



COLLEGIUM

THE HONORS COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2022

ON INTELLECTUAL PLEASURE

Dr. Scott Huelin



Alumni tell me they miss many things about their time at Union, but one comes up most frequently: intellectual stimulation. Some wax nostalgic about late-night conversations (or arguments!) on politics or theology in the residence halls. Some yearn for readings and instructors that will invite them to hard work of thinking well. Others miss the discipline of a syllabus: an ordered progression through topics and texts towards a goal of deeper understanding. In each of these cases, you are expressing an intellectual hunger, a desire to satisfy that part of the soul that is tasked with thinking, a desire often ignored amidst the daily press and crush of adult life. God, of course, planted this capacity within us, so the desire and the effort to cultivate it is not only natural but God-honoring. In writing this, I'm reminded of some lines from Shakespeare:

Sure, he that made us with such
large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us unused.
(*Hamlet* 4.4.36-39)

Or, to revert back to our metaphor of hunger and sustenance, we might recall this sentence from the essay "Learning in War-Time" by C. S. Lewis: "An appetite for [beauty and knowledge] exists in the human mind, and God makes no appetite in vain." That is, every human appetite has a God-given purpose. Most obviously, the body's appetite for food and water sustains it, and its appetite for exercise strengthens it. But the human mind, too, has its God-given appetites, and like the physical body, it requires both sustenance and exercise. When we satisfy the body's appetite for sustenance or exercise, and do so with good things in proper measure, we experience pleasure: the warm satiety that follows a delicious meal, the sweaty satisfaction that follows a challenging workout. Similarly, when we satisfy the mind's appetite for sustenance or exercise, and do so with good things in proper measure, we experience pleasure: the epiphanic delight of discovering a new and better way to understand an old problem, the thrilling chase of a solid answer to a carefully crafted question.

Unfortunately, so much in late-modern, hyper-consumerist American life interferes with the proper satisfaction of the soul's appetites. With the endless availability of educational content online, it's not hard to fall into intellectual gluttony. Even when the food is good, too much is still too much. The same is true of theological and spiritual content. When we overstuff ourselves with theological ideas, it can be difficult to get up off the couch and engage in spiritual exercise. Of course we also have to watch out for the intellectual and spiritual equivalent of junk food: smarmy Bible teachers who pander to our desires for easy and wealthy lives, political pundits who stoke outrage rather than promote careful analysis, social media influencers who provide us with a dopamine hit in exchange for likes and follows. All of these purport to feed the soul but in fact leave the soul's 'stomach' with no room for real nutrition. When this junk comprises too much of our intellectual and spiritual diet, we become like Dante's she-wolf: always stuffed yet

always ravening (*Inf.* 1.49-50). Moreover, such intellectual gluttony (what Augustine would have called *curiositas*) leaves us insensible of true intellectual pleasure. One reason why you and I would never eat watermelon after enjoying a bowl of ice cream is that the fruit would no longer taste sweet by comparison. Similarly, when our intellectual 'palate' is inundated with artificially intensified 'flavors,' we lose the capacity for finer pleasures and subtler distinctions built into God's creation.

College may well have been for you a time of well-ordered intellectual appetite, or it may have been a time of intellectual gluttony. What about this moment in your life? Do you make time for reading things more demanding than hot takes and sound bites? Do you seek out challenging conversations with folks who have different viewpoints or knowledge sets than yours? Conversely, do you fast from information sources that tempt you to gluttony? (I recently had to adopt a six-day-per-week fast from political news, and I feel so much better.) Are you part of a community that is seeking these things? Learning how to feed the soul with the right things in the right amount is a life's work, and it takes concerted, conscious effort. But doing so satisfies a God-given appetite and cultivates the intellectual pleasures for which we were made and which can only be known through cultivation. In this way, to experience true intellectual pleasure is also to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34.8)



HONORS^{at} UNION

EXCELLENCE-DRIVEN CHRIST-CENTERED PEOPLE-FOCUSED FUTURE-DIRECTED

ALUMNI: WHERE THEY ARE NOW

Anne Adams ('22)

pursuing a Master of Arts in Speech-Language Pathology at the University of Memphis. Memphis, TN.

Clark Bilbrey ('17) and Emma (Kurt) Bilbrey ('17)

Clark is a Doctor of Physical Therapy at Lakeshore Bone and Joint Institute; Emma runs Hickory Hills Flower Farm and works for The Ohio State University graduate school lab doing data analysis and publication writing. Valparaiso, IN.

Audrie Campbell ('19)

Chemistry teacher at Jackson Christian School. Jackson, TN.

Daniel Decker ('14)

Biomedical Science Career Tech teacher and Varsity Boys Head Soccer Coach at Hewitt-Trussville High School.

Andrew Edmiston ('18)

Cyber Security Analyst at FedEx. Arlington, TN.

Lydia Ezell ('22)

pursuing a graduate degree in Victorian Literature at University of Georgia; works as a TA in the writing center. Macon, GA

Elliot Garrett ('21)

pursuing his MDiv at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Youth Pastor at First Baptist Church. Senatobia, MS

Amanda Gilbert ('22)

Cancer researcher in a lab at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Memphis, TN.

Ward Howard ('15)

received his PhD in Physics and Astronomy from UNC-Chapel Hill and is pursuing post-doctoral work at UC-Boulder. Boulder, CO.

Hannah (Eason) Johnson ('21)

Attending Michigan State University College of Law; recently married. Lapeer, MI.

Brennan Kress ('22)

pursuing a graduate degree through The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's extension at Union University; Pastor of Harmony Baptist Church. Stanton, TN.

Angie Le ('22)

Registered Nurse in the Neonatal ICU at SSM Health System; married to Abraham. St. Louis, MO.

Lillian Mays ('22)

Developmental Technician for the Therapy and Learning Center of West Tennessee Healthcare. Jackson, TN.

Jenaye (White) Merida ('15)

Publishing Manager and Literary Agent for WTA Media. Antioch, TN.

Taylor Moore ('16)

earned MA in Counseling from Harding University ('21); Mental Health Counselor at Life Strategies; married to Bronwyn. Trumann, AR.

Darius Mullin ('21)

teacher at The Augustine School; Circulation Associate at Union University library. Jackson, TN.

Marissa Postell ('20)

Managing Editor at Lifeway. Mt. Juliet, TN.

Lacie (Fink) Rabenhorst ('19)

Financial Accounting Advisory Senior Associate at EY; married to Stefan. Nashville, TN.

Andrew Stricklin ('15)

finishing his third year of emergency medicine residency at Wake Forest, North Carolina, and plans to work at an Emergency Department; married to Nicki; father of two. Paducah, KY.

Joseph Wunrow ('19)

Assistant Data Coordinator for Undergraduate Admissions at Union University. Jackson, TN.

Katie (Murphy) King ('15)

is the new Program Coordinator for the Honor's Community! She and her husband are raising three boys in Dyersburg, TN.

THE BOOKSHELF

What are Honors folk reading this year?

Selected Works of Bernard of Clairvaux

When Breath Becomes Air, by Paul Kalanithi

You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News, by Kelly M. Kopic

The Good American: The Epic Life of Bob Gersony, by Robert D. Kaplan

Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture, by Peter Leithart

Insider Outsider, by Bryan Loritts

Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse, by David Toole

This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World, by Norman Wirzba

What are you reading? You can always email us at honors@uu.edu to chat, swap titles, or update your contact info.

COURSE REFLECTION: JUSTICE

Maggie Wills will graduate in 2024 with a major in Spanish and a minor in Art. She hails from Kentucky and Texas.

I was nervous to take the Justice course. I had already taken the Wisdom and Beauty courses where I enjoyed discussing philosophy, literature, art, and music. But Justice seemed to be more about history and social issues. Rather than delighting in beauty or pondering wisdom, we would be forced to look at the injustice in the world and ask ourselves what it was and what we should do about it.

I prefer to avoid such difficult and divisive topics, but Dr. Barnard, my seminar professor, challenged me on this. As we discussed readings in seminar, he asked us to come up with our own opinions. I squirmed in my seat, wondering how a twenty-year-old could possibly have an informed opinion, especially as each issue became far more complicated the more information I was presented with.

The more I learned about poverty, racism, or injustice in general, the more ignorant I began to feel. Dr. Barnard kept asking us difficult questions about hypotheticals like the trolley problem and real-world issues like the impact of history on our moral obligations. We would stare at him in silence, and sometimes he would smile. He knew that just by thinking before we spoke, we were becoming better thinkers. He was challenging us to think critically and speak accurately about topics we might otherwise avoid. Most of the time, he was not waiting for us to come up with the right answer but a thoughtful one.

Some days, I felt exhausted by the weight of injustice and the practical implications of different ideas. We read chapters of Michael J. Sandel's *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* about different political philosophies and how they played out in real-world situations. This was difficult to discuss as my fellow students and I had differing opinions. We struggled with the fact that our own opinions seemed to change throughout the class period, still unsure of what we truly agreed with. When we turned to Wendell Berry's *The Hidden Wound*, discussions seemed even more difficult. In this book, Berry reflects on the lives of two black people he knew as a child, as well as the wound

racism has inflicted on America as a whole. It was no longer about whether we had a more libertarian or utilitarian view on a particular issue. It was about getting close to the lives and pain of real people.

During one of the final plenaries of the course, Dr. Barnard gave a lecture on the idea that justice cannot only be an abstract concept. "You have to get close," he said. By this, he meant that true justice requires us to form relationships with those who are suffering injustices. We tend to look at justice as if it were a balance or scales, but this conception of justice avoids getting close to people. Like Tim Keller says in his book *Generous Justice*, we must build relationships with people and get close to them in order to help them and love them. And in this process, we grow in understanding and humility. Micah 6:8 says, "And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" In order to "do justice," we must get close to people who are hurting.

Now that I have completed the Justice course, I am wondering in what ways I have changed and if I have gotten close to people. I would like to say that I am deeply involved in the lives of the poor and that I fight against

injustice in real and meaningful ways. Instead, I am left pondering. In some ways, I have not changed since taking Justice. I would still rather avoid difficult and divisive topics. When I think on my essays and contributions in seminar, I feel as though my words were empty and immature.

But the Justice course was never meant to give us the right answers. None of the Honors courses are. They are meant instead to cause us to think and speak critically instead of assuming we know the answer or that there even is a clear answer. Yes, the more information I am presented with, the more ignorant I feel. That is how we become better thinkers.

And in this way, I have changed since taking Justice. Not only am I pondering what justice means, but I am left with an ideal that I am striving toward. Jesus "got close" to sinners and those in need. I want to be like that. I am still growing in humility and in my desire to do justice, and I will continue to grow in those areas. I pray that God will give me the courage to build relationships with others and do justice for them, becoming involved in the lives of others in tangible ways.



HIGHLIGHTS

August 2021

Honors kicked the year off with shaved ice in a shady, game-filled grove: bowling, bingo, spike ball, a riddle competition, and Scott Huelin's artisan hand-crafted Giant Jenga.

October 2021

In keeping with tradition, the freshman Honors class travelled to Waco, TX for Baylor University's Symposium on Faith and Culture. The year's theme? "Living Accountably." On deck for Fall of 2022: "Art Seeking Understanding."

In addition to the freshmen's annual Baylor trip, Dr. Barnard drove a group of sophomores to Pennsylvania to participate in Grove City College's Intercollegiate Colloquium on Fortitude. They plan to attend again this October for the theme of Humility.

November 2021

Another November, another Campus & Community Day. Honors rolled out to Jackson's city parks again—this time with an accidental contingent of nearly 50 people. Students raked and mulched the playgrounds at North Park, then did the same and picked up litter at Muse Park.

March 2022

Jessica Hooten Wilson, PhD, was Union's 24th annual Scholar-in-Residence. Dr. Wilson is Louise Cowan Scholar in Residence at the University of Dallas in the Classical Education and Humanities Graduate Program. She is the author of *The Scandal of Holiness: Renewing Your Imagination in the Company of Literary Saints* (Brazos Press) and *Learning the Good Life: From the Great Hearts and Minds that Came Before* (Zondervan), as well as three books on Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Recordings of her Scholar-in-Residence lecture series are available at uu.edu/honors.

April 2022

The Honors freshmen headed to St. Louis this year in a welcome return to our annual tradition of travel for the Beauty course. On the 2022 Art & Architecture tour they visited the St. Louis Art Museum, a J.S. Bach Birthday Celebration, Citygarden sculpture park, and had a mud-bound bus adventure on the way.

Meanwhile, the sophomore Justice course travelled to Memphis for a day at the National Civil Rights Museum, accompanied by Dr. Frank Anderson, Director for the Center for Racial Reconciliation at Union.

MAY 2022

The 11th annual Honors Banquet was one of our biggest ever, and one of our most tearful. Our Honors faculty players, Scott & the Beauticians, brought down the house with a game of Apples to Apples. We celebrated our graduates, then (thanks to dozens of messages from you alumni) honored Dr. Justin Barnard and Prof. Joy Moore for 15 years of service and farewelled Ms. Rebecca Edgren as she moves on to graduate school.

June-July 2022

Honors launched a new program of Summer Seminars for Classical Teachers with two non-credit, low-cost courses on Plato's *Republic* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Each seminar is led by an outstanding member of Union's faculty and meets for five consecutive mornings on campus, with afternoons open for reading and writing.



ALUMNA REFLECTION: ADULTHOOD'S GRIEF, AND SUSTENANCE

Rebecca Edgren ('14)

A slightly altered version of this piece was given as an address at the 2022 Honors Banquet.

I'm tempted as I leave to spill all the Honors beans from the last decade. I could disclose the location of a secret spray-paint tag in the Honors lounge, or share the story of Prof. Moore, myself, and half a gallon of white paint. I could show you the cartoon strip based on my job, or tell you where to find a Nerf pistol in the Jones Suite next time you need one. I could talk about the time a group of us played Mafia with Dr. Barnard on a road trip, or describe the afternoon I hid a student's drugged cat under my desk.

But I won't.

As I look back over my twenties, my time with the Honors Community, and my conversations with all of you, a deeper and more sincere mystery than these rises up. The word around which my mind has eddied, unable to settle, has been joy. Not Professor Joy Moore, although she's wonderful—but rejoicing.

Most of you already and unfortunately know why someone reflecting on the early twenties would find a dominant impression of joy to be both a surprise and a mystery. It's not that work for Honors has been drudgery: it's been a delight to watch all of us mature into particular (and sometimes peculiar) icons of Christ. But most of you know by now that the twenties, especially the first 2-3 years after graduation, can be very hard.

In the early years of adulthood, we encounter tragedy and trauma—sometimes in ways for which we are not braced. We face emerging mental illnesses, chronic diseases, and life-altering diagnoses. We grieve miscarriages or infertility, the deaths of our grandparents, and, sometimes, of our peers. We must both uncover and recover from harm. Relationships we rely on fray, or change, and sometimes end. There can be deep loneliness, and faith sometimes seems to have died. On top of this, we squeeze an oil change alongside a job and a grocery run, and sometimes that feels impossible.

I say all this because it is easy to think “I must have gotten it wrong. If only I were on some other path, this would be easier. If only I were a funded grad student at that

prestigious university, like my old classmate; if I were married, like my old roommate; if I had moved away—or if only I had stayed home.” This Sunday an alum uttered back to me words that hammered in my own mind during the first years out of college: Nobody warned me that this would be so hard.

It's easy to blame yourself and believe you're both failing and failing alone. But after talking to nearly 500 Honors alumni for a living for years, my sense is that loneliness and self-doubt come equally to the high-flying and the humdrum. They have certainly come to me. Jackson has sometimes been a barren place to me; it has also been—slowly—a deep and complex revelation of Love, and I do believe that Love leads us in due time.

By way of advice (to those of you younger than I, and newer on the post-graduate road), I'll say be patient with yourselves: it will get less overwhelming. Seek the help of mental health professionals and pastoral care when you need it. Look for a church where you can not only serve and learn, but where Jesus meets you as healer, comforter, and refuge, because you will need it. Find a few believers you trust and pray regularly with them in person. Wait on the Lord. And watch, against all expectation, for joy.

You may be thinking by now that courage would be a more fitting topic. But we too often picture courage as something drawn up from inside ourselves. The source of courage is not some inner well of personal strength: the source of courage is joy.

Those who've read *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* or almost any children's book know that healthy friendship makes you brave. Nothing strengthens me like laughter—hard, aching laughter—over a meal with long-known souls. Somehow that sense of safety becomes openness, becomes a willingness to take the risks that matter.

But there are also solitary, tangible joys: treasuring a favorite mug in my hands, turning a compost heap while sweat slicks my shoulders, watching how trees move like water in the wind. Noticing the shape of someone's smile. Small things, but ones that hold me in an attentive present and make me think that joy is, perhaps, a kind of vision—a sight which sees beyond without “seeing through,” so that what we hope for is already a taste on the tongue.

I know we all have fears about the future, and it will probably not be easy. But joy will be there, and it gathers strength as we attend to it and can become the most compelling and enduring utterance of God's love.

So I am grateful for seasons of leave-taking, which invite me to look back and rejoice with the full power of insight. I am grateful lately for many things, among them for the ways all of you helped teach me that being a Christ-follower requires not only intellectual content or courage but a community of joy.

I say this knowing many of us are lonely, knowing community is a loaded word: it may hold regrets, losses, legalism. At its worst it stands for cliquishness and self-satisfaction. But at its best community itself becomes something like a question: a statement that opens at its end, an utterance defined by receptivity, by the invitational and perceptive space which surrounds it.

I have seen that posture in all of you, my friends, former classmates, fellow learners then and still. I have seen it in our shared teachers, about whom I have more to say than their humility will let me print. Every time you undergo the griefs or tensions we so often wish to avoid, or stretch to hold a little more complexity of understanding. Every time you're brave enough to love what you're being called to love in ways that make you more vulnerable and dependent, but also more whole.

Joy like that—subtle, supple, elusive, and deep as an underground river—has sustained me and encouraged me in the old sense of that word: it has given me heart. Thank you for letting me be a witness. I wish you joy.





HONORS COMMUNITY
1050 Union University Drive
Jackson, Tennessee 38305

COLLEGIUM : THE HONORS COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER : OCTOBER 2022

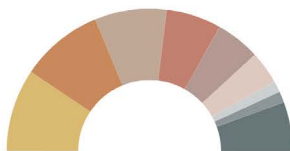
HONORS *at* UNION

Honors at Union Our Digits

360 grads in 10 years

- living in 7 countries, 40 states, & 1 district
- 25% are in graduate school
23% have earned graduate degrees
- 20% are parenting

Vocational interests of ~40% not represented by occupation



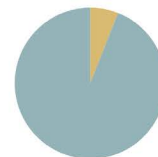
Religious (18.75%)
Academia (16.25%)
Healthcare (10%)
Business & Comm (2.5%)
Conservation & Agriculture (2.5%)
Other (11.25%)

Alumni Occupations

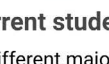


Other: Academia, Agriculture, Law, Law enforcement, Library science, Social work, & more

6% of student body



61% of Debate Team



187 current students

- in 58 different majors
- high-count departments: Biology, Business, Communications, English, & Nursing
- 42% homeschooled, 30% public schooled, & 28% private schooled