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Alumni Update: Thomas Eisenhart Delivers Talk to Chemistry Department

October 30, 2015

Life has been busy for 2010 Honors alum Thomas Eisenhart since his graduation five years ago. After spending his first post-graduate year in Belfast, Northern Ireland to study under the Rotary Foundation Ambassador Scholarship, Eisenhart returned to America to complete his Ph.D. in analytical chemistry at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Despite the demands of graduate school, Eisenhart found time to pay his alma mater a visit on October 16, when he presented his research to the chemistry department. His talk was titled "Spectroscopic Monitoring of Proton-Coupled Electron Transfer Reactions," which documented his work over the past four years to develop new methods to better monitor a class of reactions, proton-coupled electron transfer (PCET), which play an important role in developing new energy technologies.



Thomas Eisenhart (right) with Dr. Steve Engel

"Through my research, I've been able to deeply explore the chemistry associated with many of the energy challenges facing society today," said Eisenhart, "and I'm glad I got to share this research with both students and members of the department."

As a former 1906 scholar, Eisenhart was in these students' position only a few years ago. He cites his time as an honors student as a period during which his intellectual curiosity was enhanced and his critical thinking skills sharpened.

"These two qualities," Eisenhart said, "along with the drive needed to push through the ups and downs of graduate school, were key in helping me successfully work towards a Ph.D."

His spirit of intellectual inquiry has led him to pursue opportunities outside the field of chemistry. Following graduation, Eisenhart will begin working in the management consulting industry, in which he'll be able to break new ground in his professional life.

"I really enjoy problem solving, and this job will give me the opportunity to help solve some of the most complex and important issues facing large, global corporations," said Eisenhart. "Also, while a Ph.D. in chemistry takes around five years, the typical client engagement is only a few months, so the opportunity to experience numerous industries and business models is also an exciting proposition."

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Honors Students Find Success in Mock Mediation Competitions

October 30, 2015

Georgia Southern's Mock Mediation Club is one of the largest and most successful mediation teams in the United States. Thanks to the efforts of its thirty-five members, it has brought home endless accolades from both regional and national tournaments. Only two years ago, however, it was not even recognized as a student organization.

In 2013, honors student Dylan John (construction management '16) convinced two friends to compete in the regional mock mediation tournament, not expecting to win seven awards and move on to nationals. But without university funding or support, attending nationals seemed like a faraway dream.

"During a presentation at World Congress, we had to admit that we weren't going to be able to go to nationals, due to funding," said John, "but then one of the judges offered us a generous donation and said, 'if I give you this, will you go?'"

This pivotal moment in Mock Mediation Club's growth allowed the club to win 8th in 2014 nationals during its first year of existence, as well as to receive support from the university. Since then, the club has expanded from John and his two friends to include thirty-five people, including honors students Jessica Shanken (international studies '16), Giselle Devot (communication studies '16), and Brandi Hawkins (pre-nursing '18). Each of these students fill a leadership role in the club and have contributed to its success in many areas, from competition to service learning.



The Mock Mediation Team

"Mock mediation isn't just about competing," said Shanken, president of Mock Mediation Club. "We're trying to work with other student organizations to do something for the student body. We've also been working with service learning by teaching at-risk youth mediation skills."

Devot, the Vice President of Public Relations and Community Engagement, elaborated on the club's community involvement: "Next semester we're planning to become more involved with campus by collaborating with other organizations and finding opportunities to spread conflict resolution skills to fellow students"

In addition to their community involvement, the Mock Mediation Club has found immense success at various tournaments. At this year's Regional Mediation Tournament, hosted by Brenau University from October 8-9, the club received several awards, including four of the top twenty advocates, two of the top ten individual mediators, one of the top six teams in the advocate/ client team category, and one of the top six teams in the mediation team category. These awards have qualified the team for the undergraduate international competition in Des Moines, Iowa, which will take place in early November.

Shanken said, "Getting ready for competition this year is hectic, yet so rewarding. It's so cool to see everyone so excited, lights in their eyes, as we prepare for competition in Iowa."

But even for a team that consistently excels, winning isn't everything. One of the club's primary foci is helping its members develop leadership and communication skills.

Hawkins, the club's secretary, spoke about how joining Mock Mediation Club helped her step outside of her comfort zone: "When I first started college, I was really shy, but I wanted to keep up the level of involvement I had in high school. After observing a competition, I thought, 'if they can do this, I can, too,' and from there, I jumped into it. Now I'm not afraid to speak at rotunda tables or at meetings. Mediation has expanded my leadership abilities—I've come such a long way."

Perhaps the Mock Mediation Club's achievements can be credited to their focus on the personal growth and development of each of their members, as well as their dedication to further understanding mediation techniques.

"We don't go to competition to win," said Shanken, "but to learn—and that's why we win."

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Researching Writing and Writing Research: Aleyna Rentz Publishes in Composition Studies

October 30, 2015

When Aleyna Rentz (English/writing and linguistics '17) first signed up for Dr. Jessica Nastal-Dema's writing studies class, she had no idea it would lead to her first publication in an academic journal. Along with Dr. Nastal-Dema and fellow writing and linguistics major Jayne McGaughey, Rentz co-wrote "The Evolving Identity of an Undergraduate Major in Writing and Linguistics," which will appear in the fall 2015 edition of *Composition Studies*, the oldest independent periodical in its field.



Aleyna Rentz at work in Eidson House

The idea for the article began with a class discussion of college writing programs and how they should operate in order to best prepare students for careers or graduate programs in writing. During this discussion, Rentz realized just how exceptional Georgia Southern's own writing department is.

"Unlike Georgia Southern, most colleges don't offer majors in writing," said Rentz. "They relegate it to a minor or concentration, rather than treating it like a legitimate field of study."

This class discussion happened to coincide with the theme for the fall 2015 issue of *Composition Studies*, which exclusively called for papers about college writing programs. Rentz immediately saw this as an opportunity not only to venture into academic writing for the first time, but also to promote her department.

"I feel like our Writing and Linguistics Department might be Georgia Southern's best-kept secret," said Rentz. "We have an absolutely phenomenal program here, but very few people know about it—most students here don't even realize it exists."

Along with Dr. Nastal-Dema and Jayne McGaughey, Rentz sought to give the department the recognition it deserves. Together, they wrote an article discussing the scope of the Writing and Linguistics Department, as well as the issues of identity and structure that writing programs across the country must address. Rentz's section of the article focused primarily on the benefits of the program's loose structure. As one of the few freestanding writing departments in the country, and the only one in Georgia, the program offers four concentrations, giving students freedom to study whatever interests them—these include creative writing, writing studies, technical and professional writing, and linguistics. While Rentz's primary focus is creative writing, specifically fiction, she acknowledges the importance of familiarizing oneself with all tenants of writing.

Rentz said, "One of the goals of our department is to mold students into well-rounded writers, but that doesn't happen unless you look at your writing from all perspectives."

In addition to promoting Georgia Southern's Writing and Linguistics Department, Rentz hopes the article will help others recognize writing as a legitimate, freestanding academic field.

"I'm glad I go to a school that treats writing with the respect it deserves," said Rentz. "Hopefully our article will inspire other schools to do the same."

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