**Honors Forum Class of 2014 Reception**

By Alison Wrynn

On Thursday, September 9th, in Gannett Auditorium, the first year class of 2014 was formally inducted into the Honors Forum. A number of prominent speakers were present at the event.

David Vella, Professor of Mathematics and Director of the Honors Forum, delivered the opening remarks. After tracing his own involvement with the Forum, he noted the diversity of interests and past experiences in the class of 2014. Vella encouraged the incoming students to play a greater role in their own education by enrolling in challenging Honors Forum classes.

Skidmore College President Phil Glotzbach followed Professor Vella. He called the Honors Forum a “community of communities” and urged students to always connect ideas from different places. Citing great thinkers from Neils Bohr to the inventor of Velcro, Glotzbach pointed out that all had been “broadly educated” with a foundation in liberal arts. He encouraged all Forum members to have curiosity about a variety of different subject areas. He expressed his belief that the incoming Honors Forum members would achieve great success and could even come up with solutions to some of the world’s most vexing problems.

Honors Forum President Sarah Bashaw ’11 reflected on her time at Skidmore, remaking that all opportunities begin in the classroom. She urged each new member to “be an active participant in your academics” and to get involved with Honors Forum. She mentioned sponsored events, such as Shades of Gray, the Ramsey Lecture, trips, and Fridays at 4, as possible ways to become engaged with the Forum and interact with fellow members.

Professor Roy Rotheim from the Department of Economics was the next to speak. Professor Rotheim talked about his course, HF 203: Citizen Studentship, which is offered every spring. This class encourages the professor and students to educate each other as colleagues, since “you can’t really learn until you learn to learn from others.” Due to its unique structure, this class differs each time that Professor Rotheim offers it. Three of his former students then spoke about the experiences they had teaching each other in the class.

At the end of the night, each member of the new Honors Forum class was called up to receive a certificate, the Honors Forum member’s guide, and a coffee mug with a coupon for free coffee. The event was a great way to start off the year and welcome a new class of students.

**Profile of HI 224H: The Enlightenment**

By Jessica Langman

The Enlightenment, taught by Erica Bastress-Dukehart, is an honors history course that I am currently taking. The course emphasizes the prevailing ideas of the time as well as “the most important interactions taking place within and among society, politics, and culture that characterized this intellectual and cultural transformation.”

Dialogue among sources and between our peers is paramount to the class’ success. When asked what distinguishes the class as an honors course, Erica cites genuine “student interaction and engagement.” As we move forward, Erica says that she hopes to step away from the conversation and let the students contribute more. In non-honors designated classes, there is more focus on lecture and generous guidance. But when a student steps into Erica’s class, they also step into the intellectual environment of the Enlightenment. Students become as important as the teacher - or the teacher becomes first among equals.

We draw from the spirit and primary sources of the Age of Enlightenment in both our methods and our discussion. These ideals will culminate into our final “chef d’oeuvre,” as we construct a social contract together. Everyone must contribute to and ultimately sign this contract, with each fully believing in the ideals it represents. This project is accompanied by other small group and individual projects concerning moral principles and punishments, social justice, education, freedoms and liberties, and the rights and responsibilities of governments. We expect that our fellow classmates will each become experts in their assigned topics, their literary architects, and the history of their progress, so that no aspect is overlooked when we eventually design our social contract.

All demand from each other the application of the radical, political, and literary ideas that define the Enlightenment. Erica thinks, and I agree, that it’s “worth every credit.”

**The Fall Honors Forum Trip: *Billy Elliot* on Broadway**

By Hilary Knecht

On Saturday, October 23rd, 35 Honors Forum members went on a trip to New York City. We had free time in the morning to explore the city and then, in the afternoon, we could either go to the Museum of Modern Art or see *Billy Elliot* at the Imperial Theatre.

The play is an interpretation of the movie, *Billy Elliot*. The story takes place in rural England and is about a boy who discovers he has a talent for ballet amidst the labor disputes of the mid-1980s. At first, Billy’s family is not accepting of his passion for dance. His father and brother are struggling with a strike at the coal mine where they work, and they are reluctant to support Billy’s aspirations to become a professional dancer. Despite obstacles with his family and money, Billy eventually auditions at a ballet school in London.

*Billy Elliot* is not your typical Broadway show. The emphasis was on dancing, not singing (although it was a musical). Additionally, the cast was split almost evenly between children and adults, and the star was an eleven-year-old boy. The young performers added an interesting dynamic to the show. Molly Duffy ‘13 remarked, “I was really impressed by the incredible talent and professionalism of the young actors in the show.” After the show ended, the actor who plays Billy’s father asked the audience to make donations that would go to a charity. In addition to the money collected, ten percent of all of the ticket proceeds would go to a charity for people with AIDS.

Watching Billy’s progression as a dancer, all while wondering whether or not he will go to ballet school, was highly entertaining. *Billy Elliot* exposes the talent of young actors and dancers, and I would highly recommend it.

**Shades of Gray 2010: Religious Freedom in America?**

By Vinay Trivedi-Parmar

Every fall, the Honors forum organizes a two night discussion-based event called “Shades of Gray.” The purpose of the event is to spotlight a controversial issue and to give students and faculty alike the opportunity to discuss the topic freely and openly. This year, the title of the event was “Religious Freedom in America?” The two discussions, each led by a mixed student-faculty panel, took place on November 8th and 9th.

On the first night of the event, a panel including Rich Chrisman (Director of Religious and Spiritual Life), Mark Rye (Psychology), Sulin Ngo ’11, Rohini Alamgir ’12, and Ben Hanson ’13 led the audience in a discussion of religious freedom on Skidmore’s campus. A number of students expressed concern that religion is a taboo subject at Skidmore and that they found it difficult to balance their religious and social lives. Although some suggestions were made addressing the issue, it became clear that a lot of work still has to be done about religion at Skidmore.

The second night of the event focused on the topic of religious freedom in America and in the larger world. A panel consisting of rabbi Linda Motzkin, Christine Kopec (Management and Business), Joel Smith (Religion and Philosophy), Gregory Spinner (Religion and Philosophy), Alex Brehm ’12, and Megan Mosier ’13 led a discussion on a variety of topics, including spirituality, the relationship between science and religion, transcendence, Islam in the public sphere, and the future of religion. The conversation was quick and heated, and the audience along with the panelists raised a number of important questions and issues.

The attendance at the two discussions this year were higher than in past years with 43 people attending the first night and 53 the second night.  It was the hope of the Honors Forum Executive Committee that this event would spark an interesting and informative discussion on the topic of religious freedom, and based on the insightful comments and questions raised by audience members on both nights, I would say they succeeded.



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Interested in contributing to the next edition of the Honors Forum newsletter? E-mail **awrynn@skidmore.edu**!