

HUMANITIES IN ACTION  
AT  
ST. FRANCIS COLLEGE

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***IN THE SPIRIT OF HUMANITY: WHY THE  
HUMANITIES MATTER TODAY***

Thursday 7 February 2002

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## ***IN THE SPIRIT OF HUMANITY: WHY THE HUMANITIES MATTER TODAY***

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Founders Hall

Welcome by Dr. Frank J. Macchiarola, President of St. Francis College.

Opening and Introduction by Dr. Gregory F. Tague, Director of Humanities Day / Assistant Professor of English.

Keynote Address by the Reverend Dr. Richard C. Pankow, Pastor Emeritus, The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (Brooklyn): "And Let My Garden Grow."

Dr. Gerald J. Galgan, Professor of Philosophy / Assistant Dean, Division of Humanities: "The Humanities: Backbone of Liberal Education."

Dr. Kathleen Nolan, Assistant Professor of Biology: "Integrating Art into the Science Curriculum."

Pam Fleming (solo trumpeter) Elaine Valby (narrator): Walt Whitman's poem, "The Mystic Trumpeter."

Elaine Valby: Dramatic reading, with song, from Whitman's prose, *Specimen Days*.

Professor Ian Maloney, Adjunct Assistant Professor, English Department: "Stop Leading Lives of Quiet Desperation: Thoreau's Enduring Drive for the Humanities in an Expanding Market Economy."

Wendy Galgan, Editor, *St. Francis College Review*: "Poetry Can Save Your Life."

Dr. Francis J. Greene, Professor and Chair, Foreign Languages, Fine Arts, and International Cultural Studies: "Library Buildings of the Past and Future: An Architectural Perspective on the Future of the Book and of Reading Itself in the New Millennium."

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## Why The Humanities Matter Today: Some Reflections & Observations

“I like reading books, I enjoy music and I enjoy a beautiful work of art. The humanities help me understand why I enjoy these things and how I can promote the appreciation of them for others. It’s the humanities that enable me to understand the things that we as people have in common. The humanities teach me about the good, the true and the beautiful. The humanities also teach us to be more understanding of others, to develop greater ethical sensitivities about right and wrong, and to penetrate the souls of others. We learn about thinking clearly and about human feeling. To appreciate our feelings and the feelings of others, to be in touch with one another, and to understand the important things in life are all within the scope of the humanities. It is thus noble work to inform the other academic disciplines of the underlying importance of our humanity.”

--Frank J. Macchiarola, Ph.D. – President, St. Francis College

“Increasingly, education has become training—training which produces a mass of individuals with a certain capacity to handle technical artifaction and with unprecedented powers of consumer behavior, but with practically no formation in thinking about those human excellences which can deeply affect the way they live. As the backbone of liberal education, the humanities attempt to lead the student from information to knowledge and from knowledge to the examination of the claims to wisdom. As such, the humanities embody the inherent dignity of education, what education really is at its best and as an end in itself, neither

a subclass of economic growth nor a function of technological instrumentation. The humanities thus primarily approach their goal—intellectual self-determination—not in terms of social, civic, or professional roles, but in terms of the cultivation and transformation of the individual’s mind.”

--Gerald J. Galgan, Ph.D. – Professor of Philosophy, Assistant Dean, Division of the Humanities

“The role of the Humanities in a college curriculum remains to this day absolutely essential. In their various majors, students prepare for a meaningful career by following a program of studies which prepares them for law or medicine, teaching, computer technology, social work, health care, or the business world, as well as for numerous other professions and employment opportunities. To a large degree, this aspect of an undergraduate education is reflected by the Latin word *educare* (to train), for much of what transpires within the major program is specialized training in a specific discipline and its appropriate methodologies in preparation for graduate study or for beginning a career.

However, there is another Latin word at the root of the word *education*, the verb *educere*, to lead out. This process takes place through the Humanities, and most often in a college’s core curriculum, through the study of literature, art, music, philosophy, religion, foreign languages and culture, film, theater, history and other such disciplines. Through these studies students come into contact with those ideas, values, and experiences which make us all more fully human. Through exposure to such disciplines, appropriately called the Humanities, students are drawn out of themselves (*educere*, to lead out); their outlook is hopefully broadened, and the range of their interests increased. In this process some students discover new areas of investigation and interest, perhaps the enjoyment of

art for the first time, or a new and unfamiliar form of music, perhaps new authors in literature. Whatever the specific case, the student comes away enriched, with broader interests and perceptions than when he/she first entered college.

When this happens the student is experiencing true education, not only the inward focus of essential training (*educare*), but the mind-broadening ‘leading out of and beyond oneself’ (*educere*), and it is primarily through the Humanities that the latter is achieved. Are the Humanities still important in this technological age? Certainly within Academe their life-giving role is as needed today as at any point in the long history of college education.”

--Francis J. Greene, Ph.D. – Professor and Chair, Foreign Languages, Fine Arts, and International Cultural Studies

“One of the most significant consequences of a liberal education—done right—is the development of the ability to think critically. It’s a habit of mind I encourage in my students, not merely those I teach in the classroom, but all those with whom I interact, every day, in a wide variety of other settings. Do not, I urge, merely accept things as they are—or, at first blush, *seem* to be—but, rather, constantly demand to know *Why? What’s the evidence?* or, finally, *So what?* This orientation, it seems to me, is important principally because it moves one toward what I believe to be ultimate things: the purpose of life and the contexts within which each of us lives it. For me, it has always been the humanities that have provided the best sense of all this, because these are the disciplines which simply *will not let go* of these fundamental questions. Indeed, it has been through the humanities (philosophy, literature, and, especially, the fine arts) that I have come closest to an understanding of the fact that ‘human work is an imitation of Divine work,’ and have realized the best terrestrial approximation I am likely to get of

final Truth. That’s why the humanities matter today, and always will.”

--James C. Adams, Ph.D. – VP for Student Affairs, Dean of Students

“On the Meaning of the Humanities: a preliminary statement. In the most derivative sense, the *Humanities* means the public recognition of all those things in which the excellence of human beings shines forth; the body of arts, sciences, institutions, customs, and artifacts which testifies to the highest human achievements. In a properly academic sense, the study of the *Humanities* means comprehensive training in excellence; the formation of one’s character in excellence, and toward ever greater excellence.”

--Brother Owen Sadlier, M.A., O.S.F. – Assistant Professor of Philosophy

“Strangely, being human makes it easy to forget we are human. Practical things: gas for the car; heat for the winter months; putting money away for vacation, for a car, for college are our goals. Humans are linked to goals that transform everyday work into something more, into hope. A theory, an idea, a poem focus our attention both outside ourselves and inside ourselves. We live outside and inside. To do less makes us less. Our inner life: the love of family; our relationship with our God; our being faithful to our vision of ourselves, are nurtured and supported by what we appropriately name the ‘humanities.’ We study the humanities to be human. To be human at work. To be human at home. To be human inside. We have to embrace ideas because they help us mold our vision of our world—of our humanity. We do not have to agree. Humans do not agree. We think. The humanities take us to thought and the exchange of ideas. The

study of ‘humanities’ brings us together to that common place we all share: our hearts, where we are most human.”

--Edward Wesley, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor of English

“**How Did It Happen?** Words like the humanities, culture, the arts were not a part of the vocabulary of my parents. Yet all of these things were part of their lives and the lives of their six children. I wish that they were still alive so that I could ask them how this happened. My parents were the children of German immigrants. They were born at the end of the Nineteenth century, my mother on a farm in Indiana, my dad the son of a coal deliverer in Buffalo, New York. There was virtually no money for anything but food and clothing. And yet we were always surrounded by art and music. My parents both sang in the church choir, they were adept with their hands and did all kinds of crafts. We went off to museums, concerts and local historical sites. In fact we were never talked to about the arts as something to do we just did them. Not bad for parents who didn’t even graduate from High School.”

--The Rev. Dr. Richard C. Pankow, Pastor Emeritus, The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Brooklyn, NY

“‘Know Thyself’: the Delphic injunction, across the centuries, reaches us with ever-renewed vigor. Today through the humanities we take hold of ourselves as beings endowed with freedom, capable of self-examination and self-determination, rather than mere things propelled this way and that by external forces; capable, because of this very freedom, of thinking thoughts and positing acts which carry *meaning*, thus exceed the limits of our own particularity. Through the humanities we experience our interconnectedness, not as a momentary meeting of self-interests that might pit us against each other tomorrow, but as a community nourished by a common life and open to a

common future. Through the humanities we are reminded that we are only human, but no less than human—not gods, but bearers of the divine. The humanities will matter as long as it matters that we keep up our guard against inhumanity.”

--Sophie Berman, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor and Chair, Philosophy

“‘Jewish lightning!’ blurted the student from the second row. We were discussing inventory loss estimation resulting from a warehouse fire. We were not discussing the weather, and we certainly were not discussing religion. And now this comment hung in the air suspended by silence. I had a split second to make up my mind. Should I ignore it and just move on? Or should I take a moment from the accelerated end-of-semester crunch to address the implications of the outburst? I had never heard the term ‘Jewish lightning,’ but its meaning was clear. This was simply something I couldn’t ignore, one of those ‘teachable moments.’ I would just have to take the time to address this.

As a child, I was the first in my family to wake up in the morning. There were always lots of record albums around—operas and musicals—and I was allowed to listen quietly in the living room when I awoke. At the age of five I was entrusted with these delicate, large black disks that spun around the tiny turntable at 78 rotations a minute. For a few hours in the morning I soaked up Broadway’s latest hits—*Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Brigadoon*, and *South Pacific*—while the rest of the household slept. I learned the stories and the lyrics. Now, more than 50 years later, I still know the stories and the lyrics—just more of them. There always seems to be a lyric floating around in my head, thanks to Alan Jay Lerner, Oscar Hammerstein II, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Frank Loesser, Stephen Sondheim, and their colleagues. I am

enthralled by the rhymes, the use of language, the ability to describe a feeling in a phrase, and the neatness with which the lyrics fit the music. So was it any wonder that—while addressing my Accounting 101 class—a lyric popped into my head? A lyric that seemed suitable to the occasion?

‘Am I the only Jewish person in the room?’ I asked. The silence confirmed my suspicion. I continued, ‘Do you think only Jewish businessmen might be unethical? How about Italians, Irish, Asians?’ ‘Oh,’ the student said, ‘I didn’t mean any offense.’ ‘I’m sure you didn’t,’ I said. ‘I’m sure you didn’t even know that the comment might be derogatory. It’s not your fault—you have probably heard that phrase enough times not to associate it with anti-Semitism.’ There was total silence in the classroom—almost as much as when I discuss debits and credits! Oscar Hammerstein to the rescue! ‘Have any of you ever heard of Oscar Hammerstein?’ I asked. Now, this was 1996 and Oscar Hammerstein had been dead over 35 years. ‘How about *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *The King and I*, or *South Pacific*?’ No response. This was not my generation. ‘How about *The Sound of Music*?’ There were a few nods of recognition. ‘Well, about ten years before Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein wrote *The Sound of Music*, they wrote *South Pacific*. The lyric I am going to quote is sung about a woman who believes she is *born* with her prejudices—but a friend argues that prejudice is *learned*.’

You’ve got to be taught to hate and fear,  
You’ve got to be taught from year to year.  
It’s got to be drummed in your dear little ear,  
You’ve got to be carefully taught.

You’ve got to be taught to be afraid  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,  
And people whose skin is a different shade

You’ve got to be carefully taught.

You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late,  
Before you are six or seven or eight  
To hate all the people your relatives hate  
You’ve got to be carefully taught!  
You’ve got to be carefully taught! \*

There was total silence while I quoted the lyric. I especially noted the faces of the Asian and Black students. They seemed proud. And I was proud that I had taken the time to discuss prejudice and Oscar Hammerstein II. Who knew that a treasured musical theater moment would find an appropriate place in an Accounting 101 class?”

(\**South Pacific*, ©1949, by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II.)

--Geoffrey Horlick, Ph.D. – Professor of Accounting

“Our students live in a society in which persuasion has a force equaling the weather. Much of this persuasion is political, and much of that is propagandistic. And propaganda, as Jacques Ellul has warned, is dehumanizing. We who teach have only a few hours with our students to convey to them the balance of reason and intuition that is the western tradition. If we succeed in our work, our students will possess that tradition, and it them. They will be humanized. And they will join the saving remnant that preserves our country as one where such words as *kamikaze*, *pogrom*, *fuhrer*, *suttee*, and *fatwah* are foreign.”

--R.E. Byrd, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor of Communications

“Lessons learned from reading poetry can provide the framework for a life well lived. Adversity, horror, grief, terror—all can be met and, if not conquered, at least survived with the help (and, often, succor) poetry provides. Joy, love, success, bliss—all can be better appreciated and celebrated

through poetry. It can be argued that poetry is the most human of all arts.”

--Wendy Galgan

“To address the question (*Why do the Humanities Matter Today?*) I turn to a poet from Brooklyn’s past. Walt Whitman was elected President of the short-lived Brooklyn Art Union in 1851. On March 31, 1851, while addressing his union, he argued that aesthetic appreciation was vital for the human spirit in an increasingly materialistic age. His sentiments seem rather prophetic and inspiring even today. “Among such people as Americans, viewing most things with an eye for pecuniary profit; ambitious of the physical rather than the intellectual; a race to whom matter of fact is everything, and the ideal nothing; he does a good work who, pausing in the way, calls to the feverish crowd that in life we live upon this beautiful earth, there may be, after all, something vaster and better than dress and the table, and business, and politics. To the artist, I say, has been given the command to go forth unto all the world and preach the gospel of beauty. . . . And it is a beautiful truth that all men contain something of the artist in them.” [Quoted from David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*.] The humanities matter today because each person does contain a bit of the artist or poet inside him or her. Thinking and talking about subjects like art, literature, history and philosophy allow us to tap into and think about our connections to a common humanity, to rise above our daily work tasks to see the beauty and uniqueness of each human person and his or her mind at work.”

--Ian S. Maloney, M.A. – Adjunct Assistant Professor of English

“My late father, Sheikh El-Sayed Mohamed El-Ayouty, was a Professor of Islamic philosophy. He graduated from Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt, the most prestigious institution of

higher education in the world of Islam. He was also a poet, an orator, and a Deputy Mayor of our community in Sharkia (the Eastern Province) whose job was to look after the minorities in that part of Egypt. By minorities in that setting, we mean Christians of all denominations, Jews (of Egyptian citizenship), as well as resident aliens who were mainly Italians, Greeks, Armenians, and Muslims from the Sudan. From him, I learned, as of my tender years, the value of humanities in everyday life: how a poem can effect conciliation; how Plato impacted Arab culture; how literature and music are capable of making us value others, how Aristotle was adopted by the Arabs. On my way to America by boat, as a Fulbright Scholar in 1952, he counseled me: ‘Live As They Live.’”

--Yassin El-Ayouty, J.D., Ph.D. – Visiting Professor of International Cultural Studies

“The Humanities matter more today than ever before. The twenty-first century has suddenly become the century of the Inhumanities. Not only are we being physically threatened in our larger ex-academic world, but spiritually and culturally threatened in our academic institutions as well. The Humanities just isn’t selling anymore. Disciplines of the ‘Practical’ and the ‘Profitable’ rule. More and more, higher education is being seen as a means to enrich one’s pockets rather than one’s soul. The Humanities deals with numbers too. Not only is 1776 the date of our Declaration of Independence, but it is also the number of poems Emily Dickinson wrote. Many of those poems were written in a time of great national crisis and despair, in a time of bloody conflict on our own soil, and though they were written over one hundred and forty years ago, they still move us deeply in ways we cannot begin to explain. History haunts us. Poetry is eternal; it enlightens us and restores our hope. Certainly, our financial institutions, our cell phones, the great and mighty

Internet itself are important symbols of human progress, but they are empty symbols unless they can inform, can illuminate our humanity, our impulse to create, to love, to inspire, to imagine, despite the constant threats that surround us.”

--Mitch Levenberg, M.A. – Director, Academic Enhancement

“In elementary school it was the same push. Work and be quiet. I can still remember being punished for failing a Social Studies test on Westward Expansion. I was told that I must succeed even though the material meant nothing to a chubby, eleven-year-old kid who cared more about his own body weight expansion. My only way out of this expansive mess came from solid vinyl. A circular piece of technology that Bill Gates still laughs at. It contained grooves that when needled on a hi-fi turntable produced complex energy that filled a large Brooklyn home. Sinatra, Basie, Fisher, Anka, Fitzgerald and Presley. There’s a list of royalty that helped take the edge off. I mean listening to Sinatra sing words and phrases that embraced loneliness and searching helped me realize I wasn’t alone out there. Someone else was looking also. Then at 8:12 on a Sunday evening, the meaning of music crystallized for me. It simply started with a G major chord in the song, *I Want to Hold Your Hand*. I actually heard it with all the screaming. It was distinct enough for me to realize that music was already swimming in my head and in my fingers. My father and mother agreed. Bless them to this day! I bought a Caminita wooden guitar and the sounds drove them crazy. But they hung in there and bought me 30 lessons with Dan Calica. I got better. They even said so on several infrequent melodic occasions. Several small bands followed. We imitated the Beatles, the Who, the Kinks and the Dave Clarke Five. Yes, it’s true the girls do love musicians even bad ones. Today, I own four guitars. My 1949 Gibson is my favorite. It makes beautiful music and still

connects me to my Dad. You see he bought it for me before he died. I know now that music is my way of dealing with life’s daily jobs and inconsistencies. Now I find no better comfort than trying to play Billy Joel’s *New York State of Mind*. The same G major chord heard in a different world still has the same power. It brings me solace and hope in a world where so much is taken for granted. That’s why even today, if you listen while I’m in an elevator, you can hear my internal humming of *I Want to Hold Your Hand*.”

--Richard A. Giaquinto, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor of Education

“It’s easy to pretend to be an expert on art, words, or ideas, but I find that the best art and ideas still defy all expertise. Besides, the meanings they contain are always personal and solitary. It would take a work of art to explain what each work of art has done, or does, for me. That’s the magic of the creative act, and why art is such an important force. As thinkers, teachers, artists, humans, we can only struggle to communicate, to create new formulations of old meanings for ourselves. The one small comfort might exist in seeing how others before us have succeeded. To know that Whitman has already said, ‘These are the thoughts of all men in all ages . . .’ Or Rilke: ‘Nights like these, all the cities are the same.’ It’s a way to fight that loneliness of never being able to tell the whole tale. I’ve heard people asking: why bother to struggle for something that you can never really achieve? Stephen Dobyns writes in a poem, ‘How is it possible to want so many things, and still want nothing?’ Why bother to struggle for anything less?”

--Mark Daley, M.F.A. – Instructor of English

**“The Reason We Go to College and Study Useless Things Like the Humanities.** Why do we go to college (and spend a



lot of money) to study Shakespeare, Plato, Calculus, and French just to try to read Moliere in the original or Jean Paul Sartre writing about upset stomachs, and why is there an art requirement? The reason usually given for studying these useless subjects is that we allow ourselves to partake of the wisdom of the ancients. Having turned sixty-three this past summer and, therefore, being a fully qualified ancient, I can assure you that there are an awful lot of really dumb ancients. My six children tend to remind me of this fact constantly. 'I mean, Dad, your generation actually elected Nixon twice and listened to Lawrence Welk with a straight face.' (Of course, I don't simply concede their argument totally. The 1968 election was one of the closest in history and we did have Alan Freed, the disc jockey, who in 1952 introduced rhythm and blues to the mainstream audience and permanently changed the artistic tone of modern America.) The only reason I am left with then is that we study the humanities or liberal arts to keep sane. The vast majority of the population today are at a loss as to what life is all about, feel they have no control of their own fates, and with the rate of social change accelerating every day, are living in a quiet terror of the unknown.

Going to College doesn't necessarily solve the problem of meaninglessness, but it does give you a head start. Plato didn't claim to have all the answers, but he did give us a method of dealing with them. '*Accept nothing, question everything,*' has to be the mantra of the critical thinker. Shakespeare didn't just write beautiful and noble verse, he actually recreated our psychological universe by his mastery of those arbitrary sounds we call the English language. (Sigmund Freud is supposed to have confessed that Shakespeare already said all there is to say about the human psyche. His own work was just a further commentary.) A great teacher of mine once informed our class, quite matter of factly, that intelligence is not at all just knowing

facts but rather the ability to perceive heretofore hidden relationships. These relationships range from everything from  $a^2+b^2=c^2$ ,  $E=MC^2$  and the never ending relationship between economic interests and political power (and the concomitant value systems they produce) to the depths of the **I-Thou** relationship, otherwise known as 'Why Do Fools Fall in Love' and the real limitations of language in grasping and expressing anything like truth. The important thing here is to remember that our current day problems are essentially human problems and the real advantage an educated person has is that he realizes this. No matter how meaningless or terrifying our existence can feel to us at times, others have been there before us. They have written or painted or sung about it and the product of their labors is the useless stuff we study."

--M.W. Gordon – Academic Enhancement

"On 11 September 2001 an attack happened on America that would change lives forever. Nothing would ever be the same. In this time of tragedies we need humanities. Many people were touched in one way or another. It may have been physically, mentally, or even emotionally. Today in America, we need arts more than ever. People need access to the arts as a humanistic approach as well as a 'comfort zone.' Things such as literature, films, books, music allow the hurt to find a sense of peace. Humanities allow people to get in touch with their inner selves. The other disciplines (sciences) do not allow this. I have had personal experiences where humanities became some sort of 'comfort zone' for me. Whether it was a book, a movie, or even a poem, it has helped me ease the pain that I was feeling. Humanities matter more than ever today because it can be used as a tool to bridge that gap in a human's life."

--Assantwa N. Green – Student

“The memorable humanities courses I took in college included ‘History of Architecture,’ ‘History of Music,’ ‘Russian I,’ ‘Recent Asian Leaders,’ and the ‘History of Health.’ The largesse and the antiquity of European architecture impressed me. The only part of Europe that I have visited is Ireland, and I crave to see more of these icons in Europe that I learned about. The weird Cyrillic alphabet of the Russians, the haunting music of Liszt, the powerful music of Wagner, the strange hara-kiri culture of the Japanese, and the fact that barbers were the first doctors and they did not use anesthesia nor antiseptic, are awesome facets of our history. This richness and diversity reduces me to a grain in comparison to the past and what is yet to come.”

--Kathleen Nolan, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor of Biology

“Why the humanities today? They engender and bespeak what has always mattered; consistently evocative of the meditative qualities in order and peace as well as providing the means of realizing these two virtues. Consider: **Socrates**: reminded his accusers that no evil can happen to a good person living or dead; **Aristotle**: that law is reason unaffected by desire; that each community exists to achieve a good; **Terence**: that nothing human was alien to him; **Cicero**: that true law is right and natural, requiring respect for the obligatory and forbidding wrong; **Augustine**: that ‘peace is the tranquility of order’; **Aquinas**: that law is an ordinance of right reason directed to the common good by those responsible for the care of the community; **Confucius**: that the concept ‘li,’ ceremony, must include the proper treatment of people, because respect would bring order to the community; **John Paul II**: ‘Authentic freedom is ordered to truth.’ Order, respect, and peace are complementary—and suggest neither power nor force. The paradox of peacefulness is in Chesterton’s reminder that all are

ordinary, it is the extraordinary person who appreciates that fact. Saint Francis’ plea that God make each of us an instrument of his peace highlights this. Jesus handed us the sublime paradox in urging us to become childlike—to achieve what? To realize and to live the truth that God is love. All these things revive and enlarge John Henry Newman’s regard for education being its own end, and which is properly embraced by the liberal arts, which possess and protect and enhance their subtle and foundational utility.”

--Joe Gannon, Ph.D. – Adjunct Associate Professor of History

“Humanities make the world a better place. They make the day brighter and give the world a bit of zip. They add to the senses an awareness that would not be there if we did not have art, music and good books to enjoy. A love for the Humanities is not easily obtained, but once you get it, it’s good for a lifetime of pleasure and joy. The truth about Guinness is also true of the Humanities: it is an acquired taste.”

--Brother Austin Gill, M.A. – Assistant Professor and Chair, English

“**The Walt Whitman Project: gatherings for community & connection.** The Walt Whitman Project, a grassroots organization dedicated to the public presentation of the prose and poetry of America’s great poet, hosted its first gathering on Saturday, 14 October 2000. At this event, a small but diverse audience heard four hours of excerpts from Whitman’s prose memoir, *Specimen Days*. Read by a diverse group of 25 readers, the excerpts focused on the poet’s recollections of the horrors of America’s great Nineteenth-century tragedy, the Civil War. Listeners, some moved to tears, were one with Whitman in his reportage of the carnage. Almost a year later, on Saturday, 29 September 2001, the Walt Whitman Project hosted another

gathering. The audience, four times the size of the year before, had now itself survived horror and carnage, the great tragedy of 11 September. Attendees reached out to the readers and heard the words of Whitman in new ways. How right and contemporary the author's thoughts were! From descriptions of the glories of Manhattan to metaphysical musings of the relationship between humankind and the cosmos, Whitman's poetry and prose connected and connected with listeners who, gathering together, were determined to celebrate humanity.”  
--Greg Trupiano, Artistic Director, The Walt Whitman Project

“The question (Why Do The Humanities Matter Today?) derives from discourse inherent to the humanities, and is heavily over-determined, which is to say that scientists, mathematicians, and sculptors for example would not be as likely to pose this question as would teachers of the so-called humanities. My second problem is with ‘humanities’ as a defining term. Do I mean those studies privileging literature and the graeco-latin classics; those studies focused on the furnishing of the prince's mind; or those studies that somehow advance ‘human-ness’ by advancing humane values and perspectives? Finally, how does ‘Matter’ really matter. Matter to whom, in which way, when and where? Matter in the sense of providing an evening of entertainment or a program vital to the survival of human life as we know it? Are we talking about matter intrinsically or matter instrumentally, as in the case of the businessman who finds that the study of English literature improves the clarity of administrative memorandums? Do we mean ‘matter’ as in political effect, commercial effect, psychological effect, theological effect? Notwithstanding all of these qualifications, I will tell you what I believe the humanities are and how they may be used to effect.

Any discussion of human-being-ness implicates the humanities, but ‘discussion’ is the operative word in this statement, and ‘discussion,’ and exchange of symbolic signifiers, is the precondition of language. Language need not be verbal, but may be iconic, mathematical, musical, or indexical as well. Yet we cannot conceive of ‘humanities’ without some form of symbolic exchange, through some medium or another. Now why does this ‘discussion,’ through the medium of a language, matter today or anytime? For the very reason that language is the sole distinguishing human characteristic separating humankind from the animal and vegetable kingdoms, it is the precondition of civilization, of human cultures, and human projections of order onto the chaos of universal being. The humanities as we dispose them inside the curriculum of a modern college are organized according to symbolic systems, as well as methods of apprehending and analyzing such systems. The humanities do not investigate physical matter, do not investigate the demographics or psychographics of human communities, and do not ‘discuss’ or ‘communicate’ in order to develop wealth. The discourse of the humanities is properly of intrinsic merit, meaning that by engaging the so-called humanities curriculum we fulfill our compulsion to be more fully human in our being-ness.”

--Richard Berleth, Ph.D. – Professor and Chair, Communications

“Literature has the power to educate, entertain and inspire. Through generations of the past to the present, many works of literature continue to be part of the ever-changing world in which we live. In my reading of the novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, by Betty Smith, I have learned what it was like growing up in Williamsburg, Brooklyn during the early 1900s, through the eyes of a young girl named Francine Nolan. Through the author's usage of the events and the language I can

vividly picture what life was like back then. This book gives insight into the time and the personal desires of any girl growing up. Born to German immigrant parents, Francine feels that she has to make her parents proud in order for them to love her more than her brother Neely does. The events, which follow, change the events of her life as well as others around her. The book has something that almost everyone can relate to. The book in detail explains the conditions of people during this time; I believe that it is crucial for generations of the future to read literature from the past. Literature helps us gain insight into the past, gives us hope to deal with the current crisis. Literature is very important, it is essential for the growth of the mind.”

--Allison Grant – Student

“A study of the Humanities connects us to society’s universal imagination. The Humanities allows poetry to sing with music, history to pulse through philosophy, and art to embrace literature. The fusion of these disciplines propels us into the present, past and future consciousness simultaneously. The Humanities helps us avoid being the ‘type of specialist’ who never makes small mistakes while moving towards the great fallacy of isolationism. Buildings need gardens.”

--Claire Parrella, M.A.

“That branch of education referred to as Humanities by definition is concerned with human thought and human relations. Ah, yes, the Humanities Program has much to offer the astute reader. How wonderful to realize that human nature is gloriously complex. In the hands of gifted authors these complexities are captured and enshrined in fiction, poetry and drama. As they create their imaginary situations, they people them with the loneliness of a Miss Brill, the indecisiveness of a Hamlet, the depression of a Willie Loman, the mysterious

suicide of a Richard Cory and the idyllic love of a Romeo and Juliet. And we, teachers of the Humanities, have the splendid task of bringing students in contact with literature and ultimately with the reality of being human.”

--Sister Louise Sheehan – Adjunct Assistant Professor of English

“I suppose we shouldn’t care about such things as literature, philosophy, and art in lieu of the tragedy of 11 September 2001. Then, maybe the humanities will help us get our lives back to some semblance of normality. If the terrorists accomplished anything it was the taking away of our innocence, but not of our spirit. Maybe by going to a play, a lecture, or a gallery we can take our minds off what has happened, if only for a moment, and possibly languish in the beauty of make-believe as we did when we were children. I think many of us need to be able to go back to simpler times. We can lose ourselves in a beautiful painting, or verse from a much beloved poem or book.”

--Judith Ricciardo – College Relations

“Let Rachmaninov or Prokofiev serve as a slap in the face to those cynics who say, ‘Oh, there is nothing new, nothing.’ How dare so many people flourish in self-inflicted ignorance and mindless misery while there is, beckoning to them, a world of humanity. It has taken me years of trial-and-error study to understand and to appreciate music. At the age of seventeen I went out and made my first classical music purchase, something by Charles Ives. I hated it and thought, if this is what classical music is like, I don’t like it. Then, about a year later I discovered, by accident, the magnificent cathedral-like music of Bach’s noble pipes. Then came the incredibly upward sublime virtuosity of Mozart’s emotional voice, followed by an outward movement to the realms of nature in Beethoven’s somber piano

and Mendelssohn's expansive violin. This took years, with the sweets of Eric Satie and the Slavonic dances of Dvorak in between. Today, I cannot imagine my life without the penetrating, Jungian sounds of Sibelius sweeping me away along snowy billows out to the Baltic sea. All for Peace and Wisdom, which I cannot get from my cell phone, tight jeans, or a prescription drug. Such are the humanities: a lifetime of work; but lived, living, and future life itself. I am not a product: I am a process."

--Frank Thomas

"Being. Compassion. Meaning. These are not merely words, nor are they abstract concepts: they are vital elements that sustain the vigorous human creature. We learn how *to be*, we learn how to be compassionate, and we learn how to be active seekers for meaning in life by studying the humanities. Learning through the humanities must not be an end in itself but a means toward an understanding of the human condition, of what it means to be human: to love, to hate; to aspire, to fail; to hope, to despair. The humanities (literature, art, music, philosophy) teach receptive minds how to be better people for others and how to understand one's own place in a confused, threatening world. It is no wonder that ancient, primitive people knew how to tell stories and how to paint pictures: it is in the *contemplation and understanding* of who we are in the context of what is beyond us that we can find solace and wisdom. There never should be an end to our search for *meaning* in particular human life as it is lived and experienced in the greater, cosmic universe."

--Gregory F. Tague, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor of English

"Why do the humanities matter today? The word 'today' in the question brings to mind Whitehead's notion of the insistent

present. Homer, Sophocles, and Aeschylus may have a longer trip to the present moment, says Whitehead, than do Shakespeare, Shaw or O'Neill but if any of them have any meaning at all, it is right now. If not now, when? Undoubtedly, humans can face issues of overweening ambition without the insights provided on this subject in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Similarly for jealousy without what can be learned on this subject from *Othello*, or the dangers of overextension without have read *Richard the Second*. Nevertheless, can anyone doubt that one is better off if Shakespeare's insights inform his experience of these matters?

Neither, so it seems to me, can it be doubted that the great works of Greek and Hebrew past, especially the Dialogues of Plato and the Gospels, constitute a permanent program of reform throughout the history of Western civilization, and now throughout the world. The combination of unflinching rationality as expressed by Plato, and the longing for the Kingdom of God, as expressed in the teachings of Jesus, have created a noble discontent which underlies and hovers over movements of reform, and without which much progress in working toward an ideal arrangement would be unimaginable. It is from these documents that the lives and works of paradigmatic thinkers and saints become intelligible. Without the works of Plato and Aristotle, a Kant, or even a William James or a Whitehead would hardly make sense. Without the Gospels behind them, what could we make of the life of a Francis of Assisi, a Father Damien, an Albert Schweitzer, or a Mother Teresa? Plato once wrote that first we admire individuals, and then we come to admire the institutions which helped to shape their lives. Finally, says Plato, we come to admire and respect the ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty which shaped these institutions. The study and reflection upon key documents exhibiting these ideals is the permanent work of the humanities.

Let me now state what I consider to be the dangers to the formal study of the humanities. First there is pedantry. Many young people have been turned away from an acquaintance with authors such as Plato and Shakespeare through poor teaching. A too hasty demand for precision concerning technical knowledge of classical works can kill enthusiasm, and the indispensable sense of discovery felt by students as they apply these insights to their own experience of life. A second danger comes from teachers who wear philosophical blindfolds. I'm thinking of the logical positivists who claimed that nothing has any real meaning which cannot be weighed or measured, or a new brand of literary critic who believe that one person's opinion of the worth of a literary work is as good as anyone else's; who hold that the opinion of a Samuel Johnson or a T.S. Eliot on the merits of a Shakespearean play is no better than that of a student sitting in their classroom. All students receive an 'A' grade, and all have learned nothing worth mentioning. An obvious question inevitably will occur: 'Why pay tuition for learning nothing of lasting worth?'"

--Gerard C. Farley, Ph.D. – Adjunct Professor of Philosophy

"Recently, I read an article in which the actor John Travolta spoke about his friendship with the legendary actor James Cagney. Travolta related how it was Cagney who inspired him to act when, as a young boy, he watched Jimmy Cagney in the film *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. Travolta remembered that he was 'transported' while watching Cagney, whom he described as a 'spark plug.' Travolta then told his interviewer that when he finally met Cagney, he just took the legendary actor's hand and sat and cried.

I know that I would have had a similarly emotional reaction if I had met the writer William Maxwell. I would just have stared, taken his hand, and cried. Maxwell died in August

2000, a few weeks after his wife, at the age of 93. I was introduced to William Maxwell through a *New York Times* magazine piece, a biographical article he wrote entitled, "Nearing 90." As Cagney affected Travolta, so Maxwell transported me. Although he was in his 90s and I in my 40s his writing created an equivalence of feeling, of temperament that transgressed space and time. The way he speaks, in this amazing article, of his memory of examining the beautiful faces of his once-little children, or with humor speaks of his love of books and how the one thing he fears about death is that one cannot any longer engage in the nourishing and metamorphosing act of reading. As he puts it, 'One might as well be, well, dead.' I have gone on to read with enjoyment and interest many of Maxwell's works. In the *Times* article he closes by stating how sometimes he goes outside and simply 'takes a long hard look at everything.' Few words, but much sensitivity and meaning.

All of the preceding disparate ideas and feelings become coalesced in my mind with my father, who was an insurance adjuster by trade. He aspired to be a writer, in fact wrote much and often, but died in his 50s before he could get anything published. I have a poem, entitled 'A Woodland Bridge,' that he wrote when he was a man in his 30s, and to this day, over twenty-five years since his death, the words connect me to my father in a real, penetrating, and everlasting way. The poem connects me to who my father was *then*—to my mother who was in love with him, and still is—and the words continue to speak to me about who I am now, the man I married, and my special daughter. The words are a magical touchstone of family roots, of eternity.

Let me quote some of the poem: 'In the full lush of summer a lovers' haunt, and in winter her oaken heart is taunt / Patiently she awaits the song of spring with open arms and ready to sing / For she misses her children of city and wood / Just as

any mother would / The pastoral beauty of this woodland queen will live forever as a beautiful dream.' I am the lover; I am the mother awaiting her children; I am connected to the bridge, to Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and to the trees. Travolta's experience with Cagney, Maxwell's writing, my father's poem—how they are all connected for me—represent the humanities, those arts that give us a voice to cry out in joy, in sadness, in abandonment, in sheer exhilaration, in sheer madness over humankind's common dilemma to express meaning and purpose."

--Fredericka A. Jacks

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Humanities Day and these statements give living expression to the quiet voice murmuring through the body of *humanists* at St. Francis College and beyond. Humanistic study is not solipsistic labor in a silent cubicle. Rather, it is part of and the catalyst for engaged, hopeful, active community. I refer to Charles Dickens for an illustration to explain my purpose in representing the many voices today, and in this brochure, which address Why The Humanities Matter. In *Great Expectations* it is the uneducated and humble Joe who informs the vain and ambitious Pip, "life is made of ever so many partings welded together." Humanities Day and this brochure matter for the same reason that the humanities have always mattered: however tenuously, and whatever the friction, they bond together all of us in a vitally meaningful exchange. –gft