

In the Company of Friends

The Honors Program Newsletter

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Extended Hours
7 days a week
7:00am– Midnight

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Honors Program Co-Sponsors Sandy Hook Promise Talk

Alison Tobin '18

On Tuesday, November 1, Sandy Hook Promise Organization Managing Director and spokesperson Mark Barden came to Merrimack for a lecture event on December 14, 2012, tragedy struck Newton, Connecticut in the form of a school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. A shooter who entered the school killed twenty children between the ages of six and seven, as well as six staff members.

As a response, the Sandy Hook Promise Organization was developed with the mission to “prevent gun-related deaths due to crime, suicide, and accidental discharge so that no other parent experiences the senseless, horrific loss of their child.”

Barden lost his 7-year-old son Daniel in the Sandy Hook tragedy. He strives to bring people together to find solutions to prevent tragedies like this in the future. The organization believes there are more issues that surround these tragedies in addition to gun violence. He spoke about this at the event, and also told personal stories of his beloved son Daniel.

The idea of this event came to Honors Program senior student Molly Malinowski. She heard about the organization from a professor she had last year and says, “As a pre-service elementary education teacher, I was very intrigued into the mission and goals of this organization.” Malinowski researched the organization and found that they do lecture events and decided this would be a great event for Merrimack College. “I think all people should be aware of the reality of school violence at this point in time. It is an uncomfortable subject to talk about, but it is so vitally necessary.”

Malinowski was forming her Honors Senior Capstone as well, and decided to connect them and focus her Capstone on gun violence in elementary schools and whether or not pre-service teachers are prepared to enter the profession with the media attention that tragic events have caused. “I have become so passionate on educating others on this issue, and I am really excited to bring this opportunity to the college,” she says.

Audience members enjoyed the lecture. Brianna Butler '17 says, “It was great to hear how Sandy Hook Promise was focused on mental health and the culture that surrounds gun violence, rather than the gun laws that might not work and stir up much controversy in this country.”

Honors Program Manager Lisa Cavallaro is proud of the efforts of Malinowski and others including Honors Student Council members who it took to make this event happen. She comments, “This was a timely subject and we were happy to raise awareness of Sandy Hook Promise’s national initiative in school violence protection programs.”

This event was open to all Merrimack College students, faculty, and staff. The Honors Program sponsored the event in collaboration with Psychology Club, Criminology Club, Education Club, Hamel Health and Counseling, and the Merrimack Police Department.



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Opening Reception 2016

Sam Salem '18

Honors Program Students gathered once again for the annual Honors Program Opening Reception on Monday, September 26th. The event has been an integral part of the Honors Program for years, and brings Honors Students together in one communal event. Tori Thistle, class of 2018, stated that “The Opening Reception is the first big event of the semester for the Honors Program where we get the opportunity to catch up with other students that we don’t get to regularly see. It’s a great event that brings us all together.”

Due to a large class of first year Honors Students, the event was moved from its usual location in Cascia Hall to the MPR in the Sakowich Center. President Hopey addressed the attendees and spoke on how Honors Students are learning to be modern day problem solvers in order to contribute to our ever changing world. After the president’s address, alumnus guest speaker Iqra Iftikhar ’14 spoke about how the Honors Program and her other involvements during her time at Merrimack helped her achieve her current aspirations. As per tradition, after the speakers, Honors Students and faculty then joined with refreshments and hors d’oeuvres as they mingled amongst themselves. Honors Student Joanna Gormley ’18 spoke about the changes in venue, stating, “I thought it was a nice and well organized event. The separation of the speaker and dinner was great, and really helped with the large amount of students.” With such a successful opening event to the academic year, the eagerness amongst both faculty and students to continue to the Augustinian value of constantly seeking more knowledge can be sensed by all.



North View– Farewell

I write my last column for the newsletter as the fall semester comes to an end and we look forward to the holidays. It’s been a good semester for the Honors Program, with 97 incoming first-year students, our annual opening reception in September, seven students attending the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference, a moving presentation by one of the founders of Sandy Hook Promise, an excellent Last Lecture by Dr. Laura Hsu, two successful Open Houses where we talked with many prospective students, the ongoing publication of our award-winning newsletter, and many, many other activities sponsored by and involving the Honors Student Council, the Peer Mentors, and the Honors Ambassadors. I am constantly amazed by the depth of commitment I see in Honors students to our program, and I know full well it would not be nearly as engaging and vibrant as it is without all of you. You bring your ideas to us and keep the Honors Program moving ahead, you sponsor and attend events, and you prove yourselves again and again to be concerned and active members of your community. A program director can ask for no more, and I have been deeply grateful for all of your hard work and engagement with Merrimack Honors.

Faculty have been telling me for months how much they love teaching Honors courses, and I know more will offer new and interesting courses in the future along with Honors sections of our Liberal Studies Core requirements. Your enthusiasm and dedication to your courses encourage more and more faculty to teach in Honors, and I know that the curriculum will continue to improve and meet your needs and interests.

It has been a true pleasure to have worked with Honors students during the last year and a half, and I thank you for welcoming me into the program as you have. I also want to thank Lisa Cavallaro for bringing her unflinching enthusiasm and focus to constantly improving the Honors Program and for being patient with me as I learned the ropes over the past months. Some of you have had our incoming director, Dr. Ellen McWhorter, for classes, so you know that she is an excellent teacher and always looks forward to getting to know students. I have total faith that all of you will welcome her as you did me. She is so excited to be working with you, and I am moving just across the way to the Provost’s Office knowing that you are all in good hands.

Thank you for brightening my day every time I walked into the Honors Commons, and for revealing yourselves as thoughtful students and engaged citizens. I have great hope that no matter which way the wind blows, Honors students will continue to work not only toward their own achievements, but toward a just society and a better world. Good luck with final exams and please take a breather when you’ve finished to enjoy your break and spend time with your friends and families. Happy Holidays, with much gratitude for a wonderful year and a half.

Dr. Kerry Johnson

Laura Pruett's New Course

Jessica Bruso '17

Dr. Laura Pruett, Associate Professor of the Visual and Performing Arts Department at Merrimack College, is developing a new course for next semester titled FAA 1340: The Concept Album in Popular Music. She describes the course as an introduction “to the art of active listening and the practice of informed and skilled analysis.” Many genres of music will be used in the course to demonstrate the idea of a concept album as a work of art and help students develop a deeper and more mindful awareness of listening habits in their daily lives. She was inspired by her childhood and listening to concept albums such as “Pet Sounds,” “The Wall,” and “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” with her father. She decided to develop this “passion course” in order to “frame conversations about musical genre and form while incorporating a wide range of musical styles and time periods into the discussion.” She hopes that students will be able to explore and analyze music that they are already personally invested in so that they can have a deeper understanding of the meaning behind it. She really wants the students to “have a great time listening to and learning about a lot of fantastic music, and to appreciate listening to entire albums.” She is excited about the opportunity to teach this class for the Merrimack College Honors Program.



Upcoming Events



November 23rd– 27th

December 1st

December 4th

December 6th

December 8th

December 9th

Thanksgiving Recess

Winter Snack Attack

Nutcracker Ballet

Honors Student Leadership Dinner

Meditation Night

Last Day of Classes



Peace Corps Volunteer—Fiona Coleman '14

Kiera Duggan '18

Fiona Coleman, Honors Program graduate from the class of 2014, is currently working in the Peace Corps in the village of Samfya, Luapula Province in Zambia. She pursued a degree in Sports Medicine, and had expected to attend physical therapy school. This changed her senior year, when she went on a service trip to Haiti for her Honors Capstone project. While on her service trip, she became interested in food insecurity and its relationship to physical injury. After graduation, she spent a year working on farms all over the world to gain the necessary experience for the Peace Corps, saying she was “lured by the idea of traveling, submerging [herself] into another culture and language and assisting people in development.” Through the organization WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms)—a work-exchange that trades up to six hours of work a day for food, accommodation, and knowledge—Coleman stayed at places like a permaculture teaching institute, a family vineyard, and a biodynamic blueberry farm, to name a few.



Life in Zambia is different every day; Coleman collects water and firewood, tends a garden, and bikes to the market for food. She says she “[loves] the variety of work,” where she “promotes food security practices that conserve natural resources” with a variety of people and organizations, like local farmers, District Forestry and Agricultural officers, and local NGOs. Along with teaching literacy and English, and helping to provide Malaria, HIV, and early pregnancy education, the Peace Corps affords even more opportunities for travel while volunteering—the first week of November Coleman traveled to Malawi! While Coleman knows her work might not make a visibly large mark on the community, she says, “I do hope though that I can inspire people to continue to make incremental steps to increase self-capacity in areas of food security, personal health, and income generation.”



Above all, the Peace Corps has been, according to Coleman, “a beautiful life experience where you get to experience life in a way different culture and lifestyle, get to see beautiful places you never knew existed, make positive changes in a new community that feels like home, and grow and learn a lot.” To keep up with Coleman, check out her blog at fionamarie05.blogspot.com. The Honors Program wishes Coleman the best of luck in her remaining time in Zambia.

Honors Service Days

Megan Carignan '18

The Honors Student Council led three Honors Program service days to give back to the nearby community. The service days took place November 13th, 14th, and 19th, and the participants went to the Lazarus House in Lawrence, MA. The Lazarus House is composed of many different buildings, and the Honors Students went to a different area each day.

The Honors Students went to a food pantry the first day, where they worked to help put food on the shelves in preparation for the following week. The grocery store format allows people to choose their own food, under a certain amount, instead of simply a pre-made basket of food. Savannah Shairs, Michaela Casey, Caroline Ells, Jill Schiavoni, Grace Jenkins, and LeAnn DiMauro all participated in this service day. On Friday, Honors Students Savannah Shairs, Brad Picard, Amy Byrnes, Katherine Ferrara, Javaria Haseeb, and McKenna Moore went to the thrift store at the Lazarus House. While there, they sorted clothes and other items, and cleaned the store. Many low income residents shop at the thrift shop for necessities due to the low costs. Finally, the last service day was spent going to a house with multiple families. Savannah Shairs, Michaela Casey, Lisa Barbaro, Daniel Hansen, Nicole Chaisson, Danielle Morin, Carol DiMaiti, McKenna Moore, Kole Ouelette, and Michaela McCarthy all helped to make dinner and dessert for the families.

Honors Student Council Service Officer Savannah Shairs '14 led all three service days. Shairs spoke about the service, saying, "Service is so much more than simply going to a site, performing the service, and leaving. Service is all about interacting with those you are helping. I personally cherish the little things like a smile on someone's face or even a simple thank you. These people, and even the organization, were so thankful that we were there. This just shows that one person can help many." The Honors Program thanks the students who participated in these service days, and hopes more community work will be completed.



Last Lecture 2017 — Laura Hsu

Molly Meehan, '18

The Honors Program's annual Last Lecture took place on November 15th. Merrimack College students and faculty filled Cascia Hall for Laura Hsu's lecture. Hsu was instructed to give a lecture as if it would be the last one she would ever give.

Professor Hsu is an Assistant Professor in the Human Development department, with her specialty leaning towards introductory classes, as well as Diversity, Social Justice, and Ethic courses. In addition, she has taught Child & Adolescent Development. Hsu has experience within the Honors Program supervising Capstone projects and teaching an Honors Introduction to Human Development. She has loved working with Honors Students and looks forward to working more with them in the future.

According to Hsu, her lecture focuses on how "interpersonal relationships and social environments shape people's identities and affect their mental and physical well-being." Hsu has always been intrigued by external factors and how they can affect a person as well as the people around them. The point of this specific lecture is to show people that once individuals understand their potentially subconscious behavior, they can ultimately change it to be more positive.

Hsu wants the audience to benefit from such realizations, saying, "I hope they will develop a general awareness and curiosity about how the people and circumstances in their lives can shape their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and that, by becoming more aware, it will encourage them to be more mindful of the decisions they make and how they interact with others."

