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In the Loop: Fall 2018

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Commencement in June ended the 2017–18 academic year. It does get a little quieter in the College of Computing and Digital Media (CDM), as my inbox and calendar testify. But summer was still busy. CDM staff worked to close out the previous year, and start the new academic year by refurbishing our labs and classrooms and welcoming incoming students at orientations.

Faculty pursued their research and creative agendas and started to prepare classes for the fall; as well, some continued to teach in summer quarter classes. But of special note are the summer activities where we welcomed different audiences to CDM. Here are a few events from this past summer.

- We participated again in the Chicago Housing Authority’s One Summer Chicago program, with 34 high school students writing screenplays, making documentary films and creating graphic design projects. The students were at CDM four days a week for six weeks. Watch some of the program’s highlights at bit.ly/CHAhighlights.

- We hosted a Data Science Summer Academy that allowed high school students to explore the techniques used to analyze and interpret data. This workshop was made possible by a $50,000 grant supporting 15 scholarships from ACM’s Special Interest Group on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining.

- We held our 10th annual Game, Cinema and Animation Summer Academy, engaging 74 high school students interested in film/TV, screenwriting, animation and gaming.

- We hosted 41 Girls Who Code Campus students in computer science, website design and iPhone app development courses.

- And, as you can read in this issue, we hosted professional development workshops for the Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science (CAFÉCS) that trained 120 Chicago Public School teachers in its innovative approach to computer science education.

These activities are made possible by the time and effort of our full- and part-time faculty Liliane Calfee, James Choi, Lucia Dettori, Brian Ferguson, Michael Flores, Josh Jones, Jay Margalus, Bamshad Mobasher, Gary Novak, Matt Quinn, Daniela Raicu, Brad Riddell, Scott Roberts, Wendy Roderweiss, Bobby Schweizer, Raffaella Settimi, Pamela Sherrod Anderson, Allen Turner and JoAnne Zielinski, as well as administrative and operational support by our staff members Elly Kafritsas-Wessels, Adam Lubin and Jennifer McClelland, in particular.

It has been exciting and inspiring to witness the next wave of achievers and innovators working to further develop their talents. CDM is proud to provide the space and resources for these groups to do this exceptional work.
Laugh Out Loud

A new partnership with The Second City brings comedy to the School of Cinematic Arts

In collaboration with The Second City, Chicago’s legendary comedy venue and training center, the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) now offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in comedy filmmaking. The Master of Fine Arts in screenwriting with a concentration in comedy, the Bachelor of Fine Arts in film and television with a concentration in comedy filmmaking, and a minor in comedy filmmaking launched this fall. DePaul is now the only university in the country to have these MFA and BFA degree programs.

In a press release, Gary Novak, director of SCA, said, “Together, DePaul and Second City will merge the crafts of comedy storytelling and filmmaking into the most comprehensive program of its kind. The curriculum will give students the opportunity to create, develop and showcase their comedic writing and directing from script to screen.”

In addition to taking coursework at DePaul and production classes at Cinespace Chicago Film Studios, where television dramas such as “Chicago Fire” and “Empire” are filmed, students will be instructed by comedy experts at The Second City’s Harold Ramis Film School. Named in memory of the director and writer who penned the seminal comedies “Groundhog Day” and “Ghostbusters,” the film school will allow students to create their own original comedic voices and hone their skills in creative comedic storytelling.

“We’re teaching students Second City’s approach to comedy creation,” Novak says. “How do you come up with ideas? How do you workshop? How do you work with actors? It’s very much the approach that Harold Ramis used when he was making films.”

Novak affirms that the new collaboration will help advance the already outstanding talent of SCA students. “The quality of students coming in the door, as well as the quality of our graduates, has been increasing year by year. I think this is just going to add to the mix.”

Novak is certain that students in both programs will find success after graduating from DePaul. SCA’s national reputation is growing rapidly, and The Second City is a staple in the comedy movie and television industry, whose notable alumni include Dan Aykroyd, Stephen Colbert, Tina Fey, Bill Murray and Amy Poehler, as well as directors Alan Arkin, Bonnie Hunt and Betty Thomas.

“A lot of the movers and shakers in comedy, at some point or another, went through Second City or have Second City connections,” he says. “Second City has a person on staff specifically designated to help place students and find those connections.”

In the long run, Novak believes that the DePaul-Second City collaboration will be instrumental in establishing Chicago as the center of the entertainment industry. “The shows that are shooting at Cinespace have totally changed the landscape in Chicago. Film production has never been at the level it is now in the modern history of Chicago,” Novak asserts. “The key to long-term success and longevity of production in Chicago is to have content created here, shot here and finished here. We view the collaboration with Second City as a major step in that direction.”

Visit bit.ly/SCAcomedy to watch the sizzle reel announcing the DePaul-Second City collaboration.
Reel Rewind

Conferences, festivals, screenings, showcases—you name it. There is always something going on in the School of Cinematic Arts.

Big Shoulders International Student Film Festival

Students from 15 countries submitted their original films to the first Big Shoulders International Student Film Festival (BSISFF), a two-day event that promotes diversity and inclusion by showcasing the work of young filmmakers from underrepresented groups. SCA students actively participated in organizing and hosting the festival, as well as selecting the 15 films that were screened. BSISFF kicked off with a Visiting Artist Series (VAS) event that featured award-winning filmmakers Laura Checkoway and Kristóf Deák. The next BSISFF will be held February 1–2, 2019. To watch highlights from the festival, visit cdm.depaul.edu/bigshoulders.

Courier 12 Screenwriting Conference

Since its launch in 2011, the Courier 12 Screenwriting Conference (C12) has become the Midwest’s premier event for aspiring television and film writers and one of the only screenwriting conferences in the region. C12 has featured prominent writers in the industry, including this year’s guests Scott Beck and Bryan Woods (“A Quiet Place”) and Megan Amram (“Parks and Recreation,” “Silicon Valley,” “The Simpsons”).

DePaul Experimental Film Showcase

The DePaul Experimental Film Showcase (DEF) exhibits the original work of students in experimental filmmaking courses. This past May, the jury-selected DEF films were screened at the DePaul Art Museum. The festival prides itself on showcasing diverse voices and perspectives: more than half of the films screened were made by women and more than a third were made by people of color and LGBTQ filmmakers. A summer showcase was also held this year and was sponsored by Chicago Movies in the Parks.
**FxF: The Frame-by-Frame Conference**

In May, animators and animation students from across the country attended the inaugural Frame-by-Frame Conference (FxF), an inaugural daylong conference that included screenings, panels and workshops. FxF honored stop-motion animator PES, innovative 3D animator and game designer David OReilly, and award-winning short-film animator Joanna Priestley.

**Premiere Film Festival**

In June, more than 700 students, film enthusiasts and industry professionals attended Premiere, the annual film festival that showcases outstanding student work in cinema and animation. In Chicago’s historic Music Box Theatre, awards were presented in 20 categories that covered all aspects of filmmaking from screenwriting to postproduction. This year, Margaret Bialis (CDM ’18) and Kevin Endres won jury awards for their respective films “Opening Night” and “Lazaretto.” To watch highlights from Premiere 2018, visit cdm.depaul.edu/Premiere.

**Verité Documentary Conference**

The Verité Documentary Conference, a two-day program that offers an in-depth look at the documentary filmmaking process, creates a venue for students to learn from and interact with leading figures in the industry. Screenings, panel discussions and master classes provide a behind-the-scenes look at what goes into creating a documentary. This fall, filmmaker Bing Liu, and producer and sound expert Zak Piper participated in the conference.

**Visiting Artist Series**

VAS went out with a bang at the end of the 2017–18 academic year. The popular series features discussions with established and emerging filmmakers, animators, designers and artists. In May, Rainn Wilson, known for his role as Dwight in the TV series “The Office,” spoke with Instructor Chris Parrish at one of the biggest VAS events of the year. The next day, VAS presented an advance screening of Bo Burnham’s critically acclaimed film “Eighth Grade” and continued with a discussion between Burnham and Jessica King, adjunct faculty member. To watch videos from VAS, visit cdm.depaul.edu/VAS.
Ten years ago, when Lucia Dettori, associate dean of CDM, was attending a computer science conference in Oregon, a discussion broke out about the lack of diversity in computing. At the time, an estimated 18 percent of bachelor’s degrees in computer science were awarded to women, and the figure was even lower for people of color. Motivated by the conversation, Dettori and a group of educators working in Chicago decided to tackle the issue.

“Computer science is permeating almost every job and we want people to be exposed to the skill set, no matter what you look like or what gender you are,” Dettori says. “Everyone should have access to it.”

With support from DePaul and CDM, Dettori and professors from Loyola University Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago approached Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to develop a computer science curriculum for high school students. With funding from the National Science Foundation, the educators created the Chicago Alliance for Equity in Computer Science (CAFÉCS). In collaboration with The Learning Partnership, an organization that enhances education in public schools, CAFÉCS ensures that all CPS students have access to computer science education.

When the program was established in the late 2000s, only two computer science courses were being taught in CPS’s high school curriculum, one on basic computer use and the other an advanced course in coding. A decade later, CPS has become the first public school system in the country to make a year of computer science a high school graduation requirement, with classes ranging from human-computer interaction to robotics.

Students are regularly assigned projects directly related to their lives outside of the classroom. They identify problems they see in their communities and find solutions to them using computer science and technology. According to Dettori, this approach sustains students’ interest while emphasizing the applicability of the skills they are learning. “Students use the data that are presented to them to share a message about a problem they feel passionate about,” she says.

CAFÉCS has scored success toward its mission: at the end of the 2016–17 school year, approximately 7,000 students had completed the curriculum. Of that student population, 44 percent were female, 38 percent were African-American and 47 percent were Hispanic.

Dettori asserts that DePaul has been instrumental in the success of CAFÉCS. CPS teachers attend professional development workshops twice a year at DePaul, and the university has strongly supported the social justice and equality roots of CAFÉCS’s mission.

While CAFÉCS will be rolled out to CPS elementary and middle schools, there are many challenges ahead, like staffing teachers and funding. “It’s going to take a village,” Dettori says. “It’s going to take business communities, political will and the efforts of secondary partners like universities and researchers.”

Dettori strongly believes in what early computer science education can accomplish. “We see this as a way to improve Chicago and the nation in terms of creating a cadre of high school graduates that have an understanding of computer science and the technical skills to be productive members of society, no matter what jobs they get.”

To learn more about CAFÉCS, visit bit.ly/CAFECSvideo.
Not that long ago, the internet seemed like a relatively easy place to identify fact from fiction. A colleague may have posted an article on Facebook about water on Mars, a discovery proven to be true. An email forwarded to you by that “one” relative might have claimed that the cure for cancer was a combination of rattlesnake venom and Sriracha, something you would likely find questionable.

Today, however, as more and more people turn to the internet for news, personal and political biases cloud judgment, and “fake news” spreads rapidly on social media and partisan websites.

Last fall, Massimo Di Pierro, professor of computer science, and colleagues Luca de Alfaro, Eugenio Tacchini, Stefano Moret, Gabriele Ballarin and Marco Della Vedova decided to combat “fake news” on the internet. In January, they launched the Truth Value Project (TVP), a website that assigns a positive or negative reputation to news articles based on a measured reputation of those sharing the information (or misinformation) on social media.

For example, someone who regularly tweets articles published by peer-reviewed scientific journals has a positive reputation on TVP, and what they share online has a higher likelihood of being reliable. Conversely, someone who consistently shares articles from websites that are known to spread misinformation or “fake news” eventually acquires a negative reputation. In this case, TVP advises readers to be skeptical about the information they pass along.

“The goal was to come up with a system that studies the reliability of news. How can we tell how reliable a certain piece of news is?” Di Pierro explains. “There is a responsibility to assess if something is fake or not before posting or not posting [it online].”

TVP users enter the URL of a news article into the website’s search engine and a reputation rating is generated on a spectrum, with strongly red being very unreliable and strongly green indicating very reliable. TVP users are asked to vote on the accuracy of news articles they are reviewing. Those votes contribute to the reputation of the articles and their sources, such as CNN and Fox News. If a TVP user finds several factual errors in an article, they can cast a negative vote. When a vote is cast, however, TVP checks the user’s own reputation. If there is a history of voting positively for unreliable or “fake” stories, the user’s vote can earn a negative weight.

“There is a responsibility to assess if something is fake or not before posting or not posting [it online].”

Di Pierro is quick to say that the system is not perfect because, while an automated system can help determine whether an article is reliable or unreliable, the data are largely dependent on the users’ actions. “People will disagree on what’s appropriate to post or not post,” Di Pierro says. “There are facts that people disagree on [as to] whether they are true or false. We would like for more people to help with this project because the more people [who use it], the more unbiased it becomes.”

While Di Pierro says there is much work to be done with automated systems like TVP, he firmly believes that they will play an important part in defeating “fake news.”
WHAT'S IN YOUR WALLET?
Experts in digital economy, financial risk management and blockchain technology led workshops in June and October for operations professionals, technologists and innovators. Hosted by CDM’s Institute for Professional Development, the events offered participants an in-depth overview of blockchains, distributed ledgers and cryptoassets while applying the technologies to real-life cases and examples.

ILLUSTRATING INJUSTICE
Professional Lecturer Naghmeh Farzaneh was the animation director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Campaign for Smart Justice’s short documentary “Lavette’s Choice.” The film was part of a series about mass incarceration in the United States and how it affects underrepresented individuals, families and communities. “Lavette’s Choice” was a finalist at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival.

...AND THEY’RE OFF!
Alumni, faculty and students, as well as their colleagues and friends, participated in several hackathons this year. Hack2Impact brought together developers, engineers, designers, business students and others to develop solutions to issues facing Chicago communities. At a machine learning (ML) hackathon, students and Chicago ML members shared their experiences and insights on different projects to advance ML technologies. More than 100 animators spent an entire weekend creating short films at the annual Mayday event, resulting in hand-drawn, stop-motion, computer and hybrid animations.

IMPORTANT WORK
Bashar al Lawati (CDM MS ’11) and Redar Ismail (CDM MS ’15) led a group of students to victory at the annual Campus 1871 competition. Contending teams were asked to solve a problem in today’s world by creating a viable business model and design for a potential start-up company. The team’s project helps refugees and immigrants find employment opportunities that allow them to fully utilize their skill sets.
STEP
In an effort to promote the power of filmmaking and the importance of diverse voices, SCA and Chaz Ebert (JD ’77), CEO of several Ebert enterprises including RogerEbert.com, hosted a screening of “Step,” the true story of an inner-city Baltimore girls’ step-dancing team. The special presentation celebrated high school students who participated in the Chicago Housing Authority Program in Documentary Filmmaking.

TEAMING UP
In May, representatives of leading Chicagoland industries visited with CDM faculty to discuss potential collaborations and partnerships. Faculty members presented their innovative research topics to representatives from Allstate, Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase, Microsoft, Motorola Solutions and others.

• Associate Professor Doris Rusch and CDM students won a bronze medal at the 2018 International Serious Play Awards for “Blood Myth,” a fast-paced, mobile platform game that raises awareness about sickle cell disease.

• Assistant Professor Scott Myers’ blog, Go Into The Story, was named the “Best of the Best!” scriptwriting website in Writer's Digest's 20th annual “101 Best Websites for Writers” list.

• Variety named DePaul to its list of Best Film Schools of 2018, noting DePaul’s range of degrees within the program and the university’s hands-on approach to teaching and learning. Variety also praised SCA's involvement with Cinespace Chicago Film Studios and Project Bluelight.

• Last spring, the Office of Mission and Values sponsored a campuswide T-shirt contest using DePaul’s core values as its theme. Josh Miller (CDM ’18) won for his design “What Must Be Done.” Social media favorite “Dignity for All” by Will Ngo (CDM ’18) received an audience choice award. Their shirts will be sold in DePaul bookstores. Read more about Ngo on page 11.

• The Princeton Review included CDM on its list of best schools to study game design in 2018, with the undergraduate program placing 28th and the graduate program placing 17th. Animation Career Review ranked the game design program No. 1 in the Midwest and No. 7 nationally. The publication also ranked the animation program 14th on its 2018 list of “Top 50 Animation Schools and Colleges in the U.S.”

• Instructor Jay Margalus, Assistant Professor Nathan Matteson, Professional Lecturer Heather Quinn, Professional Lecturer LeAnne Wagner and Professional Lecturer Lee Zelenak presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Design Principles and Practices in Barcelona, Spain, earlier this year.

• In the DePaul Blue Demons’ video series “Possessed with a Purpose,” SCA introduced fans to Alex Pissios, president and CEO of Cinespace. To see Pissios explain how SCA students are contributing their talents and skills to TV shows like “Chicago Fire,” “Chicago Med” and “Empire,” visit bit.ly/Pissios.
Checkmate
Learn how an alumnus fights cybercrimes

Think of the crime scenes you see in “CSI” or “Psych”: yellow tape sectioning off the area, flashing cameras and investigators jotting down notes. That’s not actually what happens when digital forensics expert Jibran Ilyas (CDM ‘05) investigates data hacks, but he’s just as relentless as any Hollywood detective trying to solve a case.

Ilyas, managing director of the digital forensics and incident response practice at the risk management firm Stroz Friedberg (an Aon company), and his team of digital forensics experts first have to kick the hackers out of the network.

“We have to be very strategic, because we’re kind of playing a game of chess with the attackers, if you will. They don’t want to be detected, but we don’t want to be detected right away either because they will adjust their tactics,” Ilyas explains. “We have to think 10 moves ahead, just like in chess.”

As Ilyas races to defeat the hackers, his team creates an attacker profile of technical indicators of the hackers’ behaviors and activity. The profile shows the victim or company what signs of hacking to look for in the future.

According to Ilyas, the process typically takes anywhere from two days to a couple of weeks. While the work can be stressful and frustrating, Ilyas lives for it.

“When we get a new case, we thrive on the opportunity. We know we’re going to get to learn something new because either the hackers have started something [we haven’t seen before] or we investigate a new kind of technology,” Ilyas says. “We’re like the kids in a candy store.”

Ilyas, who was named one of Crain’s Chicago Business’ “40 Under 40” last year, is the youngest managing director at Stroz Friedberg. Although he says he’s constantly learning from new cases, he enjoys sharing his knowledge with junior members in the practice. Ilyas also teaches at Northwestern University.

“I’m most proud of passing on knowledge and making new rock stars at my own company and also preparing university students,” he says.

Despite where he teaches, Ilyas is a true Blue Demon at heart. He followed his brother, Imran Ilyas (CDM MS ’00), to DePaul and declared a major in computer science. During his undergraduate years, all of his music was hacked and stolen from the Napster application on his computer. Ilyas, who had no prior knowledge of digital forensics, fought to get his music back.

Even though he spent many sleepless nights panicked about his lost music, Ilyas enjoyed what he was doing and, after successfully recovering his files, found the experience rewarding. He discovered that the School of Computing offered classes in network security and switched his major to network technologies. Ilyas credits J.P. Labruyere, senior professional lecturer, for making a huge impact on his career.

“He made us work a lot in his course, and one of the things he taught me was stamina. You need that in the network security field,” Ilyas reflects. “His teaching style was very effective. He made us have a sense of accomplishment, and he didn’t spoon-feed us.”

At DePaul, Ilyas founded the Pakistani Student Association (PSA) and served as its president for two years. The organization quickly gained in popularity. In fact, it was through PSA that Ilyas met his wife, Samra Cheema (CSH ’09). He is quick to emphasize how important DePaul has been in his life.

“The experiences at DePaul gave me confidence. I learned that if I just put my mind on something and give a sincere effort, I will get what I want, which is a pretty big thing in my life,” he says. “And I know exactly where it came from.”
The Trendy Designer
Recent graduate details his passion for design

Will Ngo (CDM ’18) was used to all-nighters before he even entered college. Throughout high school, Ngo was involved with the student newspaper, and when he started learning photography and design, Ngo devoted more time to the publication. He often found himself staying up all night working on the paper. His interest in design became a passion, and he pursued it at DePaul as a graphic design major.

For Ngo, who is originally from Indiana, Chicago was the ideal city to study design, and after visiting CDM, he knew he could hone his skills at DePaul.

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