HARROWING TALES OF ADVENTURE FROM A LONGTIME NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CONTRIBUTOR

WHAT’S KEEPING US OUT OF SELF-DRIVING CARS? HINT: IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH TECHNOLOGY

In This Issue:

Who Is the Class of 2024?
Ten first-years share admissions essays that reveal dreams undaunted
They’re Back!

With unflagging enthusiasm and fearless spirit, students returned to UConn campuses after five months of pandemic-dictated exile. About 5,800 students moved into residence halls at Storrs and Stamford, where they began to blissfully juggle Covid-19 testing and quarantining along with their online and in-person classes. All told, this fall has 33,500 students enrolled as Huskies, including for the first time 500 who are taking UConn classes at two universities in China.
Art Alfresco

UConn Avery Point hosted Open Air by Night exhibitions this summer and fall, which drew film and video submissions from artists not just in Connecticut, but around the world — likely because so few art galleries and museums are presenting new exhibitions during the pandemic. “It’s one of those Covid silver linings exceeding our own ambitions and expectations,” says Charlotte Gray, curator of the Alexey von Schlippe Gallery at Avery Point. Shown are videos by Benthaus Studios projected onto the lighthouse.
I remember so clearly how much it meant to me to hear the stories my journalism professors told of their lives on the job, how it motivated me to get out there and file stories of my own. One such professor worked on the sports desk at the Milwaukee Sentinel. I have him to thank for my student job on the copy desk there, which felt heady at the time, despite being mostly a matter of taking bowling scores over the phone from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. (people in Milwaukee get really excited about bowling scores).

The students who have worked with us at this magazine describe similar motivation from UConn professors, among them Scott Wallace — whose writing, photography, and videography on the environment, vanishing cultures, and places of conflict across the globe have appeared everywhere from CBS News, The Guardian, and The New York Times to Harper’s, Vanity Fair, and National Geographic.

Camila Vallejo ‘19 (CLAS), one of those students who used to work for us and who graduated to NPR, found Wallace an especially inspirational and effective journalism professor. “He focused less on giving you assignments just to fulfill a syllabus and more on improving your writing with every draft,” she says. “As a seasoned features writer and war correspondent, he highlighted the good as well as the raw truth behind being a reporter — the adrenaline, the trauma, and more.”

It’s clear what Wallace brings to his students. In turn, he says, they remind him how much the profession of journalism matters.

“I see the enthusiasm with which they do their assignments and their work. The questions they raise and the topics they decide to tackle are really surprising, really innovative. These students are not empty vessels that you’re trying to fill; they come with lots of ideas and enthusiasm.” Wallace also is a 2020–21 fellow at the UConn Humanities Institute and a faculty affiliate of El Instituto: UConn’s Institute of Latina/o, Caribbean, and Latin American Studies.


University Communications
Vice President for Communications: Tywon Kendig.
Associate Vice President for Creative Strategy & Brand Management: Patricia Fazio ’90 (CLAS), ’92 MA.

Email: uconnmagazine@uconn.edu.
Letters to the editor and other comments are welcome. Send address changes to UConn Foundation Records Department, Unit 3206, 2390 Alumni Drive, Storrs, CT 06269.

Cover Illustrations by Katie Carey Snapt; Sean Flynn, Peter Morenus.
Table of Contents: Katie Carey, Scott Wallace, Curt Merlo, Katie Carey.
From the Editor: Nicolas Reynard.

The University of Connecticut complies with all applicable federal, state, and local laws prohibiting discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, non-consensual sexual penetration, retaliatory acts, and gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual harassment on the basis of sex, or gender, and other legally protected characteristics. Inquiries, including inquiries regarding the University’s compliance with Title IX legal requirements, can be directed to the University’s Title IX Coordinator(s): pnehms@uconn.edu or tixcoordinator@uconn.edu; or to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights: 500 S. Capitol St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20202-6697, or to the University’s Compliance Coordinator, Office of Institutional Equity: Campus Center, UConn, 308 Glenbrook Rd., Unit 4175; Storrs, CT 06269; Phone: (860) 486-4700; Fax: (860) 486-0646; or to the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities: 400 Washington Blvd., New Britain, CT 06051; Phone: (860) 723-3400; or to the UConn’s Office for Disability Services: 152 Glenbrook Rd., Unit 330, Storrs, CT 06269; Phone: (860) 486-4801; Fax: (860) 486-4802; www.uconn.edu/disability-resources.
LETTERS
The overwhelming number of letters we received last issue were on the topic of slavery reparations and public policy professor Thomas Craemer’s “new math.” The issue is complex, and, accordingly, so were the comments you sent. I share a few representative letters here, edited for clarity and length, and you can find the rest on our website. We welcome all feedback; the discourse is vital.

Please email me at lisa.stiepock@uconn.edu or post on our website at magazine.uconn.edu.

LETTERS

The New Reparations Math
Has anyone counted the cost of LBJ’s programs, made specifically to rebalance Black life? Caucasians and Asians denied a college entrance for the place of another minority? About 365,000 Northern soldiers died for the war that emancipated slaves. Reparations were made for the sin of slavery. Why do some say it is not enough?
Ernest Cote, via our website

Craemer points out that the purpose of a reparations calculation is to emphasize the magnitude of the injustice, the unrecompensed labor of generations of slaves who built the U.S. economy, rather than demand cash be repaid now. Despite many years at elite educational institutions, I was not taught basic facts about American systemic racism, though I was vividly educated when young about the Nazi era by teachers who were survivors of the camps. It’s crucial that we learn the truth of our history, because it shapes our present and future — the present and future of all of us.
Deborah Marks, via our website

Who will pay reparations, everyone or just slaveowners? What value will be given for those who fought in the Civil War? Let’s heal ancient wounds and move on as a nation.
Dwight Jones, via our website

The New Reparations Math
Craemer points out that the purpose of a reparations calculation is to emphasize the magnitude of the injustice, the unrecompensed labor of generations of slaves who built the U.S. economy, rather than demand cash be repaid now. Despite many years at elite educational institutions, I was not taught basic facts about American systemic racism, though I was vividly educated when young about the Nazi era by teachers who were survivors of the camps. It’s crucial that we learn the truth of our history, because it shapes our present and future — the present and future of all of us.
Deborah Marks, via our website

Who will pay reparations, everyone or just slaveowners? What value will be given for those who fought in the Civil War? Let’s heal ancient wounds and move on as a nation.
Dwight Jones, via our website

Flashback
My husband is the UConn grad, but I am the faithful reader of your magazine. The summer issue did not fail me: “Flashback” brought tears to my eyes. Howard Goldbaum wrote of the coalition of antiwar and Black Power protests in 1969. I ask your readers to research the 1968 Kerner Commission on racial disorder and social division to see some of the roots of today’s BLM movement: “This is our conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal.”
Elizabeth Cooke, via our website

Light-Years Away
Thanks for bringing back such fond memories of my days at UConn during these trying times. #BleedBlue
Pat Grondin, via our website

GOLDEN EGGS
Kumar Venkitanarayanan wants to feed the world — with chickens raised without antibiotics. This poses challenges, explains the animal science professor and associate dean of CAHNR, in keeping birds healthy, production high, and waste generation low — for environmental reasons. “Poultry meat is projected to be a major source of protein for the increasing human population, which is projected to be 10 billion by 2050,” says Venkitanarayanan. “The broiler industry has been able to reach high levels of production through selective breeding and by using antibiotics as growth promoters. We are not sure how phasing out antibiotic growth promoters will affect the sustainability of the industry, especially to meet future demand for the increasing population.” His chance for success increased quite a bit this August when the USDA awarded his project $10 million.

Flashback

Hall of Fame field hockey coach Nancy Stevens, the winningest coach in NCAA field hockey history, retired as head coach of the Huskies after 30 years. Stevens finishes her career with an all-time record of 700-189-24, and as the only coach in the history of the sport to reach the 700-win plateau. Under her guidance, the Huskies appeared in 24 NCAA tournaments; reached 18 NCAA quarterfinals and 10 NCAA semifinals; won 19 Big East tournament titles and 19 Big East regular season titles; and produced 50 first team All-Americans. Stevens led the Huskies to a No. 1 national ranking five times (2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, and 1999) and won three national championships (2017, 2014, and 2010). Find a Q&A with Stevens at s.uconn.edu/stevens.
JUST FOLK

After completing her degree in policy at the School of Social Work, Lara Herscovitch ’95 MSW traveled around the world for six years as an education specialist for Save the Children, carrying her guitar as a traveling companion around the U.S. and on several continents, singing and writing songs as she had done since childhood. In 1998, a friend invited her to perform with him in New York City. “Every single light bulb in my heart and soul went off,” she says, recalling that. “It wasn’t even a choice. I knew I had to do this.”

Herscovitch spent nearly two decades leading a dual life. Weekdays, she was a social worker evaluating a nonprofit program, writing a grant, or testifying before a legislative committee. At night or on weekends she would head to a recording studio, an open mic night, or a scheduled performance while creating and releasing six albums on her own LaRama Records label.

To leave more time for music, she reduced her full-time work from five days a week to four, moving from the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance to the Connecticut Fund for the Environment — Save the Sound, and then spending nine years with Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. With each new recording of contemporary folk music, she expanded her performances beyond Connecticut, receiving critical praise for both her music and her stage presence. In 2009, she was named Connecticut’s State Troubadour — an ambassador of music and song who promotes cultural literacy and gained national attention that music and art are both important, just in very different ways.

Your music often addresses themes of social justice and you volunteer time with connected organizations. It seems you continue to be involved in social work, just in a different way. I don’t think that’s ever going to change. I am one of the protesters who showed up in support of Black Lives Matter. I think it’s important for all of us to take this very late opportunity to evolve and to make this country healthier, increase equity and justice. I’m trying to show up and let my music also be of service. Some of it’s always going to be personal. Some of it’s going to be aspirational and some of it is probably always going to be social justice because I care about the world.

Has it gotten better for independent artists since you started in thebiz? It’s a work in progress. A lot of folk venues are all volunteer, great community builders. I’ve learned over time the way that music can bring an individual closer to themselves and also bring individuals together and a whole community. It’s a beautiful field, and I really appreciate the ethic and values of American folk music.

You describe “Highway Philosophers” as “an album of adventure, authenticity, courage, and freedom.” Why? This is an album of the hero’s journey and all the different elements of it. I took my own leap of faith into full-time music before I wrote it all, so that’s reflected throughout it. I always hope to inspire people to lean into their best self in the same way that I’m trying to lean into my best self. This is the first album, with no disrespect to any of the ones that came before it, that I just feel so thoroughly proud of. This time if a song felt good enough, I knew it wasn’t done, and I had more time to get it right. It took a long time to do, and it was a painstaking process in the studio, which also can be fun. I feel at peace. If I get hit by the proverbial bus, I will feel content that I was able to release this album before I went.

Can you leave us with a fun “on the road” tale? I remember a gig very early in my career in Northampton, Massachusetts — I was excited to break into that scene. When I got to the venue, I discovered it was the bar connected to a bowling alley. The whole place had maybe five people in it, including me and the bartender. Every time someone would come through the door from the bowling alley to the bar and back, blaring rock music would come in too. I’d be in the middle of some touching, finger-picky, lyric-rich ballad, interrupted all throughout by parts of Rick James’ “Super Freak” — I had to laugh.

—KENNETH BEST

Photo by Joy Bush Photography
“It’s not so much about the measurement being wrong, it’s that the whole underlying function.”

Dr. Belachew Tessema, otolaryngology professor, Connecticut Magazine, Aug. 24, 2020

On whether America has turned a corner when it comes to systemic racism:

“I think we see a corner. I don’t know if we’ve turned it.”

Doug Ganville, sports management/education professor, Kiplinger, July 30, 2020

On new CDC data regarding teen suicide:

“Picture a typical high school classroom of 25 students. About five of those students could be thinking about suicide.”

Sandra Chafouleas, educational psychology professor, Psychology Today, Sept. 4, 2020

On shifting locations and definitions of “invasive species”:

“The goal in this crazy warming world is to keep everything alive. But it may not be in the same place.”

Mark Urban, biology professor, Smithsonian, Aug. 3, 2020

On the 70-year-old travel-demand model transportation planners still use:

“It’s not so much about the measurement being wrong, it’s that the whole underlying theory is wrong.”

Norman Garrick, engineering professor, Vibe, Aug. 24, 2020

On nasal breathing to prevent chronic maladies:

“Our bodies were designed to breathe through our noses ... Breathing through our mouths disrupts our body’s normal function.”

On supporting the mental health of student-athletes:

“I think across the country, we have to come up with proactive approaches as well as reactive approaches. There’s just not enough therapists in the world to solve the problem purely reactively.”

UConn President Thomas Katsouleas, USA Today, Aug. 26, 2020

On remaining empathic:

“My patients’ families did not thank me for using the most up-to-date treatments, but rather for standing in as family for their loved ones during their dying moments. Being a physician during these times is truly a privilege.”


Imagine sitting on your couch on a Saturday night, watching the country react to another murder of an unarmed Black man. Your body is tense, your throat is dry as your eyes well up with tears and you begin to feel that familiar anger, sadness, helplessness. You turn to Twitter to share your feelings, bookmarking your tweets with a hashtag you create, and head to bed. When you wake up, you’re gone viral.

“I was certainly outraged by the strangulation of George Floyd, but I was also outraged by the murders of our Black trans brothers and sisters and Black women like Breonna Taylor, who were also slain by law enforcement,” says assistant professor of communications Shardé Davis recalling that night. “I was reeling and thinking, what can I do?”

Davis knew whatever she did needed to have impact and be personal to show that racism is an ever-present reality for Black people in America. So she wrote about experiences she’d had with racism while in graduate school using #BlackInTheIvory, a play on words that encapsulates her race, her research, and her position in predominately white academia. She texted her friend and fellow Blackademic, Joy Melody Woods for guidance. Woods liked the hashtag so much, she tweeted it immediately. Davis did the same. Within 24 hours, #BlackInTheIvory was trending nationwide on Twitter.

“What an emotional yet powerful day,” tweeted Davis that Sunday. “I think I’ve read every single tweet. Thanks to everyone for sharing what it’s like to be #BlackInTheIvory. We’ve opened the floodgates, so more may continue to pour out as the days pass. Pls know that we will continue to hold space for you.”

One week later, a New York Times article said, “Sensing a rare, and perhaps fleeting, opportunity to be heard, many Black Americans are sharing painful stories on social media about racism and mistreatment in the workplace, accounts that some said they were too scared to disclose before. They are using hashtags like BlackInTheIvory or WeSeeYouWAT, referring to bias in academia and ‘White American Theater.”’

Although creating a viral hashtag has landed her a lot of media attention and opened the door for conversations about racism at institutions across the country, Davis has always been involved in equity, inclusion, and connecting work. In UConn’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Davis’ research centers around Black women and how they communicate and connect with one another. She worked with former faculty Daisie Reyes and current faculty David Embrick and Milagros Castilloy.

Montoya to create town halls for faculty and staff of color. Those spaces serve as opportunities for communities of color working at UConn to connect, relate, and support one another. The night she decided to share her experience as a Black woman in academia, she was hoping to foster a similar community, but virtually, during a time when many aren’t experiencing in-person connections due to the global pandemic.

“As Blackademics, we’ve been, in some senses, bullied by the institution. Many of us have to place a muzzle over our mouths, put our heads down, and work tirelessly if we want to get tenure or enter the ranks of upper administration. For the most part, reaching those milestones requires that we ‘go along to get along,’” she explains. “We’ve never had a space or opportunity to be seen or heard, especially on such a large, national platform.”

On Twitter, the hashtag is filled with stories of professors being mistreated for students and examples of white peers not believing stories of racism Black professionals experience on campus. “[The hashtag] has created a space for many white folks to say to themselves ‘Oh, that’s not a just UConn-specific issue’ or ‘Oh, that’s not a Shardé-related problem,’” she says. “They are reading, quite literally, the exact same stories by Blackademics from different age groups, institutions, regions, fields, and even career points. It’s not a coincidence that these issues are happening over and over again across the United States. Because that’s how systemic racism works. It eats its way through social institutions and rears its ugly head in similar ways. It’s a creature of habit. There is no way to turn a blind eye to it.”

Davis plans to keep the conversation going in a few ways. She and her colleagues at UConn are continuing conversations that began in town halls and talking with leadership about how the institution can be more inclusive. The Black Graduate Support Project is reopening; it lists names and payment info for Black graduate students in need of financial support, and anyone can identify a person and send them money directly. Davis also plans to relaunch the website to highlight various student resources at that will equip Blackademics to get more institution-level resources at their respective universities. Lastly, keep an eye out for #BlackInTheIvory, the book. —BRITTANY KING

Find out about the new course Davis co-teaches, U.S. Anti-Black Racism, at uconn.edu/davis and keep up with her on Twitter or at blackinthetory.com.
An Indian American who is one of the world’s leading experts on the Civil War and slavery in the U.S., history professor Manisha Sinha has been one of the most sought after voices in the recurring and recent debate over removing Confederate statues. She told us why she believes we should take them down.

As a Civil War historian, it seems that I have been fighting against the myth of the Lost Cause throughout my career. As a Civil War historian, it seems that I have been fighting against the myth of the Lost Cause throughout my career. Histo-rians have long contested these entrenched falsehoods by holding Founding Fathers. These can be easily contextualized: they mean we should remove all statues such as those of slave-holding Founding Fathers. But Confederate statues deserve to be taken down.

But it has been only recently that protestors and city councils have started dismantling these monuments, to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Ave-nue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s to commemorate the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.

As a historian, I have never thought that taking down statues is erasing history. Statues are not history; they are monuments to hate all over the country, including Richmond’s Monument Avenue Confederate statues, after the murder of George Floyd. I would love to see the Confederate frieze that desecrated Stone Mountain in Georgia and serves as a gathering space for the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists removed. In fact, this frieze was completed and many Confederate statues were put up in the 1920s as symbols of “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the 20th century.
Simons taught UConn's first ASL course in 1986, when very few American universities offered classes in the language. She eventually finished her master's in deaf rehabilitation and a certificate in deaf education at New York University but kept teaching at UConn as demand for the courses grew, joining the faculty full time in 2002.

Now there are nine sections of the Intro to ASL course each fall, which readily fill up, as well as a long list of other courses, including classes on deaf artists, deaf women’s studies, and ASL literature, which Simons also teaches. Moreover, as of this fall students can earn a bachelor's degree in ASL Studies at UConn, making it just one of a half dozen or so schools in the country to offer that—and the only one in Connecticut.

The Class:
Simons uses a full-immersion approach in Intro to ASL class, starting from the very first day when she invokes her one rule—no talking, ever. The class is taught in silence. Students can only communicate by signing.

“They have to turn their voices off,” she says. “Sometimes I see them trying to mouth certain words. That’s them holding on to the English, and they need to focus on ASL.”

ASL is truly a foreign language for English speakers. It has its own grammar and syntax, which is completely different from English. Some signs do not even translate into English, says Simons. That is why students need to approach it like any other language they are learning.

They also have to let go of listening, she says. ASL is a visual language that they have to watch. Simons also teaches them to use their facial expressions and body language, which are key elements of ASL. Without them, the language loses much of its meaning, she says. Even how your hand is oriented, whether your palm faces someone or not, can change the meaning of a sign, she says.

Some people will have the signs on their hands but it doesn’t match what they are trying to say because it’s not on their body,” she says.

Teaching Style:
When asked to describe herself as a teacher, Simons says, “Pushy.” She has her students stand up when they sign. She stops them when they whisper to each other. She points out when a signing student is not using their facial expressions, which she equates to a speaking person using a monotone voice. She pushes the students, she says, because it is the only way they will ever learn the language.

“Students get frustrated, and I’ll ask how often they practice. If it’s an hour or two a week that’s just kind of a joke Honestly, You have to work at those skills,” she also describes herself as blunt, which she says is typical of deaf culture. When hearing people might equivocate, deaf people get straight to the point, she says. If you’ve gained weight or gone bald, a deaf person is likely to say so, she explains. That is part of deaf culture, which she teaches about in the class, so students understand better the world the language comes from.

Why We Want to Take It Ourselves:
ASL is now the third most studied language in the U.S. behind Spanish and French, says a 2016 study by the Modern Language Association. Its popularity speaks to the long list of reasons students understand better the world the language comes from.

Concern and Risk Don’t Prompt Prevention
In other unsurprising preliminary results, the study indicates that those of us who are most squeamish about germs and sickness are most likely to engage in preventive health behaviors, like frequent handwashing and disinfecting the living environment, during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

What is surprising and problematic, Shook says, is that the people most likely to be impacted by the virus are not necessarily those the most likely to be engaging in preventive behaviors.

“Older participants reported more concern about Covid, which makes sense—they’re at higher risk,” she says. “But when we looked at preventative health behaviors, we weren’t necessarily seeing that older adults were engaging more in preventive health behaviors. So where there was the concern, that wasn’t necessarily translating into the behaviors that could protect them.”

Shook and her team of researchers hope that their findings on how behavior and social attitudes change, and what factors influence those changes when people are faced with the threat of widespread disease, will help to develop new strategies and interventions for public health responses that could limit disease spread in future pandemics. —JACLYN SEVERANCE
Who Is the Class of 2024?

UConn’s Class of 2024 is like no other. There’s a lot they didn’t get to do (proms, graduations, first-year welcome parties), but let’s take a look at who they are as a group and what, as individuals, they’ve already done and — undaunted — still plan to do.

This group of 5,750 first-years is more diverse than former classes — 44.7% are nonwhite; about 18% have Hispanic/Latinx backgrounds, and about 7.5% are Black. They are highly accomplished in terms of high school ranking — more than half graduated in the top 10% of their high school classes. And circumstances have forced them to be more flexible and resilient than classes before them — rolling with every change and pandemic possibility thrown at them and then showing up in Storrs, Stamford, Hartford, Avery Point, and Waterbury ready for anything.

Most of all, they seem overwhelmingly grateful to be here, on actual campuses and virtual campuses among friends and friends-to-be — even if the experience looks a bit different than what they pictured a year ago.

Like so many first-years before them, they wrote their admissions essays and imagined the not-too-distant future, a future full of those heady college daydreams and all that became part of our daily lexicon — are a reminder of that recent social-embracing past and not a part of the picture, their essays — submitted shortly before “Covid” and “pandemic” became part of our daily lexicon — are a reminder of that recent social-embracing past and also the not-too-distant future, a future full of those heady college daydreams and all that ambitious career planning coming true. Here are excerpts from just a few of our favorites.

Illustrations by Katie Carey

A burning flame stands alone in an ocean of brown and blonde locks. Growing up, I hoped the flame would dim, stand out less in the crowd. Go unnoticed. However, over the years it has burned brighter, both inside and out. My story is not all that original, but still heartfelt. I have always been taunted for my bright red hair. You name it, I’ve been called it, from Carrot Top, Red, Ginger, Leprechaun, even Lucy. I hat-ed all the myths and stereotypes that others associated with my hair color — from being a hothead, flighty, clownish, even soulless. Did you know that in the Middle Ages redbheads were assumed to be witches and often put to death? Why could something like hair color generate such fear and attention? Adults told me how lucky I was to have such beautiful red hair while my peers taunted me endlessly. As you can imagine, this was pretty confusing as a kid and would shake any middle schooler’s confidence. I didn’t want to stand out. I just desperately wanted to blend in. Eventually, I even considered changing my hair color in hopes that the teasing would stop. The more my confidence diminished, the more I dreamed of becoming a brunette. In her senior year, my older sister, also a redhead, dyed her hair black. Like me, she probably just had enough. I imagine she must have wondered what life would be like without the stigma of being a ginger. But she didn’t seem any happier with jet black hair. I realized that changing hair color wasn’t the solution to insecurity. As I watched my sister get numerous re-dyes to return her hair to its natural color, I began to rethink why I let this one thing have so much power over me. Red hair isn’t who I am or what I care about, or value. Why was this such a big deal? It’s only hair. In the worst case I could cut it off and it would grow back. Why was I letting this mop on my head shape who I was, feel insecure, and make me wish I were invisible? Fortunately my sister’s experience helped me figure out that hair color was just one of many of my unique characteristics, like being funny, left-handed, or having blue eyes. The color of my hair didn’t mean I was ditzy like Lucy in “I Love Lucy” (what teenage has ever watched that show anyway?). As a matter of fact, I am one of the smartest kids in my class. I’m the opposite of scatterbrained. Math and science come naturally to me. I’m a very methodical thinker. I wouldn’t have been elected to class office if I was a hothead or disorganized. Animals at the rescue shelter wouldn’t bond with me if I were cold or soulless. With this new self-awareness I decided to face class office if I was a hothead or disorganized. Animals at the rescue shelter wouldn’t bond with me if I were cold or soulless. With this new self-awareness I decided to face the smartest kids in my class. I’m the opposite of scatterbrained. Math and science come naturally to me. I’m a very methodical thinker. I wouldn’t have been elected to class office if I was a hothead or disorganized. Animals at the rescue shelter wouldn’t bond with me if I were cold or soulless. With this new self-awareness I decided to face high school with a new attitude. Walking the halls, hearing the same old redhead jokes, I tossed my hair proudly and walked a little taller. Bring it on! I’m stronger because of my mane. I embraced who I am and am comfortable in my own skin. The journey of accepting my appearance has taught me to resist conformity as well as to celebrate other people’s differences. I now love my red hair and would never think about changing it. Everyone needs saving

I'm 17 years old and I have moved 17 different times. Along the way, I have learned that everyone has a story and everyone needs saving no matter what background or where they come from. I have learned how to respect people. I take responsibility for my actions, and to maintain a decent lifestyle in order to raise a family. I learned that no matter what, I will be faced with various cultures and diversity that has allowed me to see without color. I have learned to respect everyone, no matter how different, and use that in my daily life. My future is bright.

—Horacio Honoret, Hackensack, New Jersey, physiology and neurobiology major

on fire

“Bring it on! I'm stronger because of my mane.”

—Samantha Ceravolo, Syracuse, New York, biological sciences major
how I learned what a congressman was (or why I want to be an astrophysicist)

At 4 years old, I firmly believed that aliens had been to Earth. I have profound memories of sitting in my mom’s 2000 blue Chrysler Town & Country. The plush gray seats were juxtaposed by the dried-up lollipops on the carpeted floor. The seat belts and their frayed ends, kept me and my boisterous seat from sliding around the car (or flying out of it in the event of an accident). In terms of additional luxuries, we were blessed with the latest and greatest of technologies: an FM radio, which allowed for 6 presets and a 6-CD switcher. Quite often, the radio would be tuned to a classic rock station. It was the only genre allowed. Interestingly enough, the speakers in the third row (or as I liked to call it, the “way-back”) of the minivan were better than those of the second. And when my parents would think they were punishing me to sit in the third row, I was living life to its fullest. In a strange turn of events one night, my parents banished both me and my older sister to the third row. This grated on me, because I could no longer spread my feet across the palatial bench that was the way-back. On the radio, a classic. None other than “Stairway to Heaven” by Led Zeppelin. The intricate serenade of the song was accompanied by the concerned voice of my mother. “Dear god, what was that?” she questioned, barreling down I-95 at 70 mph, looking in the backseat at the two people in the backseat. “Stairway to Heaven” by Led Zeppelin? Not even “Stairway to Heaven” by Led Zeppelin. “...we only know about 4% of the universe. The other 96%? That’s up to your imagination. Or astrophysicists.”

judgment is a learned behavior

For two years I have worked for my town recreation center through their childcare programs. For two years I have chased laughing children, listened to their elaborate stories, and helped them create new friendships. This past summer, I was asked to work specifically with Jack, whose disability prevented him from the simplest of actions, such as placing a goldfish cracker in his mouth or standing up to use the bathroom. While I pride myself on my maturity and acceptance of others, I could learn a few things from the children I work with. From Jack I’ve learned to be more vocal, to ignore other people’s opinions. He is never slowed down by his disability. Perhaps it’s simply the naivete of childhood, but he is unfazed by the opinions of others. From Jack’s peers, I’ve learned not to make assumptions. It is human nature to judge others, but that trait is less prominent with children. The judgment of others is instilled in us at a young age; it is not a genetic trait. Since I began to work with Jack, I have found myself being less judgmental of those around me. I am less afraid to be curious and ask questions, even if those questions aren’t easy to address. Adults often stray away from difficult topics because they are afraid of confrontation or uncomfortable conversations. We should take notes from the children around us and learn to embrace our curiosity.

more near-death experiences than a mountain climber

I was born with a severe allergy to milk and dairy. It was discovered after I drank baby formula and went into anaphylactic shock. My parents rushed me to the hospital, where they received the diagnosis. It consumed my life. Double- and triple-checking ingredient labels. Refusing birthday cake, explaining exactly what would happen if I did eat it. Seeing the shock on people’s faces as they wonder how on earth a Boston cream donut could have such a fatal effect. Then hearing people’s expressions of sympathy. How they cannot imagine going through each day having to constantly be alert for the risk of death by cookies, crackers, or candy. There are certainly drawbacks to living with an allergy, however; it is not all bad. One small enjoyment is revealing that I have had more near-death experiences than the most adventurous of mountain climbers. On a more serious note, living with an allergy has taught me how to be prepared and how to handle myself in stressful situations. When I experience an allergy attack, the most common response from the people around me is panic, while mine is one of calm. I resolve the situation as quickly and efficiently as possible in order to prevent my untreated demos.

“Seeing the shock on people’s faces as they wonder how on earth a Boston cream donut could have such a fatal effect.”

—Joshua Ellenberg, Flemington, New Jersey, explorer major

“One small enjoyment is revealing that I have had more near-death experiences than the most adventurous of mountain climbers.”

—Analise Sanchez, Monroe, New York, mathematics major.

“...we only know about 4% of the universe. The other 96%? That’s up to your imagination. Or astrophysicists.”

—Joshua Ellenberg, Flemington, New Jersey, explorer major

Surviving

It was a chilly, sunny October morning, and I was volunteering at the Breast Cancer Walk in my community. As the momentum of people started to grow, the cold that was biting my fingertips started to dwindle, and I was warmed by the enthusiasm from people who I had never seen before. “Survivor” is what was written on most of their shirts. Witnessing such an incredible sight, watching these dazzling people celebrate their lives, made me come to a realization. Being a survivor is not just about the story you have to tell, but it is also about the person you have become because of it. Now I am capable of embracing the struggle of my own mental battles and preparing myself to surmount them. If these beautiful people could survive and whistle to the beat of a morning tune, so can I.

—Joshua Ellenberg, Flemington, New Jersey, explorer major

“...we only know about 4% of the universe. The other 96%? That’s up to your imagination. Or astrophysicists.”

—Analise Sanchez, Monroe, New York, mathematics major.
I am not being dramatic when I say sports has saved my life and is a part of my family. It’s my third parent, reminding me to go to bed on time, to be well rested for game day, nagging me to eat the proper food to fuel my body for the physical demands, encouraging me to be a good example for the younger girls looking up to me. It’s my third sibling, annoying me when all I want to do is sleep, cheering me on when I have a great game, being there for me in every aspect of life — from when I can vote or drive a car to whether or not colleges will recruit me for cross country to when I can leave Spanish class and go to physics — are no more than artificial constructs our brains have created to help us perceive the universe. And according to my brain, I am only five minutes into my hour-long run. When I run, I travel through all four dimensions of space, and that unfortunately includes the vertical one. The burning in my quads as I struggle my way up a seemingly endless hill brings me to question how this hill came to be. What movements of tectonic plates, vast glaciers, burning in my quads as I struggle my way up a seemingly endless hill brings me to question how this hill came to be. What movements of tectonic plates, vast glaciers, powers of erosion, or determination of man have joined forces to create this evil thing that now causes me so much pain? I comfort myself with the knowledge that, as I slowly rip apart the actin and myosin fibers in my muscles, I am actually benefiting myself. To make myself keep going I must remind myself that, as I sit at home later, binge watching “The Big Bang Theory,” the satellite cells in my muscles will not only repair the muscles but make them stronger than they were before. But if Einstein was correct, even before I begin my ascent, I have already finished the run. And in a different time that also exists right now, the hill does not even exist yet. Looking for a less confusing way to distract myself, I listen to the songs of a bird and marvel at the millions of years of evolution that have finely tuned the complex DNA sequences that ultimately made the bird’s ability to sing so beautiful. I run by the World War II Veterans Memorial and think of what could have been done to avoid such atrocities. I think of history’s impact on us all and wonder how the world would change had different decisions been made throughout history. I wonder how my life would be different or whether I would even be here at all had any part of history gone differently. Eventually my watch beeps to alert me I have run eight miles, and I realize I am only a block away from home. I have always been fascinated by the intricate workings of the world around me. As I climb the four steps up to my front door, I try to be observant and learn about how those stairs were assembled. Then I go inside and check the weather forecast to see when I will get to run again tomorrow and escape back into my thoughts. I want to continue learning in the hopes that one day, just maybe, I will learn something that no one has before. That future depends on the decision you make. But if the future already exists, can it still be changed?

—Cody Ottinger, Hopkinton, Massachusetts, engineering major

In school, I often encountered various racial slurs, but these experiences made me an advocate for inclusion and acceptance. When my classmates are left out during gym classes, I invite them to join my team. The beauty of leadership does not only rest on promoting and embracing diversity, but also on encompassing the ability to respect others through inclusion and creation of a positive climate. In my orthodox Jewish neighborhood, I saw myself reflecting on my own religious journey as I saw my neighbors walk to temples and dedicate the Sabbath to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship. Although I consider myself a devout Christian, the Jewish community’s extreme dedication to rest and worship.
Most kids who spent childhoods thumbing through the pages of the canary-yellow-framed National Geographics on their coffee tables, marveling at titular photos of exotic people and places, only imagined a day when they’d travel the world and see their own names attached to such stories and photos. Scott Wallace made it happen. Actively into his fifth decade of reporting, writing, and shooting stills and video for not just National Geographic but Smithsonian, Travel & Leisure, Harpers, and the like, the journalism professor illustrates his trade secrets and advice to students with real-life narratives that sound straight out of a big-screen blockbuster — one in which the pursuit of truth and justice is filled with as much trauma as triumph.

Telling us how he uses these exploits to illustrate the tenets he most wants to impart to his students, Wallace checks himself. “I don’t want to spend a lot of time talking about my own career, but I think I do have a rich trove of experiences to draw on.”

It’s an understatement. Wallace has traveled on assignment to the remotest of remote places on Earth and had a career most storytellers and adventurers only dream of. His recantations arrive humbly, however, with thoughtful pauses, counterquestions, and intellectual insights that serve to remind he’s usually on the other side of the interview.

“Everybody has a story worth telling, and our job as journalists is to pull it out of them,” he says while clicking through a computer slide show of favorite photos. His Oak Hall office brims with memorabilia, maps, magazines, and framed photos, including a prominent three — each of his grown sons. Wallace has an open, friendly demeanor made even less threatening by the slightly scruffy grooming one imagines is not just a pandemic thing. It’s hard to conjure a more inspiring teacher, or one with more entertaining, hard-won, and wise advice to impart.

By Lisa Stiepock
Photographs by Scott Wallace
Don’t Stop for Every Body
in the Road

For starters — literally — there’s this predicament from his first day as a professional reporter in 1983, just weeks out of J school and having made his way to civil-war-torn El Salvador with $50 in his pocket and a no-certain-paycheck “job” stringing for CBS News. On the way to Wallace’s crash pad, his driver swerves around a body in the road. Wallace suggests they should stop to help. “You don’t know who that person might be or why he is there,” says the driver, who does call for help when they reach their nearby destination. Wallace chalks it up as “my first lesson in how to survive in a war zone.”

The Truth Is on the Ground.
Not on the Web.

Exploring El Salvador and, later, Nicaragua and Guatemala, Wallace felt almost immediately not just the risk of what he was doing but the weight of it. “Firsthand experience is always the best way to distinguish between information and its opposite,” says Wallace. You naturally form opinions, but be ready to change those opinions in the face of facts gathered on the ground.

Know the Risks, Embrace the Friendships.

There are moments when reality is all too real. “It was in El Salvador in ’89, Election Day,” recalls Wallace. “Some friends and I enter a village where there has just been combat. The guerrillas have taken over, and we are interviewing these kids with rifles, asking them, ‘What are you doing?’ There was supposed to be a ceasefire today.” And then the army counterattacks. One of my friends is hit by a sniper bullet. He looks at me and I see the life go out of his eyes and he goes down. It was terrifying. I thought we were all going to die. I had no idea how we’d get out of there.” The rest of them did get out, and that type of shared experience and mission forges deep bonds, says Wallace. “The friends I made early on in Central America are still among my very best friends. There’s a camaraderie and solidarity in doing this kind of work. It is understood that everyone is taking a risk — I’m not talking about physical risk, though there is that too, yes, but about being willing to risk failure. In the conventional sense. There won’t be 401(k)s and you’ll have to wait for things like marriage and kids. And even then, well, trips come up, vacations get canceled.”

Keep a Bag Packed and Your Passport Current.

It was spring 2003; Wallace had just returned from a lengthy assignment in South America and was about to head off on a long-overdue family vacation when he says, “National Geographic calls and asks if I can head back to Brazil by the weekend.” The editor told him that Sydney Possuelo was leaving “any day now” on a trek into deep Amazonian wilderness. Also, “he has no idea when he’ll be back.” Which is how Wallace came to be one of the few humans alive — or dead for that matter — to have come within spearing distance of the “Arrow People,” one of the last uncontacted tribes living in the Amazon jungle.

Possuelo, explains Wallace, worked for Brazil’s indigenous affairs agency, making peaceful contact with such tribes to protect them from the advance of “civilization” into their territories. But Possuelo came to understand the gravity of what he was doing. An entire tribe could be felled by the common cold. He had a change of heart. “Once you make contact,” Possuelo told Wallace, “you begin the process of destroying their universe.” He convinced the government instead to protect these tribes’ territories. His current mission was to check on the wellness of the Arrow People without making contact with them.

Carve Out an Area of Expertise.

Possuelo, Wallace, and their guides, members of three recently contacted Amazonian tribes, spent nearly three months all told in the depths of the Amazon. They traveled first by boat and skiff up Amazonian tributaries, then bushwhacked for 20 days through tortuous terrain searching for signs of the Arrow People. When they found such signs — fresh footprints, a piece of coiled vine, and a chunk of masticated sugar cane — it was cause for excitement, and alarm. “Possuelo has led us into one of the most remote and uncharted places left on the planet. . . . this is the land of the mysterious Flecheiros, or Arrow People, a rarely
glimpsed Indian tribe known principally as deft archers disposed to unleashing poison-tipped projectiles to defend their territory against all intruders, then melting away into the forest,” wrote Wallace in the resulting August 2003 National Geographic cover story he calls “the turning point of my career.” After that, Wallace became a go-to guy for stories on indigenous people, an expertise that would bring him back to the jungle many times, but also find him at an incongruous Mexican restaurant in one of the Earth’s northernmost habitats, sharing chips and salsa with tribal leaders on the edge of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. And, yes, those trips often meant disappointing family.

If Wallace has any regrets, that’s the main one. “I am very sorry about that. I think my boys are proud of what I do despite the time together we lost out on; I’d like to think that they got more out of it. I don’t know. What I do know is that my sons all are international travelers, all are devoted to learning languages and exposing themselves to other places, other people, and other points of view.”

Get Off the Beaten Path, Way Off
Two years later Wallace found himself in another remote corner of the world on another arduous trek, this time through the nearly-never-traveled Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan, a mountainous region stretching between Tajikistan and Pakistan all the way to China, on a search for Marco Polo sheep with George Schaller, “the world’s most influential naturalist.” Wallace shakes his head in awe remembering how far beyond civilization they were. “It was so remote that in two months we never saw a single contrail from a plane. For two months we were never below 14,000 feet.” They crossed hundreds of miles of valleys and mountain passes on foot.

“This was a spectacular, otherworldly experience to have a glimpse into centuries-ago travel with yaks and horses, what it was like for most of human history. We met nomads in encampments. It was an amazing adventure, like something you might read in ‘The Hobbit.’”

Master as Many Skills as Possible
Some of the most critical — and spectacular — assignments Wallace earned came his way in part because he is that rare journalist as skilled at photography as he is at wordsmithing. Wallace planned it that way, twisting his grad school schedules and syllabi to do all the possible sequences: radio, TV, newspaper writing, and photography. “I had already set my sights on going to Central America, and I knew that to be able to do that as a freelancer I was going to have to bring as wide a range of skills to bear as I could.”

It paid off, and he’s bullish now about getting his students to understand and master the basics of photojournalism. “Just because everyone has a phone — and camera — in their pocket doesn’t mean everyone’s a photographer. I think it’s really important for students — no matter what they are planning to do — to be able to take a publishable photograph. So even in my writing classes, the assignments have a visual component.”

Find Your Personal Shangri-La
Photos always mattered to Wallace. His parents gave him his first camera at age 8. And there was a photo on the wall in his parents’ bedroom that held even more sway over him
than anything he saw in National Geographic. An image of a man on a mountaintop, his Scottish grandfather whom he never met.

“I was spellbound by the riddles the portrait held. Where was it taken? Under what circumstances? Was my grandfather a hardbitten explorer or a charlatan? Was it my imagination, or did he look like a man so seized by wanderlust that he felt boxed in by conventional life?” Wallace’s mother didn’t have the answers.

“My mother wasn’t yet five when she waved goodbye to him on a Hudson River pier as he boarded an ocean liner bound for Asia in 1930. He promised to come back rich and famous. He did not return.” She had a few clues, the photo, some published writings in which he claimed to have discovered an uncontacted tribe in Tibet. That’s right, wanderlust and uncontacted indigenous tribes. It’s not surprising Wallace was compelled to solve the mysteries surrounding this magnetic figure. By now he’d earned enough trust from editors that he was able to tailor two Himalayan assignments to this quest, from National Geographic Traveler in 2012 and a follow-up from Smithsonian Journeys Quarterly in 2015.

On the Traveler assignment, Wallace searched the wild landscapes of China’s Yunnan province. In a village renamed Shangri-La to match the place in James Hilton’s novel Lost Horizon, Wallace’s host tells him, “For Tibetans Shangri-La is not a real place but a feeling in our hearts. Everyone needs a personal Shangri-La.” Three years later for Smithsonian, high in an outpost along India’s border with Tibet, Wallace discovered the bungalow where his grandfather stayed during his quest. “It was the first time I ever walked into a room where I knew my grandfather had slept,” says Wallace, something about the moment still resonating today, still playing yearning and satisfaction against each other.

Journalism Is a Job that Matters
Not every story requires a remote mountainous trek to uncover an original source. But the proliferation of media has muddied journalistic waters. In this age of alternative facts and unexamined social media posting, it’s more difficult — and more crucial — to seek original sources and find firsthand experience, says Wallace. In his classes he addresses this issue by explaining, “This is a challenging profession, perhaps more challenging than ever in this environment, and it’s more necessary than ever for people to have fact-based journalism so they can function in a democracy. This job is important. It can shine light on important things.” You don’t have to go to the ends of the earth to find those things. Last
semester Wallace co-taught a publication practicum with his colleague Steve Smith, in which the class produced a documentary about the local undocumented immigrant community. “It’s an important story happening in our backyard. UConn students could go through four years and not know that in their midst are students who are undocumented, afraid that they and/or their parents will be deported,” says Wallace. Many of his students say they are in journalism to make a difference, and his classes make them believe they can. Camila Vallejo ’19 (CLAS) was just hired at NPR and feels prepared for her new challenge thanks in large part to Wallace. “As a seasoned features writer and war correspondent, he highlighted the good as well as the raw truth behind being a reporter. He taught me how to choose my words wisely, the importance of setting the scene in any piece, and never to rely on technology because a reporter’s notebook really is your best friend.”

For his part, Wallace says he tries to stress both the honor and responsibility a journalist has in telling other people’s stories. “It’s a challenging time to be a journalist, so these students deserve the best. I try to mentor them as best I can.”

Don’t Listen to Everything Your Teachers Tell You

And finally, in pursuit of that personal Shangri-La, don’t listen to everything your teachers tell you. In those final weeks of journalism graduate school Wallace’s professors at the University of Missouri told him not to bother trying to get work in Central America, that there were “hundreds of reporters trying for those spots overseas.” Instead of listening to them and applying for stateside jobs, he found his way into CBS News headquarters in New York and asked not for a paid job but for the “stringer” position that would pay by the story and get him the important press credential to tuck into his pocket with that $50 in cash. And he headed for El Salvador to “dodge bullets for chicken feed.” It was worth it, he says.

After all, it opened up the world and gave him a ringside seat to witness stories that may have otherwise gone unknown to the rest of us.
Checking my side and rearview mirrors, adjusting my seat belt, and scanning the environment around me, I peer into the road, ready for the drive ahead. Below me are the standard accelerator and brake pedals, and beside me is the shifter. Outside the car is darkness, with a wisp of chilliness in the air that causes my teeth to chatter.
Seated next to me in the passenger seat is Eric Jackson ‘04 MA, ‘08 Ph.D., tall and skinny and describing to me, in his calm, assured voice, the various parts and features of the car that are unfamiliar to me. When Jackson steps out of the car and I’m left alone, with other cars speeding by me and the city bustling around me, my nervousness heightens.

Normally, I wouldn’t be so nervous driving in a new car, but there’s something different about this Ford Focus. For starters, it is inside a building — the cityscape I see is projected on a wall. And if I were to pop the hood there would be an empty space where the engine used to be.

Why? Because this is not a car at all; rather it is a full-sized autonomous driving simulator. A simulator capable of running driver behavior experiments, which is what I’m here to test and discuss with Jackson, a civil engineering professor and executive director of the Connecticut Transportation Institute and its Connecticut Transportation Safety Research Center. As Jackson exits the car and starts to walk away, I ask him why we don’t have these cars on the road yet. He stares in awe as the cityscape starts to blur outside my windows.

The Long and Winding Road Ahead

Jackson projects a long timeline for adoption of the technology I’m testing. For most of us, he says, it may be something that the next generation gets to use and experience. “A lot of predictions we’re seeing are saying it will be 50 years before we have highly automated vehicles on the roadway.”

Jackson isn’t alone in that assessment. In a 2019 Slate magazine interview, Chris Urmson, CEO of self-driving start-up Aurora and former engineering manager for Google’s self-driving car program, predicted that people would start to see autonomous vehicles cruising down the road in five to 10 years, but widespread adoption would be “50 to 50 years” away.

Why so long? One of the reasons, says Jackson, is the public’s lack of trust in the technology. A 2018 Intel study found that only 21% of U.S. consumers would swap their current car for a self-driving vehicle, although a whopping 63% feel that the technology will be the “norm” in the next 50 years.

Jackson cites frequent AAA surveys on trust in autonomous vehicles. “What you’ll see is that on one survey, 78% will say they do not trust a vehicle, and then it’ll start to go down. Then a crash will happen, and everything gets set back significantly.”

Indeed, in a March 2020 AAA poll 84% of drivers said they would not feel comfortable in a fully autonomous car, and 72% said they would feel safer only if they could take over the wheel if something went wrong.

Personally, I can’t blame them.

As I travel down the simulated road in the enginieffor Fuss, I feel a pit of anxiety and dread. The car pulls up to a red light and my foot instinctively moves toward the brake pedal. When the light turns green, and the car turns right onto a new road, my hands tremble as I force them to stay in my lap.

I imagine what it would be like on a real road, with a real car, with real humans driving around me or crossing the street in front of me. What if the technology fails? Jackson acknowledges that pedestrian and passenger safety are one of the other bigger hurdles for lawmakers and insurance companies.

“States are largely left on their own to develop language in legislation, and we still, as a society, don’t know how far we need to go to keep people safe,” he says. “On the federal level, we have the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, but it’s their job to police and monitor; they don’t have the authority to enact legislation.”

When researchers speak about autonomy and cars, there are six levels of increasing complexity. According to the NHTSA, they are defined as zero, with nothing computerized (think of a classic or vintage car), to five, which is all computer, with no driver intervention.

At that, Jackson turns off the autonomous driving mode and I bring the simulator to a full stop, ending my foray into the virtual driving experiment.

Waiting to Level Up

In parting words Jackson throws out a glimmer of hope, clarifying just how far along the automated technology is.

“The car lurches forward without me touching anything, and the steering wheel starts to veer...”

---

“In the end, it all comes down to consumer tastes and demand. You can’t sell something that people just don’t want yet.”

—Eric Jackson, Connecticut Transportation Institute

in production cars is automation level two, where you see lane assist, autonomous parallel parking, and a lot of the features we’re seeing in Tesla. The testing being done by Google and Uber on test tracks or certain roads is between a three and a four, because it always needs driver intervention in case there’s a glitch.”

Jackson says he is hopeful about the future, even if public perception and legislation aren’t quite there.

“You look at every generation, and they consume and adopt technology different. My parents just got rid of their flip phones and switched to smartphones, but my generation was on smartphones almost instantly,” says Jackson. “In the end, it all comes down to consumer tastes and demand. You can’t sell something that people just don’t want yet.”

Walking toward the parking lot and my own car, I reflect on Jackson’s hope for the future, and the thoughts bring me right back to that pseudo driver’s seat and my heart starts racing again. Maybe 50 years is the perfect amount of time to get this right.
met his wife, Jeanette, 11 years ago in a UConn-style meet-cute — they were both grabbing coffee. "But it turned out Donatti was not actually Superman," he says.

Donatti began working in a pizza place in Greenwich, and I loved the pace. It’s never stopping.”

Coffee and Cubanos

Breno Donatti ’14 (BGS) met his wife, Jeanette, 11 years ago in a UConn-style meet-cute — they were both grabbing coffee in the Starbucks in Ferguson Library. Lucky thing, too, because back then Donatti barely had time to look up from his books; he was carrying a full load of courses at UConn Stamford while also running a farm-to-table restaurant. “I felt like Superman,” he says.

Donatti's love for the restaurant industry — everything from fine dining to beach shacks — is part of the reason he ended up at UConn. “When I moved to the US from Brazil at age 18, I began working in a pizza place in Greenwich, and I loved the pace. It’s never stopping.” But it turned out Donatti was not actually Superman, and full-time school mixed (continued on page 39)
Coffee and Cubanos

(continued from page 36) with full-time work promise just a little too much. “It was the first time I had to withdraw from a course in my life,” Donatti says. “And also my first realization that I can’t do everything.” Lesson learned: Sometimes you have to sharpen your focus on the things that matter. That day in the library, Donatti focused on Jeanette.

And okay, he also focused on coffee. What, was he going to leave the entire restaurant business behind because of one little dropped class? Donatti figured he just needed to find the right blend. “Coffee felt natural, like I could dive right into it,” he says. “I pulled my savings to buy a little rundown, in the middle-of-nowhere deli.” That was Winfield Deli, which had been around for 90 years. Breno and Jeanette re-named it Winfield Street Coffee. They saved more than the name. When renovating, they came across decades-old sandwich recipes—Cu-banos, chicken cutlets, bagels and lox. “I fried the lox included on many of them on the menu,” Donatti says. The combination of old and new was a winner. Patrons loved it, so much so that locations have been springing up around southeastern Connecticut including, in 2019, one in Stamford in the very spot where Breno and Jeanette had first bumped into each other. “We’re right downtown, and the library is a big community hub,” Donatti points out. “One of the goals was to make it a space where people would want to be. It felt like the dream of my life was fulfilled.” And just two and a half months later, the whole game changed. Coffee shops, libraries, entire college campuses shut down. The quick pace that Donatti loved about the restaurant business slowed to a crawl, and in the eerie quiet, he had a bad feeling about what was coming. “From the beginning, I thought this was more than a health pandemic. When this is all said and done, we’ll have tens of millions of people unemployed, and people will need basic things—like food.” With that realization, Donatti says, “I wanted a direction that would not only keep Winfield Street Coffee in business but also keep the community fed: a true win-win.”

“We thought, ‘Hey, our average ticket is about 15 dollars,’” he says. The cost of one more additional meal—a sandwich and a coffee in a to-go container—was just under five bucks in stock. So Donatti, “If we could encourage people to add a little—a cup of coffee or pastrami—we promise to donate it back to the community.”

For every 20 dollars spent, Giving Back—the program Winfield Street Coffee created—donates a meal to one of four different shelters in southeastern Connecticut where needs have spiked during the pandemic. Donatti has also reached out to other local businesses to get them to do the same. Customers have responded so enthusiastically, says Donatti, that “some of them even volunteer to deliver the food package themselves.”

It’s caught on fast. In the first two months, Giving Back committed more than 2,000 meals—and, defying all expectations, Winfield Street Coffee’s sales have been on an upswing. “We’ve seen a 4 to 6% increase every week since May 15,” Donatti said in August. Still, while the bottom line certainly counts, it’s not the only consideration. “I want to make sure we keep people and fulfill a need in the community,” Donatti says. “We’re flexible. If things change again and our space is used for testing sites or whatever, we just want to make sure we’re providing value to the community. Without providing value, there’s no reason to exist,” he says.

Still, after all, there’s one thing he’s learned in the past year, it’s to be ready for anything.—NAOMI SHULMAN
I think, when I joined, we had about 30,000 Instagram followers. When I left, we were closing in on a million. In three years we went from 13 retail stores to opening the 75th the week I left. I felt that our store was in Grand Central Station.

Why did she leave? Since high school, she had set her sights on two brands she wanted to work on: Target and Vineyard Vines — check and check. She started at Target, and that should be next. “I thought I would really love to take a job for a purpose-driven brand with a global footprint, and I would love for that job to be with Lego. And I learned, by chance, that they were hiring for a director of content management, which sounds like someone focused on digital content.”

In Our Stars

It was perfect timing because her husband, Chris Hall ’08 (CLAS), had just gotten a job as a high school counselor in Simsbury, Connecticut, and the Lego office is in Enfield, Connecticut. “So all the stars kind of perfectly aligned to bring us back,” she says. One of Hall’s first challenges was addressing the perception that Lego was for girls. “You want to meet kids where they like to play,” she says. They launched Super Mario and Minecraft sets. “You can actually build Minecraft designs out of Lego bricks. I think there will always be a physical aspect to play,” she says. “Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.” Lego is now the biggest brand on YouTube, says Hall. “Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.” Lego is now the biggest brand on YouTube, says Hall. “Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.”

Lego provides a solution to both of these needs, she says. Hall has no problem selling the Lego office is in Enfield, Connecticut, and the Lego office is in Enfield, Connecticut. “So all the stars kind of perfectly aligned to bring us back,” she says. One of Hall’s first challenges was addressing the perception that Lego was for girls. “You want to meet kids where they like to play,” she says. They launched Super Mario and Minecraft sets. “You can actually build Minecraft designs out of Lego bricks. I think there will always be a physical aspect to play,” she says. “Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.” Lego is now the biggest brand on YouTube, says Hall. “Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.” Lego is now the biggest brand on YouTube, says Hall. “Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.”

The Yellow Brick Road

Hall’s path to brickwork began in UConn’s School of Business, where she was a marketing major before she switched to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to study advertising and public relations. She found work that allowed an ad agency after graduation and, wanting to try her hand at fashion, ended up gaining social media experience at a remarkably good time.

“I moved to New York City to work for a digital agency, leading their fashion social media team. We worked with some really exciting brands like Banana Republic and did the launch of Target in Canada, which was a wild ride.”

She moved in-house then to lead the social media campaigns for Vineyard Vines, which remarkably managed to convince men it was fashionable to wear lime green pants with pink whales on them.

“Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.” Lego is now the biggest brand on YouTube, says Hall. “Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.”

Lego is now the biggest brand on YouTube, says Hall. “Something you can touch and feel is the pride of creation comes through a physical connection.”

There’s a dire need for more Black scholarly work, particularly at the Ivy League level. Harvard is a complicated place with a complicated history, given that it was built by slaves,” says Graveline. “And we as Black scholars have a contentious relationship with the university,” which is why she knew she had to be a part of the Freedom School.

“Freedom School: A Seminar on Theory and Praxis for Black Studies in the United States” is a two-semester, one-credit course established at Harvard last fall by Graveline’s colleague and friend Najha Zigbi-Johnson (pictured at left, above, with Graveline). This course, says Graveline, “demstrates that there’s knowledge coming from our communities and our experiences, and exchanging that knowledge and experience with each other is still a scholarly exercise.”

Grounded in the framework of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Schools that provided a supplemental education in history and social justice for African American youth, it is student-led and features a nontraditional curriculum steeped in Afro-surrealism and Afro-futurism. Its pièce de résistance is a 94-page literary magazine that Graveline co-edits. The poems, essays, stories, and artwork come from writers and artists “across arbitrary divisions of race, class, gender, religion and sexuality,” reads the foreword.

Graveline and her Freedom School cohorts hope the magazine serves as a call to action to create, inspire, and imagine without constraint. And as a new semester begins, she says that while this moment is filled with uncertainty there is also opportunity. “I’m a strong advocate for finding beauty in uncertainty and the opportunity for un-predictability,” she said. “It is scary, and overwhelming, but it also means all the possibilities in the world — and there’s a freedom in that.” — MAYA A. MOORE ’18 (CLAS)
It wasn’t hard to tell that he was emotionally hurt, embarrassed and humbled. And maturing right before our eyes. It was that night, that moment, that we saw a different sort: a time before the Ray Allens and Richard Hamiltons and Kehinde Balogun wore UConn uniforms, a time before four NCAA championships, a time before seven Big East Tournament titles.

As the UConn basketball beat writer for the Journal Inquirer in Manchester, Connecticut, I was on the scene when Cliff Robinson arrived in Storrs in 1985, a time when UConn’s main goal was to avoid playing in the 8–9 elimination game of the Big East Tournament. At the time, Cliff was not the kind of recruit who usually ended up at UConn — at six feet ten, 225 pounds, strong and agile, he was a big-time talent who could have gone to Oklahoma, or Marquette, or Syracuse.

Cliff was a talent level above the recruits UConn had been getting, and he knew it. Meninga and intimating, he could be downright surly at times. That changed somewhat when a strong-willed Jim Calhoun took over as head coach in Cliff’s sophomore season, threatening to “send his ass back to Buffalo” if his attitude didn’t adjust. Even though Cliff laid the groundwork for the UConn that was to come to helping the team win an NIT championship in 1988, earning all-conference status twice and scoring more than 1,600 points, he was never fully embraced by some UConn fans, who unfairly placed most of the blame on him when the team failed to make the NCAA Tournament.

The 1989 NBA draft at the Felt Forum in Madison Square Garden, however, was destined to be Cliff’s night to shine. The Connecticut sports media was in attendance in full force, ready to cover the story of UConn’s first-ever NBA first-round draft choice.

At that time, the players invited to the draft sat in the front row, leaving their seats to come onstage as their names were called. As the draft delved deeper into the first round, more and more of those seats were empty, until the first round ended and Robinson was alone in the front row — with players of clearly lesser talent selected before him. Cliff waited no longer but got up and bolted out of the Felt Forum, walking out into the rainy New York City night, with the entire Connecticut media contingent following. As we called out “Cliff!” he stopped and slowly turned around, while we apprehensive reporters approached cautiously, wary that an angry Cliff Robinson might explode. But it was a totally different Cliff Robinson who stood in the rain and spoke to the media that night — soft-spoken and sincere. He spoke to the media that night — soft-spoken and sincere.

Cliff Robinson the Husky in the 1988 NIT championship game in Madison Square Garden; as a Blazer; and a 2014 “Survivor.”

Go to s.uconn.edu/fall2020trivia or flip to p. 48 to see if you know as much as UConn Trivia King Tom Breen ’00 (CLAS).

1. Which of these is not one of the 81 activities the Student Alumni Association suggests should be on every UConn underclassmen’s bucket list?
   A: Visit the Storrs Monument and pay tribute to legendary Huskies at the New Storrs Cemetery
   B: Watch or build a float for the Homecoming parade, and then enjoy the SUBOG carnival afterward
   C: Learn the words to the UConn Fight Song and sing it at a game
   D: Attend your professors’ office hours

2. Which residence hall at Storrs was originally intended to be a hotel?
   A: Shippow Hall
   B: Charter Oak Apartments
   C: Hilltop Halls
   D: Holcomb Hall

3. Who were the UConn 49ers?
   A: The first postwar graduating class
   B: A life and drum corps
   C: The nickname of the 1949 men’s basketball team
   D: A notoriously rowdy student cheering section made up of World War II veterans

4. During the 1918–20 flu pandemic, which of the following was not a requirement for students at UConn?
   A: Maintain 1000 cubic feet of air between people
   B: Bathe at least twice a week
   C: Do not close another person’s tobacco pouch with your teeth
   D: Do not attend dances in Willimantic

Congrats to Ajay Madkekar ’06 (BUS, CLAS), who welcomed his first child in April in New York City. They’re both thankful for the healthcare heroes who safeguarded Reya Pearl Madkekar’s arrival from being negatively impacted by the pandemic. Reya is excited to join the next generation of Huskies! • A hockey of a different sort: Jeffrey (Jeffrey) Villar ’06 MA, a mother of five who teaches second grade at Southeast Elementary School in Mansfield, Connecticut, was selected last June as the Ilford’s designated “teacher on the trail,” a year-round role created to extract educational opportunities from the visiting assistant professor in HDFS, has joined the volunteer board of directors of CASA of Southern Connecticut, which advocates for the best interests of children who have experienced abuse or neglect. She was formerly an attorney at the Children’s Law Center of Connecticut and at the law firm of Brown, Paindiris, & Scott, LLP. She lives in Westbrook, Connecticut, with her husband and their three children.

Peter Vaughn ’05 MBA was promoted to director of insurance operations by Third Coast Underwriters.

Ajay Madkekar ’06 (BUS, CLAS) was promoted to senior director of Global Food Safety & Quality at Subway at the company’s Milford, Connecticut, headquarters.

When former UConn basketball star Cliff Robinson sadly passed away in late August at an all-too-young 53 years old, it undoubtedly sent the thoughts of longtime UConn fans hurtling back to a much different time period in the history of the program — a time before the Ray Allens and Richard Hamiltons and Kehinde Balogun wore UConn uniforms, a time before four NCAA championships, a time before seven Big East Tournament titles.

As the UConn basketball beat writer for the Journal Inquirer in Manchester, Connecticut, I was on the scene when Cliff Robinson arrived in Storrs in 1985, a time when UConn’s main goal was to avoid playing in the 8–9 elimination game of the Big East Tournament. At the time, Cliff was not the kind of recruit who usually ended up at UConn — at six feet ten, 225 pounds, strong and agile, he was a big-time talent who could have gone to Oklahoma, or Marquette, or Syracuse.

Cliff was a talent level above the recruits UConn had been getting, and he knew it. Meninga and intimating, he could be downright surly at times. That changed somewhat when a strong-willed Jim Calhoun took over as head coach in Cliff’s sophomore season, threatening to “send his ass back to Buffalo” if his attitude didn’t adjust. Even though Cliff laid the groundwork for the UConn that was to come to helping the team win an NIT championship in 1988, earning all-conference status twice and scoring more than 1,600 points, he was never fully embraced by some UConn fans, who unfairly placed most of the blame on him when the team failed to make the NCAA Tournament.

The 1989 NBA draft at the Felt Forum in Madison Square Garden, however, was destined to be Cliff’s night to shine. The Connecticut sports media was in attendance in full force, ready to cover the story of UConn’s first-ever NBA first-round draft choice.

At that time, the players invited to the draft sat in the front row, leaving their seats to come onstage as their names were called. As the draft delved deeper into the first round, more and more of those seats were empty, until the first round ended and Robinson was alone in the front row — with players of clearly lesser talent selected before him. Cliff waited no longer but got up and bolted out of the Felt Forum, walking out into the rainy New York City night, with the entire Connecticut media contingent following. As we called out “Cliff!” he stopped and slowly turned around, while we apprehensive reporters approached cautiously, wary that an angry Cliff Robinson might explode. But it was a totally different Cliff Robinson who stood in the rain and spoke to the media that night — soft-spoken and sincere. He spoke to the media that night — soft-spoken and sincere.

Cliff Robinson the Husky in the 1988 NIT championship game in Madison Square Garden; as a Blazer; and a 2014 “Survivor.”

Go to s.uconn.edu/fall2020trivia or flip to p. 48 to see if you know as much as UConn Trivia King Tom Breen ’00 (CLAS).

1. Which of these is not one of the 81 activities the Student Alumni Association suggests should be on every UConn underclassmen’s bucket list?
   A: Visit the Storrs Monument and pay tribute to legendary Huskies at the New Storrs Cemetery
   B: Watch or build a float for the Homecoming parade, and then enjoy the SUBOG carnival afterward
   C: Learn the words to the UConn Fight Song and sing it at a game
   D: Attend your professors’ office hours

2. Which residence hall at Storrs was originally intended to be a hotel?
   A: Shippow Hall
   B: Charter Oak Apartments
   C: Hilltop Halls
   D: Holcomb Hall

3. Who were the UConn 49ers?
   A: The first postwar graduating class
   B: A life and drum corps
   C: The nickname of the 1949 men’s basketball team
   D: A notoriously rowdy student cheering section made up of World War II veterans

4. During the 1918–20 flu pandemic, which of the following was not a requirement for students at UConn?
   A: Maintain 1000 cubic feet of air between people
   B: Bathe at least twice a week
   C: Do not close another person’s tobacco pouch with your teeth
   D: Do not attend dances in Willimantic
Crystal Dangerfield ’20 (CLAS) was named the 2020 WNBA Rookie of the Year. Dangerfield was selected 16th overall in the 2020 WNBA draft, is the first second-round pick to earn Rookie of the Year honors. She is the sixth former University of Connecticut (UCONN) player to receive the award, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.

Dangerfield ranked 13th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg), third in free-throws made and sixth in field goal percentage (47.3). Collier ranked first in free-throw percentage (92.2%), 14th overall in minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield was sixth in assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (1.0 spg), third in free-throw percentage (92.2%), and fifth in field goal percentage (47.3). Both Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.

Dangerfield ranked 13th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg), third in free-throws made and sixth in field goal percentage (47.3). Collier ranked first in free-throw percentage (92.2%), 14th overall in minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield was sixth in assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (1.0 spg), third in free-throw percentage (92.2%), and fifth in field goal percentage (47.3). Both Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.

Dangerfield ranked 13th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg), third in free-throws made and sixth in field goal percentage (47.3). Collier ranked first in free-throw percentage (92.2%), 14th overall in minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield was sixth in assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (1.0 spg), third in free-throw percentage (92.2%), and fifth in field goal percentage (47.3). Both Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.

Dangerfield ranked 13th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg), third in free-throws made and sixth in field goal percentage (47.3). Collier ranked first in free-throw percentage (92.2%), 14th overall in minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield was sixth in assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (1.0 spg), third in free-throw percentage (92.2%), and fifth in field goal percentage (47.3). Both Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.

Dangerfield ranked 13th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg), third in free-throws made and sixth in field goal percentage (47.3). Collier ranked first in free-throw percentage (92.2%), 14th overall in minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield was sixth in assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (1.0 spg), third in free-throw percentage (92.2%), and fifth in field goal percentage (47.3). Both Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.

Dangerfield ranked 13th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg), third in free-throws made and sixth in field goal percentage (47.3). Collier ranked first in free-throw percentage (92.2%), 14th overall in minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield was sixth in assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (1.0 spg), third in free-throw percentage (92.2%), and fifth in field goal percentage (47.3). Both Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.

Dangerfield ranked 13th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg), third in free-throws made and sixth in field goal percentage (47.3). Collier ranked first in free-throw percentage (92.2%), 14th overall in minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield was sixth in assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (1.0 spg), third in free-throw percentage (92.2%), and fifth in field goal percentage (47.3). Both Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.

Dangerfield ranked 13th in the WNBA in scoring (16.2 ppg), third in free-throws made and sixth in field goal percentage (47.3). Collier ranked first in free-throw percentage (92.2%), 14th overall in minutes per contest. Among WNBA rookies, Dangerfield was sixth in assists (3.6 apg); and tied for fourth in steals (1.0 spg), third in free-throw percentage (92.2%), and fifth in field goal percentage (47.3). Both Dangerfield and Collier are teammates on the Minnesota Lynx, and the franchise has won a league-best five Rookie of the Year awards, including three at UConn.

Dangerfield received 44 of the 47 votes from a national panel of sportswriters and broadcasters, while Collier received 3 votes. Two voters abstained.
The Human Rights Institute (HRI) at UConn is among the nation’s leading academic centers. Home to one of the largest majors in the country, experiential learning programs, and innovative research on human rights, HRI is effecting change around the world.

Thanks to the generosity of Gary Gladstein ’66 (CLAS), ’08 (HON) and Dr. Phyllis Gladstein, gifts to the Human Rights Institute will be matched dollar-for-dollar, up to $1 million, over the next three years. Give today at s.uconn.edu/hri.

The Human Rights Institute (HRI) at UConn is among the nation’s leading academic centers. Home to one of the largest majors in the country, experiential learning programs, and innovative research on human rights, HRI is effecting change around the world.

Thanks to the generosity of Gary Gladstein ’66 (CLAS), ’08 (HON) and Dr. Phyllis Gladstein, gifts to the Human Rights Institute will be matched dollar-for-dollar, up to $1 million, over the next three years.

Give today at s.uconn.edu/hri.
**Keep That News Coming! We Want to Hear From You.**

- To submit a Class Note, email: alumni-news@uconnalumni.com
- Or write to: Alumni News & Notes
  UConn Foundation
  2384 Alumni Drive
  Unit 3053
  Storrs, CT 06269

Submissions may be edited for clarity or length.

---

**Tom’s Trivia Answers**


---

**Diagnosis**

- **Sophia Oronoz** ’15 Ph.D., ’15 MBA launched The Sophia Consulting Firm in Brooklyn, New York. She was recently honored with the Healthcare Businesswomen’s Association Spark Award and a Congressional Letter of Recognition for receiving the Face2Face Leadership Award. She also joined the boards of two growth-stage life science companies: BioSortsa Pharmaceuticals and BlueCloud by Healthcare-CarePoint. **Michael A. Lipson ’13 (CLAS)** joined Robinson+Cole as an associate in the firm’s Real Estate and Development Group in the Boston office.

**Notes**

- **Tara Amatrud** ’13 6th Year is the new principal of Marine Science Magnet High School in Groton, Connecticut.

- **Danielle Taylor** ’14 (ED), ’15 MA, fourth grade teacher in Windsor Public Schools, was named a 2020 Fund for Teachers Fellow. She will spend 2021 in Bali, exploring mindfulness and emotional regulation techniques to improve students’ social and emotional regulation and support those with traumatic backgrounds.

- **Jordan Oriovisky** ’14 MA was appointed to the football coaching staff at the University of Albany.

- **Byron Bunda** ’14 (BUS) was promoted to team lead for the North America West Region at CloudHedas, a company for independent hosts and hoteliers. He is grateful for T’Conn’s Professional Sales Leadership Program, led by Bill Ryan, which gave him the tools to succeed in CloudHedas’ sales organization.

- **Nisha Vasan** ’15 JD was named director of employee relations at WeWork. She previously worked in employee relations at The Walt Disney Co. Law school classmate **Meghan E. Fitzgerald** ’15 JD and Ashley A. Noël ’15 JD were named shareholders at Boyle Shugruehny Law. Fitzgerald is based in Boston and focuses on defending environmental, personal injury, and construction defect claims. Noël works in Hartford, concentrating in insurance coverage and extracontractual liability.

**Eau de Herring**

Kimberly Grendzinski ’16 (CAHNR) begins every workday at NYC’s Central Park Zoo by lugging bucket after bucket of fish, some 100 pounds, up two flights of stairs. Waiting at the top of the stairs is a hungry mob of heckling penguins, who crow her the moment she starts tossing hoops. As they try to snap the prizes right out of her hands, they often pinch her forearms and leave a trail of bruises. “The penguins can be jerks, though lovable jerks,” she says, admitting to steaking time from the black-and-white to train the seals and sea lions, whose smarts make them her favorite species.

Since graduating with a global health science degree, Grendzinski, 26, has worked at Brooklyn’s Prospect Park Zoo and now at Manhattan’s Central Park Zoo, with its melee of penguins, puffins, and seals. After working with UConn’s many domestic animals, she found her calling with exotic during a summer internship at Bridgeport’s Beardsley Zoo, where she dug up rocks to build a new exhibit and trained a bison.

“I was coming home every day smelling awful, and I was like, ‘This is what I want to do.’” Zookeeping is demanding, physical work, but it is also intellectually challenging, which she loves. Zookeepers keep a watchful eye on their animals because the smallest behavior changes could signal a health problem. For Grendzinski, that means tracking 74 penguins in a nearly 100-foot-long pool.

“It’s like I have a catalogue in my head,” she says. “Zookeeping takes a lot more mental focus than most people think. It’s not just playing with animals all day.”

---

**Job Envy**

**Notes**

- **Grace Vallo** ’17 (BUS) wrote in July to say “yesterday I quit my corporate job. I’m taking the biggest leap I may ever take. This road is so unknown, and I’m not sure where it will take me. I’ve never felt so scared or excited. I’ve never felt more judged. I’ve never felt more proud. I’ve never felt more free. I’ve never felt so liberated.” Vallo left her job in the Market Research Department at Travelex for her dream career — food blogger. Find her favorite fall recipes, including Squash, Cider Caramelized Onion & Chorizo Pizza and Whipped Shortbread & Pumpkin Spice Cookie Sandwiches, at tastefullygrace.com.

---

**In Memoriam**

Please visit s.uconn.edu/octobits2020 to find obituaries for alumni and faculty. And please share news of alumni deaths and obituaries with UConn Magazine by sending an email to alumni-news@uconnalumni.com or writing to Alumni News & Notes, UConn Foundation, 2384 Alumni Drive Unit 3053, Storrs, CT 06269.

---

**College of Education and Human Services Outstanding Educator West by Virginia University, where she teaches courses in educational psychology, statistics, and special and gifted education.**

- **Dylan Graetz, ’14 MD, ’14 MPH,** received his medical degree from the University of Vermont. He is a senior benefits consultant at Boyle Shugruehny Law and a senior benefits consultant at Boyle Shugruehny Law and a senior benefits consultant at Boyle Shugruehny Law and a senior benefits consultant at Boyle Shugruehny Law.

---

**Notes**

- **Jordan Oriovisky** ’14 MA was appointed to the football coaching staff at the University of Albany.

- **Byron Bunda** ’14 (BUS) was promoted to team lead for the North America West Region at CloudHedas, a company for independent hosts and hoteliers. He is grateful for T’Conn’s Professional Sales Leadership Program, led by Bill Ryan, which gave him the tools to succeed in CloudHedas’ sales organization.

- **Nisha Vasan** ’15 JD was named director of employee relations at WeWork. She previously worked in employee relations at The Walt Disney Co. Law school classmate **Meghan E. Fitzgerald** ’15 JD and Ashley A. Noël ’15 JD were named shareholders at Boyle Shugruehny Law. Fitzgerald is based in Boston and focuses on defending environmental, personal injury, and construction defect claims. Noël works in Hartford, concentrating in insurance coverage and extracontractual liability.

**Eau de Herring**

Kimberly Grendzinski ’16 (CAHNR) begins every workday at NYC’s Central Park Zoo by lugging bucket after bucket of fish, some 100 pounds, up two flights of stairs. Waiting at the top of the stairs is a hungry mob of heckling penguins, who crow her the moment she starts tossing hoops. As they try to snap the prizes right out of her hands, they often pinch her forearms and leave a trail of bruises. “The penguins can be jerks, though lovable jerks,” she says, admitting to steaking time from the black-and-white to train the seals and sea lions, whose smarts make them her favorite species.

Since graduating with a global health science degree, Grendzinski, 26, has worked at Brooklyn’s Prospect Park Zoo and now at Manhattan’s Central Park Zoo, with its melee of penguins, puffins, and seals. After working with UConn’s many domestic animals, she found her calling with exotic during a summer internship at Bridgeport’s Beardsley Zoo, where she dug up rocks to build a new exhibit and trained a bison.

“I was coming home every day smelling awful, and I was like, ‘This is what I want to do.’” Zookeeping is demanding, physical work, but it is also intellectually challenging, which she loves. Zookeepers keep a watchful eye on their animals because the smallest behavior changes could signal a health problem. For Grendzinski, that means tracking 74 penguins in a nearly 100-foot-long pool.

“It’s like I have a catalogue in my head,” she says. “Zookeeping takes a lot more mental focus than most people think. It’s not just playing with animals all day.”

---

**For more of our interview with Grendzinski, go to s.uconn.edu/zookeeper.**