

The Junto

RMU Honors Program Newsletter

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MAY 2011

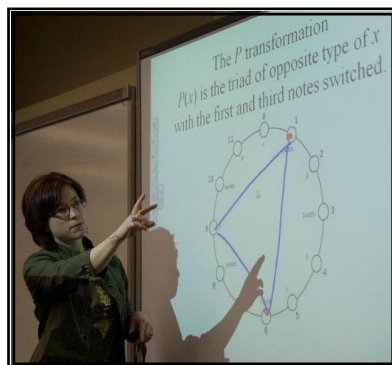
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Music, Math, and Art: A Seminar

For the first time ever, this past spring Robert Morris University offered “Music, Math and Art.” This class, an honors seminar, bridged the gap between these three unique subjects, with Media Arts professor Heather Pinson handling the music and art topics, and professor Monica VanDieren the math sections, making up a kind of dream team of professors. Everyone learned something, even the teachers. The highlight of the class was at the end, when each student (or small groups) created and presented a cross-disciplinary project that related the concepts introduced in the class.

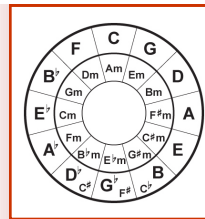
—Alexandria Antonacci



Prof. Monica VanDieren

“My brain got a workout every class!”

—Ashten Farah



Prof. Heather Pinson
(profiled on page 2)

Know that the ladder you climb to your roof
Is just ‘C’ in a diagram in a Pythagoras proof
Know that the integral of the natural log of x
Is just another page in an Archimedes text

Know that the impossible stairs in ‘Inception’
Are just another example of Escher’s deception
Know that your beautiful home, the place you know
Is just another Golden Ratio

But most of all, know your past
Know the creators and the concepts that last
Know that all math, all music, all art
Has spawned from a mind, a soul, and a heart

Willing to go where others refused
Willing to give a chance the ideas that others abused
Willing to fail for the sake of success
For failure is part of the creative process

—from “It came to me,” a poem about the Math,
Music and Art course, by Travis Loncar

Seminar Instructor

Dr. Heather Pinson

Dr. Heather Pinson has degrees in Music, Musicology, and Interdisciplinary Arts and teaches courses on art and music history at Robert Morris University. As an Assistant Professor in both the Communication and Media Arts departments, she coordinates the Humanities 1010: Art and Music undergraduate core course and continues to develop new courses for RMU. In addition to her training as a classical violinist, she performs rock and jazz regularly in the greater Pittsburgh and Ohio area and was a composer in residence for the Distillery Program of Pittsburgh's Brew House Association. Heather publishes predominately on popular music, jazz, aesthetics, and race theory and is the author of *The Jazz Image: Seeing Music Through Herman Leonard's Photography*, published by the University Press of Mississippi, which examines the photographs of African American jazz musicians during the 1950s and 1960s.



Relay for Life

The 2011 Relay for Life of Moon Township was held at Robert Morris University this year in Joe Walton Stadium. This event gives a chance for individuals to celebrate the lives of those who battled cancer, remember loved ones lost, and fight back against the disease. At the Relay, teams of people set up tents and camped out on the field for a full 24 hours, beginning on Saturday, April 9th at 4:00 P.M. Throughout the event, members from each team, as well as anyone else attending the event, walked around the "track" established on the field. One could collect a paperclip each time around to keep track of their laps. Each team was asked to have a representative on the track at all times.

The RMU Honors team had a great time at the relay offering smores, meatball subs, and hosting corn-hole tournaments. Each team set an individual goal for an amount of money to be raised in various ways. RMU Honors raised a total of \$1,226 and proudly represented the RMU Honors Program. Overall, over \$28,000 was raised at the event to help fight cancer. A big Thank You for all of those who participated and made this such a memorable and exciting event!

— Phil Timcheck



Meeting at the Roundtable

A Look Into Current Events in Egypt

With all the news we have been hearing about Egypt through the media, RMU Professor Georges Montillet gave us a different perspective in his presentation on Monday, February 14. Prof. Montillet, an Arabist who not only spent time in Egypt personally, but took some RMU students there last summer, has met and befriended some of the Egyptians who are currently protesting in Cairo. Using Facebook to show posted pictures and videos, he was able to share with us first-hand information from a point of view unlike what is often shown in the news. We also discussed the corruption and trouble that has been occurring within the Egyptian government. A large emphasis was placed on the difference between the police and the military. Because of the huge amount of power the policemen hold, they are not responsible for their actions, and some civilians are starting to fight back. This presentation allowed for interesting conversation based on Montillet's inside viewpoint.

— Sarah Robb

What is Happening in Iran

Visiting Rooney Scholar Dr. Shahla Talebi's round table presentation on Iran gave a brief history of Iran politics and religion up to the current presidential controversy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Starting the presentation with common misconceptions about Iran, including spoken languages and geographic features, Dr. Talebi expanded her talk to include the current political climate. Protests have been erupting throughout Iran for the past couple years. Dr. Talebi talked a little bit about protesting involving 2009 presidential candidate Mousavi, who opposed the current president and is a favorite among Iranian citizens. In recent protesting, police put him on house arrest, effectively cutting him off from his supporters.

— Katie O'Dowd

A Professor's Semester in Germany

For April's Roundtable discussion, Prof. Harold gave a presentation on his time spent in Germany this past semester on a Fulbright scholarship. He had the chance to live in a variety of cities, such as Munich and Dresden. In addition to being able to take German classes in Germany before starting his work, he was able to see much of the country. Germans have a different formality level in their language, he explained. People of certain status are to be addressed in a certain way, children are addressed differently than adults, and so are superiors. Prof. Harold told students about the differences of culture even within the country, for example, how people are very specific and proud of where in Germany they are from. He also explained that the German workday is shorter than the American workday. Even their schools go for a shorter amount of time, as Prof. Harold learned with his daughter's school. While the days are shorter, Germans use their time more efficiently than Americans. For example, Germans do not listen to music when they study, as many Americans do, and their libraries are not open on Sundays. In fact, Prof. Harold said that he was able to find other Americans based on behaviors such as listening to an iPod while studying. He also told stories of his various adventures exploring the different cities and shared many cultural anecdotes with the students. It was a very interesting talk to attend, and the students were able to learn much about the German experience!

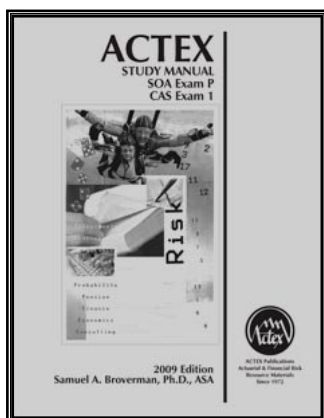
— Tori Mikulan

The Freshmen Four



Passing Exam 1/P

In many ways studying ahead for our Actuarial Exam 1/P happened by accident. This “accident” developed by setting reasonable goals and working hard to surpass even our own expectations. The group (Mike Holcomb, Andrew Grunauer, Callen Oster, and, Chris Ludwiczak) began when we all were struggling with the chapter 1 homework. We committed to doing all the homework problems and staying on top of the class to ensure that we would be prepared for Exam 1/P by May. Daily group studying took place in the honors lounge. Whether it was the group or the subject matter, it is safe to say that we had a great time studying for the Exam, especially in the first few months.



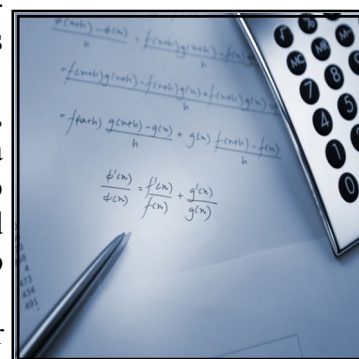
Within the week, we realized our pace was surpassing the class and, if maintained, would result in finishing the material a month early. Within a month we set a new goal of an even earlier test date, in March. Our pace had quickened after another month, and we joked about the possibility of taking the test in January, which meant we would have to finish the material before Thanksgiving, roughly 10 weeks after beginning the study-group. When we considered the amount of material we actually had left, this “joke” seemed to be completely within our reach by aiming to do 10 problems a day. This was at times a difficult task, but we achieved it and even consistently worked ahead of our schedule.

We finished the material was finished 3 days before break, which left us with over two months before our exam. We then shifted to individual study and consulted each other with the more challenging practice questions. Some of us completed over 38 practice tests, many of them twice.

The test was scheduled for 8:00 a.m. on January 29. Taking it was a different experience for all of us, but the group would agree that I was the most nervous by leaps and bounds! Passing was a relief.

After passing, we took a break to catch up with all the things we neglected, whether it be video games, classes, or girlfriends. Altogether, the experience was a tremendous example of what true effort can accomplish. A huge thank you goes to Dr. Leonard Asimow ASA, Matthew Feryus, and Besart Stavileci, who, beyond taking the time to help us with individual questions and challenging concepts, also encouraged our efforts to work ahead and pass Exam 1/P.

- Callen E. Oster



Lunch with Professor Asimow

This past April nine students and Dr. Len Asimow enjoyed a meal in RoMo’s Café. Dr. Asimow is the founder of RMU’s Actuarial Science Program, which is accredited by the Society of Actuaries. Topics of discussion included the Actuarial Science Program at RMU, Exam P, the new Actuarial Science staff member, and Dr. Asimow’s history as a marathon runner. All in all, the students enjoyed being able to connect with Dr. Asimow. “Lunch with a Professor” was a success!

-Kayla Newman

Honors Students Going the Extra Mile

Sara Meier Presents Thesis at Conference in Portland

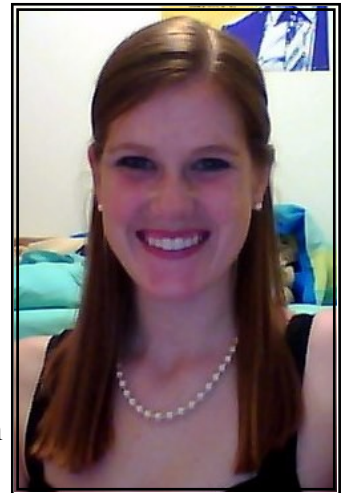


Sara Meier, a senior marketing major from St. Marys, PA, recently presented her honors thesis, Student Perception of Sustainability Efforts in Regional Southwestern PA Grocery Stores, at a conference in Portland, Maine. Dr. Gayle Marco, professor of marketing and Sara's thesis advisor, accompanied her on the trip to Portland. The conference was hosted by the Northeast Regional Honors Council. Honors students from over 35 colleges and universities in the northeast region attended the conference.

Sara gave her presentation and got good feedback on her ideas from the audience, who were interested in the topic of sustainability. The student and professor also had some free time to enjoy the tourist shops and "Old Port" neighborhood of Portland near the harbor.

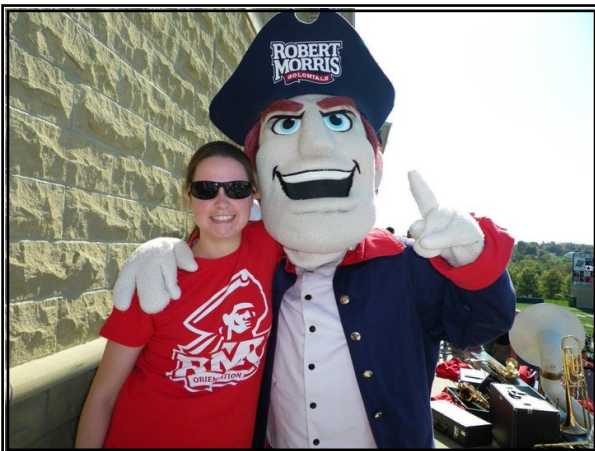
Spending a Summer Researching

This summer I'll be researching at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Massachusetts for a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) summer program. Eight students were accepted into this program, and the specific project I will be working on is "Using mechanical cues to develop functional engineered tissues." The main goal of this research is to interpret how tissue cells respond to their surrounding mechanical environment. Tissue engineering first caught my attention this semester during my Biomedical Engineering Principles class, so that is why I applied for this opportunity. I have become interested in using regenerative tissue to repair joint injuries, where actual human tissue is grown and used as a starting point for healing. It amazes me how the tissue can be a temporary scaffold that helps constructive tissue remodeling as opposed to scar tissue formation, and I excited to learn more about it this summer!



-Sarah Robb

Student Engagement Discussions



At the beginning of the semester, I was honored by being chosen as the student representative for Student Engagement Transcript (SET) category number three, Undergraduate Research. For me, research has been a large part of my academic career before, and during, my time at RMU. Most recently, I was involved in undergraduate research through the process of writing my Senior Honors Thesis. During this time, I was able to explore the international workings of tax havens. The research was an intriguing learning experience, and it was an honor to have it recognized within the RMU community.

-Sheila Strong

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Littera, Civitas, Ductus

Junto Editorial Board

Thank you to the following individuals for your contributions to this newsletter:

Alexandria Antonacci

Sara Meier

Tori Mikulan

Kayla Newman

Katie O'Dowd

Callen Oster

Prof. Pinson

Tabitha Savka

Sarah Robb

Phillip Timcheck

Prof. VanDieren

Prof. Harold

SET Credit Available! If you would like to contribute to upcoming Junto publications, please contact honors@rmu.edu

SAC Executive Update

The 2010-2011 Student Advisory Council officers were as follows:

Co-President: Sheila Strong

Co-President: Michelle Beamer

Vice-President: Phillip Timcheck

Secretary: Tabitha Savka

Treasurer: Chris Murone

SGA Representatives: Kayla Newman & Jeff Siwik

This semester, the SAC planned an end of the semester picnic to sendoff the seniors. The SAC also worked to help raise money for Relay for Life. New officers for the Fall 2011 school semester are needed!

RMU students listen to presentations at this year's URC held at California University of P.A.



Alumni Profile

Name: **Michael Wahl**

Class of: 2006

Michael is currently pursuing a Masters in Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford, Hertford College. His Honors Senior Thesis was published in the *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 10 (Oct. 2008).

Michael writes: "RMU's status as a smaller school allowed me to have more attention in becoming a more engage student, as well as helping me to build strong relationships with some professors, which I still have today. Also, having that smaller group of honors students to bond with for honors courses the first few years within the honors program really helped develop a sense of camaraderie."

His advice for current students: "The honors program is what you make of it. You only get out of it, what you put into it. Aim high, because you will never know unless you try."