

MASKING CHANGES
News, p. #1-2

BUFFALO CAMPUS
News, p. 1-2

FITNESS CLASSES
Features, p. #2

ACCESSIBILITY
Opinions, p. #3

AOTW
Columns, p. #4

HOUGHTON ANNOUNCES UPCOMING CHANGES TO MASKING GUIDELINES

OWEN HARDIMAN ('22)

On February 15, an all-campus email announced that Houghton College will undergo changes to masking requirements in the coming weeks. The email, sent from Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students Marc Smithers ('08), reported that on Sunday, March 6, the day many students will return to campus from Winter Break, masks will no longer be required to be worn in Houghton's residence halls or townhouses. Smithers noted that the transmission rate on campus will be closely monitored as these changes go into effect, and if COVID-19 rates remain low the school expects to further relax masking requirements the following week on Monday, March 14. These changes will require masking only in classrooms and in chapel and would allow faculty members to elect not to wear a mask in their classes provided they socially dis-



Students wearing masks in the Reinhold Campus Center while studying.

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tance themselves from their students. Additionally, the Dining Hall will be fully opened to students, faculty, and community members.

When asked why the Houghton PREP (Preparing a Residential Education Plan) team decided upon a phased approach to adjusting masking guidelines, Smithers stated, "A phased approach is particularly helpful when im-

plementing significant changes like this to our policies as this allows us an ability to see how these changes play out in the community on a more gradual scale. As we're returning from Winter Break at this same time, we especially want to be sensitive to the risks associated with reentry to campus, so this is another reason to be more cautious in any changes

we would make to our policies at this time."

The PREP team cited the low number of cases on campus and the decreasing number of cases in the area as a key factor in the decision to modify the school's masking requirements. These changes were greeted with excitement from many Houghton students. Leah O'Connell ('23) enthusiastically remarked,

"I'm very excited that we will no longer have to mask in a majority of places. As an RA, I especially am looking forward to not having to regulate masking in the dorms." This sentiment of enthusiasm was echoed by Mary Vandembosch ('23), who remarked, "I am excited for this step forward after the extensive amount of time that has been put into making this possible. It will be wonderful to see the many smiling faces around campus again!"

Other students shared they felt a mix of emotions regarding the upcoming changes. Sarah Halvorson ('22) shared that they already see many students not following current masking guidelines, which is a cause of anxiety and anger for them. They noted, "I wear my mask out of respect for the community even though I am fully vaccinated. Now that the choice is on the individual and it is not blatantly disrespectful to the community

See **MASKING** page #2

Symposium Returns to Houghton

JOSHUA CARPENTER ('24)

Having launched in 2011, the Kindschi Faith and Justice Symposium returned to Houghton for another week of exploring topics relating to the worldwide intersection of faith and justice. Of these challenges, unity in the body of Christ was the symposium's central issue, focusing on, as the Houghton website states, "how tribalism and polarization have led to the disunity in the church, and how bold conversations can help bridge the gap toward justice and compassion."

Ansley Green ('22), a student intern who assisted with the symposium by finding speakers and planning events, described the symposium as "a time to look at topics in the church where faith and global justice intersect." As Green pointed out, these topics are difficult, referring back to the symposium's focus on having fear-



Dr. Jonathan Case speaks on last day of the Kindschi Faith and Justice Symposium.

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less conversations about difficult topics, especially at a time when the church seems so internally divided. She feels that the significance of the symposium is how it "challenges us to look into the face of topics that we typically avoid because they are uncomfortable or just plain scary."

Brian Webb, who is the Director of the Center of

Faith, Justice, and Global Engagement at Houghton, and an instructor of Environmental Studies, was the lead planner of this year's symposium. He described the planning process as "challenging," since there were "a lot of moving pieces and details to put together." However, this was a challenge he gratefully accepted, since he thinks that it's "well worth it

See **SYMPOSIUM** page #2

Feature: Houghton College Buffalo

JANNATUL NOSHIN ('22)

Higher education begins with a college that is both financially accessible to all and is a leader in its community, which Houghton College Buffalo provides. Houghton College Buffalo, or HCB for short, is a location where students express their gratitude for their education. If any student believes that college is not for them, Houghton College Buffalo is a cause to show them that they are wrong. Most students that enter college do not immediately know their major or what they want to study following high school graduation, but at HCB, that's okay. HCB establishes a firm foundation in which students are led with opportunities and a path to success. HCB Dean Julian



Jannatul Noshin, journalist and student at Houghton College Buffalo.

Cook echoed this, noting, "HCB students are not problems to be solved. They are a cadre of emerging leaders with the ethical vision and spiritual audacity to believe that education and faith are tools for hewing our collective destinies. Every day at HCB we live out the conviction that hope is a way of life; not a passive state of being. HCB students come together to construct hope." The courses that students take at HCB

See **BUFFALO** page #2

FITNESS CLASSES AT HOUGHTON

MARITH ANDERSON ('22)

During the cold winter months at Houghton, it might seem difficult to motivate yourself to stay active. If you're searching for a way to improve your fitness while building relationships with your peers, look no further than the Nielsen Center, where there are fitness classes available to help you do just that.

For a workout and a mindfulness session rolled into one, yoga sessions are held each Monday night at 9 pm in the Aux Gym in Nielsen. Host Emily Pickering ('23) notes, "[Yoga] is a great way to end the day and take care of yourself both physically and mentally. I am currently using Yoga with Adriene videos and am excited to continue hosting this class for anyone who just needs a break or wants to try something new... Hope to see you there!" To make it even easier, all you need to do is show up, as mats are provided,

and no other outside equipment is necessary.

On Tuesday nights at 7 pm, Elianna McHenry, Assistant Professor of Accounting here at Houghton, leads Zumba in the Aux Gym. "Zumba is essentially dance fitness," she explains. "We dance through our workout. I lead the songs from the front, and you pick up the moves as you go through the class. It's a lot of fun, and you oftentimes don't even realize what a workout you are actually getting!" Ranging from class sizes of 5-20 people, there is no pressure to get it all on the first try. "We use the same songs every week so you are able to get the hang of the moves better," she adds. If this interests you, grab your water bottle, and some workout shoes, and join her on Tuesdays!

Up in the fitness center of Nielsen, Spin Class runs every Wednesday night from 8 - 9 pm. "People attending will be welcomed with fun music, disco lighting, and an energetic

group," notes instructor Cedar Smith ('24). She notes, "Space is limited," and she encourages anyone who is interested to make sure to sign up prior to attending and to "come ready to have a fun hour of cycling with friends."

If team sports are more your style, Guthrie Collins, Director of Campus Recreation and the Head Disc Golf Coach here at Houghton, leads pickup volleyball games on Thursday nights between 9 and 11 pm. "[It is] a time to come enjoy some good ole' recreational volleyball. All skill levels are encouraged to participate," he says. "If you like volleyball and want to play some pick-up games, this is the place for you!"

If any of these fitness classes interest you, feel free to stop by the Nielsen Center on the nights that they're being held, and reach out to the instructors with any questions or concerns.★

Together, we are stronger, and anything is possible, and HCB is the epitome of this. At HCB, everyone works together to achieve success. Adjunct Instructor of Communication Denise Reichard commented on this, stating, "The high academic standards as well as the implementation of those standards in and out of the classroom make Houghton College elevated in many ways that we might use to evaluate higher education." Students can work with available tutors at any time without making an appointment. HCB ensures that its students are maintaining their course load and are given practical tools and understanding to excel in any course. As a result, students are less stressed and can meet the demands that come with pursuing higher education. All other institutions pale in comparison to the level of education provided by Houghton.

Students at Houghton College Buffalo are welcomed, respected, and cherished, and they all have a place here, regardless of gender, religion, or color. At the Symphony Circle Campus, all individuals, nationalities, and personalities are honored. Professor Steve Strand, who "moved to Buffalo in 2014 largely to work with the city's growing newcomer communities of people from around the world", noted this, and also added that "Houghton College Buffalo beautifully reflects rich cultural diversity and vitality, so I was pleased to join this learning community. Working at Houghton College Buffalo has a great purpose to extend faith-based educational opportunity in the city."

Houghton College Buffalo (HCB) will also make sure that every student feels accepted and recognized as a student. This has been the experience of student Hafal Abde, who discusses, "The reason I chose Houghton College is that it has a lot of support and I feel I will not fail in the classes. All the time teachers ask students to do the work so they cannot fail in the classes. So, they are really taking care of the students." Houghton College Buffalo strives hard to ensure that students from underrepresented groups and New American immigrant communities are well equipped before they move on from the program. Tutors are available to assist students who are having difficulty understanding and completing their assignments. Every opportunity Houghton College Buffalo has offered for students has been a great achievement. Students can

win HCB honors for their participation in activities such as career fairs, immigration debate panels, and ethnically varied food festivals.

Students were astounded by how Dr. Wayne D. Lewis, Jr., President of Houghton College, and Cathy E. Freytag, Dean of the Faculty, made it a mission to visit the HCB Symphony Circle campus during a joyous welcoming event. It was more than just a moment of time spent, but it led to something much more significant. It created a beautiful experience. Student Kamulete Bwemere states, "When I met President Lewis, I felt that I'm important and I'm the part of Houghton College. In life I have never seen of any organization that I was in, but President Lewis reminds me that I am the best in my life, and I will fight for my own." Every student received the opportunity to speak and engage not only their peers but also with the faculty and staff that help contribute to creating what Houghton College is today. For every student, this was a watershed moment, a major milestone, and a reassurance. They were treated with dignity and respect and felt appreciated. This was an opportunity for everyone's voice to be heard, for every culture to be represented, and for no one to feel like an outcast.

As Professor Kushal Bhardwaj notes, Houghton College Buffalo is a wonderfully unique environment to be a part of. "As a passionate educator, I was blessed to teach Anthropology, African History and Political Science to the most unique group of students in my award-winning, multi-decade career. The sons and daughters of immigrants, from various parts of the world, enriched MY life as I taught them how to better understand themselves and the world." Houghton College Buffalo is an excellent option for individuals who want to see themselves succeeding and growing, since it provides all the necessary assistance, and every student is praised for their achievements.★

MASKING from page #1

to be unmasked or half-masked, I'll have one less reason to be annoyed by others. Do I think everyone should be masked? Yes. But since half the campus doesn't do this anyways, therefore nullifying the point, at least I can enjoy being maskless in some spaces with a clearer conscience." This blend of eagerness and apprehension was affirmed by Elizabeth Veacock (23), who said, "I found myself feeling so excited and yet so very nervous. It feels like it might be too early to lift all of the masking restrictions and things could go back to being worse like they were in the beginning. However, I feel like we have to rely on God and trust that as long as we make small steps in the right direction we can get back to the way things were before COVID happened."

When asked about the concerns that students may have about the new masking policy, Smithers noted, "Any sort of emergence from the policies that we have known for the last two years will be, at least at first, unsettling, particularly for those individuals who are at higher risk for severe infection but also for nearly everyone as this has been what

our normal life has been since early 2020." He went on to remind students that the best defense against severe infection from COVID-19 continues to be well within the control and choices of each individual, with vaccination being the best defense. "For students who are concerned about these changes, we continue to strongly encourage our community to be vaccinated and boosted, if eligible, and to social distance from others when in environments where you are unsure of the vaccination status of others. In addition to this, individuals can still continue to choose to mask in all areas of campus. There will still be many individuals who will be masked throughout campus, as they are identified as close contacts or may be in the last five days of their isolation period, in which the CDC allows individuals to be out of isolation but still requires them to mask around others."

It was on March 13, 2020 when Houghton announced it would be shutting down and sending students home due to COVID-19. Two years later almost down to the day, Houghton will start to look more like it did pre-pandemic.★

SYMPOSIUM from page #1

for the opportunity to engage our campus in challenging but important conversations," noting cultural divisions in the church as an example to explain what he means by "important conversations." When he was asked about the goals of the symposium, Webb replied that he hopes these conversations about faith and justice would continue so that "we can become better followers of Christ," who "pursue justice while bringing the church closer together to listen to one another."

Though the symposium has ended, you can still direct any comments or questions to Brian Webb.★

BUFFALO from page #1

are crucial to their career opportunities. Each student's aim at HCB is to ensure that they do not fall behind, which is precisely what an educational institution should accomplish. HCB's academic agenda is designed to assist any student in achieving their goals for a successful profession and life journey. Dieu-fidele Munano commented on this, noting, "I like Houghton college because they do everything on their ability to shape us and to get us ready for next steps to come."

SPEAK OUT!

Letters to the editor should be less than 600 words

SUBMIT TO
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Disability and Accessibility



MARY CHICHESTER ('22)

Lately, my For You Page on TikTok has shown me a very specific niche of content. This content is what inspired me to write this piece. TikTok user @immarollwithit has been documenting their experience as a wheelchair user at UMass. Their story has led to a lot of publicity on the accessibility of college campuses and led me to find another TikTok page @CampusAccessNetwork. This page advocates for more accessibility in higher education. All of this inspired me to do some research into our schools policy and practice when it comes to accessibility.

The first perspective to look at is that of the individuals who need accessibility in order to thrive on our campus. Abigail Pixly ('24) is one of these people. Last school year, after knee surgery, she was required to use crutches and wear a straight leg brace. She was also not allowed any weight put on her leg. Soon, she will be getting another surgery and

needing to use crutches again. In sharing her story she shared that she was very lucky to live in Lambain, where the elevator (known as Otis) could prevent Abby from having to take the stairs. "However," She said, "Otis is not the most reliable elevator in the world and there were many times that he had broken down and I had to use the stairs, which was not only hard for me but also dangerous." I hate going up the stairs period, but on one leg sounds horrendous.

Abby doesn't have all bad things to say though, she ended her interview with me by saying, "Mr. Plymale then reached out to me asking if there was anything that his depart-

"A handicap door opener is helpful for wheelchair users, but also carrying a big pile of boxes to the campus center, texting and walking, people with strollers, and so many other situations."

ment could do to make getting around with crutches in the snow easier and this gesture was immensely appreciated." If you don't know who Mr. Plymale is, he's the director of facilities, and has been since 2012. Upon reaching out with questions about the state of accessibility on campus, he was very forthcoming with the way his department approaches accessibility. He first explained that they do much

"He did not sit in the temple where not all could reach him and leave those who couldn't without his lessons saying 'Then they just shouldn't bother seeking my truth.'"

door hardware, renovating spaces, identifying other spaces on campus that can be used instead of inaccessible areas, upgrading fire alarm systems, installing elevators, grinding uneven sidewalks, patching holes in roads and sidewalks, and providing transportation means to students with mobility issues to name several of a long list." A long list indeed!

From this response, a few things stick out.

Firstly, the mention of handicap door openings. This is something that falls under the term Universal Design (UD). I first learned about UD in my education classes as an important factor for having an accessible classroom. UD is when an environment is accessible to all parties. This doesn't just mean people with disabilities. A handicap door opener is helpful for wheelchair users, but also carrying a big pile of boxes to the campus center, texting and walking, people with strollers, and so many other situations. Personally, I have a nerve condition that limits the use of some of my limbs. On days when it is too painful to pull open a door, those buttons are so helpful. Mr. Plymales willingness to install them when needed on an individual basis is great, but they should be in every building and every doorway.

A response I often get when discussing accessibility at Houghton is "then those people [people with accessibility needs] shouldn't come here". Instead of using this rhetoric, I think we should look to my old pal, Jesus. Jesus was accessible. He did not sit in the

temple where not all could reach him and leave those who couldn't without his lessons saying "Then they just shouldn't bother seeking my truth." He met people where they were and accommodated for their needs. When the rest of the world shunned those with disabilities or chronic illness, Jesus advocated for them and brought lessons of inclusion.

Practically, I think those in charge of construction, remodeling, and accessibility should take a Universal Design stance and consult those with disabilities before they have to reach out for help. Being proactive in our approach to accessibility not only shows how committed we are to following Jesus' example, but how committed we are to the safety and well being of our siblings with accessibility needs as well. Students can partake in the push for accessibility by advocating to those with the power to make these decisions. We can be advocates.

Marc Smithers summed up the way we should strive for accessibility best in his response to my inquiry for questions: "Houghton has always strived to be a welcoming community to people from all backgrounds and the accessibility of our campus is an important measure of our ability to do that well."★

Mary Chichester is a senior majoring in Inclusive Adolescent Education and English. They are also involved in advocacy at the national and grassroots level for inclusivity, equity, and Justice.

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 College 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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Event Review

Valentine's Day Chocolate Sampling

ANNA ZIMMERMAN ('23)

The Center for Sustainability hosted a chocolate sampling event in the campus center on Valentine's Day. There were eight different types of chocolates to sample from six different sustainable and fair trade companies. Around 50 students stopped by to grab some chocolate, of which Unreal's Dark Chocolate Crispy Quinoa Gems seemed to be one of the big hits. Erika Nash ('22) grabbed an extra piece of her favorite, Theo's Dark Chocolate Sea Salt, which was "some of the best chocolate" she has had. The other brands consisted of Alter Eco, Beyond Good, Tony's, Dr. Bronner's, and Candid.

All of the chocolate was bought from Hive, an online store that focuses on ethical sourcing of products, recycled/compostable packaging, and carbon offsets to work towards a "more sustainable and equitable world." All of the chocolate brands have practices that support both more environmentally conscientious, as well as ethical practices for the people who are involved in the industry. Unfortunately, much of the chocolate industry is entwined with high rates of deforestation, unsustainable use of resources, underpaying farmers, and child labor. Clayton Hardiman ('22) reflected on this by saying, "knowing that there is ethical and responsible chocolate out there is comforting. It really makes you think about the decisions you make when buying something as simple as chocolate."★

Artist of the Week

Caroline Oakes

About the Artist

Caroline Oakes is a senior Studio Art major, with a concentration in oil painting. Her love for the outdoors and surrounding herself in nature translates into every painting she creates. She especially loves painting fruit, flowers, and the wild little creatures she sees during her day to day life.

