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SPRING 2021

villanova honors

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# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER



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Dear Honors Alumni,

I am delighted to pen this letter to you, our esteemed alumni. I took over as Director of the Honors Program in September 2020 after Dr. Thomas W. Smith's decade-long tenure. Dr. Smith transformed our Program into a University-wide initiative, grew enrollment from 500 to more than 700 students, and redesigned the curriculum in consultation with faculty from across the University. The signature "Interdisc" program blossomed into a series of living and learning cohorts, each of which offers a multi-semester sequence, some of which are tethered to particular disciplinary interests. He built an extraordinary administrative team that has attended to every aspect of the Villanova Honors experience. As a result of his efforts, the Honors Program enjoys the highest student retention rate at the University. When I took over the reins, the carriage was running beautifully.

Looking back on my first year as Director, I feel so much pride about how our administration, faculty, staff, and most especially our students turned the challenges of Covid into triumphs. You'll see examples of this in the following pages, from the close community that Honors freshman formed in St. Monica's despite Covid restrictions to the sparkling theses our seniors completed. Fran Caponi, O.S.A., himself an Honors alum, joined our community this year as an affiliate faculty. Next year, Fr. Caponi will move into the freshman dorm as Honors Chaplain.

One of my goals during this next chapter in Honors is to strengthen the bonds between our current students and alumni. First steps in this direction include inviting you to a virtual "Reunion" event on September 14 at 4:00pm EST, as well as providing opportunities for you to mentor seniors who are writing their theses and host our *Vocare* Summer Fellows at your workplace (further information about these opportunities can be found on page 6).

The 2021-2022 academic year will find us engaging in a curricular review, establishing an overarching communications plan, building out the Shaping a Life initiative, and enhancing the freshman living and learning experience. Each of these efforts ensure that the best and the brightest at Villanova are transformed in heart and mind.

Most fundamentally, I look forward to ensuring that the promises made in our mission statement – to prepare students for a life of leadership and service to their community – become a reality for each graduating class.

Warm regards,

Anna Bonta Moreland, Ph.D.  
Anne Quinn Welsh Endowed Director

# LIFE IN THE FRESHMAN HONORS DORM

by Catherine Messier '24

Villanova is well-known for its great sense of community, and the freshman Honors dorm certainly represents this value well. St. Monica Hall on South Campus brings together Honors freshmen in a welcoming environment that allows living and learning with other members of the Honors community. Through seeing the same friendly faces in the hallways of St. Monica Hall and in Honors classes, freshmen are able to find compatible peers who make lifelong friends. I have loved living in St. Monica Hall because the tight-knit community has helped me find my closest friends and a sense of belonging in an unprecedented time where making connections is difficult. Here are some of the other reasons the Class of 2024 loves the Honors dorm!



“Coming into Villanova, it was a lot at once with new people, places, and responsibilities. The Honors dorm helped me find a smaller community within the larger Villanova one that I’m so glad I got to be part of. From finding my closest friends to working on class projects with others in the Honors dorm, I have been able to grow and find my way through being a part of the Honors community.”  
- Avleen Kaur



“I met my closest friends at St. Mo’s! We are all so different but share a common love for learning. It’s exciting to have intellectual conversations both inside and outside the classroom!”  
- Bianca Carzo



“One of the best parts about living in St. Mo’s is having an Honors student as our RA. She gives the best advice and knows exactly what it’s like to be in our position.”  
- Natalie DiDomenico

“I loved the Honors dorm because I loved living and learning with the same people! Our conversations persisted in and outside of the classroom which allowed me to bond with all of my peers!”  
- Rachel Rhee

“My favorite thing about living in the Honors dorm has been the sense of community and willingness to help one another!”  
- Katherine Flynn

“My favorite thing about living in St. Mo’s is having my classmates and friends in the same hall as me!”  
- Maddy McMaster



“I liked living in St. Monica Hall because of the tightknit Honors community I found in my hallway. I loved seeing the same faces in my classes as I did on my floor!”  
- Natalie Dawn



**"BECOME WHAT YOU ARE NOT YET"  
REFLECTIONS OF A 'COVID SENIOR'**

by Erin Fabian '21

***"Become what you are not yet."***

The above quotation from St. Augustine might make Villanova current students and past alumni remember promotional material from their Blue Key Tour, or bring back harrowing memories of carefully crafted college essays. For me, it makes me think of a certain professor whose opinion of this inspirational quotation is as follows: "Well, of course. Think about it. What else can you become...except what you are not yet? That's the very meaning of becoming." After all, St. Augustine was not a fan of the idea of unconscious or accidentally becoming (i.e. "change for change's sake"), but rather wanted a person to be present to the process of becoming. The fuller sentiment is from a sermon, encouraging the listener: "Do not be content with what you are, if you want to become what you are not yet." Just the latter half seems like the easiest process in the world, however with the added valuation of avoiding complacency, Augustine's message changes. In order to be properly ordered to becoming, one must seek it themselves, rather than letting it painlessly arrive unannounced on its own.

A lot has changed since I started as a Freshman at Villanova in the Fall of 2017, which is the understatement of the century. "Becoming" has been evident everywhere: Campus has gained new buildings, the wi-fi service has improved for the Zoom Era, and Holy Grounds cold brew vastly outranks the hot coffee over ice from years past. Much of what I love about Villanova though, has stayed the same—the friendly waves throughout campus, the daffodils appearing out of nowhere after the last snow melts, and Falvey library as a welcome refuge most every night. But back to Augustine, it seems like a pretty obvious answer to the imperative call of Villanova—how can we help but become what we are not yet every single day? Even without conscious effort who we are unfolds further each day, whether or not we recognize our growth. Critically though, the recognition of that growth is what helps to propel us forward, rather than simply being adrift in aimless "progress."

I think that this idea of being present to continued growth is what has gotten me through much of my year as a 'Covid Senior.' From the closure of Kelly's to the Pavilion's new role as a spit collection center, things have become what they had not been previously. But I have changed along with them too, for better or for worse, but all for the sake of becoming the next version of me—one that invigorates me rather than just leaving me 'content.'



At the beginning of this year, it felt really easy to just let change overtake, rather than fully recognizing the good and the bad of the altered everyday. However, as I began to learn, even if things felt stagnant, the small changes felt much more monumental than usual. And the monumental changes were met with terrified exuberance. The two weeks before the big changes are always the scariest part, because when the change arrives we simply cannot help but become what we are not yet. Change sweeps us along, whether we want it to or not, so being properly ordered to the change is the only way to not be consumed by that sweeping.

Looking back over my four years at Villanova as an alumna, time seems to have progressed astronomically fast. It feels strange to be writing so seriously about a time so wonderful, exciting, and fun in my life, but it seems as if formative experiences beget some sobriety. Obviously there is some sadness that comes with any ending, and with big life events often comes rumination on aging (because I am 22 and am totally justified in feeling old). There is such a way as to move forward and not just beyond, I believe, with a gathering mindset rather than a severing one. As myself and my fellow graduating classmates move on towards new jobs, graduate school, volunteer opportunities, and more, I know we will not shed, but evolve in our identity as "Villanovans." After all, we are continuing to become, pushed along by the flexing logic of our present minds and the inarguable logic of pure time.

Villanova is a community, and this strange year full of unprecedented situations (including the unprecedented situation of learning to long for 'precedented' times) has proven this reality. Although the ideas of 'community spirit' and the 'Caritas Commitment' may have gotten cumbersome over the year, real truths often become annoying to hear. As any student that has been through the Honors Program understands, the value of searching for Goodness, Beauty, and Truth persists. Despite everything, I think we got a little closer to understanding that transcendence this year. Even though it has been years since my Augustinian Culture Seminar, I think looking back on the roots of my first classes helps me to "not be content" as I gain years and (hopefully) wisdom. In the future, I hope myself and all Villanovans are driven by discontent to continue to learn what they do not know yet, love those that they do not love yet, and become who they are not yet. After all, what else can we do?



## TEACHING DURING THE PANDEMIC: INTERVIEW WITH AN HONORS ALUM

by Viktoria Kall '22



I recently had the opportunity to interview one of the many successful Villanova Honors College alumni, Mr. Robert McNamara. Robert is currently in his sixth year as an English teacher for grades 11 and 12 in the Jenkintown School District, about a half hour from Villanova's campus. I wanted to not only hear about Robert's experience in the Honors Program and how that may be impactful on his life as a teacher, but also the toils of being an educator during the times of COVID.

Originally from Maple Glen, Pennsylvania, Robert graduated from Villanova in 2008 with a Philosophy major and Sociology minor. He returned to receive his Master's in Education from Villanova in 2012. On top of his career successes as a teacher, as well as outside the classroom coaching high school football and middle school basketball, Robert is also the father of a newborn baby with his wife who he met at Villanova!

When asked what his favorite aspect about being in the Honors Program was, Robert gushed as he reminisced on how influential the experience was throughout his four years in Villanova undergrad.

"It was hugely impactful for me," he said.

"I would say that in the teaching I do now, I do my best to emulate that experience that I got in the Villanova Honors Program. I think the biggest thing for me is that being in the Honors Program taught me to love big ideas and intellectual thought. All throughout high school I got good grades and did everything I needed to do, but I can't say that I loved school or ever thought about school in my free time. Because of the Honors Program, though, and the professors and interactions I had, for the first time ever on a Friday night I was talking with friends about something we had talked about in class that week."

Understandably, the "new normal" of the pandemic is not the way Robert had envisioned his teaching career to go. When the pandemic hit, there were a myriad of adjustments that needed to be made in order to account for the health and safety of students and staff alike, including the incorporation of an online classroom. Currently, Robert teaches a hybrid model, where students attend some class sessions in person, and others virtually.

When asked about the adjustments he has made, he said, "I think the biggest adjustment this year has been two things actually. One is just trying to build a sense of community with a class, especially when it is a hybrid format. Trying to run a seminar discussion and build a sense of classroom identity and community has definitely been a goal of mine. This environment has made it more tricky and challenging than usual. For me, the promise I made to my students in the beginning of this school year was I was going to try to make their experience in my class as

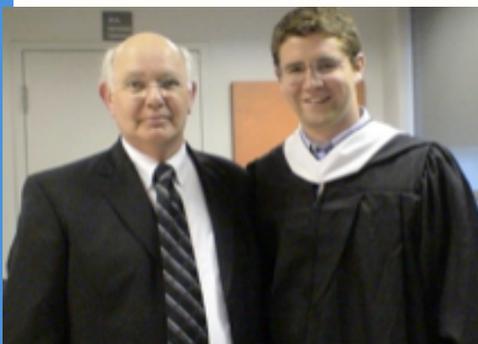
close as possible to a normal school year. I wanted to give them some feeling of normalcy, not like a special COVID curriculum."

Despite grandiose efforts, it is arguable that this new style has had a negative impact on some students. Robert stated that as a result of this hybrid teaching model, he feels as though the gap between students who do well and students who struggle has widened. Those that more heavily depend on in-person interaction with their teachers or need extra guidance to stay on task and keep up with assignments, now lack that instruction that proves to be so key to their learning and overall success in school.



Nevertheless, there are still aspects of this new "virtual" classroom that Robert has come to appreciate, such as the ability and ease of virtual parent-teacher conferences. Despite this, in Robert's eyes, the negatives are still outweighing the positives, and he makes it incredibly clear that he hopes things will one day be able to go back to "normal."

According to Robert, "Something that I've been kind of big on is that this is not a teaching style that I want to get very good at. One thing you can definitely take away from Honors is that being in a classroom with people is essential. I do not want this to be any sort of a permanent mode."



**Mr. Robert McNamara (right) with Dr. Goff, the director of the Honors Program when Robert was a student at Villanova**

**THESIS SPOTLIGHTS**



"My thesis focuses on the college-to-career pathway and how our consumption of media, mentorship, and education has set a rigid definition of success within the post-graduate world. I hope that my research will serve as a springboard for normalizing endeavors that don't revolve around these professional expectations, and my thesis can play a role in extinguishing the shame that comes along with the pursuit of non-traditional (or even unknown) paths."

**-Ally Porzio '21**



"Within cosmetics, I have found that most popular brands fail to properly represent Black women within their brands if they even feature products for them at all. My project specifically focuses on rhetorically analyzing shade names within brands' foundation shade ranges from a Black Feminist perspective. My thesis will argue that the rhetorical meaning structures that many brands reproduce for their shades hypersexualize and exoticize Black women by associating their skin complexions with edible food items like espresso, hazelnut, cocoa, and mocha. This association tantalizes Black women, while paler shades are often associated with objects related to white femininity and purity (i.e. ivory or porcelain)."

**-Chloe Benson '21**



"My family roots in Argentina have exposed me to the influence natural resources, particularly hydrocarbons, can have on the development of a country. My thesis works to bridge the gap between the political and economic literature on the state's role in managing hydrocarbon resources in Latin America through the case study of Argentina's oil and natural gas industry in the last decade. I hope that my project will provide an open-minded perspective on these challenges that resource-rich countries face as they work to provide for their citizens."

**-Bernard Zitzewitz '21**



"In my thesis, I'm taking a look at the songs of two different species of chickadees that are hybridizing (interbreeding) at our field site in Kempton, PA. Using acoustic and genetic data from 2016-2020, I'm hoping to understand whether song learning and production depends more strongly on male chickadee ancestry or cultural transmission. I hope that this project will contribute to the study of acoustic signaling, as well as create a foundation for future undergraduate research on the topic."

**-Ari Abbrescia '21**



"Over the last 20 years, the Chinese central government has been concerned with how borderland history manifests throughout three provinces: Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia. In looking at these three cases, my thesis seeks to answer the question: what triggers central government intervention into borderland areas? Through analyzing government response via economic, security, and policy means to both internal and external trigger events, I argue that as the central government perceives increased threat to the stability of the Chinese nation-state in its border regions, they respond through increased repression of minority groups."

**-Jackson Sweeney '21**

# SAVE THE DATE

Virtual Gathering - Honors *In*Formal  
A Conversation with Director, Dr. Anna Moreland  
September 14, 2021  
4 pm EST

## LOOKING FOR MENTORS FOR OUR *VOCARE* SUMMER FELLOWS!

Working in a nonprofit or in a nontraditional career field?  
Join our network to host *Vocare* Summer Fellows!  
For more information, contact  
[honorsprogram@villanova.edu](mailto:honorsprogram@villanova.edu).

### THANK YOU!

First, we would like to thank *you* readers for taking the time to stay up to date with the happenings of the Villanova Honors Program! A special thank you also goes out to those who contributed their time, energy, and creativity to the content creation and design of this newsletter:

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### Connect with us!



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