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Between Classes: Marcy Sacks

Zoya Ahmed
Staff Writer

The small liberal arts community at Albion College allows for close connections inside and outside of the classroom. One of the many Albion advantages is the small student-to-professor ratio that allows students to build strong relationships with their professors.

This Week

This Between Classes article features Marcy Sacks, professor of History at Albion College. Sacks received a B.S. from Cornell University and an M.A. and Ph. D. from the University of California-Berkeley. Her areas of expertise include United States History and African American History.

Sacks was appointed to her position in 1999. Currently, she is teaching two history classes: “US History to Civil War” as well as “The Civil War in Myth and Memory.”

I met Sacks in her office on the second floor of Robinson Hall. With shelves filled with books, plenty of plants lining the windowsill and sunlight brightening the room, Sacks’ welcoming office was a great place for an easy conversation.

The conversation was edited for length and clarity.

The Conversation

The Pleiad: Did you always know that you wanted to teach after your experiences in college?

Sacks: Yeah. I loved doing the research, so I had an opportunity as an undergrad to do an honors thesis and discover that research was really wonderful. I knew that I believed in what a classroom could be, though I hadn’t experienced teaching. I certainly didn’t start out as a good teacher. I had no idea what I was doing. But I absolutely love teaching. Which is not to say there aren’t days that drive me nuts and students drive me nuts, but I feel so certain of the importance of the work I do.

I am so inspired by my students, by young people – you are all the future. I’m halfway done. Being with young people who remind me how little I know about the current world keeps me younger, it keeps me energized. I love getting up and struggling to wake young minds up. Absolutely love it.

P: Did you ever take a break from school or did you just continue through undergrad and then onto your Ph.D.?

S: A little break –an unexpected break.



Marcy Sacks, Julian S. Rammelkamp Professor of History sits in her office. Sacks is featured in this week’s Between Classes series, which features a conversation between a Pleiad staff member and a professor from Albion College (Photo illustration by Cade Thomas).

So I unexpectedly graduated early in three and a half years, so I was done in December. And then I decided to travel. I’d planned to go to Africa and then Israel for a semester of just traveling. Again, this is a long time ago, but war tensions were rising. The first Gulf War was just about to happen and Israel was not a part of the world to go to with that happening. So I ended up in Latin America, and I did not speak Spanish. I went to Ecuador with a backpack and spent two months traveling

around, and then went to Costa Rica. So, two very safe countries, which is why I chose them, but I didn’t speak Spanish. When I got to Costa Rica I’d been traveling alone for two months, which is lonely and hard, so I volunteered in their National Park system. And in the second park, I met my husband. I brought him home and he’s my souvenir, we’ve been married for 30 years.

See Between Classes on back.

Juandering Out Loud: On Stress, Nature and Finding Your Place in College



The author, Juan Rodriguez, sitting by the Kalamazoo River. The river runs through the Whitehouse Nature Center, one of many places on campus people can visit to take a break from the stress of college life (Photo illustration by Juan Rodriguez).

Juan Rodriguez
Managing Editor

November 15 wasn’t a good day.

I woke up with my burdens already waiting by my bedside. In my waking haze, I was able to ignore the voice in my head that recited my tasks for the day.

“It’s too early,” I said to myself. Let me shower at least.

The shower cleared away the haze that had muffled the babbling voice. It did so too well. All other thoughts were soon nudged aside by the growing list of demands that others expected of me.

I could feel the mask start to slip the moment I’d gotten dressed for the day. I was having a hard time getting up and

moving out from behind my desk. My combat boots weighed me down like cinderblocks. I figured I’d step out for a moment. If I kept busy, maybe I’d feel better.

I got to the Whitehouse Nature Center around noon. I wanted to take some pictures and relax, so I went to one of my favorite spots. I followed the Rail Trail up until it intersected with the Wesley Arden Dick Prairie Trail. I veered to my left and followed the Prairie Trail until I reached the bank of the Kalamazoo River.

Usually, there’s a bench in this spot along the river. That day though, no bench. I checked. Leaves might have covered the earth and snow might have covered said leaves, but there’s no way the two could have concealed an actual bench.

I made do with the exposed root of a tree that leans over the Kalamazoo. I set my bag down beside me as I tried to seat myself on the root. It wasn’t the most comfortable seating arrangement, definitely no bench, but it wasn’t the worst.

The stress rolled back in as my gaze became fixed on the Kalamazoo. Snowflakes began to fall and create ripples in the water. I could feel my anxiety spike.

I thought: I have assignments that are past due; why am I here? I can’t keep pace with those around me; why do I have to struggle when playing the part of a productive individual? I’m happy with who I am normally; why do I have to put on a show every time I step outside my room?

“Who are you performing for here, in this moment?” asked a gentle voice in the back of my head. “It’s just you, the trees and the river.”

I spent half an hour sitting on that tree root until the cold reached my bones. When I chose to get off the root, my anxiety had been frozen out. The cold helped keep me grounded in the present. The river and the voice had further helped ease my nerves, if only for a moment. I was grateful to have had my burdens eased, even temporarily.

Looking back, I’m reminded of a sentiment voiced by environmentalist John Muir in his writings. Muir often spoke of the benefits of the outdoors, whether that be the good tidings of the mountains or the necessity for a touch of wildness.

One quote sticks with me in particular: “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and

irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.”

I constantly feel that I’m putting on a performance, more so than most people. I struggle to generate the bare minimum that others produce effortlessly. I constantly have to give all my energy to do tasks that everyone else has deemed to be easy and basic.

This performance has gotten stale.

I can’t keep pretending like stress isn’t draining me, especially when the urge to go watch the Kalamazoo grows. I don’t have to pretend out there. I don’t have to spend precious energy keeping up my appearance. I’m allowed to exist and meet my own demands, instead of the demands others ask of me when all I feel I can give is the bare minimum.

I feel like I’m competing against an imagined ideal. If I didn’t feel this way, I wouldn’t even bother entertaining the idea that there was something wrong with me. But because I’m expected to keep pace with the standard before me though, I have to constantly assert who I am to myself.

I shouldn’t have to spend time and energy justifying my existence to myself or anyone else.

The nature center, thankfully, doesn’t ask me to. Every time I leave, I return revitalized, as if the breeze that carried me out had healed my wounded soul as a parting gift.

I can’t guarantee that the outdoors are for everyone at every time. That simply depends on what a person needs at a given moment. I do, though, encourage anyone in need of respite to go out and explore.

Find that specific corner of the world that calls out and offers peace of mind. I’m forever grateful to have found mine, especially because of days like these.

Opinion: The Laundry Room is for Laundry, Not Socializing

Rhiannon Slotnick
Part-Time Staff Writer

Laundry is one of many tasks college students have to keep up with. But when there are only a few laundry machines in a building with at least 200 people, cleaning your clothes can be a bit of a hassle.

I'm in my second year at Albion College. The number of times I've had trouble doing laundry is disturbing.

During my freshman year, I lived in Wesley Hall. There were 12 washers and dryers for the entire building, but students weren't always considerate when doing their laundry. Some took up to five washers for their clothes. Others would leave their clothes laying around for hours.

I know that I'm not the only one who feels this way; many students on this campus hate doing their laundry here.

First-year Benjamin Harkness from Eaton Rapids said his experience doing laundry here has been so-so.

"I've learned not to do my laundry on the weekend because everybody does it on the weekend," Harkness said.

One of the biggest difficulties when doing laundry is finding a dryer that is not being used. Harkness said that even if you are lucky enough to get your laundry in the washer, drying it can be another mountain to climb.

"Dryers are usually the things you have to wait for the most because they take the longest, and people just leave their stuff there," Harkness said.

Wesley Hall, the building where I found doing laundry to be a massive hassle, has the most laundry machines out of

all the residential buildings on campus. Whitehouse Hall only has five.

I live in Mitchell Towers with only eight machines. Keep in mind, according to The Office of Community Living, Mitchell Towers houses approximately 233 students.

At the beginning of the semester, I went down to the basement of the North Tower to wash my clothes, only to find that there were no washers available. So I went over to the south side and found someone using all four washers at the exact same time, meaning that after they were cleaned, it is likely their clothes then went into all four dryers.

It was beyond irritating. I don't understand why people use all the washers at the same time as if other people don't

need to get their laundry done. At the most, use one washer for load after load. Even though it takes longer, it's more considerate of others who live in the same building.

Dorms are shared living spaces and not everybody has the time to wait for somebody else's massive load of laundry to finish spinning.

Others might not even have the confidence to say something when a person decides to use more than one machine.

Residents with anxiety, for example, suffer as a result of others' selfishness. Senior Ashley Rocha from Dallas said her anxiety makes laundry difficult for her.

"I have really bad social anxiety. I hate the fact that there are always people in the laundry room," said Rocha. "Sometimes I would wake up at five in the morning or stay up until three because I didn't want to run into people."

In my experience, people tend to use the laundry room as a social area.

I recall one time during my freshman year when I needed to get my laundry. People were crowded around the machine I was using, and one girl was sitting on top of it. That made me pretty uncomfortable, but compared to other laundry room violations I've witnessed, that was pretty tame.

I once saw a couple making out on top of a dryer in Mitchell Towers. I walked in, saw them kissing, and then left the room. They paused when they saw me, but before I had fully turned my back, they started making out again. It was not a fun experience. It was extremely uncomfortable.

Students should start being more considerate of other people when doing their laundry. The room is not a social area; get in, do your laundry and get out.

Plain and simple.



Laundry is a hassle at Albion College. It doesn't have to be (Photo Illustration by Cade Thomas).

Photos: AKA, SIA Host Talent Show Against Hunger

Cade Thomas
Staff Photographer

On Nov. 17, two sororities, Alpha Kappa Alpha and the Hermandad de Sigma Iota Alpha, hosted the Talent Show Against Hunger at the KC Stack.

Canned food items and loose change were collected as admission into the event. All donations were given to a local food pantry in Albion.

There were a total of 14 acts, and at the end of the night singer Lolo Reed, Saginaw junior, was declared the winner.



Above: The first performers of the night, The Albion Divine Dance Team, wearing matching outfits and dancing in unison (Photo by Cade Thomas).



Above: Skye Dickson is spontaneously joined by members of the crowd, Najee Smith and Damario Chapman, who served as her background dancers while she sang (Photo by Cade Thomas).



Above: Skye Dickson, Chicago junior, hugs Lolo Reed after Dickson was mistakenly announced as the winner. Following the mistake, Reed was officially crowned champion (Photo by Cade Thomas).



Above: Martaven Hardy, Muskegon sophomore, raps an unreleased single. Hardy raps under the stage name YermTeam Paw (Photo by Cade Thomas).

Between Classes:

Continued from front

P: So how did you get into being a park ranger from being interested in history?

S: I've always been really interested in conservation. I'm really concerned about the environment, but volunteering in their national parks had a lot to do with just, I wanted to see the natural beauty. And I was tired of traveling alone because it's hard, and so it seemed like a way to do both. Once I got to, you know, spend time in their national parks and they're really well known for their conservation in Costa Rica. But that way I'm anchored to a place for a couple weeks at a time as opposed to just randomly traveling. And then once I met (my husband) that was it. We went on the back of his motorcycle all over the country. It was great and I wasn't alone anymore because I had him.

P: What do you do outside of the classroom?

S: I run. I do jigsaw puzzles, I play with my cats. I'm a competitive marathoner, so I've run a lot and I am obsessed with running. If I don't run on a day my whole world falls apart.

P: How long do you run every day?

S: My shortest round is 6 miles. Anything less than that doesn't count, so 6 miles. And when I'm in marathon training and I've just finished my marathon cycle, so it doesn't start again for a month. I have a whole month before I have to start again, so I'm pretty much doing 6 a day. But it'll ramp up to like in the height of marathon training, I'll get to close to 60 miles a week. Which is a ridiculous amount of running.

P: Do you have anything else that you'd like to add for readers to know?

S: What readers should know is that the worst part about living in Michigan is that there are no real bagels. That is the hardest part about living in Michigan, it's the bagels. There are not real bagels here. What they think they're eating are not bagels and it is tragic.

P: The real bagels are in New York?

S: Oh yes, oh yes. And we should all go to New York and experience true bagels and then somebody needs to learn how to make them here so that I don't have to feel like I have to always be in New York.

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