Albert Liebman, 88, AB’11
More than 70 years after he arrived at the University, Albert Liebman received his bachelor’s degree, with the Class of 2011 at the June Convocation. Liebman, a physician, enrolled in 1939 but enlisted in the Navy during World War II and went on to medical school without completing his undergraduate studies. But this year he learned that his three years at Chicago, plus subsequent zoology coursework at the University of Wisconsin, were enough to qualify for a diploma.

Booth reduces G.I. (tuition) bills
The University of Chicago Booth School of Business has increased its scholarship support for military veterans. Beginning in September, all students who qualify for the US Department of Veterans Affairs Yellow Ribbon program will receive $10,000 per year from Chicago Booth. The Veterans Administration provides up to $10,000 in additional funding. Previously the business school offered only nine such awards each year.

Return to 1949 with Fermi
On June 2 two University physicists unveiled the contents of a 1949 time capsule that Nobel-winning physicist Enrico Fermi placed in the cornerstone of the Research Institutes building, which will be torn down and replaced by the William Eckhardt Research Center. The metal box contained items such as a U of C directory; University announcements from May 25, 1948; an architect’s sketch of the Research Institutes building; a booklet titled The New Frontier of Industry—Atomic Research; a road map; and train and airline timetables.

Harper Quad gets greener
Harper Quad will have a new look when students return in September. A summer renovation replaces the roadway and sidewalks with a new walkway. The walkway will combine limestone pavers and pervious concrete to make the path more bike and pedestrian friendly. The materials also have environmental benefits: water and snow can drain through the concrete, limiting the need for salt in the winter and reducing the strain on the city’s sewer system. At the center of the quad, an expanded grassy area will include new trees, plants, and benches.

Man of many worlds
As violinists tuned their instruments, Friedrich Katz’s family, colleagues, and former students streamed into Rockefeller Memorial Chapel on a sunny April morning to honor a man widely considered the most eminent historian of modern Mexico working in the second half of the 20th century. His October 2010 death at 83 was front-page news in newspapers throughout Mexico.

Seven speakers, all colleagues or former students, described Katz, the Morton D. Hull distinguished service professor emeritus of history, as a man of many worlds: born in Austria, he moved with his family to Berlin when he was three. Forced to leave with the rise of Nazism, they moved to France, then the United States, and eventually settled in Mexico. After attending secondary school in Mexico and Wagner College in New York, Katz earned his doctorate in Vienna. He taught in East Germany and at the University of Texas before arriving at Chicago in 1971, where he published The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution (University of Chicago Press, 1981) and The Life and Times of Pancho Villa (Stanford University Press, 1998). Several memorial speakers focused on the impact of those two works—and the Herculean task of researching them. The Secret War in Mexico placed the Mexican Revolution in a global context, interpreting it “as an episode in the international history of anti-imperialist struggles,” said Chicago history professor Emilio Kourí; in Pancho Villa, Katz did not portray his subject “as a dead outlaw,” said Javier García Diego, AM’79, PhD’88, Katz’s former student and president of El Colegio de México, “but rather as a living revolutionary with all his complexities.
That dogged searching, said Columbia Garciadiego. “He tracked Villa down, look with the art of storytelling. There was a lot of distortion of truth: he saw the movement of small bodies and black holes in general relativity, taking into account the forces that these bodies exert upon themselves.” Katz combed endlessly for information on him everywhere. His texts were filled with notes and conclusions in the form of questions, sage advice, and much, much encouragement.”

—Katherine Muhlenkamp

Katz’s storytelling extended to the classroom, according to former students who spoke at the service. In an undergraduate Latin American Civilization I class, recalled Indiana University history chair Peter Guardino, AB’85, AM’86, PhD’92, Katz “drew in a group of 100 or so undergraduates—most of whom had no real interest in the subject to begin with—with tales of Aztec cannibalism and Mochica erotic art.” He also shared with students his encyclopedic knowledge of modern Mexico.

Patricia Fernández de Castro, PhD’08, remembered how Katz constantly weighed factors and possibilities, asking questions, touching on nuances, smiling when history offered irony, and often referring to events very remote in time and place to Mexican revolts and revolutions.”

Over his nearly 40 years at Chicago, Katz was instrumental in making the University a hub for Mexican historical studies. Upon his 2004 retirement from teaching, the University honored those efforts by establishing the Katz Center for Mexican Studies.

“Friedrich was not just respected, he was revered here and in Mexico and indeed anywhere in the world where Mexico’s revolution was studied,” said John Coatsworth, dean of Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs and Katz’s former colleague at the University. Yet his honors and distinctions seemed to leave him “even more modest than before.”

Katz would downplay his most prestigious awards, Coatsworth said, including the Order of the Aztec Eagle, the highest honor that Mexico bestows on citizens of another country. In offering a word of thanks at the service’s conclusion, Katz’s son, Leo Katz, AB’79, JD’82, AM’82, told the audience about a fragmentary memoir his father wrote shortly before his death, in which he mentioned only one accolade: “Le Prix de Camaraderie,” awarded to him in a Parisian elementary school, “the favorite instrument of ideologues and swindlers.”

Whether he was portraying the clever politician inside the drunkard exterior of Mexican president Victoriano Huerta (1913–14) or German efforts to provoke a Mexican-American conflict during World War I, Katz was “a gifted storyteller,” said Kourí. He dictated the first draft of everything he wrote into a tape recorder, and “his texts were conceived with an ear for the flow of the spoken word,” Kourí said. “It harks back to an ancient tradition of combining research with the art of storytelling. There was a lot of Thucydides in him, but also of Herodotus.”

and also with his possibilities and contributions to Mexico’s history.” Both texts were sweeping in scope and massive in size.

Chicago history professor Bruce Cumings remembered how Katz combed endlessly though obscure, dusty documents, reasoning that any reader “who wanted to learn a lot would find satisfaction in the details.” Instead of depending on “typical historical research, his was a type of pursuit,” said Gacriadiego. “He tracked Villa down, looking for information on him everywhere.” That dogged searching, said Columbia anthropology professor and Katz’s longtime Chicago colleague Claudio Lomnitz, was a quest for truth: he saw distortion of history as “the favorite instrument of ideologues and swindlers.”

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A new University institute has been established for collaborative research in quantitative biology, neuroscience, and social and individual behavior. Named in recognition of University Trustee Sanford Grossman’s (AB’73, AM’74, PhD’75) service and financial support to the University, the Grossman Institute for Quantitative Biology and Human Behavior will have eight to ten new faculty members, including a director.

Rewarding student research
Physics graduate students Samuel Gralla, SM’06, and Imai Jen-La Plante, SM’06, have received the University’s 2011 Sugarman Awards for student research. Gralla was honored for “contributions to our understanding of the motion of small bodies and black holes in general relativity, taking into account the forces that these bodies exert upon themselves.” Jen-La Plante received the award “for the first measurement at the Large Hadron Collider of the production of W-bosons in association with quarks and gluons.”

An educational gift
A $2.5 million gift from the Pritzker Family Foundation supports the Urban Education Institute’s school-improvement efforts. The gift, from the foundation’s Education Innovation Fund, will help the UEI continue to research and implement its literary-assessment tools, college-preparation programs, and strategies for successful schools.

Richards wins second Laing Prize
Robert Richards, PhD’78, received the University of Chicago Press’s Gordon J. Laing Prize for the second time, winning this year for his book The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle Over Evolutionary Thought (2008). Richards, the Morris Fishbein professor of the history of science, also received the Laing Prize for his 2002 book The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe.

Social safety net(work)
A new School of Social Service Administration program combines research across disciplines to address issues such as poverty, violence, homelessness, and mental illness. The Interdisciplinary Scholar Networks will launch two initiatives in the coming year—the STI and HIV Intervention Network and the Employment Instability, Family Well-Being, and Social Policy Network.