



“Individual and Community in the Settling of America” 2006-2007 ISI Honors Program Summer Conferences

**Big Sky, Montana
July 24 – July 30 & August 1 – August 7**

Fifty of ISI’s elite undergraduate student members joined thirty faculty, guests, and ISI staff, for the 12th Annual ISI Honors Program Summer Conferences, held amidst the breathtaking natural beauty of Big Sky, Montana. The two weeklong conferences examined “Individual and Community in the Settling of America,” with an Honors Fellow from Yale University describing the conference he attended as “an inspiring intellectual experience that helped remind me why the issues I agonize over in the library really do matter. It may just have convinced me to become an academic!” The conferences also marked a significant milestone for the Honors Program – The 500th ISI Honors Fellow since the Program’s inception in 1995.



Each conference consisted of five mornings of two lectures, three afternoons of Small-Group Seminars, and one afternoon of talks by Honors Program Alumni, as well as a selection of after-dinner talks. Mark Henrie, Director of Academic Affairs at ISI, and author of *A Student’s Guide to the Core Curriculum*, opened both conferences with a thought-provoking after-dinner talk entitled “Conservatism and America.” Henrie questioned the common narrative of the United States as the first “Universal Nation,” and speculated that the American experience might better be understood in terms of settlement, rather than in terms of flight – “lighting off for the territories,” as Huckleberry Finn put it.



The lectures which followed through the week each spoke to these themes in a unique way. Bradley Watson (Saint Vincent College) discussed whether America is united by a common creed or a common culture, while Neil Robertson (University of King’s College) addressed the question of “Will America Ever Settle Down?” Further lectures examined such scholars as Alexis de Tocqueville, Martin Heidegger, and Carlton Hayes, among others. Peter Lawler (Berry College) argued that the unsettled condition of the United States reflects humanity’s true nature, as understood by Augustinian Christianity.

An Honors Fellow from Palm Beach Atlantic University described the lectures as “very enlightening,” and said that they “opened my eyes to modes of thought that I would like to explore further.” Honors Fellows also took part in intense Question and Answer sessions, which followed each lecture, which illustrated to the Fellows both the high level of scholarship expected within the Academy, and the rich debate that exists within conservatism in America. This was bolstered further by the informal discussions that took place between Faculty and Honors Fellows between lectures



and during hospitality. As always, the relationships and insights that develop in the informal give-and-take of the week were considered by most Fellows to be the conference's most valuable component.

The Honors Fellows also participated in six afternoon seminars, each led by a Faculty Mentor. The works discussed were *The Roots of American Order*, *The Quest for Community*, *What I Saw in America*, *The Southern Essays of Richard Weaver*, *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man*, and *Jayber Crow*. The Honors Fellows had been given these books earlier in the summer to allow them to prepare for the seminars and were singled out for praise by a



Thomas More College student, who described them as “both invigorating and informative,” and praising the format as “relaxed enough to allow free conversation between the Fellows without wandering from the task in hand.” Another Fellow, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, described the seminars as “inspiring. The students and professors held nothing back – we discussed and debated until we were exhausted and I loved it.” Indeed, one such seminar, examining *What I Saw in America*, continued a half-hour after its scheduled finish-time, such was the enthusiasm of its participants for the subject.

For the majority of Honors Fellows, the Summer Conference was their first experience of the American West, and several opportunities were provided to encourage their appreciation of its history and wildlife. After-dinner talks were given by Professor Mark Shiffman (Villanova University), who outlined the history of the Big Sky Region from the time of the Lewis and Clark Expedition up to the present day, and Professor William Stott (Ripon College) who discussed “American History and Environmentalism.” Professor Stott’s talk, which was of particular interest to the ISI Bodman Science Scholars, urged the Honors Fellows to preserve and appreciate the natural world around them by first getting to know it intimately and “to tell its story.” The Honors Fellows took this advice to heart, with many joining either Professor Stott, himself a prominent amateur ornithologist who has long been active in conservation causes, on dawn Ornithology Hikes, Professor Shiffman on hikes to Ousel Falls and Beehive Basin, or by using their free time to explore the scenery and fauna that the region is home to.



ISI Program Officers Providenza Loera (Graduate Fellowships) and Francisco Gonzalez (Membership) were also on hand to detail to the Fellows how ISI can assist students who wish to pursue graduate study, and how Honors Fellows can start up an ISI Group on their campus, respectively.

Each conference concluded with a final afternoon Alumni Panel, where two Honors Program Alumni shared their experiences of their time as ISI Honors Fellows, detailing the many resources that ISI offers its students, to help the incoming class make the most of their year.

The ISI Honors Fellows will return to their campuses this fall, ready to continue an intense year of intellectual enlightenment with the support of their Faculty Mentors and the ISI Academic Affairs staff.

For information on the 2007-2008 ISI Honors Program, please visit
www.isihonorsprogram.org **or email** honors@isi.org.