# ELMS COLLEGE

MAGAZINE

SPRING 2026



## Learning by doing:

**Experiential Learning participation nears 100%**



**"Life shines brightly not because we are rich, beautiful, or powerful. Instead, it shines when we discover within ourselves the truth that we are called by God, have a vocation, have a mission, that our lives serve something greater than ourselves."**

**— Pope Leo XIV, *Mass for the Jubilee of Education, Nov. 1, 2025***

Dear Friends,

Commencement is the most rewarding time of the year, as we see the manifestation of our fundamental purpose: helping students achieve their dreams and aspirations. At Elms College, an added objective is inviting Elms students to live a life of purpose and meaning, focused not solely on themselves but on the Dear Neighbor. A measure of our success is in the Elms students graduating as well-rounded, principled, and ethical critical thinkers who are prepared for their profession and determined to effect positive changes in their communities.

We are proud of the more than 430 graduates at our 2026 Commencement on May 16. I stressed in my Commencement address that we are confident that they are prepared to use their Elms College education to lead a fearless and purposeful life. Our Commencement put an exclamation point on a very active and rich spring semester. Amid challenging times in higher education, we are grateful for the continued vibrancy of teaching, learning, and co-curricular activities at Elms College. You will read about some of these in this issue of Elms Magazine.

Our very successful Experiential Learning Program inspires our cover story, **"Trying on the Career Slipper to see if it Fits."** In 10 years, participation in experiential learning has risen to 98% among graduating seniors. We believe that experiences outside of the classroom, through internships, study abroad, or community service, help graduates when seeking employment or applying for graduate school. And the program's success is largely due to the generosity of Regina Hitchery '71, who founded the Dolores Donlin Noonan '39 Experiential Learning Program in memory of her mother. Regina, a devoted Elms College alumna who is completing 3 full terms on our Board of Trustees, reflects on her lifelong relationship with the college in **"Always a Part of my Life."**

**"Blazer Basket Opens to Address Food Insecurity"** examines a new campus food pantry created to help those in our community who face uncertainty about their next meal. According to one federal study, as many as a quarter of undergraduate students experience food insecurity, and that is the rationale for this project. The food is donated and is available to anyone in need. Blazer Basket is another example of Elms College caring for the Dear Neighbor.

Our faculty continue to excel in the classroom and through contributions to their discipline. Dr. Winifred Martin, assistant professor of Social Work, has authored a new book that examines two key and often conflicting aspects of her life: her religious faith and her professional practice as a therapist. In **"'Professor Winifred Martin's new book explores intersection of faith & mental health care,'** she talks of what she hopes people will take away from her book.

And finally, Dr. Michael McGravey, Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Institute for Theology & Pastoral Studies, explores the Catholic Church's relatively recent embrace of the American idea of religious liberty in the public square, in an essay titled **"Revisiting John Courtney Murray and the idea of Freedom of Religion."** The topic is especially apt in today's politically charged climate, where the White House and the Vatican have diverging views on the role of the Church in world affairs.

It has been a wonderful year at the college: new programs have brought year-over-year enrollment increases, and lecture series have enriched our academic life and have brought visitors to campus. In an increasingly difficult higher-education climate, especially among smaller Northeast institutions, Elms College remains dedicated to our founding mission as we near our 100th anniversary. With your support, we remain steadfast in our commitment to graduating new classes of Elms students. Because the world needs more Elms College graduates.

I hope that you have a blessed summer, filled with blue skies and sunny days.

Warmly,

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

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*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 Engagement at **Alumni@elms.edu**



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# ‘A great experience!’

## University of Kochi receives a warm welcome at Elms College

Elms College recently hosted its annual exchange visit with students from the University of Kochi in Japan. Although a winter storm disrupted travel plans, the visit ultimately left participants feeling warmly welcomed.

A blizzard that hit the Northeast delayed the group’s arrival, stranding travelers and forcing the Kochi delegation—12 students and a faculty chaperone—into an unexpected four-day layover in Chicago. As a result, Elms organizers compressed 13 days of planned activities into just nine once the group arrived on campus Feb. 26.

Dr. Mari Kinoshita, a nursing faculty member at the University of Kochi and the trip's chaperone, said the delay was disappointing but became a memorable part of the journey.

“That was quite amazing. It was not planned, but everyone enjoyed it,” Dr. Kinoshita said.

When the students finally reached Chicopee, they were greeted by a campus blanketed in snow—an unfamiliar sight for many. During their first campus tour, students eagerly scooped up snow to make snowballs. Kochi, located on the island of Shikoku in southwest Japan, rarely experiences snowfall, making the storm’s aftermath especially striking.

“We barely have snow in Kochi city,” said student Hinata “Sunny” Akagi. “Kochi is perfectly warm. We don’t have snow.”

The exchange program between Elms College and the University of Kochi, established in 1998, is one of the college’s longest-running and most popular international partnerships. Over the years, dozens of students from both institutions have participated.

Each spring, Elms students volunteer as “friendship partners” to help visiting students adjust to campus life. They serve as guides, companions, and informal advisors on American culture. Kochi students attend classes, participate in campus events, and engage closely with the Elms community.

“Watching the Kochi and Elms students meet each other with a little shyness the first day, only to be replaced by fast friendship the second day, was awesome,” said Nancy Davis, Assistant Dean of Academic Student Success.

The visit included a full schedule of activities, from trips to local malls and movie theaters to a visit to an elementary school. They also attended a Springfield Thunderbirds hockey game. They met with Elms College President Dr. Harry Dumay, sat in on classes, had English lessons, and had a go at Irish line dancing, taught by Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Michaela Burke.

Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Joyce Hampton and her husband, Steve, opened their home for a shared meal. A total of 34 students gathered to cook, eat, and spend time together in a relaxed setting.

The Kochi students also hosted a cultural exchange event in the Dooley Center, introducing Elms students to Japanese traditions. Participants tried origami, wore traditional kimonos, and practiced calligraphy, creating an opportunity for shared learning.



***Elms President Harry Dumay and Vice President for Academic Affairs Joyce Hampton pose for a group photo with the University of Kochi students and their Elms College friendship partners.***

For Sunny, an American Studies major, the exchange offered a meaningful firsthand look at life in the United States.

"Yeah, this has been a great experience for me!" he said.

For his major, he studies American literature, film, and culture. The experience of living on an American campus and getting to know American students was invaluable.

"Every person talked to me and was nice to me, and they wouldn't let me be alone. We could talk to each other all the time," he said.

"I will remember that there are nice people here."

Dr. Kinoshita said the exchange serves multiple purposes. Some students, particularly those studying nursing, come to learn about academic programs, while others seek cultural immersion. "The basic thing is just to know how to communicate and to get to know each other," she said.

Davis said the only downer during the visit came when it was time for the visitors to go home. "There were tears from everyone, and we were sad to see them leave."

Even so, the experience has already sparked anticipation for the future. Another group of Kochi students is expected to visit next spring. Also, Elms students will travel to Japan in May—continuing a long-standing exchange that fosters cultural understanding, friendship, and global perspective.



***Kochi students play with snow outside the Maguire Center. The University of Kochi does not see much snow each winter.***



***Food, festivities, and fun during a group dinner at Dr. Joyce Hampton's house.***

# Professor Winifred Martin's new book explores intersection of faith and mental health care




***Assistant Professor of Social Work Dr. Winifred Martin discusses her new book, which she said took three years to research and write.***

Dr. Winifred Martin, assistant professor of Social Work, has authored a new book that draws on her experiences as a therapist and a woman of faith to explore the common ground between spiritual beliefs and mental health care.

The book, her second, is titled *The Couch Ministry: Where Therapy Meets Faith*. She describes it as the end product of three years of toil and self-discovery, and re-examination of both her faith and the ethics and standards of her profession.

"This book is about my journey back to faith. It has meant rediscovering what faith means to me, and how it intersects with the professional aspects of the mental health field," she said. "I am not a minister. I am not a preacher in any sense. This book was really about melding the two worlds and figuring out what faith really looks like to me."

Martin was celebrated on March 6 in Alumnae Library Theater with a book launch and panel discussion that featured a mix of area mental health professionals and clergy.

Dr. Martin, the field education director for the undergraduate and graduate social work programs at Elms College, has been with the college since 2023. She has also had a lengthy career as a therapist with Springfield Public Schools and, more recently, operates a private practice in East Longmeadow.

The book draws on her own experiences in her profession and her faith, and on her search for common ground in the often-parallel but separate worlds of mental health care and spirituality.

She said that traditionally, clergy and clinicians tend to view each other's roles with suspicion. But it does not have to be that way, because Dr. Martin said there are sufficient areas where matters of faith and counseling practices share common ground – if one chooses to look for them, she said.

As an example, she cites the Book of Elijah in the Old Testament. In the biblical account, Elijah wins a great victory, but he grows weary and withdraws into solitude. Dr. Martin said that in her diagnosis, it sounds like Elijah was experiencing depression. What's more, that seems to be God's diagnosis, too.

"How did God show up for him? God didn't say, 'Oh, you need to have more faith and pray more,'" she said. "He told Elijah to rest."

She spoke of how she became alarmed by, particularly in Black and Latino communities, the amount of "toxic theology," or rigid, dogmatic religious beliefs that harm more than heal. Dr. Martin spoke of having her own patients abandon their prescribed medication because a pastor told them all they really needed was to pray more. The outcome in those cases was often not ideal. In one case, one of her former patients took his own life. This caused her to drift away from her own faith and even become angry with God, she said.

"I did not want to do anything that talked about healing spirituality," she said.

But as she turned away from God and faith, each found their way into her counseling sessions when her patients would ask her what spirituality meant to her, or if she prayed. These conversations led her to rediscover her faith, and during this, she came to see the overlap between her beliefs and best professional practices in patient care.

The point of the book is to show that clinical care and spiritual care can complement, rather than compete, with each other, and that open pathways for collaboration can reduce stigma, improve access to care, and support more holistic healing, she said.

For mental health clinicians, it is easy to dismiss a patient's faith or religious beliefs as not germane to a mental health diagnosis or course of treatment. And for clergy, it's easy to view mental health care as a stigma and a sign of a lack of faith.

Asked whether the book seeks to help clergy gain understanding of mental health counseling or for mental health practitioners to understand faith, Dr. Martin replied that it seeks to do both.

"It's for mental health clinicians who are struggling not only with their faith but with integrating faith with mental health practices," she said. "But it is also for the faith-based minister community to recognize they do have mental health struggles in the church."




***Dr. Winifred Martin, left, speaks at a panel discussion as part of the launch of her new book,* The Couch Ministry: Where Therapy Meets Faith.**

# Blazer Basket food pantry addresses food insecurity at Elms College



***Eileen Kirk, left, and Wanda Banks organize the Blazer Basket, the campus food pantry that provides food to members of the campus community in need.***



***Nursing student Elliana Henock, who works the front desk at Blazer Basket food pantry, helps restock shelves.***

Recognizing that food insecurity exists on campus, the Blazer Basket food pantry opened its doors this spring to help students and members of the campus community put food on the table.

Located in the lower level of the Mary Dooley College Center, the pantry is stocked with canned goods, packaged foods, pasta, and perishable items such as fruit, vegetables, and meat. All items are available at no cost to anyone who visits.

Coordinators Eileen Kirk, director of Campus Ministries, and Wanda Banks of the Kirley School of Continuing Education said Blazer Basket is supported through outside donations and a partnership with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts.



**23%**

**of undergraduate students**

**12%**

**of graduate students report not having enough food to eat and being unsure when they will have their next meal.**

***— Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics***

"From our standpoint, we know that there is a need," Kirk said. "We are grateful we are able to provide this through the help of the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts (and) our donors. We're grateful for the support of the community."

The Food Bank supports pantries at nearly a dozen campuses across the region, including Elms College. It provides food free of charge, and every few weeks Banks submits a list of needed items for delivery.

According to the federal Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, 23% of undergraduate students and 12% of graduate students report not having enough food to eat and being unsure when they will have their next meal. A recent study by the Greater Boston Food Bank found that among Massachusetts households, the number is closer to 40%.

Kirk said she had wanted to establish a pantry for some time, but the idea never moved forward. Banks became involved after helping a student at Asnuntuck Community College find a local pantry. The student had just started a new job but would not be paid for three weeks and had no money for food. The experience led Banks to wonder whether Elms students faced similar struggles and what could be done to help.

She and Kirk then worked together to contact the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, seek donors, and secure a campus location. The pantry shares space in the Dooley College Center with the Career Closet.

It is open Monday through Friday for about 12 hours each week and provides food to anyone in the campus community without judgment. Visitors are asked only their age, whether it is their first visit, and how many people they are feeding. No identification is required, and no names are recorded. Staff then help fill a grocery bag with needed supplies.

Kirk said that during the first weeks of operation, most patrons have been a mix of on-campus and commuter students.

"If a residential student is looking to make another meal at nighttime, they'll access the food pantry. Some commuter students will come in to grab a bag of groceries to take home," she said.

Although there has been no formal opening and little publicity beyond posters and a campuswide email, word is spreading. Nursing student Elliana Henock, who staffs the front desk as part of her work-study assignment, said student use has increased noticeably after the first few weeks, largely through word of mouth.

"We have a lot more students coming in now than from the beginning," she said. "I tell my friends, and try to tell everyone I know just to stop by if they are looking to make food or even if they just need snacks."

# Trying on the 'career slipper' to see if it fits

## Experiential Learning has nearly 100% participation



*Elms College students Denielys Castellano '26 (standing), La'Shion Mohr '28, and Jacobo Molina Ferrer '26 speak with Regina Hitchery '71 in the Berchmans Rotunda. The 3 students participated in experiential learning programs that she helps support.*

*Denielys interned at a Boston nonprofit, LaShion with the ticket and sales office of a soccer team in Germany, and Jacobo with the Elms Athletic Department.*



***Regina Hitchery '71 speaks with senior Ramsys Garcia-Lopez, a Computer Information and Technology major from Springfield, about his internship with SimplyIT at the annual Experiential Learning Showcase in May. Hitchery, sponsor of the Dolores Donlin Noonan '39 Experiential Learning Program, attends the showcase each year to meet with students.***

Jacobo Molina Ferrer plays soccer and is majoring in computer science. It never occurred to him that he could combine his interest in sports and data management as a career.

Arielli Bellavista, a senior in criminal justice, wants to attend law school and maybe someday become a lawyer. Until interning at a law office, she had no idea that so much of the practice of law happens outside the courtroom.

Nelly Mokan, a double major in healthcare management and accounting, always assumed that when the time comes to choose a career, she would have to pick one or the other, but not both. Her internship at the Veterans Home in Holyoke showed her it is possible to do both.

The three Elms College students each credit the Experiential Learning Program with showing them new and exciting real-world applications for what they learn in the classroom. At its core, Experiential Learning is a learning experience.

And that is the whole point, said Dr. Jennifer Granger Sullivan, director of Experiential Learning.

At some point in their collegiate career, students will pause to wonder what is next after graduation, she said. Experiential learning is one of the best ways to answer that question. It offers a chance to go beyond the showroom floor to check under the hood, kick the tires, and maybe rev the engine before signing on the dotted line for a brand new career.

"For me, that is literally why you are doing it," she said. "An internship is like trying on the shoes, or trying on the clothes before you buy them."

She has heard from students returning from internships who are completely committed to a career in that field. Others report a new understanding of how their major can be applied in a way they hadn't considered. And sometimes she hears from students who disliked their internship so much that they now want to change majors.

It happens, she said.

"The good, the bad, and the ugly are all part of it. Is it a bummer that you always wanted to be X, Y, or Z and then find out that you no longer do? Yes, but I would rather our students figure out what they want to do before graduating," she said.

"Experiential Learning gives students the chance to safely succeed or safely fail, and make decisions for themselves on what they are studying."

The Experiential Learning Program at Elms College has been undeniably successful. How successful? Last year, the participation rate in the experiential learning program among graduating seniors was 98%.

At Elms College, Experiential Learning is an umbrella term for different activities intended to give students experience outside the classroom. These include internships, independent research, study abroad programs, or community service. Internships are the most popular.

One reason for this popularity over the last decade is that the college has worked to provide students with stipends for experiential learning activities. The great majority of internships offered by employers are unpaid. Students put in hours of labor and receive no compensation beyond experience. That is fine for those who can afford it. But with a great many Elms College students reliant on financial aid and part-time employment to afford school, an unpaid internship is akin to a red traffic light that never turns green.

Elms College has three programs to address that inequity: the Keating-Schneider Fund, the Dolores Donlin '39 Experiential Learning Program, and the Eileen Mendrek Fund. Each provides scholarships to students for experiential learning and immediately converts unpaid internships into paid ones.

The Keating-Schneider Fund, also known as KSF, was created in 2018 with a gift from then-Trustee Richard J. Meelia and named in honor of Srs. Kathleen Keating and Maxyne Schneider. The Dolores Donlin '39 Experiential Learning Program was launched in 2022 by Trustee Regina Hitchery '71 and her husband, Joseph, in honor of her mother, who graduated from Elms College in 1939.

The three programs have slightly different objectives. In addition to supporting internships, KSF provides stipends for research projects and independent study. Meanwhile, the Mendrek fund, founded by Eileen Mendrek '64 and in memory of her husband, James, is used at the college's discretion to support students involved with service learning or study abroad, and recipients are known as James and Eileen Mendrek Experiential Learning Scholars.

All three share the same goal of allowing students to learn outside the classroom.

Each has contributed to the popularity of internships over the last few years, across the board, even with majors that do not require internships, she said.

Granger Sullivan said that when she started at Elms College in 2021, not many students were aware of scholarships for unpaid internships. "We worked really hard to get that information out within the student body," she said.

"I think it's pretty well known at this point," she said. "I think as a culture it has really shifted to where it's cool to do."

Each May, the program hosts the Experiential Learning Showcase, where participating students set up tables and give oral presentations to visitors about their internship, research, or study abroad experiences. Hitchery makes a point of attending each year and to stopping at each table to ask students about their experiences. Granger Sullivan said the feedback she hears from students is that they are very impressed that the person who funded their internship is genuinely interested in their experience.

"Even though the students are young, there's a clicking there, as if they are thinking 'oh, this is different,'" Granger Sullivan said.



***Jacobo Molina Ferrer***

Jacobo, a member of the men's soccer team, spent this winter working as a statistician for the men's and women's basketball teams. "I take the raw stats from our games - that's the stuff that usually sits in a boring file - and I organize it into a dashboard. The coaches can click on a name or a game and instantly see things like which player combinations are the most effective or how well we're shooting from different spots on the court," he said.

"It's taking all that complicated data and making it easier to read so the coaches can use it to win.

Although he had always been involved in athletics, he had no idea what a statistician's life was like until his internship. "I definitely feel like this is a real-world experience because this is what the professional data analysts do," he said. "It's pretty fun."



***Arielli Bellavista***

Arielli has always been interested in a career involving criminal justice and is considering applying to law

Her internship this fall revealed to her what life as a lawyer is like, and that making arguments in a courtroom before a judge is just a small fraction of what a practicing attorney does daily. There is so much more done outside of the courtroom, she said.

She spent the fall working as a case manager at the Agawam law firm of McLane & McLane. She was responsible for gathering documentation from various sources that would support the lawyers' representation of their clients in court.

For example, if the law firm were representing someone suing for compensation for injuries suffered in a car crash, Arielli would be responsible for gathering all the relevant information for the case. That would include police reports, hospital reports and medical records, insurance claims, and anything else that could serve as supporting evidence. She was also in charge of processing documents and handling incoming and outgoing mail at the office.

"I found it interesting to see what lawyers do," she said.

"This is the process that they have to go through. It's not just like they are only in the courtroom. They have to go through documents, talk to different people, and interview them," she said. "It's not all the fun stuff like being in the courtroom.



***Nelly Mokan***

Nelly, a junior, came to Elms College specifically to study healthcare management, and somewhere along the line discovered she also had an interest in accounting.

She thought that when it came time to look for an internship, it would be something having to do with one or the other. She was thrilled to find one in the business office at the Veterans Home in Holyoke that allowed her to do both.

"It was really great how I get to incorporate both of my degrees into this," she said. "I never thought that I could."

She's worked with accounts receivable and payable, inventory, and purchasing. She has also been assigned special projects involving financial projections.

All of this, she notes, is right in line with her two degrees. From the moment she first heard about the Veterans Home internship, she wanted it because it was a unique and wonderful opportunity she could not pass up. She accepted it even though it was an unpaid internship.

"It was a great opportunity and I just really wanted to gain the experience, whether that meant getting paid for it or not."

She didn't find out until afterward that she was qualified for KSF scholarship funding, so everything worked out in the end.

"Getting the scholarship meant a lot for me," she said, saying it allowed her to focus on schooling and her internship, and not have to worry about money.



# *'Always a part of my life'*

## Regina Hitchery '71 reflects on her time at Elms College as a student, alum, and trustee

Regina Hitchery '71 says Elms College has always been an important part of her life—and she does not see that changing.

A longtime member of the Board of Trustees, Regina will complete her term in June. Still, she expects to remain engaged in the college's broader direction as a Trustee emeritus, continuing her connection without the formal responsibilities of board service.

"Elms will always be a part of my life," she said. "I can't imagine it not being."

Over the years, Regina has remained a devoted alumna, maintaining close ties to the campus and its community. Many of the friendships she formed as an undergraduate have endured for decades. She has also been a steadfast supporter of the college, most recently through a significant gift with her husband, Joe, to establish the Dolores Donlin Noonan '39 Experiential Learning Program in memory of her mother.

A Springfield native, Regina's connection to Elms began long before she enrolled as a student in the late 1960s. Her mother graduated in 1939, and her older sister, Martha Noonan Murtaugh, in 1968. As a child, she often visited campus for events, including Santa Claus's annual visit.

"It was just a place that was always a part of my life," she said.

When it came time to choose a college, the decision was simple: Elms College.

She initially majored in mathematics before switching to English, an experience she credits with strengthening her analytical and critical thinking skills. Those abilities would serve her well both academically—earning master's degrees from Connecticut College, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and University College Dublin—and professionally, in a distinguished management career in human resources.

Regina held senior leadership roles at several global companies, including Invensys, United Technologies, Sikorsky Aircraft, Pratt & Whitney, Carrier Corporation, and Otis Elevator. She concluded her career as vice president of human resources at Alcoa, a global leader in aluminum production and distribution.

"I am an extremely analytical person," she said. "Because I started at Elms and had that part of my brain nurtured—along with the ability to evaluate things —I honed my administrative abilities while I was here."

She said that while she was a student in the 1960s, when Elms was a women's college, the most common career paths were teaching and social work. She said that, like many of her peers, she graduated with only a general understanding of how to start a career. She said she applied for an HR position at Pratt & Whitney mostly because the company was nearby.

"That turned out to be a terrific match for me, and it set me off on a terrific career," she said.

When Regina later joined the Board of Trustees, she brought that experience with her. Remembering her own uncertain transition from college to career, she made career preparation a personal priority. She believed the college could do more to help students connect their academic experiences with meaningful professional opportunities.

Shortly after President Harry Dumay's appointment in 2017, she advocated for a stronger institutional focus on preparing students for the workforce, particularly through internships and experiential learning.

"We did not have enough (assistance) to have people feel that they can come here, and flourish and be prepared to make a living," she said.

Encouraged to take action, Regina and her husband established the Dolores Donlin Noonan '39 Experiential Learning Program during the 2022–23 academic year. The program provides financial support to students pursuing unpaid internships.

While internships are valuable for providing professional experience, unpaid internships can create significant barriers—especially for students who must work to cover basic expenses such as books, transportation, and housing.

"It's an absolute deal breaker," she said.

The experiential learning program seeks to remove that barrier by providing financial assistance to students.

"If students are getting unpaid internships, they can receive support (through scholarships)," she said. "It kind of puts your money where your mouth is, from the college's standpoint."

She takes particular pride in the data. Since the program's launch, the percentage of graduating seniors taking internships over the last five years has risen from 86% to 98%.

Regina said she has given so much to Elms College over the years to repay all she received as an undergraduate.

"Elms gave me the platform, and helped me to develop the kind of confidence to be able to speak, to answer, to be unafraid of challenges," she said. She said she has met many other women, and more recently, men, who feel the same way.

"I've always felt that Elms College is a virtuous circle," she said. "It just works its way around. You get and you give. It's certainly been that way for my life."




# The College of Our Lady of the Elms celebrates 95th commencement

The College of Our Lady of the Elms celebrated its 95th commencement exercises on May 16 at the MassMutual Center in Springfield.

Degrees and certificates were awarded to more than 430 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students.

James "Jim" Keyes, a global business leader, author, and philanthropist, delivered the main address.

Keyes and Sr. Annette M. McDermott of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, a nationally recognized leader in higher education and social justice, each received honorary degrees.

The college also presented its Via Veritatis Medal to Regina Hitchery '71.

Keyes has served as Chief Executive Officer of Fortune 500 companies, including 7-Eleven and Blockbuster. He was also CEO and chairman for Wild Oats Marketing LLC. His philanthropic initiatives include serving on the Board of Governors of the American Red Cross, the boards of directors of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, and the Dallas Performing Arts Center, and at his alma mater, the College of Holy Cross.

He is the author of Education is Freedom: The Future Is in Your Hands, which argues for the importance of education for all humanity, and its power to change the world, unlock personal freedom, and preserve democracy.

Sr. Annette serves as director of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation for the Sisters of St. Joseph. In this post, she is responsible for advancing initiatives focused on systemic justice, public policy, and ecological responsibility. She served for more than a decade as dean of Religious and Spiritual Life at Mount Holyoke College. She served as cabinet secretary for Social Concern for the Diocese of Springfield which guided diocesan policy on housing, labor, immigration, and welfare reform. She also played a key role with the Catholic Charities Agency of Springfield.

The Via Veritatis Medal is awarded to the person who best represents Catholic values and culture and who has made significant contributions to society. Regina Hitchery is the first person so honored since 2018, and just the 43rd recipient overall since Elms College created the award in 1932.

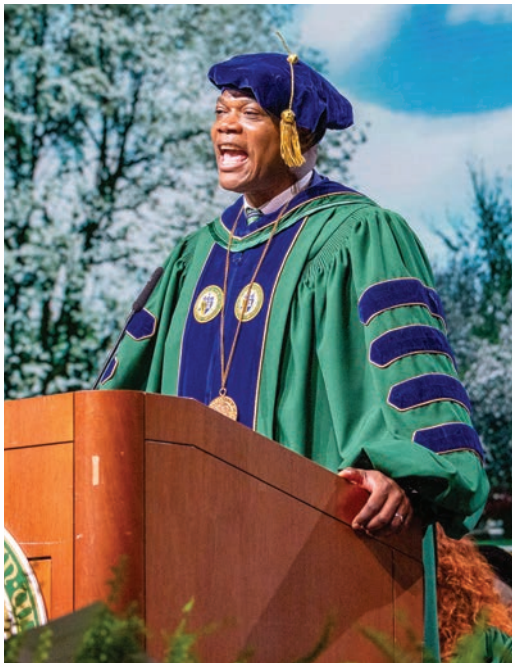
She is a long-time supporter of Elms College and a member of the Board of Trustees. She is stepping down from the board when her term ends in July. Hitchery graduated from Elms College magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in English. She also earned multiple master's degrees from University College in Dublin for Anglo-Irish Studies, from Connecticut College in Psychology, and from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

In her career, she has been a senior vice president for different global companies, including Carrier Corporation Worldwide, Otis Elevator, the global technology company Invensys, and Alcoa, the leading aluminum producer. She also held senior leadership positions with United Technologies Corporation, Sikorsky Aircraft, and Pratt & Whitney.

Hitchery was the third member of her family to graduate from Elms College. Her sister, Martha Noonan Murtaugh, earned her undergraduate degree in 1968 and her MAT in 1991. Their mother, Dolores Donlin Noonan, graduated in 1939.

In 2023, Hitchery and her husband pledged funding to create the Dolores Donlin Noonan '39 Experiential Learning Program, which provides stipends for student internships.


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## Elms Swimming makes waves at GNAC championships

Members of the Elms College Men's & Women's Swimming teams won both individual accolades and team honors at the Great Northeast Athletic Conference championships in February.

In all, eight members of the two teams received individual honors, and the men's and women's teams each won Institutional Sportsmanship awards.

Sophomore Daniel Hneen was named to the All-Conference Team in the Men's 50-Yard Butterfly competition after placing third in the event. First-year student Jose Avila was also named to the 2025-26 Men's All-Sportsmanship Team

Senior Joni McGillis, junior Sasha Plotniak, sophomore Alissa Schettini, and first-year student Rachel McNally finished 2nd in the Women's 200-yard Freestyle Relay, and third in the 800-yard Freestyle Relay, which earned them places on the All-Conference team for each event.

McGillis also earned a spot on the All-Conference in the Women's 50-Yard Freestyle, after placing third in the event. She was also named to the Women's Swimming All-Sportsmanship Team.






## Maguire Center pool reopens for public use

We are excited to share that, after being closed for repairs, the Partyka Natatorium swimming pool in the Maguire Center is open for public use.

The 6-lane, 25-meter pool is available for Elms College alumni and the community, as well as for practice rentals, youth programming, and collaborative aquatic initiatives. It will be staffed by a lifeguard at all times during public hours.

The facility offers individual memberships for alumni interested in wellness, recreation, and reconnecting with the campus. The pool offers lap swim lanes, warm-water programming opportunities, and space for clinics, team practices, and specialty groups. Whether you're looking to swim laps, host a program, or partner on initiatives, the pool is available as a welcoming, versatile space.

If you are interested in utilizing the pool, please go to the athletics website at ecblazers.com for more information or reach out to Athletic Director Rob Southall at southallr@elms.edu or 413-265-2328.

We hope to see you at the pool soon!




# 9th Black Experience Summit celebrates Sankofa, unheard voices of civil protest

The annual Black Experience Summit in February celebrated the importance of hearing, promoting, and preserving the varied and often unheard voices throughout American history, particularly those involved in the struggle for civil and equal rights.

The 9th annual summit in Veritas Auditorium coincided with the 100th anniversary of the founding of Black History Week, which would grow into the present-day Black History Month. More than 260 people registered to attend the event.

The theme this year was Sankofa: Rooted in Truth, Rising in Dignity-Celebrating 100 Years of Black History, Faith, Scholarship, and the Stories That Shape Our Future. Sankofa is a concept embraced by the Akan people of West Africa that promotes drawing wisdom from the past to move forward.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Stefan M. Bradley, a professor of history at Amherst College, and the author of *If We Don't Get It: A People's History of Ferguson*. There were also performances by spoken-word artist Lyrical Faith and the Parent Villages Youth Builders, and a panel discussion with Western Massachusetts business and community leaders about turning past legacies into action in the present.

Elms College President Harry Dumay said the college is proud that the Summit over the past nine years has presented different, difficult and sometime unheard of perspectives of the African-American experience and African Diaspora in the United States in regard to areas of education, healthcare, religion and faith, and even food and nutrition.

"This contribution to history, knowledge, and truth is consistent with our mission as a higher educational institution in the Catholic tradition."

Sankofa, like the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, places value on the "unfiltered, unvarnished, and unafraid pursuit of knowledge and truth," he said. "It is an invitation to honor history (and) to learn from the past as we build the future.

In their respective remarks, President Dumay and Dr. Bradley each cited an observation from the late Nigerian author Chinua Achebe: "Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." The observation speaks of the importance of seeking out and listening to the perspectives of the marginalized.

Dr. Bradley was teaching at Saint Louis University in 2014 during the lengthy unrest and public protests following the fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old Black man, by a white police officer. Bradley's book is based on interviews with the many students, faculty, clergy, and ordinary community members who took to the streets in the weeks after Brown's death to protest police brutality.

Those people, he said, were the forgotten "lions" in the struggle at Ferguson, and it was his pleasure to be their historian.

"I saw the lions up close, in person, and they were bold, they were pure, and they were fierce, and they taught us something that we should have learned more than 10 years ago," he said.

He said the lesson of Ferguson, where a largely white police force for years systematically oppressed a predominantly Black population, is that when people are pushed into a corner long enough, eventually they will push their way back out. "The other thing I learned is that it's probably better to listen to the most marginalized before the crisis happens," he said.

Sponsors for the summit were the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, the YMCA of Western Massachusetts, Greenfield and Northampton Cooperative Bank, Key Program, Inc., Multicultural Community Services of the Pioneer Valley, Inc., Springfield Department of Health and Human Services, Hampden County Honorary Deputy Sheriff's Association, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Family Services.



*An audience member asks Dr. Bradley a question during a Q&A period following his address.*




*Dr. Tyra Good, Inaugural Executive Director of the Center for Equity in Urban Education and Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Equity, addresses the crowd.*



*The 9th Summit attracted a large turnout. More than 260 people registered to attend.*




*Dr. Stefan Bradley, an Amherst College history professor, delivers his keynote address.*



*Dr. Stefan Bradley, Sr. Elizabeth Sullivan of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield, Maggie Dumay, and President Harry Dumay listen to speakers at the Black Experience Summit.*




*Elms President Harry Dumay.*

# The Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation awards $500K to CEUE, Western Mass. Literacy Collaborative

Elms College recently received two grants totaling $500,000 from The Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation in support of the Center for Equity in Urban Education (CEUE) and the Western Massachusetts Literacy Collaborative.

The grants, for $250,000, are each directed toward Elms College programs that seek to improve the quality of learning at public schools in urban areas across Western Massachusetts by increasing the diversity among teaching ranks and by working to improve reading skills.

"Elms College is grateful to The Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation for this grant and for the foundation's continued support over the years," said Bernadette Nowakowski, Vice President for Institutional Advancement.

The literacy collaborative, entering its 4th summer, is an Elms College-led initiative in partnership with the Springfield Public Schools and area colleges to address declining literacy rates among K-12 students, particularly in urban schools.

The centerpiece for the collaborative is the Summer Learn & Earn program, under which graduate and undergraduate Education students receive a week of specialized training in culturally responsive teaching and evidence-based literacy practices. They are then deployed to teach summer school as Literacy Intervention Teachers (LITs) with participating school systems.

Last summer, the collaborative employed 34 LITs who worked with 222 students. An assessment of student skills showed that as a result of instruction, students increased their reading ability by nearly 8 words per minute.

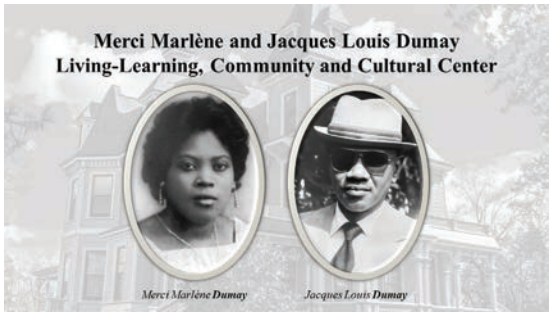
This year, the collaborative's goal is to have 48 instructors teaching at least 265 students.

CEUE was founded in 2020 to address systemic inequalities in education at public schools in urban districts.

The program seeks to increase the number and diversity of teachers and administrators in city schools. Also, it works to train aspiring teachers in culturally responsive practices that strengthen their effectiveness in diverse classrooms.

CEUE seeks to develop programs and workshops promoting professional development, partnerships with school districts, colleges and community organizations to increase engagement, while expanding its original mission of expanding teaching diversity through recruitment and support of aspiring teachers from underrepresented backgrounds.

# Gaylord Mansion renamed in honor of Dr. Dumay's parents




***Merci Marlène and Jacques Louis Dumay, the parents of Dr. Harry Dumay.***




***Dr. Harry Dumay and family members reveal the sign for the newly named Merci Marlène and Jacques Louis Dumay Living-Learning Community and Cultural Center.***

Gaylord Mansion, the 155-year-old historic property on the Elms College campus, has been renamed in honor of the parents of President Dr. Harry E. Dumay, and will now be known as the Merci Marlène and Jacques Louis Dumay Living-Learning Community and Cultural Center.

This comes after the college received a significant gift from an anonymous alumna who asked that Gaylord be renamed either for Dr. Dumay or in his honor. The Board of Trustees voted in September to rename it after his late parents.

At a Nov. 21 dedication, Dr. Dumay and several family members removed a tarp to reveal the sign with the new name.

Dr. Dumay expressed gratitude for the gift and said he was honored by the recognition of his parents.

His mother was an elementary school teacher with a heart "the size of this mansion," he said. His father taught middle school-level English, Latin, and French literature, and later became a junior high school principal.

"They were proud people," Dr. Dumay said. "They both believed in the power of a supportive community, and it is evident they would have certainly believed in the vision to renovate this beautiful mansion and restore it to its former glory."

The college acquired Gaylord in the 1960s and used it for housing and for faculty offices. It fell into disrepair and was closed in 2016. Dr. Dumay, appointed president in 2017, led private fundraising in support of a $4 million renovation of the property.




# Blazer Blitz cruises to new highs with 'Mission: Possible'

The Elms College community showed that no mission is impossible when everyone supports Blazer Blitz. The annual day of giving campaign set records for donations received and total raised, breaking marks set a year ago.

The campaign received 644 gifts totaling $208,764, which will support student scholarships and programs.

The theme of this year was titled "Mission: Possible" as a spoof of the Mission: Impossible movies. It culminated in a video of students, faculty, and staff engaged in a high-stakes, high-speed race around campus to deliver top secret information in an attaché case to Dr. Dumay. When he finally opens it in his office, he removes a glowing lightning bolt while declaring, "It's Blazer Blitz!" The video is available for viewing on the Elms College channel on YouTube ***(https://www.youtube.com/@ElmsCollegeVideo)***.

Bernadette Nowakowski, vice president of Institutional Advancement, said success with Blazer Blitz '26 was due to overwhelming support from the Elms College family.

"Blazer Blitz brought our community together in a powerful way, and your support made a lasting impact on our students," she said. "Alumni, trustees, friends, families, students, faculty, and staff all answered the call, turning momentum into meaningful impact for our students."

She said the generous support from the Elms College community creates new opportunities, opens doors, and strengthens students' futures in a lasting way.

"The numbers matter, but what matters more is the collective force behind them. This mission was driven by people who care deeply and show up," she said.

## The gifts that keep on giving:

### Endowed scholarships awarded $535K to nearly 170 students this year



*Dianne Brunelle '84*



*Ryann Anderson '26*

Nearly 200 people attended the annual Donor Scholar Brunch on April 19 in the Dooley College Center to celebrate benefactors of endowed scholarships and to recognize the outstanding Elms College students who have benefited from that support.

President Harry E. Dumay said that $535,000 in need- and merit-based scholarships were awarded this year to 167 Elms College students.

"Your generosity is deeply appreciated—by the college and by the students whose lives you are helping transform," he said.

Three new scholarships were announced during the program: the Mary Giblin Letellier '35 Endowed Scholarship, established by Marie C. Lyons in honor of her mother in support of Education majors, the Mary E. Prehoden '85 Endowed Scholarship in support of Nursing students, and the Anne M. Sullivan '67 Endowed Scholarship, in honor of her parents, Ann K. and Timothy B. Sullivan, in support of Science majors.

Featured speaker Diane Brunelle '84 said Elms College enabled her to pursue her dream of a career in healthcare. A past president of the Alumni Association, she retired after a 30-year career as a nursing executive. She and her husband created the Diane and Wade A. Brunelle Annual Scholarship to support nursing students.

"Giving back to Elms what it gave to me is a gift in and of itself," she said. "I truly feel good to be able to know that my efforts as a donor have enabled other individuals to be able to attend Elms College."

Featured student speaker, senior English major Ryann Anderson of Springfield, spoke about how, without scholarship support, she would have had to drop out of college to find work to help her mother through some difficult times. It was the Sr. Jane Morrissey and Peter Clement endowed scholarships that allowed her to complete her bachelor's degree in English. She now plans to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, and wants to work in publishing.

"On behalf of myself and all the scholars in the room, I thank you, and I can assure you this act of kindness will remain with me forever."

# Author Christopher White says Pope Leo seeks to build bridges amid global mood of division and isolation



***Author Christopher White speaks in Alumnae Auditorium.***

Vatican journalist and author Christopher White told an Elms College audience that just a few years ago, the odds that an American pope would ever lead the Catholic Church fell somewhere between "slim" and "none." But Pope Leo XIV changed that.

White, the guest speaker for the combined Reverend Hugh Crean Distinguished Lecture and Sister Mary Dooley Lecture, said that when cardinals gathered in May 2025 to choose a successor to Pope Francis, they were influenced by the Trump presidency and broader shifts in global order, diplomacy, and political norms.

The election of Pope Leo—formerly Cardinal Robert Prevost of Chicago—reflects the Church's desire to continue Francis's mission of making it more open, inclusive, and relevant in a rapidly changing world. White pointed to Leo's decades of ministry among the poor and working classes in Peru, and his emphasis on the common good and welcoming all, as a counterpoint to rising global trends of division and isolationism.

"I suggest (Pope Leo) will be committed to claiming human dignity at the center of his papacy. He will not be shy about using his voice to promote human dignity," White said.

He said Pope Leo has shown an interest in fostering dialogue and encouraging greater understanding between people and nations.

"He is trying to offer ways for the church and the world to listen to each other," he said.

White, a senior fellow at the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University, is also the author of *Pope Leo XIV: Inside the Conclave and the Dawn of a New Papacy*, a biography of Pope Leo published just months after his election.

# Jadyn Christie '28 selected as Grand Colleen for 2026 Holyoke St. Patrick's parade



***Jadyn Christie '29, riding on the Grand Colleen's float in the annual parade. (Leon Nguyen Photo)***

The rain and cold were unrelenting, leaving her soaked to the bone, but Jadyn Christie '28 says the experience of being Grand Colleen for the 2026 Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade is one she will treasure forever.

"It was like living out my childhood dreams," Jadyn said. "I have dreamed of being a colleen since I was a little girl."

A sophomore Communication Sciences and Disorders major, Jadyn was selected as the 70th Grand Colleen at the annual coronation ball in February. Another Elms College student, Paige Leahy, a first-year nursing major, served on her court.

The annual Holyoke parade, the largest St. Patrick's Day parade in New England outside of Boston, is a big deal in Western Massachusetts. Also, a big deal is the selection of the grand colleen.

The Grand Colleen rides a float at the head of the parade, waving and welcoming the several hundred thousand people lining the streets of the city over the 2-mile parade route. She is the face of the parade, the city, and local Irish culture. In the weeks before, she and her court will attend dozens of events, give press interviews, and visit schools, senior centers, and veterans hospitals. Jadyn said she enjoyed every bit of it.

"It's crazy, but it's also amazing," she said. "You're an ambassador for the whole city of Holyoke."

While the weather did not cooperate, Jayden appreciated all those who did turn out. When her float reached the end of the route, she stayed on the viewing stand to cheer for every marching unit, band, and float that came by.

"It was definitely very wet, but it was a good parade," she said.

Paige, a nursing major, said the experience was truly special for her because of a deep family connection to the parade. Her grandmother was a Grand Colleen, and aunts, cousins, and a sister have each been colleens over the years.

"This experience has truly been the best thing ever," she said.

# Elms College partners with State University of Haiti to aid education faculty development



*Rector Dieuseul Predelus of the State University of Haiti looks on as Elms College President Dr. Harry Dumay delivers his remarks at the signing ceremony.*



*Dr. Harry Dumay introduces Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Joyce Hampton to Rector Dieuseul Predelus of the State University.*




*Dr. Harry Dumay and Rector Dieuseul Predelus shake hands after ratifying the Memorandum of Understanding.*

Elms College has entered into an agreement with Haiti's largest public university to explore future collaboration for the development of a continuing education program for teachers. In a Feb. 17 ceremony at the Merci Marlène and Jacques Louis Dumay Living-Learning Community and Cultural Center on the Elms College campus, President Harry Dumay and Rector Dieuseul Predelus of the State University of Haiti signed a memorandum of understanding to explore a teacher continuing-education program in Haiti. The agreement was touted as being beneficial to both institutions and to teachers in Haiti.

Elms College will share its Education expertise and resources with the State University of Haiti. Teachers who graduate from the program will then take that knowledge and share it with their education students. This "train the trainers" approach is similar to, but separate from, an existing partnership between Elms College and the Episcopal University of Haiti School of Nursing. Under that partnership, named Our Lady of Perpetual Help Haitian Nursing Continuing Education Program, Elms nursing faculty train Haitian nursing instructors, who then instruct their own nursing students.

The two programs share a similar goal: improving the quality of health and education throughout Haiti.

Dr. Dumay credited Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Joyce Hampton, Education Division Chair Dr. Andrea Hickson-Martin, and Dr. Tyra Good, the Founding Executive Director of the Center for Equity in Urban Education and Special Assistant to the President for Strategic Equity, for their work in the agreement and coordinating the visit.

"A good teacher makes all the difference in the world," Dr. Dumay said, "And all children deserve to have a great teacher who is going to give them the foundation and confidence they need to achieve their God-given potential."

A continuing education program that improves teachers' professional development will benefit everyone, he said. Teachers will gain immediately, he said, adding, "Our ultimate objective will be the children who will be in their classrooms."

Rector Predelus said the agreement is the start of many great things that will improve many lives in Haiti.

"Every initiative that we take, every partnership we establish must contribute to a Haiti that is more prosperous, more educated, and more just," he said. "This protocol that we are about to sign is not the end. It is a beginning," he said.

Dr. Dumay said this partnership and the existing nursing program are each examples of Elms College's founding mission of enacting positive change in the world.

"I believe that we're on the verge of something truly distinctive and consequential," he said.

# Q&A: Molly Miner, Elms VP for Enrollment Management and Marketing



Molly Miner joined Elms College as the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing in September. She oversees the offices of Undergraduate and Graduate Admissions, Financial Aid, and Marketing and Communications. She is responsible for the college's enrollment strategy, student recruitment, public relations, and brand awareness. She has 15 years of experience in higher education, particularly with enrollment management and student services. Before Elms College, she was director of admissions and enrollment management at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford. She has an Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership from Maryville University, and a bachelor's degree in Education and a master's in Business Management from Emmanuel College. Outside of work, she enjoys watching sports, reading, and traveling to new places with her husband.

*Note: The responses have been edited for brevity.*

**Q: What attracted you to Elms? Why did you choose to come here? And what has been your biggest surprise?**

MM: I would say what attracted me most to Elms was the college's mission.
Elms plays a special role in the community and in the lives of the students it serves. Wherever I've worked, it has been important that I believe in the mission of the institution. And I've found that at Elms. I've spent my whole career in Catholic higher education, and I believe deeply in that mission. I'm here to help move the College forward, because I truly believe in what we're doing here. My biggest surprise? I knew Elms offered many strong programs and that students were doing meaningful work to help the community. But very quickly, I realized the impact is even greater than I anticipated.

**Q: What do you see as your job? What do you bring to the table? And what have you done for us lately?**

MM: Enrollment management is really about the holistic student experience: recruiting the right, best-fit students and supporting them every step of the way through graduation. It's about aligning the institution's brand with the student experience, so students have an authentic experience at Elms.

Since I've been here, we've implemented some new scholarship opportunities, including the Campus Visit Scholarship and the Residential Experience Grant. We are continuing to promote Elms College as a vibrant college campus and working to grow our residential student enrollment.

**Q: What are your goals for Elms? What challenges are on the horizon? How do you measure success, and how will you know if you have achieved it?**

MM: The goal is to continue thoughtfully growing enrollment, build a healthy residential student population, and sustain thriving undergraduate and graduate programs. How I'll know we've achieved this, beyond the numbers, is in the experience people have when they come to campus, whether as students or visitors. It's when they can truly feel all that Elms has to offer. Enrollment, retention, and graduation metrics are quantitative ways we measure success, but the qualitative measures are the experiences people have when they're here and the outcomes students achieve. As for challenges, there are a lot of external factors impacting enrollment at small colleges – free community college, the overall cost of education, and a shrinking demographic. That is why it is important for us to be creative and nimble in how we respond to those challenges.

# News & Notes



## Nursing Dean Julie Beck, 2 students volunteer with new Chicopee community health coalition

Elms College Dean of the School of Nursing Julie Beck and two students, Nadessa Gilet and Abigail Heinemann, with the Pre-Medical Certificate Program, are among the volunteers serving on a Chicopee-based community coalition that seeks to improve nutrition and health equity locally.

Beck, Gilet, and Heinemann are each a part of the Advancing Chicopee Together/Adelantando Chicopee Juntos community coalition.

The coalition was formed in February. It is part of a statewide effort called Addressing Health Equity in Massachusetts (AHEM), which is centered on regional and racial equity in health.

According to coalition officials, Chicopee has higher rates of hypertension and obesity than the state average, and has a shortage of providers for prenatal and postpartum care.

Dean Beck serves on the coalition's steering committee. Abigail is volunteering with the Health Air Network and is also mapping food pantry access and transportation gaps. Nadessa is researching transportation barriers to prenatal care.

"I am so proud to be a part of this community action and to be able to have our Elms students as part of the solution," Dean Beck said.

Nadessa and Abigail were recommended for the coalition with the support and guidance of Biology professor Dr. Janet Williams, and this reflects Dr. Williams' commitment to connecting students with meaningful opportunities to address real community needs.



## Art professor Amber Scoon granted tenure

Dr. Amber Scoon, assistant professor of Art and director of The Borgias Gallery in the Mary Dooley College Center, was granted tenure by the Elms College Board of Trustees and promoted to the rank of associate professor.

Dr. Scoon, from Pelham, has been at Elms College since 2022 and leads the college's Art minor. As director of the Borgia Gallery, she organizes and launches six exhibitions per year, including the recent curated work titled "The Diverse Cultural Heritage of Chicopee" exhibition, for which she received a grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

She earned her Bachelor of Science in Studio Arts from New York University, her Master of Fine Arts in Painting from American University's two-year program in Italy, and her Ph.D. in Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought from the European Graduate School in Switzerland.

She has published three books, has exhibited her artwork locally and internationally, including in Rome, Lisbon, and Sevastopol. More recently, Dr. Scoon has been giving performances in which she projects images of paintings and accompanies them with stories combining elements of philosophy, literature, and art history. She also has close ties with local arts organizations through which she offers free community art classes.



## Dr. Nina Theis, students co-author journal article on plant research

Dr. Nina Theis, Co-Chair of the Division of Natural Science, Mathematics and Technology, and Elms College alums JiHyun Pak '20 and Simon Abbott '24, recently co-authored a research article that was published in the December issue of The Journal of Chemical Ecology.

The article, titled "Effects of Leaf Herbivory on Floral Trait Correlations and Scent Composition in *Asclepias syriaca*," is based on research funded in part through a grant from Elms College's Keating-Schneider Experiential Learning Fund.

Studying floral scent and the bouquet of chemicals that are produced by flowers is a specialty of Professor Theis. This project tested whether insect damage, such as what a plant experiences when a caterpillar feeds on its leaves, might affect the floral scent of milkweed flowers.

In collaboration with then-graduate students Dr. Luis Aguirre and Dr. Seanne Clemente and professor Dr. Lynn S. Adler, milkweed leaves were damaged and flower traits were measured, including the floral fragrance which was analyzed at Elms College. The group found that leaf damage affected floral traits, potentially affecting how pollinators perceive the flowers. So, caterpillar feeding doesn't just damage milkweed plants, it also might be reducing pollinator attraction.

The full study is available online at this web link: *https://rdcu.be/eMJlR*

# News & Notes



## Elms nursing students awarded WMBNA scholarships

Elms College nursing students Asia Mary Burston Green and Jada McLeod were recently selected to receive scholarships by the Western Massachusetts Black Nurses Association (WMBNA).

Asia, of Chicopee, and Jada of Springfield, are each in their second year and are seeking their Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing.

The scholarships are awarded to black students and those of African descent who are interested in nursing. For more than 15 years, the association has awarded funding to assist nursing students with Western Massachusetts colleges.

The scholarship committee chooses awards based on each applicant's academic standing, honors and awards, two letters of recommendation, membership in professional organizations and a demonstrable history of volunteer activities. Each applicant must also pen an essay outlining personal and professional goals, thoughts on improving healthcare in communities of color, and the importance of leadership skills in nursing.

WMBNA president Yolanda Morrow, who earned her bachelor's, master's and doctorate of nursing practice at Elms College, said the scholarship had a strong competitive pool of applicants, but Asia and Jada each stood out because of their dedication, professionalism and commitment to the nursing profession.

They were honored at the group's annual scholarship luncheon on April 25 at the Twin Hills Country Club.



## No-no for Brycen Diaz

Brycen Diaz, a sophomore Sports Management major and member of the Elms College baseball team, had a day to remember in an April 8 doubleheader vs Norwich University.

Brycen, a 6-foot-4-inch righthander from Andrew, Texas, pitched a complete-game, 7-inning no-hitter, striking out 14 in an 11-1 victory. In the second game, he hit a home run.

The no-no is just the third in the history of Elms College baseball, and the first in eight years. It is the first no-hitter under Coach John Raiola.



## Dr. Dumay speaks at Chicopee celebration of Black History Month

Elms President Dr. Harry Dumay was a guest speaker at the annual Black History Month celebration at Chicopee City Hall.

He was among the noted speakers at the event that included Chicopee Mayor John Vieau and officials with area colleges and city government.

Dr. Dumay, in his remarks, noted that so much in today's world, from social media, electronic platforms, and even politicians, seems intent on finding divisions among society and exploiting them, while the spirit of Black History Month is about finding unity and common cause.

"True leaders are experiencing how hard it is to bring people together. And so, I am appreciative of the opportunity to be here at an event that recognizes Black history, American history, includes and promotes multiculturalism, which are the true strengths for our community and make us richer."



## Sisters of St. Joseph celebrated by Hibernians for history of community service

The Hibernians of Hampden and Hampshire County celebrated the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield with the group's 2026 Christian Charity Award. The Sisters were recognized for their long history of community service.

The award was accepted by Sr. Elizabeth "Betsy" Sullivan, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield at the group's annual Communion Breakfast on March 15 at Wyckoff County Club.



## Faculty Explorations:

# Revisiting John Courtney Murray and the idea of Freedom of Religion

By Dr. Michael McGravey

Throughout nearly 250 years of American constitutional history, the most heated disagreements have often emerged at the intersection of religious belief and political power. In our current moment, marked by rising nationalism, politically charged religious rhetoric, and growing suspicion of pluralism, U.S. Catholics find themselves caught between partisan extremes and a Church that, in the six decades since Vatican II, has consistently affirmed human dignity and freedom of conscience. Even the new Pontiff has felt compelled to reject the warmongering that some American politicians now embrace under a cloak of religious superiority.

The theologian John Courtney Murray, S.J (1904-1967) argued as Vatican II was underway that the American experiment posed no threat to the Catholic faith, and that the Constitution's framework for religious pluralism was something Catholics could not only accept but champion. His vision, articulated in *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition (1960)*, remains a vital resource for anyone grappling with religious freedom, civic peace, and the fragile promise at the heart of the American proposition.

Overcoming initial rejections and suspicions from bishops gathered at the Council—especially those whose dioceses back home had close ties to government (e.g., Spain)—the Jefferson-Madison freedoms found in the Bill of Rights were foreign to many. Murray's influence and participation in Vatican II led to a historic shift in the Church's teaching, particularly regarding liberal, pluralistic democracies. Three key aspects can be drawn from Murray's work: the Constitutional freedom to practice one's own religion was rooted in natural law; the First Amendment was an 'article of peace'; and a rejection of illiberalism and secularism, insofar as others argued they would deconstruct religious traditions. The freedom to exercise one's religion is seen as an essential, non-prejudicial right. As Murray wrote in We Hold These Truths:

"The American people exempted from their grant of power to government any power to establish religion or to prohibit the free exercise thereof. The Catholic community, in common with the rest of the American people, has historically consented to this political and legal solution to the problem created by the plurality of religious beliefs in American society."

The right to freely worship was held as one that "follows from the very nature of freedom and of truth." The alternative would be forced participation in a single tradition. Murray's view would be reflected in the 1965 publication of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Vatican II declaration in support of religious liberty. The Church recognized this as a fundamental individual right, ensuring the state remains neutral among competing conceptions of the good. Reaffirming the separation, Dignitatis Humane established religious freedom, advised governments to permit it for all, and recognized the Church's liberty to act freely within states.

The hierarchical objections to Dignitatis Humanae and, by extension, Magisterial leadership, challenge the legacy of Vatican II, as several outspoken past and current leaders within the Church have been in conflict with Pope Francis and now Leo XIV. Also, some influential Catholic technocrats have funded efforts to undermine the papacy, questioning the motives regarding synodality, language on the environment, and engagement with non-Catholics. They have adopted integralism, or a form of governance that favors Catholic policies, while also often rejecting religious freedom and Catholic Social Teaching. Each retort challenges the continuity of the Church's teaching authority, specifically, the task of interpreting tradition and applying the aims of Vatican II. Competing voices within the Church—technocrats like Peter Thiel and others with certain political ideologies— create parallel structures of authority, developing a 'church within a church.' At the heart of this is eroding the legitimacy of Vatican II.

To remember John Courtney Murray today is not simply about honoring a learned Jesuit of the last century; it is about rediscovering a uniquely Catholic way of loving both Church and country without compromising either to ideology. Murray boldly argued that there are public truths—about the human person, limits of the state, and of justice and peace—that believers and nonbelievers alike can affirm and incorporate into their shared life. Otherwise, the very possibility of a free society could be threatened. In an era when some Catholics flirt with integralist nostalgia, and others are tempted to privatize faith entirely, Murray's defense of religious liberty as an 'article of peace' and his belief that the Church thrives best when consciences are free remain both inspiring and prophetic.

For schools like Elms College, dedicated to shaping citizens and disciples in the shadow of both the Constitution and the Church, Murray's legacy serves as an invitation: teach and live a Catholicism that can confidently stand in the public square, patiently argue for its truths, and work tirelessly so that anyone, regardless of tradition or lack thereof, is free to seek their own version of faith.

*Dr. Michael McGravey is the Associate Professor of Religious Studies and the Director of the Institute for Theology & Pastoral Studies. He has been with the College since August 2019, and is author of Navigating Postmodern Theology: Insights from Jean-Luc Marion and Gianni Vattimo's Philosophy (2023).*

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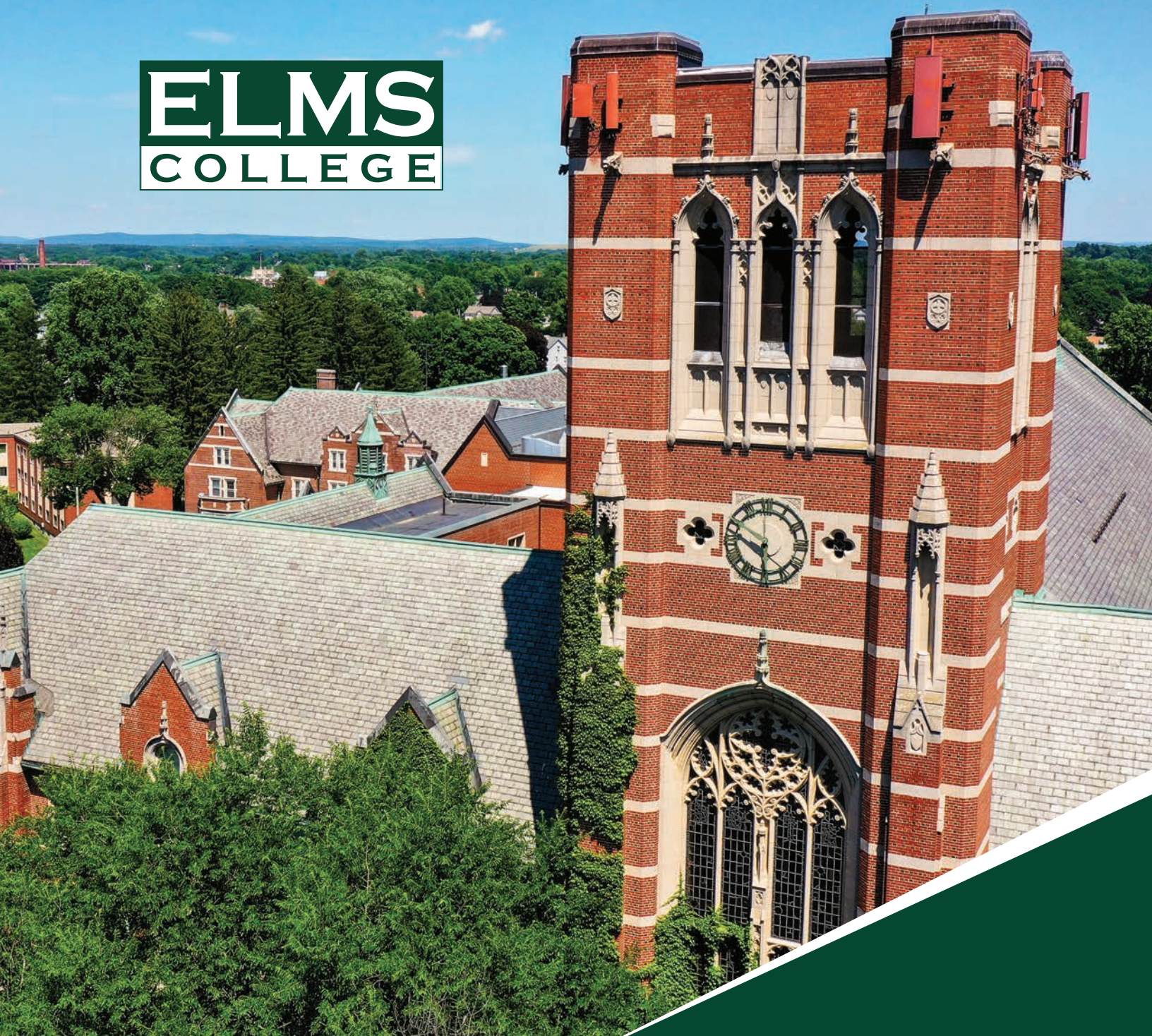
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*This list includes updates reported by family members, newspapers and other sources from October 13, 2025 through April 8, 2026.*

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