Dr. James Stellar: Vision for Honors Education

By Mirren Galway and Gina Tan

On December 6, we had the honor of speaking with Dr. James Stellar about his thoughts on the development of honors education. Since joining the University at Albany, Dr. Stellar has added to his vast experience in higher education administration as Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, and as Interim President. Working as teacher, laboratory researcher, and upper administrator has inspired his passion for experiential learning as a necessary aspect of higher education. Built on a base of academic excellence, coupled with affordability, Dr. Stellar spoke passionately about integrating internship, study abroad, and volunteer opportunities, into an honors curriculum. This, he believes, will allow students to gain real world experience as well as an increased sense of maturity within their fields. When encouraged to work in a professional community, undergraduate students will be elevated to study at a graduate level. This is the style of leadership that Dr. Stellar believes we should strive for: “student centered, authentic, genuine, and powerful.” It is a win-win situation for both the students and the University.

When asked about what we can do to continue developing the Honors College, Dr. Stellar spoke to the importance of community, and how he has worked with students in an academic setting while emphasizing the feeling of camaraderie and family within academia. On this topic, Dr. Stellar said, “there are ways to do things that, I think, can synergize with the fundamental mission through teaching by example, to create this unconscious bias toward authenticity, as well as uplifting and real role models.” He is very optimistic about what the Honors College has accomplished and what it can become, highlighting the importance of an ever-developing community of scholars and lifelong learners. Dr. Stellar has played a very active role since the Honors College transited from an honors program three years ago, and he deserves our thanks for his boundless support in our College and our success as students.
Singing, Piano, Comedy, Oh My!

BY VICTORIA PALMIERI

There is only one possible outcome when you give Honors students the stage and throw in two hilarious hosts: a recipe for a memorable evening. On October 29th, 2018, the Honors College put on its second Annual Talent Show, allowing students to showcase their abilities and share some laughs with their peers. Held in the Recital Hall of the Performing Arts Center, the venue proved to be a comfy, cozy, and welcoming escape from the brisk weather outside. Thanks to Dean Chang and everyone who offered their talents to the show for the night—it was one to be remembered.

Throughout the hour and a half show, the audience enjoyed a variety of surprises. From vocal performances in different languages to comedy acts that had everyone on their feet, the show was a great way to channel a vessel of creativity for the participants and was equally enjoyable for all who came to watch. Between acts, hosts Mirren Galway and Yatin Zirath entertained the crowd with jokes and playfully quarrelsome dialogue. Meanwhile, every performance from the lineup took the show to a new level, as the audience was treated to piano duets, instrumentals, songs by talented performers, stand up comedy, and everything in between.

The Talent Show is one event among many that reinforces the Honors College’s sense of community and the ways the students come together to create an exceptional product. Not only was it a great night out, all the hard work put in by everyone evidently paid off. Being able to see the culmination of the otherwise hidden passions and hobbies of the Honors College students was a great experience. It’s safe to say that everyone is already excited about next year’s show!
In the library, one often sees students biting away on their pens. Ever wondered why? The act of biting stimulates the jaw muscles which sends sensory information to the proprioceptive system. The system then increases one's alertness, making one more focused. So instead of reaching for that can of energy drink next time, just do 10 quick jumping jacks (but not in the library)! You'll feel energized in no time.

**Meet Your Major**

Ms. Amico-Dziezynski (mother of honors student Corynn), along with her furry companion Bri, joined us to talk about her profession as both an Occupational Therapist and Physical Therapist. She spoke of the ins-and-outs of her practice, in terms of domain of knowledge, type of client, equipment, and skills needed in each.

Halfway through her presentation, Ms. Amico-Dizezynski told the whole room to stand up. With confused faces, the Honors students complied. In a cheery tone, she explained that “at this point, we’re all tired and need a quick refresher.” She then told us to do 10 jumping jacks and to squeeze our hands afterwards. Students laughed and then jumped around. After the activities, she asked us how we felt. Surprised, everyone in the room said they suddenly felt more energized!

With a smile and a nod, she proceeded to tell us about the proprioceptive system: the very reason we felt energized. The proprioceptive system allows us to pick up objects without needing to look at them. It tells us the relative positioning of our own limbs. It also regulates our alertness, which is why we became energized after moving around. Some actually use the system without even knowing it.

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**Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy: Tips to Stay Awake!**

*by Kate Sazon*

When we hear “physical therapy” or “occupational therapy,” most of us imagine patients in hospitals or rehabilitation centers. Although both occupations are used in these settings, you might not realize that tips and tricks from these two occupations can be applied in your own life!

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To celebrate the festivities this October 31st, members of the Honors College Event Planning Committee turned the Campus Center Assembly Hall into a “spook-tacular” spot for a monster mash. All sorts of creatures turned up for a good time with friends and good food. You might have seen a Baby Shark, Bob's Builders, Jake from State Farm, or even a shiny pink unicorn! Our own in-house DJ Saad Ahmad set the musical mood for the evening. John Denver’s “Take Me Home, Country Roads” proved to be a crowd favorite and had everyone singing at the top of their lungs. Students enjoyed entering the costume contest and snapping photos by the photo wall.

Dr. D’Cruz shares some words of wisdom with Honors freshman Saad Ahmad

Who Can You Trust?

By Chamberlain Harris

On Thursday, October 18th, Dr. Jason D’Cruz, Associate Professor and Director of the Honors Program for the Philosophy Department, spoke with us about how humans make decisions to trust others. His presentation was an engaging combination of his research and interactive games to explain real life situations regarding trust. He had the audience play two different games of trust. The first game focused on trusting strangers and illustrated how there are different types of people who will either choose to cooperate with you or cheat at your expense.

The second game asked whether one person, if given 10 dollars, would take the opportunity to make 20 dollars by sending it to another person. It shows how most people tend to be cynical and choose to keep the 10 dollars rather than try for the 20, even though a large majority of people would return the money so the first person would receive more money.

Each game had a purpose relating to his research. The first is related to research on vampire bats who had cheater detection and honesty signals set up, to trusting strangers and human sharing within their communities. These systems ensure that members always cooperated and exploiters punished. The second game related trust issues seen in services like Uber and Airbnb. He also discussed how scholars reasoned about trust and theories such as “tit for tat” and reciprocal altruism.

Prof. D’Cruz also discussed how reasoning is an important life skill. He said it is “very important for those who want to go into graduate school,” adding that philosophy majors also score highest in the LSAT. D’Cruz reminded everyone that for these very reasons, they should try a philosophy class before they graduate. Philosophy disciplines the mind no matter what domain you choose to fashion your future.

Dr. D’Cruz probes the audience for definitions of trust and what we think would warrant it

A Spooky Celebration

“Boys and girls of every age, wouldn’t you like to see something strange? Come with us and you will see, this our town of Halloween.”

—Nightmare Before Christmas

Dr. D’Cruz integrated sociologically themed games into his presentation to provide a more interactive experience
Most of us know what the FBI is, whether from watching a true crime show on TV or just following the news. These sources often depict FBI agents as mysterious and top-notch athletes. Although there are such special agents, there are a variety of different jobs available. Special Agent Mr. David Fallon recently came to the Honors College to talk about his profession. He talked about the myths and various duties that came with being a special agent. He even went through a whole case that kept the audience captivated the whole time.

The case concerns a young girl who went missing and how the FBI tried to find out why she disappeared. Mr. Fallon works with cases involving missing children and child abductions. He deploys teams to investigate such cases and trains local police departments in how to respond. While Mr. Fallon enjoys working such cases, this type of work might not be everyone’s cup of tea. Fear not, for Mr. Fallon also talked about the other possible jobs in the FBI.

According to Mr. Fallon, “The superstars of the FBI team are the tech people.” Their jobs include tracking down criminals using technology such as geofencing and cell-towers. They are also able to learn a multitude of information from a person’s cell phone. With most people having cell phones, this is an important set of skills for the FBI to apply. In the case discussed during the presentation, tech people allowed the FBI team to precisely pinpoint where the abductor lived.

While technology experts comprise a crucial part of the FBI, there are also other critical specializations, such as behavioral analysis. These experts try to discern the motives behind a criminal’s actions. From the smallest details, they are able to determine a motive. Behavioral analysts also talk to victims of crime. Often, a victim can reveal information that might aid the case. Behavioral analysts helped Mr. Fallon and the investigative team create a profile of the criminal.

Many people may know of the FBI but overlook the numerous fields that the agency needs. Don’t shy away from doing a job just because it doesn’t look like it matches with your major. You never know where you might end up in the future. So, go out there and explore the various opportunities available!

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**Steinmetz/Melville: Place to Chat and Share!**

- **Peer Mentoring in Steinmetz!** Beginning in early November, honors upperclassmen in different areas of study have held office hours in the Steinmetz office to share their experiences and help with questions you might have. Thanks to Peter Gajic, Tyler Jetjomlong, Jayda Melnitsky, and Caroline Veldhuizen as our pioneer mentors, and to more who will join next semester!
- **Stop by the Steinmetz basement lounge to enjoy some hot coffee!** You will find a Keurig coffee maker in the key-controlled study room, together with K-cups, creamer, and sugar, to make good coffee.
From November 7th to November 10th, Honors College faculty members (Dean Chang, Prof. Holt, and Anita Hanson) and four students (Maksim Papenkov, Sam Strine; Paige Wright, and Brian Yu) presented two panels and one paper in the 2018 National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) Conference, held in Boston. Samantha Strine’s paper was accepted. Maksim Papenkov presented his research poster on systematic risk-factors among U.S. stock market sectors; his presentation was so well attended that he almost had a sore throat from talking so much! Brian Yu and Paige Wright presented as members of Professors Holt’s research panel pertaining to experiential learning and pet adoption. The presentation was a well-rehearsed three-part presentation, with lively interaction among the presenters, and offered a unique view of transgression (the theme of the conference) and honors education.

Dean Chang and Anita Hanson presented their findings on how UAlbany’s Honors College is transitioning successfully from an Honors Program to a four-year Honors College. They explored structural and cultural changes undertaken over the past two and a half years, and their presentation was met with enthusiastic feedback. Several audience members were especially curious about the “4.0 mugs”—a special gift for students who achieve this academic accomplishment during any semester—as a cultural symbol indicating UAlbany Honors College’s focus on academic success.

All of UAlbany’s presentations were noteworthy and stood out from the crowd, and audience members made this fact known at every presentation. In addition to the poster and panel presentations, there were also a wide variety of activities for students who attended NCHC. One night there was a comedy show, and the next there was an icebreaker party with dozens of raffle items. During the day there was also a multitude of vendors and organizations tabling. Overall it was a wonderful experience that students should consider taking an advantage of next year—so start prepping your own research posters!

A Very Honors Thanksgiving
Murder Most Foul
BY JULIE JASEWICZ

On Tuesday, November 27th, Jayda turned the Steinmetz study room into an asylum full of deception and murder. A group of 10 Honors Students came together to act out a murder mystery. Over pizza, the group got into their characters as patients, nurses and guards desperately trying to detect who was the murderer.
Small classes with complex topics in the honors curriculum allow students to express their creative freedom in unfettered ways. In Prof. McCarty’s human trafficking seminar, each of us needed to find some means to raise awareness about human trafficking and ways to fight it.

Easily the most impactful piece in the class was the original poem recited by Mika Ella Rectin-Hernandez, who highlighted the immeasurable pain that trafficking survivors experience (see her video at https://tinyurl.com/yaltqzpq, also to be showcased in "Homeland Security Today"). Complete with a "For King and Country" song, the video depicts stages of a trafficked girl’s life and how becoming trafficked abruptly alters it. The poem also describes how the women are recovering, reminding themselves that they are more than just a commodity.

With the help of clubs like Students Stopping Trafficking, and the Exploitation of People, as well as the Mixed Martial Arts Collective, I held a panel with those who are involved with cases of human trafficking—modern slavery. Many talked about how raising awareness was a major issue, because most communities don’t believe it’s everywhere—even in Albany.

Some of us held free movie nights about issues in human trafficking while others offered awareness events with organizations on campus. A few of us donated directly to organizations that fund and provide services for trafficked victims, such as St. Anne’s Institute and Eyes Wide Open. Some volunteered with these groups and worked with survivors to normalize their lives. Others went down to the state Capitol to lobby for legislation providing more services for victims of trafficking.

According to Prof. McCarty, “The students’ projects demonstrated that each of us can make a difference in our own way. Their enthusiasm has motivated me to work even harder to raise awareness about human trafficking and to support survivors as best I can.” The success of applied learning in this class is a testament to how well it works and to the abilities of our students.
By M. Grace Hren
For the past two years, I’ve been working on my Biology Honors Thesis as an undergraduate researcher for the Rangan Lab in the RNA Institute at UAlbany. Working in a biology lab has allowed me to see the tangible side of biology, rather than just learning about it in the classroom. Research is a great way to get involved with the material you’re learning in a more “hands-on” manner, and I’ve enjoyed it for this reason. Next semester, I’m planning on studying abroad in Madrid, Spain. I had a hard time fitting a semester abroad into my schedule, but I decided to work to finish my thesis a semester early so I could attain this goal. I have had an amazing three and a half years at UAlbany and I can’t wait to experience all Spain has to offer in my final semester.

By Claire McCulley
During my first 3 years of college, I genuinely didn’t think I would be able to start and finish an honors thesis, but I’m so glad I did. I was able to combine my favorite topics—film and mental health policy—into a multidisciplinary exploration of how horror films have stigmatized the mentally ill and impacted both public perception of mental illness and mental health legislation since 1980. This experience has not only strengthened my ability to research, analyze, and write but also solidified my desire to pursue a graduate degree in Social Welfare and ultimately become a social worker.

By Ilene Rothman
My honors thesis, "Removing Prejudice from Online Job Applications," is about how hiring processes should strive to be blind. Well-known social networking employment sites such as LinkedIn have popularized the use of having a profile picture accompany a candidate’s online resume. By doing this, LinkedIn allows recruiters to judge a candidate based on this photo. A photo may indicate a candidate’s race and can lead to prejudice. The new blind hiring process I have created will also remove a candidate’s name from their application for this same reason. Dr. Van Ness served as the advisor for my thesis.

HONORS STUDENTS GRADUATING IN DECEMBER 2018:

Leah Glosky, Psychology
Visual Search Array Structure and Satisfaction of Search Errors: Evidence from Eye Movements

Keily Linger, CEHC

Natasha Permaul, Human Biology
RACK1 Facilitates Efficient Translation of Viral and Cellular IRESs

Ilene Rothman, Business
Removing Prejudice from Online Job Applications

Nina Williams, Biological Sciences
The Effect of the Zika Virus on RNA Stress Granule Components

HONORS STUDENTS GRADUATING IN MAY 2019 BUT WHO HAVE ALREADY SUBMITTED THEIR THESSES:

M. Grace Hren, Biological Sciences
RNA Secondary Structure of 3’UTR Regulates Translation Control

Claire McCulley, Public Administration and Policy
“I’m Not Gonna Hurt You—I’m Just Gonna Bash Your Brains in”: A Comparative Analysis of Horror Films and Mental Health Policy in America

Saying goodbye isn’t easy

THE HONORS COLLEGE WISHES THESE GRADUATING STUDENTS THE BEST AS THEY HEAD TOWARDS THEIR NEXT ADVENTURE!

WE HOPE TO SEE THEM BACK TO BRING INSIGHTS TO ALL OF US!
I am a Biology and Psychology major. After taking a Research Methods in Psychology course with Dr. Heather Sheridan in my sophomore year, I grew fascinated with her research and asked to join her Visual Cognition Lab. Our lab is rooted in neuroscience and focuses on how the brain processes information using advanced technologies such as eye tracking and electroencephalography (EEG).

After four semesters as a research assistant, I am currently working on my honors thesis as the principle investigator for the experiment. My study is based on a phenomenon found in radiology known as the “Satisfaction of Search.” Satisfaction of search, or SOS, is observed when a radiologist is looking at an X-Ray for abnormalities and upon detection of one abnormality, will fail to detect another one. SOS errors account for between one fifth and one third of errors in radiology and other diagnostic medicines due to “premature closure” of a search. I am interested in going into the field of radiology after my undergraduate studies and want to know why the doctor’s brain “shuts down,” so to speak, after finding an initial error. As an undergraduate student, I tailored my SOS experiment to the resources I had available to me, so I substituted doctors for students, and X-Rays for English composition. My goal was to see the same SOS effect in students as radiologists and to see what is happening in the brain when one performs a visual search task.

Although this research is not something that would be found in the biology department, the skills I have learned as to how to conduct and analyze an experiment are very similar. Starting from conceiving the project, I created a hypothesis and a null; looked at sample size; and fashioned an experimental design accounting for randomization and controls. In data analysis, I did hypothesis testing; looked at significance with a t-test; ran an ANOVA for detection of targets; looked at errors and power; and employed correlation and other statistical measures that biologists use. I also incorporated computing techniques and learned MATLAB coding to create my experiment.

I presented my research at UAlbany’s 15th Annual Undergraduate Research Conference in Spring 2018 and received the Presidential Award for Undergraduate Research. After completing my thesis, I plan on submitting it for publication, where I will be the first author. I am very proud of my research :)

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The Honors Newsletter is proud to feature some of the many amazing clubs this university has to offer. Interested in one of these clubs? Just message their leaders via the following social media links to find out more!

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<td>Lexy Brooks</td>
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