Last year was a special one for the SAS Honors program as we ushered in new initiatives and bade farewell to our first School of Arts and Sciences graduating class. Continuing our tradition of innovative, critical learning, faculty offered Honors seminars in subjects from Medical Ethics and the Law to Financial Crises in Historical Perspective, and Complementarity in Physics, Biology, and Philosophy.

For our summer reading and Honors Colloquium, we brought author Mary Doria Russell to campus to discuss her novel The Sparrow, a science fiction tale of well-meaning Jesuits who are sent to another planet to make “first contact.” Our students debated and developed projects on the contact theme in history, literature, and science, as well as in their own experiences coming to the university. In developing our spring Colloquium theme “To Be of Use,” we collaborated with Batool Hassan from the social enterprise group the Acumen Fund, Russian dissident artist Vitaly Komar, poet and activist Abena Busia, and community engagement leaders Maurice Elias and Peter Guarnaccia.

Our students have also been reaching outward, attending special sponsored programs of the “Bodies” exhibition as well as the planetarium in New York City. Perhaps our most notable outreach was the brand-new Honors global experience. Over spring break Dean Julio Nazario took a group to Yucatan, Mexico, immersing the students in archaeology, ethnology, languages and culture, colonial history, marine science, and rainforest ecology as they trekked from pyramid sites to jungles, slept in hammocks, and swam in underground lakes and coral pools.

Among our program speakers this year were Honors alumni and we hope to see more of you, as we did at the annual Alumni Weekend reception at the Zimmerli Art Museum. We have established a Facebook presence and I can also connect through Linked-In. We look forward to having you share with our students your experiences and lives in the world that comes after—but remains a part of—Honors here at Rutgers.

With all my best wishes,

Matt Matsuda
MARCUS PULLMAN  
SASHP Class of 2012

Of all the experiences I’ve had in my three years at Rutgers, the Honors Program has been the most rewarding. It’s a privilege to attend the Honors courses, which cover material in greater depth, while class size is kept intimate. I major in Mathematics and Sociology. One of the first Honors Seminars I took was “Disasters” with Professor Lee Clarke. The description didn’t sound interesting at first, but we had intense discussions about 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and “panic.” I was surprised to learn that in crisis situations most people act urgently, but in ways that are calm and controlled. General “panic” is a misconception, often created by governments that give the public too little information. I wouldn’t have guessed that.

I also study proof-based “pure math.” The properties of complex numbers are hard to explain, but basically, I’m not interested in anything a calculator can do. Even calculus, in the end, just gives you a number. For my capstone thesis project I’m working on a proof that allows me to analyze and actually understand the creative nature of math itself. This is a truly a one-of-a-kind learning experience.

The Honors Program sees undergraduates for what they are, a valuable asset of the university, and appreciates what they have to offer. In a single sentence, the Honors program has allowed me to attend a massive university, while ensuring that I get the personal attention, compassion, and expanded opportunities of a small private school.

DIMETRI DUCKERY  
Class of 2013

When I was accepted into the School of Arts & Sciences Honors Program this time last year, I didn’t realize just how much it meant to be a part of the program. In the past year, however, I have enjoyed numerous experiences that come with being an honors student. One of the opportunities I appreciated most was the weekly Tea with the Dean. This forum where students and faculty meet introduced me to a range of different topics as well as to many new people. One of these, Arthur Casiato, told me about the many fellowships for which I am eligible to apply as an undergraduate and even after graduation from Rutgers.

Another rewarding component of the Honors Program was the Honors Colloquium. The Colloquium met once a week to discuss a broad central theme; this year we talked about how to be of use. A number of engaging guest speakers were brought in to give students a wide variety of perspectives on the theme. What made the course especially interesting for me was the diversity of its members; different years, ethnicities, and perspectives helped to create a unique and lively conversation.

VERA HINSEY  
Class of 2014

“I have an idea for what I want to do this spring break.” I glance across the dinner table at my dad. He looks skeptical already. “I want to go to Mexico with…” “I don’t think so,” he cuts me off. “You didn’t let me finish!” I protest. “It’s with the Honors Program!” After a bit more badgering, I won him over and was already daydreaming about pina coladas on the beach. As it turned out, we did a lot more trekking around Ancient Mayan sites and through jungles than relaxing, but it was an incredible way to spend my spring break nonetheless!

This is just one example of many opportunities the Honors Program has given me. Here’s another. On a whim, I went to a Tea with the Dean where we were going to discuss the possible books for next summer’s Summer Reading Program, and I was quickly sucked in to the cutthroat process of selecting the next book. Well, maybe it wasn’t cutthroat, but I definitely fought for my favorite, The Monsters of Templeton, which I highly recommend!

By the end of the year it had become clear to me how much the Honors Program had shaped my time at Rutgers, so I eagerly volunteered to become an Honors Ambassador and share my experience with prospective students. As I told a group of high school seniors, “The SAS Honors Program is like being one of the nerdy kids in high school, but with much better perks!”

SHOSHANNAH BUXBAUM  
Class of 2013

One of my most worthwhile experiences as part of the Honors Program was getting involved in research, which I began with the encouragement of my Honors Faculty Mentor. I received an Aresty research grant and joined Professor Jack Aiello in a lab studying social organizational psychology, with a focus on how workplaces can be made more effective. I developed a research study on “The Benefit of Distractions,” measuring the effects that “distractions” such as music can have on repetitious and automatic tasks.

I play the cello, and this enabled me to combine my interests in music with experimental studies conducted using undergraduates in psychology classes. I developed strong skills in research and teamwork. In Spring 2011, I presented my work at the Aresty Research Symposium, and also at the Honors Program Rutgers Day showcase. In Summer 2011 I was awarded a Cooper Fellowship to continue and complete my research.

My experience in the Honors Colloquium was a delightful addition to my normal course load. The speakers were all accomplished and inspiring. One of my favorites was the Russian dissident artist Vitaly Komar, who talked about his life and work, but most importantly about pursuing one’s passions whatever they may be.

As a newcomer to the Honors Program at the beginning of my sophomore year, I felt welcomed into a vibrant and nurturing community. The deans are always available with guidance and suggestions as to how to achieve future plans both in school and beyond. The Honors Program also offers many ways to get involved in the Rutgers community at large. It is a privilege to have access to so many amazing opportunities.
THOMAS FIGUEIRA  Professor  Department of Classics

My Honors Seminar in Fall 2010 was entitled “Identity in Ancient Greece: Belonging and Otherness.” It dealt with the interaction of ancient Greek elites with others who have sometimes been considered socially marginal, including women, slaves, individuals from different ethno-racial groups, and those varying in their sexual behavior. The topic approached the nature of diversity not only in ancient civilizations but also in our own. Socialization in ancient Western society is more complex than it first appears. Since this was not the first time the seminar had been offered, we were able to draw on a mass of source material, bibliographical lists, and research resources, culled from a variety of works.

The challenges and rewards of teaching at Rutgers are conjoined. Our students display a range of abilities and reflect enormous disparities in earlier schooling. For some, an exercise in vocabulary building called “Word Power” provides educative value; others find cultural literacy in courses such as Greek Civilization. Our Honors students possess academic skills comparable to those matriculating at elite institutions; Honors students in New Brunswick are like a prestigious learning community within the larger institution. Students at Ivy League schools receive significant intellectual advantage through opportunities to research, report, and write under close mentoring. How great a gift is directed revision and learning through reformulation/rewriting! My seminar emphasizes supervised research, presentations with visuals, circulated material, and commentary from seminar members. A final paper responds to collegial commentary, my critique, and, not least, to the other presentations.

ANN FABIAN  Professor, Department of American Studies

Last year I had the good fortune to teach an SAS Honors Seminar on American culture in the 1930s. It was a challenge to turn material I had covered in a lecture course into an honors seminar, but week after week my students amply rewarded my efforts. Most of them knew the basic outlines of the political and economic history of that decade, but I had the privilege of introducing them to the Marx Brothers, Busby Berkeley, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and some radio shows, as well as to novels by Raymond Chandler, Nathanael West, and James M. Cain. Most of them even made it through the decade’s bestseller, Gone with the Wind.

I am still grateful for the ways that class helped me with my own research. We hear a lot of talk about the ways classes in research universities involve students in faculty scholarship. My honors students taught me what that meant. I asked them each to write a short paper on a photograph in the remarkable archive produced by the Farm Security Administration. I thought they would turn to iconic images by Walker Evans or Dorothea Lange, but most wrote about images from the tail end of the file, pictures of a country heading to war. Those papers led me to images I had overlooked. When I sat down in the spring to write a paper on the ways World War II transformed everyday life on the home front, I began with the pictures my students had taught me to see.

JAMES ALEXANDER LEWIS V, ESQ.  CLASS OF 2007

James Alexander Lewis graduated with Honors from Rutgers University with a B.A. in Psychology and Journalism & Media Studies. His Honors Thesis was titled Contrasting Colors: Analysis of Media Representations of African Americans. While at Rutgers, James was in the Journalism Honors Program and the Livingston College Honors Program, and he was a member of the Psychology Honors Society, Psi Chi. In May 2010 James graduated from Hofstra University School of Law where he served as the Diversity Affairs Coordinator for the Student Bar Association (SBA), Associate Research Editor for the Hofstra Family Court Review, and President of the Black Law Student Association (BLSA). He was recognized for Dedicated Service to the Law School. James was admitted to the Bar in New Jersey, and currently serves as the law clerk to Hon. Marquis D. Jones, J.S.C., in the Superior Court of Ocean County.

The Honors Program provided me with a unique opportunity to develop my academic passions. The connection between professors and students in the program meant that I got profitable feedback, and invaluable research and writing experience. Last but not least, I made lifelong friends and mentors.

It was through dialogue with my academic advisors that I discovered that law was the right path for me. Further, the Honors Writing Program allowed for me to fine-tune my critical thinking and reasoning skills. While crafting my Senior Honors Thesis, I learned how proper research and publication can shed light on social problems, thereby promoting social justice. In sum, I give full credit to the Honors Program for developing within me the ethical, moral, and academic foundation that has been a large part of my success thus far.

ALUMNI STATEMENT
My involvement with the Livingston College Honors Program began in 2000 when I became assistant dean of academic programs at the college, and director of its Honors Program. The program had been established in the 1980s with a view to promoting academic excellence and instilling a strong commitment to social justice. In order to build on that legacy we stepped up our efforts to recruit a more diverse group of honor students. We also redesigned the honors colloquium and introduced a spring seminar that included a two-week field experience opportunity for students. And we formed a partnership with the Department of Philosophy, which provided us with a scholar in residence. In all of this, I was greatly assisted by a committed faculty, great students, and a caring support staff.

As you know, in 2007 the four undergraduate colleges Douglass, Livingston, Rutgers, and University merged to form the School of Arts and Sciences. At the same time, their individual honors programs were combined into the SAS Honors Program. Taking account of existing best practices, a committee of faculty and staff designed a new, innovative program that challenges its students to broaden their learning and their horizons.

In the new SAS Honors Program I took on the role of Dean of Outreach, Special Projects, and Assessment. This challenging position has given me the opportunity to continue doing what I love most: interacting with students, and developing ways to expand learning opportunities and experiences.

Before I close, a quick word to all you alumni—I’d love to hear from you. Do get in touch.