On the night of November 4, 2008, when Barack Obama officially received 270 electoral votes, Westminster Honors student Cooper Henderson was trapped in an elevator at the Radisson Hotel. Cooper was stuck, teary-eyed and proud, at the Utah State Democratic Party celebration, in a mass of emotional and celebratory liberals. It was a spot he had earned over the course of the last year, working hard on the campaign of Congressman Jim Matheson and volunteering extra time for the campaigns of Barack Obama and Peter Corroon.

Another Honors student, Ashley Pederson, spent 16 hours on Election Day working as a receiving clerk at a local polling station. She chatted with her neighbors and heard bits of news and gossip, which she found disheartening as an Obama supporter. When Honors student Ben Rackham picked her up at 9:30 pm, after he spent the day campaigning for Obama, Ashley refused to believe his announcement that Obama won. She turned on the radio and still did not believe. When it finally sunk in, she cried, partly from joy, and partly as a release of stress from her long day working for democracy.

For many Honors students, the 2008 election cycle was deep and meaningful, a powerful first opportunity to step up to the polls. The Honors program offered a class this semester called “2008 Presidential Election: Strategy & Substance.” The course was team-taught by life-long Democrat Bob Seltzer, and life-long Republican Roger Livingston. Guest speakers this semester included Utah Senator Bob Bennett, Republican Campaign Manager Jon Butler, and the former Lt. Governor of California under Reagan, John Harmer. Professor Seltzer and Professor Livingston promoted an atmosphere of respect between parties, and they showed the students and one another courtesy, even with issues on which they passionately disagreed. Many Honors students, including Cooper, made this class a part of their election process as they searched for substantial, bipartisan information among the sea of media reportage.

Honors student Cassidy Jones, another participant in the election class, tried to bring some serious thoughts to the press when Fox 13 News interviewed her on campus after the second presidential debate. Cassidy also volunteered this season at the Salt Lake City Obama Headquarters. She spent November 3 phoning Colorado voters, reminding and encouraging them to “get out and vote tomorrow.”

A large group of Honors students were in rehearsal on November 4 for the Westminster production, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum. The director set up a live video feed in the costume room, hoping to appease his cast. Between scenes, toga-clad Honors students dashed backstage to get the latest count. When Obama reached 270, a cheer went up from the cast that could be heard throughout the theater. Colin Crebs blames “all of the missed cues and botched lines that night” on Barack Obama and John McCain.

Other Honors students found creative ways to discuss the results. Jennifer Lewis logged into a chat room and discussed the tally with people from all over the world, and Mary Enge called her sister in Ireland for the first time since July. The two girls talked until the phone card ran out, and Mary said that neither of them “could think of a time when we’ve been prouder to call ourselves American.”

For a nation with a deep and real history of discrimination and violence, the election of a black president is unquestionably historic. Whether symbolic or otherwise, November 4 ushered in a new era of enthusiasm and optimism. As one might expect, Westminster Honors students were there doing their parts to bring this night about and to mark this historic occasion.

-Creed Rykel Archibald
Profs Pick the Flick: SHC Presents Profs Pick the Flick a la Badenhausen

The Westminster College Honors Program’s Student Honors Council hosted their first official activity of the 2008–2009 academic year on Thursday, September 25. Profs Pick the Flick is a semi-annual tradition that allows all Honors students the chance to hang out, snag some free snacks, and be culturally enriched by a quality motion picture and discussion lead by an Honors professor. This year S.H.C.’s guest professor was Honors program director-on-leave, Dr. Richard Badenhausen—a man whose rare ventures outside his office, along with his fabled valiance in philosophical debates with Nick More, have earned him a mythological reputation with the incoming freshmen. Dr. Badenhausen emerged from the depths of his sabbatical for one special fall evening to present The Lives of Others to an enthusiastic (if somewhat intimidated) audience of Honors students. These students thirsted for some deeper-meaning cinematic entertainment to liberate them from marathons of Will Ferrell movies being shown every night in the residence hall lounges.

The Lives of Others, winner of the 2007 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, is a German work that explores the activities of the East German secret police before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The plot is based on the true story of an author in East Berlin who was unknowingly under surveillance by the secret police in the 1980s. Following a showing of the film, Richard answered questions about the historical context and details of the work, sharing his knowledge and passion of German history and culture. Virtually none of the students had seen The Lives of Others before that evening, and a lively review and discussion of the film ensued.

Profs Pick the Flick once again proved to be a stimulating way for Honors students to connect and interact with each other and professors outside of the classroom.

-Cassidy Jones

Creative Writing Workshop: Honors students enjoy a brief foray into the creative sphere

How do you describe a scene using only objects? Pens scratch against paper. Spoons clink against mugs, accompanied by the occasional thoughtful sigh. In the first Student Creative Writing Workshop, sponsored by the Student Honors Council, Honors students gathered around a table in Nunemaker to explore their creativity. The workshop was designed for sharing, to encourage students to break out of the norms of academic writing. Students could share works they admired by other authors, author their own work, or just drink warm tea and spiced cider while listening to those who read their impromptu compositions. Ultimately, the workshop was an intimate gathering of friends and colleagues, rather than a group of students participating in a school function.

Paula Porter and Stacy Blaylock, both members of the SHC, coordinated the workshop, volunteering their writing to encourage others to share in a non-judgmental environment. According to Paula and Stacy, their goal was to design a workshop that encouraged individuality and creativity in a sometimes exasperatingly structured writing world. This evening served as an escape from thesis statements, transition sentences, and the academic rules of writing.

Each participant was handed a two-sided sheet covered in writing exercises to help inspire the author and spark their imagination. As the evening progressed, students put their inhibitions aside and attempted to write about a topic using its opposite, or to write a “conversation” in which no words were actually said—using descriptions of body language—to encourage a more creative approach to prose writing. Students shared their own writing inspirations, such as personal childhood experiences, and those they had adopted from other writers. The workshop created such a positive and safe environment that by the end of the night, almost every student had taken time to share their work with the others. Each one left the building with a little more awareness of his or her own talent and a little more appreciation for the talent of others.

-Michelle Duprey
Representing at NCHC: Honors students present at national conference

On October 22, ten Westminster College Honors students boarded a plane headed for the great state of Texas. Their mission was to share the Honors accomplishments of Westminster students with the members of the larger Honors community at the 2008 National Collegiate Honors Conference. After landing late on Wednesday, the travel-weary group checked in to the Marriott Rivercenter in downtown San Antonio and turned in for the night. The next day, they woke to a beautiful Texas morning, and the adventurous bunch decided to get to know downtown better. They walked to a small German bakery for its signature potato pancakes and “Papa Fritz” breakfast. As no one was scheduled to present that day, many took the opportunity to explore the scenic San Antonio River Walk and sample some local cuisine.

Every Westminster student pulled his or her own weight and left an indelible impression on the conference, though perhaps none more so than the seniors Sarah Hatch and Sara Rees. For the fourth consecutive year, NCHC attendees participated in a charity auction, with all proceeds donated to the host city. This year, Westminster was in charge of NCHC’s first live auction, featuring local auctioneer Joe Dorsak. Through the hard work of the “Sarahs,” the event proved to be a success by bringing in $3,667 for the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center—$1,000 more than the previous NCHC auction record. The Program Director for the Guadalupe Center gave emotional thanks to Westminster, telling Sara Rees that the money will tremendously help many underprivileged families and youth.

Most of the Honors students attended the conference to give presentations on a variety of academic, administrative, and service topics. The former SHC, Chert Griffith, Paula Porter, Lindsey Roper, and Amanda Ruiz, spoke to a packed room about how Honors programs can reach out to the larger campus community. John Cook, Paula Porter, and Bryan Craven gave a multimedia presentation about their participation in an Honors service-learning activity in which a local middle school personal finance class took on a handful of Honors students in a stock picking contest. Amanda Ruiz and Stacy Blaylock gave a presentation entitled, “V-Day: Until the Violence Stops,” in which they spoke about their programs to raise awareness and funds for the Salt Lake Rape Recovery Center. Ben Rackham displayed a poster of his research on genetically modified food. He and John Cook also participated in the popular “Student Fishbowl,” a session where they and other students from around the country discussed Honors issues and topics in a Socratic style, surrounded by Honors faculty from many different programs.

The 2008 NCHC was a success for the individual Honors students who grew together through presenting their hard work and for Westminster Honors Program’s image in the national academic community. First-year NCHC attendee Stacy Blaylock said that, though she didn’t know what to expect, “the surprise and adventure of my first NCHC awakened me to the diverse and intense scholarship being conducted by Honors students around the country.” When asked about her experience, Sarah Hatch commented, “Who can say anything bad about San Antonio? The River Walk, The Alamo, the Mexican Market it was one of the best national conferences I’ve attended.” Despite the small size of our program, Westminster had one of the most active delegations at the conference. “There were a lot of people, and it still felt like a community; even with such a large number of people, everyone was involved and interested in each other’s work,” said Sara Rees. Though disappointments from the conference were scarce, Sarah Hatch pointed out her one let-down: “I only wish we could have stayed longer…” Mission accomplished.

-John Cook

As a new school year began, the Honors Program welcomed 38 freshmen. By the end of orientation, the biggest question for many of these freshmen was “What exactly is this Living Arts thing?” What would we be doing every week? Who would be talking to us? Why should we go? As one of the new freshmen, these questions gnawed at me. As I examined the schedule for the seminars, I found that each night was different and several in particular caught my interest, especially human anatomy, election coverage, and our relationship with the planet.

One cloudy night in October, we all gathered in Nunemaker to explore the structure of the human body. Dr. Judy Rogers, a professor of biology, told us about “Body Worlds,” a display that preserves particular areas of the body in order to show all of its abilities. We discussed the ethics of human body preservation and public display. To finish the night, we learned about the processes that cadavers go through before being used at a university or college—replacing the blood in the veins with chemicals, removing all the fat. After her lecture, Dr. Rogers led the way to the science building, and we examined the cadaver in the anatomy lab. For any student studying science or going into medicine, this night allowed him or her to sample some of the things they will be studying in the future.

A week later, we met to discuss election media coverage and polling. Our first voting experience was only two weeks away and Melissa Goldsmith, an expert on public opinion polling, helped us understand the how the media presents its election coverage. She concentrated on the types of polling we would see. We discussed exit polling, which has the largest coverage, so the majority of the people are represented. She followed her presentation by leading us in a lively discussion about the election and current events. When we left that night, we were prepared to make an informed political choice.

Another evening, we met in the Health and Wellness Center to discuss our carbon footprints and the impact our lifestyles have on the earth. I discovered that it would take three planets like earth for the entire world to live like I do. Kerry Case, the director of the Environmental Center, helped us take what we learned about our carbon footprints and find ways to shrink them. We proposed that the college should work on purchasing locally grown and organic foods. Kerry then took our ideas and presented them to the college administration.

Living Arts introduces us to a variety of subjects in the world and takes us beyond our studies. These sessions expand our knowledge, spark our interest in a subject, and give us time to bond with our fellow freshmen.

-Kim Moyer

News

Student News & Notes

Amanda Ruiz spent 2 months in Colombia doing service work with IDEALES, a vocational school for individuals with physical and mental handicaps. She also received a scholarship to attend the 2008 National Conference for College Women Student Leaders held at Georgetown University in Washington DC this last June.

The Social Science Club, including Honors students Jillian Samels, Trevor Beal, Robin Hill, and Amanda Ruiz put on a series of election events, including a film screening, a debate, a costume day, tabling with information, and research presentations in order to promote civic engagement on campus.

Jacob Wayman plays on the Westminster Lacrosse Team, and scored in their National Championship win last year.

Sara Rees backpacked across Europe this past summer.

John Cook, Paula Porter, Bryan Craven, Sara Rees, Sarah Hatch, Chert Griffith, Stacy Blaylock, Amanda Ruiz, Ben Rackham, and Lindsey Roper attended the National Collegiate Honors Council Convention in San Antonio, Texas.

Robin Hill spent the summer in Costa Rica with the Outward Bound Program. He is also a student ambassador.

Brody Leven was elected President of the Associated Students of Westminster College. He spent the summer traveling in Argentina.

Two freshmen learning about political polling in this and previous elections.

-Pania Seeley signing in for another educational Living Arts event.

Amanda Ruiz spending 2 months in Colombia.
Spooks in Nunemaker: The SHC Urban Legends Night Social

The night began with Dorothy, the Joker, and a vampiric Hillary Clinton making s’mores – a motley group, even for Nunemaker. The costumes were as varied as they were creative at this year’s Urban Legends night, sponsored by the SHC. First, a small crowd of Honors students gathered around the fire with skewered marshmallows and told tales about the ghosts that haunt our campus. We started off with legends about a ghost that stayed by his cadaver in the science building and the boy who died in a combine accident where Hogle now stands, but it was the personal stories of the Nunemaker ghost that made the October night seem just a little colder, especially for those of us who planned to sleep over. In the end, no one saw the spectral bride who is rumored to linger in our Honors building, but we were haunted by Student Honors Council Treasurer, Cody Proux, who compensated for a lack of ghosts by making it a goal to scare everyone by the end of the night. But this was just half of the fun on the eve before Halloween.

As the fire died down, most of the crew went inside and snuggled into Lovesacs to watch “Dreamcatcher,” the film adaptation of a bizarre Stephen King novel about fungus and alien invasions. Those less inclined to watch alien invasions stayed outside by the fire, discussing everything from ghost stories to horror stories about the difficulties of Humanities, which freshmen were quickly learning for themselves. The movie marathon was put on pause to award prizes to the two best costumes. Michelle Dupree won second prize for a stunning Grecian-styled priestess dress she designed and made herself. And Christopher Roundy won the first place trophy, a sexy gold witch statuette, for his Joker nurse costume – which was pretty spot-on, from the green hair to the red platform pumps (and a rather chilling face of makeup complete with latex scar smile). The second movie of the evening was the suspenseful and nostalgia-inducing *The Sixth Sense*, a classic for our generation. Our audience slowly thinned as the night waned into morning hours and our honorables went to bed to rest for a fast-approaching early morning class or busy workday. After a few more hours of socializing and listening to the creaks and phantom footsteps of Nunemaker Place, the last of the Honors students left in the morning light, just a little more wary of apparitions and fungi after having enjoyed a sleepover at Urban Legends night.

-Erika Rodriguez

Student News & Notes

Kaitlyn Thomas is the editor of the *Forum*. She spent the summer working in Arches National Park as a park ranger.

Jesse Resnik presented his summer research project at a conference in Tennessee.

David Mursner-Gonzales helped launch the new Chinese Club on campus.

Andrew Waterhouse, Camber Stoddard, Garrett Schoonober, Jenn Niedfeldt, Natalia Noble, and Tracy Hansford are all in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*.

Paula Porter, Chert Griffith, Demetri Coombs, and Chris Roundy are volunteer researchers for an HIV study at the University of Utah ER.

Tracy Hansford and Chris Roundy won “Best PR Standout” award in the “A Day in the Life of a Westminster Student” video contest held by the admissions office.

Cassidy Jones and Meghan Hekker joined the Honorable Mention editing staff, beginning with the Fall 2008 issue.

Natalia Noble progressed through three rounds of auditions for the Fox TV show *American Idol*.

John Cook and Sharayah Coleman became engaged to be married and are planning a winter wedding.
Chert Griffith

Chert Griffith is an Honors Student who truly takes advantage of opportunities, both in the Honors Program and the community as a whole. When I asked Chert what a typical day in his life is like, his reply was an Excel spreadsheet. Judging from his schedule, it is safe to say that Chert is more than involved.

Along with current academic and extracurricular commitments, Chert performed summer research with Honors professor, Dr. Bonnie Baxter. Since Chert was actually inventing novel techniques as part of his research, much of his summer was actually spent finding reasons why things had gone awry. Whereas others may have become frustrated, Chert views that last half of summer as an opportunity to investigate methods of virus amplification without a known host and improve research methods for others in his field.

For Chert, staying busy is not a problem. Aside from summer research, he volunteers at the University of Utah ER with an HIV study, and he is active in Pre-Med Club, Poker Club, American Chemical Society, and he is in the ASWC Senate. He is a teaching assistant, student instructor, and grades for both genetics sections. He also went to San Antonio to present at the NCHC conference. In addition, Chert continues with his own personal research and works as a writing consultant in the Writing Center.

Even Chert’s sleep is scheduled on his Excel spreadsheet. On the two nights he doesn’t work for UPS until 3:00 AM, he gets a few hours of free time. This is time allowed for playing poker, cooking, watching college basketball, and watching his favorite TV shows: House and Scrubs. If you think Chert likes hospital shows purely out of a healthy appreciation for sarcastic doctors and dead-dog jokes, think again. Sunday from noon to 3:00 PM he has scheduled MCAT prep.

With all of the experience, knowledge, and time-management skills that Chert has acquired, he has got to be an ideal candidate for any graduate program or medical school. But I’m left wondering whether Chert would be Dr. House or Dr. Dorian.

- Whitney Strong

Faculty Profile

As a child, Chris always had a knack for numbers. Although he originally wanted to be a musician, his father talked him out of it, suggesting an engineering or accounting degree. When neither of these subjects fully captured his interest, he decided on another direction for his education—physics. Dr. Cline received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Maryland in Aerospace Engineering, and he went on to obtain a doctorate degree from Pennsylvania State. When he’s not teaching, he enjoys shooting large format photographs and playing the tenor sax. He is also an avid sports nut; he excels in swimming, baseball, skiing, and sailing.

Chris Cline began his career as a teacher at Westminster 15 years ago. After graduating from Penn State he moved to Utah to figure out his next step. At that point, all he knew was that he wanted to teach at “a small, liberal arts school somewhere in the west.” Luckily, he discovered Westminster one day while riding his bike. He sent in an application, and one week before class started, received an offer to teach and a one year contract. His contract was renewed, and he continued to teach the best and brightest students. “I’d pit them against the kids at Penn State any day,” he confirmed grinning.

For the first time, Dr. Cline is teaching an Honors course, the History and Philosophy of Science. He also teaches several physics classes. His most memorable moment as a physics professor was when an experiment went wrong in the fall of 2001. While performing the experiment for his class, he fell and broke his wrist. Rather than going to the hospital, he performed the experiment again (correctly) and once more for his next class…then he drove himself to the hospital.

Last year, Chris was honored with the “Gore Excellence in Teaching Award.” Chris loves his energetic classes, saying, “The enthusiasm my students express make teaching even more enjoyable.” If he could give one piece of advice he’d say, “Speak up! Don’t be anxious about what comes out of your mouth or worry if it’s wrong. Get involved and participate.” Chris is an important and welcome addition to the Honors Program.

- Caitlyn Stringham
Students Creating Change On Campus and Around the World

In a fall season filled with debates, elections, activism, and community organizing, it’s no surprise that a multitude of Honors students are finding innovative and important ways to express their voices. While definitions of civic engagement, community service, or responsible citizen differ between individuals and groups, it is beyond a doubt that no matter what term you use, these students have taken on issues that they are passionate about.

Spring and summer of 2008 were busy times for these students. Jill Samels spent the spring semester making the children of Guadalupe School her passion; she admits to skipping classes to attend functions with the children as a chaperone. The Guadalupe School consists of children below the poverty level. Through the Social Science Club, Jill organized a field trip to the Westminster campus so that the kids could have a pleasant and memorable experience with higher education. Jill sees her civic engagement as a part of being a responsible citizen and advocates that “everyone has something to give, society cannot function selfishly. We must attend to the needs of others.”

Trevor Beal took up this call to aid children during spring semester as well, participating in Westminster’s Social Science Club’s Chocolate for Children. The event was a baking competition to raise money to build and supply a school in Sudan.

As spring moved into summer, Westminster Honors students did not slack in their community participation. Robin Hill spent the summer participating in the Leadership Semester through Outward Bound in Costa Rica. Working with children and young teens in an outdoor setting helped Robin with his Spanish skills and his economic research. Once back in Salt Lake City, Robin attended the First Annual Conference for Political and Civic Engagement at the University of Utah in August.

Ben Rackham and Ashley Pedersen were busy too, working at the Center for Civic Engagement and setting up projects for Helping Hands Day, the annual day of service during the First-Year Student Orientation at Westminster. With local non-profit organizations, they set up 21 projects related to the campus common read, Refuge, and its themes of the Great Salt Lake, birds, family, and cancer. Three-hundred and fifty first-year students participated, doing everything from using canoes to fish trash out of the Jordan River, to making crafts with preschool-aged children with emotional and behavioral problems, to painting at the Cancer Wellness House.

This fall, student volunteers have continued their projects with passion, many of them getting involved in the elections. Trevor spent the election season helping prepare the campus for voting with voter registration drives, informational sessions on the key issues, and even open mic debates. Robin spear-headed different voter-related projects with the county clerk and ASWC, and took action as the vice president of the Social Science Club.

Honors students found many other ways to improve the community in addition to helping with the election season. Robin also participates in the Regional Ethics Bowl Tournament, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the National Society for Leadership and Success. Amanda Ruiz is Coordinator for V-Day 2009 at Westminster, a campaign dedicated to stopping sexual violence against women and children. She is also president of the Social Science Club, which just received the YouthLINC Youth Service Marathon Scholarship to pursue activities that address the needs of displaced persons in Sudan and in Salt Lake City. STAND, another student group headed by Ben Rackham, also received the YouthLINC award. In an effort to improve the environment, Jennifer Niedfeldt and Stacy Blaylock have been working hard to institutionalize a successful recycling program on campus through the Environmental Center and their positions as Campus Sustainability Fellows. They’ve distributed more than 120 bins to students living in the residence halls and are searching for more permanent solutions for the program. They will hopefully present their findings at the Rocky Mountain Sustainability Symposium in Boulder, Colorado, in February 2009.

All in all, these Honors students have spent a productive year, accomplishing goals that Westminster, and the Honors Program, can be proud of. Through their efforts to improve the lives of others, they enrich our student body as well as our Honors Program, and they experience personal improvement and success as well. Perhaps, by having read their stories, you too might find some inspiration for your own life.

-Stacy Blaylock
Dear Friends and Colleagues, both present and past,

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome those of you who are new to the Honors Program. We look forward to meeting each of you and recognizing what you will contribute to our community. To those of you whom we’ve already had the good fortune of meeting, we’re glad to see you once more. We hope you all are having a great 2008–2009 school year, and we look forward to sharing the opportunities and adventures this year will bring. As our Honors community continues to grow, we are excited to see what collaboration will emerge between old and new talent, as well as what our collective enthusiasm and commitment to academia will accomplish. From nights of fun to giving back to the community, we look forward to sharing next semester’s experiences with you.

Our door is always open,  
Your Student Honors Council

Honors Program Alumni News

Tofi Ta’afua (’01) works at Goldman Sachs. She currently is the president on Westminster College’s Alumni Board.

Adam Mangone (’02), past president of Westminster’s Alumni Board, has just started the MBA program at Duke University.

Kate Bradshaw (’03) is a government relations specialist at Parsons, Behle & Latimer, Utah’s largest law firm, where she works to represent her clients interests before the Governor, the State Legislature, and other local governments.

Stewart Anderson (’04), a PhD candidate in history, will be spending the year studying in Germany on a Fulbright Award.

Christopher Gallati (’04) was married to Alexis Van Uitert (’03) in 2006, received his MD from Mercer University School of Medicine in 2008, and just started his neurosurgical residency training with the University of Rochester at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, New York, this past summer.

Eric Glissmeyer (’04) and his family moved to Boston in May 2008 to start his medical residency in pediatrics at the Children’s Hospital Boston and Boston Medical Center.

Nicki Blair (’05) has just started the MA in Library and Information Sciences program at University of Iowa, where she will hold a fellowship associated with their digital library.

Jennifer Morrison (’05) has just started the MA in Counseling program at Western Washington University.

Heather Brown (’07) is managing editor of the custom publication division at Wasatch Journal Media.

Ben Haverkost (’07) works at A.T.K. and is in his first semester of Westminster’s MBA program.

Stan Sarkisov (’07) writes for IN magazine and works with the International Rescue Committee as a translator. He is planning on attending law school next year.

Lindsey Tripp (’07) is activities director at Evergreen Canyons Health and Rehabilitation.

Blakely Neilson (’08), an Alvin and Helene Richer Scholar while at Westminster, just started her first year of law school at the University of Utah.

Marie Martin (née Robinson) (’08) is the new Administrative Program Coordinator for the Office of Sustainability at the University of Utah. In September, she married Adam Martin.

At Westminster’s 2008 Commencement ceremony, Marie Robinson (’08) and Amberlyn Peterson (’08) won the President’s Leadership Award and the Trustees’ Character Award, respectively, marking the 5th consecutive year that an Honors student has won at least one of the three major student awards announced at graduation.

A big thanks also to Jennifer Morrison (’05), Ray Bradford (’07), and Marie Robinson (’08), all of whom made donations to the Student Honors Council Fund since the last issue of Honorable Mention. Alumni who would like make gifts to this fund—which helps current Honors students investigate graduate school—can send donations to the fund care of the Honors Program at any time of the year.
Considering the national climate, what do you see as the role of the Honors Program in preparing students to represent their generation?

**Faculty Response**

John Watkins  
*Professor of Economics*

The role of the Honors Program is the same as the role of higher education generally, to help students find their own path. Education involves more than solving differential equations, appreciating Shakespeare's sonnets, or understanding the implications of fiscal policy. Education involves reflecting and critiquing the myths underlying civilization itself.

Yesterday, we believed that markets work and that governments govern best that govern least. Today, we see these beliefs as myths. The world is on a precipice. The economic crisis presses urgently upon our consciousness, but in the background remain environmental and ethical crises as well. Three billion of us live on less than two dollars a day; many of us have more than we need, while many more need more than they have. These crises challenge our assumptions regarding the role of government, the function of business, and the responsibilities of citizens. Most importantly, they raise questions regarding the path we have chosen.

Understanding precedes solutions. Understanding requires wide-ranging knowledge, and the capacity to view the world from different points of view, especially viewpoints dismissed as irrelevant, ancient, or passe. History moves in spirals. The present resembles the past, but there are always differences.

The past can teach if we are willing, but we cannot follow paths previously chosen. We must choose our own path, which demands reflection, something uncongenial to those who mouth time-worn answers. They remain stuck, denying their senses, calling truth myth and night day. To find examples, one only need turn to those who sing the praises of free markets while socializing banks; deny global warming while ice caps melt; or tell the poor to pull themselves up while receiving bailouts.

The solutions are less technical than ethical. An axe can be used to split wood or inflict wounds; splitting the atom can destroy a nation or light a city. Ultimately, we decide. The purpose of an Honors education is to provide the tools necessary to address the problems at hand. How you use these tools is up to you.

*-John Watkins*

**Student Response**

Christopher Roundy  
*Class of 2011*

In our current national climate, whether you define that as our political situation, economic circumstances, or anything in between, it is very important for the coming generations to find their voice and make their opinions heard. One problem with adolescence is the overwhelming pressure to “go with the crowd.” However, falling into the mainstream and following the current trend without stopping to consider where you are going, is a dangerous habit, at best.

In my experience, the Honors Program is one of the best ways for a student to find his or her voice and learn how to use it. Students in an Honors class cannot sit silently at the back of the classroom, coasting through the class on the momentum of other students’ opinions. Rather, students are taught specifically to take a stance on an issue, in an intelligent, informed way. From debating whether or not Odysseus has virtue according to Aristotle, to making a scientific observation about our planet and then supporting it with observation, Honors students have to make claims and then learn to support them with logical evidence.

While this may seem like the perfect recipe for a stubborn, argumentative Honors student, students are also taught to respect and consider the opinions of others. Intelligence and respect are prime weapons to combat the mob mentality. Classes in the Honors program teach students to find their voice in any field, from science to politics and economics to philosophy to fine art. The result of this liberal education is a well-rounded student who can hold an intelligent conversation, no matter the topic at hand. Furthermore, Honors students learn how to represent their voice comfortably to any audience whether professors or fellow students. These skills are vital when entering the real world—which demands opinions and action.

Students who are unable to find their voices enter life after college as a blank slate, without having learned how to fill that space other than assuming opinions not their own. Therefore, these students fall into the habit of allowing others to define their voice for them. However, Honors students enter life after college with not only their slate already filled, but also armed with all the tools necessary to defend that voice and keep it as their own.

*-Christopher Roundy*
Both John Locke and Baruch Spinoza were instrumental in forming the social and philosophical foundation necessary for the First Amendment. But a number of significant differences exist between the church-state configurations envisioned by Locke and Spinoza. In many ways, Locke’s toleration theory leans much closer to theology than philosophy, and taken alone, likely could not produce the First Amendment or the church-state configuration as it exists in the United States today. While Lockean toleration never even achieves Erastian toleration (Rosenthal, 320), Spinoza offers a comprehensive system of toleration that cultivates social cohesion, individual freedom of thought and expression, and an open sphere of public dialogue, all supporting a pluralistic, theologically disinterested state. These elements, while far from identical to the First Amendment, can generate a political system much more like the First Amendment than Locke’s limited theory of mutual Christian toleration.

Although the possibility of diffusing intellectual credit for the First Amendment has important historical ramifications, re-examining this important document in light of Spinoza’s philosophy offers an opportunity to develop a deeper, more rich, and more accurate understanding of it. Doing so illustrates more clearly exactly how the First Amendment operates and how we can use that new understanding to solve the complications of religious diversity in modern America.

Many Enlightenment philosophers proposed a wide range of church-state configurations. The contrast between the particular systems of Locke and Spinoza, however, highlights most clearly the difference between what Jonathan Israel refers to as the radical enlightenment (which, he argues, is led by Spinoza) and the more conservative response represented by Locke. Israel’s argument is unique in this way also, that it views the European Enlightenment as an international movement, rather than a series of largely isolated movements occurring across the continent. Spinoza’s radical philosophy, Israel argues, provided the main impetus for much of the subsequent Enlightenment. Furthermore, Israel grants the development of philosophy and ideas a particularly privileged place in the shaping history. Such a perspective leads Israel to conclude a much larger, but more diffuse role for Spinoza in the Enlightenment. By extension, Spinoza also earns a distant role in the foundation of the United States. He writes:

> Generally, Locke’s toleration was vastly preferred and, in this sense, it is doubtless true that ‘Locke provided the theoretical defence of the toleration which would rule the outlook of the coming’. Yet Locke’s ‘Christian argument’ was decidedly not that of the radical wing; by eulogizing freedom of the individual, and of expression, in preference to freedom of conscience and worship, Spinoza in fact cleared a much wider space for liberty and human rights than Locke did and arguably, more important path towards modern western individualism. (Israel, 161)

So how exactly does Spinoza “clear a wider path towards modern western individualism” and explain the implementation of pluralism in the United States? In relation to the First Amendment, Spinoza’s philosophy contains the following elements, of which many are missing from Locke’s toleration doctrine:

1) A dual relationship of both checks and liberties between church and state.
2) A system of defense for minority groups, and restraint on majorities.
3) Special protection for speech, action, and opinion.
4) A disestablished central government capable of acting as a legitimately neutral mediator.
5) The ability to accommodate a wide range of religious beliefs across a variety of traditions and interpretation in an egalitarian way.

1a. The Wall of Separation as a Two-Way Mechanism

The relationship between religious sects and the state is one of the most important elements of any political philosophy intent on building religious tolerance and constructive, non-territorial pluralism. But is the wall of separation supported by the Constitution and the documents surrounding its framing? While many conservative critics often cite Jefferson’s letter to the Danbury Baptist Church in Connecticut as the only appearance of the wall of separation, in reality, a number of other discussions regarding the depth and meaning of the First Amendment litter the writing of James Madison. These documents describe for what intents and purposes the First Amendment was put into place. We begin with Jefferson:

> Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

Despite Jefferson’s use of the term wall of separation, his description is still relatively vague... Although his words do echo Spinoza’s assertion that “every man may think as he pleases, and say what he thinks” (Spinoza, TPT, XX), and that government may only regulate action and not opinion, he provides little commentary to accurately interpret the functional meaning of the First Amendment.

For this, Madison’s correspondence offers a much more useful insight in considering the First Amendment in terms of political power structures. He writes:
Every new and successful example therefore of a **perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters**, is of importance. And I have no doubt that every new example, will succeed, as every past on has done, in shewing that religion and Govt. will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together.

Again, Madison does use the term, “separation.” But he articulates a more specific meaning for the division. In contrast to Jefferson, Madison's language demands much more than a negative interpretation of religious liberty, that is, that government is bound to remove itself from religious matters, in line with Locke's laissez-faire configuration, but leaves religious sects largely unbound. No, Madison maintains “There is not a shadow of right in the general government to **intermeddle** with religion. Its least interference would be a most flagrant usurpation” (Madison, 329). Consistent with his concerns with factional supremacy, Madison demands that the church-state relationship be one of mutual constraint; both are prohibited from dominating the other. Beyond that, both institutions perform their roles **better** when free from the interference of the other.

Where Locke invites competition between and among churches for doctrinal supremacy and majority, Spinoza, in line with Madison, senses danger in such a configuration. As such, Spinoza seeks to protect the government as well as smaller and perhaps less orthodox sects from more powerful ones.

### 2b. Sect, Faction and Balanced Pluralism

James Madison's primary concern for the stability of the newly formed nation took clear form in the threat of factional disputes and power grabs. Religious sects clearly fit within Madison's definition of factions, and as such, a powerful religious majority poses as much threat to the stability of the state and the liberty of its citizens as any other faction, be it political, financial, or otherwise. “For where there is such a variety of sects, there cannot be a majority of any one sect to oppress and persecute the rest. Fortunately for this commonwealth, a majority of the people are decidedly against any exclusive establishment.” He goes on, “If there were a majority of one sect, a bill of rights would be a poor protection for liberty…”

### 3b. Private Dogma, Public Faith

Despite the strict divisions between theological and governmental structures, Spinoza does not, as many modern liberals are criticized for, draw a harsh line between faith and the public sphere. Perhaps one of the most compelling elements of Spinoza's political philosophy is its commitment to cultivating a healthy public forum in which philosophy and theological pursuits can coexist, and even push one another to thrive. Spinoza asserts, “the Bible leaves reason absolutely free, that it has nothing in common with philosophy, in fact, that Revelation and Philosophy stand on different footings.” This compatibilist view asks citizens of both religious and philosophical persuasions to engage one another in the public sphere, each contributing to Spinoza's view of “piety.” Each individual should proclaim beliefs, and submit them to public scrutiny not for rejection, but for refinement, and to contribute to the betterment of the “public faith,” or in reality, something closer to a set of secular ethics.

Spinoza, unlike his materialist cousins, avoids the pitfalls of Hegelian organicism by means of his explanation of the **conatus**, or the power of all things to persist in their own being. As such, Spinoza maintains his metaphysical monism, but does not fall into a monistic conception of value. That is, each mode of existence has its own **conatus**, and all ideas of value simply describe the relationship between and among other modes. Spinoza need not reconcile conflicting values, for they do not correspond to any fixed concept of morality. Nor does he tie human nature or society into a rigid categorical set leading to authoritarianism to which the critics of the Hegelians like Isaiah Berlin object. He preserves the integrity of human **conatus** by refusing to discriminate between human activity and any other mode or action in existence. Further, he assumes complete uniqueness of each mode, ensuring that each distinct human being is different from every other one.

From this careful organization, Spinoza's commitment to private dogma and public faith emerges. As each human being is entirely unique from all other human beings, and mutual understanding of the universe and each other leads to increased power (for Spinoza, coextensive with freedom), it is actually beneficial for all individuals to express their opinions openly as much as possible. Madison clarifies, referring to the time period in which Spinoza wrote in the Netherlands, “The example of Holland proved that a toleration of sects, dissenting from the established sect, was safe & even useful.”

### Bibliography


Opportunities to have your voice be heard come up every day, so it’s pivotal that Honors students are taught to represent themselves intelligently, professionally, and enthusiastically in their academic, career, and community environments. Thankfully, the Honors Program is devoted to developing students who know how to express themselves and how to be active in their communities in a way that will benefit them long after they leave Westminster’s campus. This issue of Honorable Mention presents several instances of Honors students representing themselves and the Honors Program in the recent election, events in the immediate community, and even in the broader world community. From our Westminster community to events on the global scale, we are proud to say Honors students represent our program well.

As co-editors of Honorable Mention, we are pleased to be a part of representing Honors Program. We have the privilege of compiling the best of Honors to present to the world. In this mission, we are pleased to welcome two new editors, Cassidy Jones and Meghan Hekker. Cassidy joins us as layout editor, and Meghan is our new copy editor. Through collaboration, we strive to represent the Honor Program.

The Honors Program has helped each of us grow in new and unexpected ways. In return, each of us will continue to represent the program, Westminster College, and our generation with pride and self-respect.

Honorably Yours,

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