



# The Honorific

Spring 2016

## From the Desk of the Director...

The class of 2019—37 new Honors students—began in late August, with a rousing start. Honors Orientation went smoothly and the new students broke into groups to begin formulating ideas and plans for the academic year. Special thanks go out to the advanced students who volunteered to serve as group leaders.

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The new groups included: (1) The Action Figures, whose responsibility is planning activities and events, (2) The Reporters, who have been responsible for creating this newsletter, (3) The Ambassadors, who are meeting with prospective students, and (4) The Servitors, whose task is to create service learning events for the Honors students. All of the groups seem to be full of new ideas and the program is probably as active as it's ever been.

In the fall alone, we have had several honors events: (1) Clean up the Campus Day, led by the Servitors, (2) Honors Farm Day—again led by Matt Chabot and the Servitors, (3) Board Games Night at the Honors House, (4) Two Dream-a-Thons where students from the Dreams, Dreams, Dreams class helped to interpret students' dreams, (5) A Big Questions event focusing on Science Fiction, and (6) Our annual fall trip to the theatre, to see the play, "Red."

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**Photography by:** Rehan Afzal and Catherine Groh

Crystal Henshaw took over as the Honors Secretary, after Amanda Khodorkovskaya accepted the position of Wellness Coordinator. Crystal is off to a flying start, getting involved in Honors Admissions, Orientation, and participating in several Honors Events. It looks like she will be a great asset to the program!

Once again, I can safely report that there were no casualties at Death by Chocolate this year. This is despite the fact that nearly all the desserts were consumed. Of course, the House Residents did not complain at all about the leftovers from the event. Big Brothers/Sisters were introduced to their 'littles' and a cool party ensued. Thanks to all the Big Brothers and Big Sisters who volunteered to mentor the new first year students!

The Big Questions Series was launched with David DeGraff, professor of Physics and Astronomy, discussing the history and role of Science Fiction in science and in society at large. Dr. DeGraff has been a consistent contributor to the Honors Program—teaching many courses, conducting several Big Questions Events, and serving on the Honors Advisory Committee.

The fall field trip featured a journey to Rochester to the GEVA Theatre to see a production of the play “Red.” It was a heavy, powerful play that was simply a two man show that focused on the life of Mark Rothko, a famous artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and his struggles with questions about authenticity and commercialism. It was fantastic! We had a great meal at The King and I and a terrific time seeing the play.

If you have any thoughts, ideas, or questions about the Honors Program, please feel free to contact me at: [atlas@alfred.edu](mailto:atlas@alfred.edu). I love to hear from Honors Alums and find out what you’re up to. If you have any suggestions for the Honors Program, I’d love to hear them!

Also, the AU Honors Program now has a Facebook page! In addition to this, Siggie the Walrus is now on twitter, keeping everyone updated on what's happening in the Honors calendar. Be sure to like and follow both pages to keep on track!

Here is the information you need to get connected!

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Alfred-University-Honors-Program-1502958470027588/timeline/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SiggieTheWalrus>

Use the hashtag #AlfredHonors when tweeting about us!

Gordon Atlas  
(aka, The Walrus)



Dr. Atlas cuts the cake at  
this year's freshman  
orientation

Students chat with  
Dean Litchman,  
Professor Riesing &  
Dr. Atlas (a.k.a. Mrs. Walrus)  
during this year's  
Death by Chocolate



# Students take a look at Fall '15 Seminars

## **Monsters: From Folklore to Reality** (Kelsey Bennett)

In this honors course, topics cover everything from Ancient Monsters, to the Science of Monsters, to future monsters and artificial intelligence. Each week, groups present one of the various topics via PowerPoint, and ultimately make each topic their own. The class also offers experiences outside of the classroom, such as movie nights and haunted house trips. There was even a private tour of the Rolling Hills Asylum, which allowed a group of us eight hours to roam around the building in search of apparition sightings, ghost conversations and supernatural occurrences. Overall, this course is interesting and unique.

## **Two-Faced: Alter Egos** (Lydia Galarneau)

In this seminar, taught by Katarina Riesing, students examine identity, specifically focusing on how someone can have different identities when they are in different situations. Discussions have been focused on readings from sociologists like Erving Goffman to the artwork of Cindy Sherman and Nicki Lee. Also taken into consideration are movies featuring identity and the fracturing thereof, like the Swedish film *Persona*, and *Black Swan*, starring Natalie Portman. One minor project students in the Seminar completed was a photography project in which the subject matter was people portraying different stereotypes. The final semester project is an open prompt encouraging students to be creative, either expanding on something already discussed in class or exploring something not discussed but that students believe is an important part of the artistic conversation about identity.

## **Build Your Own Religion** (Samantha Grgas)

Is God real? Is there an afterlife? If so how do these things work? How do we decide what is moral or immoral? We tackle all of these questions in *Create Your Own Religion* taught by Brian Sullivan. In this course we explore religious and spiritual topics through group discussion and readings. In a friendly and supportive environment we help each other develop our beliefs and thought, as well as looking at famous international religions and the beliefs of people in the Alfred community. We also go on field trips and finish off the course by designing our own funeral! So, what do you believe in?

## **Invest Like Buffet** (Brennan Jelstrom)

When do you plan on becoming a billionaire? In the honors seminar "Invest Like Buffett," the class goes into the history of one of the richest men in the world today: Warren Buffett. Taught by Mark Lewis, we look into the mindset of the billionaire and the moves he made to gain his wealth. Although this class won't give you the exact steps to becoming the next billionaire, it gives you an intake on investing and how to be safe with your money.

## **Drinking Up** (Schuyler Malak)

I was initially unsure of what of a class that seemed entirely devoted to the study of alcohol would be like; however, it did not take long to catch the vibe of this seminar taught by Professor McGowan. It is exactly what it sounds like—a class about drinking. The seminar covers beer, wine, and distillates. The history of alcohol is delved into as we learn about why we have alcohol, where it came from, its medicinal purposes, use as social lubrication, place in religion and culture, and development in characterization. Students are expected to spend some time in the lab, where they physically brew beers/wines. They also go on trips such as ones to local microbreweries (to study beer) and local farms or wineries (to study wine). Research projects are also required (one for beer, one for wine, and one for distillates). A few times over the course of the semester, guest speakers will come in to address lectures on one of the different alcohols and why their respective histories are significant. Overall, I have found this class to have the capabilities of being laid back whilst holding my interest and keeping the class intrigued, excited, and focused.

## **Culture and Cuisine** (Elisabeth Estep)

The This Honors seminar taught by Dr. Becky Prophet is truly a course that introduces students to a variety of world cultures through food and film. Our regular assignments include watching critically-acclaimed films that have plotlines centered on the specific food of a culture, like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Big Night*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, and *Chocolat*. In class, we discuss the films, how they compare, and how the food in each of the films prove to be characteristic of its respective cultural values. We also learn, in small groups, how to prepare a dish of choice in the manner of its given culture. On one class night, all groups bring in their dishes for everyone to get a sampling. It is a fun and interesting way to get everyone to try some of the cuisine mentioned in the films we have watched, and to learn about the dishes' origins and steps of preparation. As a whole, "Culture and Cuisine, Food and Film" gave me a stellar first impression of the Alfred University Honors Program, and I cannot wait to take more Honors courses that broaden my intellectual horizons such as this one.

**Dreams, Dreams, Dreams** (Catherine Groh)

What do dreams mean? ...Is there any one right answer to that question? In this seminar taught by Dr. Atlas on dreaming, we've looked into the theories of Freud, Jung, and other prominent psychologists, in an effort to shed some light on the subject. We also record our own dreams and, if we choose to, talk about them in small groups. Getting outside perspectives on dreams can be very thought-provoking! The class also held a "Dream-a-thon" at a café in town, where anyone could come in with their dreams, to have us give interpretations or just to hear some of what we've learned about dreaming. But however much we may learn about the world of dreams, there is always more mystery to be explored.

**Science That Will Save Your Life** (Briar Hayes)

What's the best course of action in an emergency? How do I handle a natural disaster? Just how realistic was Gary Paulsen's Hatchet? These may not be the most common of questions, but they are important ones – and in this course taught by Dr. Fred Beaudry, those and more were examined. This Honors seminar was focused around a variety of topics related to survival and disaster preparedness. Each week, a student gave a presentation based on one aspect of survival, ranging from hypothermia and foraging for food, to group psychology and the hazards of water. Between building their own temporary shelters, reading cartographic maps, identifying important survival items, and learning to counter heat exhaustion and shock, those in the class will leave better prepared to face the potentially dangerous, unpredictable world that surrounds us.

All fun and games  
at Game Night in  
the Honors House!



**Big Questions: Science Fiction**

-Briar Hayes-

The Big Questions event this semester was an academic romp through some of the greatest examples and themes in science fiction writing. Led by Dr. David DeGraff, with discussion from Dr. Gray and the attending students, the topics of conversation covered everything from War of the Worlds to the newest and most thought-provoking post-cyberpunk. Dr. DeGraff, a public science fiction author and enthusiastic professor of Astronomy, focused especially around the scientific, ethical, and social value of speculative fiction. There is a long list of great names in the genre – Isaac Asimov, Ian M. Banks, Ursula K. LeGuin, Brian Herbert, and countless others – and they all spoke of themes and enlightenment far beyond the bounds of a simple sci-fi paperback.

# Spring 2016 Seminars

## **Maple Syrup: The Real Thing**

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. Even though this is an accurate description of a maple syrup producer, don't let it scare you! The method of producing maple syrup is one of the things in our society that has endured even in today's culture of constant change; fundamentally it's the same process Native Americans used centuries ago. Additionally, field trips to local producers, restaurants, and festivals helps students explore the local community.

## **A.I. Fiction and Future**

"Hello. Would you like to be friends?" This may seem innocent coming from a new roommate, but what if it came from your computer? From Hebrew golems to 'Ex Machina,' people have been both fascinated and terrified of animating the inanimate. Are we ready for technology to become sentient? This course explores early fascination with AI and where the future might be headed. Readings include contemporary science fiction like 'Mindscan' and 'Existence.'

## **It's the End of the World as We Know It**

This class will study the notion of the apocalypse in mythology, literature, film, graphic novels, and science. Why are people drawn to these stories, and why do we continue to tell them? What do the different causes/incarnations of The End say about our culture? And how the heck did the darkest apocalyptic novel in recent memory end up as an Oprah Book Club selection? The course culminates with a "Design Your Own Apocalypse" project, in which students create and present their own creative or scientific apocalyptic projects.

## **Swedish Magic**

Why does some of the best design, music, art and film come from this tiny, northern European country? Together we examine Swedish folklore, history, politics and language in relation to some of this country's most influential cultural producers, from Ingmar Bergman to Robyn. Through readings, discussion, lectures and videos, you discover what makes Sweden so unique culturally and, as a final project, harness some of this magic by making your own creative work in response.

## **Show Me the Money**

The purpose of this course is to educate the student in the fundamentals of the lifelong financial planning process. This process incorporates six basic areas: investment planning, insurance planning, education planning, tax planning, retirement planning and estate planning.

## **The Aliens Did It?**

There are theories that this planet has been visited by aliens for millennia and that these visitors have influenced the course of human history. Although some theories are somewhat thought-provoking, there have come allegations that some of the proponents of these theories have fabricated evidence and that some have willfully ignored reliable evidence contrary to their theory. In particular, we discuss cases where misconduct has been alleged and use this to initiate a discussion on scientific misconduct/ethics.

## Honors Trip: RED

-Haley Ruffner-

As a first-year student in the Honors program, I wasn't really sure what to expect out of the trip. I'll admit that I was a little skeptical going in—I didn't really know anyone else who was going, and I was worried that the play, "Red," would be over my head since I'm not very artistically inclined. However, once we arrived at The King and I for my first Thai food experience, I had a blast. There was good food, good company, and the best lemonade I've ever had.

With pleasantly full stomachs, we proceeded to Rochester's Geva Theatre to see "Red," a play about artist Mark Rothko's torment over the superficiality of those who would view his work. The entire play was composed of two actors, Mark Rothko and his assistant, and was set in Rothko's lofty studio. The dialogue was intense but understandable even to a blatantly non-art person such as myself. Paint was flung, voices were raised, and human existence and expression were contemplated. Though it was nothing like any plays I've seen before, it was an experience I would definitely repeat.

I'm glad I went on the trip, and I will plan on taking other opportunities to travel with the Honors program as they arise!



### Helping Hands:

A group of honors students spent at Saturday working at living acres farm in Alfred as part of a service learning opportunity.



## Creative Writing by AU Honors Students

### Man in the Mirror

-Kelsey Oliveira-

Michael Jackson said it best: "If you want to make the world a better place take a look at yourself, and then make a change." We hear so often that change starts with yourself; however, how does one know where to begin? Alfred University has always highlighted leadership and social change. Being the second co-educational college and one of the earliest colleges to enroll African American and Native American students, innovation is our middle name. AU's liberal ways have continued through students and faculty on campus today.

Considering recent events, students have come together and organized a panel discussion on being a person of color on campus. Additionally, they organized a Rally for Solidarity to raise awareness about student protests and campus efforts to train faculty and administration on diversity. These students have found a passion in these causes and seek a better community on campus. Their works will unify the campus and give benefits to future students at AU. Find your passion and use it to make the change you want to see. College is an opportunity for you to make mistakes as a leader. If it does not work the first time, do not be discouraged. Change does not happen overnight nor are leaders made in one day. Your difference will pave a way for future students who will be able to make their mark on our campus. Change begins with you!

# Shin

-Briar Hayes-

Hannukah has never been, strictly speaking, my holiday. I remember being very small and scoffing at the kashrut of meat and milk. I'd shiftily reheat pepperoni pizza in the microwave, or laugh along with the others as I eat a cheeseburger and then dig into chicken quesadillas as the snow outside slams against the Friendly's windows. It's all based on a single stanza about not boiling a calf in its mother's... But this isn't the place for Rabbinical debate.

Times have changed so much from when I wished Beck a Happy Hannukah, not understanding what it was or why her holiday was taking place two weeks early. Now the presents are—at least some of them—my own. My friends up the street are suddenly my surrogate family, and a man I didn't know five years ago cried for me last night like I was his daughter. Now I sit and rewatch *Lord of the Rings* on Christmas Eve with a bunch of Jews because this holiday season, I am the unwelcome gift.

The irony is not lost on me. The Jews and the Catholics and the doctors and the backwoods rednecks accepted me, wholeheartedly and without reservation, while I watch my cousin have his Bahamas Bar Mitzvah from far away. I'm not allowed in the house unless I'm Connor, they say.

The thoughts are too mixed up in my bird's-nest neurons for proper attribution, but I know someone said you have two families—the one you're born to and the one you choose. It's Friday night now, just before Christmas, and they ask me what I'm grateful for. *I'm grateful that blood is thicker than water.* They nod, smiling sadly. Then the dishes are done, and before I realize it, the day's ticked over into a space I used to spend sleeping on the couch next to my cousins.

We're playing dreidel with more dreidels, a dozen pastel-colored plastic and dusty clay polygons scattered about on the woven green tablecloth. It's arbitrary, acausal and out of nowhere, but I suddenly realize I miss the stupid tablecloth and that warm amber light right after midnight so much it makes me nauseous.

I walked by the house the day after they moved out, on my way home from work. The new owners had dragged tire tracks through the spice garden, and cruelly clipped away Michael's overgrown yet lovingly cared-for roses. I wanted to run up the walk just once more, take the steps three at a time, and ring the damn sticky doorbell twice to make sure it worked. I ached to fall to the floor in the front hall crying, screaming at those occupying strangers inside to treasure this house for all it's worth, because they don't know what it did for me or meant to us.

I made it as far as the stairs, and then I saw the tiny, less-weathered patch where the mezuzah had been tacked. I just turned away and stumbled home, exhausted, knowing that I'd never be able to see their faces through the tears.

But it's all right. It'll be spring and the Passover door's open for Elijah, the restless outcast, my wandering analogue. I quietly notice that I'm one with the world, as boundaries fall apart in much the same way that the crickets and peepers echo through the vine-woven framework.

Divorce takes certain things away, I think, and the house is no longer home for any of us. Things fell apart and I was an unwilling witness to it all. I saw things change faster than I could take in the seasons, a whirl of time I was no longer a part of each time I came back from school. Sometimes I'd stop to wonder why this was now my home, why I came out here before anything else, why I was restless sleeping in my own bed and not curled up on Isaiah's floor.

It's a fair tribute to pay - leave one more piece of yourself behind, and move on to the next place. Maybe the next time the new owners dust off the smooth-worn wood for the sukkah behind the stairs in the basement, they'll feel some of the love.

# Around Campus

A curious buck behind Bartlett Residence Hall momentarily stops grazing in order to check out the funny-looking human with a camera.



One of the many tree-lined paths through campus, picturesque in any season.

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