Tiger origami

New buildings on campus

Plans for the major reunion classes

Princeton Alumni Weekly

2010 REUNIONS GUIDE
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Reunions Guide • May/June 2010
New in the neighborhood

Major-reunion visitors who haven’t been on campus for five years are sure to notice a few prominent additions. PAW provides this walking tour to help you get acquainted with the University’s newest (or most-recently refurbished) buildings, including one that is nearing completion. The tour begins near Elm Drive, at the site of the former pagoda tennis courts.

1. Whitman College (2007)
Designed by Demetri Porphyrios ’80, this fresh interpretation of collegiate gothic offers new views that seem familiar. Recent alumni will enjoy the one-word inscription on the walkway outside Hargadon Hall – “YES!” – and fans of Princeton’s arts community may want to visit the Class of 1970 Theater, in 1981 Hall. Other interior spaces worth seeing include Community Hall’s main dining area and the two adjacent private dining rooms.

2. New Butler College (2009)
Five new red-brick dorms have replaced the New New Quad, which was razed shortly after Reunions in 2007. Designed by Henry Cobb of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, the buildings are “subtly sophisticated,” according to University Architect Ron McCoy. A grass-ramped amphitheater overlooks Butler College Memorial Court, which honors the classes for which the college’s previous dorms were named – 1922, 1940, 1941, and 1942.

The chemistry department’s move to its new home – still under construction – is expected to begin this fall. Designed by Hopkins Architects of London, the 265,000-square-foot structure will be Princeton’s second-largest academic building, after Firestone Library. For the best view of the construction site, walk to the south end of Princeton Stadium.

Frank Gehry’s Princeton debut features an exterior defined by “counterpoint and contradiction,” as author Dale Cotton notes in his recent book Princeton Modern: Highlights of Campus Architecture from the 1960s to the Present: “[S]aw-toothed rooflines are juxtaposed against sloping steel profiles and brick boxes; soaring towers confront horizontal rooms; shiny steel embraces light-color brick.” Inside, the second-floor reading room, dubbed the Treehouse for its leafy views, has become a favorite study space.

5. Campus Club (2009)
The new incarnation of Campus Club brings something different to The Street: a multifunctional gathering place open to all undergraduates and graduate students. Campus Club’s days as an eating club ended in 2005, and the following year, the building was donated to the University. After 18 months of renovations and more than a year of planning by an advisory board of students, the club re-opened its doors last fall.

6. The new Carl A. Fields Center (2009)
In September 2009, the Fields Center moved across Olden Street from the former Osborn Clubhouse into a restored and renovated building that once housed Elm Club. The new home is more visible and significantly larger, with refurbished spaces and a 5,000-square-foot addition designed by Ann Beha Architects. Established in 1971 as the Third World Center, the center aims to promote empowerment, leadership, social justice, and understanding.

7. Sherrerd Hall (2008)
Sherrerd Hall, designed by Frederick Fisher and Partners, features a glass façade that reflects nearby foliage and neighboring buildings. The building is home to Princeton’s operations research and financial engineering department and the Center for Information Technology Policy. Inside, a metal and light sculpture by artist Jim Isermann serves as the centerpiece of the main stairwell.
When Alex Hilton was here (Class of 1919) it was boater hats and stiff collars. His son (my father, Norman, Class of ’41) came in the raccoon coat, tweed jacket era. We opened our store in 2001, and the styles have evolved even since then. But one thing remains. Quality has a style all its own. And though some may give it the “old college try,” you simply can not fake it.

Dan Sachs ’60

Notebook

The collage on the cover of the Class of 1960’s 50th reunion book includes a photo of one classmate familiar to nearly everyone in the class: Dan Sachs ’60.

A remarkable athlete and outstanding student who went on to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, Sachs died young, losing a battle with cancer at age 28. But at Princeton — and at Oxford — Sachs’ legacy lives on through a scholarship that has sent Princeton graduates abroad to pursue graduate studies for the last 40 years. (Most attend Oxford’s Worcester College, where Sachs studied history.)

David Loevner ’76, a former Sachs scholar who has directed the scholarship for more than a decade, said that the program relies on its “extended family,” with past scholars forming a committee to choose each year’s recipient.

The scholarship fund, Loevner added, began as a friends-and-family affair. Money had been raised to form a trust for Sachs’ daughter, Alexandra, who was less than a year old when her father died. But when Sachs’ widow, Joan, remarried a few years later, she turned the fund over to its secondary purpose, creating a scholarship at Princeton. The first scholarship was awarded to Dennis Sullivan ’70.

Fifteen years later, the Class of 1960 revitalized the scholarship fund, on the occasion of its 25th reunion, preserving the award’s fiscal health at a time of rising tuition costs andwan-

ing investment returns. In appreciation, the award was renamed the Daniel M. Sachs—Class of 1960 Scholarship.

In the last 25 years, the Sachs scholarship has grown to become one of Princeton’s best-known honors, in part because of the accomplishments of past recipients like U.S. Solicitor General Elena Kagan ’81 and Anne-Marie Slaughter ’80, the former Woodrow Wilson School dean and current head of policy planning at the State Department. Charles Gillispie, an emeritus professor who was Dan Sachs’ undergraduate adviser, tracks the latest developments from each scholar, reporting the news like a proud parent in an annual letter to scholars and donors.

Phil Becton ’60, the president of the Class of 1960, said that the scholarship holds special meaning for his classmates, even for those who barely knew Sachs in their Princeton days. “It has been a tremendous success, and it’s been a matter of great pride to the class,” Becton said. “The Sachs is our lasting monument at the University.”

Phil Becton ’60, the president of the Class of 1960, said that the scholarship holds special meaning for his classmates, even for those who barely knew Sachs in their Princeton days. “It has been a tremendous success, and it’s been a matter of great pride to the class,” Becton said. “The Sachs is our lasting monument at the University.”

By B.T.
New this year: ’85’s Reunions run

As an early riser and avid runner, Catherine Patrick Sullivan ’85 noticed that quite a few alumni found time for a Saturday-morning run at Reunions. So when her class began looking for a project that it could launch at its 25th reunion, Sullivan suggested bringing those individual joggers together in a community event: the new 5-kilometer Princeton University Reunions Run, or PURR, at the West Windsor fields.

Designed to be a recreational event, the Reunions run begins Saturday morning, May 29, at 8:30 a.m. and follows the same course that Princeton’s cross country teams use to train and compete.

“It’s a chance to catch up with people and do something that you feel good about,” said Maria Carreras Kourepenos ’85, Sullivan’s co-chairwoman. Participants who have not registered in advance can sign up on the morning of the run.

PURR is a fundraiser for two charities with ties to the Class of 1985: Princeton Young Achievers, an educational after-school program for local children from low- and moderate-income families; and Friends of the World Food Programme, the food-aid program of the United Nations. Clayton Marsh ’85 is president of the board for Princeton Young Achievers, and the Class of 1985 recently sponsored an undergraduate intern at the World Food Programme through Princeton Internships in Community Service.

The class’s choice to support one local nonprofit and one international charity was inspired by Princeton’s informal motto, “In the nation’s service, and in the service of all nations.” By B.T.

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During her Princeton graduation weekend, Robin Epstein ’95 told her parents that instead of going to law school, she was heading to New York to become a stand-up comic. Her parents were less than thrilled. “I think that was the closest I’ve come to seeing people spontaneously combust,” she jokes. “They were not happy.”

One of the founding members of Princeton’s improv comedy troupe Quipfire, Epstein held 9-to-5 jobs to pay the rent and lined up gigs at clubs at night. After several years doing stand-up, she shifted into TV comedy writing. Today, she makes people laugh by doling out advice.

Her book So Sue Me, Jackass! Avoiding Legal Pitfalls That Can Come Back to Bite You at Work, at Home, and at Play, published by Plume, takes a playful approach to legal issues people face. Co-written with her sister, Amy Epstein Feldman, a lawyer who reports on legal issues for a radio news station in the Philadelphia area, the book poses questions that range from “Can you sign your mother-in-law into a nursing home against her will?” to “Who gets to keep the ring when an engagement is called off?” (Answer: the giver.)

The authors cover issues related to work, money, marriage and divorce, children, pets, the online world, home, and health in a humorous question-and-answer format. The questions primarily were culled from Amy’s work – both as a nationally syndicated legal commentator and general counsel at the Judge Group, where she helps employees with their legal dilemmas. But a few sticky situations from Epstein’s life make their way into the book, like the time she ignored the no-subletting clause in her lease. She sublet to a friend whose boyfriend moved the air conditioner to another window without properly attaching it; when Epstein was moving out of the apartment and the movers tried to remove the unit, it “went sailing out the fourth-floor window” down an interior shaft (no one was hurt).

The sister duo had a short stint as online advice givers for The Jewish Daily Forward Web site, and they are working on a deal for a legal-advice syndicated talk-radio show – a lawyer’s version of NPR’s Car Talk.

Epstein, who teaches TV sitcom writing at New York University, also has written fiction. In May, Dial published her first young-adult novel, God Is in the Pancakes, about a teenage girl who works at a retirement community and is faced with deciding whether to help one of the residents dying from ALS fulfill his wish of assisted suicide. “Young adult [fiction] is darker than a lot of people realize,” says Epstein.

Epstein’s interest in writing was nurtured at Princeton, where she majored in English and wrote her senior thesis on comedy writing. She jokes that she still holds a grudge about not getting into any creative writing classes. “I only applied to Toni Morrison’s class,” she laughs, “but still.” By K.F.G.
Things to see and do
Reunions exhibits, events, and more

- A new exhibit of “Pictures of Pictures,” opening May 28 at the Princeton University Art Museum, explores the diverse tradition of nested imagery in prints, photographs, collages, paintings, and sculptures. Works on display include “Colosseum Pictures (The New Antiquity),” below, a 2009 print by American artist Tim Davis.

- The art on the walls of the Nassau Hall Faculty Room will be featured in the exhibit “Inner Sanctum: Memory and Meaning in Princeton’s Faculty Room at Nassau Hall,” opening May 28 at Nassau Hall.

- Student publications from the last 175 years take center stage in “Princetonians in Print,” an exhibition at the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library that chronicles the history and variety of student journalism and creative writing at Princeton. Items on display include the Nov. 10, 1917, issue of The Princeton Tiger, below, which included “The Staying Up All Night,” an F. Scott Fitzgerald ’17 poem about an evening of campus revelry.

- The Lewis Center for the Arts presents “On the Verge,” written by Eric Overmyer and directed by Sophie Gandler ’10, May 27-29 at the Marie and Edward Matthews Acting Studio, 185 Nassau Street. For tickets, call University Ticketing at (609) 258-9220.

- The Triangle Club performs its Reunions encore of the shopping spoof “Store Trek” at McCarter Theatre May 28 and 29. For tickets, visit the McCarter box office or mccarter.org.

- All single alumni are invited to Singles Mingle, a casual reception at Chancellor Green May 28 from 8:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. Last year’s inaugural event drew about 100 people, according to Jill Baron ’80, who organized this year’s mixer.

- Maps from the collection of Henry Wendt ’55 are on display at Firestone Library’s Milberg Gallery in the exhibit “Envisioning the World: The First Printed Maps, 1472-1700.”

- Alumni journalists will discuss politics at PAW’s Reunions panel, May 28 at 1:30 p.m. in the Frist Performance Theater. Scheduled participants include Alexander Bolton ’98, Amy Holmes ’94, Kristin Jensen ’93, Richard Just ’01, Kathy Kiely ’77, Andrew Romano ’04, and moderator Joel Achenbach ’82.
Reunions 2010

More than a dozen new ways to celebrate the Year of the Tiger

Compiled by Madeleine Bruml ’11, Photos by T. Kevin Birch

Class of 1945

Friday’s class dinner will take place at the Present Day Club, preceded by the class photo at 5:45 p.m. Entertainment after dinner will feature classmate Rocky King, the Nassoons, and a slide show of old reunion photos. Saturday’s activities include lunch in the tent and the P-rade for classmates and families. Dinner in the tent will be preceded and followed by the piano playing of Bob Egan, featuring songs of the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s. Sunday brunch will be in the Forbes dining room.

Class of 1950

The Class of 1950 is celebrating its 60th, beginning with a Thursday-night dinner at Frist Campus Center, featuring the Patty Cronheim Ensemble. On Friday, a lunch at Prospect House will honor Professor David Billington ’50’s 50 years of service at the University. The Royal Palm Steel Band will play at dinner. Before Saturday’s P-rade, class members and guests will meet for lunch at Rockefeller College with music by the Ancient Order of Hibernians Pipe Band. Saturday-night dinner features the Bobby Mansure Ensemble, followed by the University Orchestra concert and the annual fireworks display.

continues on page 12
Ready to enjoy retirement but not ready to give up control? Consider Princeton Windrows. Own a maintenance-free villa, townhouse or apartment minutes from Palmer Square and the intellectual, artistic, and athletic events at Princeton University. Enjoy alumni class functions held at Princeton Windrows. Restaurants on-site. Extensive library featuring resident authors. A Health and Wellness Center complete with indoor pool. And stay in control of your money and healthcare.

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Class of 1955

The 55th reunion begins Thursday with a tour of the Trenton and Princeton battlefields, led by emeritus professor James McPherson. That evening, Princeton Project 55, founded by members of the Class of 1955, will celebrate its 20th anniversary with a gala at the Westin Princeton at Forrestal Village, featuring keynote speaker Cory Booker, the mayor of Newark, N.J. At headquarters, Jerry Rife and his Dixieland band will perform. Friday starts with a panel discussion on "The Tectonic and Cyclonic Economic Events Since the 50th Reunion." Later, there is a reception at the Lewis-Sigler Institute for Integrative Genomics, followed by dinner at headquarters and a performance by the class's own Stan Rubin and his all-star jazz band. The Saturday reception will be held in the Lewis Science Library, with Peter Lewis '55 serving as the class's guide.
Class of 1960

Two “Years of the Tiger” – 1938 and 2010 – have special meaning for the Class of 1960: The first is the birth year of most of the class, and the second marks its 50th-reunion year. To celebrate, a Chinese symbol for tiger joins ’60’s classic class logo, a Janus tiger looking back to a rich past and ahead to new adventures. Thursday night’s entertainment will feature classmate Tom Artin’s Nassau Jazz Band. A memorial service for deceased classmates will be held in the Chapel Friday morning. The class dinner on Friday will be followed by a performance from the Midiri Brothers Orchestra. Taiko drummers will lead the class in the P-rade, bringing an Asian presence to the festivities. Saturday night, the Asian theme continues at dinner, followed by entertainment by the ever-popular DJ Joe Cool.

Class of 1965

The Great Class of 1965 returns for its 45th reunion at Holder Courtyard, ready to remind fellow Tigers why rock ’n’ roll will never die. The class reception and dinner entertainment. After Saturday dinner and the fireworks, the class will hit the dance floor again as the Party Dolls and Beatlemania Now alternate sets.

Class of 1970

In keeping with its motto “In Locusts Parentis,” the legacy of its cacophonous 1970 Commencement in concert with millions of cicadas, the class will again bug the assembled masses in the P-rade with the world famous Seventypede (seen on page 28 and below), as well as a perennial favorite: the University’s first female undergraduate-degree recipients. In the usual desperate attempt to re-create the ’60s, the class will party down with the Party Dolls and the Fabulous Greaseband, presumably named in tribute to Commons cuisine. The class will cheer on the Saturday fireworks from its nearby insecti-site at the Boathouse. Eleven members of the class will participate in alumni-faculty forums. The class will hold its traditional memorial service in the rotunda of Chancellor Green on Saturday. In

continues on page 17
The P-rade begins at 2 P.M. on Saturday with the ringing of the Nassau Hall bell. See the map for detail on staging areas for classes and spectator viewing sites.

**Reunion Headquarters**

70th/1940, 75th/1935 and all Old Guard

Forbes College

65th/1945 with '47, '46

Forbes College

60th/1950 with '52, '51, '49, '48

Princeton Stadium, Palmer Pavilion

55th/1955 with '57, '56, '54, '53

Scully Courtyard

50th/1960 with '62, '61, '59, '58

Blair-Joline Courtyard

45th/1965 with '67, '66, '64, '63

Holder Courtyard

40th/1970 with '72, '71, '69, '68

Dodd-McCormick Courtyard

35th/1975 with '77, '76, '74, '73

Cuyler-1903 Courtyard

30th/1980 with '82, '81, '79, '78

Butler College

25th/1985 with '87, '86, '84, '83

Whitman College Courtyards

20th/1990 with '92, '91, '89, '88

Little-Edwards Courtyard


Dodge-Osborn Courtyard

10th/2000 with '03, '02, '01, '99, '98

Foulke-Henry Courtyard

5th/2005 with '09, '08, '07, '06, '04

Pyne-1901 Courtyard

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The Class of 1975 will celebrate “Good Times” (7×5=35) at its 35th reunion. Thursday night features dinner at the site, with a full evening of live rock ‘n’ roll with the ’75 alumni band with Hollis Russell and friends. The class continues with a busy Friday that includes a reception and class dinner at the Boathouse. A live DJ, Chris B., will have the site...
REUNIONS

Behind the P-rade

Have you ever stopped to think what goes on behind the scenes at Reunions? For starters...

- **Dining Services crews** served over 30,000 meals in 2009 (actually served 30,927 meals!)
- **Maintenance crews** set out more than 100 tents totaling over 183,000 square feet
- **Carpenter crews** set out 265 sections of band staging plus 800 sections of dance floor to make 34,080 square feet of wooden flooring
- **Electrician crews** set out 11 miles of tent wiring and heavy duty service cable
- **Building Services crews** set out more than 15,000 chairs, more than 1,700 round tables and 520 trash cans

And then there are, among others...

- 270 **alumni volunteers**
- 1,170 **student workers** and **entertainers**
- 20,000 **REUNIONS PARTICIPANTS**

“On behalf of the Office of the Alumni Association, thank you to all the alumni volunteers and members of the Princeton University community who come together to make Reunions happen each year!”

Margaret Moore Miller ’80
Assistant Vice President for Alumni Affairs and Director, Office of the Alumni Association

The Alumni Association of Princeton University:
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hopping after dinner, followed by a ’75 reunion tradition: the 11-piece Alex Donner Orchestra, playing until 2 a.m. On Saturday, a special women’s breakfast at Prospect kicks off the biggest day at Reunions. The Greater Trenton Pipes and Drums will join us for the P-rade. Saturday’s reception and dinner will take place on Frist Lawn, followed by dancing with One Step Ahead back at headquarters. Several campus a cappella groups will be visiting and the Princeton University Band will make a march through Saturday’s lunch. This year, the class will donate used cell phones to benefit a local charity.

Class of 1980

The Class of 1980 comes “Together Again” at the new Butler College. The celebration begins on Thursday night with a dinner at headquarters and entertainment by DJ Too Kewl. Friday’s festivities feature Triangle’s “Ding” show and a lively performance of classic rock by the Strayz. On Saturday, post P-rade, the class will enjoy the mellifluous voices of the Tigertones prior to a class dinner. Afterward, class members and guests will dance to the always popular Total Soul.
Class of 1985

At the Class of 1985’s “Roarin’ 25th,” returning Tigers intersect with the flappers of the Roaring ’20s – think art deco, the Charleston, and of course, Fitzgerald – at a speakeasy tent in Whitman College. The celebration begins Thursday night with dinner and dancing. On Friday, the class will gather for ’20s-style jazz and cocktails at the Graduate College, followed by a class dinner on the Graduate College lawn. Back at the headquarters, two bands, Rubix Kube and Unforgettable Fire, will provide music from the good old ’80s. On Saturday, hardy classmates will join other reunions in the first Princeton University Reunions Run (PURR), a 5-kilometer fun run organized by ’85 classmates and benefiting two charities: Princeton Young Achievers and Friends of the World Food Programme. After lunch on Saturday, the class will don its dapper new jackets and – in Princeton tradition – take its place at the head of the P-rade. The party will continue Saturday night with dinner and dancing to the Right On Band.

continues on page 21

Reunions Guide • May/June 2010

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For more information go to
princeton.edu/~profile or
blogs.princeton.edu/anscombe
Five things to love about Reunions

Dedication
For Bob Tritsch ’47, above, there’s “an element of habit” that goes along with Reunions. He and classmate Koke Kokatnur both have perfect attendance since graduation and plan to be back for number 63 this year.

Creativity
Reunions committees continue to surprise with new themes and costumes, but the outfits that turn heads often are one-of-a-kind – homemade headwear, Tiger-striped dog sweaters, or a pair of custom cowboy boots.

Education
Whether delving into Dante or listening to foreign-policy debates, each May brings engaging programs that fill the seats at Alexander Hall and elsewhere. And the best part: No exams.

Exuberance
All eyes turn to Poe Field when the senior class leaves behind its student days – and a flip-flop or two – to dash into alumnihood in perhaps the only part of Reunions that is better with a little mud.

Youth
Today’s stroller set makes it hard to believe there was a time when children and spouses stayed on the P-rade sidelines. Is there a better view than the one kids get when perched on a parent’s shoulders?
Class of 1990

The Class of 1990 returns to Old Nassau to remind all Tigers how to “Keep it Rio!” Famous for setting attendance records and for always innovating, the class will be mustering in an expanded headquarters site made up of the Little-Edwards Courtyard. The class will briefly relocate the party to the Graduate College for a Brazilian-themed class dinner. In the P-rade, the class will samba its way down Elm Drive, showing off Carnival-themed threads. The 20th reunion also includes a service project, refurbishing a local shelter and landscaping its grounds.

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Class of 1995

The Class of 1995 is donning flight jackets and dog tags and requesting a fly-by as class members return for their 15th reunion in the Dodge-Osborn Courtyard of Wilson College. The “Top Tiger” reunion will feature a Thursday-night DJ, Friday-night entertainment from the band Jersey Joint, and Saturday-night music from Milo Z. The Officer Training School on site will train top cubs in airplane running races, parachute games, paper plane making, and airplane story time. On Friday night, ’95ers will enjoy a cocktail hour with a nacho bar preceding a Mexican buffet dinner, with a kids’ buffet earlier in the evening. On Saturday night, the class dinner will feature the Footnotes and the Tigerlilies in a joint performance. For its community-service project, the class is donating much-needed supplies to first-graders at Spoede Elementary School in Missouri, supporting a project started by a recent recipient of the Class of ’95 Summer Service Fund.

Class of 2000

Surf’s up as “’00 Hangs 10” at this year’s 10th reunion, a surfing-themed celebration in the Pyne and 1901 courtyards. Dinner on Friday will be a big surfer buffet, followed by music from Christabel and the Jons. Saturday’s program includes the P-rade and evening entertainment headlined by the Rhythm Shop. Enjoyment is not the only goal of this 10th reunion: The class has asked its members to perform 10 hours of community service before arriving at Reunions and to participate in a river cleanup with Princeton Water Watch on Friday. The class also will contribute to academic life at Reunions through participation in the alumni-faculty forums and sponsorship of the Millennial Lecture Series and various Millennial Precepts. This year’s Millennial Lecture features Eliot Spitzer ’81 on Saturday morning.

Class of 2005

It’s a bird ... it’s a plane ... it’s the fifth reunion! The Class of 2005 will don capes and masks and become a band of superheroes for the weekend as it celebrates “Truth, Justice, and the ’05 Way.” On Thursday, the class will kick off Reunions by teaming up with the Class of 1950 on a Habitat for Humanity project in Trenton. Classmates and guests will dine at its secret hideout in the 1901-Dillon Courtyard. Meals at headquarters include Friday lunch, Saturday brunch, and a quick Sunday breakfast. Friday evening will feature a special catered, superhero-themed dinner. Three nights of great musical entertainment are planned, featuring the Giants of Science, the Spazmatics, the Blaire Reinhard Band, and DJ Bob.
Graduate School

“PrinceTunes” is the theme of the APGA reunion, and graduate alumni will revel in the theme of music at Princeton. The logo shows musical Tigers having a great time on a keyboard and will be prominently displayed on banners and special commemorative T-shirts. The PrinceTunes weekend begins with a welcome reception on Friday evening for returning alumni and an expected visit from President Tilghman. Saturday lunch will consist of festive hoagies and a do-it-yourself ice cream sundae bar. There will be strolling music and entertainment for both alumni and children. The Riverside Bluegrass Band will lead the APGA contingent in the P-rade. The band will also perform afterwards at dinner. Right after the P-rade, alumni will gather in the Icahn Laboratory atrium for a Tribute to Teaching reception, during which the Nassoons will perform. For this year’s community-service projects, graduate alumni will work on a housing project in Trenton and collect musical instruments for local schools.
Welcome Back Alumni & Congratulations to the Class of 2010!

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Lessons recast in the real world

By Jennifer Albinson ’05

Jennifer Albinson ’05 teaches first grade at Malcolm X Academy in San Francisco.

It hit me one winter day in my first year out of Princeton. Like so many classmates, I was living in New York. Unlike so many classmates, at that moment, I was in an elementary school cafeteria, scooping pickles onto a 5-year-old’s lunch tray and then taking a few back when she squealed “Too many!” As I offered her a spoonful of corn, I said to myself, “Seriously, is this how I’m using my Princeton degree?” And, with no one but the 5-year-old to respond to my question, I spoke up again. “I think the answer is apparently ‘yes.’”

The “apparently yes” moments have been plentiful, especially as an elementary school teacher. They have ranged from the poignant (despairing that my training in Latin American history hadn’t prepared me to handle a situation with a student and her potentially abusive mother) to the disgusting (mopping a child’s regurgitated lunch off my classroom floor). Sometimes the Princeton banner on my classroom wall just fades into the background, indistinguishable from the artwork and colorful charts that surround it. Other times, it’s like a bright orange billboard, announcing to me and anyone else who will listen that “only people who’ve actually used their degree deserve to go to Reunions.”

On the occasion of my eighth journey to the fifth reunion tent – and my first major reunion – I decided to explore how I conceived of my Princeton training and what reality emerged.

Conception: If I take John McPhee ’53’s seminar class in creative nonfiction, I’ll be joining the staff of The New Yorker within nanoseconds of graduating. Reality: The closest I come to creative nonfiction is writing homework packets. Take-away: First graders appreciate quality writing, too; The New Yorker might do well to consider them potential subscribers.

Conception: My thesis adviser and I will have a long and fruitful relationship, in which she continues to offer insights into my scholarly work, and I, in turn, make her proud by publishing book after book. Reality: We’re still in close touch, but she’s turned out to be much more useful in procuring cast-off children’s books from her local library, as well as spotting 50-percent-off sales on Play-Doh. Every few weeks, she sends me a new package of goodies. Take-away: Thesis advisers advise more than theses.

Conception: Leading an Outdoor Action trip was a really fun way to kick off each year of college, but when I graduate, it will be time to put away the compass and camp stove. Reality: While some of the skills I learned haven’t come in handy (to my surprise, I’ve not yet needed to splint a broken femur), the supposed soft skills of group dynamics, “leader radar” (imagine Rick Curtis ’79 pivoting his open palm over his head as you say those words), and conducting an effective debrief have become the essential hard skills of my career. Take-away: You may think you’re just chatting while you wait for the murky creek water to iodize, but you’re really résumé-building.

Conception: My Princeton friends were amazing companions in precepts and on The Street, but now that we’re all moving to disparate corners of the globe, we’ll likely fall out of touch. Reality: Whenever I’ve felt my Princeton education had wildly unprepared me for the trials of adult life, it was my friends from that very same institution who supported me through the challenge at hand. Sometimes that support was coming from places like a refugee camp on the Burmese border, but it nonetheless came immediately and unconditionally. Take-away: All those long study breaks at the Bent Spoon were worth it.

As an undergraduate, if I had to pinpoint the experiences – the courses, the relationships, the extracurricular activities – that would prove meaningful to my young adult life, I probably could have identified them easily. However, I could not have explained accurately why these experiences would be relevant. I went through Princeton thinking I was learning one thing and enriching myself in one way, but then I graduated and realized that I’d actually been learning an infinite list of other skills that would be fundamental to my success as an adult.

And so, next fall, as I shake the dust off my Princeton banner, I’ll coolly inform it to stop giving me pangs of insecurity. I am using my degree, and perhaps, I’m using it exactly as Princeton intended me to: in a way that is so integral to the fabric of my life as to be rendered almost invisible.
FunPage

Help the tiger find his ears

Fold in half on fold line #1

Flip over, fold along fold line #2 to green line

Fold along fold line #3 to green line

Fold along fold line #4

Flip over. The tiger found his ears!

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Help the tiger find his ears.

Cut out the above square and fold according to the directions at left.
Lovable bug

Born in McCarter Theatre’s costume shop, the Class of 1970’s “Seventypede” has been a P-rade staple since 1990. The class’s affinity for insects dates back to its Commencement, when the hum of cicadas inspired honorary-degree recipient Bob Dylan to pen “The Day of the Locusts.”

Photograph by Frank Wojciechowski
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