

January/February 2009

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**Honors Awards:
Nominations Due
Feb. 4**

The University Honors Program annually welcomes nominations of Honors students and faculty for its Honors Awards, presented this year on Feb. 25, 2009. Honors students are encouraged to nominate their peers and professors.

**For more information and
how to apply, visit
www.american.edu/honors**

How to contact us:

Phone 202-885-6194
E-mail honors@american.edu
Walk-in Hurst Hall 206
American University
4400 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20016
Hours Monday - Friday,
9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Online www.american.edu/honors

**Honors students take time off
to help 'make history'**

*Reid Rosenberg (SPA '10) tells of his role
traveling with Obama for America*

While many of my friends studying abroad soaked in the sun at beaches in Australia, explored the ruins of ancient Egypt or dined at cafés on the street corners of Paris last semester, I stayed behind working what seemed like endless hours, with little sleep and no weekends off. But I wouldn't trade my semester for theirs for all of the gold in the world. I helped make history.

I spent my semester as an Advance Consultant for the Obama for America campaign, traveling around the country producing and managing events for the campaign's principals and surrogates. In just six weeks of the campaign, I produced events for Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore, Jill Biden and Bill Clinton, assisted in the production of an unprecedented four rally, five-hour swing through Philadelphia for Barack Obama, managed an off-the-record event for Joe Biden, and produced several other rallies and events in Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.



Frank Poppe and Reid Rosenberg at inaugural headquarters.

From start to finish, the average time given to our team to create a trip from scratch was about five days. Everything – from finding a venue and contracting vendors to building a crowd and renting port-a-potties – needed to happen as fast as possible. On more than a few occasions, I worked 36 hours straight without sleep, finalizing arrangements with vendors, building a site, running the event, and then breaking it down. After an event, I would get an e-mail with a plane ticket, and the whole process would begin again the next day.

The project management skills I learned in the process and the ability I gained to stay calm in extremely high-pressure situations are the sorts of things I could have never picked up from writing term papers or studying abroad, and the hundreds of connections I made surpassed any of those I might have made as 20-hour-a-week intern.

As I stood in Chicago's Grant Park, just 50 feet away from the President-Elect – as of just an hour earlier – of the United States, listening to him tell a live audience of 200,000 exuberant Americans, and worldwide television audience of millions more, that "Change has come to America," and as my friends at home

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and studying overseas sent me e-mails and texts congratulating and even thanking me, I knew that my semester spent in the United States beat any semester I might spend abroad.

And as my friends return from relaxing winter breaks at home, I spent mine in an office 10 hours a day working at the Presidential Inaugural Committee helping prepare to inaugurate the next President of the United States of America. No doubt about it: Best. Break. Ever.

Frank Poppe (SIS '11) writes about life as a field organizer for Obama's campaign

This past semester, I took a leave of absence to work as a field organizer for the Obama campaign. I had participated in a program called the Obama Organizing Fellowship over the summer, during which I was sent to Erie, Penn., the fourth largest city in the state.



Frank on the job.

Our job was to act as community organizers on behalf of Obama, and the Fellows and I worked incredibly long hours registering voters, making phone calls and leading meetings.

After the Fellows program ended in July, I was offered a job as a full-time, paid field organizer, which would require me to work until the election. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I didn't want to pass up. I was given the task of organizing three rural counties in northwest Pennsylvania - Warren, Forest and Clarion.

This was very tough turf, as this area is extremely politically conservative and is one that Obama lost badly during the primary. Race, guns and abortion were the main issues that our campaign had to grapple with.



Reid on business for Biden in Des Moines, Iowa.

Despite the difficult odds, and after many long hours on the phone and going door-to-door, a small, dedicated group of Obama volunteers began to emerge. I oversaw the operation of two campaign offices, where a steady trickle of visitors came in to pick up yard signs and find out how they could get involved. In the end, Obama did better than Kerry's 2004 campaign by 6 to 7 points in all three of my counties - winning Pennsylvania by more than 10 points.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of this historic election and to have met such incredible people along the way. I learned things that I could never have learned in a classroom, and I know that I will come to see this time as a transformative part of my undergraduate experience.

From Director Michael Mass ...

This issue of *Honorable Mentions* marks the beginning of a new year and a new semester - so welcome back, Honors students! I especially would like to welcome our new self-nominated and transfer Honors students to the University Honors Program. I'm pleased that each of you is now a part of the Honors community, and I look forward to the contribution you will make to Honors and to American University.

Don't forget that Honors forms (including Capstone forms, independent study

forms and both graduate and regular supplement forms) are due on Monday, Feb. 9. Coincidentally, this is the same day that the Registrar's independent study form is due to that office.

Before you start thinking that Honors is all work and no play, please note that there are many Honors activities already planned for the spring 2009 semester, including a Tea Talk with AU Librarian Bill Mayer on Wednesday, Jan. 28 and the Honors Award Ceremony on Wednesday, Feb. 25.

We'll also have discounted tickets on sale later this month for upcoming symphony and ballet performances at the Kennedy Center. I know the Student Honors Board plans to continue with an excellent array of activities - to learn more about what they have in store, check out page 4.

The entire staff of the University Honors Center joins me in welcoming you to the spring semester and reminding you that we are here to help you in any way possible. Enjoy the spring semester!

Alum to return to Honors classroom – as faculty

Chris Jacobs (CAS/SPA '01) writes about experience in and beyond Honors

Few students, looking back on their college careers, would say they were fortunate enough to win a fellowship to study overseas, appear on national television, or serve on a corporate board. Yet my time at American University allowed me to do all three.

The University Honors Program was central to many of these positive experiences stemming from my time at AU. I initially chose American because of the generous financial aid packages available to Honors students – but I stayed because of the close relationships built with my fellow Honors students and the dedication of the faculty toward mentoring, guiding and inspiring students to succeed.

Faculty lie at the heart of any good university, and American is blessed to have some of the best. I won my Rotary fellowship to study in England because a History professor came to me and offered to help me undertake original research overseas – a faculty member volunteering her valuable time to help me succeed. Likewise, my time as the undergraduate representative on the University Budget Committee found me serving in a professional setting with dedicated faculty and staff who were always willing to consider the student viewpoint.

The Honors program, and Honors faculty, only served to magnify the rich educational experience I received at American. Professor Lenny Steinhorn's 2000 presidential campaign colloquium – televised weekly on CNN – provided an in-depth look at the way the media portrayed both candidates in an election environment and our classroom discussions in soundbytes fit for quick consumption. Another Honors class by Professor Philip Brenner led to an enriching independent study, again because a faculty member volunteered to serve as a personal mentor for me.



Chris (far right), Prof. Steinhorn and alums at an Honors alumni brunch.

I still stay in touch with several of my Honors professors, to say nothing of my fellow Honors alumni. Some of the most enjoyable – and memorable – experiences of my AU career took place outside the classroom, often on the Honors floors. Tea talks, study breaks, or just spontaneous discussions in the Honors lounges helped me form lasting bonds with my classmates, several of whom I communicate with frequently.

Since I graduated in May 2001 with a degree in Political Science and History, I've been able to embark on a fulfilling career due to the strong education I received at American. After completing my Master's in London, I returned to the States and embarked on a career in health policy. I recently returned to a position on Capitol Hill, thanks in no small part to an AU alum who's now my colleague. Living here in Washington, D.C. has allowed me to return to campus frequently to see how AU, and Honors in particular, has grown and thrived since I left. I only wish opportunities like the Honors Study/Travel Abroad program existed when I was a student!



Chris Jacobs (next to camera) in 2000 Honors colloquium.

While I've returned to campus many times in the seven-plus years since my graduation, I most look forward to coming back next fall as a professor, to teach an Honors colloquium on health care policy. Coming back to join the faculty on a part-time basis will allow me to teach subject matter I love to a group of bright, capable Honors students, all the while giving back to the institution that has given me so much. I can't wait to get started all over again. See you in the classroom!

Latin American poet spends time with class of Honors Spanish students

Class member Chiara Becker (SIS '11) reports

Poet Mayamérica Cortez visited Professor Consuelo Hernandez's Honors Spanish class in November and shared several of her poems and personal literary works with the class for consideration and discussion.

Originally from El Salvador, Cortez moved to the Washington, D.C., area in the early 1980s to escape El Salvador's civil war. To do so, she had to leave her three beloved children behind and was unable to see them for several years. In order to ease her loneliness, Cortez wrote and sent many letters to her children during their separation. The class was able to read a sampling of her unpublished letters and a selection of her poems.



Mayamérica Cortez, seated, spoke last fall to Prof. Hernandez's class.

Cortez also described the difficulty she encountered as a foreigner living in the United States. Her heart-wrenching account of the trials and tribulations involved in immigration – especially from Latin America – were fascinating.

Cortez read several selected poems to us from her poetry collection titled, "Songs of Silence." She explained that she gains significant inspiration from her religious faith, nature's raw beauty and her indigenous ethnic background. Nature, she believes, is like the mother of all human beings. As a product of her indigenous culture, she considers herself a "campesina," – a woman of the countryside – rather than a "citadina" – a woman of the industrial city. Mayamérica Cortez's unique life experiences affect the emotional responses to her literary works, making each piece both insightful and influential.

Student Honors Board says 'welcome back'

Thank you for a wonderful fall semester! We hope that you enjoyed all of the Student Honors Board (SHB) events and thank you for your support.

We look forward to a fantastic spring semester, and have some big plans. Not only will we continue SHB's traditional s'mores night and spring barbecue, but we have some new ideas as well. Our recent cookie-decorating holiday party was a huge success, so we're planning a similar event for the spring. Response to the idea of an Honors movie night has been overwhelmingly positive, so we're looking to add that as well.

We're also planning two new major events next semester: An Honors ice-skating trip in late January or early February, and for a grand finale for the spring 2009 semester, an Honors talent/variety show! In addition, we are planning at least one, perhaps several,

community-service projects throughout the semester.

Though these plans are subject to change and your input, we're really excited about what we have tentatively planned so far and are looking forward to firming the dates and specifics. Details will follow soon after spring semester kicks off, so keep an eye on *Honorable Mentions* and your inbox for information on all of these events.

From a broader standpoint, we hope to really expand the reach of SHB events this semester – we'd love to see more of the Honors community participate and to see Honors play a larger role in the broader AU community. We look to accomplish this with a

combination of exciting new programming, including the SHB talent/variety show, for which we hope to attract an audience from the larger AU community, not just from Honors (although performers will be Honors students only).

As always, we appreciate and welcome any and all comments, criticism, suggestions and concerns. Also, if you would like to help out with any of the events this semester – or help to plan others – please let us know!



SHB members volunteer with the nonprofit A Wider Circle.

Capstones in progress

Grenye O'Malley (CAS '09) describes Capstone that uses zebrafish to learn about human disease

Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness in the United States, and causes blindness in 70 percent of patients who have had diabetes for more than 15 years. Patients with diabetes have fluctuating blood sugar levels. This puts a strain on their nerves and blood vessels and can result in retina damage, called retinopathy. Using a zebrafish model of diabetic retinopathy developed by Professor Victoria Connaughton of the AU Biology department, I am analyzing the effects of hyperglycemia (high blood sugar levels) on neurotransmitters of the retina. Neurotransmitters, such as glutamate, may be elevated, creating a toxic environment.

Each day for a month I will transfer experimental fish between normal

water and sugar water to induce hyperglycemia. I will collect retina samples on different days and use antibodies to stain for various neurotransmitters, after which I will compare the results to my control fish.

I approached Prof. Connaughton about her research because I am interested in neuroscience. I plan to attend medical school next year, so I want more experience, both in research and in the field in which I may specialize. Studying an animal model of a human disease is especially appealing because of previous research I did on a model of multiple sclerosis at the National Institutes of Health. It taught me how important it is to understand how information about human disease is discovered.

Honors Capstone Quiz

Do you have questions about ...

- A. Your Capstone proposal
- B. Selecting a faculty Capstone advisor
- C. Completing the necessary paperwork
- D. Honors in a major versus general University Honors
- E. All of the above

If you said "yes" to any of these, find answers at a Capstone Information Session on Jan. 21 or Jan. 27 at 5 p.m. in Hurst 206.

Josh Levitz (CAS '09) writes about channeling biology and physics for his Capstone on sodium potassium pumps

Ever since I began taking biology courses, I have been fascinated by the world of membrane channels and pumps – the proteins that sit in the membrane and control the transport of various chemicals in and out of the cell through a wide range of mechanisms. The importance of these proteins cannot be overstated and is especially clear in neurons and the chemical fluxes they use to produce signals. In many ways, channels and pumps are the basis of all neurobiology. In accordance with this interest, my Capstone is an investigation of the precise mechanism by which the sodium potassium pump, a membrane protein that is present in almost every living organism, pumps sodium ions from the cell.

I have been working in the Molecular Neurophysiology Unit at the National Institutes of Health under Dr. Miguel Holmgren, and will continue this work for the rest of my senior year. Dr. Holmgren's lab focuses on many different membrane proteins, but especially the sodium potassium pump. In order to look at the precise mechanism of ion "pumping" by the sodium potassium pump, I use a technique called electrophysiology. Using frog eggs injected with sodium potassium pump RNA, I am able to measure the currents elicited by sodium being pumped out of the cell and can thus deduce the precise kinetics of the process. This project has been a challenging way to integrate skills from both of my majors: biology and physics.

This research is an excellent opportunity to enter the world of membrane proteins and more generally, biophysics. It has forced me to think more deeply about a specific problem in science and has greatly prepared me for graduate school in the quantitative life sciences. After I graduate this spring, I intend to begin work on a Ph.D. in biophysics with an emphasis on ion channels and how they contribute to basic neuron function.

Next deadline approaching for AU Undergraduate Research Support

University Honors Program will administer program

In coordination with the Office of the Provost, the University Honors Program will now administer American University's Undergraduate Research Support grants. These grants support research or creative projects undertaken by students in their sophomore, junior or senior years. Depending on the type of grant awarded, students may receive from \$500 to \$2500 for their research/creative efforts.

Grants assist various kinds of projects and research. For example, in 2008, one grant recipient wrote a research paper on price discrimination in the Washington, D.C., area transit system, and another synthesized and analyzed the efficacy of antimicrobials, while another recipient used funding to support the creation of a complete photo, video and Web promotion company for local musicians.

Interested students and their faculty advisors, please note these important deadlines: All applications for both the Summer 2009 Research Fellowships and Fall 2009 Student Research Awards are **due on Monday, Feb. 16, 2009**. In addition, the University Honors Program accepts applications throughout the academic year for grant support from the Student Research Expense Fund, covering small expenses linked to research or creative projects, up to \$500.

The University Honors Program will continue to administer the Honors Capstone Research Grants. Interested students typically apply for one of these grants – worth up to \$500 – at the start of the term in which they will complete a Capstone project. The grant application deadline for the spring 2009 semester is **Monday, Feb. 9**.

Find more details, including guidelines for all three AU Undergraduate Research Support grants, at: www.american.edu/undergradresearch. For more on Capstone Research Grants, see: www.american.edu/honors.

Upcoming Undergraduate Research Workshops

January 29 & 30:
Maximizing AU Library
Resources for Research

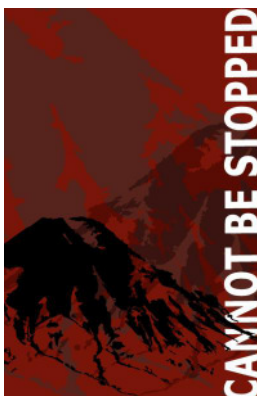
February 4:
Applying for Grants:
The Basics, plus Testimonies

February 16:
Achieving Capstone Success –
with Less Stress

March 18:
Making Your Research
Look Good:
Presentation Techniques

Honors senior to share unique work in upcoming Capstone performance

Come hear experimental music of Farley Miller (CAS '09)



Farley's Capstone was completed in fall 2008.

On Feb. 20, 2009, Farley Miller, a senior in the CAS Audio Technology program, will present his original work for the experimental music project, CANNOT BE STOPPED, at a free performance in the Katzen Recital Hall. The concert will feature Farley controlling a digital synthesizer with a drum set to create music that the *Washington City Paper* has described as “[combining] percussion acrobatics with the kind of electronic bleeps that usually indicate [an] unprejudiced Goomba killing in Super Mario Bros.”

Several pieces from this project have been recorded for Farley's Honors Capstone, an album entitled "Mountain." More information about CANNOT BE STOPPED and "Mountain," as well as media samples can be found on Farley Miller's blog, www.wecannotbestopped.com.

Doors open at 7 p.m. and the music begins promptly at 7:15 p.m.

Tea Talk spotlights AU Librarian, his vision for library

The first Honors Tea Talk of 2009 will feature American University Librarian Bill Mayer. This event will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 28 from 3:30 to 5 p.m., in the Mud Box at the library. Mayer's talk will focus on the where the AU library is headed in the twenty-first century and his vision for getting there. Refreshments will be served.

Although an R.S.V.P. for the Tea Talk is not required, if you expect to attend, for planning purposes, please send an e-mail to honors@american.edu.

Bill Mayer brings a rich background to his work at AU. After receiving a Master of Library Science degree from Simmons College in Boston, Mayer worked at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, eventually as the school's Document Resources Librarian. Prior to becoming American University Librarian

in 2007, Mayer served as the Associate University Librarian for Information Technology and Technical Services at the George Washington University. There, he was responsible for developing, implementing and integrating information technology services across the entire library system. Mayer also was an adjunct faculty member for the School of Library and Information Science at The Catholic University of America in 2005 and 2006.

At AU, direct communication with constituents is an important priority to Mayer, who regularly holds sessions with students for their ideas and suggestions.

Under Mayer's leadership, the library is sponsoring a variety of sessions, including two research workshops later this month that will not only provide a basic overview of library resources,



Bill Mayer has been at AU since 2007.

but will also allow students to voice their opinions about what they want from their university library. The first workshop will be held on Thursday, Jan. 29 from 3:30 to 5 p.m. in room 306 in the library. A repeat session for those unable to attend the first workshop will be held on Friday, Jan. 30 from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the Electronic Classroom, Library Lower Level.

Career Center: Upcoming Events

Africa Career Café

Thursday, Jan. 22, 6-8 p.m., Katzen Arts Center Krieger Lobby

Join students, staff, faculty, alumni and employers for food, music and conversations about careers in and about Africa. You will have a chance to discuss career paths and get and share advice. R.S.V.P. by e-mail charles@american.edu.

SIS Career Week: I Want to Do Something International

Wednesday, Feb. 4, 3-4:30 p.m., MGC 203/205

Wondering how you can create a career in the international service field? This interactive workshop will help you picture the possibilities and map out your future.

SIS Alumni-Student Networking Reception

Thursday, Feb. 5, 7-8:30 p.m., MGC 4 & 5

This reception is an opportunity for students, alumni, faculty, staff and employers to meet, share career information and network.

Whose Life Is It, Anyways? (Part 1 of 4)

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 3:30-5 p.m., Butler Conference Room

This fun, interactive and educational four-session workshop will help you find direction and gain insight into what major/career path to pursue. Become familiar with self-assessment tools that will help you evaluate your interests, skills, personality, and work values, and assess how they relate to various career fields. Please note: to register for the workshop, you must attend all sessions, Feb. 10, 12, 17 and 19.

For more information or to RSVP for any of these events, please contact the AU Career Center at 202-885-1800, careercenter@american.edu or www.american.edu/careercenter.

Calendar of Events

The University Honors Program calendar is updated regularly on the Honors Web site at www.american.edu/honors.

- Wednesday,
Jan. 21;
Tuesday,
Jan. 27
- Capstone Information Session**
Confused about your Capstone? Come and get all of your questions answered.
5-6 p.m., Honors Center, Hurst 206
- Wednesday,
Jan. 28
- Tea Talk with AU Librarian Bill Mayer**
Mayer's talk will focus on where the AU library is headed in the twenty-first century and his vision for getting there. Refreshments will be served.
3:30-5 p.m., Mud Box
- Thursday,
Jan.29;
Friday,
Jan. 30
- Maximizing AU Library Resources for Research**
The workshop will provide a basic overview of library resources and allow students to voice their opinions about what they want from their university library.
Thurs.: 3:30-5 p.m., AU Library, room 306, repeats Fri.: noon - 2 p.m.,library's lower-level electronic classroom
- Wednesday,
Feb. 4
- Applying for Grants: The Basics, Plus Testimonies**
This workshop will cover the basics of applying for grants and will feature testimonies of prior student winners.
3:30-5 p.m., SIS Lounge
- Thursday,
Feb. 5
- Ivan Fischer and the National Symphony Orchestra**
Conductor Iván Fischer leads the NSO in a program featuring pieces by Bartók and Dvorák.
7 p.m., Kennedy Center Concert Hall, special Honors ticket price: \$20
- Monday,
Feb. 9
- Honors Forms Due**
Capstone Grant applications, Capstone and supplement forms (300-400 level and 500-600 level) are due to the University Honors Center. Today is also the Registrar's deadline to sign up for an Independent Study.
9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Honors Center, Hurst 206
- Friday,
Feb. 13
- Cake Day**
Take a break and enjoy some cake with the University Honors Program -- while supplies last!
10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Honors Center, Hurst 206
- Monday,
Feb. 16
- Achieving Capstone Success -- With Less Stress**
AU Counseling Center's Dr. Amy Bowers offers strategies to keep on top of work and reduce related stress.
5:45 p.m. (for pizza), session begins at 6 p.m., Butler Conference Room
- Friday,
Feb. 20
- American Ballet Theatre's 'Swan Lake'**
The ABT presents a classic tale of love, loss and enchantment in four acts.
7:30 p.m., Kennedy Center Opera House, special Honors ticket price: \$20
- Saturday,
Feb. 21
- Honors 101 Mentor Retreat**
Co-chairs and mentors for the 2009 Honors 101 program will attend a day-long training session off-campus.
5 p.m., Mary Graydon Center, rooms 5-6
- Wednesday,
Feb. 25
- Fourth Annual Honors Award Ceremony**
Join the Honors community in recognizing outstanding Honors students, faculty, staff and alumni.
5 p.m., Mary Graydon Center, rooms 5-6