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Michael McCain, HBA’79, LLD’17, reshapes the role of food in our world
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Hord named university's 23rd Rhodes Scholar

Levi Hord, a four-year Sexuality Studies, School for Advanced Studies in Arts & Humanities (SASAH) and Scholar’s Electives student, was named a recipient of the esteemed 2018 Rhodes Scholarship, an international postgraduate award for students to study at the University of Oxford. It is widely considered to be one of the world’s most prestigious scholarships.

Eleven Rhodes scholarships are awarded annually in Canada, two of which are designated for Ontario. Hord is the 23rd Western scholar to receive the award.

While studying as an undergraduate, Hord has undertaken extensive research on the use of gender-neutral language in transgender communities, and how linguistic identity expression varies based on grammatical gender systems. This project is part of a larger mission to raise awareness of, and enhance research into, transgender identities and how they are embodied and experienced in society. Hord hopes to play an integral part in breaking through the social and intellectual barriers that remain for those who subvert the binary gender system.

At Oxford, Hord plans on doing a double master’s – two one-year degrees, the first in women’s studies and the second either in political theory or with the Internet Institute at the university, looking at how embodiment and identity are negotiated in a digital age.

Findings from a recent Western-led study indicate young athletes who suffer concussions may be returning to the field, court or ice too soon, as their brains are continuing to change long after they are cleared for action.

Western researcher Ravi Menon and his team at Robarts Research Institute and Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry have shown that young hockey players who have suffered concussions still show changes in the white matter of the brain months after being cleared to return to play. The findings were published in the October 2017 issue of Neurology, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.

The study looked at MRI brain scans from 17 hockey players between the ages of 11 and 14, who suffered a concussion during the regular season. Most of the concussions were a result of falls involving a hit to the back of the head.

The athletes had their brains scanned within 24-72 hours of the initial concussion and again three months post-concussion at Western’s Centre for Functional and Metabolic Mapping. At the time of the three-month scan, all the players reported no symptoms on clinical evaluations and were cleared to return to the ice following the standard concussion consensus return-to-play protocol.

“What the MRI shows is there are still changes occurring in the brain even after the clinical tests have returned to normal,” Menon explained. “This is potentially of some concern and we’d like to understand this further to determine if these are normal healthy changes or if they are indicative of something that might be going wrong.”

*(15% off applies to food only and excludes alcohol purchases. To receive the discount your Western alumni or employee card must be shown. Some restrictions apply.)*
GIFTS TRANSFORM NUMEROUS PROGRAMS

Programs across campus benefit from a series of game-changing gifts last fall.

SEPTEMBER. Female students aspiring towards engineering and business leadership will gain the boost of a lifetime through a $5-million investment to Western from Linamar Corp. and the families that founded and operate the manufacturing giant.

The Linamar Scholarship for Women in Engineering and Business will offer 10 scholarships to female students each year, to fund half the cost of tuition for each of the three years recipients spend in Western’s Engineering and Business Dual Degree Program. The scholarships will also guarantee students a summer co-op at the end of their third and fourth years, plus an offer of full-time employment at Linamar after graduation.

The gift comes from Linamar, its CEO Linda Hasenfratz, MBA’97, and her husband Ed Newton, and Linamar founder Frank Hasenfratz.

NOVEMBER. A $1-million investment by TD Bank Group into data analytics teaching and research in Western’s Faculty of Science will position the University as a hot spot for solving some of the world’s most complex problems.

Data analytics — the science of extracting meaning from large volumes of complex information — has diverse applications currently being researched by Western experts, including disaster risk analysis and response planning, health analytics, finance and banking, ecosystem analysis and real-time brain imaging.

Insights drawn from this research are helping build smart power grids, prevent bank fraud, plan for and mitigate damage from forest fires, and even improve affordable housing.

DECEMBER. The DAN Department of Management & Organizational Studies welcomed a $5-million donation from the department’s namesake, Aubrey Dan — his second $5-million donation to Western in a little more than a decade.

Dan, BACS’85, has directed $4.5 million of his gift to create three endowed research chairs in the fields of Consumer Behaviour, Change and Innovation and Corporate Governance. The Corporate Governance Chair will be appointed jointly between DAN Management and the Faculty of Law, and is intended to lead to the creation of a new module in Management and Legal studies, pending approval.

With matching funds from Western, the chairs’ initial endowment is $9 million.

Another $300,000 will establish two endowed Distinguished Lectures in the areas of consumer behaviour and corporate governance, which are designed to help elevate the profile and promote the expertise of the department.

For more information visit www.alumni.westernu.ca/benefits
Western once again played host to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as Alumni Hall was the setting of a London Town Hall meeting Jan. 11. Trudeau was visiting London as the Canadian government held its winter cabinet retreat in the Forest City. The visit came almost one year to the day after Trudeau brought his London Town Hall to campus in 2017.

(PHOTO BY PAUL MAYNE)

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Kevin Vuong, BMOS’11
Young alumnus and bequest donor
Her Majesty The Queen’s Young Leader for Canada, (2017)
Canada’s Top 30 Under 30, (2016)

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For more information visit: alumni.westernu.ca/10kcoffees
The Western Mustangs ended a 23-year Vanier Cup drought with an exclamation mark this year, knocking off the defending champion and No. 1 nationally ranked Laval Rouge et Or 39-17 in the Canadian university football championship game in November in Hamilton.

It marked the seventh Vanier Cup for Western and served to avenge the Mustangs’ 2008 loss against Laval in the championship game, also played in Hamilton that year. Western’s last national championship victory came in 1994 against Saskatchewan.

Western quarterback Chris Merchant of Calgary captured the Ted Morris Trophy as the Vanier Cup’s most valuable player by rushing for two touchdowns and tossing another in the victory. He finished with 365 all-purpose yards completing 13 passes on 20 attempts for 276 yards while adding 89 on the ground.
During a years-ago conversation between a pair of Canadian communications giants – Pierre Morrissette and Ted Rogers – the late Rogers Communications CEO joked that his definition of an entrepreneur was someone who, at some point, had mortgaged their house to make payroll.

“What does it mean if you have done it twice?” Morrissette asked.

“That means,” Rogers replied, “you’re now a member of the club.”

Morrissette, MBA’72, LLD’10, has been a member of that entrepreneur club for nearly half a century. For a kid who preferred his father’s Fortune magazine to Sports Illustrated, there was no other future in mind. And today, as he enters the next stage of a storied career, Morrissette still sees entrepreneurship not only as an integral part of the next generation’s mindset, but a vital piece of a prosperous future for Canada.

“Most people would like to start their own business, own their own business – but few do. Why is that?” Morrissette asked. “For one, entrepreneurship is tough. Every step of the way, you are starting from scratch. Ultimately, you need a tolerance for risk, you have to be willing to bet the farm. And you have to have great supports.”

After early stints in the banking and communication sectors, the Montreal-born Morrissette founded Pelmorex Media Inc. in 1989. Starting with a handful of television stations, the company purchased The Weather Network and MétéoMédia in 1993. Under his direction, Pelmorex became the undisputed leader in weather-related data across all platforms in Canada.
It is a position the company garnered by its leader’s willingness to think a bit differently.

“Managing from the rearview mirror doesn’t get you very far,” said Morrissette, who drew early inspiration from his father, who started as an entry-level accountant in a multinational food company and, eventually, rose to become its CEO. “As a company, we have been very good at going where the market is going to be. We get there early, we occupy that space and we create a leadership position there. And we often do all that before we know what the exact business model is going to be.”

“It is entrepreneurial. It is innovation. And it requires embracing change.”

Serving as Pelmorex founder and CEO since 1989, Morrissette became the company’s Executive Chairman in September 2017 as Sam Sebastian, former Google, Vice-President and Managing Director of Canadian Operations, was named President and CEO. While an active advisor within the company, Morrissette has also used this transition to augment his focus on helping the next generation of entrepreneurs across Canada.

“More and more people, especially among this generation, view entrepreneurial as a really exciting path to follow, a really exciting career. I don’t think it was seen as that 20 years ago,” he explained. “These are young people who see the advantage in taking ownership over their lives and careers through entrepreneurship. In them, I see that determination and tenacity necessary for success.”

Among 18-34 year olds, more than 1-in-3 consider themselves an entrepreneur. Perhaps surprisingly, the younger that the young entrepreneur has not been swayed by economic slowdowns or an evolving job sector shedding full-time work in lieu of a “gig economy” of part-time and contract work. Among self-identified entrepreneurs, almost 60 per cent see good opportunity to start a business, a further majority are unimpressed by the idea of failure, according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Canada 2016 report.

More broadly, Canada stands as the second-easiest place in the world to start a company, behind New Zealand and a full 49 positions above the best place in the world to start a company, behind Switzerland. According to the World Bank’s Entrepreneurship Monitor 2017 report. Nearly 1-in-5 working-age Canadians are either setting up a company or are already owner-managers of a revenue-generating business less than three and a half years old, according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.

But this isn’t just a young person’s opportunity. Morrissette pointed to numerous mid-career individuals looking to make the leap, as well. And he does know – he made his entrepreneurial leap in his mid-40s.

“We are going to see more and more of that. And that is a good thing,” he said. “The more people who come into private enterprise – and that is the base of our economy – that means we grow our economy, we grow investment, we grow jobs.”

“That is why I am so passionate about entrepreneurship. The end result is long-term, beneficial growth for Canada.”

MORE AND MORE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY AMONG THIS GENERATION, VIEW ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A REALLY EXCITING PATH TO FOLLOW…

Calling it the “engine that drives the country’s economy,” Morrissette sees entrepreneurship as an opportunity to create homegrown global champions of Canadian values, beliefs and practices and export them into new markets. At every level of government, at every university, we need to create ways to help these people chase and achieve their dreams, he stressed.

For the last decade, Morrissette has done that through the Pierre L. Morrissette Institute for Entrepreneurship at Ivey Business School. Created in 2006, the Institute is the global standard-bearer for entrepreneurship research and education.

It was the success found within those walls that inspired Morrissette to push out even further. As co-chair of the Western Entrepreneurship Advisory Board, he is a key player in the campus-wide entrepreneurship ecosystem taking shape over the last year.

“We were very successful in the Ivey Business School with the Morrissette Institute,” he explained. “But now, we are seeing it grow throughout all the faculties at Western. Other universities have achieved success within one faculty – like with engineering at ‘The Other W School’ – but Western is setting itself apart by having this collaboration across all faculties. We are integrating all of our skill sets to create success stories.

“We are talking about expanding entrepreneurship across the university. We are looking to create ideas and then enable the commercialization of those ideas. What that means is employment, investment and growth. With where the economy is going in the future, the more of these type of people Western produces, and as Western becomes a leader in this area, then we are contributing greatly to Canada. That is exciting.”

Western sparked performance ‘fire’ for Taty Kenney, BA’14

BY ANGIE WISEMAN

For Taty Kenney, BA’14, the feeling of performing on stage during her first year at Western sparked something inside her. “I got a small role in a play at Concorde Hall. It set me on fire in the best way I was immersed in it. I couldn’t imagine ever letting it go,” she said.

After completing her degree – one she calls a “family affair” since her parents weren’t able to pursue postsecondary education – Kenney began studying in the two-year Conservatory Program at the prestigious Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in New York City. The school’s alumni include names like Robert De Niro, Al Pacino, Sally Field, Marilyn Monroe, Claire Danes and Angelina Jolie. She absorbed every ounce of the experience.

“While I lived in New York, I found out about the rush policy for Broadway plays. If you go the day of, you can get any seat for $29. I saw 23 plays the first year I lived there. I did that instead of dinner a lot. I wanted to see everything,” she said.

While studying in New York, Kenney received the Vincent D’Onofrio Scholarship Award for lifelong dedication to method acting. She trained with the veteran American character actor in an invitation-only master class. Since, Kenney has assisted him in his master classes for students at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute and NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. Kenney also starred in several productions at the Lee Strasberg Theatre during her time as a student.

After completing her training, she workshoped plays at the legendary Actors Studio and Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, performed Off-Off Broadway at New Perspectives Theater and as part of the Future is Female Festival.

Kenney made her television debut this past year in the leading role of true-crime victim Erin Belanger on Investigation Discovery’s The Real Story with Maria Elena Salinas. She recently made the move back to Canada for a job with an agency in Toronto while she works on her artist’s visa, which will allow her to return to New York.

“I’ll go anywhere for a job I love. It all feeds into community and mentorship. Everyone’s in it together. Art is such a collective,” she said.
Michael McCain has never shied away from the right thing – even when it wasn’t the easiest thing. And now, a decade after his most daunting professional challenge, the Maple Leaf Foods President and CEO is building a company set to become unlike any other on the planet.

Born in Florenceville, N.B., McCain started university at 16. After completing two years at Mount Allison University, he was approached by the dean of the school’s Commerce Department about the future. Seeing something in the young man that could benefit from broader opportunities, the dean advised McCain to transfer to the Ivey Business School.

“I had a big appetite for challenge and adventure – and that sounded like quite a challenge and adventure,” McCain said.

At Western, McCain thrived by embracing the “intensely focused experience” of Ivey.

“I was something of a workaholic at the time. Mine was an academic experience. I didn’t have the first two years at the school – I didn’t have that broad, social experience,” explained McCain, whose five kids all attended Western and had, he points out with a laugh, “more of a social experience than I did.”

“But what I had was a deep, enduring experience with my classmates. It is a tight-knit experience.”

And what he drew from Ivey, he carried with him into his career.

“When I think to my time there, there are two things that endure not just in business, but in my whole life’s ecosystem. One was the mental discipline of decision-making, the architecture of how Ivey teaches. Everything was about embedding the DNA of decision-making – the art and science of the simple notion that you have got to make a call,” McCain said.
“The second was around communication skills. It was about coming to class with that feeling of preparedness but still knowing there was someone in the class just a little more intelligent, that spent just another hour preparing, who had a completely different point of view and was going to share it. You had to be ready to defend your point of view. That art of communication was foundational.”

McCain has since devoted his career to the food industry, starting at McCain Foods in the late 1970s where he held a variety of roles culminating in his appointment as President and CEO of McCain Foods USA. He joined Maple Leaf Foods in 1995. For most of his life, he has watched an industry evolve.

“The food industry has gone through lots of transition. Our journey, specifically, at Maple Leaf has been one of evolution and transformation. It has had many successes, and many obstacles, along the way,” he said.

No obstacle was bigger than the crisis the Canadian food processing giant faced a decade ago. In August 2008, listeriosis contamination was confirmed at one of the company’s meat-processing plants near Toronto. In total, 23 deaths and numerous serious illnesses would be linked to the outbreak.

Starting the evening the outbreak was confirmed, and continuing throughout the crisis, McCain and his team took accountability for the issues and opted for transparency, rather than spin, in providing information to the public. The handling of the situation is still studied today as an example of responsible crisis management. That ‘buck-stops-here’ approach is credited with not only saving the company, but of responsible crisis management. That ‘buck-stops-here’ approach is foundational.”

“We came through a difficult period, a decade of struggle – ‘We have been through so much of it.’ – but knows the story of that crisis is compelling to anyone in the industry. It’s addressing the needs of billions by finding a balance between affordability, accessibility, nutrition, sustainability and animal welfare – all of which conflict with one another, none of which have the ability to address the fundamental challenge of feeding nine billion people.”

Last June, McCain and Maple Leaf Foods set out a bold, new vision. They plan to become “the most sustainable company on Earth,” a goal based on a sweeping set of principles and an expansive agenda that has yielded substantial advancements in nutrition and environmental impact, elevated animal care, and step-changed the company’s investment in social change.

Sustainability requires a broad perspective and Maple Leaf has spent a lot of time researching and thinking about what this entails. The result is an industry-first set of Sustainable Meat Principles that will guide the company’s growth and business practices.

Beyond being “the right thing to do,” the company’s vision aligns with the changing tastes of its consumers, and an oncoming generation “materially more focused on responsible consumption.”

“Our food purchases need to mean something more than just a great food experience,” McCain said. “It has to be delivered in a way that is responsible. They are helping revolutionize the food industry.”

McCain touts his as an organization that embraces change – “We have been through so much of it” – but knows the path forward is not necessarily easy.

“When you establish a goal to be the most sustainable protein company on Earth, that is an extremely bold undertaking. There is the continuous appetite to understand how we are going to address the questions of ‘Is that possible?’ ‘How?’ ‘Is that important?’ What does it mean to the commercial success of the business?’

“Today, most of the people in the organization are emotionally aligned with this. It would be hard to argue this idea doesn’t matter; it is too obvious to ignore. The obstacle isn’t that, but it is ‘Wow, that is really important, but that is really big – can we do this?’ My job is to give people the clairty that, yes, we can do this.”

Photo: Paul Mayne
Sarah Baeumler, BA’99, brings creativity, perspective to family business

Sarah Baeumler, BA’99, may seem like she has it all — but she is just getting started.

In 2009, the television design guru made her HGTV Canada on-air debut alongside her husband, Bryan, as the couple built and designed their dream home on the television series, House of Bryan. The show’s popularity led to three subsequent seasons. Bryan Baeumler, BA’96 (Political Science), is a Gemini Award-winning television personality who has hosted shows Disaster DIY, Leave It to Bryan, House of Bryan and most recently Bryan Inc., which follows Bryan and Sarah working together as they built and renovated investment properties.

The couple has become something of a sensation in the ever-popular home improvement-meets-entertainment television landscape. And in that journey, they have found both professional and personal satisfaction.

“The time that we have behind the camera has helped our relationship become stronger — we’re now sort of spinning in the same direction. It’s important and it’s helped us grow as individuals. He’s been there to support me and vice versa,” she said. “We’ve learned how to trust each other. Instead of arguing or trying to prove that one way is best, we’ve really understood what compromise is. We’ve learned some valuable lessons about ourselves and our marriage.”

After completing her degree in Political Science at Huron University College, Baeumler moved onto International Business at Sheridan College. Her time in post-secondary education gave her clarity on what her next steps would be.

“You really need those years to mature and dig deep into what your passions are. You go back to your roots and things you love the most,” said Baeumler, who credits her time on the University Students’ Council for shaping her Western Experience.

“It was shy and came from a small school. It was a chance to meet other people and become more involved in the school as a whole and feel like you were giving back in a different way,” she explained. “It was a huge growth experience. I came to university at 17 and was on the younger side. I needed that growth and maturity.”

After university, she followed her passion and opened her own dance studio. Around the time of filming her first show, House of Bryan, she joined her husband for long filming days and taught dance at night. It was a lot to juggle and she realized that something had to give. Baeumler soon came to the difficult decision to give up the dance studio.

“We needed to reorganize our careers in a way that we were both helping our family and giving us the time we needed with our children. It was time to step away and commit to spending some time working alongside Bryan,” she said. The shift allowed Baeumler to trade one passion for another.

“It was our home and there was a tie in to the creative side of things that I always sort of longed for. It seemed like a good path and we started working together and found what we think is really a perfect path for both of us. We can focus on our work and our family,” she said.

With her own lifestyle website and a subscription box called Sarah Delivered that includes specially curated items for women, Baeumler has carved out a place all her own.

She describes her website, sarahbaeumler.com, as “a place to discuss some of my favourite things, sometimes become more philosophical, sometimes give advice and sometimes offer a shopping guide. It’s a huge outlet for me and it’s something that is my own where I can sit quietly and write to share some of my day’s thoughts. It’s helped me find some serenity,” she said.

Something else she finds meaning in is the foundation she and Bryan started a few years ago. The Baeumler Family Foundation for Kids’ primary focus is to provide renovations for children and families in need of accessibility, safety and security in order to create a nurturing and positive environment in their home.

One of the first projects they completed was for a 14-year-old girl returning home from Sick Kids hospital that needed an accessible bathroom and bedrooms. Sarah and Bryan enlisted the help of their design pals, Sarah Richardson, BA’93, and Tommy Smythe, to create a Tiffany-inspired motif.

Recently, Baeumler added magazine editor to her repertoire with the launch of Curated. All of that, along with what Sarah considers her most important role, being a mom to four busy children.

“There is a lot to sink my teeth into; it makes me thrive. I like to be a busy person. Sometimes as women and mothers, we are very hard on ourselves. I hope we continue to support each other because a modern-day woman is very different this day and age and her ability to sort of do it all and balance a home life and a strong career is what a modern woman is. We just take it all in stride,” she said.

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RESTORING TITLE TOWN

Michael Copeland, LLB’93, MBA’99, helped Argos return to prominence

On Nov. 25, Michael Copeland, LLB’93, MBA’99, watched the Western Mustangs celebrate their first Vanier Cup title in more than two decades on Tim Hortons Field in Hamilton, Ont. Fewer than 24 hours later and 500 kilometres away, Copeland kept on celebrating as his Toronto Argonauts hoisted the Grey Cup after a last-minute field goal by former Mustangs kicker Lirim Hajrullahu, BA’13, MA’15.

“It was an incredibly exciting and special weekend,” said the former Argonauts President and CEO. “I watched the Vanier and have always remained a big supporter of the school. It was great to see the Mustangs win. “Then, with our Grey Cup win, it was huge—a career moment for me and our team. I don’t know if that feeling will wear off. But, over time, we want to continue to look forward by taking all this in, enjoying it, but building off of it and never taking it for granted.”

Wrapping up just his second year leading one of the oldest existing professional sports teams in North America at 144 years, Copeland is thrilled to have helped bring the Argos back to prominence in the Canadian sports landscape.

A seasoned Canadian business executive with an extensive business development, marketing and legal background, Copeland served as Chief Operating Officer of the Canadian Football League starting in 2006, then headed league operations as President and COO from 2013-15. During his time in the league office, he led several key initiatives, including a comprehensive new broadcast and digital rights agreement, the establishment of a new salary cap system, a new collective bargaining agreement with players, the introduction of the league’s first drug-testing program and the return of football to Ottawa.

In January, Copeland announced that he was leaving his role as Argos President and CEO to assume a new role within MLSE. Details of that role will be coming out at some point in the near future.

But for a kid born and raised in the GTA, Copeland saw the team to Larry Tanenbaum’s Kilmer Sports Inc. and Bell Canada – two-thirds of the mega Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment (MLSE) group, and owners of such Toronto sports teams as the Raptors, Maple Leafs, Marlies and Toronto FC. In November 2017, Rogers Communications, the third partner in MLSE, joined as part of the CFL team’s new ownership.

While “great for the team and great for the city,” the powerful partnership brought great expectations.

“Everyone involved understood what the objective was—restore the Argos to where it should exist in the landscape of Toronto sports,” Copeland said. “Certainly, it was a big challenge, and continues to be a big challenge, but one we know we will achieve.

“It’s a lot more fun being involved in something that requires a group to roll up their sleeves and make a difference. It would have been less attractive to me if it didn’t require our group to work together to make an impact. I like to think of myself as a builder— and the bigger and more daunting the challenges the better. I learned, in my consulting background, there is no problem too large or too complex that can’t be resolved with the right amount of creativity and hard work.”

While the on-field product was top priority, he recognized the importance of the off-the-field experience. “We want fans understanding that our game experience is different now and really something special. We want to continue to improve in those areas and we’ve made some great strides and progress in the last two years.”

He continued, “Our core fans are incredible. They have stuck through some very difficult times and conditions with this team over the last decade. They are passionate about the team. Anything we do to bring in new fans, they are receptive and supportive of. The core fans really care about the pride we have in the team, which is important to us as management. We never want to alienate them as they are the foundation on which we are building.”

Dedicated to delivering fans the greatest football experience, Copeland understands the careful balance between consistency and tradition with staying current.

“Sports is a business and it has its challenges, like any other business. But it’s always a fun place to be,” he said. “We’re involved in something that is meaningful to people. When you can bring a championship to your hometown and be involved in this, it is exciting. It’s one of the reasons I love it so much.”
Jeffery Hutchinson, LLB’94, navigated an unexpected path to Coast Guard

Jeffery Hutchinson never set out to chart a meandering course toward the Canadian Coast Guard. His visions were of operating rooms, not open waters. Yet, following a challenging first year at Western when his pre-Med dreams ended quickly, Hutchinson stepped away from school and headed to sea.

His parents, neither of whom attended university, were trepidacious about the move. “It was difficult for them. After I left school after that bad year, my father’s deepest fear was I would not go,” Hutchinson, LLB’94, explained. “But he was the person who encouraged me most strongly to travel, to see the world, to make a contribution by volunteering, and then decide on what my next step would be. My father was driven by his personal faith to do things on a large scale. He came from a small place, but he had a large vision of the world.”

Born, raised and educated in London, Hutchinson had never set foot on a ship, let alone lived on one. Yet, he ended up on a relief and development ship cleaning up Jamaica in the aftermath of Hurricane Gilbert, a massive storm that killed 49 people and left the island looking, according to then-Prime Minister Edward Seaga, “like Hiroshima after the atom bomb.”

The experience opened Hutchinson’s eyes to a world he never considered. For a moment, he almost remained in the Caribbean when offered a job “doing sound for a band on the island.” He thought better of that and returned to Western where he eventually ended up pursuing Law. “I had no intention of being a lawyer. I am pretty sure by the time I started Law school, I had never met a lawyer,” Hutchinson said. “But I have a genetic wiring that makes me a bit rules oriented. I loved frameworks and structure. I found myself attracted to the law’s historic roots – how the law developed, the philosophical and religious influences on it. And the toolset you got, in terms of both analysis and problem-solving, that all clicked for me. That all appealed to me.”

“I spent three years in law school. I am the only person in my class that wished law school was a year longer.”

After graduation, he became a Department of Justice attorney, working in Halifax, White Horse and Ottawa, focusing mainly on Indigenous law. He worked closely with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). As the Executive Director of the Independent Assessment Process, he set up the original out-of-court process to resolve claims of sexual and/or physical abuse that caused psychological harm to former students of Indian Residential Schools.

“What we do at the TRC was a highlight of my career, but it was also emotionally draining work. I remember sitting in my office in the evenings, working through claims I had to sign off on, and reading about little kids who had been so mistreated and then thinking about my kids at home who were the same age. After a certain amount of time, I needed a reprieve from that.”

After a stint in the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat office – where he “learned a thing or two about how Ottawa works” – he was recruited to the Canadian Coast Guard. In March 2017, Hutchinson was appointed Commissioner to lead the organization and its 5,000 individuals charged with overseeing Canadian waters.

Formed in 1962, the Canadian Coast Guard is tasked with marine search and rescue, communication, navigation and transportation issues in Canadian waters, such as navigation aids and icebreaking, marine pollution response and providing support for other government initiatives. Headquartered in Ottawa, the organization operates 119 vessels and 22 helicopters, among others.

Since taking the helm, Hutchinson has helped restore the financial health of the organization, as well as expanded its recruiting push beyond traditional boundaries. It is a challenge he has embraced, if not expected.

“What we do at the front line, and the level of commitment I see, it inspires me every day.”

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“WHAT WE DO AT THE FRONT LINE, AND THE LEVEL OF COMMITMENT I SEE, IT INSPIRES ME EVERY DAY.”
LOOKING TO CHANGE LIVES

BY ANGIE WISEMAN

UNLOCKING THE CODE FOR SUCCESS

HEATHER PAYNE, HBA’09, AND HACKERYOU
LOOKING TO CHANGE LIVES

As Heather Payne, HBA’09, sat taking online coding tutorials in a café in China, she had no idea that moment would become a full-fledged career – and she would be at its helm.

“My plan was to join a Fortune 500 company and work my way to the top – that was my definition of success,” said the founder and CEO of the Toronto-based career college HackerYou.

“Being in an entrepreneurship class didn’t get me thinking about entrepreneurship for myself. But looking back now, it was my favourite course. Learning about making deals and how things are done, those are the parts of my career today I love most. It was an impactful experience, despite my not being ready for it in the moment.”

An exchange brought Payne to Hong Kong in her fourth year of university. It was there she decided to stay in China and continue her schooling, while starting to learn how to code.

“Even when I moved to the Chinese mainland, I knew I was moving back to Toronto. I thought I should improve my skill set. I thought if I learned how to code, if I could put coding skills on my resume, I would be a more attractive candidate to potential employers,” she said.

Even though she didn’t get a job in technology when she moved back to Canada, she continued to build her coding skills. In Los Angeles for business, Payne stumbled upon a workshop to learn the programming language Python.

“I drove out to a workshop in the middle of nowhere and had the best day. It was productive and fun and gave me the idea there should be something like this in Toronto because there wasn’t at the time. I tweeted about how there should be workshops in Toronto for women who want to learn to code,” she said. “It took off from there.”

Payne’s tweet created a buzz. More than 80 people signed up for a brainstorming session she offered to figure out how to build the workshops. From there, she gathered a small group of women to bring the ideas to fruition.

“The energy was really high and it felt really exciting,” she said.

“I had a plan to announce that our first workshop would be one month later. I didn’t have an instructor, a venue, or a curriculum but I thought by making a public commitment, it was the best way to make it happen.”

And make it happen, she did.

From there, Ladies Learning Code, a not-for-profit organization focused on teaching beginner-friendly technical skills in a social, collaborative way, was born. Payne quit her job to work full-time for the organization she created with fellow alumna Melissa Sarifodeen, HBA ’10, and two other co-founders. During this time, Payne heard from participants that they wanted more than a one-day event.

“People loved the style, the energy and the way we were teaching with a low ratio of students to instructors. But they kept saying that one day wasn’t enough. People wanted a multi-month-long course so they could really build their skills and put them on their resume,” she explained.

“First of all, our participants were asking for it. Second of all, somebody is going to do this in Toronto and if it’s not me, I will be really upset,” she laughed.

In 2012, Payne’s vision came full circle with HackerYou, a career college in Toronto, with compressed web-development courses, officially launched with an article in the National Post. It now serves almost 1,000 students with 140 full-time students and 850 part-time students.

Today, she has expanded the program and moved to a larger space. While the future is promising, she is not rushing things.

“I don’t have a thirst for growth. What I have is the desire to change people’s lives. I’m OK with changing fewer lives if we change them deeply. That’s just as impactful,” she said.

What she wants to do, however, is shake up the status quo for women in tech.

“I’m an entrepreneur and I’m a woman. I’m an entrepre neur and I’m a mom. I’m an entrepreneur, a young person and a mom. I want to show people it doesn’t matter what other people think you are capable of – you can do whatever you think you can do.”

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Taking a big step

Chance encounter lets David Hackam, MD’92, offer hope to premature infants

They were boring. There was no excitement; no place, you weren’t really fixing things the way you do in surgery. I still had this nagging feeling I wanted to be a paediatrician, but now I wanted to be a surgeon. I thought, “How is this possible? How could I join these two worlds?”

The answer was paediatric surgery, a relatively new field at the time. And when it came time to pursue his training in the area, Grotti once again held sway and directed Hackam “to the mecca, SickKids in Toronto.”

At the Hospital for Sick Children, Hackam conducted fundamental research, taking a three-year hiatus from his residency to earn his doctorate in cell biology. “I knew doing things the way we’d always done them was not going to make a difference on society or children’s health,” he explained. “There were diseases we needed to investigate.”

Among those in need of exploration was necrotizing enterocolitis – or NEC – a ravaging disease that causes the sudden death of parts of the intestine in premature babies.

“Those children are sitting in the NICU, humming along, and out of the blue, they start to get sick,” he said. “Their belly gets swollen, and then, within 24 hours, they’re either dying or dead. When you operate on these kids, you see that their intestines have gone from pink and happy to violent and black. It’s devastating for these families.”

Hackam remembers “little Freddie,” a premature newborn he met as a newly minted attending surgeon at a community hospital in Pittsburgh. Freddie’s parents were somewhat older and became close to Hackam – and vice versa. All stood witness to the short, difficult life of the little boy. Despite numerous operations, Freddie died about one month shy of his first birthday.

“It was at that point, through that journey with that family, I decided to devote my research career to NEC,” Hackam said.

His quest has led to groundbreaking discoveries and established him as a leading authority on intestinal inflammation and bowel disease in infants. Notably, his team has shown that a protein known as TLR4 is behind the malfunction that fuels necrotizing enterocolitis.

To combat the effects of TLR4, Hackam’s lab has also shown that sodium nitrate – a substance found in breast milk – can block TLR4 and stave off necrotizing enterocolitis in premies by increasing the oxygen supply to the gut. By adding that substance to infant formula, researchers can prevent necrotizing enterocolitis in premature animal models. They have also identified novel agents present in breast milk that directly inhibit TLR4, and which can be engineered to synthetic formulas to mimic the effects of breast milk and thus prevent NEC.

As that research continues with an eye toward the future, there are cases happening every day. Currently, NEC is treated by intestinal transplants or feeding tubes. Neither option is ideal.

“If you lose all your intestine, you still need to eat,” Hackam explained. “Your brain is fine; your legs are fine; you just need fuel. The only treatment is intestinal transplant. But it’s not ideal. There aren’t intestine available for every child and the incidence of mortality is still quite high.”

The better solution is an artificial intestine made from the patient’s own intestinal tissue. Hackam’s team has grown the lining of an intestine in a dish by harnessing the rapid and regenerative nature of stem cells.

It was a big step. But what was missing, was a tubal surface – or scaffold – the stem cells could grow upon. John March, a biomedical engineer from Cornell University, created such a thing. And he showed up at the right time, right place – a bar, actually – while in town attending the same scientific conference as Hackam.

“It was a total geek encounter. I was talking about how I wanted to make an artificial intestine – because that’s what you talk about at a bar,” Hackam laughed. “I said, ‘I can make these stem cells I take from the intestine grow. I can do it in mice and other animals. I just wish I had something to grow them on that looked like an intestine.’ Next to me at the bar was John (yes, that’s his real name). He had this scaffold and had shaped this platform in a way that looked just like a real intestine.

“We started talking, I said, ‘You’ve got a scaffold and need stem cells; I’ve got stem cells and I need a scaffold. We should get together.’”

They did. The two teams collaborated to create an artificial gut, with their model being the first to successfully recreate the delicate finger-like projections of the intestine, called microvilli, integral to absorbing nutrients.

“We take stem cells at the time of surgery, and grow them in a dish. Then we take a customized scaffold that’s the right size and shape of the patient. We place the cells on the scaffold, which grow in this tube. It is then implanted into the mouse in an organ called the omentum that gives it a blood supply. Then we hook it up with whatever intestine is left, and – assuming this will work in humans as well as it works in mice – now the patient has a new intestine made from their own stem cells,” Hackam said.

They’ve found great success in small-to-mid-size animal models and predict human trials are hopefully only three to five years away.

“We’ve got a little way to go. But we feel like we’re a little bit like the Wright Brothers,” Hackam said. “We’re tinkering now; we have a concept; we think we can make this thing fly. Now, we’re optimizing the conditions, to make it really soar.

“And when it does, we believe we can offer new hope to these tiny patients, which is our ultimate goal.”

I

It was not what David Hackam, MD’92, had planned, but thanks to the influence of a famed London surgeon early in his career, he now stands on the brink of helping more children than he ever imagined possible.

“I wanted to be a paediatrician and neonatologist. I wanted to help children,” Hackam said. “But then I rotated with this new recruit to London – Murray Girotti, a famed London surgeon early in his career, he now stands on the brink of helping...
of university student-athletes compete. The Summer Universiade had more than 10,000 athletes from more than 150 countries competing in 15 compulsory sports, which makes it the largest amateur sporting competition after the Olympics.

“These games are intense, for us and the athletes alike. We had a ball taking care of them and cheering them all on.”

While watching competition at an elite level, it can be easy to forget that even these athletes struggle with challenges like the rest of us. As physiotherapists with manual and manipulative therapy training, Renaud and Clegg used their capable hands to keep joints and muscles in balance to avoid injury.

“From early morning workouts, to practices and long hours at the clinic, we were constantly moving from helping competitors get warmed up and prepared for competition, to designing a recovery plan to keep them in top shape and ready to win,” Renaud said.

As for the ‘team’ behind the teams, Renaud honed her own training in the fast-paced, 24-hour sport medicine clinic as a member of the health team playing a key role in supporting each athlete’s best performance.

“Although making sure our specific teams were well taken care of, collaboration in the clinic was an adrenaline rush. Working side by side with other professionals, each with their own expertise, experiences and treatments, it is not only satisfying to see how quickly comprehensive care can happen, it is amazing to ‘talk shop’ with everyone from sport medicine physicians, surgeons, massage therapists, physiotherapists and athletic therapists. There aren’t any barriers to information and we’re all on the same team with the same goal. As a learning and emotional experience, there’s nothing like it.”

BY SONIA PRESZCATOR

When Geneviève Renaud, MCISc’14, travelled 12,000 km from Ottawa to Taipei on one of the sport medicine support team for the 2017 Summer Universiade, she expected the rewards of working with the world’s best athletes. What she didn’t expect was to find out her roommate for the event, Heather Clegg, MCISc’17, was a fellow Western alumna of the Advanced Health Care Practice Program.

While Renaud has worked with athletes of all skill levels, the Summer Universiade was a unique experience thanks to the calibre of the athletes competing. Renaud was responsible for the care of rhythmic gymnastics athletes, while Clegg was committed to the badminton teams.

The Summer and Winter Universiades are international sporting and cultural festivals in which thousands
Erin Kleinberg, BA’06, takes entrepreneurship and keeps it cool

Erin Kleinberg’s resume reads like the glossy pages of a fashion magazine: glitz, glamour and ingenuity. Yet, her success as a designer, publisher and advertising executive is the pinnacle of her hard work, tenacity and a little inspiration from her grandmother.

“My favourite thing to do is take something from nothing and make it cool, build brands and tell stories.”

Around that time, Kleinberg visited her grandmother – a fashion magazine: glitz, glamour and ingenuity. Yet, her success as a designer, publisher and advertising executive is the pinnacle of her hard work, tenacity and a little inspiration from her grandmother.

“It was a crazy idea and it was for fun. We got a bunch of people together and went to New York and we did it and the content was really compelling. It was right time, right place and nothing like that existed at the time.”

Kleinberg was able to get the support of Vogue and Elle simultaneously in advance of launching the site as well as style.com and vogue.com. “We had no idea how forward-thinking it really was,” she said.

Kleinberg and her partners photographed closets in high-profile people’s homes and told the stories of their individual style. “Once they got some traction, they reached out to Chanel and partnered with them on a number of projects. They had the support of their favourite brand, so much so, Chanel became their first advertiser.”

“Chanel flew us to Paris and we interviewed Karl Lagerfeld and toured Coco’s apartment. We had never been to Paris before so it was an absolute crazy story,” she said.

With an eye on expanding the website, Kleinberg and her team hired Janet Bannis-Teer, HBA’92, as their CEO and started to look for investors.

“We were on our way. We were in over 500 of the most epic individuals’ houses and it was an experience, but I missed my clothing line. It was the right time to move on,” she said.

Kleinberg went on to work with big names such as Lena Dunham and Jared Leto through her clothing line but started to see another gap in the market. This time, she wanted to bring all of her experience together into an advertising agency. Along with partner Stacie Brockman, Métier Creative was established. “I’ve tapped into the very popular movement of ‘girl boss’ and feel grateful to have all these women around me – women who are fundraising and building businesses and being moms and doing everything that they could,” she said.

“Being an entrepreneur, you always feel like there is more you can be doing, there’s never really a time where you feel like you are done.”
“We set up fitness programs and measured the effects. It went amazingly well. We closed the gap between them and the control group by half in one school year. And they were still getting better.” Hayden documented his work in a landmark paper in 1965 at the International Conference on the Psychology and Sport in Rome. “I presented my work, went home and waited for the Nobel Prize people to call,” he laughed.

Using his research, Hayden created a fitness program to improve stamina and muscle strength in children with developmental and/or physical disability. The program, presented in booklet form, included tests, practical training sessions, evaluations and directions for putting sessions together.

“Ultimately, we sold 50,000 copies of the booklet within a couple years. So I knew there was a market out there,” Hayden said.

By 1964, Hayden was back at Western as a professor where he joined the physical education department. He was great,” Hayden said. “When Frank Hayden, BA’55, LLD’11, came to see sport as the great equalizer, few

“I met with Eunice at her Maryland estate. During the meeting, her husband, Sargent Shriver, then-head of the Peace Corps, burst in holding the proposal for the National Centennial Games. He said, ‘Can you do this in the United States?’ And I said, ‘Well, somebody can do it. It’s bigger and more complex but it can be done here, too. Of course, I’m happy to help you in any way if you want to do it.’” Hayden recounted.

“From the first six weeks, I received a barrage of phone calls and telegrams asking ‘When are you coming? When are you coming?’” and I’d say, ‘I’m not coming.’ But they were persistent. And in three months, I was there,” he said.

Hayden worked for the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation, from 1965-72. Things were slow materializing, but he continued giving presentations and building his network. His perseverance paid off when Ted Kennedy announced funding for regional games and directors needed to establish the Office of European Affairs for Special Olympics International. In 1988, he returned to Western. He served as its first director. He designed and directed the growth of the program to include 50 national organizations. His travels took him across Europe, South and Central America, Asia and the South Pacific, Africa and the Middle East, North America and the Caribbean.

His international work culminated in 1988 with a move to Paris to establish the Office of European Affairs for Special Olympics International. In 1990, he returned to Canada. He served as Special Consultant to Special Olympics Canada until 2000.

Today, the Special Olympics is the world’s largest sports organization for people with intellectual disabilities with more than 4.9 million athletes in 172 countries and more than one million volunteers.

Hayden’s lifelong efforts have earned him widespread recognition including investiture as an Officer of the Order of Canada, induction into Canada’s Sports Hall of Fame, the naming of the Dr. Frank J. Hayden Secondary School in Burlington, and numerous honorary degrees, including one from Western.

But the true testament of his work is the enormous impact on the millions of athletes whose lives were immeasurably changed by the Special Olympics. It is a success rooted in some of his earliest beliefs discovered at Western.

“My experience from travelling the world is that we’re all much more alike than we are different and sport is a great common denominator,” Hayden said.

When they got home, nobody played with them on the street, nobody bothered to teach them how to ride a bike because they thought they couldn’t do it.”
Donor support for the Adopt A Mustang program helped our student athletes bring home an unprecedented seven national championships last fall, including the Vanier Cup. With your gift we can continue to attract exceptional student athletes and coaches, maintain our world-class facilities and enable our teams to compete and excel at the national level each and every year.

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Mark Ideson, BSc ’99, takes on the world in Pyeongchang Games

BY TODD DEVLIN, MA’09

When Canada’s wheelchair curling team won Paralympic gold on home soil in 2010, Mark Ideson had never thrown a rock — let alone competed in the sport. Yet eight years later, the 41-year-old will skip that team into the 2018 Paralympic Games this March in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

Ideson, BSc 99 (Environmental Sciences), who hopes to earn Canada an unprecedented fourth consecutive gold in the sport introduced in 2006, said Ideson’s first action on the world stage came in 2011, when he skipped his team to a third-place finish at the Ontario Wheelchair Championships. When Team Canada conducted a coast-to-coast search for talent that year, he attended a training camp in Grimsby, Ont., and was selected as one of 28 athletes to try out for the national team in Vancouver. He continued to make cut after cut, week after week, and finally earned a spot on the five-person mixed team.

It’s been more than a decade now since Ideson crashed his helicopter into a farmer’s field during a maintenance flight just outside of Cambridge, Ont., on Feb. 2, 2007. He suffered 29 broken bones and was placed in an induced coma. The crash, to taking up the sport at age 33, to leading Canada to an unprecedented fourth Paralympic Games in 2014 to win gold again — beating the host Russian team, 8-3, in the final. Ideson said he thought it might be a fun challenge to pursue. And luckily for me, I met my wife on that team and we’ve been married now for 14 years.”

Hockey and golf were his favourites. But post-accident, he looked to new sports. He tried wheelchair rugby, but soon realized he was “like a turtle amongst rabbits on the court.” When the Olympics came to Vancouver in 2010, his quest to find a new sport was fueled by new inspiration. “I was sitting on the couch and a piece aired about Canadian gold medal-winning skeleton athlete Jon Montgomery,” Ideson recalled. “I thought, ‘Maybe I can find a sport and use my new abilities and maybe represent Canada someday, too.’”

The sport he found was wheelchair curling. Training out of the Ilderton Curling Club, Ideson quickly improved his game, rising up the ranks at a rapid rate. In 2011, he skipped his team to win gold at the Ontario Wheelchair Championships. When Team Canada conducted a cross-country search for talent that year, he attended a training camp in Grimsby, Ont., and was selected as one of 28 athletes to try out for the national team in Vancouver. He continued to make cut after cut, week after week, and finally earned a spot on the five-person mixed team.

Ideson’s first action on the world stage came in 2013, when he traveled to Sochi, Russia, for the World Championships. When Team Canada conducted a coast-to-coast search for talent that year, he attended a training camp in Grimsby, Ont., and was selected as one of 28 athletes to try out for the national team in Vancouver. He continued to make cut after cut, week after week, and finally earned a spot on the five-person mixed team.

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The team won gold and then returned to Sochi for the Paralympic Games in 2014 to win gold again — beating the host Russian team, 8-3, in the final.

Ideson plans to compete on the world stage for a second time — with great hope to earn Canada an unprecedented fourth Paralympic Games in 2018.

“I was sitting on the couch and a piece aired about Canadian gold medal-winning skeleton athlete Jon Montgomery,” Ideson recalled. “It said Jon had chosen a sport in his 20s — a sport where he could use his athletic abilities and maybe one day represent Canada at the Olympics. I thought, ‘Maybe I can find a sport and use my new abilities and maybe represent Canada someday, too.’”

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Ideson says the sport demands “the athleticism and the height of which the girls flew during a basket toss,” Ideson said. “I thought it might be a fun challenge to pursue. And luckily for me, I met my wife on that team and we’ve been married now for 14 years.”

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Voice of Alumni

By David Simmonds, BA’07

Recently, my mother asked me why I was going to London “again.” As I near the end of my tenure as Alumni Association President, I stopped to really think about my answer. I landed on my belief that “moments matter.” I give it my time to Western to help shape, and experience, important moments—large and small. Over the past two years, a few of those moments really stood out for me.

Answering a call to leadership for our students.

Habits, shared values, and rituals make a tribe—and we have a fiercely proud alumni tribe at Western. I’ve asked you to support our current students, and your response has been overwhelming. During exam season, not only have you donated to support campus mental health services, you’ve written notes to first-year students facing finals through our “Kind Mail” Campaign. You cared, and it made a difference.

We took a bold step this year, asking graduates within the last decade to donate—whatever they could—to support Western. It’s a tough ask of our young alumni, many of whom are starting careers. Despite this, a number of you joined me and made gifts—gifts that were matched by donors at a previous dedication to the arts, sciences, or engineering. Thank you for your leadership.

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Eight after graduating Western, Michelle Chair, Bat'14, landed a rewarding summer internship at the Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation. She became a full-time employee by that fall. Recently, she joined the Corporate and Community Partnerships team—a tight-knit group of co-workers who discovered they were all Western graduates. Included among the purple-and-proud group are, from left to right, Paige Cunningham, Bat'14, Senior Development Office of Corporate Partnerships; Chair, Shayna Blumen, Ba'12, Director of Corporate and Community Partnerships; and Melissa DenBok, BCom'07, Senior Development Officer of Corporate Partnerships.

1980

Nancy Snoeien, BSc’81, received her Doctor of Health Administration degree from Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow School of Health Sciences, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Mich., in December 2016.

1984

Night Court starring Harry Anderson premieres on NBC TV

1981

The Smurfs animated series first broadcasts in North America

1976

First commercial flights of British-French supersonic passenger jet Concorde

1934

The Hamilton-based author has written a memoir, Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism, which will be published in 2019 by Zero Books in the UK. The Hamilton-based author has written two previous books on the profession, Don’t Believe It: How lies become news and Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism.

1996

IBM Deep Blue became the first computer to win a game of chess against a reigning (human) chess champion, Gary Kasparov.
Melting pot of campus life led to new insight

When I came to Western as a wide-eyed first-year student in 2006, my circle of friends quickly expanded from a rather homogeneous group of suburban teenagers to a network of diverse young people from all across the country, and beyond. It sounds downright silly writing this now, but attending undergrad marked the first time I had serious conversations about politics or religion – or food, for that matter – with people who didn’t grow up like I did. I lived in a humdrum, middle-class Canadian community. Be it during an editorial board session at our student newspaper or in an international relations seminar on conflicts in the Middle East, I found myself regularly enlightened by the diversity of thought surrounding my younger self.

Living in Toronto, that sort of cosmopolitan experience is routine for me these days. I have colleagues hailing from small-town Newfoundland to the capital city of Bahrain. I can walk out my door and stroll to an Ashish-nawbe restaurant or a Jewish deli. The diverse nature of this city, where half the population is born outside Canada, is stunning and beautiful and thought-provoking on a daily basis.

And when I first had a taste of that kind of experience at Western, as an 18-year-old coming from a Catholic high school – well, it was nothing short of eye-opening.

Western lecturer Larry Cornies wrote that, this year, the university has roughly 3,600 international students from nearly 130 countries in attendance, with hundreds more at the university’s growing push to increase its international student body. Today, it’s about 10 per cent, Cornies continued.

And it seems the trend is continuing in the other way, with a rising number of Western students heading abroad for international study experiences.

Aside from making the campus a global village capable of attracting the brightest minds from abroad – good news for the school’s reputation and, surely, its bottom line – this direction will serve students well, offering them a different kind of learning experience outside the classroom.

South of the border, Columbia University in New York has taken a similar stance, with Dr. Dennis A. Mitchell, the school’s Vice Provost for Faculty Diversity and Inclusion, helping lead the push for diversity among both students and faculty members. A year ago in the Columbia Spectator, he posed a question to readers: “Why is diversity so important?”

The answer, he wrote, lies in the fact that “we cannot truly embody excellence, a hallmark of our storied institution, without diversity.” And this is rooted in evidence; he said, not some “aspirational rhetoric.”

Researchers have shown the benefits of diversity are apparent in various ways in a campus environment, from the sped-up pace of innovation spurred by interdisciplinary research to the “richness of conversations” in the classroom, enhanced by diverse voices, he writes.

“Diverse groups and diversity of thought produce a myriad of positive outcomes, including more innovative solutions to complex problems, more productive collaborations, and richer learning experiences,” Mitchell continues.

I recall that richness during my time at Western, both in the classroom and outside of it. There were the simple moments, like residence potlucks where students from around the world shared their food and traditions. And there were heavier discussions, where opposing viewpoints on international relations or women’s rights or world religions came to a head in lecture halls or at campus protests.

At times, the clash of ideas sparked conflict, but more often than not, the melting pot nature of university life led to new insight into other world views, if not appreciation and understanding. At least for me, it’s a mindset that has stuck with me long after graduation.

While Western looks and feels like a small town in many ways – the charming stone buildings, the lush green lawns – I’m glad our alma mater is pushing for a more cosmopolitan vibe on campus.

As Cornies noted, Western adopted an international action plan in 2014, with “10 detailed objectives to support the organic development of a more international university during the subsequent five years.” That’s up for review next year, I, for one, hope our beloved school stays the course.

Lauren Pelley, BA’18, MA’18, is a Toronto-based multimedia journalist and reporter at CBC.
Christine Magee (HBA’82) took a risk when she co-founded a chain of specialty mattress stores in 1994. Sleep Country Canada is now the country’s largest mattress retailer with more than 245 stores nationwide. Today, Christine is mentoring the next generation of young entrepreneurs. And her business acumen was fostered at Western.

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