SPRING 2024

ELMS

MAGAZINE

2 Core Curriculum Revision
9 Mission trips to Jamaica, El Paso
10 Blue House renamed Haddad Writing Center
12 Hundreds attend Black Experience Summit



4

Sheila Coon '98, on Faith, Resilience, and Sharing the Cookie Love



Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops - at all.
– Emily Dickinson

Dear friends,

It has been a very active Spring semester at Elms College. Spring in Western Massachusetts, when the last of the winter recedes and all the world emerges anew, is a time of daily wonder. No matter how busy we are with our day-to-day preoccupations, we can't help but to observe nature's rebirth, with each new daffodil that flowers and each new tree that blooms, and to reflect on opportunities offered to all of us for crafting new todays and shaping new tomorrows.

On April 8th, hundreds of students, faculty, and staff gathered on the Sr. Kathleen Keating Quadrangle to witness the moon passing in front of the sun; joining millions of people from Austin, Texas to Burlington, Vermont, taking part in Eclipse '24. While the Chicopee campus was not in the path of totality, we were close enough to experience a significant partial eclipse. This was another opportunity for togetherness and for keeping vibrant the word that is often used to describe Elms College: community.

The stories in this edition of the Elms Magazine attempt to provide you with a glimpse of the many initiatives that have taken place on campus. Most exciting among them is the culmination of the faculty's multi-year effort to **revise the Elms core curriculum** and to articulate the distinctiveness of the Elms liberal arts core in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. The newly created D'Amour Center for Faculty Teaching Excellence is already endeavoring to foster a consistent implementation of the new core curriculum to all Elms students.

Our cover story **"Sharing the Cookie Love"** profiles Sheila Coon, '98, whose life is a case study in hard work, creativity, resilience and faith. Just a few years ago, she was homeless and living with her children in a shelter, but never lost faith that she would overcome those odds. Her Springfield-based gourmet cookie business, Hot Oven Cookies, is expanding, and her story of rising from poverty is generating national media attention.

I hope that you enjoy reading about the restoration of our Blue House by the Haddad family and its rededication as the **Missy Haddad Center for Writers**. Missy died in 2020 of cancer before she was able to finish her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and literature. She had spent hour upon hour at the Blue House writing and editing her own work and helping colleagues with their writing.

An article on our Campus Ministry's **Compassionate Heart Service Trips** program shares the stories of students traveling over Spring Break to Mandeville, Jamaica and El Paso, Texas, and having their own transformational experiences helping the elderly, the sick, the migrants, and others in need.

In the Athletics section, you can learn about the inaugural season of the **Elms Men's Lacrosse Program**. You can also read about **Coach Denisha Parks'** return to her alma mater to lead the Women's Basketball team.

Thinking back over the past academic year, these are but a few of the many examples where the lessons learned at Elms College extend beyond the lecture halls and are cemented into the lives of the people who form the Elms College community: our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends.

It is my fondest hope that you have a safe, enjoyable, and relaxing summer. As always, I want to express my most sincere appreciation and deepest gratitude to you for all the ways in which you help to make Elms College the special institution that we are, as we advance the legacy of our founders.

Have a nice summer!



Harry E. Dumay, Ph.D., MBA

President

TABLE OF

CONTENTS

ELMS COLLEGE MAGAZINE

Patrick Johnson
Multimedia Writer

Codi Alberti
Graphic Artist

Katherine Cardinale, Cardinale Design
Creative Director

Don Forest, Cardinale Design
Art Director

Photography
Don Forest, Cardinale Design

Harry E. Dumay, Ph.D, MBA,
President

Bernadette Nowakowski '89
Vice President of Institutional Advancement

Lukman Arsalan,
Vice President of Enrollment Management and Marketing

Elms College
291 Springfield Street • Chicopee, MA 01013

We are a Catholic liberal arts college founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, Massachusetts.

The editors invite you to send comments, questions, and suggestions to the Elms College Office of Alumni Services at **Alumni@elms.edu**



President Harry E. Dumay drops first puck at 'Elms College' night for Springfield Thunderbirds.

FEATURES



Why students don't buy required textbooks?

Jacqueline Jamsheed, assistant professor of accounting knows why. A study she co-authored found students have one specific criteria when deciding whether to buy assigned textbooks: is it absolutely essential for a passing grade? If not, they tend not to buy it, no matter the cost.



Sharing the Cookie Love

Sheila Coon '98, and her children were homeless and living in a shelter. With some gumption, hard work and 1,000 or so original cookie recipes, she was able to launch her own business, Hot Oven Cookies. The Springfield-based operation is expanding, and Coon has big plans for the future.



When Irish Eyes are Smiling

Elizabeth Gourde '23, was selected as the Grand Colleen of the 2024 Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade, New England's 2nd largest St. Patrick's celebration. Gourde, a native of Holyoke, said being selected is quite an honor and has her feeling "over the moon."



Elms College Whodunnit

Katherine Anderson '01, M'07, has always enjoyed reading a good murder-mystery novel. Then she set out to write her own. Anderson's new book, "Murder at the Alma Mater," is set at the Elms campus and draws partly from her time as a student.



'We Will Turn Some Heads'

The men's lacrosse team debuted in its inaugural season, and new head coach Robert "Cizz" Cross says his team is young but determined and has plenty of talent to be competitive for years to come.

Correction: The fall edition of Elms Magazine contained an erroneous figure in the annual report for FY22 total liabilities & net assets. The correct figure is $76,385,000

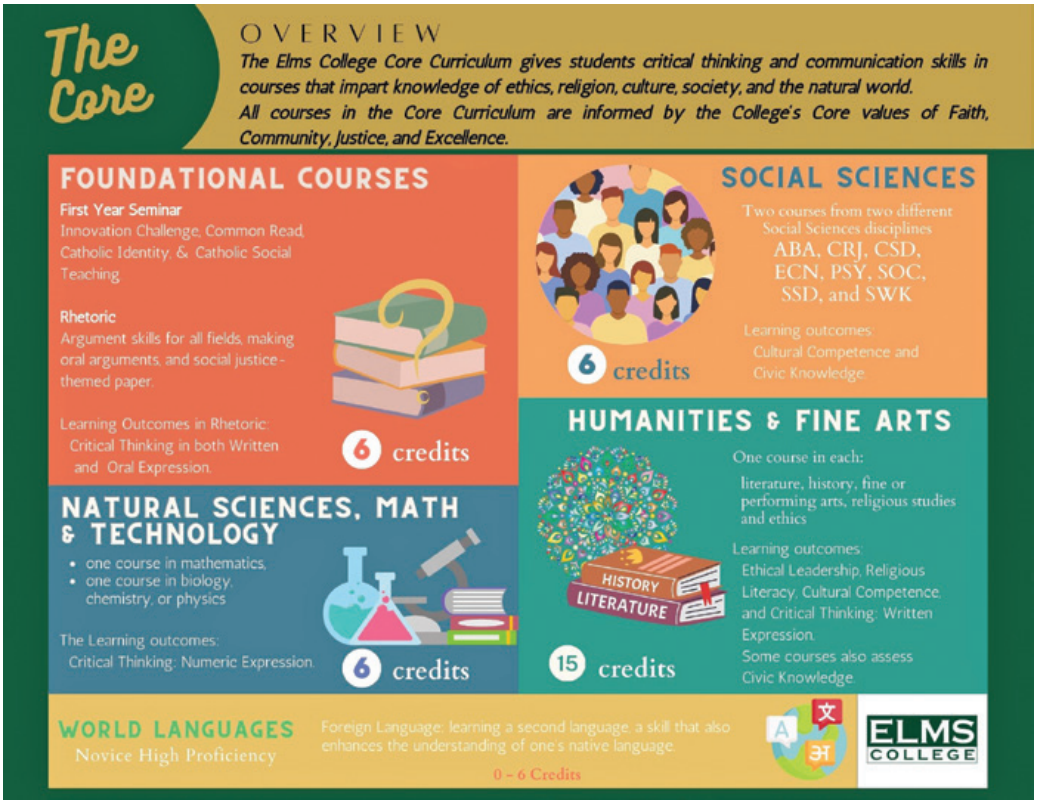
Elms' Core Curriculum revision, new center for teaching boost liberal arts education

A major revision to the college's core curriculum and the launch of the D'Amour Center for Faculty and Teaching are touted as opportunities to boost Elms College's liberal arts tradition.

The two projects, each led by faculty and each closely related, have been in the works for some time. They were presented to the Board of Trustees in February.

"We're trying to tie the academic core more closely to the college's mission and our core values of faith, justice, community, and excellence," said Dr. Tom Cerasulo, chair of the Division of Humanities and Fine Arts who led the development of the Center for Faculty Teaching Excellence.

English professor Jasmine Hall, who led the core curriculum project said the revisions should make it simpler for undergraduate students and their faculty advisors to navigate what had been a sometimes byzantine process of meeting all the requirements needed for graduation.



Core Curriculum revision. Graphic by Michael McGravey and Annette Ziomek

Previously, there were required courses and required outcomes, but meeting one did not necessarily fulfill the others, she said.

"It was confusing and hard for the students to meet all those requirements," Hall said. "What we tried to do in the revision was to think about the learning outcomes."

The D'Amour Center for Faculty Teaching Excellence was funded last year as part of a $1.5 million contribution – the largest single gift in college history – by Michele and Donald D'Amour. The bulk of the money was designated for the Our Lady of Perpetual Help Haiti Nursing Continuing Education Program, but $500,000 was earmarked for a center focused on faculty development and other initiatives to solidify the curriculum in the Catholic liberal arts tradition.

Cerasulo said a key role of the center will be to improve communication throughout the faculty, and to encourage collaboration by faculty in different departments.

"Too often in academia, you get silos where people do not collaborate or even talk with those from outside their department," he said.

An example of cross-department collaboration is a new Humanities course in the fall, "Climate Ethics: The Blue Marble, Religion & Philosophy." The course will examine the morality and ethics of the climate change debate and will satisfy core requirements for religion and philosophy.

Hall said under the revised core curriculum, students will still need a total of 39 credits in liberal arts courses across different disciplines in social sciences, foundational courses, humanities and fine arts, and natural sciences, math and technology. Students will still need to demonstrate they met certain learning outcomes for religious literacy, critical thinking skills in writing, speaking and mathematics, civic knowledge and cultural competence.

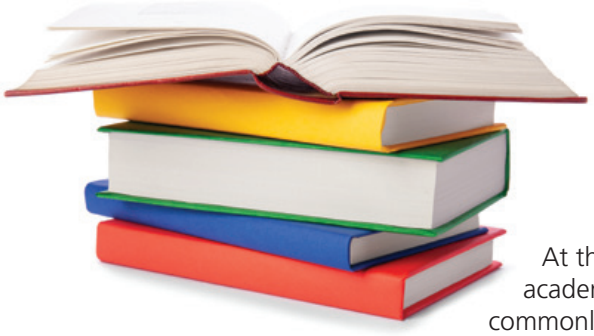
By aligning course and outcome requirements and increasing transparency, students will know when they sign up for a course what it fulfills. She said many times students would take a course thinking it met a specific outcome only to find out later it did not.

"You can see the ways in which the core values and the mission statement line up with the core curriculum much more easily rather than just being a list of things that you have to check off," Hall said.

Cerasulo said the changes in the core curriculum and the center for teaching should each promote the value of a broad-based liberal arts education, such as what is offered at Elms College.

"I still very much believe in the skills that liberal arts teach you – the communications skills, the critical thinking skills, the empathy. I still believe in that part. I still believe that reading books makes you a more empathetic person," he said.

Why do students avoid buying required textbooks? It's not about cost but value, says Elms professor Jacqueline Jamsheed





Jacqueline Jamsheed, assistant professor of Accounting at Elms College

At the start of each academic year, there is commonly a lot of press coverage about the cost of textbooks and students struggling to afford them, but an Elms professor who co-authored a study on the issue said price has very little – if anything – to do with why students decide to buy the books for a class.

Much more important than cost, said Elms Assistant Accounting Professor Jacqueline Jamsheed, is whether students feel the book is needed to pass the course.

"If the students feel the textbook is going to help them, they buy it," Jamsheed said. "If they believe it is not going to help them, they won't."

Jamsheed and Florida Atlantic University Business Professor Joseph Patton co-authored a paper in the Journal for Education Business, titled "Is Price Why Students Don't Get Their Books? Undergraduate Acquisition of Class Materials."

There's a saying in the newspaper business that if the headline asks a question, the answer is invariably no. And no is the same conclusion reached by Patton and Jamsheed, based on a survey of more than 1,300 college students nationwide.

Their paper concludes that high prices are not a roadblock to textbook acquisition. The reverse is also true as lower textbook prices do not lead to higher acquisition rates.

Their research shows that around 67% of students, from first-years to seniors, will put off purchasing books until after the class begins. By delaying, they hope to get a lay of the land to determine if the book is absolutely necessary. "The longer these students delay, the less likely it is that they will acquire assigned materials," the study notes.

The average annual cost of textbooks and materials has over the last decade actually gone down – from $1,400 to around $400. But the rates of students purchasing all their books has not gone up. Roughly two-thirds of undergraduate students in the survey reported not buying every book their professors assigned. That percentage is consistent across the country and by class year, age, gender, and even by GPA.

Jamsheed, entering her third year on the Elms faculty, said that at the outset of the study, the premise asked if there was a direct correlation between the cost of books and a student's decision to buy.

"It turned out from the data that that wasn't the case at all," she said. "Lower textbook prices don't increase acquisition rates."

More important than the cost is what she called the "utility rate," defined as each student's measure of whether the text is necessary for passing the course. Students assigning a low utility rate to a book will almost never purchase it. The cost is practically irrelevant, she said.

"Sometimes faculty are trying really hard to find cheap textbooks or open-source materials. It doesn't matter," she said. "If the student says 'You know what, this isn't going to help me learn the material,' (cost) doesn't matter."

Her recommendation for faculty working on next semester's syllabus is to take a full and realistic measure of course materials before requiring them for students. If it is absolutely necessary, include it on the reading list.

"If it isn't, don't assign it," she said. "Because they're not going to buy it."

Jamsheed, who had a career in international business as an accountant and executive before segueing to academia, is a prolific researcher and author. She has authored and co-authored multiple articles in several academic journals.

She said she enjoys the work and said getting it published in an academic journal helps the college's visibility. "It's good for Elms because it gets our name out there."

It also helps her stay up-to-date in her subject areas, and this helps the students have a better grasp.

"I always find it fun when I can pull up one of my papers and the students read it and go 'Hey, that's you!'"



Sharing the Cookie Love:

Sheila Coon ‘98, has turned ‘Hot Oven Cookies’ into a sweet success

Ten years ago Sheila Coon ‘98, was unemployed, separated from her husband, and living with three of her children in a Springfield homeless shelter. Down but not out, she had a dream of raising her family out of poverty, and she had a notebook with more than 1,000 original recipes for cookies. From that arose her action plan.

Today, Coon is the owner and face of Hot Oven Cookies. She launched her company in 2018, peddling unique, fresh-from-the-oven confections with names like Guava Cheesecake, Coquito Snickerdoodle, and Kahlua Buzz Brookie. She operates retail locations in Springfield and now Chicopee, and has a catering service that prepares and delivers large orders for special occasions. She also has a rolling kitchen on a trailer that appears at county fairs, community events, and anywhere else cookie-craving people assemble.

“I sat in that shelter and created this business. I created it with passion and purpose,” she said recently. “It’s about tenacity.”

The variety of her cookies and a deft understanding of social-media marketing have gained her a devoted following, as her Facebook and Instagram accounts have a combined 12,000 followers. And Coon’s modern-day Horatio Alger backstory of picking herself up by her bootstraps has gotten her attention from the local, regional, and national media.

She has been interviewed on New England Public Media. The Boston Globe profiled her story in a front-page article and also featured her in an extended segment on its daily news program broadcast over NESN.

And in November, Coon traveled to New York City to be a guest on the Tamron Hall Show, a weekday talk show broadcast nationally on ABC.

Attention and accolades are nice, she said in a recent interview, but neither puts the cookies in the oven.

In the kitchen of her Chicopee store one morning, Coon scoops out spoonfuls of raw cookie dough, rolls them into balls, and places them on a baking sheet. She will repeat this step hundreds of times over the next two hours in advance of the 11 a.m. opening.

Coon said Hot Oven Cookies sprang from nothing through a lot of hard work and a lot of faith. She supplied the work, regularly putting in 14-hour days mixing, baking, and selling.

The faith was supplied by others who bought into her dream, from the nonprofits offering seed money to get off the ground to the customers who continue to come in each day.

“I cannot quantify to you how amazing our customer base is. They're like family,” she said.

Coon, 50 and the mother of seven, said she realizes more work is needed to get her business to where she envisions it can be.

She is preparing to launch a spin-off company called Hot Oven Cookie Dough that will mix up the dough for the retail stores, and eventually sell it wholesale to other businesses and supermarkets. She is looking to purchase a production facility.

She also wants to establish a toehold for the retail business in Worcester and Boston.

But she said she views Hot Oven Cookies as not just a business, but her "mission and ministry" with the potential to lift people up.

Her most ambitious goal is within a few years to begin franchising the Hot Oven Cookies name and business model. People buying rights to a franchise will own and operate their own retail location and sell cookies made from her dough. It is a way for people on the economic fringes, especially single mothers and people of color, to own a business and achieve financial stability.

She says she has a list of 50 names waiting to become franchisees.

As a child growing up, Coon's role models were her mother and grandmother, each a micro-entrepreneur, and her grandfather, a sharp businessman. Her mother sold just two varieties of homemade cookies, chocolate chip, and peanut butter, while her grandmother mixed up flavored Puerto Rican popsicles. Her grandfather, however, was adamant that she become a lawyer.

"From the time I was eight or nine years old, I was going to be a lawyer who owned restaurants."

She enrolled in Elms in the mid-1980s, back when it was still a women's college. It was her first step toward fulfilling her grandfather's dream. Majoring in liberal arts with a minor in legal studies, Coon intended to graduate, get a job as a paralegal and then work her way through law school and then pass the bar exam.

"I loved Elms. I loved my classes. My degree was top-notch quality," she said.

She remembers the classes emphasizing being able to research complex legal issues and documents. Her teachers said again and again that they were preparing them to be research assistants in a legal office, not just clerks.

"I absolutely loved it," she said.

But somewhere along the way in her time at Elms College, her life goals changed. In her senior year, she signed up for the LSAT exam, a requirement for admission into law school. Midway through the test, it struck her that she did not want a life in law. She preferred the life of an entrepreneur serving customers.

She enrolled in a local culinary school and even opened a bakery in Chicopee for a time. But the bakery closed, then she and her husband separated, and she took a job as a nursing assistant at a long-term care facility to support her children. She lost that job and soon afterward her apartment, and she and her three youngest children spent time living in the shelter or her car.

When Coon speaks of this time, she describes herself as being broke, not poor. The difference is a matter of attitude, not semantics, she said.

"Poor is a constant mindset and a constant identity. Broke is temporal. I was never poor; I was broke," she said. "I can climb out of broke; I can hustle out of broke. Being poor impedes my ability to grow."

It was at the shelter where she developed what she called her "broke plan," a simple but detailed way to provide for her family. While some were telling her she needed to focus on her immediate problem of being homeless, Coon took a broader, big-picture approach to find stability for her family.



First, she would start a cookie catering business using her big notebook of original cookie recipes that she developed and jotted down over the years. If customers wanted a large batch of 400 or more cookies, she would bake and deliver them.

Then, if catering was popular, she would open a retail location in Springfield where people craving a single cookie could pop in off the street. If one store worked, she would look to open more, with seven being the ideal number, or one for each of her children.



All that was missing to spring her plan into action was investment capital.

One day she read an article about a Holyoke organization called SPARK providing grants to qualified Latinos seeking to start their own businesses. Coon stopped in and asked for a check.

Instead, she was enrolled in its business incubator program, and in time, she was awarded a grant for $20,000. She used the money to buy the trailer she uses as her mobile kitchen.

A short time later, she learned of Valley Venture Mentors, a Springfield group of successful entrepreneurs who offer advice and support to those just starting out. She enrolled in that program, too.

She credits both with helping her refine and refocus the plan and with helping Hot Oven Cookies off the ground. She also credits her Elms College education.

Baking cookies seems a good distance away from legal studies, but she said the lessons she learned at Elms have been invaluable as a business owner. She can read and understand the legalese found in government regulations, legal contracts and bank documents. And since much of her business involved rental properties, she has developed fluency in lease agreements and tenant rights.

Coon said that through it all, she approaches each day with a feeling of gratitude for how far she has come and for all those who helped her along the way.

"I was in a homeless shelter. No one had to buy my cookies," she said.

The slogan for Hot Oven Cookies is "sharing the cookie love," and it sums up nicely her view she is not just selling cookies, but offering comfort.

People will come into the shop to buy cookies, but they end up hanging around to talk to her about their lives, their troubles, about anything at all. Customers have told her about their spouses, introduced their fiancés, and shown her pictures of newborns. One woman came in the day after her husband died because she didn't know where else to go.

"I'm like a cross between a priest and bartender. People come in to buy cookies and they talk to you," she said. "And we listen."

Through it all, she said she is grateful every day, and expresses it the best way she knows, by baking cookies.

"It's kind of cheesy but I always tell people that Hot Oven Cookies is my love song to humanity. It's a song of thanksgiving."

hot oven COOKIES
SHARING THE COOKIE LOVE



Sheila Coon '98 had quite a year. Her business, Hot Oven Cookies, has expanded and she's been a guest on the nationally broadcast Tamron Hall show. Quite a turn for a mother of 7 who was homeless at one point.

Elizabeth Gourde '23, Shines as Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade Grand Colleen



As a Holyoke native, Elizabeth Gourde '23, grew up fully versed with the significance of the Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade, the second largest such parade in New England. So when she was chosen to be the parade's 2024 Grand Colleen, let's just say she was excited.

"I'm over the moon," she said. "It's kind of like jumping in the air and I don't know at what point I'm going to come down."

Gourde, who graduated in 2023 with a bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in writing, said that when they called her name at the coronation ceremony and placed the tiara on her head, she experienced a moment of disbelief. In the weeks leading up to the parade, the feeling did not exactly recede.

"I'm ecstatic and honored, and I feel entirely unworthy," she said.

She described her life since the crowning ceremony as a whirlwind, with old friends and teachers, neighbors, and even strangers reaching out to offer congratulations. On her first day at work after the pageant, her boss at Gary Rome Hyundai greeted her by playing the theme to Miss America over his phone.

Being grand colleen for the Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade is more than just wearing a crown, riding on a float, and waving to the 400,000 spectators lining the streets of Holyoke on parade day.

The colleen and her court are expected to serve as ambassadors for the parade and Western Massachusetts Irish-American culture. There are speaking engagements, meet-and-greets, and other functions. There are classes in Irish heritage and traditional Irish step-dancing lessons.

"I'm just so shocked by the number of people who have voiced some kind of support and told me this is well deserved," she said. "I feel like the luckiest human alive."

At Elms College, Gourde was vice president of her class for four years and served a year on the Executive Board. She was a writer and co-editor for Bloom, the literary magazine, and interned in the Elms Marketing Department. She was also an organizer of a poetry-and-prose workshop at the Care Center in Holyoke and worked with Sister Jane Morrissey at Homework House.

She also took part in mission trips to help rebuild homes in Puerto Rico and to work at a refugee shelter in El Paso, Texas.

She is applying for graduate school and has long-term goals of earning her master's degree and doctorate in English and becoming a college professor.

Japanese students visit Elms College on cultural exchange



Pictured with the University of Kochi students and their Elms Friendship partners are Associate Vice President and Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences Joyce Hampton, Elms President Dr. Harry E. Dumay, Assistant Dean of Academic Student Success Nancy Davis, Chief Diversity Officer Dr. Jennifer Shoaff, and Dr. Andrew Oberg of the University of Kochi.

Ten students from the University of Kochi visited Elms College in February as part of a cultural exchange program with the college that has been in existence for more than 25 years.

The 10 students, accompanied by administrator Dr. Andrew Oberg, spent 10 days on campus, learning about Elms College. They studied English and attended classes related to their majors. They also learned about American culture.

The campus hosted a Japanese Celebration meal on Feb. 27 in the Mary Dooley College Center Dining Hall.

Elms students also served as "friendship partners" for the students, showing them the campus and accompanying them on trips off campus.

Under the exchange program, students from the two schools visit every other year. Elms students are scheduled to visit the University of Kochi in 2025.

The partnership with the University of Kochi in Kochi, Japan, is one of the longest-standing programs at Elms and one of the most popular student exchange programs. It was established in 1998.



Katherine Anderson '01, M'07,

Katherine Anderson '01, pens murder mystery set at Elms

The seeds for Katherine Anderson's new novel, "Murder at the Alma Mater," a detective mystery set on the Elms College campus, were planted more than 25 years ago, even before Anderson became a student here.

In a recent interview, Anderson said her idea for the book traces back to around 1997 when, during an overnight visit to campus as a prospective student, her campus guides told a ghost story. It had to do with a supposed student, years before, dying in a fall from the Berchmans Hall clock tower, and authorities never determined if the death was an accident, a suicide, or foul play.

Anderson said she knew at the time the story was make-believe, intended to send a shiver down the spines of impressionable teens. Instead of being scared, she found herself being drawn to it.

"It stuck with me," she said.

Fast forward two decades. Anderson, a special-education administrator with the Chicopee Public Schools, an adjunct faculty member at Elms, and the author of multiple books detailing the history of Massachusetts insane asylums, wanted to change things up by trying her hand at detective fiction.

While thinking of ideas for a mystery novel, her mind kept drifting back to that story about the death from the fall from the clock tower. For lack of a better term, the story seemed a good jumping-off point.

The result is "Murder at the Alma Mater," a 2023 novel independently published through Otherwords Press. It is available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Anderson in February had a reading of the book and a Q&A in the Alumnae Library Theater about how it was written. The session was well attended by students, faculty, staff, and some alumni.

Without giving away too much of the story, the novel's central character, Nora, is a best-selling mystery writer struggling with a rapidly approaching publisher deadline and a crippling case of writer's block. During a visit to Elms, her former literature professor suggests she write something about the campus folklore surrounding the tragedy at the Berchmans clock tower.

But in researching that story, Nora uncovers two other student deaths, occurring days apart in the 1950s. She digs a little and finds evidence that each girl was murdered, most likely by the same killer. Soon, she begins receiving threatening notes warning her to stop digging – or else.

From there, as Sherlock Holmes would say, the game is afoot.

Although the book is set in the present, the campus retains a look and feel of around the turn of the century when she was an undergraduate. Sister Kathleen Keating remains president, and the Lyons Center for Natural and Health Sciences is still on the drawing board.

Readers can hear the clanking of radiator pipes in Berchmans, see the quirky architecture in Alumnae Library, and feel the creaking staircases and floorboards of O'Leary Hall.

Anderson, who graduated from Elms with a bachelor's degree in English in 2001, and a master's in Education in 2007, said she consciously wrote about the campus as she remembered it from her undergraduate days.

"I wanted to write something that reflected how it felt to be here when I was here, and have it weave into a mystery," Anderson said. "So that is what I did."

As she wrote in the acknowledgments, "Murder at the Alma Mater" is at its heart a love letter to Elms College.

"I hope I did justice for my love for the Elms and my time there in this book, and that many generations of Elms students enjoy this fictional romp through campus," Anderson wrote.

Four characters in the book are based on actual people. The professor who gives Nora advice about her next project was inspired by longtime English professor Jasmine Hall who had Anderson in her Detective Fiction class 25 years ago. The Alumnae Library research assistant who pulls together college records for Nora's research is based on Michael Smith, the reference and information literacy coordinator who pulled together records on Elms history for her. The administrative assistant in the President's office who pulls files for her was inspired by Sandy Talbot.

And Sister Eleanor, the formidable but chatty nun with a rock-solid memory, is a blending of real-life Sisters Eleanor and Mary Dooley and Sister Patty Hottin.

Hall said it is exciting to have a former student publish a novel about Elms, and is pleased to have inspired a character. She enjoyed reading it, although, she admitted, "when I picked it up I immediately wanted to read about the character who I am."

She said she thought Anderson captured the overall look and feel of the campus quite well. But as word spread about the book and how she inspired a character, Hall found herself being asked the same question over and over.

"The first thing everyone asks me is 'So, are you the murderer?'"

Campus Ministry's 'Compassionate Heart' volunteers offer community service in Jamaica and Texas



Jamaica group: James Shea '27, Megan Heath '24, Grace Wells '24, Amanda Willard '25, Malina Woodbury '26, Sister Maureen Kervick, SSJ, Kelly Hislop '25, Emily Cheevers '24, Eileen Kirk, Director of Campus Ministry, Isamar Perez '26, and Andrea Bertheaud, Assistant Clinical Professor of Nursing, pose together at a restaurant in Mandeville, Jamaica



Texas group: Johnathan Hernandez '27, Brooke Bailey '25, Jack Labbe '26, and Cecilia Sanchez '24 posing with one of the meals they cooked at a shelter for migrants.

Twelve Elms College students, and four staff and faculty volunteered in Jamaica and El Paso, Texas over spring break as part of the annual Compassionate Hearts Service Trips program sponsored by the Office of Campus Ministry.

Service trips create awareness of social justice issues in a real-world setting. Students connect with the people they serve, listen to their stories, and live out the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph by welcoming strangers as their neighbors. They also encourage students to make community service a part of their lives after graduation.

The group traveling to Jamaica volunteered with service agencies in the city of Mandeville and surrounding communities. They visited Mustard Seed Children's Home and Mary Help of Christians Home for the Elderly, and assisted staff in their work at the Holy Spirit Clinic and St. Croix Clinic, and did home visits to AIDS patients and others in need of proper medical care. Volunteers spent their last day in Jamaica visiting YS Falls. They enjoyed spending time throughout the week with Sister Maureen Kervick, SSJ, former Elms College Dean of Students, former Director of Campus Ministry, and 2022 Elms College honorary degree recipient.

One student who wrote "This trip taught me about holding gratitude despite difficult circumstances" summed up the lessons learned. "God's love is so powerful and evident in Jamaica."

A special thank you to Our Lady of Dunsinane Retreat Center for providing housing for our volunteers, to the Catholic Diocese of Mandeville for providing transportation, and to Sister Maureen for her assistance.

The group traveling to El Paso took part in a U.S.-Mexico border immersion experience in partnership with the Encuentro Project. Members of the group met with and heard stories from migrants, learned from presentations given by immigration lawyers and a former border patrol agent, went on a historical walking tour of El Paso, cooked meals in a migrant shelter, and hiked Mount Cristo Rey in New Mexico. They also had the opportunity to spend time with Sister Deirdre Griffin, SSJ, lawyer, and former Elms College Director of International Programs, who is serving as a full-time Maryknoll Lay Missioner in El Paso.

"Visiting El Paso taught me that I have a part to play in the border crisis. God calls me to fight for those who are oppressed and hurting, to walk alongside those suffering, and to treat strangers as neighbors," one student wrote.

A special thank you to Brother Todd Patenaude, Brother Hector Dessavre Davila, Coralis Salvador, and Jacob Grimm for the hospitality and education they provided to our El Paso volunteers.

Restored Blue House renamed Missy Haddad Center for Writers



After a restoration, the Blue House at Elms College is now known as the Missy Haddad Center for Writers.



Winifred "Missy" Haddad, '23

While a student here, Winifred "Missy" Haddad would spend hour after hour writing and editing, and collaborating with other writers inside the Blue House, the home of the college's writing program.

Following her death of cancer in 2020 at age 66, her family has stepped forward to ensure that her name will always be linked to the building on the very edge of the Elms campus.

Following an extensive renovation that included new siding, a handicap-access ramp, benches, and a larger parking area with better lighting, the property at 147 Grape St., now has a new name: The Missy Haddad Center for Writers.

Dan Chelotti, associate professor of English who taught Missy and considered her both a friend and a great talent, said her death is a great loss for the Elms community. Her family's decision to restore the building in her memory, as part of Elms College's ongoing Building Bridges comprehensive campaign, is a fitting tribute.

Missy was a wife and mother and spent her career as a nurse. But she was also a prolific writer, and later in life, she enrolled at Elms to study literature. Elms College awarded her a posthumous Bachelor of Arts degree at the 2023 commencement.

"We lost a member of our family," he said. "Now when I come to work and see her name out front, it's a really goose-bumpy kind of feeling. It's like, 'there she is.'"

For more than a decade, the house across Fairview Avenue from Gaylord Mansion has been home to the writing center, and *Bloom*, the student literary and arts magazine. Hundreds of students across all majors have gone there for writing classes, to hear guest speakers, or to use the space to write, study, and collaborate. Many, like Missy, saw the house as almost a second home.

Sage Giordano, '18, an undergraduate classmate of Missy and now an adjunct English professor at Elms, said Missy's death has been a profound loss.

Chelotti said Missy loved being at Elms, and enjoyed working with students on their writing at the center. She would commonly send him thank-you notes following special events held there.

"When she got sick and couldn't come to classes, I would get notes from her every once in a while that would just say how much she missed it here, and what it did for her writing," Chelotti said.

Dr. Hani Haddad, her husband of 41 years, said Missy always loved to write, but she gave up a literary career to help raise their four sons. She returned to college after age 60 when they were grown.

"The Blue House meant a lot to her. She learned how to do research there. And Dan Chelotti was a real mentor to her," Dr. Haddad said.

The Haddad family also established the Missy Haddad Endowed Scholarship to be awarded to students majoring in English with a writing concentration.

Chelotti said the writing center has always been an ideal space for teaching writing classes as it invites students to sit around a table to discuss each other's work.

Many Elms students, including some from other majors, never knew they enjoyed writing until they came to the writing center, he said.

Labor of love: Sage Giordano completes the late Missy Haddad's unfinished novel

Months after Winifred "Missy" Haddad died in 2020, her family approached her friend and Elms College classmate, Sage Giordano '18, with an unusual request.

They wanted to complete her unfinished novel, and Giordano was more than willing to help. It was a labor of love.

"I was Missy's number 1 fan, and she was my number 1 fan," Giordano said. "She was just an incredibly supportive and wonderful writer."

The two met at Elms as undergraduate students. After Giordano graduated and moved to California for graduate school, they continued to write to each other, always concluding their letters with "from your number 1 fan."

After her death, Dr. Hani Haddad, Missy's husband of 41 years, reached out to Giordano, knowing the two had been so close while at Elms.

Giordano, now an adjunct professor in the Elms English Department, spent two years on the book and this fall presented the completed copy to Dr. Haddad and the couple's four sons.

The book, titled "The Pigeon Girl," has been sent to publishers and literary agents, and the wait is on to see if there is any interest in publishing it, Giordano said.

Completing her novel and being able to present it to Dr. Haddad and their sons was very special, said Giordano, who uses nonbinary pronouns.

"All of her sons had never read it before," they said. "She was always in her office just working away at it…Now they get to see what their mom worked on for so many years."

Dr. Haddad said it was very important to him to have the book completed because she spent years researching, writing, and rewriting it. He said he is excited their children will now have a chance to read it in its finished form.

He said Missy loved literature, poetry, and the arts but once they started having a family, she put her interests aside to focus on the children. After they were grown, she enrolled in Elms and just threw herself into her studies as if to make up for lost time. She did not slow down until she became too sick with cancer in her final semester before graduation.

Giordano said the book is a historical novel, set in Brooklyn just before World War I. The story involves two main characters, the daughter of a poor Irish Catholic family and the son of an English Protestant family. They meet in Prospect Park and develop a relationship that opens their eyes to a larger world beyond their families.

"It's a beautiful love story, a beautiful historical story."



English faculty Sage Giordano, left, and Dan Chelotti share a laugh in the upstairs library of the Missy Haddad Center for Writers at Elms College. Each knew Missy Haddad well and consider her death to be the loss of a great talent.



7th annual Black Experience Summit Celebrates

The 7th annual Black Experience Summit at Elms College focused on the role that Black women have played in America to promote, preserve, defend, and expand democracy.

The main speakers, Rutgers University professor Brittney Cooper and Wellesley College professor Kellie Carter Jackson, took part in an hour-long discussion with Elms Chief Diversity Officer Jennifer Shoaff about the unique challenges Black women faced and continue to face in America as targets of racial and gender discrimination.

The summit, held each February to coincide with Black History Month, was co-sponsored by Elms College and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, and organized by the Elms Office of Diversity and Inclusion. More than 200 people attended the Feb. 23 summit in Veritas Auditorium.

This year's theme was "Forging Democracy: Black Womanhood and the Long March for Civil Rights."

Professors Cooper and Jackson also took part in a panel discussion along with Springfield School Committee member and Elms alumna LaTonia Monroe Naylor, and Springfield College professor of elementary and multicultural education Stephanie Logan. The panel was moderated by Dr. Tyra Good, director of the Center for Equity in Urban Education at Elms College.

Cooper and Jackson were each participants in the 2023 Netflix documentary "Stamped from the Beginning," based on Ibram X. Kendi's bestseller that explores the origins and history of racist beliefs in America. As part of the summit, portions of the documentary were shown.

The summit's theme was the critical role Black women have played in defining, defending, and preserving democratic ideals and practices in the United States, and how their work has inspired democratic movements in other countries. Their multigenerational knowledge and wisdom provide each of us, especially our young voters, with an indispensable blueprint for civic engagement in the long march toward liberation. This is especially true in an election year that has many scholars arguing that the future of democracy is on the ballot.

Elms President Dr. Harry E. Dumay said the purpose of the annual summit is to have a forum "for scholarly dialogue on the experience of African-Americans and Africans from the diaspora as a rich contribution to American History and American Culture."



Elms College Board of Trustee members Elizabeth G. Dineen '77 and Cheryl Stanley watch excepts from the documentary "Stamped from the Beginning," which explores the origin and history of racist beliefs in the United States.



Black Women as Defenders of Democracy

Black women, in particular, have often played a crucial role in U.S. history and the fight for civil rights for generations, he said.

Dr. Cooper is professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Africana Studies at Rutgers University, and the founding director of the Race and Gender Equity (RAGE) Lab. She is also the author of the award-winning book "Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women."

Dr. Jackson is the Michael and Denise '68 Associate Professor in the Department of Africana Studies and the chair of Africana Studies at Wellesley College. She is the author of the award-winning book "Force & Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence," which won the James Broussard Best First Book Prize.

Also featured was Lyrical Faith, a spoken word poet from the Bronx who is seeking her doctorate in Social Justice Education from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The focus of her work is the intersection of arts and activism, and she has been featured on National Public Radio, Huffington Post Black Voices, and other media.

Patience Naylor, a Springfield high school student, delivered a rousing performance of the song "Stand Up" from "Harriet," the 2019 movie biography of Harriet Tubman, famed conductor of the Underground Railroad.



Rutgers Professor Brittney Cooper, Elms President Harry E. Dumay, Sister Elizabeth Sullivan, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, and Wellesley College Professor Kellie Carter Jackson pose before the Black Experience Summit. Cooper and Carter were main speakers.



Brittney Cooper makes a point as Kellie Carter Jackson looks on during a discussion as part of the Black Experience Summit.



COMMENCEMENT 2024

Elms College Graduates 93rd Class



Marjorie Hass



Johnnella E. Butler



Reverend John J. Unni

The College of Our Lady of the Elms celebrated its 93rd commencement exercises on May 18 at the MassMutual Center in Springfield, Mass. The college awarded some 400 undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificates.

Marjorie Hass, president of the Council of Independent Colleges, was chosen this year as the main speaker for the Class of 2024.

Honorary degrees were awarded to Hass, and to Johnnella E. Butler, former provost and vice president of Academic Affairs at Spelman College, and Reverend John J. Unni, the chief chaplain for the Boston Fire Department.

Hass has, since 2021, been president of the Washington, D.C.-based Council of Independent Colleges, an organization representing more than 700 colleges across the United States, including Elms College. Before that, she was president of Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee, from 2017 to 2021, and president of Austin College in Sherman, Texas, from 2009-2017.

She is considered a leader and a trailblazer in higher education and has a reputation for being a fierce advocate for liberal arts education and for small, independent colleges.

Butler ‘68, has had a distinguished career as a teacher, author, and higher education administrator since graduating from Elms with a bachelor of arts degree in English Literature.

She is on the faculty of the Executive Leadership Academy and affiliate faculty with the Center for the Studies of Higher Education at the University of California at Berkeley.

Butler is professor emerita of comparative women’s studies at Spelman University since 2020. She also served as provost and vice president of academic affairs at Spelman from 2005-2014.



She earned her master's degree in English from Johns Hopkins University in 1969 and her doctorate in Afro-American Literature and Multicultural Studies from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1979.

Butler has been a tenured faculty member at Smith College and the University of Washington before Spelman. With her appointment to the Smith faculty in 1981, she became the first Black woman in the history of the college to be granted tenure.

Father Unni for the past 20 years has been pastor at St. Cecilia Parish in Boston. He was ordained as a priest in Boston in 1992. In his time at St. Cecilia's, he has focused his ministry on education, health, and spiritual growth, especially for the poor and marginalized.

In 2017, he was appointed an assistant chaplain for the Boston Fire Department. In 2022, Mayor Michelle Wu named him chief chaplain. As a fire department chaplain, he has provided spiritual and emotional support to firefighters and their families, especially after experiencing grief or heightened stress.

Elms President Dr. Harry E. Dumay and Board of Trustees Chairman Paul Stelzer also delivered remarks.

For more information and photographs from the ceremony, please visit the Elms College page on Flickr.com or by scanning this QR code with your phone.

Elms officials, scholarship recipients offer thanks to donors at annual brunch

More than 200 people attended the annual Donor Scholar Brunch on April 21 in the Dooley Campus Center to celebrate the benefactors of endowed scholarships at Elms College and to shine a spotlight on the outstanding students selected to receive scholarship assistance.

Elms President Dr. Harry E. Dumay praised the donors for their generosity over the years, and for their continued belief in Elms College, its mission, and new generations of students.

"You continue to bring dreams to life," he said.

Need-based scholarships help those students facing near-insurmountable college costs, and merit-based scholarships reward top students who have demonstrated hard work, dedication, and ingenuity," he said.

"What you have given to our students cannot be quantified, because each gift goes far beyond its monetary value," President Dumay said.



Student Cecilia Maria Sanchez addresses the crowd.

Cecilia Maria Sanchez, an early childhood education major who aspires to be a first-grade teacher at an urban school in Greater Springfield, spoke of how her scholarship award was critical to her remaining in school.

The youngest of three children raised by a single mother, Sanchez, 21, of Holyoke, said her mother always wanted her to attend college but could offer little help with tuition. Sanchez works full-time as a restaurant manager while a student, but still needs scholarship support to cover tuition. She received awards from the Catherine M. Long '66 Scholarship award, the Elms Presidential Scholarship, the CEUE Urban Scholarship, and the Sheila Tully Memorial Award.

"I believe that none of this would have been possible for myself but also for the other students in this room without the care and generosity of the scholarship donors," she said. "We want to thank you and we will keep this act of generosity in our hearts forever."

Charlene Zagrodnik '71 spoke briefly about why she founded the Gertrude and Charles Zagrodnik Endowed Scholarship, in memory of her parents. She said her parents sacrificed so much to send her to college, and she wanted to repay their faith in her by creating a scholarship to help future students.

"What better way could I have my parents live on than to memorialize them with a scholarship to a deserving recipient who will also appreciate the special place that Elms is and receive a premium education."



Lisa M. Wills '88



B. John Dill



Ashley Vanasse '11

Area business leader, 2 prominent alumni appointed to Elms College Board of Trustees.

Lisa M. Wills '88, and **B. John (Jack) Dill** were named to four-year terms in February. They join **Ashley Vanasse '11**, president of the Elms College Alumni Association Board (AAB), who was appointed to a two-year AAB term in July of last year.

Dill is the president and CEO of Colebrook Realty Services, Inc., one of the leading commercial real estate firms in Western Massachusetts and Northern Connecticut. He graduated with honors from Williams College in 1974 with a bachelor's degree in history and Greek, and from the Harvard Business School in 1986 with a master's degree in Program for Management Development (PMD).

He has served on numerous boards in the Western Massachusetts region, including Fallon Community Health Plan, Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation, Baystate Health Systems, Greater Springfield YMCA, the Community Music School of Springfield, and the Springfield Library and Museums Association.

He is a 2015 recipient of the Outstanding Volunteer in Philanthropy Award from the Western Massachusetts chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, a 2016 winner of the William Pynchon Award, and a 2017 recipient of the Service Above Self Award from the Springfield Rotary Club and Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

Wills is a partner at Whittlesey, a Hartford-based independent accounting firm.

She graduated from Elms College with a bachelor's degree in accounting and business management in 1988.

In her 30-year career in public accounting at national and regional firms, she specialized in working with nonprofits and educational institutions. She has been with Whittlesey since 2015 and was named a partner in 2017.

In 2023, the Hartford Business Journal named her one of the top 25 women in business in Connecticut. The year before, she was named by the Connecticut Society of Certified Public Accountants as a winner of the Women Distinguished Service Award.

She has published multiple articles on topics related to nonprofit financial reporting.

Vanasse graduated from Elms College with a bachelor's degree in history. She earned her master's degree in psychology - school counseling from Westfield State University in 2014.

She has been on the Elms Alumni Association Board since 2011, serving in numerous positions including vice president and as a member of the Marketing Committee. She became president in 2023.

She previously worked at Elms College in the Office of Admissions for five years, beginning in 2014 as an admissions counselor. In 2017, she was promoted to the position of Assistant Director of Admissions.

She is now the office manager for Barry J. Farrell Funeral Home in Holyoke.

Elms sees big rise in US News & World Report 2024 college rankings

The College of Our Lady of the Elms greatly improved its ranking on two listings in the U.S. News & World Report (USN) 2024 Best Colleges Rankings and was listed as a Best Value School in the North Region for the first time.

The college jumped 33 places to number 60 on the list of Best Regional Universities (North) and rose 22 slots to number 12 in the Top Performers on Social Mobility – Regional Universities (North) category. This list ranks schools for enrolling and graduating large proportions of students who have received federal Pell Grants.

New this year, Elms College was ranked number 33 on the Best Value Schools – Regional Universities (North) list. This category examines a school's academic quality and the cost of its programs. The higher the quality of programs and the lower the cost, the better the value a school provides.

"It gives all of us at Elms College immense pride and satisfaction that the Elms value is recognized in rankings such as the U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges Rankings. We are pleased that Elms improved its ranking on two lists this year and entered the list of Best Value Schools (North)," said Elms College President Harry E. Dumay, Ph.D., MBA.

The full rankings are viewable at ***www.usnews.com/colleges***.



Elms selected for nationwide program focused on experiential learning

Elms College is one of 25 colleges nationwide selected by the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) to participate in its Work-Based Learning (WBL) Consortium, a new program designed to combine academics with experiential learning to prepare students for the workplace.

The three-year grant announced in September, goes into effect this Spring and has a value of around $65,000. A team of seven faculty and staff at Elms will work to update curricula and integrate experiential learning into course materials.

The consortium seeks ways to ease student barriers to internships and employment, particularly for students from underrepresented groups.

It is intended to provide a national platform for participating colleges to ease barriers for students seeking internships and job preparation.

"Elms is honored to be a part of CIC's WBL Consortium which will provide our students an enhanced learning experience since the internships will be integrated within their course curricula," said Jennifer L. Granger Sullivan, Ed.D., director of Experiential Learning at Elms.



Master of Nursing program ranked 4th best in U.S. by Forbes Advisor

The Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program at Elms College has been ranked the fourth best MSN program in the United States by Forbes Advisor (FA). The MSN program at Elms was the only one located in Massachusetts.

Forbes Advisor is part of the Forbes organization and is dedicated to helping consumers make the best financial choices. A portion of their editorial content includes the ranking of higher education institutions and programs.

"The Elms School of Nursing's MSN program being ranked #4 in the country by Forbes Advisor speaks to the fabulous teamwork, teaching expertise, and students that are found in our MSN program," said Julie Beck, D.Ed., RN, CNE, dean of Elms College's School of Nursing. "Our current director, Dr. Emily Cabrera, and her faculty have done a marvelous job at recruiting, teaching current nursing practice, and supporting our students who are eager to learn."

The MSN program at Elms is fully online and allows students to pursue one of four tracks: Nursing & Health Services Management, Nursing Education, and an MSN/MBA dual degree option. The fourth track, School Nursing, is the only MSN School Nursing Program in the United States.

"Elms College has an exceptional history of educating nurses and supporting the healthcare community. Our MSN students are experienced professional nurses who are looking to advance their careers while maintaining work-school-life balance." said Emily Cabrera, Ed.D., MSN, RN, Elms College MSN Program Director.

For the online MSN rankings, FA rated data from several sources in the following categories: affordability, credibility, student outcomes, student experience, and the application process.



Andrea Hickson-Martin hired as chair of Education Division at Elms

Dr. Andrea Hickson-Martin '89, M'08, was selected in March to be the new chair of the Education Division at Elms College, the college announced.

Hickson-Martin was previously at Bay Path University where she was Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director for Early Childhood and Elementary Education Licensure.

She also has 15 years of experience in urban public education as a teacher and administrator in Holyoke, Springfield and Chicopee, and nine years of faculty leadership at Bay Path. She is also ex-officio chair of the Board of Directors for Square One.

She comes to Elms with a reputation as a strong advocate for education. She earned her doctorate of Education focused in Educational Leadership and Supervision, and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study from American International College.

She graduated from Elms College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education in 1989 and earned her master's degree in Education in 2008.

While at Elms, she was a three-sport athlete and was inducted into the Elms College Athletic Hall of Fame in 2009.



Michael McGravey publishes book on postmodern theology

Dr. Michael McGravey, the director of the Institute for Theology and Pastoral Studies and an associate professor of religion, recently published a book titled "Navigating Postmodern Theology: Insights from Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo's Philosophy."

He called the book, which dates back more than 10 years when he was in graduate school, a labor of love.

He described it as an exploration of continental philosophy in conversation with ecclesiology and compares the works of two noted modern-day philosophers, Jean-Luc Marion of France and Gianni Vottamo of Italy.

"Both of them suggest a new way of talking about theology is good. It challenges the sort of metaphysical traditions that the church has relied on since the era of St. Thomas Aquinas," he said.



Dr. Tyra Good publishes book, speaks at United Nations conference on women and girls

Dr. Tyra Good, executive director of the Cynthia A. Lyons Center for Equity in Urban Education and associate professor of education, recently published a book titled, "Black Women Navigating Historically White Higher Education Institutions and the Journey Toward Liberation."

The book, co-edited with Dr. Stepanie Logan and published by IGI Global, provides a collection of ethnographies, case studies, narratives, counter-stories, and quantitative descriptions of Black women's intersectional experience learning, teaching, serving, and leading in higher education.

She also presented at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW68) Parallel Conference. The session was titled, "Transforming Our World by Creating Equitable Opportunities for Women and Girls." Dr. Good highlighted her educational work both locally and in Kenya, and discussed strategies to empower and uplift women and girls around the world.



President Dumay appointed to CIC Executive Committee

Elms President Dr. Harry E. Dumay in January was appointed to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors for the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC).

Dr. Dumay will serve as Vice President for Programs and Member Services. He has been a member of the CIC's Board of Directors since 2022.

The College of Independent Colleges is a leading national organization that for nearly 70 years has served as an association of nonprofit colleges and universities, state-based councils and higher education affiliates to promote independent higher education and their contribution to higher education.





Professors Laura McNeil, Damien Murray interviewed by Holyoke Media on the facts and myths of St. Patrick

Elms College history professors **Laura McNeil** and **Damien Murray** appeared as guests on the local community access program, "Holyoke Media Presents" to discuss the truths and myths behind the historical figure known as St. Patrick, and what would become his impact on Irish culture, both in Ireland and around the world.

In addition to teaching, McNeil is the director of the Honors Program and Murray is director of Faculty Development.

Each spoke of the life of Patrick and the symbolic relationship with the costumes, traditions and celebrations of St. Patrick's Day, both in Ireland and in the United States. They also gave historical overview of St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the United States, dating back to the very first one in a Spanish outpost in what is now St. Augustine, Florida, in 1601.

Holyoke, of course, is home to one of the largest St. Patrick celebrations in the northeast each year, with a parade, road race, and other festivities that attract several hundreds of thousands of spectators each year.

Their interview is available over the Holyoke Media Presents channel on YouTube.



Blazer Blitz shatters records in 2024

Blazer Blitz, Elms College's annual day of giving, was a smashing success in 2024. The drive, held on March 20, broke records for the amount raised and for the number of donors participating, according to Vice President of Instititional Advancement Bernadette Nowakowski.

The campaign raised $183,859.30 from 487 donors.

"This could not have happened without you, our amazing alumni, trustees, friends, families, students, faculty, and staff," said Nowakowski. "We are inspired by the outpouring of support on this special day of giving and we are overwhelmed by your generosity. Thank you for being part of the best Blazer Blitz day yet!"

She cited several alumni contributors who gave matching gifts and said Elms College is filled with immense gratitude and extends its sincere thanks. Those include: Patty Chmiel '73, Kathleen Donnellan '63, Bonnie Chmiel Hoyt '73, Ellen C. Hynes '03, L. Kate Mansfield '77, Joseph and Jan Peters, Ann '69 and David Southworth, Karen '60 and Robert Vollinger.

Nowakowski also thanked Assistant Vice President of Advancement Lynn Korza and the Institutional Advancement staff for their work in the planning and execution of Blazer Blitz.



‘We will turn some heads’

— Robert “Cizz” Cross

The Men's Lacrosse Team, starting this year from scratch, won its debut game in March vs. SUNY Cobleskill.
Head Coach Robert "Cizz" Cross says the team will is going to surprise people.

Elms Launches Men’s Lacrosse Program

Elms College launched its men’s lacrosse program this March, and the new head coach, Robert “Cizz” Cross said he feels it will not be long before the team establishes itself in the Great Northeast Athletic Conference.

“I will say this: We are going to turn some heads,” he said.

The team is stacked with a lot of young talent and is bound to surprise a lot of teams in the next few years as the program gets established, he said.

Fourteen of the 23-man roster are first-year students, and the most veteran member of the team is a junior transfer student. To have a team that young means there will be a good foundation of talent for the next two to three years, he said.

“We have some good players, and we have several guys who are studs,” he said.

There are players on the squad who, if they wanted, could easily be playing for a Division 1 team instead of a D-3 program like Elms, he said.

The pre-season rankings had Elms ranked number 6 in a 7-team conference, which Cross said was quite a compliment considering the team hadn’t played a single game at the time the rankings were compiled.

In their first game on March 2, before a home crowd, the Blazers took it to the SUNY Cobleskill, scoring a 12-4 win.















Lacrosse is the fastest growing college sport and has been for some time. A recent NCAA study showed the number of men's teams created between 2003 and 2018 increased by 60%, while women's teams increased by 100% over the same period.

Elms has had a women's lacrosse program for years.

The 2024 men's team is the result of more than 18 months of planning that started from the drawing board. Elms invested in the cost of the program, including a new locker room facility in the 2nd floor of the Maguire Center.

When Cross came on board and started recruiting players, he had to show an artist's rendering of the locker room because it had not been built yet.

"It's been a challenge but it's been a good challenge, building this thing up from scratch," he said.

He said one of his goals from the start was to recruit good people and good athletes.

"My three rules are: be a good person, work hard, and be coachable," he said. "These guys have exceeded my expectations. They are great people."

Before Elms, Cross had done a little bit of everything in the game except for serving as a collegiate head coach.

He was a two-year starter for his college team at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and briefly played professionally. He won a professional championship as an assistant coach of the Philadelphia Waterdogs.

He has been an assistant coach at his alma mater, as well as at Mercyhurst University, Harvard, Rutgers, the University of Delaware, and Siena College. All but Mercyhurst are D-1 schools.

He stepped away from coaching four years ago with the birth of his first daughter because the daily commute between his home in Hadley and the Siena campus just outside Albany was too much.

After Siena, he served as head lacrosse coach at the high school level for Northfield Mount Hermon School.

But four years away from the college game seemed like an eternity, he said, and when he saw the ad for the Elms head coaching job, it seemed to be the answer to a prayer. He could be a head coach, have a short commute, and not have to relocate the family.

"I'm living out a dream right now," he said.





‘We’re teaching them something that will give them the tools for the rest of their lives’
— Denisha Parks

Denisha Parks '15 - Elms GOAT for WBB returned to Elms as coach.

Elms Hoops Star Denisha Parks Returns to Alma Mater to Lead Women’s Team

In her time as an Elms College student and star basketball player and now as a first-year coach of the women’s basketball team, Denisha Parks ‘15, has developed her own twist on the college’s marketing slogan.

“Elms College’s slogan is ‘Where passion meets purpose.’ I believe that your passion is your purpose,” she said in a recent interview. Wherever your passion lies, Parks recommends pursuing it with all the drive, energy, and creativity you can muster, and the reward will be joy and fulfillment.

“Your passion is your purpose. I stand on that,” she said.

Parks’ passion always involved the game of basketball, first as a player and now as a coach. In the transition from playing to coaching, she found her passion shifted, too. Now her focus is on being the best teacher and mentor she can be for the young women on the Elms squad.

“I had a great group of student-athletes,” she said. “You couldn't ask for anything more in your first year of coaching.”

Parks, a native of Fall River, is arguably the best player the women’s program ever produced. When she graduated in 2015, she held 11 separate school records, and tallied more than 2,000 points and more than 1,000 rebounds. She was named New England Collegiate Conference (NECC) All-Conference First-Team Player four times, and Player of the Year twice. Parks was on the 2012 team that went to the NCAA Tournament. In 2021, she was inducted into the Elms College Athletic Hall of Fame.

After earning her bachelor’s degree in sports management from Elms, she completed her master’s in sports leadership at Lasell University in 2018.

After her playing career, she became an assistant coach, first at Clark University and then Worcester State University. When the Elms head coaching job opened up, she leapt at the chance to come back to her alma mater.

“Elms is a good people place – a great people place!” she said.

In her first season, Parks’ squad finished with a 10-15 record, or one more win than in 2022-23.

“It’s progression,” she said. “The thing throughout the whole year was putting emphasis on trying to get better – especially when we hit that wall.”

That wall came in the form of a 1-8 record in the final two months, including seven straight losses. The streak ended on the second-to-last game of the year with an 8-point win over Anna Maria College. Throughout the losing streak, the team focus was always on looking forward and striving to be better, Parks said.

“Winning makes your culture but it can't be your only drive. You learn more from losing than you do from winning. It prepares you for life and makes you more resilient,” she said.

After the win over Anna Maria, Parks gathered the team and told them to be proud. When losses accumulate and seasons drain away, it can be really easy to just give up. But they all continued to fight and play hard.

“I told them ‘You took a huge step forward – not just in basketball but in life,” she said.

“This is why we do this,” she said. “We care about them as people and we hope we’re teaching them something that will give them the tools for the rest of their lives.”



Women’s Basketball Coach Denisha Parks huddles with players on the sidelines during a game this year. (photo courtesy of Elms College Athletics)



Making Waves with DeAngela Fobbs

DeAngela Fobbs sets two school records for Elms Women's Swim Team

DeAngela Fobbs, a member of the Elms Women's Swimming and Diving Team had a record-breaking performance during a two-day swim meet December 1-2 at Regis College.

Over the course of the meet, Fobbs finished first place three times, and set Elms College records in the 50-meter butterfly and 100-meter butterfly. For good measure, the 50-meter time was also the fastest time in the history of the Regis pool.

Fobbs of Bowie, Maryland, a graduate student seeking her master's in Biomedical Sciences, said the record-breaking performance was surprising because before each race she felt awful.

"I just felt like I couldn't keep any food down," she said. "And I had to take an antacid before both events so my stomach would settle."

Rather than backing out, she decided to compete, thinking she would just go as hard as she could for as long as she could and then see how it turned out.

She competed in three races on the first day, won two of them and set three best-ever times.

When she finished the first, the 100-meter butterfly, she looked at her time and thought, "Ok, I didn't do too bad." That was when she was told her time, 1:00:06, had bested the previous Elms record by more than 4 ½ seconds.

"I beat the record and I didn't know. I was kind of shocked," she said.

In the next race, the 50-meter butterfly, she recorded a time of 26:86, besting another Elms record as well as the existing mark at the Regis pool.

"I was like, 'Ok, this is nice. This is different.'"

Fobbs earned her bachelor's degree in Sports Medicine at Howard University and came to Elms two years ago for a post-baccalaureate degree, and continued in the master's program for biomedical sciences. She is on pace to complete her degree in December. She is pursuing a career in orthopedic medicine.

The records are a nice way to cap her collegiate swimming career. She had been a part of the swimming team at Howard during her undergraduate days. The 2023-24 season was her last year of eligibility under NCAA rules.

She said she is happy to have left her mark at Elms. The best part of holding a school record is knowing that her mark is a target until someone comes along to swim even faster.

"Everybody has to chase my times to get better. That's what any of us want when we set these records," she said. "The point is to have the program grow and have more people come to swim and be able to have their names up there (on the leaderboard)."

Fobbs said that she remembers when she joined the Elms team, she researched school records to see which times she had a chance to eclipse. Setting two school records means all the hours of practice and training, and the amount of dedication and determination were worth it.

She hopes her marks will motivate members of the team to try to set records of their own.

"That is all I wanted to do, to add to the drive of the team."



IN MEMORIAM

Alumni
Nadine Henderson ’49
Irene Mickelson Gill ’51
Ann McElroy Quinlan ’52
Margaret Bouyea Robillard ’52
Patricia Byrnes Alger ’53
Mary Ellen Shea Cadieux ’54
Lillian Finn Stapleton ’54
Teresa Harris ’56
Sr. Ann Gibeault, SSJ ’58
Patricia Ryan Chandler ’59
Eileen Moriarty Corrigan ’59
Florence Wright ’59
Mary Ellen McCarthy Massmann ’60
Sr. Margaret McNaughton, SSJ ’60
Sr. Claire Belforti, SSJ ’61
Susan M. Bell ’61
Sr. Mary Brennan, SSJ ’62
Richard Perry ’62
Patricia Harty Jolicoeur ’64
Barbara Heubach Snyder ’65
Janet Perlowski Stanley ’65
Cecilia Boubon Zajk ’65
Maureen Murphy McDonnell ’66
Cynthia O’Sullivan ’68
Joan Matyszczyk Denucci ’69
Ann Nicoloro Szostak ’69
Barbara Varrone Tracz ’71
Alice Bellamy ’74
Diane Trybulski Brouillard ’74
Ann Wilson Wilson-Rivest ’74
Ann Irvine ’78
Alice Lanier Lamothe-Roy ’81
Esther Noga Partyka ’87
Lauren Scibelli Mullin ’88
I. Jane Conner St. Sauveur ’90
Cynthia May Coggswell ’92
Helen Plante McDonald ’93
Denise Riedel Lynch ’96
Bozena Czeremcha ’97
Sr. Tuyet Tran, OP ’97
Kathleen Lajeunesse Welsh ’98
Lauren Fenton Scibelli ’15
M. Celine Harrity
Brendan Sullivan

Husband of
Kathleen Barry Voigt ’58
Judith McCarthy ’60
Anita Perry ’69
Pamela Chute Reponen ’71
Rachael Chasse Godaire ’88

Father of
Denise Perry Ninneman ’89
Karen Gadbois Febnstermacher ’90
Jose Ferreira ’13

Mother of
Maria Lococo '72
Kathleen O’Malley Adamczyk ’76
Sandra Haynes Ginalski ’76
Kerry Allen ’78
Mary Beth Alaimo Kennedy ’92

Brother of
Margaret Wallace ’58
Margaret O’Neil-Favrot ’69
Sr. Kathleen Wallace, SSJ ’69
Dr. Andrew Coston (Staff)
Michael Sobon (Former Trustee)
Mary Jean Topor Thornton (Former Staff)

Sister of
Elizabeth Varrone Barrachina ’69
Donna Harty-Grimaldi ’71
Carol Nowak ’69

Grandmother of
William Dziura ’11 (Former Staff)
Kimberly Forni (Staff)

Grandfather of
Bevin Peters (Staff)

Mother-in-law of
Joyce Hampton (Staff)
Sean Milbier (Staff)

Brother-in-law of
Lorraine McMahon Dube ’57

Stepfather of
Laurie Fontaine (Staff)

Former Faculty
Adelina Gomez
Patricia Hurzeler
Dr. Robert King
Thomas Shea
Ronald Woodland

Former Staff
Dr. Antoinette (Bonnie) Candia-Bailey
Dr. John Freed
Lorraine Greenwood

Friend of the College
Fred Brozek
Frances M. Fallon
Jose A. Ferreira
Sr. Janet Finley, OSF
Stephen Joseph
Victor Joseph
Sr. Estelle Santarpia
Paul J. Sears
Paul Thomas, D.M.D.

This list includes updates reported by family members, newspapers and other sources from October 10, 2023 through April 2, 2024.



Sr. Mary T. Quinn, SSJ ‘71 Endowed Scholarship

In remembrance of their beloved sister, Sr. Mary T. Quinn, SSJ ‘71, who passed away in 2021, the Quinn family has established an endowed scholarship at the College of Our Lady of the Elms in Chicopee, MA.

The Sr. Mary T. Quinn, SSJ ‘71 Endowed Scholarship will be awarded to undergraduate students in the social work program. The scholarship will give support to students who will make a difference in their communities as Sr. Mary did in hers for many years.

Her steadfast leadership as a past President of the Sisters of St. Joseph, a past Vice President of the Congregation, a past Chair of the Board of Directors of the Mont Marie Health Center and a past President of the Honorary Deputy Sherriff’s Association has showed her innate ability to lead others with dignity and respect. Sr. Mary completed two six-year terms on the Elms College Board of Trustees and was a highly regarded Trustee Emerita and consistent supporter of the Elms.

In an effort to memorialize and celebrate Sr. Mary’s lifetime of work and compassion, her family is inviting others to join this special endeavor by making a gift to the Sr. Mary T. Quinn, SSJ ‘71 Endowed Scholarship. In recognition of their sister, the family is extending a challenge to match additional gifts (up to $50K) made to the scholarship through June 30, 2024.

This challenge makes the impact of your support even greater as this scholarship will both keep the memory of Sr. Mary alive and provide financial assistance to worthy students who will follow and benefit from her legacy.

To make a gift online, visit:
https://bit.ly/SrMaryQuinn
or scan the QR Code

Please make checks payable to *Elms College* and mail to:
Institutional Advancement
Elms College, 291 Springfield Street, Chicopee, MA 01013

For more information, please call 413-265-2214



The audience in Veritas Auditorium for the start of "Dear Neighbor."

Elms hosts premiere of 'Dear Neighbor,' Sister Jane Morrissey's play on pivotal women in SSJ history



Sister Jane Morrissey, front row, second from left, and the cast of "Dear Neighbor" backstage before the premiere in Veritas.



Malina Woodbury '26, performs as Sister Jeanne Burdier.

Elms College in March hosted the premier of Sister Jane F. Morrissey's play "Dear Neighbor" in Veritas Auditorium before a crowd of 200 people.

The play, told in 5 acts, details the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph from its founding in Le Puy, France, in 1650 through the creation of the Springfield Sisters of St. Joseph in the 1880s to the modern day. Sister Jane wrote the play to commemorate the upcoming 375th anniversary of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Each act features one of the pivotal sisters speaking of their life and times during significant periods of SSJ history. The five sisters are Sister Jeanne Burdier, one of the six founding sisters, Mother St. John Fontbonne who organized the congregation after the French Revolution, Mother Mary Cecilia Bowen, founder of the Springfield Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Mary Dooley, president of the Springfield congregation and one-time president of Elms College, and Sister Patricia McDonnell, current vice president of the Springfield congregation.

The cast featured students Malina Woodbury, '26, Isamar Perez, '26, Olivia Le Blanc, '26, Professor Jasmine Hall, and Austin Porter as the narrator. Sister Jane also performed the role of Sister Mary Dooley.

Elizabeth Gourde, '23, served as director.

Elms President Dr. Harry E. Dumay was in attendance and delivered brief remarks before the show that celebrated Sister Jane and the work put in by the cast and crew.

Catholic Communications recorded the performance, and copies will be preserved in the Sisters of St. Joseph archives and given to other religious communities bearing the name St. Joseph.

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ALUMNI SUMMER EVENTS

RED SOX GAME

Sunday, July 14, 2024
at Fenway Park, Boston

Bus transportation available
from and to Elms College

sweet SUMMER SOCIAL

Wednesday, August 28
4 p.m -7 p.m.
at Elms College

CAPE COD LUNCHEON

with President Harry E. Dumay, Ph.D., MBA
Wednesday, July 31, 2024 • Noon - 3 P.M.
The Popponesset Inn Mashpee, MA

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