Honors Program Welcomes SARAH VOWELL

On Monday, April 2, author and public radio personality Sarah Vowell visited the University of Florida. She read from her works at a public performance in the Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, captivating the crowd with her wry and endearing takes on American history. Her story of cartographer Charles Preuss was particularly engaging (to hear the original on This American Life, visit http://bit.ly/KXCxsB). The evening concluded with a book signing in the Phillips Center’s reception area.

The following morning, Ms. Vowell visited Dr. Knudson’s (Un)common Reading Class, Two or Three Books by Sarah Vowell. Students asked her all sorts of questions about her life as a writer, her upbringing in Montana, and her experience as a voice in a Pixar film. The latter led to an amusing conclusion to the visit as one of the students asked Sarah if she would recite a line from The Incredibles on her sister’s voicemail. Being a good sport, Sarah obliged.

Be sure to check out Sarah Vowell’s best-selling books Assassination Vacation, The WordyShipmates, and Unfamiliar Fishes. She has also written two collections of essays on pop culture and American history as well as Radio On, a diary of a year spent listening to the radio.

“Don’t think. Thinking is the enemy of creativity. It’s self-conscious, and anything self-conscious is lousy. You can’t try to do things. You simply must do things.”
— Ray Bradbury
A Note from the Director

I am writing this on June 7, 2012. Ray Bradbury, a giant of American letters, died this week. Coincidentally, I’ve been reading a lot of his work lately, in particular *Zen in the Art of Writing* and *Fahrenheit 451*. In the former, he exhorts the would-be writer to simply get out of the way and let the characters forge a path. That is good advice for fiction, certainly, but it also works for essays if you think of your main idea as a character. Indeed, a good idea has as much life as any living thing.

*Fahrenheit 451*, however, is about characters and ideas. It is also eerily prophetic. We may not have interactive televisions on multiple walls of our sitting rooms yet, but it is not difficult to imagine such a future (and we are certainly getting closer to it all the time). In Guy Montag’s world the citizens asked for no more books; it wasn’t imposed upon them. Print book sales have been decreasing for years and while the rise of e-books has offset that a bit we are still in a period of overall decline. E-readers are certainly convenient, and I enjoy mine as much as anyone, but the next time you’re using one think about whether it really represents an advance in technology. I assert that the standard paper codex is perfect as is—tactile, compact, intuitive—while an e-book is more like a scroll (the thing that books replaced) that needs power to come to life.

You might have hoped that book burning (or banning) is a thing of the past, but it is not. Challenges to books are raised every year. The list of most challenged books for 2011 includes some new titles, such as *TTYL* and *The Hunger Games*, and some very familiar classics such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Brave New World*. This year’s Honors Program common reading selection was inspired by this question: What does it mean to ban a book in the digital age? We have chosen Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, which was removed from school library shelves in a Missouri school district last year after one (!) parent wrote a letter of complaint to the school board. I pulled out my 25-year-old copy and re-read it to remind myself of what could be considered objectionable. It contains fewer expletives than one might hear on a typical episode of Jersey Shore, and those that do occur are uttered by soldiers fighting the Germans in Western Europe.

The response to this by the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library was ingenious—any student in the school district who wanted a copy of the book could have one shipped to them free of charge by the Library. This effort was spearheaded by Julia Whitehead, the Library’s director, and Dr. Marc Leeds, president of the Kurt Vonnegut Society. In the end, the school board reversed its decision and the superintendent resigned, but the whole affair certainly raised troubling issues about freedom of information.

The Honors Program will host Dr. Leeds this fall. Moreover, all our incoming freshmen will receive a copy of *Slaughterhouse-Five* at Preview. I hope they will also consider reading some of the other most-challenged books and reflect on what ideas they contain that seem so dangerous or subversive that some people think they should be banned.

Have a good summer. We’ll see you in the fall.

Dr. Kevin Knudson
Director
Two University of Florida students were named GOLDWATER SCHOLARS by the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation

Zachary Kaufman and Lauren McLeod are two of just 282 students nationwide to receive the scholarship for the 2012-2013 year, which recognizes and awards sophomores and juniors who excel in mathematics, the natural sciences and engineering.

Zak, from Plantation, FL is a junior with a double major in electrical engineering and computer engineering. He plans to earn his doctorate and to conduct research involving microelectro-mechanical systems. His ultimate goal is to teach at the university level.

Lauren, from Sunrise, FL is a junior physics major. She plans to pursue a doctorate in biophysics and teach at the university level.

More than 1,000 students were nominated for the award by college and university faculty members around the country. This is the eighth year in a row that UF has had multiple students named as Goldwater Scholars.

Each scholarship covers eligible expenses for undergraduate tuition, fees, books, and room and board, up to a maximum of $7,500 annually.
In August 2011, 35 honors freshmen gathered together for the very first H-Camp, the official Honors retreat. In January 2012, another group of 30 honors freshmen participated in our second H-Camp. This August, more than 75 newly-admitted honors students will experience H-Camp and all of its benefits.

H-Camp has three main goals: making new connections, preparing for the college journey, and of course, having fun! As an incoming freshman, making connections is arguably one of the most important things to do. It is easy to feel alone on such a big campus, so by interacting with students who share common goals and interests, H-Campers can build relationships that will last throughout their years at UF. Secondly, H-Camp helps prepare the freshmen for their college journey. H-Campers are placed in small groups and given the opportunity to share in the past experiences of their peer leaders. This is a perfect time for the freshmen to ask any questions about the Honors Program or UF in general.

“When I was first offered the opportunity to be on staff for the inaugural H-Camp, I eagerly jumped at the opportunity. I came on board not because I knew the impact it would have on so many freshmen, not because I saw how H-Camp attracted the highest caliber of students, and not because I expected many of the H-Campers to go on to achieve great things here at UF. Indeed, all of those things came true, but I delved wholeheartedly into H-Camp only knowing that I was eager to share my experiences and advice with these freshmen who so much reminded me of myself a year earlier. I’ve seen so many of those original H-Campers grow to be successful, but the experience has also shaped my life in ways I could never have imagined. H-Camp is already growing to be the next big thing here at the University of Florida, and I’m honored I could be a part of it.”

— Joe Monir, Student Director
Students get excited about the uniqueness of H-Camp. Every session so far has involved different recreational activities. Activities allow campers to engage in high-ropes courses, an alpine tower, various water activities, and a wide range of teambuilding games. The teambuilding games create a sense of unity among the H-Campers. It’s an amazing feeling to be a part of such an exceptional group, and we can attest to its lasting impact as participants from the first session of H-Camp.

H-Camp started off as a one night retreat and has now tripled in attendance and doubled in length. The first H-Camp was a success in the eyes of all the H-Campers. In August 2011, 35 nervous freshmen hopped in a couple of cars and drove out to Camp Montgomery in nearby Starke. There they learned what it means to be a Gator and how to take advantage of being an Honors student. Activities ranged from high ropes course to late-night Catch Phrase.

The H-Camp in January was an all-day trip to Lake Wauburg. This trip was designed for the freshmen who were already at UF but were just admitted into the Honors Program. Many of them claimed that H-Camp helped get to know other Honors students who don’t live in Hume. The activities included the Alpine Tower, challenge courses, and team games that were dependent on every team member’s success.

“The H-Camp serves as the bridge between high school and the Gator Nation. It builds relationships and gets freshmen comfortable with the college atmosphere. H-Campers get insight on potential organizations and therefore have a leg up when it comes time for the Fall semester. I have made many strong connections through H-Camp. My first year experience would have never been the same without H-Camp. The least I could do to give back was help with future H-Camps!”

— Catherine Infantolino, Spirit Chair

The Fall 2012 H-Camp will feature a 2-night stay at Camp Kulaqua in High Springs. The SOFAs (H-camp jargon for “counselors”) include H-Camp alumni from this past year who come from various majors and interests. They will be there to stimulate bonding and offer advice to the freshmen. The activities of the upcoming H-Camp will be more engaging and interesting than before! The fun at this camp simply will not as end campers will engage in a hayride, bonfire, and the famous “blob” while swimming in the local springs.

To learn more, visit http://www.honors.ufl.edu/H-Camp.aspx
NYC Urban Fellow

University of Florida graduating senior Jerry Bruno has been named a 2012-2013 New York City Urban Fellow. The Urban Fellows Program is a highly selective, nine-month fellowship which combines work in Mayoral offices and City agencies with an intensive seminar series that explores current urban issues impacting public policy. Twenty-five students are selected a year from a national pool of qualified and diverse applicants.

Bruno is a public relations major with a minor in public leadership, and has completed internships in Washington D.C. with Presidential Classroom and in the Florida Senate with state Senator Christopher L. Smith. Jerry has been the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Gates Millennium Scholarship, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

After graduation, Bruno will be in Washington D.C. for 10 weeks interning with Burson-Marsteller, a leading global public relations and communications firm. The nine month fellowship in NYC begins in September and includes a $30,000 stipend as well as health insurance coverage.

UF’s First Carnegie Fellow

University of Florida senior Yevgen Sautin has been selected as a 2012-2013 Carnegie Junior Fellow. Junior Fellows serve as research assistants for Carnegie Endowment projects and will have the opportunity to co-author journal articles and policy papers, participate in meetings with high-level officials, contribute to congressional testimony and organize briefings attended by scholars, journalists, and government officials. Fellows are paid a salary of $3,000 per month for approximately one year, and receive a full benefits package.

Sautin was born in Ukraine, and emigrated from there to Japan to the United States where he attended middle school and high school in Gainesville, FL. He speaks Russian and Ukrainian, and will earn degrees in history, economics, and political science when he graduates in May. While at UF, Sautin has been active in student government and Model UN, and completed a research internship with the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in Washington, DC.

Following his fellowship, Sautin plans to earn a PhD in international relations in preparation for a career in foreign policy.
The UFC Honors Program is happy to sponsor our students to participate in the Partners in the Parks program organized by Southern Utah University and the National Collegiate Honors Council. This year, some of our students visited the U.S. Virgin Islands. Here is what they had to say:

“The Virgin Islands trip was absolutely incredible. We stayed at the Virgin Islands Environmental Resource Station (VIERS), and learned about the history and culture of the island, including a visit from a native who sang and danced for us and showed us local herbs and medicine. I’m so grateful I had the opportunity to go, and it’s one the honors program should definitely promote.”

— Casey Cox

“The trip was definitely one of the best experiences I have ever had. I had never spent that many hours a day underwater or spent much time snorkeling at all, but I’ve definitely missed it since I’ve been home. I actually spoke with the site manager about possibly interning there next summer.”

— Kelly Jones

Partners in the Parks—U.S. Virgin Islands
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