

# Honorable Mention

Spring The newsletter of the Honors Program at Westminster College 2006

## Lost Boys Educate Honors Students on Reality



In the mid 1980's, a civil war fueled by religious, ethnic, and regional tension broke out in the East African country of Sudan. Troops and tanks poured into Southern villages and murdered an innumerable amount of civilians. The only group of Southern Sudanese to survive the violence in any measurable amount was children who happened to be away from the village tending flocks and completing other chores.

With the immediate threat of violence and the sudden loss of their families and homes, thousands of these surviving children--mostly boys between the ages of 6 and 12--began a walk towards freedom and peace that earned them a title now recognized across the world: The Lost Boys of Sudan. Three of these surviving "boys," now grown into men, spoke last November to Westminster Honors program students in a discussion titled, "The Lost Boys Panel."

The three speakers were James Garang, Augustino Mayai, and Solomon Awan--the latter a Westminster Student, and the former two students of other higher education institutions in Utah. The men explained that in order to escape continued bloodshed, the boys grouped together and began walking

through the jungle towards refugee camps in Ethiopia. The boys stayed in these camps until 1991, when political turmoil in Ethiopia forced them to, once again, start walking.

The boys returned to their birth country of Sudan, though hundreds died on the journey from starvation, thirst, drowning, animal attacks, and war. But when the boys arrived in their homeland, they were met not with safety, but with guns and persecution. This time when the boys turned around, they walked to a refugee camp in Kenya.

The boys lived in Kenya until 2001, when the United States government began resettling some 4,000 of these individuals across America, all of them hoping to pursue an education.

The panelists told their story to an interested group of Honors students, who all, as Solomon explained, "were not aware of what is happening in some countries like Sudan." The three men answered questions about their trials and future plans; but they mainly emphasized awareness, proving that help can never be offered to the afflicted nations if the more stable countries do not have knowledge about important world issues. The Honors students in attendance learned a great deal about the conflict in Sudan and the continuing struggle of these men to complete their education. It was undoubtedly a very sobering, educational, and valuable evening for all involved.

If you would like more information about the Lost Boys of Sudan, or if you would like to donate to the education fund that assists them, Solomon recommended the following websites: [www.utahlostboys.org](http://www.utahlostboys.org); [www.sudanmirror.com](http://www.sudanmirror.com); [www.sudan.net](http://www.sudan.net); [www.gurtong.org](http://www.gurtong.org). -Creed Archibald



Honors student Casey Rasch with Lost Boys Solomon Awan, James Garang, and Solomon Awan



## Avalanche Forecast: Knowledge = Power

Utah's backcountry skiing attracts a variety of outdoors enthusiasts, men and women from all walks of life. Many people, from today's most renowned professional skiers to the average college student, flock to Utah's untracked and largely unknown terrain to take advantage of "the Greatest Snow on Earth." However, that same snow sometimes comes at a devastating price. According to avalanche expert Greg Gagne, knowledge is power. At this semester's "Pizza with Profs," he gave his captivated audience a brief introduction to the costs and benefits of backcountry travel, showed numerous pictures of avalanches and their causes, passed around some backcountry gear, and finally directed Honors students Marie Robinson and Seth Simonds in a mock "rescue" using avalanche beacons in the basement of Nunemaker.

About fifteen students attended the event and they were not only better fed, but better educated for doing so. Gagne currently teaches in and chairs the Computer Science program at Westminster and still finds time to spend over 50 days a year in Utah's backcountry as an avalanche field observer. Honors students who attended were fortunate to share in his experience and learn from it.

Though Gagne has "never gone for a ride" in an avalanche, he has had three friends die from avalanches. During his

first year in Utah, a friend died in a Colorado avalanche, sending Gagne a "wake up call" to the dangers of the activity he loves so much. After this traumatic experience he decided to learn all he could about avalanches, and to share his knowledge with others.

Gagne presented his information in the very palatable and interesting form of a college level class. Whereas other avalanche classes tend to focus primarily on recognizing avalanche conditions, his illumination of why avalanche conditions exist was immensely helpful and insightful. Avalanches are caused by strong layers of snow, such as new snow fall, falling on top of weak snow. Weak layers of snow form when the water content of the snow near the ground,

which stays a relatively warm 32 degrees, moves upwards towards the cooler and less humid surface layer of snow. This process of osmosis creates beautiful but unstable faceted snow--much like stalagmites in caves.

His scientific explanation was tempered by the practicality of his topic. Nature holds many clues of potential danger for the astute observer. Gagne presented many shots of avalanche conditions in Little and Big Cottonwood Canyons, pointing out the subtle clues that precede a slide. As Gagne said, "trees don't grow there for a reason," indicating several natural snow runs in various powerpoint slides. Trees can't grow in an avalanche prone area. This seemingly obvious indication of avalanche danger, like many others, goes unnoticed by the untrained eye, precipitating backcountry accidents and fatalities. The irony of backcountry skiing is that the best skiing conditions often coincide with the best avalanche conditions, which puts even more importance on objective understanding of avalanche conditions.

However, Gagne's essential message was not of doom and gloom for snow lovers, but one of qualified optimism. Like all "snow people," Gagne "loves to ski and loves to ski powder," and loves to live. Because "avalanches don't happen without reasons," they can be understood, prevented, and avoided, and one can safely enjoy the surrounding environment.

-Seth Simonds



*Seth Simonds and Marie Robinson enjoy a slice of pizza at this semester's Pizza with Profs*

# Changes at the Core: Honors and Westminster's New L.E.

Westminster College's Honors program has long offered an alternative to the general liberal education courses required for graduation in the form of seven interdisciplinary, team-taught seminars. Recent revisions of the campus-wide L.E. curriculum added two new course requirements, Cultural Diversity and Living Arts, as well as a Learning Community component for all students beginning in the fall of 2006. In order to continue to provide Honors students with a complete liberal education, the Honors program had to incorporate these new L.E. requirements into the basic Honors curriculum.

A Learning Community, as prescribed by the new L.E. curriculum, involves two different L.E. courses--for instance English and Philosophy--in which the same students enroll in both courses and the two professors collaborate along a common theme. The Honors seminars are already team taught and interdisciplinary, with an emphasis on making connections from one topic or field to another; therefore no change to the Honors curriculum was necessary to satisfy this requirement. Mary Jane Chase, Dean of Arts and Sciences and an advocate of the new learning community courses, acknowledged that "the Honors program has long felt the benefits of a learning community environment," and so she feels strongly that a similar experience, if on a smaller scale, will benefit every student of Westminster College.

The new Cultural Diversity course requirement also presented little difficulty or change for the Honors program. The guidelines for this course stress "global consciousness, social responsibility and ethical awareness." The Science, Power and Diversity seminar critically examines stereotypes based on gender, race and sexuality, teaching students to analyze the impact of discrimination and ethnocentrism in science and the media. As Dr. Badenhausen stated, this seminar "is already a model course for this area."

Once again, the new L.E. requirement did not impact the Honors curriculum because such a program was already in place.

The final change to the L.E. requirement, namely the Living Arts course, posed more of a challenge for Honors. In the first place, the required subject matter was somewhat unclear and broad, roughly described as "real world, life enhancing knowledge." Secondly, adding another course to the Honors load seemed problematic, given that the average Honors student already has a third of his or her L.E. requirements satisfied before arriving at Westminster. Making the Honors/L.E. credit hour comparison less favorable would affect recruiting. Yet arguing that Honors students did not need Living Arts also seemed not quite right, since such a class might balance out the intensely academic Honors seminars. The nine-member Honors Council discussed the issue at length, and with Dr. Badenhausen, drafted six different options for incorporating Living Arts into Honors, ranging from a May Term course to an extracurricular 'living arts portfolio.' After further discussion with Dean Chase, other faculty, and current Honors students, the Honors Council arrived at a solution that incorporated a new Living Arts component into the Honors curriculum without adding a stand alone course but still adhering to the spirit of the program and the goals of the new L.E. requirements.

Beginning this fall, entering Honors students will find attached to their Humanities I course a weekly 2-hour lab, which will contain a semester's worth of living arts programming taking place in Nunemaker on Tuesday nights, 7:30-9:30 PM. A wide array of faculty and guest lecturers will cover topics such as stress management, etiquette, stock trading, the environment, leadership, the legal system, and health, among others; the program will also incorporate existing programming like "Pizza with Profs" and visits with guest lecturers. Peer

Mentors will also help administer the events by taking attendance, introducing the guests, and helping moderate discussion. In the end, the long-debated change will add another layer of Learning Community activities to those already in place and put Honors students in contact with faculty and staff whom they might not otherwise meet. While the new students gain their prescribed 'real world' knowledge, they will hopefully also have a good first year experience along the way.

-Anna Hansen

## What Do Current Honors Students Think?

"The 2-hour lab sounds like a great addition to the Honors program. The wide array of topics covered, combined with an outlet for intensive discussion really seems to describe the Honors program curriculum . . . However, looking at potential problems with the lab, as an incoming freshman, I would not have liked adding the 2 credits to my schedule because it would have limited the number of other classes I wanted to take, and it seems to be an added stress for the first semester of college. In spite of this, the course seems to be more beneficial than problematic." -Blakely Neilson

"The new requirement seems completely redundant to me. Learning about stress management and leadership are things people already learn in INTR courses and Honors students are going to be exposed to all the other issues anyway. However, an extra two hours per week isn't ridiculous, and it's good that Honors students don't get a special exemption." -Colin Crebs

**Student News & Notes**

**Heather Brown** presented her paper on 20th century Italian women's literature at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference at Weber State University as well as at the "InterDisciplining the Body" Graduate Student Conference at Florida State University on April 8.



**Greg Bowen, Brooke Turner, Tiana Frisby, Anna Hansen, Jessica McKelvie** and **Sharayah Coleman** will be traveling to France and Spain this May with the Westminster Chamber Singers choir. They will perform in cathedrals from Paris to Madrid.



**Casey Rasch** was honored as the Outstanding Student for the 2006 Westminster Honorees to Utah Campus Compact's Statewide Recognition Event.



**Alisha Panunzio** completed an internship with PricewaterhouseCoopers as an auditor.



**Ashley Pedersen** performed as the Sugarplum Fairy--the lead role--in Mountain West Ballet's annual production of *The Nutcracker*.



**Amy Burns** served an internship in Congressman Matheson's Office during spring semester.



**Meghan Hamilton** has been doing research with principle investigator Ray Kesner, Ph.D. and has accepted a paid research position at the University of Utah studying addiction.



**Alana Dela Cruz** is studying Spanish Language and Culture at the Centro de Lenguas Modernas at the Universidad de Granada in Spain.



**Lahdan Saeed** has been working at Anzen Bio to develop a test to rapidly identify Tuberculosis. She has presented her work to the Rocky Mountain Pus Club and will present at the International Association of Food Protection in Calgary.



**Sharayah Coleman** spent Spring Break in New Orleans helping clean and gut hurricane-devastated houses.

**The Truth about the Senior Thesis Project**

As clumps of torn-out hair, wads of tear-soaked tissues, and empty Red Bull cans fill the floors of Nunemaker, we know Honors students must be working hard on their senior theses. Okay, not really. Although the thought of writing a senior thesis might make you shudder and recoil into the fetal position, it actually isn't worth running to the hills just to avoid the topic.

During senior year, students are often required to complete a thesis. Not all majors have a thesis requirement, but all Honors students seeking an Honors degree must fulfill a thesis requirement of three credit hours. For those seeking an Honors degree that also have a major requirement, the thesis can be combined into one large project. All theses must be pre-approved by the Director of the Honors program, Dr. Richard Badenhausen. Upon completion of the thesis, students are required to present their work at an academic conference, Westminster's undergrad research fair, or an end-of-term gathering in Nunemaker. Let's be honest: writing a senior thesis feels like a daunting task. When asked how much time and effort it has taken to write, Tristan Glenn, a senior, answered "Aye! Don't make me think about it." Sound depressing? Do not be discouraged. There are many ways to lessen the torturous nature of the experience. Time management, planning, and a good relationship with your advisor are all necessary for a successful completion of a thesis. Procrastination is not an option. Of course, you could type-up thirty pages of garbage the

night before it is due, but that is not the point of writing a thesis. To use a favorite line from Honors professor Chuck Tripp, "you have to burrow like a sea worm." Utilize this opportunity to delve into your topic, not skim the surface superficially.

Glenn is currently writing his thesis on American Buddhism in the context of cultural evolution--a topic that derived from previous research he conducted through an Honors Independent Summer Research grant last year. Glenn says the most important thing is to "make sure you like your topic." He adds that "writing just flows so much better when the person really feels a passion for what they are doing. When the interest is not there, neither is the mind--at least not fully. True interest allows you to dive into it head first without thinking of it as a burden." If you get sick of burying yourself in the books, Glenn suggests burying your face in a pint of Ben and Jerry's instead.

Other students currently conducting Honors degree thesis work include Heather Brown (on Contemporary Italian Literature), Megan Nelson (on the American Pastoral), and Alison Poulson (on the presence of German-Americans in Utah during WWI).

Writing a thesis requires a great deal of work, but as Tristan says, it can also be a great deal of fun. So, if you do happen to see clumps of torn-out hair, wads of tissues, and empty cans of Red Bull near the end of April, it is more likely to be the aftermath of the Humanities final...not a senior thesis.

-Marie Robinson

**Honors Student Writing Awards (2005-06)**

**Best Humanities Paper (2 Prizes):**

**Heather Hicks**, "Dante's Inferno: A Christianized Version of Aristotle's Model for Human Flourishing" (*Badenhausen & Newell*)

**Blakely Neilsen**, "The Clash of Rousseau and Nietzsche" (*Badenhausen & More*)

**Best Social Sciences Paper:**

**Heather Brown**, "Gigantic Insects!: Marxian Alienation and Dehumanization in Kafka and Melville" (*Watkins & Tripp*)

**Best Science Paper/Best Paper Overall:**

**Ray Bradford**, "Moral Responsibility in a Deterministic Universe" (*Goldsmith & Popich*)

## Terrorism Expert Shares His Views on World Politics

On the afternoon of February 9th, Honors Students filled the basement of Nunemaker for lunch and conversation with terrorism expert Daniel Benjamin. After enjoying a catered meal of gourmet food, Benjamin briefly introduced himself and then opened the floor for questions. Benjamin offered his views on issues from college to politics to work ethic. He explained that "government is the most frustrating thing you can do" due to the bureaucracy and conflicting personal interests involved. However, he was quick to add that he valued the experience since it offered a direct way to make a difference. When asked for advice applicable to college students, he stressed the importance of writing. "The best thing you can do for yourself is work on your writing skills [because] they will carry you," he asserted. Despite rumors to the contrary, Honors program director Richard Badenhausen did not bribe Benjamin into giving this advice.

Most students asked the global terrorism and counter-terrorism expert to comment on today's unsettled global situation. Benjamin said the U.S. government has taken many wrong turns, causing "unbelievable antipathy" to the President both home and abroad. Even the "pro-American Europeans are shaking their heads ... wondering what's happened to us," he commented. The solution? According to Benjamin, the U.S. needs to try to be on the same page as its allies in order to meet the many global challenges facing it. Also, Americans need to realize that the "right answers to questions" aren't necessarily "emotionally satisfying."

Benjamin has been a senior fellow in the international security program and the Center for Strategic and International Studies since 2001. He worked on the National Security Council as director for transnational threats from



*Andrew Waterhouse and Jennifer Niedfeldt meet with expert Daniel Benjamin* 1994 to 1999. He also directed the interagency working group on counter-terrorism and helped plan operations related to the U.S. attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan. Beforehand, he served as a foreign policy speechwriter and special assistant to President Clinton.

In addition to his work in government, Benjamin has written for *Time* magazine, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Financial Times*, and the *New York Review of Books*. He was also Berlin bureau chief for the *Wall Street Journal*. Benjamin and Steven Simon have co-authored two highly-acclaimed books: *The Age of Sacred Terror*, and the recent *The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting it Right*. Both books have merited much praise and are on the must-read lists of most high-level military commanders.

-Sharayah Coleman

## Profs Pick the Flick: An Abstract Experience

Serene landscapes and "transient art" dominated the "Profs Pick the Flick" event in February. Presented by Professor Jeff McCarthy, *Rivers and Tides* profiled the art and artistry of Andy Goldsworthy, a noted "landscape sculptor" and photographer. Directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer and released in 2002, the documentary follows the Scottish artist as he worked on pieces in North America and Europe.

McCarthy described the film as offering a look at the adventure and transience of Goldsworthy's unique type of sculpture. Goldsworthy creates his art out of and as a part of the natural landscape of our world. His media are leaves, ice, rocks, and sticks, and his art becomes a part of the landscape, never hindering or imposing upon it.



*Students kick back to watch Rivers and Tides with Jeff McCarthy*

A dozen or so Honors students and faculty joined McCarthy to follow Goldsworthy through the conception and creation of several of his landscape sculptures, following him from Nova Scotia to France to Scotland to New York State.

The most fascinating feature of Goldsworthy's art is also the reason it has been called "transient": all of his art is soon swallowed up by the ever-changing natural world around it. The film emphasizes that this is not destruction, but rather that the sculpture has completed its cycle by returning to nature. Yet the documentary also serves to capture and make timeless art that is, at its core, ephemeral.

McCarthy ended the session with a discussion of the simple yet powerful images of the fluidity and changeability of nature presented through Goldsworthy's art and through the film.

-Lenni Keyes  
page 5

## Daniel Perez

Going to medical school never looked so effortless, at least on the surface. With programs at NYU, Cornell, Dartmouth, and Vanderbilt all clamoring for his attention, Daniel Perez simply has to make his decision by May 15th. However, things are never as easy as they appear. He has had to work hard to get to where he is now, and it will only get more difficult.

Medical schools look at more than just numbers. They consider the admission essay along with work skills, volunteer experience, and the rigor of your undergraduate academic program, which is where Honors can help a med school candidacy. Perez is the Pre-Med Society president and also currently works in a homeless clinic and long-term care program.

It is not surprising that Perez is ambitious and achieving much with his time at Westminster. This spring, he will graduate with a degree in Biology and a double minor in Spanish and Psychology. He also plans to receive his Honors certificate from the Honors program. His transcript is almost a spotless array of A's except for one B that he received. On paper, he seems a perfect student. Not only that, but most professors say they like him because of his easy-going, joking manner and interesting individuality.

The jump from his undergraduate schooling to med school will certainly be trying, but Perez is willing to take the chance. "I know it's going to be hard at first, but I want a change," he said. "It's a bit overwhelming, but I'm looking forward to it." Perez is not intimidated by medical school. He is excited about the many opportunities he now has in front of him.

After graduating from medical school, Perez is thinking about doing reconstructive plastic surgery or oncology. Commenting on a possible career in oncology, he says, "Cancer strikes home to a lot of people. I wouldn't mind pursuing that area." At any rate, Perez is extremely willing to jump headfirst into the medical field. "It's cutting edge; there's a lot you can do," he says.

This has been one of his dreams ever since he was a child. Due to a little luck and lot of hard work, it is one of those dreams that will actually come true.

-Tiana Frisby

## Student Profile



## Faculty Profile



## Jeff McCarthy

Changes continue to surface in the Honors program. This year, the Honors "Arts in Performance" class is being co-taught by Karlyn Bond and, returning to the Honors program after a multi-year absence, Professor Jeffrey McCarthy.

What does he bring to the class? As an Associate Professor in the English Department, McCarthy tends to focus more on literary texts and their theoretical implications, which explains why an Arts class is currently reading James Joyce. He also likes to view art in terms of social power and how it influences culture. Often, audiences see art in a realm all its own, untouched by cultural situations, while McCarthy sees it as being more wrapped up in society and connected with daily reality.

McCarthy first became a professor due to his intense interest in ideas. "Being a college professor is really the idea business," he says. He can still learn and progress intellectually on his own while teaching. He finds this connection between his own intellectual life and the subjects he teaches to be a big bonus.

McCarthy received his B.A. from Wesleyan University, and then his M.Litt. in English Literature from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. His Ph.D. in English Literature is from the University of Oregon. Besides the "Arts in Performance" class, McCarthy also teaches British Modernism, Literary Theory, and Environmental Literature. He chairs the new major in Environmental Studies and recently lectured at Princeton on that subject.

Regarding changes, such as the ones in the Honors program, McCarthy says, "I'm all for it." As learners, McCarthy believes we need to get good at change. "This world is in flux, and we need people who can make good decisions regarding change," he says. This helps create a full intellectual life.

One of the things McCarthy appreciates about the Honors program is how it "generates a community of thoughtful people who care." He values the environment made by inquisitive minds and engaged thinkers. In addition, it creates a sense of belonging through its programs and opportunities such as summer research grants, "profs pick the flick," and team teaching--all experiences that McCarthy enjoys.

McCarthy has multiple interests outside the academic community. One of his passions, mountaineering, has taken him to many interesting locations around the world such as Kenya and North Africa.

Jeffrey McCarthy has been a valuable addition to the team of Honors professors, proving, once again, the benefits that can come from change.

-Tiana Frisby

## Modern Renaissance Man

### Moves into Nunemaker

Modern society has reduced the term "Renaissance Man" to something almost irrelevant and anachronistic in today's economy. Fewer individuals now live lives motivated by an all-consuming desire to learn, question, and challenge.

However, Pat Shea, Westminster's Academic Advisor for Student Scholars and new occupant of Nunemaker's third floor office space, embodies the term 'Renaissance Man.' A former student of Salt Lake City's Highland High, Stanford, Oxford, and Harvard Law School, Shea possesses incredibly diverse interests in genetics, politics, and agronomy (the study of native grasses). He was also the recipient of the Rhodes and Truman Scholarships, two prestigious fellowships that he hopes now to help Westminster students secure.

The wealth of experience Shea has acquired in his varied pursuits has served to further enhance a resume that also includes stints working for the Senate Intelligence Committee and the Council on Foreign Relations. Currently he occupies his time practicing "triage law," a term suggesting his ability to process cases others are not sure how to approach. Shea, who has previously taught classes at BYU, the University of Utah, and Kansas State University, also anticipates co-teaching an environmental studies seminar at Westminster in the near future.

Shea will surely call upon his previous experience in higher education to meet his goals of providing Westminster students with advice and assistance in securing scholarships and internships. His larger objectives include increasing diversity on campus and hosting locally and nationally recognized speakers. He believes this will help promote vibrancy and depth to student learning.

Westminster students, especially those in the Honors program, should recognize that Shea's purpose is to serve as a resource for them and they

should take advantage of his service in any way that may be beneficial to their course of study or post-college ambitions.

Shea encourages all students to spend their undergraduate academic careers exploring various fields of study. He cautions students from focusing too intently on course requirements and recommends taking enjoyable, unexpected classes. In a similar vein, Shea feels strongly that one strengthens depth of character not only by expanding one's academic repertoire, but also by experiencing different cultures while studying outside of the United States. He drew his final words of advice from his athletic experiences. Before each soccer game (among everything else, he used to be a soccer coach), he always told his players to "Do right" and "Be just." For those seeking networking opportunities, Shea recommends taking up golf.

For students hoping that Shea's spirit of the Renaissance may rub off on them or those who simply wish to gain some insight into the scholarship and internship processes, his office in Nunemaker is open on Friday mornings...early...8AM early: perhaps the only negative aspect of his presence on campus!

-Amy Burns



## A Glimpse at Grads

*Welcome to A Glimpse at Grads section. Here are the latest events of some of our Honors Alumni. A special thank you to every one who sent in information!*

### Kristin Briggs Jolley

*Year of graduation: 1997*

Married Brian Jolley in 1999 and is a new mother of one-year-old son Joel. Recently Kristin opened Jolley Media, an online marketing firm, and is the co-founder of the Wasatch Online Marketing Association.



### Heidee Lund

*Year of graduation: 2003*

Heidee will start medical school at the University of Utah this fall.



### Pepper Hayes

*Year of graduation: 2005*

She has completed her first year at Boston University Law School and will spend the summer working at a domestic violence organization called Casa Myrna Vazquez (they take a holistic approach to ending domestic violence through education, policy work, shelters, legal representation, and counseling).



### Juliette Campbell

*Year of graduation: 2005*

She graduated in December and now works for Wasatch Advisors as an International Trade Operations Analyst.



### Cody Coonradt

*Year of graduation: 2005*

He graduated last semester and is employed in a communications & marketing role with Amedica, a new orthopedic technology company. He also just found out he will be a father in August!

*We hope you've enjoyed this Glimpse at Grads. Alums, as new and exciting things come up in life, keep sending your info this way. Please email Mary Dirks at [mary.dirks@mccann.com](mailto:mary.dirks@mccann.com). We welcome info on all of life's happenings and special shout-outs to the Honors community.*

# Student Honors Council

Dear Honors Students,

*As this year comes to an end, we would like to commend all of those students who made the effort to embrace change this last year. The Honors program sets the stage for a unique intellectual and social environment, and the faculty and students involved really make it a special experience. It has been our pleasure serving as your Student Honors Council, and representing such an outstanding group of students. We are sad for the change to come, but we hope your new SHC will serve you well. We also would like to thank everyone who took the time out of their schedules to get involved in our events. We would like to remind everyone to mark your calendars for our end of year banquet and faculty vs. student softball game. We look forward to seeing you all there.*

*Thanks for a memorable year.*

*Sincerely yours,  
The SHC*

## Honors Students in College Bowl 2006



*Freshmen Colin Crebs, Jacqui Smith, Heather Hicks, and Dallen Ford represented the Honors program well in the very first annual Westminster College Bowl Tournament in January 2006, taking first place!*

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### **Congratulations to the following Honors students who were elected into ASWC:**

**Ray Bradford:** President  
**Blakely Neilsen:** A&S Senator  
**Ben Haverkost:** Business Senator  
**Alisha Panunzio:** Graduate Senator  
**Amy Burns:** Social Science Senator  
**Ben Rackham:** Social Science Senator  
**Marie Robinson:** Social Science Senator  
**McKay Holland:** Undeclared Senator

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### **Parent Contributions to Student Honors Council Fund**

Once again, the Westminster College Student Honors Council is very grateful to the following parents of Honors students who have contributed to the Student Honors Council Fund since the last newsletter. This fund, which has grown in size in the past few years, supports student development initiatives, especially those related to assisting students in making decisions about continuing their educations in graduate school. Contributions to this fund, which are tax deductible, can be made at any time in the year and should be sent care of the Westminster College Honors program, 1840 South 1300 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84105. Those in excess of \$100 are acknowledged on the Parents' Honors Roll plaque, which hangs in Nunemaker Place, home of the Honors program.

*John & Regie Bradford  
Colin & Ramona Crebs  
Barbara Neilson  
Joseph & Lisa Rotunda  
David Moore Sherry &  
Jeanne Ambruster Sherry  
Brad & Mary Shurtleff  
Scott & Kaelyn Strong*

*The Editors of Honorable Mention want to thank fellow Honors student Jay Springer for his assistance in producing the fall newsletter in his capacity as an employee at FedEx Kinko's. We couldn't have done it without him, even if he refused to deliver 1,000 copies of the publication on his bicycle. Also, we are very grateful for the generosity of Mr. Jason Lund, General Manager of the FedEx Kinko's on 10291 S. State Street in Sandy. He chose to support the Honors program by giving us a substantial discount on printing costs.*

# Our culture views college as a dramatic time of change. What did you find most helpful in dealing with these changes?

## Faculty Response

## Alumni Response

### Al Patenaude

*Justice Studies Program Chair and team-teaching partner in "Human Culture and Behavior" (HON 231)*



If I were to identify a number of tools that have helped me as a student and, later as a faculty member, it would be time management and tolerance. When I returned to college as a non-traditional student I brought along the notion that I would treat school like a job and put in a

solid eight hours of work at my new "job." If I had a class or two during that day, I counted those hours into my daily work schedule and would spend the remaining 4 hours on school work (studying, research, writing papers, etc.). This practice left my evenings and weekends for free time or paid employment and drove my roommate up the walls in the process since he believed I never studied! Similarly, estimating how much effort would be needed for a given task remains a skill that helps me to budget my time more effectively. Sometimes I'm effective at it and at other times...well, you get the idea!

Tolerance is an attitude that is currently in short supply. Someone once said "there, but for the grace of God, go I." Part of being tolerant is being respectful of the other person and his or her culture. As a guest in this country, I have learned to tolerate many behaviours and attitudes that run counter to my own beliefs, while many American students now tolerate my spelling even though I would never change my spell checker from Canadian English! I understand that while our ways may seem confusing to one another, we still can also learn from each other.

Finally, I try to follow the advice of the little green guy on the dust jacket of Douglass Adam's fantastic work, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. His advice: "don't panic!" Take a moment to assess the situation, accept what has happened, and look for ways to deal with it in a constructive manner. Most crises on campus are short-lived and can be accommodated with a little effort.

### Nicki Blair

*Class of '05*

*Honors Degree and majors in Philosophy and Psychology*



Ah, yes. Age old and timeless, the answers to this question would seem to be as valued for the conscientious college student as manna from heaven was to the wandering Israelites. Unfortunately, my experience has taught me that the answers are nothing so finger

snapping easy as picking up a gourmet dish off the desert floor. Perhaps a better way to view the college time frame would be as a time of important change, rather than one of dramatic change. Your life will be what you build it to be and the changes you make now will most certainly be important. Understanding this, remember to keep the long term in mind as you stack the blocks that will build your college experiences. This will help you lay a road to the future that will keep your track focused and build a you that will take you there.

During my undergraduate days I adopted a sponge-like philosophy, with me being the sponge. I wanted to absorb as much information and as many experiences as possible. The result was a whole lot of fun and very little sleep. In looking back I cannot say that I regret a single decision.

Making the choices and changes that will build a future you want to be a part of (and the You you want to be there with) can be very challenging. Here I offer a couple of tips in how to deal with the stress. First, continually remind yourself that things are never as bad as they seem. Many times the mounting heat and stress made me want to curl up into a ball and give up entirely. At those times I would pull up the trusty old mantra "It's not as bad as it seems, there is life after this paper," and that would help me through. Second, while you are working for the future do not forget to enjoy the present. When you spend your days planning for tomorrow you may reach your goal only to look back and wonder what you really achieved. If there is no joy in the journey, then it's not worth taking. If you will do these two things as you strive to achieve the greatness that is in you then I promise your life will be happier, and that the changes you make—be they dramatic, important, or both—will be of your own choosing.

# Moral Responsibility in a Deterministic Universe

by Ray Bradford

*The following is an excerpt from a paper for History and Philosophy of Science with Professors David Goldsmith and Michael Popich. In this paper, Junior Honors student Ray Bradford examines popular misconceptions about determinism and contends that socially efficacious moral responsibility can rationally exist independent of the "garden of forking paths" concept of free will embedded in Western culture.*

Philosopher Daniel Dennett provides a sufficient definition of determinism on page one of his book *Elbow Room* when he states, "All physical events are caused and determined by the sum total of all previous events." When people conceive of the choices they must navigate in everyday life, they appear to implicitly assume such an outlook on the universe--after all, choosing between alternatives only proves meaningful if one deterministically expects certain choices to result in certain consequences. Yet the application of determinism to human behavior itself elicits overwhelming hostility. Critics often argue with a mixture of disbelief and indignation that the concession of a deterministic universe would entail the breakdown of morality and personal responsibility. They not only find such a world preposterous, but they imagine society would spontaneously disintegrate into anarchy as individuals justify their unbridled selfishness with "I could not have done otherwise."

While the apocalyptic vision advanced by many critics of determinism has surface appeal, it rests on two faulty assumptions regarding the nature of morality and personal responsibility. First, it assumes that conceding a deterministic universe would allow us to abandon our morally reactive attitudes. Second, arguing that determinism eliminates the rationality of moral responsibility incorrectly assumes that "morality" does not possess a free-floating rationale independent of the truth of determinism. A more thorough inspection of alarmist responses to determinism reveals that a deterministic universe can achieve compatibility with concepts of moral and personal responsibility.

Any discussion on the bearing of determinism upon issues of moral and personal responsibility first requires an adequate understanding of determinism and its distinction from fatalism. Determinism suggests that human behavior results from an incredibly complex function of inherited genetic predisposition, environmental and cultural influences, and prior responses to environmental influences. However, the theory holds that given an initial set of conditions external and internal to the mind, only one "choice" or behavior will result. While easy to confuse, determinism carries a subtle but significant distinction from fatalism. Fatalism suggests that certain events will occur regardless of how humans act.

When considered in the context of both everyday conceptions of the universe and in terms of daily "choices," most people appear to already accept deterministic principles. We assume that certain events will result in causally determined consequences. So why does the idea of determinism operating on "choices" and human behavior itself meet so much resistance?

One explanation for the heated opposition determinism often receives may lie in its conflict with the traditional decision-making model of "forking paths" typically utilized in

religious conceptions of free will. According to the traditional model of "choice," a person's future branches out from a single past into a "garden of forking paths." A person acts of his or her own free will in selecting between alternative paths. This obviously conflicts with the premise of determinism, since determinism contends that only one future can emerge from a specific set of antecedent conditions in this actual world.

The difficulties that the forking paths model faces under a deterministic universe may illuminate much of the opposition to determinism. Without [the "forking paths"] framework for interpreting "choice" and responsibility, alarmists may fear that a deterministic universe cannot accommodate morality or provide any rationale for personal responsibility. Since most religious concepts of morality derive themselves from selecting "rightly" or "wrongly" from a forking paths model, an emotional or metaphysical drive may fuel the ferocity of opposition to determinism. While accepting a deterministic universe proves problematic for the concepts of moral responsibility involved in theological conceptions of man, the works of P.F. Strawson and Daniel Dennett suggest that on a practical level, moral and personal responsibility can thrive in a deterministic world... [and] also maintain a free-floating rationale independent of deterministic principles.

In his essay "Freedom and Resentment," Strawson provides strong rebuttal for the claim that moral responsibility would evaporate in a deterministic universe. Strawson takes a unique approach to the conflict by challenging the assumption that a theoretical question of determinism could pragmatically alter the reactive attitudes we undergo as part of the human experience. Strawson focuses on what he describes as "personal reactive attitudes" that include feelings of anger or resentment in response to another individual's demonstration of ill will. He takes great length to demonstrate that human existence without these attitudes would be largely inconceivable.

Strawson proposes a concept of morality ... [where] moral responsibility results from the personal reactive attitudes and their vicarious analogues that arise as a necessary function of interpersonal relationships. Strawson suggests that morality emerges for the demand for goodwill from our cooperative society inherent in reactive attitudes. The message persists that excusing individuals in a society from moral responsibility is an issue independent from the theoretical truth of determinism, and therefore determinism's theoretical truth cannot undermine it.

While Strawson's arguments appear convincing, some critics may attempt to dispute their significance by stating that his contentions only argue the unavoidability of moral responsibility in a deterministic universe and say nothing of its

rationality. These critics ask what the rationale behind such "moral responsibility" could be if people had no alternative courses of action. In response to these counterarguments, Strawson notes that the question seems to miss the point entirely by failing to understand the inextricability of reactive attitudes from the human experience.

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 The counterargument essentially claims that ... if determinism were widely accepted, people would opt to engage in an anarchic free-for-all under the guise that "I could not have done otherwise." Such argumentation hinges on the faulty assumption that moral responsibility does not rest on a free-floating rationale consistent with selfishness and that it cannot or will not find motive to rationally exist independent of the truth of determinism.

An analysis of the work of philosopher Daniel Dennett and his claims in *Freedom Evolves* illustrates the free-floating rationale of what we call "moral responsibility" by observing its value in the natural selection of a cooperative system. Dennett essentially shows how "moral responsibility" plays into an organism's self-interest within a cooperative system. Dennett observes the results of a basic societal model in which individuals can accomplish greater tasks through cooperation with their peers. He observed that while, in theory, cooperation was the key to greater societal benefit, the freeloaders in the society would tend to overrun the cooperators. The reasons for this proved intuitively simple--individuals stood to profit by taking advantage of the work of cooperators and contributing little in return. Those alarmed of determinism's impact on moral responsibility envision exactly this societal response upon the widespread acceptance of determinism.

Dennett's model changed radically when it included additional variables consistent with the behavior of more advanced organisms. Under such a model, cooperators tended to self-assemble into groups with similar characteristics. With the addition of a policing mechanism to the model such that cooperators in the community actively sought out and discouraged defector behavior, Dennett found himself well on the way to explaining how cooperation might prove naturally sustainable within a system.

Dennett's results provide a startling explanation for how moral responsibility could not only evolve in a deterministic way, but also how "moral responsibility" might emerge naturally to correct for our tendency for short-sighted self-interest as organisms. His results serve to challenge the assumption that in an acceptedly deterministic universe, we would cease to find incentive or rationale for the concept of "moral responsibility."

Dennett turned to the idea of the prisoner's dilemma ... [where] two individuals suspected of committing a crime are caught, but there is not enough evidence to convict either unless one confesses. If neither confesses (they cooperate with each other), both will be set free. If one confesses (the defector) but the other does not, the individual who confesses will be set free while the other (the cooperator) receives a long jail sentence. If both confess, they will both go to jail for a shorter, but still significant amount of time (two defectors).

Under this scenario, an efficacious and low-risk, short-term policy for a self-interested individual would entail confession. An even more beneficial short-run strategy for the self-interested individual would involve convincing the other prisoner of your intentions to cooperate, but confessing instead (bluffing for self-interest). While these policies may have short-run benefits to the self-interested individual, they are obviously not optimal for the "society" (both individuals). Over the long haul, if the prisoners could develop a way to know they could count on one another to avoid confessing, they both stand to benefit significantly more than they would by pursuing their own short-sighted self-interests as defectors.

Dennett suggests that the prisoner's dilemma contains critical implications for the development of moral responsibility through natural selection. An "arms race of rationality" occurs as the organisms that thrive are those that cooperate while simultaneously developing the most advanced mechanisms of convincing their peers of their ability to cooperate and detecting the presence of defectors masquerading as cooperators. Dennett goes on to say that our unadulterated inclinations have a bias toward short-term rewards at the expense of larger benefits down the road. Yet, as we have found with the prisoner's dilemma, it is advantageous to us as organisms to pass up these smaller short-term gains for more sizable long-term ones--and convince others of our ability to do so. Thus, we have problems of both self-control and convincing our peers of our capacity for self-control, and it is from these grounds that moral responsibility emerges as the pinnacle of the arms race. This pivotal point for Dennett reflects the fact that our long-term reward consists of a sterling reputation of "moral" character that we must sacrifice short-term benefits' "temptation" to obtain. What we consider morally responsible behavior emerges as a self-control mechanism, since demonstrating self-control at individual points of temptation proves difficult with our bias toward myopic self-interest. Actually being good becomes the most cost-effective solution to the prisoner's dilemma. As Robert Frank observes, "Moral sentiments may be viewed as a crude attempt to fine-tune the reward mechanism, to make it more sensitive to distant rewards in selected instances" (Dennett 214).

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 When taken collectively, the arguments of both Strawson and Dennett provide moral and personal responsibility with a free-floating rationale and simultaneously allow the separation of such principles from the "garden of forking paths" model of choice. We can act no other way from a set of actual initial conditions and yet still talk rationally about morality and responsibility.

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## From Your Editors...

Hey y'all! Spring is finally here; the sun is shining, the birds are chirping, and finals are just around the corner! As we make the transition from the cold, wet winter, it brings to mind the changes within our own lives.

Many fear the concept of change, because it forces us to step out of our comfort zone. To accept change means to accept the possibility of something worse than what we have. People often forget that change can also enrich and improve our lives, and that it need not be something we fear. As college students, it is imperative that we embrace change. Whether it be welcoming new friends into our community (*pgs 6, 7, 9*) or adjusting to new Liberal Education requirements (*pg 3*), Honors students deal with transitions on a regular basis.

A few words to the wise: be flexible. Learning to be flexible now will undoubtedly make life easier in the future. View life as a constant adventure. With that attitude, every new experience will present an opportunity to learn and grow. Take time to enjoy every moment, because we never know what could be around the corner! Until next semester...

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