



# THE POWER OF PRINT

Alumni magazines are surviving and thriving in the digital age

BY MEREDITH BARNETT

In 2010, career journalist Maria Henson headed back after time away volunteering in Botswana to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, U.S., to take the helm at Wake Forest University's magazine.

But leading her alma mater's flagship publication at the height of the Great Recession wasn't going to be simple. The budget for the magazine's four issues a year was miniscule; the paper stock flimsy; the content inwardly focused.

This was a time when plenty of higher education leaders were taking stock of their print publications: In an increasingly digital age, did it make sense to continue producing a pricey, labor-intensive print magazine at all?

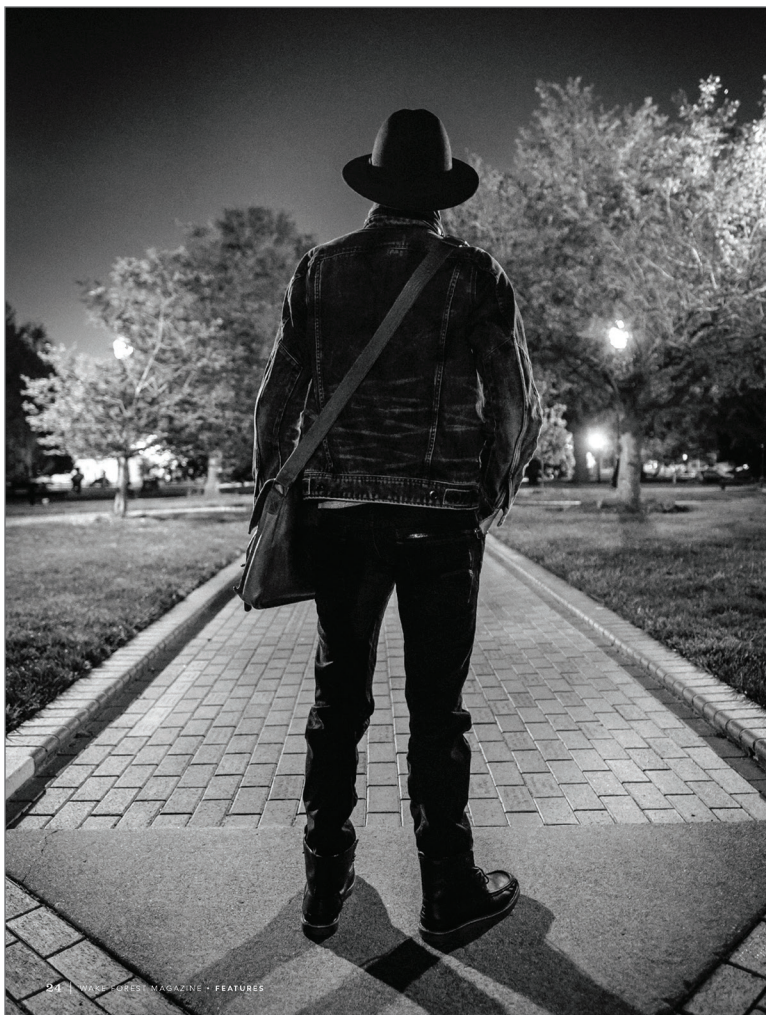
Instead of cutting down the magazine or going digital only, Henson took

the opposite road. Armed with reader surveys and leadership support, she and her team deepened and expanded the print magazine.

"We wanted the magazine to be considered a gift," she says.

In 2011, Henson and her staff phased in a revitalized *Wake Forest Magazine* with heavier paper, storytelling for and about alumni, and a fresh nameplate. Readers raved. And now, nearly a decade later, *Wake Forest Magazine*, published three times a year, has risen to be the gold standard in higher education publishing, earning CASE's 2019 Robert Sibley Magazine of the Year Award.

Print is alive and well, and even—as Wake Forest's magazine journey demonstrates—thriving. Alumni and school magazines have stayed relevant and



24 | WAKE FOREST MAGAZINE • FEATURES

# WALKING

How Wubetu Shimelash,

# WITH

a shepherd boy from the wilderness of Ethiopia,

made his way to Wake Forest, and, yes,

# THE

# HOPE

shoes had something to do with it.

**By Maria Henson ('S2)**

Photography on campus by **KEN BENNETT** and in Ethiopia by **MARIA HENSON ('82)**

FALL 2018 | 2

resonant with audiences even in the digital era by leveraging the strengths of print and strategically grappling with its challenges.

## Print Preferences

Colleges published the first alumni magazines in the 1890s, but by the 2000s, the landscape for print had changed. As newspapers and magazines outside education shuttered in the 2010s amid dwindling ad revenue and the rise of digital media, university magazines scaled new digital frontiers. In 2011, Loyola Marymount University launched the first iPad version of a higher education magazine; some magazines replaced print with digital versions or went online only.

But readers never stopped preferring print magazines. Magazine readership has been on the rise since 2012, according to MPA—The Association of Magazine Media's 2019 *MPA Magazine Media Factbook*, and 73% of adults say they

enjoy reading a print magazine more than reading on an electronic device.

Though outside of education, many print publications have foundered, data indicate that for alumni and school magazines, print remains powerful. According to CASE's Alumni Magazine Readership Survey, a tool for institutions to survey readers, magazines are historically the primary source of institutional information for alumni, over email, web, or word of mouth. Since 2016, more than 80% of the 91,000 alumni surveyed by 176 institutions said they read all or most magazine issues. Seventy percent of readers say they prefer to read in print, while 11% prefer online and 18% want both.

Despite its benefits, digital has drawbacks for publications. It's a crowded space, with tweets, alerts, and emails all vying for readers' attention—and it may not be where readers want to see stories about their alma maters. A quarter of readers say they're "not at all likely" to

view additional magazine content online, according to CASE's Magazine Survey; only 10% are "very likely to."

A well-crafted magazine delivers a unique experience, says Henson. "People are so intent on monitoring [their] devices all the time that it gives people a pause, a serenity, to pick up something that's real and tangible, that's been crafted with care," she says.

Still, though they're popular, magazines are expensive and time-consuming to create. The strongest magazines deliver return on investment by playing to the three advantages of print: conveying value, delivering a physical experience, and facilitating profound storytelling.

## Quality and Value

Viewpoint School's magazine is a window into a thriving learning ecosystem. In 2019, students at the bustling Calabasas, California, independent school have 3D-printed rainforest fauna, performed





**EYE-CATCHING DESIGN:**  
Photography and design  
are key in *Wake Forest  
Magazine* (left) and *View-  
point* (right).

**Alumni and school  
magazines have stayed  
relevant and resonant  
with audiences even in  
the digital era.**

*Seussical*, created museum-quality artwork, and more. It was no small feat to capture all of that in the K-12 school's 72-page magazine, *Viewpoint*, says Monica Case, associate director of communications. The twice-a-year publication (a gold Circle of Excellence Award recipient) paints a full picture of school life.

"My job is to encourage people to want to come here but also to remind current families of why they continue to make this investment each year," says Case. "It's meant to welcome people in and remind them why they're here."

*Viewpoint* underlines a key strength of print: It conveys value. Print magazines can highlight the quality of a place—essential for engaging alumni, appealing to prospective families, and encouraging donors.

"Print is a luxury item," points out Teresa Scalzo, director of creative strategy and editor of Carleton College's *Voice* in Minnesota. Like *Viewpoint*, the quarterly

48-page *Voice* delivers an immersive reading experience with heft. Every cover, for instance, has a tactile element: For the spring 2018 cover with a green video game controller, Scalzo applied a varnish so that the controller on the cover felt like plastic.

"Our printed materials very much have to reflect Carleton as a place of value," says Scalzo. "Everything we produce needs to reflect that notion of a top-tier liberal arts college and a place of quality."

### **Dynamic Design**

In a print magazine, photography and design can take center stage and draw in readers. Take *Oberlin Conservatory Magazine*, an annual publication that celebrates the visual as much as the aural. Its 55,000 readers received the June 2018 issue with a dramatic blue cover photo of musician Sonny Rollins's 1968 saxophone, a gift to the Ohio music college. The next two pages featured a photo of three elementary students touching a violin.





### Believe it or non?

You might believe a fact is always a fact, no matter which language you say it in. But new research by Manchester scientists demonstrated that people who are bilingual are more likely to accept a fact in their first language, and more likely to deny it in the other—even though they know it was true. C: best incredible, right? well?

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8 TUESDAY

9 WEDNESDAY

10 THURSDAY

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## Print's Charming

### Magazines aren't all that's fit to print

The value of print extends beyond magazines. Higher education institutions continue to appeal to alumni, students, donors, and volunteers by way of colorful and creative printed materials.

"In a way, print has become more special now that digital has taken over," says Lisa Burke, senior associate director, advancement communications, at Princeton University in New Jersey, U.S. "It makes you stop and look. It's something you can touch and feel and really take a moment to look at."

A variety of CASE's Circle of Excellence winners did something special with tangible, printed items. In the category of fundraising publication packages, the **University of Manchester, U.K., took home Grand Gold honors for its diary/planner**, which highlighted the institution's expertise via fast facts and quirky artwork. Part of the **College of William & Mary's bronze-winning Women's Weekend** submission was a coloring journal that featured specially designed images of the Virginia campus.

**Princeton won a gold award for a set of notecards for advancement volunteers.** Each card featured a different image of a tiger (Princeton's mascot), taken from the university's Cotsen Children's Library collection. Lloyd E. Cotsen, an alumnus, emeritus trustee, and donor who established his namesake library, died not long before the cards were conceived. But the cards went beyond paying tribute to Cotsen.

"I thought of it as an opportunity to thank these volunteers but also to highlight some of

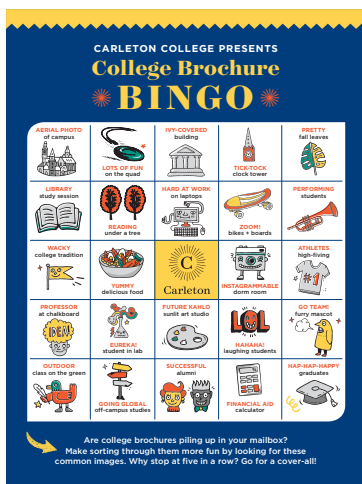
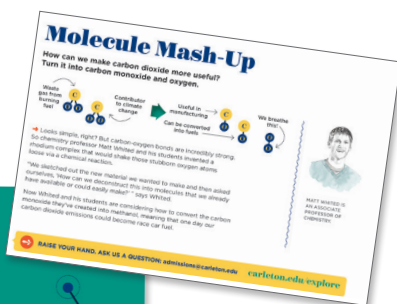
the resources at Princeton, to showcase something that people may not see on an ordinary visit to campus," Burke says. "It's a way of sharing with the volunteers that, 'You helped do this, you help make Princeton special.'"

**Carleton College emphasized its own special qualities with two silver-winning entries**, each a collaboration between the communications and admissions teams—led by Teresa Scalzo, director of creative strategy, and Jaime Anthony, senior associate dean of admissions. The Northfield, Minnesota, institution appealed to potential students with an eye-catching **set of teacher cards**, which introduced faculty members and their expertise.

"To the degree that it's possible with print, we wanted to encourage interactivity," Scalzo says. "You can't help but interact with this piece: You open the box and remove the cards, and then, the quality of the illustration and the content invites you to interact with them further."

According to Scalzo, almost 22% of students who received the cards applied to Carleton, compared with 4% who got the old materials. The college took a more humorous approach to a single-page publication, the **Search Bingo Mailer**, which allowed applicants to make a game out of the stereotypical images within university outreach materials.

"Our research has revealed pretty consistently that students and their families still rely on print materials to learn about and engage with colleges," Scalzo says. "That's why we don't shy away from featuring high-quality photography and illustration; a sense of humor in our writing; and beautiful design, paper, and printing." **BRYAN WAWZENEK**





#### FAST >> FORWARD

Remember wrestling pixels on these bad boys? Makes you wonder how soon VR headsets will seem as quaint. Gaming isn't the only thing that's changed at Carleton.  
SEE PAGE 10

#### TACTILE EXPERIENCE:

Carleton College's *Voice* used a special varnish on this cover to make the controller feel like plastic.

For that image, Director of Conservatory Communications Cathy Partlow Strauss sent two photographers running through a crowd of 900 kids as 12 college music students explained how their instruments worked. This spread, she says, “draws people into this world.”

“We prioritize big, splashy photos. We try to find something that’s the best photo from, say, an opera program or a stage production that’s extraordinary or incredibly intimate,” she says.

Interesting design is essential to intrigue readers who could be, say, perusing *The New Yorker* or watching Netflix, says Lisa Cook, an associate director of communications at University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, which publishes its magazine *New Trail* three times a year. When *New Trail* retooled its editorial strategy seven years ago, it prioritized design, relying on “more, bigger, better art to attract readers,” Cook says.

For instance, the winter 2018

“How-To Issue” featured peppy, light-hearted cartoons. In its autumn issue, *New Trail* illustrated a cover story on dementia with a striking photo illustration of a man set adrift on a canoe. (Both won Circle of Excellence Awards.)

“For the cover of an alumni magazine, it’s almost more important for us to catch the reader’s eyes than a newsstand magazine,” Cook says.

#### Immersive Storytelling

A print magazine gives institutions an opportunity to showcase compelling stories. At Wake Forest, that entails crafting stories that inform, delight, and affirm the university’s motto, *Pro Humanitate*—serving humanity. Tracking down one such tale took Henson to Ethiopia’s Simien Mountains. To chronicle Wubetu Shimelash’s journey from shepherd to communications student at Wake Forest, Henson rode a mule to Shimelash’s home village, where a chance childhood

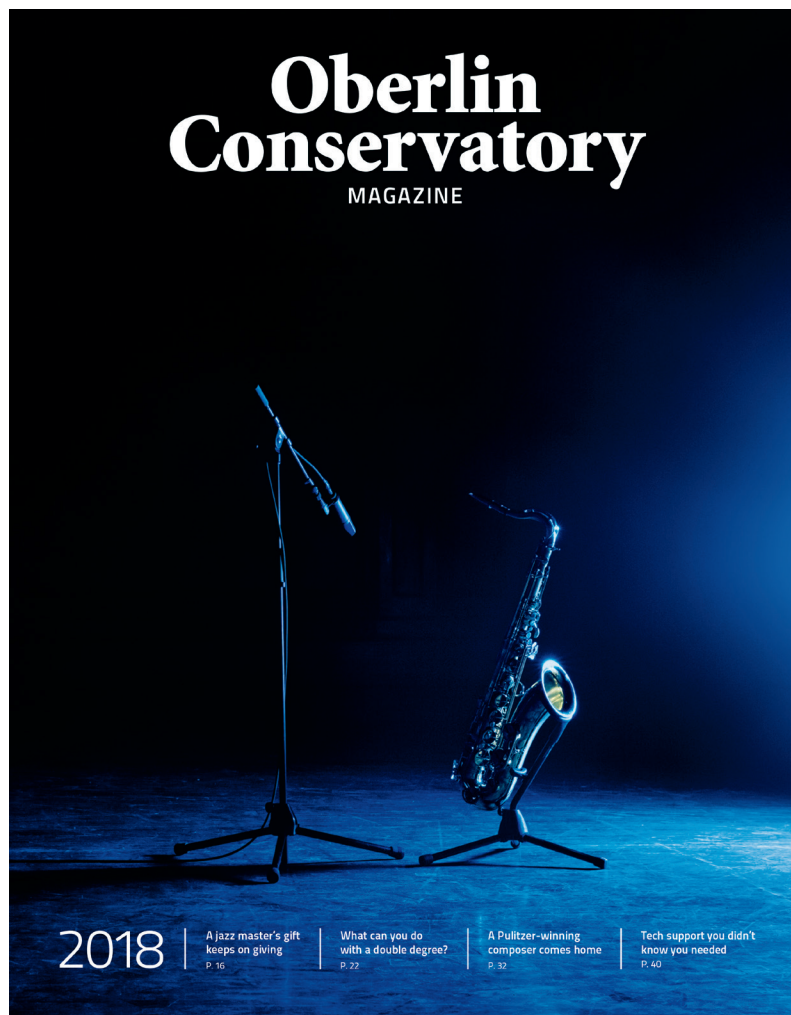
encounter put him on the road to a U.S. education.

“We can be storytellers and, in tandem, reinforce the university’s mission,” Henson says. “It’s a natural way we can highlight the great works of alumni, and faculty, in the world.”

Print is where readers seek long-form reading: According to the 2019 *MPA Magazine Media Factbook*, readers are more focused, have higher comprehension and recall, and feel more sensory engagement when they read print magazines than when they read digital magazines.

Lethbridge College, Canada’s first publicly funded community college, has used its Circle of Excellence Award-winning magazine *Wider Horizons* to tackle ambitious stories deeply tied to its region, from first-person accounts from indigenous women to recipes from the school’s culinary program kitchens. For a feature on the opioid crisis—an idea pitched by an alumnus—Editor Lisa Kozleski

**BLUE NOTES:** *Oberlin Conservatory Magazine* featured musician Sonny Rollins' saxophone on a bold cover.



collaborated on a joint story with the provincial health region's magazine, which had the funding for additional photography and reporting.

"Here's something that's happening in Canada and in our community," she says. "Readers got to hear from real people, our graduates, and see how their lives have changed."

### Building Bonds

Print is powerful in measurable ways. CASE's Alumni Magazine Readership Survey indicates that audiences are likely to take key, quantifiable actions after exploring an institution's magazine: More than a third of readers say they discuss an issue with or recommend the institution to friends or family. More than 34% say they attend an event as a result of reading, and 28% of readers say they've made a gift after reading the magazine.

Beyond that, magazine devotees say that print pieces build personal,

emotional, long-term bonds with an institution—and data reflect that. Eighty-three percent of readers agree or strongly agree that their magazine strengthens their ties to their institution, according to CASE's magazine survey.

How? Magazines can help readers reconnect with their college or school experiences. *Aiglon Magazine*, the twice-yearly publication for Aiglon College, seeks out stories that "aim to connect in shared experiences," Valerie Scullion says.

"Readers share a common bond in their shared Aiglon experience," says Scullion, director of admissions and marketing at the Chesières, Switzerland, boarding school. "The 'voice' of the magazine is family: speaking to people we know and reminiscing."

Similarly, when the University of Alberta revisited the mission of its magazine a few years ago, its magazine team realized that *New Trail* can reawaken the student within each reader.

"Once you leave the university you don't stop being a learner who wants to be inspired; you just don't have the time and access anymore," says University of Alberta's Cook. "So we figure that three times a year, *New Trail* comes in your mailbox and you get to be that person again."

### Costs and Cutbacks

Despite print's influence, marketing and communications professionals often contend with harsh budgetary realities. "Our colleagues at other schools face real pressure to eliminate the print magazine because it's such an attractive pot of money," says Carleton's Scalzo. "It's just irresistible for leadership to say, 'Who's going to notice if you go down to three issues?'"

Editors like Scalzo have had to be creative budget stewards and problem solvers. Many, instead of cutting down the number of issues, opt to reduce pages



# Inviting Invitations

## For major events, mail matters

In an era of evites and breezy email event announcements, the heft of a print invitation on thick, creamy stock delivered to your door rather than your inbox commands attention. Take the winner of the **Grand Gold Circle of Excellence Award for invitation design for the grand opening of a new center for theater and dance at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire.** The black letterpress invitations were hand-addressed with silver ink and employed multicolor holographic foil. They were inspired by the center's architectural details and incorporated theatrical elements, including tickets and a playbill.

"In the age of digital communications, print invitations are a novelty. Print represents elegance, seriousness, and formality," says Diego Melendez, Exeter's graphic designer. "If this invitation had been digital, the patterns and textures of the building wouldn't have translated well. The letterpress and tactile approaches we took generate feelings of excitement. ...When you really want to stand out, looking beyond the norm will be key."

Robert Waller, director of marketing for institutional advancement at **Texas Tech University**, had the same thoughts when helping create the **silver Circle of Excellence Award-winning invitation to the Chancellor's Council Gala** in February 2018. The subtly sparkly paper evokes snow overlaid with line drawings of pine cones and needles.

"As screens become pervasive, there's never been a more exciting time for digital design. But when a person takes time to craft and share a physical object—even a simple invitation—there is intrinsic value," he says. "Throughout history, printing has been reserved for special occasions. We record our most powerful ideas in books. We commemorate educational milestones with diplomas. So it makes sense to celebrate our most significant events in print."

**The University of Nebraska Foundation** marked the **third anniversary of the opening of its Baxter Arena** by inviting top athletics donors to an event with a black and red invitation featuring a montage of black and white photos of university athletes, earning it a **bronze Circle of Excellence award.**

"From a designer standpoint, tapping into the affinity and enthusiasm of the potential attendees is always an exciting challenge and leads to creative exploration and execution," says Mitchell Johnson, art director. "Hearing positive feedback and appreciation for the materials lends proof of the effectiveness and philosophy of going with the print approach." **BARBARA RUBEN**



**COOL COVERS:** *New Trail* (left), *Wider Horizons* (middle), and *Aiglon* (right) draw in readers with engaging cover designs.



instead. In 2013, faced with budget cuts, Lethbridge College considered winnowing *Wider Horizons* from three to two issues. But after conferring with fellow editors, Kozleski recognized that publishing only twice a year could lead to stale content, so she trimmed the page count instead. In 2008, *Carleton College Voice* made the same move, reducing pages to 48 from 64.

To ease the sting of printing costs, *Oberlin Conservatory Magazine* stopped mailing issues to international alumni. In a different approach, the University of Alberta launched an opt-in campaign last year. For the first five years after graduating, young alumni receive the digital version—this acknowledges the reality that many new graduates frequently move—and at six years out, alumni can update their addresses and receive print copies.

Meanwhile, other institutions have consolidated some publications into a single magazine. Viewpoint School combined its annual report with one issue of its

magazine instead of separately distributing the report—a cost-saving solution that Viewpoint’s Case says is working well.

### Extending the Reach of Resources

Beyond maneuvering around costs, savvy magazine editors have found clever ways to stretch budgets.

At Lethbridge College, content repurposing is key. When, for instance, staff members knitted scarves in the winter for students, a communications team member created a video for the college’s internal newsletter, and Kozleski transformed that into a magazine story.

“If marketing is taking a picture for a viewbook, I might say, ‘Here are some alumni I’m going to be talking to who are in the area. Can we split costs on that?’” she says. “We’re always looking for ways we can just make the dollar stretch as far as possible.”

Other higher education editors curtail content costs by asking students, alumni,

and faculty to serve as writers and contributors. Digital journalism students offer extra support at Lethbridge. *Oberlin Conservatory Magazine* regularly calls on alumni photographers. One recent popular article chronicles the lifespan of orchestral performers and was written by an alumnus (now a journalist) who double-majored in clarinet and English.

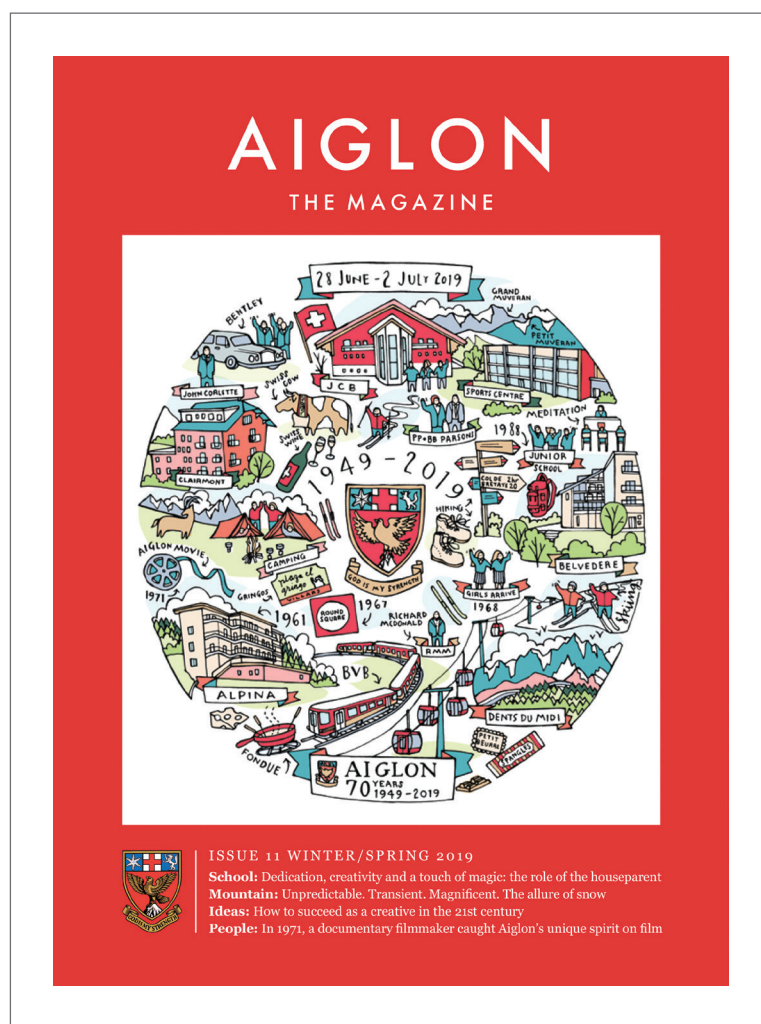
“That’s one of the wonderful things about working in higher education: you have a bunch of smart people around you,” says Oberlin’s Strauss.

### Digital Future

Effective alumni and school magazines deliver a visually dynamic print reading experience that bolsters the bonds between audiences and institutions. But that doesn’t mean that digital content is irrelevant.

Online, magazines can enhance stories with sound or video—plus they have the flexibility to extend their coverage. Class





**Print magazines build personal, emotional, long-term bonds with an institution—and data reflect that.**

notes, for instance, are often popular with alumni readers but can eat up page space in print, so Lethbridge publishes extra class notes online. Most higher education magazines today create a flipbook or PDF version or publish web-only stories. Ultimately, print and digital can work in concert—after all, nearly one in five readers prefers to have access to both a print and an online version of the alumni magazine, according to CASE's magazine survey.

There are signs, too, that online publishing will have to evolve for environmental and practical reasons. In response to its highly socially conscious alumni community, *Oberlin Conservatory Magazine* pivoted to using soy ink and post-consumer-waste paper to be as biodegradable as possible. Nonetheless, Strauss receives about 15 unsubscribe requests a year, specifically for sustainability concerns. Print magazines may need to shift, she says.

"I think there are going to be increasingly fun digital publications. We can evolve with the times, and we adopt [a] digital design that will be engaging and offer multimedia, especially for us as a conservatory," she says. "There are questions to face moving forward, but...our magazine is a beautiful artifact that we take pride in."

So for now and the foreseeable future, magazine editors around the globe will continue to inform, surprise, and delight—one cover, photograph, and story at a time. ■

**MEREDITH BARNETT** is CASE's digital communications manager.