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The Honorific

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From the Desk of the Director

Let's talk about the medallions.

If you've attended a commencement ceremony or an admissions event, you've probably seen them. The medallions are 2 ½ inches in diameter and weigh almost exactly 50 grams, the weight of ten nickels. That doesn't sound very heavy until it's hanging around your neck by its purple and gold ribbon. The metal is pewter, an alloy of tin, copper, and antimony. On one side, Siggie the Walrus is encircled by the words ALFRED UNIVERSITY SCHOLAR; on the reverse, there's a corny joke found in many issues of the Honors newsletter and other documents: "Time flies like an arrow, fruit flies like a banana." One side serious, one side goofy. That's us.

These medallions represent successful completion of the Alfred University Honors Program requirements: passing at least four Honors seminars, maintaining a GPA of at least 3.2, and successfully defending the Honors thesis project. It's this last step, the thesis, that often causes students the most stress, but it's also the most rewarding. There are months of writing, of research, of creation; then one final examination by members of the student's committee, who decide if the work passes muster. Once the committee approves and signs the paperwork, and the thesis is accepted by the library archivist (and the student breathes a heavy sigh of relief), the last step is turning in the sign-off sheet. In exchange for the form, the thesis student and soon-to-be AU Scholar graduate receives a small purple box. Inside, on a bed of cotton, rests the medallion.

For students, this metal disk represents four years of hard work and achievement. It also represents the values of our program. For over 15 years, each medallion has been handmade by an artist named Jerry Jackson. In his studio in Pennsylvania, he casts each one from molds designed by an AU alumnus; he also hand-sews the purple and gold ribbons from which the medallions hang. We could have ordered them to be mass-produced more cheaply by a medal supply company, but it's important to us that each one is crafted by an independent artist, like the artists some of our students have become. It's important that the artist who creates these symbols of achievement does so with the same dedication and care that our students devoted to their scholarship.

When AU Scholars cross the graduation stage each spring, they're often bedecked with various colorful cords representing different honor societies. But the weightiest symbol they wear – the one that bounces a little each with step, tapping them gently in the chest – is the walrus medallion. Each one is unique, made with love and worn with pride – and yes, a little silly. We wouldn't want it any other way.



Honors Orientation by Bryce Easter

As a student who had signed up for 18 credit hours during my first semester of college, becoming an Honors student was a terrifying experience in the month leading up to classes. After all, joining Honors is an extra class every semester, so how could that not be stressful? My social anxiety also added a layer of being afraid to communicate with other people.

For the first half of the Honors Orientation, the overwhelming panic I felt made me hide where no one could see me or talk to me. Orientation took place in a beautiful two-story house with an elevated back porch that overlooked a gorgeous forest-like clearing. I put on a colored sticker so that other people could identify me, and then I hid in the house's empty second living room. I lay down on the couch and ignored the bustling conversation happening nearby. How was I supposed to talk to people? I didn't know them. Looking back at this moment, I can honestly say that I regret that decision.

Yes. You read that correctly. I, a person with crippling social anxiety, regretted not getting up off the sofa and saying hello to a person in the room roughly ten feet from me. Under any other circumstances, I would have been much happier to ignore the chatter and remain out of the conversation until the day I die. But not this time.

So what changed? I did. And the Honors Program is what sparked that change.

After lying on that sofa for twenty minutes, there was a loud call, which I correctly presumed to be the call for all students to listen for instructions. The person speaking was an English professor, Juliana Gray, the director of the Honors Program. Dr. Gray is, to this day, an exciting person to talk to. Her energy, in both crowds of few and crowds of many, and her exhilaration for almost anything that you've brought to her attention, was the first thing that caught my eye. But I chose not to talk to her.

Professor Gray then separated all the Honors students into four groups, each one having a certain role, and we talked to each other about the specifics of our roles. In charge of our group, the Reporters, were two juniors whose names I could have learned had I not shut myself down during the deliberation. But I chose not to talk to them.

Every first-year Honors student was assigned a "big brother" or "big sister," an upper-class Honors student who guides their "little sibling" on the right path within the Honors Program. But I chose not to talk to him.

Only after I had left and sat in my empty dorm room did I realize that the Honors program was not a place meant for the uninteresting yet intelligent, or the bland yet knowledgeable. It was a place meant for the creative, the bombastic, the lives of the party that can keep it raging for days and nights to come using their personality alone. These were people with fantastic talents, hidden or exhibited, and brilliant minds that are used not only academically, but socially as well.

Honors Movie Night by Kayleah Aldrich

It was a lovely September evening when a group of Honors students gathered at Powell Campus Center for a Friday movie night to finish out the week in a relaxed style. The Action Figures hosted the event and made sure to have a table of all the goodies you could possibly want for a movie: a plethora of popcorn, Twizzlers, Milk Duds, Sour Patch Kids, and a few more chocolatey candies as well as drinks. The movie screening was an odd film called *The Lobster* made in 2015 that was about a dystopian society involving a need for love, transforming into animals, and matters of life and death. The event was none short of being unforgettable, unsettling, humorous, and tasty. The Honors students had a great time bonding over the oddities the movie presented and sharing some delicious treats— overall a wonderful night.

Fall 2019 Seminars

Can We Weather the Weather? by Chanse McAllister

Professor Tim Keenan's seminar explored the history of major weather events in the United States and around the world. Through various sources such as statistical databases, documentaries, and published news articles, students engaged in weekly discussions about catastrophic weather events; during the first half of the semester, students learned about earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and more. The second half of the semester brought attention to climate change.

On the issue of climate change, students analyzed scientific data and trends to develop critical thinking skills. The politicization of climate change was also discussed, and students were challenged to determine the difference between factual and embellished information. While navigating climate change's divisive rhetoric, having an open mind was important to maintain an unbiased understanding. At the end of the semester students discussed solutions for climate change and gave presentations. Regardless of students' personal political views in the class, they were all surprised to see how their opinions changed by the end of the semester.

Monsters: From Folklore to Reality by Emily Hart

It was a dark and stormy night... well, not really. Every Monday night, Dr. Andy Eklund's class explored the creepy, dangerous, and downright frightening monsters that have haunted humans throughout time. Students led each topic of discussion, from monsters that crawl out of the depths of ancient times to modern monsters, humans. Each group presented a PowerPoint full of extraordinary facts and pictures, a video, and ended with an original interactive game.

The two main projects of the course were building your own monster and your "Monster's Book of Monsters" journal. Student groups explored their fears and the fears of others, incorporating different aspects into their very own creature. Individually, each student wrote journal entries, responding to questions that prompted them to explore the darkest depths of their minds. Dr. Eklund engaged the class with movies, Andover's very own haunted house, pumpkin carving to celebrate All Hallows Eve, and an end-of-the-semester trivia game. Dr. Eklund blended myths with reality, exploring how facts have turned into fiction, as humans throughout history have dealt with their fears of the unknown, bizarre, and the deadly.

Misconduct in Research and Science by Sophie Eckhardt

In this course, taught by Dr. John D'Angelo, we discussed scientific cases riddled with conflict and drama in the form of plagiarism, credit, and falsification of data. We also discussed more hypothetical dilemmas, which engaged us into understanding our own ethics, morality, and subjectivity. We attempted to come to grips with questions that often do not have a right or wrong answer. We analyzed and discussed scientific cases that contained forms of plagiarized work and debated topics such as the scientific credit for the theory of evolution and the ethics of de-extinction in animals.

Though these questions have no correct answer, we debated and identified the pros and cons of any possible outcomes using facts, making for an extremely engaging class. We familiarized ourselves with and identified different kinds of plagiarism from excluding authorship to falsifying data in a lab. Over the semester we accomplished any two of the following assignments: a research paper on a case of our choosing in which scientific misconduct occurred, a mock trial, or a discussion-based presentation on any controversial topic of our choosing.

Fall 2019 Seminars, Continued

The Psychology of Heavy Metal and Punk Rock by Ben Middlemiss

When I first walked into the small conference room on the third floor of the Science Center with my ten or eleven peers, I thought, “What have I gotten myself into?” It turns out, I’d gotten myself into one of the greatest classes I have ever taken. Under the leadership of Dr. Steve Byrne, those two hours every Tuesday night from 7pm to 9pm opened my eyes to a whole new world of music that I once would’ve overlooked, the vast and intricate genre of heavy metal and punk. We not only listened to the said genres of music, but we also delved deep into the inner workings of each song, discussing everything from hidden melodies and meaning to how music makes us feel. The *pièce de résistance* of this class had to be the rock concert we went to as a field trip. We drove to Syracuse to one of the greatest rock concerts I have ever been to. Not only was the concert a whole experience and a half, I discovered a new favorite band, Ghost.

Quest for Knowledge: Dungeons and Dragons by Eleanor Fanning

Professor Danielle Gagne’s seminar explored the cultural history and impact of the classic table-top roleplaying game. Students did not need to be experienced players in order to take the class—it was accessible and enjoyable to those of all levels of familiarity. The class began with a basic introduction to the game and its mechanics, and moved on to a more in-depth discussion on game mechanics and rules as students built their own D&D characters. Students discussed the stereotypes and perceptions surrounding the game and the people who play it; the use of D&D and other role playing games (RPGs) as tools of escapism and experimentation with identity, racism and sexism within the game; and the literary, historical, and cinematic influences which shaped D&D. In every discussion, students were encouraged to contemplate how the game reflects, exaggerates, distorts, and deviates from society in real life. The course culminated at the end of the semester with an exam in which students used the characters they had created to play in a one-shot campaign. If their character survived, they passed the exam.

This class was fun and engaging, and it was one of my favorites of the semester. It broadened my perceptions and allowed me to see how society influences fantasy, as well as how fantasy influences society. It was also interesting to discuss morals and ethics in a game setting. The actions we may choose for a game could be different from those we may choose to perform in real life. To all future adventurers, I have a warning, or a promise—take it as you see fit: here there be dragons.

The Science and History of Alcohol by Jonathan Nadolne

Professor Chris Romanchock and Professor Garrett McGowan’s “The Science and History of Alcohol” is something I never would have expected to take coming into Alfred as a first-year student. The way that the professors combine the teaching of the science and the history of alcohol is truly fascinating. Students learned how alcohol defined socioeconomic status in the medieval times, how different shapes in the bottle and glass affect the taste of the beverage, and even the best places to grow the ingredients meant for making wine and beer!

While it is appealing enough to learn about the beverages that are a large part of society today, we also made the beverages we learned about or went to wineries or breweries to get a more hands-on experience. Students fermented cider and brewed beer at the Powell Campus Center and learned the process of distilling in Myers Hall. Trips to local wineries and breweries allowed us to see in real life the materials needed to make the drinks. Students also chose a specific beer, wine, and hard liquor to design a “coaster” showing information on each of the selected beverage. This course not only taught the history and science of alcohol, but also certain ways to appreciate each specific drink and the history of how humans made, enjoyed, and respected alcohol! Thank you, Professors Romanchock and McGowan, for making something that may be overlooked as truly awesome as it could be!

Fall 2019 Seminars, Continued

The Psychedelic Experience by Larissa Hageman

A class that freely and creatively explored psychedelic culture, from its complex history to current research, “The Psychedelic Experience” taught by Professor Lydia McCarthy opened the gateway into a world largely unknown. Students were given the unique opportunity to view different psychedelics and their eye-opening effects from the perspectives of shamans, documentarians, travelers, and researchers. Taken for purposes such as spiritual, medicinal, and purely experiential (because why not?), psychedelics are not as black and white as they may seem. In fact, many forms of psychedelics like ayahuasca (a tea derived from the Banisteriopsis caapi vine native to the Amazonian jungle) have been used for medicinal and spiritual purposes by indigenous Peruvians for centuries. Alternatively, we explored the darker and more secretive side of psychedelics through learning about the CIA’s undercover biological warfare initiative, Project MK-Ultra and watching the Netflix docudrama miniseries *Wormwood*.

The class Skyped with someone whose family member was a participant in the experiments done by the CIA to test the effects of LSD and other drugs on mind control and physical effects. We explored the hippie movement and its influential leaders like Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey, analyzing their contributions to drug ideology and how they shaped how psychedelics are viewed today. While listening to podcasts of Terence McKenna, an ethnobotanist and advocate of hallucinogenic plants, we formed our own opinions on his ideas and how they might make sense in the context of today’s world. This class challenged us to form our own opinions on psychedelics and why they have become shunned in today’s society. Perhaps Terence McKenna says it best: “You are an explorer, and you represent our species, and the greatest good you can do is to bring back a new idea, because our world is endangered by the absence of good ideas. Our world is in crisis because of the absence of consciousness.”

Honors Trip to the Theatre by Liz Radigan

This year the Honors fall trip was to see *The Book of Mormon* at the Rochester Broadway Theater League. The musical is about a pair of Mormon boys who are going on their first “mission.” They move from Salt Lake City to a rural village in northern Uganda. After experiencing the disinterest of the people in the village and the ruthlessness of the local warlord, Elder Price, one of the boys, starts to lose faith. The other boy, Elder Cunningham (who lies because he has no friends and wants to fit in), proceeds to lie to the villagers and twist the stories of the Bible to fit the everyday lives of Ugandan villagers, adding elements of pop culture and other stories. This satirical musical isn’t for the faint of heart or for those who get offended easily. As hilarious as it was, there were a couple times I felt uncomfortable—the musical’s exact point.

The Thai restaurant beforehand was amazing as always. The King and I is a great place to go before the show. The food was filling and tasty, although I do wish my friends and I had the forethought to get spring rolls. All in all, it was a fun night. The food was good, and the show was hilarious—I even bought stickers. I recommend *The Book of Mormon* and would definitely go again.

Interview with Dr. Larry Greil by Chanse McAllister

We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Larry Greil for his help in chartering the Honors Program in 1982. Being a formative model for many students, Dr. Greil has taught Sociology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences since 1977. He later became our first director of the Honors Program. To commemorate his contributions and his 2018 retirement, we have included a short interview reflecting on his development of the Honors Program:



When you helped charter the Honors Program in 1982, what goals did you have in mind for students?

Howard Neville became the new Alfred University president around 1979. As I recall, his first two mandates were to start an Honors Program and to serve apple pie at the opening breakfast for faculty and staff. Several people were asked to be on the committee. In my case, the invitation was because I had been in the Honors Program at Syracuse University.

I was elected chairperson, and I argued that it would not be feasible at Alfred to have more challenging Honors sections of regular course, as we had in Syracuse. Furthermore, I argued that the problem an

Honors program needed to address was not more challenging coursework. Students needed help creating a community for intellectually oriented students finding like-minded peers. This is the origin of the idea of Honors Seminars and Honors trips. The program we designed is like the one that exists today.

What expectations did you have as the first Honors Program Director? What memories come to mind when you first started?

I remember the first semester being incredibly busy. We welcomed our first class of students the same year my oldest child was born. I also remember that first class of students very fondly—we invited students based on their high school records.

In the beginning, there was one Honors Seminar offered each semester. I led the first one, “American Odysseys,” where we read travelers’ accounts of trips to America from colonial times to the present. Dr. Paul Strong, who became the second director of the Honors Program, led the second one, “Symbolic Worlds,” where we discussed cryptic works of art and literature. I also remember going to see Isaac Stern at the Rochester Symphony.

What are your thoughts of the development of the Honors Program today?

The program we designed is like the one that exists today. I did most of the practical things that got the Honors Program started, and Dr. Strong was responsible for making it fun. It was his idea, for example, to have an Honors walrus instead of an Honors seal. He also developed the motto, “Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana.” He also organized Death by Chocolate.

I enjoyed teaching Honors Seminars (including “High Tech Sex,” “Human Genome Project,” and “Quasi-Religion”), but I eventually became too busy to keep up. It has now been years since I served on the Honors Advisory Committee.

Spring 2020 Seminars

Alfred E. Nigmas – Garrett McGowan and Andrew Eklund

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'll study, develop, and solve puzzles of many forms – numerical, alphabetical (words), and mechanical, as well as the history and importance of cryptography & puzzles, and ciphers ranging from simple substitution to technologically advanced systems. Students will also design their own puzzles or ciphers.

DO NOT PASS GO AND DO NOT COLLECT \$200: What we can learn through board games – **Likin Simon Romero**

In this class, we will see how to use board games as a pedagogical tool. Each class will center on a subject (such as history, economics, natural sciences, social justice, morality and ethics), and students will play a game whose theme matches that subject. Students will 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.

Evolution of the DIYer – Tim Keenan

Learn about the evolution of “Do It Yourself” projects, the tools and methods utilized, and the industries built to help the weekend construction warrior. We will survey methods of the past to help us appreciate the tools of the present (such as Pinterest, YouTube, HGTV, etc.) and learn how to take on a variety of DIY projects. The course will include weekly videos and discussions, along with several group activities to learn basic home improvement skills. The class will culminate with a final presentation on how this knowledge might help the students become better informed homebuyers.

Let's Talk About Death – Danielle Gagne

We're all going to die at some point. How much do you actually know about this process? This course is not for the faint of heart – we will compare death on film vs. reality, view an autopsy, visit a funeral home, tell ghost stories, discuss what the dead can provide crime scene investigators, and host a death café. In addition to weekly readings and reflection assignments, students will write a will, plan their own funeral, and present on a topic of their choice.

Maple Syrup: The Real Thing – Laurie Lounsberry Meehan

The production of maple syrup is one thing that has endured even in today's culture of constant change; fundamentally it's the same process developed centuries ago. This class uses “maple” and all things related as the lens to explore a variety of disciplines: chemistry, botany, forestry, art, national and local history, business, environmental science, literature, cookery and more through a mix of readings, discussion and hands-on experiences. Assignments include reflective essays, participation in class, attendance at field trips, work at the on-campus Sugar Shack, and a final project/presentation.

The Science of Baking – David Marsh

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.



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Death by Chocolate by Karennia Elyse

My roommate and I arrived at the Honors House and were immediately greeted by friendly upper-class students. We signed in and took slices of cakes and pies. Though the spread of desserts wasn't exactly the overwhelming plethora of foods I expected, the night went on. The cakes and candies never seemed to run out. As soon as the last slice of one cake was finished, another was brought out. I returned for seconds and thirds, smuggling Lindt Chocolate truffles in my pockets, as I went back to my seat. I met with my "big sibling" and chatted with a few other students about the Honors Program. Later, we happily moved to the lawn when the Rochester theater trip was announced: *The Book of Mormon*. I recognized it would be at the Broadway Theater League—the same theater I had done summer camps at a few years ago—and I was overcome with excitement of returning. Though the first few days of college can feel isolating, this event helped me realize that I could still find bits and pieces of home all around me.

