

From the Hill



JASON KOSKI / UP

For the Class of 2014, a Sunny Send-Off

President David Skorton presided over his penultimate Commencement in May, giving the traditional address to some 6,000 graduates and nearly 39,000 friends and relatives on a picture-perfect spring day in Schoellkopf Stadium. In his talk, Skorton noted that fifty years after President Lyndon Johnson launched the War on Poverty, income inequality is endemic and 50 million Americans are economically disadvantaged. "Virtually all of you will find your places in the knowledge economy," he told the University's 146th class, "which relies on advanced skills and higher-order thinking of the kind you've developed and refined at Cornell." He lauded *Chasing the American Dream*, a recent book by sociology professor Thomas Hirschl, for its message of creating a "virtuous cycle"



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Pomp and circumstance: (Clockwise from far left) Grads and supporters pack Schoellkopf, a selfie with Skorton, and Provost Kent Fuchs hoods a new PhD.

through investment in human capital. “As you move to new communities in your lives after Cornell,” he said, “I hope you’ll consider how you can contribute to that virtuous cycle, whether in your careers or as engaged citizens.”

This year’s Convocation speaker—chosen by the seniors themselves—was actor Ed Helms, who portrayed fanatically loyal Cornellian Andy Bernard in the sitcom “The Office.” “You do realize I’m not actually Andy Bernard, right?” Helms told the crowd in Schoellkopf. “He isn’t a real person. He is a character from a TV show, and I am the actor who played him. Or did you actually invite a fictional person to give this speech?” Helms described his

efforts to break into acting, which included years of voiceover work and going on auditions that ended in rejection 99 percent of the time. “When you try hard at everything you do, even if it feels utterly foolish to do so,” he said, “you’re opening up future doors and possibilities that you might not be seeing in the moment.” Helms went on to thank Cornellians for embracing Bernard—not always a sympathetic character—and for inviting him to deliver the Convocation address despite having “directly embarrassed this school for eight years on national television.” Said Helms: “When I got the invitation to speak here, I was scared to open the e-mail, because I thought it might actually be a lawsuit.”

Give My Regards To...

These Cornellians in the News

Robert Schenkkan, MFA '77, who won the Tony and Drama Desk awards for best play for *All the Way*, about President Lyndon Johnson’s efforts to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Schenkkan holds a 1992 Pulitzer for *Kentucky Cycle*.

Human Ecology Dean Alan Mathios, named to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Applied and engineering physics professor Greg Fuchs, PhD '07, who won a five-year, \$750,000 early career research award from the Department of Energy.

Environmental activist Annie Leonard, MRP '13, named executive director of Greenpeace USA.

The Lab of Ornithology, whose Merlin Bird ID mobile app won a gold medal from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE).

Geneticist Edward Buckler, elected to the National Academy of Sciences.

Economics professor John Abowd, honored by the American Statistical Association and the Washington Statistical Society for developing innovative approaches to solving statistical problems in federal census data.

Katharine Leigh '15, a biology major in CALS, winner of a Udall Scholarship.

Gannett Health Services director Janet Corson-Rikert, winner of an exceptional service award from the American College Health Association.

Aaron Match '15, Swati Sureka '15, and Benjamin Van Doren '16, winners of Goldwater Scholarships. Matthew Loring '15 got an honorable mention.

Roman Mystery Tapped for Student Reading Project

A literary mystery with multicultural themes has been chosen for this year's New Student Reading Project. *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, a 2006 novel by the Algerian-born writer Amara Lakhous, is narrated by the various residents of an apartment building in modern-day Rome. "Lakhous's story generates a range of engaging topics for discussion and exploration—including emigration and immigration, ethnic stereotyping, cosmopolitan culture, and literature," says Laura

Brown, senior vice provost for undergraduate education. The novel, a European bestseller that was adapted into a 2009 film, will be the subject of seminars, talks, and events on and off campus throughout the 2014–15 academic year.



Johnson School Launches Bilingual MBA in China

In a partnership with Tsinghua University, the Johnson School will offer an MBA in China. The part-time program, taught in English and Mandarin and lasting twenty-one months, will enroll its first students in April; it's expected to attract people in their early thirties with five to eight years of work experience. The curriculum will include field trips to Wall Street, Cornell Tech, and Ithaca.

Leaders in Undergraduate Enrollment Appointed

After a year in their posts on an interim basis, two leaders in undergraduate admissions have been formally appointed. Jason Locke was named associate vice provost for enrollment; his responsibilities include enrollment management, undergraduate admissions, and financial aid programs. A former director of admissions in CALS, he reports to Barbara Knuth, vice provost and dean of the Graduate School. Shawn Felton, who has worked in admissions on campus for more than a decade, was appointed director of undergraduate admissions.

In other leadership transitions, the executive director of the Cornell Center for Technology Enterprise & Commercialization (CCTEC) has announced his departure. Alan Paau will leave the post in early August, with CCTEC official Alice Li, PhD '98, filling it on an interim basis.

R&D

More information on campus research is available at www.news.cornell.edu

In the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*, veterinarians report that they've found a worm in cats never before seen in the species. They theorize that the animals may have contracted the six-inch worms, known as *Dracunculus insignis*, by drinking unfiltered water or hunting frogs.

Using solar power and a smartphone app, engineers and medical researchers have developed a way to test for a deadly skin cancer related to HIV infection. Known as Kaposi's sarcoma, the disease is a known killer in sub-Saharan Africa.

Facebook users already know to be careful of what they post about themselves, but research at Cornell and Northwestern finds they should also be mindful of posting about others. Communication professor Jeff Hancock and colleagues polled 150 users and found that many felt uncomfortable or threatened by what had been posted about them.

Good news for coffee drinkers: food science professor Chang Lee reports that the beverage contains a strong antioxidant that may prevent retinal degeneration. The theory has been successfully tested in mice.

Illegal immigrants working in dangerous jobs generally don't

get compensated for the risk. A joint study with Penn State found that although illegals don't tend to do the nation's most dangerous work, they're rarely paid extra for workplace hazards like heights and toxins.

According to archaeologist Sturt Manning, climate change may have felled the Egyptian empire. Tree ring samples taken from an ancient coffin and funeral boats indicate that an arid period disrupted growing seasons and lowered food production.

Psychologist David Dunning and colleagues are exploring "excessive trust" among strangers, such as farmers who leave produce to be purchased on the honor system. "Despite the protests of philosophers and economists that it is irrational to do so," the researchers write, "people trust strangers and those strangers reward that trust."

The Cornell Stem Cell Program, which comprises forty affiliated labs, recently got a major boost: \$3 million in research funding from New York State.

A computer avatar can help women evaluate breast cancer risk, says psychologist Valerie Reyna. She developed a system that helps women decide whether to be tested for the BRCA1 mutation and what to do if they have it.

Ending a long debate, a study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* finds that the pathogen behind the Irish potato famine originated in central Mexico rather than in the Andes. The discovery could help breeders identify local plants with blight resistance.



Sew lovely: *Double Mexican Wedding Rings IV* by Nancy Crow is among the works on display at the Johnson Museum from July 5 to August 17 as part of "Bold by Design," a show featuring contemporary quilts collected by John Walsh III '58, BCE '59.

Lab of Ornithology Receives New Sculpture by Maya Lin

In recognition of the Lab of Ornithology's conservation efforts, artist Maya Lin has given the facility a large wooden sculpture that's part of her series on endangered species and habitats. Entitled "Sound Ring," the work consists of an oval made of American walnut and speakers that play natural soundscapes drawn from the lab's Macaulay Library—from loons on an Adirondack lake to lemurs in a Madagascar forest. "The sounds surround us with stories of beauty, fragility, vulnerability, and loss," says lab director John Fitzpatrick. "They cry to us for help, lest they disappear forever." Lin, best known for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, visited campus in May to unveil the work. "As an artist, I want to get people to think outside the box," she said at the ceremony, "and give them hope that there is something they can do as individuals."



LINDSAY FRANCE / UP

Semester Abroad Options Now Include Cuba

Starting in August, Cornell students can spend a semester in Cuba. Described by organizers as the first time a U.S. school has sponsored a joint research effort by students of the two nations, the Cornell Cuba Research Program will bring young investigators in the life sciences to the University of Havana. The program will start small, with placements in two Havana labs—one focused on the neurophysiology of bats, the other studying potential medical uses for enzymes isolated from local marine invertebrates. "We've made important inroads," says psychology professor Tim DeVoogd, who proposed the program, "and this has the possibility to expand."

Five New Members Join Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees has welcomed five new members, whose terms begin July 1. They are Richard Baker '88, CEO of Hudson's Bay Company; alumni-elected trustees Elizabeth Everett '97, a managing director at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, and Michael Troy '81, former managing director and partner at Goldman Sachs; grad student trustee Annie Devaney O'Toole, a second-year law student; and faculty trustee Mariana Wolfner '74, the Goldwin Smith professor of molecular biology and genetics.

Hazing Charges Lifted Against Theta Delta Chi

After an investigation by the Office of Fraternities, Sororities, and Independent Living found that hazing allegations could not be substantiated, Theta Delta Chi has been restored to full recognition status. The University announced its findings in late May; the frat had been on interim suspension since mid-March.