what if...

...math were not required in schools?

...Athens had not invented democracy?

...all landscaping had to be done with local-native plants?

...the universal fine structure constant were changing?

...Keynes’ General Theory had guided Hoover?

also:
Joe’s Big Idea
Without A Box
Discovery Cubed
Abuzz at the Hive
(and more)
WHAT IF...

Counterfactual speculations by:

PROFESSOR OF ASTRONOMY
BRYAN PENPRASE

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY
SAM YAMASHITA

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CLASSICS
BENJAMIN KEIM

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS
GIZEM KARAALI

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY
WALLACE MEYER

PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF ECONOMICS
JAMES LIKENS

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
SUSAN HOLLAND

VICE PRESIDENT AND TREASURER
KAREN SISSON ’79

WE INVITED POMONA COLLEGE FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS TO STEP OUTSIDE THE REAL WORLD OF THEIR DISCIPLINES FOR A MOMENT TO GIVE SOME THOUGHT TO THEIR FAVORITE “WHAT-IF” SCENARIO. HERE ARE THEIR SPECULATIONS ABOUT HOW THINGS MIGHT HAVE TURNED OUT DIFFERENTLY OR HOW WE STILL MIGHT CHANGE THE COURSE OF OUR FUTURE.

\[ \alpha = \frac{e^2}{(4\pi\varepsilon_0)hc} = \frac{7.2973525698(24)}{10^{-3}} \]

\[ \frac{\Delta \alpha}{\alpha} \text{ def } \frac{\alpha_{\text{prev}} - \alpha_{\text{now}}}{\alpha_{\text{now}}} = (-5.7 \pm 1.0) \times 10^{-6} \]
What if the fine structure constant of the universe were changing?

This question is not idle speculation. In fact, it is the center of a recent controversy in the field of physics and astronomy that is relevant to a topic I have done some research on—quasar absorption lines.

The controversy revolves around the idea that the fine structure constant—usually represented by the Greek letter \( \alpha \)—might be changing with time. The fine structure constant is a dimensionless number that arises from a combination of physical constants and has a big role to play in determining how strongly atoms interact with light. Its value is very close to (but not exactly) 1.097.

The quasar absorption line community has been dealing with this controversy for a couple of decades, and it revolves around a very exacting study of ratios of line strengths in quasar light from very different cosmic times. Some preliminary data from an astronomer named John Webb (then at Cambridge, now in Australia) indicated that he had some evidence for a very microscopic change in this fundamental constant, by about one part in a million.

If found to be true, this slight shift in the fine structure constant would have little impact on our everyday lives, but it would have huge implications for science. For example, it could explain some of the mysteries of astrophysics, such as the phenomenon of “dark energy,” which has vexed astronomers for over a decade or more.

At the same time, the idea that fundamental constants can change with time would represent a complete change in how we understand the science of astronomy and astrophysics operates. We postulate that the laws of physics—on the scale of space and time—are the same everywhere. Known as the “Cosmological Principle,” this idea enables us to use atoms in the laboratory and atoms 10 billion light-years away to the same theory. In this view, these atoms are all the same and obey the same physical laws.

Thankfully (from my point of view, anyway), in 2005 a new and even better instrument was able to demonstrate that there was not a change in this value. So the Cosmological Principle is safe after all—at least for now.

What if a better choice of words could have prevented the Hiroshima A-bomb?

A recent controversy over a possible change in the fine structure constant (\( \alpha \)) has echoes in the field of quasar absorption line studies. This raises questions about the validity of the Cosmological Principle, which posits that the laws of physics are the same everywhere.

Astronomers have long wondered about the possibility of a change in the fine structure constant, which is a dimensionless number that arises from a combination of physical constants. This constant has a big role to play in determining how strongly atoms interact with light. Its value is very close to 1.097.

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The controversy has echoes in other fields, such as the study of quasar absorption lines. This raises questions about the validity of the Cosmological Principle, which posits that the laws of physics are the same everywhere. A recent controversy over a possible change in the fine structure constant has echoes in the field of quasar absorption line studies.

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What if math were not required in K-12 education?

Let me turn this around and ask what if all kids were forced to take regimented and stiffing music classes through their K-12 years? What if they were tested yearly, through multiple-choice high-stakes tests, in their music skills? What if students of music were not allowed to listen to a real musical composition until they could appreciate it—which would, of course, be in college, only if they made it that far, of course... What if government bodies and corporate entities alike kept pushing for more and higher standards to ensure that our nation’s competitive advantage, musical potential, would not disappear? If you’re up for it, also try the artist’s nightmare for size: Imagine a world where young children are not allowed to touch crayons, water colors, even a colored pencil, before they learn all their primary and secondary colors, their hues and tints, their shades and perspectives, and all that which could conveniently be tested in a high-stakes test, to be systematically administered yearly of course... This would be justified by policy statements urgently calling for improvements in the nation’s art education, for of course, our students could not fall behind students of all other nations, or else our competitive edge, our creative potential, would be compromised!

Math teacher Paul Lockhart writes in A Mathematician’s Lament that the current state of mathematics education is analogous to the above two scenarios. Math in K-12 is taught out of context, without regard to intellectual need and curiosity, and in a uniformly linear fashion. School math often leaves out the cool stuff, the fun stuff, the naturally interesting and absolutely fascinating parts, and focuses almost exclusively on what can be tested. Students are “assessed” regularly and classified into those who can and those who cannot do math. Various entities whose existential purposes have nothing to do with the education of the nation’s future generations pontificate recklessly about how best math teachers should perform their craft.

And so we get students who arrive at college with no idea what math really is about. Some is like it that way, but many have been totally turned off. All have concluded, through extensive experience that does not yield to any alternative readings, that math is about rules to be memorized and regurgitated when requested. That there is only one answer to each question and that there is only one best way to get at it. That some are naturally born with the math gene and others remain hopeless no matter what they do.

At Pomona, it is our pleasure to disabuse those unlucky to have gone through a standard K-12 education of these beliefs. We love to help students discover for the first time what math is really about (hint: it has more to do with playful curiosity and stubborn stick-to-itiveness than memory). How math is really expansive and accessible to anyone who wishes to learn more. How math does not really have to be linear (there are multiple entry points to our curriculum and not much that is linear in our major at Pomona). Why math can actually be fun (Tetris, Sudoku, and that 2048 game are addictive; what math is hidden in your favorite pastime?). But wouldn’t it be lovely if we didn’t have to do that? Erasing false beliefs is hard. And it is unpleasant to have to go uphill all the time. Wouldn’t it be lovely if students came in with no preconceived opinions of what math is about?
distinguish from the commonly used term “native.” Local-native plants are plants that are native to a particular area. In Southern California’s low-elevation areas, local plants would include white sage and elderberry, not a redwood tree, which would be considered a California native.

Such a policy would differ from the one that only requires water reductions because local-natives have evolved to cope with the abiotic conditions (temperature, water availability, etc.) and do not require any water inputs once established. Second, local-native plants support local animals and tourism. Since their ecosystem type (California sage scrub) is SoCal’s low-elevation native, such protection would be endangered and many species require it for their survival, significant conservation progress may be achieved. Third, policy focused only on water resources ignores other complex interactions that occur when people modify the landscape. For example, increased use of mulch to reduce water loss facilitates establishment of non-native arthropod species (isopods and Argentine ants) by providing a moist habitat, and potentially represents a significant source of CO2 through UV photo-degradation.

This “local-native” regulation would also transform our ecocentrism. Many residents have never heard the term California sage scrub but need to understand this habitat and become familiar with the species that inhabit it. If we genuinely intend to build a sustainable future with diverse biotic/regional communities that can provide essential ecosystem services (e.g., carbon storage), long-term sustainability requires a holistic approach, incorporating regulations that help avoid the problems of the past, such as land degradation, biodiversity preservation, wise use of vital resources and an educated public. Only when everyone, human actions will decide the future. If you intend to be part of the solution, some good initial steps in its construction would be to: (1) learn about your amazing local-native plants (my favorite: royal penstemon), (2) consider planting your landscape and have it teach you your species that require it for their survival in the local conditions, and (3) make it beautiful to inspire others to follow your lead.

What if Keynesian ideas had shaped policy during the Great Depression?

Before the publication of John Maynard Keynes’ great treatise, The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money, in 1936, conventional economics held that discretionary economic policy could not affect the real economy. Intervention would not help overcome unemployment, and naive attempts to do so would actually undermine the effective workings of markets. Keynes, in contrast, showed the way to contain economic recessions through stimulating aggregate demand. His insights revolutionized economics.

The Great Depression began in the United States in 1929 with the collapse of the stock market, which set off a wave of bankruptcies and defaults that spread rapidly around the world. Germany and to some extent Great Britain, which were the most indebted to the U.S., were hit the hardest.

What if the Keynesian insights of The General Theory had been understood by policy makers as early as 1928? There would have been a serious recession in the U.S. and abroad, but not the disaster of the 1930s that actually occurred. Policy makers in the 1930s would have followed Keynesian practices and stimulated aggregate demand through discretionary fiscal policy. This would have reduced both the length and severity of that depression.

After World War I, Germany suffered from heavy reparation payments and hyperinflation, so it had lots of problems. But wise Keynesian countercyclical policy probably could have helped its economy to recover. Also important, the economic contagion from the United States would also have been less severe. In Germany the U.S. itself had been following Keynesian practices. Unemployment in Germany consequently would not have reached 30%, as it did in 1932, to usher Hitler and the Nazis into power.

There still might have been wars. Italy and Japan would have probably still have set out as colonial powers to conquer new territory. But had the insights of Keynes been available 10 years earlier and embraced by the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations and the Fed, Hitler and the Nazis might well have never come to power, and there would have been no World War II in Europe.

As Keynes said, “the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else.”

SUSAN McWILLIAMS
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICS

What if the Electoral College didn’t exist?

In one very real sense, the Electoral College doesn’t exist: it has no location. Its members—the 538 electors, who are chosen by and bound to a hodgepodge of state-level rules—never gather as a single body.

During presidential election years, on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December, the electors meet in their respective states and cast votes, on separate ballots, for president and vice president. Shortly thereafter, on January 6, a joint session of Congress oversees the counting of electoral votes by state. The sitting vice president, acting in his (or someday, God willing, her) capacity as a president of the Senate, then announces the results of the ballots and who, if anyone, has received the necessary 270 electoral votes to be named the next president and vice president of the United States, respectively.

It’s a weird enough seeming system that there are always proposals to dimate it, usually in the name of democracy or transparency. Currently, the National Popular Vote movement tries to do an end run around the Electoral College by asking state legislatures to pledge their electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote.

So: what if the Electoral College really didn’t exist? The obvious thing to say is that the Electoral College wouldn’t exist, the presidency and vice presidency would be chosen by a simple majority of American voters.
That change would in turn spur changes in presidential campaigns. Today, under the Electoral College system, candidates try to maximize their chances of winning by focusing on the 10 states with the largest electoral vote. In a series of “swing states” that include California, Texas, and Florida, candidates spend large sums of money to win the swing states, a majority-vote system also leads to consequences that are not always good for the majority. In a country where the majority of the population lives in urban centers, it is only natural that urban centers would get a disproportionate share of the national political attention. The presidential candidates spend most of their time campaigning in cities and states with large urban centers, while rural areas are largely ignored.

Is there any question more characteristically human than one that begins with “What if?” People are often asked to imagine what the world would be like if something different had happened in the past. For example, what if the United States had a different political system? What if there had never been a war? What if the Moon had never been discovered? These “what ifs” are a way of reflecting on the past and considering what might have been.

What if Pomona had not built a strong endowment?

Where would we be if Pomona had never changed the way it managed its endowment? In the late 1970s, then Treasurer Fred Moon approached President David Alexander about a “new” approach to investing the College’s endowment. The traditional investment formula was to invest a lower percentage of the endowment in stocks, but under the new approach, a higher percentage would be invested in stocks. Treasurer Moon suggested that a different approach might result in better returns on the College’s investments. Moon was acquainted with an investment advisor at Harvard who had formed his own firm and was recommending an “asset allocation” approach to investing. In this approach, the idea was to create a portfolio of diversified investments with a wide variety of asset classes—real estate, bonds, private equity, venture capital, stocks and bonds—that would be less volatile than a typical stock and bond mix but also yield better returns.

President Alexander and the Board of Trustees agreed and a long and productive relationship with Cambridge Associates and the implementation of the asset allocation strategy began. Since that time the endowment has grown from approximately $17 million in 1985 to over $2 billion today, fueled not only by outstanding investment performance but also by new gifts from donors and the reinvestment of earnings. Today, income from the endowment funds over 40 percent of the College’s operating budget, including 35 percent of faculty salaries through donor-endowed chairs and 40 percent of student aid through student aid endowment. Needless to say, the endowment is what has made it possible for Pomona to stay need-blind in admissions, package financial aid without loans and meet each student’s full financial need.

You can also see the endowment at work in Pomona’s campus—new sustainable buildings like the LEED Gold Studio Art Hall, the new LEED Platinum Millikan laboratory and Andrew Science Hall, LEED Gold Pomona and Sonora halls all were funded for contributions from endowment income in addition to generous donor contributions. Due in large part to the endowment, sustainable building practices and landscaping are the norm on the Pomona campus. The renovation of buildings bordering the Peter Sturtevant Academic Quadrangle, repurposing of parking lots to create new open spaces like those between Mudd-Blaisdell Hall and Harwood Court and the Big Bridges North Portico patio also benefited from endowment income. That income also provides generous support to the Claremont Colleges library materials budget as well as research and materials for numerous College departments through donor-restricted gifts.

It is hard to find a part of our community that has not benefited from the endowment. When we celebrate our successful faculty and small class sizes, the beauty of our sustainable campus and the richness of our student body, we should keep in mind the contribution of donors over time and that first conversation between Fred Moon and President David Alexander.

What if? Is there any question more characteristically human than one that begins with “What if?” People are often asked to imagine what the world would be like if something different had happened in the past. For example, what if the United States had a different political system? What if there had never been a war? What if the Moon had never been discovered? These “what ifs” are a way of reflecting on the past and considering what might have been. What if Pomona had not built a strong endowment? Where would we be if Pomona had never changed the way it managed its endowment? In the late 1970s, then Treasurer Fred Moon approached President David Alexander about a “new” approach to investing the College’s endowment. The traditional investment formula was to invest a lower percentage of the endowment in stocks, but under the new approach, a higher percentage would be invested in stocks. Treasurer Moon suggested that a different approach might result in better returns on the College’s investments. Moon was acquainted with an investment advisor at Harvard who had formed his own firm and was recommending an “asset allocation” approach to investing. In this approach, the idea was to create a portfolio of diversified investments with a wide variety of asset classes—real estate, bonds, private equity, venture capital, stocks and bonds—that would be less volatile than a typical stock and bond mix but also yield better returns.

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Before heading to the Summer 2015 issue very interesting and informative, which has been increasing the case over the past two years. The American Dreamers feature got me thinking about a great issue for this issue once I finished it. I past old issues have found a home in a coffee table shelf before they were rejected. This issue is bound for the waiting room of my physical therapist’s office, where it may be browsed by an undocumented immigrant or someone who knows such a person, who in reading the Dreamers feature may use this information. Keep up the good work!

—Steve Rempel ’76

South Pasadena, Calif.

I don’t believe I’ve ever missed a year donating to Pomona College since I graduated in 1976. My reasoning was that since someone paid for half my education, it was up to me to pay that back, and forward. But to have a debt for a few years ago I did ask a Pomona benefactor why I should be donating, so Pomona has such a large endowment already. I never felt I really got a good answer until I read an article in The New York Times—another year this, which I believe listed Pomona as having the fourth most economically diverse student body in the U.S. That was very gratifying. And now I have a second reason—The Pomona, as profiled in the recent issue of PCM. I love that my money is going to support these truly young adults in their quest for high quality college education. As someone who has a conservative/libertarian bent, I am appalled at the racist and xenophobic immigration laws enacted in the last 130 years or so. From my perspective, these young adults are representing every side of the issue, so I am proud to read that Pomona College feels led to do so.

P.S. In a bit of irony, my conservative/libertarian political views were largely formed after taking a pol- litical science course from the late Dr. Kinsey, whose views were far to the left of where I ended up. When they hear people decry the liberal viewpoints normally espoused in the typical college curriculum, I think they are human-experiential studies concerning human reason, I am so excited to be going to Pomona College since I graduated in 1976. My reason I am so excited to be going to Pomona College since I graduated in 1976. My reason is to learn the new music. This was 1982–1984; my first (and only) performance with concert band was invited me to sit in on anvil for this concert. Once Mrs. Bent explained that I had noticed dividing by whole numbers puzzling it was for many. Dean Walton enjoyed the village and we began to talk about math and how she was a rarity, a female professor in an extroverted society. And then I read your recent essay “Stoner Marx,” and all I could say to my hus- band Bill and Natasha was: “Wow…”

—Pamela Marie Briggs P’19

Los Angeles, Calif.

Memories of Little Bridges

Thank you, Susan Cohn’s wonderful tribute to Little Bridges. I was especially interested in his note that 1962 marked the beginning of annual collaborations between the choir and orchestra. In April 1962, I had the honor of performing with the substantial Little Bridges orchestra in the very first such collaboration. Under the baton of Professor William Russell the combined forces of orchestra and chorus performed Brahms’ A German Requiem (in English), interestingly enough for a full house in Little Bridges. As noted by Professor Russell, we actually had to build an extension of the stage to accommodate all the musicians for that con- cert, but Bill Russell had the vision to make it happen and to continue the tradition thereafter.

My favorite memory of Little bridges and of Bill Russell is from the concert presented in the same year by a part (what shall we call it as an orchestra. I didn’t normally play in symphonic bands, but Professor Russell would have me sitting in an oboe for the concert. Once we located an actual oboe for the purpose it turned out much like a very fine clarinet, and so I was not an professional. Having grown up with all the classical music, I was a true believer in classical music, the beethovenian district. I received a group of young libertarians to come speak to the class. He wanted me to hear oppos- ing views, and for me it was a truly galvanizing moment in my Pomona education.

—Donald Bem ’74

Essex, Calif.

The elegantly written piece, “American Dreamers,” expresses the highest aspirations of our College’s founders, of whom my great-grandfather was the first dean. Inventing our future leaders, and in this mat- ter, of our immigrant youth, is a passion I share. I am “invested” in this enterprise as a matter of carrying “our miles to all mankind” and have done so in teaching and adapting four of these immigrant kids.

—Evan Grin, ’15

South Pasadena, Calif.

Hurray for Introverts

There are many reasons I am happy to be a new member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where I am the Assistant Principal Oboist. I was raised in a family of music lovers, and have been a musician since childhood. When I was a young child, my mother, a professional musician, would take me to concerts every week, and I would always look forward to them. As I grew older, I continued to study the oboe, and eventually decided to pursue a career in music. I studied at the Juilliard School and then at the University of Southern California, where I received my Bachelor’s degree in Music Education. I then went on to teach for 10 years in the Los Angeles Unified School District, where I taught at several different schools. In 2008, I was selected to join the Los Angeles Philharmonic as the Assistant Principal Oboist, and I am thrilled to be playing with such talented musicians. This past season, we performed a variety of works, including Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5, Stravinsky’s Petrushka, and Mozart’s Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra. The ensemble is truly amazing, with each member bringing their unique style and creativity to the performance. I am grateful to be a part of this incredible group of musicians, and I look forward to many more years of playing together. Thank you for your support and for making this possible.

—Emily Easton

Los Angeles, Calif.

More Walton Memories

Thank you, Judy Bartels, for your letter about Jean Walton. I would like to add that when Jean was an oboist at Pomona College, she was a rarity, a female professor in mathematics. Mark Twain said that the books are important, so I would say that the beethovenian district. I received a group of young libertarians to come speak to the class. He wanted me to hear oppos- ing views, and for me it was a truly galvanizing moment in my Pomona education.

—David Rempel ’75

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—Evan Grin, ’15

South Pasadena, Calif.

Music Restored

On August 14, 2015, Butt Johnson’s 1922 Steinway, which was installed at the library and later donated to the college by the Class of 1915, had remained in pieces in the courtyard until earlier this year, when a section of the fountain collapsed. Based on photographs of the original fountain, the statue was rebuilt, and the College took the opportunity to have the statue restored and its broken flute repaired.
(It’s Lonely at the Top...)

There’s no modest way to say it. According to Forbes magazine, Pomona College is now #1 among all colleges and universities in the country. Really.

When Forbes released its “America’s Top Colleges 2015” issue earlier this year, to the surprise of many across the country and the delight of Sagehens everywhere, Pomona topped a distinguished list that went on to include #2 Williams, #3 Stanford, #4 Princeton, #5 Yale and a lot of other amazing institutions. (Harvard is in there somewhere.)

Forbes explains that their rankings differ from other college rankings, in part, due to their emphasis on outcomes, including amounts of student debt, graduation rates and measures of student satisfaction and career success.

“While the cost of U.S. higher education escalates, there’s a genuine silver lining in play,” explains Forbes. “A growing number of colleges and universities are now focusing on student-consumer value over marketing prestige, including alternatives to traditional college rankings, in part, due to their emphasis on outcomes, including amounts of student debt, graduation rates and measures of student satisfaction and career success.”

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Forbes explains that their rankings differ from other college rankings, in part, due to their emphasis on outcomes, including amounts of student debt, graduation rates and measures of student satisfaction and career success.

“While the cost of U.S. higher education escalates, there’s a genuine silver lining in play,” explains Forbes. “A growing number of colleges and universities are now focusing on student-consumer value over marketing prestige, including alternatives to traditional college rankings, in part, due to their emphasis on outcomes, including amounts of student debt, graduation rates and measures of student satisfaction and career success.”

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Suzanne Thompson, professor emerita of psychology at Pomona, conducts research on how people react to personal threats, particularly those with delayed consequences. She and her undergraduate researchers proposed a variety of ways in which different perceptions of threat influence the processing of threatening information and guide health and safety behaviors.

PCM: As a psychologist, how do you see the role of “what if” thinking in human affairs?

Suzanne Thompson: The theme that you’ve chosen is especially interesting because “what if” or “if only” thinking is such a basic part of human cognition. And there seem to be good evolutionary reasons for that. It has helped us develop the ability to control things, to anticipate—if I do this, what’s going to happen?—and then to carry that several steps down the line. On looking back, it allows us to analyze what has gone before and play out these little scenarios of what else could have happened, which is full of information about causes and effects.

PCM: What kind of research has been done in this area?

ST: When thoughts like these refer to the past, they’re usually called counterfactuals, and when they refer to the future, they call those anticipatory factuals or prefactuals. I would say most of the work has been done on counterfactuals, or what’s sometimes called “cognitive undoing.” There are two basic types—upward and downward counterfactuals. An upward counterfactual is when we undo what did happen and imagine a better outcome. For example, if I’m a student who got a C on a test, and I imagine, “If only I had skipped that party and studied hard, this could have been a B or an A.” Alternatively, we can imagine a worse outcome—a downward counterfactual, such as, “I’m glad I at least covered that material or I could have had a lot worse. This could have been a D or an F.”

The two kinds of counterfactuals have very different effects and different research outcomes. Imagining something better tends to lead to unpleasant emotions—regret or maybe self-blame. And if it involves other people’s behavior, we might blame them. That’s the downside, those negative emotions and reactions.

But the upside is that there’s a lot of information there about what we can do to change things in the future, and people can use that. Our study asked college students about the kinds of counterfactuals they were making for their grades on the first big exam. Then the researchers followed them for the rest of the semester, and found that the students who had made upward counterfactuals felt more regret and blame, but also tended to have a stronger sense of control and got better grades over the course of the semester. That gives support to that idea that upward counterfactuals are very useful.

In contrast, the downward counterfactuals—“it could have been worse”—led to more positive emotions, but were not as intrusive. They didn’t have useful information about how to change your behavior to get a better outcome.

PCM: So no pain, no gain?

ST: That’s right. Research has also looked at what we “undo” in a counterfactual. We tend to look specifically at our own behavior, maybe because we have more control over that or it’s more useful. We also tend to undo things that happened fairly close to the event. And if something unusual happened—if you had a break in your routine or took a different route to work and then got into an accident—that’s what’s going to pop out as something to undo.

PCM: What about people who get obsessed with their “what if” thoughts?

ST: Research has shown that near misses are particularly powerful. There’s a classic example that I use with my classes. Mr. Crane and Mr. Tees are going to the airport and they both get there a half hour late and miss their plane. When Mr. Crane gets to the airport, he finds that the plane left on schedule, a half hour before. When Mr. Tees arrives, he finds that his plane was delayed, and he just missed it. Almost everyone recognizes that Mr. Tees would feel worse, even though the situations are identical in terms of what happened to them. But emotionally, psychologically, we pick up on the fact that it could have so easily have been a lot worse. This could have been a D or an F.

This kind of counterfactual thinking. It seems useful early on, but if people are still doing it years later, it’s a sign of not coping very well. It is better to get your information, and then get out and play it out in society sometimes. Around the time when AIDS was first identified, we didn’t know a lot about it, but medical researchers did know that it wasn’t easily spread. You can be in the same room with someone, even touch them, but not at risk. But many parents wouldn’t let their kids go to school with another child who was identified with AIDS or had a relative with HIV or AIDS. Sensitization to threat can lead to that kind of over-reaction.

It is easy to see how this ability to play things out and anticipate outcomes allows you to identify more negative things that could happen, and that can heighten anxiety and lead to over-reactions. My research has not yet tied threat hypersensitivity to counterfactuals, in particular, but now that I have talked with you about this, it is something I want to do. Does the hypersensitivity to threat come from being very prone to counterfactuals and especially prone to ones in which you play out the scenario to a regret-ending?

PCM: There’s one aspect of “what if” thinking that we haven’t discussed yet. That’s the fact we also do it for fun—like in this issue of the magazine. We read counterfactual stories. And we play games, like chess, that are all about pre-factual scenarios.

ST: Chess is a good example. You’re following a line of thought with all the branches and pathways. What does margin of do—thinking many moves ahead—is an amazing ability. Because counterfactual and prefactual thinking is such important abilities for survival and competition. It makes sense to find them rewarding. The fun is our incentive for practicing these very useful ways of thinking.

—Mark Wood
If you are ever offered a tour of the new Millikan Laboratory and Andrew Science Hall with David Haley as your guide, take it. A 21-year veteran of physics departments, he has an enthusiasm for his subject that is nonstop and infectious. Completely at ease in the corridors of Millikan’s new underground laboratory, he misses no opportunity to point out the fascinating creations of Pomona students and faculty.

“This is a senior thesis project,” he says, referring to one of the many capstone projects he’s kept over the years. “It uses sound to create a bubble, which produces light. And this—” He gestures to a nearby rolling chair contraption. “—Is a fire-ex- 
stinguisher-propelled rocket car. You sit on it and you squeeze the 
pin and you shoot yourself down the hall. It’s for talking about Newton’s laws.” Before exiting a workroom, he pauses to 
flack on a homemade air hockey table, explaining: “I’m trying to 
convince one of the professors to create 3D shapes that we can 
print and use to teach conservation of momentum.”

Haley, who has been working at Pomona since the summer of 2001, describes himself as a “physics roofer.” As the senior 
technician of the Physics Department, he is primarily responsible 
for handling the equipment for labs and the lecture demonstra-
tions, in addition to supporting faculty research and student proj-
ects. “One of the nuances of my job is making the process more 
streamlined and straightforward for students, so they’re less wor-
tied about how things work and more focused on the concepts 
behind the lab,” he explains. “If I do my job right, you’ll rarely 
see me in a panic.”

Haley graduated with a B.A. in physics from Kansas State 
University, after which he spent seven years working as a tech-
ician at New Mexico State University before moving to Califor-
nia. Luckily for Pomona, he was informed of the open position 
by chance, after contacting a former coworker who happened to 
attend the same undergraduate program as a member of the 
Physics Instructional Re-
source Association (PIRA) as Pomona Professor of Physics David 
Tanenbaum. “I didn’t really realize the caliber of Pomona when I 
lived in New Mexico,” he says. “I just was interested in science and the world around them.”

Since Haley is an enthusiast for science in general, you’d think 
choosing to focus in on only one field would have been tough for 
him, but this isn’t the case. “I like the applied nature of physics,” he says. “The world is a very beautiful place, and I want to un-
derstand it better. Why do objects have mass? Why is there grav-
ity? The more evidence you get to support a theory, the more 
you believe it’s accurate, but you can never really take it as truth. 
Just that’s what I like about physics. It’s always a reiteration.”

And yet despite the reiteration, Haley’s job is never boring. 
Particularly exciting for him was the opportunity to use his many 
years of experience to help design the new science building. The 
Physics and Astronomy Department seized the opportunity to 
reorganize their space, implementing prep rooms between labs 
and behind lecture classrooms at Haley’s suggestion. His favorite 
parts of the building also include the new student research labs 
and machine shops, which were absent in the old Millikan. And 
new perks of the job include selecting items for Millikan’s first-
year students to use to teach conservation of momentum.

“Here—let me show you.” —David Haley

New on the Board of Trustees

The Pomona College Board of Trustees has a new chair and three new mem-
ers, Samuel D. Glick ’04 took over the gavel this summer from Jeanne Buck-
ley ’65. The Board for the first time was Matthew E. Estes III, 
Nathaniel “Nate” Kirtman ’92 and Xiaoye “MD” Ma ’11.

Chair Samuel D. Glick ’04

Samuel D. Glick ’04 first served on Pomona’s Board of Trustees as the young alumus member from 2007 to 2011. He was elected to his current term in 2012. Glick is a partner and San Francisco office leader at Oliver Wyman, where he advises clients in various industries on global business strategy. At Pomona, he earned his bachelor’s de-
gree in economics, with a minor in classics. As a member of the 
Board, he has served as chair of the Advancement Committee and as a 
member of the Finance Committee, Facilities and Environment Committee, Educational Quality Committee, Student Affairs Committee, Wig Fund for Teaching Committee and Honorary Degrees Committee.

Matthew J. Estes ’88

Matthew J. Estes built four companies in China during the past 24 years. He was founder & CEO of BabyCare, which manufactures and sells nutritional supplements via a chain of BabyCare Centers and a direct sales force of over 
200,000 people in China. He was also founder of Yaolan New Media Ltd. (yaolan.com), a leading Chinese language 
parenting website with more than 11 million registered fami-
lies. He sold BabyCare and Yaolan to U.S. companies. Previously, he was 
with Wella Cosmetics (now part of Proctor & Gamble) and SmithKline Beecham (now GlaxoSmithKline PLC). He served as Vice Chair of the Amer-
ican Chamber of Commerce in China currently focusing on health-
care and internet-related venture capital.

Nathaniel “Nate” Kirtman III ’92

As senior vice president for publicity of NBC Universal Televi-
sion, Kirtman oversees the media group’s corporate publici-
ity initiatives, corporate communications, operations, events and digital communications ef-
forts. His previous roles at NBC included overseeing publicity for late-night programs such as “The Tonight Show” and “Late Night with Jimmy Fallon” and serving as a producer for “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno.” Prior to joining NBC, Kirtman served as manager of communications at GE Aviation and led the corporate digital team at GE’s corporate headquarters. A government major at Pomona, he was a member of the Executive Committee, the Board of Governors and the Dallas Cowboys. He has also served on the Alumni Association Board.

Xiaoye “MD” Ma ’11

Xiaoye “MD” Ma ’11 is the new young alumus trustee. Ma is a senior manager at LinkedIn and was a University of Arizona graduate. Before LinkedIn, he was a mechanical engineer and was involved in R&D efforts for late-night programs such as “The Tonight Show” and “Late Night with Jimmy Fallon.” Prior to joining NBC, Kirtman served as manager of communications at GE Aviation and led the corporate digital team at GE’s corporate headquarters. A government major at Pomona, he was a member of the Executive Committee, the Board of Governors and the Dallas Cowboys. He has also served on the Alumni Association Board.

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HOW TO BECOME THE DIRECTOR OF SAGEHEN ATHLETICS

There’s nothing particularly surprising in the fact that Pomona-Pitzer’s new athletic director has hit the ground running. Lesley Irvine has been moving fast ever since she was a child—first as a multisport athlete, then as a high-profile coach and finally as an athletic administrator. At Pomona, she has assumed a newly created full-time position as chair of Pomona’s Physical Education Department and director of the joint athletic program of Pomona and Pitzer colleges.

“I wanted to be at a place that was striving to be excellent both athletically and academically—a place that knew and believed that those things go hand in hand and support one another,” she explains in a clipped British accent softened at the edges by 16 years in the United States. “I also wanted to be at a place that was really striving to improve and be aspirational.”

Since her arrival, Irvine has been visible all over campus as she acquaints herself with every aspect of Sagehen sports—from intramurals to varsity—and begins to plot a course for the future. “As I think about the vision for Pomona-Pitzer Athletics, I think about broad-based competitive excellence,” she says. “I think about providing an experience that is at the highest level for our student-athletes. And I think about the visibility and connectivity of athletics on the campuses here.”

Grow up in Corby, a steel town in central England where most people are of Scottish descent and speak with a Scottish brogue. Develop into an active child, always sporting a scraped knee. Get involved in athletics with the encouragement of your dad, an avid soccer player, coach and fan.

Join a track and field club at the age of 9 and, since you excel in a range of athletic events, specialize in the heptathlon. In high school, find yourself playing almost every sport from basketball to volleyball to soccer. Discover the game of field hockey and fall in love with it.

Accept an invitation to play on the English junior national field hockey team at the age of 16, while also competing internationally in the heptathlon. Play for England in a victory over Scotland in the Six Nations field hockey tournament and have to explain to your teammates why your dad, a proud Scot, is rooting against you.

Become the first member of your family to go to college, playing field hockey at prestigious Loughborough University. While there, win five national championships. During your second year, teach tennis at a summer camp in Maine (though you’ve never touched a tennis racquet before) and find yourself at home in American sports culture.

After graduating, come back to the U.S. for graduate school, attending the University of Iowa and playing competitive field hockey for one more year, scoring the only goal in a 1–0 victory over Stanford University in your first trip out West and leading your team to a Final Four appearance. Earn your master’s degree in health, leisure and sports studies.

Return to Stanford as assistant women’s field hockey coach. Discover that you love working with committed student athletes who love sports as much as you do. After two years, succeed the retiring head coach and spend eight years at the helm of Stanford’s elite program, guiding them to three straight NorPac championships.

Leave Stanford to enter sports administration, spending five years at Bowling Green State University and rising to the rank of senior associate athletic director. Decide the job at Pomona-Pitzer is a perfect match for your abilities and your desire to help build something special for talented and motivated student-athletes while promoting wellness for a whole community.

—STORY AND PHOTO BY MARK WOOD
As Bridges Hall of Music celebrates its centennial, many Pomona alumni look back fondly at the place where they said “I do.” The Little Bridges Wedding Register is a historical record of marriages that took place in the building, starting with Howry Warner 1912 and Mary Roof 1912, married June 1, 1916. Compiled in the early 1970s, the register was maintained and updated through 1992 and includes the names of 453 couples.

**ITEM:** The Little Bridges Wedding Register  
**DATE:** 1916–1992  
**COLLECTION:** Pomona College Books and Periodicals Collection  
**DESCRIPTION:** 29-page handwritten book (16” X 12” X 1”), registering the names of all the couples who were married in Mabel Shaw Bridges Hall of Music between 1916 and 1992.  
**ORIGIN:** The book was created by the College to list couples who were married in Little Bridges and kept for many years at the Alumni House (Seaver House).  

If you have an item from Pomona’s history that you’d like to see preserved in the Archives, please call 909-621-8138.

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**MARRIED IN BRIDGES HALL OF MUSIC**

1919

Paul E. Young ’18 to Judith Garrison ’18 – July 2

1920

Perry Clark ’20 to Estelle Hamilton ’18 – June 8

Merrel Libbey ’20 to Edith Jordan ’22 – June 22

George S. Burgess to Laura Squire ’08 – June 30

Dan McDonald to Effie Ranson ’20 – July 30

1921

Ernest W. Boughner ’15 to Lois M. Clancy ’15 – June 15

1922

Edwin T. McFadden ’14 to Florence Brockenridge ’20 – Feb 11

Albert Vollmer ’20 to Jeanette Chaney ’20 – June 14
Millikan Laboratory is reborn.

Above: The new Millikan Laboratory is still home to the Department of Mathematics and the Department of Physics and Astronomy. Below (from left): students at work in the Harry Mullikin Math Commons; the Fletcher Jones Foundation Planetarium; the open and light-filled foyer of the new Millikan; a research lab with Physics Professor Richard Mawhorter; and a class in the John C. Argue Auditorium.
LONG-TIME NPR SCIENCE CORRESPONDENT JOE PALCA ’74 HAD AN IDEA — A BIG IDEA. WHAT IF HE STOPPED TRYING TO IDENTIFY THE IMPORTANT SCIENCE STORIES AND FOCUSED EXCLUSIVELY ON THE INTERESTING ONES?

JOE’S BIG IDEA

STORY BY ANDREA APPLETON
PHOTOS BY LISA HELFERT
Joe Palca’s cubicle in NPR’s Washington, D.C., headquarters is strewn with bicycle gear from his daily commute, assorted piles of books about science, and random objects: a can of mackerel, a leaf-shaped bottle of maple syrup. From this cluttered perch, the longtime science correspondent has the power to shape what becomes news.

If Joe Palca ‘74 decides a story is worth putting on the air, roughly a million listeners hear it. And if he misses a story, well, some of those listeners may never hear about it.

In 1996, Science magazine published a study on a novel approach to treating cancer. Immunologist James Allison and his co-authors reported that they had successfully treated malignant tumors in mice by blocking molecules on immune system cells that act as a brake on immune response. Palca didn’t cover the study. “Nobody covered that paper,” he shrugs. “Everybody has cured cancer in mice.”

Two decades later, Allison’s immunotherapy methods have led to the first effective treatment for advanced melanoma. Patients used to die in less than a year, with treatment based on Allison’s research, some now live more than a decade. Allison has won dozens of prestigious awards for this work in recent years, including the Louisa Gross Horwitz Prize, often a precursor to the Nobel.

Palca could not have known which one would make history. Nevertheless, the media generally presents scientific findings as if they were wrapped in a coat. As a result, Palca says, studies that will later prove inconsequential get the limelight, sometimes simultaneously because they lend themselves to sexy headlines. Meanwhile, reporters inadvertently ignore research that, in hindsight, they ought to have covered (like that 1996 immunotherapy study).

So a few years ago, after two decades as an NPR science correspondent, Palca had an idea. A big idea. What if he stopped trying to identify the interesting ones?Palca’s irritation on this subject is personal. An animated guy with a mischievous streak and a penchant for tangents, he is himself a trained scientist. He has a PhD in psychology from the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he studied human sleep physiology. Remember Jim Allison, the immunologist? Palca worked for him as a lab technician, his first full-time job out of Pomona College. (He also happens to be married to a pediatrician who’s succumbed to it. A hundred listeners left grateful comments about the story online. “I had colleagues coming up and hugging me, telling me they were sitting there sobbing,” Palca says. “And I understand it because it still makes me tear up.”)

It turns out Olson is a practicing physician. This is what drives his tumor research. He’s tired of telling parents their children are going to die. He’s “sick of seeing the devastation on people’s faces,” Palca says in the piece. “Sick of feeling helpless.” Yet Olson has the rare ability to cast a child’s cancer prognosis in a bearable light. One parent tells him her 7-year-old’s death to cancer “was as beautiful as her birth” because he helped the family see it that way. Here’s a man who is not only trying to cure pediatric brain cancer; he’s helping parents with part with children who’ve succumbed to it.

The key to conveying that beauty is often the researcher. “You can’t tell a really moving story about a nanoparticle,” Palca says. “But the person studying the nanoparticle can be pretty interesting.”

Palca’s attention span may not have served for years of lab work, but he has covered some impressively arcane research as a reporter. A giant hand-painted bowl in his office is proof. He received the bowl for delivering the 24th annual Ullyot Public Affairs Lecture to the Chemical Heritage Foundation. It was titled “Covering Complex Science, or How I Explained a Nobel.”

“None of us in science journalism is smart enough to know which are the really important papers. No one is.” —Joe Palca ‘74
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IDEA SAMPLER

Here are a few recent stories from Joe’s Big Idea. To hear the broadcast or read the story, go to www.npr.org/series/156490413/jeo-big-idea.

A Discoverer of the Buckyball Offers Tips on Winning a Nobel Prize (Oct. 8, 2015) Harold Kroto shared a Nobel in 1996 for finding a new type of carbon molecule that ignited the field of nanotechnology. Find a passion where—with hard work—you can be the best, he advises.

Why NASA Didn’t Just Send Over a Rover to Look for Water on Mars (Sept. 29, 2015) One reason is that it would take the Curiosity rover about a year to get there, even with no obstacles and no traffic. But the other reason might surprise you.

Why Monotrip Travel in Personal Pods Has Yet to Take Off (Sept. 29, 2015) Personal rapid transit was supposed to be the future of public transport. Lightweight pods on elevated tracks, on-demand destinations. But funding issues make cities reluctant to change course.

Small Venom Yields Potent Painkiller, But Delivering the Drug is Tricky (Aug. 3, 2015) The drug derived from the venom of cone snails must be injected into the spinal column to get beyond a patient’s blood-brain barrier and bring relief. But scientists think they may have a workaround.

2-D Printers Are Changing the Way People Think About Manufacturing (April 21, 2015) At the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee, the future of manufacturing is taking shape. At the lab, 3D printers offer some unique design opportunities as well as interesting challenges.

Doctors Test Tumor Paint in People (April 8, 2015) A modified venom from scorpions that carries a dye into the brain and makes tumors glow has cleared its latest hurdle. But will this attempt to improve brain surgery work in humans as well as animals?

Sofer Anheuser Test Aims to Keep the Bioweapon from Terrorists (March 22, 2015) Current tests require growing anthrax for two weeks, which isn’t the best option for labs in Afghanistan. So engineers have come up with a credit-card-size test that could make the world a safer place.

Why Anti-Handle Traffic Better Than You Do (Jan. 19, 2015) Ants don’t show road rage. In fact, some research shows they never get into traffic jams and are able to maintain a steady speed even as their numbers swell. Can physics explain it?

Do Fish Have Fingers? (Dec. 26, 2014) Of course they don’t, but they do have the genetic machinery to make them into real mammals.

Build a Toothbrush, Change the World. Or Not (Aug. 27, 2014) You think bringing a new toothbrush to market is easy? The seven-year saga of two dental entrepreneurs struggling to bring their patented brush to consumers suggests otherwise.

Transformer Paper Turns Itself into a Robot, Cool! (Aug. 7, 2014) Start with paper, add Shrinky Dinks, a microprocessor, heat, and voilà! It’s not quite that easy. But this engineering project might one day lead to a printable, flat spacecraft that folds itself.

Frank Kasper Phase in Sphere. Forming Block Copolymer Melts to a Radio Audience.” Palca really did produce a story on a study by that name. In fact, he chose it precisely because it was so daunting. “I said I’m going to pick the most obscure thing I can find and do a thoughtful, serious story about it just to prove I can.” Palca says. (One charming detail from the piece: the researchers used mudmushrooms and coffee stirrers to model the molecules they studied.)

Palca claims no research is too obscure to make for an engaging story. He travels around the country giving lectures to scientists about how to couch their research in compelling terms. The trick, he says, is knowing what to leave out. Sometimes it’s the very detail the researcher most flustered upon. Scientists tend to focus on what is new in their fields, he says, a habit that only perpetuates the media’s tendency to do the same. “A lot of the time scientists think that the ‘news’ is the new thing, which of course it is,” Palca says. “But in fact, the new thing may be pretty tedious.”

Take adaptive optics. This technology has been used in astronomical telescopes for several decades. It unblurs the blurring caused by the atmosphere. “So if you say you want to do a story about adaptive optics, well, the scientist will tell you about how they’ve tuned the laser and how the signal’s getting better and the interferometry,” Palca says. “And you say, ‘Wait a minute! You can do that! You can unblur the atmosphere?’ That’s where scientists get lost. They know about adaptive optics. It doesn’t occur to them that nobody else does.”

That’s because it’s easy to get lost in the details as a researcher, Palca says. The work can be monotonous. Palca recalls reporting on the successful cloning of Dolly the sheep in the mid-1990s, an event that spawned headlines the world over. Scientific findings too often overshadow the work it took to get to them, Palca says. So his reporting focused on the tremendous effort it took to clone just one sheep. Palca did. “It took months of failure, months and months and months of boring, tedious, awful, discouraging failure to get one successful birth,” he says.

By interesting the public in the fits and starts that characterize scientific research and the personal drive that keeps researchers forging ahead, Palca hopes to convey a truer picture of how science really works. He says that the alternative, focusing on dazzling findings and reporting them as breaking news, gives the public the wrong idea. “It thinks to contribute to a sense of science teaching from breakthrough to breakthrough,” rather than as a continuum with incremental steps along the way, he says. It’s easy to get mired in minutiae. “I wonder if we should do more and more and more big science stories, the really exciting stories, has set science up for a fall,” Palca says. “Water on Mars? Wait a minute, I thought you figured that out already? Why are we still being told about it?”

In the end, Palca hopes his own enthusiasm for science, and that of the people he talks to, is contagious. “The passion that people have and the desire to make a difference, it’s fun to listen to that,” he says. As he told an audience recently. “Not every story is going to lead to Tetris or, I’m sure, but we’re going to learn something about the natural world. That’s got to be worth something in our culture.”
Inside, Kafi Blumenfield ’93, executive director of the year-old museum, kneels to join a small child sweeping his hands through the sand of an interactive exhibit that displays the resulting changes in topography on a digital map.

To Blumenfield, this is about more than science. She sees the museum as a catalyst for change in the community, a way to build a better Los Angeles by starting near the place known for the traffic stop that changed the history of a city.

“We are in a neighborhood that is full of kids with potential but lacking in resources,” Blumenfield says. “So many of our kids go jobless. They’re strong, eager, talented kids, but they’re jobless. Overlay that with the fact that we have a gap in our pipeline of young people who are ready and willing and able to enter the STEM jobs. So this is a natural fit. If we can provide these kids with additional educational support to encourage them to enter these types of jobs, it will not only make their lives and their households better, but this whole region better.”

Running a children’s science museum might seem an unlikely role for a vibrant, well-connected civic leader whose first job after majoring in politics at Pomona was as a White House intern. (She served in the Clinton Administration two years before the most famous intern in history arrived in Washington.) After earning a law degree from UCLA and working at various jobs related to such issues as housing and the environment, Blumenfield’s most recent role was president and CEO of the Liberty Hill Foundation, an L.A. nonprofit that gives about $5 million a year in grants to grass-roots organizations promoting social causes.

She has strong political ties, both professionally and personally. Her husband is Los Angeles Councilman Bob Blumenfield, a former member of the California State Assembly whose West Valley council district includes Woodland Hills, where the couple lives with their two elementary-aged children.

It was one of Blumenfield’s personal/political connections that led her to Discovery Cube LA. She was having lunch last fall with Wendy Greuel, the former Los Angeles City Controller who ran for mayor against Eric Garcetti in 2013. Greuel, then a consultant for Discovery Cube LA and now vice chair of the board, suddenly envisioned a match between the museum and Blumenfield, who had planned to take a year off to reflect on the next step in her career after leaving Liberty Hill.

“As we were talking about life transitions and things to do in the future,” Greuel says, “I heard how she cared about kids and about how to make a difference in their lives at this age, around elementary school. So I said, ‘Would you ever think about this?’ Because it was outside the box.

“But as she met with the team, you saw that she saw it as more than a building and more than a children’s science museum. She saw it as a way to train teachers to teach science, and a way to excite young girls about science. She sees it as part of a way to seek social justice. She frequently talks about this being the corner where Rodney King was beaten. I’m inspired by her when she gives those tours.”

“She gets it. She gets that it’s transformative, not only for the kids who come in, but for the neighborhood. This is a community that wants to be known for something more than where Rodney King was beaten. This is something that’s a spark.” ▶
Among the sparks for Blumenfield were conversations with her daughter, now 9, and her 6-year-old son.

“We’re trying to address some of the problems of the day but do it in a very affirming way that allows people to see how they can actually effect change,” Blumenfield says. “But we’ve faced with, particularly from the kids’ vantage point, it can all seem so overwhelming. They really don’t know what they can do in their little lives to make a difference. So here, they get to see it in some very practical ways.”

The community has moved on from the notoriety of the Rodney King incident, though it will be the subject of retrospectives as the 25th anniversary approaches in March. Two of the acquitted officers later served prison time after being convicted of violating King’s civil rights in a subsequent federal trial. King himself died in a backyard pool in 2012 at the age of 47.

Almost a quarter-century later, children inside the Discovery Cube museum learn about the solar system or earthquakes or the ice on a hockey rink. For Blumenfield, instead of putting the funding into social change, now she is putting the fun into it.

“We’re trying to address some of the problems of the day but do it in a very affirming way that allows people to see how they can actually effect change.” — Kafi Blumenfield ’93
In person, Dan Weinand ’16 is a polite, soft-spoken Pomona College senior. But put him onstage and he is someone else altogether. He’s a hostile loudmouth being interrogated for a crime. He’s a laidback traveler with a Jamaican accent. He’s a TV show host who waxes poetic about the wonders of trash.

He is all of these things in a recent performance by Without a Box, the improvisational comedy group composed of students from the five Claremont Colleges. Their improv shows are a long-standing tradition: Pitzer College student David Straus formed the group in 1989. Team members graduate each year, but the group endures, adding new students to the mix.

Without a Box performs about once a month during the school year, at various locations on the five campuses. Weinand, a double major in math and computer science, says it’s a kick to perform in front of fellow students—especially the Claremont crowd, who share a certain frame of reference. “I just love that only on the 5Cs can I make a linear algebra joke,” he says.

The group generally consists of anywhere from five to 10 students. However, when the 2015–2016 school year starts, Without a Box is down to three: Weinand, Lauren Eisenman, a Scripps College sophomore majoring in neuroscience; and Matthew Roberts, a Pitzer senior and history major.

Despite the small number, the crew is in fine form at the September show, held at Pitzer’s Benson Auditorium. More than 100 people are in attendance, and they look to be having a blast. The three performers wear blue Without a Box shirts, and stage props consist of little more than two chairs.

There are topical references (the Pope, Donald Trump), pantomimed actions (smoking, using a cell phone), and a spirit of play throughout. Audience interaction is a big part of the show, with members suggesting scenarios and providing snippets of dialogue. In one skit, two volunteers jump onstage to join Weinand and Roberts. Here’s the twist: the two students move the bodies of the two performers, as if manipulating human puppets, and the dialogue flows from the movements. The scene starts with Weinand and Roberts facing each other, then Roberts is turned in the opposite direction, to which Weinand cries, “Don’t leave me!” A lovers’ spat emerges, and limbs fly every which way.

Like all good improv performers, Without a Box members embrace the “Yes, and … ” principle: the idea that you accept whatever your scene partner throws your way, however far-fetched, and build on it. As they set up the show’s final scenario—Weinand and Eisenman are co-hosts of an early-morning public access program; Roberts is the guest—they ask the audience to select a name for the TV program. The winner: “Garbage Connoisseurs.”

The two hosts gush about thrown-away toys in trash bins, exquisite finds like the tossed bodies of Barbie dolls. In comes Roberts, an authority on discarded Transformers. Then, a change of direction: the expert is uncovered as a fraud, a betrayer of garbage dreams.

Audience members eat up the show’s quirky, quick-shifting action. “It’s cool that it’s unpredictable and different,” Jonah Grubb, a Pomona senior, says afterward. “With improv, you never know what you’re going to get.”

Weinand, Eisenman and Roberts say they’re not just winging it onstage—they hone their skills through rehearsal. The group practices three times a week, doing exercises in improv game-playing.
physical humor, and character work. “Doing improv might be scary if I didn’t feel comfortable with the other performers,” says Weinand. “But I totally do.”

“Trust is a really big part of it,” adds Eisenman.

GROWING THE GROUP

The trio knows that Without a Box needs to get bigger to be at its best, so a week after its September show it holds auditions for new members. Eighteen students show up on a Saturday at Scripps’ Vita Nova Hall. Then that group is winnowed down to nine students invited for callbacks the next day.

Among the hopefuls is Pomona sophomore Zach Miller. In one exercise, he is asked to stand outside while Weinand, Eisenman and Roberts set up a scene with three of the students. Each is given a character feature. One is a ghost, another has a tail, and the third one’s foot is on fire. Miller comes back inside. His task: to guess what distinguishes each of the three, all of whom he is hosting at a party.

Miller is an agile performer. By the end of the scene, he has figured out each one’s crazy feature. Guessing the ghost mystery, he quips, “Say hi to Casper for me.”

Weinand says Without a Box selects performers based on their comedic abilities, physical skills, character range and “how well they keep scenes feeling real.” The group also wants a diverse mix of students who are passionate about improv, he adds.

THE SCHUMER EFFECT

Another aspiring member is Cassie Lewis, a junior at Claremont McKenna College whose parents are both Pomona alums (Kara Stuart Lewis ’88 and Gordon Lewis ’87). During a lunch break, she talks of how she discovered the edgy comedy of Amy Schumer over the summer, a revelation that has inspired her to pursue a career in stand-up comedy. Cassie, the vice president of CMC’s theater group Under the Lights, says she saw Without a Box perform a while ago and was “blown away by how they came up with really funny jokes.” So here she is, eager to become part of the group.

“You can’t be a comedian without doing improv,” she explains.

In one exercise during callbacks, Cassie plays off of Marisa Galvez, a CMC freshman. The setting for their scene is a motel continental breakfast. The two verbally spar as Lewis’s character steals apples and stuffs them into her pants.

Both young women are confident and creative. For most people, speaking off the cuff is daunting. A script provides a security blanket. Yet Lewis, Galvez and the others seem fearless, perfectly comfortable to perform without a net—or a box, if you will.

Galvez says she follows the motto of the improv company Upright Citizens Brigade: “Don’t think. Just act.”

Most of the students have previous experience with improv, evidence of its growing popularity. Many high schools now have improv teams or clubs. There are improv-based companies like The Second City, Upright Citizens Brigade and ComedySportz, and TV shows such as Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Stretching their improvisational muscles serves students well even beyond the stage. Morgan Blevins, a Harvey Mudd fresh-
Those interviews with students and faculty also brought to light another significant concern: time. “They want chances to explore and fail,” Whitaker says. “They want chances to be experiential rather than just critical and writing papers. But then we also definitely heard from both groups, the students and the faculty alike, that, ‘Yes, we want to do all that. But we have no time.’

With that in mind, the Sontag Center’s programming has been designed to offer a range of activities, with a sliding scale of time and commitment required—from mini-workshops to pop-up courses, guided explorations and full-credit courses.

“I think there are some people who will make the time, and there are some people who will just dip their toes in the water,” Whitaker says. “That’s what the workshops are really good for. I think the hope for those is that it sparks something. If it sparks something, then you will carve out the time and you will make the commitment. But I think unless you get in the door, you’re not going to get the benefit of the program.”

So how do you go about developing the creative skills involved in cross-disciplinary collaborations in an academic setting dominated by its distinct disciplines? That was the problem Rick and Susan Sontag—1964 graduates of Harvey Mudd College and Pomona College, respectively—sought to address with their $25 million gift to create the new center that bears their names. But that remarkable gift was just the start.

The result is a work in progress, but a very busy work in progress. Already nicknamed “The Hive” for the buzz of creative thought and collaborative activity it is designed to foster, the new center occupies renovated spaces inside what was once Pomona’s Seeley G. Mudd Science Library, with Pomona serving as lead campus. A chalkboard sign out front invites passersby inside to see what it’s all about. A new website (creativity.claremont.edu) invites students to: “Take chances. Mix things up. Make mistakes. Learn from them.”

That theme of risk-taking is central to the Hive’s purpose. Garcia says students have heard all the familiar clichés about the importance of exploring fearlessly and learning from failure, but the stakes for students at a place like Pomona are just too high to risk failure in anything that counts. “Intellectually, they understand that, yeah, sure, you need to fail to learn, but where are they going to do that?” says Garcia. “There are precious few venues for that in life, especially here at the 5Cs, because everybody is so overachieving and everybody sees that in everybody else. So how do we give them that safe space? We heard that over and again in the student interviews, in the ethnography at the outset, and we wanted to bake that into the ethos of this place.”

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“They already have plenty of opportunity for creativity within your discipline,” says Associate Professor of Physics Dwight Whitaker, who, along with Harvey Mudd College Professor of Engineering Patrick Little, is serving as co-director of the Sontag Center until a national search for a permanent director is completed. “If a student is truly passionate about physics, they can get an awesome experience working in our research labs, doing creative, cutting-edge stuff that no one else has done before. They can really develop their creative chops as a physicist. We’re already doing that, and I’m confident every department does that very well.”

What’s missing, he believes, is the opportunity to develop those “creative chops” in collaborative settings that bring together experts from different fields to tackle problems that resist disciplinary definition.

“The really messy, important problems that we face are ones that don’t fit into a discipline,” Whitaker says. “I think if you look at the environment, the really messy problems like end-of-life issues, creating an inclusive space for all Pomona students on a local level, these are not going to have a solution that lies within any one discipline. I think the way that these problems are going to be solved is going to be with people with vast expertise truly collaborating, getting in the intellectual muck together and doing the messy business of working out mindsets. Being generative and appreciating that their mindset approaches the problem differently than your mindset. That’s really hard skill to develop.”

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But that remarkable gift was just the start. To help get this innovative new program off the ground, the colleges turned to design experts Tom Maiorana and Vida Mia Garcia of Red Cover Studios, who devoted a big portion of the last year to helping the center’s planners develop a conceptual framework and bring those concepts to life in the form of actual programming.

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POMONA COLLEGE MAGAZINE
“THE BEAUTY AND, I THINK, THE POWER OF THE SONTAG CENTER IS THAT it can start by dealing with something that you think about that, if you put that in any kind of a disciplinary framework, what ends up happening is that you necessarily limit the ways you can think about it. So if it’s an engineering program, it wouldn’t make sense to talk about this in non-technical solutions, because you’d be moving away from the very thing you’re good at. Or if you were to think of it in the context of a computer science program, you would normally be thinking. ‘How can we provide software or applications?’ The beauty and, I think, the power of the Sontag Center is that it can start by dealing with the question of ‘What are the needs?’ rather than ‘What are our capabilities?’”

“It’s about forming the question, even before you start critiquing them.”

“To put it in a less technical way, the result is a little bit like a startup, you’re just playing with toys.”

“Because in that early stage, it’s not about the details yet. You’re just trying to figure out what you can do, what you think is possible, without being concerned that you can play with. But the kind of low-resolution prototyping that you can do, there’s a danger that it can look like preschool. People walk in and see a couple of kids who have a shoe store. In fact, you’d barely recognize most of them as shoes. Of course, they’re not finished, they’re not done. They haven’t yet been told these problems are beyond their perception. And as a result—whether you’re talking about something that’s really playful like making shoes or whether you’re talking about something like building a rocket ship—there’s a result in the world where you think, ‘This is an academic center? You’re doing design-thinking? This is an academic center? You’re doing design-thinking? This is an academic center? You’re doing design-thinking?’

“It might be surprising to think of college students helping to solve some of the world’s big, messy problems even before they earn their diplomas, but Little thinks they may be particularly well suited to this sort of cross-disciplinary, out of the box thinking. ‘They haven’t yet been told these problems are beyond their perception. And as a result—whether you’re talking about something that’s really playful like making shoes or whether you’re talking about something like building a rocket ship—they have to think about that, if you put that in any kind of a disciplinary framework, what ends up happening is that you necessarily limit the ways you can think about it. So if it’s an engineering program, it wouldn’t make sense to talk about this in non-technical solutions, because you’d be moving away from the very thing you’re good at. Or if you were to think of it in the context of a computer science program, you would normally be thinking. ‘How can we provide software or applications?’ The beauty and, I think, the power of the Sontag Center is that it can start by dealing with the question of ‘What are the needs?’ rather than ‘What are our capabilities?’”

“For their capstone project, a group of graduating seniors in Pomona College Professor Char Miller’s Environmental Analysis 190 class went out on a limb last spring and sought to map all of the public trees in the city of Claremont, sometimes called “The City of Trees and Ph.D.s.”

“The talking about the world is like the work of art that it is—how you present to the community know more about the trees that are rooted into our stormy soil,” he says.
Who stands out when you think of Pomona’s daring minds?

Over the years, many of them have been featured in the pages of this magazine—the array of portraits at left serves to remind us of just a few. But there are many, many more than we have pages in which to feature them.

That’s why, as Campaign Pomona: Daring Minds draws to a close, we are inviting you to join in Pomona’s celebration of the extraordinary Sagehens whose ideas and actions reflect the spirit of this historic campaign.

All you have to do is visit pomona.edu/hdm to see who is being recognized and to make sure the Pomona professor, student, sponsor, coach, staff member or friend who inspires you most is listed among those being honored.

Here are a few recent honorees:

You can also help keep the spirit of daring inquiry and innovation alive for today’s Pomona students and faculty by making a gift in honor of your favorite Sagehen. Gifts received before the Campaign closes on Dec. 31, 2015, will be matched dollar for dollar by the Daring Minds Fund, doubling your gift in support of the daring minds of the future.

Honor your daring mind at pomona.edu/hdm.
Manners for the 21st Century

As the great-great-grandson of the world’s most famous expert in etiquette and a fifth-generation steward of “the family business,” Daniel Post Senning ’99 is a co-author of the 18th edition of Emily Post’s Etiquette. He and his cousins Anna and Lizzie Post are part of a new generation working to keep that classic work relevant in the 21st century.

PCM: Today the word ‘etiquette’ has an old-fashioned ring. Is that justified?

Daniel Post Senning: It’s certainly a perception that I’m used to. The Emily Post Institute is a five-generation family business. The original Emily Post was my great-great-grandmother, and she wrote the first edition of Etiquette in 1922.

If you were to pick up that book today, it would read like a historical document. It’s actually quite remarkable as that. There are people who love looking at etiquette books that have been produced throughout history. One of my favorites, Castiglione’s The Courtier, predated The Prince. Occasionally, a good book of etiquette will tell you a lot about a culture or a time.

We are very fortunate to be part of a tradition that has continued to update that original book. It was incredibly popular in its time. They couldn’t print it fast enough. But as times changed, they found that it was absolutely necessary to revise it. It’s that process of revision that I think has really become the substance of what we do at The Emily Post Institute.

Our whole approach is that etiquette is a moving, living, fluid entity. It’s a moving target. If it becomes too rigid, it loses its meaning. It’s not something that stays static. We have to keep up with the times.

PCM: How much of etiquette is timeless and how much do you believe is bound to the times?

Daniel Post Senning: We say that etiquette is a combination of manners and principles. For us, the manners are time-, location- and culture-specific. They’re the particular expectations we have of others and ourselves in a particular social situation. The principles are what we use to guide us as manners change and evolve, or to help us make choices when we’re in a new situation. For us at the Emily Post Institute, the fundamental principles for all good etiquette are consideration, respect and honesty.

Here’s an Emily Post quote for you, “Any time two people come together and their lives affect one another, you have etiquette.” Etiquette is not some rigid code of manners. It’s simply how persons’ lives touch one another. Any time you have people interacting, you’ve got social expectations.

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PCM: So how do you become an expert on etiquette? Is it something you just absorb?

DPS: I never thought a liberal arts education would prepare me so well for the work that I do. Being someone who writes about etiquette, researches about etiquette, teaches about etiquette, I find myself drawing from so many disciplines and so many skill sets. When I’m teaching and I’m presenting, my background in dance and the performing arts comes out. When I’m doing research, my background in critical inquiry comes out. When I’m assessing a new study that we’re getting, and I’m looking at data that’s come in from our survey partners, my background in microbiology and having the ability to look at data sets come into play.

Let me tell you a personal story. I was living in Claremont, working with the Laurie Cameron Company out of the Pomona College Dance Department. I had started working for Emily Post. At the time, I was answering questions via email. My cousins and I cut our teeth on those emails. We would get batches of questions. We’d go through the books. When there was a particular question that had a historical precedent, we would refer to the book and find an answer that was pretty concrete.

Other times, there are relationship situations that people are trying to resolve, and that framework of consideration, respect and honesty comes into play. You ask yourself: Is the advice that I’m giving considered? Is it taking into account all the people who are involved? Is it respectful? Is it recognizing their worth and their value? Is it honest? Is it something I can do with a sense of integrity and sincerity? It’s really a pretty powerful framework to give advice from.

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PCM: How much of etiquette is timeless and how much do you believe is bound to the times?

DPS: Our whole approach is that etiquette is a moving, living, breathing thing. It changes and evolves all the time. That’s why the book is currently in its 18th edition. It’s never been out of print, and we think that’s really important. That’s why it’s important to continue to update it, because it is a moving target. If it were to ossify, it would lose its meaning very quickly.

When you look at the 1922 edition of Etiquette and the 18th edition of Etiquette, there’s some material that looks remarkably similar. You can probably guess that the way my great-grandmother described using a knife and fork is very similar to the way I would describe that today. Manners around how we share food and how we eat change relatively slowly. Those are cultural expectations that are very firm. The ones that we see changing the most rapidly are manners around communication.
We absolutely do. The framework that we use is relationship technology, you use the relationship as your guide. My cousin Anna’s really good at this. When she’s presenting, she’ll take her phone, hold it up and say, ‘This is my phone. It’s the newest, the latest, the greatest. It’s amazing. I can do incredible things with it. It’s not rude. It’s not polite. It’s how I use it that matters.’ I think that the relationships that are being im- pacted and affected, it helps you make good choices in those en- vironments.

So, do you have etiquette suggestions for Twitter?

Sometimes we hear from people, ‘Oh, there are no man- ners; manners are in a state of decline.’ I think that that was intentionally trying to deconstruct the social order at that time.

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So, do you have etiquette suggestions for Twitter?

Sometimes we hear from people, ‘Oh, there are no manners; manners are in a state of decline.’ I think that the relationships that are being intentionally tried to deconstruct the social order at that time.

DPS: Absolutely, but there, too, there are lessons to be learned from the past. The development of conversation skills, for example, is unique in the fact that we are a refer- ence book that has continued to change and evolve, and has been in print for over 90 years now. There is no replacing that. We sometimes call ourselves a social barometer. In figuring out which methods don’t make sense to receive sanctions when other similarly sized active organizations do not. Basically, it appears to remove the irrationality of using mark- ers—such as whether a group attacks air- planes or is an Islamist organization—that drives the results at the margin,’ Beck says.

Beck believes this calls into question many of the justifications for the continuing ‘War on Terror.’ This focus on a few markers that signal terrorism—especially the post-9/11 focus on Islamist organiza- tions—suggests that governments and the military in- telligence agencies are not well equipped to perceive and respond to the new and emerging threats, he says.

‘The Islamic State was quite downplayed during its initial period, as was Boko Haram, etc. Like in matters of affairs of state and matters of power, it seems that governments are all- ready preparing to fight the last war rather than the next one,’ says Beck.

Beck and Miner wrote a paper about their findings, which was published in the journal Social Forces. Miner, who is now an English teacher in Los Angeles, says of her work with Beck. ‘Researching together was an amazing op- portunity, even though I felt vastly under- qualified in comparison, Colin and I have de- cidedly involved me in every step of the process, and the study and paper has been com- pletely collaborative. I learned a lot about the different pieces of sociological research, from data collection to analysis to publica- tion,’ she says.

So how do you know who’s a terrorist? Beck points to three aspects of terrorist behavior as making the designation: First, whether or not the perpetrator is a legitimate wielder of violence—per international norms, govern- ments are the only entities permitted to use violence, and says Beck that non-state terrorist actors are usually illegitimate, says Beck. Two, whether their violent action is routine or not routine; terrorism is non-routine vio- lence, not actions during wartime. Finally, who is the intended target of the action? ‘If you just want to hurt the person, that’s mur- der, that’s not terrorism,’ he says.
$12.95
Faust, Parts I and II
This curatorial version of Jo- hannes Wolfgang von Goethe’s masterpiece, intended to bring the tragedy back to the theatre, was translated into English by Douglas Langworthy ’80 and timed to the 212-hour work to only six. Richer Resources Publications, 2015 / 247 pages / $18.95

Supporting the Dream
High School-College Partner- ships for College and Career Readiness
Chris McGuigan ’91 and Andrea Vernier ’91 offer ed- ucators a guide to cross-system partnerships to support college-bound students. Corwin, 2015 / 152 pages / $29.95

Frederick Law Olmsted
Plans and Views of Public Parks
Credited by Lauren Meier ’79 with Charles E. Beveridge and Irene Mills, this lavishly illus- trated volume reveals Olm- sted’s design concepts for more than 70 park projects. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015 / 448 pages / $74.95

Driving Hungry
A Memoir
The author of the cult blog “Taxi Gourmet,” Layne Mosler ’96 takes her readers on a delicious tour from the back seat of taxis to the kitchen, taking her readers on a delicious tour from the back seat of taxis to the kitchen, taking

Southern California Mountain Country
Places John Muir Walked and Places He Would Have Loved to Know
Photographer Glenn Poscall ’64 provides a delightful visual tour of the high country of Southern California, using the words of John Muir to tie the photograph- raphy together. Sierra Club Angeles Chapter 2015 / 106 pages / $24.99

Interstellar Cinderella
This futuristic retelling of the classic tale, in a new picture book written by Deborah Underwood ’93 and illustrated by Meg Hunt, gives Cinderella a fairy godrobot and an unladylike kick for interstellar mechanics. Chronicle Books, 2015 / 40 pages / $16.99

On Betrayal

Inequality, Human Rights, and Democracy
Chile and Argentina, 1990-2005
Thomas Wright ’63 traces a tri- umph for human rights—the erosion and collapse of the impu- nity of former repressors in Chile and Argentina. University of Texas Press, 2014 / 206 pages / $55.00

Ideas With Consequences
The Federalist Society and the Conservative Counterrevolution
Assistant Professor of Politics Thomas Wright ’63 offers an intricately woven tale of betrayal and redemption spanning generations, places, cultures and languages. CBH Books, 2015 / 152 pages / $24.99

From Trafficking to Terror
Constructing a Global Social Problem
Associate Professor of Anthro- pology Pardis Mahdavi chal- lenges the anti-Muslim panic surrounding two socially con- structed conflicts, the “war on terrorism” and the “war on traf- ficking.” Routledge, 2013 / 106 pages / $18.42

In Beck’s “Radicals, Revolutionaries and Terrorists” course, students study groups and personalities from Che Guevara to Al Qaeda to Weather Underground. This semester, Beck will include ISIS and the Arab Spring in the curriculum. Beck says the class discussions and feedback from students gathered over the years were integral to the development of his book. “They were the first audience as well as the inspiration,” says Beck.

In his book—which critics have called “sweeping and powerful”—Beck examines eight questions about radicalism, including its origins, dynamics and outcomes. He points out that terrorism is not a new phenomenon. There was a wave of terrorist activity around the world starting in the late 19th century through World War I, when more heads of state were assassinated than at any other time in history, he says. Then as now, there were sharp increases in telecommunications technology and international trade, ups and downs in global economic cycles and demographic pressures, says Beck.

Beck says the impact of globalization is one factor that sets our current era apart from past ones. “Globalization gives movements a stage and a target. International connectivity makes it more likely that contention in one place will become contention in another,” he says.

ISIS is a fascinating case, says Beck, and its rise is no surprise, as it developed in un- governed spaces left by the American inva- sion of Iraq and the Syrian civil war. They are here to stay for the near term, he says, but in the long term, “when radical groups tend to seize power, they tend to either do them- selves in by becoming either more radical or moderate over time.”

Beck hesitates to make predictions, but he says the question is whether ISIS will change as other revolutionary movements have over time, like the Tamil Tigers or Hezbollah or Hamas. He says ISIS’s endgame is still un- clear and he questions what their objectives are, despite their stated aims.

“What is important is to look behind their actions,” says Beck, “because the first wis- dom of sociology is that things are not what they seem.”

—Sneha Abraham

Did you know there was a Sagehen behind the new blockbuster movie, The Martian?
Story on page 50

/alumni·voices/
The Alumni Association Board held its first meeting of the year, led by Alumni Association President Oxetta Brooks ’74, on October 4. President Oxtoby shared an informal “State of the College” and members were joined by parent and student guests for the following committee meetings:

- Athletic Affinity (alumni co-chair Jared Mathis ’94)
- Alumni Career Services (alumni co-chair Matt Thompson ’96)
- Young Alumni Engagement (alumni co-chair Emma Fullen ’14)
- Giving/Service Days (alumni co-chair Lisa Phillips ’79 P’12)
- Current Matters of Concern (alumni co-chair Cathie Brown ’53 P’75)

To nominate someone for the Alumni Association Board, email alumni@pomona.edu.

Winter Break Parties

Celebrate the new year with a Pomona College Winter Break Party, coming to a city near you January 2-28, 2016! Held while students are home for winter break, this Pomona College tradition is one of the best ways for alumni to connect with students in their hometowns and to meet fellow Sagehens living nearby.

2016 Winter Break Parties are currently being planned for Boston, Chicago, Kansas City (Missouri), Los Angeles, Menlo Park, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Portland, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, D.C.

Don’t miss out—check out our listings at pomona.edu/alumnipevents for details and updates about the Winter Break Party nearest you.

4/7 Celebration of Impact

Civic-minded Sagehens: Make sure you are part of Pomona’s second Celebration of Sagehen Impact, scheduled for April 7 (yes, 4/7), 2016. Last year, more than 150 Pomona students and alumni flooded the College’s Alumni Facebook group and Instagram feeds with pledges, shout-outs and stories about the many ways Sagehens are “bearing our added riches” on campus, in our neighborhoods and around the globe. Organize with fellow Sagehens or find your own ways to contribute your time, talent or treasure to the causes that mean most to you. Our community will be ready to celebrate your good work on April 7.

Budenholzer Heads List for Hall of Fame

Mike Budenholzer ’92 and former Athletic Director Curt Tong were among the honorees when the Pomona-Pitzer Hall of Fame inducted six new members this fall. Also honored during the 58th annual induction ceremony were Scott Coleman PO ’08 (swimming); Joy Haviland PZ ’03 (water polo, swimming); Kevin Hickey PO ’99 (baseball); Lucia Schmit PO ’03 (water polo, swimming). Budenholzer was inducted as an honorary member (basketball) and Tong was honored for his years of distinguished service as athletic director.

Want to keep up with our sports teams and engage with the Athletics community? Follow @Sagehens on Twitter and like “Pomona-Pitzer Sagehens” on Facebook.

Jessica Ladd ’08 has been selected as the recipient of the 2015 Inspirational Young Alumna Award. Ladd, who was featured in the summer 2013 issue of PCM, is the founder and CEO of Sexual Health Innovations (SHI), a nonprofit dedicated to creating technology that advances sexual health and wellbeing in the United States. At SHI, she spearheaded the creation of the STD partner notification website So They Can Know, the VTD test result delivery system Private Results, and the college sexual assault reporting system Callisto.

Before founding Sexual Health Innovations, Ladd worked in the White House Office of National AIDS Policy as a Public Policy Associate at The AIDS Institute, and as a sexual health educator and researcher for a variety of organizations. She also co-founded The Social Innovation Lab in Baltimore and a chapter of FemVox at Pomona College. Ladd has also recently been recognized as a Fearless Changemaker by the Case Foundation, an Emerging Innovator by Ashoka and American Express, and as the Civic Hacker of the Year by Baltimore Innovation Week.

Jessica Ladd ’08 was honored during the 58th annual induction ceremony of the Pomona-Pitzer Hall of Fame inductees. She is the first female inductee to be inducted in both the basketball (men’s) and swimming (women’s) categories. Ladd is the founder and CEO of Sexual Health Innovations (SHI), a nonprofit dedicated to creating technology that advances sexual health and wellbeing in the United States. She founded SHI while attending Pomona College, and she has been recognized for her innovative approach to sexual health education and research.

Ladd’s work at SHI has been recognized by several organizations and awards, including the White House Office of National AIDS Policy, the AIDS Institute, and the Case Foundation. She has also been honored as a Fearless Changemaker by the Case Foundation, an Emerging Innovator by Ashoka and American Express, and as the Civic Hacker of the Year by Baltimore Innovation Week.

Ladd was born in New York and grew up in Chicago. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Pomona College in 2008. After graduation, she worked as a sexual health educator and researcher for a variety of organizations, including the AIDS Institute, which she joined in 2010 as a Public Policy Associate.

After leaving the AIDS Institute, Ladd founded Sexual Health Innovations (SHI) in 2013, a nonprofit dedicated to creating technology that advances sexual health and wellbeing in the United States. SHI’s flagship product is called “So They Can Know,” which is a tool that helps people find out if they have a sexually transmitted infection (STI) and offers them guidance on how to get tested and treated.

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Taylor-Brown ’74 was an alumnus who was inducted into the Pomona College Hall of Fame in 2016. Taylor-Brown was a member of the 1972-1974 basketball team and was selected as an honorable mention for the NCAA Division III basketball team in 1974. Taylor-Brown went on to become a successful coach at the high school level, and he was inducted into the National High School Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2010.

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When producer Aditya Sood ’97 came across writer Andy Weir’s self-published book The Martian in 2013, it was selling on Amazon for 99 cents a download. Sood read the book and knew he had found something incredible—this is part of his job: find great, new material and projects to turn into movies.

The film The Martian, starring Matt Damon, opened on Oct. 2 and is now a box-office hit making nearly $100 million worldwide on opening weekend.

“When I read The Martian, I was blown away,” says Sood. “It is one of the best books I have ever read. I hadn’t seen anything like this, it’s a warm, human book which is so rare in science fiction, which can be a cold and distant genre.”

Sood, who is the president of Genre Films, brought the story to his company partner Simon Kinberg, and soon had Twentieth Century Fox behind it. With an incredible screenplay written by Drew Goddard, they were able to get Matt Damon and director Ridley Scott on board.

“We gave the script to Ridley Scott on a Friday and by Saturday, he called us to say he was in. Six months later, we were in Budapest starting filming,” recalls Sood.

Many of the positive reviews of the film highlight the accurate science and meticulous research that makes The Martian so good.

“More than anything, I’m just happy that we were able to translate Andy’s book into a movie that captured all of its values,” says Sood. “I wasn’t a science major at Pomona, but I’ve always loved science, and I get frustrated when movies don’t get science right but The Martian does. It tells a story that is entertaining and scientifically accurate—we used science to tell the story.”

Sood has some advice for students wishing to make it in films: “Read everything you can—things that are movie-related, screenplays, books about the business, blogs, trade papers.”

He also tells students to find a group of like-minded friends who are into the same thing, friends who you can share information and experiences, and network with. That’s where 5C Claremont in Entertainment and Media (CEM) comes in. CEM recently organized a special screening of The Martian with a Q&A with Sood open to CEM and Pomona alumni.

“It’s incumbent upon students to figure that part out. It only helps you when you’re sharing experiences and information, that’s really valuable.”

—Carla Guerrero ’06

Hollywood Reporter in his school mailbox, and interned at New Line Cinema and Dreamworks. Sood passed over film school to come to Pomona and valued what the liberal arts had to offer.

“The greatest thing about Pomona was taking classes in any field. I’d always wanted to be an astronaut for the first 12 years of my life and so I took Bryan Perpeza’s astronomy class my first year, which was great,” says Sood.

But Pomona holds a fond spot in his heart for more than academics. It was at Pomona that as a sophomore he met Becky Chassin ’98, his future wife.

“I was a sophomore with a terrible room draw, so my friends and I got doubles in Lyon. She was in a sponsor group right next door to us,” remembers Sood. “We introduced ourselves and became good pals. We were good friends through college and it wasn’t until many years later that we started dating. We got married three years ago.”

Along with the success of The Martian, Sood also recently celebrated the birth of his son, who he says “will hopefully be Pomona class of 2037.”

Sood does major in Philosophy, Politics & Economics (PPE) at Pomona, but he took it upon himself to pursue his passion of films, signing up to receive the
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Founders Day
at the New Millikan

Founders Day 2013 was a celebration of mathematics, physics and astronomy, centered around the dedication of the rebuilt Millikan Laboratory and renovated Andrew Science Hall. The day featured a range of family-oriented activities, including Planetarium shows, physics and astronomy demonstrations, math lectures and music.

Above: President David Oxtoby examining the remains of a model atom “smashed” by a couple of bowling balls during the Millikan dedication. Top opposite: a visitor studying minimal surfaces in the Math Commons using soap bubbles on zome structures. Second row opposite, left to right: children learning about forces while attempting to play catch in a rotating reference frame; Ian Descamps’ Hitachi SU 70 Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscope in the new Microscopy Center; and Mathematics Professor Ami Radunskaya singing with the Millikan Family Band. Bottom row opposite, left to right: Angela Twum and Physics Professor Philip Choi and his son Phineus Choi watching a musical performance; and math student Peter Staub showing off his academic passion.

Photos by Carrie Rosema
THE COMEDY OF "WHAT IF"

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