THE POWER OF IDEAS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO ANNUAL REPORT 2007

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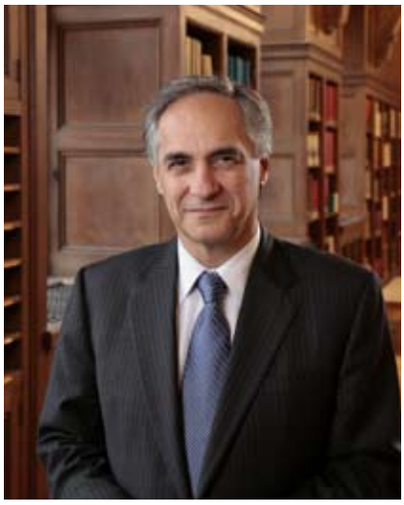

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Over the past year—my first as president of the University of Chicago—I have been engaged in conversations with faculty, deans, trustees, students, staff, alumni, and others about the future of the University. As we look ahead to how the University will define its agenda in the coming decades, several themes consistently have emerged. In this report you will find some early examples of how we are acting to realize our aspirations and how we are continuing to work to set the direction for the University.

The University's culture of rigorous, unrelenting inquiry, in which bold ideas are constantly proposed and tested, creates an intellectual environment that is exciting and enriching for students and faculty alike. This distinctive culture empowers our faculty and alumni to challenge conventional wisdom, define new disciplines, and make creative contributions to almost every domain of human endeavor.

Support for Faculty and Students

Our ability to sustain this culture requires us to seek the most original, agenda-setting faculty and students who have the capacity to most benefit from and contribute to our distinctive academic environment. To that end, we have focused our attention on support for faculty and students, and two new programs launched this past year merit particular mention.

The Odyssey Scholarship Program, initially funded by a $100-million gift from an anonymous alumnus of the College, will enable the most talented undergraduate students, no matter their economic circumstances, to participate more fully in the uniquely rigorous and powerful education provided in the College. We have been challenged to raise an additional $200 million to fully endow the program, which goes into effect in fall 2008. Because of the importance of continuing to enhance our financial aid programs, we have committed further to raise $100 million, bringing our fund-raising commitment for undergraduate financial aid to $400 million.

The University also committed an additional $50 million over six years to ensure that incoming doctoral students in the humanities and social sciences will be among the most generously supported in all of higher education. The Graduate Aid Initiative will allow us to continue to attract emerging scholars who have the potential to shape their academic fields.

Evolution of Academic Programs

Of course, the University is more than simply a collection of very talented individuals. We must foster our research and educational environment to allow us to lead and to respond to paradigm shifts in a wide range of academic fields and to capitalize on and enhance our culture of porous disciplinary boundaries.

An area that exemplifies swiftly changing academic boundaries is computation and applied mathematics. The University is making significant new investments in these fields, enhancing the growing capacity of the University's Computation Institute. These investments position us to play a leadership role in the reconceptualization of questions and modes of analysis in several fields due to the technological advances in the capacity to manage massive data sets and immense amounts of information. Complex structural problems ranging from climate change and energy policy, to human disease and its relation to the human genome, to economic and sociopolitical interactions are examples of areas that we expect to advance.

The construction of the Reva and David Logan Center for Creative and Performing Arts, to be completed in 2011, is a major event in the evolution of our arts programs. By bringing multiple forms of artistic expression and inquiry together under one roof, it will foster connections of critical thought with performance and production in our curriculum and research, and allow us to pioneer new ideas and art forms.

Engagement beyond the Campus

Our ongoing dialogue also has raised possibilities for further engagement beyond the University's Chicago campus. We have a long history of pioneering work in Chicago, particularly in the South Side communities, and we expect our work in social service, education, the arts, and health care to deepen and grow. We also are exploring how to increase our presence and visibility across the globe, building on the strengths of our Graduate School of Business programs in Europe and Asia and the distinctive foreign study programs of the College.

Attaining these successes and our many additional priorities requires the generous assistance of our many supporters. The University's alumni and friends met the challenge in fiscal year 2007, making more than $346 million in gifts to the University, by far our largest fund-raising total ever. Our fund-raising will continue through the end of the Chicago Initiative campaign in June 2008 and beyond in order to realize our aspirations as stewards of this great University.

It has been an exciting year at Chicago, but it is also clear that there is much more that we will have to do to support our faculty and students at the highest level, to continue leveraging the opportunities of evolving disciplines, and to engage our communities, both locally and around the world.

Robert J. Zimmer, President

Making the Economic Case for Early Education

"The key to the success of intensive early enrichment programs is that they have lasting effects on all the noncognitive skills that, acquired early enough, help lay the foundation for learning and achieving throughout life."
—James Heckman

For most advocates of early childhood education, providing disadvantaged kids with intellectual and emotional enrichment is simply a matter of fairness and social justice.

For James Heckman, it's also sound economic policy.

Heckman, the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor and a Nobel laureate, makes the economic case for early education. He argues that investing in programs for prekindergarten children will yield dramatic returns for individuals and for society. Early education, says Heckman, offers the most cost-effective path to a whole range of social benefits: not just higher future incomes for participants, but a more productive workforce, greater economic growth, lower crime rates, smaller prison populations, and substantial savings for taxpayers.

"This is more than just a feel-good topic. You can make a very powerful argument for early enrichment solely on the basis of hard-boiled cost-benefit analyses," Heckman says. "This is the rare public policy initiative that promotes productivity in the economy at the same time that it appeals to fairness."

Heckman's case draws on new developments in neuroscience and developmental psychology. Recent research has shown that a child's earliest years are vital to cognitive development; it is when they are most ready to acquire the basic skills that will provide the foundation for continued learning in years to come. But with the emphasis on K–12 education, researchers say, too many students from impoverished environments begin kindergarten already at a disadvantage when it comes to acquiring essential skills. Getting kids off to a good start, the argument goes, is more cost-effective than trying to play catch-up by providing them with remedial education later.

"If we invest in the very young," Heckman explains, "we avoid the need for remediation in the first place."

It is an argument that is attracting the attention of legislators, policy makers, and other leaders. Heckman's work has been cited by everyone from then–Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain to New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton to conservative columnist David Brooks. And when members of Congress gathered for a conference on early childhood development recently, they heard Heckman deliver the keynote address.

"We wouldn't see this national movement, we wouldn't have presidential candidates speaking about

James Heckman travels the world promoting investment in human capital through early childhood enrichment programs. He addressed the opening session of the First World Conference/ Seventh International Summit of Early and Preschool Education "Science, Knowledge, and Early Education" in Nuevo León, Mexico, in fall 2007.

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"I-think-I-can! I-think-I-can!" Heckman joins preschoolers at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools in reading *The Little Engine That Could.* Heckman's research shows that intensive early childhood enrichment has lasting effects on motivation and other noncognitive skills that lay the foundation for lifetime achievement.

the issue, without Heckman's work," says Art Rolnick, senior vice-president and researcher at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, who has written on the topic. "He has done the heavy lifting of analyzing the longitudinal studies and making the most convincing economic case."

Heckman's investigations of early childhood development were inspired in part by personal experience. Born in Chicago, he spent much of his childhood in the South, where he attended segregated schools and witnessed firsthand the effects of racial discrimination. Early in his career as an economist, he began studying ways to eliminate gaps in achievement that persisted along racial and ethnic lines. In one project, he analyzed the effectiveness of a job-training program for young adults in Texas. What he found only discouraged him. Efforts to educate or train young adults—whether through adult literacy programs, prison rehabilitation, or job training—too often turned out to be ineffective, because it was relatively more difficult for adult workers to learn new skills.

"These programs were based on the hope that society can solve eighteen years of neglect with a short-term intervention," he says.

Instead, Heckman began examining the effects of intervening in early childhood. He found that addressing problems early was far more effective than trying to compensate later in life for early neglect. Experimental preschool interventions showed that children who were provided intensive early enrichment fared far better than others over the long term. One of the best-known interventions, the Perry Preschool Project, initiated for low-income African American families in Michigan in the mid-1960s, encouraged learning through playing, problem solving, and decision making. Evaluations of these programs, conducted over several decades, showed that participants went on to complete more schooling and earn more money than their peers and were far less likely to be arrested for violent crimes or to spend time in prison.

The key to the success of such programs, Heckman says, wasn't so much that they raised IQs, but that they had lasting effects on the participants' motivation, socialization, and self-control—all the noncognitive skills that, acquired early enough, help lay the foundation for learning and achieving throughout life.

Understanding and measuring the effects of such noncognitive skills remains a challenge, Heckman says; they are, after all, not as easily documented as such traditional, "hard" measures as achievement test scores. Working with researchers associated with the Pritzker Consortium on Early Childhood Development (based at the University's Harris School) and from University College, Dublin, Heckman is helping to develop experimental interventions for preschool children in impoverished areas of Belfast. One of the chief aims of the project is to refine the ways researchers chart children's improvements in noncognitive skills.

"A lot of public policy is based on measuring achievement test scores," Heckman says. "But interventions work through other mechanisms—concerning motivation, social relationships, and self-discipline—that public policy has yet to come to grips with."

Some of Heckman's work touches on the most esoteric reaches

James Heckman visits an early childhood development center in Monterrey, Mexico (above).

Heckman participated with 3,200 educators, child development specialists, and public sector professionals in child policy from thirty-two countries in the First World Conference/Seventh International Summit of Early and Preschool Education.

of economic methodologies, but even there his work has provided economists with tools to address practical, applied problems. His 2000 Nobel Prize recognized his innovation in statistical techniques to correct selection bias—the problem that occurs when samples available to researchers don't randomly represent real populations. His research has also included analyses of the forces that affect women's decisions to enter the workforce; evaluation of social programs such as the Job Training Partnership Act; and investigations of the impact of civil rights and affirmative action programs.

"I think some of the best economics comes out of solving applied problems," says Heckman. "People out there in society are asking us to solve big problems. That's what we do. We are trying to answer one of the biggest questions there is: namely, how do people get to be the way they are?"

Heckman's work at Chicago spans the Department of Economics, the Irving B. Harris School of Public Policy Studies, and the College. He credits the University's environment with fostering work that is at once intellectually rigorous and rooted in the problems of the wider world.

"There's a tradition here of taking economics seriously as a field that can help solve real problems," he says. "We challenge each other, we test ideas, we learn from each other, and that's been very valuable."

Forging New Space for the Arts

"We're trying to break the paradigm of these different, separate pursuits, ways of making art, and make a new place that encourages a complete dissolution of these boundaries."—architect Billie Tsien

Cropping up spontaneously all over, like blades of spring grass, art is happening in every cranny and corner of the University. For example, tucked in a corner of the Reynolds Club, Heidi Coleman teaches classes in a little gem of a performance space that's actually the landing of a stairwell.

"It's one of my favorite places to teach," says Coleman, Director of University Theater. "It doubles as a design studio. It has a lighting system and a sound system, and we've put in a floor and mezzanine. It's a fantastic space. You can seat twenty-five people there."

This little design/performance space says a great deal about the arts at the University of Chicago: the creative energy on campus is so prodigious that art finds a place to happen, whether it's a stairwell with a makeshift theater or a single practice room packed elbow to elbow with an entire a cappella singing group. And the end result is apparent: on any given day or evening, the campus hosts a multitude of student or professional performances, recitals, exhibits, and readings—from comedy improv by Off-Off Campus to a screening by Fire Escape Films—in addition to the plays and exhibits at professional venues on campus, such as Court Theatre and Smart Museum.

Now, a beautiful new arts center, slated to open in 2011, promises to become the heart and hub for this ubiquitous creativity, which will continue to thrive throughout campus, as well as a destination for art-loving Chicagoans and visitors. An anchor for a newly enlivened south campus, the Reva and David Logan Center for Creative and Performing Arts will provide a home base for the visual arts, theater and performance, music, and cinema and media studies. The state-of-the-art facility will be devoted to classrooms, studios, practice rooms, theaters and performance space, exhibition space, a film screening hall, a film vault—and more. Thanks to leadership gifts from Reva Logan, Ex'43, and David Logan, AB'39, JD'41, and their family, as well as other donors, the University has reached 40 percent of its $100-million goal to complete the facility.

Creating a central home for many disciplines, the David Logan Arts Center will be a physical manifestation of a series of convergences that happen on campus—convergences not only of discipline and discipline, but also of theory and practice, of University and community, and of scholarly and professional. For example, in autumn 2006 the Middle East Music Ensemble collaborated in a concert with Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. Third-year undergraduate Alyssa Mathias, a member of the University

The Reva and David Logan Center for Creative and Performing Arts will provide a home for the creative passion that is now dispersed across campus.

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Students in Theater & Performance Studies (TAPS) challenge the boundaries between theory and practice by gaining facility in both the practice and critical analysis of two media. Here Heidi Coleman, Director of Undergraduate Studies in TAPS and Senior Lecturer in the College, engages a group in exploring the dramatic performance of a text.

ensemble, recalls it as a thrilling experience that will always stay with her. A busy performer, Alyssa has also joined the University Symphony Orchestra, the forty-five-voice Motet Choir, and the New Music Ensemble. "There are just so many fantastic arts opportunities here," she says. And the opportunities are not just plentiful but also of world-class quality: Chicago's music program was ranked first in teaching and second for faculty quality by the National Research Council, the nation's most highly regarded assessment of doctoral programs.

The idea for the David Logan Arts Center has been gestating since the release of a 2001 report by faculty and arts professionals on the state of the arts at the University. The report found that art production was dispersed across campus and that a new space could help nurture a sense of artistic community. "We do over thirty-five productions a year," says University Theater's Coleman. "There is such a hunger and a demand to produce work."

A group of faculty, administrators, students, and consultants convened to study programming needs and draft a plan. Committee meetings turned out to be anything but dreary administrative exercises. "It was very, very exciting," says Larry Norman, Associate Professor in Romance Languages & Literatures, Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities, and the College, who has taken on the new position of Deputy Provost for the Arts. "There were so many collaborations going on, so much synergy and cross-fertilization between the arts departments and between scholars and artists. Just bringing everyone to the table to talk about the building led to even more creative collaborations."

David Levin, Associate Professor in Germanic Studies, Cinema & Media Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities (Theater & Performance Studies), and the College—is a living example of the fruitful interplay of disciplines that is so distinctive at Chicago. (He also melds the professional with the scholarly in his work as a dramaturg, most recently for the San Francisco Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago.) "Chicago is just a hotbed of interdisciplinary exchange," he says. He describes teaching a graduate seminar in opera that was comprised

of students from eight different fields. "Of course, interdisciplinarity means that the conversations are much less predictable than if the class were all historians or all musicians or all PhD students in German. But there's a sense of shared intellectual adventure that has continued to define my experience here. It's enormously stimulating."

Plans for the David Logan Arts Center are full speed ahead. An architectural competition last spring yielded a clear winner—Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, world-class architects who understand the University's imperative to create a space that is truly interdisciplinary. "We're trying to break the paradigm of these different, separate pursuits, ways of making art," Tsien explains, "and make a new place that encourages a complete dissolution of these boundaries."

"I came here because I wanted to be surrounded by people with diverse interests," says Alyssa Mathias, the busy music student. "We are doing well at mixing intellectual inquiry with artistic practice." That's exactly the point of the David Logan Arts Center, says Bill Michel, Assistant Vice-President for Student Life and Associate Dean of the College—to serve the entire University community.

"It will be a wonderful way to bring together curricular and co-curricular work," says Michel. "The center will combine theory and practice with the creativity and intellectual passion of our students and faculty. All our students will be touched by the creation and the enjoyment of art there."

Student demand has increased for opportunities on campus in painting, music performance, dance, improvisational comedy, and the gamut of artistic activities. The Reva and David Logan Center for Creative and Performing Arts will provide a space where intellectual inquiry and creative practice can meet in dynamic collaboration.

Tailoring Medical Treatment to the Individual

Physicians should one day be able to pinpoint differences among patients at the molecular level and use that information to truly individualize treatment. Getting to that point, however, will require a monumental effort.

Which of an oncologist's lung cancer patients will respond favorably to a new treatment, and which will see no improvement at all from the same drug? Of all the patients an internist sees with high cholesterol, who are the ones most at risk of developing heart disease?

While physicians have long been able to use diagnostic tests or facts gleaned from a patient's family history to get at such questions, the answers still sometimes elude them.

That's why the evolving field of personalized medicine, in which a strategy for prevention, diagnosis, or treatment of a disease would be tailored to a patient's unique genetic makeup, holds such promise. And with the help of researchers who are extracting and harnessing ever more information from the human genome, physicians should one day be able to pinpoint differences among patients at the molecular level and use that information to truly individualize treatment.

Getting to that point, however, will require a monumental effort.

"Diabetes, heart disease, and many cancers are generally caused not by just one gene, but rather by the combined effect of many genes. How they do so is a crucial problem to understand in order to develop better diagnostics and therapeutic strategies for patients," says Kevin P. White, Professor in Human Genetics, Ecology & Evolution, and the College.

Geneticist Kevin P. White is using advanced computational techniques to understand the complexities of the genome's regulatory systems.

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Geneticist T. Conrad Gilliam and undergraduate Katie Given work on a genetics experiment in Gilliam's lab. As Chair of Human Genetics, Gilliam is a key player in the University's push toward realization of the promise of personalized medicine.

White, who investigates how networks of genes and proteins control development and disease, is hard at work on efforts to unlock that understanding.

Not long after joining the University in 2006, he and one of his research teams won a $9-million grant from the National Human Genome Research Institute to identify all regulatory elements—the DNA sequences that control when and where specific genes get turned on or off—in the genome of the fruit fly (*Drosophila melanogaster*).

"The fruit fly genome is the ideal model for this study because it shares the structure and many features of the human genome," White says. "Beginning with *Drosophila* allows us to test our predictions in live animals, the only way to experimentally validate our computational methods."

That sort of groundbreaking work adds to the significant work being done by Chicago's other computational and genomics teams; its theoretical genetics researchers, led by T. Conrad Gilliam; and scientists at Argonne National Laboratory, whose high-end computing architecture allows for the extraction of crucial biomedical information.

Those combined capabilities

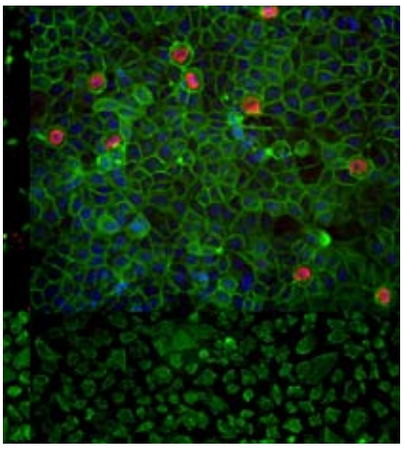
helped convince White that Chicago was the ideal place to establish a research and academic program focusing on genomics, the study of the entire DNA sequence of an organism's genome, and systems biology, the study of protein networks, cells, tissues, entire organisms, and other biological systems as integrated "wholes."

"Conrad and I are working together to realize a vision that plays to the unique strengths of the University and Argonne for the development of personalized medicine and also to obtain support for the infrastructures underlying that vision," says White, who also directs the Institute for Genomics and Systems Biology, a joint program of the University and Argonne.

To make that happen, building bridges among many diverse disciplines is essential, and Chicago, with its single campus unifying undergraduate, graduate, and medical training and research, has a clear head start.

"Chicago has an institution-wide commitment to interdisciplinary research that is going to be key to the development of our genomes-to-medicine concept," White says.

That emphasis on collaboration makes it possible for White's group to work with the Department of Pathology, for instance, to collect large numbers of clinical specimens, particularly of cancers from patients who undergo surgery at the University of Chicago Medical Center. Together, the teams are developing diagnostics for predicting outcomes and informing the treatment of cancer patients. Among their recent discoveries: a new biomarker for breast cancer that predicts metastasis



Top, these microplates in the Cellular Screening Center contain cells that are tested with RNAi or small drug-like compounds that inhibit cellular pathways. Directly above, image of a breast cancer cell line. The green cells are live cells, and the red are dying cells.

Sam Bettis (above), the center's chief research technologist, monitors the progress of the microplate setup and replication.

This busy robot, named Dot (right), manages multiple genetics experiments around the clock in the Cellular Screening Center at the Institute for Genomics & Systems Biology, housed in the state-of-the-art the Gordon Center for Integrative Science.

and what is believed to be the first molecular marker for the most common kind of kidney cancer.

Personalized medicine will be driven by research at "the interface between genetics, clinical medicine, and the computational sciences," says Gilliam, Chair of Human Genetics and a specialist in identifying and characterizing heritable mutations that affect the nervous system.

"There are still important problems to solve at this interface, but Chicago has a lot going for it. With the arrival of leading genome scientist Kevin White, we are able to generate massive data sets that measure hundreds of thousands of individual molecular events in each of potentially thousands of hospital patients. With our combined strength in computational science and theoretical genetics, we are one of very few institutes nationwide who can manage and analyze these data in a sufficiently sophisticated manner to make sense of them."

Argonne—which the University manages for the U.S. Department of Energy—"provides a great home for doing big science," says White. At the same time, Chicago's computation experts are leading the way in understanding the implications of the new technological capacity for processing huge amounts of information.

White hopes to set up a state-of-the-art gene expression processing facility at Argonne to handle projects involving tens of thousands of specimens, including blood and tissue samples. Using DNA chips, scientists will be able to determine the whole repertoire of which genes are turned on or off, up or down, throughout the entire genome under different conditions.

Also contributing to such big thinking is Chicago's involvement (along with Northwestern University and the University of Illinois at Chicago) in the Chicago Biomedical Consortium, whose goal is to bridge institutional boundaries to transform research at the frontiers of biomedicine.

But scientific challenges, though crucial to the task, are not the only ones to overcome in the quest for realizing the true possibilities of personalized medicine. There are ethical, legal, and social issues to tackle as well.

"How we practice medicine, treat people, and insure people will resonate through our economy," says Gilliam.

And the strength of Chicago thinking, he says, could make it a leader in creating new policy paradigms that respond to this revolution.

"We have people in the Graduate School of Business already thinking about how personalized medicine will have a dramatic impact on the insurance industry, and in ways that are not always intuitive," Gilliam says. Chicago's MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics, the nation's leading center for the teaching and study of clinical ethics, will be a key player as well.

"We have the opportunity to bring together all the brainpower at Chicago—not just in medicine, but in business, law, and ethics—and become national policy leaders."

Investing in Opportunity

"We are proud to meet the needs of our students. It's a core value and tradition at Chicago."—Susan Art, Dean of Students in the College

John Thomas III and Kimberlee Pelster have very different interests and futures in mind. In completely different phases of their academic careers, the former is a doctoral student and the latter is a College sophomore. But together they represent a powerful trend at the University—a renewed financial commitment to invest in students' educations.

In 2007, that commitment reached a high-water mark of $199.8 million, the University's total expenses for both graduate and undergraduate aid. While Chicago has always been known for embracing an economically diverse student body, this increase in scholarship support is a telling metric about Chicago's intention, in President Zimmer's words, to recruit "those students who can most benefit from, and contribute to, Chicago's uniquely powerful and rigorous education, whatever their financial circumstances."

One such student is John Thomas III, the kind of scholar many universities would like to entice—a high-performing doctoral student conducting original research in an area of inquiry where he will leave a mark. Thomas's expertise is the Andes—the black Andes. He studied black culture in Peru on an IIE Fulbright grant and now plans to extend that study to Ecuador and Venezuela. Given the region's dearth of data, Thomas must create and collect it himself. He has been interviewing organizations, making connections, and getting linked in with black cultural and political movements across the continent.

Alicia Reyes, Director of College Aid, advises students on their financial aid options. The new Odyssey Scholarship Program will allow many College students to graduate without a debt burden.

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Kimberlee Peltzer works three part-time jobs to supplement her financial aid package from the College. Next year she will be eligible for an Odyssey Scholarship, which would free her to devote more time to her academic studies.

Why did he choose Chicago's political science department? Thomas cites two determining factors. One is the legendary Chicago culture. "Most of the current scholarship has been limited to sociology and anthropology. I needed a place that would allow me to be multidisciplinary. The whole Chicago school of thought is not just politics, but cultural linkages."

But equally important was the matter of financial support. Previous graduate support packages at Chicago had varied from program to program and even within a department. But starting in 2007, the University's new Graduate Aid Initiative provides all incoming doctoral students in the social sciences and humanities the same generous package of support. For Thomas and his peers, that includes tuition waivers, health insurance, a teaching assistantship, two summers of research support, a stipend for living expenses—and the guarantee that the support will be in place for five years. By 2013, when the program is expected to be fully operational, the University will be providing graduate students with an estimated $13 million annually in new support. These packages will enable the University to maintain enrollment levels in

Political science graduate student John Thomas III (right) confers with Steven Wilkinson, Associate Professor in Political Science and the College. Thomas was among the first recipients of the improved financial aid package for graduate students in the social sciences and humanities.

the graduate programs of its Social Sciences and Humanities Divisions, which are among the largest and most comprehensive of their kind at leading private research universities.

By developing a model for doctoral student financial packages that is generous, uniform, and fair, the University sends a clear signal: the best and brightest prospective students will be supported throughout the pursuit of their doctoral degrees—and they will be able to complete those degrees as expeditiously as possible. "This is our best package," says Martha T. Roth, Dean of the Division of the Humanities. "And it will allow students to take money out of the

equation when they are weighing graduate schools. They will be able to make an intelligent decision based on where they want to go—and with whom they want to study—without having to think about money."

At the same time that this multimillion-dollar commitment to graduate students has been under development, undergraduate financial aid is being transformed by the Odyssey Scholarship Program, the result of a remarkably generous $100-million gift from an anonymous donor. The Odyssey Scholarships will eventually affect 25 percent of the College's students—and fully half of its students on financial aid.

For students like second-year Kimberlee Pelster, such support can mean a great deal. A public policy major who hopes to work on child welfare issues, she will bring a much-needed insider's perspective to the field: when she was in sixth grade, she herself entered the foster care system.

Pelster is also what the University terms an "independent student," meaning she carries sole financial responsibility for her education costs. Currently, her financial aid package includes loans she will have to pay back after graduation, as well money she contributes out of her earnings from three part-time jobs.

"Many students will see the loan portions of their financial aid packages entirely replaced with grant money," says Vice-President and Dean of College Enrollment Michael Behnke. "They will graduate without a debt burden."

And with concern about debt removed, students will be able to avoid excessive hours at jobs. "I'll be able to devote more energy to my interests," says Pelster. "I would like to volunteer at Chapin Hall Center for Children, doing research in child welfare to influence policy makers—which I don't have the luxury of doing now."

The Odyssey Scholarship donation brought Chicago national recognition—not only because it was the largest single gift given to a university in Illinois, but also because of the circumstances of the gift. The donor, who graduated in the 1980s, believes deeply in the core curriculum and appreciates the Homeric reference. He has said that, like Odysseus, he feels himself on an exciting journey and believes his education enabled him to survive many failures. "Although I fell far from the academic vine," he has written, "my education in the College convinced me (in a way that no event or person has yet to undermine) that I was in fact . . . somehow a worthy citizen of an ancient and honorable community of scholars." The University has undertaken to raise another $300 million to continue the Odyssey program.

Announced in May 2007 and slated to being in autumn 2008, the program will dramatically alter the financial aid picture for more than 1,200 students in the College from low- and moderate-income families, the first beneficiaries. About 800 students will have no loan expectation; the rest will have their loan expectation reduced by half.

Funding from the Odyssey initiative will also enhance the twenty-three-year-old Chicago Academic Achievement Program (CAAP), a summer bridge program for bright students who have not had the benefit of an enriched high school preparation. Originally a six-week, commuter Work-Study program for a dozen Chicago-area students, CAAP will now be available to about fifty students, who will live on campus for eight weeks in the summer. The summer work requirement will be eliminated, and instead the students will receive a $1,000 stipend. They will also participate in a study group during the academic year. "We are saying to these students, you have loads of potential but may have missed out on opportunities your classmates may have had," says Susan Art, Dean of Students in the College. "We are proud to meet the needs of our students. It's a core value and tradition at Chicago."

The University's need-blind admission policy means that admissions officers do not look at the related financial aid material when considering applications. Students are accepted without regard for their economic situation, and once they are admitted, the University is committed to making up the difference between costs (tuition, room, board, etc.) and the amount that the student and his or her family can pay. This year, nearly half of all undergraduates (48.1 percent) received some form of aid, with the average package equaling $19,934—figures that represent a 9.6 percent increase in the University's spending over the previous year.

Programs such as the Odyssey Scholarships and the Graduate Aid Initiative support students with the most financial need, make a Chicago education available to the widest economic vector of students, and express a confidence vote in both students and faculty. "At Chicago, we measure our self worth not by wealth but by whether or not we have good ideas," says Behnke. "The priority here is academic excellence."