2014

Meet the Honorable Staff

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MEE THE HONORABLE STAFF

Here in the Honors program we are blessed with a phenomenal staff that cares for each student!

DR. JIM NUTTER serves as Honors Director and Quiz Bowl Coach, and is a professor of English. He teaches Honors seminars in Composition & Rhetoric, Composition and Literature, and American Literature, as well as upper-division courses in Modern Novel, American Novel, Early American Literature, American Renaissance, and Senior Honors Thesis. In 1993 Dr. Nutter received his doctorate in English from the University of Mississippi, and in 2004 he earned an M.Ed from the University of Virginia with a specialization in Gifted Education.

He received his master’s degree in English from Marshall University in 1985 and also taught there for three semesters. He met his wife Laurie at Tennessee Temple University, where they were both working on their undergraduate degrees in English. In 1985 Dr. Nutter joined the faculty of Liberty University as an instructor, and in 1995 he accepted the position of Honors Director.
Throughout his time at Liberty, he has coached the Liberty Quiz Bowl team to seven Big South Conference championships in nine years and in 2014, a number 20th ranking in the country. When he is not working on campus, he serves as a deacon in his church, Rivermont Avenue Baptist Church, cooks the Family Night suppers, and co-teaches an adult Sunday school class. In his spare time, he also enjoys camping, fishing, driving his Jeep, and watching Orioles baseball.

**DR. BRENDA AYRES** is one of the two assistant Honors directors. She was hired twelve years ago as full professor of English with a specialty in nineteenth-century English literature. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses, both residential and online. She also directs Education dissertations and English Masters and Honors theses; and she oversees the Honors creative project theses. To date she has published 19 books and over 120 articles, and regularly presents papers at conferences. Dr. Ayres is now the General Editor over the two Honors journals, *Honorable Mention* and *The Kabod*, as well as *Liberty University Journal of Undergraduate Research Symposium and Journal*.

She attends The Well, a non-denominational church on Thomas Road in Forest, Virginia, where she sings duets about once a month, and in the summer she teaches a six-week Bible study at Forest Community Church. Being a true Romantic, her favorite Scripture is Isaiah 55, especially verse 12: “For you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”

Her home is in Forest with Annie and Libby, her two darling and hilarious cocker spaniel babies. They, and Gracie before them, were shelter rescues, and their experiences of going from abuse to healing love are recounted in one of four books titled *What Dog Lovers Know About God*, written by Dr. Ayres. They are the stories about the rehabilitation we go through in the hands of a loving God who rescues us and then retrains us so that we can walk with Him.
The sweets that you see in Scholar Commons usually come from Dr. Ayres’ kitchen. Her office is 361 B, next to Dr. Nutter’s. In it is a pink striped settee that may not be the most comfortable, but it is always available to any student who wants to take a load off, talk, chat about British novels, or pray.

**Dr. Marilyn Gadomski** works as an Assistant Honors Director and a Professor of Psychology. Since 1991, Dr. Gadomski has taught such classes as Child Psychology and Foundations of Learning, along with advising psychology interns in residence and online programs. She works with Honors students in several capacities, including Alpha Lambda Delta (Freshman Honor Society), Psi Chi (Psychology Honor Society), and students conducting empirical research in Psychology Department research teams and in the Honors program. In addition to the HONR 495 thesis course, she helps students in HONR 395 with producing a Thesis Proposal. This is a relatively painless process since it gives step-by-step guidance—and credit—for the task that each Honors student should be doing at this time, with or without the course. This is an easier way to produce a better Thesis Proposal and to be earlier/farther in the Thesis process.

Dr. Gadomski earned her PhD in Child Development from Virginia Tech and her Master's degrees in Early Childhood Education and in Educational Administration from the West Virginia College of Graduate Studies. She seeks to prioritize her life with purpose, in the order of serving God, her family, and the students. This focus allows mental energy for each without sacrificing attention for the others. When not working at Liberty she devotes her time to TRBC and music, Geary (her husband of 42 years), her three children's families with her eight grandchildren, and mentoring with students and friends.

HONR 395 offers advice and guidance for Honors students who have a thesis topic planned or for those who have no ideas for a topic. This course gives credit and support for the thesis preparation that should be ongoing either with or without the course. Dr. Gadomski is willing every week to give students friendly direction, emotional support, or a kick in the right direction, according to their expressed needs; sometimes all three are useful together.
**MRS. LAURA KLINE** is the Honors Program Office Manager and is much loved by the Honors students she serves every day. She has worked for the federal government; and in churches, Christian schools, and colleges. Most recently, she worked at the SBC of Virginia in Richmond before relocating to Lynchburg in 2010. Mrs. Kline likes to read, shop, and watch anything on HGTV. She is a native of Washington, DC and has lived in Maryland, New York, and Virginia. Mrs. Kline enjoys spending time with her two daughters and two granddaughters.

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**JAKE ROGERS** serves as the coach of our Quiz Bowl team and is currently pursuing his MBA after having earned his B.S. in Software Engineering and Computer Science at LU.

When asked why anyone would want to be a Quiz Bowler, Jake’s answer was “Apart from the scholarship and excellent meal budget, the camaraderie of those with similar interests in literature, the sciences, &etc. is usually what attracts students, and there’s a strong social element to quiz bowl.” He has been a state and nationally decorated shotgun competitor, writes epic poetry, and puns at every available opportunity. By “epic poetry,” he means that he and a friend have been building a high-fantasy legendarium for almost ten years, all of which they consider to be “recreational writing.”

He remembers his first collegiate tournament at UVA. On the way back to the vans, some frat kids drove by and threw cheeseburgers at the Liberty competitors. Jake et al. didn’t think that it was very funny at the time but since has come to appreciate how ridiculous it was and worth a good laugh.
Since he is a veteran of the Honors program, he has some good advice to those who are coming behind him. “If your major has a capstone project of some sort, try to find a way to synergize that with your thesis. It reduces workload and gives you a more thoroughly researched product.”

WESLEY PENA works in the Honors office as a student worker and is currently a junior pursuing a degree in English with Teacher Licensure. The oldest of nine siblings, Wesley grew up in Southaven, Mississippi. Her parents are LU alums who inspired her to attend Liberty herself. She also serves as a prayer leader on the South Tower. She says that she loves tea as well as black and white movies. In fact she is big on collecting absolutely useless trivia about movies. When she’s not working, she’s hammocking, doing puzzles, and is constantly buying children’s books for her younger siblings with the conviction that everyone should read Mo Willems. She seems to have an aversion to ebooks and electronic communication and would rather have overladen bookshelves and piles of letters. When working, she is often spinning around on her desk chair like a kid and usually doing it when the President of LU walks into Scholars Common.

Her advice to Honors students is “Don’t stress. Everyone tells you that, but I mean it. I’m a stresser and worrier by nature, and I feel that we get so caught in ‘the big plan’: GPA, test scores, grad school, job offers, thesis. All those are good
things—don’t go telling Dr. Nutter that I told you not to turn in a thesis! But enjoy the moments now. They were given to us for a reason (and that reason was not so that we could spend them on worrying).” When asked what was the funniest thing that ever happened to her in the Honors Office, she had to think for a while because, “a lot of funny things happen.” But then she recalled the day that she was sitting at her desk, “innocently trying to drink my tea in peace and quiet after a long day, and suddenly out of nowhere a tiny Rubik’s cube comes flying through the air and lands smack in my cup of tea and tea splashes everywhere and I was devastated because of the wasted tea. But it was also pretty funny, because the pitcher had not been aiming for the tea. Now I use cups with lids.”

**HANNAH UNDERHILL** also works in the Honors office as a student worker. She is a junior studying Strategic Communications: Social Media Management. However, she began her collegiate journey as a Women’s Ministry major. She came to know the Lord at the age of 5, and she hopes to use Communications in a ministry field—either church or nonprofit. Her favorite social network is Twitter, her favorite Disney movie is *Tangled*, and in her spare time she likes watching movies, hiking, reading, and baking. That’s not all that she enjoys. She confessed that she eats so many nuts for snacks (cashews, almonds, peanuts, etc.), that it is a
surprise to herself that she hasn’t turned into a squirrel. Students who frequent the Honors suite call her a “foodie” because they think her typically organic, low-sugar, gluten-free food is… strange, but she just shrugs her shoulders and prefers to eat what makes her feel good and have more energy!

People say that she is always positive, to which she claims that they haven’t seen her stressing about a huge midterm project. She apparently is greatly disturbed by “grammatically incorrect/sloppy PowerPoint presentations because they force her to focus on the errors instead of the show.”

Her advice to young Honors students: “Spend time in God’s Word every day—even if you read just a verse or two. You can study hard and rock every assignment, but if you don’t have God’s Word fresh in your heart and mind, you’ll have succeeded in something that doesn’t ultimately matter. True wisdom and knowledge come from God and His Word. ‘For the Lord grants wisdom! From His mouth come knowledge and understanding’ (Prov. 2:6).

**COME VISIT US**

Be sure to make time to stop by the Honors office, introduce yourself, meet the staff, and enjoy a cup of Honors coffee or tea! Each of these lovely people would be thrilled to meet you and answer any questions you may have!