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Sophomore Charity Moore, an Archaeology major from Harrisburg Pennsylvania, shares a little about being part of ROTC, her plans for the future, and why she would like to have lunch with J.R.R. Tolkien.

- **What has been your favorite honors course and why? Is there anything different about honors courses as opposed to non-honors courses?**

  My favorite honors course so far has probably been Academic Discourse with Dr. McGurk because it was one of my first college classes. Although I didn’t always agree with everything that she or my classmates said, the class really challenged me to think critically and to own what I believe rather than just absorb what my parents, friends, or professors tell me and spit it back out. I love honors classes because there are more opportunities for discussion and interaction with the professors and other students.

- **As part of the ROTC program at Mercyhurst, can you describe what it’s like participating in ROTC and juggling coursework at the same time?**

  It can be difficult balancing ROTC and academics, because both require a lot of time and effort. As an ROTC cadet, I have physical training in the mornings, an extra class, and often have training on the weekends. Although my workload can feel overwhelming at times, it’s rewarding to know that I’m part of something important and that every physical or mental challenge is preparing me to better serve my country.

- **What is your favorite thing about your major? What are you looking forward to in the next two years?**

  My favorite experience as an archaeology student has been meeting other people who share my passion for ancient history and prehistory. We can talk incessantly about our favorite ruins, our inspiration for becoming an archaeologist, or how excited we are to finally meet people who don’t say, “That means dinosaurs, right?” when we mention archaeology. I’m really looking forward to spending this summer with my friends at an excavation.

- **What are your plans after graduating from Mercyhurst and for the future?**

  After graduation, I am committed to serving at least four years on active duty. I hope to one day work as an Army archaeologist with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, a military taskforce charged with recovering missing American soldiers from past conflicts. After the military, I plan to go on to graduate school, and then work in Middle Eastern archaeology.

- **If you could have lunch with any person (alive, deceased or fictional) who would you dine with?**

  At the risk of sounding like a complete nerd, I would love to meet J.R.R. Tolkien. I can relate to a lot of his experiences and his work has been an influence and inspiration to me.
When a person hears the word “character” today, various different meanings come to mind. However, the word character comes from an interesting history of lineage dating back to the people of Greece around the year 1000 BCE. The present “character” comes from “carecter,” which meant a mark and was spoken by people of England during the time period of 1100-1550 CE. This “carecter” is derived from “caractere,” spoken in France around 1000-1400 CE. This French version was taken from “character,” meaning a mark of quality and heard from people in Italy near 700 B.C. Lastly, the Italian “character” was taken from “charakter,” meaning ‘to sharpen,’ spoken by the people of Greece.

Although the word character has come to own many connotations over the years, its actual definitions include moral or ethical qualities, a reputation, or an account of the qualities or peculiarities of a person. In the words of Helen Keller, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” Character is built through daily experiences, from something as simple as going to class, to a life-changing event like a job interview. Through these experiences, the basis of a person’s integrity is molded, and characteristics such as generosity and responsibility can define a person.

Here at Mercyhurst College, this presence of character building is evident in both the College mission statement as well as its core values. The mission’s emphasis on leadership and service clearly identifies a push to exercise one’s character development. Even more than the mission statement, the college’s list of core values also demonstrates several character traits which involve the student being socially merciful, globally responsible, compassionately hospitable, intellectually creative, reflectively aware, and ambassadors of service, all of which create opportunities for character-building experiences. Only through the experiences of life can a person’s character build, and Mercyhurst effectively advocates the building of strong character.
Sodexo for the Future? 

By Sarah Mastrocola

The dining services provided by a school are always of concern to students, and Mercyhurst is no exception in this. What some may not realize, however, is that Sodexo, Mercyhurst’s current food provider, is currently under evaluation. Sodexo’s present contract, which has lasted for the past eleven years, will end this summer. At this point it is uncertain whether or not Sodexo will be chosen as the future food provider for the school. Ted Foessett, General Manager for Dining Services, did say that “We [Sodexo] would really like to stay here.”

Several changes have gone into effect this year within Egan cafeteria and the other dining areas. Renovation of the cereal, salad, and dessert bars has taken place, as well as expansion of the deli and the drink line. These changes have resulted in added variety as well as improved presentation. Some of the counters have also been revamped in an attempt to make serving food easier, and the dish room for cafeteria employees was refurbished as well. Visually, the cafeteria has done work with special decorations for holidays and special buffet days, as well as frequently updating the “Mind, Body, and Soul” display. Modifications have also appeared at The Laker Inn, mostly involving increased food options and pricing adjustments for easier dealing with meal exchange equivalency.

As Sodexo’s current contract with Mercyhurst draws to a close, some might be tempted to surmise that these changes are correlated to an attempt by Sodexo to gain a new contract for the future. Sodexo is currently working with a consultant to figure out how to move forward with food service, but other food service agencies may submit proposals for the contract, which could put more pressure on Sodexo to hastily improve their own service.

According to Foessett, however, there is no real correlation between Sodexo’s contract and the changes that have been made within the dining areas this year. “We work with the college at budget time each year and talk about changes for the following year, especially for more involved projects. Proposed changes are generally based on information from student surveys and similar feedback,” said Foessett.

“We also make smaller changes on a weekly and monthly basis based on student responses and trends,” he added. Another cafeteria worker also said, “Most of the changes have been cosmetic structural changes. The recent cosmetic changes follow the same trend as other changes over the past three and a half years, so I do not believe the contract bid is a significant influence.

The bidding did, however, trigger a round of assessments that included student, workstudy and employee meetings with an independent firm investigating the bidding.”

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Foessett also explained that feedback about the dining services is gleaned each summer from students who attend the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for the Arts (PGSA) at Mercyhurst. “They tend to be a smaller group, ranging from about 200-250 students. Because of this, it is helpful to gain feedback from them, which we do through a weekly survey. Also, as college students-to-be, the PGSA attendees are a useful crowd to survey,” Foessett noted.

The source of feedback is certainly not limited to a small range of yearly PGSA students, though. Sodexo periodically surveys the Mercyhurst student population, and MSG also sent out a rather length survey last summer that related to campus dining. This particular survey was created to determine what should be offered in the convenience store planned for the new Mercyhurst dorms, but the information gathered also had effects on the general campus dining, according to Foessett.

Foessett also noted, “Our main concern is not so much in what we specifically serve. Our primary goal is simply to please the students.” Similarly, Mercyhurst’s website says of Sodexo’s services, “You’ll find great food, honest values and a comfortable atmosphere in which to enjoy it all.” Given the frequent grumbling that can be heard among the students in regard to the available food, however, one might easily call these statements into question.

Much of this dissatisfaction may be resulting, however, from insufficient staffing, especially within Egan cafeteria. One cafeteria worker explained, “Although the variety of tasks has increased at the cafeteria, they haven’t hired more full-time workers. The full-time people are extremely nice and fantastic people, but they are also extremely overworked. The cafeteria should hire more full time people, instead of relying on students, who can sometimes be unreliable workers because of their heavy academic loads.” This worker also said, “This is part of why the weekend meals are not as good as the weekdays – most of the full time people are gone on weekends and the students are not as well supervised.”

Although Sodexo’s future with Mercyhurst still remains somewhat uncertain, one cafeteria worker said, “Sodexo is highly likely to keep the contract.” If Sodexo receives another contract, this will involve the food services at not only Egan Cafeteria and The Laker Inn, but also at the Mercyhurst Bookstore and Mercyhurst Northeast, as the contract is fully inclusive. Foessett said, “If we stay here, we will probably be looking at a facelift for Egan cafeteria again. This is a major project, though, so it won’t be happening until we get more feedback.” Thus, as those ever-pesky dining services surveys start coming out again, you might want to consider adding your input to the pile – it just might affect the food services for years to come.
Adolph Merckle’s obituary in the January 6, 2009 newspaper could easily have been the inspiration for a sensational Hemingway story: in the wake of his cement, pharmaceutical, and auto investment failures, a despairing German billionaire steps in front of a train. Hemingway would undoubtedly dazzle his literary admirers with some delicate metaphor relating the impact of the train to the impact of the recent stock market crash on Merckle. It could be a beautifully tragic composition if not for the eerie fact that it is the true story of an unfortunate man.

While the rest of the world joins Merckle, wavering between bouts of distress and panic, Mercyhurst appears to be nearly oblivious to the financial crisis. Workers continue to haul planks around the building site of the new dorm and to hammer beams into place. President Gamble’s November statement about effects of the financial crisis on the construction of the dorms and plans for the new academic building was anything but panicked. In a rather optimistic letter, Dr. Gamble assured the Mercyhurst community that the college ended its fiscal year on a good note, which put the institution in a favorable position to continue adding buildings and amenities to campus.

The new dorm, built on the site of the former Mercy Walkway orchard, will be completed as scheduled, in time for the 2009-2010 school year. Living within the mustard-yellow walls of the Mercy Suites will not be an option available to freshmen next year (condolences to all shady characters who are fond of the dimly-lit real-estate). Instead, they will choose among rooms in Egan, Baldwin, McAuley, or the new dorm.

Mercyhurst secured funds for the new dorm before the September economic downturn, so the dorm is what Dr. Gamble called “on budget and on time.” As for the planned academic building, time is more of an uncertainty. The $12 million budget that allows for construction of a complex planned to house Intelligence Studies, Business, Communications, Hospitality, and Ethics comes from private donations and loans.

Donors most often fulfill their pledges by giving stocks to Mercyhurst. During unstable economic situations, donors are reluctant to grant stocks because of low value and tax purposes. Needless to say, a few years will lapse before benefactors begin to provide a steady flow of funds for the new building.

Dr. Gamble’s conservative estimate puts initial construction for the building to begin three years from now. Though economic circumstances delay construction, Dr. Gamble promises the instability of the economy will not discourage plans for an aesthetically-pleasing, state-of-the-art academic facility. In the midst of the world’s economic trouble, Mercyhurst will continue to be a fine institution whose scholars read Hemingway rather than end up like his characters and the unfortunate Adolph Merckle.
The student body received an e-mail from Dr. Chris Magoc over Thanksgiving break regarding a proposed Energy Makeover. The e-mail asked interested students to volunteer their apartments for an Energy Makeover, occurring in early January, which would encourage energy-efficiency for apartment and student alike. Twenty-one students responded, a number Dr. Magoc calculates to represent over sixty students in all. The students were from a wide range of housing areas, including Briggs and Lewis apartments, the Wayne Street apartments, Duval sophomore housing, and the freshman housing areas, represented by two interested freshmen.

The goal of the Energy Makeover, Dr. Magoc says, is to “improve energy efficiency in select student apartments and to demonstrate to those students the ways by which they can live more efficiently and responsibly.”

In addition to helping Mercyhurst reach its energy goals, the Energy Makeover is intended to foster energy-efficient behavior beyond students’ lives at Mercyhurst.

The effort is part of the college’s increasing effort to lessen its impact on the environment, already manifested in four geothermal buildings and the use of alternative energy from wind and sun. The college is already more committed to green energy than most other institutions in the state. It now hopes to increase energy efficiency by tackling student housing, much of which is slightly decrepit with drafty windows, leaky faucets, and erratic heating.

The idea was originally proposed by the Mercyhurst Green Team in November. The administration has been supportive. Dr. Magoc notes that administration wants to “create good models for environmentally responsible living.”

The effort will also help the college save on energy costs. The administration has apparently exhibited some interest in student energy use for some time. Earlier efforts failed, however, as in the case of an experimental Green Apartment several years ago. Dr. Magoc had little involvement, but points to poor planning as the cause of the failure, something that will not be repeated.

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The effort is not a contest among participating students. Specific details of what the makeover will involve for each apartment are pending, but it will focus on efficient use of electricity, heat, gas, and water. It will also involve, according to Dr. Magoc, “a willingness to learn how to do simple things like [putting] plastic on windows [and learning] how to cook more efficiently.”

The program is no longer accepting participants at this point, but it is hoped that the Energy Makeover will become an annual effort. For those who would like to be more energy-efficient without participating, try turning off unused appliances and, at the end of the day, electronics. Turning down the thermostat and getting some friends together to play some classic board games instead of playing video games are two other ways to be more energy –conscious.
Many students arrive on campus as freshman having no idea what a senior thesis entails, just knowing it’s a looming, bulky, quiver-inducing, knee-buckling, all-consuming something-or-other that students must get a highly-sought stamp of approval on from every single faculty member on campus in order to graduate.

Admittedly, the hyperbole is a bit overwrought. Once the process starts, the project, presentation, or paper generally finds form and becomes a more manageable task. Hardly anyone goes the Pico della Mirandola route anymore (the Italian humanist scholar wrote a treatise at age 23 titled On Everything That Can Be Known.) However, the perception of the insurmountable hurdle remains, true even for Honors students, many of whom opt out of the program rather than face their fears.

“I think that a thesis could be a reason that students drop out of the program, especially if they have majors like mine [Forensics, with a concentration in Criminalistics and forensic biology] that don’t require one on their own,” senior Julissa Armstrong said. Along with Dr. Marlene Cross and with help from Dr. Steven Mauro, Armstrong is studying differences between red and white oak trees to determine if they are genetically distant (in terms of statistical significance) to the point where it can become a point of consideration in crime scene investigation.

“It’s coming along slowly, but surely,” Armstrong explained. “We’re hoping to be done by early/mid-spring term. The presentation will take place as a thesis defense, in which faculty from the biology and forensics department will attend.”

“Honestly, I wish we [could have started] sooner,” Armstrong elaborated. “I am so busy this year that I feel like I would have benefitted from being able to start it at the beginning of last year, rather than at the end.”

These are sentiments echoed by Mercyhurst College Honors Council President Nick Gutowski. This year, he has tried to revive talk about the nature of the thesis, reimagining it not as a burden, but as an opportunity.

“The goal of the thesis, as I see it, is to prepare students for the kind of research they’re going to be doing in graduate school, should they be interested in going, or as a way to show employers that they’re bringing something new to the table,” Gutowski, who is completing his thesis requirement with research concerning the relationship between intelligence analysts and the making of policy, said.

“Right now I see the Honors thesis as a good idea with poor execution,” Gutowski continued. “What I mean by poor execution is that many students who complete the thesis opt for a ‘cop out’ strategy and apply a large class project to the thesis requirements, simply to get credit for completing it. I understand that students are busy, but this is really contrary to the purpose of the thesis. I want it to be a final, vindicating challenge for honors students, not an insurmountable obstacle that scares people away from the program.”

Gutowski believes the solution exists in offering more support to students, especially in helping them understand what the thesis requirements are, and how they can go about beginning to think about their projects.

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“One of the Honors Program’s biggest problems right now is graduating students,” Gutowski acknowledged. “People stay on until their junior or senior year and then drop out before graduation. I blame the intimidation factor of the thesis for this. To help solve this problem, I’m creating a presentation/assistance program about the thesis for honors juniors. Hopefully this will be an adequate first step in solving the thesis problem.”

Gutowski credited first-year Mercyhurst College Honors Program adviser Dr. Douglas Boudreau for “putting up with my wild ideas as he learns the job” and an exceptional Honors Council for being extremely motivated. Within the next few years, look for a reinvigorated Mercyhurst College Honors Program with a rewarding Senior Thesis program as its culminating capstone achievement.
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