

# The Honorific



Alfred University  
Honors Program  
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Newsletter  
Fall 2021- Spring 2022

## The Honorific

### Inside the issue:

Fall 2021 Seminars  
Spring 2022 Seminars  
Honorary Siblings  
Death by Chocolate

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Samantha Batt  
Allison Panek  
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### From the Desk of the Director

by Dr. Juliana Gray

My family never did big, reunion-style Thanksgivings, the house stuffed with grandparents, aunts and uncles, and distant cousins. Our relatives lived far away, so usually it was just the four of us gathered around a bland turkey we felt obligated to bake. We never had a houseful of relatives and loved ones happily crammed around long tables, catching up on news and gossip while they munched pies and cookies.

The Death by Chocolate party is probably the closest I've ever come to that kind of big family holiday experience. Each fall, the weekend before classes begin, the Honors House hosts a gathering of returning students, new first-year students, and Honors faculty. Inside the house, the table is covered with sweet indulgences – chocolate cakes, chocolate peanut butter pies, chocolate cheesecakes, chocolate truffles, chocolate chip cannoli, chocolate brownies, chocolate-covered cream puffs, and even a few non-chocolate items for those with defective tastebuds. In the kitchen, Crystal patiently slices more cakes and pies (and maybe sneaks a taste here and there), replenishing the spread as needed.

Outside, students spread across the porch and front lawn, chatting while balancing plates loaded with treats. Big Siblings scan name tags and introduce themselves to their new Littles. Returning students hug and catch up, sharing stories of their summer travels or jobs or internships, saying hello to professors from their favorite seminars. Dr. Andy Eklund holds Sabi's leash while the friendly pup luxuriates in pets and belly rubs.

And me? I'm everywhere: setting out more desserts, taking pictures, helping Little Siblings find their Bigs, pointing folks toward the trash cans and recycling bins, talking with students and faculty, happy to see everyone again after a long summer, happy to be beginning a new year. Death by Chocolate is hot and noisy and crowded and chaotic, and I love it.

It feels like being with family.

# The Honoric

## Honorary Siblings

by Em Sexsmith

You won't have to miss your siblings at home when you join Honors! A unique characteristic of this program matches first-year students with their very own Big Sibling. Dr. Gray shared with me in our interview that Dr. Paul Strong started the Big Brothers and Big Sisters Program (as it was called then) some time in the early '90s. (The first mention of the program was in the 1994 Honors newsletter). She also gave me some insight on her view of the Big and Littles program:

*How are Bigs and Littles paired?*

Dr. Gray (she/her): I review applications from prospective students and take notes of personal details. Over the summer, I send out an email thread to first-year students and take notes of their interests, which I use to find volunteers who are compatible with them.

*Do you think it is successful?*

I do; not all Bigs and Littles are going to be best friends, but it's good to have that person as a first-year. I determine how successful the program is by the number of volunteers I get to be Big Siblings the following year.

*Are there advantages to the program?*

Yes, making the college transition is scary and lonely. Doing anything possible to help first-year students feel comfortable helps a lot. Making those connections is important.

*Disadvantages?*

People don't always click. Sometimes it just doesn't work out. Sometimes Bigs or Littles don't always respond – that doesn't mean it's not worth trying.

In order to get an accurate representation of the sibling program, I needed to find students actively involved within it. Luckily, Mia Heidenreich (they/she) and Sam Blank (he/they), who are Honors siblings, were willing to share their thoughts:

*What does it mean to you to be a Big?*

Mia Heidenreich (they/she): Being a Big Sibling and having the opportunity of being an ambassador for Honors, I already work with first-years and like the interactions I have with them. So, I want to be a reliable source for people coming to campus for the first time.

*Did you have a Big?*

# The Honoric

I did, but my Big wasn't very involved.

*What is your favorite memory of the program?*

Walking around campus with Sam! I pointed out places and gave my perspective of the area, shops, and other things.

*How did you meet/contact your Big?*

Sam (he/they): They emailed me through the AU emails, and I gave them my Instagram for easier contact. Then on move-in day, they found me at check in and said hi.

*Were you excited to finally meet?*

I was excited to meet them in person. Before I got here, they were so helpful in answering my troves of questions, so meeting Mia was fun.

*Does your Big help you? If so, how?*

Mia helps me so much. They answered so many of my questions. Then after that, she just helped me out more and more by checking in and lifting me slightly.

*Would you want to be a Big later?*

Sure! Mia's help was so integral to my adjustment here that I'd love to do that for someone else.

*Does having a Big impact you in some way?*

It impacts me in that I have gotten help throughout my time here from a support system I wouldn't have otherwise.

Overall, the Bigs and Littles Program is a positive and fantastic experience. The care and support most Bigs have for their Littles is something they will cherish forever and will be inspired to continue for future first-year students. There is no lack of Bigs in Honors; I think Dr. Gray would say that is a success.

Thank you to Dr. Gray, Mia Heidenreich, and Sam Blank for your time.

# The Honoring

## Fall 2021 Seminars

### **Artificial Intelligence: Fiction and Future**

by Natalie Cates

We have all seen movies about how robots take over society. For a while this created hesitation in the progression of artificial intelligence and robotics. Over the past few years, researchers have made great progress with AI which could help many industries. In this Honors course, taught by Danielle Gagne and David DeGraff, students explore early fascinations with artificial intelligence as well as where the future will take us.

Each class is discussion-based, with students focusing on weekly topics from assigned reading. Students interact with their peers in a positive way to encourage learning from each other as well as debating topics in a controlled environment. Discussion topics include: Is AI a real person? Should AI be allowed to vote? Can artificial intelligence feel emotion? And what is intelligence? Students have covered a variety of science fiction pieces along with papers discussing artificial intelligence. At the end of the course students in the class will give a group presentation on the topic of AI in the modern world.

### **Crochet: Pattern and Improvisation**

by Samantha S. Batt

At first glance, crochet might seem boring. Perhaps your grandmother crochets, but it seems like hardly anyone our age would be interested in the dying craft. Yet under Professor Sara Kramer's tutelage, this course is anything but boring. Crochet is not limited to scarfs or hats—you can make 3-D objects with crochet. Any shape you can possibly imagine can be created with only a hook and some yarn. However, crochet is also an exercise of the mind, and transferring an intangible idea to the physical plane has never been easy. This class is challenging yet most certainly worthwhile.

In this course, students dive into the complex yet versatile nature of crochet. They examine the craft's application in our current culture—from its presence in contemporary artwork to its suitability for modeling complex mathematical concepts, such as the hyperbolic plane. While the class starts out at the basics, some of the more complicated projects include a collaborative Afghan and a freestyle piece, finishing with an original project that students design themselves. There is a discussion after each project is finished, fostering a learning environment as students grow into their skills together. From beginners to advanced learners, there is something for everyone in Crochet: Pattern and Improvisation.

# The Honoric

## Fall 2021 Seminars, cont.

### From Farm to Table

by Corrine Kayes

When sitting down for a meal, most people don't stop to wonder about the journey their food took to make it to their plate. In fact, few think about where their food came from at all. Yet under Professors Garrett McGowan and Christopher Romanchock, students in the From Farm to Table: The Importance of Being Local seminar were able to take an in-depth look at the sources of our food, and why trying to shorten the distance between it and us is so important.

Students gained insight into how food is produced, which factors around it affect the quality of the product, and what nutritional needs the food meets. They learned how food is preserved over time and the current issues with food industries like the meat and dairy businesses. To supplement learning, students took frequent field trips to dairy farms, bee farms, and the local farmers' market. For the final project, students were tasked to choose a food item and through their research, find the cheapest versus the best way to make the food, and which way is worth it. To conclude the course, students were asked to bring a food item from their own local community to include in their potluck dinner. While it is difficult to truly ever understand the depth of the food industry today, students were able to educate themselves on the importance of bringing their own food a little bit closer to home.

### From Monsters to Folklore

by Kelly Champlin

If you are interested in learning more about the cryptids and monsters that roam around us and in the stories we read, you should consider the Monsters: Folklore to Reality Honors seminar. In this seminar, you will have weekly journal entries based on the next topic. Some topics include phobias, opinions, and beliefs. You can also enjoy exciting activities! We have movie nights and there is more to come! These movie nights are based on the topics we are currently learning. The class has already gathered to watch *The Ghost and the Darkness*, directed by Stephen Hopkins, set in 1898. Recently, we have visited Andover's Haunted House, where all the actors are volunteers, and the profits are donated to promote breast cancer awareness. At the moment, we are doing group and solo presentations. These group presentations are based on selected topics that we will learn throughout the entire seminar. The solo presentations are for your own enjoyment, with topics of students' own choice. So far, people have chosen to present on: Mothman, the Wendigo, the Russian Sleep Experiment, and Anneliese Michel. After the presentation, students take a short quiz to test their knowledge on that topic. I hope you join!

# The Honoric

## Fall 2021 Seminars, cont.

### From Clash to Kendrick

by Alyssa DiMillio

One of the seminars in the Fall 2021 semester was From the Clash to Kendrick: The Art of Protest Music taught by Robert Reginio. The focus of this seminar was to explore music that attempts to put anger to use to create music in the face of injustice, rage, and protest.

The class started to dive into protest music by discussing the protests over the killing of George Floyd and looking at the differences between the immediate feeling of rage and the anger felt for years and decades afterwards. The students also created their own zines with help from Kevin Adams, part of the Library Division. Currently, the class is looking at the history of hip-hop and how it relates to social protest by analyzing Public Enemy's Fear of a Black Planet, some of Chuck D's song lyrics and his collaborators in The Bomb Squad. An upcoming class will look at a current artist, Kendrick Lamar, and his album To Pimp a Butterfly. This album hit number 1 on both the US Billboard 200 and US Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums Billboard for 2015-2016.

"In any case, it seems as if the class is enjoying our seminar immensely, based on the deep and intense conversation we are having about current politics and how protest music can address our feelings of anger and rage and transform them into feelings of solidarity – or not" said Professor Reginio in an email conversation. Being relevant to such a current and relevant topic in our society right now, I'm sure this seminar has hit hard for some students and opened the eyes of others.



Students in Dr. Eklund's Monsters class carved pumpkins

# The Honorific

## Fall 2021 Seminars, cont.

### This Course Sucks

by Patrick Harris

With a name like “This Course Sucks,” Dr. Allen Grove’s Honors course will always be remembered, especially when looking at your transcripts. This course dealt with all things vampire, including movies, tv shows, and books. Classes involved a short discussion over the short story or book chapters that had been assigned the previous class, followed by a viewing of something vampire-related, from Nosferatu to Supernatural to Buffy the Vampire Slayer. One section of the course was devoted to the book Dracula and some movies that had been inspired by it. These classes’ discussions focused on ideas presented in the book, such as purity and the role of women, as well as how the film adaptations were similar to or different from the book.

Each week the students read what was assigned and then came to class, possibly taking a short quiz on the reading. The final assignment for the class was any project that Dr. Grove approved. This included things like rewriting sections of Dracula, writing your own short story with vampires, baking or cooking something and writing how it tied to vampires. The most important thing about this course, however, is that now all job interviewers will view my transcript and see a class on it called “This Course Sucks.”



Sam Blank and Kylie Simkins representing the Honors Program for an admissions event

# The Honoric



## Death by Chocolate

by Allison Panek

What better way to end Welcome Week than with chocolate? In other words, the 2021 “Death by Chocolate” event at the Honors House was a super sweet success. Students were welcomed with open arms as they walked into the house, and were greeted by smiling faces of professors and returning students. Following COVID-friendly protocol, the masked and eager students filed into a line and wove around the large dinner table loaded with all the chocolate treats you could imagine. From scrumptious pies to tasty cookies, to decadent cakes, the choices of chocolate confections were delightfully overwhelming!

After deciding on what to fill their plates with, students headed back outside where they could unmask and mingle with one another—don’t worry, you could go back for seconds. Everyone from first-year students to Honors professors to dogs (yes, Dr. Andy Eklund’s very own canine comrade, Sabi) came out to enjoy the weather and sweets. Additionally, our newest Class of 2025 members were introduced to their “Big Siblings!” The meetings were tasteful, some might even say they were sweet! Dr. Gray also spoke to the crowd of students as they finished up their desserts about the annual honors trip, as well as homing in on the important roles they’ve all taken on by joining the Honors family. Save a slice of cake for Siggy!

# The Honoric

## Spring 2022 Seminars

### Alfred E. Nigmas

Throughout history, societies have used puzzles for relaxation and encrypting information. More recently, it has been shown that puzzles are an excellent means to flex your brain, to build cognitive ability and maintain mental health as we age. In this course, we study, develop, and solve puzzles of many forms - numerical, alphabetical (words), and mechanical. In addition to focusing on the history and importance of cryptography, ciphers ranging from simple substitution to technologically advanced systems are discussed.

### CAMP!

In CAMP!, we want to go beyond marginal self-presentation to explore the expressions and the experiences of an “aesthetic of artifice,” in fashion, films, life, music, novels, and theater internationally. As seen at the Met’s Costume Institute and Gala 2019, camp is a social practice of ostentation and theatricality that celebrates exaggerated performance. We will immerse ourselves in thirteen unique examples of camp. Students will design a project that embraces camp’s “love of the unnatural” as explained by Susan Sontag. Can you take CAMP! far enough?

### Corporate Scandals & Business’s Dark Side

Every heard of Enron or of Volkswagen’s dark secret? This class reviews controversial cases in various industries from food to finance. Using Netflix’s “Dirty Money” series and MIT’s research on why people cheat, we will identify common motivations and patterns of bad behavior. Business ethics, corporate governance and other regulatory processes will be presented along with the slippery slope that can occur even with protective mechanisms in place. Students will write “lessons-learned short papers” and develop a final team presentation of a scandal of their choice. This course serves to elevate awareness and build stronger future leaders.

# The Honoric

## Spring 2022 Seminars, cont.

### **Do Not Pass Go and Do Not Collect \$200: What We Can Learn Through Board Games**

In this class, we will see how to use board games as a pedagogical tool. Each class will be centered about a subject (history, economics, natural sciences, social justice, morality and ethics, among others). The students will play a game in class whose theme matches the corresponding subject. They will be asked to write a short reflection about the board game that they played and its theme. As a final project, students will choose a topic and a board game, then develop supporting materials (such as brochures, reference cards, images, audio, questionnaires, etc.) that could be used in a classroom setting to teach the chosen topic.

### **Natural Glasses**

What do obsidian and amber have in common? Both are natural glasses, just like the silica skeleton of a deep-sea sponge or tektites and fulgurites which have been melted by meteorite impact or lightning. We want to explore natural glasses from their historic significance (having been used as tools and jewelry as early as the stone age), to differences and similarities in their structure and properties to how these materials inspire modern and future materials (biomimetics). We offer hands-on analysis of natural glasses by Electron Scanning Microscopy, X-ray diffraction, or spectroscopy; you will work with our TA and no special science background is required, though welcome. In class presentations will be complemented by posters and presentations of our artifacts for the AU Glass Museum which will be opened soon.

### **The Science of Baking**

We will look at how bread, cake, and pastry are so different, despite being made of the same ingredients. In the same way that chemicals are made of different combinations of elements, we will learn how to create an endless number of delicious treats with just a few things in different ratios and mixed in different ways. Class time will be devoted to baking, so you can get hands-on experience. There will be short papers reflecting on each topic, and a final project where you invent a recipe and discuss it with the class.

# The Honoric

## Spring 2022 Seminars, cont.

### Training Methodology: Ancient Spartans to Spartan Racers

From ancient soldiers of Sparta and samurai of Japan, to marathon runners and triathletes, to today's on-screen Batman and Wonder Woman, explore the evolution of training methodology among athletes of varying concentrations throughout history, including both the physical regimens and mental approaches, designed to achieve maximum success. Weekly readings and videos will stimulate in-class discussions, and students will be asked to prepare one final presentation summarizing which techniques they found most intriguing, and whether there are any methods they might adopt themselves.



Students at Volunteer Day at Living Acres Farm

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The Alfred University Honors Program  
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Welcome Event for  
Class of 2025 Honors  
Students



Students on the trip to see  
Mystery Science Theater  
3000 in Rochester

