

COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

2017

UPCOMING DATES

APRIL 18:

Honors Convocation,
Hawthorne Hotel Ballroom

APRIL 28:

Road Trip to the Statewide Undergraduate
Research Conference

AUGUST 21 AND 22:

Honors Program Freshman Retreat,
Camp Burgess

A GENEROUS GIFT TRANSFORMS THE HONORS PROGRAM

BY JEN YAO

The Commonwealth Honors Program is very fortunate to have received a gift of \$250,000 from Efrosine A. Yeannakopoulos-Richards (class of '59 and '62G) and her husband Dr. Adrian F. Richards. This generous gift will help honors students to pursue and showcase original ideas and creative projects, especially at regional, national, and professional conferences. It will also provide necessary equipment and materials to aid students in their research and projects. With this gift, students will be able to study abroad, and entering freshmen will continue to attend our annual honors retreat for years to come. Lastly, the gift will help students prepare for competitive internship placements and provide panels, workshops, and individual mentoring for students interested in Fulbright and Rhodes fellowships and graduate study. This donation from the Richards is meant to inspire others to pledge their support to the honors program. To acknowledge this gift, the Honors Center will be renamed the Yeannakopoulos Honors Center.

A FAREWELL TO PROFESSOR ELIA

BY JEN YAO

The Commonwealth Honors Program lost an important member and role model this year, Richard Elia, PhD. Elia was an integral part of the Honors Program; he worked with six program coordinators and taught honors literature for as long as there has been an Honors Program at Salem State.

Elia donated money and wine to the honors program, which allowed us to host events for students and fundraise for honors



program activities such as educational trips to Washington, D.C. and New York City. But most importantly, he influenced and inspired students for decades.

Matthew Gangi '05 and '11G, who had three classes with Elia, is an English teacher at Woburn Memorial High School. In a letter, he shared what he learned from his experiences with Elia. Elia taught him that "hubris leads to self-destruction of sorts" and "to keep 'climbing the ladder' to seek enlightenment," which Gangi always understood as a metaphor for constant self-improvement.

Gangi wrote, "He taught me—after swiping a Stephen King book off my desk—that we ought to read the 'best works first,' for we don't know how much time we really have. This carpe diem-esque advice has definitely served me well in these past 14 years. He taught me that you can't argue about taste (*desgustibus non est disputandum*); so when talking to people in my life (family, friends, students) I try to remember this and step back from judging anyone. So far, it's helped me be much more open-minded."

Ten years after teaching Gangi, Elia continued to inspire. Devin Rutter '17, who also has had three classes with Elia, said, "I learned that all the writing skills in the world are useless if you don't have sprezzatura. Also, in order to truly be happy, you have to listen to your head and your heart equally. If not for Dr. Elia, I would not be where I am today. He renewed my love for literature and I will be forever thankful our paths crossed."

CONTINUE

Melissa Carella '13 described Elia as "dynamic" and said "While a lot of literature is rooted in fantasy, literature can help us engage in the world more fully. You might think you can get this from any English class, but I don't think this really clicked until I had class with Elia. He made literature come alive. Life is too short to not enjoy it. When I think of Professor Elia, I know he would want me to see the (wine) glass half full, instead of half empty. I try to live my life every day with this mentality and know that people who think this way aren't always easy to find. I hope I can have a life as full as his!"

Jacki Saunders '18 agreed that Elia was an excellent professor who taught her about life. "In his class, Elia spoke a lot about humility and grace. The morning after Convocation, I walked into the classroom, super proud about winning the freshman service award. I sat down and Elia look me right in the eye and said, 'Well, wasn't last night the Jacki Saunders' show,'" and I was mortified. That little comment was the epitome of Elia. He was proud of me, but he wanted to keep me in check. He believed that grace and class were the ultimate characteristics a person could have."



HONORS PROGRAM SPRING TRIP TO NEW YORK CITY

BY JEN YAO

We've broken with tradition! On March 10–12, the honors program took 22 students on a trip to New York City, thus breaking our biannual spring trip tradition. Kathleen Neville, PhD, planned the trip with Scott Nowka and Annette Chapman-Adisho.

"I sit on the Honors Advisory Committee with Annette and Scott. In January, we discussed the gift from the Richards family that the Honors program just received, which afforded us the opportunity to plan a cultural trip this year instead of waiting until next year. From my years of working with students here, I know that students love to see different parts of the country—and they love adventures! NYC is an exciting city, offering cultural opportunities that are only found in the great cities of the world," said Neville, the associate dean of graduate and professional studies and an adjunct professor in the Graduate School.

Besides the museums and tourist attractions, the main goal was to see *CATS*, the Broadway musical, at Neil Simon Theatre. "I chose *CATS* for a couple of reasons," said Dr. Neville. "First, it was a Broadway hit before many of our SSU students were born and it's getting rave reviews again. Second, one of the leads,

Gangi ended his letter with: "The Greeks had an aphorism: gnothi seauton, or 'know thyself.' I want everyone to know that I came to know myself, both strengths and weaknesses, during my time in Elia's courses. Since then, I've continued to go ten-rounds-in-the-mirror (with myself) constantly in order to determine if the life I'm living—it's not languished, unexamined—is what I really want. I want everyone to know that I continue to understand myself, day-to-day, in part because of Elia. One of my favorite quotes is 'death ends a life, not a relationship.' I'm very thankful for the time I had with Elia. He went above and beyond his duties as a teacher, helping all of us climb that ladder of enlightenment to better ourselves academically and personally. He was and still is a force in all our lives—I think he knows this, too."

In the spirit of his generosity, Elia's family and friends have established the Richard L. Elia Endowed Scholarship, which you can contribute to by mailing your donation to the Salem State University Foundation at 352 Lafayette Street, Salem, MA 01970 with the scholarship name in the memo of your check.

Andy Jones, is the son of a friend of mine. I first met Andy when he was in high school. He has since graduated from college and was the lead in the national tour of *Cinderella*. Before we settled on *CATS*, I reached out to see if he would meet our group after the show to make the performance extra-special."

Neville had arranged a pre-show conversation with playwright and Salem State grad, Leah Miles, as well as an after-show meeting with actor Andy Jones, who plays Munkustrap, the narrator of *CATS*.

Unbeknownst to many, *CATS* is inspired by T. S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. According to *CATS* the Musical website, T. S. Eliot had always been a cat lover. He used to come up with cat names for friends and even strangers (www.catsthemusical.com).

"The names of the cats were convoluted and interesting. My favorite part was that the characters were genuinely just cats. I mean, I'm sure there were obviously a lot of subtext, but it was sincerely about cats," said junior Nick Bias.

Because the cats were human-sized, the set—a junk yard—contained trash items that were larger than life-size, such as three-foot long ballet shoes and a Coke bottle, a chair, and tennis rackets for giants. As for lighting, there were strands of lights that hung from the stage to the audience, and the bulbs emitted different colored lights.

"The scenic design and lighting were really detailed and incredible—nothing I've ever seen in a show," sophomore Kim Barboza said. "And I saw three distinct brassieres."

Besides attending the musical, students had the opportunity to explore other parts of New York. Some went to the American Museum of Natural History or the Met while others went to the Central Park Zoo, the Museum of Modern Art, and the National Museum of Mathematics. All in all, this weekend trip to New York was fruitful and educational.

A SHARED HONORS EXPERIENCE

BY CAROLINE SULICK

On Saturday, December 3rd, Students in the Commonwealth Honors Program joined honors students from across the state for a trip to Boston's Museum of Science.

The Honors Program trip to the Museum of Science in Boston was a wonderful opportunity, because there was a combination of the social and educational aspects of the Commonwealth Honors Program. We were able to meet students from other colleges throughout Massachusetts and share our different academic experiences. The relaxed setting of the museum allowed us to explore exhibits at our own pace while enjoying the company of other students in the Honors Program. One of the highlights of the day was attending a planetarium show called "Explore: The Universe" where we experienced the universe through a narrated tour of our galaxy. We put our problem-solving skills to the test at an engineering station where we tried to build the tallest structure that could hold a bowling ball using household objects. While we didn't succeed, we learned a lot about our strengths and weaknesses when it came to teamwork. In the middle of the trip, everyone regrouped to eat lunch as a program and discuss the exhibits we had seen. The trip overall encouraged us to be more active in the honors community.



NEW HONORS COURSE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

BY JEN YAO

In the fall semester of 2017, the honors program is offering a new science course on global climate change. Stephen Young, PhD, who will be teaching the class, provides more information in the following interview:

Q: What is the honors geography course about?

A: This course is a Scientific Reasoning class (no lab) which demonstrates how the scientific method is used to understand our changing climate. This course will show how science is used to understand this issue and how we can use science to help solve the problem.

Q: Why is it important to learn about climate change?

A: The world's climate has been relatively stable for the past 8,000 years. During this period of stability, humans have created agriculture and civilization. It is in our best interest to maintain that climatic stability as it is easier to survive in a stable world than in one that is changing. The instability that climate change is creating touches all the various disciplines in academia from political science and sociology to criminal justice and health services. The knowledge gained in this class will provide important insights for whichever discipline one is studying.

Q: What do you think about people who deny climate change?

A: There are three main reasons: one is based on a lack of scientific understanding and the associated critical thinking; it is extremely clear from the scientific perspective that our world is warming, and this warming is causing our climate to change in many ways. The second major reason is based on greed and profits which are being made through the industries that are driving the warming of our climate. The third reason is blind faith

in a political philosophy that says that you are either on our side or not, and you need to follow every aspect of it.

Q: With what skills will students leave the class?

A: Students will have a deep understanding of how our world is warming and what the consequences are of that warming. They will also understand how climate change relates to all aspects of our society.

Q: What will the class be doing day to day?

A: We read from a textbook and have some online readings and videos to watch. We have a weekly online assignment in which we review different news articles and news organizations related to climate change. We will perform basic research looking at temperature change in New England using weather data and Excel. The workload is evenly distributed throughout the semester, readings and a brief online assignment each week and a small final project which will occur over several weeks.

Q: What do you hope students will get out of the class?

A: I hope that students will gain a deep understanding of the scientific method and an appreciation of the benefits to society that science provides. Also, I hope students will understand how our climate is changing and the associated problems with that change as well as how climate change is important to their area of study.

Q: Have you taught an honors class before?

A: No, I have not. I look forward to working with honors students and challenging them in this class.

HONORS PROGRAM PASSES REVIEW

BY JEN YAO

As part of Massachusetts' system of Commonwealth Honors Programs, the Salem State University Honors Program is reviewed every seven years to ensure that it meets the high standards expected of honors education. This past fall a site visit team from the Commonwealth Honors Council (CHC) came to campus for a day to meet with President Meservey, Provost Silva, members of the Honors Program Advisory Committee (HPAC), honors students, and faculty. The resulting report on our activities was glowing and we expect the program to be re-accredited for another seven years by the Department of Higher Education later this year. Thank you to the president, the provost, and the many students, faculty, staff, and librarians that made this site visit a success!

THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM IN NUMBERS

Size of the Program: 278

Number of students graduating in the Honors Class of 2017: **35**

Discipline with the most students completing theses this year: **8 in Psychology**

Years returning to Camp Burgess for the Honors Freshman Retreat: **16**

Number of students that went to New York City or are studying abroad in the spring and summer: **26**

Percentage of students awarded an honors scholarship: **100%**

Number of downloads of Salem State honors theses from Digital Commons this year: **28,926**

Greatest number of downloads for a single thesis: **6,000**

Number of student presentations at the Statewide Undergraduate Conference in Amherst, MA: **44**



REFLECTIONS ON A TRIP TO FRANCE

BY KATRINA VALLARIO

I first signed up to go on a week-long trip to France because I thought it would be a fun spring break experience. It was definitely a good time, but I also took more away from it than I ever expected. Mainly, I learned that I know nothing about how the world works. I barely know anything

about my country, not to mention the rest of the world. This trip has forced me to come out of my shell and take the initiative to grow more as a person.

The first thing that I realized—and the thing that made me most uncomfortable throughout the trip—was that America is very loud. I noticed it first when the group was at a restaurant on the first day in France and a waiter told us to quiet down. From that point on, I was conscious of my noise level. There were even a few instances where I was mocked for being loud and got many strange looks.

By the end of the trip, I realized that being loud was disrespectful. I wasn't necessarily angry, but I was frustrated that we were judged for something that is normal for us. Then I realized how often I judge others every day. Even if I think no one can tell what I'm thinking, facial expressions are a language of their own. So even though silent judgment seems like it can't hurt other people, I could definitely tell when people were judging me. This experience made me more aware of how I view people.

Another way our cultures are different is our clothing style. Everyone on the streets looked well dressed, even the kids playing on the playground. And then there were us. I wore leggings and a T-shirt every day, which is not defined as nice clothes in France. In fact, we were even told by the people at the hotel not to wear yoga pants and, instead, to observe a more

formal dress code. While many people have told me that French people are stuck-up, I didn't really see their clothing choice this way; I related it back to respect and pride and saw that they all held themselves with a prideful demeanor.

Americans have a reputation for being lazy and the youth for being disrespectful, and I can see why: we drink alcohol to get drunk, we are loud, and we dress like we don't care about our image. I'm not saying that we should all be shallow and care about what people think, but I'm not going to lie: I've gone grocery shopping in my pajamas. I can see why that is viewed as disrespectful in other countries. If I'm not putting the time and effort to make myself appear put together, why should anyone take me seriously?

Speaking of French lifestyle, I loved the farmers' markets. For starters, Europe has better food policies than America does, which is nice. Secondly, I loved being able to walk to get fresh food. In America, I get grossed out that I have to wash pesticides off of my produce, but I felt like I didn't need to worry about that in France. Plus, all the produce was fresh.

I think the most important thing I took away from this trip was how important it is to travel. Yes, I've always dreamt of traveling the world, but was I ever really going to do it? Before this trip, I'd probably answer no. But now, I can answer undoubtedly yes. I learned more about another country in seven days than I have in my entire school career, not to mention all of the personal growth that occurred over the week. I've already started looking into my next destination and decided to go through an ecotourism company and volunteer in underprivileged kindergartens around the world. I can read every book ever written on anything that I desire, but nothing can compare to experiencing it firsthand. That is the most important lesson I took away from this trip.