

ALETHEIA

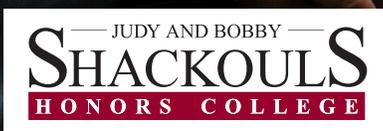
The Shackouls Honors College Newsletter

Spring 2014

Aletheia is a Greek word normally interpreted as “truth,” or “reality.” However, *aletheia*’s original meaning suggests discovery or revelation, a notion that is more aligned with the traditions of education and enlightenment.

FIELD BROWN

Rhodes Scholar
Class of 2014



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY



CLASSICAL WEEK AT SHACKOULS HONORS COLLEGE, SEPTEMBER 23-27

A student strummed an acoustic guitar in leather sandals, shorts and a sackcloth shirt. People lined up on the sidewalk and grabbed snacks before settling on the ground in camping chairs and blankets. The courtyard between Griffis and North halls made the perfect space for outdoor theater. Student voices echoed off the brick and the sunshine illuminated the stage. The music played until actors dressed in Roman garb entered the courtyard. An actor delivered the opening monologue: “In the first place now, spectators, at the commencement, do I wish health and happiness, to myself and to you. I bring you Plautus, with my tongue, not with my hand: I beg that you will receive him with favoring ears!”

The Brothers Menaechmus, written by the comedic playwright Plautus (254-184 B.C.E.), follows two brothers separated by birth in a hilarious case of mistaken identity. Before William Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* or *Twelfth Night*, the familiar trope retained a distinctly Roman flavor. Moschus of Syracuse fathered twins named Menaechmus and Socicles. Moschus decided to take Menaechmus on a business trip to Epidamus, where the boy was abducted and raised in the city. Moschus renamed Socicles to honor his missing son. Years later, Menaechmus of Syracuse visits Epidamus with his quick-witted and put-upon slave, Messenio. Confusion descends when Messenio and the townspeople mistake the Brothers Menaechmus for the same person while Menaechmus of Syracuse stirs up trouble between his less than faithful brother and his brother’s wife.

Dr. Donna Clevinger, Senior Faculty Fellow at Shackouls Honors College and Professor of Communication and Theatre, directed the play. Clevinger held auditions in August and met a host of talented students. More than 50 freshmen honors students provided music, acting roles and stage support. Students rehearsed four days during the week and Sundays for more than a month.

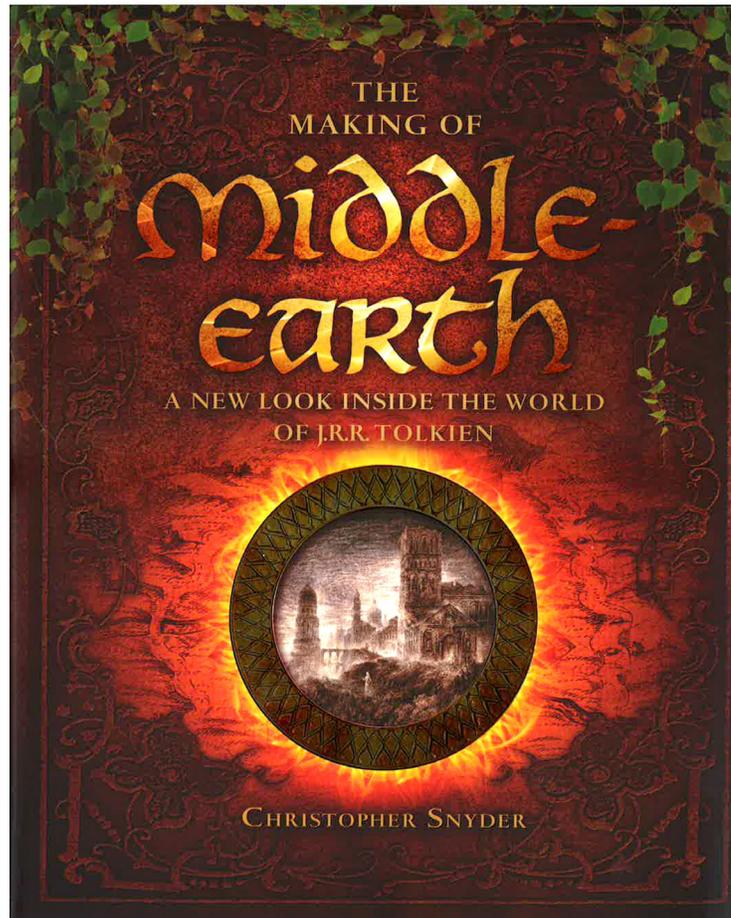
Students performed *The Brothers Menaechmus* twice during Classical Week while participating in other events. Dr. Michael Galaty, Professor and Head of Anthropology at MSU, presented a talk about Mycenaean Greek Economics. The Honors College also hosted a Greek and Roman inspired art display for students to enjoy.

UNEXPLORED ASPECTS OF TOLKIEN IN HONORS DEAN'S NEW BOOK

The *Making of Middle-earth: A New Look Inside the World of J.R.R. Tolkien*, represents seven years of hard work and dedication from Dr. Christopher Snyder, Dean of the Shackouls Honors College. “I wanted to do a book on Tolkien that was similar to my Arthurian book and look at the whole phenomenon, not just *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, but his other writings, his career as an academic, and primarily how history and archaeology influenced his creation of Middle-earth. Most Tolkien books are written by English professors, by people with a background primarily in English literature and literary criticism, and my perspective on this was going to be one of a historian, but also one who knows medieval literature well. I wanted to show how not only reading literature, but also medieval history and archaeology, influenced Tolkien’s creation of Middle-earth.”

Dean Snyder searched for these answers at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, where he had access to Tolkien’s manuscripts and letters. “Reading Tolkien’s letters gave me insight into a man who was hard to pin down. He’s elusive; he doesn’t make it easy on you to try to go to him for answers in explaining his literature and his fiction because he liked to play games with people who thought they knew everything. He told lots of tales about his writings and some of them were meant to throw you off the track.”

Dean Snyder encourages honors students to dig for those answers, just as he did. “I think that a lot of honors students read Tolkien or watch the movies or both and find them enjoyable. An honors student is one who will stop and ask why: What do they get, what are they getting out of this? What is so compelling about Middle-earth? The more you ask questions the deeper you go into a realm of history, of heroic legend, of language, and I think that an honors student will want to know more. They will want to read the primary sources that Tolkien read, things like “*Beowulf*” and the medieval Arthurian romances. They will want to see the things that inspired Tolkien, the places that he lived in and taught, and they will have an opportunity at Mississippi State to do that through taking our interdisciplinary seminar course on Tolkien and maybe even participating in our Oxford program during the summer at the University of Oxford. That’s how you really get to know Tolkien.”





RHODES SCHOLAR ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO EMBRACE CONFLICT

“Great people are forged by conflict. If you can understand your conflict, you can make it stick out. Find a conflict and acquire a passion for changing it.” Honors student Donald “Field” Brown, a senior literature and philosophy major from Vicksburg, and MSU’s latest recipient of the Rhodes Scholarship, knows what it takes to stand out. One of the ways that Field was able to stand out on the Rhodes application was his statement of purpose.

Field talked about developing a second, more powerful narrative for his statement of purpose.

“The power of the second narrative is a very important part of the personal statement for the Rhodes Scholarship. All applicants will have good grades, exhibited leadership qualities in various ways, and done important research in their field. The second narrative is what is going to separate them from other applicants. In other words, the second narrative is the compelling personal story of one’s life that makes an individual interesting to an interview committee.

“One’s second narrative will most likely have something to do with conflict. To put it simply, great people are forged by conflict. Look at the people we consider to be great in the history of the Western world: Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, Helen Keller, and so forth. These people’s life stories are compelling because their lives tackled the most controversial issues of their time. The greater the conflict, the greater the potential for greatness.”

Field encouraged his fellow students to find what makes them unique, to find the greater conflict that exists and embrace it. “My second narrative has to do with the conflict of race in the South. This conflict lies at the heart of American democracy, and my research in African American literature directly correlates with my personal story. That is what I think made my personal statement powerful.”



NEW GRADUATE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM OFFERS INSIGHT FOR UNDERGRADS

Organized by the office of the Graduate School, the Shackouls Honors College and the Division of Student Affairs, the Undergraduate Mentorship Program is designed to demystify graduate school. Graduate student mentors representing the different colleges on campus—from engineering to arts and sciences—share firsthand experiences and advice with their undergraduate mentees. The undergraduate students are paired with individual graduate mentors and meet twice a month in an informal setting.

Individual meetings allow students to ask questions about finding graduate programs, application requirements, graduate school life, and, sometimes, research techniques. Students take the opportunity to discuss their professional goals both as an undergraduate and as a potential graduate student. Sharing progress with mentors motivates students to have important conversations with instructors and advisors about their current educational goals, as well. The mentorship program encourages stronger ties with academic advisors and is an effective supplement to advising on campus.

“The undergraduate students have a chance to ask questions about graduate school that they would not get to otherwise,” history graduate student Justin Dornbusch said. “Everyone will eventually want coffee or lunch, so getting together does not take a big toll on busy schedules.” This informal structure enables the students to make a big impact with very little time commitment. In addition to individual meetings, the program has two group socials each semester to help members get to know one another and discuss educational goals.

Dornbusch said his college advisor emphasized the downsides of graduate degrees in history before agreeing to help him apply. “My undergraduate advisor let me know that graduate school was costly, time consuming, and had to be motivated by a passionate desire to learn”. His professor emphasized the highly competitive job market and other challenges. “My goal is to provide my students with the same opportunity to make an informed decision,” Dornbusch added.

A man with glasses and a blue shirt is holding a clear plastic sheet with four pinned butterfly wings. The wings are arranged in a 2x2 grid. The top two wings are dark brown with light brown spots, and the bottom two are dark brown with light brown stripes. The man is looking at the camera with a slight smile.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH HELPS SATISFY THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

A new academic year has come-and-gone, but the work of our students will last a lifetime. Honors students involved in undergraduate research are receiving notice, and it's no wonder why. A few examples of our students achieving greatness in research are Kate Thompson '15, Taylor Szasz '15, and Ben Bailey '14. We are proud of these students and others who are participating in meaningful research opportunities.

Kate is working with the Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences at Mississippi State University on male infertility in mammals. Kate recently joined the Wildlife Vets group in South Africa to study wildlife conservation and veterinary medicine.

Taylor is using magnetic nanoparticles to try to treat osteosarcoma, a bone cancer most often diagnosed in adolescents. She is looking to see if attaching certain proteins to the nanoparticles will have an effect on receptors in the cancerous cells, inducing cellular death.

Ben has been focusing on addressing "food deserts" in the Mississippi Delta. He aims to document in video the prevalence and impact of limited food access in the Mississippi delta region and its relation to other poverty-related issues.

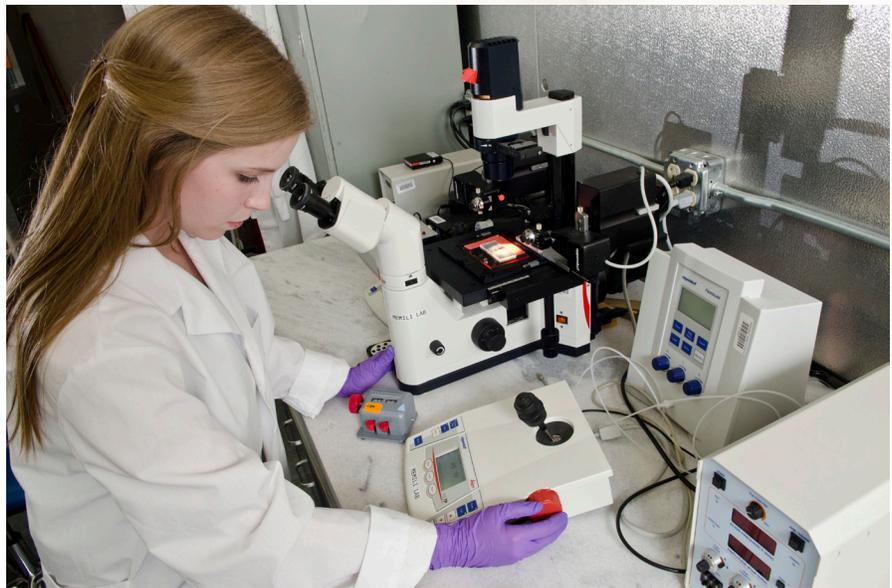
Undergraduate education should be broad in the sense that students should have breadth of knowledge; students should have knowledge in terms of techniques and approaches that various disciplines use, but to really go deeply into a subject requires the single-minded concentration that students have when they do research. Research allows undergraduates to really get their fingers into the soil of the subject and to dig down and get a deeper understanding of the material, but in the process of research students also get a broader view; they begin to understand what the search for knowledge within their field is like.

The Shackouls Honors College supports student research endeavors in several ways. We have summer research fellowships, which can partially support a student over the summer in terms of materials, but we can also provide money for salary support and housing if it is needed. We also help students find research mentors; we are quite happy to help search out faculty mentors who match the interests of the students.

We have travel funds available for Honors students who have done work and would like to present it to regional and national meetings. We also, through the generosity of the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (nSPARC), have money to support students in the arts and sciences who get internships in major domestic and international cities. For those honors students who get internships in the liberal arts that might not pay very much, we now have some money to help support those students so that they have the ability to take advantage of internship opportunities.

Beyond these opportunities for undergraduate research, we have two university-wide research symposia, one in the spring and one in the summer, which allow students to present their work, either as posters, talks, or performances. Students are not only presenting research in laboratory sciences or in engineering, students out of English have presented poetry or literary criticism. We want to see art majors who have a sculpture or a canvas that they are particularly proud of, or a communication major who has prepared a dramatic reading or a monologue, as part of our symposium.

**IN THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH,
STUDENTS ALSO GET A BROADER VIEW;
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FIELD IS LIKE**



SHACKOULS HONORS COLLEGE WELCOMES NEW FACULTY FELLOWS

The Shackouls Honors College is proud to welcome Dr. Donna Clevinger, Professor of Theatre, and Dr. Joseph Trullinger, Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion, as faculty fellows.

Dr. Clevinger, Senior Faculty Fellow, said that one of the most rewarding parts of being a faculty fellow is getting to build relationships with the students. “I live with them for a few hours every week.” Being in the same space as the students and teaching at night allowed Dr. Clevinger to get to know the Honors students in a way that she wouldn’t have otherwise. “The students come by the office to meet me and just say hello, or they drop by my classroom.”

Dr. Trullinger also enjoys the closeness with the students that teaching in Honors allows. “I get to teach the best students at MSU.” Dr. Trullinger also enjoys “not being confined to one discipline; I can teach art and literature together.” Dr. Trullinger shares the view of Plato that “Philosophy should be a conversation. The discussion based classes with the Honors College are ideal for both teaching and learning.”

Drs. Clevinger and Trullinger both hold office hours in Griffis, and faculty, staff and students have enjoyed getting to know the newest additions to the Shackouls Honors College.

SHACKOULS HONORS COLLEGE OFFERS NEW COURSES

The Shackouls Honors College offered a diverse set of new courses covering everything from mythology to food security. The Honors College remains committed to offering new innovative courses in multiple disciplines. The following courses were added this year:

HON 2990, “Myth as Truth: Liberating Images of the Spirit,” taught by Dr. Joseph Trullinger. As “an experiment in thinking about how a myth can be true—and what we mean by truth,” the class explored the philosophical dimensions of mythology.

HON 3143, “Peoples and Cultures of The Middle East,” taught by Dr. Kate McClellan, offered an introduction to the Middle East from an anthropological prospective. The seminar style class addressed student questions about everyday life in the Middle East, gender relations, and the practice of Islam.

HON 3163, “Honors Seminar in Natural Sciences: Food Security,” taught by Dr. Brenda Kirkland, explored local, national, and global food security issues while discussing creative solutions to promote food security. Understanding the conditions for food security allowed students to consider the route to ending world hunger.

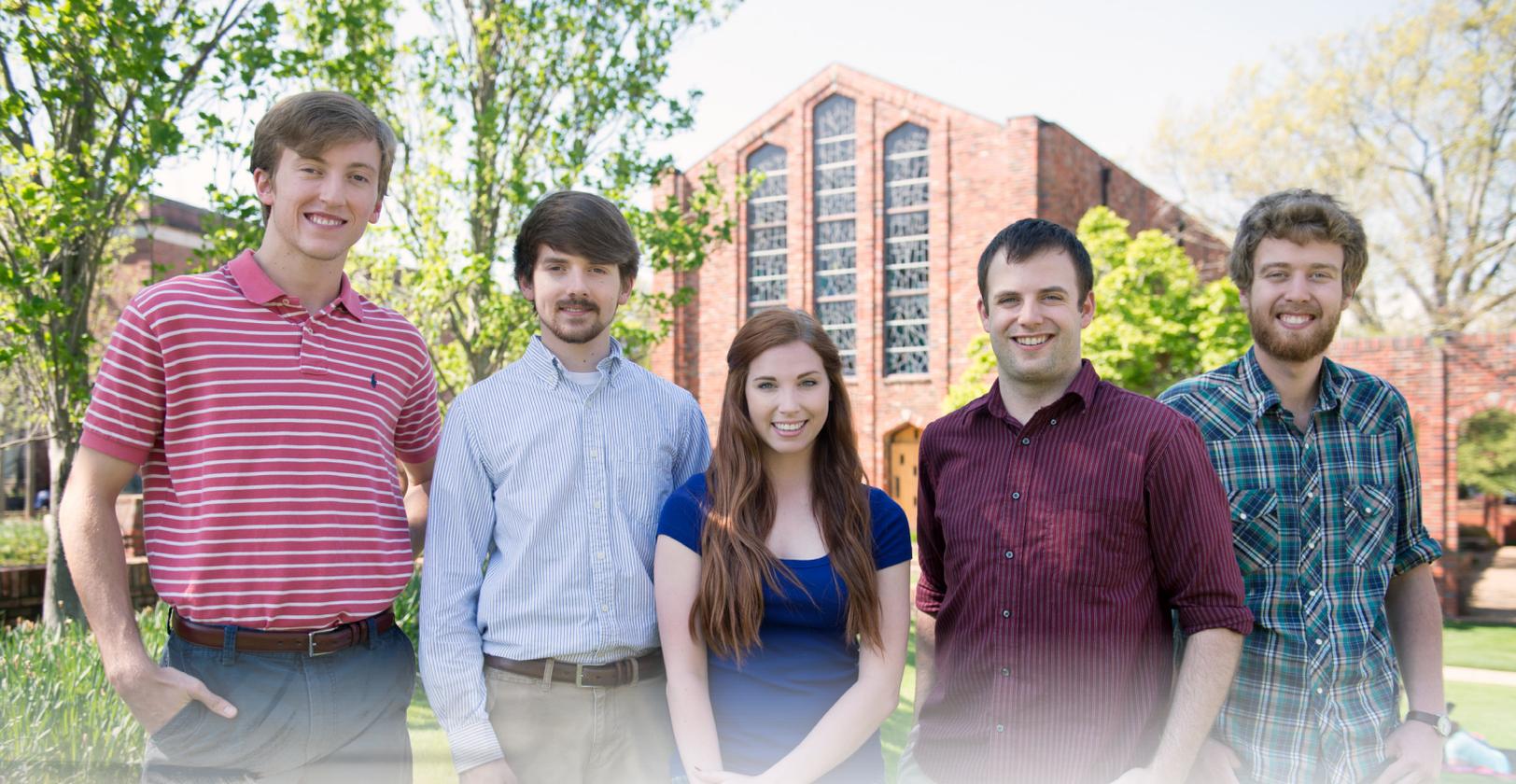


SOPHOMORE STUDENT STARTS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Jamie Aron, a sophomore double major in Political Science and Mathematics from Jackson, saw the chance to create a learning opportunity for young women in Mississippi. After attending a conference intended to get women interested in politics, Aron realized that women needed to be educated and motivated to join other leadership areas too—and if you could do it for college, why not also do it for high school. “I was undecided about my major for a long time when I entered college. If there had been something like this, for me, it would have been so helpful.”

The Women's Empowerment Leadership Conference, known as WE Lead, is designed to show young women that they can be leaders in whatever field they choose to enter. “You can be a leader behind a microscope; you can be a leader writing a book.” The conference aims to expose young women to leaders and businesses run by women. “While at the conference, the young women will build friendships, give back to their communities, and develop fundamental leadership abilities. Furthermore, they will gain the confidence and skills necessary to pursue their dreams.”

Aron and five other students, from different majors, backgrounds and interests joined forces to make the conference a reality. She said it is hard as an undergraduate to get things started, but, if you want something badly enough and truly believe in your project, it is possible. The most important thing to remember is that “at the end of the day you can't do it alone,” she added. “You cannot be afraid to ask for help, and never forget to say thank you. These people that are helping don't owe you anything.”



SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS INCREASE EXPONENTIALLY

Dr. Thomas Anderson | Director of Prestigious External Scholarships

Applications for nationally prestigious scholarships such as the Rhodes, Goldwater, Gates Cambridge, Truman, Udall, and Marshall have more than doubled in the two years that the office has served undergraduates. This year, for example, we had twice as many applicants as the university could advance to the national competition for the Goldwater, and we have growing pipelines for the Truman and Boren scholarships, as well.

Applications for these scholarships have increased because the university has a dedicated office to work with undergraduates at every stage of the application process. We are also actively recruiting applicants from our strong pool of undergraduate researchers and leaders.

More students are applying for these amazing scholarships at MSU and across the nation. The Rhodes, for example, awards scholars a fully funded graduate experience at Oxford University. Thirty-two students win this scholarship and thousands seek the nomination and support their university.

Students interested in these prestigious external scholarships should begin thinking about them when they enter the university, but most of the scholarships are for juniors and seniors, though the Udall and the Goldwater accept applications from sophomores who have engaged in meaningful research.

We're continually amazed at the caliber of our applicants for these awards. Our undergraduates are doing meaningful research and engage in significant leadership at MSU. This year, the Dean of the Graduate School was so impressed with the caliber of applicants of the Goldwater Scholarship for students in STEM that she offered an internal scholarship to support the research of the applicants who didn't advance to the national competition. This gives you a sense of how remarkable the undergraduates are who seek out these awards.



Dr. Christopher Snyder

Dean, Judy and Bobby
Shackouls Honors College

DEAR STUDENTS, ALUMNI AND FRIENDS:

The last year has been exciting, to say the least. Our students are being recognized for their amazing work, in and out of the classroom. Since last year's newsletter went out we were fortunate enough to see our students receive great honors from several prestigious organizations. Donald "Field" Brown received the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship and will be embarking on his journey to Oxford University this fall. Matthew Berk was a recipient of the highly competitive Goldwater Scholarship. Additionally, four Honors students received honorable mentions from the Goldwater Foundation. It gives me a great deal of pride knowing that our students are competing at the highest levels.

Beyond winning and competing for prestigious scholarships, our students are being placed in some of the most prestigious graduate and professional programs in the country. This year students have been accepted to attend schools such as MIT, Princeton, Yale, Oxford, Cambridge, Stanford, Duke, Notre Dame, Vanderbilt, and Emory.

There are several reasons our students are being placed in such great company. They are taking advantage of a true Honors education that is based in the liberal arts. They are developing skills in critical thinking and engaging students and faculty in discussion of the formative ideas, arts, and cultures of the world. Our students are also participating in study-abroad and research opportunities that provide new ways of thinking and seeing the world around them.

Of course, as more of our students seek these opportunities, our needs continue to grow. These are exciting times in the Shackouls Honors College, and I ask that you consider making a gift to support the work of the Honors College. To do so, please contact our office at 662-325-2522 or shc@honors.msstate.edu.

With warmest regards,

Christopher A. Snyder, Ph.D.
Professor of History and Dean
Shackouls Honors College

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