

A 'Sweet' Honors course for Laurie McFadden '91

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Laurie Lounsberry McFadden '91 grew up helping to make maple syrup on her family's farm, so when she was offered an opportunity to create an Alfred University Honors Course, she knew exactly what she was going to offer. She has now taught "Maple Syrup: The Real Thing" five times since 2003.

Her course was among those profiled in "Getting Schooled," an article in "[The Official United States Maple Syrup Almanac](#)." Author Mike Rechlin surveyed schools and found that 25 offer courses, extracurricular activities, an interdisciplinary program and/or research into maple syrup.

"The maple syrup industry has always had important links to colleges and universities," Rechlin wrote. "As an industry that continues to go through rapid changes in technology, we rely heavily on university research to drive innovation and change."

But research is not the sole focus; in fact only four -- Cornell University, the University of Vermont: Proctor Center, West Virginia University and the University of Virginia at Wise conduct research. Nine of the 25 offer credit-bearing courses. Alfred is among that number.

Rechlin found that Alfred students get an opportunity to tap trees at the Lounsberry homestead, where else? but "syrup making is not the only goal." McFadden, with her love of history and her background as the University archivist, explore "U.S. and local history, environmental science, business and economics of the industry, storytelling, and biology.

Classes take students outside to tromp around the woods, and visit local sugaring operations. They gain an understanding of the cultural and economic importance of maple syrup, and get an opportunity try several delicious foods made with maple syrup.

This is not the first time McFadden's course has made the news. It's been cited numerous times including a BuzzFeed list from 2013 of "23 Awesomely Weird College Courses to Enroll in Immediately."

Her course description reads: "Wanted: Someone with a background in meteorology, chemistry, botany, forestry, art and cookery who is also a nature lover with lots of patience. Must enjoy long hours of hard work in the snow, cold and mud."