too; the blue-chip recruit known as Dre came to Northwestern and was on the 1983 team that made the National Invitation Tournament—a first for the basketball program. Goode quickly flourished on campus and the court, becoming a leader and the “glue guy” on a tight-knit team.

“I was from Winnetka, Dre was from Rockford, and the whole team learned a lot from each other,” says former teammate Joe Flanagan (WCAS86). “Dre came from an amazingly strong family. They are serious public servants.”

Goode played briefly for the Detroit Pistons and then in Europe, where he was offered guaranteed contracts with several pro teams. At the World University Games, he was on a team with NBA players Charles Barkley, Karl Malone, Ed Pinckney, and Johnny Dawkins.

“It was a great era with lots of talent, including Patrick Ewing and Michael Jordan, who I played with in summer league,” Goode says, joking that if he were playing today, he “probably would have made an NBA team long-term. There might have been a few more slots available.”

With season tickets to Northwestern men’s basketball, Andre and Kimberley are excited to be back. In addition to working with the alumni board, he’s joined the Northwestern University Black Alumni Association and attends quarterly NUBAA events and get-togethers.

“Northwestern is a special place,” he says. “I am excited to deepen my commitment to this phenomenal university.”



Dorie Blesoff

Blesoff spent nearly three decades as an instructor in SESP’s undergraduate program. She continues to teach in the Master of Science in Learning and Organizational Change program.

During my career, I’ve focused on leadership, learning, social justice, and organizational and cultural change. I sought ways to integrate impactful and sustainable approaches to learning and change, aiming for a more just and compassionate community, school, country, and world.

I’ve had the privilege of teaching and learning from three generations of students, working with many supportive advisers and dedicated faculty, TAs, staff members, and deans. Being a part of SESP allowed me to channel my focus in service of students’ learning.

While teaching Learning Systems for Complex Environments, I followed the principles of adult experiential learning and made sure at least two-thirds of class time was spent in interactive exercises, small groups, simulations, and innovative ways for students to share what they learned with the rest of the class.

We discussed concepts like personal mastery—how to be energized rather than discouraged by the gap between your vision and current reality. Or how to cultivate a shared vision by aligning all personal visions on the team.

Organizations are living systems—complex, adaptive, always evolving. We discussed how information flow and relationships create power and how self-referencing involves changing to become more authentic versions of ourselves.

I loved students’ creativity in their interactive final presentations—an interactive candy game to simulate systems thinking; Learning and Organizational Change Jeopardy; constructing marshmallow towers. Another team created a final exam, which we used and revised over the years.

A student athlete once carried me across the room during a team presentation to demonstrate kinesthetic intelligence.

Switching to teaching the practicum—a course where all students are in internships—was a breath of fresh air. It gave me the opportunity to share my professional career experience and continue to learn from the students.

The SESP community is a beacon in the world of academia. I hope it continues to challenge the idea that some people are more deserving of life’s promises, when in fact all are worthy and part of an interdependent web of life. Or that the earth is only for extraction and profit, when it is our sacred, shared home.

May we always embody “SESP love” in how we treat one another, influence higher education, produce policies that affirm humanness, and prepare students to change the world.

AS TOLD TO JULIE DEARDORFF

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HAVING A BALL

EL Da' Sheon Nix (BS04) was honored in February by the Northwestern women's basketball program. The University's director of Evanston community relations has dedicated his career to youth, families, and communities facing economic and social barriers.