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Marshall University Honors College

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Honors News

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Marshall University

Comments from the Chair

The annual National Collegiate Honors Council convention is always a frustrating and exhilarating meeting, for while everyone leaves the four-day conference filled with new ideas about how to make their honors programs stronger, better, and more efficient, they are inevitably daunted by the prospect of finding time to enact many of these exciting plans.

This year's November gathering, in the heart of downtown Chicago, was no exception. Over 1600 student and faculty representatives from honors programs around the country gathered to discuss their own successes and failures, participate in supplemental activities like art tours and lectures, and attend workshops on every conceivable aspect of honors education. Oh, and we managed to have a number of fabulous meals out on the town.

Panels that I found particularly useful included those on incorporating service learning into

honors curriculums, employing peer mentoring as a component of honors orientation courses, developing exciting and meaningful curriculum, expanding an honors program into an honors college, and fundraising strategies in honors. Such sessions are useful not only because participants make so many practical suggestions that can be applied to any situation but because the discussions often generate related ideas about how to improve one's own program.

Attendance at the NCHC meeting also inevitably causes me to compare Marshall's honors program with programs around the country and I am always struck by how relatively well off we are; many honors directors told stories of having no office space, little furniture, no staff, or few scholarship funds. We have a stable scholarship base, a generous supply of office space in the CAE, full-time staff, a committed honors faculty, and motivated honors

students, as last week's splendid presentation by the students of Honors 480 showed (see below). There is plenty of room for improvement, of course; but we are starting from a fairly strong position already.

Speaking of honors students, it is not too early to think of next year's NCHC convention in sunny Orlando, Florida. Since we always try to bring students to the convention (Jacob Comer and Molly Bassett attended this year), interested honors students should look for future announcements in the *Honors News* and on the email discussion list regarding student presentation possibilities at the 1999 convention.

Good luck with exams and papers. Have a safe and enjoyable holiday break and we will look for you in the new year.

Richard Badenhause, Chair
University Honors Council
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Line of Sight: The State of Culture

by Stacy Mercer

Students in Honors 480, team taught by Dr. Montserrat Miller and Dan Holbrook, have spent the semester studying civilizations from ancient Greece to present day America, in order to answer the question: "Is our civic culture in the United States dead, alive, or diseased?" The class defined civic culture as a commonly held set of beliefs and expectations

about the rights and responsibilities between an individual and the polity in which they live. This definition evolved out of our readings and class discussion.

The class was divided into three groups focusing on specific issues: voter turnout, mass media, and service learning. Through additional research and in-class work, we explored these three areas and

their relationship to the civic culture of our country. We offered our findings in a formal presentation to the Drinko Academy and approximately 25 guests, using the multimedia facilities of the new Drinko Library to supplement our talk.

Honors 480 is a difficult, challenging class. (HON 480, cont'd p. 4)

Honors Happenings: Teaching Together

by Montserrat Miller
and Dan Holbrook

This semester we have had the pleasure to teach a class together for the first time. We are both historians, traditionally lone wolves in the academic world. Rarely will historians team-teach, at least at the undergraduate level. (At the graduate level, where a higher premium is put on torturing students, historians will frequently gang up.)

We have certainly shared many academic experiences; graduate student classes, reading and review groups, conferences, and so forth. In addition, of course, we live together, and so have a pretty good idea about each other's personal and intellectual strengths and preferences.

The class we taught, "Civic Culture in the 90s: Dead, Alive, or Diseased?" covered a topic that has interested both of us for some time. As a result, we have talked extensively about the ideas behind this seminar over the course of several years. Although strictly speaking outside the somewhat narrow bounds of either of our academic specialties (Montserrat is a European social historian whose main focus is on markets, marketing, and consumerism in Catalunya; Dan is a historian of technology whose primary research interest is in the late 20th century

development of complex technologies) we have both followed the discussions of civic culture in the popular and academic presses.

Going into the class we did not anticipate any particular problems working together. We are accustomed to helping one another with all sorts of tasks; photocopying, research, record keeping, washing dishes, and so forth. In practice, our teaching styles, indeed our intellectual approaches, though different, complement each other. One of us likes to hover about 1500 feet above the forest, metaphorically speaking, looking for the groves of beech and oak, scouting out the denuded portions, trying to figure out how the whole pattern of growth works. The other likes to hike right into the woods, examining the bark, the root structures, the patterns of ring growth, and the interrelations between the types of trees, and only then draw some conclusions about the nature of the forest. In the classroom, as well as allowing lively discussions, this can sometimes lead to disagreements. The underlying respect and like for one another, however, means that the disagreements are not personal. Disagreement is at the heart of any academic discourse; it is healthy for students to see that disagree-

ment does not imply dislike.

Married instructors (this could of course include a broad definition of married) create benefits that are reflected in the classroom. There is no need to coordinate complex schedules for consultations about the class; we could discuss class matters in the morning, at night, in the car, over dinner, and last thing at night (how exciting, you say!!). This allowed us to hammer out major differences, to coordinate our efforts, and to plan particularly intricate paper and exam topics. We were also able to discuss at whatever length necessary our impressions of the class as it went along and to make adjustments as needed.

Would we teach another class together? Yes. Did it result in a better class than one in which the teachers are unrelated? Maybe - the relevant variables are too many to say so for sure - but we think so. From our perspective, it was an enjoyable, intellectually and logistically challenging experience well worth repeating. Perhaps the married couple team-teaching an Honors seminar in the Spring semester will offer their perspective on teaching together in a future issue of the newsletter.

Comments from the Editors

We're hailing you from our bloody keyboard with fingers blistered from typing papers, prompts, and the like; Happy Holidays! Having lost all tactile sensation from the numbing work we did over our break-- mind you it's not a vacation-- we are struggling to do more than complain in these, our comments. So, we've come up with some more advice for all of you eager honorlings: Molly and Kathleen's "Prompts 4 Dummies."

1. Consider how much you like your prof and modify the length, font size, and margins accordingly.

2. If you forget to write a prompt and find yourself in "deep do-do," don't worry, it won't affect your grade too much and it could humble you in the process.

3. Feel free to use the phrases "I

like this _____ because," "This _____ changed my life," or "I cannot comment because this author is against my religion."

4. If these comments don't help, we offer below a fool-proof sample prompt. Feel free to plagiarize. (They like that, too.)

"The Itsy-Bitsy Spider" is a metaphor for the intrinsic dichotomy of intellectual advancement in academia. To begin we find a spider diligently endeavoring to advance his two-part body up the waterspout. To the reader this represents the struggle of man to discover the meaning of human existence. Next "down came the rain" (1.2), which to the literary minded is a blatant symbol of the repressive Nazi regime and their book burning bonfires. The spider

has been "washed . . . out" and is despondent and hopeless. In the fourth line of the first stanza, the out-coming of the sun gives our spider hope, a false hope, which will lead to his first failure. And yet this spider, still driven by the innate need for self-realization, begins his climb again. Yet the text offers no evidence of redemption or success, and ultimately clearly stands for man's cyclical struggle to better his lot in the eyes of his fellow man and (we're divided on this one, because Molly always thought of the spider as climbing up a gutter and Kathleen envisioned him climbing up a sink drain) the internal strife which arises from growing old.

Molly Bassett &
Kathleen Sandell, Co-editors

The 1998 National Collegiate Honors Council Convention took place in early November in Chicago, Illinois. Marshall University was well represented by Jacob Comer, John Marshall Scholar, Molly Bassett, *Honors News* co-editor, Martha Woodward, Executive Director of the CAE, and Dr. Richard Badenhansen, Chair of the Honors Council. The conference's theme "Honors in the Loop" focused on Honors activities as "loops"-- links that connect honors programs, courses, faculty, and students to form strong programs with enterprising philosophies and outstanding students. The conference began with a brain-storming session for students, in which we mixed, mingled, and learned about honors programs and colleges from New Mexico to Puerto Rico to Brooklyn. Many programs seek to involve students as thoroughly as possible and some even

NCHC: An Honors Student at an Honors Convention

by Molly Bassett

require participation in campus social and cultural activities. A major focus of the conference concerned a noted increase in the apathy of honors students. Students from schools with small honors programs asked the larger programs, which includes Marshall's honors program of approximately 250 students, what incentives we employ to increase participation in the program. Marshall's big honors incentive is our scholarship program; John Marshall Scholarships, alone, have increased

300% in the last five years. Other schools employed alternative methods of recruitment, including offering early registration and honors housing to outstanding students. Some honors programs encourage students to take multiple honors courses by offering an A/Credit/No Credit grading scale so that excellent achievement is rewarded with an "A," while other students' GPAs are not damaged by low grades. These are just a few of the ideas that we tossed around in one session. The rest of the conference consisted of City as Text journeys, student and faculty presentations, plenaries, and caucuses. NCHC offers a wonderful chance to meet honors students and faculty from all over the nation, and it gives Marshall a chance to measure its program against those of the best schools in the nation.

Capstone Experiences and Senior Projects: Writing a Thesis

by Molly Bassett

At NCHC I attended several student/faculty presentations, some that I thought would help me edit a better *Honors News*, some that corresponded with my majors, and others that just sounded interesting. I happened into "The Honors Thesis: Secrets of Design, Execution, and Writing for the Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences" because it was the last day of the conference and the other presentations sounded like too much work. A faculty panel, consisting of Gary Bell, Texas Tech University, Lillian Mayberry, University of Texas--El Paso, and Joseph Reish, Western Michigan University, presented this topic geared toward upper-division students developing or writing thesis proposals and lower-division students feeling vague pangs of thesis anxiety.

I admit that as a sophomore, I haven't given too much consideration to my thesis project (a lofty term for a senior project or capstone experience). Peterson's publishes a NCHC-sponsored guide to honors programs, which reports that there are 296 honors programs among two or four year public institutions nationwide and that 43% of those programs do not require a thesis for graduation in

honors. This figure surprised me because Marshall requires that every student complete a capstone experience prior to graduation. As the presentation went on, these honors directors and professors made some great suggestions that apply to any student doing a senior project.

Reish, of Western Michigan, began the discussion in which I participated by observing that: writing a thesis is 75% process and 25% dealing with faculty egos. He went on to explain that faculty invest a great amount of time (often without any monetary compensation) in their senior project students, and in return, the faculty need to feel involved in the projects. Reish suggested that you spend time with your advisor discussing the most effective methods for researching your thesis, and that if you study abroad, keep in close contact with your advisor so that they remain involved in your project. Be aware of scholarships, grants, and funding opportunities for your project; one student in my group received a grant from an airline company to spend two weeks in Ireland researching for his project about Jonathan Swift's satires.

From this faculty oriented issue, the discussion turned to the project itself and the ways in which successful projects may be organized. Reish suggested that students keep in mind the various forms that a thesis may take, including fine arts performances, visual art displays, humanities papers, or interviews (our discussion was humanities oriented remember that science and social science projects may take other forms). An upper level student suggested that you use undergraduate work as the foundation for your thesis, which should be the culmination of all of your undergrad studies. Begin by asking yourself where your knowledge bases lie: How can you develop a knowledge base? What forms can the thesis take? Once you answer these inquiries, question the "doability" and the value of your project. Reish's final comment concerned the purpose of your thesis: Projects started as an undergrad often lead to later ventures. So, it turns out that the presentation that I thought would entail no work inspired this article, but I hope that it helps you as you start your senior thesis.

(HON 480, cont'd p. 1) The readings were many in number, but once our studies left ancient civilizations and entered modern ones, the easy to comprehend readings interested most students. The enthusiasm of both professors made up for any difficult reading. The team teaching approach worked well in this class, and class

discussion was informative, partly due to the students, and partly due to the immense knowledge of both professors. Oh, and in case you were wondering, we found civic culture in the United States to be alive, yet changing from its earlier form.

Question of the Month:

What is your vision of the spider's "water spout" (1.2)?

Law: What's It Like?

by Kathleen Sandell

On October 28, Marshall students who attended the first program of this year's "What's it Like?" series learned about the law profession through the first-hand account of three area lawyers. Mark McOwen, Andrew Miller, and William Powell, who work in three distinct law fields, offered a comprehensive overview of what students who wish to enter a career in law can expect.

The first presenter, Mark McOwen, has served as Chief Counsel to the West Virginia House of Delegates Committee on Finance for the past 18 months. McOwen received a B.A. in Political Science from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a law degree from West Virginia University, and has been in a private practice for 17 years. He has been President of the Cabell County Bar Association and a member of many other professional and community boards and organizations.

McOwen began by suggesting which disciplines are most useful for the pre-law undergraduate to study. A strong emphasis in English, he believes, does not necessarily ensure success as a lawyer. Students also need a solid background in the liberal arts and communication. In response to the question of "what's it like," McOwen replied, "unbelievable." He feels that being a lawyer has "given him the opportunity to work with the fabric of society. Law provides the tools to settle disputes between people and disputes between people and the govern-

ment." McOwen currently advises over 100 people in the West Virginia Legislature in the fashioning of laws. He did point out, however, that the law profession also involves aspects that are unlikable. He laments that the public perception of lawyers is the worst that it has ever been. The lawyer, he claims, "is the whipping boy for all of the frustration that people feel about the law." Nevertheless, McOwen recommends a profession in law.

The second speaker, Andrew Miller, is currently a partner in the real estate firm of Flynn, Max, Miller and Toney in Huntington. Miller received a B.A. from Marshall University and a law degree from West Virginia University. His firm closes over 1000 real estate loans per year.

Miller describes his profession as "challenging, demanding, and intelligent." However, he quips, "What's the most exciting thing I do? Nothing. I recommend being an astronaut if you want excitement." While Miller did attack the glamorized image of the lawyer presented on television, he praised the law field as interesting and accommodating to the individual's interests. Most lawyers, according to Miller, "gravitate over time to find the things that are most satisfying to them. Their practice evolves until they find the correct niche."

Finally, students heard from William Powell, who is currently a partner in the Charleston firm of Jackson and Kelley, where he specializes in defense litigation.

Powell received a B.A. from Salem College in public administration and a law degree from West Virginia University, as well. He served for three years as an Assistant U.S. attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of West Virginia. He is also a member of several professional organizations and has lectured widely on health care fraud and compliance issues.

Powell emphasizes the difficulty of law school and recommends that pre-law students stress reading, writing and communicating effectively and take writing and speech courses. He also warns students against the desire to be a lawyer "for the money," since very lucrative practices are not the norm. Echoing some of Miller's sentiments, Powell claims that a lawyer must be "aggressive, thick-skinned, detail-oriented and capable of losing well." The presence or absence of these traits will determine the type of legal work that you will want to do. Some of the good aspects of being a lawyer, according to Powell, are that: "you can make a difference, you can help individuals, it can provide you with the basis for other professions and you have the control of your career - you can go anywhere and be a lawyer." As a final consolation, Powell jokes, being a lawyer involves no math.

Look for the next program in the "What's it Like?" series in the calendar of events and take the opportunity to learn in depth about a possible career choice.

Calendar of Events

Spring Semester 1999

January 4-- University Offices Open

January 4-8-- Registration/Schedule Adjustment

January 10, 9:00 am-- Residence Halls Open

January 11-- First Day of Classes

January 18-- Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday, University Closed

January 22-- Application for May Graduation due in Academic Dean's Office

February 17, 3:30-5:00 pm-- "What's It Like?" Health Care, Alumni Lounge of MSC

March 17, 3:30-5:00 pm-- "What's It Like?" The Arts, Alumni Lounge of MSC

March 24, 2:00 pm-- Elizabeth Gibson Drinko Honors Convocation, Dr. C. Everett Koop, Speaker

March 29-- Advance Registration for Summer Session for Currently Enrolled Students

April 2-9-- Spring Break

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