Welcome to the Real World

PROF. MERI-JANE ROCHELSON, PH.D.
The Mission and Aims of The Honors College

The mission of The Honors College is to provide an intellectual community where outstanding students and dedicated teachers and scholars pursue intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and personal and professional enrichment marked by excellence in all engagements. It is guided by the FIU Value Statement, which espouses a commitment to: freedom of thought and expression; excellence in the pursuit, generation, dissemination, and application of knowledge; respect for the dignity of the individual; respect for the environment; honesty, integrity, and truth; diversity; and service excellence.

The aims of The Honors College are to:

1. Attract the "best and brightest" students from within and outside FIU and provide them a high quality trans-disciplinary educational experience.
2. Enable students to develop critical, integrative, and creative thinking skills and to make connections among domains of knowledge.
3. Facilitate engagement of students in applied and other research collaboration with the finest research faculty as learners and teachers in the scholarly community.
4. Provide mentoring and internship experiences to complement and enrich the knowledge acquired in the classroom and through research collaboration.
5. Offer scope for service learning engagement as a way to build bridges between domains of knowledge and service activity that enhances civic responsibility.
6. Foster a sense of community among students and faculty as citizens with special talents and responsibilities to self, the scholarly community, and society.

The Honors College Administration and Faculty

Administration
Ivelaw L. Griffith, Ph.D. (City University of New York), Dean & Fellow
Stephen M. Fjellman, Ph.D. (Stanford University), Associate Dean & Fellow
Caryl Myers Grof, M.A. (Florida International University), Assistant Dean & Fellow
John Kneski, M.Arch II (Syracuse University), Assistant Dean & Fellow
Sharon Placide, M.A. (Florida International University), Coordinator of Student Services

Faculty Fellows
Irla. T. de Alonso, Ph.D. (University of York), Professor, Economics
Regina C. Bailey, M.F.A. (Pratt Institute), Special Projects Coordinator, The Wolfsonian Museum
William K. Beesting, Ph.D. (Florida State University), Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies
Christopher Brown, Ph.D. (University of Delaware), Professor, Biological Sciences
Manuel J. Carvajal, Ph.D. (University of Florida), Professor, Economics
Ricardo Castells, Ph.D. (Duke University), Associate Professor, Modern Languages
Stephen M. Fain, Ed.D. (Columbia University), Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Mary G. Free, Ph.D. (University of Georgia), Associate Professor and Associate Chair, English
Bernard S. Gerstman, Ph.D. (Princeton University), Professor, Physics
Kevin Hall, B.A. (Fordham University), Editor-in-Residence, Journalism & Mass Communication
Bruce Harvey, Ph.D. (Stanford University), Associate Professor, English
Bruce W. Huapiti, Ph.D. (Washington University), Professor, Philosophy
Marinly Hoder-Salmon, Ph.D. (University of New Mexico), Associate Professor, English
Robert H. Hogue, Ph.D. (University of Pittsburgh), Associate Professor, Marketing and Business Environment, Honors College Director of Service Learning
James E. Huchinson, Ph.D. (Emory University) Associate Professor, Religious Studies
Barry B. Levine, Ph.D. (New School for Social Research), Professor, Sociology/Anthropology
Peter A. Machonis, Ph.D. (Pennsylvania State University), Associate Professor, Modern Languages
Anthony Maingot, Ph.D. (University of Florida), Professor, Sociology and Anthropology
Tomislav Mandakovic, Ph.D. (University of Pittsburgh), Professor, Decision Sciences
Pete E.C. Markowitz, Ph.D. (College of William and Mary), Associate Professor, Physics
Florentim Maurrasse, Ph.D. (Columbia University), Professor, Earth Sciences
Lesley A. Northrup, Ph.D. (Catholic University), Associate Professor, Religious Studies
Kevin O'Shea, Ph.D. (University of California), Associate Professor, Chemistry & Graduate Program Director
Darden Pyron, Ph.D. (University of Virginia), Professor, History
Meri-Jane Rochelson, Ph.D. (University of Chicago), Associate Professor, English
Caroline Simpson, Ph.D. (University of Florida), Associate Professor, Physics
Richard Tardanico, Ph.D. (The Johns Hopkins University), Associate Professor, Sociology/Anthropology
Constantino Manuel Torres, Ph.D. (University of New Mexico), Art & Art History
Michael Wagner, Ph.D. (Florida State University), Professor, Music

Office Staff
Rosa Barredo, Program Assistant
Ana Cortada, Office Manager
Juan Lopez, Information Technology Officer
Lourdes Pereira, Senior Secretary
Jessica Siskind, Development Officer
As I worked on this speech I wondered: Will we be at war with Iraq on September 30? Will we be lining up for smallpox vaccines? Will tropical storm Lili become a hurricane and wipe out all our convocation plans? The only things we can count on are uncertainty and change. Yet our minds remain a constant, and as they engage with the thoughts, ideas, and creativity of other minds – reaching out from the past and in our own time – they help sustain us.

We know from the facts of history that an appreciation of the arts or philosophy does not necessarily make for better people. But we also know, and I believe, that an understanding of history can help us avoid repeating its mistakes, while remaining aware that not all analogous situations are identical or require the same response. An understanding of how great thinkers have dealt with the core issues that still confound us can provide a source of guidance for our own lives, as well as a source of comfort through empathy when no guiding path is apparent. Sometimes the very vastness of what there is to learn can be daunting; we hear mention of a book, an article, a poem, or a story, and we wonder if or how we will ever have time to read it all. The internet is enormous and no one ever “finishes” it. Nor, if we think about it honestly, do we really want to experience all it is possible to know of life. The nineteenth-century novelist George Eliot, living in what we might consider simpler times, put it this way in her novel Middlemarch: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.”

But George Eliot did not therefore throw up her hands in defeat or despair. Even as she said it’s impossible to comprehend human suffering, she implicitly urged us to try. And she was an extraordinarily well-educated woman – mostly self-educated, I might add – well versed in languages, music, history, and classical and contemporary literature. Indeed, her inspiration for the words I have just quoted may well have come from a scientific essay, T. H. Huxley’s “On the Physical Basis of Life,” which appeared in the Fortnightly Review in 1869. Commenting on the microscopic activity taking place within every cell of every tree and plant in a tropical forest, Huxley wrote, “could our ears catch the murmur of these tiny Maelstroms, as they whirl in the innumerable myriads of living cells which constitute each tree, we should be stunned, as with the roar of a great city.”

Interdisciplinarity is nothing new. It is, in one sense, just a fancy way of saying learn everything you can, and don’t worry if it doesn’t seem related to your major. The more you know, the more you can understand; the richer your life will be and the wider the scope of your world. What we do here is essential to life. Welcome to another year in the Honors College. Welcome to the real world.

Notes


Honors Convocation Speaker

Meri-Jane Rochelson, Ph.D.
Fellow of The Honors College

Meri-Jane Rochelson grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Barnard College with a major in Political Science. She received an M.A. in teaching English from Teachers College Columbia University, and taught for a few years in New York City public high schools before returning to earn her M.A. She received her Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Chicago.

Dr. Rochelson has been a faculty member at FIU for eighteen years. In addition to her work in the English department and Honors College, she is affiliated with the FIU programs in Women’s Studies and Jewish Studies and has taught and published in both those areas. Co-editor of Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s, she is also editor of Israel Zangwill’s 1892 novel, Children of the Ghetto, reissued in 1998 with her introduction and notes. She is currently at work on a major study of Zangwill as an Anglo-Jewish writer and political activist. Last spring she was elected Secretary of the Nineteenth Century Studies Association, an interdisciplinary national organization of scholars.

Dr. Rochelson is married to Joel A. Mintz, Professor of Law at Nova Southeastern University, and has two sons, Daniel, a college student, and Robert, in high school. When not immersed in teaching and research, she enjoys traveling and reading books not on the syllabus. And she loves being a part of the Honors College faculty, exploring subjects across disciplinary lines with the remarkable students who make up the Honors College.
Welcome to the Real World
by Meri-Jane Rochelson, Ph.D

President Maidique, Provost Rosenberg, Dean Griffith, Dean Fjellman, faculty, staff, students, and guests. It is truly an honor for me to present the keynote address at this second annual Honors College Convocation. Teaching itself—in the Honors College and in the university as a whole—is an honor as well as a significant responsibility. Our words (or so we hope) can have such impact, and that is especially the case on a formal occasion such as this one. What, of the many things I would like to say, now that I have the chance, should I say in the few minutes I’m allotted? I’ve decided to draw on what I know best—my experiences as a teacher and scholar—in the hope that they will have some meaning for all of us as we enter this new year as a College and an intellectual community.

Several years ago I was talking to a class of graduate students about the research they would do in my course. As I wrote on the board the title of the MLA guide to writing research papers, one of the students raised her hand with a question: “Why do we really need to buy this?” she asked. “After all, we’ll never need to use it in the real world.” I paused for a moment, but just a moment, for the answer came to me immediately. “This is the real world,” I answered. “You are a graduate student and you need this book to write your paper. Buy it.” She did; she wrote a fine paper, and eventually she received her degree. But her question stayed with me, because it seemed to crystallize what I know many people feel about academia, and perhaps even about the Honors College, that somehow what we do here may be all very nice, but it’s not really connected with what makes the world go round. I am here to tell you that it is just the opposite. What we do in the Honors College is of the utmost importance.

In last year’s Convocation address, Professor Stephen Fjellman evoked the image of the September 11 tragedy that had taken place only three weeks before we gathered. Indeed, the shortness of that interval seems even more moving in retrospect. On October 2 last year, flags of a multitude of nations waved proudly in procession across this campus (as they did today) in testimony to the fact that at FIU, and in the Honors College, the values of free inquiry, cooperation, and respect for diverse cultures and diverse points of view would stand strong against the worst that could be done to us by those who choose to reject such values. If ever the relevance of a liberal education were to be tested, it was in the days immediately following September 11, 2001. So I would like to share with you, briefly, my teaching experiences of September 12.

My Honors class, “Aesthetics, Values, and Authority,” met at 2:00 p.m. I knew it would be difficult simply to discuss the assigned reading for the day, and asked the students how they wanted to approach the hour and fifteen minutes we would spend together. One student brought up an aesthetic controversy that had recently been in the news and seemed apt: the question of how to properly memorialize the Holocaust. We began discussing the issue of how a society can or should commemorate an experience of unspeakable horror, and I was proud of that student for making the connection between the events of the day before and the subject matter of our seminar. But it soon became clear that only a few of us were really able to concentrate on the issues raised; for most of us, it was just too soon, and what we really needed was to vent, to share, and—in a symbolic way—to cry. That was what we did, and it was the right thing to do.

One year later, however, what is it we read about in the news? Six designers were asked to present plans for a World Trade Center memorial. Hundreds if not thousands of New Yorkers went to a convention center to see ... thinking, of deliberation that stretches boundaries and refuses to be satisfied with simplistic answers. Sound familiar?

My second class on September 12, 2001 was due to begin at 6:25 p.m. It was an upper-division literature course, held in an auditorium with stadium seating not conducive to the kind of emotional bonding that had taken place in the Honors seminar. As the day wore on it occurred to me that if my students—most of them older, most of them coming from a full day of work—if these students came to campus at all, many of them would want a class that followed the syllabus, regardless of how sad they may still have felt about the previous day’s events. I decided to make my decision after conferring with them, but I wanted to be prepared—in case I did teach the material—to open the discussion with something that would acknowledge what we had all been through. So I turned to my syllabus and there it was: Jane Austen.

Now, for those of you who are familiar with Jane Austen’s reputation as a writer of pleasant novels dealing with the ultimately resolved romantic travails of people who live in pretty houses, you may think I had a daunting challenge ahead of me. And I’ll admit that at first blush that was my thought, too. But it didn’t take me long to remember that Jane Austen’s reality is much more complex than her popular reputation would suggest. I remembered the observation of literary critic Dorothy Van Ghent, that Jane Austen’s “two inches of ivory” (the metaphor which she herself used to describe her work), though it may resemble the handle of a lady’s fan when looked on scantily, is in substance an elephant’s tusk; it is a savagely probing instrument as well as a masterpiece of refinement.” And I remembered the comment in a review of Park Honan’s biography of the writer that Jane Austen, the sister of military men, knew quite well about the ugly and seamy side of life. Finally, I remembered how Persuasion, the novel I was scheduled to teach, ends. Anne Elliot’s love has at last been recognized by Captain Wentworth, a naval officer, and they have just been married. But Austen does not end on a note of undiluted happiness. No; her narrator insists, “His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish [Anne’s]... tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine.” Jane Austen in 1818 knew that violence can destroy happiness in an instant, and that enmities on a global scale can annihilate without warning the ties formed by love.
Welcome to the Real World
by Meri-Jane Rochelson, Ph.D

One year later, however, what is it we read about in the news? Six designers were asked to pre-
sent plans for a World Trade Center memorial. Hundreds if not thousands of New Yorkers went to a convention center to see . . .

My second class on September 12, 2001 was due to begin at 6:25 p.m. It was an upper-division
literature course, held in an auditorium with stadium seating not conducive to the kind of emo-
tional bonding that had characterized the event of September 11. I asked the students how they wanted to approach the hour . . .

In last year’s Convocation address, Professor Stephen Fjellman evoked the image of the
September 11 tragedy that had taken place only three weeks before we gathered. Indeed, the shortness of that interval seems even more moving in retrospect. On October 2 last year, flags of a multitude of nations waved proudly in procession across this campus (as they did today) in testimony to the fact that at FIU, and in the Honors College, the values of free inquiry, cooperation, and respect for diverse cultures and diverse points of view would stand strong against the worst that could be done to us by those who choose to reject such values. If ever the relevance of a liberal education were to be tested, it was in the days immediately following September 11, 2001. So I would like to share with you, briefly, my teaching experiences of September 12.

My Honors class, “Aesthetics, Values, and Authority,” met at 2:00 p.m. I knew it would be dif-
cult simply to discuss the assigned reading for the day, and asked the students how they wanted to approach the hour and fifteen minutes we would spend together. One student brought up an aesthetic controversy that had recently been in the news and seemed apt: the question of how to properly memorialize the Holocaust. We began discussing the issue of how a society can or should commemorate an experience of unspeakable horror, and I was proud of that student for making the connection between the events of the day before and the subject matter of our semi-
nar. But it soon became clear that only a few of us were really able to concentrate on the issues raised; for most of us, it was just too soon, and what we really needed was to vent, to share, and – in a symbolic way – to cry. That was what we did, and it was the right thing to do.

One year later, however, what is it we read about in the news? Six designers were asked to pre-
sent plans for a World Trade Center memorial. Hundreds if not thousands of New Yorkers went to a convention center to see those designs and weigh in with their opinions. As a result of the objections they raised and the questions they asked—the kinds of objections and questions that might easily be debated in Honors Seminar V and VI—the designers have now gone back to the drawing board, and others have been invited to submit proposals. What is eventually built in lower Manhattan will most certainly be part of the real world for residents, workers, and tourists, as well as for the families for whom the site will be a place of mourning and, indeed, for the United States as a whole. And what is eventually built there, if the process is successful, will be the product not of decisions made pragmatically or for a quick return but will be the result of people thinking long and hard, examining precedents, pondering philosophical, socio-
logical, and historical as well as spiritual and aesthetic considerations. It will be the result of interdisciplinary thinking, of deliberation that stretches boundaries and refuses to be satisfied with simplistic answers. Sound familiar?

My second class on September 12, 2001 was due to begin at 6:25 p.m. It was an upper-
division literature course, held in an auditorium with stadium seating not conducive to the kind of emo-
tional bonding that had taken place in the Honors seminar. As the day wore on it occurred to me that if my students—most of them older, most of them coming from a full day of work—if these students came to campus at all, many of them would want a class that followed the syll-
abus, regardless of how sad they may still have felt about the previous day’s events. I decided to make my decision after conferring with them, but I wanted to be prepared—in case I did teach the material—to open the discussion with something that would acknowledge what we had all been through. So I turned to my syllabus and there it was: Jane Austen.

Now, for those of you who are familiar with Jane Austen’s reputation as a writer of pleasant
novels dealing with the ultimately resolved romantic travails of people who live in pretty hous-
es, you may think I had a daunting challenge ahead of me. And I’ll admit that at first blush that was my thought, too. But it didn’t take me long to remember that Jane Austen’s reality is much more complex than her popular reputation would suggest. I remembered the observation of liter-
ary critic Dorothy Van Ghent, that Jane Austen’s “two inches of ivory” (the metaphor which she herself used to describe her work), though it may resemble the handle of a lady’s fan when looked on scantily, is in substance an elephant’s tusk; it is a savagely probing instrument as well as a masterpiece of refinement.” And I remembered the comment in a review of Park Honan’s biography of the writer that Jane Austen, the sister of military men, knew quite well about the ugly and seamy side of life. Finally, I remembered howPersuasion, the novel I was scheduled to teach, ends. Anne Elliot’s love has at last been recognized by Captain Wentworth, a naval officer, and they have just been married. But Austen does not end on a note of undiluted happi-
ness. No; her narrator insists, “His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish [Anne’s] . . . tenderness less; the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine.” Jane

Austen in 1818 knew that violence can destroy happiness in an instant, and that enmities on a
global scale can annihilate without warning the ties formed by love.
As I worked on this speech I wondered: Will we be at war with Iraq on September 30? Will we be lining up for smallpox vaccines? Will tropical storm Lili become a hurricane and wipe out all our convocation plans? The only things we can count on are uncertainty and change. Yet our minds remain a constant, and as they engage with the thoughts, ideas, and creativity of other minds – reaching out from the past and in our own time – they help sustain us.

We know from the facts of history that an appreciation of the arts or philosophy does not necessarily make for better people. But we also know, and I believe, that an understanding of history can help us avoid repeating its mistakes, while remaining aware that not all analogous situations are identical or require the same response. An understanding of how great thinkers have dealt with the core issues that still confound us can provide a source of guidance for our own lives, as well as a source of comfort through empathy when no guiding path is apparent. Sometimes the very vastness of what there is to learn can be daunting; we hear mention of a book, an article, a poem, or a story, and we wonder if or how we will ever have time to read it all. The Internet is enormous and no one ever “finishes” it. Nor, if we think about it honestly, do we really want to experience all it is possible to know of life. The nineteenth-century novelist George Eliot, living in what we might consider simpler times, put it this way in her novel Middlemarch: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.” But George Eliot did not therefore throw up her hands in defeat or despair. Even as she said it’s impossible to comprehend human suffering, she implicitly urged us to try. And she was an extraordinarily well-educated woman – mostly self-educated, I might add – well versed in languages, music, history, and classical and contemporary literature. Indeed, her inspiration for the words I have just quoted may well have come from a scientific essay, T. H. Huxley’s “On the Physical Basis of Life,” which appeared in the Fortnightly Review in 1869. Commenting on the microscopic activity taking place within every cell of every tree and plant in a tropical forest, Huxley wrote, “could our ears catch the murmur of these tiny Maelstroms, as they whirl in the innumerable myriads of living cells which constitute each tree, we should be stunned, as with the roar of a great city.”

Interdisciplinarity is nothing new. It is, in one sense, just a fancy way of saying learn everything you can, and don’t worry if it doesn’t seem related to your major. The more you know, the more you can understand; the richer your life will be and the wider the scope of your world. What we do here is essential to life. Welcome to another year in the Honors College. Welcome to the real world.

Notes

The Mission and Aims of The Honors College

The mission of The Honors College is to provide an intellectual community where outstanding students and dedicated teachers and scholars pursue intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and personal and professional enrichment marked by excellence in all engagements. It is guided by the FIU Value Statement, which espouses a commitment to: freedom of thought and expression; excellence in the pursuit, generation, dissemination, and application of knowledge; respect for the dignity of the individual; respect for the environment; honesty, integrity, and truth; diversity; and service excellence.

The aims of The Honors College are to:

1. Attract the "best and brightest" students from within and outside FIU and provide them a high quality trans-disciplinary educational experience.
2. Enable students to develop critical, integrative, and creative thinking skills and to make connections among domains of knowledge.
3. Facilitate engagement of students in applied and other research collaboration with the finest research faculty as learners and teachers in the scholarly community.
4. Provide mentoring and internship experiences to complement and enrich the knowledge acquired in the classroom and through research collaboration.
5. Offer scope for service learning engagement as a way to build bridges between domains of knowledge and service activity that enhances civic responsibility.
6. Foster a sense of community among students and faculty as citizens with special talents and responsibilities to self, the scholarly community, and society.

The Honors College Administration and Faculty

Administration
Ivelaw L. Griffith, Ph.D. (City University of New York), Dean & Fellow
Caryl Myers Grof, M.A. (Florida International University), Assistant Dean & Fellow
John Kneski, M.Arch II (Syracuse University), Assistant Dean & Fellow
Sharon Placide, M.A. (Florida International University), Coordinator of Student Services

Faculty Fellows
Irma T. de Alonso, Ph.D. (University of York), Professor, Economics
Regina C. Bailey, M.F.A. (Pratt Institute), Special Projects Coordinator, The Wolfsonian Museum
Manuel J. Carvajal, Ph.D. (University of Florida), Professor, Economics
Ricardo Castelli, Ph.D. (Duke University), Associate Professor, Modern Languages
Stephan M. Fain, Ed.D. (Columbia University), Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Mary G. Free, Ph.D. (University of Georgia), Associate Professor and Associate Chair, English
Bernard S. Gerstman, Ph.D. (Princeton University), Professor, Physics
Kevin Hall, B.A. (Fordham University), Editor-in-Residence, Journalism & Mass Communication
Bruce Harvey, Ph.D. (Stanford University), Associate Professor, English
Bruce W. Haupli, Ph.D. (Washington University), Professor, Philosophy
Marilyn Hoder-Salmon, Ph.D. (University of New Mexico), Associate Professor, English
Robert H. Hegner, Ph.D. (University of Pittsburgh), Associate Professor, Marketing and Business Environment, Honors College Director of Service Learning
James E. Huchinson, Ph.D. (Emory University) Associate Professor, Religious Studies
Barry B. Levine, Ph.D. (New School for Social Research), Professor, Sociology/Anthropology
Peter A. Machonis, Ph.D. (Pennsylvania State University), Associate Professor, Modern Languages
Anthony Maingot, Ph.D. (University of Florida), Professor, Sociology and Anthropology
Tomislav Mandakovic, Ph.D. (University of Pittsburgh), Professor, Decision Sciences
Pete E.C. Markowitz, Ph.D. (College of William and Mary), Associate Professor, Physics
Florentin Maurrasse, Ph.D. (Columbia University), Professor, Earth Sciences
Lesley A. Northrup, Ph.D. (Catholic University), Associate Professor, Religious Studies
Kevin O'Shea, Ph.D. (University of California), Associate Professor, Chemistry & Graduate Program Director
Darden Pyron, Ph.D. (University of Virginia), Professor, History
Meri-Jane Rochelson, Ph.D. (University of Chicago), Associate Professor, English
Caroline Simpson, Ph.D. (University of Florida), Associate Professor, Physics
Richard Tardanico, Ph.D. (The Johns Hopkins University), Associate Professor, Sociology/Anthropology
Constantino Manuel Torres, Ph.D. (University of New Mexico), Art & Art History
Michael Wagner, Ph.D. (Florida State University), Professor, Music

Office Staff
Rosa Barredo, Program Assistant
Ana Cortada, Office Manager
Juan Lopez, Information Technology Officer
Lourdes Pereira, Senior Secretary
Jessica Siskind, Development Officer
Florida International University
Annual Honors College Convocation
September Thirtieth – Two Thousand Two

A World of Honors: Celebrating Excellence

Keynote Address
Welcome to the Real World
Prof. Meri-Jane Rochelson, Ph.D.