My Life on the Road: In Defense of a Career in the Theatre
Dozens of Honors Scholars participated in a day of service in partnership with *ReTree the District*, a project aiming to plant 1,000 trees in Buffalo’s University District over the next two years. The project helps foster collaboration and cooperation across the district’s many neighborhoods.
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Dean of Undergraduate Education
Director of the Honors College
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Just for fun, try the following exercise – take some paper and a pen, and write down the five things you think it’s absolutely essential for a college student to know. Only five – no more. You can base your answers on academic disciplines, such as “every college student should know the ten most important events in US History,” or “every student should know computer code,” but you might also include cognitive skills such as the ability to think critically, employ logical reasoning, or learn how to distinguish between high quality information and its crappier counterpart. You could also include what we might call “aptitudes” or habits of mind, such as the capacity for empathy, the will to persevere, or the ability to adapt to different cultures and cultural spaces, especially when these seem disorienting or strange. And don’t forget to leave room for the foundation: math, natural sciences, and the mechanics of good prose. Financial literacy will also be useful for today’s debt-ridden student, as will a sense of how to keep themselves healthy in this age of hyper-palatable foods, hyper-infectious diseases, and their own hyper-caffeinated friends. Speaking of friends, it wouldn’t hurt for them to have a grasp of “digital citizenship,” that is, knowing how to maintain one’s dignity and reputation in the twenty-four hour confessional that is the internet - #careerruined.

As you’ll see for yourself, this exercise very quickly produces a list that far exceeds five things, yet for the past eighteen months or so, this is exactly the exercise that I and a large group of faculty and staff across campus have been trying to do as we redesigned UB’s general education program. Unglamorous though it sounds, much of it has been highly engaging, fun even, for the simple reason that when we attempt to build a syllabus of core education, we’re essentially asking a profound question – “what should a person know?” This is a question with a long tradition stretching far back into antiquity from Plato’s philosopher king, to renaissance works such as Desiderius Erasmus’s *The Education of the Christian Prince*, which attempts to spell out the curriculum needed to build the perfect, pious governor, and Baldassare Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*, a manual for cultivating sprezzatura, that air of effortless mastery that comes from hard work and diligent study in rhetoric, oratory, deportment, athletics, and science, humanities and the arts.

In the United States, the idea of a general education is as old as the country, and like the country itself is deeply entwined with the concept of liberty. Thomas Jefferson argued that if the country was to be governed by its people, it was essential that those people possessed the education they would need to govern it wisely. Equipping individuals with the ability to think for themselves was the first defense against tyranny. As *A Bill For the More General Diffusion of Knowledge*, presented to the House of Delegates 1778, stated, Americans “should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens.” But what does “liberal education” mean? For Jefferson, who was concerned only with the education of white male landowners, there was a clear and gentlemanly consensus regarding what this syllabus should be: rhetoric, politics, and history – the classical arts of governance – and, in recognition that this was still a virgin territory, some practical knowledge of agriculture and husbandry.

Our new curriculum could claim no such consensus. Not only is society far more diverse and inclusive of multiple viewpoints, but advances in information technology have given us untrammeled access to a universe of information that demands us to reconsider how we transmit and receive education. Plus, there is the question of the size of the university itself. UB’s undergraduate catalog contains around 3000 courses, and the idea that we might go through it and compile a list of all we deemed “essential” – ENG101, MTH101, HIS101, etc. – was bonkers. How would we decide? And which of us had the authority to proclaim that a literature course was fundamental, but a course in Classics was not? (Another thing we learned during our campus-wide discussions was that, regardless of what department one taught in, while it was easy to imagine leaving some disciplines out, no one could imagine axing their own.)

A list was not only unhelpful, we also started to feel that it ran counter to the engaged learning we were hoping to inspire. When general education is presented as a list, that’s exactly how students will approach it – as a series of things to check off. But life is not a sequence of compartmentalized episodes, each sealed off from the other and requiring radically different approaches to get right, so why should education be? We wanted students to approach their classes in a way that encouraged them to synthesize different kinds of knowledge, and to get away from the idea that each course was a self-contained, unit. We wanted students to feel empowered to find the similarities between disparate fields of knowledge, but also the tensions, complexities, and irresolvable difficulties one might find there as well. We wanted them to wrestle with that, and find out what it means.

Instead of prescribing a set menu, then, we decided to build our new general education around the idea of integrative learning. Integrative learning cares deeply about the content of individual courses, but is also focused on asking the students to reflect on how those courses interact. It is designed to develop critical thinking and creativity and to inculcate the ability to adapt to new situations and settings, while fostering an intellectual agility that will prepare our students for a diverse, dynamic, and rapidly changing world.

The new curriculum is being built now, with the aim of launching it for incoming freshman in the fall of 2016. So while we work on putting it together, I invite you again to consider you list of what every college student should know. Here’s my top five:

1. Good communication skills
2. Empathy and regard for others
3. Numeracy and an understanding of scientific method
4. Knowledge of world cultures
5. How to parallel park
Junior electrical engineering major and Honors Scholar Kristina Monakhova has another accomplishment to add to her list. She received the John R. Sevier Memorial Scholarship Award, which is awarded annually to two students nationwide who are interested in a science or engineering career, with an emphasis on space research or space science education.

The honor, which includes a $2,000 prize, was one of four scholarships awarded by the Universities Space Research Association (USRA), an independent nonprofit research corporation that works to advance space science and technology.

“Ms. Monakhova’s depth and breadth of research interests, her friendly collegial nature, her ability to plan and execute research, and organize and deliver presentations all are truly outstanding,” says John Crassidis, CUBRC Professor in Space Situational Awareness. Crassidis, professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering, is supervising Monakhova and other students who are working on LANSAT (Lightcurve Analyzing Nanosatellite), a U.S. Air Force-funded project designed to track space debris that orbits the Earth, threatening satellites and future space missions.

“For this, I am leading a team of students to design the attitude determination and control subsystem for the satellite,” says Monakhova, a native of Liverpool, N.Y. “The project is extremely multidisciplinary, hands-on and is giving me the chance to launch and test my work in space in 2017.” The project — her favorite — is one of many she has worked on since arriving at UB with a full-ride Presidential Scholarship, an honor presented to the top 24 students admitted to the university each year.

Monakhova, who has maintained a 4.0 GPA, is working with four students to develop a radar system for unmanned aerial vehicles. The project is funded by UB’s Center for Undergraduate Research & Creative Activities (CURCA) under the supervision of Manoranjan Majji, assistant professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering.

Outside of UB, Monakhova worked in the Planetary Robotics Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University last summer. Along with a team of students and professionals, she designed a lunar rover to compete in the Google Lunar X-Prize. She also graduated from NASA’s Robotics Academy at the Marshall Space Flight Center and placed first at the NASA Intern Poster Expo, other engineering events and the UB Elevator Pitch Competition.

Monakhova, who plans to earn a PhD before joining the space and defense industry, says the field of electrical engineering continues to amaze her. “I study electrical engineering because of its diversity and breadth — I just love learning and understanding what makes everything work around us,” she says.

Kristina Monakhova, a junior electrical engineering student, has received the John R. Sevier Memorial Scholarship Award from the Universities Space Research Association.
When I was about five years old I wanted to learn to swim, but despite the fact that I was armed to the “gills” with water wings and floaties like most small children, I was too scared to let go of the edge of the pool. One sunny summer afternoon, my mom walked over, peeled my fingers off of the warm metal edge of my grandparents’ above-ground pool, and gave me a gentle shove into the water. I was purported to have splashed down below the surface, popped back up with a gasp and a sputter, and shrieked, “I DON’T LIKE THIS ONE BIT! Do it again, Mommy!”

I have to be honest, when it was recommended to me that I consider applying for a job to teach at the Singapore Institute of Management’s Global Education Program (which partnered through the University at Buffalo), to say I was uncertain is an understatement. I had always been a Buffalo Gal, and while I had lived on my own in different apartments since I was 18, I had never lived away from the Queen City. To move to the other side of the planet, to a country I had never even visited (and global travel, I knew, would be nothing like the experience of living and working in another country) it was a prospect that was both fascinating and terrifying. I told myself that it was a one-year commitment; the worst case scenario was that if I didn’t like it, I could survive anything for a year. So I applied.

I had gotten my bachelor’s degree in communication in 2005 from UB, my master’s in public relations management in 2008 at SUNY Buffalo State while working at a local firm, and earned my Ph.D. at UB in 2012 in communication with a focus on socio-emotional intelligence and a certification in facial coding of emotions. I was fortunate enough to have been granted a teaching assistantship, and during my time at UB, I had had the opportunity to design and teach three different communication courses. When I learned I had been accepted to teach in Singapore, my mind was reeling with excitement and a healthy dose of anticipation. I closed down my apartment and sold a quarter of my belongings, donated a quarter, trashed a quarter that was worthy of neither, and kept a quarter of mostly sentimental items in a storage unit. I moved into an upstairs addition at my parents’ house as I planned for this new chapter of my life.

There was a lot of planning to be done, but so many unknowns still lay before me. I knew that nothing would really prepare me like just pulling my fingers from the edge of the metaphorical pool and jumping in. At one point, I had confessed to my mother that I thought this was a crazy idea. “You’re crazy if you DON’T do this,” was her reply, and with these words I imagined her lovingly – but firmly – peeling my fingers from their death grip on the pool edge so many years ago.

And so, I kicked off from the side of the pool and I dove. I arrived in Singapore in August of 2012. Aside from an in-country school-related orientation and a number of very friendly greetings and get-togethers with the colleagues I’d be working with, there was very little along the lines of day-to-day orienting, and in truth, this would hugely contribute to the growth that I credit to this time in my life. I don’t consider myself to have been particularly immature or naïve before moving to Singapore, but I feel that the experience has matured me in ways I didn’t anticipate. Aside from a few days of sight-seeing in other world cities, I had never taken public transportation as a part of my daily life. While I had gone to school at UB, a community of nearly 30,000 enrollees, I had never lived in a city populated by millions. While I had lived on my own in apartments, I had always had friends and family within a short driving distance. Now, I was completely on my own. And, I would come to find out, this was okay.

During my first semester, I taught three sections of an introductory communication course, COM101, and in future semesters (yes, I decided to go back for another year… and another…), I would teach this along with sections of mass communication, communication theory, public relations.
and business communication. I teach between three and four classes per semester, with class sizes ranging from 25 to 90 students each. My largest classes at UB averaged 45 students, and I don’t feel that the large class sizes in Singapore were that much of an adjustment. I still do small group discussions and activities, individual assignments and group presentations. Larger classes just mean a larger number of groups. Over the semesters at UB and SIM, I have honed my teaching style to one that incorporates clips from current TV shows and movies, a wide variety of in-class assignments and anecdotes from my personal life, many of which involve my adjustments to life in Singapore through the lens of communication studies.

My students are incredible, and with each passing semester, I’ve gotten to know them better and better. At every turn, I share the culture and day-to-day experiences of the United States and, more specifically, of Buffalo and the Western New York region; and at every turn, they share their cultures and day-to-day experiences with me. I take every opportunity that I can to embrace Singaporean culture, from attending a Bollywood-themed birthday in a Punjabi suit to a community dinner at a Taoist temple, from cheering on dragon boat racing teams to trying octopus satay at a festival market. I feel that the best part of being a university instructor living overseas is that I never stop learning.

A question that I find oddly ruffling, and one that I find I get the most often, is “How different are the students in Singapore from the students you taught in the United States?” I really can’t answer that question. To lump U.S. students together is to suggest that every American is the same; to lump Singaporean students together is to suggest that every Singaporean is the same. Every semester in the United States, I would be amazed by how different the class environments were. As each class is made up of individuals, this shouldn’t be surprising, and yet it is. The same class with the same material presented to one group of students might evoke tons of discussion. In another class, discussions would be brief but written papers would flourish with ideas and in-depth analyses. Some classes would be rambunctious, others quiet. Some would be full of sass, others full of questions. And this class uniquely, delightfully, challengingly different.

Through this program, housing is provided. By choice, I have lived in two different serviced apartments, and the spring semester of 2015 will see me in yet another new option. This will enable me to live in three very different neighborhoods in Singapore, getting the most living experience out of my time on the island each semester. The apartments are small but efficient and beautiful, each in a different way. I usually take buses in to school (with the occasional taxi on crunch days), which enables me to really take in my surroundings. During the week, my schedule is filled with teaching and grading, but during the weekends, I try to take one afternoon off from grading and future semester prep to go out and see something new in Singapore. In this way, I have had many terrific experiences exploring the ethnic diversity, history and culture of this tiny city-state that has become one of the four Asian Tigers within the last two decades. I started a blog, LeftOrRightSingapore.blogspot.com to try to capture some of these moments.

So where does this leave me? I am currently entering the second half of my third year in Singapore, and I hope to continue for another year or so. After that, I would like to return to Buffalo, my home, and secure a teaching position at a college or university here. I am a lifetime Buffalo Believer, and I would like to think that my time in Singapore has strengthened me as a lecturer and as an educator, and I would like to bring this experience back to Buffalo and into my classroom. I would also like to encourage my students to travel and live abroad – and that this doesn’t have to mean leaving home forever. The lessons I’ve learned while living on my own in another country are lessons I could not have found in any classroom (although my decade spent in college classrooms certainly helped prepare me in other ways).

The biggest piece of advice I’d like to offer students is to live their lives to the fullest. Take risks. Be proactive in eliminating regrets. Make that leap. Peel your fingers off of the edge of the pool and jump in! And whether you doggie paddle or make great Olympic strokes, you’ll figure out how to swim.
Biological Engineering (BE) is the engineering field affiliated with the science of biology, while other engineering fields are based on chemistry, physics or other basic sciences. As such, BE is based on an understanding of biological molecules, cells, organs, organisms, species and ecosystems, and is still developing as new understandings of biology continue to emerge. Specific applications range from biomedical areas such as molecular engineering, tissue engineering, bioprocess engineering, biomechanical engineering and ecological engineering. Coastal Bioengineering is a growing subfield based on applications of biology to engineering challenges in the coastal zone. The coastal zone is of great interest: more than half of the US population lives within 50 miles of the coast (NOAA 2015), while over a billion people live in areas with coastal concerns (World Ocean Review). Challenges include impacts on coastal ecology from human activities; concerns about the impacts of coastal storms, sea level rise and climate shifts; and ways to most sustainably and safely manage these areas.

Specific applications in the area focus on literally growing solutions to coastal challenges. Two specific areas of interest are coastal protection; and coastal structures.

Coastal Protection: Louisiana has 40% of the nation’s coastal wetlands but is experiencing 80-90% of the nation’s coastal wetland loss (Risinger 2014). This extensive land loss can be attributed primarily to subsidence (slow compaction of soil particles), erosion, and sea level rise. Many traditional coastal solutions used hard engineered structures. However, these structures tend to sink over time and are often not biologically or ecologically friendly. An alternative method is applying bioengineering to the creation of coastal structures. One example is providing a substrate in a desired geometry to encourage the Eastern Oyster *Crassostrea virginica* to grow on various calcareous substrates. This led to design of biologically dominated, low cost and environmentally friendly artificial reef systems, which often serve as intertidal breakwater structures. These systems can reduce coastal erosion, restore coastal habitats and protect wetlands, while the vertical growth of oysters can allow these structures to literally grow upward, compensating for sinkage and sea level rise (Hall et al., 2015).

Bioengineered reefs maximize growth to protect the shoreline and continue to grow to the new relative surface level, providing habitat for juvenile fish and other species. This growth can simultaneously reduce wave energy and allow sustainable protection and ecosystem services.

Sustainable Coastal Structures: Louisiana wetlands, like many around the world, host a working environment. Humans, in addition to living in these coastal environments, use many coastal resources: harvesting fish and plants; dredging canals and using major rivers for shipping of billions of dollars of trade; while often extracting resources such as oil and gas from under the coastal zone. As such, many structures are built in the coastal zone. These typically require significant maintenance as they degrade over time in the wet, salty environment. A new concept proposes to literally grow structures in the coastal zone which will not only resist degradation but may actually become stronger over time. In addition, whereas hard structures tend to negatively impact the local ecosystem, these structures could have a net positive impact on the ecosystem over time, by providing habitat for oysters, plants and humans in the coastal zone.
In summary, our research brings together bioengineering, plant science and architecture synergistically to culture aquatic organisms, which allow structural growth and stability. This improves sustainability for the structures, as well as the ecosystem. Oyster reefs provide numerous ecosystem services including enhanced water filtration, habitat for marine species, nursery grounds and more. Bioengineered structures and reefs provide protection, and as the plants and animals grow, the structure often becomes significantly more stable and stronger over time. The synergistic benefits of bringing biology, ecology and engineering together can enhance productivity and sustainability in the coastal zone.

Figure 3. Concrete (center) has been completely enclosed by oyster growth.

Figure 4. Test strength from beam tests after 6 months and 2 years of growth show that oysters significantly strengthen the structures.

Figure 5. Artists rendering of growth on cylindrical columns.

Figure 6. Bioengineered structures are designed to grow oysters, land and vegetation.

Steven Hall, PhD, P.E. (licensed in NY and LA) received his BS from the University of Buffalo, MS from UC Davis, PhD from Cornell University, postdoc at McGill (Montreal, Canada), has served on faculty at the Au Sable Institute (Michigan, Washington – Environmental Studies in a Christian context), and currently serves as Associate Professor and Graduate Coordinator in the Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering with appointments with both LSU and the LSU AgCenter; He has served as adjunct faculty at the LSU AgCenter’s Aquaculture Research Station, president of the International Aquacultural Engineering Society; and in other service positions. He has received awards for teaching, research and outreach, has served as an invited reviewer for NSF, and was elected fellow of the American Scientific Affiliation in 2010. Hall focuses on aquacultural engineering and coastal ecological engineering, with interest in sustainable solutions to agricultural, water quality and coastal issues. He is a licensed engineer with industrial experience in servohydraulics, has patents on coastal engineering, autonomous vehicles and other automated and environmental systems. He has international experience in Africa, Europe and the Americas, including sustainable resource use, coastal restoration and artificial reefs. His work focuses on automation, water quality and natural resource management in aquacultural and ecological engineering. He works with biological and ecological systems to manage and enhance productivity and sustainability. Current projects include work on autonomous vehicles, recirculating aquaculture, biofiltration and bioengineered coastal reefs. Overall, his contributions lie in the area of sustainable natural resource management and engineering. On the home front, he enjoys renovating old houses; playing with his children; ultimate Frisbee, soccer, trail running and piano; chairs the Christian Faculty Staff Network at LSU; and has been an elder in his church. He enjoys fresh peas and oranges in the front yard; and his children think he tells good stories.

I give to Honors because…

“… I want today’s students to be availed of the same opportunities and experiences that made such a difference in my academic career at UB.”

Peter Rizzo
Honors Scholar, Class of 2007
“So, what will you do for a real job?” “How are you going to make money?” “When this acting phase is over, what are you going to do next?”

These are just a few of the hundreds of questions I have been asked about my decision to pursue a career in theatre. Fortunately none of these questions came from my parents (who encouraged me to do whatever I desired), but instead from peers, co-workers, distant relatives, acquaintances, and the occasional “good friend.”

There seems to be some sort of social stigma attached to the idea of becoming a professional actor; that the pursuit is too difficult, that not enough people make it, that one could do something “so much better.” Now, as I enter my seventh year of continuous work in both amateur and professional productions, I find myself asking those same questions. Is this too difficult? Am I going to keep working? Could I be doing something else?

These past seven years have been anything but easy. After graduating from UB in 2009 with two college degrees (BFA Music Theatre, BA Dance), I moved to New York City ready to take on the theatre world. Both of these programs prepared me for the basics - I had singing technique, I had dance technique, I had monologues ready to recite, I had a book of songs to sing - but I knew little about the professional side of “the business.”

As I started auditioning for professional shows, I quickly understood where my shortcomings were. Perhaps I didn’t have the right type of song to sing for an audition, or I wasn’t well versed in a certain style of dance. That’s when the reality of the business started to sink in. I would get cut (a theatrical euphemism for “I didn’t get the job”) from nearly every audition I walked into. For every fifty to one-hundred auditions I attended, I might have one or two jobs actually say “yes.”

Fast forward two years into my time post-UB: I had now worked for a number of different companies as a performing artist. I started as a dancer on a cruise ship for Celebrity Cruise Lines, I danced for Dayton Ballet, a ballet company in Dayton, Ohio, and even toured to Japan with a production of “A Chorus Line.” As I came back to New York from halfway around the world I knew there was more in store for me as a true professional. Auditions came and went and for a few months nothing seemed to be happening. Through the struggle, the fear, and the uncertainty I persisted. Soon an audition came about, one that I went to on a whim, which would ultimately change my life as a professional actor.

This audition was for the US touring company of the musical “Billy Elliot,” based on the 2000 movie of the same name, now with music and lyrics by Elton John. The offer was for an ensemble role with an understudy track (actor lingo for “part”) for the ballet dancing adult male, aptly named “Older Billy.” The money was more than I had ever made, the housing was paid for, the transportation was all provided, and I was given a weekly stipend for food and necessities. There was one caveat to all of these terms - I would have to join the Actors’ Equity Association, the professional actors’ union of the United States.

Finally! This was it! My chance to become a true, professional, working actor. I quickly accepted, paid my initiation fee, and had a union card in my hand. I was ready to work! Having this union card in hand is the proof, so to speak, that one has joined the ranks of the professional actor. Actors from Patti LuPone, to Bradley Cooper, to Jessica Chastain all have this same card in their wallets. AEA members have certain professional benefits such as access to quality health insurance, a 401(k), a pension plan, and an actors’ credit union in addition to protections such as overtime pay, workers’ compensation, a comprehensive health fund and more.

Gone are the days of wondering what my “real job” is, where the money will come from, or if I can make a living as an actor. The life of a professional actor is as much an art form as it is a business. Finding that balance, especially while performing out on the road is key.
Currently, I am writing this article from an airport lounge, on the road with the US tour of the spectacular new production of “The Phantom of the Opera.” In this new company, I am a swing (a universal ensemble understudy) and the show’s Assistant Dance Captain (making me partially in charge of all the dance numbers in the show). Following the tours of “A Chorus Line” and “Billy Elliot,” this marks almost four years I have been touring and performing in a road company. While many misconstrue the life of an actor to be all glitz and glamor, that is far from the case. Schedules are often arduous, travel days are long, and the work can be incredibly difficult, but we endure it all for the chance to stand up in front of thousands of people and perform eight shows every week. To me, that is what I appreciate most about the work I do; I get the chance to travel the world while doing what I love and getting paid a livable wage. Nothing beats the feeling of having the privilege to step out on stage night after night and bringing a story to life in front of a live audience.

A typical day on tour can vary from person to person, and even then it will change on a daily basis. It always starts by waking up somewhere away from home. You might find yourself in a local hotel or an apartment you’ve found to sublet online, sometimes sharing with others to save a bit of that per diem money. For me, as one of the dance understudies, I like to go find a daily dance class to take, most often ballet, to keep myself in proper dancing shape. Then there’s often a trip to the local gym - a YMCA or whatever else can be found in town. This keeps me not only in shape for performance, but for my own personal well-being.

By early afternoon comes the possibility of rehearsal. Even though the show is open and performance ready, we are constantly in rehearsal for any number of reasons. At times an actor’s contract has ended and a replacement actor has to learn the show. Some weeks there is rehearsal for the understudies and swings to make sure they are always prepared to go on. Maybe a dance number has become less precise than we’d like, so we have a dance rehearsal. Or perhaps a certain moment in the show isn’t working as well as it could, so we practice to make it more fresh and exciting for the audience.

Rehearsal can last from an hour to maybe four or five hours in a day in addition to an evening performance. Evening performances often start around 8:00pm, with a matinee added to the weekends, adding up to eight shows each week. When rehearsal schedules are light, we’re afforded some extra personal time to explore whichever city we find ourselves in, go visit family and friends in the area, or perhaps just rest and watch some hotel TV.

Though the days are long, they are rewarding. There are thousands of actors around the country striving day after day for a very limited number of jobs, and I’m fortunate enough to be a part of one of the biggest shows in Broadway history. Even on days when I’m
struggling to enjoy things, I take a step back and look at where I’ve come from, and where I could potentially go next. Through my extensive training (thanks UB!), performance experience, determination and hard work, I have built a career as a working actor. I’ve branched out into the professional side of “the business” and despite the tough times and disappointments, I try to always let the successes shine through.

So, go ahead. Ask me what my “real job” is. We can discuss it when the curtain falls.)

EXPLORE BUFFALO

Brad Hahn
Honors Scholar, Class of 2013

In recent years, interest in Buffalo’s architecture and history has grown tremendously. Both local residents and visitors from around the globe have become enamored with the stories of a city that rose from a frontier outpost in 1800 to one of the largest and most prosperous American cities (in less than one hundred years), able to attract the best architects in the nation to design many of its buildings.

Today, volunteer docents give freely of their time to promote the city and community that they love, simply because they love to do so. I was proud to become one of those volunteer docents in 2011.

In the fall of 2013, a group of docents, myself included, began discussing the possibility of an independent tour organization and once this group sets its mind to something, there is nothing that can stop it. Strongly believing that this new organization, soon christened Explore Buffalo, needed to have a full-time staff person from the very beginning to provide leadership for its activities, the group offered the position of Executive Director to me.

From the start, we seemed to find people willing to help at every turn. We met Phil Haberstro, Executive Director of the Wellness Institute of Greater Buffalo, who agreed to make Explore Buffalo an affiliate of the Wellness Institute, providing us with critical 501(c)(3) status immediately.

Through my church contacts, I connected with First Presbyterian Church of Buffalo, a landmark on Symphony Circle where we were fortunate to be able to find office space. I reached out to many of the community contacts that I had made while in the Honors College, including as a Colloquium Teaching Assistant, to begin developing partnerships.

On January 24, 2014, Explore Buffalo had its official debut with a Launch Party held at First Presbyterian Church and over 300 people came out on one of the coldest nights of the year to celebrate the start of a group that most people didn’t really know much about. Following the success of the Launch Party, our talented group got to work on planning the tour season and the variety of tours that we would offer beginning in May. We wrote about 20 new tours, with
different docents working individually or in groups on the research and writing. Once each tour had been prepared, we trained one another to give the tours—
I have still not been forgiven by a group of docents who I led on a particularly icy training tour of the (unheated) Silo City grain elevators in February.

We had made a conscious decision to not prepare a schedule for the entire summer in advance—instead, we planned to offer a new schedule each month, based in part on what tours were popular and which ones weren’t. In part this decision was also necessary because we didn’t have the money to print a schedule for the entire summer, but it turned out to be an incredible advantage as we were able to constantly reinvent our schedule. While we had originally been hesitant about embracing the Internet as our primary marketing tool, as it was a major departure from our past model, in hindsight I cannot imagine doing it any differently.

In addition, as docents developed new tours throughout the summer, we were able to add them to our schedule without any problem. This allowed the creativity of our docents to be truly unleashed, and they responded by coming up with several new tours each month of neighborhoods that were of special interest to them.

A major part of Explore Buffalo’s mission is giving tours of Buffalo to schoolchildren. On a personal level, I believe it is extremely important for schoolchildren in Western New York to take tours of Buffalo to gain an appreciation for the community they grow up in. I remember taking tours of Buffalo several times in school, beginning in second grade, and I believe those experiences were an important part of making me into who I am today. Eventually, I would like for Explore Buffalo to be able to give a tour to every student in Western New York, and in 2014 we made an excellent start with over 1,000 students taking a tour with us.

In addition to schoolchildren, Explore Buffalo welcomed over 800 college students to Buffalo in 2014 by providing a tour as part of orientation programs. The largest group of students was for the Honors College, with a record incoming freshman class that filled seven motor coaches to capacity! Our docents narrated the tour all across the city, including stops at Silo City and Delaware Park before ending at Niagara Square for a dinner and presentation at the Statler to kick off the Colloquium course.

Having officially wrapped up 2014, Explore Buffalo is extremely proud to have completed the year in the black with zero funding from any government or foundation sources. All of the expenses necessary to operate the programs were paid for entirely by revenue generated from tours. Among non-profit organizations, this position is extremely unusual, as many if not most non-profits are heavily reliant on government and foundation grants to continue operating.

As 2015 begins, Explore Buffalo is as busy as ever, even though the winter might seem to be a ‘slow season’ for us. A history course, titled Adventures in Buffalo History, began on January 15 at First Presbyterian Church with an incredible turnout of 191 people in attendance for the first session. New tours are in development for the 2015 summer season, with different topics, geographic areas, and transportation modes all in the works to be launched in May. Perhaps most exciting is that training for new docents began in February, with over 30 people signed up to participate. As more docents join, Explore Buffalo is strengthened and its ability to tell Buffalo’s stories continues to increase.

The volunteers who make up Explore Buffalo are without question the best group of people I have ever worked with. What has been accomplished in just one year’s time is a remarkable testament to their energy, passion, and dedication for promoting Buffalo. As we are now embarking on a strategic planning process for the next five years, we are realizing that we can turn off the ‘survival mode’ of the first year and really open our eyes to the possibilities of the future. I cannot say for certain what those next five years will bring, but I can say with great certainty that I am excited for the future of Explore Buffalo because I believe that this group can make any of its dreams a reality.)
The quaint seaside town of St. Andrews is recognized around the world as the home of golf. But for Phil Kiernan, that was almost beside the point.

Almost.

After all, golf played an important role in the process of scoring his study abroad experience in Scotland.

While a student at Western Ontario University, Kiernan applied for a scholarship to study classics for a year at one of the world’s oldest institutions of higher learning: 600-year-old St. Andrews University. The scholarship, offered by the Canadian Robert T. Jones Jr. Scholarship Foundation, was created to further spread the legacy of American golfing legend Bobby Jones, who invented golf’s Grand Slam, founded Augusta National Golf Club and the Masters tournament, and racked up more major golf championships than anyone not named Nicklaus or Woods.

Kiernan dutifully submitted his grades and CV and wrote an essay about Jones’ brilliant career to land the scholarship. But his interest in the game pretty much peaked there.

“I feel guilty to this day that I really hate golf,” Kiernan said. “I spent a year in this beautiful Scottish town – this old university town and also the golf mecca of the world – and I never once played.”

Still, the overseas adventure had a profound effect on Kiernan, now an assistant professor of classics and Honors College faculty fellow at UB.

“That one year I spent abroad really changed my life,” Kiernan said recently from his office in the Ellicott Complex. “That was my first big experience alone in an international setting, and certainly my first experience in an academic setting. I think it’s a really great thing to meet people in another country who study something as weird and quirky as classics. Studying this very specialized area, and then getting to meet someone from another country who works on the same thing is really quite special.”

There may be no bigger fan of internationalization than Kiernan. A Canadian citizen born to British parents, he earned his bachelor’s degree in Canada, his master’s degree in the U.S., and his Ph.D. in classical archaeology in Germany. Drawing on his extensive international background, he encourages all of his UB students to take part in some sort of international experience, whether it be a formal study abroad program or an extracurricular activity outside of the country.

“In the summers while I was getting my master’s, I was going to visit people I’d met from France and Germany,” he said. “And eventually, I ended up doing a Ph.D. in Germany, and really that was because I had been exposed to European cultures and academic systems when I was an undergraduate.”

His global influences now extend to his role at the front of the classroom. Before coming to UB in 2010, Kiernan taught Latin and ancient history as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Prior to that, he taught at the University of Heidelberg (Germany) while completing his Ph.D.

“Both experiences were different, I would say, than the U.S. teaching experience. Not better or worse, just different,” he said. “The systems were just differently oriented. It’s not a question of one being harder or easier. It’s a question of where priority and stresses are laid in the teaching.”

One approach that Kiernan has brought to UB puts students in direct contact with artifacts, rather than learning about ancient objects through photos in a book or projected on a screen. Kiernan has been working with Honors College students to create a database of the hundreds of antiquities that the university has collected over the past half-century. Until recently, most items were kept in plastic bags and shoeboxes.

Dr. Kiernan’s excavation on Idol Hill in Hassloch, Germany.

Experiences Abroad:
Par for the Course for Faculty Fellow

Patrick Broadwater
Sr. Copywriter/Editor,
Undergraduate Admissions

UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO
stuffed in drawers, rather than housed in storage boxes specially designed to protect and preserve the objects. Students in his Honors Seminar were assigned artifacts and assumed responsibility for identifying, photographing and writing a description for each item, so that the objects could be properly cataloged and stored as part of a permanent collection.

“U.S. classical archaeology has focused on big artworks – these big works that everyone’s heard of – but they represent a very small aspect of antiquity. Beautiful as they are, they are unique,” said Kiernan, who in February was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquities of London, a prestigious international order of experts on antiquities. “Whereas there are thousands and thousands of less interesting objects that give you the bigger picture of antiquity.

“UB has traditionally been very strong in classical archaeology, and I think courses like this will make it all the more interesting, because there’s nowhere else in North America that you can do this as a graduate student, let alone as an undergraduate.”

“Just to be in contact with objects thousands of years old, it’s fun,” said senior history major Hannah Sigurdson, an Honors student who interned with Kiernan in the fall and is aiming to pursue a graduate degree in museum studies. “I really enjoyed working with objects in a hands-on way.”

Kiernan himself is no stranger to getting his hands dirty. He has conducted archaeological fieldwork in several locations across Europe, and from 2010 to 2013 led UB students on an excavation of an ancient burial mound in the south of Germany. The site, dubbed “Idol Hill,” dates back to the middle of the Bronze Age, when it was likely used for burials and communal religious activities.

“It’s very rare that archaeological services permit people to excavate burial mounds. The usual strategy is to leave them alone,” Kiernan said. “So, that’s been a real highlight of my career so far, the opportunity to direct that site.”

Over the course of the excavation, Kiernan’s crew discovered that the site had been used for burials for more than a thousand years and that it more than doubled in size over that time. They also uncovered a wooden wall supporting the tumulus or main burial chamber, a feature rarely associated with that part of Germany.

“Now that’s the kind of thing where people would say, ‘That’s not very interesting,’” Kiernan said. “But for us archaeologists it is. The objects we find, they’re more visually spectacular. People would say, ‘There’s the treasure. That’s the exciting part.’ And they are interesting, but they’re only part of the bigger picture. The wall and the size of the tumulus are equally important.

“It’s a logistical nightmare in some respects, but it all paid off. I’m very happy with how it went and the conclusions we were able to draw.”

For Kiernan, projects like Idol Hill are the realization of a childhood dream to be involved in archaeology. His pursuit of that goal really started to gain steam when he landed an undergraduate internship at the Canadian National Currency Collection in Ottawa and became exposed to antiquities in the form of old coinage and currency. Still fascinated by ancient objects, he is now writing a book on idol worship in the Roman world. The book examines ancient sacred objects thought to be divine –idols in the oldest sense of the word – and how people interacted with them over the course of their existence.

Roman oil lamp (6th - 7th Century AD) as processed by Alyson Holahan (Honors Scholar, Class of 2018).
Plus, there is still much work to be done preparing the Idol Hill research for publication. Kiernan, who also coaches fencing at Buffalo Seminary, a private high school in the Elmwood Village, figures that it will take two to three years to complete follow-up work and draft his results while searching for the next archaeological site. Wherever it takes him, he will be recruiting more UB students to join him.

“...”

Melissa with SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher

SUNYCON

Melissa Kathan
Honors Scholar, Class of 2016

With nearly 500,000 students, and a quickly increasing enrollment, the State University of New York (SUNY), system is the largest network of public education systems in the United States. There are 64 campuses within the SUNY system including 34 state operated schools and 30 community colleges. SUNY leadership stems from the Chancellor, currently Nancy L. Zimpher, to the Board of Trustees, the Cabinet and trickles into the different campus’ presidents, provosts and other educational leaders. Annually since 2011, SUNY has held SUNYCON, a conference that focuses on higher education. Hosted in New York City, this conference attracts not only SUNY administrators, professors, and other executives, but also leaders in education globally. Starting in 2013, students could apply to be a student fellow, meaning that one could represent his or her campus and attend the conferences on behalf of his or her school. After writing a few short essays, seeking letters of recommendation and having Dr. Andrew Stott submit my application, I was selected to represent the University at Buffalo at SUNYCON for 2014.

New York is a powerful city, and the conference was held in the heart of Times Square – an impressive venue! It was humbling to be in the presence of some of the nation’s most elite educational pioneers, including Chancellor Zimpher, as well as leaders from around the country, such as Retired U.S. Navy Captain and author, David Marquet. In addition, there were panels with well-established individuals, such as representatives from the White House and Chief Executive Officers of growing companies. The theme of this year’s conference was, “Executing Change to Drive Collective Impact,” and reconsidering higher education was a major focus.

As a Student Fellow, I was able to network with other SUNY students as well as professors; following the presentations we had private sessions with all of the speakers. The fellows were encouraged to ask any questions in order to have a more impactful experience with such powerful leaders. In addition to different workshops and networking opportunities outlined on the SUNYCON website (www.suny.edu), the conference also served as a networking opportunity to discuss ideas, future plans, and goals for SUNY and higher education in general, not only with SUNY Executives, but also with other global leaders.

After the conference ended, there was a corporate-sponsored gathering that took place in Times Square. This allowed everyone to reflect upon what was learned at the conference and to form lasting contacts for future opportunities. It was at this get-together that there was a green-screen that allowed for pictures. Even Chancellor Zimpher was participating in the fun festivities!

Attending SUNYCON has been a highlight of my undergraduate experience. I was able to meet amazing students who inspired me from around the SUNY System, as well as learn about the country’s future within the realm of higher education. Most notably, Dan Heath, a Senior Fellow at Duke University’s Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, spoke on the importance of change. I learned that even if a system is effective, it is imperative that change continues to occur. It is through change that progress takes effect. This experience inspired me to not only be a more effective leader within my clubs and student government involvement, but also proved the incredible value of a SUNY education. I am proud to be a part of the SUNY System."

UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO
Alumni Updates

What they’re doing now…

1988

DWIGHT GRIFFIN
Dwight and his wife Yuko have been married since 1991 and have three children Mia (19yrs.), Eimi (16yrs.), and Thomas (14yrs.). He has been working for Texas Instruments in the San Francisco Bay Area since 2006.

1989

STEPHANIE ARGENTINE
Stephanie recently left Rich Products to pursue work as a management, strategy, and human resources technology consultant. Her new website is www.solveand.com.

1990

NATHAN AND CAROL ANN (BEZIO) DIACHUN
Nathan and Carol recently moved to the Jacksonville, FL area for Carol’s new position as Associate Chair for Education, Residency Program Director, and Associate Professor of Anesthesiology at the University of Florida - Jacksonville. Their boys Jason (12yrs.), Logan (9yrs.) and Ethan (7yrs.) are enjoying Florida!

1993

KEVIN KURTZ
Kevin recently wrote an eBook, Uncovering Earth’s Secrets, a new children’s eBook about one of the world’s most important scientific research vessels, the JOIDES Resolution. It was created through a National Science Foundation grant and can be downloaded for free from the JOIDES Resolution website at http://joidesresolution.org/node/2998.

1996

KAREN SCHUPP
Karen recently published her first book, Studying Dance: A Guide for Camus and Beyond. Karen is an assistant professor of dance in the Herberger Institute School of Film, Dance and Theatre at Arizona State University and Associate Editor of the Journal of Dance Education. She and her partner Todd have a daughter, Zadie (1 yr.), and reside in Tempe, AZ.

1999

SIMHA PRATIVADI
Simha finished his MRI Fellowship from University of Rochester in June and is working as a Radiologist in Columbia, MO.

2000

KEVIN WANG
Kevin is a head and neck surgical oncologist at Kaiser Permanente, Oakland, California and was married in August 2014.

2004

NARASIMHACHAR (SIMHA) PRATIVADI
Simha finished his MRI Fellowship from University of Rochester in June and is working as a Radiologist in Columbia, MO.

2005

SAMANTHA (GOSCH) DEMART
Samantha was recently promoted to Manager of Communications and Advancement for Heritage Christian Services, and appointed as a Marketing and Communications Ambassador for the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network in Buffalo, NY.

2006

PATRICK KNAPP
Patrick is married with a new son and is working as an analyst for LWR and studying for the final module of the CFA.

2007

MARY ELISE RUMP
Mary successfully completed a PhD in geology and geophysics, focusing on the emplacement of lava flows, at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 2014.

2008

NICOLE MORICI
Nicole will be graduating with a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from the University of Maryland Baltimore in May 2015.

Attention UB Honors Alumni!

To update our records please log onto honors.buffalo.edu/alumni and complete the alumni update form.

*We would also like to include a photo of you (and/or your children) with your update! Photos can be e-mailed to Karyn St. George at kcs9@buffalo.edu.

I give to Honors because…

“…it’s a recipe for success:
SUCCESS
Preparation:
1. Gather gifted/talented high school students to the UB Honors College.
2. Place them in a supportive, close-knit environment within the larger university.
3. Carefully stir in an outstanding faculty and a wide range of challenging academic offerings and opportunities.
4. Cook for four years, allowing time for questioning, creating, problem solving, and friendship making.
5. Serve to the world.
The piece de resistance: Young adults ready and able to travel their career and life paths with confidence and capability.”

Lois Pendergast
Parent of Megan Stewart (2005) and Sara (2007)

Join us on Social Media!

Like us on Facebook: University at Buffalo Honors College
Follow us on Twitter: UBHonors
Join us on LinkedIn: University at Buffalo Honors College
Find us on Instagram: uohonors
Look for us on YouTube: University at Buffalo Honors College
What they’re doing now…

**Alumni Updates**

**2009**
**TIMOTHY DOOLITTLE**
Timothy joined the Wladis Law Firm in Syracuse, NY concentrating on estate planning.

**2010**
**ELLE SIRVAITYTE**
Elle passed the July 2014 New York State bar exam.

**2011**
**LUCAS HAMMILL**
Lucas is working as a reporter for The Oregonian newspaper in Portland.

**MARISA HORNBAKER**
Marisa is currently a 4th year MD/PhD student in UT-Houston/MD Anderson Cancer Center’s joint program. She is studying the notch pathway in normal hematopoiesis and in pediatric acute myeloid leukemia.

**KRISTA SCIMECA**
Krista and Kyle Eudene (Honors 2010) are engaged to be married in June 2015. They met as UB Honors undergraduates living in the Governors complex. Kyle works in Orlando, FL as a transportation engineer for HDR, and Krista works as a Manager of Pricing for the Parks and Resorts segment of The Walt Disney Company.

**2012**
**KRISTEN (RUNCO) JACKSON**
Kristen currently works as an RN in the NICU at Sister’s Hospital. She and her husband Darren reside in their new home in Blasdell, NY.

**NICOLE KENDEL**
Nicole is in medical school at The Ohio State University College of Medicine.

**2013**
**ERIC ENNIS**
Eric is serving as the Community Development Block Grant Administrator in the Department of Neighborhood and Business Development in Syracuse, NY.

**Births**

**KELLY (MCLAUGHLIN) BECKER (2002)**
and her husband Justin welcomed a baby girl, Elizabeth Mary, on January 14, 2015.

**NARASIMHACHAR (SIMHA) PRATIVADI (2004)**
and his wife Anjana had their first son, Om Prativadi, in November 2014.

**ERICH DEVEN DORF (2005)**
and his wife Caitlin welcomed a second daughter, Charlotte on March 2, 2014.

**NATHANIEL HECKMAN**
Nathaniel started graduate school for architecture and is the Sponsorship Manager for UB’s Solar Decathlon 2015 Team. For more information visit: grow.buffalo.edu.

**RACHEL SUTTELL**
Rachel is an occupational therapist for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

**JOSEPH SWERDLIN**
Joseph is currently living in Brooklyn and working at Richard Meier and Partners, is a Community Director at The Morpholio Project (a startup developing apps designers), and is teaching at Institute - NY.

**2014**
**YI KAN LEUNG**
Yi Kan is working at Epic (Verona, WI) as EpicCare Ambulatory Technical Services.

**CHELSEY REED**
Chelsey currently in her first year of medical school in UB’s MD/PhD Program.

**Marriages**

**SARA PENDERGAST (2007) married PHIL BASKO (UB PHARMD ’12)**
on August, 2014.

Our apologies: we were experiencing some technical difficulties with our online alumni update form the weeks leading up to January 11, 2015. If you submitted an update prior to then, we would appreciate if you could resubmit the form at honors.buffalo.edu/alumni. We apologize for any inconvenience!

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**I give to Honors because…**

“...the Honors College and Honors Research and Creativity Fund provided an excellent foundation for my undergraduate studies in mechanical engineering and set me up to excel in my current doctoral program. I want future Honors students to have similar opportunities that help them realize their goals.”

Jeffrey Ackerman
Honors Scholar, Class of 2010

**I give to Honors because…**

“...because my experience was nonpareil and I want others to derive the same benefit that I did.”

Kathy Bethin
Honors Scholar, Class of 1987

Honors College Assistant Director and Honors alumna
**MEGAN (PENDERGAST) STEWART (2005)**
and her husband Mike welcomed a baby boy, Hudson Vernon, into their family on June 17, 2014.
Elise Roberts attended the 2014 meeting of the SUNY Model European Union (EU) in Brussels, Belgium, thanks to a donor-supported fund in the UB Honors College. Once there, she heard an address by the head of the Canada and U.S. division of the EU’s diplomatic service. By the time he finished, she knew she wanted to go to graduate school to study international affairs. Elise completed three bachelor’s degrees at UB—in political science, international studies and Italian, with a minor in French for good measure. There could hardly have been a better prepared U.S. college senior. She’ll be good for the world. When you support UB, you support students like Elise.

The best public universities have the strongest private support.

I’m thankful.
The Great Cardboard Regatta!

Last fall the Honors College hosted its first annual cardboard regatta where teams of UB students and staff constructed cardboard boats and sailed across Lake LaSalle on UB’s North Campus. This fall, will you brave the lake? Alumni boats welcome!