

A BACHELOR'S IN BOOKS?

Shimer College brings Great Books curriculum to city

BY JIM RITTER
Staff Reporter

An unusual little college has just moved to the South Side of Chicago.

It's called Shimer College, and it's the only college in the Midwest where every student must take a daunting Great Books curriculum.

For four years, students immerse themselves in the often-challenging writers who have shaped Western culture, from Aristotle and Sophocles to William Faulkner and Toni Morrison.

Students call their professors by their first names. Professors call themselves "facilitators." There are no lectures. Classes, typically with just 12 students, are run like Socratic dialogues.

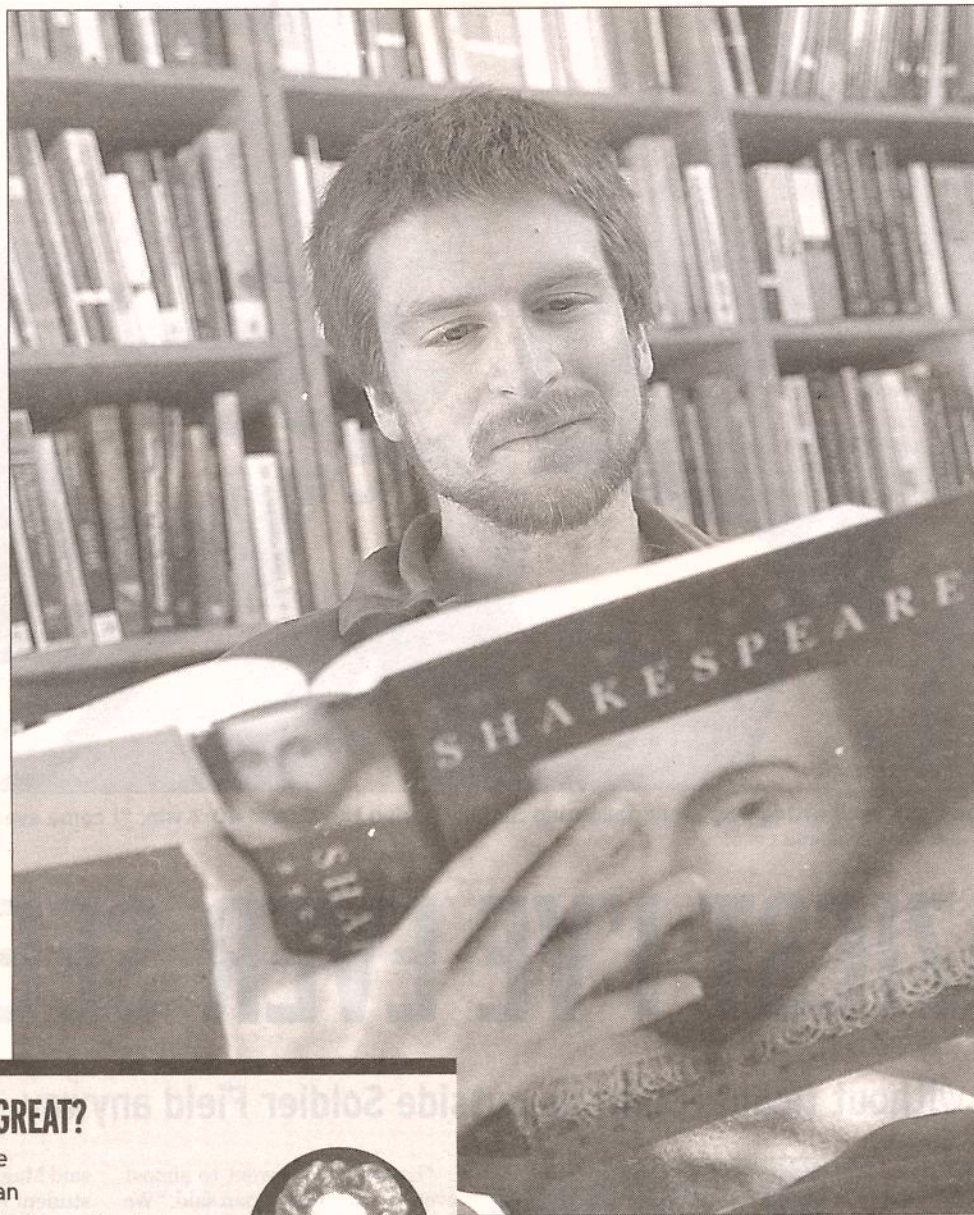
Dig in to Dostoevsky

Students read Great Books before class. They read Great Books after class. And when they're done reading, they're as likely as not to talk about Great Books.

"We'll talk about a hip-hop song, but it will be informed by [Martin] Heidegger," said senior Matt MacDevitt.

The liberal arts college has an enrollment of about 100 students, making it one of the smallest in the country. Tuition and room and board total about \$29,000 a year.

To try to boost enrollment to 300 or 400, Shimer has relocated from Waukegan to leased space on the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology.



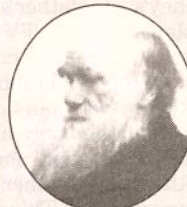
Matt MacDevitt, a senior, reads Shakespeare in the library at Shimer College, which has moved to the IIT campus. —KEITH HALE/SUN-TIMES

WHAT'S GREAT?

- ♦ The Bible
- ♦ The Quran
- ♦ *Opticks* by Isaac Newton
- ♦ *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad
- ♦ *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill
- ♦ *Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois
- ♦ *The Republic* by Plato
- ♦ The Federalist Papers
- ♦ *The Iliad* by Homer
- ♦ *Politics* by Aristotle
- ♦ *Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith
- ♦ *Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin
- ♦ *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer
- ♦ *Beowulf*
- ♦ *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare
- ♦ *Paradise Lost* by John Milton



Isaac Newton



Charles Darwin

Shimer was founded in 1853 in Mount Carroll in western Illinois. It adopted a Great Books curriculum in 1950. After running into financial trouble, Shimer sold its campus and moved to Waukegan in 1979.

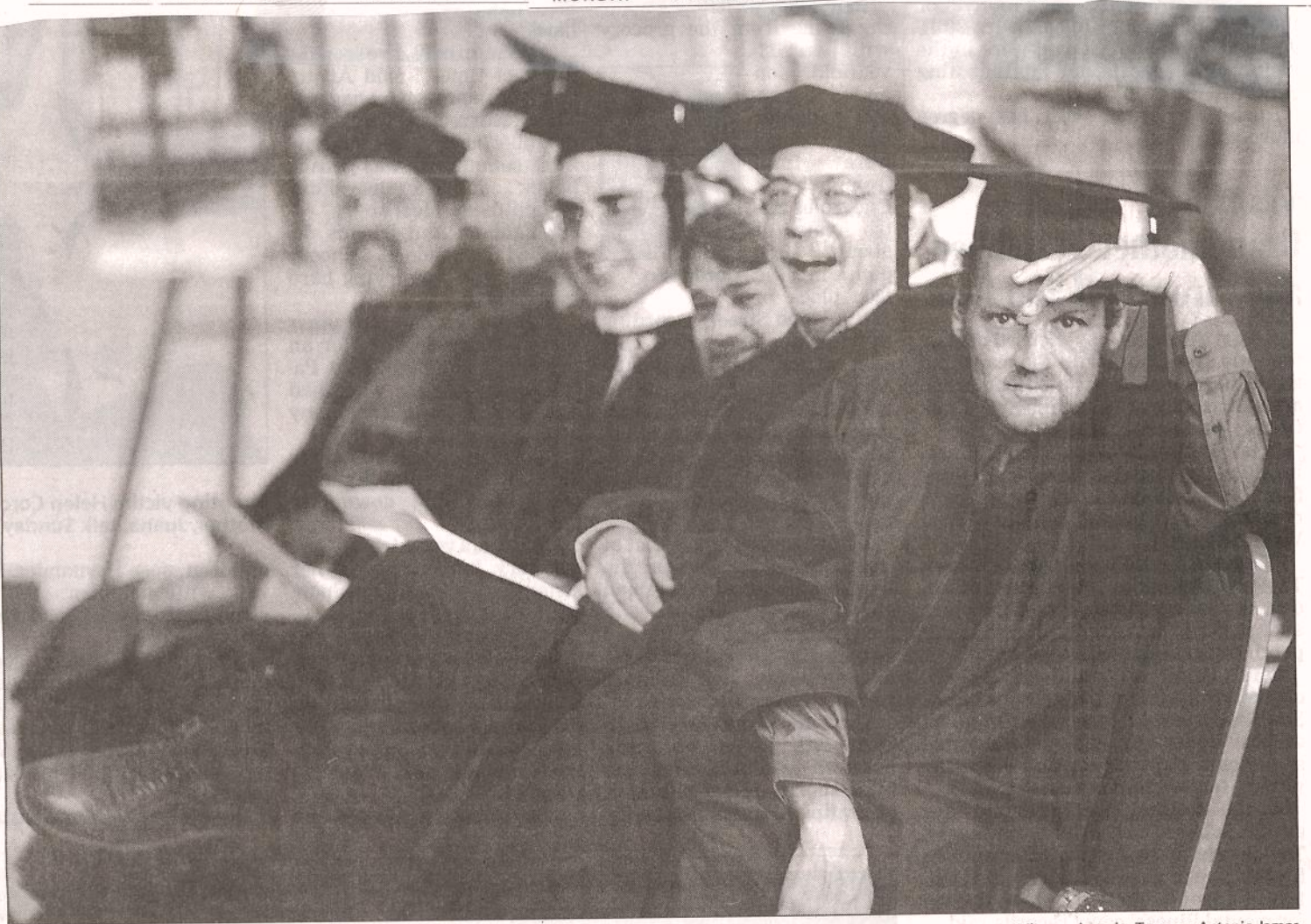
The best-known Great

courses.

Great Books deal with timeless issues and are so rich that "even the expert, re-reading the text for the umpteenth time, will find new ideas and insights," the college says. There are many fine books, the college adds, "but very few qualify as great."

Harry Potter not bad, either

MacDevitt's favorite Great Books include *History of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides ("fascinating and fun to read"), *The Brothers Karama-*



Tribune photo by Terrence Antonio James

Stuart Patterson (right) and other Shimer College faculty members attend Sunday's convocation at Illinois Institute of Technology.

The college that went away to school

Shimer College's move from Waukegan to IIT brings about unique blend of students, learning

By Jeff Long
Tribune staff reporter

Students from a small liberal arts college in the far north suburbs have been mixing quietly for the past month in their new home on the Chicago main campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology, where students delve chiefly into things such as science and engineering.

Socrates likely would have been fascinated by the culture clash.

Shimer College has been in Waukegan for a quarter century, a haven for lively intellectual debate. Its "Great Books" curriculum goes directly to the source of learning: the works of Plato, Newton, and Darwin, for example.

Faculty, alumni and students at the college's convocation Sunday in the new IIT digs.

President William Craig Rice said more prospective students are contacting Shimer now that it is in Chicago, and fundraising is ahead of schedule.

With enrollment at about 80 students, he said there have been 570 inquiries from prospective students since August. Usually, there are about 400 inquiries by this time of year, he said.

Meanwhile, students from Shimer can take technical courses from IIT and IIT students can take courses from Shimer.

Although classes have been under way for a month, the convocation officially marked IIT's

been stagnant for 15 years, and he hopes the move will end that. He expects Shimer to remain Shimer, however.

"You sit down with the books and the conversation begins again," he said. "You could convene a Shimer class on a mountaintop in North Carolina and the conversation begins again."

Students attending Sunday's ceremony agreed.

Noah Kippley-Ogman, 20, is taking a differential equations class and calculus 3 from the IIT curriculum.

Because he wants to be a math teacher, the move means he'll be able to stay with Shimer by taking the IIT classes.

Otherwise, he'd have attended another college for those classes.

"I really like living in Chicago," he added. "It's a lot better than living in Waukegan."

That helped tip the balance

ing to me, because I wanted to go to school in the city," she said.

Stosur-Bassett, who is from Glen Ellyn, said city life gives her easy access to the museums and theaters she loves.

Liz Todd, 17, is a second-year student. To some extent, she's sorry to leave the Waukegan campus. "It's really exciting in some ways, because you get to be in Chicago," she said. "But it's hard to leave behind a place you called home."

She already has been to the symphony, the Goodman Theatre and the Art Institute. "Living in Chicago is great," she said.

Shimer students also will have access to IIT student facilities and services under the long-term lease Shimer signed, Rice said, adding that he's looking forward to seeing how the two sets of students and faculties mix.