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In January of 2014, Byrd moved to Haiti where she is currently working as an environmental consultant for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). She is the co-founder and author of a blog called Sustainability Cooperative. The Sustainability Cooperative was an idea she had with a friend when they wanted to write about more complex issues for a broad audience. She felt many environmental issues where put forth in the media with data manipulation and bias, so she found it important to bring awareness to local and global environmental problems. She says, “I want to provide these issues in a clear enough way that a reader can develop their own opinion on the issue.”

Byrd also expanded her writing to other media outlets such as the Huffington Post. “Blogging for the Huffington Post is particularly important for me because I am able to reach a wider audience than The Sustainability Co-Op,” says Byrd. An important issue she especially enjoys to write about is climate change policy in the United States where the majority of citizens are not familiar or simply apathetic to the issue.

As for her current work in Haiti, she is excited to be involved in on-the-ground environmental sustainability efforts. Her role as a consultant for UDB is to assess possible environmental impacts of proposed development projects that are financed by the bank. This also involves determining mitigation efforts to these environmental impacts.

A major factor in her success with environmental and international relations has to do with the devotion of Honors College professors and the small intimate classes. The learning environment provided by the Honors College allowed each professor to grasp each student’s level of understanding and the discussion-based style of these classes ensured each student contributed to the conversation. She explains, “[The professors] expect you to be involved in the lessons, and although it did seem that just anticipating Dr. O’Brien’s or Dr. Steigenga’s questions sent me into a panic and made my heart beat at 100 miles an hour, these are unique and valuable experiences that had a great impact on my academic career.”

When I began my graduate courses at IR/PS, I wasn’t afraid to contribute to class conversations and discussions, having already experienced this type of learning at the WHC.

It wasn’t just the intimate debates within the classes that inspired Byrd. The friendships and community enriched her experience far greater than what a larger campus could provide. “We all were experiencing the same things together—Core classes, registering for classes, thesis, dorm life so we were each other’s support groups. We knew we were never alone in dealing with the challenges of college life.” She is grateful for the community that resulted from this empathy and understanding. “[It was] an important aspect of my college life that my friends who went to larger campuses did not experience”.

Be sure to check out Byrd’s site at thesustainabilitycooperative.net and follow her on Twitter @sustain_cooptve.
Dr. Chris Strain and Dr. Monica Maldonado (pictured) have worked together to receive a $20,000 grant from the Florida Humanities Council to create a week-long summer program for high school students this June.

The program titled, “Florida on the Edge of Tomorrow: Change, Innovation, and the Humanities” introduces talented high school students to the collegiate community as well as inspires participants to pursue a career in the diverse field of the humanities.

Last summer, in partnership with Eckerd College, the Council piloted its first seminar entitled “New Eyes for a New Century: The Humanities 20-20.” After the great success of this program, the Florida Humanities Council launched a new grant initiative in 2015 to support a weeklong, residential humanities-based seminar for rising high school juniors and seniors. This academic year, the FHC funded four seminars, which will include Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, the University of Florida in Gainesville, the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg, and Florida Atlantic University’s Wilkes Honors College in Jupiter.

FAU’s seminar will accommodate at least 25 students in a weeklong program from June 14 to June 19, 2015. The theme of the Honors College’s seminar will be “Florida on the Edge of Tomorrow: Change, Innovation & the Humanities.” The program will draw on FAU’s unique geographical location, the MacArthur Campus’ proximity to the Scripps and Max Planck Florida Institutes, and the Wilkes Honors College’s strengths in the humanities and social sciences. Each student will be involved in experiential education: getting out of the classroom and, with the guidance of faculty members, interacting with each other in some dynamic environments. The program will serve to introduce high school students to a collegiate living-learning environment, as well as to promote the humanities with the hope of inspiring student participants to pursue a career in one of the diverse fields represented within the humanities. Several of the program’s learning modules will focus on modern Florida and the natural environment.

The Honors College was encouraged to apply for the Special Initiative Grant by Dr. Nancy K. Poulson, Professor of Languages, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature at FAU, former Associate Dean of the Honors College, and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors of the Florida Humanities Council. As a result of this encouragement, the program’s lead scholar, Dr. Christopher Strain, professor of American Studies, along with many other Honors College faculty members, developed a summer program that will highlight several of FAU’s unique strengths. “A number of faculty members have collaborated to brainstorm, make suggestions, and plan academic lessons for the students. Professors Christopher Ely, Jacqueline Fekwes, Dorotha Lemeh, Rachel Luria, John Moore, Ashley Kennedy, Mark Tunic, and William O’Brien will all share duties as instructors this summer,” says Dr. Strain. Other faculty members who will take part in this program include Dr. Jeffrey Buller, Dean of the Honors College. The faculty will link their proficiencies in Anthropology, Social Science, Environmental Science, Biology, Art, History and Philosophy to give students a complex understanding of the humanities and how they can be integrated toward a common goal or focus.

As the program coordinator, Dr. Maldonado has been responsible for providing extensive logistical support for the project. “She submitted the grant application. She’s scheduling the marketing and advertising. She’s handling the logistics. She is in charge. And it’s been great working with her to make it happen,” states Dr. Strain.

The Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College is very excited to host this program this summer, and is very thankful to all those who have participated in the planning and development of this project. “Faculty and staff at the Honors College work very closely with each other across disciplinary boundaries, both in the classroom and outside of it, so a program such as this one is a natural extension of what we’re already doing,” affirms Dr. Strain.

Dr. Christopher Strain, Professor of American Studies at the college, will serve as the principal director of the program and will join other Wilkes Honors College faculty in mentoring the selected high school participants. The program allows faculty to share their proficiencies in Anthropology, Social Science, Environmental Science, Biology, Art, History and Philosophy to give students a complex understanding of the humanities and how they integrate into future career paths.
Jon Moore was part of a consortium that was awarded an $8.3 million dollar grant from Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative. Most of the money for the consortium grant goes to fund ship time and equipment for 6 deep-sea research cruises over a 3-year period starting next year. The grant may provide funding some of our recent HC graduates to serve as consortium members as graduate students.

Yasmine Shamma had a chapter accepted titled, “Room in the Room that you Room in?” Ted Berrigan’s Structures in Spatial Perspectives: Essays on Literature and Architecture (Peter Lang, forthcoming in 2015).

Ashley Kennedy was invited by the Oxford-Yale Chinese summer school to teach a philosophy of science course in China this summer. Each year since 1988, 4 professors from the UK/US are invited to teach as a part of this prestigious program. This year 3 professors from the UK, and 1 from the U.S. were selected for this prestigious position.

Rachel Luria just had a short story entitled “In the Park with All the Birds.” accepted in The Doctor T. J. Eckleburg Review, an online and print literary and arts journal housed at The Johns Hopkins University.

Chris Strain is participating with the College of Education, which has been selected to be the recipient of a grant to establish a Center for Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation. As an investigator on the grant, Dr. Strain will be working to design social studies content course for elementary education.
Instead of going to the chapel and getting married, FAU alumni Megan Allore '12 and Eric Bishop '11 are planning to say their vows near the bougainvillea trellis at the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College in Jupiter. Both Megan and Eric feel it is only fitting to have their May 24, 2015 wedding at the Honors College because that is where they met and fell in love.

“We were both Flagler Scholars. We shared classes and spent a great deal of time together. We started dating after becoming good friends,” said Eric. “The backdrop of our relationship is the Honors College.”

The Honors College was founded in 1999. It offers a liberal arts education with focus on interdisciplinary studies, and a student-faculty ratio of 11:1. All students are awarded scholarships. The College boasts a close-knit community of students, professors and administrators, according to Megan and Eric.

“The Honors College is such a wonderful and nurturing place. It was the right decision for Eric and me,” Megan said. “I had a great time there both academically and socially. The professors are accessible and provide you with a great classroom environment. On the social side, you live in the dorms with the same people that are in your classes. The Honors College has provided me not only with a quality education but also many lasting friendships.”

Eric and Megan currently reside in Miami. He is completing his studies at the University of Miami’s Miller School of Medicine and she is an evaluation manager at City Year Miami, a national education nonprofit. The couple likely will move when Eric begins his psychiatry residency. Megan plans to attend law school nearby.

Although there is some question as to where they will spend the next few years, Eric and Megan know they’ll be in Jupiter in late May, saying their vows in front of family, friends, and several former professors and classmates. We wish them the best as they begin their lives together and join the many other Owl couples whose relationships "started @ FAU."

Justin Pacific ‘03

Justin Pacific graduated in the inaugural class of the Honors College. He entered the Honors College in 1999 taking a Psychology concentration course load, then went on to FAU in Boca for the Cognitive Psychology program. After receiving his Master’s, Pacific decided to change his course and entered law school at the University of Florida. He is currently part of a successful real estate law practice in the Northern Atlanta Metro area, and will be running a new branch of the firm this spring. His primary practice is based around representing lenders in real estate transactions.

Pacific agrees that the live and learn community at the Honors College is tight knit. In fact, he even met his wife at the Honors College, Kayley Malencia class of ’04.

“The first few classes, as I’m sure the current ones are, were all very close. Looking back at the past 12 years since graduating, I think the reason was that shared adversity leads to stronger bonds. The academics were challenging, but when finals came around or it was thesis deadline time, it was good knowing that everyone was in the same boat with you. This holds true with the shared work environment in my current legal career,” says Pacific of the experience.
For those of you who graduated in the class of 2010, you may remember your symposium speaker, Kenyan writer and Professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. Well not only did professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o return to the college to do a reading from one of his novels, various members of the Ngũgĩ family also did readings from their respective books. The other speakers included Professor Mukoma Wa Ngũgĩ, author of Nairobi Heat and Black Star Nairobi and Nducu Wa Ngũgĩ, author of City Murders. The daughter of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and current MacArthur Campus student governor, Mumbi Ngũgĩ, monitored the discussion held after the readings.

Professor Mukoma Wa Ngũgĩ was the first to give his reading from his novel. The audience listened as he read about the beginning of his character’s journey that lead him to a crime scene where a murder took place. The author explained the story was inspired by real social problems in both America and Africa.

Nducu Wa Ngũgĩ, author of City Murders, was next to read from his novel. This mystery novel takes place in Sub-Saharan Africa and its main character is lead detective, Ali Fana. The scene was acted out by Nducu and Mumbi.

The last to read was Professor Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o from his memoir Dreams in a Time of War. When Ngũgĩ is accepted into an elite high school in Kenya, he is worried about how he will get to school with trains heavily monitored due to war in the area. The world-renowned Kenyan writer looks back at his growing up in the 1950s in this crisp, clearly told memoir, which evokes the rising African nationalism of the era in all its conflict and complexity.

Wilkes Honors College Alum Tyler Stubbs presented oral arguments this summer before the Florida Supreme Court on rule amendments that affect prosecutors. Tyler received his law degree in 2012 from George Mason University after completing his undergraduate degree at the Wilkes Honors College, where he studied Political Science and Economics. He now works as general counsel for the Florida Prosecuting Attorneys Association (FPAA). His side won the argument with his help. View his oral argument here: http://wfsu.org/gavel2gavel/viewcase.php?eid=2163
August marked the 15-year anniversary for Florida Atlantic University’s Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College on the John D. MacArthur Campus in Jupiter and since its inception in 1999, students of the Honors College have thrived while continually giving back to the community through their academic ventures during and after graduation. This year’s alumni reunion celebrated the anniversary with a Crystal themed party held at Life Long Learning Center on December 12th, 2014.
What do you want to share?
Who do you want to nominate?