

Honors Outlook

Step Afrika!: Honors Fall 2024 Field Trip

By: Destiny Ward (Class of 2027)



Greetings, I am Destiny Ward and I had the amazing opportunity of participating in a collaborative Honors event with the S.T.A.R.S office. The field trip was to attend the show Step Afrika. Step Afrika is a special event that integrates cultural elements into performance art. This performance was held in Richmond, VA and focused on the works of Jacob Lawrence. The entire show focused on the history of African Americans and their experiences throughout the Jim Crow era. The performers of Step Afrika displayed the ability to create a multitaled performance including live instruments, singing, and a combination of dance types. Throughout the show you could

see a variety of styles including tap, stepping, gumboot, and other contemporary techniques. The performances included religious songs like Wade in the Water, which was composed phenomenally and executed with precision by a female choir. The show resonated with me and it was an astounding to see such a powerful performance with such a great storyline. Overall, this show was thrilling and entertaining.

Some aspects about the show that I feel are important to discuss are the accessibility. The show has great acoustics which made it easier to provide descriptions and pick up on the stories being told through the songs and dances. Additionally, the art that was displayed was created in accessible format to be viewed before the performance began, which I appreciated given the fact that I am legally blind. The venue had ushers to help guide people throughout the building, which was also helpful.



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What We Do and Why: Making a Difference in the Community

By: Allie Schwartz and Sarah Tyree-Herrmann (Class of 2027)



Starting this past spring semester, we continued working with the on-campus organization, Community Outreach and Resources (COAR) but in a new capacity. Last fall, we had the enriching opportunity to join the COAR family as two of their five Fall 2023 interns. When this internship ended, we decided that our time with COAR was not over just yet; it was just beginning. We began a new role as Co-Council Leaders of COAR's weekly volunteer program, Environmental Action and Awareness (EAA). EAA hosts weekly litter pick-ups around Fredericksburg. Armed with trash-grabbers and garbage bags, we choose a different walking path (or route) every week. We do this to ensure no areas that are accessible to us are left neglected.

Though there were a myriad of weekly programs we had the opportunity to choose from, EAA stood out to us the most. One of the biggest draws for us specifically was the program's ability to accommodate our busy schedules. Unlike other programs, EAA takes place on Saturday mornings. Typically, EAA occurs once a week. However, the schedule (the days we meet) can change depending on our schedules, school breaks, and the weather. These changes allow us to maximize our time spent engaging with our campus and the greater Fredericksburg area.

There have also been some other unexpected benefits that we have discovered with EAA thus far. We have seen more areas of Fredericksburg

that we might otherwise have missed entirely. Getting to see the beauty of Fredericksburg throughout the changing seasons has given us a heightened appreciation for our new home during our time at Mary Washington. Along with seeing some of the picturesque sights of this town, we also get to interact with many of its amazing citizens. Often when we are on our walks, fellow residents will express their appreciation for our contributions to the community. Sometimes, we even get to meet a new furry friend! The friendliness of Fredericksburg citizens gives us a unique opportunity to engage in dialogue about EAA and COAR.

"We have seen more areas of Fredericksburg that we might otherwise have missed entirely."

Our work with COAR and EAA has been inspired and encouraged by our time in the Honors Program, specifically in relation to our City as Text (CaT) class. During CaT, we learned about the history of Fredericksburg, especially the history outside of Mary Washington. CaT showed us the importance of truly enmeshing ourselves into the Fredericksburg community and we held onto that when we decided to work with EAA; specifically, we have continued CaT's critical examination of Fredericksburg during our EAA walks. By exploring all different parts of Fredericksburg, both historical and contemporary, we are able to learn more about what Fredericksburg is, who its citizens are, and where we can find a place to fit in during our four years at UMW. Overall, our experiences with COAR and EAA have been nothing but beneficial to our college careers, as well as to the community that surrounds us. If we could give any piece of advice to our fellow Eagles, it would be to get involved on campus, and maybe even check out EAA while they're at it!

What I Do and Why: A Spotlight on Light Design

By: Rylie Vann (Class of 2025)

When I entered UMW as a first-year student, I had no intention of majoring in theatre. I had done it in high school and loved it, sure, but it didn't feel like something that was going to be my forever. However, I quickly found a community of supportive individuals within the UMW Theatre department and began to realize that lighting design was something that fulfilled me creatively and personally. I was the light board operator for the very first show my freshman year, and it has been like a stone rolling down a hill since then. I then started to branch out into being the Assistant to the Lighting Designer for several of our guest lighting designers, which is where things began to take shape for me.

I found that I enjoy working with Max Doolittle, one of the designers we frequently hire here. I worked with him on three productions before taking his lighting design class in my sophomore year. During the middle of the spring semester, he invited me to work with him on a production of *In the Heights* at Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival over the summer. This was my first professional gig, and I couldn't believe that I had been trusted to assist with the execution of the massive, complex musical.

Since that point, I have continued my professional connections with Max both in and out of UMW. In the spring of 2024, we worked as the co-lighting designers for *Twelfth Night*, and the ability to design



(left to right) Max Dolittle, Rylie Vann, and Johnathan Groff behind the scenes of *Just in Time*

on the Klein stage was something I will continue to cherish. He and I worked at Wolf Trap over the summer to light a production with Jordan Fisher and Laura Benati, and most recently worked on the first concert performance of Johnathan Groff's new musical, *Just in Time*.

Lighting design is something that is now such an integral part of who I am, and I can't consume any piece of media without looking for the choices the designer made (and considering if I would have made the same choices). I love the people, I love the process, and I love bringing a world to life with lights; and I am so lucky that UMW has afforded me the opportunity to explore this love and work in my field.

An Exploration of Fredericksburg

By: Valentine Cotton (Class of 2026)

As the month of September drew to a close, my friend Attilio Piazza and I set out to explore the streets of Fredericksburg and complete the UMW Honors Scavenger Hunt. The scavenger hunt was a challenge open to all members of the UMW Honors community, with fifteen cryptic clues leading to locations all around the city of Fredericksburg. Together, Attilio and I had to decipher the clues, reach each location, and snap a commemorative selfie in each spot. Some of the clues we solved right away – like campus' Devil-Goat statue or the Amtrak station downtown – but others remained mysterious even as we finally called it quits and, as it goes on any good weekend night, headed to McDonald's.

In retrospect, the intention of the scavenger hunt cre-

ators was probably not for the entire thing to be completed in one go and on foot, but that's how Attilio and I did it. We wanted to make an adventure out of it, and while I often feel that Fredericksburg is well-trodden ground, this night still had some surprises in store.

For starters, did anyone else really know about the giraffe before all of this? The one in the yard of that fancy house over on the corner of Sunken Road and Fitzhugh Avenue? Zillow interlude – \$778,600. Absolutely crazy number, but I digress. At least they've got some fun decorations. Other highlights of our exploration included a visit to Mary Washington's Meditation Rock, a favorite warm-weather spot of mine, actually finding Wonder Bread Studios for the

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An Exploration of Fredericksburg *continued*

first time, and seeing a very cute dog while walking downtown, which was bustling with Friday night life.

Oh, and speaking of Fredericksburg nightlife, I'd like to give a special shout-out to a couple that we passed on the way to Carl's. Upon viewing us, they affronted us with a slur, but we had no other choice but to continue on, laughing away. At least the guy apologized when he was told I was a woman! While that moment obviously wasn't on my wishlist for the evening, I do think it's important to get out into the world and remember that an uncomfortable interaction isn't always a dangerous one.

Overall, I had a fantastic time walking the streets of Fredericksburg. It was kind of like City as Text all over again. Which – can I get one of the T-shirts with cats on them? My year's was nice, but I'm jealous!



8TH ANNUAL HONORS GINGERBREAD CONTEST

By: Kasey Morello, Honors Program Coordinator

Our 8th Annual Honors Gingerbread Contest was last week and as always the competition was fierce. The Honors Gingerbread Contest is always a challenge as no team is given a kit. Teams must pick pieces from an array of kits that have been disassembled to build a creation without instructions or a picture to reference. Each year students create unique structures and this year was no different.

We had over 15 teams register and had friends of the Honors Program, Professors Mara Scanlon and Leslie Martin as our guest judges. Both have taught honors-designated courses in the past year and have seen first-hand in the classroom what our Honors students are capable of. They were tasked with judging the creations on three categories, Most Traditional, Most Unconventional, and Be More, named after the Honors slogan, which was awarded to the team with the most UMW/Honors Program spirit.

Most Unconventional



Battlefield Backyard

Be More



In the Lab

Most Traditional



Snowy Winterland Scene

City as Text Leader Lands an Internship



By: Layla McGovern (Class of 2025)

As a senior in the Honors Program at the University of Mary Washington, I've had the exciting and unique opportunity to experience City as Text for three years now: once as an orientation participant and twice as a volunteer peer leader. The City as Text activities during my time as a participant and in my first year as a peer leader were quite similar to each other. While these activities provided us with fascinating context about our new home in Fredericksburg, not all the activities appealed to our different interests, personalities, and accessibility needs. That's why this year, I was exceedingly impressed with how significantly the Honors Program Director, Dr. Slunt, Honors Program Coordinator Kasey Morello, and Associate Directors, Dr. Di Lauro and Dr. Wells, leveled up the City as Text experience for everyone.

"City as Text has provided me with irreplaceable experiences during my four years in the Honors Program."

This year, students had the option to choose which activities they wanted to participate in during the City as Text experience based on their specific interests, accessibility needs, and future career goals. For example, some of these "Choose Your Own Adventure Sessions" included a meeting with Mike Craig, Principal Planner of the City of Fredericksburg to learn more about Fredericksburg community issues; a Civil Rights Tour in Fredericksburg where students had the opportunity to travel on the Fredericksburg Civil Rights Trail; a meeting with Chris Allen, the Executive Director of Fredericksburg Main Street to learn more about Fredericksburg businesses, arts, and culture; a visit to the Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR) whose mission is to advocate for a healthy and scenic Rappahannock River; a guided tour of the Fredericksburg National Military Park to learn from the National Park Service (NPS) staff about the civil war in Fredericksburg; a free guided tour of the Mary Washington House; and a visit to the

Patawomeck Museum and Living Village.

Not only did I find the new and improved City as Text experience more customizable and enjoyable, but I quickly learned how it can contribute to your "Life After Mary Washington." This year, I led my group on the "Choose Your Own Adventure" with Chris Allen who led us on a tour of Downtown Fredericksburg. After chatting with Chris about his position as Executive Director at the non-profit organization Fredericksburg Main Street, he mentioned he was searching for a University of Mary Washington senior to apply for a social media internship. As a double major in English and Communications & Digital Studies with career goals in digital marketing, this was the perfect opportunity for me. After gushing to Dr. Slunt about my fantastically opportune experience, I applied for the internship on Handshake. This story has a happy ending: I got the internship!

City as Text has provided me with irreplaceable experiences during my four years in the Honors Program. From supportive friendships, to academic connections, to professional contacts, the Honors Program has opened some of the most meaningful doors I have had yet to encounter.



City as Text Leaders
(left to right) Layla McGovern, Isabella Wilson,
Elizabeth Breckenridge, Rylie Vann