The Houghton STAR

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COURAGEOUS CAMPAIGN

LAUREN FLANDERS '28

Houghton University's (HU) $83 million COURAGEOUS campaign will move into its public phase during Homecoming & Family Weekend on Oct. 2, marking a visible turn for a fundraising effort that has been quietly underway since 2020.

COURAGEOUS follows Houghton's previous comprehensive campaign, Impact: The Campaign for Greater Houghton, which ended in May 2020 after surpassing its $70 million goal. The Impact campaign supported the Kerr-Pegula Athletic Complex (K-PAC), Paine Center for Science renovations and the Equestrian Event Center, along with scholarships and endowment growth.

Since June 1, 2020, the new campaign has operated in what Karl Sisson, Vice President for Advancement and External Engagement, calls a "silent phase." "It's more of a term of art because it's quiet," he said. "We're still talking to people about making gifts to Houghton. We're still talking about the goals, but not in the same way as in a public phase."



The Luckey Memorial Building, host of administration offices. COURTESY OF ANNABELLE ROOT

The COURAGEOUS campaign, which runs through May 2029, is built around three strategic priorities. The first, Pursuing Christ-Centered Excellence, carries a $36 million goal and will strengthen the Scholar-Servant Fund and Student Scholarship Fund while expanding curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities for students. The second, Investing in Places and Spaces, carries a $24 million goal and will renew residence life facilities, the Equestrian Center, and athletics. The third, Solidifying Your Legacy Through Houghton, carries a $23 million goal and is dedicated to building the endowment for generations to come. Sisson said COURAGEOUS is intended to strengthen Houghton "academically, experientially, and financially."

An immediate effect of COURAGEOUS is already visible. East Hall, HU's largest residence hall, recently received an $11.6 million donor-funded renovation, including improved accessibility and security, larger communal spaces, kitchens and lounges. Sisson said East Hall is the "cornerstone" of Houghton's broader residence renewal efforts, which the campaign hopes to continue through projects such as Shenawana Hall.

According to Dan Noyes, Regional Director of Development, the work of Advancement is to "invite people into our ministry and our mission of the institution." Donor support often forms students' experiences in ways they never see. Noyes pointed to the Shannon Summer Research Institute in Science, an endowed program, as one example. "So there are funds in an ac-

See **COURAGEOUS** *page #2*

Declining Literacy and the Technological Childhood

EVANGELINE FOSTER '29

Reading levels in the United States (US) are declining, causing a nationwide literary crisis. The US Department of Education released an article on Sept. 9, 2026, stating that twelfth graders today have record breaking low reading scores, and nearly "70% of 4th and 8th graders cannot read proficiently." Professor of Philosophy, Dr. Benjamin Lipscomb explains this to be "a deep literacy crisis." The US population is struggling to hold the attention span needed to work through "a complicated argument or policy, question, or body of evidence or epic poem or long novel."



Books on the floor of the Willard J. Houghton Library. None were harmed. COURTESY OF ANNABELLE ROOT

Dr. Jesse Sharpe, Associate Professor of English, believes that distraction is the number one contributor to this crisis. Lipscomb agrees, saying, "The media environment, intensifying in the past couple of decades, has been one in which ubiquitous devices work on our psychology to draw us more and more away from books, fragmenting our attention." Elementary education student Paige Sliwa '29 passionately believes that short form content like YouTube reels is detrimental to literacy, finding that it causes a lack of attention span and isolates people from human interaction, one of the primary ways children learn to be literate.

A decline in literacy is a problem beyond knowing how to read well. Low literacy rates negatively impact other subjects in school. Sliwa says, "In school you don't just have to learn to read, you have to read to learn." A student who is unable to read proficiently cannot understand math word problems or write a science lab report.

Sliwa does acknowledge that "when used correctly, technology can be a useful learning and teaching tool." In the classrooms she's worked in, programs like "i-Ready" meet children at their skill level, something classroom teachers cannot always accommodate for. Teachers also cannot always work with kids one-on-one. If a child has completed their work early they can use "i-Ready" to continue learning while the teacher is busy, making better use of school time.

Social media stifles sustained attention which suppresses creativity. An article by the Atlantic, "The End of Reading is Here," notes brain scans done by Dr. John S. Hutton showing that chil-

See **LITERACY** *page #2*

Changes with Safety and Security and Students Concerns

JOEL ROCHA '29

Safety and Security (S&S) at Houghton University (HU) has recently undergone several major changes under its new director, Brian O'Gorman, prompting a significant amount of criticism from the student body. S&S has been working with the Student Council to explain its decisions and improve its day-to-day operations in order to make HU a better place.

Jonathan Ford, HU's student body president, explained that the Student Council has met with S&S several times and plans to include them in their next meeting. In order to better understand all of S&S's responsibilities, Edmund LaDine, HU's student resource representative, met with the department and asked about the changes they were making. These changes include new uniforms, changes to the process for unlocking buildings and new vehicles.

One of the most criticized changes is the acquisition of new vehicles for S&S around the same time as an approximately 17% increase in tuition, with several students feeling that this is unnecessary and coming at their expense. Bill Burrichter, Vice President of Student Life, stated in an interview that the changes being made are intended to make HU a safer place. Regarding the new vehicles, he explained that the leases on the previous vehicles had expired and that the department was able to negotiate a deal for newer vehicles at little additional cost. He explained that this would be a direct benefit to the student body, as they are Toyota Tacomas with four-wheel drive and have the ability to perform well during extreme weather events, such as the flooding at the end of March 2026 and the recent storm in early September.

O'Gorman has also received criticism regarding the apparent use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in his presentation during the Around the Table meeting on Sept. 16. Students expressed concern that this use of AI reflects unpreparedness and unprofessionalism within the department when addressing the student body.

When interviewed about O'Gorman's presentation, Burrichter explained that O'Gorman was dissatisfied with his performance and acknowledged that the presentation was poorly handled. Burrichter stated that the administration is working with S&S to better handle the public-facing aspects of their job. However, he also stated, "We hired Brian O'Gorman to protect Houghton, not to present to Houghton." Burrichter affirmed that HU needs to feel safe to the average student and that campus safety should not be something that is constantly on the average student's mind.

As S&S continues to undergo these changes, communication between the department and the student body will remain important. While some students have expressed concerns about the department's recent decisions and presentation to the student body, S&S and the administration maintain that these changes are intended to improve HU's campus. Students will have opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback via student council's correspondence with the department. Ultimately, the goal shared by both the student body and S&S is for HU to be a place where students can feel safe and secure. ★

COURAGEOUS *from page #1*

count," Noyes said, "and the interest that those funds produce then funds that program every year."

The Philanthropy Council is made up of volunteers serving as advisors to the Advancement team. Rather than making institutional decisions, John Schneider, co-chair of the HU Philanthropy Council, explained that members offer perspective and serve as ambassadors for the campaign.

Schneider is a direct descendent of founder Willard J. Houghton whose relationship with the university developed over time, built through visits to campus, conversations with university leaders and a growing, firsthand understanding of HU's mission and values.

Schneider said HU plays "an important role in the world," and that his family's connection gives the campaign a sense of continuity. He and his wife have supported the university for years through annual gifts, visits and regular meetings with people at Houghton.

For Schneider, the campaign is about sustaining HU's mission. He said its goal is to make the university "better than ever in the future," while ensuring it stays both academically rigorous and Christ-centered.

Noyes said the benefits extend beyond graduation, just as current students benefit today from projects funded by earlier campaigns. Even students who leave before every project is finished still gain something, he said, the knowledge "that your alma mater is thriving and continuing."

The public launch will include a formal dinner Friday evening, Oct. 2, for invited guests and prospective supporters. The following morning at 9:30, East Hall will be dedicated. The event, open to everyone, will offer a visible sign of what the campaign can accomplish.

Ultimately, COURAGEOUS is an investment not just in today's students, but in the generations to come. ★

LITERACY *from page #1*

dren from 3 to 5 years old used their imagination half as much watching an animated video versus a static picture paired with audio. When children do not have as much information given to them, their imagination is used to fill in the gaps.

TikTok, Instagram and YouTube have the same effect as the animated videos in Hutton's study. These platforms flood us with curated content, which can create an illusion of perfection and hinder creativity, possibly magnifying one's fear of failure. But "you can't develop creativity without failing," Sharpe says. The internet is stiflingly full of endless options of perfect ways to accomplish goals, tasks and projects. Sharpe goes on to say that before social media, "the options were whatever you could come up with," but the "continual presentation of options makes it harder to settle," fracturing our attention.

According to Lipscomb, "there's nothing hopeless about our predicament." He notes that there has been research done on brain plasticity and how the practice of repetition builds proficiency in a skill. For instance, when someone begins running it takes practice to build endurance and become a better runner. Making time to speak and interact with children can make all the difference. Literacy provides children with future opportunities for their careers, communications and relationships. Sliwa believes public libraries are great resources for anyone interested in building literacy skills because they are free and available to all, and suggests that parents make visiting the library a weekly affair where the parent reads to their kid and vice versa. Children gain literacy just as much, if not more, by oral communication as reading. ★

EVENT CALENDAR

SEP 25 — Lyric Theatre: Mozart's The Impresario - 7:30 pm
SEP 26 — Women's Tennis vs Utica University - 12:00 pm
SEP 26 — Lyric Theatre: Mozart's The Impresario - 7:00 pm
SEP 26 — Black Heritage Club Cookout - 1:00 pm
SEP 26 — Softball vs Alfred State - 1:00 pm
SEP 26 — Open Ropes & Glow in the Dark Zipline - 4:00 pm
SEP 30 — Wellness Wednesday at Equestrian Center - 11:00
SEP 30 — Purple & Gold Laser Tag - 9:00 pm
OCT 1 — Homecoming & Family Weekend Begins - 11:00 am

check CampusGroups for additional information

Traditional vs. Contemporary Music in Worship



COURTESY OF JONATHAN FORD

PAUL CLAYDON '28

I first want to start by saying I grew up around contemporary Christian music, so I understand why some people are attracted to it. But I'm not arguing based on what I personally prefer for worship; I'm arguing that traditional hymns are what best helps the gathered church obey Scripture's command to sing. I'm not saying every hymn is perfect and every contemporary worship song is bad or that older automatically means better. When it comes to worship, we should be asking ourselves what kind of music best glorifies God and serves the flock, not what kind of music makes us feel good.

That is the main difference between hymns and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM); CCM appeals to emotion to mimic the presence of God while hymns generally appeal to doctrinal truth. In Colossians 3:16, Paul commands believers to "teach and admonish one another" through singing. Hymns do this best. A good example of this would be Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God". It is a bold confession of faith drawn primarily from Psalm 46 that weaves together Reformation theology of God's sovereign protection, the reality of spiritual warfare against the devil, the insufficiency of human strength, Christ's victory, the power of God's Word and the assurance of the Kingdom despite earthly losses. It emphasizes Sola Gratia, Solus Christus and Sola Scriptura in poetic form.

On the other hand, most CCM songs are doctrinally dry or, worse, have very theologically questionable lyrics that are often repetitive. An example of this would be Cory Asbury's "Reckless Love". Reckless is a theologically bad way of describing God's love. Scripture portrays God as all-knowing (omniscient), all-powerful (omnipotent), wise, intentional and sovereign. If "reckless" were tied to open theism (the view that God does not exhaustively know the future and thus takes real risks), it would be heretical. The way the song interprets the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18, Luke 15) makes God look irresponsible and foolish. In Jesus' day, shepherds could leave flocks under mutual care. The point of the parable is the value of the lost one and God's deliberate pursuit, not careless risk-taking that endangers others. Traditional interpretations do not support the idea that God might forfeit the "ninety-nine".

Now you might be thinking to yourself, that's just one song. Well, there are a lot of CCM songs that have problems like this, especially the ones produced by Hillsong, Bethel Music and Elevation Worship. Tell me your favorite worship song, and I can probably ruin it for you. The theological errors in the songs are not necessarily an accident. These mega churches (Hillsong, Bethel and Elevation) have very questionable teachings. Steven Furtick, the lead pastor of Elevation Worship, teaches modalism, an ancient heresy that states that God appears in three different modes instead of being three persons in one. Bill Johnson, the leader of Bethel, has stated that Jesus did his miracles not as God but as a man in right relationship with God, which confuses the two natures of Christ. I could go on and on. The fact is, the three churches that I mentioned are all connected to the New Apostolic Reformation, a heretical movement that claims new revelation from living apostles. The fact is, these megachurches infuse their heretical beliefs into their songs, and the more you sing their songs, the more you will confess what they believe (See https://bereanresearch.org/bethel-hillsong-elevation-worship-music/). That is why no church should be singing their songs. Not all their songs have bad theology in them, but by singing them at your church and on this campus, you're promoting their brand and leading people to their false teachings.

Tell me your favorite worship song, and I can probably ruin it for you.

Now you may be asking: Why does it matter what songs we sing or how we worship? Well, God cares about how we worship him. In the Old Testament, Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu were struck down for offering improper worship. Now, we may not be struck dead for singing bad worship songs, but this passage shows that God cares about how he is worshiped, and we should care about how we worship him. This brings me to my final reason of why hymns are better than CCM. Hymns are slower and easier to follow, and they are better designed for congregational singing, whereas worship songs are faster, harder to follow, and are designed to be sung by people with high-pitched vocals. Not everyone has high-pitched vocals, which is why CCM often makes people passive observers during worship instead of active participants. Worship shouldn't be only for the worship leader. Everybody should participate. Hymns encourage participation for everyone, while CCM turns worship into a performance that people watch rather than participate in. Contemporary worship songs are designed to be performed, not sung.

It is for these reasons that I advocate that all worship songs in Chapel be replaced by traditional hymns. I know that some people like worship songs, and those in the praise bands enjoy being a spectacle. But we should all set aside our personal preferences in favor of what most honors God. I challenge Scott Hallman, Dean of Spiritual Life and Campus Pastor, to go two weeks without using any worship music in Chapel or Around the Table and see what people think. I will even help pick out the hymns. ★

Paul Claydon is Senior Bible and Theology Major. He is a member of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and he loves to call out the theologically bad practices of American Evangelicalism. He is also preaching at St Paul's Lutheran Church in Basswood hill on October 11th if you want to come see him.

Have an opinion you want to share?

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The mission of the Houghton STAR is to preserve and promote the values of dialogue, transparency and integrity that have been the ideals of Houghton University since its inception. This is done by serving as a medium for the expression of student thought and as a quality publication of significant campus news, Houghton area news, and events.

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The Houghton STAR

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Movie Review

Spider-Man: Brand New Day

ISAIAH BORCHERT '28

One of the biggest movies of the summer ended up being the highest-grossing film of all time; Sony's Spider-Man: Brand New Day comes remarkably close to being a perfect superhero movie, lacking only one crucial element: surprise. In Tom Holland's fourth movie as Spider-Man, we finally see Peter Parker stripped of his safety net, leaving him broke, living alone and cut off from Iron Man and the Avengers' backup. The result is the most authentic screen version of both classic comic Spider-Man and Peter Parker we've gotten yet, grounded in real financial and emotional stakes rather than technology gifted to him. For the first time in a Spider-Man movie, our hero was depicted as he always should have been: lonely, broken and yet hopeful for the city he loves.

The opening montage, stacked with classic villains, sets the tone perfectly and rewards longtime fans immediately with cameos from stars in Spider-Man's rogues' gallery like Tombstone, Boomerang, Tarantula and Ramrod. The color grading and the practical swinging were both monstrous improvements on previous MCU Spider-Man movies and went a long way to making the whole movie feel more real. Frank Castle, who first appeared in a Spider-Man comic, stepping into the "mentor" role once occupied by Tony Stark was a fantastic choice, as he supports Peter's story without overshadowing it. As a massive fan of the Netflix shows, I was extremely apprehensive about the inclusion of Frank Castle's Punisher given how mature and morally complicated Castle's history is, and I was worried that would not translate well to the big screen. He is a fantastically written and developed character across two MA shows, but thankfully his characterization here is a pleasant surprise, staying true to the source material except for maybe a slightly too-warm, too-friendly interaction with Peter in the finale. The absence of a rumored Daredevil cameo stings, especially for fans (like myself) hoping to see Matt Murdock alongside Peter Parker, but that was just speculation.

Hulk's scene might be the best the MCU has seen in years, as it was a treat to see our first truly angry Hulk since the opening sequence of Infinity War almost 10 years ago. The MJ and Ned subplot was one of the weaker parts of the movie; it often got in the way and felt mostly like fan service, bringing back two beloved characters and actors but distracting from the overall theme. I did like how they used Ned and MJ to remind Peter that he is alone and forgotten, but the rest of their appearances in the film rarely helped the plot and distracted from Peter's overall character development.

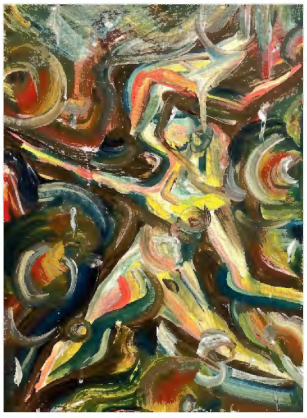
Sadie Sink's character being revealed as Jean Grey wasn't exactly a shock, as most people expected it due to the press tour and because Sadie Sink looks like Jean Grey in the comics, but using another hero as the antagonist in a Spider-Man movie is a bold structural choice that mostly pays off. It does raise a concern that after the possession and apparent killing she's responsible for here, redeeming Jean as a genuine hero in the upcoming X-Men film may be a tough sell for most of the audience. That predictability is the film's core weakness. Jean's identity, Peter's survival in the end and his gradual mastery of his new mutant-adjacent abilities all play out exactly as expected, with no real twists to keep viewers guessing. Still, as a comic book superhero movie, it's a fantastic film, well-written, character-driven and visually satisfying, and it sets up both a great sequel and a new X-Men story, as well as building hype for this December's Avenger's: Doomsday. 4.5 stars out of five. ★

Student Spotlight



GRACIE STICKELS ('27)

Hello! :D
My name is Gracie Stickels, and I am a senior here at Houghton! I study Communications with a Digital Marketing Concentration here at Houghton, as well as two minors in Studio Art and Art Business. I love all different types of art mediums, but my favorites are photography and painting. I strive to make art that is colorful and filled with emotion. I do a mix of marketing and studio art, and I do it all to the glory of God!











Want to write a review of a book, movie, etc.?

Want to recommend a Student Spotlight?

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