Left: A portion of a larger art display on the Main Hall bulletin boards thanks to Fleeting Thoughts, Taft’s Art Collective for student work (see more on page 38). One artist, Sophia Zogbi ’22, said of her work (in middle, with hands and leaves), “It is part of a collection I created over the summer that focused on memories from my childhood summers in Lebanon (where my family is from). The use of different colored lines and background shades reference colors I thought most embodied my experience in Lebanon, and the cedar branch is a nod to the cedar tree on the Lebanese flag.”

ROBERT FALCETTI

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Rising Above: Creating Opportunities for Learning

The work of educators Derek Mitchell ’84 and Michael Humphreys ’93
“Over the past several months … I saw compassion, courage, and commitment in abundant measure, in faculty, staff, and students—so much so that I found myself moved and inspired every day, often by small acts.”

COMMMENTS? TELL US!
We’d love to know what you think about the stories in this Bulletin. We may edit your letters for length, clarity, and content, but please write.
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DEADLINES FOR CLASS NOTES
Winter—November 15
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We, too, met our mission, showing that the school today, as the school then, was marked by faculty of inspiring strength, optimism, and adaptability; staff of great professionalism and loyalty; and students of incredible resilience, energy, and perseverance.

Taft is worried he has lost touch with his own school. He sounds dispirited, tired. No wonder.

And in his memoir, Taft wrote of those dark days. In a work marked by his wisdom, warmth, and humor, this memory stands out for its gravity and solemnity:

“There are so many elements in this reminiscence which all but beggar understanding: the image of the Main Hall filled with cots and feverish, coughing boys; a mother, years from her professional nursing days, risking her life to care for students she did not know; another mother with a dying boy volunteering to help others; the faculty learning that a colleague has died. I’m not sure what amazes me more: the details Taft chronicles, or the fact that he notes them with such a matter-of-fact tone.

I like to think that in some way, the courage, compassion, and commitment of these faculty, staff, and students have trickled down, like water through sand, to all of us on the campus of 2020–21. To be clear, I want to be careful that I not equate what this school experienced this fall with what it knew a century ago. There are very real differences, especially two tragic ones. But the historic rhyme cannot be missed.

Perhaps a century from now in a moment of great challenge, Tafties will look back on 2020, a year when Taft was forced to do school in a way it had never been done before, wondering at our one-way halls, 6-foot spacing, regular COVID-19 testing, hybrid learning, dorm visiting limitations, canceled athletic seasons, and radio broadcast dramatic production, and think, “If they could manage, so can we.”

As for Horace Taft? In March 1920, the influenza epidemic had essentially ended. But life at boarding school never is easy. Here’s what he wrote Thacher that month: “We, too, carried fears of the unknown and felt a similar fatigue. And we, too, met our mission, showing that the school today, as the school then, was marked by faculty of inspiring strength, optimism, and adaptability; staff of great professionalism and loyalty; and students of incredible resilience, energy, and perseverance.”
The Road to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Taft DEI Innovations in the Age of COVID

To say that the first semester of this school year has been uniquely difficult and challenging would be an understatement. In my decade-plus of educating in independent schools and nearly a lifetime of being in school, I cannot remember a semester like this. To conduct the business of educating students has required new ways of teaching, coaching, advising, dorm parenting, and simply being in community with each other. And while we all long for many elements of life pre-COVID, there have been some innovative and creative changes to the way we do our work at Taft that we will want to keep. This has been true for our DEI practice as we have created new avenues for and arenas in which to do this important work. In this article, I detail some of the changes that have occurred this past fall that have increased our opportunities to help students become the socially just and responsible global citizens this world so desperately needs.

DEI in Co-Curricular Spaces

While we have always done work on DEI in our co-curricular spaces, that work has frequently been less formal than our efforts in other spaces. With the change in our afternoon schedule during COVID, Co-Directors of Athletics Robert Madden ’03 and Rachael Ryan had the wonderful idea to launch the Taft Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program Community Days, where we would do DEI work and take time from our afternoon program as a result of COVID, in other spaces. With the change in our co-curricular spaces, that work has frequently been less formal than our efforts in our pre-COVID, there have been some innovative and creative changes to the way we do our work at Taft that we will want to keep. This has been true for our DEI practice as we have created new avenues for and arenas in which to do this important work. In this article, I detail some of the changes that have occurred this past fall that have increased our opportunities to help students become the socially just and responsible global citizens this world so desperately needs.

Creating belonging and gender identity and norms, and specifically the experiences of people who identify as girls and women. Our first Community Day centered on creating belonging, and allowed students to do some individual reflection and to undertake paired and small group discussions. Students were asked to think about and discuss moments when they felt like they did and did not belong in certain groups, and to identify certain key conditions for both feelings. They then used these conversations to come up with norms for their co-curricular group—norms that would cultivate feelings of belonging, which are so key to individual and group success.

The second Community Day was designed to work on concepts of gender identity, specifically looking at the experiences of people who identify as girls and women. Students watched a clip of the movie Miss Representation and took Implicit Association Tests from Harvard’s Project Implicit. These tests are designed to identify unconscious biases that individuals might have toward people who identify in certain ways. That day, students took tests to determine their biases related to gender identity and careers and gender identity and the sciences. Students then had follow-up conversations in their dorms. Not surprisingly, both of these activities led to conversations and learning that were important for us as a community.

Time is the scarcest resource we have as a school, and taking time from our co-curricular activities is significant. And while this change is a product of limitations brought about by COVID, the benefits that we reaped as a result make it clear that we must continue to reallocate this time in the future.

Time is the scarcest resource we have as a school, and taking time from our co-curricular activities is significant. And while this change is a product of limitations brought about by COVID, the benefits that we reaped as a result make it clear that we must continue to reallocate this time in the future.

To learn more about Taft’s ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work, visit www.taftschool.org/dei

Taft Bulletin / WINTER 2021
BELONGING

BY ANDREW PRINCE, dean of multicultural education

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WHILE THE REST OF THE WORLD focuses on ending the worst public health crisis in more than a century, Matt Rice ’94 is resolved to mitigate the next global catastrophe coming rapidly around the bend.

Climate change is already affecting millions of people in the watershed of the Colorado River, one of the fastest-heating regions in the world. The 1,450-mile river and its tributaries flow through seven western states, sustaining 40 million people and more than five million acres of agriculture.

Water, Water—Not Everywhere

Left: Rafting on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon.
Above: Matt Rice ’94 at Warm Springs Rapid, Yampa River, Dinosaur National Monument, Colorado.
Below: Rice at North Fork, Poudre River, Colorado

RUSS SCHNITZER
The projections are terrifying,” Rice says. “But we use all that water”—five trillion gallons—“before it gets to the delta” in eastern Mexico. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Rice’s job is tailoring solutions to replenish the rivers without antagonizing the region’s ranchers and farmers, many of whom hold so-called “water rights” passed down for generations. Water users in many western states must file with their state water resources agency for a water right, which turns into a property right of sorts that is tied to the land or a specific use; in fact, farmers can lose their rights if they don’t put all their allotted water into beneficial use.

This, you can imagine, poses some difficulty for conservationists like Rice. “The status quo is a very powerful thing in the West when it comes to water,” Rice says. “I’m not vilifying agriculture at all. But the status quo is kind of an ‘all-hands-on-deck,’ ‘we’re in this together’ situation.”

As the director of the Colorado River Basin for American Rivers, an advocacy group based in Washington, Rice’s work is aimed at getting people in the region to recognize the urgency of the unfolding environmental disaster caused by global warming—and then hopefully to adapt before it’s too late.

“The projections are terrifying,” Rice says. “We’re looking at a 20 to 40 percent reduction in water availability in the Colorado River basin by 2059. That’s a whole region of the country.”

There are already glimpses of a much drier future. This summer in Colorado, when more people than ever before fled COVID-19 related lockdowns to go rafting, fishing, tubing, and otherwise enjoy the outdoor splendor, several rivers had to be shut down to all recreation due to low flow. The mass closures weren’t unique to 2020; they happened the year before, as well, and two years before that, and ten years before that. What scientists have realized, Rice says, is that the melting snowpack from the Rockies every year no longer is enough to regenerate healthy supplies downstream, as it had been in the past. Droughts have a way of compounding problems—the warming climate dried out the earth, which absorbs more and more water, causing more and more water to flow from the hills each year. The downstream effect is hotter temperatures, requiring more frequent irrigation in areas like Yuma, Arizona, which grows 90 percent of the country’s winter vegetables.

Today, the Colorado is one of the few major rivers in the world that doesn’t empty into the sea. “It’s supposed to,” Rice says. “But the health and future of the Colorado River is not a partisan issue,” Rice says. “The status quo is a very powerful thing in the West when it comes to water.”

What is the West doing about it? Rice’s job is tailoring solutions to replenish the rivers he loves so much. Sustaining that tradition long into the future will require much water we’re using, we see our water availability diminish, and it really is kind of an ‘all-hands-on-deck,’ ‘we’re all in this together’ situation.”

Rice’s job is tailoring solutions to replenish the rivers he loves so much. Sustaining that tradition long into the future will require much water we’re using, we see our water availability diminish, and it really is kind of an ‘all-hands-on-deck,’ ‘we’re all in this together’ situation.”

Rice often hitch a ride off campus to go fishing to clean water, lessons he took back with him to the United States and his graduate studies at the University of Denver before finding his way to American Rivers. Sometimes, Rice admits, his work can seem like squeezing water out of the Washington Monument. But there are reasons to feel encouraged. On November 3, for instance, American Rivers helped bring a ballot measure before voters in 15 counties in western Colorado to provide much-needed funds for water preservation. Even though it meant taxes would go up, the measure passed with 72 percent of the vote. Another motivating factor for Rice is taking his wife and their three boys, Curran, Mac, 7, and Walker, 5, on fishing trips on
News Sense for Uncertain Times

IF EVER THERE WAS A CRUCIBLE FOR journalism, Susie Banikarim ’93 met this one head-on: a year consumed by a pandemic, protests, and a presidential election. It was one that an ever-evolving and challenged industry—or anyone, for that matter—could not foresee or prepared for.

Two months after Banikarim joined Vice News as its head of global newsgathering and as an executive vice president, the World Health Organization declared the spread of the coronavirus a pandemic. The public health crisis sent top media executives like Banikarim, a recipient of the Edward R. Murrow Award for feature reporting and a five-time Emmy nominee, scrambling to reimagine the newsroom, coverage, and the work-life balance.

“It was definitely very jarring,” Banikarim says. “We’re not working from home. We’re working from home during a pandemic, and that’s fundamentally a different thing.”

Banikarim oversees a staff of about 200 reporters who are based at Vice’s headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, and bureaus in Washington, Los Angeles, and London. She is also in charge of the outlet’s flagship television program, Vice News Tonight, which airs on its Vice TV channel.

The dynamic of directing news coverage remotely suddenly had a major human component to it, from journalists having to juggle childcare responsibilities with Zoom calls and bearing witness to so much suffering. “There’s a sort of underlying difficulty in everyday life now that didn’t exist before,” she says. “We’re covering painful stories. That can take a toll.”

Vice’s team of reporters found themselves reporting from COVID-19 hospital wards and on the ground of widespread protests over police brutality and racial injustice. Banikarim notes that there are many journalists of color that work for Vice. “We have Black reporters covering Black deaths over and over again,” she says.

Before joining Vice News, Banikarim served as an executive vice president and editorial director for Gizmodo Media Group, where she oversaw the edgy and opinion-filled websites of Deadspin, Gizmodo, Jalopnik, Jezebel, Lifehacker, Splinter, and The Root. The parent company was sold to the private-equity-backed G/O Media, a fate becoming all-too-familiar in the media landscape. “I really loved running those sites,” she says. “There’s a place in the news ecosystem for strong opinion-based writing.”

Banikarim later helped Katie Couric launch the Katie Couric show in Newtown, Connecticut, in March 2013, a few months after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012. “That work is incredibly emotional,” she says. “You’re human. I feel like Newtown was the first time that I realized what a significant amount of disinformation was emerging on online platforms.”

Banikarim began the project while she was the Shorenstein Center’s very first filmmaker-in-residence at the Harvard Kennedy School. The documentary featured top journalists, including Jeff Zucker, the CNN president; Maggie Haberman, the White House correspondent for The New York Times; and David Fahrenthold, the Pulitzer Prize winner from The Washington Post. It aired in October 2020.

Banikarim says the shortcomings of 2016 and the gravity of the pandemic changed the way the media approached the 2020 election. “The machinery of government can feel distant and remote, but COVID has made that impossible,” she says. “I feel like Newtown was the first time that I realized what a significant amount of disinformation was emerging on online platforms.”

Ed. note: Banikarim recently left Vice News to pursue other opportunities.

Above: Susie Banikarim ’93 is the head of global newsgathering and executive vice president for Vice News.

Right: Banikarim at a town hall she produced for the Katie Couric show in Newtown, Connecticut, in March 2013, a few months after the Sandy Hook shootings. (ABC/IDA MAE ASTUTE)

“No one could have foreseen or prepared for.

Susie Banikarim ’93 is the head of global newsgathering and executive vice president for Vice News.

Above: Susie Banikarim ’93 is the head of global newsgathering and executive vice president for Vice News.

Right: Banikarim at a town hall she produced for the Katie Couric show in Newtown, Connecticut, in March 2013, a few months after the Sandy Hook shootings. (ABC/IDA MAE ASTUTE)
THROUGHOUT HIS FOUR-DECADE career as one of Connecticut’s most sought-after architects, few things have contributed more to Rick Wies’s success than his ability to stay open and adaptable to each project that comes across his drawing board. At any given time, he might be designing a new apartment complex, overseeing the renovations of a major commuter rail station, or helping reinvent a former local Sicilian puppet theater—sometimes simultaneously. “Our team has developed expertise in a few core areas, which gives us a lot of variety. Things never get boring or routine,” says Wies, Class of ’71.

Already interested in design while at Taft, Wies eventually earned a master’s degree in architecture from North Carolina State University. From there, he worked for a handful of prominent firms, including with preeminent classical architect Allan Greenberg, and in 1986, he established his own private practice. With the addition of two partners, he ultimately grew the firm into Gregg Wies & Gardner Architects in the early 1990s.

Starting out, Wies focused largely on renovations of historic buildings. “The language and discipline of historic preservation benefits from having a firm grounding in traditional architecture,” he explains. “And because my roots revolved around classical architecture, that’s where I started my career.”

But far from sidetracking him from new design, this early experience further developed his architectural education. “It’s a very good learning lab to be in that vein of architectural discipline. It’s a nice challenge working on buildings that are really well built and finding clever, architecturally compatible ways to extend their life,” says Wies, who serves on the board of Preservation Connecticut. “You have to get familiar with the building practices used a hundred years ago while also applying today’s technology.”

“Of course, we like creating new things too, and our work slowly morphed to be more balanced between renovation and new construction,” he adds. “But we would be less technically competent if all we had to do was build new buildings from the beginning.”

Above: Architect Rick Wies ’71 in his office. Right: Wies’s firm designed New Haven’s Canal Dock Boathouse, a mixed-use structure housing a community boathouse for rowing and small sailing craft and offices and classrooms for cultural history organizations. (IAN CHRISTMANN PHOTOGRAPHY)
One recently completed project gave Wies a perfect opportunity to integrate new construction with historic preservation. When the construction of the new Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge required demolition of New Haven’s Adee Boathouse (originally built by Yale University in 1911), the city called on Gregg Wies & Gardner to develop possible replacement plans. “At first, they asked us to do two feasibility studies,” he says. “One, to replicate the building in a new location, and one to come up with a new design.” It took another six years of logistical hurdles before the firm was officially selected to design the new Canal Dock Boathouse.

Left and below: Wies’s firm was tasked with a comprehensive renovation project of New Haven’s renowned Long Wharf Theatre, both interior and exterior. GREGG WIES & GARDNER ARCHITECTS LLC

Above: A Connecticut home designed by Gregg Wies & Gardner Architects. GREGG WIES & GARDNER ARCHITECTS LLC

Right: As volunteer work, Wies helped remodel the home of an Iraq War veteran, pictured far right, with Heart 9/11, an organization founded by 9/11 first responders to support individuals recovering from trauma. GREGG WIES & GARDNER ARCHITECTS LLC

And even then, it was far from smooth sailing. “It was a very long process in the design because it was a complicated building,” Wies points out. “At its core, it’s a harborside community house that supports sliding-seat rowing, small-boat sailing, and paddling. But it also required facilities for special events and a museum.” Not to mention the added complication of having to build atop the Quinnipiac River: “We had no land to put it on, so we designed a platform out of the shallows.” In all, the project took 16 years to complete, but it remains one of Wies’s proudest accomplishments. “I really had to immerse myself in that world. I traveled around the Northeast visiting boathouses, and we hired an Olympic gold medalist rower to help advise us. In the end, we developed a very interesting building program.” The team was even able to salvage the original Adee Boathouse’s entry portal and stair tower, preserving its elaborate terra-cotta, masonry, and soaring windows. Wies is equally passionate about smaller projects, too. Recently, he leapt at the chance to volunteer with Heart 9/11, an organization founded by 9/11 first responders to support individuals recovering from trauma. For Heart 9/11, Wies helped remodel the home of an Iraq War veteran suffering from PTSD. “That was one of the most amazing projects I’ve ever done,” he recalls. “We basically doubled the size of her house and gutted the rest of it. Within just the first week, they demolished the interior, cut off the roof, framed up the second floor and the roof, and totally enclosed it. And 100 percent of the materials and labor were donated.” Whether he’s designing a boathouse, a library, a municipal building, or a home for a veteran and her family, Wies always has the greater community in mind. “We always strive to create something that fits into the community and has a positive impact—that’s always the goal.”

—Christopher Browner ’12
ELIZA GEDDES’ ARTISTIC PASSION began at a very young age. She remembers falling in love with everything from papier-mâché to sculpting with something as simple as a pipe cleaner.

“I dove into every art and craft medium I could, both at school and at home,” Geddes ’97 recalls. “In my free time I would teach myself how to marbleize paper, decoupage, and create a multitude of mixed-media collages.”

It was a passion that persisted, and art remained Geddes’ primary focus at Taft. She has fond memories studying under the guidance of Gail Wynne, and she received the Thomas Sabin Chase Award in art her senior year. Geddes went on to get her B.A. in art history from Trinity College in 2001.

“Having that strong foundation of the history of art is an important building block for any contemporary artist,” she emphasizes. “While pursuing my major, I became completely captivated with abstract expressionist art developed in New York in the 1940s, and that period continues to influence my work today.”

Over the years, Geddes has explored several mediums—welding, mixed media sculpture—but ultimately chose to pursue painting as a career.

“Painting is what I focused on during my time at NYU, where I got my master’s degree in 2003,” she shares. “For over a decade now I have been exclusively painting.”

Geddes’ process is highly creative and unique. Each of her paintings begins...
Conversely, the toughest part of being an artist for Geddes is wrestling with her inner critic. “A painting can be a complete disaster up until it’s a complete success,” she admits. “Knowing when that switch is flipped is vital.”

Geddes also shares important wisdom about the nature of being an artist in general. Specifically, she warns of becoming too preoccupied with the financial part. “It’s hard to predict what will sell, but creating with only sales in mind will leave you nowhere,” she says. “In the end, authenticity is more appealing and more rewarding. It’s a fine line, and I feel lucky that I am able to sell what I love creating.”

Geddes’ work has been displayed at numerous exhibitions across the U.S. and in London, and is currently installed in three permanent collections in New York. Her studio is located on Long Island, where she lives with her husband and two sons. Her younger son, Thor, is battling a rare genetic disease called Duchenne muscular dystrophy. “Thor’s spirit remains my biggest inspiration,” Geddes says.

Geddes is excited to keep creating and sending her art out into the world while always staying true to her own vision. “That I haven’t changed course to have my work fit into a particular place or trend with the times…that is something I’m most proud of,” she says.

You can view many of her paintings on her website, elizageddes.com, and on Instagram, @elizageddes.

Left: Two from Geddes’ portrait series: at left, Twiggy, 2020, house paint and ink on canvas, 5 ft. x 4 ft., and on right, Bardot, 2020, house paint and ink on canvas, 5 ft. x 4 ft.

Above: One of Geddes’ paintings in a home.

Right: Gaia Rising, 2020, house paint on canvas, 4 ft. x 4 ft.

Kraemer, and Robert Rauschenberg. Presiding themes in her paintings include surface, shape, texture, movement, and balance. The interaction and repetition of shape and texture provide entry points with which to navigate her work. “I love to paint what I like to look at,” Geddes says. “It seems simple, but it’s satisfying to choose the content, color, and scale of an artwork and create something that resonates with me.”

Right: Medley #8, 2019, ink and house paint on a series of assembled canvases, 4 ft. x 3 ft.
"Many times, out of frustration, I tried not to pursue music, but it just kept nagging me. Every time I put it down or took a break, the music started to reveal itself to me again." A lifelong musician and amateur songwriter, Tim Ely ‘67 will release a new song that marks the first of many periods of inspiration for the budding songwriter. After graduating from Allegheny College, Ely recalls, “I went to Nashville and was trying to make a name for myself, but I was really a songwriter without a clue. I didn’t really have the craft or the experience to make it happen.” But when he moved back to New York City, he took a job in his home studio.

“I ran into some friends who had their own small advertising agency, and they wondered if I could write a jingle for one of their clients, who was an exterminator,” says Ely. “It’s not small wonders for his business, and it won me an advertising club award for radio.”

The song is “The Long Haul,” and the film is The Comeback Trail, starring Robert De Niro, Tommy Lee Jones, and Morgan Freeman. “It’s not small potatoes,” he smiles, “or at least that’s what my daughters keep telling me!”

The movie’s original premiere date was postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but a few extra months gave nothing compared to Ely’s years-long journey to songwriting success. For as the chorus of “The Long Haul” declares, “I ain’t on a fast track, it’s move like a slow train, but I ain’t gonna turn back on account of a little rain. I’m in it for the long haul.”

—Christopher Browner ‘12

The Long Haul

songwriter and musician Tim Ely ’67
in his home studio.
Cooking Through Childhood

AFTER SPENDING MOST OF HIS LIFE living abroad, Alex Lo Faro ’21 moved to the United States when he was 12. There were a lot of things about life in the U.S. that he wasn’t expecting.

“Walking through the supermarket, I was surprised to discover that a large bag of chips was cheaper than an apple,” Alex recalls.

The idea that socioeconomic status could drive food choices and overall health not only perplexed Alex, but made him want to dig deeper. Taft’s Independent Study Program gave him the opportunity to do just that.

“I started my ISP during my upper mid year by exploring food insecurity and heightened obesity rates in America,” says Alex. “I immediately noticed that people of lower socioeconomic backgrounds and communities of color are disproportionately served by the fast-food industry.”

To better understand this correlation, Alex interviewed a nutritionist and an executive at Wholesome Wave, a nonprofit organization fighting nutrition insecurity by building infrastructure and systems to increase access to healthy food. He also visited local farms to learn about sustainable farming. Then he took action.

“After combing through the menus of many fast-food chains, my price analysis showed that a meal at a fast-food restaurant in many fast-food chains, my price analysis showed that a meal at a fast-food restaurant was well received—so much so, in fact, that it sparked a new idea: a cookbook.

“Writing those simple, cost-effective recipes reminded me that cooking is something you share with those you love,” Alex says. “I’d always wanted to share my passion with friends, and it was time.”

Alex spent last summer choosing recipes for his cookbook. During the process, he prepared more than 200 dishes.

“I cooked them at my house, at friends’ homes—anywhere there was room in the kitchen. I’d always wanted to share my passion with friends, and it was time.”

Alex’s cookbook, Cooking through Childhood, contains 87 recipes inspired by his life. It begins when he was 3 years old, sitting on the kitchen counter in New York City, “begging Paola to let me taste the minestrone,” and traces his Italian roots. In addition to writing the book and testing the recipes, Alex shot all of the photos and researched and negotiated publishing options. The first print run sold out in a matter of days, Alex donated a large portion of the proceeds from the sale of the book to Wholesome Wave.

“The book grew out of my ISP and the website I shared with families in the greater Waterbury community. Working with those families was incredibly enriching; the opportunity to give back to the community is what was most meaningful about the project,” says Alex. “And while I hope the research I did provided some help, I realize the problems of food and nutrition insecurity are substantial. This realization has inspired me to commit to donating a large percentage of the proceeds from the cookbook to Wholesome Wave.”

Above: In the kitchen with cookbook author Alex Lo Faro ’21.

Below: Alex shot all of the mouthwatering images featured with his recipes. Many of recipes also feature a personal note about the dish.

**Fried Zucchini Flowers**

**INGREDIENTS**

- 32 zucchini flowers
- 4 oz lager beer
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp all purpose flour
- 1 cup Parmesan cheese
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- Salt & pepper

**PROCESS**

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the flowers to the pot and boil for 1 minute on the first side so that the edges are crispy and lacy. Flip and fry the other side. Remove the flowers from the pot and let them drain on a paper towel.

2. In a bowl whisk the beer and flour together until a smooth and fairly fluid batter forms. If the batter is too thick add more beer until it is runny.

3. Using your hands rip the mozzarella into small pieces. Fill the zucchini flowers with the mozzarella. Do not overfill the flowers though, because you must leave enough room to be able to twirl the petals and seal the flowers with the mozzarella. Do not overfill the flowers though, because you must leave enough room to be able to twirl the petals and seal the flowers with the mozzarella.

4. Now you must twirl the tips of the flowers lightly so that the filling does not spill out. Next dip the flowers into the batter. After dipping each flower, let it drip over the bowl for 10 seconds in order to get rid of any extra batter.

5. Add the sunflower oil to a large pan until it is hot. Carefully add the zucchini flowers to the pan. I would recommend doing batches of 3 or 4 flowers so that you don’t crowd the pan. Let fry for around one minute on the first side and then turn over. Gently press down on the flowers with the mozzarella. The flower will settle on the bottom. Flip the flowers over and fry until crispy. Remove the flowers from the pan and drain on a paper towel.

6. Season with salt and pepper. Serve immediately when warm with a sprinkle of flakey sea salt and a small sprig of basil leaf.

This is one of Alex’s favorite dishes to eat, but it is hard to make because the flowers have to be super fresh! This recipe makes sure that the flowers are fresh and the delicate flavor of the zucchini flower is super fresh! This recipe makes sure that the flowers are fresh and the delicate flavor of the zucchini flower is

Left: Alex Lo Faro ’21 on the cover of his recently published cookbook.

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Left: Alex Lo Faro ’21 on the cover of his recently published cookbook.

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FOURTEEN MEMBERS OF THE TAFT SCHOOL faculty returned to the classroom during the first week of December—this time as students—to attend the 2020 online People of Color Conference. For more than 30 years, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has hosted the conference, designed to equip educators at every level with knowledge, skills, and experiences to improve and enhance the intercultural, interethnic, and intracultural climate in their schools, as well as the attending academic, social-emotional, and workplace performance outcomes for all members of the community. Typically a dozen or so Taft faculty members have attended the People of Color Conference (PoCC) each year for the past 30 years. The 2020 conference included seminars, a master class, and more than 100 workshops built around the theme New Decade, New Destinies: Challenging Self, Changing Systems, and Choosing Justice. Speakers included award-winning author and chair of Princeton’s Department of African American Studies (and Taft Morning Meeting speaker) Eddie S. Glaude Jr.; esteemed educational researcher, award-winning author, and University of Georgia Professor Dr. Bettina L. Love; and Social Justice Summit keynote speaker Lesley McPadden-Head, mother of Ferguson, Missouri, shooting victim Michael Brown.

“Attending the NAIS PoCC Conference is a deeply impactful professional development experience where, as a white-identifying, cisgender individual, I can engage in training to become a more effective co-conspirator for racial and social justice,” Dean of Faculty Edie Traina explains. “PoCC’s fusion of urgency, scholarship, affinity spaces, and innovative strategic thinking serves as a model for the Taft community’s reflection on our school’s history as we confront our communal shortcomings.”

Following the conference, the Taft attendees engaged in group reflection, discussing takeaways and potential applications within our community. They also identified topics around which Taft would benefit from further inquiry and intervention. “This year’s reflection highlighted the importance of examining curriculum with a critical lens focused on decolonization, spiritual identities, and acknowledgment of indigenous peoples/First Nations, as well as the essential nature of inclusivity in onboarding training for both students and faculty,” says Traina.

Three Taft students also attended the concurrent NAIS Online Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC). The annual event is a multiracial, multicultural gathering of upper-school student leaders from across the globe. SDLC focuses on self-reflecting, forming allies, and building community. Participants develop cross-cultural communication skills, design effective strategies for social justice practice through dialogue and the arts, and learn the foundations of allyship and networking principles.

McPadden-Head, mother of Ferguson, Missouri, shooting victim Michael Brown.

“hunger for learning endures, even under the most challenging circumstances. Never in the schools’ history has the learning process been so challenging, but never has the durability of learning been more affirmed.”

Congratulations to the 18 students who were inducted into the Cum Laude Society—one of the most important ones. And not just because Taft’s annual fall celebration of academic excellence honors the deep commitment to learning and exceptional achievement of Taft students, but, notes MacMullen, because it is tangible proof that

To read more about other academic honors this fall or to watch the awards ceremony, visit https://bit.ly/2OC7Taft.
A Visit from Jack Cannata ’15, USAF

TAFT’S ANNUAL VETERANS DAY
observation always includes a Community Time/Morning Meeting speaker. This year, Taft welcomed Air Force officer and member of Taft’s Class of 2015, Jack Cannata.

“Officers make up about 16 percent of the U.S. military,” Jack told the Taft community. “The enlisted corps is the heart and soul of the military function. Officers have the humble opportunity and responsibility to lead these men and women.”

Jack shared information about the military academy experience starting with basic training. “The goal of basic training is to acclimate you to a new lifestyle,” Jack said. “These six weeks were one of the best stories of a team you will ever make with people of all different backgrounds.”

During his time at the Academy, Jack had the privilege of learning about and operating advanced military equipment, attending classified briefings, and being part of audiences for speakers who included two U.S. presidents, a vice president, and a secretary of defense.

“The one thing I am most grateful for, however, is that every day I was given the opportunity to lead others,” Jack noted. As an active member of the military, Jack also shared his perspective on Veterans Day, in an effort, he said, to help Taftians consider the ways they think and feel about those who have served, are serving, and have put on a uniform with an American flag on their left arm. Veterans, men and women who have served, are all around you. No matter what their capacity of their service, they truly believed in putting that service before themselves. Thank them. I promise you, it will mean the world to them. They have made the ultimate commitment to making the world a better place for all of us.”

Welcome Home, Tamara!

New Annual Fund Leadership Structure

In looking toward the future, Taft turns to those in leadership roles to build on a 130-year tradition of excellence to advance the school. That forward thinking brings new ideas and initiatives that incorporate what Taft does best with timely, creative, and meaningful responses to the ever-changing needs and demands of the global community. It is in that vein that the Annual Fund team has announced a new alumni leadership structure.

In the past, the Annual Fund has been led by an alums/us committee. As of November, the Fund is now led by two co-chairs: new appointee Tamara Sinclair ’05 and long-serving Fund leader Dylan Simonds ’85.

“Tamara Sinclair’s deep connection to Taft and her dedication to helping lead the school toward the future bring great energy, fresh ideas, and optimism to our community,” notes Annual Fund Director Dylan Simonds. “Tamara and I have done so much for the school and the Annual Fund through the years. He is thrilled to welcome Tamara to our team.”

After graduating from Taft, new Alumni Annual Fund Co-Chair Sinclair earned a degree in the biological basis of behavior from the University of Pennsylvania. Following graduation, she moved to Tokyo, where she worked with elementary and junior high school students. Time teaching adults in Thailand followed, then a return to Taft as the director of multicultural recruitment.

In that position, she traveled with the Ten Schools Admission Organization, building valuable professional and personal knowledge and relationships along the way. All of that served her well in founding her current business, Choice Boarding Education Consultants.

“Taft has always been my first home away from home, and since my final days as a student, those brick buildings have beckoned me back,” says Sinclair. “My first homecoming came when I joined the admission team traveling to further Taft’s global connections and working with students to channel the lessons learned from my own transformational mentors here. Now I find that I am home again—this time with the opportunity to help Taft respond to its new call to action, and rise to the financial challenge that real institutional change demands.”

As Alumni Annual Fund co-chairs, Sinclair and Simonds will work closely with the Alumni and Development Office as well as class agents to steward Taft’s Annual Fund by building strong relationships with alumni and increasing philanthropic revenue and participation. During their voluntary terms, they will also serve as ex-officio trustees, participate in all trustee meetings, and sit on the board’s Development Committee. Moving forward, the positions will always be filled by one individual who identifies as female and one identifying as male, they will also adhere to three-year term limits.

Students in Carly Borken’s Advanced Ecology class partnered with the scientific staff of the White Memorial Conservation Center’s research program throughout the fall semester. The collaborative projects were broad in range and included work on species mapping to locate native and invasive crayfish, a look at disturbances in nature, the scientific study of bats, and consideration of pollinators. The semester culminated with a virtual student presentation, hosted by the White Memorial Conservation Center in December.
Committing to Change

MANY TAFT COMMUNITY MEMBERS gathered during a peaceful walkout on campus in October to bring awareness to ongoing police brutality across the nation and to shine a light on the decision not to indict any of the officers involved in Breonna Taylor’s death in Kentucky.

Some participants dressed in black as a show of solidarity, then walked together through Centen arch to the soccer field, where a number of speakers, including Susannah Brown ’22, shared their thoughts with the Taft community.

“We must actively work on breaking down systemic racism and implicit biases,” Susannah said. “We must fight for what’s right, draw strength in one another, and lift each other during this political climate and desperate time of need.”

In his opening of school address, Head of School Willy MacMullen ’78 also spoke to the “complex and potent social, political, cultural moment” we are facing. He noted that there is work to be done on our own campus: “We commit to it, and we commit to the change that follows,” Mr. MacMullen said.

“We must fight for what’s right, draw strength in one another, and lift each other during this political climate and desperate time of need.”

—Head of School Willy MacMullen ’78

THE TAFT SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES recently welcomed new trustee Supriya Balsekar Booth ’04. Born and raised in Mumbai, Booth joined Taft as a new middler. She was a dorm monitor and a school monitor, played JV field hockey, and was captain of the varsity girls’ squash team. She had an undefeated 46–0 squash career and was a three-time New England squash champion. She graduated with cum laude honors. After Taft, Booth went on to Harvard College, where she received an A.B. with cum laude honors in economics and a Chinese language citation, and was also named a Harvard College Scholar. She was the captain of the Harvard varsity women’s squash team and a three-time All American. She later received an M.B.A. and M.A. in education from Stanford University, where she was an Arjay Miller Scholar.

Booth has spent the past 10 years living in the San Francisco Bay Area and working in tech. She was vice president of business development in the Strategic Partnerships Group at Flextronics, where she led multimillion-dollar mobile deals in emerging markets including India, China, and Brazil. More recently, she was the general manager for the Americas region at Ouster, a lidar technology company partnering with customers on their autonomous vehicles, robotics, drone, industrial, and smart-city applications. She is taking a career break this year to homeschool her daughter during the pandemic.

Booth’s family includes her husband, Garnett, who was also a squash player at Harvard; children Sienna (3 ½ years old) and Shaun (2 years old); and two puggles, Dosa and Idli. Her family loves the sunny outdoors in California and spends a lot of time hiking and biking. She has been a longtime board member at Khelshala, a sports and education NGO serving underprivileged children in India.

“Taft was my first home in the U.S., and what an amazing home it was,” Booth says. “The education I received and relationships I made at Taft have been lifelong gifts. It’s such an honor for me to join the board and to give back to the school that has given me so much.”
Taft’s annual Fall Dance Showcase highlights the incredible body of work dance students develop over the course of the fall semester. This year, that work took place not only on campus in the Paley Dance Studio, but in unique and creative spaces across the globe. The 2020 Showcase features dancers in classes at every level, from Dance for Everyone to Dance III and IV. Some work was choreographed by students, some by Dance Director Sarah Surber, and some with Zoom coaching by a variety of guest artists, including Carolyn Dorfman, Jacquie Dumas-Albert, Masem Enyong, Sylvia Knaal-Davidowitz, Sibbey Moreno, and Kaitlyn Waldo.

THEY SAY THE SHOW MUST GO ON, AND INDEED, IT DID. Taft theater students staged a fall play in Bingham Auditorium in front of a live (but limited) audience, while family, fans, and friends tuned in via Zoom from across the globe. *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* offered a safe, socially distanced, and creative twist on the classic Frank Capra holiday film. In this telling, it is Christmas Eve 1946 and a group of actors have gathered in a radio studio for a live performance, re-creating Bedford Falls, George Bailey, and the life-affirming story that is *It’s a Wonderful Life.*

It’s a Wonderful Life! and a Wonderful Show
FLEETING THOUGHTS—TAFT’S ART COLLECTIVE
for student work—has taken over the Main Hall bulletin boards. Fleeting Thoughts publishes an all-school newsletter and posts student submissions on Instagram @fleetingthoughts (yep, two s’s). They welcome any artform, from original digital art, paintings, and sculpture to poetry, ceramics, embroidery, and photography.

FOR TWO WEEKS THIS FALL, TAFT’S BOYS’ LACROSSE PLAYERS joined other colleges and prep schools in taking on the CityLax “Virtual 5K, So NYC Kids Can Play!” team challenge. The culminating 5K run raised awareness of the CityLax mission to grow urban lacrosse and empower student-athletes in some of New York City’s underserved communities, while the parallel fundraising efforts will help make that mission happen. The team’s efforts raised just over $14,000 for the cause.

TAFTIES WERE INVITED TO ENGAGE IN A VARIETY OF OPTIONAL AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES between the end of the fall afternoon program season and the start of winter offerings. In additional to some more traditional options, including lacrosse and ergometer workouts, students learned to knit, played handball, competed in a golf tournament, and enjoyed a screening of McFarland, USA, a true, against-all-odds story of a high school cross-country team.
Fall Scrimmage Day

Unseasonably warm weather and beautiful sunshine were the perfect combination for a memorable day on Taft’s athletic fields. The fall athletic season culminated in a Scrimmage Day in November; it was also a Senior Day of sorts, where athletes in the Class of 2021 were recognized. The full day of back-to-back intra-squad scrimmages was not only a day for athletes to compete, but for the community to come together. It was a time, said Head of School Willy MacMullen ’78 in a message to parents, “to recognize that these amazing athletes did not get the season they deserved, but how deeply we celebrate them as a community.”

Around THE POND
RISING ABOVE

Creating Opportunities for Learning

The work of educators Derek Mitchell ’84 and Michael Humphreys ’93

By Bonnie Blackburn-Penhallow ’84

Our feature highlights Michael M. Humphreys and Derek S. Mitchell, who are both on a mission to improve the options for those enrolled in public education today. Both have risen within the field of education, where they feel compelled to improve teaching and to see schools work better systemically, and fairly. Their perspectives and work are looking from the “outside”—listening and advising and from the “inside”—in the daily work, class to class, one to one with students.
Derek Mitchell, who spent time teaching in classrooms across the country early in his career, now looks at the classroom from the outside, considering global, data-driven solutions to problems that many urban schools face, particularly those with low-income students of color.

Since 2009, he has served as CEO of Partners in School Innovation, a San Francisco-based nonprofit educational consulting service. Mitchell and his team currently work with 11 school districts across the country, comprising more than 30,000 students. They provide innovative solutions by using data and working alongside teachers and administrators, rather than imposing cookie-cutter mandates.

“I had tried in a number of ways...to infuse data,” Mitchell says of the school systems he had worked in prior to joining Partners in School Innovation (PSI). “So finding out that this organization was good at actually getting folks to use the data was a real interest to me.”

PSI was developed as an AmeriCorps project in 1993 to find innovative ways to help schools with struggling students. It’s about using data, such as test scores and student grades—“data the students produce themselves,” Mitchell says. “These data are much more robust and much more powerful to help teachers know what it was about their instruction that helped or hindered students’ acquisition of knowledge and skill. It’s about the instruction, not the child,” Mitchell says. While earning his Ph.D. in educational psychology at UCLA, Mitchell saw the ways in which the nation’s educational system is designed to stratify society rather than uplift it. Disinvestment in schools with large numbers of Black and brown students, yet still expecting those underfunded schools to meet the same standards as those with ample funding, leads to a cycle of perceived futility.

“I learned that getting the educational system to do anything but what it is designed to do was going to be really, really hard,” he says. “I wanted to support places like the place Taft ‘rescued’ me from.”

Mitchell grew up on the South Side of Chicago, where he attended public schools that didn’t have the resources or skills to serve those ready for more rigor. A science fair at a well-appointed school in a Chicago suburb opened his eyes to the systemic class stratification and racism that permeates the American educational system. Mitchell and his mother took buses and trains to get there. When he saw how much equipment was available to the mostly white students of that school, he wondered why schools for children like him were so underfunded. The suburban school had an array of science and lab equipment that his own public school could only dream of having. “My school barely had chalk,” he adds. “We had Xerox copies of book chapters, not books.”

“They show up every day in incredible and even now life-risking circumstances, to teach and inspire other people’s kids every day. And our job is to show up for them.”

DEREK S. MITCHELL ’84

Success by Design

Left: Dr. Derek Mitchell ’84, CEO of Partners in School Innovation

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be wasted,” he says. Reduced investment in schools with many students of color perpetuates the class system, and working with schools that are struggling takes leadership, he says—leadership that works collaboratively with those being led.

“The idea of leadership is not just forcing people to follow your will. It’s not sustainable, and it won’t get results,” Mitchell says.

When PSI is contracted to help a struggling school, Mitchell said his staff members make sure that teachers and administrators know that improving schools is a team effort. The group works with schools that have 75 percent students of color and 75 percent living in poverty, and with at least five years of underperforming test scores.

“We come in and we say, ‘Listen, you didn’t create this problem. This is not your fault. These problems long predate you, Mr. Superintendent, Mr. Principal, Mr. Teacher, but here you are,’” he says. “And you’ve got 28 little ones or a school full of them showing up today. What have you got for them?”

PSI also works with schools and districts to prepare them to better support teachers. “That involves a full host of things, from helping the principal articulate a vision or creatively collaborate with their teachers to develop one,” he says. “They show up every day in incredible and even now life-risking circumstances, to teach and inspire other people’s kids every day. And our job is to show up for them.”

Mitchell’s organization will spend time in classrooms, observing how the teachers work with their students, then suggest ways to support the teachers with new learning techniques. It’s hard for districts to look at problems globally, he says, which makes it hard to implement meaningful changes.

“It’s hard to look right and left, it’s hard to look up and get a broader perspective on a problem because you’re essentially in the midst of churn all the time,” he says. “We bring our opportunities to kind of look up and out to ask the broader questions and learn from what others, either in their own system or across systems, are doing that could help them be effective.”

Mitchell says he knows about the lives of the schoolchildren in the schools they help because “I was that kid. I know that kid. I know his possibilities. And I was lucky. I don’t want luck to be the way most kids excel anymore. It needs to be success by design.”
MICHAEL M. HUMPHREYS ’93

The Art of Teaching and Learning

A standout artist, athlete, and school monitor at Taft, Michael Humphreys now works as a master teacher and chair of the history department at the College Academy High School in Washington Heights, New York. He enjoys mentoring new teachers, developing innovative teaching protocols, and advising the School Leadership Team on ways to move the school forward. He also serves on the Taft Board of Trustees.

“I see in young people an opportunity to, without sounding clichéd, make the world a better place,” Humphreys says. “Regardless of racial background or country of origin, many parents and grandparents have instilled principles which we would all be proud of: equity, selflessness, compassion, competition, and of course, ambition. Educating students is a continuation of these traditional and enduring truths of humanity through the lens of different subject matter,” he notes. “My preference is the study of humankind or the social sciences. The goal is to encourage reflection, self-worth, and value as a world citizen and the moxie to become a force of good for more than just oneself.”

As an energetic young man from the Bronx, Humphreys applied to Taft as a second thought. New York Prep, his junior high school in Harlem, was one of the city’s new experimental public schools, focused on finding creative methods to keep troubled youth in school. Fortunately, one of his teachers there was a Choate graduate who, on a hunch, introduced Michael’s family to the idea of boarding school. Now, Humphreys works to instill a love of learning in his students, many of whom face similar challenges Humphreys did as a young man.

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“I have, over the course of my career, taught global studies, American history, economics, and AP government and politics. Though most students are intimidated by their misconceptions about the content, they quickly realize that studying the social sciences is study of human survival that they are so entirely a part of,” he says. “This reflection and shift of purpose opens their eyes to recognizing differences and embracing the many more similarities they share with people in their country and abroad.”

Regarding courses on government and economics, Humphreys believes they serve as an invaluable stop along a student’s academic journey because...
These classes are where they learn the tools for understanding and thriving in a democratic republic that has chosen a capitalist economic system. “This understanding is needed more than ever for students, many of whom come from families who have not figured out how to actively participate and influence their political representation and financial understanding that allows for economic upward mobility,” Humphreys says.

One challenge they are all learning about together is the COVID-19 pandemic, which sent his students to distanced learning. “This year has been incredibly difficult for students across the planet who were fortunate enough to be privy to a professionally organized and publicly funded education,” says Humphreys. Though his students have always dealt with racism and inequality, he says doing so in a global pandemic has been an added challenge.

“I believe that learning during the pandemic has been especially challenging for them because many of their inequalities were further exacerbated. Financial instability and lack of proper health care were two issues that often compromised the efforts of the most committed scholars. Lastly, though public school teachers are at times maligned by many, our stabilizing academic focus, self-esteem building, and unyielding love for our perfectly imperfect students on a daily basis was missed,” he adds.

Humphreys says that as a community, his school has tried its best to replicate its students’ experience online; however, it is exponentially more challenging. “Nothing replaces a genuine ‘Good morning,’ a high five in the hallway, or a serious after-school conversation about college and adulthood,” he says.

Humphreys says the greatest change in education has come in the ways in which schools are operated and the expectations stakeholders have for children’s futures. “Unfortunately, certain schools and personnel who work there never connect with their students. As a result, this lack of trust limits a student’s potential as time quickly passes. Fortunately, those who are naturally willing and a few who have come along continue to show promise as tomorrow’s leaders,” he says.

—Bonnie Blackburn-Penhollow ’84 is a freelance writer living in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Below: Humphreys family at a dinner event: center, Ana and Michael; front, seated, Matthew, 9, and Aaron, 11; standing, Elijah, 17, and Jacob, 15.

Below: Humphreys with two of his four sons, Elijah (standing) and Jacob.
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Why did Hank Brauer ’74 decide to establish a gift annuity at Taft?

“It was an elegant way to make a gift to Taft at a time when the school needs our support and, for me, to save for the future—and receive a competitive return. We have a great deal of trust in the way Taft manages its endowment and finances. With the school’s AA rating, we are confident that this is a good place to put our money.”

—Hank Brauer ’74, P’08,’09,’10

Members of the 1898 Polo Team depended on the weather to play—now our students have a facility with two rinks with their own Olympia machines to keep the ice playable. Making and keeping ice has come a long way in 120 years. These photos are from the 1950s, during the construction of Mays Rink and Angier House, and before the installation of the roof that kept the ice colder and free of snow. Angier House still holds the refrigeration equipment for Mays, along with the changing room with a fireplace.

—Beth Nolan Lovallo ’93, The Leslie D. Manning Archives

Left: Can you imagine the time and patience it took snowblow an entire rink in the 1950s?

Below left: This truly was a different pregame ritual in the 1950s. This tractor and attachment took six people to smooth and pull the snow away from the boards.

Below right: This photo, taken after the roof was added in 1957, shows an early Zamboni. Mr. Zamboni himself came out annually to service the machine.

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