

The Honorific



Alfred University
Honors Program
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Fall 2023 - Spring 2024

The Honorific

From the Director's Desk

by Dr. Juliana Gray

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Everyone at Alfred knows that, after spring break, time seems to accelerate. Those last few weeks of the academic year are a blur of ceremonies, dinners, honor society initiations, and other events recognizing student accomplishments.

While it's not as momentous as Commencement or as glamorous as the Honors Banquet, one of my favorite events is the Undergraduate Research Forum. It's like a middle school science fair on steroids: the Joyce & Walton Center is filled with zig-zag rows on which students display posters describing their research projects. Those projects range from field data collected by environmental studies students, to engineering experiments on ceramics density, to presentations of student-edited and published editions of formerly out-of-print books. As I make my way down the rows, trying to talk with as many Honors students as possible, I find myself getting distracted by other posters – so many “whoa, that's cool!” moments when I have to stop and check out someone's incredible work.

But what's really impressive is the maturity and expertise of the students themselves. Wearing suits, dresses, or other professional clothing, they stand proudly beside their posters, ready to answer questions or explain their research process. With poise and confidence, even the most technical chemistry and engineering students are able to articulate their work so clearly that I feel (briefly) that I understand, and I'm blown away by their accomplishments.

Commencement may be the ritual that marks our students' final transition into adulthood, but the Undergraduate Research Forum is when I feel it most sharply. There they are, the future writers and researchers and professionals, ready to add their knowledge and diligence to their various fields. It makes me proud to see so many Honors students poised on that edge, ready to move forward and change the world.

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Monsters, from Folklore to Reality

by Ana Richard

If you enjoy horror as much as those of us who participated in the Fall 2023 “Monsters, From Folklore to Reality” seminar do, chances are there’s a place in your heart for Fall and the Halloween season. That’s why it’s been such a pleasure to sit down once a week with Dr. Andrew Eklund for these thoughtful conversations about the hidden histories of monster mythology and the societal causes and implications of this ubiquitous cultural phenomenon.

Do you ever wonder where all these depictions of vampires, witches, mummies, and phantoms come from in the first place? Have you ever wondered what ghost stories look like in countries across the globe or why there are so many ancient and contemporary tales of sea monsters? Why is it that humanity has, since the very beginning of civilization, been fascinated with stories of the malicious and monstrous? How does this affect our culture, and what does it say about us as a species? Or even—why do human beings feel fear in the first place?

In this seminar, we investigated the prevalence of monster mythos and media throughout time and from all around the world, exploring all kinds of questions about the scientific and cultural factors that contribute to fear and folklore. Under the surface, this world of monsters is often anything but lighthearted or whimsical; in fact, most monster stories give a name and a face to issues such as bigotry, war, disease, and other real-world horrors dependent on the surrounding sociocultural climate. Even amidst this scientific age, monster culture is alive; if the supernatural isn’t your thing, maybe human horrors like murder, natural threats like climate change, or the idea of an AI takeover strike that same fear into your heart. Diving into this subject was such a fun yet insightful way to learn about and discuss the many problems plaguing our world that may be frightening or uncomfortable.

Of course, there was all sorts of spooky fun to be had as well. Whether it was horror movie nights, paranormal field trips, or jack-o-lantern carving, we celebrated the fun side of horror and all the ways we’ve loved monsters since the start of time. At the end of the course, we were encouraged to get creative by giving life to a monster of our own design. It’s been a lot of fun to think and talk about everything in this world we love to fear.



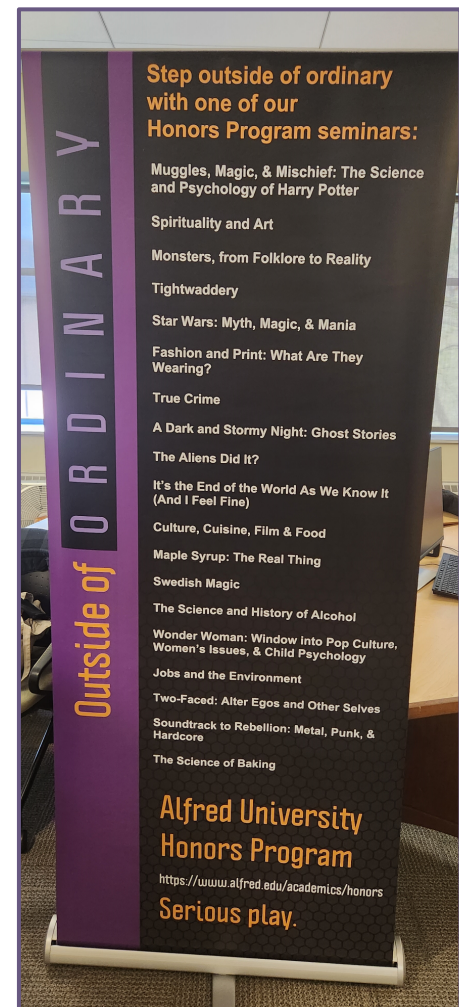
Jack-o'-lantern pumpkins carved by students!

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Honors Admission Event

by Gabriella Rodriguez

Five ambassadors stood around a table in Herrick Library, antsy with joy, awaiting the arrival of potential AU students. Their job was to get incoming students excited and ready to apply for the AU Honors Program. "The Honors Program is fun and inspiring," reported Evan Davis, a first-year Honors student. Incoming students got to learn all about the program's benefits, including the fun variety of classes we have to offer. If future students or their parents had any questions, they were answered by either Dr. Gray or one of the ambassadors. "We are here to educate you!" said Kylie Simkins. Kylie is a senior Honors student who made new students enthused for the program with her camp counselor attitude and her delight about the medallion. On graduation day, Honors students graduating as AU Scholars get to wear a medallion featuring the Honors "seal," Siggie the Walrus. "I care about the bling!" Kylie exclaimed multiple times throughout the event. Potential students were also attracted to the idea of the Death by Chocolate party. "If you don't have a stomachache by the end, you're not doing it right" Kylie stated, bringing smiles and laughs from those around her. The event ended with our ambassadors breaking out in celebratory dance!



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Drinking Up: The Science and History of Alcohol

by Kendall Steward

“Drinking Up: The Science and History of Alcohol” is an Honors seminar that met once a week to explore the science and history behind alcohol. The history portion of this seminar was taught by Christopher Romanchock while the science portion was taught by Professor Garrett McGowan.

Through science, this class dug into the various ways alcohol has transformed throughout history. We were given opportunities to visit local breweries and wineries to see the transformation happen and do some taste testing. At the Brewery of Broken Dreams, we were handed samples of beer while also learning about the history behind the brewery itself. Along with these trips to the brewery and winery, we got to experiment and make our own beers with our professors. Working together in groups, we brewed a Dry Irish Stout, a Brown Ale, and an IPA (India Pale Ale). If someone was 21 or over, they were allowed to try the drinks we had made. In the spirit of Fall, Professor McGowan also showed us how to make hard apple cider and the process behind it.

The course ended with a final project of making coasters and presenting a paper on a wine, beer, and liquor that each student had been assigned at the beginning of this course. Students then presented two beverages of their choice, sharing their knowledge and findings with the class while also distributing their coasters. We ended this course with a plethora of different coaster designs.



Brewing different beers in the beer-making lab at the Community Kitchen

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From The Clash to Kendrick: The Art of Protest Music

by Landon Berry

In a world where many voices often go unheard, the art of music has provided a powerful way for individuals to connect with a large audience and share their views. In "From The Clash to Kendrick: The Art of Protest Music" taught by Dr. Robert Reginio, students explored the art of protest music. Notable artists such as The Clash, Fugazi, and Kendrick Lamar used music as an empowering and uplifting way to spread anti-racist, anti-government, and anti-oppressive views to their listeners. Throughout the week, students would listen to one or two albums and then discuss them in class. These albums fit into categories such as UK Punk, US Indie Punk, and Hip-Hop Protest. Each album explored a political viewpoint, such as anti-racist, anti-government, and anti-oppressive views. The Clash's *London Calling* is a UK Punk album that discusses the social unrest in the late 1970s in the UK. The album criticizes topics such as unemployment and racial issues, making it a prime example of an anti-government album. Fugazi's *13 Songs* is an album in the US Indie Punk genre that touches on ideas of resistance and is therefore anti-oppression. Kendrick Lamar's album *To Pimp a Butterfly* explores subjects such as police brutality and racism, highlighting topics such as anti-racism and anti-oppression. Whether you're well versed in the art of political music or it is brand new to you, "From The Clash to Kendrick: The Art of Protest Music" is an excellent way to explore and discuss the use of music as a political education.

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

by Lila Condie

In the Fall 2023 semester, the Honors class "Do Not Pass Go and Do Not Collect \$200: What We Can Learn Through Board Games" met every Wednesday evening in the Bookend Lounge of Herrick Library. Professor Simon Romero presented students with many different types of games about various topics. The final project for the class was to write a lesson plan for teaching students through using one of the board games. For this purpose, students filled out a questionnaire after each class about how well it taught material, if they enjoyed it, and what supplemental material they would need to present the game in a classroom setting.

Games were presented in groups of four with each group playing a different one each week. A wide range of subjects was featured: from history to business or even evolution. While some games were simple, others were much more complex. Due to the diversity of game styles and topics, each student was sure to find one that interested them. Through bouts of laughter and confused glances at each other, students expanded their knowledge and learned more ways to teach students.

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Death by Chocolate Event

by Luke Sullivan

Death by Chocolate is a cherished yearly tradition that brings together all Honors students for a delightful evening of socializing and enjoying sweet treats. This year's event featured a tempting array of chocolate desserts, ranging from cake to brownies to countless other delicious, sugary treats that ensured every sweet tooth was satisfied! It was a wonderful occasion to unwind and make new friends or simply enjoy quality time with old ones. It also created the perfect opportunity for new Honors students to connect and build relationships with some of the other students in the Honors Program. The first-year students got to meet their Big Siblings: older, more experienced Honors students who will help guide them through their exciting college journey.

Events like Death by Chocolate define what the Honors Program is all about: having fun. It shows that academics are more than just hard, tedious work and can instead be full of enjoyable, memorable experiences. Students had a fantastic time building connections with each other, feasting on a ton (literally) of wonderful chocolate desserts and making memories that will last a lifetime. The wide range of exciting Honors classes, delicious social events, and, most importantly, lots of fun, are what make the Honors Program so unique. Everyone who's not an Honors student should be jealous at missing out on such an amazing program!



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Film Photography

by Lily Schena

Humans love taking pictures and capturing the moment, which is part of what makes film photography is so interesting. Since it is so easy to just snap a photo on our phones at any given moment, many of us do not realize the whole process that goes into developing film. In this Honors seminar that met on Wednesday nights, students learned the ins and outs of how to shoot, develop, and print film.

Professor Thomas Logan, who was teaching this course for the first time, did an exceptional job of instructing students how to operate the equipment and taught in a way that created a fun, lighthearted atmosphere in which students felt free to be creative.

The Film Photography seminar allowed students to take their own pictures and use their own film. This added a personable aspect to the course, which allowed students to be more actively engaged in the film-developing process. When interviewed, Professor Logan thought that the most interesting aspects of the course were “understanding where photo comes from and understanding the light-based medium.” He also hoped that students would take away the “origins of photography and how to compose photos.” He said that this class challenged Honors students because it “slows them down and makes them think about the material they are using.”

Alyssa, a first-year student in the class, said that she had fun “learning how to use the film camera and the equipment.” She really enjoyed “having the flexibility to express creativity” and was looking forward to seeing the results of the photos she has taken. In film photography, it is very important to take your time and be careful with the equipment so that your film does not get damaged in the process. Alyssa thought that this is what made the seminar so challenging and exciting. “I want to make sure I get everything right so that I don’t ruin my film,” she said.

The Film Photography seminar is an engaging class that encouraged partner work and left space for students to problem-solve on their own. The class had very good energy, and it was evident that the students enjoyed completing the class work as well as learning about film.



Students (and Dr. Grove) enjoyed our fall trip to see Frida: A Life at the Geva Theatre in Rochester.

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The Food Lab

by Sophia Symeslatini

The world of food is much more complex than you might think. While food is a necessity, it's also at the center of festivities across different cultures. In The Food Lab, we took a closer look at the history and science of food. We discussed how different flavor profiles work together and why people drink wine with certain foods and beer with others. We learned about the Maillard reaction, a browning of sugars which gives caramelized foods their distinct taste.

Students began each class by sharing food diary entries. These consisted of a few meals they had eaten during the week prior and a little information about each food, such as how it had been prepared. We had food parties several during the semester. We also chose a recipe to cook and eat together as a class. We prepared Syrniki, a traditional Russian pancake made with cottage cheese, and had a pie party!

This class was a great opportunity to make all sorts of foods students might have been craving and to learn more about the chemistry and historical value behind great meals. While working in the kitchen of the Community Table for The Food Lab, students can pick up a few culinary skills or enjoy some good laughs and fun facts from Dr. John D'Angelo.



Students enjoying pie as they learn about its history

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The Doctor in the Police Box

by Z Zavorotny

The class The Doctor in the Police Box takes a deep dive into the 60-year history of the hit television series *Doctor Who* and the many great and not-so-great factors that led to such an iconic series. These subjects range from the Doctor's many planets and the various times they visit these planets to the very specific and mostly European inspirations the show drew from, to the questionable role women and people of color tended to take in the series. The lectures, led by our very own Honors Director, Dr. Juliana Gray and Dr. David DeGraff, provided an eye-opening look into the show's triumphs and progressive nature as well as its unfortunate biases and embedded stereotypes.

The seminar also took a deeper look into the science behind the Doctor's many tools: from a screwdriver that emits a noise that can apparently control anything, to a piece of paper that relays whatever message the Doctor wants, to a blue box that can travel anywhere in time and space and is also bigger on the inside. With Dr. DeGraff explaining the scientific intricacies of time travel, we learned that knowing everything about a subject truly does feel like knowing absolutely nothing. The psychology behind both the psychic paper and the sonic screwdriver shows that the intricate details of any story are what makes it truly great. Both tools are based on real science, albeit science much too complex to include in this article.

However, the students of the class, all genuine fans of sci-fi and storytelling alike, are the main spectacles. The discussions led by Dr. Gray and Dr. DeGraff would be nothing without the students' fervent and powerful opinions on all matters Doctor. Altogether, this class embodies the brilliance and chaos encompassed by the sixty-year series.



Three members of the class, dressed up in Whovian attire for Halloween!

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Spring 2024 Seminars

Alfred E. Nigmas – Dr. Andrew Eklund & Dr. Garrett McGowan

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, build cognitive ability, and maintain mental health as we age. In this course, we will study, develop, and solve puzzles of many forms—numerical, alphabetical (words), and mechanical. In addition to focusing on the history and importance of cryptography, we will discuss ciphers ranging from simple substitution to technologically advanced systems.

Credible Costumed Crusader Creation: The Science and Psychology of Superheroes – Dr. David DeGraff & Dr. Danielle Gagne

From DC to the MCU, superheroes and supervillains have permeated pop culture. In this class, we will explore whether mutations, alien powers, trauma, or badly conducted science can account for the range of abilities seen in comics and on the big screen. Students will engage in weekly missions to scour mainstream and fringe sources for evidence to discuss and “myth-bust” these costumed creations. For a final project, students will design their own superhero or analyze a character from the multiverse.

Mathematics & Machine Guns – Dr. Elizabeth Matson & Isaac Matson

What was the logistical genius of Napoleon Bonaparte? How much total force would one warrior have experienced being a part of a shield wall? This course, co-taught by a professor of mathematics and a former infantry platoon leader in the United States Army, will cover vignettes in military history in which the numbers behind what happened can give us a better understanding of the situation overall. This course will be lecture and discussion-based with students submitting reflections throughout the course and the final project being a presentation made by the students on a connection between mathematics and an aspect of warfare.

Parapsychology – Dr. Julia Langdal-Sittu

This course will examine and evaluate the psychological theories, phenomena, and explanations for paranormal experiences. These experiences include but are not limited to: ghosts, alien abductions, telepathy and telekinesis, near-death experiences, dreams, communicating with the dead, out-of-body experiences, precognition, and demons. We will explore the psychological research relating to paranormal phenomena, emphasizing the psychological explanations for such phenomena, and examine the real-world impact of this research. Assignments will include weekly readings, participation in weekly discussions, 1-2 short reflection papers, and one final presentation on a paranormal phenomenon of the student’s choice.

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Spring 2024 Seminars, continued

Screen Print & the T-Shirt – Thomas Logan

This seminar will explore print through the lens of commercial use and application. With social media trends and pop culture enforcing the practice, students will explore various printing inks, including glow-in-the-dark, puff additive, fluorescent, metallics, etc. Students will get a hands-on approach in all aspects of designing, stenciling, printing and reproduction. From printing on clothes to printing objects, we will cover a variety of methods around screen print. We will discuss color theory, practical design elements, Photoshop, and all the current trends shaping modern screen printing. Materials and lab usage will be provided.

Sleep, Dreams, and Nightmares – Heather Davis

Sleep is not only an essential biological process but also a clear channel to the subconscious, a time when our deepest fears and desires rise to the surface in the form of dreams. In this course, students will examine the science behind sleep, how humans have historically understood or explained this once-perplexing phenomenon through art and literature, how dreams have appeared at pivotal moments in religious and cultural movements, and more.

Watching The Sopranos: The Psychopathology of Everyday Violence – Dr. Robert Reginio

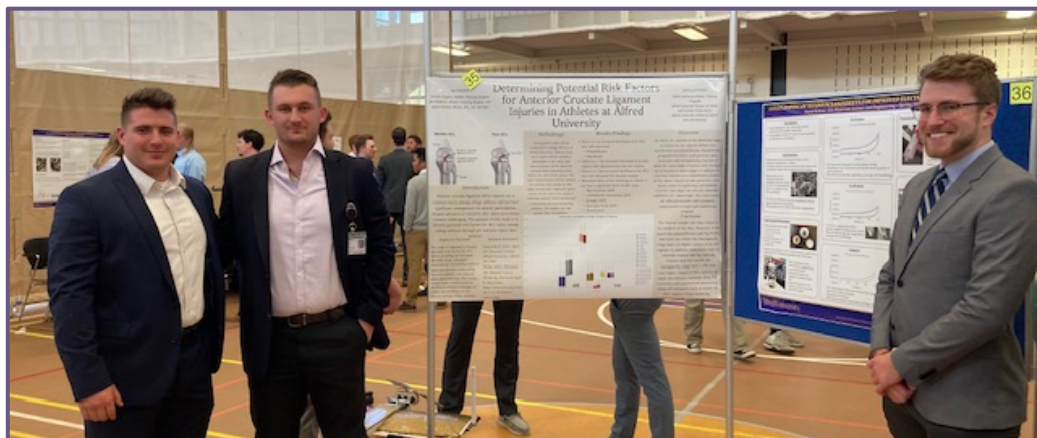
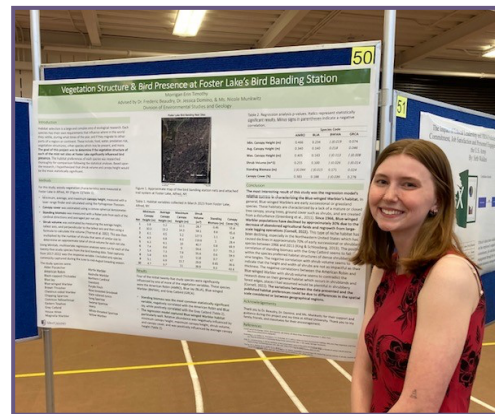
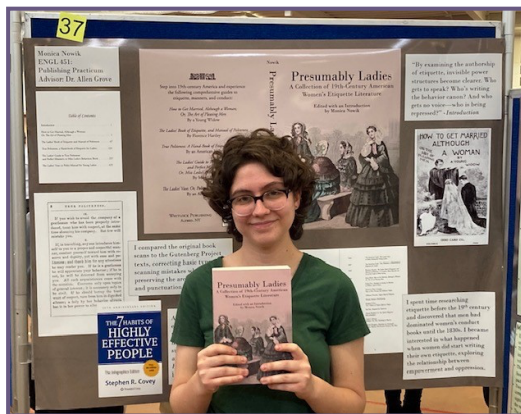
This seminar will consist of watching, discussing, and reading about the mafia television series *The Sopranos*, which brought a rich cinematic style to the small screen and then used the form of a serialized drama to subvert the expectations we hold as seasoned TV-watchers. We will interpret the show from three key perspectives: as an exploration of human psychology, as a part of the gangster genre in American cinema, and as an exploration of American materialism and its political, cultural, and spiritual effects.

ZINE Machine – Kevin Adams & Sara Kramer

A zine (as in magaZINE) is a popular form of do-it-yourself publication. Zinesters use drawing, poetry, narrative, and collage as a form of personal expression and community building. In this class, students will make and distribute their own original zines, discuss zine theory, and learn about zine history. Students will complete their first zine on the first day of class! Students will also explore zines from a variety of communities and creators, including BIPOC, queer, goth, and punk. Co-taught by a librarian and an artist, this course will offer perspectives from both the art world and the world of librarianship.

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Students displaying their posters at the 2023 Undergraduate Research Forum