Since my freshman year, the Westminster College Ethics Bowl Team has placed in regionals each year, qualifying for the National Competition. Having had the good fortune of participating in the Ethics bowl for the last three years, I have learned a lot about the success of this program, and also why it remains such a point of pride for both the Philosophy department and the Honors program.

The Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl is a competition that requires undergraduate students to take an ethically defensible position on 15 unique, morally complex, and often real-life cases. The competition occurs in rounds where teams go head to head. After a coin-flip, teams are randomly assigned one of the 15 cases. The first team explains its position to the judges and critiques the position of its opponents. Initially, this might seem very similar to forensic or debate competitions. However, one critical detail truly makes this competition unique. In Ethics bowl, teams can agree with each other! Each team strives to find the most morally defensible position rather than rhetorically abusing opponents, and judges award points based on who presents the most in-depth and critical analysis of each case.

Teams not only need to be well versed in moral philosophy, they need knowledge of many other fields as well. For example, one of the cases this year involved the legal action of states to seize and redistribute unclaimed life insurance policies from private companies. Another case put the spotlight on brain scan technology, begging the question: When, if ever, should this technology be morally permissible? So many of these cases require interdisciplinary thinking and critical analysis before the moral analysis can even begin.

Given the nature of this competition, it’s not particularly surprising that, along with Westminster’s tradition of qualifying for nationals every year, there is also another tradition of strong representation from the Honors program. As the mission statement of Honors emphasizes an interdisciplinary education, it makes perfect sense that Honors students choose to participate in the Ethics Bowl. In a way, it’s an extracurricular activity that allows students to exercise all the fundamentals learned in the Honors program; the learning goals emphasize quite explicitly the desire for students to make connections between disciplines and to discuss complex ideas as a group. These shared basic skills and goals seem to encourage Honors student participation, and by that same token, help the Westminster team succeed.

A common critique of the Honors program questions whether or not it adequately covers each discipline or focuses on seemingly esoteric ideas. Yet the Ethics Bowl demonstrates to undergraduate students why moral philosophy remains a complicated issue and why society still needs practical, morally sound solutions. The heavy Honors presence in this competition suggests that a robust interdisciplinary education which focuses on critical thinking over staple content can prove far more valuable in the “real” world than the standard educational tradition.

– Tyler Sutton
When freshman Honors student, Katie Mullin, first visited Westminster as a prospect, she expected the standard pitch from the admissions staff about why she should choose to study at the college: small classes, personal relationships with professors, and opportunities to grow personally and academically. What she didn’t expect was the warm, personal welcome from an unexpected admissions officer and the most famous resident of Nunemaker Place—Scout, Dr. Richard Badenhausen’s loveable golden retriever. As Katie chatted with Richard about the Honors program, she felt more at home than any other college visit and more comfortable chatting with a professor. “Scout’s cheerful greeting made talking to a professor so much more relaxing, and I left feeling that I would enjoy working with the professors and other students in the Honors program. I guess you could say Scout’s friendliness made me think I would be happy living at Westminster.” Richard agrees that Scout is a welcoming presence for students and once suggested that Admissions hire Scout as a recruiter; her salary, of course, consists of dog biscuits.

Scout’s history with the Badenhausen family began six years ago. The Badenhausen children had been pressuring their parents to get a dog for a while. Eventually, they gave in, deciding it was the right time to expand their family. They discovered Companion Golden Retriever Rescue, a nonprofit organization that places abused and neglected golden retrievers with loving families. The first time the Badenhausens met Scout, she raced to greet them, toy in mouth. After a short walk with her, they knew, with a little love, Scout would happily fit into their family. The then two-year-old Scout faced many medical problems: a ragged coat, skin infections, a hairless tail (which Scout often hid in shame), and no thyroid function. With the support of her new family, Scout recovered full health, but memories of her difficult early life linger. Scout still fears abandonment and becomes very agitated whenever suitcases appear. Other seemingly benign objects also provoke her anxiety, such as ladders and people in uniform. However, Scout will make an exception to this rule when a member of campus patrol visits the building with doggie treats.

Scout now lives a happy and calm life, accompanying Richard to work and making friends with Honors students who pass through Nunemaker. In her free time, Scout enjoys hiking and spending time with her best friend on campus, Hogan (the canine companion of Dr. Jeff Nichols). Scout also enjoys carrying toys around in her mouth, particularly tennis balls; her most recent Christmas present contained a pack of fifty tennis balls to keep her occupied. When Scout feels blue or suffers from an upset stomach, her favorite meal of cottage cheese and white rice will always cheer her up. Scout demonstrates an excellent long-term memory by recognizing past friends, including special Honors graduates. A very affectionate dog, Scout cries joyfully when she greets a loved one. Westminster’s dog friendly campus has made Scout into a very happy resident of Nunemaker and her friendly presence has made the Honors program and Westminster into more of a home for students.

— Chris Cunningham

Parent Contributions to Student Honors Council Fund

The Westminster College Honors program is very grateful to the following parents of Honors students and graduates who have contributed to the “Student Honors Council Fund” since the last newsletter. This fund supports modest travel grants to assist Honors students in making decisions about continuing their educations in graduate school.

Honors students applying to graduate school this year have been offered admission to many fine programs, including those at Univ. of Arizona, Case Western, Univ. of Colorado, Dartmouth, Duke, Emory, Georgetown, George Washington, Johns Hopkins, Univ. of Oregon, Univ. of Texas, Tulane, USC, Univ. of Utah, & Vanderbilt, among others. Your donations play a crucial role in helping with such searches.

Contributions to this fund, which are tax deductible, can be made at any time of the year to the “Student Honors Council Fund” and should be sent care of the Westminster College Honors program, 1840 South 1300 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84105.

Anonymous
John & Regie Bradford
Douglas & Kathleen Burroughs

John MacFarlane
Robert & Monica McCaskey
Lee Midgley & Gary Resnick

Michael & Jan Mullin
Brian & JoAnne Nelson
Dana & David M. Wolf
Nunemaker Place’s history extends beyond Honors
Constructed in 1977, the building meshes futurist and naturalist architecture.

Nunemaker Place is all about angles and textures. The building is nothing more than a spire that rises above the surrounding trees, nestled into a bank of Emigration Creek. The structure protrudes into the sky with riverbed rocks embedded into a pyramidal concrete tower. Nunemaker’s grey exterior reminds me of winter weather: clouded skies, quiet days, the stillness of bare trees and enduring stone. Inside, I always feel off balance in a curious way, as if I’m in a labyrinth of wood paneling and converging acute corners.

The building is almost woven into the growths of trees that line the creek and it feels remote, like a hidden surprise. Nunemaker is one of the least known structures to the general student body, but I’ve always taken pleasure in visiting this burrowed and isolated place.

My experience with Nunemaker is limited but strong. The place feels cozy and warm with natural materials and large furniture. Yet its slanting walls and triangulations always give me the impression that it is barely clinging to the ground, simply caught in a pose that persists against gravity. The building’s intrigue is that it provides an interesting mix of relaxed and unsettled atmospheres.

According to Westminster College of Salt Lake City by R. Douglas Brackenridge, Nunemaker Place “functioned as a center for religious activities, an area for theatrical and musical performances, and a retreat center for students, faculty, and staff” following its construction in 1977. The feel of the building is definitely indicative of the era. Nunemaker’s architecture is part futurist, part naturalist as wood and concrete run throughout the structure. It is a solid monument that has a timeless quality in its preserved design.

Irene Nunemaker, Presbyterian philanthropist, intended Nunemaker Place to function as a “sanctuary on campus.” Since 2004, the building has been home to the Honors program, and the tucked away, quirky structure couldn’t be more fitting for our group of passionate, curious, and unique personalities.

Nunemaker has made a lasting impression in my experience and memory. When I work inside the building, I am always met with a quiet and productive environment. There may be a few Honors students lounging around, working on papers or reading for their seminar. Every once in a while, someone might grab a piece candy for some sustenance and distraction.

During the daytime, natural light spills in warmly from large windows. At night, the accent lighting that graces the cedar paneling becomes even more prominent and the quietness of diligent work endures into the later hours. No matter the time, the building is both welcoming and motivating.

My favorite thoughts of Nunemaker come from movie nights, guest presentations, and passionate debates that break out while students are studying. We are quite lucky to have such a memorable space to call our own, for it is truly a place, a home in its odd character. I think of the building’s asymmetry, unrelenting ’70s aesthetic, and inviting warmth, and I can’t help but love Nunemaker for simply being itself. – David Luhr

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2011-2012 Writing Award Recipients

Humanities: Jessica Bowen
All You Need is (the Right Kind of) Love
(Goldsmith & Nichols)

Sciences: Melanie Long
Tool or Science? The Methodological Paradox of Neoclassical Economics**
(Goldsmith & Wellman)

Social Sciences: David Luhr
The Dangers of Emulation and Conspicuous Consumption
(Popich & Watkins)

Special Topics & Cross-Listed: Sam Webster
Negotiating the Space between Urban and Rural: Simmel’s Blasé Attitude Visits the Suburbs
(Badenhausen)

**Best Paper Overall

Independent Summer Research Grant Recipients (Summer 2012)

Jeff Collins
Temporal Variation of Total Mercury and Methylmercury Content in Great Salt Lake Water and Brine Flies
(Faculty Advisor: Frank Black)

Elizabeth Nelson
Ovarian Cancer in Utah: Incidence, Mortality, and Risks
(Faculty Advisor: John Contreras)

Elizabeth and Jeff will present their findings at an open forum for the Honors community in October 2012.
Richard Badenhausen, director of Westminster's Honors program, was one of seven faculty members from around the country to be named a 2011 National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) Fellow. Badenhausen was recognized during the NCHC national convention in Phoenix, Arizona in October. According to NCHC Past President John Zubizarreta this “distinction celebrates [his] many contributions not only to our organization but more widely to honors teaching, learning, scholarship, and leadership within the growing international influence of NCHC in higher education.”

Badenhausen became involved in Honors education in 1994 and has since been active in NCHC in various ways, helping plan the last seven national conventions, co-chairing the student research program at those meetings, and giving sixteen different conference presentations on Honors pedagogy and administration during the past five years. He sits on the editorial board of HIP: Honors in Practice, is a former member of the NCHC Board of Directors, and is a Recommended NCHC Site Visitor.

His most recent essays on Honors education in JNCHC: The Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council are “Help, I Need Somebody: Rethinking How We Conceptualize Honors” (11.2), “Immigrant Song: A Cautionary Note about Honors and Technology” (10.2), and the forthcoming lead essay “Costs and Benefits in the Economy of Honors” (13.1). Badenhausen came to Westminster in 2001 to direct and teach in the college's Honors program and he also holds the Kim T. Adamson chair.

**Badenhausen received the award at an NCHC convention in October**

**Tommy Tanzer presents ‘MoneyBall’**

On the very day that Major League Baseball announced Tampa Bay’s Joe Maddon as Manager of the Year for the second time, Maddon’s agent, Tommy Tanzer, arrived at Nunemaker Park City public school. What began as a talent for negotiating teacher union contracts eventually burgeoned into a sports management company.

Tanzer delivered the inside scoop on American baseball in his presentation “Moneyball: An Insider’s View of the Business of Sport,” discussing his struggle to become an agent, the rarely discussed business side of sports, and tips for success in any field.

Tanzer attended college at Washington University in St. Louis and continued with graduate school at the University of Texas in Austin.

After college, he joined the staff at a Park City public school. What began as a talent for negotiating teacher union contracts eventually burgeoned into a sports management company.

Russ Costa, longtime baseball fan, admired the presentation “as a raw and real narrative, avoiding the edited and polished renderings about the business of baseball that one usually gets in typical media outlets that cover the subject.” According to Costa, Tanzer “discuss[ed] ball players as things between a collection of statistics and heroes; as young men, with both huge talents and huge flaws.”

But Tanzer didn’t gear the presentation just for baseball fanatics. Chris Cunningham, current Honors freshman, admits that he’s no sports buff, but he found Tommy an “interesting and entertaining person” and enjoyed learning how professional teams operate.

In addition to the insider’s info, Tanzer elaborated on several key points to success in any venture. He stressed the need for planning ahead and the importance of knowing and achieving priorities.

He continued further: “Don’t be afraid to ask for advice, be persistent, and finally, remember to be respectful and humble when dealing with others.”

According to Dana Tumpowsky, an instrumental player in Tommy’s appearance at Westminster, “Tommy wove together some very good advice and life lessons about persistence, commitment, attitude, and client relations with great little-known baseball stories. His energy was infectious and his message was inspiring—even if you aren’t a baseball fan.” –Kellie Carrigan
Facebook connects alumni, students

In November 2010, Honors students and alumni received a new conduit to connect with each other: the Honors program Facebook page. Richard Badenhausen created the page with three goals: to allow prospective students to learn more about the program and get a feel for what it’s really like in Honors, for current students to interact with each other and Honors alumni, and for alumni to keep in touch with the program.

Since its creation, the page has hosted photos from Honors events, updates from alumni, and articles that may interest students. Richard realizes that students don’t keep up with every update, but he does hope to provide a small grain of wisdom or information with every post. “Are students waiting with bated breath for the next post? No,” he said. “One thing I’d like to see more of: students posting Honors-related material and advertising Honors events.”

Sara McCaskey, a sophomore in the Honors program, recently presented at the National Collegiate Honors Conference, discussing how small liberal arts colleges utilize social media. After organizing a Facebook page for the Honors Class of 2014, she saw the power that social media can have in our lives to connect to each other.

However, social media also comes with some reservations. “One of the most interesting topics that we discussed was the ethical implications of having professors and directors interact with students in a social media form,” Sara recalled. “There was a huge amount of discussion on how students can maintain their individual privacy while still being part of a larger program group. One of the best comments, ‘How would you feel if your professor walked into your bedroom?’ really highlighted just how invasive it can feel to know that a person of authority can keep tabs on what you do in your personal life.”

Using social media as a tool has challenges of its own. Sara and Richard both agreed that one of the biggest challenges in creating the page has been generating interest. Richard continued to say that he would love to see more student-alumni interaction occurring on the page, and to see people posting and tagging photos from Honors events. And he had one special request: “If students have embarrassing pictures of Dave Goldsmith, please post them immediately.”

To “like” the Honors Facebook page or to post your photos of Dave, visit http://www.facebook.com/pages/Westminster-Honors-Program/166840850011432.

- Lexie Banks

Monograph features Honors

Our very own program was one of six small college Honors programs featured in the recently published National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) monograph Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges (3rd ed.).

In that publication, former NCHC president Sam Schuman writes that Westminster's program “is a fully developed one for an institution of its size. Rarely can a small college sustain an annual offering of seven interdisciplinary, team-taught honors seminars. That its curriculum replaces the entire required liberal education core requirement for undergraduates is notable; moreover, it offers a study abroad option. Its range of extracurricular activities is also quite broad.”

This national recognition acknowledges the hard work engaged in by students, faculty, and administrators to make Honors a signature program at Westminster.

Student News & Notes

Nicole Bedera presented at the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association conference in Boston, Massachusetts.

Yvonne Clark presented her research on childhood aggression at the Western Regional Honors council meeting at the University of New Mexico.

Jackie Wilson went to Manzini, Swaziland in February to volunteer at a CarePoint.

Mai Ho served as the Student Representative on a Search Committee for Professor of Entrepreneurship - Gore School of Business.

Laura Wolf received funding through NASA and Project BRINE to study microbes on the Bonneville Salt Flats.

Paul Christian had a long poem published in the collection “Horseghost,” which is also available online at www.horseghost.info

During May Term, Lauren Johnson is traveling to Peru, staying with a family, and doing a directed studies project with Isabel Allende’s short stories in Spanish.

Robin Hill ('10) received an M.A. from Stanford University, where he wrote a thesis on Early Education policies in India, Chile, and Malaysia.

Christian Felt’s prose entitled “Eraser Ghosts” was published in Ellipsis, while his musical composition “Nocturne” appears in Scribendi.

John Cook ('10) will be attending the University of Colorado Law this fall to complete a dual degree JD/MS in Telecom.

Natalie Batty received funding through the Keck Grant and Project BRINE to study microbes on the Bonneville Salt Flats.
Professors play a huge role in our lives, but they are not just fountains of knowledge from which students extract as much wisdom as possible. Professors are role models, and more importantly, they’re fellow human beings. To discover why they do what they do, I asked several Westminster professors about their journeys to teacherdom.

English professor Lance Newman decided to teach because he “wanted to never stop learning.” In fact, many professors consider themselves super-students of sorts. Honors Director Richard Badenhausen explained that “growing up, I always liked to read literature and write about it, so when I learned that you could make a living doing those things, I became quite interested in pursuing the teaching profession as a career.”

While discussing their philosophies on teaching, professors consistently referred to themselves as intermediaries to ideas rather than purveyors of information. Professors facilitate learning experiences, but it is up to the student to think and learn. Ecology professor Christie Clay believes that an inspiring teacher acts as a compass in an oftentimes confusing, overwhelming world. They take interest in their students’ well being and push them to develop into independent, self-actualized adults. Chemistry professor Robyn Hyde said she also enjoys watching students wrestle with tough concepts and finally reach “that ‘A-ha!’ moment.” Richard expressed his continued passion for education, stating, “I love seeing students develop as thinkers and achieve things they didn’t know possible.”
Somewhere in their schooling days, professors encountered a beloved teacher capable of kindling the same passion for life and learning that they hope to instill in students today. Matt Kruback, an art professor, recalls the teachers that impacted him. “Those teachers who were perpetually excited about the things I was curious about were hands down the ones that resonated with me.” Professors like Matt said they try to emulate their favorite teachers to recreate a lively environment in their own classrooms. Since each class is unique, however, professors must constantly adapt. Sometimes even time-tested lesson plans turn sour. Many professors, including mathematician Bill Bynum, like to be kept on their toes. Bill teaches for the challenge of presenting material in new and interesting ways because “it’s a creative process.”

And there is good news for students. Professors agreed on their least favorite part of the process: grading. Though students may picture professors sadistically hunched over stacks of papers riddled with red ink, professors hate grading. As Richard put it, “sometimes the activity makes me want to stab myself in the head with an ice pick.” But at the same time, professors see grades as a necessary form of feedback. To unwind after tedious hours of grading, professors like to ski, hike, and even play World of Warcraft; turns out they aren’t so different from the rest of us.

Here’s to all the great teachers out there. Thank you. – Andre Biscaye
Shannon Boyle

Shannon Boyle came from Herriman to Westminster this year as a freshman. Although she didn’t have to travel far to become part of the Honors program, she said that the bustling atmosphere of Sugarhouse is a big change from the quiet in her hometown.

“I heard Westminster was prestigious, like the Ivy League of Utah,” Shannon said. Upon visiting the college, she fell in love with the campus’ “cozy” atmosphere and “beautiful” buildings. When she got here, she decided to major in Communications. She also has a strong interest in the Japanese language and is pursuing that, although she doesn’t yet know if she’ll minor in it or make it a second major. “Ideally, I’d love to be able to work overseas doing public relations or even human resources for a Japanese company,” she said.

In the past, Shannon has always been involved in academic organizations and honors societies, and wanted to stay in academically rigorous programs as she moved into college. “The Honors program just seemed like a natural progression for me to make,” she said, “I wanted to make sure I kept challenging myself.”

Shannon found even more than academic challenge through the Honors program, though, she found a sense of community and belonging. “I know that no matter how stressed I am over Humanities or whatever I’ve got going on, I can always find someone going through the same thing,” she said. This sense of connection is something that freshman Honors students find not only in their classes, but also with their peer mentors. Shannon stayed in close contact with her peer mentor, Sara McCaskey, and said that Sara has been “a life saver.”

Outside of academics, Shannon continues her interest in languages with American Sign Language (ASL) and hopes to get involved with the campus ASL club. She also enjoys painting and writing, although much of her writing is assigned. This semester, she has a class, Advanced Writing, which has opened up the opportunity to write more personal work.

– Jessica Smith

Faculty Profile

Russ Costa

Dr. Russell Costa has been intrigued by interdisciplinary research from the time he was an undergraduate, an interest that he brings with him as a researcher and new professor in the Honors program. While at Middlebury, a liberal arts college in Vermont, Dr. Costa explored various disciplines, from philosophy to history to psychology. He eventually settled on that last discipline with an emphasis in cognitive science, inspired by the advancements in neuroscience in the late 1990s.

After completing his graduate work at the University of Utah, Dr. Costa wanted to return to the liberal arts environment. “Being at a small school definitely left a strong impression,” he said. He missed the more “comfortable” small college community. He found this environment at Westminster, where he is now in his second year. Dr. Costa teaches Honors seminars (including Human Culture and Behavior, as well as Science, Power, and Diversity) and Neuroscience courses.

Dr. Costa says he has enjoyed how Westminster and the Honors environment have allowed him to pursue research projects that he called “outside of the box” and to engage with perspectives from various fields. At this semester’s Pizza with the Profs, Dr. Costa discussed one of his ongoing projects on the relationship between art, aesthetics, and perception. “I liked not just delivering that talk but also receiving a lot of feedback… in ways that I typically didn’t have when presenting to a group of cognitive psychologists,” he said. “Presenting to an interdisciplinary audience has been a new and great experience.” Dr. Costa added that team teaching with professors from various disciplines has given him valuable new perspectives. “It allows you to experience being a student again in a way that is intellectually rewarding.”

Outside of the classroom, Dr. Costa is an avid backcountry skier and climber. He has participated in the US Freeskiing Tour and enjoys spending time in the mountains, which he considers “a completely different world.” “I like spending time in places where there aren’t a lot of people,” he added. “It’s a good way to get away from being a psychologist all the time.”

When asked whether he had any advice for Honors students, Dr. Costa returned to the interrelations of diverse fields and ideas. “Stay interdisciplinary as long as you can,” he said, noting that it may be difficult to do so in graduate school and in the job market, but drawing on the perspectives of various fields can be fruitful and exciting. – Melanie Long
Faculty Response

Sean Desilets
Assistant Professor of English

Running an Honors seminar at Westminster is a delicate and complex task. Professors have strong—sometimes fierce—investments in their own disciplines and pedagogical methods. Sitting down with another professor to plan an Honors course, therefore, feels a bit like making a potential enemy. Sure, I like and respect this person from a distance, but now she's going to mess with my teaching. One enters these conversations very wary—well-armed, and with a sense that the person on the other side of the table has weapons of her own. In my experience, this feeling never altogether goes away.

In the presence of Honors students, though, it changes into something more positive—call it the frisson of collaborative teaching and learning. While there always remains something of a standoff about it, there is also always an energy or excitement that you cannot get anywhere else. The students add a sense that the differences in teaching style and disciplinary methods have real on-the-ground consequences, and they also represent a new kind of challenge.

There is a funny scene in John Woo's film The Killer in which an assassin and a cop, mortal enemies, find themselves in the home of a blind woman they both love, guns to each other's heads. To avoid alarming the woman, they pretend to be old college buddies, calling one another by made-up nicknames and slowly maneuvering themselves outside where they will be able to resume the work of trying to kill one another. Teaching in Honors is kind of like that, with some very important differences.

For one thing, obviously, Honors professors are not enemies. For another, an Honors student at Westminster may be literally blind, but unlikely to be figuratively so. Students, therefore, play a much more active role in the dynamic. Their various ways of engaging the material break apart the hypermasculine faceoff model that I have deployed to this point, offering in its place a network of interlocking relations, interests, beliefs, and modes of interrogation. The confrontation so bound up in the identities of two professors becomes instead—when things go well—a site of genuine discourse. Power proliferates in discourse, which is why the rhetoric of conflict seems so apt in this context. In the seminar space, though, thanks to the students, opportunities for genuine insight also proliferate.

– Sean Desilets

Student Response

Quayla Skevington
Sophomore

Westminster: a place where just about everything fits under the umbrella of ‘unique.’ And the Honors program is, of course, no exception, with talented students, a dedicated group of professors, and a truly distinctive approach to the project of education.

The structure of the Honors experience and the philosophy behind it lend themselves to opportunities for students to interact directly with their professors both in and out of the classroom.

In the interest of going above and beyond, however, the Honors program has gone one step further, creating numerous opportunities for students to connect with their professors. Not only are students encouraged to actively push against our professors in seminars, but they also experience Living Arts, Pizza with the Profs, and Profs Pick the Flick, during which they have a chance to connect and converse with professors about issues which draw them or on which they hold special expertise.

Many Honors students have most likely spent a lot of time thinking about why these opportunities matter. Personally, though, I hadn't until I sat down to think about which of my professor interactions was my favorite.

I decided I am a huge fan of our seminars. Somewhere in the midst of all that frantic reading and frenetic writing, I appreciate the amount of work our professors ask of us and the level of work they do for us in return.

Showing up to class each day knowing my professors read as much as I did and are prepared with thought-provoking questions motivates me to prepare and participate actively in class. This is not to say I always complete the reading, have my intelligent thoughts written neatly in the margins, or have never raged over a paper. But I feel that our professors approach us with a high level of respect, both in class and in their willingness to interact with us in many other forums.

While I’m partial to seminars, I am genuinely convinced that my opinion is rooted in the general availability and approachability of our professors, whether in class, during office hours, or at a slightly more social event.

– Quayla Skevington
Christopher Roundy

Entering college as a driven, self-proclaimed bio-nerd, I was set on a future in medical school. By the end of my freshmen year at Westminster College, I had completed my intro classes and a semester in the microbiology lab under Dr. Lawrence Anderson, researching gene expression of Enterococcus faecalis. I did very well in my classes and enjoyed the research, but I was curious about more than just the micro world. What were the implications of what I was studying? How does the micro world interface with human populations? It was then I was introduced to the prospect of public health.

At the close of my freshman year, I was awarded a Gore summer research stipend with the college’s new global health professor, Dr. Han Kim. He was impressed by my experience in the lab, but encouraged me to consider research that went ‘beyond the bench.’ I had no prior experience in the field or with human populations. Together, we decided that I should examine trends of falling vaccination rates, from vaccine development to social perspective. Synthesizing data from studies at the University of Utah and the Utah State Health Department, I followed the broken trail from research to public interpretation and was fascinated. In the end, I presented my findings of trends of income levels, education levels, and other factors that correlated to vaccination rates throughout Utah.

I thoroughly enjoyed the new experience connecting the biological with the social. While my small, liberal arts college did not yet offer an undergraduate degree in public health, I followed the field with personal interest. Additionally, I began to incorporate many public health-related classes into my bio major, particularly enjoying Immunology and Parasitology. During my sophomore year I assisted an HIV-prevalence study through the University of Utah and became an HIV-prevention counselor, volunteering with the Utah AIDS Foundation. I continued work in the microbiology lab, now focusing on prevalence of Staphylococcus aureus carriage among student populations, a direct public health connection. I presented my research at conferences that spring and loved explaining the implications of my results for students on campus.

The following summer, I travelled to Uganda with Dr. Han Kim. Another student and I researched methods of mosquito vector control for malaria prevention. Given the circumstances of the villages, we decided that using indoor residual spraying would be most cost-effective and most sustainable. Utilizing my experience as an HIV-prevention counselor, I trained students in preparation for educating the villagers about HIV. Our trip was challenging but successful. Communicating the protocol of indoor residual spraying was particularly difficult, but seeing the sharp drop in malaria cases after our visit made it well worth it. One night during dinner in Kampala, Dr. Kim mentioned how much he loved his work because of it’s global perspective on diseases. As I thought about it, I realized that the trip exposed me to new cultures while combining my passions of biology, research, and education: a combination which I decided to turn into a career.

I began exploring my career options ‘beyond the bench’. I spent my next summer working as an intern with the state health department in the office of epidemiology. I trained myself how to use SPSS and ran statistical analysis and cross-tabulations for the Gay and Bisexual Utah Survey of men (GUS), a survey performed on HIV positive males in Utah who identified as a man who has had sex with a man. I enjoyed learning the intricacies of SPSS and the study results but did not enjoy the environment of the health department. While the social and behavioral aspects of the GUS survey were very important, it was not strongly connected to the microbiological level which draws my interest. More than anything, my time at the health department helped my narrow down my career path.

During my senior year, the college finally offered public health classes on an undergraduate level and I was the first to graduate with the new public health minor. As a culmination of my college career, I spent a month doing public health service in Thailand. My primary interest was education and vector control of mosquitoes to lower the local risk of dengue fever. Collaborating with Thai nursing students allowed me to communicate and work with locals fluently while also gaining valuable cultural insight, which I thoroughly enjoyed. With other students, I led discussions on the basic biological mechanisms of dengue fever and the importance of proper vector control. I involved villagers and younger students in my inspection for sources of standing water. We then implemented...
Benjamin V. Rackham

I intend to dedicate my scientific career to studying the nature, extent, and astronomical context of life in the universe. These, I believe, are the greatest questions of our time. I also believe that we live at a unique era in human history in which we can address these questions scientifically. However, the study of astrobiology will challenge us to reach beyond the boundaries of established fields and forge an interdisciplinary approach to this research. As such, I plan to apply my training in multiple fields and gain additional training in astronomy as a graduate student in order to address novel questions in the search for life in the universe.

I am interested in the astronomy program at the University of Arizona because of the institutional focus on astrobiology embodied in the Center for Astrobiology and the associated minor. Additionally, my research interests align well with those of multiple faculty in the Department of Astronomy, namely Drs. Apai and Eisner. As a graduate student, I aim to deepen our understanding of the astronomical context life requires and to investigate potential biosignatures we may detect from planetary bodies in our solar system or those orbiting other stars. I believe the study of exoplanets and their atmospheres, including the respective work of Drs. Apai and Eisner, provides the most appropriate method by which we can investigate the possibility of life elsewhere in the universe. Thus, I intend to build upon this work throughout my career in academia by collaborating with astrophysicists and planetary scientists to develop a catalog of exoplanetary atmospheres with thermodynamic disequilibria that may indicate the presence of life.

The interdisciplinary path I pursued in my undergraduate education at Westminster College has prepared me well for a graduate education in the interdisciplinary field of astrobiology, the next step on my career path. I studied neuroscience, a field that combines the approaches of biology, chemistry, physics, and psychology to understand neural functions. In my research on the effects of mercury on the neural development of brine shrimp, I drew on my training in these fields to show that ambient concentrations of methylmercury analogous to environmental levels found in Great Salt Lake produced significant decreases in expression of two genes associated with neural development in brine shrimp. This work provided me with experience formulating research questions, designing and conducting experiments, analyzing data, and presenting my findings at the Westminster Undergraduate Research Fair. This experience strengthened my desire to pursue a career conducting research that answers unique questions at the boundaries of traditional scientific disciplines.

My participation in the Honors Program at Westminster College has also prepared me well for an interdisciplinary graduate education. The Westminster College Honors Program draws connections across disciplines through a sequence of team-taught seminars that emphasize research, critical thinking, communication skills, and collaborative learning. As part of my Honors education, I examined the ethical obligations of scientists using the example of genetically modified food aid and presented my findings at the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference. This project allowed me to evaluate a topic critically, draw a conclusion, and present my argument at a national academic conference, training that has aided in preparing me for graduate-level research.

Since graduating, I have worked in a variety of positions in biology and continued my studies in math, physics, astronomy, and biology in support of pursuing astrobiology as a career. Through my independent studies and formal courses at Pima Community College, I have strengthened my understanding of these subjects and deepened my interest in the question of life in the universe. The additional college credits I have earned in math, physics, and astronomy since graduating illustrate my commitment to pursuing this path. Moreover, my performance in these classes, in addition to my strong GPA from my undergraduate career and my exceptional GRE scores, testifies to my ability to excel as a graduate student in astronomy at the University of Arizona.

During my recent visit to Tulane, I met with Dr. Young Hong to ask about research being conducted. We discussed Dr. Kumar's research on a transmission-blocking vaccine for malaria as well as Dr. Krogstad's grant to establish a center of excellence in Africa, valuable and interesting work that links the lab with the world. With my strong microbiological background, travel experience, and ability to learn quickly, I look forward to contributing to such projects. Not only this, but I also look forward to contributing to the classroom as a TA, utilizing my breadth of experience as a tutor and supplemental instructor.

In my future career, I hope to emulate the professors whom I admire most. Current Tulane tropical medicine students spoke to me of their professors' passion for their subjects and the excited manner in which they teach. This, above all, draws me to Tulane. As a future professor, I want to show students the global perspective of the micro world while instilling in them the same sense of curiosity which drives me to this field.
Dear Colleagues,
Here in Honors we are often reminded of the uniqueness of our program, and what special perks and courses we have. Westminster Honors is comprised of a diverse group of individuals all in different places in school and life, but we come together around seven seminars to commiserate and grow with one another on the journey.

This issue of Honorable Mention is dedicated to you, the Honors students and to discovering once again what it is that makes our program so special. From understanding how the architecture and background of Nunemaker makes it the perfect quiet place to gather for intellectual discussions and lectures, to the background of our unofficial Honors mascot, Scout. We re-discovered the use of social media in keeping Honors students connected, and learned more about our professors, new and old.

At Honorable Mention we desire to help you see Honors for its core values: the classes, the people, and the places that make up our little corner of campus. As with all things, we see the changes in the program as new professors and topics come in, and students grow academically and graduate. This year we are saying goodbye to Jackie, as she graduates and moves on to new adventures, and we welcome Sara McCaskey to our editorial team. We are excited about Sara’s contributions to Honorable Mention already, and know she will be a great addition to our team.

Good luck in all your summer adventures. Make a difference and come back with stories to share.

Honorably Yours,
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Co-editors of Honorable Mention

Dear Honorables,
This spring, we’re privileged to look back on a wonderful year of changes, challenges, and improvement in our program. It has been an exciting year of new students, professors, classes, and activities for our community, and we’ve been honored and thrilled to work with you all. This year’s students have been some of the best and most involved we’ve had in the program, and we look forward to continuing our traditions with all they have to offer in future years. While we say goodbye to one senior class, we look forward to welcoming a new class with new faces, voices, and potential, and we can’t wait to continue serving you and your experience in the program in our upcoming year!

Best,
Your 2011-2012 Student Honors Council

From Your Editors

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