



# Shimer

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## The Great Books College of Chicago

### Welcome to the May 2008 e-newsletter!

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#### Quick Notes

- Register at the [Reunion Website](#) for the 2008 Alumni Reunion, June 13-15, where you'll also find travel, hotel, class, childcare, and activity information.
- Harold Krent, Dean of Chicago-Kent College of Law, will speak to alumni on Friday night, June 13 at the alumni reunion. [Click here for Krent's biography.](#)
- Reunion gear? Hoodies? Shimer Nerdware? Find them all at the [Shimer Bookstore.](#)

#### Commencement 2008 by Nick Schmitt, class of 2008



There seemed to be a common thread running through the commencement addresses on Saturday, May 10th. This same thread is a common theme in many late night discussions at Shimer: what unites us Shimerians in the Shimer experience?

Phil Farina touched on the theme with his greeting from the Board of Trustees, noting that many alums have returned to serve on the board to help engender unity. Alan Dowty, distinguished Shimer alum ('59) and Middle East scholar spoke about the Shimerian ability to not only ask questions but to follow them wherever they lead, especially when following means going outside of academic boundaries and beyond intellectual trends.



The student speakers, however, approached the theme differently. Ted Krug concentrated on the individual's experience of Shimer, and Denise Lane ended her speech with a common charge to all present, particularly to graduates (including Jessa Wright, pictured to the left with Don Moon). She exhorted us to be the active citizens that we are now prepared to be, as stated

in the Mission of the College:

The mission of Shimer College is education — education for active citizenship in the world. Education is more than the acquisition of factual knowledge or the mastery of vocational skills. It is the process leading away from passivity, beyond either unquestioning acceptance of authority or its automatic mistrust, and towards informed, responsible action.”

As a new graduate, I agree with all the viewpoints offered on this theme. However, I still wonder how this “collage” of unique, disparate, and sometimes just strange students has been able to coalesce into a true “college.” And I happily take up Denise Lane's charge; I hope to help Shimer succeed in its mission, to educate people for active citizenship in the world.

## Dark Energy: Not So Dark Anymore?

Jim Donovan, Professor of Natural Sciences at Shimer, has been pretty talkative lately. While in a Shimer classroom he prefers to ask questions instead of lecturing, he's been giving a number of lectures outside of class, all related to his elegant, seemingly simple solution to the question, “What is dark energy?”

At last month's annual meeting of the American Physical Society, he presented two papers. The first one, *Dark Energy and the Age of the Universe*, summarized his work on dark energy, that mysterious ‘stuff’ that cosmologists say comprises 72% of the mass in the universe. Jim's work indicates that dark energy arises from a previously overlooked consequence of quantum mechanics that results in an additional component to gravity. Assuming that one can apply quantum mechanics to large objects (like the universe), the amount of additional energy that Jim calculates corresponds closely to the measured amounts of dark energy.

In Jim's second paper, *Dark Energy and Measurements of Newton's Constant*, he applies the results of the first paper to resolve a decade-long dilemma in the physics community about why measurements of Newton's Constant,  $G$ , are so incompatible. (Newton's Constant gives the size of the gravitational force, it's the ‘ $G$ ’ in Newton's equation of gravity.) Jim's work suggests that the discrepancies in these measurements result from the fact that the additional component has not been accounted for; when he corrects published results to account for his effect, the previously discrepant values match.

So how were his talks received? “Great,” says Jim. “After the talk on dark energy, several members of the audience followed me out into the hall to discuss the topic further. Then, after talking to people about Newton's constant, I think I found a collaborator who will do measurements to directly test my predictions.” It sounds like he had a great week.

But that's not all. Since Jim was in a talking mood, Shimer students didn't want to leave all the fun to physicists; they wanted to hear about his work too. So Jim gave a layperson's version of his work to the Shimer community. Fortunately, since we were able to videotape it, you can share it too. Jim's talk is titled *A Meditation on the Beauty of Physics and Galaxies* and is available [at this link](#).

## **Mt. Carroll, Through New Eyes** by Meg Nelson, class of 2011

There is no real way to describe having found a home you never knew you had.

That's what I felt when I first came to Shimer College in the fall. But until I went back to see its roots, I never truly understood the feelings so many older students and alumni have for Shimer. I can't claim to understand them fully now—after all, Chicago is the only Shimer campus I've really known—but I can begin, perhaps, to share a feeling.

A small group of us—nine total—journeyed out to Shimer's original campus, Mt. Carroll, on what must have been the most perfect day of the year so far. From the moment I set foot on the old Shimer campus, the scents of grass and pine needles wove themselves around me, and the quiet was deafening. There were no constantly rushing cars or trains, no blinking lights or wires here—civilization had come to a comfortable pause here somewhere a century earlier, before the noise of humanity started overpowering the wind and birds and trees. We were guided along restored and untouched buildings alike by a kind campus worker, Sharon Weldon, part of the Campbell Center restoration group that has taken over the campus. Our walk was also narrated by David Shiner, whose stories brought images of the campus, as it was, before my eyes.



As I walked around this quiet campus that seemed frozen in time, or perhaps left behind, I was astounded at its beauty at the same time I was filled with an aching longing. All the rooms were filled with pieces of memories of years past, and although Shimer in Mt. Carroll lived before I was born—it was in its final days in my mother's era—David's descriptions brought the rooms and buildings to life.

I cannot know what it was like to leave this small part of country paradise to go to Waukegan, or leave the home of Waukegan to come to Chicago. But I felt as I walked on that campus that home was here, and happiness was here, no matter how quickly fly the years away from it. I will carry the memory of that campus wrapping itself around me, to see the past echoing in silent corners of the buildings: "We are still here, always here, as long as there are those who remember us."

I will remember them. I will remember Shimer as it was, and carry that with me as I walk with Shimer into the future.

### **Shimer Joins the Conversation: One Book, One Chicago**

Every spring and fall for the last seven years, the Chicago Public Library has been inviting the city to do what Shimer has been doing for decades: to read a significant book and come together in a collective conversation about it, as part of its "One Book, One Chicago" program.

Last fall, the Library chose Arthur Miller's "The Crucible" as its One Book. In addition to almost daily book discussions around town, the Steppenwolf Theater staged the play, and, as they do for each book selected, De Paul University created a class devoted to Miller's work and its history. At Shimer we decided to join the

conversation with a readers' theater production of transcripts from the now-infamous House Committee on Un-American Activities. We thought it crucial to recall the historical context in which Miller's play on collective suspicion had emerged, of apparatchik Red-baiters terrorizing independent political and cultural voices, hounding scores of talented and committed individuals out of the public arena for a decade or more. Over a Saturday night and Tuesday afternoon, students, staff and faculty participated in a dramatic rendering of defiant testimony from the likes of Miller himself, Paul Robeson, and Pete Seeger, among others.

The success of our fall reading determined us to offer a production like it for each of the Library's One Book selections. This Spring, the book chosen - Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* - represented a genre we haven't read much of at Shimer: hard-boiled detective fiction. We gamely signed on, and found that the novel, which was Chandler's most concerted attempt to raise the literary standards of the crime story, offered a great many possibilities for alternately engaging and amusing conversations and events.

Shimer offered three discussion sessions on the book (which drew, among other Chicagoans, a graduate student at the University of Chicago writing her dissertation on mystery and crime novels). We also screened the film noir classic *Double Indemnity*, directed by Billy Wilder and based on a story by James M. Cain, with a screenplay adapted by Chandler - his only foray into Hollywood script writing. Finally, we did our own adaptation of Chandler himself, rendering his story "Trouble is My Business" into a live "radio-noir" program based on the old time radio series "The Adventures of Philip Marlowe," Chandler's hard-bitten, wise cracking shamus. So, we ended this season's One Book, One Chicago program with our tongues firmly in cheek, romping our way through a lively radio-noir spoof that showed our Theater Program off at its melodramatic best.

We have just been reliably informed of the choice of the fall's One Book, but have to keep it top secret until Mayor Daley makes the announcement, probably sometime in September. Until then, we will be devising another slate of discussions and programs, including more theater and film screenings. Look for announcements of our events here - or in the brochures that flood the city each season as the city dives into the next book.

## **Webmasters: Link to Shimer!**

Are you a webmaster, business owner, blogger, or web editor? If so, help expand Shimer awareness by linking to our website, [www.shimer.edu](http://www.shimer.edu).

Please feel free to use the logo below, or contact our website administrator [Zachary Hamm](#) to receive the URL and logo.

**Your continued support and dedication to Shimer College make a huge difference.**



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