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The Honors Program Celebrates 25 Years!

Dr. Antonas Suziedelis, Honors Director Dr. Peter Shoemaker, CUA President John Garvey and former Honors Director Dr. Ingrid Merkel

Our Honors alumni gathered to celebrate 25 years of the Honors Program over Homecoming weekend. The Friday night reception featured a roundtable discussion on Catholic education in the 21st century. CUA’s new president, John Garvey, kicked off the discussion with a short talk on his views on Catholic Higher Education.

Six alumni led the panel, speaking on their educational and professional experiences. The panel included Anthony Buatti (’08), Fr. Kyle Ingels (’99), Sarah Litke (’06), Dr. Brian Flanagan (’99), Molly Bryson, Esq. (’93), and Nicole Firment (’07). Each panelist spoke on the effects that Catholic education has had on their personal lives and careers.

The Honors Program was founded by Dr. Ingrid Merkel with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1985. Dr. Merkel collaborated with other CUA faculty in applying for the grant and designing a unique series of courses for high achieving students.
Alumni Spotlight: Anthony Buatti (‘08)

I graduated from CUA in 2008 with a BA in History, minors in Philosophy and TRS, and as a University Honors Scholar. I found that the critical thinking skills that I acquired through the UHP were the perfect fit with tackling educational inequity, one of our nation’s most pressing civil rights issues.

Immediately after graduating, I joined Teach For America (TFA)’s 2008 Corps and left for Phoenix, AZ, where I spent two years teaching 3rd Grade at TG Barr Elementary School. TFA is one of the many service opportunities offered through AmeriCorps funding and I found it to be the exact challenge I needed. It was such an incredible feeling to be part of a national movement that currently has 8,400 teachers (most recent college graduates) teaching in 39 of our country’s most underprivileged and under-resourced communities.

In two years I was able to make significant gains in my students’ education (they learned 1.5 years worth of material for every year I taught them) and build incredible relationships with the teachers, administrators, and community members in Phoenix. As a direct result of the training that TFA gave me, the relationships I built, and the efforts that we made, I was awarded the “Beginning Teacher of the Year” Award for the Roosevelt School District in the 2008-2009 school year.

The Odyssey of The Odyssey: The Honors Fall Lecture

Wednesday, Oct. 27, the University Honors Program sponsored a lecture in the Regan Hall classroom. Dr. Sarah Ferarrio of the Greek and Latin department presented “The Odyssey of The Odyssey: From Bronze Age Palaces to the Great Library of Alexandria and Beyond.” This lecture was continuing on a common theme for the class of 2014. Because the incoming freshman class was required to read The Odyssey this summer as part of the First Year Experience, the Honors program took the opportunity to invite a scholar to provide the students with a historical perspective on the epic. Dr. Ferarrio told how the story of The Odyssey developed over time and even had students interpreting Linear B. The event was a roaring success with standing room only. A sound recording of this lecture is available on our website at http://honors.cua.edu/about/honorsnews.cfm

Two Generations of Honors Students

This year the Honors program celebrates another milestone. For the first time, the child of an Honors alumni is entering the CUA Honors program. With our incoming freshmen came Bridget Sheaff (‘14), daughter of Timothy Sheaff (‘89). Timothy was the Honor Program’s first University Scholar. Timothy is now the Director of Drama and Debate at Dowling Catholic High School in West Des Moines, Iowa. During his time at CUA, Timothy completed the tracks in Humanities, Philosophy, and Social Science. He fondly remembers the first Honors Convocation, which took place on the back patio of the President’s residence at Nugent Hall. Bridget is following in her father’s footsteps by majoring in Drama.

Sheaff celebrated this progression, saying, “At no point during my time at Brookland did I imagine this turn of events.”
Notes from Across the Pond: The Honors Program in Oxford

Each semester, a number of students from the University Honors Program are selected to study abroad at the University of Oxford. This fall, five juniors from the Honors Program took advantage of this magnificent opportunity.

Students can study either during the Michelmas Term (fall semester) or the Hilary Term (spring semester), and have the option of taking a seminar on C.S. Lewis, Shakespeare, or British Politics, along with two tutorials. Tutorials are one-on-one with the professor (called a tutor) and the student. The program of study for Oxford is particularly challenging as students are required to produce a paper for each of their classes every week. Yet, the challenge is part of the appeal for our students. The majority of their research is done in the Bodleian, one of the world’s most prominent and beautiful libraries.

In their leisure time, students can join Oxford University student groups and sports teams, as well as attend High Table, the official college dinners, and attend formal college balls. This semester our students have gone boating on the Thames, watched the Wickerman burn on Guy Fawkes Day and attended debates and a ball at the Oxford Union. The Honors program is thrilled to be sending seven students to Oxford this upcoming spring semester.

Defiant Requiem at the John F. Kennedy Center

On Wednesday, Oct. 6, students and alumni of the University Honors Program performed with the Catholic University Chorus and the City Choir of Washington at the John F. Kennedy Center with Dr. Leo Nestor Conducting. The choir performed Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezin which “tells the story of courageous Jewish prisoners in the Theresienstadt concentration camp during World War II who performed the Verdi Requiem while experiencing the depths of human degradation. With only a smuggled score in hand, the famous Mass was performed 16 times, including once before Adolph Eichmann and a Red Cross delegation. The performances came to symbolize resistance and answering the worst of mankind with the best” (Kennedy Center Playbill Oct. 2010).

Performing Honors students: Eleanor Brasfield ’12, Monica Israel ’12, Lillian Blotkamp ’11, Montana Brown ’09, Page Felix ’09, Rachel McNellis ’11, Beth Rothschild ’09, and John Danley ’12.

The Honors Living and Learning Community

The Honors Living and Learning community in Regan Hall has been very busy this semester. The Honors program admitted 118 incoming freshmen into the program this year, and the majority of these incoming students participate in the Living and Learning Community in Regan Hall. Every other Friday, Dr. Taryn Okuma and Dr. Daniel-Gibbons, the faculty-in-residence, host an afternoon tea for students in their Regan apartment. The students enjoy this opportunity to unwind and to bond with the faculty and their 3 year old son, Simon. On Sept. 26, the Honors Community sponsored a trip to the Shakespeare Theater Company’s production of All’s Well That Ends Well. The Honors Council invited Dr. Thérèse-Anne Druart of Philosophy and Fr. Frank Matera of the School of Theology and Religious Studies to the two Symposia dinners so far this fall. Dr. Shoemaker also came to Regan for the annual Pizza with the Director.
Honors graduates, we would love to hear from you!

Please update us on recent events or accomplishments that we could feature in upcoming newsletters. If you would like to share photos or memories from college, we would love those too! Otherwise, we would appreciate if you could simply update your contact information with us in a short email.

Please direct email to:
cua-honorsprogram@cua.edu

Or visit us at
http://Honors.cua.edu

Thank you!