

areté 2017

The Magazine of The Honors College at the University of Houston



UNIVERSITY of
HOUSTON
THE HONORS COLLEGE

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*On the cover and below:
Photos of current Honors College students
holding their favorite book
from the Human Situation course*

Rodolfo "RG" Yamba
Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*

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Shakespeare, *Richard III*

Chris Chambers
The Bible

Monica Marin
Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Elnora Awatt
Robert Fitzgerald, *The Aeneid Virgil*

Konstantinos Vogiatzis
Herodotus, *The History of the Persian Wars*

Ann Weise
Petronius, *The Satyricon*

Rajiv Ajodha
Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Husain Poonawala
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

Livia Garza
Mary Wollstonecraft,
A Vindication of the Rights of Woman
and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*

Morgan Biscoe
Plato, *Symposium*

Tara Thompson
Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*



Katherine Corrigan
Beowulf

Dear Friends,



he Great Red Book of Honors—an archive of our publications dating back to when the world was young—contains a thin missive entitled “The

Long Awaited Newsletter.” It’s undated, but internal evidence suggests it was created circa 1978. Under the curious headline HUMAN “SIT” SURVIVORS is the following advisory:

“Papers from last semester’s Human ‘SIT’ course are still being held in the Program Office. If you want any of these papers or exams go down and pick them up—SOON!”



Those were the early days of a great University of Houston institution: the Human Situation, the great books course that has been a rite-of-passage for Honors students, regardless of major, since 1977. This fall we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the class created by Founding Dean Ted Estess, Dr. Stephen Langfur, and their colleagues. Human Sit is a formative experience, connecting undergraduates with both the past and the future: students are connected to the past and the present by reading and discussing texts animated by eternal questions, plots, and characters; they are connected to the future by honing a set of intellectual skills that will stand them in good stead throughout their professional and personal lives. Honors students survive Human Situation, and subsequently thrive, enriched by the bounty, wisdom, complexity, and provocation of the course and its faculty.

Forty years after its founding, a cohort of almost two dozen dedicated professors creates the Human Situation learning environment. As a means of honoring the transformative effect of our faculty, both inside and outside the classroom, we are inaugurating the Wong Faculty Engagement Awards. These awards have been made possible through a generous gift of Bee Wong ('87). The gift is Bee’s way of expressing her appreciation for the positive role Honors faculty played in her life. We are deeply grateful for her commitment to Honors education and Honors educators.

This magazine, *areté*, is just one of the ways we keep in touch with alumni like Bee. In the pages that follow, you will spot others who were snapped at Honors get-togethers and UH alumni events. We hope you can attend such future gatherings: they are a great opportunity to renew old friendships, catch up with peers and mentors, and encounter the exciting new programs and faces of the College. Be in touch!

Warm Regards,

William Monroe,
Dean, The Honors College

Save the Date

2017

October

October 12

Undergraduate Research Day
Rockwell Pavilion

October 17

Honors College Advisory Board
Meeting

November

November 1

Honors Open House
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

November 3

Human Situation
40th Anniversary

November 4

Homecoming:
UH vs. East Carolina

December

December 5

Honors College Advisory
Board Meeting

2018

Go COOGS!

January

January 13

Tier One Invitational

January 23

Honors College Advisory
Board Meeting

January 25

Honors Open House
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

April

April 10

Honors College Advisory
Board Meeting

February

February 16

Ross M. Lence Dinner

February 20

Honors Open House
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

May

May 10

Graduation Banquet
The Houstonian

March

March 3

National Merit Luncheon
11:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.

March 24

The 26th Annual
Great Conversation
The Houstonian

Make plans to join us!

For more information,
contact **Elena Rios**,
Special Events and Development:
cerios@central.uh.edu

713-743-3986

or visit

thehonorscollege.com/alumnievents

40
YEARS

THE HUMAN SITUATION COURSE 1977-2017

By Robert Cremins

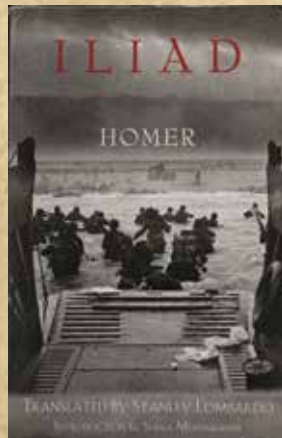
The hairstyles are longer and the glasses are thicker, but the expressions on their faces are just as attentive and serious as those of their contemporary counterparts. They are Human Situation students—from the fall of 1979, one of the early semesters of our legendary Great Books course. Forty years ago professors Ted Estess, Steve Langfur, and Tony Sirignano created Human “Sit.” We weren’t the Honors College back then. Those pioneering students are pictured in the University Honors Program Newsletter. But this news has not gone out of date. “Honors program freshmen come from various parts of the country,” the caption reads, “but they share a common bond: The Human Situation.”

We asked six people who share that bond—current students, alumni, teachers past and present—to write about a Human Sit text that means a lot to them personally. As a toast to this course and its many contributors, we share with you here these eloquent responses.

Nancy Mangum McCaslin ('83), Inaugural Year
Human Situation Student:

When I think of Harold Bloom’s list of Great Books and the Honors College (or Honors Program as we were in my day), I asked a simple question: “Which book have you read repeatedly in the course of the intervening 40 years since Human Sit began?” The answer was clear: Homer’s *Iliad*.

I home educated my four children and required it for them, along with the many other home-educated students who attended my Classical Lit seminars in co-ops for the high school years.

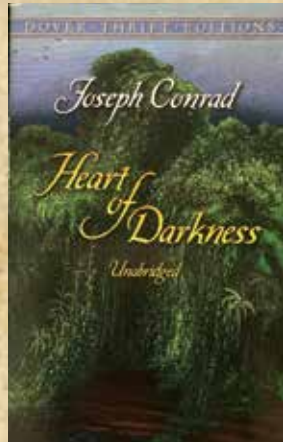


I confessed to Ted at the Human Situation 25 celebration that I started using my HS notes (from 1978, the first year of the course) as a basis for my syllabus (always giving credit, of course). Since, unfortunately, war never loses its relevance, the *Iliad* retains its significance. Are we not still moved by the foreshadowing of Hektor’s death when he, in his role as father, sets down his shiny helmet in the dust for love of his son? Are we not amazed that two opponents in war bend to the higher duty of hospitality (philoxenia)? Are we not unfazed, immersed in our culture of violence, by the brutality of war and the distance we’ve artificially created with our precision-guided, high-tech, once-removed weapons and their “collateral damage?” And, are we not surprised by the plight of women in war, an all too familiar constant?

Somehow, when returning to the *Iliad*, I always make the association with another book about war and its effects, which prompts a rereading of Vera Brittain’s thick *Testament of Youth*. And we march forward but back again.

DeMointé Wesley, Current Human Situation Writing Fellow and Team Omega Teaching Assistant:

Heart of Darkness means a great deal to me because it taught me to be a better student of literature. I went into our reading of the novella having already read Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and his searing criticism of *Heart of Darkness* (criticism which I still agree with). Needless to say, I had my reservations about reading it, and initially tried to fight any discussion about the book that treated it as serious literature.



I soon found, however, that to do the work that was required of me by the Human Situation, I would have to put my preconceived opinions about and discomfort with *Heart of Darkness* on a shelf, not to be abandoned, but to be revisited later. *Heart of Darkness* taught me that oftentimes the most fruitful readings come not from reading against the grain of the text, but with it. I learned, to paraphrase one of my Human Situation professors, that oftentimes if you look closely enough, a written work will teach you how to read it.

I learned to read the text on its own terms and to use the logic presented by the text itself to understand its implications and map its contours. I eventually arrived at a convincing interpretation of the novella and wrote an essay on it, which went on to win the Best Human Situation Essay Award.

In this vein, *Heart of Darkness* taught me that not liking or agreeing with the logic of a text should not impede one from reading and interpreting that text. This lesson has been important to me throughout my career as a student of literature.

Dr. Jesse Rainbow ('99), Human Situation Instructor 2012-Present; Leader, Team Omega:

The first time I laid hands on Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* as a graduate student, I felt like I had discovered fire. On a park bench across the street from the bookstore where I purchased it, I read the book with bated breath from cover to cover in a single sitting, retracing the bold (and in 1677, earth-shattering) steps that would endure as some of the foundational insights of the modern academic study of the Bible.



Like Spinoza, I've been reading and hearing the stories of the Bible for most of my life: as a small child, as a graduate student specializing in the Hebrew Bible, and now as a faculty member in the Honors College. Reading Spinoza on that crisp fall day took me back to my own days as a freshman Human Situation student, when I first read the biblical book of Exodus and other ancient literature with the benefit of the critical and philological stance pioneered by early modern thinkers like Spinoza. Like so many others, I look back on Human Situation as a breakthrough in my capacity to read books—including the Bible—critically, deeply, and in conversation with others.

For me, the thrill of reading Spinoza's seminal treatise was as much about the archaeology of my own intellectual formation as it was a prophecy of the years of graduate study that still lay ahead of me at the time. In addition to numerous books of the Bible, we've assigned Spinoza twice since I've been teaching Human Situation. It still excites me. As a teacher, I get to pass on not only what I learned in Human Situation, but also what I learned because I took Human Situation.

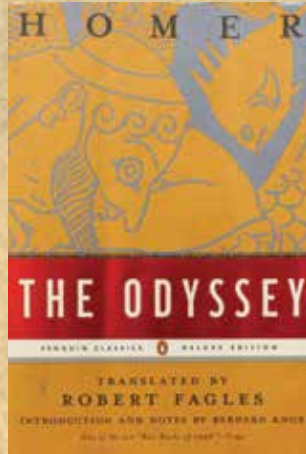
Dr. Stephen Langfur, Co-Creator of The Human Situation Course; Instructor 1977-1979:

The Odyssey is my pick. It works on at least two levels. On the one hand, we have the story—those adventures!—and, on the other hand, there is something else going on, something deeply engaging. I think of it in terms of initiation into manhood (for, yes, the gender factor is strong).

There is Odysseus, who went through initiation in his youth and thus became the hero that he ever again proves himself to be. The mark of his initiation is the scar on his thigh, received from a wild boar during a hunt: he faced the danger of castration and prevailed. (When he arrives on his home island in disguise after an absence of 20 years, it is by this scar that his old nurse recognizes him while washing his feet.)

And there is Odysseus' son, Telemachus, whose initiation is being built up throughout the poem. At the start, his absent father's palace is usurped by a crowd of carousing suitors who, proclaiming Odysseus dead, want to marry his mother and seize the estate. (I think of these suitors as the wild impulses raging in every son.) The initiation of Telemachus requires a confrontation with the suitors. Feeling overwhelmed, he goes in search of his dad. Learning he is alive, he then returns home.

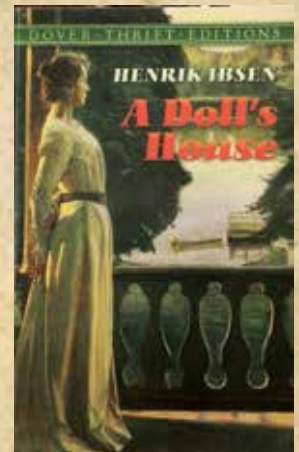
Meanwhile, with the help of the gods, Odysseus arrives disguised as a beggar and lets his son in on the secret. Odysseus' wife, Penelope, suspecting who the beggar is, sets a task: whoever can string the great bow of Odysseus and shoot an arrow through a row of axes will have her as wife. Telemachus tries and "would have strung it," but his father dissuades him. (Must I spell out the psychology?!) The suitors fail to string it, and then father and son team up to slay them.



It is uncanny to me how this ancient poem tells two stories seamlessly—an adventure story and the story of every son growing into manhood. The contrast throughout is with Agamemnon (killer of his daughter), who returned home speedily—only to be murdered at once by a faithless wife, who in turn would be murdered by their son, Orestes. The Greeks had many a string in their lyre!

Nicole Mosley, Current Human Situation Writing Fellow:

Although Human Sit provided me with an opportunity to explore a variety of significant and enlightening texts, one of my favorites by far has been Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*. The story was particularly meaningful for me because it illuminated aspects of my personal life at the time, and ended up being a catalyst for significant personal growth.

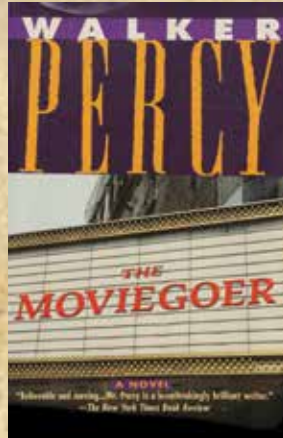


I remember distinctly how my mindset shifted after reading about the courage that Nora exhibits at the end of the story. Her brave choice to leave behind something she had spent most of her life building and nurturing in pursuit of freedom fueled by her growing desire for independence was one that inspired me to approach my own life in the same way.

I think that reading this story pinpointed a pivotal moment in my own story, one where I grew from a girl entering college starry-eyed and eager to learn, to a woman grounded in my own truth. This story encouraged me to become fearless in the pursuit of finding my own voice, and motivated me to stake my claim in the world and find my own distinctive place in it.

Christian Sarkar ('89):

I worked in a movie theater during my first years at the Honors College, so that made me a Moviegoer. At least that's what I thought when I liberated the Walker Percy novel sitting on Dr. Estess' desk. I'd been hearing about Walker Percy from John "The Baptist" Hudson who was reading Percy's *Second Coming* in his "modernity" section of *Human Sit*. I wasn't in that section. The section I was in was something more like "Boredom and the Renaissance."



We were reading Pico, Valla, and Ficino. The big idea apparently was that we could choose reason, and use it as a lamp to guide ourselves out of the darkness in the world around us. What a novel idea—especially these days.

And so it was that I sat down to read *The Moviegoer*. The quote on the inside was the invitation:

"...the specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair."

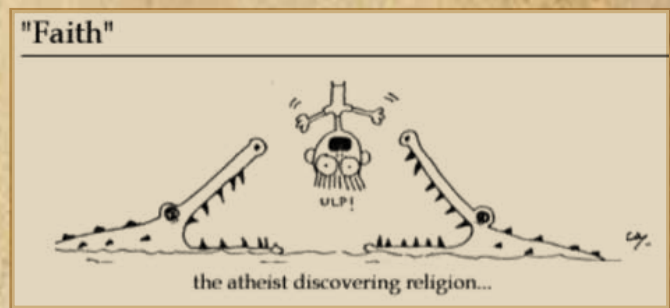
—Søren Kierkegaard
The Sickness Unto Death

As an engineering student, somehow I intuited that I too was suffering from a type of despair, seeing as I spent most of my time avoiding my engineering classes as much as possible.

Anyway, *The Moviegoer* is about this lost soul, a gent by the name of Binx Bolling, who works in his uncle's brokerage firm, chases the secretaries, and is generally viewed by the matriarch of the fam as an utter failure as a human being. I identified with that last part. Binx reads *Consumer Reports* and lives a shallow existence watching movies with the secretaries at a movie theater in Gentilly. One morning Binx wakes up with the idea that everydayness isn't what it's cracked up to be. Maybe, just maybe, there's more to life than simply watching movies and making money. Now he's on to something—the search. This was before Google, so the search, as defined by Percy, is "what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life."

Like Binx, I don't know what I'm searching for, but I do know that it's not engineering. I decide to do my own search. I end up reading everything Percy ever wrote. Turns out his first published work was a short story called "Carnival in Gentilly" in Donald Barthelme's *Forum*—printed at the University of Houston!

One evening, I write Percy a letter consisting of about six or seven cartoons. What I get back is a handwritten note in which Percy tells me he likes "The Atheist Discovering Religion."



Dr. Monroe will never believe this! Now I'm certified. Walker Percy knows me. I exist.

And so, in my final semester before graduation, I switch from Electrical Engineering to English Literature. Thanks, Walker Percy. Now my life is all about rotations and repetitions. But that's another story.

STUDY ABROAD | EUROPE



By Omar Jamal



I have always been someone who prefers being completely self-sufficient and very stingy with who I trust, and I'm sure any college student who has done any group project can sympathize.

During this trip, I felt an extreme amount of kindness and generosity from both strangers and friends alike, and my boundaries and comfort zones have never been tested and pushed more.

My journey with Mason Malone started while we were still in Houston. We spent so many hours looking at maps of Europe, figuring out train schedules, deciding what we would do when we got there, planning our budget for three weeks, and thinking about all of the food we would eat! This was a much bigger group project than either of us had

imagined, and it required a lot of push and pull between the two of us. Mason's specialty was in being meticulous and thorough with planning: it's amazing what that man can do with Google Maps! My role in our partnership shined when things didn't go as planned: Being able to stay calm when we missed three trains in one day (yeah, that happened), figuring out the best exchange rates when we needed money (the sell rate is key), and relying on locals for guidance (French train stations can be complex).

A lesson I learned is that a little effort can go a long way. Between Mason and I, we knew about 30 words of French, but people were willing to go out of their way to help us even if we couldn't communicate the most effectively with them. My advice to future F.E.E.T. scholars and travelers is: be comfortable believing and trusting in the goodness of others.

STUDY ABROAD | GALÁPAGOS

By Amanda Beck



As an English major, I chose to pursue my love of science writing by attending this research-based trip. It still seems like a dream.

As a group, our work centered around field research supported by an entire spring of preparation on the UH campus. Studying the migration patterns of sea turtles, investigating the food chain of sea urchins, and analyzing the relationships between sea lions and dogs provided intriguing research endeavors. I woke to beautiful sunrises, hiked over volcanoes, snorkeled with sea turtles, and played with sea lions. I will never forget the overwhelming moment of my first scuba dive—sinking into deep blue water on all sides, blinking at the swarms of fish surrounding me, and shrieking in excitement as hammerhead sharks passed overhead.

The natural beauty of the Galápagos surpasses anywhere on earth, but my favorite memories stem from island community relations. Although I was nervous to spend a month with a local family due to limited knowledge of the Spanish language, the experiences with my host family were the most rewarding part of the whole trip. Birthday parties, pre-dawn motorcycle rides, and family vacations in the isolated highlands formed a familial bond that distance can never break.

My study abroad in the Galápagos taught me to embrace adventure, but it also taught me to appreciate the depth of human connection. My perspective entirely changed—as a researcher and traveler, but mostly as a student, friend, and lover of humanity.



STUDY ABROAD | HONDURAS

By Michael Mathews



The concept of biopsychosocial perspective of medicine, has been emphasized in every Medicine, & Society class that I have taken in the Honors College, but I had never experienced it firsthand until this past summer when a group of physicians, Honors College students, and I embarked on a medical service trip to a clinic run by Houston Shoulder to Shoulder in Santa Ana, Honduras.

We took turns shadowing physicians, working in the pharmacy, taking vital signs of the patients, and teaching kids about the ways they could reduce the amount of trash they produced. Every day, after we had finished treating every patient in the clinic, a group of students and physicians would make daily house calls to patients who could not come to the clinic due to debilitation. Some of my most memorable experiences of the trip were formed in these house calls. Whether

we would stroll across the dirt road or traverse sharp, rocky inclines, we always found ourselves being greeted with a family of warm smiles and a flock of clucking chickens.

Service learning in Honduras gave me the chance to experience the idea that one of the doctors' greatest strengths is their ability to tap into the patient's emotions, experiences, and physical state during the encounter. This interpretative relationship builds trust and respect between the patient and the physician.

One of my most vivid memories was when either Dr. Spann, Dr. Parkerson, or Dr. Hnatek would hold the patient's hand and smile after the encounter. Dr. Spann coined this as the "Doctor's touch" and explained it to be a nonverbal reminder to the patient that the doctor genuinely cared for the patient's well-being.

STUDY ABROAD | PERU

By William Littlejohn-Oram



his summer, I had the amazing opportunity to visit Peru with Dr. Rita Sirrieh and four other students in the Honors College Study Abroad program. When we arrived in the Lima airport, we met up with other groups from Pennsylvania, New York, and Michigan.

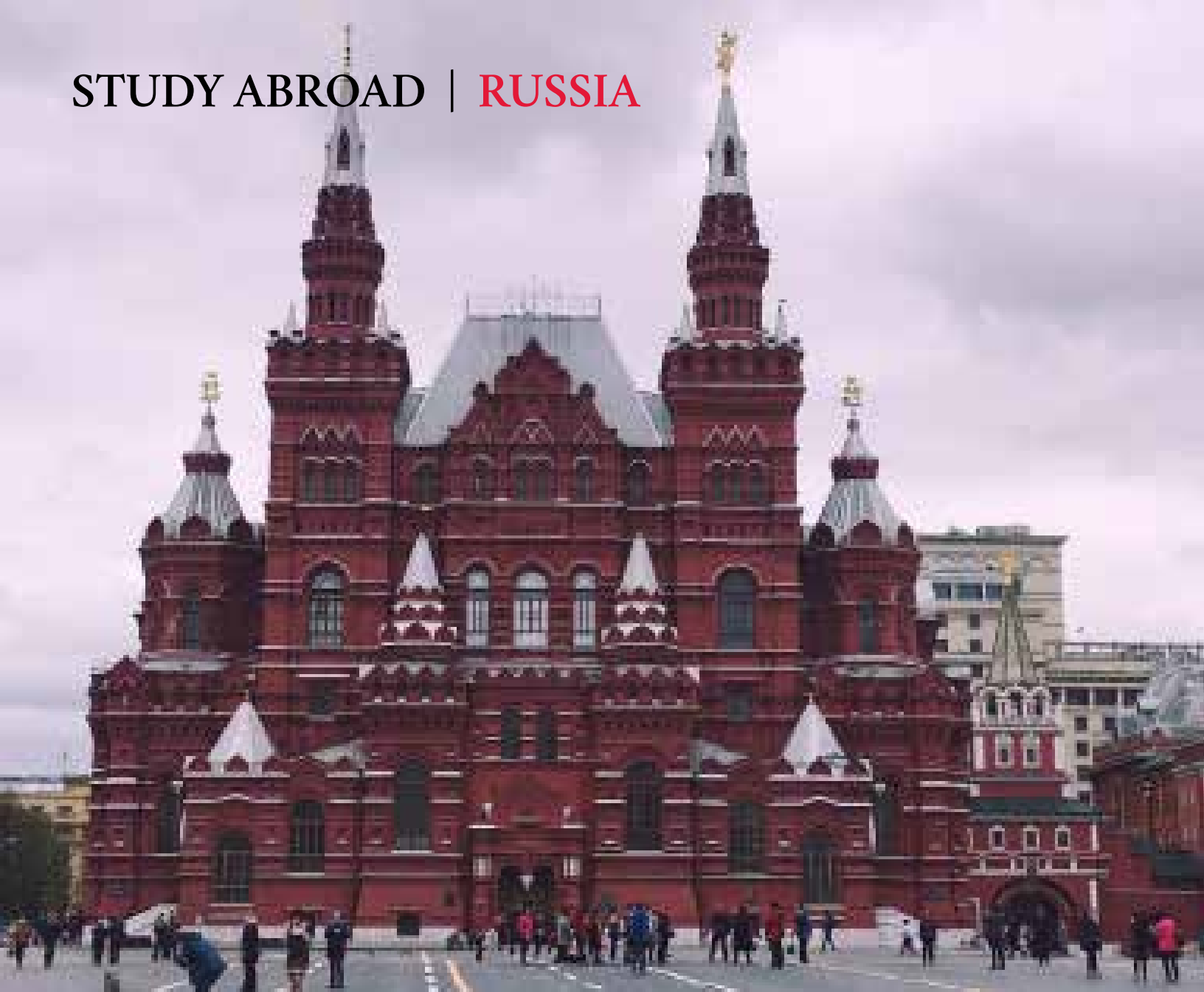
Then we were able to visit Lima, Cuzco, Ollantaytambo, and other cities in Peru. Of course, the highlights during the trip were being able to stand atop Macchu Picchu, an amazing wonder of the world, and spending three days in the rainforest along the Amazon River.

Seeing how other people live in different countries and cultures is always an important aspect of understanding the world, but Peru has to be the best place I have ever visited. From cooking Ceviche in a Peruvian home to weaving alongside textile masters in the countryside, our group from UH was able to experience the calm authenticity of life in Peru.

Although, the best part of my trip to Peru was the people I shared it with. I stood in the Houston airport before the trip with a half-empty suitcase and a dash of airplane fear. Then, I flew back to Houston with six great friends, a full heart, and an overflowing suitcase.



STUDY ABROAD | RUSSIA



By Nicole Mosely

Part of what made the trip to Russia so special is that no matter how much knowledge you may have about a certain place, seeing it for yourself gives it more meaning and increases your appreciation for its unique significance. There's nothing like walking through the imposing and stately atmosphere of Red Square or seeing the brilliant colors of St. Basil's Cathedral up close. Nothing compares to the nostalgic magic of seeing the Russian Ballet perform their rendition of the "Nutcracker" or walking through the overwhelmingly beautiful rooms of the Winter Palace, taking a closer look at all the exquisitely ornate details. We also had the privilege of visiting many churches and monasteries, and one of my all time favorite moments

of the trip was listening to a choir perform inside St. Basil's Cathedral. Having the opportunity to share in the sacredness that is such an inherent aspect of the culture in Russia, even if it was only for a moment, is a memory I'll always treasure.

Each stop we made on our journey helped us to better understand and connect with Russia's rich culture and the history that shaped it. Throughout the entire trip, I couldn't help but lag behind the group just to take it all in and take an extra moment to capture it before I ran to catch up. I really think it's this sense of wonder, a desire to immerse yourself into something completely new, that makes trips abroad so special. These experiences are truly one of a kind in that they remind you of the ways we are all connected, regardless of the distinct and unique cultures.

STUDY ABROAD | WALES/IRELAND

By Peter L. Scamardo



From the day I learned of the study abroad trip to Wales and Ireland, I worked to book my ticket across the pond two years hence. And even though expectations were high, the trip turned out to be everything a study abroad trip with the Honors College should be.

The trip was advertised as a chance to see two of the most beautiful countries in the world. It ended up exceeding my every expectation. By day, we would visit landmarks—both historical (Tintern Abbey) and modern (Trinity College). At night, we would walk the cobblestone streets of Waterford, Galway, and Dublin, taking time to get to know each other.

But the cities paled to the beauty of the countryside. Going toward Innisfree in County Sligo felt like faerie hunting; and there is nothing like watching the sun set while the waters of the River Wye rush all around.

Of the places we visited, my personal favorite was The Devil's Pulpit on Offa's Dyke. Professor Jonathan

Zecher told us we would be going on three hikes during our trip. And as someone who never hiked before, getting to climb to the top of the ancient border of Wales and England made the preparation worth it.

We were even witness to a bit of history as Cardiff was hosting the UEFA Champions League Final the week we were in Wales.

Admittedly, I was nervous on the day we left. I knew about six of my fellow travelers from the class connected to the trip, but I wouldn't have called any of them friends. But, that was the amazing thing about the journey. All 22 of us grew close within the first 48 hours and grew closer throughout the entire trip.

Since this was the last UH activity Professor Zecher participated in before moving to Australia, we were all grateful for the fond memories we created with him. The trip only lasted 15 days, but it was an experience we won't forget for a long time.



FACULTY | SPOTLIGHT

David Mikics

2017

Guggenheim Fellowship for his book project on Stanley Kubrick (Yale Jewish Lives)

Slow Reading in a Hurried Age (previously translated into Italian and Korean) was translated into Arabic

Continued writing his column for *Tablet*

Debbie Harwell

2016

Invited to speak on her book *Wednesday in Mississippi: Proper Ladies Working for Radical Change* at the Frederick Douglass House in Washington, D.C., the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson, and as part of a 2016 C-SPAN panel at the Mississippi Book Festival

Kimberly Meyer

2016

Los Angeles Review Spring 2016 Creative Nonfiction Award for essay "Rupture"

Published essay "Little Log Houses for You and Me" in *Inspired Journeys: Travel Writers in Search of the Muse*

2017

Published article "Welcoming the Stranger: Faces of the Refugee Crisis" in *Texas Monthly*

Ann Cheek

2016

UH Group Teaching Award

David Rainbow

2017

Awarded a U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant for the development of curriculum related to Russia

Organized series of events marking the centennial of the 1917 Russian Revolution

Co-led study trip to Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia

Michelle Belco

2017

Published *The Dual Executive: Unilateral Orders in a Separated and Shared Power System* with co-author Brandon Rottinghaus (Stanford University Press)

Appeared on Georgia Public Radio show "On Second Thought"

Hayan Charara

2016

Published poems in *North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Poetry*

Published interviews with *Poetry International* and *Bettering American Poetry*

2017

Arab American Book Award for *Something Sinister*

Honorable Mention for Arab American Book Award for *The Three Lucys*

Richard Garner

2016

Published "Melville Among the Heathens: Religion, Race, and Representation in the South Seas," in the collection *Visionary of the Word: Melville and Religion* (Northwestern University Press)

Interviewed on *Houston Matters* about the 2016 Presidential Election Debates

Tamler Sommers

2016

Published second edition of *A Very Bad Wizard: Morality Behind the Curtain*

Published “The Three Rs: Retribution, Revenge, Reparation” in *Philosophia* and “Relative Responsibility and Theism” in *Free Will and Theism: Connections, Contingencies, and Concerns*

Podcast “Very Bad Wizards” has had 3 million downloads since August 2016

Marc Hanke

2016

Published papers in the *Marine Ecology Progress Series* and in *Water Science and Technology*

Presented at the Restore America’s Estuaries national conference with his student, Robert Laroche

Robert Cremins

2017

Wrote about Houston’s own Donald Barthelme for the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and “Engines of our Ingenuity”

Conducted an on-stage interview with fellow Irish writer Colm Tóibín for Inprint

Helen Valier

2016

Led a roundtable session on the role of medical humanities in the education of future health professionals at the Society for the Social History of Medicine Biennial Conference, University of Kent at Canterbury, UK

Brandon Lamson

2017

Published poem “Night Owl” in *Poetry Northwest*

Interviewed for the article “Buddhists Pitch in with Hurricane Harvey Relief” in *Tricycle*

Laurie Lambeth

2016

Published essay “The Three-Legged Dog Who Carried Me” in *The New York Times*

Published poem “Cusped Prognosis” in *Poetry Magazine*

2017

Commendation for poem “Self-Portrait with Barium: Dysphagia Swallow” from the UK’s Hippocrates Initiative for Poetry and Medicine; poem was published in the *Hippocrates Prize Anthology*

Dustin Gish

2016

Published *Thomas Jefferson and the Science of Republican Government* (Cambridge University Press)

Created new program for the Honors College at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston — Human Situation “MindWalks”

Henk Rossouw

2016

2016-2017 Poets Out Loud Editor’s Prize from Fordham University Press for *Xamissa*. An excerpt of the book will be included in *Best American Experimental Writing 2018* (Wesleyan University Press)

HONORS ALUMNA GIVES BACK

By Daniel Wallace



It's not uncommon for professors at big universities to feel torn between research and teaching. Scholarly production and classroom commitment are equally important, but not often rewarded equally. At the Honors College, a high value has always been placed on the classroom experience: how can we educate students for a lifetime if we don't actually spend time with them?

And now, thanks to a generous donation by alumna Bee Lim ('87), the Honors College will be able to offer additional support to instructors who prioritize teaching and who create new learning opportunities for their students. The Wong Faculty Engagement Awards will be given annually to faculty members who go above and beyond in their efforts to reach students and transform their lives.

Bee herself is a testament to the transformative impact that teachers can have on the lives of their students. An international student from Malaysia, she had been struggling to afford her tuition at UH, and she credits the Honors College—and the financial support it made available—with her ability to graduate. "I could not afford to continue, and I would have likely had to return home. Dr. Monroe's decision to accept me into the program meant that I could finish my studies. That changed everything for me," she recalls. Without the Honors College, she wouldn't be where she is today.

Bee's experience afforded her opportunities that were far more than financial. She still remembers the life-changing impact of her time in the classroom. "Dr. Estess and Dr. Monroe encouraged me to speak up during class discussions, and they made me feel



welcome despite my awkwardness and shyness in a foreign culture. It meant a great deal to me." And their classes, she writes, still resonate to this day. "They influence how I read a novel, how I evaluate issues, and how I approach life in general. I try to strive for areté—not always successful, but certainly always at the back of my mind."

After graduating, Bee went to the U.K. to work in finance and to join her now husband, Kee. The couple eventually migrated to Canada where, together with their three children, they have been striving for areté for almost 30 years. Bee had a distinguished career in international finance: her résumé includes the



The Wong family: Jeremy, Bee, Lauren, Kee, and Matthew

Security Pacific National Bank, the Financial Institutions Group, and the Multinational Group of the Royal Bank of Canada in Toronto. She is now in a position to give back, and she is particularly excited about her donation to the Honors College.

“I know how tough it can be for students who lack adequate financial resources as I did and how lonely it can be for foreign students who may not have a support group in a foreign land. I also know that professors who teach, guide, and inspire students can make a big difference, oftentimes without even knowing it themselves. I hope this donation can do some good—I hope that other students will have the opportunity to meet professors like Dr. Monroe and Dr. Estess,” she writes.



Dean Monroe's 1987 letter of recommendation for Bee has become a Wong family keepsake.

The Human Situation: A Rite-of-Passage

By Robert Cremins

Though she is a relatively recent graduate, Ysabelle Abraham ('16) is already committed to the Honors College philosophy of "student success that lasts a lifetime." Talking to Ysabelle, you can hear not only traces of her native English

accent, but also sure signs that an Honors education has been a big part of her personal formation. "I now look at the world through a different lens," she says, "especially if you pair my experience in the Honors College with my experiences of living in three different countries. All this has made me more determined to bypass that regular first-read of life and go to a deeper understanding."

Those three countries are the U.K., Nigeria, and the United States. In the first 12 years of her life, Ysabelle moved around a lot, finally settling in the East London suburb of Hornchurch, Essex. Then, to deepen her "cultural education," she spent a year in her parents' native country, Nigeria. That time had a profound impact on her. Despite having to endure a bout of malaria, she gained a firmer sense of her own identity and new perspectives on privilege and exclusion.

After a spell back in England, Ysabelle and her family moved to the U.S., more specifically Texas, where she attended high school in Katy. Injury prevented her from pursuing a promising track-and-field career, but she continued to thrive academically. In 2012, she chose UH and the Honors College, impressed by the small class sizes and the balance between courses in the humanities and her STEM-related major.

The rite-of-passage known as Human Situation was transformational for Ysabelle, especially the antiquity semester. She names the *Iliad* as a favorite among

the Great Books. "It reminded me that the world is very small," she says, "and that even hundreds of years ago, there were the same kinds of themes and discussions regarding life and individual decisions and interpersonal relations that we still deal with today."



These were lessons that Ysabelle did not forget once she submitted the final Human Sit paper. They still form part of her critical thinking skill set: "A lot of issues—philosophical, social, spiritual—were addressed, and I use them as a platform to build on and formulate my thoughts today."

From 2012-2016, Ysabelle became a familiar face around Honors, taking on many roles and responsibilities. She had a very busy schedule both inside and outside the classroom—a typical day would begin at dawn in the gym, then to the classroom and labs, followed by tutoring and ending late at night in the library! Mentoring and tutoring were two recurring themes during her UH years. For example, one of her own mentors, Dr. Alison Leland, had Ysabelle attend and speak to an orientation session for potential students. She also became very involved with an "inclusive and accepting" on-campus church group. Moreover, she returned to the stimulating Human Sit atmosphere as both a Writing Fellow and the Team Alpha Teaching Assistant.



Majoring in geology, Ysabelle graduated from NSM with a bachelor of science degree. However, she is quick to point out that she is as likely to strike up a conversation about Caravaggio as she is about chemistry. She enjoys the challenge of “going beyond my major and what might be expected of me.”

What can be expected of Ysabelle, who “likes to do a lot of outreach,” is her ongoing interest in service. Professionally, she works as a Business Systems Analyst for an IT company; in her spare time, she spends her time at Interfaith Ministries as an orientation and special events volunteer. She has also started a blog called Ysabelle’s Essence (ysabelleessence.com); her hope is that people who visit the site will leave happier and more motivated.

One of her goals is to take a return trip to Nigeria. “When I do re-visit,” she remarks, “it will be with a very different purpose. The first time I went there, it was to help myself. I was looking for a sense of

identity. Now I know who I am and I’m in a position to give back and hopefully influence and inspire.” Her ultimate goal, she says, “is to go into charity work, where I can get the opportunity to truly help, inspire, and empower people to reach their potential.”

Before, during, and after her time in Honors, Ysabelle Abraham has been engaged with learning and life. She has put into practice what we call, theoretically, “high impact practices”: study abroad, service learning, career exploration. What comes naturally to her was affirmed by the people and programs of our academic community. She is passionate about extending those kinds of opportunity to other people in Houston and far beyond.

“They say ‘charity begins at home,’” she notes. “I have many homes. And though I have graduated from UH, I will always consider this University one of the places I call home.”

HONORS | IN ACTION



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This page: (1) Attendees at a football tailgate celebrate the Top 10 rating of the Honors College in the nation by *Public University Press*. Also, at the tailgate: (2) The Sirrieh family, all UH Alumni: Loretta ('15), Peter ('79), Honors staff, Rita ('10). (3) Pam and Cory Burns, and Nicole. (4) UH President Khator and Dean Monroe attend a Tier One Invitational. (5) Prof. James Shapiro is speaking at the Ross M. Lence Master Teacher Dinner. (6) Dean Monroe is shown with some of his "Strangers Come to Town: Fear, Trust, and Hospitality in Our Songs and Stories" seminar group at the Common Ground Teachers Institute.

Facing page: (7-9) The 25th Great Conversation was attended by donors and friends of the College, as well as the Honors Advisory Board, faculty, and students who created the centerpieces. (10) One of the explorations of

students on their study away trip included retracing the life of iconic Mississippi bluesman Robert Leroy Johnson and visiting his gravesite. (11) Honors hosted the Phi Beta Kappa Induction Ceremony, (12) which included the induction of Provost Paula Myrick Short as an honorary member, pictured with Frederick Lawrence, President/CEO of the PBK Society. (13) Honors Founding Dean Ted Estess is viewing the solar eclipse of August 21, 2017, with students, faculty, and staff. (14) Study abroad students photograph sealife on the Galápagos Islands. (15) Shazad Kalloo is working on his research in the SURF program.



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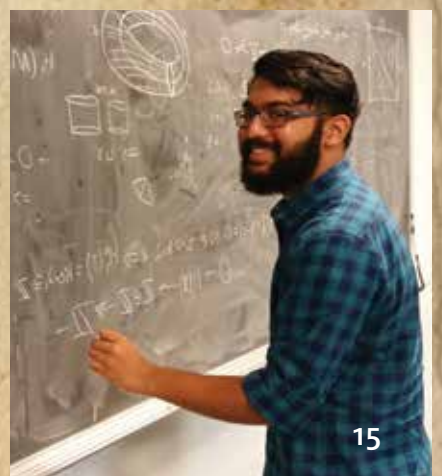
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M.D. Anderson Library
4333 University Drive, Room 212
Houston, TX 77204-2001

The Honors College has been rated among the top 10 in the nation by *Public University Press*.



The Honors spring 2017 Graduation Banquet recognized its outstanding graduating seniors.

UHCARES

Cougar Assisted
Relief Efforts

One of the ways the UH community is providing service and support in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey is through UH CARES (Cougar Assisted Relief Efforts). The initiative launched to organize UH volunteers into teams and take on projects in the wake of the storm. Volunteers may select college affiliations such as NSM or the McGovern College of the Arts, service groups such as the Bonner Leaders, academic interest groups such as Medicine & Society, or campus organizations such as the Metropolitan Volunteer Program—or ask to be placed where needed.

The program is open to students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the University. For more information, visit uh.edu/uhcared

