Westminster Honors Hosts Academic Decathlon
Honors students lead, learn, and serve

The weekend of January 23–24, 2009, Westminster’s campus was overrun by over 100 well-dressed young scholars. Many classrooms and auditoriums teemed with eager test-takers while anxious academic advisors produced a harmony of pacing footsteps in the hallways. The serious students and their leaders flocked to the college for a number of specific reasons—to avenge past humiliations, to establish esteem, or to defend a rich record of domination. Overall, a voracious appetite for glory brought these students together for two drizzly days as they competed in the Utah Regional Academic Decathlon hosted by the Westminster College Honors program.

Over the course of the weekend, teams representing 12 high schools from across the state participated in 10 academic events to vie for the regional title and prepare for the Utah State Academic Decathlon. Participating high schools included: Alta, Ben Lomond, Bingham, Christian Heritage, Duchesne, Jordan, Morgan, Park City, Paradigm, South Summit, and Wasatch. Volunteer Honors students, members of the freshman class and peer mentors, facilitated the event in various capacities: many Honors students administered written exams in art, economics, essay, language and literature, mathematics, music, science, and social science. Others proctored practical examinations in the categories of interview and speech and served as evaluators for the events. Some Honors students contributed their time as scorers—reading essays and organizing electronic results of multiple choice exams.

Throughout the weekend, all of the volunteers put forth a huge effort to assist the competition coordinators in orchestrating the many phases of the event, and they remained accessible to the high school students offering advice and answering questions. Westminster Honors sophomore Demetri Coombs commented, “I was impressed by how smoothly the whole thing ran. Aside from the fact that we were short some pencils in the beginning, the event went off without a hitch.” The competing students seemed to appreciate the Westminster Honors program’s efforts as well. “This is so much better than normal,” offered Jennifer Foster, 17, of Park City High School. Glenn Rees, 17, of Christian Heritage High School said, “My favorite part about Westminster was how open and welcoming the students are.”

The Regional Academic Decathlon also created a unique opportunity for students to experience Westminster College as an institution and observe the dynamic learning environment that the Honors program offers. Interim Honors director, Dave Goldsmith, in collaboration with Hailee Hatch, Assistant Director of Admissions, arranged for the competing students and their coaches to take tours of campus as a supplementary activity to the weekend’s contest. Many high school students and advisors came away from their experience on campus recognizing the great opportunities for learning that Westminster offers. Upon seeing the Center for Financial Analysis, David O’Donnell, 17, of Park City High School noted “This [ticker] is awesome.” Jennifer Foster, 17, of Duchesne High School raved, “I love that Westminster is so eco-friendly.”

Chris Roundy, an Honors sophomore at Westminster, has fond memories of participating in Academic Decathlon as a high school student, and he was particularly excited about the potential effects of hosting the competition at Westminster: “Academic Decathlon was a great opportunity for both the Honors students and the competing high school kids. It exposed the high school students to Westminster and the Honors program—both of which are complementary environments for the types of students that competed.”

The Utah Regional Academic Decathlon was a great occasion for Honors students to participate in service-learning and offered a hands-on opportunity for the high school community to experience Westminster Honors. -Cassidy Jones & Greg Dean
Westminster Creative Writer Recognized
Archibald receives WRHC award in Western Regional Honors journal

Creed Archibald always had a knack for writing. As an elementary school student, he wrote his first story—“11 pages, handwritten, front and back”—about Arney of Killarney Lane who fights off a group of zombies led by Michael Jackson. His teacher asked him to read his story to the class. As Creed puts it, “I was a fairly goofy kid, laced up with glasses and a bowl cut, and I sucked at sports. But when I read that story the whole class laughed.” He was hooked.

Creed's love of writing led him to choose an English major at Westminster College, where he spent time further studying the art of creative writing. This year, Creed submitted two stories to the Honors journal, Scribendi, which publishes the work of Honors students throughout the Western Region. After submitting his works, Creed received a letter informing him that they would be published. Furthermore, Creed was selected for the Western Regional Honors Council award, an honor that offered a $250 prize and the opportunity to read his work at the 2009 Conference, which took place March 5–7, 2009, in Spokane, Washington. Creed attended the conference with a group students from the Honors program. During the conference, Creed read his pieces “Broken Stone in Duchene County” and “The Tribute Game” at the opening reception for the 2009 edition of Scribendi. Scribendi published Creed's story entitled “Boys and Girls” in addition to “Broken Stone,” which won the prestigious WRHC award.

About his writing, Creed says, “in a sense it’s cathartic for me—I will occasionally become obsessed with a certain sentence or phrase and writing it down gets it out of my head.” He enjoys getting together with other writers to read their works in an informal and organic setting. Creed hopes to continue the tradition of these open-mic nights and to attract new people and perspectives to these venues. Creed believes that even though literature can be serious “it should also be rebellious and edgy—push the envelope a little.”

The Last Lecture
What wisdom would we impart to the world if we knew it was our last chance

As college Honors students living in the era of the Internet, we are constantly taking advantage of the many sources of knowledge at our disposal, whether it’s accessing databases of academic articles or stumbling on the Internet. Technology has facilitated our learning process by offering millions of hits for a one-word Google search and yet has also distracted us with all its bells and whistles from many of life’s larger questions that we can’t just google.

The evening of Monday, April 6, 2009, the Student Honors Council hosted the Westminster debut of the Last Lecture Series, an event modeled after a lecture series at Carnegie Mellon University in which top academics are asked to reflect upon their lives and share their life’s wisdom as if it were their last chance. The inaugural guest was Pat Shea, a Rhodes Scholar and Harvard Law graduate who has taught courses at Westminster, as well as the University of Utah, Brigham Young University, and Kansas State University. Mr. Shea also served as the Director of the Bureau of Land Management under President Clinton.

With so many experiences in the public and private sectors, Mr. Shea warns that we can either passively observe history as it is made or become an educated participant, like when Mr. Shea, as a law student, personally confronted Justice Rehnquist about the Kent State shootings, or when Mr. Shea got involved in his local community by working to legally protect Alta from further development. Yet, as he was asked to reflect upon his life and what wisdom he had acquired, Mr. Shea focused not on technicalities, but spoke candidly about the value of companionship and love and the inevitability of death, highlighting life’s larger issues through a uniquely educated perspective to an eager audience of malleable young minds brimming with information and yet short on such wisdom.

Even after the formal question session ended, the room was still abuzz. Students discussed Mr. Shea’s accomplishments and advice while they waited in line to speak to him personally. This Last Lecture was hopefully the first of many to come.

-Caroline Hill
They may be called many things: nerds, brains, or overachievers, but Honors students also know how to have a good time. On Friday, March 13, Casino Nunemaker opened its doors for the annual event, Monte Carlo Night. True to style, Honors students arrived dressed to the nines, ready to cut loose. Whether it was the Texas Hold’em poker tournament, or the free play blackjack and craps tables, Honors students played to win that evening. With mocktails and chips to burn, they all set out to make their fortunes (in the form of Chili’s and Starbucks gift cards). Some left with prizes, some left with only memories, but a good time was had by all.

Initially, the poker tournament was slow. Many came to play and no one left the tables without putting up a fight. However, three tables of hopefuls slowly dwindled down to one table: the professionals. This was where the action got intense; every player presented a challenge. It was a tough battle between the card sharks, including past winners professors Richard Badenhausen and David Goldsmith. As the night dwindled and the chips circulated among the final three, a pattern emerged: no one was going to give up, the soon-to-be-winner would have to be both lucky and good at bluffing. The eventual winner fought hard and came from behind to claim the grand prize, a $25-dollar Chili’s gift card. Sophomore Jillian Samels became the first student ever to win the poker tournament at Monte Carlo Night. No student has ever beaten a professor at any Honors competition, making Jillian’s win all the more epic. Furthermore, she was the first woman to win this tournament, professors or students alike.

The Texas Hold’em tournament was not the only place for students to achieve glory. The craps and blackjack tables allowed for students interested in free play and mocktails to win a prize as well. In fact, some students played both tables simultaneously, putting their fortunes in the hands of chance. However, demonstrating intense focus, the chip leader at the end of the night, junior Amanda Ruiz, won $18,300 in chips solely at the blackjack table. Because she played her cards right, Amanda walked home victorious with a $15 Starbucks gift card.

In the dark corners of Nunemaker, many students participated in the unofficial card scene of the evening. On the sidelines, freshmen Tess Graham and Madeline Savarese played exciting games of spoons, speed, and a very interesting but quite complicated game called peanuts. Sophomore Demetri Coombs preferred to stick to the classics, and he ran a hot game of gin.

Between the Poker Tournament, the craps and blackjack tables, and all of the fun of the “unofficial” games, everyone at the event had a grand evening. Of course, cards weren’t for everyone, but with the never-ending supply of mocktails made to order, delicious hors d’oeuvres, and a smashing crowd of Honors students, there was nothing not to love about Monte Carlo Night. That evening there were no freshmen or seniors, only fellow Honors students to cheer you on as you win big or bust. Clearly, this evening is one to remember and a tradition to keep.

-Victoria Valencia
V-Day: Until the Violence Stops
Students raise awareness to end domestic violence

Each February, the Westminster College campus is festooned with red hearts and quotes for V-Day. These hearts are not designed to express one person’s undying love for another, but to raise awareness of sexual violence and gender equality. The official description of V-Day calls this international fundraising campaign a catalyst for social change. The Westminster campus is well on its way to achieving that goal.

This year, the Westminster College V-Day effort raised and donated more than $11,000 to the Salt Lake City Rape Recovery Center and to the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Organizers hosted more than a dozen events including art auctions, self-defense classes, and sales of knit goods. To do their part in the fight against domestic violence, the Student Honors Council sponsored a bake sale and sold cakes, cookies, brownies, and the infamous chocolate vagina pops. Honors students volunteered to help bake and staff the table. Also, SHC President Paula Porter and Secretary Cassidy Jones worked diligently towards the success of the sale. The bake sale was a smash, resulting in more than $350 donated to the cause.

The Clothesline Project featured hundreds of t-shirts sharing stories of abusive situations in an encouraging and supportive environment. “It’s utterly crushing to read what some of these people have experienced, yet the stories are out there and then healing can begin,” says Stacy Blaylock, assistant organizer for V-Day 2009.

This year also was a year to introduce new V-Day trends, including the V-Men discussion. A gathering of men and women met to discuss men’s role in ending sexual violence and empowering women. Robin Hill states: “Gender equality has a stigma of being a female-only activist pursuit. Eliminating this view and getting men comfortable being an activist for gender equality was the focus of our discussion.”

One of the crowning events of the V-Day movement is the annual production of The Vagina Monologues directed by Jenni Lou Oakes in consultation with Babs DeLay. Many honors women were directly involved in the largest cast The Vagina Monologues has seen since its first production on the Westminster campus.

Ultimately, the V-Day campaign gives students a voice in the fight to prevent violence against women. It gives Honors students a means to volunteer and an opportunity to lead. V-Day encourages students to be passionate about their beliefs and to fight for what they value. It teaches people the importance of humanity and equality. Campaign organizer Amanda Ruiz says: “As a philosophy student, I’ve learned from a bunch of dead white men that a human is a rational animal, but somewhere in me I have a sneaking suspicion it’s really our compassion that makes our humanity worthwhile. And V-Day; it brings that compassion to the forefront.” V-Day brings people to a place of understanding and unity. One never forgets the person they helped to heal or the person who supported them when they needed strength. –Michelle Duprey
Westminster at WRHC

Western Regional Honors Conference in Washington

In Spokane, Washington, Honors students from colleges around the Western United States gathered for the 36th annual Western Regional Honors Conference at the historic Davenport Hotel. Washington State University hosted this year’s event with the theme “Pathways to Preservation, Sustainability, and Renewal.” Robin Hill, Ashley Pedersen, and Creed Archibald represented the Westminster College Honors program at this year’s conference by presenting various works. Cassidy Jones, Cody Proulx, and Acting Honors Director David Goldsmith also attended to learn, listen, and make connections with other Honors programs.

Robin presented on economic globalization and its limiting effect on sustainability efforts, where he evaluated the increasing problems taking place in Costa Rica with unfair trade agreements that allow outside corporations to make profits by depleting local resources. He had a unique perspective because he spent spring and summer 2008 abroad studying economics in Costa Rica and other areas in Central America.

Ashley presented on Environmental and Social Justice in Utah, analyzing local issues of pollution and identifying what is and isn’t being done for environmental justice. This research is a part of her environmental studies senior project.

Creed’s writing was published and one piece won the award for best short fiction in *Scribendi*, a 22-year-old literary magazine that gives Honors students an opportunity to publish their creative works. This prestigious Western Regional Honors Council award has never before been bestowed upon a Westminster student. Creed presented his WRHC award-winning piece “Broken Stone in Duchesne County,” as well as an incredible and moving poem, “The Tribute Game,” that filled the entire room with ear-shattering applause.

While at the conference, Westminster Honors students also had the opportunity to hear presentations by Honors students from other institutions. These presentations covered a range of topics including literature on dystopia, universal health care, and even Frankenstein. Apart from intriguing presentations to stimulate the brain, Spokane offered several interesting sights. The Spokane Falls, the Spokane World’s Fair grounds, stores and cafes, and the Davenport Hotel provided a rich mixture of people to meet and things to see. —Cody Proulx

Student News & Notes

Jenn Niedfelt, Andrew Waterhouse, Natalia Noble, Tracy Hansford, Marya Smith, and Josh Zollinger started in Westminster’s performance of *A Chorus of Disapproval*.

Robin Hill serves on the Common Ground Committee, is a Student Ambassador, and started a campus-wide Pennies for Peace Fundraiser.

Chris Roundy co-presented a poster at the Utah Conference for Undergraduate Research.

Demetri Coombs and Paula Porter presented a poster at the Utah Conference for Undergraduate Research.

Jake Wayman, Chert Griffith, Paula Porter, and Demetri Coombs volunteered as research associates in the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of Utah Hospital.

Ashley Pedersen, Tracy Hansford, Jacob Kovac, Christina Della Iacono, Cody Proulx, Deanna Castro, and Amanda Ruiz were on the planning committee for the V-Day effort which raised over $11,000 for the Salt Lake Rape Recovery Center.

Benjamin Rackham, Robin Hill, Jillian Samels, Jillian Edmonds, Jacob Kovac, Tyler Sutton, Trevor Beal, and Amanda Ruiz, planned the Sudan Community Empowerment Project.

Amanda Ruiz published “Generation Lobotomy: Kinase Inhibition Therapy, Memory Erasure, and Identity Loss” in an international undergraduate philosophy journal, was named a Colorado Truman Scholarship Finalist, and will study abroad in Mexico this summer.

Dallin Vanleuven’s paper “Community Oriented Policing as a Foundation to Anti-Radicalization Efforts” was accepted into the World Civic Youth Forum, making him eligible to present in Seoul, South Korea. He’s studying abroad in Europe this semester.
Ashley Pedersen

Ashley Pedersen entered college like many other students. During the application process, she realized how many opportunities she had forgone during high school. Furthermore, she was uncertain which opportunities she might seize in the future: her major was undeclared. She took this moment to realize that she could move forward with full force. Her freshman year she decided to go on the Habitat for Humanity alternative spring break trip to San Diego, something she thought would be fun, affordable, and would assuage her guilt about not taking advantage of volunteer opportunities in high school. Ashley enjoyed service and decided to make it a part of her life during more than just spring break trips. Ashley signed up for the AmeriCorps program, opting for the highest level of commitment possible—900 hours in two years. She got involved with various charities and nonprofits, and she still keeps in touch with her friend Jane from the senior center. She is currently employed at the Center for Civic Engagement and remains active in many of the organizations with which she first became involved during her AmeriCorps experience.

Through her volunteer service, her Honors core courses, and a conversation with professor Jeff McCarthy about a new major on campus, Ashley was able to find a direction. She took an environmental studies class and loved it. When she took environmental ethics with professor Bridget Newell, Ashley found her passion: environmental justice, a subject that studies the inequality in the location of pollutant-emitting operations, often in minority neighborhoods. She and her classmates created a manual for educational use in Utah schools. The manual is still a work in progress, but includes information on a variety of local issues, such as the rural nuclear testing of Utah’s past. Ashley put on an event at Westminster called “Green Jobs Now,” which opened up a dialogue about environmental justice on campus. She also presented about the subject at the Western Regional Honors Conference this year in Spokane, Washington.

Besides her academic discoveries, this Utah native has decided to take advantage of the beautiful Wasatch Front through the Outdoor Recreation program, which began during her junior year. She completed the Environmental Leadership May Term course, and consequently led a school trip to Canyonlands and Arches National Parks this past October.

Unfortunately there is no masters degree in environmental justice, so Ashley plans to take a year or two off to gain some “real-world experience” working at a non-profit organization and figuring out more about her goals for graduate school. With Ashley’s experience blazing her own course, she shouldn’t have any trouble. –Kayla Whidden

Faculty Profile

Lance Newman

In college, Lance Newman originally planned to major in biology and pre-med, aspiring to be “the doctor on the space station.” However, after one poetry class, Dr. Newman changed all of those plans, ultimately finding his calling within the pages of literature and poetry. Completing his bachelor’s degree in English at the New College of Florida in Sarasota, Dr. Newman affectionately recalled the school’s motto, which so many fellow students took to heart: “in the last analysis every student is responsible for the quality of their own education.” Philosophically quite similar to Westminster, New College paved the way for Dr. Newman to eventually receive his doctorate in English from Brown University.

An enthusiastic outdoorsman, Dr. Newman has spent each summer for the last 20 years as a white-water rafting guide throughout Utah and Northern Arizona. After living in San Diego for the last six years, his recent move to Utah required him to find a new hobby to replace surfing. Choosing to add skiing to his recreational repertoire this winter, Dr. Newman frequently visits Alta ski area. Dr. Newman has also participated in various anti-war and environmental activism movements over the years.

In the summer of 1991 before attending graduate school, Dr. Newman was living in Salt Lake City working as a waiter and bartender at the Perry Pub and Cafe. Often passing by Westminster with thoughts of graduate school circulating in his head, Dr. Newman remembers wondering if he “could ever get a job teaching there.” Fifteen years and an advertisement later, Dr. Newman was able to return to a desert southwest similar to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he was raised.

This semester, Dr. Newman pairs with Nick More to teach his first Honors program course, Westminster’s infamous Humanities 202. Regarding his initial Honors experience, Dr. Newman remarked that Honors greatly transforms the character of the classroom because “the students are interested in pursuing ideas for their own sake, having the confidence and patience to pursue ideas just because they are interesting and not because they think there will necessarily be a payoff.”

An aficionado of early U.S. Literature, environmental literature, transatlantic romanticism, critical theory and cultural studies, Dr. Newman heartily recommends the following works: Henry David Thoreau’s Walden, The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Allen Ginsberg’s Howl, and any of Gary Snyder’s poetry. Dr. Newman is undoubtedly an inspiring addition to both the Westminster and Honors communities. -Demetri Coombs
Nick More Named Utah’s Professor of the Year
Honors professor accepts prestigious award

Associate professor of philosophy at Westminster College, and Honors program faculty member Dr. Nick More was selected as the 2008 Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Utah Professor of the Year. More traveled to Washington DC in November 2008 to receive the award.

After taking many classes from Dr. More, Westminster Honors program alumnus Seth Simonds was not surprised to hear of his success. Simonds told Honorable Mention, “I could walk into Nick More’s office and say, ‘I have a paper idea about bananas.’ And Nick More would look at me and say, ‘Okay… keep talking about bananas,’ and 30 minutes later I would walk out of his office with a thesis about Milton’s Satan, and Dr. More didn’t just tell it to me; he somehow led me into thinking my own coherent thought.”

Simonds’ experience is remarkably consistent with Dr. More’s current goal as a professor of philosophy. More believes that the skills of a philosophy degree are “extremely marketable, because the discipline is not about what to think, but how to think.” Few people are lucky enough to get paid to talk about Plato, he admits, “but any savvy employer wants people who can logically analyze, problem-solve, and see creative options. Training in philosophy does all of those things to a very high degree,” More says. “Philosophy graduates typically rise much faster in an organization than people who pursued supposedly ‘practical’ majors, because they are mentally flexible and conceptually strong.” More adds another reason to like his philosophy students: “They also tend to be damn smart.”

Other Honors students mentioned Dr. More’s use of the white board as a particularly memorable and helpful component of his teaching style. In a typical class, More will list six or seven key ideas from the reading on the board. As the class dissects and discusses each idea, More will outline the concept, or even diagram it. When the class feels satisfied with their comprehension of that idea, More checks it off the list. “I learned this strategy from Dr. Kathleen Higgins at the University of Texas,” he says. “It gives some structure to our otherwise open discussions.”

The University of Texas at Austin, where Dr. More received his PhD in 1995, also provided his first teaching experience. More was a second-year grad student and a TA for an aesthetics class. As part of his assistantship, More was required to lead a weekly discussion session with a group of undergrads. More remembers being extremely nervous before the first meeting. He even felt as though it were “hard to breathe.” He came over-prepared, with pages of notes, and calmly led the students through the ideas. As the session progressed, most of the students seemed to grasp some concept that they had previously missed. More recalls a feeling of satisfaction following that session and a sudden realization that perhaps teaching was something he could enjoy.

From that first discussion session in Austin to the conference in DC where he was named Utah Professor of the Year, Dr. More has evolved and grown both as a student and as an instructor. Recently, More has undertaken the task of helping students better relate philosophy to their own lives. He asks his students, “If this philosopher were absolutely right about everything, what would that mean for you? What might that change about your life?” The answers can be startling and invigorating.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Award is the only national award that specifically honors undergraduate educators in the United States. The Westminster Honors program is extraordinarily lucky to have a recipient of this award teaching our seminars. Honors students who have not previously had the opportunity, would be wise to take a class from this inspiring rock star of teaching, Dr. Nick More. -Creed Rykel Archibald

More & More: Dr. Nick on the Triumph of a Slight Incident
Philosophy and Honors Professor Nicholas More sat himself down recently to discuss teaching, rabbits, and being named Utah’s Professor of the Year by the CASE/Carnegie Foundation.

Nick: So what’s it like to be a rock star of teaching, a man among rabbits?
Dr. More: It’s untrue, embarrassing, lovely, and tiresome.
Nick: You may say that but you can’t mean it. You’ve reached the pinnacle of your profession, been nationally recognized for excellence in undergraduate teaching, you got a plaque.
Dr. More: You mean a plaque?
Nick: Yeah, what did I say?
Dr. More: You said a plaque.
Nick: Just answer the question. You’ve been named Utah’s Professor of the Year. Isn’t this the vindication you’ve always craved?
Dr. More: I didn’t know the award existed. But sure, it’s nice to be recognized.
Nick: Oh you’re just trying to be modest.
Dr. More: You can accuse me of a lot of things, but not modesty.
Nick: My profound apologies. So, why’d you win this thing? Why are you so good at teaching, supposedly?
Dr. More: I don’t know. Maybe it’s because I’m curious. But I don’t know very much.
Nick: You had two dozen years of formal education, what are you saying?
Dr. More: Education always has a peculiar effect on me: I just learn I’m still hungry.
Nick: So you’re an insatiable glutton? How’s that any good for teaching?
Dr. More: Cheeses, you’re relentless with the questions.
Nick: Oh yeah, I’ve heard that’s an element of your classroom manner, too.
Dr. More: Well, Kierkegaard once remarked that you shouldn’t drive a horse according to the horse’s idea of being driven, but by your own conception of its potential for success. 
Nick: So you see students as farm animals?
Dr. More: I didn’t say that.
Nick: But you meant it, didn’t you?
Dr. More: This interview is over.
Nick: Rabbits.
Dear Honors Colleagues,

Here we are again, wishing we could run away and join the circus... instead of pulling another all-nighter to finish that last Honors paper. However, as your SHC, we have seen the incredible talent, motivation, and leadership of every Westminster Honors student. After a year of getting to know you better, from writing poetry together to socializing over mocktails, we know you can surmount any challenge. Honors students can and already are changing the world through capable attitudes, determination, and a driving passion for truth and service. As our time as your SHC draws to a close, we would like to thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to share the year with you and hopefully make it a little more memorable, and the paper a little more bearable.

Sincerely yours,

Your SHC

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The Honors program offers opportunities for Honors students to cultivate their skills and fulfill their capacities for academic excellence. By offering writing awards and research grants, the Honors program aims to support students’ development into competitive members of the academic community by encouraging completion of conference papers or publishable work.

To promote and recognize exceptional performance in writing, the Honors program annually offers awards for outstanding written work completed in the Honors seminars. Each award is accompanied by a $250 monetary prize and is commemorated on a plaque that hangs in Nunemaker Place.

Each year, the Honors program also awards three grants to help Honors students conduct undergraduate research. Honors students from all academic disciplines are encouraged to apply. This year, the Honors program issued three Independent Summer Research Grants of $2,500, a $200 increase from grants awarded in previous years.

Congratulations to this year’s recipients!

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End-of-Year Announcements

Annual Writing Awards and Summer Research Grants Awarded

2008–2009 Writing Award Recipients

**Humanities**

**Christina Della Iacono**

“On the Limited Control of Internal Reality”

**Science**

**Kaitlyn Thomas**

“Biochemical Foundations of Youth: Cheating Cell Death by Preventing Cellular Aging and Apoptosis”

**Arts/Social Science**

**Kaitlyn Thomas**

“A Unified Progression, Not a Virtual Power: the Meaning of Aesthetic Interaction in Dance”

**Special Topics**

**Cooper Henderson**

“Western Conquest: How Barack Obama Turned Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada Blue”

**Paper of the Year**

**Kaitlyn Thomas**

“Biochemical Foundations of Youth: Cheating Cell Death by Preventing Cellular Aging and Apoptosis”

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2009 Independent Summer Research Grant Recipients

**John Cook**

“A Tale of Two Crises: An Analysis of Ben Bernanke’s Great Depression Hypotheses and Applications to the Financial Crisis of 2008-2009”

**Sara Rees**

“Genotyping of Mutant Mice to Determine Key Pathways Involved in Inner Ear Development”

**Meghan Hekker**

Being an exemplary member of society requires more than just being decent. Being decent takes little work: just pursue behaviors and roles that we as a society value and avoid those that we criticize. Volunteer. Donate to charities. Don't solicit sex in public bathrooms. Don't operate a dog-fighting racket.

If we want to set an example, however, we have to do more than this. To be exemplary members of society, we must be decent, but also question our society’s values and criticisms. We must recognize the faults of our society and work to better them. To put it bluntly, we must be both political and progressive. We don’t have to be politicians, but we must take whatever our lots are in life and wield them as tools for promoting social justice, for bringing about equal rights and an equitable standard of life for all of the inhabitants of this planet.

Consider, for example, the history of this nation and the icons we celebrate today: George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr., among others. These figures provide us with examples to follow not by what they did within their status quo, but by what they did to change their status quo. These visionaries recognized our nation for what it was and saw what it might be. If someone knows anything about Martin Luther King Jr., they know that he dreamed of a future of racial harmony for this nation that many at his time could not imagine. Should we want to set examples in our society as well, we must also envision a better future and work towards realizing it. Like King and our other national icons, we must be progressive voices of our times, players in the steady drama of securing rights for disenfranchised groups that is our national heritage.

Our society teems with good, decent members. But if we want to be exemplary members of society, we will have to work for a cause that someone will be willing to carry on after we’re gone. In our national discourse, that cause is human rights and will be the same for the foreseeable future, though we won’t have to become national icons to be exemplary. In whatever spaces we work, the scope of our motivations must be beyond our experience, the effects of our actions sustained in this world after we’ve played our part.

-Kristjane Nordmeyer

I question the paradigm of leadership itself. When we raise questions we can address the problems caused by the “assumptions of authority” that leadership can present. At their worst, leaders can engage in acts of self-interest. They can abuse authority and mislead and misguide others, intentionally or not.

At their best, leaders can lead from the ground up by creating policies or theories based on listening to the marginalized members of society, and drawing from the people who are actually experiencing the issues at hand, but may lack the individual power to change their circumstances. Throughout US history, great leaders have worked for a multitude of civil rights.

Social justice is not a given. Leaders can challenge the status quo or they can support the status quo. There are a whole range of possible outcomes.

When working for social justice, a leader must challenge the “natural” divisions we see around us, challenge how resources and rights are distributed. Old ideas and old ways of doing things may no longer work; indeed, they may be part of the problem itself. Previous assumptions need to be reexamined and questioned, so that we can come up with entirely new ways of looking at situations. These new ideas can be shaped from the bottom up, and we must consider the viewpoint of the oppressed. They will inevitably have the best insight and perspective on the situation.

Exemplary leaders are great listeners. Exemplary leaders gather resources from the entire group, bringing a range of insights and experiences together to work toward a common goal. When working for social justice, great leaders are aware of the power issues that are embedded in social institutions and the decision-making process itself. Great leaders recognize that decisions often have unintended, but very real, consequences. This is an important point. Without understanding the issues that people face from their own lives and perspectives, we will continue to make well-intentioned, yet misguided decisions.

-Ben Rackham
Philosopher’s stones and fountains of youth; invincibility potions and promises of eternal life. Throughout our lives, we read stories and attend churches that entrench us within the idea of immortality. Our various religions, myths, and medicines have been our only (failed) means to defeat death, but with the advent of contemporary genomics and biochemical research, the myth of extended life may soon come true. New research about programmed cell death—a phenomenon called apoptosis—and chaperone proteins has lead to greater understanding of and localized control over animal cell aging and apoptotic pathways. As our knowledge of these pathways increases, we may soon be able to turn off aging to the point where human lives become greatly extended, if not immortal. Such research has already allowed scientists to prevent aging in mice organs, and similar techniques have been used in human cells to combat general cell degradation. However, biologic longevity—as lovely as the concept seems—comes at a price. Our current and future genomic therapies have evolutionarily conflicting ethical consequences that could strip our species of the very humanity it seeks to immortalize by halting genetic shift, stagnating society, and eliminating future diversity.

…Concurrent with our psychological fascination, we now devote mass sums of money to biomedical endeavors and reward individuals who uncover increasingly specific methods of biological longevity in modern science. One organization in particular, the Methuselah Foundation, awards prizes up to 4 million US dollars in research funds to scientists and students who work with biochemical pathways that radically increase cellular longevity and youthful function. The foundation’s very mission statement claims that “Aging is a thief that robs us of our most precious resource—the wisdom and experience embodied in every human life—even as it increases the burden on our strained healthcare systems…The ultimate goal of the foundation is therefore nothing less than the defeat of age-related disease and suffering.”

…An August Nature Medicine article, titled “Restoration of chaperone-mediated autophagy in aging liver improves cellular maintenance and hepatic function,” delves into the metabolism of mouse liver cells, and how those cells can be genetically modified to produce effectively ageless organs that function at their peak youthful performance level indefinitely…In young cells, the junk molecules are filtered out very efficiently by chaperone-mediated autophagy (CMA), a process in which protein receptors find and transport oxidated waste to lysosomes where the waste molecules are destroyed. As cells age, however, the gene that produces the proteins responsible for CMA gradually shuts down, producing less and less protein until it ultimately turns off. Then, toxins gradually build up within the cytoplasm and eventually reach levels that interfere with other necessary cellular processes, resulting in programmed, chemically-dependent cell death. …Armed with this knowledge, a team of scientists sponsored by the Methuselah Foundation genetically modified a group of mice to contain an extra copy of the CMA gene, which they turned on when the mice reached middle age. Not only did the gene function, it actually reversed damage that had begun to accumulate and enabled the mice livers to regain their original function and vitality.

The success of the experiment only reinforces the Methuselah Foundation’s hypothesis that aging can be stalled or prevented in cells and entire organs—in animals, and in humans. “By removing these damaged products, by maintaining the cleaning systems inside the cells, we were able to preserve the function of a whole organ. So if we can do that in the whole body, we hope that we will be able to have very healthy animals and, of course, we’d like to have healthy people even more than healthy animals,” said Ana Cuervo, head of the CMA experiment. It is reasonable to believe that duplicating and turning on the same gene in humans would lead to similar results as in mice. These humans could then carry out perfectly normal existences, but their livers would never lose function. The same technique could easily transfer to other organs as well, resulting in an incredibly youthful and resilient (though genetically modified) individual…

Upon closer examination, this desire to overcome death and aging actually conflicts with our scientific conception of evolution—at least once we reach the previously discussed level of biochemical engineering—and inevitably harms the human species as a whole. While the protection of our species initially improves our ecological success, once we reach our biologic maximum through increased longevity, we actually stop our evolutionary clock, at least as we currently perceive it. Evolution represents the process by which the unique qualities of a species originate through genetic shift. Ageless people, however, could no longer reproduce at normal rates in order to prevent crowding, which would eliminate a significant amount of genetic variation. Take away genetic shift (i.e., reproduction) and you take away the mechanism by which unique qualities arise within a species. Biochemical immortality, therefore, halts changes in gene frequency when death no longer exhibits pressure on a population...

By engineering ageless cells, we also would be engineering humans outside of evolution under the assumption that our species has reached a level of genetic perfection that requires no further change in expression or frequency. In a world without human death, or at least a world with extended life spans, genetic shift becomes achingly obsolete. When we engineer cells and organs that contain a genetic immunity to death, we assume that the tissue we immortalize requires no further tinkering by selective
pressure and will be adequate for all future environments. We take for granted the idea that our current physiology, because we are now so successful, will best be adapted even as the world changes around us—we assume that our fitness today will be fit for tomorrow…

Creating a breed of ageless humans also implies that the breed will remain alive for the foreseeable future and would certainly imply mandated population control. Because the breed would live indefinite lifespans, reproduction rates would necessarily fall in relation to available resources, eventually dropping to negligible levels as the world runs out of resources. The longer-living individuals would therefore need to reduce the number of successive generations, almost to the point at which no more reproduction could occur without obligating the death of an elder, a process in conflict with the very principle of engineering immortal humans. Of course, the humans could kill one another in order to establish artificial selection, but then that death would also defeat the original purpose of Methuselah-inspired human immortality: protecting all human life…

Secondly, if we stall genetic flow within the species, we will necessarily stagnate the society in which we live. The Methuselah Foundation strives to protect “individual wisdom” from the “thief” of aging by defeating age-related deterioration. If the foundation’s mission came true, the thinkers of today would live long enough to be the thinkers of tomorrow, and the same stories, experiences, and ideas would exist indefinitely within the population. While on a simple level, this wish seems poetic—who does not love to listen to their grandparents’ first-hand accounts of immigration, desperation, and triumph?—the fruition of the wish would surely defeat itself. Without death, the experiences of those living humans would be the only experiences to build upon, and the storytellers would have no future generations to which they could relay their knowledge…

Society relies so strongly on new ideas to progress that the two prerequisites for a Methuselah culture, population control and the protection of existing human life, actually destroy the societal dynamic they desire to defend. As people begin to live longer, the global human population will continue to explode. Regardless of biological feasibility, ethical questions emerge when science endangers in human longevity. At some point our species will peak at a critical threshold at which we can no longer reproduce; we will reach our planet’s carrying capacity. However, as we approach that boundary, we certainly will need methods to lower birthrates worldwide in order to ensure resource availability for the living. This, of course, has enormous socioeconomic and racial consequences for humanity: Some people would be allowed to take advantage of anti-aging technology while others would not.

The Methuselah Foundation claims that all humans have the right to live the longest lives biologically possible, but just who would qualify for the right to an extended life? And, as populations grew toward the global maxim, who would have the right to reproduce, and who would be excluded? Once age-inhibiting techniques become available to the public, those who first take advantage of the genetic technology will necessarily be those with higher incomes who live in wealthier nations. The right to live a long, healthy life will go to those who already receive the most healthcare, typically Caucasians in western countries. The distribution of wealth already favors a disproportionate fraction of European/North American whites over those of any other race (especially in the United States), and as the wealthiest individuals capitalize on gene therapy, other races and economic brackets will be left behind…

Minorities and the poor, even in countries that establish race quotas, eventually would reflect a much smaller future proportion of society than they do today. And these quotas, if implemented, would only remedy the situation if scientists could predict the amount of genetic diversity needed in the future, assuming that such a number even exists. However, a fixed percentage system would most likely precipitate out of this problem, leading the human population toward arbitrary numbers of genetic variation required by the state. Suddenly, lawmakers would need to place numbers on allowable birthrates per ethnic group or income status in an attempt to maintain current percentage levels under the assumption that those percentages are the best model for human fitness—a model already shown to be considerably detrimental in instances of catastrophe, not to mention morally unsettling even in the absence of global crisis…

In a sense, cellular immortality robs humanity of its future potential by removing it from death, the process that constantly refines and pushes the species toward genetic variation. When we cheat death, we cheat ourselves (and future generations) out of the opportunity to evolve. Genetic variation depends on reproduction, but the success of new variants relies on death to push variant genes in new directions. When we assume that humans need no further biologic refinement, we prevent the species from gradually attaining new modes of biologic and intellectual innovation. Without cell death, species would not need to change through time; the planet would still contain the non-specialized cells that first inhabited it, and no humans would be alive to study them. But if we allow humans to age, albeit without disease and pain, we let evolution take its course while eliminating sickness and suffering. Science can prevent most disease without necessitating immortality; doing so guarantees that variety and societal progress will continue in future generations. And, if any global crisis occurs in the future, our species’ variety—not its agelessness—will best ensure that our “wisdom” lives on in our descendants long after we die.

Works Cited

Musings

From Your Editors . . .

Spring is a time of beginnings, from blossoming flowers to registering for next semester’s classes. However, it is also a time of goodbyes. At the Honorable Mention we find both of these happening at once. As we bid farewell to Brooke Gecsey, an editor on her way to bigger and better things, we would like to introduce you to the newest member of the team, Jackie Wilson, a first-year Honors student. We wish Brooke all the best in this transition and have faith that Jackie can fill her shoes.

Continually we see Honors students lead by example. Honors students have shown their capability as leaders and activists by hosting a younger generation of academics on campus (“Westminster Honors Hosts Academic Decathlon”), presenting award-winning literature (“Westminster Creative Writer Recognized”), making efforts to end domestic violence (“V-Day: Until the Violence Stops”) and celebrating outstanding professors on campus (“Nick More Named Utah’s Professor of the Year”). Clearly, Honors students do far more than hide in Nunemaker and study—we know how to cut loose as well (“Casino Night with Class”).

As we move forward to another school year, keep in mind that Honors students who lead by example are the ones who define who we are and where we’re going.

Honorably Yours,

Brooke Gecsey
Paula Porter
Cassidy Jones
Jackie Wilson
Co-editors of Honorable Mention

btturner@westminstercollege.edu
ppj0122@westminstercollege.edu
cfj0307@westminstercollege.edu
jnw0421@westminstercollege.edu