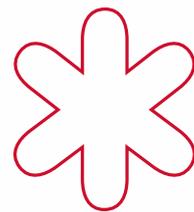


The York University Magazine

Fall 2025



**The push for parity
in
science,
technology,
engineering
and
math**

Balancing Act

Engineering student Aleeya Irshad

YORK UNIVERSITY School of Medicine

Opening 2028



At York University, we are creating a bold new medical school focused on preparing the next generation of frontline primary care physicians – equipped to lead in diverse communities, embrace digital innovation and collaborate across health professions.

Backed by years of growth in health education, our medical school will train future doctors in real-world settings, working with inter-professional health-care teams to address complex patient care issues and factors that affect the health of people and communities.



yorku.ca/medicine



The York University Magazine

Contents

4 The President 5 Editor's Notes 6 View 33 Alumni 38 Flashback

12 BALANCING ACT

How York University is building equity and momentum in STEM

18 KEEPING IT REEL

*Cineplex founder
Nat Taylor's cinema gift*

24 NEWSMAKER

*The Globe and Mail's
Angela Paciensa*

30 CLOSING THE JUSTICE GAP

*Osgoode's Barbra Schlifer
Commemorative Clinic*



THE PRESIDENT



RHONDA L. LENTON
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

IN MY TIME HERE AT YORK, I have witnessed first-hand the impact that higher education has, not only for individual success, but for enhancing the well-being of the communities we serve. Like many students on our campuses today, I came from a modest background.

Neither of my parents had the chance to attend university, but they believed that education was the key to opportunity, and they instilled in me a desire to study from a young age.

I started university prepared to pursue a career in law, but I happened to take an introductory sociology course. The issues grabbed me and I never looked back. I share this personal experience because it forms the basis of my deeply held belief that, in our knowledge-based society, higher education is more important than ever. Emerging technologies such as AI can aid higher education, but never replace it.

My leadership journey at York has been driven by my desire to positively shape the higher education landscape. I was drawn to the University because of its unwavering commitment to access, equity and social justice. Over the years, I have seen this commitment manifest across the University's scholarly and community engagement activities, and inform major projects, including the School of Medicine, set to open in 2028.

Universities Canada reports that approximately one in 10 Canadian students will be the first in their families to attend university, and will likely face additional financial and navigational challenges. These are most explicit in competitive fields such as medicine.

A study published in *BMC Medical Education* revealed that Canadian medical students are more likely to be from high-income, urban households with highly qualified parents, and are rarely from ethnic minorities. Income disparity is a predictor of receiving an offer of admission, as the application process itself is expensive. These differences can exacerbate health care inequities, as graduates often care for affluent populations, while racialized physicians are more likely to serve underserved populations.

York was founded more than 60 years ago to expand access to university education and to foster greater diversity among graduates. We have worked to open doors and remove barriers so that no talent is overlooked – ensuring that students with the right qualifications can pursue their program of choice. We are also grateful to the Ontario government for its support in creating additional spaces for medical education.

Our medical school is the first in Canada dedicated to family medicine and generalist specializations such as pediatrics, psychiatry, obstetrics/maternal health, and general surgery. We have established a broad network of partners – ranging from major hospitals to community health care agencies, including the Indigenous Primary Health Care Council – to ensure students receive comprehensive, diverse training experiences. Applicants are eligible after two years of undergraduate study, and to support broader access, we have created a two-year pathway program for those who may have missed key preparatory content during high school.

Our catchment area spans north Toronto, York Region, Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka and adjacent rural areas. We expect to recruit diverse, highly qualified medical students – including those who are economically disadvantaged – to ensure that our graduates represent the communities they serve.

York will continue to ensure positive and equitable long-term outcomes for all Canadians.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

EDITOR'S NOTES



Ready, Steady, Go

I FOUND IT TUCKED in an old photo album, a photograph of myself at six, caught mid-stride in that eternal “ready, steady, go” pose that defined so many small-town Ontario summers. There I am in a homemade dress, white ankle socks pulled high, hair held back with a stretchy hair band, surrounded by other little girls in shorts and T-shirts. We’re about to race across some forgotten field near Georgian Bay, and I know, with the particular certainty of childhood memory, that I won.

I won because I was fast, yes, but mostly because my mother was on the sidelines, her voice cutting through the humid air: “Go! Go! Go!” There was never a question of not trying, not winning, not being exactly as capable as anyone else. She’d been a standout on Ontario’s provincial women’s field hockey team, and she raised me with the fierce assumption that being female meant nothing less than everything.

That photograph came to mind as we shaped the fall 2025 issue around the theme of capability. Our STEM feature reveals how young women are rewriting the equations in physics and mathematics. The Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic continues that legacy of determination, empowering women to seek justice when the system has failed them.

But capability isn’t only about breaking barriers. Sometimes it’s about breakthroughs that change how we care for ourselves and each other, as seen in researchers at York modelling the

spread of the Zika virus and developing wearable technology for preventive health. Sometimes, capability is found in individual nerve and imagination, as when York alum Jerry Levitan turned a chance encounter with John Lennon in a Toronto hotel room into decades of creative risk.

From the Nat Taylor Cinema nurturing Canada’s next filmmakers, to Angela Pacienza, who rose from the newsroom of York’s student newspaper *Excalibur* to executive editor at the *Globe and Mail*, to York engineers pioneering additive manufacturing and printed electronics for custom prosthetics and intelligent textiles, this issue celebrates the particular satisfaction of work well done.

That little girl in the photograph ran because she had to. York alumni, faculty and researchers create, discover and persist because they can. ●

— Deirdre Kelly

THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

The York University Magazine



Volume 11, Number 1

PUBLISHER Jacqueline Janelle
EDITOR Deirdre Kelly
DESIGN Communications & Public Affairs
CONTRIBUTORS
 Kyle Finbow, Mike Ford, Carolyn Gruske, Horst Herget, John Lorinc, Moira MacDonald, Rebecca Payne, David Silverberg, Will Sloan, Joanna Thompson
INTERIM CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING OFFICER
 Barbara Joy

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MCKENZIE JAMES

INFO CHANGES: alumni@yorku.ca or 1-866-876-2228. Update your communication preferences at yorku.ca/alumniandfriends

THE YORK UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

is available three times a year online, at yorku.ca/magazine. Ideas and opinions expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect the ideas or opinions of the University or the editors. To get in touch, email yumag@yorku.ca

ON THE COVER



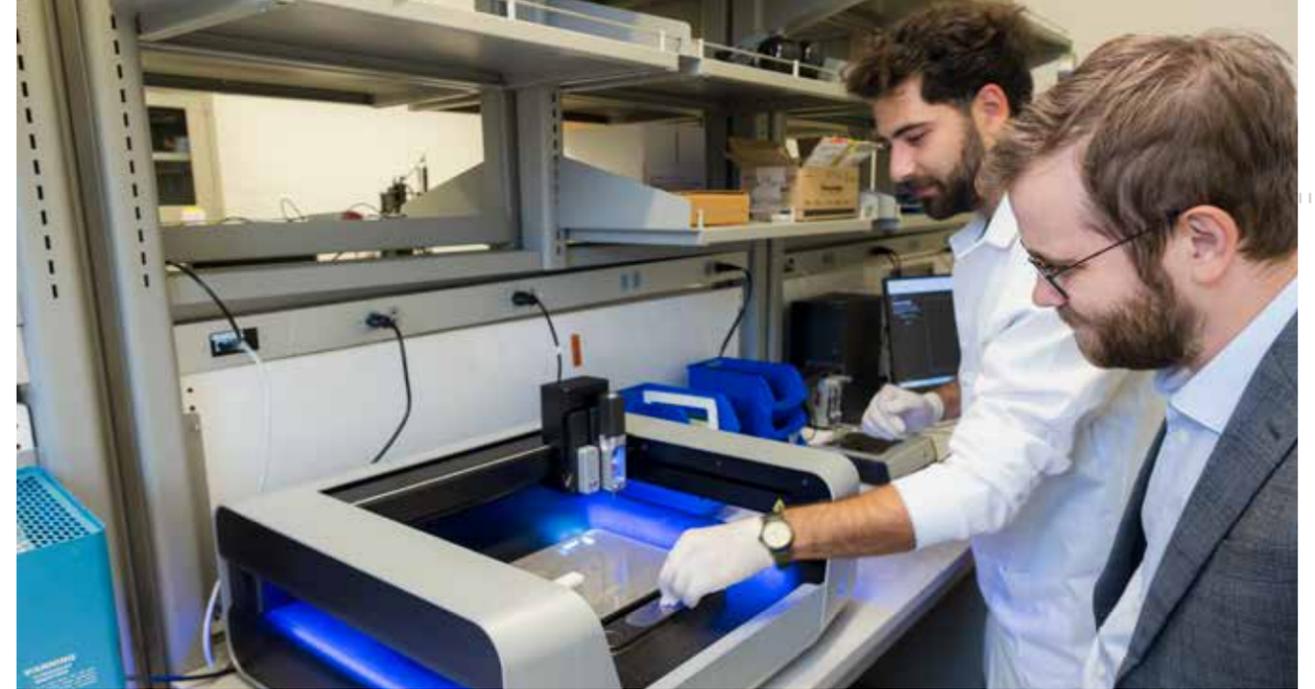
Aleea Irshad
Photography by
Horst Herget



Gerd Grau

The Print Revolution

How 3D printing and smart electronics are changing everything



Ali Eskandari, a graduate researcher in Professor Gerd Grau's lab, prints electronic devices directly onto a 3D-printed object using the Voltera NOVA dispense printer as part of their research in additive electronics

IN A YORK UNIVERSITY LABORATORY, a robotic arm glides back and forth, layering polymers so fine they're nearly invisible. This isn't just another demonstration of 3D printing's potential – it's the front line of a technological shift that could redefine how Canadians make everything from prosthetic limbs to wearable health monitors.

Professor Gerd Grau heads the Electronics Additive Manufacturing Lab (E-AM) at the Lassonde School of Engineering, where his team is merging two once-separate fields: additive manufacturing and printed electronics. The result is a new generation of devices that are not only custom-built for individual users, but also imbued with sensors and circuits that make them smarter and more responsive.

Consider prosthetics. Traditionally, manufacturing an artificial limb meant compromises – generic sizing, wasted material and high costs. Now, using 3D printing, engineers can tailor each prosthetic to the patient's anatomy, reducing both waste and expense.

"With 3D printing, we can create prosthetics that are not only a perfect fit, but also produced more efficiently and with less environmental impact," Grau explains.

But the innovation doesn't stop at fit. By printing flexible electronics directly into the prosthetic, labs can add sensors and actuators without the bulk of traditional wiring. The result: lighter, more comfortable devices that can monitor pressure, movement or even send data wirelessly to a doctor.

The same technology is being woven – literally – into textiles. Imagine a T-shirt that tracks your heart rate and relays

the information to your physician or smartphone app. It's not science fiction; it's a project already underway at York, made possible by printed electrodes and conductive inks.

The lab's research extends to environmental challenges as well. Grau's team is developing microfluidic devices to help recycle lithium from used batteries – a crucial step as Canada ramps up electric vehicle production. Even playful experiments, like a remote-controlled paper plane powered entirely by printed electronics, serve a purpose: pushing the boundaries of what's possible with new materials and techniques.

These advances are quietly reshaping Canada's manufacturing landscape. As automation and digital fabrication take hold, some traditional jobs may disappear, but new opportunities are emerging for those skilled in design, engineering and digital production. Institutions across the country are racing to update training programs to prepare workers for this shift.

Yet the transition won't be seamless. The shift to advanced manufacturing is a work in progress. For every breakthrough in the lab, there are new questions about how these technologies will shape Canadian industry and the people who depend on it.

"Think of the current paradigm of electronics," Grau says. "We are trying to come up with ways of manufacturing that are maybe orthogonal to that, but that basically enable new applications." ●

—Joanna Thompson

THE FUTURE OF CREATIVITY

At York, students and AI share the canvas,
but not without questions

O N A WEEKDAY AFTERNOON at York University's Markham Campus, the creative process looks different than it did a decade ago. Laptops hum alongside sketchbooks as students in the Creative Technologies program coax images and sounds from generative AI tools. The results are sometimes dazzling, sometimes confounding, and always up for debate.

Professor Rebecca Caines, who teaches the Creating with AI course, has made that debate central to her classroom. The syllabus doesn't just cover how to prompt an algorithm; it asks students to consider what's at stake when machines enter the studio. "We studied



CONTAGION CONTROL



Researchers use math to calculate the spread of mosquito-borne diseases

MATHEMATICS IS OFTEN seen as a world apart – full of abstract theories and distant from daily concerns. Yet, in a York University lab, equations are being put to work on one of the most urgent challenges in public health: understanding how diseases like Zika virus spread.

At the centre of this research is singular perturbation theory, a mathematical tool for dissecting systems that move at different speeds. Mosquitoes – the swift, short-lived carriers of Zika – interact with humans, whose experience of the disease unfolds more slowly. The result is a tangle of timelines that can confound conventional models.

By separating the “fast” rhythms of mosquito behaviour from the “slow” course of human infection, the York team uncovers how subtle shifts in climate or biology can tip the balance, sometimes triggering sudden outbreaks.

“Singular perturbation theory lets us cut through complexity and see how interventions might shift the course of disease,”

says Woldegebriel Assefa Woldegerima, a professor in York’s Department of Mathematics and Statistics. “These techniques are powerful for studying multi-scale processes – across time, space or size – in public health, science and engineering.”

The urgency is real. Zika virus made headlines during the 2015-16 outbreak, linked to severe birth defects and neurological complications. While symptoms are often mild, the risks during pregnancy and infancy remain high. By sharpening our understanding of transmission, the York research opens new avenues for managing future outbreaks.

For co-author Joe Tran (BSc ’24, MA ’25), now a PhD student at York, the project is a testament to the power of collaboration.

“Bringing together mathematics and epidemiology leads to insights neither field could reach alone,” Tran says. “We hope our work sparks more partnerships across disciplines.” ●

— Deirdre Kelly

the ethical implications of the tools, and the activities of the major players in the industry,” Caines says.

“We discussed issues like environmental impact, bias, copyright, deepfakes and disinformation, skills loss, devaluing of creativity, and low-quality output at scale – as well as more existential concerns of AI taking over and humans losing control.”

Assignments reflect this dual focus. Students might record a podcast that weaves their own commentary into an AI-generated script, or write an essay with the help of a chatbot – then critique the process. Caines has noticed that the

main hurdle isn’t technical. “The biggest issue was getting students to explore the potential rather than getting hung up on the tool limitations,” she says.

The classroom conversations rarely end with consensus. Some students see AI as a new kind of collaborator, opening doors to forms of expression they hadn’t imagined. Others remain skeptical, wary of what’s lost when creativity is filtered through code. For now, Caines and her students are content to sit with the uncertainty. ●

— Deirdre Kelly



Balancing Act

BY MOIRA MACDONALD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

Computer science student Pritumi Patel

How York University is building equity and momentum in STEM

A **T YORK UNIVERSITY'S LASSONDE** School of Engineering, a quiet revolution is underway. In just six years, the number of women students has nearly doubled. The school's \$1.5-million "50:50 Challenge" is on course to make York the first engineering school in Canada with equal gender representation. This vision is realized every day through hands-on learning, outreach to young women, and a supportive community focused on getting – and keeping – more women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.

Third-year computer engineering student Aleeya Irshad's story is a window into this changing landscape. Encouraged by family and teachers who nurtured her love of science, she graduated from high school in Woodbridge, Ont., after building and launching two apps on the Google Play store. With that confidence behind her, she arrived at York expecting to find plenty of other women who shared her interests, only to discover how few there actually were. "I thought I'd see more women," she says. "That really wasn't the case."

Irshad's experience is hardly unique; it mirrors national numbers that point to a persistent lack of representation. While women now account for close to 60 per cent of all university students in Canada, they make up less than a third of STEM workers, with female representation in disciplines such as computer and software engineering hovering at just 11 to 12 per cent across Ontario campuses. The problem, experts say, is not a shortage of talent but the complex, systemic

**SHE GRADUATED
FROM HIGH SCHOOL
AFTER BUILDING
AND LAUNCHING
TWO APPS
ON THE GOOGLE PLAY STORE**



Engineering student Aleeya Irshad

**THEY REMAIN
UNDER-REPRESENTED,
UNDER-PAID,
UNDER-PUBLISHED,
AND UNDER THE SHADOWS
OF MALE SCIENTISTS
WHO ARE ASSUMED,
WITHOUT EVIDENCE,
TO HAVE INNATE CAPACITIES
THAT WOMEN LACK**

barriers embedded in every level of the STEM pipeline, from early education to research and leadership.

As former federal science minister Kirsty Duncan, author of *The Exclusion Effect*, observes: “While women have come a long way in science, there is still far to go. They remain under-represented, under-paid, under-published, and under the shadows of male scientists who are assumed, without evidence, to have innate capacities that women lack.”

That imbalance has galvanized change at York. Since Jane Goodyer became dean in 2018, the Lassonde School has doubled undergraduate enrolment of women, with women now representing more than 20 per cent of all engineering students, up from 15.5 per cent just a few years ago. Goodyer credits this growth to both bold leadership and programs designed to dismantle barriers. “We get the best solutions when we bring in different perspectives,” she says.

One key driver is York’s k2i (“kindergarten to industry”) academy – a flagship outreach program designed and tested by Lassonde that exposes girls and under-represented students to STEM from the earliest grades. Partnering with school boards, industry leaders and community organizations, k2i has directly engaged thousands of students.

This past year, women accounted for more than half of the co-op placements in k2i’s work-integrated learning pathways. The program’s emphasis on hands-on, real-world skills and inclusion is now considered a prototype for other Canadian universities looking to boost diversity.

The school also launched Canada’s first fully work-integrated degree in digital technologies in 2023: this program allows students to earn credits as they learn with direct industry experience. The hope is that this program will further open

doors for first-generation and equity-deserving students while reducing barriers related to cost and access.

But it’s not just recruitment; it’s retention. Institutions across Canada struggle to keep women and other equity-deserving students in STEM, especially through the critical first year. In response, Lassonde has pioneered a “block model” approach to the first-year engineering curriculum, delivering key concepts in focused, intensive blocks rather than the traditional multi-tasking format. This shift has resulted in a 70-per-cent reduction in first-year failure rates, a 108-per-cent increase in top grades, and a 45-per-cent rise in students completing academic requirements on time. Student stress has dropped by nearly half, and the effect is strongest for women and racialized students.

“Retention isn’t just a numbers game,” Goodyer says. “It’s about community and supporting people all the way through.”

Improvements include an early-warning dashboard that allows academic advisers to spot students needing extra help. Programs such as PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) and mentorship targeted at women in first-year cohorts also support these retention gains.

The school’s Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) York chapter cultivates both community and hands-on experience through initiatives such as the annual ElleHacks hackathon – Canada’s largest all-female and non-binary coding event – along with peer advising and leadership training. “It’s amazing seeing younger girls get involved,” says Pritumi Patel, WISE’s vice-president and a third-year York computer-science student from Uganda. “We get to see them bringing new energy and ideas.”

**REPRESENTATION MATTERS NOT JUST IN LABS.
IT’S ABOUT WHO TELLS THE STORY
AND HOW HISTORY GETS WRITTEN**

York’s broader Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (DEDI) strategy reinforces these efforts. It has embedded measurable benchmarks and equity leadership into hiring, research, teaching, and everyday campus life, turning equity goals into practice across faculties.

Initiatives to change attitudes extend from the classroom to the wider community. Biology professor Dawn Bazely – recipient of the Sandford Fleming Medal for excellence in science communication – has championed scientific literacy and public engagement, organizing “editathons” to expand Wikipedia entries for Canadian women in science.

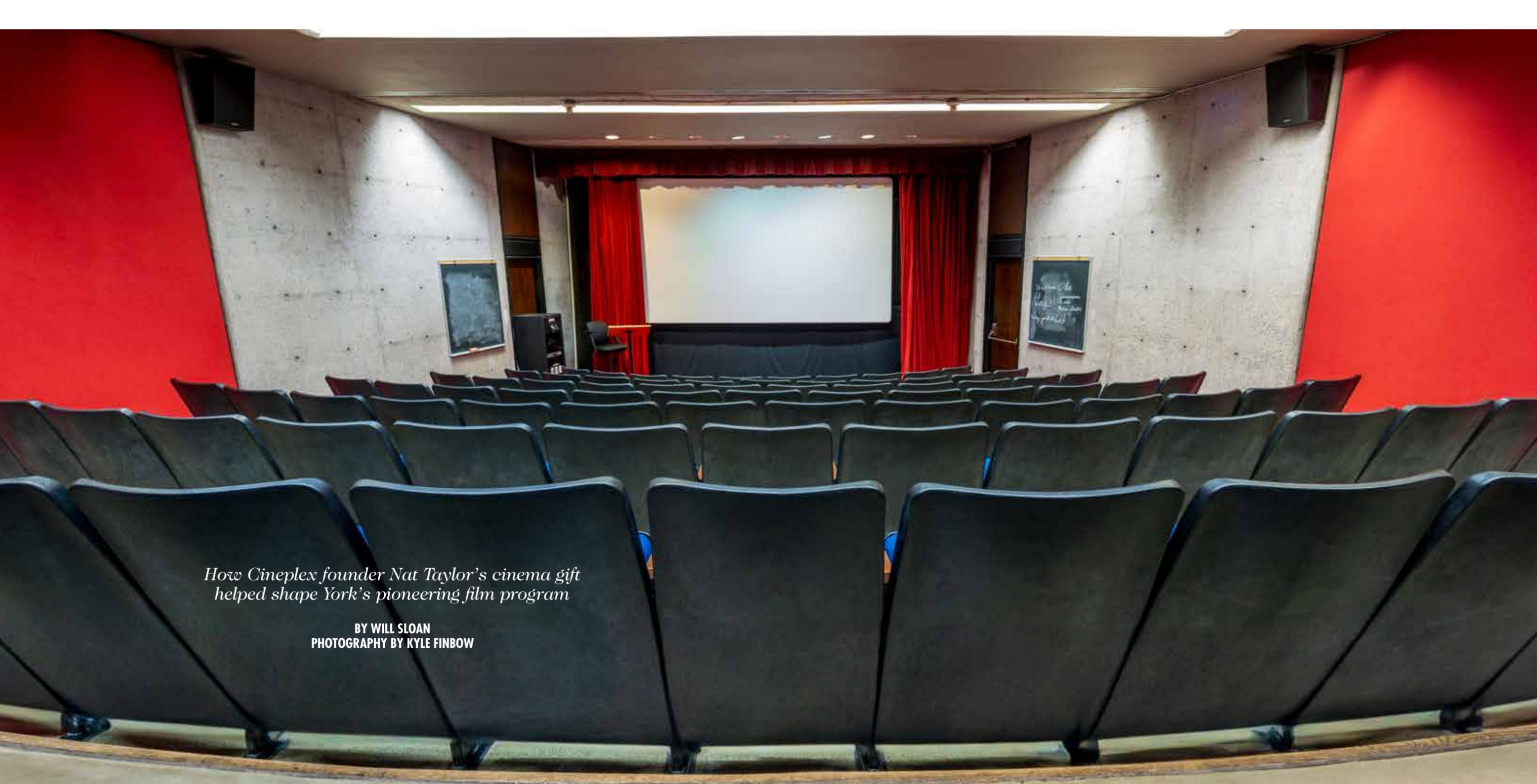
“Representation matters not just in labs,” Bazely says. “It’s about who tells the story and how history gets written.”

Still, there’s ground left to cover. York’s latest *Measuring Success* report notes that while retention and graduation rates for women in STEM have climbed steadily over the last three years, parity remains a work in progress. This is consistent with national trends. At Lassonde, staff and students say the culture is changing. Options for mentorship, co-op placements and support are greater than ever.

For Irshad, the goal is clear: women’s place in STEM should be fully recognized and reflected. “I want it to be normal for women to see themselves in engineering and science so the next generation doesn’t feel out of place,” she says.

That objective looms closer as York’s community expands, support networks grow and more female students enter the field each term. Yet one truth remains: success in STEM still means working to be seen. “We’ve got to prove ourselves constantly,” Patel says. “I want that to change.”

Lassonde is ready to meet the challenge. For women entering STEM now and in the future, the balance of the equation is shifting. ● — *With files from Deirdre Kelly*



*How Cineplex founder Nat Taylor's cinema gift
helped shape York's pioneering film program*

**BY WILL SLOAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE FINBOW**

KEEPING IT REAL

**For decades,
Nat Taylor Cinema
has been the shimmering
heart and soul
of our film program**

WALK DOWN THE HALL of the Ross Building, and you'll find a movie theatre marquee reminiscent of those that adorned so many neighbourhood cinemas during the golden age of Hollywood. It reads "Nat Taylor Cinema," and since 1982, this unique space has been an active movie theatre within York University, with events serving both students from the Department of Cinema & Media Arts, and the public at large.

"For decades, Nat Taylor Cinema has been the shimmering heart and soul of our film program," says John Greyson (MA '10), an established Canadian filmmaker and influential faculty member at York.

Established in 1970, York's film department quickly became a cornerstone of cinema studies in Canada. For more than five decades, it has contributed significantly to film education and research. In 1980, York further distinguished itself by introducing the nation's first graduate-level film studies curriculum, broadening the scope of cinematic discourse in academia nationwide.

Central to this legacy is the Nat Taylor Cinema, where aspiring filmmakers immerse themselves in cinema theory and history while mastering industry-standard equipment. This dynamic space buzzes with activity, hosting student screenings, alumni showcases, faculty premieres and community events such as Cinema Politica and weekly Nat Taylor Tuesdays. By combining rigorous academic study with hands-on production experience, York's film program has shaped generations of filmmakers, critics and scholars. Many successful alumni continue to make their mark in the industry, a testament to the program's effectiveness.

"It's our communal campfire – the place we gather to share our stories," Greyson says.

But who was Nat Taylor? If you watched Canadian TV in the late '90s, you probably remember him from a Heritage Minute: at a smoky Ottawa movie theatre in 1957, a couple asks the owner when he's finally going to play the season's most anticipated movie, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. "Well, I'm still doing 50 per cent business with *Witness for the Prosecution*," he tells them. Meanwhile, his staff is besieged by calls from Columbia Pictures threatening that if the Elgin didn't take *Kwai* immediately, it would go to a competitor. Suddenly, the owner has an idea: why not play the older film in a smaller auditorium on neighbouring land, and the newer one in the larger house?

With this idea, the multiplex was born – and Taylor would continue to expand. Among his accomplishments, Taylor converted Toronto's historic (and now closed) Uptown Theatre from a single-screen movie palace to a bustling five-screen multiplex in 1969. Ten years later, he embarked on the paradigm-shifting, 18-screen movie theatre in Toronto's Eaton Centre shopping mall, which was the flagship theatre of the Cineplex Corporation. This chain, launched in partnership with producer Garth Drabinsky, now accounts for 75 per cent of Canadian box office sales.

Born in 1906 in Toronto, Taylor's entrepreneurial spirit was evident from an early age. As an adolescent, he sold ads for movie theatres on the back of postcards, and by his late teens was managing his father's College Street cinema. At age 28, he went into business for himself, opening 20th Century (Twinex) Theatres. The chain would grow to encompass 17 cinemas within the next decade, with Taylor soon overseeing many more after a partnership with Famous Players Canadian Corporation in 1941. Taylor even dabbled in filmmaking himself. As a producer, his most fondly remembered contribution to the art form is 1961's *The Mask*, a kitschy thriller film that notched several firsts: first Canadian horror





Nat Taylor (centre) and York University President Ian Macdonald (second from left), among others, cutting a film-strip ribbon to open the Nat Taylor Cinema, on Oct. 29, 1981

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF YORK UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, CLARA THOMAS ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Ten years later, he embarked on the paradigm-shifting, 18-screen movie theatre in Toronto's Eaton Centre shopping mall, which was the flagship theatre of the Cineplex Corporation

film; first Canadian 3D film; and first Canadian film of any genre to receive wide distribution in the United States.

Taylor received a barrister designation from Osgoode Hall in 1930 (Osgoode joined York University in 1968). On Oct. 29, 1981, Taylor was in attendance at York for the opening of the movie theatre he generously donated.

Over the years, the Nat Taylor Cinema has hosted events that enrich York's film students' education. From master classes with renowned filmmakers to exclusive screenings of cutting-edge works, the cinema bridges academic study and professional filmmaking. Its state-of-the-art projection capabilities let students study films in their intended format, from classic 35-mm prints to the latest digital technologies.

Given Taylor's legacy as the inventor of the multiplex, it's just a little ironic that the theatre that bears his name is a cozy, intimate, single-screen venue like the one he managed as a teenager. For generations of students, Taylor's gift has provided the unique opportunity to see films the way they were meant to be seen: with an audience, on the big screen. ●

— *With files from Deirdre Kelly*

NewsMaker

**The Globe and Mail's
Angela Pacienza
on rewriting
the future
of journalism**

**BY DAVID SILVERBERG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD**



Angela Pacienza at the Globe and Mail

ANGELA PACIENZA (BA '05) remembers what it felt like to chase stories across campus, juggling classes and late-night deadlines at *Excalibur*, York's student newspaper. Two decades later, she's still chasing stories – only now, the stakes are national, and the future of journalism is on the line.

As executive editor at the *Globe and Mail*, Pacienza moves through the King Street East newsroom with the same curiosity she brought to York, greeted by nods and quick smiles from colleagues who know the pressure and unpredictability of the job. There's camaraderie here, but everyone understands the business is tougher than ever.

The landscape she navigates today would have been unimaginable when she was gluing together pages at the student paper. The collapse of print, the flight of advertising to tech giants and the relentless churn of misinformation have left newsrooms smaller and audiences more skeptical. A recent Reuters Institute report found that just 14 per cent of Canadians now read a print-based news source, down from 33 per cent in 2017 – a stark measure of how quickly the ground has shifted.

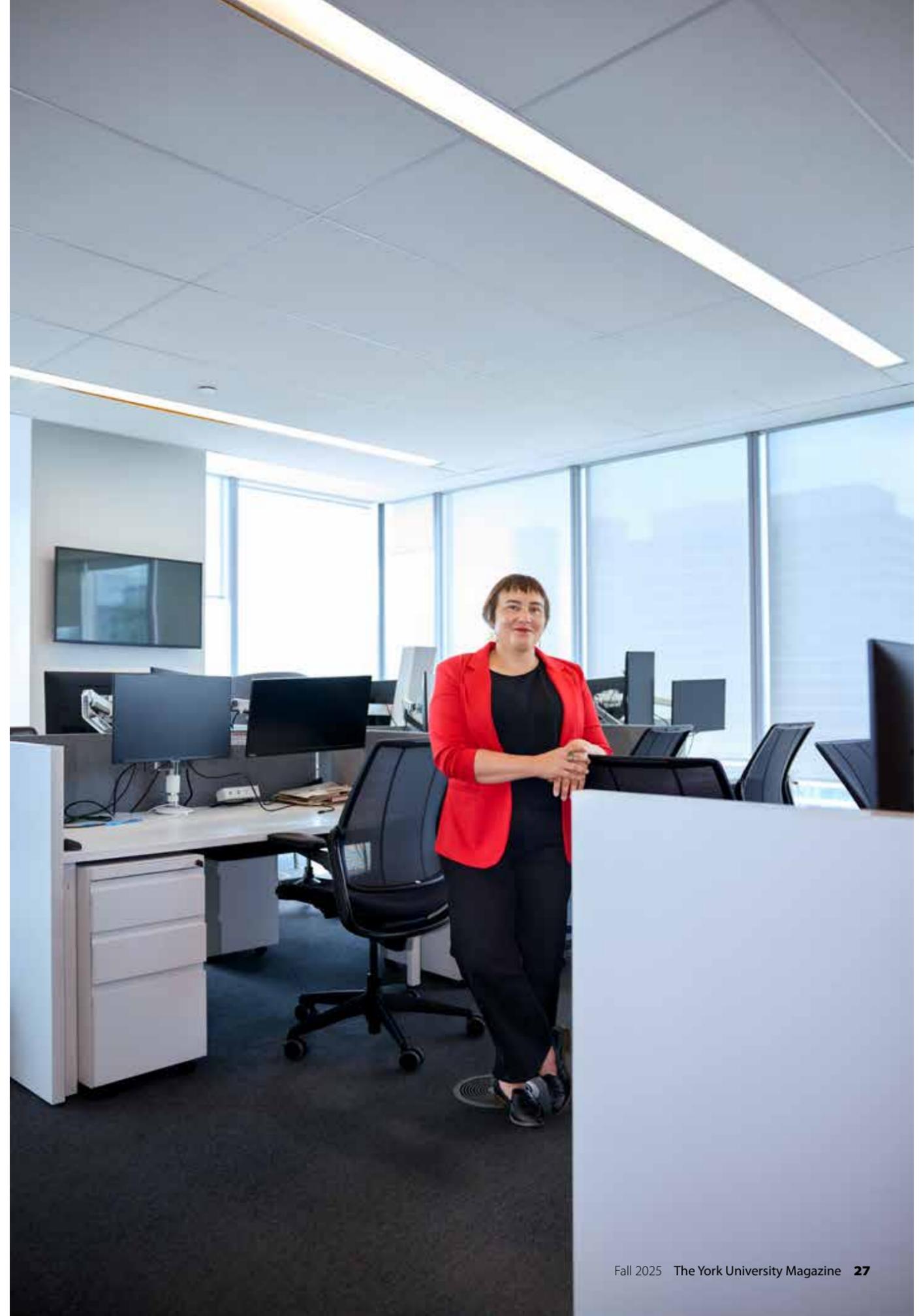
"Social media and their algorithms are built for entertainment purposes, and they do a great job at sucking people

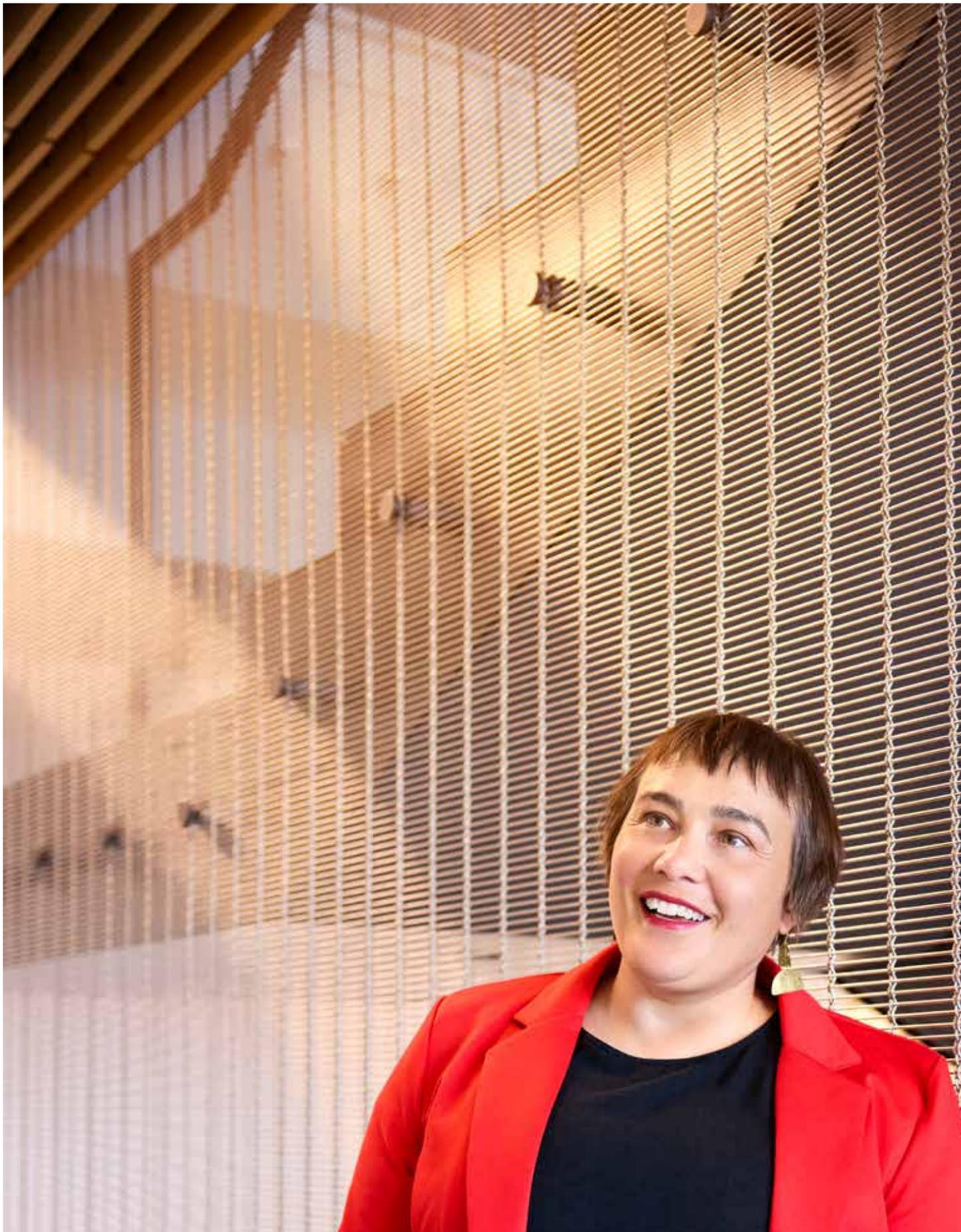
in," Pacienza says. "Their success proved that entertainment and dopamine hits are what make people feel good. And as an industry, we haven't always done a good job at meeting people where they are, but we're very strong at fact-based storytelling."

At the *Globe*, that means adapting – doubling the size of the health team, launching an "Ask the Doctor" column to answer questions about Ozempic or Lyme disease and investing in more life and culture coverage. "We are seeing readers return to us because social media networks don't often give people what they need, and they might not be sure if they're actually getting sound advice on areas like personal finance. That's why our business reporters help make sense of the world, and offer information to readers that isn't pumped out by an AI technology. Half the stuff on TikTok isn't even true, but at the *Globe*, stories based on truth and science are what we do."

Pacienza's leadership is practical and forward-looking. She's quick to remind her team – and the next generation – that the core of journalism hasn't changed. "I tell J-school graduates that the way we deliver our journalism may have changed, but the craft itself isn't different. You're still interviewing people and telling stories. You still have to be a strong storyteller. We are curious about the world, we are constantly

**Social media and their algorithms
are built for entertainment purposes,
and they do a great job at sucking people in.
Their success proved that entertainment
and dopamine hits
are what make people feel good**





**There is a lot of war and bad news,
but also there is good news out there,
which is why we've invested in
doing more solutions-based journalism**

asking questions and there are opportunities for journalists to help answer those questions.”

She's also realistic about the challenges. “What needs to be done is ensuring our journalists meet folks where they are, and address what they are worrying about. There is a lot of war and bad news, but also there is good news out there, which is why we've invested in doing more solutions-based journalism.” The Globe's new “Mastering It” series profiles Canadians excelling at their craft – like the world's top female lawn bowler – offering readers a sense of possibility alongside the headlines.

Pacienza was drawn to journalism as a child, watching her mother battle a serious illness and feeling compelled to dig for answers. That instinct to research, question and explain shaped her time at York and propelled her through a career that included pioneering digital news at the Canadian Press before joining the Globe in 2012. By her side through it all has been her husband, Derek Chezzi (BA '03), whom she met when both were undergrads at York; he now teaches journalism at Centennial College. Together, they have two children.

Inside the newsroom, Pacienza is known for her approachability and the respect she shows her team, even as she pushes for innovation. Melissa Stasiuk, now head of experience at the Globe, credits Pacienza for helping the newsroom adapt to new challenges. She recalls a time when Pacienza organized a day-long meeting for the life and culture team, giving everyone space to connect and share their goals. “Angela

helped us build an understanding of how everyone can work together and leverage resources across the newsroom to create the strongest journalism,” Stasiuk says. “You could feel the positive energy and excitement in the room.”

Pacienza is also a champion for young journalists, especially those who come up through student media. “When I see a young applicant's CV mention they were a news editor at their student paper, I know that is someone that cares deeply about media and that they got the best training possible. That kind of student-newspaper training is valuable, and sometimes those writers want it twice as much. Why? Because they are also getting other degrees, say in political science or English, and they are doing journalism at the same time, so they are curious and passionate, and those are people we want in our newsrooms.”

For Pacienza, that passion and curiosity are essential as journalism faces an uncertain future. “As the net becomes more like a garbage dump, places like the Globe become an alternative for readers to find out what exactly is true, to read stories from reputable writers.” For her, journalism's future isn't about nostalgia for what's been lost, but about building trust and relevance for what comes next.

“I like learning about new things every single day,” she says. “I love being able to shape what we should care about, and bring forward stories that reveal something essential about Canada.” ●

— *With files from Deirdre Kelly*

CLOSING THE JUSTICE GAP

WHEN NAA ODE LANSANA (JD '21) walked into the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic in downtown Toronto, she didn't just gain legal experience – she learned how to listen. "When you're approaching a client through a trauma-informed lens, you hear their stories differently," she says. "You listen for what's unsaid, rather than rushing to ask them to tell their story."

FOR LANSANA and other Osgoode Hall Law School students, the clinic offers more than hands-on training – it's a transformative experience. As part of the Feminist Advocacy: Ending Violence Against Women Clinical Program, students spend a year working directly with survivors of violence, many of whom face barriers related to race, gender, immigration status or socioeconomic circumstances.

BY CAROLYN GRUSKE ● PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

Osgoode's Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic provides legal services to survivors of domestic violence



Naa Ode Lansana

The program not only equips students with practical legal skills, but also instils empathy and a deeper understanding of justice.

The Barbra Schlifer Clinic was founded in memory of a young lawyer who was tragically murdered on the day she was called to the bar. Today, it provides free legal services to marginalized women and gender-diverse people dealing with family, criminal and immigration law matters. The clinic also fills critical social service gaps by helping clients access housing, mental health support and translation services.

In 2017, Osgoode Professor Janet Mosher launched the

words have weight,” she says. “Whether it’s writing legal documents or filling out forms for compensation boards, you’re shaping someone’s story, and that has real consequences.”

Soliyana Yared (JD ’24), who worked at the clinic before articling at an immigration law firm, created resources for self-represented litigants during her placement. She wrote guides explaining court forms and processes – tools that empower individuals who can’t afford legal representation.

Yared also conducted research on anti-SLAPP (strategic lawsuit against public participation) laws and their impact on survivors of intimate partner violence. Her paper

You listen for what’s unsaid, rather than rushing to ask them to tell their story

Feminist Advocacy program in partnership with the clinic. Each year, 12 to 14 second-year law students are selected for this intensive elective course. They spend one day a week at the clinic working alongside mentors and another day in seminars exploring feminist legal theory and trauma-informed lawyering.

“The idea is to expose students to the gap between ‘law on the books’ and ‘law on the street,’” explains Sonia Lawrence, a professor at Osgoode and co-academic director of the program. “It’s about understanding how systems don’t always work as they should, or how they can be incredibly difficult for people to navigate.”

At its core, the program is client-driven. Students quickly learn that justice isn’t always about what they think is right – it’s about what their clients need. For example, in cases of intimate partner violence, students may assume leaving an abusive partner is the best course of action. But socioeconomic or immigration factors often make that impossible.

“The ethos of the clinic is about following the client’s lead,” Lawrence says. “Sometimes that means waiting until they’re ready – or realizing they may not want what you think they should.”

This approach is rooted in trauma-informed lawyering, which emphasizes empathy and avoids victim-blaming. Students learn how to reduce clients’ anxieties about legal processes while acknowledging their trauma. It’s a lesson that stays with them long after graduation.

For Lansana, who now practises family and civil litigation in Toronto, this training was invaluable. “You realize your

was accepted for publication in the *University of Toronto Journal of Law and Equality*. “The skills I developed at the clinic apply far beyond family-violence law,” she says. “They’ve shaped how I approach my career.”

The program isn’t just about teaching marketable skills – it’s about fostering reflection and growth. Twice each semester, students participate in rounds inspired by medical school practices. These sessions allow them to discuss challenges, share insights and connect their practical work with academic learning.

“We want students to reflect on what they’re learning,” Lawrence says. “How do these experiences shape their understanding of justice? How do they integrate this knowledge into their broader education?”

As beneficial as the program is for its graduates, Lawrence says there are no plans to expand it or offer it to a wider number of students, partly due to the costs of running the program for both York and the clinic.

York, she adds, directs funding, including donations, to experiential learning partners such as the Schlifer Clinic, and the clinic, which also accepts donations, is managed in “an incredibly dynamic and creative way because it has to hustle resources all the time.”

For many students, working at the Barbra Schlifer Clinic leaves an indelible mark, not just on their careers, but on their understanding of advocacy and justice.

“It changed how I see my role as a lawyer,” Lansana says. “It’s not just about knowing the law – it’s about understanding people.” ●

Alumni



Beyond Beatlemania

How Jerry Levitan turned a chance encounter with John Lennon into his own revolution

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

JERRY LEVITAN (BA '76, LLB '79) is 71, and he's still trying to explain something that happened more than five decades ago. We're sitting in a quiet Toronto cafe. His hands are moving before his words come out, small, involuntary gestures, as if the story is impatient to escape.

"Every sinew of my body was electrified," he says, then laughs, one part self-mockery, one part awe. "I know how that sounds. But I was 14. And there he was."

Levitan is a lawyer, actor, children's entertainer, *Toronto Star* columnist, Emmy winner and one of those rare people who can say he spent half an hour talking to John Lennon alone about world peace. He has been living, and reliving, that instant ever since. Not the version everyone knows: the book deal, the media appearances, the Oscar-nominated film. The real version: the moment you decide, from someplace so deep you can't even name it, that you want to construct a life worthy of that kind of lightning strike. Or at least, not be solely defined by it.

It began, as Levitan says, with an obsession that would reshape everything. "Early on, I developed a passionate identification with John," he reflects, settling back in his chair. "I could never have predicted where that passion would eventually take me."

He was never an ordinary 14-year-old.

While other kids just screamed at Beatles concerts, Levitan was determined to actually meet one. Nursing a now luke-warm coffee, he proceeds to tell how.

Born and raised in Toronto, the son of a Holocaust survivor who worked in a kosher butcher shop at Bathurst and Eglinton, he had heard a rumour on CHUM radio that a Beatle and his wife had been spied at the airport, likely heading for the city. The self-declared Beatlemaniac then went into determined detective work, intent on finding the truth, along with his idol.

On the morning of May 26, 1969, he dialed up every downtown luxury hotel he could think of until the concierge at the stately King Edward hung up hard enough to give him hope. Changing into the purple double-breasted jacket he had worn to his sister's wedding, a Brownie camera dangling from his neck, he skipped class at Dufferin Heights Middle School to jump

on a bus from his home in north Toronto to the hotel's King Street location.

Once there, he searched frantically floor by floor for where John and Yoko were staying en route to their Montreal bed-in for peace. He came close to getting caught by security when a kindly white-haired maid took pity on him and pointed him in the right direction. Knocking on the door of room 869 – the same suite where the Beatles themselves had stayed when they played Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens in '64, '65 and '66 – Levitan invented "Canadian News" on the spot and let it unlock his destiny.

A contraband copy of *Two Virgins* – showing John and Yoko buck-naked on both front and back cover – in his hands, Levitan instantly captured Lennon's eye. "How did you get that?" John asked in his Liverpoolian drawl. "I thought the Mounties had come in on horses and took them all away."

After explaining how he had brazenly rescued a copy from the recall box at Sam the Record Man before police could confiscate it, John was duly impressed. He enthusiastically autographed a corner of Levitan's coveted copy of the album, adding a whimsical line drawing of himself with Yoko – naked again. Yoko signed it, too. Years later, she would happily recall the moment: "I remember fondly, how young Jerry came to us and did the interview, when so many journalists were trying to speak to us. He was not only brave, but very clear and intelligent. Both John and I thought it was a very pleasant experience." So pleasant, in fact, John insisted he come back for a second round.

Later that same day, armed with a reel-to-reel tape recorder he had begged, cajoled and ultimately received on loan from the astonished DJs at CHUM, Levitan returned to the King Eddie. Sitting inches from John, he queried him about the *White Album*, his fellow Beatles, his peace activism and his recent drug bust, which had made him *persona non grata* south of the border.

"Like a lot of people don't want me in, you know; they think I'm gonna cause a violent revolution, which I'm not. And the others don't want me in 'cause they don't want me to cause peace either. War is big business, you know, and they like war 'cause it keeps them fat and happy and I'm anti-war so they're trying to keep me out. But I'll get in," Lennon continued, "cause they'll have to own up in public that they're against peace."

After that life-altering meeting, the world felt restless in a new way. The tape came home with Levitan as proof. The voice of Lennon, patient, amused, philosophical, became a kind of haunting. It would stay with him the rest of his life.

But what next? He'd had a brush with fame – more than that, he had sat eyeball-to-eyeball with John Lennon, a freaking Beatle! He wanted that moment to mean something on a stage whose scale he couldn't yet imagine. He knew he wasn't going to be a rock star, but he thought of another way to create a sensation.

"I thought after that, I should go into journalism, because I scored probably one of the hottest interviews you could possibly get," Levitan says. But he had another idol besides Lennon – a charismatic law professor-turned-politician-turned-prime minister named Pierre Elliott Trudeau. He asked himself, "Should I be a journalist? Or should I go into politics one day, like my hero?"

To answer that question, Levitan went to York University at a time when it was newly vibrant, conceived as an alternative institution that attracted draft dodgers, avant-garde artists and bold thinkers: politics in the cafeteria, protests clattering down the concrete hallways, professors who encouraged argument rather than obedience. For a young idealist who would brook no obstacles, York was a perfect fit, testing how far nerve and bold inquiry could take you. As an undergraduate, Levitan studied political science, then law at Osgoode Hall where he recalls performing in the annual mock trial and getting a D on his trust law exam. But that didn't stop him.

Once he earned his degree, Levitan launched into a career as unconventional as his teenage exploits. He became a precedent-setting liquor licensing lawyer – Ontario's go-to advocate in battles that blurred the line between culture and commerce. As Sir Jerry, he embraced the wild joys of children's entertainment, creating full-band shows that made music for kids as serious as anything made for adults, while raising children of his own. He played small clubs and fancy halls. He walked TV sets (you can find him on reruns of *The West Wing*). He lectured on constitutional law. His boyhood crush became a lifelong love affair with risk, with creativity, with what it means to keep moving forward.

Decades after that first tape, Levitan found it again. The

I thought after that, I should go into journalism, because I scored probably one of the hottest interviews you could possibly get

voices were unchanged, his and Lennon's, twined together across the years. He wanted to share it with the world. Working with animator Josh Raskin (nephew of former Faculty of Education Dean Paul Axelrod) and illustrator James Braithwaite, he brought *I Met the Walrus* into being – a

five-minute animated film that earned an Academy Award nomination in 2008, won a Daytime Emmy in 2009 and was selected for the inaugural YouTube Play Biennial at the Guggenheim Museum in 2010, letting a new generation listen in on their shared longing for a better world.

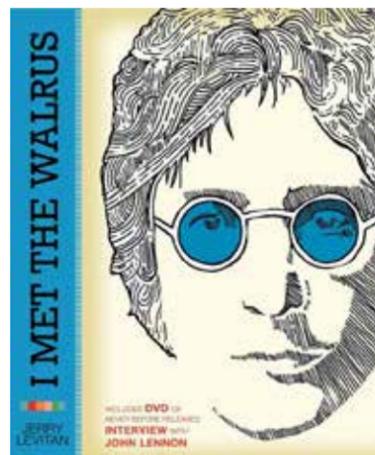
"Honestly, that's one of my favourite interviews of dad, even without the animation, because it's so candid and so relaxed, and it's really clear that he's in a certain mood because he's speaking to you – and he's speaking to a kid – so there's nothing performative about it," Sean Ono Lennon – John and Yoko's only child – said in a subsequent interview. "He doesn't feel like he's trying to be Beatle John or deep thinker John or anything – it just seems like he's talking to a kid and he sincerely wants to tell you things that are important and he's doing it in such an unguarded way."

In the pandemic, Levitan and Ono Lennon wove something entirely new: *I Am the Egbert*, a groundbreaking series of short films that trace one man's journey from birth to death. Created for the 50th anniversary of *Plastic Ono Band*, the project pioneered a new use of Spotify Canvas technology, telling a complete narrative through short visual loops – the first time the medium had been used this way. Set against the raw emotions of Lennon's 1970 album tracks and his chart-topping solo anthems "Instant Karma!" and "Give Peace a Chance," each three- to eight-second loop stands alone while contributing to a larger story that mirrors the album's emotional arc.

With such ongoing creative endeavours, Levitan remains plugged into what's relevant in culture today. It's why he is now an in-demand speaker, sought not out of nostalgia, but for his shrewd sense of how celebrity and politics intersect, and what can be done to shape a better future.

"I have a lot to contribute," he says, not in the manner of a boast, but as a vow, his voice carrying just enough of that old teenage chutzpah to remind you that some doors, once opened, lead to others yet to be discovered.

— *With files from John Lorinc*



Classes

1970

BULGER, JOHN
(PhD '70, EXPERIMENTAL SPACE SCIENCE)
John and his wife, Judith Alexander, moved to Calgary in 1998. This past June, he received a bachelor of arts degree in history from the University of Calgary, where he previously received a BA in music. He retired in 2008 after serving two terms as a commissioner at the National Energy Board.

1971

KAY, ROBERT
(JD '71, LLB '71)
Robert is currently chairman of the advisory board at the Migao Group and chairman emeritus at Baycrest Hospital and Apotex Long-Term Care Residence. He is a former deputy judge at the Superior Court of Justice of Ontario. Earlier in his career, he was personal assistant to the deputy prime minister of Canada. He has served as a corporate director in both privately held and publicly listed companies and is a long-standing member of the Institute of Corporate Directors.



1982

GRANT, MARY ANN
(BA '82, SOCIOLOGY)
Mary worked in marketing for Imperial Oil in Toronto for 26 years. Toward the end of her career, she became a marketing co-ordinator at the Convenience Retailing group. She retired in 2009 and currently volunteers at the Orillia Museum of Art and History where she writes about local Orillia history and handles publicity and co-ordination for their History Speaker Series.

ELLIOTT, STEVEN
(BA '82, GEOGRAPHY, BA '84, GEOGRAPHY & URBAN STUDIES)
Steven's career has lasted almost four decades across a variety of different industries and fields. Recently, he has written a book about 1970s and 1980s pop music, entitled *A 45 R P aMble On A Flat Foot*. The book covers the basics of the structure and sound of music, the history of radio and charts, the visual aspect of labels and sleeves and the art of collecting records, specifically 45s.

1989

MOORE, PATRICK
(BFA '89, MUSIC)
Patrick worked as a camera operator and video operator with TSN, CTV National News and CTV local news in Toronto. His broadcast career took him across the globe. In 1999, he worked as a script editor in Beijing at China Central Television and worked at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver and the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. He has now recently retired from his broadcasting career.



1993

ZEMANS, ADAM
(MA '93, SOCIOLOGY)
Adam married Gina Cos Santiesteban on March 25, 2025, and is now a dad to two young men, two new stepdaughters and a step-granddaughter. He is based in Blue Hill, Maine, and hopes to have his new wife by his side soon, in the United States or Atlantic Canada.

2003

BLAIR, BEVERLEY
(BScN '03, NURSING)
Since graduating from York, Beverley received a master's in nursing (MSN) degree, master's in business administration (MBA) from the University of Phoenix and a Doctor of Nursing (DN) Practice.

REHAN SIDDIQUI



2004

DOUGLAS, STACY
(BA '04, WOMEN'S STUDIES, ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES)
Stacy had an art installation at the 2025 Berlin Biennale, which opened on June 14. She is a former member of Vanier College Productions and the Vanier Improv Company. While studying at York, she was a residence don and was a winner of the Residence Life Award of Winter's College.

STACY DOUGLAS



2013

SIDDIQUI, REHAN
(MSc '13, PhD '17, PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY)
Rehan worked as a contract faculty and research associate at York. Currently, he is a professor at Epic College of Technology and executive director at Epic Climate Green. He also volunteers as a director at the Career Advisory Network. In 2024, he was reappointed as a part-time member of the Council of the College of Dental Technologists of Ontario.

2020

AMALATHAS, MARY
(BA '20, HEALTH AND SOCIETY)
After graduation, Mary was hired for her first full-time permanent job at York University where she has worked for the past five years. She completed a certificate in human resources and is currently taking courses to pursue further education.

2021

BLACKWOOD, YVONNE
(BA '21, ENGLISH)
Since graduation, Yvonne published a memoir, *College Life of a Retired Senior: A Memoir of Perseverance, Faith, and Finding the Way*, sharing the story of her university life as a senior citizen and the obstacles and challenges she overcame. In 2024, she published her debut novel, *The Ambition*, a cat-and-mouse thriller set in Toronto.



2023

SHAW, ABHRAJIT
(MF '23, FINANCE)
Abhrajit has held senior finance roles in India, Singapore and Canada. Currently, he is senior assistant director of finance at Marriott International in Calgary, where he was recognized in 2025 as Marriott's Best New Talent in Finance across Canada – an award that celebrates the company's most promising finance leaders.

2024

QITA, ABEER
(LLM '25, CANADIAN COMMON LAW)
Since graduation, Abeer has been actively advancing her legal career. She completed a second master's degree in international business law and enrolled in the Law Practice Program at Toronto Metropolitan University, where she began her articling placement in August. She has been actively involved in advocacy and mentorship for immigrant and newcomer communities. Currently, she is in the process of becoming licensed with the Law Society of Ontario.

Want to be in Classes?

Send us your photos and news.
Email us at magnotes@yorku.ca



Flashback



Have a great photo from your days at York?

Email us at magnotes@yorku.ca

THIS PHOTO OF ME with the Stax Records box set – assembled after years of research into the label’s history – was taken at York’s Keele Campus, where I set out, as a student and later as a professor, to prove that rock, soul and R & B deserve the same respect as any symphony. When I began teaching at the University in 1979, I argued that listening to popular music meant listening to the world: its struggles, triumphs and changing values.

Years later, my research into Stax Records – the Memphis label that launched Otis Redding and Isaac Hayes, and brought Black and white musicians together in defiance of racism and segregation in the American South – earned me a 1996 Grammy for a 10-disc box set. York gave me the freedom to treat music

as a lens on society, a habit that has shaped every project since.

This year, two documentaries based on my work received Peabody Awards. My new book on Muscle Shoals, Ala., due this fall, draws on material I developed teaching graduate courses in popular music and African American music. In November, more than 100 essays I wrote on Muscle Shoals will anchor a six-month exhibition at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville.

None of these undertakings would sound the same without the perspective I first sharpened at York, where listening was never just about the notes – it was about everything the music dared to say.

— *Rob Bowman (BA '78, MFA '82)*

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF YORK UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, CLARA THOMAS ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

**RIGHT
THE
FUTURE™**

Amazing things happen when diverse communities work together to tackle world issues. When our students apply their knowledge, they have the power to make things right.

Join us in creating positive change.
yorku.ca/rightthefuture

YORK
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

The **York University** Magazine

Subscribe!

JUST GO TO
yorku.ca/magsubscribe

Sign up and receive three digital issues a year of York University's award-winning magazine on your phone, tablet or desktop.

Stay in touch to enjoy more news, features, alumni stories, and our latest updates!

**Digital.
Anytime.
Anywhere.**

