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2016–2017**

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U.S. Rep. of Washington's 6th congressional district

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Medical Student, University of Texas

Field Instructor, Where There Be Dragons LLC

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Educator

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Senior Managing Director, Citadel Investment Group LLC



Alumni Association
Princeton University

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**Committee to Nominate
Alumni Trustees**

April 2017

Alumni Trustees

Trustees elected by Princeton's alumni make up nearly one third of the members of the University's Board of Trustees. This governing body is a working board and our elected trustees play an important role in determining policy and setting the future course of the University. We urge all alumni to reflect on the ballot material and to vote.

Last year, Princeton alumni elected **Derek C. Kilmer '96** on the At-Large ballot and **José B. Alvarez '85** on the Region I ballot.

We want your input. If you would like to recommend a Princeton alumnus or alumna, undergraduate or graduate, as a potential trustee candidate, please send his or her name with a brief letter of support to:

M. Kathryn Taylor '74
Director, Special Projects
Office of Alumni Affairs
Princeton University
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Committee to Nominate Alumni Trustees

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Stephen Nickle '83
Richard Woldenberg '81
Nancy J. Newman '78 (ex officio)



Beth F. Cobert '80

Denver, CO

At-Large Alumni Trustee

Beth Cobert did not expect to become a cyber security warrior when she left her corporate career to join the Office of Management and Budget. It was 2013 and she was tasked with driving President Obama's Management Agenda. But in 2015, when the government announced the cyber intrusion of the Office of Personnel Management that compromised personal information of 20+ million people,

Cobert was asked to step in. Suddenly she was leading damage control in the wake of a major government crisis—and in eighteen months, she restored the agency's reputation and helped reshape federal cyber security. The Senate had not even confirmed her, but as Acting Director, she said, "I acted. I did things. We just decided we were going to get work done."

From her earliest days at Princeton, Cobert has been interested in getting work done. As a freshman, she recalled, the challenge in her Outdoor Action leadership experience was getting peers to work together. She learned to "lead from the back," which meant not just being last on the trail, but creating the space for others to step up so that the group as a whole performed at a higher level. Beth became an Outdoor Action trainer and a leader of the Campus Fund drive in support of the Student Volunteer Council. She graduated from Princeton with an AB in Economics, with high honors, and won the Paul A. Volker Award in Economics. After graduation, she worked at Goldman Sachs before attending Stanford Business School and receiving her MBA with honors in 1984.

With her MBA in hand, Cobert embarked on a 29-year career at McKinsey & Company, while simultaneously starting a family. She set important precedents as a young working mother by becoming one of the first consultants at McKinsey to work part-time as both a partner and senior partner. She worked with corporate, not-for-profit, and government entities on strategy, operations, and organizational issues. She became a leader in people management and a champion for initiatives to support women's advancement to leadership positions. Cobert also gained a reputation as someone who could manage complicated systems and large-scale operational challenges.

Cobert was an active community leader during her time in the private sector. She served on the boards of the San Francisco Ballet, Stanford Business School and the United Way of the Bay Area, where she was board chair for three years. At United Way, Cobert refocused the organization on building a coalition across non-profit, private, and government entities to reduce poverty in the Bay Area. "Bringing these groups together to act in a coordinated way created much greater impact than any organization could on its own."

"I spent the majority of my career in the private sector helping clients make their businesses work better," Cobert said, and she brought the same mission to civil service. She oversaw the government's performance, procurement, information technology, and financial management offices and implemented "smarter IT delivery," bringing modern digital approaches to government. She led initiatives to improve employee engagement and to recruit a talented, diverse workforce. This was all in little more than a year, before she was tapped to rescue the hacked Office of Personnel Management.

Throughout her career, Cobert has remained close to her Princeton friends. She cares deeply about Princeton as a place that "fundamentally changed her life," and has served the University as Alumni-Faculty Forum panelist at Reunions, Alumni Schools Committee interviewer, Special Gifts Steering Committee member, and Special Gifts Solicitor for her class. Princeton, she said, has "the ability to make an impact at scale—both on its students and on the world—and that creates a special opportunity and special obligation."



Andrew C. Florance '86

Washington, D.C.

At-Large Alumni Trustee

Andrew Florance calls himself a dorm room entrepreneur. "When I run across a classmate, they can't believe I am doing the exact same thing they saw me doing back in the dorm in 1986," he said, "or that I still haven't had my first job interview." Florance catapulted over the usual career steps by building his company, CoStar, from scratch in his junior year at Princeton. Today CoStar is the world's leading

provider of commercial real estate information.

Florance's career illustrates the transformative power of education. His own education started in the public school system in Washington, D.C., which was, he has said, "demotivating." Then a scholarship in seventh grade opened the doors to St. Thomas Choir School in New York. "That opportunity transformed my life," he said. "I was motivated to learn." One of the things he learned at St. Thomas was software coding.

Florance went on to St. Andrew's School in Delaware, and then to Princeton, which he instantly loved. He was drawn to physics, economics, architecture, and more software coding. "That one scholarship opportunity set me on the path to eventually attend Princeton and have a wonderful educational experience."

He was one of the few students at Princeton in the 1980s with a computer of his own. He began writing code in earnest, and was soon paying the bills with software jobs for advertising agencies and real estate developers during school breaks and summers.

The idea for CoStar grew out of Florance's interests in computer programming and real estate. When he was growing up he often accompanied his father, a leading Washington architect, to construction sites and learned to appreciate architecture. At Princeton he put the two together and came to the conclusion that digitized data could revolutionize the real estate industry. In the mid-eighties, only the largest real estate companies could afford to invest in complex data analysis to calculate property values; Florance began to build an independent research database that would use cash flow data to determine "real" value.

Soon Florance saw it as a viable business. The day after he graduated from Princeton he started working in his father's basement, writing code 100 hours a week and raising money from investors. Today, while he is still doing many of the same things that he started doing in his room at Princeton, CoStar is now a multi-billion dollar global company with 60 million users. CoStar is featured on *Fortune's* list of 100 fastest growing companies and *Forbes'* list of 100 most innovative growth companies.

Florance said he never knew who funded that initial scholarship that sent him to St. Thomas, but he has "worked hard to pay forward the opportunity they gave me." For twenty-four years he has served on non-profit boards related to education, including St. Alban's and St. Andrews; the national nonprofit Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America (LEDA) that helps high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds gain admission to selective colleges; MIT's Management Leadership for Tomorrow, which provides mentorships from leaders at top universities for talented young people from diverse backgrounds; and a D.C.-area junior college aimed at keeping working students in school.

He focuses on academic excellence, financial sustainability, and the extension of educational opportunities to gifted students who are economically disadvantaged. "It is my conviction," he said, "that ensuring access to transformative educational opportunities from preschool to post-elite university master programs is the best way to create a thriving society." "Princeton is one of the true transformative experiences" in his life, he said. "I am incredibly passionate about everything Princeton stands for."



Robert H. Gleason '87

San Diego, CA

At-Large Alumni Trustee

Robert Gleason is the CEO of a premier chain of San Diego hotels, a prominent civic leader, and a tireless supporter of the arts, economic development, educational opportunity, and civil rights. His many interests, he says, are grounded in the liberal arts view of the world that he formed at Princeton—and more specifically, in Princeton's theater program "because, from the moment I arrived on campus, I spent what seemed like every moment inside one theater or another."

Gleason grew up in southern California and attended the Bishop's School in La Jolla. Princeton was his first choice for college due to its modest size and proximity to the New York theater scene. While Gleason officially majored in economics, his real love was theater.

In his freshman year, he became general manager of Theater Intime. He directed and produced nine shows in his four years, including a major production for the Program in Theatre and Dance, "Bent," and won the Francis LeMoyné Page Theater Award. After graduation Gleason co-ran Princeton Summer Theater. These experiences, he said, taught him much of what he knows about working with people, finances, and boards of directors that has served him throughout his career. "Since then," he said, "I've simply put those skills to work for my business, family, and community."

But the most important aspect of his Princeton career was something most students take for granted: the ability to be himself. "I was already openly gay when I arrived on campus," he said. "It was an extraordinary time of exploration and growth during which I was allowed the space to be my authentic self." Recognizing this was not the experience of all LGBT students or students from other historically under-represented groups, he learned "a responsibility to make sure everyone not only has a voice, but feels free to and does use it."

After Princeton, Gleason returned to San Diego and also to Evans Hotels, where he began as a reservations clerk before college. He worked his way up to CFO and General Counsel before being appointed CEO in 2014. Along the way he earned his JD, summa cum laude, from the University of San Diego School of Law.

Determined to make a difference in the city where he grew up, Gleason took on an impressive roster of civic activities at the local, regional, and national level, earning a reputation as a consensus builder who can bridge traditional divides. The causes may be varied, but his ability to build coalitions and achieve results is consistent—whether coordinating advocacy efforts to increase local funding for the arts, chairing the board of San Diego International Airport during the largest project in its history and delivering it on-time and under-budget, bringing together over 40 organizations in the LGBT and allied communities through the San Diego LGBT Community Leadership Council, or co-founding the Harvey Milk Diversity Breakfast to celebrate advances and renew a commitment to seek justice for all traditionally marginalized communities.

He maintains close ties to Princeton, having co-chaired the Steering Committee for the University's first LGBT Alumni Conference, "Every Voice," held in April 2013. "I was so proud of the opportunity offered for reconciliation, reconnection, and celebration," he said. He currently serves on the Alumni Council's Executive Committee and co-chairs its Committee on LGBT Alumni Affairs, which is "seeking to deepen the engagement of LGBT alumni, with an eye towards issues of welcome and inclusion applicable to all affiliated alumni groups."

"I have been very fortunate in my life," Gleason said. "Princeton helped me understand myself and, in turn, made me passionate about seeking inclusion and equality for all."



Melanie C. Lawson '76

Houston, TX

Region II Alumni Trustee

"Princeton shaped so much of who I am and how I see the world," notes Melanie Lawson, an award-winning journalist and television news anchor who presents history as it unfolds. She has traveled the world covering elections and interviewing heads of state, civic leaders, and celebrities. She has an AB in politics from Princeton, both an MA in journalism and a JD from Columbia. At heart, however,

Lawson is a proud Houstonian. She has been with KTRK-TV, the city's ABC affiliate, for nearly 34 years.

Lawson grew up in the thick of Houston's civil rights movement. Her father was a minister and civil rights activist, and Lawson became one of the first black children to integrate the local school district. "I grew up in the company of men like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Andrew Young, and Rev. Jesse Jackson," she said. "I walked alongside those men and my parents in marches to integrate our city."

Despite the challenges of integration, Lawson was an excellent student, and in high school she was encouraged to apply to Princeton. When she arrived, she found Princeton still finding its feet as a coed university, and the few black students often felt like outsiders. Doubly an outsider, Lawson was first "terrified," but soon found the intellectual stimulation of her professors and fellow students exhilarating: "I finally felt like a person, not a category," she said. "What I found at Princeton were men and women who wanted to change the world for the better."

She also found her calling. Already passionate about print journalism—"it's hard to remember a time when journalism was not in my blood"—Lawson discovered Princeton's student radio station, WPRB. She started a late night jazz program and then a news show. Her radio experience led to a summer internship at the local ABC TV station in Houston, and she was hooked. She went back the following summers as a replacement reporter.

Her interest in politics blossomed at Princeton, especially after a 1975 summer internship in the Ford White House, one year after Nixon's resignation. She wrote her senior thesis on "Black Presidential Politics in the 1976 election" and graduated with honors from the Woodrow Wilson School with a Certificate in African American studies. Columbia's graduate program in law and journalism was next, followed by three years at a Wall Street law firm that specialized in First Amendment law. Realizing that she'd "rather be a reporter than represent one," she returned to Houston.

Lawson started at the local ABC station as a general assignments reporter, and then became co-anchor of Live at 5 and Eyewitness News at 11 and host of a weekly community affairs program called Crossroads. Known for her in-depth interviews of notables, from presidents to poets, and the winner of numerous awards and three Emmys for her reporting, she also serves on the boards of many organizations, including the Houston Ballet, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Volunteer Houston, the Houston Museum of African American Culture, and the Children's Defense Fund.

Throughout her career, Lawson has maintained her connections to Princeton. She is a steadfast supporter of the Association of Black Princeton Alumni and the Woodrow Wilson School and has interviewed Houston high school students for Princeton for nearly a decade. She has been a Reunions panelist and was a keynote speaker at the 2014 "Coming Back" conference for black Princeton alumni. In 2015 she interviewed President Christopher L. Eisgruber in front of an audience of 400 alumni in Houston. These experiences reaffirmed her ties to Princeton as it is today: "a place for all people to acknowledge the strengths and gifts of each of us."



Christopher P. Lu '88

Arlington, VA

Region II Alumni Trustee

Public service is "a commitment to address the problems of our time—and not simply pass those problems on to the next generation," Chris Lu has said. The son of immigrants, Lu has spent most of his professional life in public service, becoming White House Cabinet Secretary and then U.S. Deputy Secretary of Labor in the Obama administration.

Where did his commitment to public service originate? "Princeton has played, and continues to play, a major role in inspiring me to serve others," Lu said. He described receiving his letter of acceptance from Princeton, followed by a congratulatory letter signed by the four Princeton alumni then serving in the U.S. Senate. It was, he said, "a powerful testament to the University's long history of developing public servants." And it set the tone for his college career.

At Princeton, Lu was the president of Mathey College and the senior news editor of the Daily Princetonian. His junior paper advisor was William Bundy, one of the architects of the Vietnam War under President Johnson. Lu interned on Capitol Hill and wrote his senior thesis on the press coverage of presidential campaigns. Policy, law, and service—Lu attributes his interest in all three to his Princeton years.

After earning his AB magna cum laude from the Woodrow Wilson School, Lu went to Harvard Law School and returned to the Princeton area, where he was a law clerk to a federal court of appeals judge in Trenton. He then worked as a litigator at a large D.C. law firm before entering government service in 1997, when he launched his government career as deputy chief counsel for the Oversight and Government Reform Committee of the House of Representatives. Then, in early 2005, Lu joined the Senate staff of his law school classmate Barack Obama, first as legislative director and then acting chief of staff.

The day after Election Day 2008, Lu became executive director of the presidential transition team, overseeing the planning to assume control of the federal government. During the first four years of the Obama administration, Lu served as White House Cabinet Secretary, managing the relations between the White House and the federal agencies and setting the agenda for Cabinet meetings. He loved the demanding work, comparing himself to an air traffic controller keeping dozens of planes smoothly on course.

In 2014 Lu was unanimously confirmed as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor—a job that allowed him to focus on increasing employment opportunities for all Americans. He is now a senior fellow at the University of Virginia Miller Center and a senior strategy advisor at FiscalNote, a tech startup in D.C.

Lu has always stayed connected to Princeton. He started writing class notes for the Class of 1988 during his senior year and never missed a report for the next twenty years—and only relinquished the post when he joined the White House staff. He embraced the role of the class secretary in keeping classmates connected.

He has been a frequent speaker on campus, including serving as the Baccalaureate speaker in 2014, and in each of his appearances, he has always returned to the topic of public service and Princeton's role in training the future leaders of the nation and the world.

"Since leaving Princeton," he said, "I've been blessed with a career that has taken me to levels of government unimaginable to my parents when they came to this country in the 1950s." Lu is committed to helping and inspiring the next generation. "My career has been possible only because of those who blazed a trail before me, and I've always felt a responsibility to widen this trail for those who follow."



Frederick G. Strobel '74

Nashville, TN

Region II Alumni Trustee

Even by Princeton's high standards, Frederick Strobel is an exceptional volunteer. His service to the University began in his sophomore year and has never stopped. "I was interviewing prospective students while still one myself," he notes. By his own account, he is now in the 47th year of his Princeton career.

Strobel grew up in Nashville and attended Father Ryan High School. When he applied to Princeton, he was the "product of a wonderful but still provincial Southern city." Princeton began broadening his horizons before he had even left home, when he read the names of his Cuban roommates. He was fascinated by the different cultures and languages he encountered on campus. Inspired by a class on Middle English literature, he decided to major in English and develop his skills as a writer. As a result, he said, "I have spent most of my professional career in the land of communications, dependent on language, written and spoken."

After graduation, Strobel made a conscious choice that has governed the rest of his life. Instead of pursuing an advanced degree, he returned to Nashville to focus on what mattered most: his family, his community, and his alma mater. He went to work for a prominent public relations firm, Seigenthaler Associates, and was soon involved in all aspects of the firm's work. When it closed in 1983 Strobel and two partners founded a new firm, called the Burgundy Group.

Burgundy Group evolved into an award-winning full-service advertising agency that excels in branding regional clients. Early on, the firm became known in the restaurant and food service industry, with clients like Lee's Famous Recipe Chicken, Captain D's, and Tony Roma's. Strobel has run the business for more than thirty years and is now sole owner following his partners' retirement. Even with the firm's success, he has intentionally kept it lean and local. He remains intimately involved in the business, including writing, public relations, and budgeting, and prefers to work directly with clients, most of whom have been with the Burgundy Group for years.

Strobel is deeply committed to his community and has served on a number of boards, including the United Cerebral Palsy board and the Catholic Charities of Tennessee board, which he now chairs. He and his wife have two daughters, who both attended Catholic high school in Nashville before following their father to Princeton. And the family remains actively involved with their local Nashville high schools.

In Princeton's case, the list of Strobel's volunteer efforts is longer than most professional resumés. In the 1980s he was instrumental in rebuilding and revitalizing the Princeton Alumni Association of Nashville. He helped organize visits by President Bowen and the Triangle Club and worked on the Nashville committee for the Princeton Prize in Race Relations. Active in Annual Giving since 1985, for his class he has served as class agent and leadership chair, and he was also the section chair for the South. From 2004 to 2007, he chaired the National Annual Giving Committee. He has also chaired the Committee to Nominate Alumni Trustees and served on the Aspire Campaign Executive Committee. In 2012 he received the Harold H. Helm '20 Distinguished Service Award. For almost five decades he has supported Princeton's growth and progress at every level from grassroots expansion to institutional vision. Over the years he has developed a reputation as an astute and generous moderator with a gift for building consensus.

"Princeton gave me an outlet for service, both to the University and to my community," Strobel said. "The opportunities to volunteer at Princeton and for Princeton have given me ways to give back to the place that shaped me."



Ellen N. Junn *84 PSYCH

Turlock, CA

Graduate Alumni Trustee

Ellen Junn, president of California State University-Stanislaus, is used to being a “first.” She is the first of three sisters, a first-generation American, and the first Korean-American woman to serve as president of a four-year college or university in the United States.

Education has always been a central focus in her life: her parents emigrated from South Korea so that her father could pursue his PhD in political science. She says of her father, “His fierce determination to succeed and his commitment to living in a democracy remind me almost daily of the tremendous opportunity that this nation has afforded my family.”

Junn began her own studies in pre-med and then experimental and cognitive psychology, graduating cum laude from the University of Michigan. This opened the door to Princeton, where she earned both an MA and PhD in cognitive and developmental psychology. After Princeton she earned a Management Development Program Certificate from Harvard University and a CSU-Knight Collaborative Program Certificate from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton Institute for Research in Higher Education.

Thus prepared, Junn embarked on a career “within one of the most ethnically and economically diverse systems of higher education in the nation.” For more than three decades she has held teaching and administrative positions as professor, associate dean, provost, and now president of a 9,762-student campus in the largest university system in the nation. Throughout her career, she has developed a reputation for putting students first and seeking better outcomes for first-generation students, economically disadvantaged students, and students from underserved populations. She is “deeply committed to the values of higher education as one of the most important vectors for promoting intergenerational prosperity and improving the greater good.” To this end, she partners with faculty members and campus, civic, government, and business leaders to constantly improve the educational experience.

Junn’s success is visible in a trail of achievements throughout the CSU system. As provost and vice president for Academic Affairs at CSU Dominguez Hills, she launched the Departmental Student Success and Innovative Teaching Grants Program, Freshmen Success Program, and technology-enabled Active Learning Classrooms. As chief academic officer at San José State, she started the Undergraduate Research Initiative, co-chaired the Commission on Diversity, and established the African American Student Success and Hispanic Student Success Task Forces to better serve and increase graduation rates among students of color. And as the associate provost at CSU Fresno, she established the Center for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching and founded the Women’s Campus Connection and the Asian Faculty and Staff Association. In February, Junn was named one of the top twenty-five women in higher education by the magazine *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*.

In addition to having published widely on various topics, including strategies for supporting non-tenure track faculty, especially women and minorities, Junn has served on a variety of regional and national governing boards related to education. At the same time, she has stayed connected to Princeton through extensive volunteer activities, including involvement with Alumni Schools Committee interviewing, and has been recognized for her service to the Princeton Orange County Club and the Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni. “Because of the transformative experiences I enjoyed at Princeton,” she said, “I have always been keen to contribute as an actively involved alumna.”

Junn regards her Princeton experience as a lens through which she assesses and strengthens the campuses of the California State University system. She believes Princeton will “continue to transform the lives of an increasingly diverse student body and push the boundaries of discovery to address the most vital and critical needs confronting us both nationally and globally today and into the future.”



Ann Kirschner *78 ENG

New York, NY

Graduate Alumni Trustee

Ann Kirschner is an educator and pioneering executive in digital media, though “old” media was her first passion. When she was growing up in Queens, New York, Kirschner loved books. “As a child of an immigrant family, I believed that books paved the path to the future,” she said.

Kirschner’s love of books set her on an academic path through the English departments of three universities. She became the first woman in her family to graduate from college, and the only one to pursue a graduate degree, earning her BA at the State University of New York at Buffalo, MA at the University of Virginia, and PhD as a Whiting Fellow in Humanities at Princeton. In 1978, she started her academic career at Princeton as a lecturer in Victorian literature.

At the same time, however, the media landscape was changing—and beckoning. Kirschner’s career path took a turn worthy of a Victorian novel when she saw an ad in the *New York Times* for something mysterious and exciting: cable television. How did she make the leap from professor to entrepreneur? “Princeton gave me license to learn,” she said, “and gave me confidence to follow my evolving career interests.” She observed how each new technology, from cable to satellite to Internet, “sought to shift consumer preferences and establish new business models.”

Kirschner led four technology start-ups, among them the cable industry’s first on-demand channels for data and entertainment. She led marketing and communications for PrimeTime 24, a pioneering venture in the home satellite dish business. In 1994, she became the first digital strategist at the National Football League and launched NFL.com, soon a wildly successful Internet sports site—even though, she said, “I’d never been to a football game in my life.”

As strategist and entrepreneur, she often reflected on the role of universities in the digital age, leading to her own role as founder and CEO of Fathom, an early e-learning company, in partnership with Columbia University and other institutions. “That experience brought me back to academic priorities and the changing landscape of higher education.”

In 2006, Kirschner was asked to head a start-up honors college at the City University of New York (CUNY), where most students are from immigrant, low-income, and first-college-generation families. “I jumped at it,” she said. Over the next ten years, she led Macaulay Honors College and expanded it to more than 2,200 students. “It was a special joy to celebrate our first Rhodes Scholars, Truman Scholars, and other scholarship winners,” she said, “and a personal delight when Macaulay alumni chose Princeton for their graduate studies.”

Last spring, Kirschner was appointed special advisor to the CUNY Chancellor to build strategic technology-focused partnerships. She co-founded the Women in Technology and Entrepreneurship initiative to bring more women into computer science and chaired CUNY’s presidential task force on online learning. She writes on innovation and technology in higher education and has published two books, including *Sala’s Gift*, the story of her mother’s wartime experiences as a Holocaust survivor.

At Princeton, Kirschner has served in numerous volunteer capacities, including the Graduate School Leadership Council, the board of the Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni, the English Department’s Advisory Council, and the Alumni Council’s Executive Committee. She also serves on corporate and nonprofit boards, including Strategic Cyber Ventures, the Paul and Daisy Soros Foundation, FIRSTnyc, and Public Agenda.

Whether learning from new media or old, Kirschner believes that “in a world of rapid change and expanding knowledge, we cannot possibly know all we need to know. Our education must provide the solid foundation for lifelong learning. At Princeton, I learned how to learn.”



José A. Quiñonez *98 WWS

Oakland, CA

Graduate Alumni Trustee

“In the world of finance, trust is everything.” So writes José Quiñonez, a financial services entrepreneur and CEO of the Mission Asset Fund, a nonprofit organization that helps financially excluded communities become successful participants in the financial mainstream. Trust, he says, is what brings low-income and immigrant families—“the unbanked and credit invisible”—out of the shadows.

Quiñonez knows about life in the shadows. He was nine when he crossed the U.S./Mexico border with his siblings— orphaned, undocumented, and afraid. He learned to be invisible and keep out of trouble. But he also learned about the “ingenuity of people who live in the shadows, who come together to help one another.” When Quiñonez was fifteen, the 1986 Immigration Reform Act changed his life. His new legal status gave him a voice. He began speaking out in school, organizing student activities, and advocating for others. The law, he said, “opened a world of future possibilities.”

Knowing that he wanted to help people, Quiñonez enrolled at University of California Davis intending to become a doctor. Instead, he discovered his gift for organizing and his passion for social justice. He was elected leader of MEChA, a Latino student organization, and excelled as a student organizer. But, he said, “I realized I needed more than passion to make a difference in the world.” One of his professors recognized his potential and recommended a study program that led him, in 1996, to the Woodrow Wilson School’s Master in Public Affairs Program.

Princeton was unlike anything he knew, and he struggled with culture shock. “The second year, I accepted the difference. I decided to enjoy it and really be a part of it.” He organized events celebrating Latino culture and connected with staff and professors. He helped start an annual conference for Woodrow Wilson School students of color—and after graduating in 1998, he returned to campus for almost 10 years in a row to participate.

Quiñonez moved to Washington, D.C., to work for national advocacy organizations. During his six years in D.C., he saw the “limitations of government programs and realized the importance of developing a community model with self-reliance as its foundation.” He returned to San Francisco to work with national nonprofits creating asset-building opportunities for low-income people. From there, he founded the Mission Asset Fund (MAF), a new nonprofit organization working to improve the financial lives of low-income families.

In setting up the nonprofit, Quiñonez realized that at Princeton he had built the academic framework for his innovative ideas to help people break the cycle of poverty. “As we were designing MAF’s programs, I found myself thinking back to my time at Princeton, where I learned about informal economies, the economic activity that goes on outside the regulated system.” His idea was to use the trust system of informal economies as the basis for new financial products that “radically change the way we think about solutions to the problems people face in poverty.” Since its inception in 2008, MAF’s Lending Circles program has helped participants’ credit scores jump an average of 168 points. The success of the program, replicated at a state and then national level, earned Quiñonez a 2016 MacArthur Foundation “genius grant” in recognition of his groundbreaking work.

Quiñonez was recently honored at the Woodrow Wilson School with a Distinguished Alumni Award. “Princeton was the one institution that really believed in me. My professors actually believed in me and my potential,” he said. “My story is not about academic achievements. It is about how I started in life and how much help I’ve gotten along the way to get to where I’m at today.”