

CA

CONCORD ACADEMY MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2026

Finding the FUNNY

Students
create a
sitcom from
scratch

DAKOTA RODRIGUEZ VASQUEZ '26, CAMERA, SOUND

CAROLINE ESPINOSA '26, CAMERA, ART, TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

WILLIAM JIANG-FOGEL '27, WRITER, ACTOR, DIRECTOR

MIKAYLA OSAFO GRANT '26, ACTOR, DIRECTOR

LIRA SCHWAB '26, WRITER, ACTOR

VINNIE FLORENCIO '27, CAMERA, SOUND

DANIEL PEREGUDOV '27, WRITER, CAMERA, SOUND





Mentored by technical director James Williston P'28 (second from right), CA students work the strings of a massive marionette from the catwalks above the Centennial Arts Center's Hammett Ory Theater during the February production of *The Impracticality of Modern-Day Mastodons*.

SUMMER 2026

CONCORD ACADEMY MAGAZINE

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**Find the
Chameleon**
CA's mascot exemplifies
adaptability in an ever-
changing world. It's hiding
somewhere in these
pages. Can you spot it?



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CA students create a sitcom from scratch



MISSION

We are a community animated by love of learning,
diverse and striving for equity, with common trust
as our foundation.

Honoring each individual, we challenge and expand
our understanding of ourselves and the world through
purposeful collaboration and creative engagement.

We cultivate empathy, integrity, and responsibility
to build a more just and sustainable future.



A LETTER FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL **HENRY D. FAIRFAX**

TEAM GREEN,

I've felt an affinity for the class of 2026, who entered CA as I became head of school. Now graduated, they have joined our global alum community of change-makers. It's been remarkable to see this class's increasing readiness for challenge and responsibility, and how their teachers, coaches, and peers drew from them new talents and commitments while encouraging them to remain confidently themselves.

CA is not a school that molds students into a predetermined ideal. It's a community that allows them to grow authentically: to celebrate performances and intellectual breakthroughs and team wins together, to approach mistakes as learning opportunities, and to see their value reflected in how they touch others' lives.

This year, the Positivity and Light Society was formed to recognize student service (page 6). This new society is developing student leadership in alignment with the Joan Shaw Herman Award for Distinguished Service, CA's only award (for alums), which honored **Helen Chase Trainor '67** this year (page 36). I couldn't be prouder of our focus on the joy of serving others.

In my classroom visits this year, our superstar faculty and incredible students routinely astonished me. Together, they engaged in experiments ranging from applying chemistry principles in cooking to taping a laugh-out-loud funny sitcom on our new soundstage (page 20). Across our curriculum, purposeful collaboration and creative engagement remain CA throughlines.

That's why I'm excited to share that in May, the Board of Trustees approved our campus master plan, driven by CA's strategic plan. This long-range framework considers how every inch of our campus—including academic and administrative buildings, student houses, and even our boathouse—supports a CA education. It's a flexible framework that ensures future leaders can make decisions nimbly and with intention to protect the character of this campus as it adapts to changing times.

If you're interested in this work, or anything we're doing at CA, I'd welcome a conversation.

Go, Green!

Henry



campus

Concord Academy Dance
Project's winter performance,
The Ballast of Iridescence,
offered a moving meditation on
play and growth through the lens
of shifting colors.

CONGRATULATIONS

Class of 2026!

At Commencement on May 29, CA celebrated the class of 2026, whom **Jennifer Pline P'13 '15**, co-president of the Board of Trustees, characterized as “graceful disruptors,” calling it a fitting description of CA alums. Head of School **Henry D. Fairfax** encouraged them to “engage with a sense of purpose, and have integrity in your effort.” And **May Zheng '26**, student head of school, reflected poignantly on learning through loss, saying, “Within every absence we experience, there is a celebration of what was once there, what we have lived.”

Veerawit Sirikantraporn '26, senior class president, introduced commencement speaker **Amy Rosenfeld '84**, senior vice president of Olympics and Paralympics production at NBC Sports, whose efforts to expand accessibility made the 2026 Milano Cortina Winter Olympics the most inclusive viewing experience in the history of the Games.

THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY

A career sports television producer, Rosenfeld reflected on community as “one of the most rewarding aspects of life.” With humor and humility, she shared that, though she hadn’t been a model student at CA, the faculty had rooted for her, and she learned that she could be herself and take her own path.

After recounting how she once missed a goal on a live U.S. women’s soccer broadcast, she said, “I fiddled with my CA ring and remembered all the mistakes I had made back then, and despite it all, how that community still believed in me.” Not only did the oversight not end her career, but she was later recognized with a media award by the National Soccer Hall of Fame. It’s in adversity that we recognize the value of community, Rosenfeld said. She assured the class of 2026 that, though they might not know all the answers, or even all the questions, “because of CA, I promise you are ready for what’s next.”

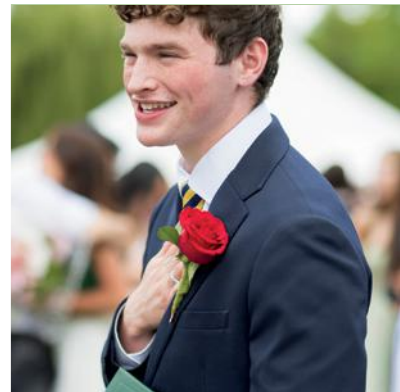
WATCH THE CEREMONY
concordacademy.org/commencement-2026



“Embracing individuality is what makes a true and honest community—that is what you have here at CA.”

AMY ROSENFELD '84





COMMENCEMENT 2026





Like Light Through a Prism

CA's new Positivity and Light Society recognizes the radiant reach of service

At a ceremony in May, CA's new Positivity and Light Society (PALS) recognized 60 students for contributing more than 2,000 collective hours of service to local communities. Spearheaded by **Robyn Bostrom P'24**, PALS was established through the generosity of a group of parents and organized in collaboration with a committee of student ambassadors, faculty, and staff.

In addition to celebrating commitment to helping others in need, the event honored the living legacy

of the alum who inspired the society's creation, **Axel Bostrom '24**, who died following a car accident in June 2025. Having heard an outpouring of stories of Axel's generosity from his friends and the CA community, Robyn says that as she and her husband, **Paul Bostrom P'24**, considered how to honor their son's memory, "positivity and light were the two words that came to mind." At CA, they saw philosophical alignment around service, which had always been important to him.

Robyn wanted to recognize the service CA students already engage in, create new student leadership positions, and encourage additional community aid by developing a resource

any CA community member or group could use to organize service trips. "I think of Axel like a prism," she says. "He shined his light, and it refracted on everybody who ever met him. To me, service is like that. One person's gift of time and attention can impact so many people."

That's why in May, she presented a crystal prism to each of the society's first 20 members, who had all given 100 or more hours of service. Additional students were recognized for meeting an inaugural "Six for '26" spring-semester challenge and for 10, 25, 50, and 75 hours of service.

The PALS planning committee asked students to submit reflections on their volunteer journeys. **Lyle Waldek '26**, who co-headed the Lawrence-Concord Action Partnership and Concord Academy Notes of Compassion, wrote that service "is much more complex, collaborative, and beautiful than I believed it to be."

Melina Petropulos '28, a volunteer

CA students recognized in May for their service to others, with Henry D. Fairfax (back row, left), Robyn Bostrom P'24 (front row, right), Paul Bostrom P'24 (standing, second from right), and Grant Hightower (standing, right).



PHOTO: LEAH LARICCIA

“I think of Axel like a prism. He shined his light, and it refracted on everybody who ever met him. To me, service is like that. One person’s gift of time and attention can impact so many people.”

ROBYN BOSTROM P’24

with many organizations and a teen ambassador at a food pantry in Newton, Mass., wrote, “I’ve come to think that empathy without action is incomplete.”

After connecting with residents at the Harvard Square Homeless Shelter in Cambridge, Mass., **Christopher Choy ’27** said he better understands the complex systemic factors that contribute to homelessness and inequality. And **Gavi Miller ’27**, who started a reading buddies partnership with a local elementary school, wrote about the thrill of watching her “vision come to life.”

In the first year of PALS, CA students showed their commitment to communities in Concord and beyond. By being so motivated to serve without any graduation requirement, Robyn says, they set a “gold standard.” She’s proud to have created a pathway at CA to recognize their contributions and, just as importantly, to have opened up more opportunities for them to experience the joy of lending a helping hand.

LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/pals



Eliya Ganot '26 speaks about her project, inspired by a course on British Romanticism; she crafted garments integrating lines from William Wordsworth’s poetry.

SENIOR PROJECTS

The 32 senior projects presented by members of the class of 2026 showcased independent research in a wide range of areas. Students apply for the program during their junior year and dedicate much of their senior spring to pursuing their academic passions. This year’s projects included an exploration of neuroscience related to visual art, a student-developed course on robotics and autonomous systems, fashion as a form of literary interpretation, and a custom-built flight computer.

LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/projects-2026



VIDEO MAPPING

Jack Colton '13 gave CA students a live demonstration of video mapping techniques in February as part of a visiting artist series organized by drawing teacher **Ashley MacLure**. A digital production manager for artist and former CA faculty member **Sarah Sze**, Colton reflected on the love of filmmaking he developed at CA and shared tips for pursuing careers in the arts.



STUDENT ACTION AT THE STATE HOUSE

Several CA students joined the Massachusetts Youth Climate Coalition at the Massachusetts State House on Boston's Beacon Hill in February, where they met with state legislators to advocate for climate justice and renewable energy legislation. State Rep. Simon Cataldo posted afterward that the CA students' research and advocacy skills were "on par with many of the governmental relations pros we meet with." **Chris Labosier**, science teacher and CA's environmental sustainability lead, says he was deeply impressed by the students' commitment to civic action and their extensive preparation: "I am so genuinely proud of how they engaged in our democracy."

BUILDING THE WE

Together We Strive

CA students led a variety of workshops for their peers this spring as part of the Strive Workshop Series, organized by the Community and Equity Office. Some explored cultural traditions, with tastings of traditional foods. Others discussed the topics of environmental injustice, reproductive healthcare access, and the rights and inclusion of trans athletes. One group considered the experiences of first-generation college and independent high school students. All of the workshops aligned with this year's theme: "Building the We: Responsibility, Connection, and Growth."



LEARN MORE

concordacademy.org/strive-2026

Left to right: Bella Lacroix '27, Emily Billilo '27, and Johan Perez-Lemus '27 hosted a Strive workshop focused on the first-generation experience.

SPOKEN WORD

Inspiration from campus speakers

"Our community's opportunity to connect with each person's authentic self every few days as a ritual in a chapel helped me see people as individuals with multitudes."

NAOMI KO '91, P'21 '26
Medical oncologist,
breast cancer specialist
concordacademy.org/ko

"In these creative fields, you hear the word 'no' all the time. Just make sure that voice is not coming from yourself."

CURTIS CHIN
Author and filmmaker,
2025–26 Davidson Lecturer
concordacademy.org/chin

THREE STEINWAYS have joined Concord Academy's piano fleet in the Centennial Arts Center (C.A.C.). The new Model D in the Recital Hall in the Fields is a full-sized 9-foot concert grand—the first the school has ever owned. “We wanted to give our students access to this caliber of instrument,” says Linda Coyne Lloyd Performing Arts Department Chair **Michael Bennett**. “Our advanced pianists are always eager to play it.”

Because Steinways are handcrafted, no two are exactly alike. In September,

Bennett and Sarah Yeh P'24 '27, associate head for teaching, learning, and faculty, visited the Steinway & Sons factory in Queens, N.Y. There, they observed the precision that goes into the instruments' construction, and they tested five pianos. “I thought it was going to be difficult to tell them apart, but each was very different,” Bennett says. Knowing the concert grand would be needed for solo recitals, chamber music, and chorus accompaniment in CA's medium-sized hall, he adds, “we went with an

instrument that had the clarity and projection necessary, while still being able to create more intimate tone colors.”

Two generous CA families also donated pre-owned Steinways. A Model B classic grand piano was moved into the Hammett Ory Theater when the C.A.C. was completed in spring 2025. It was in use throughout the year for orchestra and chorus rehearsals and performances, the mainstage musical, and Music Café. In September, a Model O, a living room grand with

a custom macassar ebony finish, part of Steinway's “Crown Jewel” collection, arrived from Singapore, a gift from **Jaehee Koo and Tong Buhm Tommy Kim P'26**. It's now used regularly in the Jasmine Music Practice Room for piano lessons and chamber music.

At the end of its first year, the C.A.C. is home to all-new pianos: seven grands, four uprights, two digitals, and a keyboard lab. “Students now have reliable access to new, fully functional, and pedagogically appropriate instruments,” Bennett says.

CA's new concert grand piano in use in the Centennial Arts Center's Recital Hall in the Fields.

STUNNING STEINWAY(S)



How Do You Know You're Conscious?

A new advanced biology class examines the psychology of the self

When CA biology teacher **Kim Kopelman P'26** decided to offer a psychology class this spring, she didn't plan a typical intro course. Instead, she wanted students to explore the neuroscience of consciousness: how humans perceive, understand, and experience their own identities.

She organized this new advanced biology course, Psychology of Self, around three central questions: What is the biological basis of selfhood? How do our brains perceive ourselves in the world? And what happens when our behavior conflicts with our sense of self?

"My mission is to get kids to be independent learners," Kopelman says. "I want to put them into situations where they have to figure out how *they* learn and communicate their understanding."

Students took part in discussions, hands-on activities, and experiments. They analyzed brain studies and gave presentations. Each week, one student would prepare a slideshow on a scientific article about the brain and a topic such as personality, perception, brain injury, coma, or sleep.

"I'm so impressed with the beautiful, thoughtful questions that they asked each other, the grace they've given each other, and how deeply they listened," Kopelman says.

To contextualize the scientific material within philosophical theories of self-perception, she invited **Ollie Longo '21** to join her to guide several discussions. Longo earned his bachelor's in philosophy from Wesleyan University in

2025 and credits his CA education with cultivating his interdisciplinary interests. He was impressed by how Kopelman's students interrogated central philosophical ideas. "Exploring complicated issues can be disorienting, frankly, but I think that disorientation is one of the values of philosophy," he says.

The class included a neuroanatomy practical exam—dissecting a sheep's brain. Longo returned afterward to talk with students about animal ethics and the moral worth humans assign other animals based on our perceptions of degrees of sentience.

Seeing the structures of the brain during this dissection made a big impression on **Luke Schumacher '26**, who plans on a premed track in college and says he's now considering majoring in psychology. The final project for the class was a self-directed research paper. Luke chose to study how first-generation antihistamines, such as Benadryl, cross the blood-brain barrier and can produce sedative effects and, in some cases, hallucinations.

Other final paper topics varied widely. **Zuri Gonzalez '26** researched how the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder can interrupt self-awareness by focusing on studies of women who had experienced repeated childhood abuse and dissociative symptoms. She learned that PTSD is highly individualized and that patients benefit most from individually tailored treatments. **Emilia Deng '27** compared human, plant, and animal consciousness with artificial intelligence.



"I think that part of what makes us such a great species is our ability to have empathy," she says, "but when we don't extend that empathy outside of our own species, it gets really difficult to ascertain where the line is between right and wrong."

And **Celeste Bogan '27** appreciated that Kopelman was receptive to her final paper idea of researching young children who report memories of past lives. Celeste was struck by the number of cases from around the world, their similarities, and how many involved verifiable evidence in scientific journals. She also presented on quantum consciousness research, which is based on quantum mechanics. "It requires a different mindset than the materialistic worldview the scientific community relies on now, but through a quantum lens, consciousness comes before the physical world," she says. "The implications are mindboggling."

Zuri says she especially enjoyed the course's interweaving of philosophy and experimentation: "I liked that I could have my own ideas and that the topics were so broad, I could find my own way of exploring consciousness."

LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/psychology



Science teacher Kim Kopelman P'26 (right) helps her students complete a project mapping brain anatomy onto swim caps.



GIVING US IDEAS

Alums introduce Conversation for Civility at CA

This spring, the Council on Community Life welcomed **Lara Jordan James '80** and **Kate Pugh '83** to CA to share a framework for better communication with the campus community. They visited several times, along with some of their colleagues at the Conversation for Civility Network, to help students, faculty, and staff speak and listen in ways that strengthen relationships, generate ideas, and increase commitment to action.

James, a practiced facilitator and marketing executive, and Pugh, an academic whose research inspired this approach, introduced a framework they had customized for CA. They presented five discussion disciplines that they referred to collectively as IDEAS: inquire, declare, ennoble, acknowledge, and summarize. While most verbal exchanges default in large part to declaration and many can be derailed by "snarky" modes of engagement, they said, small adjustments can change the tone and outcomes. James and Pugh recommended asking more questions, speaking factually and honestly, lifting others up, soliciting all perspectives, and synthesizing to check understanding.

CA students analyzed a transcribed discussion, practiced using the five discussion disciplines in conversation, and listened for IDEAS in everyday chats. At the end of the school year, they gathered to reflect on the benefits of using these tools and to set personal goals for the next year. CA's conversation about the positive power of our words has just begun.

JOIN US Which discussion discipline can you commit to trying more as you talk with others?

ADAPTABILITY

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ATHLETICS

Go Green!

CA Athletics had a standout spring after building momentum during a successful winter season. Multiple teams and individual athletes excelled at the Eastern Independent League (EIL) and New England Preparatory School Athletic Council (NEPSAC) championships while consistently demonstrating teamwork, grace, and competitive grit.

The **varsity all-gender Ultimate Frisbee** team won the Class A NEPSAC championship for the first time in program history, also earning the tournament's Spirit of the Game trophy for gracious fair play. At the season's end, the program was ranked first among New England independent schools and 25th among public and private schools on the East Coast.

For the second year, the **varsity squash** teams competed in the U.S. High School Team Squash Championships. Seeded second in Class V, the boys won the national championship. The girls finished 10th in the competitive Division IV bracket. **Flora Xu '27** earned the program's first EIL Player of the Year award in over a decade.

Boys varsity tennis capped off an undefeated league record by capturing the EIL championship and a NEPSAC tournament bid for the fifth consecutive year. Seeded second in to the Class C NEPSAC tournament, the team won the quarter- and semifinals, falling only in the finals to the No. 1 seed. League coaches named **Brayden Yuan '28** EIL Player of the Year.

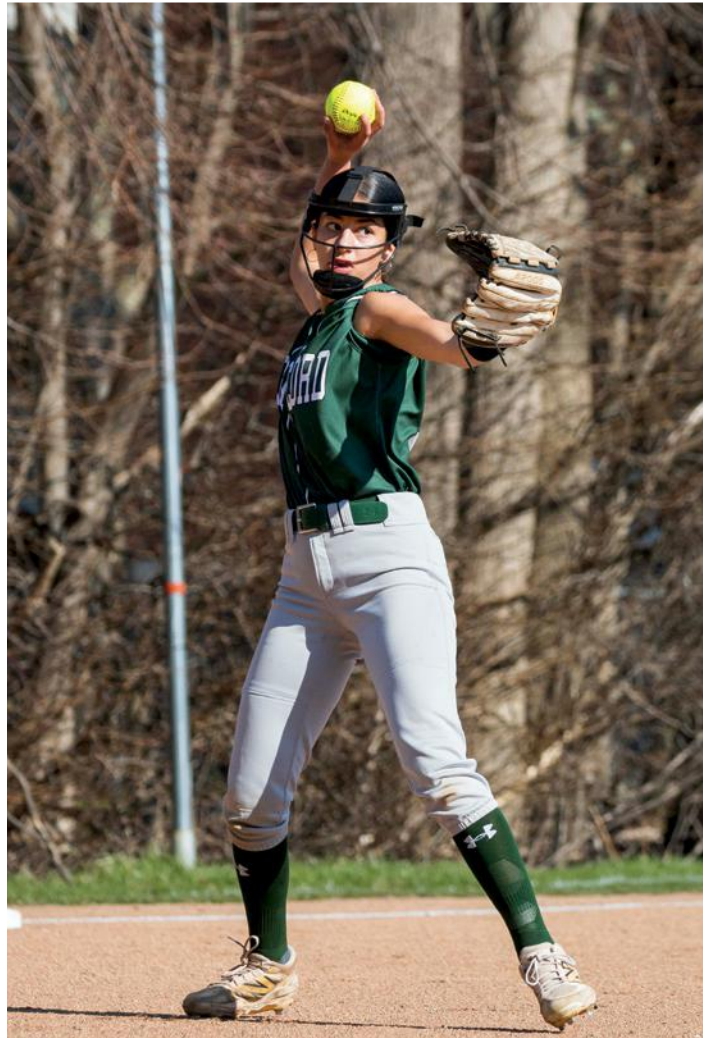
The **track and field** teams posted undefeated regular-season records. At the EIL championships, the boys earned the program's second title, and the girls finished third. Six student-athletes earned individual EIL championships in seven events. At the NEPSAC Division III championship meet, the boys finished fourth, the girls finished 10th, and 20 CA athletes earned All-NEPSAC honors. **Alex Tarantino '26** won a NEPSAC championship in javelin.

In **boys varsity lacrosse**, **Bernie Mattox '26** was named EIL Player of the Year.

Boys varsity basketball earned a berth in the EIL finals again this year.

LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/athletics





VISUAL ARTS

In May, student artwork lined the hallways of the Centennial Arts Center and filled the Spencer and Colton P3 (Process, Presentation, and Production) Lab. Work from every student enrolled in a spring-semester visual arts course was showcased.

1. Sebastian Colberg Reyes '27

Sculpture: coconuts, 3D-printed plastic, laser-cut foamboard, and laser-etched wood

2. Emma Li '28

Tapestry: hand-dyed fabric utilizing appliqué, quilting, and screen-printing techniques

3. Inaya Bajaj '28

Charcoal self-portrait on paper

4. Aria Pangaro '29

Acrylic on paper

5. Michelle Yuan '29

Photograph

6. Cora Myers '29

Charcoal on paper

7. Rihanna Loum Smith '27

Oil on canvas

8. Kiara Sonawane '29

Monoprint

9. Alex Mehta '29

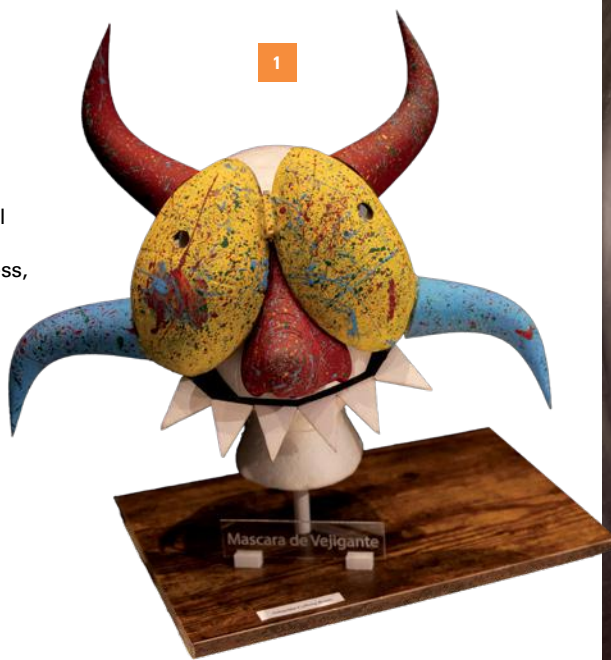
Graphic design

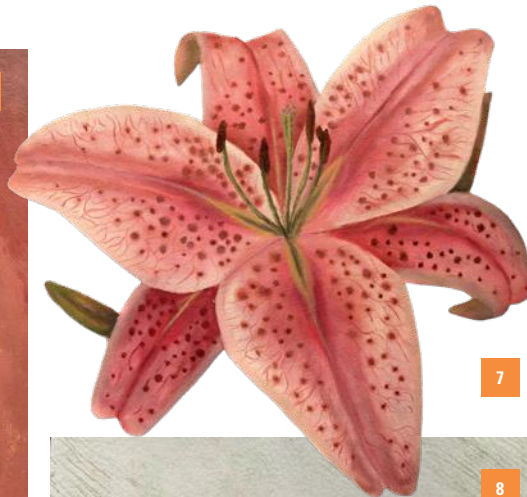
10. Leo Xiao '28

Bracelet: laser-cut and engraved plywood, 3D-printed plastic, and carved wooden base

11. Cece Gu '27

Ceramic dish







PERFORMING ARTS

MUSIC CAFÉ

In April, the first Music Café performances in the Centennial Arts Center lit up the Hammett Ory Theater, which had been transformed into a jazz club for the occasion.

Heartfelt Goodbyes

CA bids adieu to retiring staff and faculty members



JACKIE DECAREAU

At CA, a day doesn't get off to a good start without a chat with **Jackie Decareau**. That widely shared sentiment has reflected Decareau's approach to her role as assistant to the Student Life Office. Given her deep respect for students and families, her unwavering attention to detail, and the warmth and compassion she brings to every interaction, it's no surprise that many students have thanked her in their senior chapels. Decareau has also left a lasting impression on her colleagues, who wish her well in retirement after 23 years at CA.

Annie Bailey P'25 '27, director of residential life, calls her a "beacon

of light." To **Renee Coburn**, chief of staff, she's been "the heartbeat of this school." And Student Life Office Manager **Georgia Cassidy** says she "communicates with so much grace, kindness, and patience; she has truly inspired me and brought so much joy to our team."

With a background in human resources, Decareau has always been focused on people. Before coming to CA in 2003, she administered benefits at a marketing company; previously, she was an employment counselor for a regional bank. She initially joined CA part time to track student attendance, and over the years she extended her hours as her duties expanded to include coordinating everything from bulletin boards and class rings to laundry services for boarding students and commuter-rail passes for day students traveling from the city.

Decareau says that when she first arrived, she didn't feel like she was dealing with high school students: "They were so mature, they felt more like coworkers." That hasn't changed, she says. The check-in systems she initiated have adapted over the decades, thanks to her diligence in ensuring students were safe and their whereabouts known.

"She made sure that every student knows someone cares where they are—that literally every student at CA is seen, every day," says **Grant Hightower**, assistant head for student life.

Decareau says she couldn't have asked for a better job: "The kids kept me feeling younger. And getting to be here every day with wonderful, smart, educated individuals who are

always learning—for me, that hasn't felt like work."

While she looks forward to a slower routine with more time for walks with friends, book group chats, and volunteering at her local food pantry, her quiet influence at CA can't be replaced. And it won't be forgotten.

"Jackie is a beautiful person, a beautiful soul," Hightower says. "She is selflessly devoted to service and has been one of the most significant binding agents when it comes to the spirit of our institution. I'll miss her dearly."

SUE JOHNSON P'20

After more than a decade at CA and 40 years dedicated to sport and education, Athletics Director **Sue Johnson P'20** has hung up her jersey. "Her impact on the CA community and the field at large has been significant," says Head of School **Henry D. Fairfax**. "Sue was disciplined about making sure every decision was made through an equity lens. Not only did she support student-athletes of all genders at CA, but she was instrumental in ensuring that same equity in the Eastern Independent League (EIL). This is legacy work that will live on for many generations to come."

Johnson evolved many facets of CA's athletics program after arriving in 2015. She expanded the physical education, intramural, and subvarsity offerings and created a supervised, well-equipped fitness center. During her tenure, CA saw marked improvement in competitive success within EIL play and in New England



Preparatory School Athletic Council (NEPSAC) postseason tournaments. While serving on the NEPSAC executive board, Johnson also helped draft its original gender identity inclusion statement, and in her first year at CA, she guided the EIL's transition of wrestling to an all-gender sport.

Under Johnson's watch, the school amassed a fleet of banners and trophies, but she remained focused on raising the caliber of the athletics program in alignment with CA's mission. Throughout her tenure, she prioritized the life skills and values learned through athletics and centered the transformative experience of team sport.

"Sue fostered a positive and supportive environment that made staff, coaches, and students feel valued," says **Laurie Baker**, former assistant athletics director. "Her leadership will truly be missed."

Left: Jackie Decareau. Above: Sue Johnson P'20 at the victory bell with CA's girls varsity soccer team in 2021. Near right: Nancy Boutilier. Far right: Christa Champion coaching CA's throwers on the track and field team.

NANCY BOUTILIER AND CHRISTA CHAMPION

Nancy Boutilier joined CA's English Department in 2016 following a career teaching and coaching in independent schools on both coasts of the U.S., as well as at Oberlin College. Before long, she became integral to CA athletics and residential life as well. A poet, activist, and fierce competitor, Boutilier encouraged authentic engagement and expression, inspiring students and colleagues alike to approach the world with a sense of wonder. She helped establish CA's Writing Center, laying a foundation for peer mentorship and writing feedback. And her famous "sophomore letters" have been a treasured delivery to senior students as they near graduation.

"Coaching is teaching, and teaching is coaching with Nancy," says

Sarah Yeh P'24 '27, associate head for teaching, learning, and faculty. "In the classroom, everything she does is in the spirit of helping a student find their place, their confidence, and their voice. On the basketball court, she models what it means to be an athlete, a teammate, and a community member at every step of a practice or game."

The CA community will also greatly miss Boutilier's partner and fellow house faculty member, **Christa Champion**, whose boundless energy and zest for track and field infused her coaching of throwing and pole vaulting. Former track and field coach **Jon Waldron** says Champion's expansive vision of sport and ability to integrate her experiences as an athlete, engineer, poet, and teacher made her a transformative coach and mentor at CA.





CACKLEBERRIES

Finding
the

FUNNY

STORY BY
VANESSA DE ZORZI

PORTRAITS BY
COLE + KEIRA

CANDID PHOTO BY
NATALIE CHERIE CAMPBELL

CA students
create a
sitcom
from scratch





boundary between spectator and participant to dissolve in a flurry of rolling takes. To the side, a monitor plays a live feed of the action. Tension builds as a crew member flashes cue cards—“laugh,” “aww,” “gasp!”—every few seconds.

“Cut!”

the director yells. The crew resets for a second take. Chatter ripples across the audience. A curated playlist kicks in—managed, like everything else about this production, by students. “I love this song,” an audience member exclaims as a Billy Joel track blares through the speakers. At the diner counter, an actor grabs a spatula and, for a moment, turns it into a microphone, crooning along.

In Concord Academy’s Centennial Arts Center (C.A.C.), a small soundstage has been transformed into a vintage diner. Café tables and chairs sit atop a checkered floor, and rust-colored barstools are lined up along a counter whose chrome edge gleams in the warm glow from overhead lights.

One student crouches behind a camera, adjusting focus. Another lifts a boom mic into place. An actor runs a few last lines at the counter. Then the student director calls out:

“Quiet on set,”

the director calls, and the next take rolls, the scene now familiar but still funny.

This is *Cackleberries*, a sitcom CA students wrote, acted in, directed, and filmed this year, following a process modeled on professional TV production. A collaborative effort through and through, the series involved more than 30 student artists.

“Rolling!”

“In case you haven’t noticed, business hasn’t exactly been booming lately,” the actor deadpans.

A beat. Then, on cue, a tumbleweed drifts across the floor.

Chuckles, snorts, and full-throated laughter erupt from the audience, and also from the crew behind the cameras. It doesn’t take long for the



During a photo shoot for this story, some CA students who performed in *Cackleberries* got into character, and others who worked behind the scenes showed up as themselves.

FROM PREMISE TO PITCH

In fall 2025, CA launched the new class the Sitcom Project: Writing and Acting for Television. Teaching a section each, film teacher **Justin Bull P'25 '28** and theater teacher **Shelley Bolman P'27** guided students through the process of writing episodic stories. This winter and spring, a group of students, including many from the class, brought several of those scripts to fruition on screen.

The Sitcom Project builds upon the Feature Film Project, a course CA offers every other year in which students create a feature-length film. The resulting films have spanned multiple genres, and Bull, who teaches the class, saw sitcoms as a natural next step given their popularity on streaming platforms.

As the C.A.C. was under construction, Bull's idea was likewise taking shape. The new facility's Spencer and Colton P3 (Process, Presentation, and Production) Lab introduced a setting ideal for filmmaking, with grid lighting, dedicated space for a standing set, and the Rasmussen Digital Production Lab.

When the film program moved from the Math and Arts Center to the C.A.C. this academic year, Bull also saw an opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration. "The sitcom is an interesting Venn diagram of film and theater," he says. "There's a traditional rehearsal process, a live audience, and it's shot chronologically."



To bridge these programs, Bull turned to Bolman for his expertise in acting and directing. The two aligned closely on curriculum and execution, drawing from a course on writing for television that Bull and English teacher **Andrew Stevens** offered several years ago and incorporating lesson plans from Bolman's playwriting class. The 24 students enrolled in the 15-week course began by learning the fundamentals of sitcom writing. They analyzed scripts from popular sitcoms, including *Seinfeld*, *Freaks and Geeks*, and *Black-ish*, to identify plot structure, character archetypes, and objectives.

Early in the semester, both sections met together during a daylong symposium to develop a story. Bolman led acting exercises that emphasized the

importance of ensemble work, giving students the beginning and end of a scene, for example, and asking them to improvise the middle.

"That physical approach to acting really sparks ideas, while giving people the freedom to be playful, take risks, and fully embrace the fun," Bolman says.

The students generated hundreds of ideas, which they organized on a digital whiteboard before narrowing them down. After much debate and several rounds of voting, they determined a tone, a cast of characters, and the setting: *Cackleberries*, a struggling diner in a New Hampshire resort town.

After the symposium, Bull and Bolman compiled a "show bible" that outlines each character's defining

“One of the things
comedy does is
disarm us; it makes
us more open to what
we’re hearing.”

Shelley Bolman P’27
theater teacher

traits: Nina, an MIT grad, channels her passion for science into concocting elaborate coffee drinks. Blair, the hostess, is more interested in cultivating her Instagram following than serving customers. Trent, a delivery driver, adds oddball energy that unites the crew. Unemployed Ray, a regular customer, practically lives at Cackleberries. And Jo, the fiery short-order cook, keeps the operation running with tough love and her catchphrase: “Get the hell out of my diner!”

Back in class, each student brainstormed an “engine,” or premise, for an episode, which they pitched to their peers. They wrote “cold opens,” the short scenes that hook the viewer before the opening credits, then drafted a full script of about 30 pages, or around 15 minutes.

THE PUNCH-UP

The 12 members of Bull’s class flip to the first scene of a script they will discuss today. “Terminally Online” is an episode about Danny, a waiter and aspiring writer, whose growing fixation on online criticism is driving him into a spiral of self-doubt. The conversation heats up quickly:



“What if the whole situation
escalates into something

totally
absurd?”

one student asks.

“What if the person he mistakes
for the internet troll at the diner is
a child?”

“What if he tries to confront the
little kid and it turns into a full-blown
showdown?”

This revision process, known as
a “punch-up,” is where the story
comes to life—outside the brain of
a solitary writer, with input from the
entire team.

“The writers’ room requires that you
work with everybody, that you trust
everybody, and that you are willing to



put yourself in somebody else's shoes," Bolman says.

The students' approaches to humor went far beyond superficial jokes, he adds: "They brought their personal experiences to bear through the medium of comedy. One of the things comedy does is disarm us; it makes us more open to what we're hearing."

Students crafted storylines around timely issues in ways both funny and relevant. In one episode, when the diner faces a corporate takeover, the colleagues turn against one another,

competing to keep their jobs. Other episodes tackle the threats of artificial intelligence and social media addiction through the lens of absurdity.

Grace Goodman '27, who played Jo, the cook, wrote "Terminally Online," drawing from her experience leading CA's No Social Media November student movement. She says the writers' room format challenged her, but made her a better writer: "It forced me to consider all angles. I had to take a big-picture idea and condense it into a short episode

The Cackleberries cast and crew during a taping of the sitcom in January 2026. Members of CA's campus community joined the live audience, and several appeared in cameos, including history teacher Paddy O'Halloran and Grace Carnahan '26 (seated center).

that could carry a message and connect with people. "

Bull and Bolman say all 24 completed scripts were strong; based on cast size and set limitations, they selected the eight best suited for filming.

“The experience
gave me a lot of
confidence in my
creative decisions.”

China Santos '27



PLACES, EVERYONE

Beginning in winter 2026, the *Cackleberries* cast and crew of around 30 students plunged into a demanding after-school production schedule, filming an episode every week for two months. Mondays and Tuesdays were devoted to rehearsals, Wednesdays and Thursdays to three-camera-format taping, and Fridays to table readings for the next week's episode.

Actors largely self-directed their rehearsals, receiving periodic feedback on blocking and delivery from Bull and Bolman. Many of them, used to performing on stage, faced a new challenge in acting for film as well as a live audience. They had to adjust their approach for the camera, delivering more nuanced performances.

It took a team to create a cohesive set, with guidance from faculty members, including sound advisor **Nate Tucker**, technical director **James Williston P'28**, and set designer **Jessica Cloutier-Plasse**. Wesleyan University student **Micah St. George '25** designed the lighting that gave the show its distinctive mood.

China Santos '27 designed props and costumes. In the wardrobe, she worked closely with actors to align outfits with each character's personality. To determine which props were needed, China carefully analyzed scripts, then sourced or crafted the set pieces. The most complex object she created was a retrofuturistic AI robot fashioned from a torn-apart tape editor, tubes, an old keyboard, and an LED-lit screen.

“The experience gave me a lot of confidence in my creative decisions,” China says. “It was really fun to make things and find solutions to the problems we had.”

Bull served as the showrunner, the lead creative and production manager who ensures consistency across episodes. He began the process by organizing a weeklong “sitcom bootcamp,” helping students learn to use the cameras and sound equipment through mock tapings.

Olivia Kim '26, who wrote the episode “Running out of Steam,” served as a technical director. From the control room, she operated the video switcher, selecting camera shots, graphics, and video feeds to shape the story in real time as the taping took place. “I had a lot of fun working with Justin, who’s been in the professional film industry, and just seeing how everything works on set,” she says. “I thought it was incredibly impressive how we were able to put each episode together in a week.”

Sometimes the schedule was even tighter than that. Weather-related delays and illnesses created compressed



timelines within an already tight academic calendar. After back-to-back snow day cancellations, the team shot the final two episodes in a single week.

They had the equipment to pull it off. The crew used sound-canceling headsets to communicate, and they adjusted camera angles on the fly. “The process taught me that so much depends on

collabor- ation,”

says camera operator **Daniel Peregudov '27**, who also co-wrote the final episode. “Even when it seems like it’s mostly about technical skills, that’s not the whole picture. Everyone has to work together seamlessly.”

Over the eight weeks of filming, CA students, faculty, staff, and alums joined the audience. Some also made cameo appearances in various episodes.



CACKLEBERRIES

WATCH THE SERIES

concordacademy.org/sitcom

What's your favorite episode?

Each week, after taping wrapped, Bull led post-production, the final stage of filmmaking. Working from a rough cut assembled by the technical director, he selected the best takes and created a complex sound mix, then handled the credits and color grading, polishing each episode for its debut.

GREENLIT

CA released *Cackleberries* episodes weekly on YouTube from January 23 to March 27. By the end of the school year, the series premiere alone had been viewed nearly 1,000 times.

"We're so proud of the tremendous amount of expertise and dedication our students and faculty across depart-

ments have put into this experience," says **Sarah Yeh P'24 '27**, associate head for teaching, learning, and faculty.

"It's been stunning to see students operating cameras like professionals."

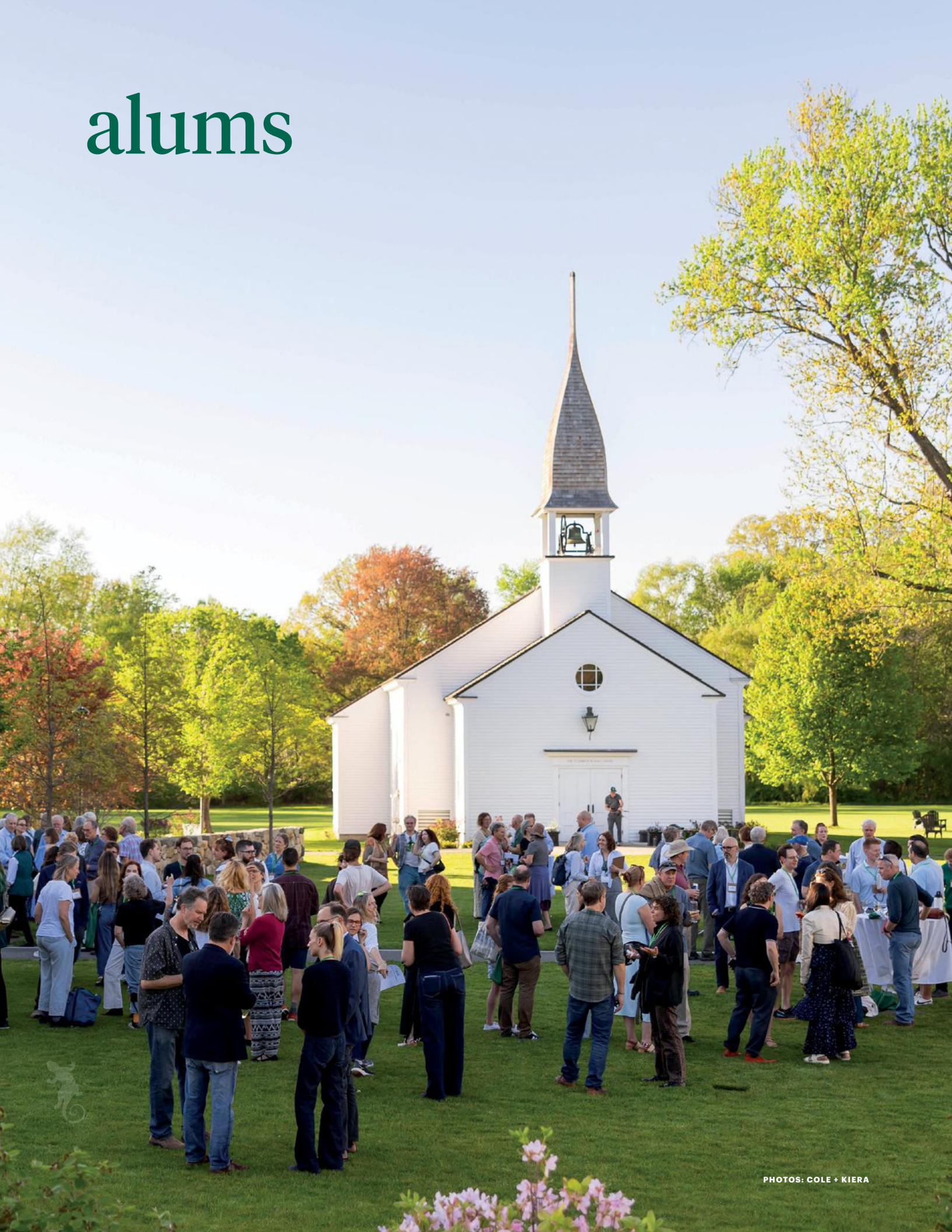
This spring, the school greenlit the Sitcom Project as a staple of CA's film program, to be offered, in alternate years, along with the Feature Film Project. The feature-length filmmaking experience, spearheaded by Bull and fellow film teacher **Ben Stumpf '88** is open to juniors and seniors, as is the Sitcom Project. Interspersing feature-length and serialized comedy formats will allow older students to take part in both, increase their opportunities to get involved in film during their time at CA.

Bull is eager to evolve the Sitcom Project. In the future, he plans to begin the semester by providing students with a complete story bible to ensure consistency and maximize their writing time. He also sees opportunities to involve students in the musical score and film editing.

"I find great joy in making art with others, and that's why I love filmmaking," he says. "I hope students step away from this process realizing that when collaboration, communication, and creativity come together, you can bring even the most impossible

ideas
to life."

alums



PHOTOS: COLE + KIERA

CONNECTING CA ALUMS

Let's Break the Ice

When I talk with fellow CA alums, whether or not we were students together, some similarities are clear. We know our individual strengths, and we value others' perspectives. We lead with trust. We *love* learning. We might be in different life stages, work in disparate fields, and not even share a hobby, but we are curious, empathetic, and driven to leave things better than we found them.

As we transition from yearly reunions to a new Alum Weekend model, I'm confident that this change will deepen relationships across classes. Yes, we'll occasionally celebrate milestones a bit "early" or "late," but we'll gain many opportunities to connect with more of our peers. I encourage you to use a new tool at concordacademy.org/alum-weekend to easily see your reunion years so that you can plan when to return to campus.

Other in-person and virtual programs will continue as usual. This year, CA held regional events in Los Angeles and San Francisco, and young alums gathered in Boston and New York. The school also introduced the Green Guild, a seminar series for post-50th reunion alums, with journalist **Julia Preston '69** as its inaugural speaker.

To stay in the loop, join CA's LinkedIn page (linkedin.com/school/concord-academy). Better still, volunteer with the Alum Association. It's a delight—as I can attest! In many roles, individuals like you keep our community connected. Email me at alum_@concordacademy.org to get involved.

I'm honored to serve our global community. And I hope to see you at an upcoming event. No doubt, we'll have something in common.

Natalie Krajcir '02

Alum Association President



CONCORD ACADEMY ALUM ASSOCIATION

Everyone who attended Concord Academy is automatically a member of the Alum Association, which fosters lifelong connections between Concord Academy and its extended community. The association facilitates meaningful opportunities to preserve and promote a love of learning, service to others, and a commitment to diverse perspectives and backgrounds. Through involvement in the life of the school, within the community, and through service to the greater world, the association strives to renew and affirm the core values instilled while at CA.



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A Joyful Gathering

In May, CA welcomed nearly 250 alums back to campus for a reunion with special celebrations honoring classes ending in 1 and 6. They enjoyed beautiful spring weather while gathering for discussions, tours, dance and music performances, class dinners, and an evening reception. The weekend also included sample interdisciplinary classes and a memorial service, while leaving plenty of time for attendees to paddle on the Sudbury River and casually reconnect.

At the Alum Association Assembly, Head of School **Henry D. Fairfax** discussed how the strategic plan is guiding ongoing work, and three students talked about life and learning on campus today. Alums had a chance to offer their younger counterparts some advice, too. One tip: Always wear your CA ring—you never know when you'll run into someone connected to the CA community.

LEARN MORE

concordacademy.org/reunion-2026

Sustainable Callings

Three alums discussed their work for the environment during a panel discussion about sustainability. **Melissa Moye '76** spent over two decades at the World Wildlife Fund, leading efforts to create sustainable sources of financing for conservation in developing countries. Both she and **Nina Callahan '16** have invested in seaweed businesses—Moye, in methane-reducing cattle feed, and Callahan, in a substitute for plastic. Callahan, who works for a private equity firm that specializes in sustainable food chain investing, traced her “sustainability bug” back to CA, where **Sonia Lo '84** visited as the Hall Fellow to speak about hydroponic farming in 2015. **Haninah Levine '01**, a lawyer for the National Park Service, said he appreciates that his job involves so many disciplines. “CA cultivated in me a passion for always finding out more about different things, and I've been lucky enough to find a career where I get to humor that impulse,” he said.

PHOTOS: COLE + KIERA, JODI HILTON





REUNION 2026



A Critical Time for Queer Media

Adam Goldman '04 has started a foundation to support LGBTQ+ creators

“In my career, my successes have come from creating things that should have already existed,” says writer and director **Adam Goldman '04**.

An avid theater student at CA, once called “iconoclastic and contrary,” he realized he was better at creating works than reading parts in plays. Goldman graduated from Bard College with a BFA in theater and has created a web series, a scripted podcast, and, in 2025, a foundation to support the next generation of queer filmmakers.

His first major project, *The Outs*, appeared on Vimeo for two seasons beginning in 2012. He describes it as a simple story about an emotionally wrenching breakup between two men. More challenging at the time than writing a series featuring gay characters was selling the public on the idea of a streaming series. “It was a moment when people were saying to me, ‘No one wants to watch TV on their laptops,’” Goldman says. But he and co-creator Sasha Winters disagreed, and they “made a bet that if you make something good, people will want to watch it.”

Netflix launched *House of Cards*, considered the first major success by a streaming network, a little less than a year after *The Outs* debuted, and Goldman had his proof. Not only did people watch his show, they also responded to it on a profound level. Goldman’s early fan mail included a note from a teenager. “He said that watching *The Outs* showed him a version of life that allowed him to imagine a possible future for himself,” Goldman says.

He soon learned that *The Outs* had at least one very high-profile fan after stage and film icon Alan Cumming tweeted about it. “I freaked out,” Goldman says. “Once I calmed down, I tweeted back to Alan, and we made plans to get together for coffee.” Cumming asked to be written into a scene, and the two have been friends ever since. When Cumming co-hosted the Tony Awards with Kristin



Chenoweth in 2015, Goldman was a scriptwriter for the broadcast.

Goldman’s next major project was *Hot White Heist*, a scripted podcast series picked up by Audible in early 2020. “Right after we shook hands on it, the pandemic lockdown began,” Goldman recalls. “Suddenly, all of these major actors were trapped at home with time to do smaller projects. We put together an incredible cast that included Bowen Yang, Cynthia Nixon, Margaret Cho, Tony Kushner, and Sir Ian McKellen. It started out as a very silly and jokey premise, but underneath it was a serious question about what queerness means and how it is evolving.”

Despite the high visibility of stars like Yang and Nixon, as well as the popularity of series that center on gay relationships, from *Schitt’s Creek* to the recent breakout hit *Heated Rivalry*, a tide of repression has been sweeping through the media and the arts, Goldman says. Major studios including Disney, Amazon MGM Studios, Paramount, and Warner Bros. Discovery are publicly dialing back their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and even critically acclaimed shows from queer creators haven’t been renewed. GLAAD’s 2025 Studio

WORKING KNOWLEDGE

NATALIA WINKELMAN '11 HAS HER DREAM JOB

Responsibility Index reports that the top 10 major film and TV distributors released 250 films in 2024, of which 23.6% include at least one LGBTQ+ character—a decrease of nearly 4% from the previous year.

Timing is critical. That decrease in investment in queer film and TV now will impact the next several years of media production. “Queer media is in crisis,” Goldman says. “It isn’t enough just to write roles for queer characters. We need to make it possible for young, early-career queer filmmakers to break into an industry that is increasingly hostile toward them.”

This realization led him to embark on his most recent endeavor, the Necessary Foundation, which provides funding and mentorship to emerging filmmakers in the LGBTQ+ space. “I was in a state of utter despair after the second election of Trump,” Goldman says. “And then I came up with the idea of starting a foundation.” Cumming signed on as a co-founder, as did Yang and actor, writer, and producer Lena Waithe.

The Necessary Foundation aims to help creators reflect the full spectrum of experiences for the queer community. It will provide financial support for young filmmakers to tell the stories they want to tell, without worrying about appealing to the mainstream. Grant recipients will also gain on-set production experience. “We will help them to get into film festivals and generate publicity,” Goldman says.

The foundation’s focus is still on fundraising, but the founders’ vision is that the community will rapidly grow into one that can sustain itself, with past recipients helping future ones. Goldman says, “We will help these artists grow into industry-leading talents.”

—Nancy Shohet West '84

Freelance film critic **Natalia Winkelman '11** has been reviewing movies for the *New York Times* since 2019. As a writer and producer, she has also helped create award-winning documentary podcasts, including *The Plot Thickens* for Turner Classic Movies, about what it took to make iconic films such as *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and *Cleopatra*. We caught up with this film buff about what it’s like to watch and respond to movies for a living.

When did your passion for movies start?

I’d always enjoyed movies, but I had never thought about them in an academic context until I started taking classes with **Justin Bull P’25 ’28** and fell in love with film at CA. Justin had all of these *Film Comment* magazines, and I just loved reading the film criticism in those. My best friend, **Dani Girdwood '11**, and I did an independent study to make an unscripted hybrid documentary-narrative short film. We were going to grow up and be directors. She just directed her first feature, by the way (page 85). My skill set was more in writing, but I applied to college as a film major because of Justin’s classes. It’s so rare to have a full film program in high school. When I tell people about it now, their jaws drop.

How did you break into this field? When I took a film criticism class in college, I remembered, oh, that’s something a person can do. I had figured I’d end up in academia or work in the film industry in some capacity, but film criticism was the dream. I went back to school and earned a master’s through a cultural reporting and criticism program at NYU. Then I got my first big entertainment writing job at the *Daily Beast*.

What’s it like to be a film critic? It’s lots of fun. I go to screenings and some film festivals and cover for various outlets, not just the *Times*, though I’ve had a weekly assignment for seven years. I watch a lot of documentaries, but it’s a total hodgepodge. The more you watch, the more well-versed you are in the current

film landscape and in film history, so it’s been kind of a project: to watch everything I can. There’s a robust film scene in New York. I see myself in the world of film enthusiasts—thinking about films, analyzing how one piece works in the larger cultural landscape.

How do you approach reviewing? I don’t think about being a tastemaker. It’s just my take. I’ve studied film and bring some expert knowledge, but I also bring my own sensibility and biases. I’m making something when I’m writing, just like the filmmaker is making something. For the *Times*, I usually have only 250 to 300 words, sometimes longer for a big movie. I had to train myself to write that short. Now it’s become a precision exercise

to pick the most salient things to say. One of the guiding rules of criticism is to take a movie on its own terms. My voice will start to echo the tone of the film. If it’s a comedy, I can be more playful. If it’s a serious drama, I’ll take it more straight. The only movies I really go hard on are huge studio releases. I would never be cruel to a first film or an indie.



What’s the best writing advice you ever got?

When I was in graduate school, a lot of people were saying there are no writing jobs, there’s no money. Someone told me, “There are never any jobs, there’s never any money, but there is always a dearth of good writing. So if you have a strong voice, your writing will be read.” That really helped me refocus on improving my writing rather than positioning myself for a job, which was a lot healthier for me. Just focus on the work and what you love doing.

Describe an ideal trip to the cinema. I’d watch an Ernst Lubitsch movie, *To Be or Not to Be*. It’s an audacious, hilarious World War II comedy. I’d bring all my friends. From the concession stand, I’d get Sno-Caps, Junior Mints, and a Diet Coke. You know, this movie is so underseen. It would make a good CA class, about how Lubitsch approaches comedy: The Lubitsch Touch. I’m going to pitch this to Justin Bull.

Courtside Legacy

A basketball star at CA, Kevin Benjamin '91 is paying it forward as a mentor

When **Kevin Benjamin '91** arrived at CA from Queens, N.Y., the academic rigor and dorm setting were new to him, but the basketball court was familiar. Having honed his skills as a kid in New York City, he was the only 9th grader to make the varsity basketball team. "Some great players took me under their wing," he remembers. "**Corwin Allston '88** was like a big brother to me."

His parents and aunt, **Karen McAlmon '75**, had encouraged him to apply to CA through the A Better Chance program, recognizing that his academic potential exceeded the opportunities he was likely to have if he stayed in Queens. At CA, he found the intellectual stimulation he was seeking. Just as important were the social relationships that led to personal growth.

Outside of basketball, he connected with peers through Harambe, an affinity group for students of color. With them, he felt immediate kinship. "We were able to relate to one another and to build some semblance of home away from home," he says. He also made new friends whose backgrounds were unlike his. "One of my freshman roommates was from Indonesia, and the other was Korean-American," he says. "We all came from very different walks of life. But we became a close-knit group, sharing our cultures and experiences."

Benjamin captained the varsity basketball team for the next three years, and he upheld the team culture created

by those older players who had helped him through his first year. League championships followed, but it was always more about the fellowship than the score, Benjamin says.

Then came a pivotal game. CA was playing Lexington Christian Academy, whose roster included a young superstar the college scouts were watching. Benjamin scored 44 points, helping CA pull off a narrow victory. The scouts' eyes turned to him. He was soon drawn to Pomona College in California, where he could continue playing basketball while pursuing an excellent education.

"I knew I was never going to be in the NBA, so I set my sights on a strong academic institution where I could continue my basketball career," Benjamin says. He played varsity basketball for two years at Pomona, then completed his degree at California State University, Northridge, where he majored in cinema and TV.

After 15 years in film production and screenwriting, ultimately in the role of senior manager for distribution operations with Disney Entertainment,

in 2025 he started his own company, Razzle Dazzle Entertainment. Currently he is working on a documentary honoring his younger brother, Casey Benjamin, a Grammy Award-winning musician, songwriter, and producer who died suddenly in 2024.

Basketball still plays a major role in his life, now through Venice Hoops, a community partnership he co-founded with other weekend warriors that offers drills, tournaments, skills camps, and scrimmage opportunities for basketball enthusiasts of all ages on Venice Beach, near his Los Angeles home.

"Sports have always been a big part of my life," Benjamin says. "Venice Hoops is a chance to promote the fellowship and mentorship that has meant so much to me as an athlete. Whether in New York City, in Concord, at Pomona, or on Venice Beach, basketball has helped me learn how to communicate, how to demonstrate dedication and hard work, how to deal with pressure and make good decisions under stress. Those are skills that help in business, in family, in all segments of life."—*Nancy Shohet West '84*



SUPPORT FOR STUDY ABROAD

BEYOND THE FAMILIAR

Katherine Bucknell '75 recalls the “thrilling freedom and challenge” she found as a student at Concord Academy. Encouraged to experiment “seriously and safely,” she says, “we were invited to do anything that fascinated us. Everything was available if we approached it with rigor and discipline.”

Throughout her school days, she found much that fascinated her. Long stretches at the pottery wheel offered “beautiful oblivion,” she remembers. Outside the studio, she played hockey, basketball, and lacrosse. Music—piano, guitar, and singing—accompanied it all. She was equally immersed in academic exploration. In her junior and senior years, she joined an economics tutorial built around conversation and sustained interrogation of ideas.

“You could imagine you were Joan Baez with the guitar, and then an economist,” she says. “Without pressure to measure yourself against others, you got to try on a lot of hats.”

The freedom was real, but so was the expectation that each experiment be taken seriously. “You couldn’t fake it,” she says.

Bucknell went on to Princeton, studied English literature at Oxford, then earned her doctorate in English and comparative literature from Columbia University. She built her life in England as a literary scholar and novelist. Her experience in Europe reshaped her perspective. “America is so insular,” she says. “Living in a foreign country is both humbling and expanding. That bit of abrasion as you gain a broader understanding is healthy.”

For many years, CA receded into the background of Bucknell’s life, but that changed at her 50th reunion last year. She found herself connecting with classmates she had not known well. Listening to their stories, she says, she was struck by how they had “lived their lives unafraid and authentic, not flinching from getting older and wiser.”

Having seen how her peers had held to their values, Bucknell grew interested in reengaging with the school. In conversations with Head of School **Henry D. Fairfax**, she found that CA’s mission still resonates with her. “I recognized it,” she says.

As a way to bolster that mission, she established the Katherine Bucknell Maguire '75 Study Abroad Fund, which helps students take part in weeklong travel programs or attend school for a semester or year outside of the United States. She especially intends this endowment to support students who might otherwise be unable to afford to study abroad.

Bucknell hopes they’ll benefit from a balance of freedom and challenge, just as she did—and that they’ll be open to seeing where experiencing a different culture might lead them.



“You could imagine you were Joan Baez with the guitar, and then an economist. Without pressure to measure yourself against others, you got to try on a lot of hats.”

Katherine Bucknell '75

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2026 JOAN SHAW HERMAN AWARD

What Is Yours to Do?

Helen Chase Trainor '67 serves from a spirit of *ubuntu*

When **Helen Chase Trainor '67** visited Concord Academy on April 17 to receive the Joan Shaw Herman Award for Distinguished Service, she wasted no time in addressing the anxieties of the youngest members of Generation Z.

“Are you feeling hopeless about the state of the world?” she asked CA students during her acceptance speech. “And about your ability to do anything about it? Are you overwhelmed by how much needs to be done in order to make the American dream a reality for more people?”

Trainor paused after each question. As she did, a chorus of yeses rose from the audience, each time a little louder.

She nodded. “Then I have a job for you,” she said.

She was being honored for her “efforts toward systemic change,” she said, “not just changes around the edges of things, but changes to the very systems that form our social fabric.” After building a legal career as an assistant federal public defender, Trainor became a fellow at the U.S. Supreme Court. She later founded the Virginia Institutionalized Persons Project to secure humane healthcare for incarcerated women and investigate civil rights abuses in mental hospitals. She also created the Florida Mental Health Advocacy Coalition, bringing multiple mental health organizations together to pursue policy changes to improve the lives of people with behavioral health conditions.

As an ordained Episcopal deacon, she has bridged spiritual care and social justice to manage a range of programs, including securing kindergarten education guarantees and supporting women transitioning from homelessness. She’s the author of multiple books and articles on appellate practice and prisoner litigation, as well as the 2025 book *Why Millennials Don’t Go to Church* (page 84).

During her talk at CA, Trainor proposed that incremental reform can transform systems that perpetuate inequality into systems that support



life and dignity for all. Gradually, she said, “if the smaller issues are just, and if they are humane, they have the power to affect the larger issues.”

For example, as an appellate lawyer Trainor argued before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit, which encompasses Florida, Georgia, and Alabama, for less draconian sentencing measures. Through several cases, she helped make the law more humane. “Working as an appellate lawyer,” she said, “is one of the most thrilling things that you can possibly do, because you are actively changing the law every time you stand up to argue a case.”

To help students take steps toward the better future they envision, Trainor suggested a foundational orientation: the southern African philosophy of *ubuntu*, roughly translated as, “I am because we are.” With *ubuntu* as a guiding

The Joan Shaw Herman Award for Distinguished Service was established in 1976 in honor of **Joan Shaw Herman '46**.

Though confined to an iron lung, Herman devotedly advocated for others with disabilities. Concord Academy's only award is presented annually to an alum or alums who embody CA's ideals of empathy, integrity, and responsibility and its shared value of service to others.

LEARN MORE
concordacademy.org/trainor

principle, we can all become agents of systemic change, she said.

She shared an acrostic, DARE, that she had devised for the occasion to help students remember her advice: “Dream your passion. Address what is yours to do. Respect the stories. Embrace your power.”

“It’s hard to dream when the problems that we face seem resistant to change, generation after generation,” Trainor admitted, “but I say, make your dream as big as the problem.” Her dreams, she said, were a correctional system that did not further punish people by withholding medical care and a medical system that did not discriminate against the mentally ill.

Addressing what is yours to do involves identifying steps you can take personally or with others, she said. For her, that meant finding ways to require correctional facilities to provide batteries for hearing aids and ensure that women receive regular mammograms.

To respect stories, you must listen to voices others don’t want to hear. Trainor started her project in Virginia with no staff and no funding, she said, just a stack of letters from incarcerated people describing the mistreatment they had endured in prison. “Together, they added up to a pattern, which turned out to give us an opportunity to create a lawsuit,” she said.

Finally, she advised embracing the power we each have by becoming experts in our particular passions, then teaching others to become experts in sharing their stories. “This is called organizing,” she said. “But what it really means is helping people tell their own personal stories to the right people at the right time.”

She recalled a committee hearing during which a Florida mother testified about her daughter’s difficulties navigating the mental health system. As she spoke about what it was like to be the parent of a child dealing with mental illness, Trainor said, the room was silent. Then, one by one, committee members began recounting stories of their own relatives. The legislation Trainor sought that day was passed, but what happened in that room, she said, was just as important.

“*Ubuntu* means that we cannot do other than to see ourselves in each other’s stories,” she said, “and *ubuntu* is calling us in the name of our common humanity to dare to confront systems that would treat us as anything less than human.”

ANALYSIS:

THE AI BEAT



This year, **Rithik Kundu '22** is serving on the jury of the International Sound Awards (ISA), an annual competition dubbed the “Oscars of Sound.” One of 25 jurors, the recent New York University graduate joined this multinational panel of audio experts while still a college senior. Already building a career advising companies on emerging music technology, Kundu studies the intersection of music and artificial intelligence.

At NYU, he founded the GenAudio & AI club, which established partnerships with commercial music tools to encourage creative use of generative AI technologies, also the focus of his undergraduate research. For his capstone project in the Music Technology program, he conducted a pilot blind-listener survey to compare perceptions of human-made and AI-generated music. While it’s still underway, Kundu says, “what we’re seeing is that people do have ideas about what AI-generated music is going to sound like.”

Will AI overtake artistry? “There are legitimate concerns, particularly around data scraping and copyright,” he says. “It’s a very complicated issue, but there are also creative benefits.” Those include assistive production technology, which can help more composers make their songs label-ready.

Kundu has been producing digital music since his 9th grade year at CA, where he found support from friends and faculty members. His advice for students interested in music technology: “Follow your curiosity. Try to take as many classes as you can, but also don’t be afraid to explore on your own and show what you’re doing to other people.”

LEARN MORE

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CA ON THE ROAD

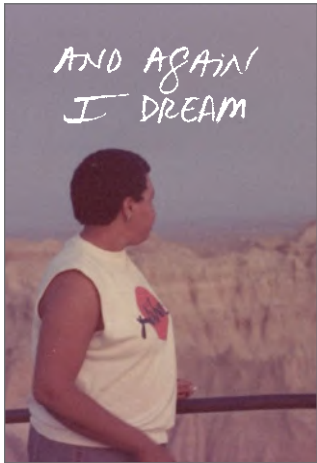
Alums gathered in Los Angeles (above) this year, among other locations, keeping community ties strong.

CreativeTypes

CALLING ALL CREATIVE TYPES

Have you published a book or released a film or an album within the past year? Please contact martha_kennedy@concordacademy.org, and consider donating a copy to the J. Josephine Tucker Library's CA alum collection.

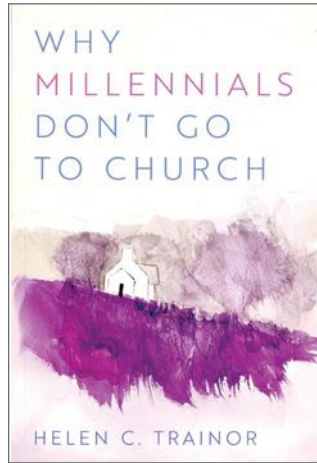
FILM



And Again I Dream
Catherine Gund '83,
producer and director
Aubin Pictures, 2026

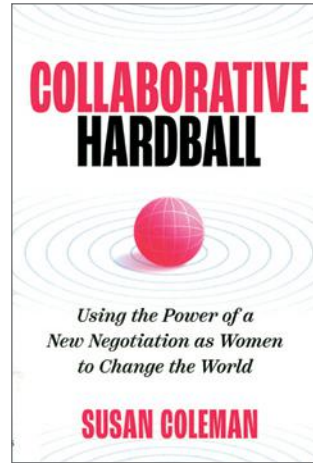
Ivy Young, an African American journalist, organizer, poet, and photographer who died in 2023, campaigned for LGBTQ+ civil and political rights. Young's lifelong friend Gund co-directs this documentary alongside history student Mariah Norman, exploring Young's archive to illuminate her life and link memory, activism, and identity. The film was selected for the 2026 Woods Hole, Roxbury International, DC/DOX, Atlanta, and Cleveland International film festivals.

BOOKS



Why Millennials Don't Go to Church
Helen Chase Trainor '67
Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2025

While attending a wedding, Trainor (page 36), an Episcopal deacon, was struck by the ceremony's exclusively secular nature. Wondering why so many millennials have rejected Christianity, she researched early Christian interpretations of the New Testament gospels and explored divergences from traditional forms of Christian practice today. Trainor suggests that much has been lost and might be better translated through a Christian mystical lens.



Collaborative Hardball
Susan Coleman '73
Amplify Publishing, 2026

Coleman, who hosts the *Peacebuilding Podcast*, shares negotiation techniques she has honed throughout years of experience in mediation work guided by the principles of collaboration. Rather than settling, she encourages challenging systems that perpetuate gender, racial, and socioeconomic inequities to make meaningful change that will create solutions to the world's most pressing problems, including the climate crisis and challenges to civil rights.



Pete's Beat
Matt Robinson '92
Red Barn Publishing, 2026

In this children's book, young Pete is an aspiring drummer who taps out beats with whatever is on hand and daydreams of playing for an audience. When an older student approaches him and asks if he'd join his band for the upcoming school talent show, Pete seizes on the chance to make his dreams come true.



Invisible Sun

Amani Willett '93

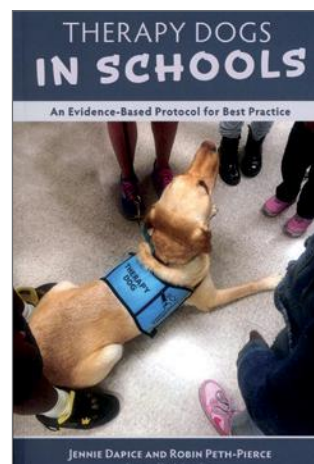
Dust Collective, 2025

Willet's fourth photography book is a personal reckoning and visual meditation on survival, transformation, and the fragility of being. As a child, he survived two life-threatening medical events that left lasting imprints. Using photographs of his children, landscapes, photographic experimentations, and AI-generated imagery, he explores the unspoken: what the body holds even when the mind forgets.

MORE TITLES FROM CA FILMMAKERS

My Fault: London
DANI GIRDWOOD '11,
DIRECTOR
Amazon MGM Studios, 2025

Girdwood makes her feature directorial debut with a high-stakes British romantic drama about forbidden love. This atmospheric slow burn, an adaptation of a 2023 Spanish film, *Culpa Mía*, stars Asha Banks and Matthew Broome.

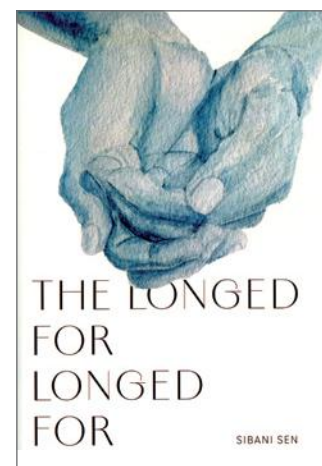


Therapy Dogs in Schools

Jennie Dapice '94

Purdue University Press, 2026

Therapy dogs have long assisted people with disabilities or vision loss and provided needed companionship for individuals. In recent years, more have been introduced in educational settings to help children by reducing anxiety and encouraging socialization. This guide outlines how to plan and implement a successful therapy dog program in K–12 schools with student and staff safety and animal welfare in mind.



The Longed For

Topi Dasgupta P'22 '25
(as Sibani Sen), faculty

Cathexis Northwest Press, 2025

From the perspective of the migrant, the marginalized, and the estranged, this collection gives voice to the longing and loss of loved ones and the deep scars born from ancestral enslavement, and how they carry into the lives of their descendants. Though personal in nature, these poems reach beyond, offering a universal message to any who have felt adrift yet survive and gain resilience through time and experience.

Then &



HELPING HANDS

THEN: CA already had a long history of student service when a school-organized group traveled to Kiln, Miss., in 2007 to help communities rebuild after Hurricane Katrina.

Now



NOW: CA students at a Charles River cleanup in April 2026, organized by the Outdoors Club.

IF MEMORY SERVES
What action did you take for others during your time at CA that brought you the most joy?



LAURENCE VANLEYNSEELE P'22 '28, ENGLISH TEACHER

01. Child's drawing: When my oldest daughter, **Zoé Green '22**, started reading, she was obsessed with this sentimental series. She loved animals—still does.

02. Student artwork: These are beautiful creations from 9th graders over the years. Over a page from the *Odyssey*, they made designs in dialogue with the remaining text.

03. Angel: By **Avi Cariens '25**, son of my friend and officemate **Topi Dasgupta P'22 '25**. It's so very like him.

04. Collage: By **Lucy Kania '12** in my first year teaching English (I migrated from French): Mr. Rochester from *Jane Eyre*.

05. Baudelaire photo: His discussion of suffering and not accepting the status quo resonates with teenagers.

06. Camus poster: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." When you're 17, this idea that within relentless hardships you make your own freedom is powerful.

07. Paris map: In my Literature of Paris course, I want students to be able to situate themselves. I'm from a suburb of Paris, where I studied before coming to the U.S.

08. Cartoon: Lynda Barry is darkly funny and thinks a great deal about time and attention.

09. Teapot: I taught *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* years ago. This was a token from a student-made board game inspired by Victorian literature.

10. Book: Dante, for Literature of the Infernal.

11. Postcard: From my colleague **Nick Hiebert**, when he visited Paris.

12. CA show ticket: From an amazing Dance Company collaboration, *I Sing the Body Electric*. It reminds me how much our students do outside the classroom.

13. Poem: "Winter Term's End" by Mary Karr, about teaching as learning how to let each year go—a gift from my colleague **Andrew Stevens** one year.



January's Winterfest included
a club showcase, student talent show, and raffles.
The event raised over \$7,200
for Boston Children's Hospital.

GUEST BID
PIES

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AVERY BAKER NIELSEN '29, BOOM, SET DRESSER, PROPS

ABBY HU '26, WRITER, DIRECTOR, CAMERA

TOBY CLEARY '27, ACTOR

GRACE GOODMAN '27, WRITER, ACTOR, DIRECTOR

CHINA SANTOS '27, COSTUMES, PROPS

MARGARET RAPAWY '26, CAMERA, ASST. TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, DIRECTOR

JEFFREY YEH '27, WRITER, ACTOR, DIRECTOR

