

# In the Company of Friends

## The Honors Program Newsletter

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### Office Hours

North Residential Village  
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Monday – Friday  
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Extended Hours  
7 days a week  
7:00am– Midnight

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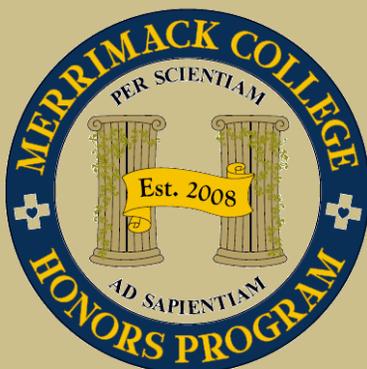
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## Honor Student David Bailot's Last Lecture

Alison Tobin '18

Senior athletic training major and Honors Program member Dave Bailot delivered the eighth annual First Lecture speech last week, an event that is unique to Merrimack College. Even though Bailot looked calm, cool, and collected on stage during his speech, he says he was pretty nervous in the hours leading up to the moment. He was able to overcome his nerves with help from friends and family, but only truly overcame them when Joe Fisher was introducing him on stage before he began his speech. "I took a breath and knew that I had a mission and purpose for that evening and understood that it was time for me to achieve it," said Bailot.



The First Lecture was very important to Bailot. "The two aspects that I took away from this experience are that we as individuals need to be able to share our life stories, believing that we have the ability to influence others and how important it is to reflect on our experiences because that single act helps us figure out what the next step in our lives is."

Other members of the Merrimack community gave Bailot a pat on the back for a job well done. "Dave Bailot was chosen because of how well he represented his journey of personal integration and growth during the interview," said Father Ray Dlugos. "And because of the impact he has had on so many throughout his years at Merrimack."

According to Father Ray, the process of choosing a speaker for the First Lecture takes a little effort from everyone in the Merrimack Community. Students and faculty are invited to nominate students in November. The nominees are interviewed by a committee of students from the campus organizations of Omicron Delta Kappa, Student Government Association, and the Honors Program, as well as Father Ray himself.

Senior Joe Fisher is on the committee that chooses the speaker. He commented on why Bailot was a good candidate for the First Lecture. "Dave's experiences on the Pellegrinaggio, in Campus Ministry, and among others certainly made us believe that he had a great Merrimack story to share. And after hearing Dave's lecture last night, we certainly made a great choice!"

And Bailot was even inspired by his own lecture, too. "I do not know how I can ever thank those who have helped me get to this point in my life, which includes each and every one of you. All I can say is thank you from the bottom of my heart, and please remember that in everything I do and everywhere I go, I will carry your influence with me. Through all of this, I am finally able to be my true self."

Student Megan Carignan attended the first lecture. "Dave did an amazing job in terms of content and presentation skills when delivering the First Lecture. I really connected with his emphasis of the importance of being pushed out of our respective comfort zones, and I agree that these challenges are what push us to grow mentally and emotionally," she said.

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The Honors Capstone is a near-publication worthy project created by students in their senior year at Merrimack. Through completing the project, students distinguish themselves academically, prepare themselves for graduate level work, and maintain a challenging but supportive community during their last semesters in Merrimack Honors. Below are two different examples of Honors Capstones by '16 graduating seniors.

## Theatre Performance Capstone– Michaela Lonati

*Haley Mallett '20*



Michaela “Mick” Lonati is a second semester senior majoring in Elementary Education and Theater at Merrimack College. She aspires to be an elementary school teacher once she completes her master’s degree, which she will be pursuing through Merrimack’s Teacher Education Fellowship program starting in the fall. Currently, Lonati is preparing to graduate by student teaching during the day, and rehearsing at night. She is the President of Merrimack’s student-run theater group The OnStagers. Lonati not only acts in the two productions they put on every year, but in the Visual and Performing Arts Department’s shows as well. She hopes to incorporate her passion for theater in her lessons “to make learning more fun and engaging for students.”

This past fall, Lonati completed her Honors Capstone project through the Visual and Performing Arts Department. Lonati performed in their production of Heidi Schreck’s  *Creature*, and played the role of Margery Kempe. The whole play revolves around Kempe’s character, Lonati describes, “as she deals with visions of the Devil and Jesus and the resulting panic of being burned as a heretic in 1401.” Lonati took her role to a whole new level by researching her the real person on whom the character was based. She then applied what she had learned from her research to her capstone project, which not only tied into the role she was playing, but looking at theatre from a historical standpoint. Research like this is bound to help Lonati in her future career when she is utilizing theater in an elementary classroom setting.

## Android Application Capstone– Gavin Killough

*Jessica Brusco '17*

For Gavin Killough's '17 Honors Capstone, he created an Android application that used facial recognition to take attendance in a classroom environment. It was done through a "directed study" with his adviser, Dr. Chris Stuetzle. As a Computer Science major, he decided to do this because of his interest in image processing (for example, how autonomous vehicles are able to "see" when they drive). He decided that he would create an application for phones because it is an easily accessible camera that everyone has. He says he had trouble at first with coming up with what to do along these lines--he knew what he wanted his solution to look like, but he did not yet have a problem to solve. Ironically, the idea came to him in the "Senior Honors Capstone" class. While the attendance sheet was going around, he thought about the problems that existed with students writing down their names. He realized this would be the perfect problem to solve with facial recognition.

He chose Android as the platform for the application due to the accessibility of the programming language (Java code, which he was already familiar with) and because it did not have the recurring developer fees or tedious approval process that an iPhone app would have required. He began by designing the user interface on index cards because they were the perfect shape and size to help him visualize what the app should look like. After he was satisfied, he programmed each screen, one at a time, adding the various functions. Next, because he was able to use Google integrations on Android, he decided to use Google Sign-In to authenticate users so that he could get course rosters from Google Classroom and store the attendance records on Google Sheets. This method saves space on the user's phone and simplified the design process.

Finally, he added in the facial recognition aspect to the application. When asked to explain, Gavin said, "First, the camera had to be opened to take a picture. Here, I gave the user feedback in real time by placing boxes around faces to indicate that they were in focus. Next, when the picture was taken, a screen displaying the picture and the boxes around the faces appeared, this time allowing the user to tap a face individually to be identified. This was a much trickier problem. The ability to detect a face in an image was significantly easier than being able to recognize whose face it was. A phone did not have this kind of processing power. To solve this, when a face was tapped, I would send that image to a secure server to run the facial recognition algorithm on it, then send it back to the user's phone. The algorithm identified various 'landmarks' on a person's face and compared each one to those of the faces stored on the server. Finally, if the face was recognized, it would add that person to the roster, otherwise, it would prompt the user to identify the face manually and then save that to the secure server for future comparisons".

Gavin plans to eventually put his facial recognition app on the Google Play store. He says it works exactly the way it should, and that he is now working on minor improvements to make it more user friendly.



## Faculty Spotlight: Sandra Raponi

*Maria DAuria '20*

Professor Sandra Raponi specializes in political philosophy, philosophy of law, moral philosophy, and applied ethics. She has taught Honors sections of Introduction to Philosophy and Biomedical Ethics, and has done many great things with the philosophy department. In February, she invited John Kaag, a philosophy professor at UMass Lowell and the author of *American Philosophy: A Love Story*, to come to Merrimack and discuss the meaning of life. This was a campus-wide event that allowed students to listen to Kaag talk about his life and how philosophy has helped him answer the question “Is life worth it?”

Raponi’s main goals for the philosophy department are to engage students and to encourage students to apply what they learn in class into the real world. Reflection and understanding are two major themes in the study of philosophy, and Raponi believes that they can be applied in everyday life. Additionally, she is working on more events that interest and attract students to philosophy. Philosophy has been a passion of Raponi since she was a college student; the subject has ignited her love of learning. Philosophy has helped her open her mind and question the world we live in. Furthermore, philosophy has helped her understand current events, and it has given her a critical eye to politics in America and in other countries.



## Rising Sophomores

“A small group of freshmen stood out so clearly this Fall semester that they were invited to join the Program as rising sophomores. Some of these students were recommended to us by faculty members, and some earned a 4.0 their first semester in college. All of them were forced to undergo a one-on-one interview with me. This is a fantastic group and I’m incredibly excited to see what they contribute to our growing community!”- Ellen McWhorter

Alers, Gabriel	Demirchian, Daniel	Humes, John	Polzello, Sarah
Alkhamis, Danah	Derrick, Raheem	Kelly, Orla	Rodriquez, Gabriela
Bowie, Evan	Eckert, Spencer	Logue, Drew	Skelton, William
Collins, Tristan	Evans, Victoria	Ludwig, Liz	Soucy, Amanda
Demers, Lea-Kristine	Faulkner, Mackenzie	Maroun, Amanda	Velutini, Lucila

## North View

Modernist poet and provocateur Edna St. Vincent Millay famously writes in her 1918 poem “First Fig”:

My candle burns at both ends;

It will not last the night.

But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends--

It gives a lovely light!

Almost one hundred years later, Millay seems to have anticipated the stresses and successes - the fire and the fortitude - the merri-ment and the momentum of spring semester in the Honors Program at Merrimack College. We’re not alone in this roller coaster ride, of course; the best students at colleges and universities nation-wide push hard to bring their A-game before they settle into the summer months. But, being a mere two months into the Merrimack Honors directorship, I’ve noticed some genuinely special, intensely lovely things about our Honors students as they burn their candles at both ends and I’d like to take a moment to share those with our readers.

When the members of our Honors Program care, they CARE. Whether it’s members of our Honors Student Council hashing out the finer planning points of an endless stream of events; the rising sophomores who’ve only recently been invited to the program signing up en-masse for advising - just to make sure they’re meeting Honors Program requirements; or the students who volunteer time and again to share their experiences with families at Accepted Student Days (even if they have to show up at 8 am on a Saturday), the members of our Honors Program do not cut corners. As a new director, I am humbled and enlivened by their work ethic, their earnest belief in our four pillars, and their steadfast devotion to high-quality work on every front.

This spring semester has seen an abundance of activity in the Honors Program. Our seniors have completed their Capstone projects - see the interview with Gavin Killough for an impressive example of the kind of projects they’re executing. Our juniors are now gearing up to take on similarly noteworthy projects. We’ve implemented Fireside Chats, which bring beloved faculty members into the metaphorical living rooms of Honors housing to talk about passion projects. We’ve had Pancakes with the Provost. We’re about to represent the Program at NRHC, where students will present original work to regional Honors colleagues. And we’ve added Honors sections of WGS 1010 (Gender and Society) and HSC 1122 (Human Biology and Physiology) to our course offerings for Fall 2017.

Here’s to hoping that the spring weather gains similar momentum very soon!

Dr. McWhorter



## Honors Alumni Spotlight– Elie Ata

Jessica Brusco '17



Elie Ata '16 is a recent Merrimack College Honors Program graduate currently in medical school. He says that his experiences within the Honors Program helped him decide that this was the best path for him. Through his service learning experiences at Corpus Christi, he worked with patients translating forms and medical information. He says "With those experiences I knew I wanted to be able to help people in the future. Medicine seemed like an appropriate way to do just that." When asked for advice to give to other students looking into medical school, Ata advised that students talk to Dr. Berkes (professor of Biology) about the application process, to learn the basic sciences but also take classes that are not in your comfort zone, and to not give up. He also talked about how every student can get the most out of the Honors Program. He says, "Of course being in the Honors Program is a great resume builder, but make sure that's not all it is. The people who've done the most with the Honors Program embrace it completely and work to make experiences better for future classmates. Be open to new experiences: everyone knows something that you can learn from them. Learn it, and then go out and teach someone."

## Honor Student's Push to Publication– Sarah Vita

Sarah Vita '19



In a paper that I am hoping to publish in a highly selective, undergraduate academic journal, I analyze representations of the psychological concept of the bystander effect in *The Dutchman*, a play written in 1964 by American poet and playwright Amiri Baraka. The presence of the bystander effect has previously gone unnoticed by the play's critics and readers, however I identify a compelling parallel between it and the inaction of some of the play's major figures. My thesis explores the theme of power in the 60s and how struggles over it contributed to the pervasiveness of the bystander effect, while still remaining widely unnoticed by readers of Baraka's play. In short, the bystander effect is a social psychological phenomenon identified by John Darley and Bibb Latané (1963) in which the presence of others in an emergency situation discourages an individual from intervening to help the victim. Interestingly, *The Dutchman* made its stage debut within days of the first publication of Latané and Darley's work on the bystander effect. My research demonstrates that the bystander effect has been a prevalent cultural phenomenon for much longer than it has been identified as such. In the play, specifically, it inhabits the minds of the individuals who witness the abusive and, unfortunately, fatal scene between Lula, a white woman and Clay, an African American man, that unfolds in front of them. The undeniable power of the bystander effect is what initially intrigued me most about the play, and that fact that it goes significantly unnoticed to this day is absolutely fascinating.

## Honors Alumni Spotlight—Brittany Leonard

Sam Salem '18

Upon completion of her Bachelor's Degree in Human Development at Merrimack College, Brittany Leonard has since accepted a job offer as an Executive Assistant at Fidelity Investments in Boston, MA. She currently supports the SVP of Healthcare Product and Marketing, as well as the sales team. Her particular role involves detailed travel coordination and heavy calendar management, which is instrumental to the organization's day-to-day flow and overall team success. Outside of work, she volunteers at Boston Children's Hospital in the MyMusic Rx program as well as at Tufts Medical Center with Musicians on Call. This includes performing live music to patients that are undergoing treatment and are unable to leave their beds. Leonard has spoken highly of her experiences here, saying that the ability to bring hope and positivity to families as they go through difficult circumstances is an opportunity she wouldn't trade for anything in the world. In the meantime, she is pursuing her passions of both music and helping others through studying to become a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Music Therapist Board-Certified.



She has just been recently accepted to Lesley University's Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling with a specialization in Music Therapy Program, and will begin classes this summer. Leonard states her long-term goals are to work in a hospital setting and provide treatment to a variety of ages and conditions, including mental health disorders, disease prevention, geriatrics, and rehabilitation. With a B.A. from Merrimack in Human Development and Spanish, she feels confident for success within this field.