

THE BROTHER DAVID S. BAGINSKI FSC SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Senior Symposia

CLASS OF 2020





"Then out spake brave Horatius, The Captain of the Gate: To every man upon this earth Death cometh soon or late. And how can man die better Than facing fearful odds, For the ashes of his fathers, And the temples of his gods?"

> Thomas Babington Macaulay, Lays of Ancient Rome





Hendrick Goltzius (Netherlandish, 1558–1617), Publius Horatius, Engraving, 1586



Parade plate with Horace Cocles in defense of the Pons Sublicius, 1542, Urbino, Museum of Ancient Art in the Sforza Castle, Milan, Italy (Majolica).



#### WELCOME SIXTEENTH ANNUAL SENIOR SYMPOSIA CLASS OF 2020

Welcome to the sixteenth annual Senior Symposia for The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program. This forum is an opportunity for students to showcase some of the interesting discoveries they made while working on their theses projects. It is also an opportunity for the Central Catholic community to experience the intellectual vitality that is created when talented students work under the direction of dedicated faculty and outside researchers. This combination of discovery-based learning and mentorship has been transformative for everyone involved.

The breath and scope of the oral presentations reflect not only a wide range of academic interests; they also speak to the caliber of the students themselves. Enterprising and thoughtful, these students have delved into a deepened knowledge within a specific field of study. They worked on multiple drafts of their theses and discussed them with their peers in a thesis-writing seminar. Last February, they stood before a faculty panel and advanced an ethical position through rigorous defense and argument. These experiences have enriched their education, sharpened their skills in critical thinking and strengthened their self-confidence as scholars.

Every year, our symposia takes inspiration from a classical or literary theme. This year, we chose Lord Macaulay's poem, *Horatius at the Bridge*, written in 1842. The popular ballad recounts the courage of a humble, Roman soldier fighting against the Etruscans in the late 6th century BC. The choice seemed fitting because Horatius placed great importance on the virtues that matter most to our Scholars: citizenship, discipleship and scholarship. There could not be a better way, we believe, to identify young men of character, purpose and promise than through these virtues.

Many of the theses include a recommendation section. As such, the symposia are very much a celebration of our Seniors' noble efforts in advocating for positive change in the world. Some of the pressing issues they tackled this year include: changing the rhetoric of climate change in America, therapeutic recommendations for treating victims of cults and trauma, the integration of myco-mimicry into sustainable design practices, new understandings about the role of community and postmodernism as social practices, the legal and moral dilemmas raised by the development of self-driving cars and the role of informed consent in the current debate on the safety and efficacy of immunizations.

We extend our sincerest thanks to all of the Second Readers for their generosity of time and expertise in guiding the students work. Their names are included in each of the abstracts. We are most grateful for their efforts.

Enjoy the symposia!

DIRECTORS Patrizia Costa John J. Allen

#### **ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Justin Belardi Sara Budacki Glenn Campbell Todd Rooney









## SYMPOSIA OVERVIEW

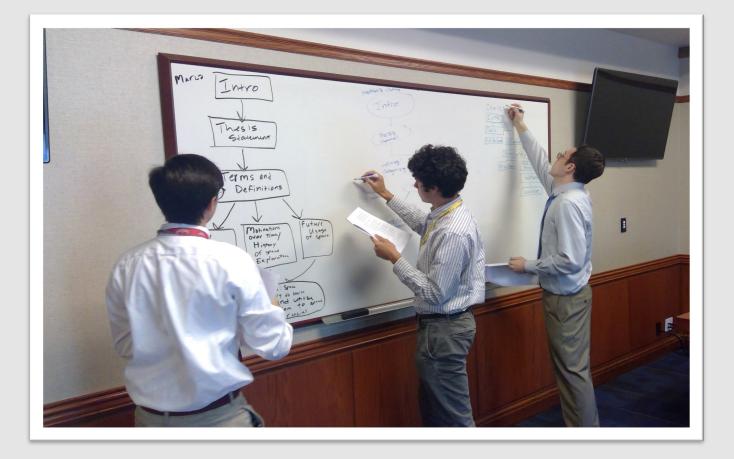
May 18, 2020 6:00 pm

Welcome and Prayer Br. Tony Baginski, FSC Opening Remarks Patrizia Costa Student Presentations

May 19, 6:00 pm *Reassembly Distinguished Mentor Award Student Presentations* 

May 20, 6:00 pm *Closing Remarks John J. Allen Student Presentations Awards for Outstanding Work on the Thesis* 

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## CONGRATULATORY REMARKS FROM THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Congratulations on a wonderful achievement. I am truly blown away by the quality of your work and the effort that you put into this program. I hope that you take the opportunity to reflect on your successes before transitioning to the challenges that are ahead of you next year. Please also continue to challenge yourself intellectually. We need bright, thoughtful, and moral young men like you to become our future leaders.

> Justin Belardi Faculty, Science

You have reached true success in your tenure in The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program. You have taken this opportunity and countlessly seized your potential. We hope that Central has instilled the skills and dedication for your future success. Ralph Waldo Emerson reminds us that: "Success comes from within, not from without."

> Sara Budacki Faculty, English

A British dictionary defines a scholar as a learned person, especially in the Humanities. We hope that your years here at Central have helped you earn this title of erudition and that you continue on the journey of learning for the rest of your life. A true scholar is a curious person and a lifelong learner.

Glenn Campbell Chair, History and Social Studies

While congratulations are certainly in order, be sure to see your completion of this program as the start of something lifelong. Now more than ever, the world needs disciplined and inquisitive minds. Your work in the Baginski Scholars program must lay the foundation for your life's work, whatever and wherever that may be. Be always like the son in Seamus Heaney's poem "Digging" who, upon watching his father drive his spade deep into the peat, says of himself:

"Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.

I'll dig with it."

Todd Rooney Faculty, English

## **INTRODUCTION**

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the sixteenth annual Br. David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program Symposia Presentation. This event represents the culmination of thoughtful research and disciplined thinking by some of the best young minds at Central Catholic and in Western Pennsylvania.

For the sixteen years of the symposia, many students have extended their love for the Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings and have incorporated them into their thesis research. As we remember the spring of 2020 for the way COVID-19 changed the world and our lives, I refer back to a conversation between Frodo and Gandalf in the mines of Moria when Frodo realizes the enormity of the situation and wishes that none of it had happened. Galdalf's reply has stayed with me for over thirty-five years since I first read it: "So do all who live to see such times, but it is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do in the time that given us."

I commend the co-directors of the Scholars Program, Dr. Patrizia Costa and Mr. John Allen, who have carried on the tradition of the program begun by Br. Ernest Miller, FSC in 2002 and further developed by Matthew Sudnik. Having co-directors has allowed the program to further evolve and to provide deeper and more varied opportunities and perspectives that ask the scholars to wrestle with the perennial questions: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to live a moral life?

I congratulate our scholars on their successful completion and defense of their theses. I look forward to hearing the oral presentations and taking part in the question and answer periods. To the Scholars: I have no doubt that when faced with difficult times, you will use your gifts and talents for the good of all.

> Live, Jesus, in our hearts. Forever! Fraternally,

Br. Tony Baginshi, FSC

Br. Tony Baginski, FSC Principal





Georg Pencz, (German, 1484-1545), *Cloelia and the Etruscan King Porsenna*, Engraving Georg Pencz, *Horatius Cocles*, Engraving, c. 1537, Carnegie Museum of Art

#### **DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

#### Horatius at the Bridge and How to Define Courage in Difficult Times

In 1842, Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote a powerful narrative poem, or "lay," called *Horatius at the Bridge*. He based the poem on an account by the Roman historian Livy on the legendary courage of Horatius Cocles. This humble and dutiful soldier is credited with having saved one of the greatest empires in history by staging a diversion against the Etruscans. The ruse took place on a key bridge in Ancient Rome, the *pons sublicius* or "bridge on piles," just as the Etruscan army was about to march across. Horatius convinced two panic-stricken comrades not to desert their post and bought them enough time to dismantle the bridge before leaping into the river fully armored. Without a clear path, the Etruscans were forced to retreat. Horatius emerged upon the shore with permanent injuries but without having lost any of his weapons. More than a medal of valor or a commemorative statue, the grateful citizens of Rome gave him "as much public land as he himself could plow in one day with the yoke of an oxen." They also took turns bringing him daily rations of food for the rest of his life.

When we chose the story of Horatius as the theme for this year's symposia it was so that you, our Seniors, would have an inspiring reminder that a community of virtue (*communitas virtutis*) must be armed with courage (*furtitudo*) to forge ahead. "And how well Horatius kept the bridge in the brave days of old," wrote Macaulay. The Etruscan enemies were astounded at the preternatural courage of Horatius and his comrades: "for such a gallant feat of arms was never seen before ...." They saved a great city and changed the course of history. But little could we have imagined in the early planning stages of this symposia that the story would befall on pertinent times. We are now dealing with one of the greatest crises of our lifetime: a global pandemic named COVID-19. Suddenly, advice along of the lines of "remember this if and when the time comes" seems so inapt with the times at hand. That moment, for you, is "now."

We are reeling with an unprecedented and fast-paced turn of events. There is a gravity to our collective concern and crisis. You are holding so much in your young hearts and minds. You are mourning the loss of important milestones leading up to graduation and wondering what your first semester in college will be like. You are worried about the health and safety of the people you love. These are circumstances that we all wish we could take away but, sadly, we cannot. All we can do is allow you to process the moment you are living and, when you are ready, encourage you to reach for possibilities that you did not imagine before. COVID –19 has thrown a wrench like no other into your universe. But it is also true that disruption and crisis always offer the opportunity to act with greater urgency. So when you are ready, pick up the wrench and use it as a tool towards social justice, compassion, government reform, better university programs, assistance for the poor, and other things that matter. You'll navigate these things better if you continue to arm yourself with *furtitudo*.

So many universities are reporting that COVID-19 has adversely affected the culmination of so many senior theses and dissertations. I too worried that working on the final stages of your theses would be met with a lessening of enthusiasm because of all of the other challenges on your plate. Remarkably, that did not happen. Buffeted by the winds of life and facing the disappointment of it all, you leaned on each other, the community of scholars that you built together, and poured new energy and creativity into your projects. You made a collective decision that the work you were doing mattered. You did exactly what you were supposed to do: you pressed on. This too is a form of courage.

You may be amused to learn that *Horatius at the Bridge* was Winston Churchill's favorite poem as a boy. He once wrote that while he "apparently stagnated in the lowest form" at the Harrow School in London, he memorized all 1200 lines of the poem to inspire himself to develop courage. He also won a prize open to the entire student body by reciting it to his Headmaster without making a single mistake. Churchill returned to the poem often throughout his life. In a nostalgic address to his war cabinet in the biographical film *Into the Storm* (2009), he shared Macaulay's most famous line with great effect: "And how can a man die better, than facing fearful odds, for the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his gods."

The outlook for Britain was grim when Churchill took over as Prime Minister of England in 1940. But much like Horatius, he turned to his fellow countrymen, and said "let us brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, *this was their finest hour.*"

I have no doubt that you'll continue to treat these days, as difficult and uncertain as they may seem, as "your finest hour." You will finish the school year with a greater appreciation for what it means to persevere through difficult and uncertain times. And when you do get to college, continue to use your imaginations, your hearts and your impressive ability to ask important questions —just as you did in Junior Seminar and Senior Thesis— so that you can reconfigure your world in ways that matter.

Patrizia Cirta

Patrizia Costa, PhD Director, The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program





















#### **DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

#### The Temples of the Gods

As we convene this Sixteenth Annual Symposia there is, for many us, an acute sense of lack and longing. Central Catholic and the Scholars Program as a *communitas docta virtutis* (scholarly community of virtue) have endured a long separation. While our suffering is far less than that of some, for a community that cherishes and fosters unitive diversity, we are certainly missing our constituent parts—each other. Like most trained in education, however, I challenge us to rethink of this present difficulty as an opportunity that might yet prove to be one more teachable moment in the four years you have spent at Central.

The theme for this Symposium draws from the story of Horatius, as described by Plutarch from the early 6th century B.C. and immortalized by Thomas Babington Macaulay's ballad "Horatius at the Bridge." In defending ancient Rome from an Etruscan invasion, Horatius emerges:

Then out spoke brave Horatius, the Captain of the Gate:

To every man upon this earth, death cometh soon or late;

And how can man die better than facing fearful odds,

For the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his Gods.

Many throughout our world continue to fight against an impending death, be it from COVID -19 or some other threat. Rising in the face of fearful odds, we each aspire to bring about a better world for the sake of those who have died—for our ancestors and for our God. Yet, Horatius' last line raises some concern for us as scholars. Are we morally equipped to mount the daunting task of fixing what has been broken, not just by this virus but by other, possibly more elusive threats?

In some ways, a pandemic fueled quarantine has brought forth the best and worst of human nature. From hoarding supplies to job loss, panic and fear has exposed the tenuous reality that so many face in this country and throughout world. When Horatius cites the temples of his gods as a source of motivation for a defense of his community, I am prompted to wonder what temples we have, as a nation, now come to offer our worship. Drawing from the oft-read and frequently quoted book of junior English, *Infinite Jest*, the *magnum opus* of David Foster Wallace offers words of incisive wisdom: "Our attachments are our temple, what we worship, no? What we give ourselves to, what we invest with faith...Choose your temple of fanaticism with great care" (*Infinite Jest*, 107). In quarantine, our fanaticisms, our temples to whatever we give ourselves over to, come into greater relief. Wallace challenges those in our society to reconsider how we teach our children to choose their temple and what, in fact, we teach children to love?

While it is certainly true that temples of worship, broadly speaking, can often devolve into manipulation or blind devotion, is it true that any temple should be treated as a false idol? Much of the post-modern project has been to, rightly or wrongly, tear down temples of devotional meaning. As Remy Marathe explains in *Infinite Jest*:

Someone or some people among your own history sometime killed your U.S.A. nation already... Someone taught that temples are for fanatics only and took away the temples and promised there was no need for temples. And now there is no shelter. And no map for finding the shelter of a temple. And you all stumble about in the dark, this confusion of permissions. The without end pursuit of a happiness of which someone let you forget the old things which made happiness possible (*Infinite Jest*, 319-320).

As you contemplate the occasion of your matriculation from Central Catholic and the Scholars Program, be sure to reflect back on "the old things which made happiness possible" and think how you might re-construct a map to temples of devotion and love.

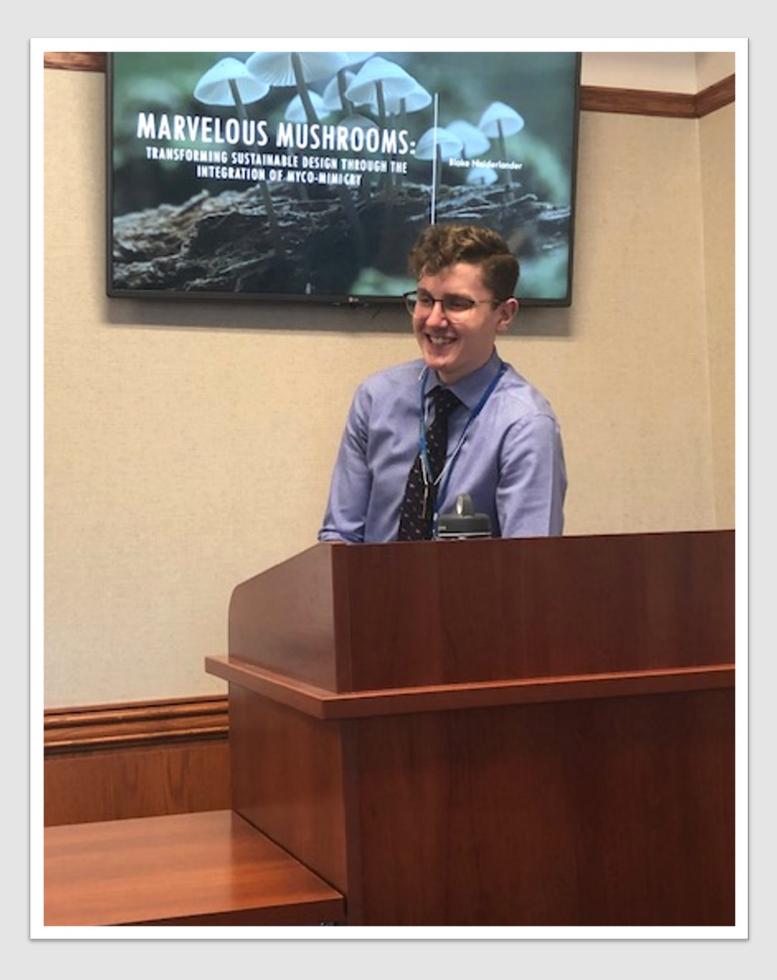
It is my belief that the program at Central Catholic has prepared you well, forming you to ask critical questions and to develop empathetic concern for others. Each of you has taken advantage of the guidance of faith and academic learning offered through the community here and, especially, amongst each other. You have been given the very edges of a map marked with paths to follow and trails still left to blaze. The Scholars Program has, hopefully, shed light on the realities you will face in the world into which we send you out "like sheep among wolves" (Matt. 10:16). The predominant cultural and philosophical perspective sees only an isolated, quarantined self, but you know that:

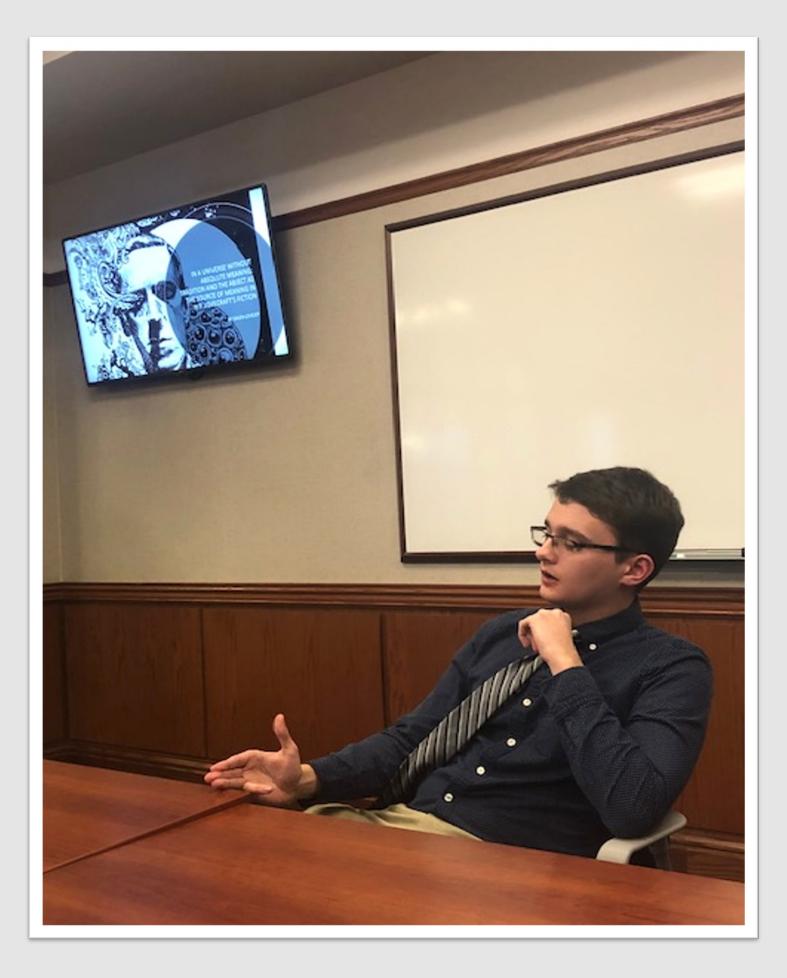
In such a case your temple is self and sentiment. Then in such an instance you are a fanatic of desire, a slave to your individual subjective narrow self's sentiments; a citizen of nothing. You become a citizen of nothing. You are by yourself and alone, kneeling to yourself. (*Infinite Jest*, 108)

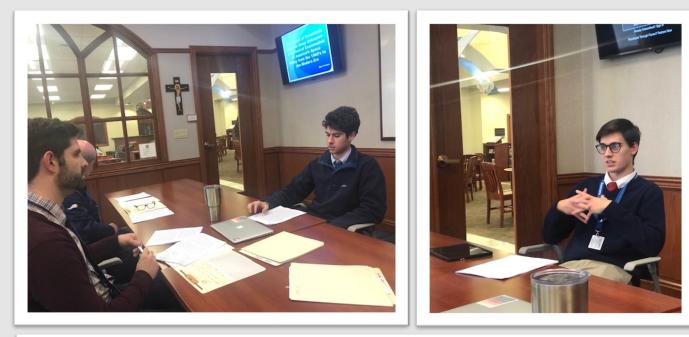
In contrast, you have indeed come to know the value of community, in part, because you now feel its lack, but also because you have lived it each day for four years at Central Catholic. You know the danger of closing yourself off from the world and have learned how to support and share with your friends. Some day when you return once again to the beauty of our community, you will, no doubt, have much upon which to reminisce. Some faces will be new, others will be gone. In the depth of your heart, however, you will always know that those who fade away to ashes were perpetually striving to bear witness to the good of communal living and the temple of our God.

John Allen

John J. Allen, M.A. Director, The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program









#### Linking Real and Unreal: The Importance of Fanservice in Anime

Sean R. Dolan — Film Studies/Cultural Anthropology

Anime and the *otaku* subculture surrounding it have been growing rapidly throughout the past 20 years in both Japan and the West. With *anime* coming into the forefront of pop culture around the globe, academics of Japanese literature and philosophy, such as Christopher Bolton, Susan J. Napier, and Azuma Hiroki, have invested themselves in researching the intricacies and implications of *anime* and *otaku* culture. However, these authors have viewed *anime* through a postmodern lens. Bolton and Napier specifically do not mention fanservice, which is a method by which directors cater to their fans outright in a work. This thesis asserts that fanservice is a method of creating what the acclaimed author and professor David Foster Wallace defined as New Sincerity while fostering the growth of ideals within the *otaku* subculture. This study accomplishes this by analyzing several contemporary *anime* series and films and focusing on the application of fanservice, it can be defined more so as "animalized" or "sincere." Through critical and rhetorical analyses of a variety of works from different genres and formats and a discussion on their use of fanservice, it can be discovered whether it builds narrative despite the technique's use as a mode of animalization in some cases. This thesis challenges the base assumptions of postmodernist *otaku* commentators while offering an alternative to the endless cycles of deconstruction perpetuated by U.S. television and cinema culture.

Reader: Todd Rooney, English Department

# It's Human Nature: The Inability of Capitalism to Sustain the Environment

#### John A. Hollihan — Theology/Environmental Studies

Ecological destruction is a key issue within American politics. As forests burn, sea levels rise, and the ozone layer depletes, the issue continues to persist. This thesis attempts to illustrate the root cause of humans' exploitation and destruction of nature. It does this through a three-fold argument: that the development of capitalism in the United States has led to the destruction of nature, that an understanding of capitalism can never be compatible with an eco-friendly world, and that humans need to have a new mindset towards both nature and capitalism in order to address the current situation of an ecological disaster. Key parts of the development of the Protestant work ethic in the United States are analyzed in order to show how this phenomenon has allowed for capitalism to place roots in the country. I then propose that in order to prevent any further damage to the environment, we must question the effects of the Protestant work ethic on American society. This study advances the understanding that the American mind-set is pre-conditioned to be productive and, therefore, will justify the overconsumption of resources within nature.

Reader: Justin O'Connor, English

#### Nothing is Not Sacred: Public Space in Acts of the Apostles

#### Patrick C. Koroly - Theology

The Catholic Church in the modern era is faced with a crisis of the sacramental. There has been a loss of the sacred in daily life, as secularization has led to a view of our actions in society as not signifying anything holy but rather amounting to, at most, civic duty. Understanding the world in this way makes the Church and religion insignificant in daily life. Losing this public relevance is damaging to the Church as it allows it to be coopted as a tool of the state. To seek an alternative, this paper analyzes the Acts of the Apostles for an understanding of the Church as a unique public space independent of the public discourse, allowing for a sacramental understanding of daily life. This problem is analyzed through the issue of public theology, considering the present dispute regarding publicity and how the Church should work within the context of society to approach the issue of the sacramental in our society and to understand what questions Acts is to answer. Particularly, William Cavanaugh's critique of public theology is used as an entry point, working with his idea of public space in order to understand community in Acts of the Apostles and what makes it sacramental. Throughout Acts, there is constantly a unity between religious and social, showing a concern for life as an extension of the Mass and the rituals of the Church. Ultimately, Acts of the Apostles shows the need for a Church which is able to integrate the social and the sacramental into a family, calling us to work for justice as a means of expanding the Body of Christ and the family of the Church and act as an alternative to state discourse.

Reader: Brother Kevin Dalmasse FSC, History

# In a Universe Without Absolute Meaning: Tradition and the Abject as the Source of Meaning in H.P. Lovecraft's Fiction

#### Galen P. Lovejoy — English

The horror of H.P. Lovecraft's fiction arises from the indeterminacy of an indifferent universe inhabited by strange, blasphemous entities which mock everything sacred. This creates a tension between tradition and the abject—the known and the unknown. Lovecraft explored the conflict between these two forces and he came to argue for tradition as the basis of meaning. More specifically, Lovecraft argued for tradition as static— something which must resist any change in the face of the abject lest it be consumed by it and all meaning lost. Most analyses of Lovecraft's fiction only take into account Lovecraft's biography and thought and neglect to explore how his fiction might present a different answer to the problem of tradition and the abject. This thesis presents a revisionary critique of Lovecraft's conception of tradition and fiction, arguing for the value of dynamic tradition—the idea that tradition must be in dialogue with the abject to create meaning. The thesis first analyses Lovecraft's biography and the development of his writing style to show how he lived out dynamic tradition. Next, it provides an analysis of the fiction itself through the lens of Bakhtin's Carnival language to show how Lovecraft's fiction gradually shifted towards accepting the dialogical nature of tradition and the abject. Finally, the thesis explores how weird fiction, the style of writing which Lovecraft developed, is adapted by modern authors, ultimately showing how meaning is derived from the dialogue between tradition and the abject.

Reader: Todd Rooney, English

#### The Quest into the Deep Unknown: a Historical Examination of Presidents on American Space Policy from the 1950's to the Modern Era

Marco J. Morgano — History

This study examines the decisive roles of the American Presidents from 1953 – 2020 in the formation and continued support of America's space programs. My study fills important gaps in the existing research of the interaction of presidents and the space programs as a whole by reviewing previous examinations on the actions of each president, as research mostly exists on individuals presidencies without making connections across history and addressing that arise. This includes historical documents, NASA reports, and primary sources including speeches from presidents themselves all published before. For example, these themes include differing motivations to support exploration and the persistent change in policy instituted by the presidents. Motivation was found to be the most important factor in driving change in space policy. The findings from the research illustrate how space diplomacy is present in each of the presidents' action and offer insights into how space diplomacy can be achieved, as their actions form the basis of our ideas today. This is because space is a place to envision, it provides a unique medium to engage in diplomacy. In order to preserve the use diplomacy in space, we must continue the line of thinking established by the presidents, beginning in the 1950's.

Reader: Glenn Campbell, Department Chair, History

# Bottom Text – A Memetic Approach to Understanding Community and Postmodernism

Nathan W. Jordan - Sociology / Communications

Memes are and always have been the lifeblood of human interaction – understanding memes is therefore vital to understanding community. The purpose of this thesis is threefold. Drawing from Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* and other meme theory, it creates an original theoretical framework for categorizing and evaluating memes. Using this framework, two communities are analyzed: the Polish Orange Alternative political protest movement, and the international *doujinshi* community surrounding the Touhou Project. From this, the thesis asserts that communities rely on functioning dyads and honest self-involvement on the part of their constituent members. The postmodern philosophical project is examined and critiqued on memetic grounds, which it concludes to be both unsustainable as a memeplex and inherently opposed to community. David Foster Wallace's model of New Sincerity is proposed as a remedial memeplex whose dyads counteract the deconstructive and nihilistic tendencies of postmodernism and serve to facilitate community growth and development.

Reader: Justin O'Connor, English

#### The Complexity of Procrastination: an Examination Along Philosophical, Social, and Neurological Perspectives

#### Charles J. Massaro - Psychology

How does procrastination affect our lives? One response-survey done by educational psychologist Jill Janssen found that 83% of high school students procrastinated on assignments. There are two parts to procrastination: active, the type that is 'productive,' and passive, the type that is 'hindering.' The thesis brings together previous research, accompanied by response-based surveys and neurological studies to come up with practical solutions for high school students. The research done for this thesis showed that there are various facets of life that exploit procrastination, such as economics and law. It also showed that some people are just naturally inclined to procrastinate. Prior inquests have given simple solutions to this compound problem, but the thesis connects aspects of philosophy, sociology, and neurology to derive these feasible solutions. The first solution for high school students is to reconceptualize by setting smaller goals to engage the reward pathway in the brain, which uses the amygdala, a part of the brain that controls fear and aversiveness responses, to force us to do work. Another recommendation is to use procrastination against itself by doing lesser, yet still important, tasks when we procrastinate. The final remedy is to find a healthy environment where we train ourselves to be productive by creating good triggers for our brain and get rid of the easily distractible aspects.

Reader: James Donahue, Counseling

#### Climate of Denial: An Investigation of American Climate Change Rhetoric

#### Adam E. Sipe — Environmental Studies / Psychology

The dangers posed by the continued existence of climate change denial in the face of scientific fact raise an incredibly important question: Why does it exist and how can it be overcome? It is widely supported by the scientific community that climate change is both real and human caused, and that if left unchallenged it will cause disastrous consequences on a global scale. Yet, despite this, there still exists a large population of climate change deniers amongst the American public who do not accept this conclusion. Thus far, the United States government has not taken the necessary action to combat the issue of climate change due to lack of public support or belief in the credibility of the issue at hand. This paper seeks to answer the question of why climate change denial still exists in the United States through an analysis of the psychology of denial and the principles of effective advertising. This analysis is broken down into an exploration of the origins of climate change denial, its relation to the greater societal contexts of the American economy and political climate, and the failure of current outreach efforts. These points are synthesized into the central argument that climate change denial in American politics must be combatted through a non-judgmental, positive approach that centers around economic benefits, emotional appeal, and community building.

Reader: Justin Belardi, Science

#### "No, Officer, I Wasn't Driving,": The Ethical, Practical and Legal Consequences of Autonomous Vehicle Technology

Anthony J. Scholle — Technological Ethics

Over thirty thousand people die in the United States annually due to automobile accidents. It has been suggested that autonomous vehicles, or self-driving cars, could lower accident rates by up to 40%. There are several concerns regarding autonomous vehicles that must be taken into account. This thesis examines those concerns. The first of these concerns has to do with the moral programming of autonomous vehicles. There are infinite possibilities of accidents on public roadways and autonomous vehicles must be programmed to deal with them all. Given the inherent unpredictability, such programming is difficult, even with machine learning. There are also problems regarding the practical implementation of publicly available autonomous vehicles on public roadways. The threat of cyber attacks and other catastrophic failure of autonomous vehicles are very important to the public safety. Moreover, when autonomous vehicles are inevitably involved in crashes it is not yet clear who or what would be held criminally and/or civilly liable given current law. The government and the public are not well prepared to deal with widespread autonomous vehicles. In order to remedy this problem several steps must be taken. First, the National Highway Traffic Administration must develop extensive and enforceable regulations that apply to autonomous vehicles. Legislatures and/or the courts must either write new legislation or set consistent precedents to ensure that the correct party is held liable. Finally, manufacturers and developers must take the greatest precautions to ensure the safety and security of their vehicles before they are released to the public.

Reader: Br. Kevin Dalmasse FSC, History

#### Don't Drink the Kook Aid: An Examination of the Abusive Cult Environments and Treatment Recommendations for Trauma Victims

#### Richard N. Thomas III - Neuroscience / Psychology

Secrecy and isolation allow cults to thrive and promote their agenda while reinforcing it with extensive physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. These actions cause lasting damage to the human psyche and nervous system. The five chapters in this thesis investigate specific practices and offer recommendations on available forms of treatment for the victims. The first chapter establishes a sociological definition for cults. It also provides a case study on the infamous Jonestown Massacre where over 900 members of the Peoples Temple committed mass suicide in 1978. The second chapter questions cult membership by examining the predispositions that lead a person to become more vulnerable to cult influence. The third chapter analyzes two case studies on Community in Island Pond and the Children of God- notorious for the sexual abuse of children. Through a neuroscientific and psychological lens, chapter four examines how these traumatic events can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The final chapter discusses the treatment options for former cult members who are suffering from PTSD and the process that allows them to heal. The abuse that occurs in cult environments puts an immense amount of stress on the human mind and body, ultimately causing victims to suffer from illnesses like PTSD. Despite the extremity of the sickness, this thesis concludes that there are forms of treatment that can be used to overcome the pain and effects of such horrific behavior.

Reader: Ashley Salamacha, Department Chair, English

# Unavoidably Unsafe: an Investigation into the Risks, Research, and Industry of Vaccines

#### Jackson W. Vento - Law / Ethics

From 1982 to 2020, the vaccine industry has grown in value from \$172 million to \$60 billion, a 350fold increase in less than forty years. Vaccines have helped the medical community to make strides in modern medicine and are the makeup of an entire global market. However, vaccines are rarely made available for debate on their safety and efficacy. I aim to take a close look at many facets of the multi-billion dollar vaccine industry. The investigation includes an assessment of the validity of the claims made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding vaccines and the risks involved with vaccination. The thesis presents a case for informed consent as opposed to government mandating, centered around scientific evidence that refutes the theory of herd immunity. The laws passed exempting vaccine manufacturers from responsibility for their products are analyzed for their ethical validity. In addition, corruption within the CDC is explored, as they are the primary promoter and regulator of vaccines and vaccine safety. The main method of research is a comparison between information found in independent peer-reviewed journals and specific claims made by the CDC as well as the vaccine manufacturers themselves. The thesis includes three separate case studies on vaccines for the human papillomavirus, chicken pox, and measles. The first demonstrates the trend of disagreement between the claims of the CDC and independent research, and the latter two illustrate the benefits of naturally acquired immunity. This project sheds light on corruption within the vaccine industry and concludes that there is an inherent risk associated with vaccination and that it should be a fully informed choice.

Reader: Ashley Salamacha, Department Chair, English

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## Vox Populi: an Historical Comparison of Contemporary Populism in the Neoliberal West

#### Nicholas G. Weising - Political Science

Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 U.S presidential election and Boris Johnson's 2019 Conservative leadership victory and subsequent U.K general election victory has prompted the public to recognize the popularity of other self-proclaimed nationalist and populist groups in the West. Political scientists acknowledge that this is not a new phenomenon; liberal democracy has experienced subversive populism before many times, most notably during the 1930s in Europe. This study aims to identify similarities between populism in the past and present with the goal of using this new understanding to appropriately confront populism. It expands on the work of political philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), particularly the theory of cultural hegemony, in light of modern-day neoliberalism as identified by anthropologist David Harvey (1935-). I examine historical and current case studies from both the United States and Europe. My findings indicate that the two conditions that must exist in order for populism to arise in a society is economic hardship and melancholic ennui. This is common between today and in history, but current recruitment methods and discourse have morphed because of the Internet and modern political correctness. Furthermore, my analysis indicates that neoliberalism is unable to adequately combat the populist threat because, fundamentally, populism is a response to neoliberalism. Ultimately, I conclude that we must innovate a new dominant ideology to account for the shortcomings of neoliberalism.

Reader: Justin O'Connor, English

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## **APPLIED SCIENCES**

#### Marvelous Mushrooms: Transforming Sustainable Design Through the Integration of Myco-Mimickry

#### Blake F. Neiderlander — Environmental Engineering / Sustainable Design

Mushrooms are the primary recyclers within nature; what we see above the ground is a tiny part of a huge organism which spans over hectares of land below our feet. Using mycelium's natural behaviors may play a pivotal role for stabilizing our conditions and maintaining balance. The primary purpose of this thesis is to offer an approach to "sustainable design" that provides pathways toward regenerating and preserving the life that surrounds us. Specifically the thesis examines Mycorestoration, using mushroom functionalities as tools for ecological restoration, modeled around two core sustainable pathways: Mitigation and Adaptation. Mitigation deals with applying fungi's molecular abilities to transform agricultural waste into a renewable product for the building industry. Adaptation focuses on manipulating fungi's natural role of a decomposer to rejuvenate contaminated lands. This thesis proposes an experimental model testing fungi's ability to degrade oil pollutants; the second experimentation aims on using spent coffee grounds, straw and sawdust as a medium for cultivating mushroom, ultimately using this material to form a mycelium brick. A mass spectrometer is recommended to measure oil degradation, while a microwave helps to digest the substrate before analysis. Compression and tensile strength analysis information is provided within procedural steps allowing comparisons of the material to the normal standards of a brick to be made. Integrating mushrooms around an ecosystemic economy for waste management may help to mitigate our waste problems while adapting to sustaining the life around us. By manipulating fungi's external digestive system we can use this natural ecological behavior as a tool to remediate contaminated areas.

Reader: Mark Krotec, Science

## **A LEGACY OF IDEAS**

Through fanservice, anime builds community and creates meaning in a world of meaningless media. —Sean R. Dolan

The Protestant work ethic lives on today through global capitalism and environmental destruction. —John A. Hollihan

Religion as a public space independent of narratives of citizenship provides a realistic alternative to state-controlled discourse and power.

-Patrick C. Koroly

Although one may fear the abject, it is our salvation from an all too terrifying universe. —Galen P. Lovejoy

One man on the moon is a leap towards diplomacy for all of mankind. —Marco J. Morgano

Civilization is a living animal, one whose lifeblood is thought and whose pulse is the flow of interchanging memes. —Nathan W. Jordan

The consequences of procrastination are not as hindering as the labels we give it.

-Charles J. Massaro

## A LEGACY OF IDEAS

In an argument, do not seek to vilify your opponent. The only enemy should be the problem at hand. —Adam E. Sipe

The emergence of autonomous vehicles has created real-world moral dilemmas that we are now forced to solve. —Anthony J. Scholle

The extremes of cult behavior allow us to better understand the damaging effects of trauma and how to treat it. —Richard N. Thomas III

Be immune to whether your search for truth will bring you praise or ridicule.

—Jackson W. Vento

Populism attacks the culture of diversity and acceptance in the liberal democracies. —Nicholas G. Weising

By shining light upon the humble mushroom, we can realize that we live in a world ripe for discovery and innovation. —Blake F. Neiderlander

## NOTES

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program is to foster intellectual, cultural and ethical growth essential to leadership in the service of humanity.

Participation in this program provides Scholars with foundations and opportunities in: intellectual curiosity, civic engagement, balance, diversity of perspectives, leadership, creativity, innovation, experiential learning, applied learning, integrity, effective communication, building community.

A deeper goal of the Baginski Program is to motivate Scholars to reach beyond their individual niches and to understand that they can effect justice in society and, in fact, have a responsibility to do so.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The Brother David S. Baginski, FSC Scholars Program was created in 2002 by Brother Richard Grzeskiewicz in honor of the beloved teacher and Vice Principal for whom the program is named. Embodied by three related concepts —scholarship, citizenship and discipleship, it offers an engaging intellectual forum to highly motivated students. These students become part of a community of peers and faculty advisors and meet regularly through seminars, mentoring, programmatic retreats/trips, and symposia.

Students in the program prepare for advanced studies at the university level through a liberal arts curriculum that is interdisciplinary and multi-faceted. In Junior Humanities Seminar, students will engage in critical inquiry, social justice perspectives and community-focused service projects rooted in the Lasallian tradition. In their Senior year, students will use the skills they have acquired to develop, defend and present an original research thesis.

At its core, the program is designed to encourage students to understand the intrinsic connections between their intellectual development and their responsibilities as global citizens. Many of the enrichment activities offered by the program are fueled by this intent.

# Program

SHAM IN STATES

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL SENIOR SYMPOSIA MAY 18, 19, 20, 2020

#### WELCOME AND PRAYER

Br. Tony Baginski, FSC

#### **OPENING REMARKS**

Patrizia Costa, Ph.D. Director, Scholars Program

#### PRESENTATIONS

Class of 2020

#### **CLOSING REMARKS**

John J. Allen, M.A. Director, Scholars Program

#### AWARDS

Outstanding Work on the Thesis Best Thesis Distinguished Mentor Award