



LINCOLN: MOVIE REVIEW |  
CULTURE, P. 4

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK  
MEASURING ACHIEVEMENT IN  
TANGIBLE WAYS | OPINIONS, P. 7

CHRISTMAS PRISM PREVIEW |  
CULTURE, P. 4

ARTIST OF THE WEEK:  
ANTHONY PETRILLO | FEATURES, P. 8

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*Merry Christmas from the Houghton Star*

## Contemporary Contexts 2014 Faculty “Search for Meaning in a Fragmented World”

LINDSEY HAWKINS

The Contemporary Contexts program, which replaced the London First-Year Honors Program in 2011, gives an interdisciplinary approach to searching for “meaning in a fragmented world.” From reading great novels such as *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Paradise Lost* in the classroom to observing the exhibits in The British Museum and the timeless artwork of The National Gallery, this program has been an influential experience for many Houghton faculty and students, with some participants citing it as the reason they chose to attend Houghton.

The new social science theme of the 2014 Contemporary Contexts program integrates the studies of art, communication, literature, and psychology to “provide important lenses for explaining the trends and transitions that produce a fragmented experience of the world,” as stated in the program description. Dr. Stephen Woolsey, professor of English and one of the professors involved in the program, explained that the program aims to further explore a time that is “disconcerting and exciting at the same time.”

“We’re hoping to bring in this idea that in some ways fragmenta-

tion in our world has made things a lot more interesting,” said Woolsey. “The implication of the word fragmentation is almost always negative, and we’re interested in ways in which it’s been positive to in creating an environment in which the arts can flourish but also even political ideas and diversity, social diversity, cultures that aren’t quite so homogeneous but are more mixed and diverse, and ways of communication that are far more diverse than people could have ever imagined twenty years ago.”

The overall structure of the program consists of four components. The first, a one credit communication based introductory course in Fall 2013 taught by David Huth, associate professor of visual communication and media arts, will focus on communication media and its importance in establishing a sense of meaning in culture.

The second, an eight credit art and communication based seminar in Spring 2014 taught by Huth and Ted Murphy, professor of art, will focus on the lack of a singular world-view and the resulting issues that have erupted in response.

Following the spring semester, the third component, a Mayterm in London at The Highbury Centre

focusing on art and literature led by Murphy and Woolsey, will treat western culture’s fragmentation in the modern and postmodern eras as shown in the various museums, galleries, and architecture of London.

Lastly, the final four credit psychology and literature based course in Fall 2014 taught by Woolsey and Dr. Paul Young, professor of psychology, will study fragmentation and restoration via subjects such as art, religion, and drama.

While the layout of the program may seem very structured, this is not the overall intent of the program. Murphy emphasized how the faculty involved “want flexibility and questions to be asked, not just a chronological sequence of curriculum.”

He added that new program was “set up so that the city that the students ultimately go to visit is not critical.” In other words, the program is not centered around London specifically as it was in previous years, but rather London has been chosen for its rich historical and cultural roots.

With the new layout of this program, the students may be traveling to other areas of the world, as they are for the current Contemporary Contexts program which is traveling to Vienna in May 2013.

This program has had a wide

range of students interested in different areas of study, including biology, music, English, psychology, art, computer science, math, philosophy.

While the structure of the program may be changing, Huth said, “the core purposes and character of the program remain fairly constant.” This program has helped to mold many Houghton students.

Murphy explained that their “main goal has always been to bring in the brightest students, and not set them aside as a special group, but rather excite them to learn and have them be an example of that in their other classes.”

Katie Szejebka, a sophomore currently in her last semester of the program, expressed how the program has shown her that she doesn’t “have to always be perfect. Maybe that sounds opposite of what an honors program should do. But after stressing about being academically perfect all through high school, I was thrown into a group of kids who were also perfect at their own schools. I’ve realized that there is more to me than my grades, and I’ve seen that sometimes walking around a crowded street teaches you a lot more than reading a textbook can.” ★

## Cancelling Classes Before Breaks:

## Correlation Between Accreditation and Cancellations Explained

ANNELISE HEIN

The question, “Can’t we just cancel class?” may have bounced around campus in the past few weeks. As Thanksgiving break approached, students and faculty alike were eager for the holidays to commence. The last day of class before Thanksgiving arrived sooner for some than for others, and not just because some students have the luxury of having no classes on Tuesday. Rather, many classes on the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week were cancelled, for a variety of reasons. Dean Linda Mills Woolsey said that several professors were put in a tight spot when students whose Monday classes were cancelled asked that their Tuesday classes also be cancelled.

Although both students and facul-

ty deserve a break, Dean Mills Woolsey presented several reasons why professors cannot cancel class simply so that the holidays can begin sooner. She stated, “For our accreditation, we need to offer a certain amount of instruction.” Houghton College is an accredited institution, which means that it is officially recognized by higher authorities, including those at the state and national levels. To comply with the New York State Board of Regents, Houghton operates under a credit-hour system, so the number of credits awarded for a course correlates with a certain number of contact hours.

This means that students in a 4-credit Biblical Literature course must be in contact with the professor for a corresponding number of hours over the course of the semester. Hearing this, a student may ask,

“Then how is it that I can receive 4 credits for Biblical Literature when I only attended half (or two thirds, insert appropriate fraction here) of the

classes?” While students are free to skip class, the College must schedule classes to meet credit-hour requirements.

Cancelling classes is an issue not only because of accreditation issues but also because it impacts the quality

of the education offered by Houghton. While emphasizing the importance of complying with accreditation regulations and offering a quality education, Mills Woolsey emphasized that faculty at Houghton are not lazy and very rarely cancel classes simply because they want a break. She also stated, “My perception of Houghton students is they’re human and they want to go home early, but they’re not slackers.”

For a weary student or professor counting down the hours until break, jeopardizing Houghton’s accreditation and upholding a high standard of education may not be of paramount importance. But consider the cost of this education: every time a student misses one class, he or she loses at least \$15 per credit, assuming that

See CANCELLATION page 5

