

*Living the Liberal Arts  
Periclean Honors Forum  
& HF Induction*



Friday, February 26, 2016 at 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Upper Dining Hall, Rooms 3 and 4

Featuring Alumni Participants:

Annie Potish '11, Charter School in NYC / Relay Graduate School of Education

Dr. Jessada Mahatthananchai '09, Lecturer in Chemistry at Skidmore

# SKIDMORE COLLEGE HONORS FORUM

## Mission Statement

*Skidmore College is a small, highly selective liberal arts college that fosters academic inquiry and creative thought and expression. Honors Forum promotes these goals. Skidmore founded the Honors Forum in 1997 as an inclusive community of highly motivated students who have promise to become student leaders and globally informed citizens. Our goal is to encourage students to take ownership of their academic and co-curricular education and to reflect meaningfully on their personal and professional goals. The Honors Forum invites all first and second-year students with a 3.5 GPA to apply to the Forum.*

*Honors Forum introduces extraordinary rigor into academic programs as students consider complex questions and examine sophisticated materials. Honors Forum students develop what we refer to as “the life of the mind” by working alongside their faculty on research projects in labs, at field sites, in libraries, and in studios, often helping to shape the curriculum with which they engage. The Forum promotes and supports student-organized co-curricular activities (e.g. lectures and panel discussions) and leadership and civic engagement opportunities where students guide fellow peers, faculty, and staff within the Skidmore community and beyond. We also encourage all students at Skidmore College to take an Honors course, add-on, or independent study to become invested in a community of scholars and leaders.*

# SKIDMORE COLLEGE HONORS FORUM

**HONORS FORUM PROVIDES TALENTED, HIGHLY MOTIVATED STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY** to engage in heightened academic challenges and meaningful community service experiences. The Forum, as the name suggests, is not an exclusive society but a structure that enhances Skidmore's intellectual and civic life. The approximately 180-200 Honors Forum students earn membership on the basis of their academic achievements and aspirations as well as their commitment to community and leadership qualities. Students with a 3.5 GPA receive an invitation to apply for membership after their first and third semesters at Skidmore.

**A SKIDMORE EDUCATION EMPHASIZES** the "*mind and the hand*," learning and doing, and creativity. Honors Forum members work for community betterment, either on campus, the greater Saratoga Springs area, or the global community. Forum members must complete a citizenship requirement by the end of their junior year and course work by the end of their senior year.

## **HONORS FORUM:**

- Annually organizes and sponsors such events as the annual Jon Ramsey Honors Forum Lecture (Skidmore students nominate their professors for this honor), and "Shades of Gray" (thought-provoking, campus-wide discussions on diversity, athletic stereotypes, academic and personal ethics, gender-related issues, climate change, voting dynamics, etc.).
- Assists students in traveling to conferences and conducting research.
- Has a designated student lounge, 321 Ladd Hall
- Encourages student course initiatives such as "Independent Studies," "Peer Health Education," and "Citizen-Studentship" (students literally teach themselves).
- Sponsors trips to places such as New York City's Broadway, the Boston Aquarium, The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Proctors Theatre, and the Saratoga Battlefield.

## **ALUMNI PANELISTS**

**Name:** Annie Potish

**Email:** [anne.potish@gmail.com](mailto:anne.potish@gmail.com)

**Class Year:** 2011

**Major/Minor:** English Major/History Minor

**Career Field or Graduate Degree Discipline:** Education

**Job Title or Graduate Degree / Program:** Teacher/ Masters of Teaching

**Employer / Graduate School:** A charter school in New York City/ Relay Graduate School of Education

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### **How has your journey of academic discovery at Skidmore helped to shape who you are today?**

At Skidmore, there's so much emphasis on learning as a rewarding process in itself, rather than as a means of securing a degree or satisfying requirements. I was encouraged to take classes that challenged me and opened my mind, and I try to keep that sense of inquiry with me today. The English department at Skidmore is absolutely incredible, and my positive experiences in those classes definitely contributed to my desire to teach English. Another part of my academic journey at Skidmore was being Head Tutor in the Writing Center, which further solidified my passion for going into education.

### **Please describe your current employment or graduate study.**

I am currently a middle school English Teacher. I work at a charter school in the South Bronx in New York City.

### **Is graduate education typically required in your field?**

A Master's degree is typically required to be a teacher.

### **What talents, personality traits and specific skills help people do well in this field?**

I think that dedication, inquisitiveness, and enthusiasm go a long way in the field of education. Problem-solving and willingness to try new things are also important, as well as communication and organization skills.

### **What do you like about your work or studies?**

There's something amazing about seeing my students grapple with a text's meaning, express themselves powerfully through writing, or simply learn about themselves and the world around them. I've always loved reading and writing, and my work allows me to share that passion every day with young people.

### **What is the biggest misconception about what you do?**

Teaching isn't standing in the front of a classroom and having students follow along. The best teaching is student-centered, and this requires a lot of planning, adapting, problem-solving, and reflecting. Teaching isn't about finding something that works and sticking with it—it's about constant growth and improvement.

### **What advice would you give to Skidmore students who are joining Honors Forum today?**

My advice is that while you're at Skidmore, take classes that interest and excite you throughout your four years—not just when you're fulfilling your liberal arts requirements. This may sound straightforward, but I think it can be easy to get caught up in requirements or classes you feel you “should” take. I love English and history, but while I was at Skidmore, I found myself unexpectedly interested in psychology classes. These classes didn't count towards my major or minor, but they inspired me to think in new ways and enhanced my overall college experience.

**Has creative thought mattered in your career? How so?**

Absolutely! Whether I'm planning out an entire unit or a short-term project, it's so important for me to be as creative and purposeful as possible. Creativity leads to student engagement. When students are engaged, they put in the most effort and show the most academic growth. As an educator, it's my responsibility to foster creativity in my students, which means taking a look at how creative I'm being myself.

**Would you be open to having students and other alumni contact you for further information or assistance? If so, please include your email address:**

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Name: Jessada Mahatthananchai

Email: [jmahatth@skidmore.edu](mailto:jmahatth@skidmore.edu)

Class Year: 2009

Major/Minor: Chemistry/English&HF

Career Field or Graduate Degree Discipline: Chemistry

Job Title or Graduate Degree / Program: Visiting Assistant Professor

Employer / Graduate School: Skidmore

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**How has your journey of academic discovery at Skidmore helped to shape who you are today?**

While I imagined pursuing an advanced degree in chemistry, Europe was definitely never on my radar screen. I had initial reservations about moving, but in the end I did so in no small part due to a lesson I learned at Skidmore and HF—to always challenge myself with new circumstances and learning experiences. I enjoyed the challenges Skidmore offered—taking classes in subjects with which I was not familiar, participating in a travel seminar program, and taking on summer research.

**Please describe your current employment or graduate study.**

I am currently a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Chemistry Department at Skidmore.

**Is graduate education typically required in your field?**

Yes, very common.

**What talents, personality traits and specific skills help people do well in this field?**

Problem-solving on the spot; multi-tasking; written communication

**What do you like about your work or studies?**

To be able to teach what I love at my alma mater, the school I love.

**What is the biggest misconception about what you do?**

That we blow things up for fun (an explosion is not acceptable in chemistry lab).

**What advice would you give to Skidmore students who are joining Honors Forum today?**

Always challenge yourself academically; never settle for what is easy or comfortable. If there's something you don't learn in class, you can find it yourself, expand your knowledge, and start a conversation with any professors; they love to teach and discuss ideas. Doing so also allows you to create a lasting relationship with faculty members.

**Has creative thought mattered in your career? How so?**

I once heard someone boldly argue that "critical thinking matters" should be Skidmore's motto. I do agree with that statement. While creativity certainly has its place in my work, the skill set that is more crucial to my daily work is critical thinking. I spent a lot of time learning to think critically at Skidmore. For example, when I read science publications, I always read them closely and carefully to examine why the work is important and how I can learn from it and make new connections.

**PREVIOUS ALUMNI PANELISTS (2013)**

**Name:** Leah Elliott

**Email:** [lee28@cornell.edu](mailto:lee28@cornell.edu)

**Class Year:** 2006

**Major:** Biology (general)

**Career Field or Graduate Degree Discipline:** Field of Genetics, Genomics and Development in the Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics

**Job Title or Graduate Degree / Program:** PhD Candidate

**Employer / Graduate School:** Cornell University

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**How has your journey of academic discovery at Skidmore helped to shape who you are today?**

When I reflect on my career goals, I realize that in some ways I want to recreate my Skidmore experience. My career goal is to be a professor in a Biology department in a small liberal arts college. I want to spend my time teaching students about Biology and hopefully inspiring in others the excitement and joy I find in figuring out how life works. I also want to continue to do independent research, involving undergraduate students, and expand the boundaries of human knowledge.

**Please describe your current employment or graduate study.**

I am currently finishing my PhD studies. My dissertation work has focused on how proteins made from genes on nuclear DNA coordinate and cooperate with proteins made from genes on mitochondrial DNA in order for mitochondria to make the energy that powers all cells.

**How did you get to where you are now? Please describe how you landed your current job or the process by which you got into your current graduate program.**

Directly after graduating from Skidmore in 2006 I entered the Japanese Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) to spend a year teaching English as a second language in Japanese public schools. While in Japan I applied to the Graduate School at Cornell University, where I currently am. I believe that my application was greatly helped by the summer undergraduate research experience I participated in at Cornell in 2005. My acceptance into that program in turn, was helped by the independent research opportunities that I had at Skidmore.

**Is graduate education typically required in your field?**

A PhD is required for a career as an academic researcher, which is my ultimate goal.

**What might be some of the next career steps for someone in your position?**

I plan to continue my training as a researcher by becoming a post-doctoral fellow (post-doc) in order to learn about another aspect of biology that is different than my PhD work, and to become more independent as a researcher.

**What talents, personality traits and specific skills help people do well in this field?**

Research in the life sciences is often repetitive. An intense attention to detail, along with a dose of perfectionism, is important to keeping experiments working and consistent time after time. A strong sense of curiosity and/or a passion for the question the research attempts to answer is key to keeping you engaged with the daily tasks in the lab.

**What do you like about your work or studies?**

I love doing research because it makes me an explorer and adventure in knowledge. For a (brief) time I am the only person in the history of humanity that knows the fact that I just uncovered.

**What do you dislike?**

Repeating experiments over and over again to verify the result can be boring; rediscovering the same fact for the second and third time isn't as exciting as the first.

**What is the biggest misconception about what you do?**

I suppose people think of science as dry and boring, when in reality science is a creative and constantly changing field.

**What advice would you give to Skidmore students who are embarking on this major today?**

I encourage students in Biology to explore all aspects of the discipline and to avoid too much specialization. Graduate study forces you to go deeply into a very narrow topic. But in order to learn what topic you would want to delve into and to bring a variety of perspectives to a problem, you need to experience many different aspects. Plant and yeast have just as much to teach us about how life works as animals or fruit flies.

**Has creative thought mattered in your career? How so?**

Science is an essentially creative process. I know that it can seem to be little more than the memorization of facts and rules, especially early on. But to be a researcher and to push at the boundaries of our understanding of the natural world requires creativity: creativity to imagine what could be happening in order to generate testable hypotheses. A researcher must be flexible in his or her thinking, to be willing to abandon an idea when experiments show it to be wrong and to look at the data with fresh eyes and an open mind to try again.

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**Name: Adam Epstein**

**Email: [adamnepstein@gmail.com](mailto:adamnepstein@gmail.com)**

**Class Year: 2008**

**Major: Religious Studies / South Asian Studies**

**Career Field or Graduate Degree Discipline: Music Education**

**Job Title or Graduate Degree / Program: K-8 Music Educator (Master of Music Education degree)**

**Employer / Graduate School: Somerville Public Schools / The Boston Conservatory**

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**How has your journey of academic discovery at Skidmore helped to shape who you are today?**

Skidmore gave me the tools and perspectives to think about how I can best serve our society and our world. My semester abroad in India was particularly influential. I think one of Skidmore's many strengths is the college's emphasis on connecting academic study to the real world.

**Please describe your current employment or graduate study:**

I earned a Master of Music Education degree at The Boston Conservatory, and I currently work as a K-8 Music Teacher in the Somerville (MA) Public Schools. I teach general music, chorus, percussion, and world music to a diverse population of mostly low-income urban youth.

**How did you get to where you are now? Please describe how you landed your current job or the process by which you got into your current graduate program.**

I gained experience in the field by teaching for a non-profit music program in the Boston Public Schools during graduate school. Immediately afterwards, I taught in the Troy, NY City School District in a Title I school. My degree, my experience in urban education, and some important professional networking helped me land my current job.

**Is graduate education typically required in your field?**

Yes. A Master's degree is needed to obtain a professional teaching license within 5 years from entering the profession.

**What might be some of the next career steps for someone in your position?**

I have lately become more involved in my local, state, and national professional organizations. This involvement could lead to some leadership positions with regard to planning professional development conferences, helping coordinate regional music festivals, conducting festival ensembles, and presenting workshops to other music teachers. I am also working on a certificate in a particular teaching approach called the Kodály Concept. I have also been asked to conduct an All-City ensemble. In the future, I could work toward becoming a music supervisor/administrator or a teacher-educator; I could also work on a PhD or EdD in Music Education and do research on music learning and/or ethnomusicology.

**What talents, personality traits and specific skills help people do well in this field?**

A high level of musicianship is essential. Even more important is an understanding of how to present and sequence musical material for students in developmentally appropriate ways. The most crucial skill is being able to connect with children and to inspire a passion for music in them by example. That's about 80% of the job.

**What do you like about your work or studies?**

Seeing students surpass expectations and grow.

**What do you dislike?**

Dealing with workplace politics and working through scheduling problems.

**What is the biggest misconception about what you do?**

Many people view school music as a fun time that isn't particularly demanding; Music education is often perceived as something extra or superfluous in public education. As a result, most people don't understand the robust skill set that is involved in teaching music. I believe that music education is an inherited right of every person and that only the highest quality music and teaching will do. It is an incredibly complex and rigorous profession.

**What advice would you give to Skidmore students who are embarking on this major today?**

Develop your musicianship on as many instruments as you can, particularly your voice, and keyboard if you can. Get practice working with kids through summer camps, volunteering, interning, etc. and network, network, network. Surround yourself with great mentors who will lead you on the right paths.

**Has creative thought mattered in your career? How so?**

Of course! My job constantly demands thinking creatively in order to come up with the best ways to help my particular population of students learn music. The answers are hardly ever in the textbook. Careful analysis of student data is important, but finding that special way to engage the student who didn't know he or she had it in them is the art of teaching music. Creative thought matters big time.

**Comments (anything else you'd like to add that we didn't ask about?):**

The skills you are learning at Skidmore are transferable to a number of careers. Think expansively when you are selecting courses and also when you are thinking of your post-graduate options. Even though I didn't major or minor in music, I was able to use the skills I began in my pre-college study in music which I honed through my participation in Skidmore ensembles to make a career. Being able to write well and to think critically about culture didn't hurt either. And don't forget to have fun!



## **The Career Development Center**

Counseling and advising services and resources are available for all Skidmore students, first-year through senior, and for all Skidmore Alumni, for life (open year round).

The Career Development Center

Starbuck Center, 2nd Floor

(518) 580-5790 / [www.skidmore.edu/career](http://www.skidmore.edu/career)

### **Counseling Appointments**

- Career Counseling
- Career Exploration
- Choosing a Major
- Resume & Cover Letter Critiques
- Networking
- Interview Prep
- Internship/Job Search
- Graduate School Prep

### **Programming**

- Career Jam
- Graduate & Professional School Expo
- Alumni Back to Campus
- Internship Expo
- Careers That Make a Difference
- Recruiting Programs
- Information Sessions
- Workshops
- Programming for Specific Populations, Disciplines &/Or Majors
- Skidmore Summer Funded Internship Awards Program

Career Coaches are available, first come/first serve, in the Career Development Center each day, 10 am – 4 pm, for resume and cover letter critiques, and to answer general career questions.

## **NOTES:**