

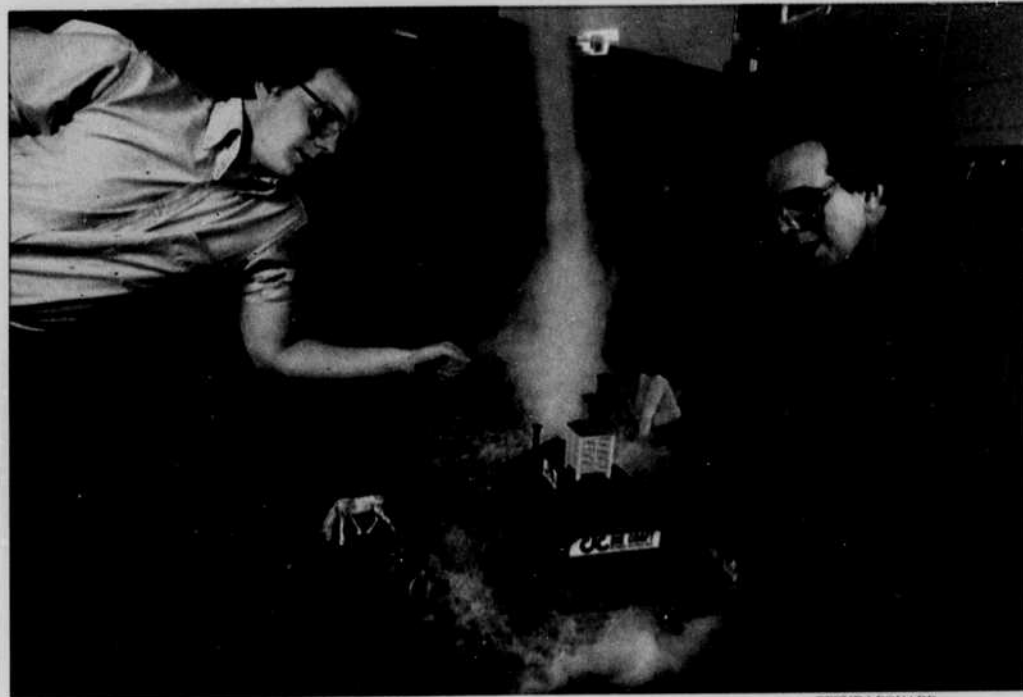
dereson, a senior in math and physics.

But if no one would mistake Chicago for a country club, students also admit they have their share of good times. Says sophomore Tom Inck, "Of course, there is a social life. Whenever you put 20-year-olds together, they're going to party." Get-togethers at Chicago, however, are more likely to be small and intelligent than large and rowdy. That's especially true since last spring, when Chicago's administrators quashed the Lascivious Costume Ball—the more titillating the costume, the cheaper the admission. The annual event, which inspired the school's most studious drinking, died after administrators refused to let it take place on campus.

Midway monsters: Not that Chicago students lack for extracurricular activities. In the past few years more students have begun to work on the campus paper, the *Maroon*. And, stoked by star athletes in football and women's basketball, student interest in varsity sports has shot up. "The student body has become more well rounded," says Bruce Montella, who was the leading collegiate rusher at the Division III level last year as a senior and was a football All-American before entering Chicago's medical school. Then again, as the original Monster of the Midway, six-time winner of the Big 10 championship before president Robert Maynard Hutchins ruled football out of bounds in 1939, Chicago is only returning to a noble tradition. The school resumed intercollegiate play in 1969, and now competes in the newly formed University Athletic Association, a league of eight schools better known for scholarship than sports.

Walking around this campus, you're less likely to overhear Monday-morning quarterbacking than rarefied intellectualizing. A casual discussion of the limits of nihilism, for example, dissolves into laughter when one person says, "Well, then you'd be Nietzsche." Sometimes the conversation is even more singular. "You get a high number of people walking around talking to themselves," says Ron Becker, an M.B.A. student who attended Michigan as an undergraduate.

The university prospers by letting brilliance take its course—hiring the best minds and giving them total freedom. This enticement has kept Saul Bellow, best-selling author and a 1976 Nobelist, at Chicago for 23 years. Bellow, a 1937 anthropology graduate from Northwestern, teaches literature, and he's appointed to the Committee on Social Thought, one of the degree-granting bureaucratic structures created to encourage interdisciplinary work. "I'm an



STEVE LEONARD

Scholarly storm: Simulating a tornado in the university's meteorology lab

outsider, in a way," confesses Bellow, "and one of the compliments I'd like to pay the University of Chicago is that it knows how to use this kind of outsider." Bellow teaches courses on Joseph Conrad or James Joyce or "whatever comes up" because, he says, "I get to talk to well-thought and extremely intelligent and feeling young people about literature. It gives me a real sense of whether I'm connected with contemporary intellectual currents."

To some extent, however, Chicago shelters itself from other currents. Although it's located in the country's third largest city, and surrounded by one of the worst ghettos in the United States, you'd never suspect this as you stroll the quiet sidewalks amid a campus dominated by Gothic-styled buildings. In the 1950s the school bought up much of the surrounding Hyde Park area and displaced thousands of residents, many of them black. Today, with 95 percent of the students and 80 percent of the faculty living in the neighborhood, Hyde Park is a racially integrated, upper-middle-class place: "We live in a beautiful, tree-lined community," says Steven Loevy, assistant dean of the undergraduate college. "My kid rides a skateboard a mile home from school every day."

Protecting Hyde Park and the school from the South Side Chicago blight that surrounds it are 75 well-equipped campus police. The strong efforts of this security force have provoked complaints from black students, who say that they're stopped and questioned indiscriminately. Fewer than 250 of the nearly 8,000 students at the University of Chicago are black and the number is getting smaller—just as it is at

schools around the country. The decline at Chicago seems particularly striking because so many blacks live near the school, but, says admissions' Dan Hall, "being situated on the South Side is not an advantage in attracting these people. There's a sense of wanting to get out."

For all of its past and present glory, the University of Chicago does not seek the spotlight. "It's constantly rated in the Top 10," says John Kruper, a virology graduate student, "yet it's not the school that comes to mind when you say, 'What are the top schools?'" Why is the University of Chicago somewhat less celebrated than its peers? Some say it's because the school is not as old and established as Harvard or Yale. Others contend that Chicago has been too arrogant—or preoccupied—to publicize its accomplishments. And still others argue that the strengths of the University of Chicago just aren't mediagenic—that as long as research and highly intellectual pursuits dominate the school, it will be better known in academe than the outside world. As John Gould, dean of the graduate business school puts it, "Chicago graduates go out and make a terrific contribution that, by its nature, is not going to be very well known." The University of Chicago would never want to win a popularity contest—quite the contrary. Says Charles O'Connell, who retired last year as vice president and UC dean of students, "The University of Chicago is like a martini. There are some people who find it an acquired taste. It's intense. But we think it's intense about the right things."

RON GIVENS in Hyde Park