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THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF THE COLLEGE OF IDAHO

QUEST



FROM BOONE HALL TO MAYO CLINIC

How biomedical science major Colton Troxel turned undergraduate research into a neuroscience research appointment at Mayo Clinic



FROM THE DESK OF THE CEO

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE AT THE COLLEGE

We alumni often share fond memories of how things were at the College during our time as students. Just as often, we marvel at the changes, or complain about them! As a leader, I strive every day to maintain the core values of the institution to ensure that the essential aspects of its character are sustained, even in periods of change. The College has evolved dramatically over the years in response to changing student interests, admissions and enrollment patterns, the economy, and the higher education landscape, but over time it has always sustained its commitment to the liberal arts tradition.

This past December, we made the difficult decision to close two academic programs, communication arts and theatre. The primary activities associated with these programs, debate and theatre productions, will continue as co-curricular offerings, but we will no longer offer majors or minors in either discipline. These decisions were not made lightly and were grounded in student enrollment and program review data. Still, contracting is never easy. It involves the loss of positions and valued colleagues. It also invokes difficult and necessary discussions about tradition, identity, and the liberal arts—issues very much in the forefront of the minds of everyone involved in these decisions.

The same issues presented themselves in discussions related to recent program growth. New majors in biochemistry, finance, and criminology have been added and are already showing strong student enrollment. Blended and stand-alone graduate programs have been added in organizational leadership, public policy, and K-12 educational administration, providing opportunity for continued study by our alumni and enrollment by newcomers to the Yote community.

Each program closed or added contributes in some way to reshaping the institution at large, so it is crucial that we maintain focus on our mission and core values to ensure continuity in the midst of change. Our guiding values will remain those of the liberal arts tradition that began in 1891 with our founder, Dr. William Judson Boone, which have served as the cornerstone for all the achievements since.

Thank you for your understanding and continued support. Go Yotes!

David Douglass



ON THE COVER:

Colton Troxel, a biomedical science major, grew up in a Mexican-American Marine Corps household living in the small town of Twentynine Palms deep in California's Mojave Desert and then on a ranch outside Middleton, Idaho. Colton was selected as the College's 2026 Scholarship Gala speaker and, during his speech, shared how he grew profoundly in the College's research lab in Boone Hall. His work with biology professor Luke Daniels studying glioblastoma multiforme, an aggressive form of brain cancer, led to an appointment at Mayo Clinic conducting neuroscience research on Parkinson's disease.

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THE ENDURING VALUE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS



PRESIDENT DAVID DOUGLASS EXPLORES THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS IN DEVELOPING THOUGHTFUL CITIZENS, ADAPTABLE LEADERS, AND LIFELONG LEARNERS.

I was recently invited to participate in a panel discussion for the City Club of Boise provocatively titled, "Uncertainty in Higher Education." The context for the event involved

educational budget cuts. House Bill 876, signed into law by Governor Brad Little, will reduce funding to all publicly-funded colleges and universities in the coming year by 5%. In response, Boise State University announced the closure of one of its colleges and the merger of two others. Idaho State University disclosed plans to eliminate 44 positions, merge two colleges, and reorganize dozens of programs; and the University of Idaho acknowledged that it will have to cut at least \$6.7 million from its current budget and \$8.4 million from its fiscal year 2027 budget. News of these and other cuts at virtually every public institution across the state had been arriving in waves.

The panelists with whom I shared the dais spoke convincingly about the necessity of workforce preparation and the importance of educating the next generation of labor for the state. They pointed out how a lack of qualified employees could hamper the state's economic development and reduce competitiveness with other states for attracting businesses to Idaho. A good deal of time was spent discussing Idaho Launch, a state-funded program providing Idaho graduates up to \$8,000 for college tuition and fees related to in-demand career training and college coursework specific to labor's needs.

Not surprisingly, as the president of a liberal arts college, I countered with the crucial role of higher education apart from service to the state economy. College education produces engaged citizens, improving not only employability but also quality of life. The hard evidence in support of these many beneficial outcomes is unequivocal—college graduates not only earn more money and pay more taxes but are more likely to be involved in their communities, to volunteer, to contribute to charities, to understand issues of the day, and to vote. College grads also enjoy better health, live longer, and are more likely to accrue retirement benefits. As parents they spend more time with their children, who, in turn, have lower teen pregnancy and birth rates and are themselves far more likely to obtain a college degree. And the list goes on.

The difference in our perspectives was more than happenstance. Focusing on the fullest development of each individual rather than narrow, vocational preparation of the collective has always been a characteristic feature of the liberal arts. Consistent with their missions, public colleges and universities often emphasize employment. Many of our neighboring schools' charters make reference to "advancing the local and global workforce" and providing "workforce development opportunities." These references are well suited to these institutions' purpose and very much in keeping with their reliance on direct support from the state budget allocations that they receive to fund their operations.

In contrast, as a private institution, The College of Idaho focuses on the individual – preparing each student to live a productive and fulfilling life. Our method, inscribed in our curriculum, involves deep and sustained exploration of a specific discipline combined with broad exploration of a range of disciplines, including the humanities and fine arts. This combination is generative and produces portable skills such as problem solving, analysis, critical thinking, and effective communication. It also sponsors understanding of one's self and others and, particularly through the immersive residential experience, expands capacity for community, compassion, conflict resolution, and empathy. Taken as a whole, a Yote



education is less about training for a specific career than what Roosevelt Montás has called "the unfolding of a moral agent."

At the conclusion of our remarks and an extended question-and-answer period, I found myself surrounded by a group of audience members who wished to express concern. The message of educating for humane and civic purposes rather than employment alone resonated with them, but they feared that these such outcomes were no longer in vogue, or even that they had passed from relevance in light of changing times, Gen Z sensibilities, and GenAI. They voiced concern that post-pandemic influences may have ruptured what they perceived to be traditional values of higher education.

The truth of the matter is that private, independent liberal arts institutions, such as The College of Idaho, have always represented the thinnest slice of American higher education, generating only about 4% of all bachelor's degrees nationally each year. It is not the case that contemporary students and their families are rejecting values-driven education. Rather, a majority of students have always attended colleges and universities primarily for employment-related reasons, and the present trend simply reflects this long-standing orientation.

IT TURNS OUT THAT A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION IS ACTUALLY THE MOST EFFECTIVE PATHWAY TO A LUCRATIVE CAREER

Students and parents can hardly be blamed for this practical focus. College is expensive, both in terms of money and time, and it is completely reasonable to expect a return on the investment. To the extent that liberal arts may be seen as excessively expensive, impractical, and unrelated to career success, it makes sense that most would choose the shortest and clearest path to getting a job. However, it turns out that a liberal arts education is actually the most effective pathway to a lucrative career. Just as the general theory of relativity teaches us that the shortest distance between two objects may be curved, or the classic film, *The Karate Kid*, tells us through the lesson of "wax on, wax off" that mastering fundamentals and establishing foundational skills are essential to mastery, the path to a rewarding and meaningful career is best achieved obliquely, through the cultivation of curiosity, the habit of learning, and the fundamental skills associated with collaboration. So it is that the distributed, organic, and humane approach represented by the liberal arts typically produces a greater return on investment than does a narrow, vocational focus represented by, for example, preprofessional tracks.

The challenge is that of discernment among students and their parents in recognizing the long-term value of a liberal arts education, regardless of the institution attended. A liberal arts pathway, with its distributed coursework, inclusion of humanities and fine arts, and breadth requirements might seem unlikely to achieve short-term, concrete outcomes such as assured employment after graduation. However, a host of studies demonstrate that liberal arts graduates achieve skills for navigating complex, changing work environments, and that they are best prepared for management and leadership. A 2025 survey conducted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities shows that employers recognize these skills—93% of them agree that liberal arts outcomes are more important than a student's undergraduate major, and four out of five agree that qualified students should be broadly educated in the liberal arts and sciences. Given these findings, it should not be surprising that such students go on to earn substantially more over the course of their careers, or that The College of Idaho has consistently been recognized as the top school in the state for employment after graduation.

Private liberal arts colleges do not have a monopoly on the liberal arts. Many among us achieved such transformative educations at large state universities, although we may have been required to exercise care in finding our path through a maze of alternatives. However, colleges such as the CofI are purpose-built to achieve liberal arts outcomes, and because of that intention the likelihood of success is much higher. Yote alumni have been the proof of that success for the past 135 years, and future Yote generations will continue to demonstrate the enduring value of the liberal arts for many more years to come.

OUR FOUR NEW 3+1 DEGREES

As part of its new curriculum, the College has launched four 3+1 degrees, an innovative approach to education providing students the opportunity to earn both their bachelor's and master's degrees in just four years and a capstone summer. Even better, students complete the majority of graduate coursework during their four years of undergraduate study and pay no additional tuition during this time. Such a degree program responds to the increasing percentage of high school students who enter college with a significant amount of advanced placement (AP) and dual credit, allowing them to graduate within three years as opposed to the traditional four years. Our 3+1 program attracts such high-performing students to the College and ensures they remain at the College for four years. Our 3+1 degree offers one of the most affordable pathways to a graduate degree in the nation, helping students save time and money without sacrificing a high-quality education.

Scan the QR codes below to learn **MORE** about each graduate program.



Master of Accountancy (MACC)
Enhances knowledge of financial reporting, auditing, taxation, and accounting information systems—all while preparing students to pass the Idaho State CPA Exam.



Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership (MAOL)
Equips students with a deep understanding of organizational dynamics, strategic management, and effective leadership practices.



Master of Science in Data Analytics (MSDA)
Provides individuals with in-depth knowledge of statistical analysis, machine learning, data visualization, and data management systems.



Master of Science in Exercise Science (MSES)
Meets the increased demand for professionals in clinical exercise physiology, strength and conditioning, corporate wellness, and related health professions.



Marcos Ceballos, who earned a bachelor's in business administration in May 2026 and will graduate with a MA in organizational leadership in August 2026, reflected on his participation in the College's 3+1 program: "I believe graduating with two degrees helps me stand out among other college graduates, prepares me for leadership roles earlier in my career, and shows future employers that I have intentionally invested my time in developing leadership qualities."

AUGMENTING REALITY: HOW IS AI IMPACTING THE COLLEGE?



Not long ago, artificial intelligence lived mostly in the realm of science fiction—a concept explored in novels, debated in philosophy seminars, and imagined on movie screens. Today, it lives in our pockets, our classrooms, our hiring processes, and our homework assignments. It writes cover letters, grades essays, generates code, and holds conversations that are, at times, difficult to distinguish from human ones.

For colleges and universities, this shift has arrived not as a distant horizon but as a present reality—one that demands thoughtful engagement rather than reflexive alarm or uncritical enthusiasm. At The College of Idaho, that engagement is already underway.

Three faculty members bring their distinct disciplinary views to one of the most consequential questions facing higher education today. From left to right in the above picture, business professor Andrew Ellestad examines how AI is reshaping the landscape of commerce and the skills students will need to thrive in an economy increasingly shaped by automation. Computer science professor Eric Friedlander pulls back the technical curtain—exploring how these systems actually work, where they fall short, and what it means to build and use them responsibly. And, graduate education professor Matthew McDaniel considers what AI means for the future of teaching, learning, and the preparation of the next generation of educators.

Together, their perspectives don't arrive at a single verdict. That is by design. AI is not a problem to be solved or a tool to be simply adopted—it is a conversation to be had, carefully and continuously, by precisely the kinds of curious, critical thinkers a liberal arts education is meant to produce.

The College of Idaho has a strong liberal arts tradition, placing heavy emphasis on critical thinking, analytical reasoning, written communication, and problem solving. How is this mission impacted by the rise of AI?

MM: As an alum myself, I've enjoyed the opportunity to watch the development and integration of technology as a tool that supplements the liberal arts instead of supplanting them. On any given day, one can still walk by a classroom on campus and hear a Socratic seminar or observe students meaningfully engaging with one another in dialogue and debate while simultaneously seeing the overlay of broad technological tools that support these learning opportunities. The reality is artificial intelligence is a part of everyday teaching and learning in 2026. Our outstanding faculty and students are learning to use AI tools to extend their seminars, debates, thinking, reasoning, and problem solving which is essential to a 21st century education.

AE: Students could easily outsource their education to an AI chatbot but will not develop the skills necessary to build a successful career in doing so. Today's employers need leaders who can reason critically but also communicate effectively. Such skills have to be developed. They are like muscles that you have to train. In my classroom, I spend a lot of time talking about the "why" of assignments with my students and use exercises that help students practice and develop these skills so they can be prepared once they reach their future employers.

How is the College responding from an academic perspective?

EF: Artificial intelligence has generated a lot of uncertainty about the future. What AI skills do I need? Will my career be automated away? Will I be able to get a job when I graduate? To help our students stay competitive and prepare them for the job market, we are launching a master's degree in data analytics in collaboration with our business faculty. In a world with so much uncertainty surrounding the utility of skills like mathematics and coding, this program is designed to equip students with the knowledge to operationalize those skills in a business context—setting them ahead of their peers.

MM: Within the field of education, the College's response to the rise of AI has been both swift and purposeful. This includes the development of clear policies and procedures, as well as direct instruction focused on the ethical, effective, and professional use of AI tools. Our priority is ensuring that graduates are well prepared to engage responsibly with the technologies they will encounter in their careers. Rather than avoiding or minimizing AI, the graduate faculty are working collectively to ensure that its use supports, rather than replaces, the essential human connections at the heart of teaching and learning.

THREE SENIORS SHARE HOW AI IS INFLUENCING THEIR EDUCATION AND CAREER OUTLOOK.

ASHLEY RUSSELL
Majoring in Philosophy and
Computer Science/Mathematics



"While AI sounds exciting in theory, I'm anxious about it in practice. I worry about how it will change humanity in the long run, from environmental racism to outsourced thinking."

TAO SALISBURY
Majoring in Psychology and Exercise Science



"I use AI for studying and building my professional portfolio, with my own effort and intention guiding every step. As college keeps up, I think we need to stop treating AI like something to fear."

SARA VANDERWYK
Majoring in Marketing & Digital Media and
Environmental Studies



"I am strongly against the use of AI. While I understand its ease, the creative process is much more rewarding. Our education should teach us to solve problems."

What is the College doing to equip students for a future impacted by AI?

EF: More than ever, it is important for students to know how to think. As AI can automate a lot of tasks that had previously been done by college graduates and seems to develop new abilities every week, the need to be able to adapt to the quickly changing landscape has never been more important. Fortunately, teaching students how to think is what Coff has always done and does best.

AE: I agree. The rise of AI has placed a greater need on developing critical thinking abilities. We do not lack for knowledge or information, but we need to know what to do and how to evaluate that information. As such, I have changed many assignments in the classroom to put a bigger focus on developing analytical skills, weighing multiple possibilities and advocating for a path forward.

MM: Similarly, in education graduate courses, students explicitly learn how to leverage AI tools to support their own teaching practices and to better meet the individual needs of their students. But we also require them to model ethical and effective use, facilitate discussions around strengths and limitations, and learn to identify content generated by specific tools.

EF: In my classrooms, I strive to strike a delicate balance of teaching students to use AI without automating their thinking. In some classes, I teach students how to write code using AI by requiring them to provide the prompt they used to generate the code to demonstrate that they used their expertise when drafting the prompt. In other courses, I leverage AI to aid in instruction. For example, I created a customized version of Gemini (Google's LLM) designed to serve as a "Recitation Leader". When students were done with a chapter, they could simply ask the LLM for practice problems, which I designed to provide at the appropriate level of difficulty.

What "big questions" do you have when it comes to thinking about AI?

MM: Where does "natural" human intelligence end and "artificial" intelligence begin? We know and understand that AI is built on trained models derived from human-generated content. This line continues to blur as AI models improve. As we move forward, while it may be easier to differentiate these concepts today, I wonder how we can ensure we can adequately separate them in the future.

AE: Societally, I wonder how it will change and shape the job market. Much of our work as business faculty is to prepare future leaders for their career. We know that as AI evolves some jobs will be eliminated while others will be created.

MM: And, how are the ideas of bias, equity, and power implicated by AI? How does AI reproduce or amplify existing inequalities? Who controls AI, and who benefits from it? Since AI systems learn from historical data that may encode bias of many types, explicit advantage or disadvantage may be in play any time AI is used which leads to a direct power imbalance.

EF: The main questions I'm trying to figure out are: "When is the proper time to teach students how to use AI?" and "What should we teach them?" It is clear to me that students will need to learn how to integrate different AI tools in their workflow. It's also clear that there is utility in having students complete exercises that AI can complete. I'm still looking for how to strike the right balance. A good analogy is the calculator. Even though we have calculators, students still need to learn how to add and multiply. Maybe we don't place as much emphasis on doing times tables and instead we spend time teaching students how to leverage calculators to aid them in doing addition and multiplication. AI seems to be a much more complex version of this, and I'm still trying to navigate where and how is the best way to introduce it in the curriculum.

MM: Finally, is the role of the College to critique AI? To develop it? To regulate, teach, and humanize its use? We know that our world has become embedded with AI at every turn – what do we do next?

What do you see as the future of AI?

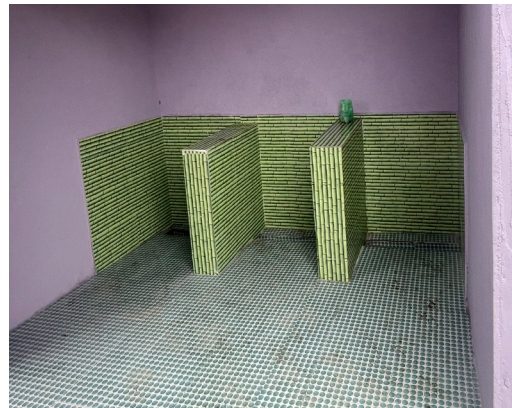
AE: Predicting the future of AI is like trying to predict where a speeding bullet will land. As we think about how best to prepare students for a new future, it is clear that students will need to find a way to add value to organizations outside of work that can easily be done with a chatbot. This puts a greater premium on the role of critical thinking and reasoning so that students can bring a greater level of engagement and understanding to problems they will face at work.

EF: Woof! I really don't know! I think you'll see a wide range of predictions out there ranging from "we are five years away from automating most white-collar work" to "we're in a complete bubble, companies will soon realize this, and we're going to be back to a largely AI-free world in six months". As with anything, I think reality is somewhere in the middle. I predict that AI will fundamentally transform the workforce but in a way that it remains shockingly similar to what it is now. Most of the jobs that currently exist will continue to exist, but most people will frequently use AI in their daily work. However, I do think we will experience growing pains in the near term as we navigate what the potential is for AI.

MM: In education, AI is already playing a growing role in both assessment and instructional differentiation. For example, computer-adaptive testing systems now use AI to adjust questions in real time based on student responses, analyze performance at increasingly granular levels, and provide immediate feedback. Students are also engaging with AI-powered tutoring systems that adapt to individual strengths, needs, and learning progressions. Within the next five years, these tools are likely to become commonplace across all levels of education. As this occurs, it is imperative that educators remain grounded in their disciplines and professional judgment, using AI to augment educational practice rather than replace human expertise.

RONISH ACHARYA GOES HOME TO HELP

BY CONNER KLEIN, A SENIOR MAJORING IN HISTORY AND PHYSICS-MATHEMATICS



When Ronish Acharya returned to Nepal to visit Basanta Primary School, a rural school near his hometown in the Jhapa district, the first thing he noticed was the smell. The open land that students and teachers used as a restroom sat directly beside the classrooms where children spent their days. He thought of a college classroom back in the United States where a class had been let out early over an unpleasant odor, a perfectly reasonable response. "The first moment I went to Basanta Primary," Acharya recalls, "I was thinking about how these kids were studying. The restroom is right here. The open place is right here. Your classes are right here." The class of college students could go home. The children at this school could not. There was no choice but to remain.

That discrepancy is what drove Acharya, a junior double majoring in international affairs and environmental studies, back to Nepal last summer. Funded by a \$10,000 Davis Projects for Peace grant, Acharya coordinated the construction of a gendered restroom facility at the school. This required replacement of a deteriorating hand pump, installation of a water storage tank, and implementation of a waste management system to prevent runoff into the surrounding environment. What began as a search for a meaningful undergraduate project became a sustained confrontation with a deceptively simple question—what does it mean for something to be a basic need?

The school he identified had no functional restroom at all. There was no separation of facilities by gender and no reliable access to clean water. For girls reaching adolescence, the situation had become untenable; many transferred to schools an hour away to keep from navigating a space that offered neither privacy nor dignity. The principal was not unaware of the problem. He simply had no money to fix it. "They would love to have a good restroom," Acharya explains. "Everyone would love to have that. They don't have any funds." Between paying teachers and building a washroom, a school without funding has no real choice.

A SCHOOL WITHOUT A RESTROOM IS MORE THAN AN UNFORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCE. IT REVEALS WHAT A SOCIETY CHOOSES TO PRIORITIZE

Rather than organize a workshop or a one-time event, Acharya wanted something that would outlast his presence. "I really wanted to create a long-lasting project," he says, "that is physical, that could be seen." Working alongside a local contractor and the school's administration, he coordinated the construction across thousands of miles, ordering materials to the site before he arrived so that work could begin immediately. His project fell exactly during the monsoon season, when Nepal receives 90% of its annual rainfall across three months. Constant rain delayed construction, but it also created a deeper problem. The monsoon is when farmers plant rice, because the crop requires enormous quantities of water and the window is narrow. Laborers left the construction site to tend their fields, and the project stalled. Sanitation had been deferred, once more, by a more immediate need.

The schools Acharya contacted were not waiting passively for outside intervention. They were already making hard choices about where limited money could go. Washrooms are not absent from rural Nepali schools because no one wants them, but because funding structures force administrators to choose between them and more immediate needs. "Finance is the main reason," Acharya says. "There is not enough funding." What the project revealed was not a failure of awareness but a failure of political and economic priority.

Before the project materialized, a peer had asked Acharya what, exactly, he had done for his own country. The question unsettled him. He plans to return to Nepal after graduation, and he speaks openly about pursuing a career in public life, but the washroom project was not a credential. It was a confrontation with conditions he had known abstractly and now understood materially. In building something small, lasting, and necessary, he came to understand his home differently. A school without a restroom is more than an unfortunate circumstance. It is a decision, made by systems that have chosen what things deserve consideration; Acharya intends to be in a position to make different ones.

REDEFINING THE EQUATION: HOW RHODES FINALIST JULENE ELIAS IS UNCOVERING THE MATH IN EVERYDAY LIFE

BY: LUNA MCCUSKER, A SENIOR MAJORING IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

Julene Elias is on a mission to change how we think about "math." For many of us, mathematics is a daunting subject we gladly left behind in school, strictly categorized as something only specific types of people can do. But for Elias, a recent Rhodes Scholarship finalist and College of Idaho alumna, math is everywhere—from the rigid complexities of calculus to the creative precision of sewing and the practicalities of a monthly budget. Today, she is blending her deep passions for history and education to pursue a PhD in the history of everyday math, aiming to reshape our understanding of mathematical literacy.

The Road to the Rhodes

Elias's academic journey was heavily shaped by her time at The College of Idaho, where she initially enrolled as a history major before adding a math minor. She credits the uniquely engaged faculty, particularly in the history department, for giving her the vital support and confidence needed to pursue one of the world's most competitive graduate scholarships. "It takes a village," Elias notes.

While Elias was ultimately named a finalist and attended the intense two-day scholarship weekend in Seattle, she was not selected for the final award. However, rather than viewing this outcome as a defeat, she saw it as a moment to calmly refocus. She is continuing to apply to Oxford and other graduate programs, ensuring her next steps are guided by her research interests rather than just financial necessity. Her advice to students facing unexpected detours is simple but powerful: take a deep breath, reevaluate your priorities, and realize that a setback is not a "death knell". She encourages high-achievers to recognize that big goals take time.

Rethinking the "Math Person"

Elias's perspective on mathematics is deeply informed by her years working as a math tutor. Through working directly with students, she realized that many arrive with the limiting belief that if they struggle with one narrow subject, like pre-algebra or calculus, they are "doomed forever" and simply not a math person. Elias pushes back aggressively against this binary thinking. She points out that mathematical skills like pattern-seeking and problem-solving are present even when someone claims they hate math, yet routinely enjoys Sudoku, puzzles, or managing a household budget.

In her tutoring practice, Elias found that helping students succeed meant addressing higher-order learning strategies rather than just forcing rote content repetition. "The solution is rarely just reteaching them whatever they didn't figure out in that day's class," she explains, noting that foundational skills like note-taking or confidently manipulating equations are the true keys to unlocking mathematical confidence.

Uncovering the History of Everyday Math

Elias's specific academic path crystallized during a winter course on the history of math at the College, where she was captivated by ancient practices like base-60 Mesopotamian calculations and manual square roots. Later, a chance encounter with a historian of mathematics at an astronomy conference revealed to her that studying the history of math could be a viable primary academic field. Completing her senior history thesis confirmed her intense love for the research process, leading her to specialize in what she calls the "history of everyday math."

This is where Elias's work takes on profound social significance. She believes that the traditional history of STEM, which is too often framed as a long, exclusive lineage of famous white men like Newton and Gauss, has alienated entire communities by ignoring the technical prowess embedded in daily life. Activities historically dismissed as "women's work" or "manual labor," such as quilting, sewing, cooking, and trades, are highly precise and inherently numerical. By successfully bringing mathematical language to these disciplines, Elias hopes to break down long-standing barriers.

"I want very much to be able to do the work of opening up what math means so that it is accessible to more people," Elias shares. Giving these everyday activities their proper intellectual weight is an act of empowerment. Historically, the denial of mathematical literacy, such as restricting access to financial knowledge, has been a potent tool of discrimination. By acknowledging the complex math that diverse communities already perform every single day, Elias hopes to help more people see themselves as capable, technical thinkers who are ready to take control of their worlds.



MATH ISN'T SOMETHING A FEW PEOPLE ARE BORN GOOD AT, IT'S ALREADY PRESENT IN THE WORK WE DO EVERY DAY

A HISTORIC MOMENT: THE COLLEGE'S FIRST DOCTORAL GRADUATION

BY SARA SWENSON, PHD, INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER



On June 5, 2026, The College of Idaho marked a historic milestone as it celebrated the graduation of its first class of doctoral students.

Launched in September 2024, the Doctor of Medical Science (DMSc) program welcomed physician assistants (PAs) seeking advanced leadership, education, and clinical expertise. The inaugural graduating class includes 31 PAs representing a range of degree concentrations from clinical fellowships and healthcare system leadership to early career development and educators seeking administrative and accreditation expertise.

"Our first graduating class represents exactly the kind of students we hope to attract to the DMSc program: engaged, intellectually curious professionals who embraced feedback, challenged themselves, and truly earned this degree through consistent effort and meaningful collaboration with faculty," said program director Kari Bernard, PhD, PA-C. "In doing so, they embodied The College of Idaho's mission of cultivating a community of scholars prepared to lead positive change in healthcare and bring evidence-based ideas into practice."

Graduates describe the program as both rigorous and encouraging, highlighting the faculty's commitment to student success and professional growth. "The faculty thoughtfully engaged us and held high standards, respectfully pushing us to aim higher while maintaining a healthy atmosphere," said graduate Mónica M. Rivas, DMSc, MCHS, PA-C.

The program also received high praise for its practical application, ensuring the knowledge and skills imparted through the curriculum translate directly into real-world initiatives. "One of the most impactful parts of the program for me has been developing my pilot study focused on osteoporosis screening following fragility fractures," reflected graduate Jeffery K. Bobo II, DMSc, PA-C. "The coursework challenged me to think differently, and I feel it has already made me a stronger clinician and future leader within healthcare."

As the first graduates crossed the stage, the DMSc program established a new chapter for the College, one centered on advanced healthcare education, leadership, and innovation.



To see **MORE** of the Commencement Exercises visit: <https://shorturl.at/7ptci>

MORE!

A WEEK THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

BY KYNDRA LYONS, A SENIOR MAJORING IN CRIMINOLOGY



For Silipa Swai, what began as an academic opportunity became a powerful and transformative journey of growth, confidence, and global understanding.

Recently, Swai, a senior majoring in business administration, had the honor of representing the College as a delegate at the National Model United Nations (NMUN) conference in New York City. Serving on the Commission on the Status of Women, she joined students from around the world in addressing complex global challenges. Selected by political economy professor Rob Dayley, Swai spent months

preparing alongside her peers through in-depth research, writing position papers, and participating in rigorous strategy sessions.

Representing the Republic of Latvia, Swai focused on two critical issues: addressing the burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women and girls; and protecting women and children in armed conflicts. Her research explored how unpaid labor limits economic participation and security, while conflict continues to displace communities and silence vulnerable populations.

Swai noted that these topics pushed her to think beyond policy and examine her own beliefs about justice and equity. Throughout her experience, she found a consistent theme in discussions: women's empowerment is not charity, but a matter of justice.

Her journey to NMUN was shaped by her upbringing in Tanzania, where she was surrounded by examples of hard work and service. Her father built a trekking company from the ground up, while her mother, a PhD research scientist and public health doctor, demonstrated the importance of community impact. These early influences instilled in Swai a sense of purpose, though she did not always feel confident in her abilities.

In high school, Swai often saw activities like NMUN as spaces meant for others. She doubted whether she belonged. However, her experience at the College challenged those perceptions. Over time, she began to step outside of her comfort zone, gaining confidence and embracing opportunities she once avoided.

Participating in NMUN became a full-circle moment. During the conference, Swai and her partner worked through cultural differences, built consensus with other delegates, and successfully passed one of two resolutions based on her ideas. Beyond these accomplishments, she discovered a passion for public speaking and negotiation.

Reflecting on the week, Swai expressed that she left New York not only as a delegate, but as someone changed by the experience. She described it as both humbling and transformative, emphasizing that the most meaningful outcome was her personal growth. Swai left the conference with a stronger sense of self and a deeper understanding of her capabilities. She also credited Dayley for his mentorship and leadership throughout the process, highlighting the role his support played in her success.

She now views leadership and global citizenship through a new lens, recognizing the importance of stepping into unfamiliar spaces with courage. For Swai, NMUN was more than an academic event—it was a defining experience that reshaped her confidence, broadened her perspective, and reinforced her commitment to making a meaningful impact in the world.

A YOTE IN THE CORPORATE WORLD

BY DESIREE RESENDIZ, A JUNIOR MAJORING IN LITERATURE & CREATIVE WRITING AND SPANISH



The College of Idaho's history runs much deeper than its campus, stretching all the way to a grocery chain store whose name may sound familiar: Albertsons.

Recently, over the span of an intensive summer, Christian Benischek, a senior majoring in environmental studies, completed the Bob Miller Legacy Internship, a long-standing internship collaboration between the College and Albertsons.

Originally having heard of the internship through word of mouth, Benischek took a chance and applied, despite some initial hesitation. "Since working an office job for a grocery chain did not exactly line up with the things I learned about in environmental studies, I was hesitant to apply," explained Benischek. His original intent was to apply for the data analyst position but he soon encountered another option instead. "It's kind of funny because I originally applied to be a data analyst with Albertsons since I've had two on-campus jobs that deal with data analysis (as a statistics tutor and with

microplastics research)," he mused. "Weeks later, I heard that my friend Shubham Singh had been offered the data analyst internship, and I thought that meant I was out of the running."

Instead, Albertsons recognized Benischek's talent in project management and offered him an internship focused in that discipline. "I took the job and had a great time," he stated. No two days ever looked the same for Benischek in the office. He attended various meetings, traveled to multiple store locations, and worked on a variety of projects, including creating the layout for the store located in Wenatchee, Washington. A major accomplishment for Benischek was getting to walk through the Wenatchee store with experts in fresh produce and examine the layout he developed for the store.

Reflecting on his experience, Benischek has acknowledged just how transferrable the skills he learned during the internship are proving to be. "Although the skills I learned did not directly correlate with what I want to do someday, there are similarities," stated Benischek. "For example, at Albertsons, I learned how to make data-driven decisions. As my end goal is to one day be a superintendent with the U.S. National Park Service, I will be able to use my Albertsons experience to help me allocate limited federal funding towards the most meaningful projects, whether they be conservation efforts or the guest experience."

Benischek takes ultimate pride in being part of the Yote family and is heavily involved in campus life as a student conductor of the Coyote Marching Band, a resident assistant in Hayman Hall, president of the Yotes Traditions Council, an academic tutor, a student ambassador, a member of Student Philanthropy Council, a member of the Gipson Honors Program, and a frequent volunteer as the Yote Mascot. It was, however, his internship in the corporate world of Albertsons that helped him learn just how resilient he can be.

ECHOHAWK APPLIES FOR THE UDALL



Ryken EchoHawk, a sophomore majoring in biomedical science and a student-athlete on the College's football team, recently applied for the highly competitive Udall Undergraduate Scholarship, which recognizes future leaders in Tribal public policy and health care fields. Read EchoHawk's own words as he describes the importance of his family and heritage and his pursuit of a career in Tribal healthcare.

My surname, EchoHawk, is derived from the name of my ancestor which translated to "hawk whose deeds are echoed"—an honorable name that reflects integrity, reliability, and success with a quiet and modest nature. My grandfather, Larry EchoHawk, is an excellent example and role model to me as he embodies the meaning behind 'EchoHawk'. He is a successful man with a calm and collected personality that has positively impacted Native Americans through his work as a lawyer, attorney general of Idaho (1991-1995), and assistant secretary of the interior for Indian affairs under Barack Obama (2009-2012). Using the examples set by my grandfather and family, I plan to embody the true meaning behind my last name and make my ancestors proud.

I aspire to become a surgeon that will positively impact Native American communities by entering a field that is underrepresented by Natives, rebuilding trust in health care systems, and strengthening cultural connections among tribal communities. I believe my education at The College of Idaho not only provides me course work that will contribute to my future in medicine, but also has exposed me to many different avenues of education that have shaped my professional aspirations. For example, a medical history course introduced me to Dr. Lori Arviso Alvord and her book *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear*, where she describes how marginalized groups, such as Native Americans,

have a legacy of distrust in health care due to historical unethical practices, systemic neglect, and cultural misunderstandings. Dr. Alvord, as the first Native female board certified in surgery, illustrates how Native physicians can impact health care within Native communities. Her example is inspiring to me and demonstrates that culturally grounded physicians can mend historical damage and distrust. However, today Native Americans make up less than 0.4% of total physicians in the United States. Due to this statistic, I believe that increasing this number will greatly impact Native American health care. Overall, I hope to emulate Dr. Alvord and model my future practice as one rooted in cultural understanding as well as a strong community presence.



AN ANTHROPOLOGIST'S MUSICAL ETHNOGRAPHY ON LIFE

BY JODI NAFZGER, ASSOCIATE GRADUATE PROFESSOR



Anthropology professor Aaron Weiss started chasing his dream to become a musician in 2001 after completing his bachelor's degree at Temple University. He pursued his master's and doctorate while launching a punk band with his brother Michael. They became mewwithoutYou, which developed an iconic presence in heavy indie music, producing seven studio albums and two live albums, and performing alongside famed bands like Weezer and Flaming Lips. After 21 years and 1400+ performances, mewwithoutYou did their farewell tour in 2022-2023. Their musical style is often associated with folk, indie, and rock/alternative, but the band self-describes as experimental-punk with lyrical themes drawing heavily on Sufi philosophies and Judeo-Christian imagery, derived from Weiss's Islamic roots and extensive study of world religions.

MewithoutYou performed mostly as a five-piece band with Weiss starting out on bass and vocals. "I had a lot to say—a lot of ideas. I wanted to connect with people. I poured my heart into lyrics, mostly about spiritual searching. I wanted to explore who I was, my purpose, and really wrestle with big questions." Weiss studies different religious world views in an effort to put into practice what he calls "the best of what he's learned." When his band performed, he was surprised to find a rapt audience, people who loved his stories and wanted to hear meaningful music—"more than sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll." After a performance, Weiss would spend hours in dialogue with fans, hungry to learn as much as sing.

Weiss's passion for music and story-telling spills over into the classroom. His culturally-responsive teaching uses ethnographic methods and social theory to analyze how culture and social structures shape education. Weiss teaches traditional anthropology classes, but also teaches about death and dying, magic and witchcraft, madness and civilization, and the anthropology of punk. He views education as fostering collaboration, community, and critical thinking, rather than merely filling students with knowledge. Laughingly Weiss says he hasn't always found a rapt audience in his classrooms, but students have definitely found inspiration. Violet Conklin, a junior anthropology/sociology major, describes Weiss as a role model who wants students to tackle big issues but "doesn't tell you what to think...he leaves those questions open."

Weiss has some formal training in music, having studied under internationally known musicians and composers, but his inspiration to create music is rooted in Sacred Harp, an *a cappella* American folk music best known for its shape notes and dispersed harmony. A lover of Weiss's music, Lucy Dacus, acclaimed singer-songwriter and member of the Grammy-winning band boygenius, asked Weiss to perform a duet with her at Boise's Morrison Center in 2025 during her *Forever is a Feeling* tour. Together they sang *Bullseye*, a song about first loves, naivety, and the passage of time. Weiss has also been applauded for his inspirational lyrics by boygenius's Julian Baker and Hayley Williams of Paramore. The notable music blog Stereogum called mewwithoutYou "one of the 21st century's greatest rock bands."

Weiss speaks of his music career with quiet modesty, but he comes alive when talking about teaching anthropology. Going on tour was unforgettable, but the classroom is where he truly finds connection and the opportunity to wrestle with deeply personal and conscious reasons for existence and to connect individuals to something greater than themselves. As with his music career, Weiss is just as driven to learn from his students as he is to teach them.

MILLER ELECTED TO THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

BY ALAN MINSKOFF, SENIOR LECTURER



History professor Rachel Miller has added member of the prestigious American Antiquarian Society (AAS) to her resume. She becomes one of only two Idahoans in the society. She counts her time—three stints including a year-long fellowship at the Worster, Massachusetts based archive—as "central to her teaching and work as a scholar." Her work there was vital to her thinking about art and theater in 19th century America.

AAS has been part of Miller's intellectual development since 2013 when as a grad student she attended a summer seminar in Historic American Visual Culture. She was impressed "by the reach and range of the collections and the expertise of the archivists and curators." In 2019-2020, she was honored as the Hench Post-Dissertation Fellow, which allowed access to AAS's extraordinary resources and afforded her time to write her soon to be released book, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: On Stage in America's First Culture Industries*. She also benefited from friendships with and feedback from staff and other fellows. To Miller, AAS, which has more documents than the Library of Congress, was much more than an archive, "it was an incredibly supportive fellowship community."

Miller's book details the story of working in the theater—1820s to silent films—from the vantage point of the "pit musicians, character actors, chorus girls, and vaudeville comedians." Miller reports: "Even though they worked in smoke-filled theaters and told jokes for a living, nineteenth-century stage performers outside of the spotlight of fame have much to teach us about the value of artistic work and the kind of conditions that make art work possible."

The daughter and granddaughter of physicians, her parents wanted her to be a lawyer. She grew up in Freeport, Maine (think L.L. Bean). As an undergrad at Vassar, she majored in English and actually took little interest in history until she wrote a paper about the use of cassette tapes on the 1979 Iranian revolution. "And I was just like oh my gosh I've never thought about tape and media having anything to do with politics." Passionate about Irish literature, she did an MA at Trinity College in Dublin. Upon returning to Maine, she worked at a historical society. "I led tours and did field trips, and I worked on this amazing project working with towns to create historical websites. I enjoyed doing that and I decided that I would like a job doing history." She then earned her PhD from the University of Michigan in American studies.

History matters to Miller. She wholeheartedly believes in its value and effortlessly points out that history grads find work in as "attorneys, civil servants, entrepreneurs, librarians, architects, realtors, rare book dealers" and, of course, as professional historians.

Besides teaching history—from western civilization to rock and roll—Miller directs the Gipson Honors Program and enjoys spending time with her husband, artist Walt Gerald, whose leather and engraving work can be seen on waltsmade.com, as well as their active toddler Sidney and their "two very annoying cats" named George and Elaine from *Seinfeld*.

MARY AND ME: MCELWAIN EARNS BARKER FELLOWSHIP

BY ALAN MINSKOFF, SENIOR LECTURER



Barely a hint of his Texas upbringing can be detected in philosophy professor Greg McElwain's speech. Given his long-term interest and relationship with the late English environmental philosopher Mary Midgley, an English accent might be more likely. McElwain has had the rarest of opportunities to not only get to know his mentor but to spend years interviewing her. This summer, he now gets to continue that work researching Midgley's papers under the aegis of the Barker Fellowship at Durham University in

the United Kingdom where he will study in the historic Palace Green Library.

McElwain began his journey with one of the great modern environmental philosophers after he did graduate work at Vanderbilt and earned his doctorate at the University of Florida. His passion for the esteemed author of *Animals and Why They Matter* (and a dozen other books) has formed the crux of his scholarly work. His *Mary Midgley: An Introduction* was the first of his own takes on her long and distinguished career (she lived from 1919 to 2018). Over a span of eight years, McElwain visited with Midgley, drank tea, and came away with a trove of interviews that form the basis of his second Midgley book.

He admires her work because she is "accessible and saw that philosophy was important to life." For his part, he has garnered more than 135,000 words of his conversations with a woman who some called "frightening." Famed as part of the quartet of powerful female thinkers at Oxford in the 1940s (the renowned novelist Iris Murdoch was another), Midgley's view of the natural world is meaningful today. In crafting his new book, *Mary Midgley and What Matters: Conversations on Science, Ethics, and Nature*, which will be published in December 2026, McElwain uses the material gleaned during his decade-long visits. He was fortunate enough to meet with Midgley until a month before her death and reports she was quite sharp until the

end. In their time together, he notes, "there was lots of laughter and lots of biscuits."

As a result of his unique relationship with Midgley, who he calls an "inspiration, a collaborator and a friend," McElwain earned the Barker Fellowship, which is both prestigious and competitive. The fellowship honors scholars whose work expands the frontiers of knowledge through archival research and intellectual collaboration. This summer, he will spend time in the famed stacks to continue his study of Midgley. The research will be fundamental to his new website project focused on her work. He will also have the opportunity to introduce his eleven-year-old daughter, Emily, to Great Britain. She will be joining him in Newcastle, which is as close to Scotland as anywhere in England.

McElwain has been teaching philosophy and religion at the College for more than a decade. His passion for environmental philosophy was ingrained in his early life in the northern part of Texas, where he had a lot "of freedom to explore." The Texas country became his initial learning space and sparked his later curiosity about the relationship between humans and the natural world. Closer to home, McElwain and his family now run Bent Corners Used Books located in Boise and Nampa—where discounts abound and he would "love to see Yotes trade in their quality books."

SIBLINGS ABROAD: FACULTY-LED STUDY AWAY TRIP TO SPAIN

BY NATE BADGER, A SENIOR MAJORING IN HISTORY



A Spanish coast, a new language, a foreign health care system, and a sibling duo to make it all make sense. In January 2026, Biology professor Luke Daniels and Spanish professor Jennie Daniels brought twenty students to Madrid, Spain. From there they traveled South to Malaga, soaking in the sights, experiencing the food, and immersing themselves in the culture of the country.

The program was centered around Spanish language. Students of varying Spanish-speaking abilities—from one course of experience to native speakers—were invited to expand their skills with the help of Expansion, the program's partner institution. Across four-hour language classes, field trips, and homestays with host families, students found themselves in the heart of Spanish culture.

Speaking to the value of such a program for learning a new culture, Jennie reflects, "I was really excited to get students into environments

where they could interact authentically with people in Spain." For students, this meant learning to navigate public transportation or asking for directions when lost. These simple exchanges, Jennie maintains, are central to "the growth and independence and self-assuredness" that language students gain from studies abroad.

Students also explored the Spanish health care system. While students can observe clinical work in the U.S., Luke noted that studying abroad can significantly expand one's medical worldview. Students sat in on lectures from health experts, visited clinics and hospitals, and met with staff at a local mental health hospital.

For Kiera Barnes, a senior majoring in chemistry and theater, "going to Spain to learn Spanish and healthcare was more informative than sitting in a classroom." She appreciated the expansive pedagogy of Spanish healthcare educators, who bore insights into all European medical systems and even those in other continents.

Along the way, students journaled to reflect on their experiences, which gave travelers space to process not only their academic lessons but also their encounters with a foreign culture. Many took the opportunity to partake in day trips across the country. Exploration included Barcelona, Granada, Gibraltar, and even the

Real Madrid soccer stadium. Over the final days, students stayed in authentic Spanish hostels, taking the opportunity to engage in some final-hour team bonding.

Barnes used her free time to see the Basilica de la Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, an architectural monument built in 1882. "Walking into the Basilica was a jaw-dropping, eye-widening, and tear-inspiring moment," she remarked.

Though students receive academic credit for the College's study-away courses, the benefits are personal as well. Barnes advises, "Don't be afraid to take part in others' social norms or cultural traditions." This is where the learning begins. "Learning is a process," says Jennie. "It has to happen over years and years." For the 2026 cohort, there is no telling what revelations might follow their month in Spain.



MARCHING WITH THE COMMANDERS

BY RYAN ELSBERRY, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF ATHLETIC COMMUNICATIONS



When Blake Cowman first stepped onto The College of Idaho campus, he was searching for belonging. What he found was a community that valued him, challenged him, and gave him the chance to help build something new—the Yotes Marching Band.

Cowman chose CofI because of the personal connection he felt during his visit. “The faculty and staff valued me in a way no other school did,” he recalls. “They weren’t just interested in my grades, they wanted to know me.” As a first-generation student, that mattered. The liberal arts model let him double-major in political economy and environmental studies, minor in music and pre-law, and still serve as student body president and resident assistant. “How could I pass up the chance to go to the best school in the state and help found a marching band?” he says.

The College gave him more than academics. He met his wife while working as an RA in Simplot Hall and cherished the closeness of campus life. Professors became mentors, pushing him academically and personally. “Their support gave me the knowledge and skills I needed to make the jump to law school,” he says.

When Cowman arrived in 2016, football had returned after decades, but the campus lacked a marching band. That fall, he became a founding member. With fewer than 20 members, the group was scrappy and relied on creativity—singing “Livin’ on a Prayer” at halftime, drumming on trash cans, and performing percussion solos. “We were laying the groundwork for a program that would extend beyond our time,” he says.

Game days were unforgettable. Cowman recalls parades through cheering fans and the electric moment when Kyle Mitchell’s 58-yard field goal kept the Yotes’ perfect season alive. “We played the fight song after that kick. The energy was electric,” he says. Other highlights included drumline runs to Dutch Bros and McDonald’s, and his own drum set solo on the field. “I still have my drumsticks from our first game. They’re hanging in my office at work.”

After graduation, Cowman attended Georgetown Law, clerked for the D.C. Court of Appeals, and joined the U.S. Department of Justice as a Trial Attorney. He credits his musical background for courtroom success. “Performing in front of judges feels a lot like performing in front of fans. Band taught me how to stay calm under pressure.” His liberal arts training also proved invaluable, helping him quickly grasp unfamiliar subjects. “My legal job often requires me to quickly learn the basics of unfamiliar subjects,” he says. “To defend a government contract or program in court, I have to first understand it. I draw on my liberal arts education almost every day. It gives me a huge leg up.”

Cowman thought his marching days ended with college until the Washington Commanders offered a new stage. A lifelong fan, he auditioned after moving to D.C. Despite nerves and years away from drumming, he made the cut. His first game was surreal. “Walking out of the tunnel,

I DRAW ON MY LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION ALMOST EVERY DAY. IT GIVES ME A HUGE LEG UP

I’d watched this team on TV since I was a kid. But once the music started, it felt like any other performance.” The Commanders band parades through the concourse before games, entertaining fans from both sides. “Even opposing fans cheer for us,” he says.

Now, Cowman balances court briefs by day and drumline by night. “Planning and organization,” he explains. “I put all my Commanders obligations on my work calendar. Both my job and the band have been supportive.” His advice to students is simple—lean on your community. “Between alumni, faculty, and staff, someone at CofI is doing what you dream of. Reach out. Ask questions. People want to help.” And if you are considering the marching band? “Do it. You will make lifelong friends, improve as a musician, and have a ton of fun.”

From Simplot Hall to the NFL stage, Cowman’s journey proves the power of community, creativity, and saying yes to opportunity. For him, the beat goes on, whether in a courtroom or under the bright lights of FedEx Field.

SCHOLARSHIP GALA RAISES \$1.3M

BY JACK CAFFERTY, VICE PRESIDENT OF COLLEGE RELATIONS



The annual scholarship gala continues to impress! Each year, a large group of volunteers and staff puts on its best “Yotes Can Do It” hat to plan an epic event to raise money to support scholarships for current and future students. One has to wonder if the small planning committee in the mid-90s ever expected to see the event producing more than a million dollars each year.

This year’s event raised \$1.3M for student scholarships and had more students than ever on the stage. From emcees Keylee Wilson ‘27 and Jessica Stire ‘26, to live auction reader Brodie White ‘28, to student speaker Colton Troxel ‘26, the evening was a celebration of the incredible students the College continues to recruit. If you haven’t had a chance to hear Colton’s speech, I’d encourage you to check it out on the College’s YouTube channel. His is a classic College of Idaho story—growing on a ranch outside of Middleton, Idaho to now securing a neuroscience research appointment at Mayo Clinic—all while playing the pipe organ sporting his iconic cowboy hat.

Highlights from the live auction included 101-year-old Winston Moore again buying the Golden Retriever puppy and donating it back. The puppy was purchased three times before it was eventually purchased and taken home to Florida by proud first-time puppy owners Pam ‘82 and Steve DeCoste. The live auction was full of surprises, including a \$19,000 bid on a KIN dinner donated by James Beard award winning chef Kris Komori ‘05. Kris graciously donated a second dinner which was also purchased for \$19,000! From high-end bourbon to trips to Hawaii and Vancouver, BC, the live auction was filled with excitement.

The Paddle Up or “fund a need” portion was impressive as well. The auctioneer began with three donors gifting \$50,000 each, followed by two donors at the \$40,000 level. Lori and Duane Stueckle surprised the audience with a \$150,000 match at the \$10,000 level, requiring fifteen gifts to fulfill the match. Special thanks to all those who helped, as we just met the match! Another challenge was offered at the \$1,000 level, with a \$30,000 match from two alumni couples, Debbie and Chet ‘81 Wood and Ellen Sachtjen ‘68 and Rich Peter. After several rounds, we secured all thirty of the \$1,000 gifts needed for this match as well.

We’re incredibly grateful to everyone who participated in the room and from afar, as this year’s “Changing the Story” theme struck home for so many. One guest who called to make a gift prior to the event shared, “I am so happy to be in a position to help support scholarships for others, as The College of Idaho changed my story and there’s no way I’d be where I am today without someone else’s support of my scholarships.” Turns out that was one of the many reasons the theme was chosen for this year’s gala.

“Changing the Story” is also the theme for our \$150M comprehensive campaign, which was launched publicly last September. Thanks to this year’s scholarship gala funds and more than 33,500 gifts, we’ve now raised more than \$147M in the last four and a half years, 98% of our overall goal. We’ve added ten new fully-funded endowed positions at the College and more than \$50M in scholarship funds. With just \$3M remaining, we hope others will be inspired to help, providing a catalyst for change for more future Yotes.

Be sure to “save the date” and make plans to be there for our 2027 Scholarship Gala, which will be held on Friday, March 5, 2027. Go Yotes!



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MORE!



MORE!

To hear **MORE** about Colton Troxel’s journey at the College, visit: www.youtube.be/4MtsLIDCTPU

A MOMENTOUS FALL: FIVE YOTE TEAMS MAKE NATIONAL RUNS



When the mornings turn crisp in Caldwell and fog gathers around the Marty Holly Athletic Center, there is a familiar rhythm at The College of Idaho. Weight plates rattle, whistles echo, cleats scrape the turf, and sneakers drum across the J.A. Albertson Activities Center. This fall, that rhythm carried farther than usual. It carried into November and December and into venues where national bids were earned and championship expectations grew. Five of the six fall programs advanced deep into the NAIA postseason, creating one of the most successful autumns in school history.

Football set the tone. The Yotes opened the NAIA Football Championship Series at home against perennial power Morningside University and delivered a complete performance. Behind a top tier defense and an efficient, ball controlling offense, the Yotes built a 20 to 7 halftime lead and closed out a 37 to 19 win. The following week brought a rematch with previously unbeaten Montana Tech. The Yotes responded with a clinical display featuring two early defensive takeaways, 145 rushing yards and four touchdowns from Rylie Byington, and timely plays throughout the roster. The 41 to 26 win sent the team to the national semifinals for the second time in three seasons, where a hard fought battle with Keiser University showcased a program firmly established among the NAIA elite.



Cross country added to the momentum. Two years after a women's national title and one year removed from a men's crown, both teams arrived at the NAIA Championships in Tallahassee with youth and ambition. The women finished fifth, missing the podium by a single point while producing three All Americans. First year runners filled key scoring roles and positioned the team for a bright future. The men, with only one returner from the previous championship squad, finished 14th and gained invaluable national experience. Every scorer on the men's team returns next season.

Inside the J.A. Albertson Activities Center, the Yotes opened the NAIA Women's Volleyball Championship with a decisive sweep of Bethel College. The balanced offense and stifling block sent the program to Sioux City with confidence. In pool play, the Yotes pushed No. 6 University of Providence to the brink, then nearly forced a fifth set against Mount Vernon Nazarene the next day. A 19 to 12 overall record combined with an Opening Round win signaled that a young core is positioned to contend for seasons to come.

Women's soccer capped the fall with a national run that rewrote expectations. Entering the NAIA Women's Soccer Championship as the No. 4 seed, the highest in program history, the Yotes brought a dominant résumé that included 62

goals scored, just 15 allowed, and sweeps of both the Cascade Collegiate Conference regular season and tournament titles. They advanced to the final 16 with signature defending, timely scoring, and clutch penalty kicks. Even in a double overtime exit, the Yotes showed composure and competitive edge that placed them firmly among the nation's top programs.

Across sports, the identity was consistent. Football controlled games with discipline. Cross country raced with maturity and promise. Volleyball swept, battled, and grew. Women's soccer defended with grit and attacked with belief. Together they created a campus wide narrative about what happens when high standards meet a collective will to compete.

This fall was not a collection of isolated stories. It was a chorus. It was a season when hosting felt normal, advancing felt expected, and the Yotes left lasting impressions on national stages. The images from November will linger in Caldwell long after the fog lifts. They will shape winter workouts and heighten expectations for next fall. National runs, after all, are part of the Yote way.

THIRTY YEARS OF WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: A CELEBRATION OF LEGACY AND COMMUNITY



This winter, the College marked a significant milestone inside the J.A. Albertson Activities Center—30 years of women's basketball. The anniversary weekend featured back-to-back home games as the Yotes welcomed Northwest University on February 6th and The Evergreen State College on February 7th. But the true heart of the celebration happened between those games, when alumnae returned to campus to reconnect, share memories, and meet the student athletes who now carry the program forward.

A special alumni luncheon created space for storytelling and community building. Former players swapped memories of road trips, rivalry games, and championship runs. Current student athletes listened, asked questions, and gained a sense of how their own experiences fit into a larger lineage.

Thirty years allows for a wide lens. The all-time record of 512–407 represents more than wins and losses. It reflects eras of growth, seasons that stretched into March, and years when the Yotes hovered near the top of the Cascade Collegiate Conference (CCC) standings and appeared regularly on the national stage.

Coaching milestones provide another anchor. From 1995 through 2001, head coach Tod Corman guided the program to its highest winning percentage. His 123-61 record, a 66.8 percent mark, helped set the foundation for what Yote women's basketball could become. Those years placed the team in positions where postseason banners and national tournament brackets were part of the conversation.

From 2001 to 2014, the program thrived under current Athletic Director Reagan Rossi, who compiled a program-record 244 wins and a 61.5 percent winning percentage over 13 seasons. During that stretch, the Yotes won three CCC regular season titles and two tournament championships, while making nine NAIA National Tournament appearances. The highlight came in 2001, when the team advanced to the national championship game, capping one of the most successful eras in program history.

Yet numbers alone do not define a 30-year celebration. Alumni returning to campus reminded everyone that the story of women's basketball at The College of Idaho is ultimately about people. It is about the athletes who built the foundation, the coaches who guided them, the families who cheered from the stands, and the current players who now add their own chapters.

The weekend reflected the program's identity. Warmups, introductions, a tipoff, and a scoreboard remained the same as any regular season game. What changed was the context. The past and present shared the same space, honoring achievements that continue to shape the program's future. With a winning record, conference titles, national appearances, and a strong sense of community, Yote women's basketball stands firmly within the tradition of excellence at The College of Idaho.

To hear **MORE** about our athletic programs, check out our monthly Caldwell Courtside magazine: www.tinyurl.com/CaldwellCourtside



WILSON'S IMPACT REACHES FAR BEYOND THE COURT

The College of Idaho is defined by students who lead with integrity, empathy, and a deep commitment to serving others. Volleyball student-athlete Keylee Wilson exemplifies those qualities, and as a result, was named as the 2025 female recipient of the Cascade Collegiate Conference's Cashell Family Impact Scholarship. The scholarship honors student-athletes whose influence reaches well beyond athletic performance and recognizes those who strengthen team culture and uplift those around them.



Wilson's impact emerged most clearly during a year marked by challenges. Before the season even began, Wilson underwent two surgeries to repair both hip labrums, followed by a third surgery in December. These setbacks prevented her from competing during a season in which she was expected to be one of the team's key contributors. Rather than stepping away, she chose to stay fully engaged. She attended every practice, encouraged teammates, and contributed in any way she could despite being unable to jump, dive, or swing. Head coach Liz Mendiola, who nominated her for the award, wrote that in 25 years of coaching she had never seen an athlete put her team first the way Wilson does.

Wilson's leadership extended into moments of deep personal difficulty as well. During her rehabilitation, she experienced the loss of a close family member. Teammate Abby Flerchinger described how Wilson continued to support others even while grieving, offering steadiness and comfort when it might have been easier to withdraw. Flerchinger said Wilson lights up every room she enters and remains a source of positivity and strength for her teammates.

Her influence was also practical and hands on. Over the summer, she remodeled the team's locker room to give each player her own space, something the program had never had before. She managed the team's daily uniform schedule and patiently answered every follow up question. She often offered rides, held doors, hosted team dinners, and quietly checked in on teammates who needed support. These small, consistent actions became a defining part of her leadership.

Her commitment to the well-being of others expanded even further when she attended a retreat hosted by the Jae Foundation. The experience deepened her passion for mental health advocacy. She returned to campus determined to help create an environment where teammates felt safe, valued, and understood. Her openness encouraged others to speak honestly about their own struggles, fostering a culture of trust and empathy.

One of the clearest demonstrations of her servant heart came through the campus partnership with Be The Match. When Wilson learned she was a stem cell match for someone in need, she moved forward with the donation. The process required a full day of injections and blood draws and left her physically drained. Yet, she described it as profoundly meaningful. She even returned to team activities the next morning.

Wilson's story is not defined by statistics or on court achievements. It is defined by presence, character, and the choice to show up for others every single day. Her recognition through the Cashell Family Impact Scholarship affirms what her teammates and coaches already knew. Her influence reaches far beyond volleyball and reflects the very best of what it means to be a student at The College of Idaho.

SEND US YOUR CLASS NOTES!

We want to hear about all the great things our alumni are doing! If you would like to submit a class note, please email alumni@collegeofidaho.edu or call us at (208) 459-5004.

The Idaho Business Review named the following College of Idaho alumni to its IDAHO 500 list, which celebrates the most influential and accomplished professionals throughout the Gem State: RON BITNER '68 (beverage/winemakers), MARY BARINAGA '91 (healthcare), MEGAN RONK '01 (energy), ALI RABE '10 (government/politics), MOLLY LEADBETTER '11 (beverages/winemakers), and GIBSON BERRYHILL '19 (food processing).

1950s

CHUCK SHORT '59 has been inducted into the Half Moon Bay 2026 Athletic Hall of Fame for his dedication to students for more than 30 years as a teacher and varsity basketball coach.

1970s

RAY MARSHALL '75 was honored as the 2025 recipient of the Bill Edlund Award for Professionalism in the Law by The Northern District Historical Society and the Ninth Judicial Circuit Historical Society.

1990s

On February 10, 2026, CHRISTOPHER FARNSWORTH '93 celebrated the release of his newest novel, Robert B. Parker's *Big Shot*, his second addition to the iconic Jesse Stone series.

COREY SURBER '91 was recognized for her photographic image entitled *Stanley Lake*, which will be installed in the future USS IDAHO SSN 799 to showcase Idaho's incredible beauty and enhance the lives of crew members as they live aboard the submarine.

2010s

COURTNEY INDART '15 served as Secretary General of the National Model United Nations conference in New York

City, an educational conference bringing together nearly 3,000 college students from around the globe.

Continuing to find success in Major League Baseball, RILEY O'BRIEN '17 stands out on the St. Louis Cardinals starting roster as a relief pitcher and closer. Early in the 2026 season, he emerged as a dominant closer, recording multiple saves and posting an impressive stat line that includes a sub-2.00 ERA and exceptional strikeout-to-walk numbers.

RAHUL SHARMA '14 has been awarded a coveted research scholar position at The Metropolitan Museum of Art where his work focuses largely on photograph conservation.

REINALDO GIL ZAMBRANO '13 is featured in a recent episode of PBS's *Art by Northwest*, in which he discusses his work as an artist exploring identity, migration, and home through intricate woodblock prints and murals.

2020s

iWIN Sports and The Taylor LEAD Foundation recognized KAYA EVANS '21, the College's 8th Rhodes Scholar, at the 2026 Change Make*Hers Gala for her work advancing equity and opportunity for girls and women in sports.

CHELSIA NETO '23 was appointed to serve as president of the board of directors for the Idaho Black Community Alliance and named as a 2026 honoree on the Idaho Business Review's Accomplished Under 40 list.

After earning her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from Washington State University, MONTANA MILTON '21 will begin her career as a small animal veterinarian in Missoula, Montana.

IN MEMORIAM

The following alumni and friends of the College have passed away. When you learn of the death of a College of Idaho graduate, please email the information to alumni@collegeofidaho.edu.

1940s

Adriana Kunkel '45
Margaret Hicks '49

1950s

Keith Taylor '50
Jacquelyn Weber '51
Velma Vance '51
Bill Zimmerman '52
Dennis Mullins '53
Rosemary Beal '54
Marvin Blickenstaff '54
Ann Lloyd Edwards '55
Joan Kerfoot '57
Don Newbill '57
Donald Gaines '58
Wayne Palmer '58
Ruth Adams '59

1960s

Betty Lou Donnelly '60
Petros Spanakos '60
Carolyn Harrold '61
Terry Foxx '62
Kyu Lee '62
Nan Levorsen '62
Linden Pitkin '63
Paul Loree '63
Phil Anderson '64
Richard Foster '64
Mabel Itano '65
Neva Mullins '65
Dale Peterson '65
Jim Bruce '66
Buck Fitch '66
Jim Kantola '66
Alan Pritchett '66
Dale McAlister '67
Everett Crouse '68
Klaus Scharioth '68
Gerald Mitchell '68
Robert Osborne '69
Ronald Dehlin '69
Mary Nelson '69

1970s

Mike Davis '70
Arley Sue Hagman '70
Paula Burkhalter '70
Barbara Sweat '70
Leroy Foote '71
Robert Yensen '71
Mary Ensley '72
Debby Davis '73
Ravic Huso '73
Bill Buckendorf '74
James Luttmann '74
Mary Wood '75
Doug McNally '76

1980s

Brian Ford '81
Martha Noffsinger '81
Judy Shannon '81
Pat Papapietro '83
Wil Kirkman '85
Suzy Owens Eaton '85
Rob Gerber '87
Phil Bush '89

1990s

Sonia Alexander '91
Jodi Symms '94
Jed Fitch '96

2000s

Leslie Hammond '01
Amy MacDowell '06

2010s

Rachel Haneke '10

Previous Employees

Ralph Applebee
Merna Davis Bennett

Founder's Society & Previous Trustees

Harry Bettis
Kathy Mertz
Nancy Symms

Creative writing professor DIANE RAPTOSE '83 published a poem and interview reflecting her commitment to the transformative capacity of language in *Sign & Breath*, an anthology exploring the essence of poetry and the power of voice.
www.amazon.com/Sign-Breath-Shanta-Lee/dp/B0D9X3X483

Professor emeritus JOHN REMBER celebrated the recent publication of his three-volume series, *Journal of the Plague Years*, reflecting on life during and after the pandemic with humor, honesty, and small pockets of light in dark and uncertain times.
www.amazon.com/Journal-Plague-Years-John-Rember/dp/B0FXNF1Z86

FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

Sociology professor SCOTT DRAPER contributed a chapter to the 2026 publication of *Collective Effervescence* that examines the influence of sound and volume in shaping collective effervescence within religious contexts.
www.amazon.com/Collective-Effervescence-S%C3%A9bastien-Tutenges/dp/1439926824

Education professor TERAH MOORE recently published a children's book entitled *If You Give a Coyote Meat Scraps*, which inspired by a true story follows a curious coyote as a simple act of kindness turns into a farmyard adventure.
www.amazon.com/You-Give-Coyote-Meat-Scraps/dp/B0GQPZ8KF2

UPCOMING EVENTS



FRIDAY & SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2-3, 2026
HOMECOMING & FAMILY WEEKEND 2026



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2026
WINTER COMMENCEMENT

FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2027
SCHOLARSHIP GALA



FRIDAY, APRIL 16, 2027
GO PURPLE STEAK FEED

FRIDAY APRIL 30, 2027
STUDENT RESEARCH CONFERENCE

SATURDAY, MAY 15, 2027
SPRING COMMENCEMENT

RECOGNIZED FOR LEADERSHIP



COLLEGE OF IDAHO LEADERS RECOGNIZED ON THE IDAHO 500 LIST

The College of Idaho is proud to celebrate the members of our community recognized on the Idaho Business Review's IDAHO 500 list—a statewide honor highlighting Idaho's most influential leaders.

Doug Brigham (education), Latonia Haney Keith (education), Reagan Rossi (sports), David Douglass (education), and Jim Everett (living legends, not pictured) were recognized for embodying the values of leadership, service, and excellence that define The College of Idaho.



HELP THE COLLEGE FULFILL ITS SUSTAINABILITY GOALS. LET US KNOW IF YOU ARE WILLING TO RECEIVE OUR QUEST MAGAZINE DIGITALLY IN THE FUTURE BY SENDING AN EMAIL TO: ALUMNI@COLLEGEOFIDAHO.EDU

QUEST

The College of Idaho
2112 Cleveland Blvd
Caldwell, ID 83605



20
26

NEW TREES TAKE ROOT AT COLLEGE OF IDAHO

BY NICOLE CAMMANN '14, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

Some changes to a campus happen gradually—a new coat of paint, a renovated classroom, a walkway repaired over summer break. You almost don't notice until someone points it out.

The planting of 35 mature trees was not that kind of change. Almost overnight, The College of Idaho campus looked and felt different. A bit of shade where there was sun. Texture where there was open sky. A sense that this place has been here a long time—and intends to stay.

This transformation was made possible by the remarkable generosity of our donors, friends of the College, and alumni who believe that beauty is not a luxury, but an investment in the students, faculty, and staff who walk these grounds every day. We are especially grateful to Ray Neilsen and the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, whose continued commitment to honoring emeritus professor Dr. Howard Berger provided vital support for this project.

There is a quote often attributed to various sources, but its meaning never dims: "She who plants a tree loves others." We think of that often as we look at what has taken root here—not just in the soil, but in the spirit of a community that keeps showing up for its students, for its campus, and for the generations of Yotes still to come.



MORE!

To hear **MORE** about why your fellow Yotes give to the College, visit: www.tinyurl.com/fvz33afk

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www.collegeofidaho.edu/about/non-discrimination