Our world is full of boxes. Democrats and Republicans. Omnivores and Vegetarians. Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Atheist. The 99% and the 1%. Often the boxes are even more precise: Tea Party Republican, Raw Food Vegan, High Episcopalian. These boxes not only define who we are, but they often determine how we respond to the world around us. What bleeding-heart liberal would ever be caught watching Fox News? What staunch Tea Party conservative would crack open a copy of *Mother Jones*? Would a Lutheran ever consider observing Ramadan? Staying inside our comfortable boxes not only winnows down our experiences, but in processing information and events through the same lens, over and over, it creates an incredibly rigid and limited worldview. As Americans, are we even capable of having an in-depth, let alone rational, discussion on abortion, the death penalty, or gun violence anymore? How about the existence of God or the relative benefits of GMOs? How much easier is it to post a snarky e-Card on Facebook, decrying the people who collect welfare, wear pajamas in public, and carry iPhones? How much more pleasant and affirming to re-tweet a link to a take-down article on Romney’s “47% comment”? The personalization of websites (and social media especially) have allowed us to surround ourselves with a community of Yes men, nodding and murmuring assent to each new post or link, creating a feedback loop of self-affirming agreement.

Academics are no exception to this trend. Each discipline has its own standards and expectations, which we teach students when they enter our class. This is an English paper: fix your passive voice. This is a scientific data analysis: don’t use so much first person. Except for the occasional writing across the curriculum initiative, the disciplines generally remain lonely islands, static and immovable, across a vast sea of academic data. Students, many of whom come to us with preconceived notions of their strengths and weaknesses, choose which islands to maroon themselves on. Only when the clock hits 10:30 or 12:45 do students swim out to the next bit of land.
That is why, as teachers, we tend to gravitate to the student who wants more. Perhaps it is the student who wants to think deeply about the ethical implications of euthanasia, pulling information from both science and philosophy. Perhaps it is the student who wants to conduct her own primary research on the news bias surrounding gun control legislation and then track how effectively we recognize and respond to that bias. Or perhaps it is the student who genuinely wants to learn something and not simply check off a box on a graduation list. Gathering all of these students together, students who are willing and able to think deeply about a subject, to process—and even be excited by—opposing viewpoints, to sift through data from different disciplines and see the connections and emerge with a fundamentally original viewpoint—this is the goal of the Honors program.

The Honors program, then, is about more than establishing rigorous coursework. It is persuading students to see the connections between their Sociology and Philosophy and Critical Thinking & Writing classes. It is encouraging originality in thinking, creativity in presentation, and rigor in preparation and research. It is helping students shed, at least temporarily, the mindset they have established for themselves, becoming more concerned and active citizens in the process.

Are we successful? I could point to our graduation and attrition rates or the number of students who transfer, then achieve success at four-year institutions and beyond. However, I come from an English background, so I respond best to story. Each Honors instructor has at least one moment he or she can point to as representative of the program, a clarifying example of what it is we aim to do. In Critical Thinking & Writing, it might be the moment a student takes a History lesson on Manifest Destiny and explores how that concept is still guiding our foreign policy through a rhetorical lens. In Art History, it might be the trip to New York City to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art when the bus stops and students walk onto the front steps, many who have never left the Eastern Shore, and stand, awestruck, their mind open and thrumming with possibility. In Literature, it might be the moment students drill down into “post hole" research to discover the name of a 15th century tapestry broker or the director of a short-lived production at Broadway’s now-demolished Vanderbilt theater, not only valuing but also enjoying the experience. In Speech, it might be the moment students were so engaged in a lively critique of an informative speech, nobody noticed class had ended five minutes ago. And in Scientific Thought and Data Analysis, it might be the moment a student is able to articulate, without prompting or guidance, Aristotle’s virtue as the mean between excess and deficiency.

We all have these moments. Each class, each lecture or discussion, is a reaching out, a striving toward the instant when we are able to transcend what we thought ourselves capable of, to step outside of those boxes we thought impenetrable and see for miles. Are these lofty goals? Yes. Are they a bit naïve? Perhaps. But as the new Director of Honors, this is my philosophy, and I hope, if you are reading this, it can be your philosophy too.
Where Are They Now??
Reminiscing about Learning . . . and Life

Cassandra Dasher
Graduated 2009

My Education

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness...” –Mark Twain

“I can, with one eye squinted, take it all as a blessing.” –Flannery O’Connor

I write this sitting in a café in Concepción, Chile. It’s raining with the unrelenting dreariness of a southern-hemisphere winter, and I’m not entirely sure where I am, having spent a sleepless night in a bus terminal; but I have my laptop, the biggest cup of coffee available, and several empty hours ahead in which to reflect on what I’ve learned along my journey.

Not the journey to South America, though that’s part of it. I mean the journey that began the day I donned a robe and funny tasseled hat and walked across a stage into the nebulous, quasi-adult stage of life that follows high school but precedes full maturity in the world’s eyes.

The valuable information acquired from textbooks is just the beginning of “Receiving an Education.” Even if I don’t realize it at the time, each experience—moving to a new place, talking with a person of different beliefs—leaves some mark on the constantly shifting thing I call my Self.

What has my journey—from Wor-Wic Community College to a small liberal arts college in western Pennsylvania, to working at a library, to teaching English in a Chilean high school—taught me? Not much, part of my brain says snidely, since I still forget to check bus schedules and wind up stranded in a cold terminal at 2:00 am. Not much, compared to the dozens of people I know who “have it together” much more than I. But compared to who I was when I turned that tassel, so, so much. Wor-Wic boosted me from the less formal world of homeschooling into academia. In my studies, I learned not only facts, but certain mental habits that now shape the way I see the world. The Honors Program class discussions
cultivated my ability to think critically: to search for flaws in logic and to consider different viewpoints, recognizing differences of culture or time period in order to see past them and discover the common thread of humanity.

But much of what I learned outside the classroom has proved just as valuable. Serving in various campus groups gave me experience in leadership and responsibility. I learned how vital the ability to say “no” is to one’s sanity—that is, I learned its importance in retrospect, having mostly failed to either turn down excess responsibilities or keep my sanity.

I learned the immense amount of sweat and stress that goes into organizing a fundraiser dance, and that staying up all night decorating is more than half the fun. Taking part in service projects, I discovered the thrill of impacting lives, which first led me to consider foreign missions; and that, uncoordinated as I am, the dancing can be fun too.

I left Wor-Wic with a better understanding of how the world works, but I didn’t know what direction I should turn my talents and passions in (spoiler alert: I still don’t.) I decided to pursue a bachelor’s degree in English.

If Wor-Wic was the springboard into academic life, Grove City College was the deep end. There I found a closely knit scholarly community, with unabashed enthusiasm for philosophy and the arts and a collective sense of irony.

Ever the bookworm, I learned to read for layers of meaning, acquired respect for the giants on whose shoulders we stand. I discovered Romance and fell headlong in first love (his name was John Keats, and he died in the 19th century, but that doesn’t come between us.)

On GCC’s ‘dry’ campus, I learned that contrary to popular belief, alcohol is not a prerequisite for a good time; a fire, bag of marshmallows, and decent guitar player are all that is needed.

I learned to appreciate different kinds of music, from my roommate’s favorite indie band to Beethoven to that weird stuff your dad listened to back when his hair was a lot longer.

Nights in with classmates taught me not to be intimidated by appearances: the most reserved ‘English major’ can be reduced to giggling by the right combination of BBC miniseries, PG Tips tea, and [in]appropriately placed references to Walt Whitman.

Living in a region whose bad weather ranks just behind Seattle, I discovered a law which has proved infinitely useful in rainy Chile: that in a climate of perpetual fog and rain, there is no task that cannot be abandoned if the sun miraculously comes out.

With my formal schooling behind, next fell to me a much harder course of study: taking my new knowledge into the “real world” and trying to build a life on it. For a year after graduating, I lived at home juggling various part-time jobs, from nannying to running programs at the local library.
I had to learn that moving home, while nothing to be ashamed of, is not easy. Alongside learning to balance a checkbook (with a lot of coaching—thanks, Mom), I realized what it’s like to be a stranger in one’s hometown, that one can be loneliest in a crowd.

Lessons can come in surprising places: it was working at the library that I learned about client confidentiality (fire will not melt out of me whose grandmother carries home steamy romance novels in a paper bag).

I learned (well, started learning) to keep my patience and pacify tantrums, whether with an unstable customer or a stubborn toddler. Coincidentally, it was also during this time that I became addicted to—sometimes skipping lunch for—nerve-calming afternoon tea.

I gained a new respect for librarians, who work to fill whatever need they see in the community, sometimes way above their pay grade. (Love your library, dear reader.)

I also learned to show consideration for the homeless who frequent the library, unaware that later a bus mix-up would give me one day’s firsthand experience of being on the street. Much in this period was fulfilling: precious time with my family, reconnecting with childhood friends, devouring every episode of Doctor Who and the books I hadn’t had time for at school. Despite this, I felt I was just marking time until I could get my feet under me—or the road under my feet.

Finally, the opportunity presented itself. The Chilean Ministry of Education’s “English Opens Doors” program would utilize my strengths in working with young people and the English language, as well as indulge my wanderlust. In April 2013 I hugged my family goodbye and boarded a flight for Chile, dragging approximately twice my weight in suitcases, with no idea what to expect but a quavering hope that it would be amazing.

So here I am, learning to live in a new country, still not finished with my education. In addition to life in general I’m discovering a new culture, with a different set of social cues and expectations. I’m training myself to accept a kiss on the cheek without flinching, to eat any food I’m offered without questioning what it is, to take a hand down from the bus as an expression of courtesy, not necessarily flirting.

The public transport system’s notoriously lax schedule—“Chilean time”—is teaching me not to worry when things don’t go as planned: you nearly always get where you’re going eventually.

At Grove City College, where people leave their bicycles unlocked for others to borrow and use their wallets to save a seat in the cafeteria, I had learned trust; but in Santiago, Chile’s metropolis capital, I had to learn to hold my possessions tightly in the metro, and to NOT always trust the nice man offering to carry my suitcase: best case scenario, he’ll extract an exorbitant tip. A dear friend in college taught me fearless self-expression, and I think of her whenever I whistle in the street (an oddity for women in this culture.) Since people WILL stare after me, it may as well be for something I enjoy rather than my coloring or accent.
I’ve started to un-learn my prejudice against big cities, even to enjoy the faster pace, the congregation of different types of people. I’ve learned that the most unlikely things are possible, from opening a tuna tin with a butter knife to meeting an acquaintance halfway around the globe.

Some lessons take humorous forms: warnings about securing my belongings didn’t sink in until I found that my shoes had been lifted from my backpack’s outside pocket. (All I can say is, good luck to whoever needed my stinky tennis shoes so badly.) I’ve practiced the strangely difficult-to-master skill of asking for directions—and then asking a second and third time, as I rarely get there on the first try. I’ve learned that, as with gremlins, feeding street dogs is a bad idea however cute they are.

A holiday road trip showed me that the best parts of travelling are unplanned: a hike to a mountain overlook becoming a breathtaking day-long trek through an ancient temperate rainforest; spontaneously exploring the colorful port city Valparaíso with friends I’ve just met; singing Spanish love songs with patrons at a bar full of strangers.

The wonderful camaraderie that instantly springs up between fellow travelers taught me that a shared love for adventure is stronger than any culture or language barriers. I learned the power of everyday human interactions from a metal-worker in a pueblo artesanal who made a gift of copper wire rings for me and a friend, simply because we stopped to talk with him and saw him as a person, not part of the scenery. I’m learning the humility to trust the kindness of strangers, like the hostel owner who drives to the countryside in the middle of the night to rescue a group of stranded gringos, where we otherwise surely would have been eaten by a puma. In teaching, I’ve found that teenagers are not so different from one country to another: maddeningly distractible, but easily won over by openness and humor.

And when a busload of tourists unanimously insisted on giving some half-frozen backpackers a lift, I learned what it looks like to pay that kindness forward. The most important lesson that the bitter school of experience has given me is that when I make mistakes, the world doesn’t necessarily end; after I’ve hidden in the corner and given myself a sound kicking, I still have to figure out what to do next.

Life is composed of terrifying, inescapable choices. Sometimes it’s a choice between good or better, bad or worse; and I may never know which I have chosen. If I had applied for that other job, instead of the one I did... if I’d taken a photography class rather than theology... if I’d gone for a master’s degree.... We are awash in a sea of unknowable might-have-beens.
I don’t know where my journey will lead after my Chile adventure; I’m taking this Life thing one step at a time. What’s certain is that, whether the next step involves exploring the world further or putting down roots, I’ll continue to discover how little I know of all there is to know.

So, what has my journey so far taught me? I may never master planning ahead, but I’m enrolled in a lifelong course—one from which I’ll graduate in a coffin—in choosing to live without regret; to take every experience, pleasant or unpleasant, as a blessing; to learn what I can from my mistakes and keep looking ahead to the next adventure.

At home or abroad, in school or in the “real world,” the art of Life is taught by living.

— Cassandra Dasher

Are you interested in taking Speech in an intimate, supportive atmosphere? Try SPH 101 Honors!!

Fundamentals of Oral Communication, Honors (SPH 101H) is an exciting, hands-on approach to public speaking. Students integrate a common theme into their classroom speeches and enjoy sharing their analyses of acclaimed speeches by well-known public figures. Honors speech students report that they enjoy the small-group atmosphere, at least in part because they feel less trepidation speaking to a group of 12-15 instead of the much larger group that characterizes the regular sections of speech.

Honors speech is offered only in the fall semester and will be offered during the day in fall 2014 and during the evening in fall 2015. If you think you might be interested in taking this course, please don’t register for a regular section of SPH 101 in spring 2014 as this would make you ineligible for the honors section. Contact Dr. Elaine Vander Clute at 410-334-2854 or evanderclute@worwic.edu if you would like to learn more about this opportunity.
Honors Students Share Their Memories of Classes

The honors program is a truly rewarding experience for any student. My most memorable moment during Mrs. Reddish’s critical thinking & writing class last fall was our book presentation discussion. Sitting amongst my fellow honors classmates discussing a fabulous read hardly felt like an assignment, let alone class. I felt like I was attending a book club with good friends who shared my same passion in a dialogue of learning.

—Leanne Ferraro

Honors classes at Wor-Wic gave me my voice. I found it first during an Art History presentation. PowerPoint slides chuckling along, my notes took on a life of their own, and I entered the zone. Twenty minutes later I looked at the clock and Professor Tavel was making that wind it up motion he has. It was time travel. Speech class found me delivering ideas that I had only been comfortable writing—speaking about my passion for art—and no longer squeezing fingertip impressions into the podium. Weaving a story of depression era programs that foreshadowed the NEA, it came to me. I could do this. Now, at Salisbury University, teaching and writing are becoming my future.

—Dan Norris

One of the most rewarding moments for me was several intense minutes long. I am thinking back to the debate in Mrs. Reddish’s Critical Thinking class. At first I was disappointed with the point of view assigned for the debate since I agreed with the opposition. Then, as we researched the topic, team members presented their evidence using the techniques we learned in class—especially the appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos. Working as a team for this challenging assignment made this a memorable achievement. I was relieved and proud when the debate was over. Convincing the audience was icing on the cake!! I probably learned more from this class than any other I have taken to date because the assignments were not private. Our skills displayed; we were challenged by our classmates. This promoted confidence (I never start an honors class confident!!) as well as perseverance.

—Tamalin Truitt

The Honors program has given me the opportunity to challenge myself beyond my regular class studies. Reading and analyzing great literary works not offered in regular classes has made for some of my favorite academic moments while attending Wor-Wic.

—Brandon Hudson
“I have a dream.” “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” “We cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground.” These lines are famous examples of the power of words—so famous, in fact, the speaker and situation immediately spring to mind. And the situation is necessary. How much more inspirational are Martin Luther King Jr.’s words woven against centuries of racial oppression? How much more solemn are Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s words in the context of the Great Depression? And how truly staggering are Abraham Lincoln’s words on the site of the Battle of Gettysburg, where over 46,000 soldiers lost their lives? But rhetoric does not simply exist in the dusty tomes of history. Malala Yousafzai, a sixteen-year-old girl from Pakistan, speaking out against the Taliban for women’s rights and education, was asked what she would do against the Taliban’s death threats. She said, “I think of it often and imagine the scene clearly. Even if they come to kill me, I will tell them what they are trying to do is wrong, that education is a basic right.” All of this can lead us to several conclusions. 1.) Words do indeed have the power to incite, to inspire, to raise us up from a pit of depression and despair. 2.) So much of the rhetoric we use is tied up in our values and the stories we tell ourselves. Understanding how words gain their power, through different modes and contexts, is at its core, the goal of Critical Thinking and Writing.

In this class, we examine rhetoric in its myriad forms, to understand how we can shape words and even images to persuade someone of our point of view. We examine oratory in the form of famous and contemporary speeches, written rhetoric in the form of articles and opinion editorials, and visual rhetoric in the form of advertisements, political cartoons, and documentaries. We also examine the different contexts for rhetoric, exploring how politics can complicate our notions of persuasion. Like any Honors class, students must sift through disparate and often conflicting viewpoints, many of which have merit. Students then practice the art of persuasion in their own writing and speaking through journals, presentations, discussion leader projects, essays, and a formal debate. Beyond a burgeoning awareness of rhetoric, however, my not-so-secret goal is to facilitate a genuine exchange of ideas in a safe academic space and to foster more active, concerned citizenship in the process. I too engage in a deep examination of my own viewpoints and the rhetoric I find most appealing, further dismantling and re-shaping my worldview in the process. I often learn something new about the subjects my students are most passionate about as well.

Because this class examines more advanced forms of rhetoric and argumentation, English 101, our Introduction to Composition course, is a pre-requisite. As Scientific Thought & Data Analysis does with science and math, this course offers a foundational look at how we understand the written word, from Aristotle to Toulmin and beyond. Together, both courses form the foundation for our current academic disciplines and thus, the foundation for the entire Honors program. Both courses will change how you think about Science and English, respectively, which will have ripple effects on how you view everything from a political debate to the latest news article on the Higgs-Boson.

And next semester, look for my newest course offering: ENG 200-C, a class for members of Congress to sift through differing points of view without shutting the entire government down. Ah . . ., if only.

—Melissa Reddish
Honors Students Share Memories of Classes

One the most memorable moments I can recall from the Honors Program at Wor-Wic was the debates in ENG200H. Taking on the broad subject of Financial Aid, we discussed how Financial Aid is being abused and what can be done to curb the abuse. Naturally, in the class setting, not every student landed on the side of the argument that they supported. At first it felt odd debating on a side I did not agree with, but I knew that feeling would go away with a “win,” so my peers and I fought on. By the end of the debate, the competitiveness was easily detected by the intense, yet courteous, and often brilliant arguments coming from students who may or may not truly support the side they were representing. This is the unique setting the Honors program provides. Overall, the Honors Program at Wor-Wic provided me an exclusive and engaged community, almost fraternity-like, that has helped shape my future and how I will get there.

— Joey Sabo

The moment which stands out as the most memorable from any of my Honors Program classes is definitely a rather heated discussion on race which took place in Dr. Bartlett’s Honors English 151 class. It was towards the end of a semester in which our class had read and watched many works which were emotionally charged and often stirred up polarizing feelings in my classmates and myself. Although it was admittedly a bit upsetting at the time and a moment I was initially hesitant to write about, the discussion and the ones leading up to it are so memorable to me precisely because of how different they were from any other experience I have had here at Wor-Wic. The small class sizes and the freedom of expression available in Honors Program classes leads to a very engaging environment, wherein students and instructors are free to talk openly with one another and express a wide variety of views, and though this may sometimes lead to a clash of opinions, it is exactly these type of experiences which are an important part of the college experience.

— Sierra Fleming
An Honors Student’s Vivid Memory . . .

"Why are you guys all moving away from me? I really need you to stop,” Dr. Yurek implored his baffled students, expression completely serious, as he slid his spinning desk chair slowly away from them. “Seriously guys, this isn’t okay. We’re trying to have class here.” His chair backed into the wall as his students exchanged glances that betrayed a mixture of confusion and amusement. Dr. Yurek would go on to claim that he was in fact completely stationary the whole time, and that it was the rest of the classroom that was moving away from him. This is only one of many clever illustrations Dr. Yurek used to demonstrate the difficult concept of relativity. We had many scintillating discussions in that class, coupled by a slough of creative metaphors, but I think this one stuck with me solely because, although the students found it humorously absurd, Dr. Yurek was completely serious. According to Einstein, he was really holding still, and we really were moving away from him. That ability to consider abstract concepts and think about old ideas in new ways will endure in his students long after they’ve forgotten that which they learned by rote in order to pass their various exams.

—Nicholas Dasher

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