The Honorific

Alfred University Honors Program
Annual student-run newsletter
Fall 2025 - Spring 2026

The Honorific

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Chyla Armstead
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Editors:
Gabby Rodriguez
Samantha Smit

From the Director's Desk

by Dr. Juliana Gray

One of the innovations that Dr. Gordon Atlas instituted as Honors Program director was the creation of the first-year student groups. Dr. Atlas believed our first-year students needed more support and greater opportunities to connect with other students, both those new to Alfred and those with more experience who could serve as mentors. So he created four groups: Action Figures, Servitors, Ambassadors, and Reporters.

Today those four groups are still an essential part of the AU Honors Program. Under the leadership of three to five upper-class students, each group gathers roughly a quarter of the first-year cohort to serve a particular mission. This year our Action Figures organized fun activities, leading students on a hike to Stony Brook State Park and hosting them for a cookie-baking party at the Honors House. The Servitors volunteered at a local farm, helping them prepare their fields for winter, and at the Govinda Goshala Cow Haven, doing chores around the barn and helping to socialize the cows by grooming and snuggling with them. The Ambassadors attended admissions events, chatting with prospective students and their families about Honors seminars, activities, and our community. And finally, the Reporters wrote, laid out, and edited this very newsletter, which is sent to Honors alumni all over the country.

In each of these groups, students provide valuable services to the Honors Program while also making connections to fellow students and the greater Alfred area. Some of the first-year students enjoy their groups so much that they volunteer to become group leaders, meeting new students at our August orientation and helping them transition to life at AU. If our seminars are the heart of the Honors Program, then the first-year groups are the backbone, providing structure and support for our members as they adjust and grow.

The Honorific

Fall 2025 Seminars

From The Clash to Kendrick: The Art of Protest Music

by Izzy Stem

Starting out with a bang, Professor Robert Reginio invited the class to discuss what we all felt was wrong with the current state of the world and what we felt should be a part of the discussion and be protested. The first assignment was to listen to five protest songs and, based on those, determine what defines a protest song. As a class we defined a protest song as one that calls to action, has an emotional impact, demands people to think critically, and forces the artist to take a risk by releasing it. In class after reviewing an assigned album, we then went over certain songs that stuck out to us and thought of what references would've meant at the time and what they mean for us now. Some popular albums we listened to were *London Calling* by The Clash, *Pussy Whipped* by Bikini Kill, *Fear of a Black Planet* by Public Enemy, and *To Pimp a Butterfly* by Kendrick Lamar.

Professor Reginio has taught this class before and says his inspiration behind teaching about protest music is that "In high school and college, protest music was all around. More specifically, I was galvanized by the activist work of Larry Kramer and ACT UP during the AIDS crisis." Bob Dylan's song "Only a Pawn in Their Game" and Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet* are Professor Reginio's favorite protest albums and songs, both of which we listened to in class. Reginio describes the Dylan song as "incredibly moving, filled with powerful rage, and sharp-eyed about the structural forces in America that support white supremacy" and the Public Enemy album as "the perfect protest album."

The end goal of this class, and our final project, is to curate a radio show on WALF. For this project as a class we pick a theme and songs to fit it, then write related text for each song. It's going to be on air at the beginning of next semester, so look out for it in the spring!

The Food Lab

by Josephine Somers

Welcome to Food Lab, where everything is food and science. This is Professor John D'Angelo's second time teaching the class. He's drawn to this class because he is a foodie and food is fun. Food marries science and society; the social aspect of cooking and eating ties people together. This semester a few new topics were added, such as ritualistic eating and cannibalism. There was an increased coverage on plating food, as more art and design students were in the class than before. This class follows several cooking books and online sources, including the book that inspired the name of the course, *The Food Lab: Better Home Cooking Through Science* by J. Kenji López-Alt. Generally, each week starts by talking about and selecting things students have eaten throughout the previous week or students' childhood favorites using a 3-5 slide PowerPoint presentation. This includes a show-and-tell of recipes and/or nutritional information about these foods. What does this class teach? Professor D'Angelo includes various topics about food sciences: flavors, food and drink pairings, and the chemical changes that happen during cooking, and social science topics such as how to plate/present food.

Engineering Origami

by Lindsay Shelhamer

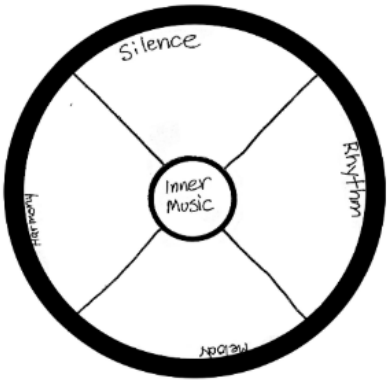
A seminar offered this semester brings the traditional art of folding and the complex mathematics of engineering together to show students how intricate and versatile the art of origami really is. Engineering Origami, taught by Dr. Nikta Amiri, leads students through an understanding of how origami can be used in construction to make buildings and structures stronger than using standard engineering mathematics and techniques. During my sit-in, I learned that certain patterns can be incredibly useful in the field of engineering. Using different patterns, students learn how specific folds can create strong foundations, capable of expanding and allowing flexibility in the structures these techniques are used in. Students tested these ideas by creating their own origami folds, specifically the waterbomb base model to test the limits of compression of a certain load on the base using weights like rocks or coins in their experiments. This class encourages out-of-the-box thinking by putting two arts together and lets students see for themselves how powerful a simple piece of paper can be when used in different ways.

Psychology of Music in Everyday Life

by Josephine Somers

In Psychology of Music in Everyday Life, taught by Dr. Michelle Tichy, students learn about how music connects to their everyday lives and their inner selves. Each class starts with a daily question that relates to the day's topic. During each class, around the beginning, Dr. Tichy's husband helps lead us through shamanic journeys. How exactly does this tie into the class? Well, shamanic journeys, at least the ones we do, are a trance-like state induced by a steady beat on a drum of between 180-240 beats per minute. This drumming pattern affects the body's theta waves and induces a trance-like state without the use of hallucinogens. This brings in the psychological aspect of the class, as it is a way for people to do a deeper delve into their sense of self and basically work through the inner subconscious of the mind.

The curriculum of this class is almost entirely based on the book *Music Medicine: The Science and Spirit of Healing Yourself with Sound* by Christine Stevens. This book does a deep dive into how, in different ways, music is . . . . well, medicine. It is believed that music comes in four elements: rhythm, melody, harmony, and silence. This is one of the many exciting things the Psychology of Music seminar had to offer.



Students filling out a chart based on the four elements of music; to the right is an example of the chart

Your Brain on Nature

by Lindsay Shelhamer

Something most people learn when they are young is that nature holds a high importance and impact for their health, but we never really understand the full depth of how much it can affect our health in our day-to-day lives. One of the Honors seminars that was offered this semester was a class taught by Dr. Beth Johnson titled “Your Brain on Nature.” This class explores in detail the impact nature can have on someone’s physical, mental, and spiritual health through show-and-tell assignments and in-class discussions on aspects of nature that students have noticed, and the influences and experiences they have observed.

The class is organized into units on mind, body, spirit, and community, which aid in focusing in on the senses and feelings evoked when experiencing natural phenomena and outdoor spaces. Each week a new topic, such as “This is the greatest” and “3 out of 5,” was assigned, each of which asked the students to go out and search for a specific natural thing to be captured as a photo or a physical object, such as sunsets, petrified hummingbirds, flowers, and many others, to be examined in class in a show-and-tell. These show-and-tells allow for a deeper discussion into understanding what we thought of the topic that week and why students had chosen this certain thing that made them feel as though it reflected the feeling of awe or how it reminded them of a childhood memory.

With many people feeling disconnected from nature, this class is a great way to take a step toward rebuilding that connection and to experience the positive effect that simply taking a short walk away from manmade creations can do for someone.

Fake News, Real Consequences

by Chyla Armstead

This seminar, taught by Dr. Hakan Karaaytu, is centered around very open discussions, and it is easy to have a free-flowing conversation about any current topic covered in the news or other media. For the first assignment the students had to find three fake news stories that they had encountered. This led to some very different conversations compared to regular classes. Some topics were related to politics; however, others centered around subjects we had seen on social media. A prime example of this is a discussion about the president and then a man in a bean five minutes later.

We learned that there were three parts of evaluating fake news. 1: Everyone is an actor who plays a role in fake news. 2: Motivation is crucial – for someone to make something, or spread false information, there is most likely a motive. 3: We must consider the impact after the fake news is spread. Dr. Karaaytu is a great fit for this course. He makes it easy to understand important words, by giving out real, recent examples. The class is also fun to present in. Almost every week we present examples that we have found. Most of the time it is related to misinformation.

We even got to look into the international media sector. Misinformation can be spread very easily from one person to another. This can be very dangerous depending on the type of information that is given. Other types of information are based on clickbait titles. Clickbait is a media that has purpose, such as to gain attention from viewers, so they will interact with what is being said. This was one of my favorite weeks, because the examples that I found were different from what I was expecting. A large theme throughout most of the presentation weeks was to check the sources of what is being posted in the media. If you enjoy looking deeper into information in the media, this course would be great for you.

Alfred E. Nigmas

by Maddax King

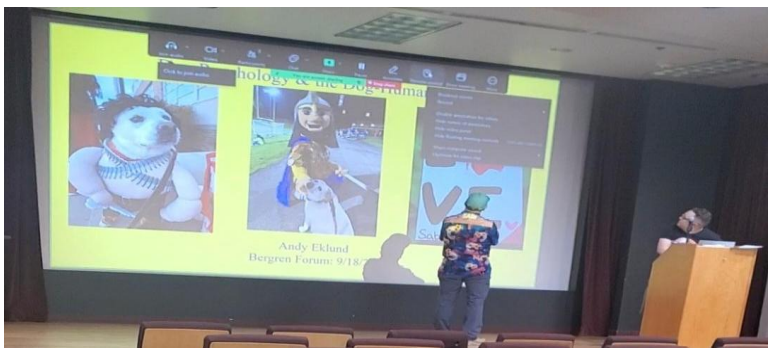
Are you someone who enjoys math, puzzles, or challenging questions? The Alfred E. Nigmas class taught by Dr. Andy Eklund might be just the class for you. This seminar allows students to delve into the world of puzzles, both for fun and to see how they were used throughout history. When I had the honor of sitting in on the class, we learned about cryptography machines used during World War II and in the sciences, thanks to student-led presentations. Each student was expected to present at least one slide, but many read two or three based on how much research and data they had acquired. After the presentation, we had the opportunity to work on puzzles of different difficulties and varieties. These puzzles vary but when I took part, we did a sudoku puzzle, a crossword puzzle, and a cipher. From my experience and the people I spoke with before and after the class, it's a hit! I highly recommend the class for anyone who likes to be challenged with a fun time and likes to relax with puzzles.

Gone to the Dogs

by Chyla Armstead

In Dr. Andy Eklund's Bergren Forum lecture on dogs, based on his Gone to the Dogs Honors seminar, he looks deeper into why dogs act the way they do. Behavioral psychologists have investigated the cognitive abilities of dogs, one famous example being the Pavlov experiment, which concluded that conditioned responses could be made from a stimulus. Later, students learned about dogs' genetic disposition that makes them respond differently to humans.

In the lecture Dr. Eklund also gave examples of activities students can do as projects. One was for students to make their own dog toys. Another activity was to create fundraisers to help dogs or to volunteer at a shelter. Overall, this class is a great way to get involved with and learn about our four-legged friends.



Honors Orientation

by Maddax King

With my first semester at Alfred University already halfway through, I can wholeheartedly say that being part of the Honors Program has been a wonderful experience. It began with Orientation, and I had an exciting time at the event. We started with everyone breaking up into their small groups depending on the survey students took before moving onto campus. These groups included Action Figures, Servitors, Reporters, and Ambassadors. Once we found our groups, we received a name tag from our group leaders. Afterwards, we moved with our groups to separate locations to learn about our roles. As a Reporter, we are "responsible for writing and publishing the Honors newsletter, The Honorific," as instructed by Dr. Gray. After that we had the opportunity to reconnect with the other Honors students over some pizza and other dinner goodies. Overall, it has been a fun time being part of the Honors Program and I would recommend this experience to everyone.

Honors Fall Trip

by Lindsay Shelhamer

At this year's fall trip, students were treated to dinner at The King and I Thai restaurant and a showing of *The Play That Goes Wrong* at the Geva Theatre in Rochester. *The Play That Goes Wrong* was a great comedy, filled with immersive acting that felt as though even in the audience you were a part of the show. There was nonstop laughter throughout as we slowly watched the play fall apart. The play opened with one of the characters seemingly arriving late to the show and jumping onto the stage and running behind the set to change. The rest of the show consisted of mistaken lines and parts of the set breaking; at one point the part of the set started to drop below the actors' feet as if they were going to slide right off it, causing a fright for the audience, though it was carefully planned to keep the actors safe. Every part was perfectly done in a great presentation of what a good comedy should be, from the dialogue, the amazing acting, and of course the crumbling set.

Upper-class Student Q&A

by Izzy Stem

Q: What has been special about the Honors Program for you?
Sophomore Katie Ransom: “I think the Honors Program is especially great because it opens you up to so many different opportunities that you wouldn't otherwise have. Events like Death by Chocolate and the fall trip are just a couple examples of fun traditions, and the Honors seminars are such a cool way to explore fascinating and sometimes niche topics. I especially enjoy the activities all of our groups put together, such as service and community bonding.”

Q: What advice would you give to first-year students about taking their first Honors seminar?
Sophomore Ava Peterson: “Don’t see it as a hassle or simply extra work; see it as an opportunity to do things that you will probably never be able to experience otherwise! There are many cool classes offered and the variety changes every year!”

Q: Have special opportunities been open to you besides the seminars?
Junior Gabriella Rodriguez: “I feel like Honors seminars help you connect with your professors more, leading to better recommendation letters if you choose to go to grad school.”

Q: Which fall trip has been your favorite?
Sophomore Quentin Bale: “The *Les Mis* trip.”

Q: What was your favorite activity from an Honors seminar?
Multiple answers: Some favorite activities from an Honors seminar have been hiking through Hairpin Trail, making a movie, and playing board games for the Honors seminar: Do not Pass Go, Do Not Collect $200.

Sophomore Quentin Bale at Hairpin Trail

Macbeth

by Izzy Stem

From fights to the death, to apparitions brought on by witches, to the rise and fall of monarchs, *Macbeth* is a play full of action and drama. The plot centers around a general named Macbeth who is approached by witches and is told three things: 1. He will become Thane of Cawdor. 2. He will then become King of Scotland. 3. Macbeth's companion, Banquo, will father the line of future kings. Each of these predictions is then fulfilled by chance or by force. After these events Macbeth visits the witches and is told three new prophecies: 1. To beware of Macduff. 2. No man born of woman can harm him. 3. He'll be safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Castle. Each of these prophecies foreshadows what happens throughout the rest of the play. When the opposing army marches on the castle, they do so hidden by branches. Macduff, who is one of the opposition leaders, is revealed to have been born not naturally but by caesarean section, and he is the one who beheads Macbeth, concluding the play.

The star of the show, Macbeth, is played by senior Tristan Duhan, who has been a part of six other shows here at Alfred University. Duhan is a member of the Honors Program, and for his senior thesis, he plans to analyze his experience with the show, highlighting "memorization, character work, and choreography, as well as the importance of balancing everything else in your school life, such as studies, athletics, work, and the small bit of social life you can maintain outside the production." Duhan believes that with Shakespeare plays and characters it is easy for the audience to get lost, so it's important that actors do a lot of tablework and research so that even if the audience doesn't understand everything, the meaning can still get through to them.

Duhan states that the most challenging part of the play was the memorization of lines. Macbeth's character has roughly 33% of the dialogue and roughly 5,500 words in the play. The role of Macbeth has been Duhan's favorite role at Alfred University: "It had everything an actor could want: a beautiful script, fantastic collaborators both on and off the stage, and of course fight choreography." Duhan credits director Jonathan Ziese for being a wonderful person to work with. As it is Duhan's senior year, he reflects on how he was excited to be able to act in one of Shakespeare's plays again, his first being *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. For Duhan, this is a full circle moment to end on another Shakespearean play here at Alfred University.

Spring 2026 Honors Seminars

Aliens Across the Galaxy – Dr. David DeGraff

Let's take a look at aliens in science fiction stories and novels (and maybe a movie or two) and analyze how reasonable their biology is. Class time will be spent discussing the aliens in the short stories/novels we're read, and working on ideas for our own aliens. The final project will be a presentation of your own alien design, or an analysis of an alien from a science fiction work not discussed in class.

Financial Wellbeing – Dr. Mark Lewis

Do you want a bright financial future? In this class we will explore the latest research and insights on our relationship with money, how our attitudes and beliefs can support (or detract from) our well-being, and how people routinely make financial decisions that are not in their best interests.

Gone to the Dogs – Dr. Andy Eklund

The symbiotic relationship between dogs & humans has evolved over time, as shown through mythology, history, and culture. We'll examine the science and evolution of dogs, their occupations, the economics of dog/pet ownership in the USA, and partake in debates on "adopt don't shop," kill versus no-kill shelters, and stereotypes of dog breeds. We'll also outreach to local shelters and rescues.

Maple Syrup: The Real Thing– Laurie Lounsberry Meehan

"Wanted: Someone with a background in meteorology, chemistry, botany, forestry, art, engineering and cookery who is also a nature lover with lots of patience. Must also be able to work outdoors in changing weather conditions." While true of a maple syrup producer, don't let the description scare you away! The exploration and understanding of maple syrup happens through the lens of many disciplines. This class is an introduction to the elements and aspects surrounding real maple syrup using readings, discussion, activities, field trips, and hands-on experiences as well as enjoying a multitude of foods made with maple syrup. A capstone project of the student's choice rounds out the class requirements.

The Pharmaceutical Industry– Dr. John D'Angelo

How are drugs discovered? How are their safeties determined? How much does it cost? Who pays for it? Why do medicines cost so much? Why is health insurance so expensive and how does it impact our access to care? All these questions and more will be answered as we discuss the pharmaceutical and health care industry. The good, the bad, and the ugly of this necessary industry, including drug advertising and the recent political impacts on the industry will be covered. No prior experience in a science class is necessary.

The Alfred University Honors Program
1 Saxon Drive
Alfred, NY 14802

Spring 2026 Honors Seminars, continued

Political Film: Protest on Screen – Dr. Robert Reginio

In this course we will screen and analyze all sorts of movies with explicit political subject matter—from Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, to Studio Ghibli's *Valley of the Wind*, and documentaries like *How to Survive a Plague* (about AIDS activists) to consider a.) if and how great art can be made about explicitly political themes and b.) how these films are understood by us now during a time of political turmoil. We'll ask how past crises can inform the present, and how culture in general can forcefully respond to an era of crackdowns, political exclusions, and climate change. Students will present on the films over the course of the seminar and that work will culminate in the creation of a podcast in which the films we screen – and others – will be reviewed for a wider audience.

Quest for Knowledge: Dungeons and Dragons – Dr. Danielle Gagne

Seasoned players, Dungeon Masters, and newbies can join this honorific quest for knowledge to explore why Critical Role and *Stranger Things* have brought Dungeons and Dragons out of basements and into mainstream pop culture. Adventurers in this course will be introduced to the basic game rules and mechanics. Weekly encounters with ancient and contemporary scrolls of knowledge will help adventurers build character sheets based on discussions of the societal impact of the game, values, sexism, racism, role-playing and identity, religion and magic, and morality. At the end of term, adventurers will present a character sheet based on a well-known persona and try their luck, skills, and new knowledge in a campaign.