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The McGillicuddy fellowship showcase: An annual opportunity for enlightenment

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Michael Socolow, director of the Clement and Linda McGillicuddy Humanities Center, and Karen Sieber, a humanities specialist at the center, were excited to introduce this year's four McGillicuddy's students. While their research differed in topics, students Hailey Cedor, Nola Prevost, Nolan Altvater and Katherine Reardon all had the same idea of sharing the truth in mind.

The truths that these four students have spent the past year chasing range from the retelling of family history to reparations for the Holocaust from the influence of men in fairytales to the treatment of Wabanaki people – both in the past and present.

The McGillicuddy Humanities Center was created with the intention of deepening the teachings and public engagement of the humanities, especially regarding the human condition. Currently, the center is supporting eight undergraduate fellows and four graduateing fellows who are all allotted \$4,000 per semester during their time in the two-semester program. During these two semesters, the students are given the opportunity to work on independent research projects in the humanities.

The two-night event on April 21 and 22 was the annual fellows' showcase titled "The Stories We Tell."

Reardon, an English student from Westwood, Massachusetts, was the first student to present. Her research focused on the Irish origins of her family, specifically on her paternal grandfather's side while taking a closer look at feminism and the place of women in Irish culture. Reardon had the chance to travel to Ireland in order to unlock the truth of her family history.

"There is value in knowing the truth," Reardon said. "But it is okay to still live in the lie... it is a case to case basis on whether or not it's a good thing or a bad thing."

In some ways understanding where Reardon came from was not an easy truth.

"Maybe the objective truth wasn't exactly what I wanted," Reardon admitted. "I wanted my assumed truths to be the truth."

The second student presentation was that of Nola Prevost, who is originally from Brewer, Maine. She is also an English student and is concentrating in creative writing. Prevost's fellowship project is centered primarily on the idea of feminism, or lack thereof, in fairytales. She explained that most of the fairytales we know today were written by men and modeled after the expectations of the upper class. Prevost's project titled "All The Girls In the Woods" is a compilation of seventeen pieces ranging from fiction to prose to poetry. When asked what the weirdest constraint was in writing her very abstract thesis, Prevost was quick to respond.

"During my research, probably the element of magic was the biggest constraint, but I mostly felt compelled as opposed to constrained," Prevost said.

The second night of the showcase began with Hailey Cedor's presentation, which revolved around the Holocaust in Lithuania. Cedor is a History student major from North Kingstown, Rhode Island. Through her research, Cedor discovered drastic statistics and facts that she had never heard in her life.

Her project is divided into three parts and compiled of essays, excerpts and maps depicting the genocide that took place throughout the early to mid 20th century. Many Lithuanians, according to Cedor's research, were complicit, if not involved, in the Holocaust.

"Lithuania is not the only country that needs to take action for reparations," Cedor said. "There are systemic issues in our country, too."

The final project of this year's fellowship showcase was the work of secondary education student Nolan Altvater of Sipayik and Island Falls, Maine. Altvater's research is focused on decolonizing Maine schools in regard to Wabanaki education programs.

Altvater, a Wabanaki himself, offered insight into the failure of Maine schools to teach indigenous people's history.

"Maine is pretty behind compared to other states in regard to their relationship with indigenous people," Alvater said. "And it is time for that to change."

After explaining the history of the Wampum and other parts of Wabanaki culture, Altvater readily offered some suggestions for improving the education system.

"Start by reinstating the Wabanaki Studies Commission with state funding and university support," Alvater said. "Also, develop a compulsory [UMaine] course at the 300 level."

The McGillicuddy fellowship showcase was a reminder to us all that there is much more to be done. Thank you to the students and staff who made this year's program possible.

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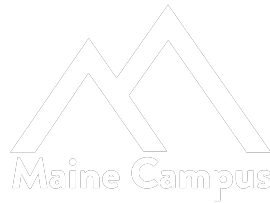
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