Dear Alvernia Community,

On Tuesday, January 12th, a catastrophic earthquake struck near Port-au-Prince, Haiti. As I am writing this, the full extent of the damage is still being assessed, but the death toll is still climbing. As the tragedy in Haiti continues to unfold, Alvernia students are beginning to take action to help the victims devastated by the earthquake. The Student Government Association, Campus Ministry and the Office of Student Activities have teamed up to help support the victims of this tragic natural disaster.

Fundraising to help the victims in Haiti kicked off at the Martin Luther King Day Celebration on January 19th. The fundraising continued until the 26th of January. This is the initial step Alvernia students are taking to help the victims of the earthquake in Haiti. Please look around campus for students who are carrying silver cans and donate what you can to help these victims.

The initial fundraising ended on Tuesday, January 26th and on that day a prayer vigil was held at the quad.

If you have any fundraising suggestions or ideas for events to raise awareness of this disaster, please do not hesitate to contact me. Also, if you would like to send a donation, please send it to Father Kevin Queally in Campus Ministry. All donations will be sent to Mercy Corps nations will be sent to Mercy Corps to help with their efforts in Haiti. I would also like to invite you to join our facebook event for Alvernia Helping Haiti. We will be sending out updates on our efforts to help the Haitian people through that event.

Thank you everyone for your wonderful support and please keep the people of Haiti in your prayers.

Emily Berret
Student Government Association President

“It is incredibly horrible to see a catastrophe of this size hit a people who have been suffering from extreme poverty, violence and unrest for so many decades. We understand the first response is critical to serve the immediate needs of countless people who are now displaced from their homes, are suffering trauma, and most require urgent care.” - Angelina Jolie
Features

Alvernia Plans Day Trips to Chase Away the Winter Blues

By, Geoff Nagle
Staff Writer

Outside the weather continues its assault of bitterly cold temperatures. Snow-covered trees are bare and tremble from each swirling gust, and the grass, stapled with frost, eagerly anticipates the first spring rainfall. All of this is happening while students continue to barricade themselves inside from what feels like a ceaseless winter. Thankfully, a break has come to allow hardworking students to indulge in fun, rather than abstain from it. This semester Alvernia University has planned day trips which range from snow tubing to a day in our nation’s capital. These day trips are designed to get students up and moving.

The Office of Student Activities offers Saturday trips until the end of the spring semester–trips which have quickly become a welcome tradition. Each trip offers the opportunity for having fun, gaining knowledge, and taking a break from schoolwork.

Ever wondered about the possibility of a pinky-sized ball of wax? Or how exactly crayons are made? On Saturday, February 6th, Alvernia will be offering a trip to the Crayola Factory in Easton, PA. If this isn’t enough, each ticket includes admission to the National Canal Museum located next door. This museum is set up to answer any and all questions about waterways. Potamophobics (look it up if curious) need not worry, however. The Crayola Factory offers more than enough entertainment for an entire day.

Trekking closer toward Valentine’s Day, Alvernia has a trip to King of Prussia set up on February 13th. Only a week after having hands transformed into the image of its predecessor? Could you not re-build your island home in flimsy shanty- and shack-towns? flipped into the lake of fire and brimstone. This is the beginning of Christianity’s argument that God’s judgment is terrible and swift for those cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.

This is not his responsibility to help be free them from French colonialism, of which the former has located the source of.

For centuries the church has wrestled with the allegedly rationally moral and the other at the philosophical response is that your argument is counterintuitive and in- revulsive. To the former, the argument is persuasive, and taking a break from schoolwork. Ever wondered about the possibility of a pinky-sized ball of wax? Or how exactly crayons are made? On Saturday, February 6th, Alvernia will be offering a trip to the Crayola Factory in Easton, PA. If this isn’t enough, each ticket includes admission to the National Canal Museum located next door. This museum is set up to answer any and all questions about waterways. Potamophobics (look it up if curious) need not worry, however. The Crayola Factory offers more than enough entertainment for an entire day.

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As we prepare to assist you in this difficult time, a polite request: If it’s possible, could you not re-build your island home in flimsy shanty- and shack-towns? And could some of you may be use a condom once in a while? Sincerely, "The Rest of the World"

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Shirley’s argument is that it is not his responsibility to help because, after all, Haitians and the Haitian government have been so irresponsible in the past in regard to developing the Haitian economy and preparing for the inevitable natural calamity of an earthquake. There it is again, the simplistic appeal to the responsibility of the suffering. Unfortunately, too many of us find the argument persuasive, even as some of us embrace Robertson’s vengeful God. We are a country of hard-driving, results-oriented achievers. And it’s easier to repeat the creed of individual responsibility write larger than to work the problem through. Besides, it makes us feel so blessedly well-responsible.

The basis for Shirley’s position? Logic, and who can argue with logic? Referring to Hurricane Katrina, Shirley writes, “Make the same mistake again. Rebuild a doomed city, putting aside logic as we did.” Consequently, it makes no sense to Shirley to help Haitians without laying down conditions so that “I feel that my assistance is deserved and justified.” Pat Robertson and Paul Shirley, one at the theological extreme and the other at the philosophical extreme. To the latter, my philosophical response is that your argument is counterintuitive and instinctively revulsive. To the former, you have forgotten that Christian-ity is about heart as well as head. To both of you, you are entrenched with your reflection in the pool.

Haiti’s’ On Haiti

By, Gerald S. Vigna
Director, Center for Ethics and Leadership

Working with my students in Introduction to Theology last fall, I decided to assign them a few passages from Revelation. Chapter 19 speaks of the enemies of God being cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. This is the beginning of Christianity’s argument that God’s judgment is terrible and swift for those cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.

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The question of whom God judges and how was raised again in the worst way by politician and Pastor Pat Robertson, who has quite a track record in spiteful Christianity. Readers may recall that he and Jerry Falwell suggested that 9/11 might have been God’s punishment for America’s sins. Those of us with a special attachment to New Orleans will not forget his attributing that disaster to the Crescent City’s unique ambiance. Robertson has now crossed over into territory that is beyond reprehensible for a Christian pastor. Cit- ing a Haitian legend from the late 18th century that claims that Haitian slaves made a pact with the devil to free them from French colonialism, Robertson has located the source of the earthquake in divine retribution.

Robertson is in good company with the allegedly rationally moral and the other at the philosophical response is that your argument is counterintuitive and instinctively revulsive. To the former, the argument is persuasive, and taking a break from schoolwork. Ever wondered about the possibility of a pinky-sized ball of wax? Or how exactly crayons are made? On Saturday, February 6th, Alvernia will be offering a trip to the Crayola Factory in Easton, PA. If this isn’t enough, each ticket includes admission to the National Canal Museum located next door. This museum is set up to answer any and all questions about waterways. Potamophobics (look it up if curious) need not worry, however. The Crayola Factory offers more than enough entertainment for an entire day.

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By, Chris Farley
Contributing Writer

100 SPF maximum shield sunscreen, check. Insect repellent containing 50-70% DEET, check. A prescription for “Cipro” in case the infamous traveler’s illness appears, check. Anti-malaria pills because, well, I’m better off playing it safe, check. A mind that is prepared for an interesting and probably exhilarating experience in a country that “needs our help,” check. I felt ready to go to “Los Tres Brazos” in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. After all, it’s normal to approach a trip to Santo Domingo or any third world country with a bit of caution. It is also quite ordinary to assume that, while you will likely enjoy your time with the good people of a new country, you will be happy to leave the following week. After all, what could measure up to the land of opportunity, beauty, and majestic freedom that is the United States of America? Well, I might have found a competitor.

I am writing this article principally as a witness. Though I do realize words and articulation can only go so far, it has become a duty of mine to express what I have felt in Santo Domingo. It is unlike anything I have experienced in my life. Once again, life reveals its own truths in the character of irony. Irony tells of the paradox in our souls, the paradox we are often unwilling to accept. What is this irony of which I speak? Simply stated, Alvernia University’s quest to Santo Domingo was not so much a mission as a spiritual journey, a face-to-face confrontation with the pure, unadulterated God, the explicit Jesus. And whether we realize it or not, the very same God became nearly non-existent in contemporary America. Perhaps that is not America’s fault since the U.S., in many ways, does not offer the same riches as a third world nation. Do you now see where the irony resides? The beautiful people of Los Tres Brazos and the materially weak communities of Santo Domingo are not poor. We are. Allow me to explain.

As somebody who has never been to Santo Domingo or on a similar mission trip, I was anxious to discover a new culture. Meanwhile, veterans like Judy Bohler and Lisa Venkler were content and at peace while you will likely enjoy your time with the good people of a new country; the term “poverty” took new meaning (something that would happen numerous times throughout the trip). Trash piled up on the roads, stray, sickly dogs wandered the sidewalk, and potholes sunk so deep that I could swear our van nearly assumed a 45 degree angle; the material exiguity was visually suffocating.

In the same moment, amidst all the misfortune and injustice that has plagued Los Tres Brazos, I was struck with the grandest feeling of absoluteness when I met the town’s inhabitants. This is exhibited most clearly in the presence of Sister Valdair. The undisputed commander of the sisters in Santo Domingo rules with the zeal of a president, the gentle touch of an angel, and the unconditional love and patience of a saint. Her eyes are the most compassionate you will ever see. Sister’s undying effect on the kids, teachers and her fellow sisters creates a family atmosphere. A good example of this is shown when, every day before every meal, Sister Marta would lead us in a Spanish song of praise and thanks to God. If the richness found in the serenity of the sister’s was all I could speak of after the trip, it would have been enough. Amazingly, the blessings seemed to have no boundaries.

The teachers and children of Los Tres Brazos are the most beautiful human beings I have ever met. Never have I experienced such grace. From the moment the “ninios” my fellow Alvernians and I, were hanging onto us, clutching our hands, dancing with us, and looking deeply into our eyes with innocent affection. They wanted to copy us, study us, accompany us, play with us, sing with us, worship with us; they wanted to create everlasting bonds with us. And they succeeded. Kids like Egal and Berni and Lorena and Valentina would wait for you on a daily basis. Nothing gave them more satisfaction that to attach themselves to us and engage in a game of “Joon” (a game with puzzling rules, does any one REAL-LY know how to play?) or dodge-ball. It was constant community; constant. No words could properly describe the type of Godly love I felt with every moment around those children.

Additionally, I must mention something about the teachers and staff in the school. Role-models in the truest sense, they are as gentle as they are astute and as thoughtful as they are intelligent. Every one of them approached our group with smiles and kind sentiments. More importantly, they always treated the ninios with motherly love. None of them exemplifies these attributes more than the afternoon teacher, Yoly. Yoly is a vibrant, bright light of unshakable energy for the community. Whether she is teaching the children a new dance, helping them with their crafts, introducing them to a new song, or walking them home and embracing their families, her servitude seems never to cease. It’s amazing to watch. Like all the teachers, Yoly pours every grain of talent God has given her (which is no little amount) for the children. If any one wanted a lesson in how to instruct properly and impact young men and women, or even, have a conversation with Yoly.

After such a profound journey with such amazing people, it is difficult to put things into perspective when returning home (the incivility of Philadelphia International Airport was no help). The adjustment has not been easy. However, I have narrowed it down to two points which I must share. First: We (first world countries, Americans, Pennsylvanians, you get it) have forgotten what true happiness is and therefore, many of us have no idea how to find it. Because of this lack of fulfillment, we accumulate “things” to keep us happy. And we all have our “things,” don’t we? A six-pack of beer, a night of your favorite re-runs or movies, video games, adding a new addition to your car, one more shirt or one more pair of shoes, that late-night Starbucks special that makes life worthwhile; all these things make us a little happier at the end of the day. Is there something intrinsically wrong with that? I don’t know; probably not, but it brings me to my second point. If there’s one ultimate lesson I learned from the people of Santo Domingo it’s that true joy is found in community. Community, community, community! Hey, guess what? Community! One more time for those who are speed-reading: COMMUNITY. Community is the recipe to happiness; people are the ingredients. What does that mean? It means God is not in the dollar bills we spend or the television we watch. God is not in the museums of information we process or the jobs that give us security. God is not in the materials that encompass our lives: cell phones, computers, cars, or other toys. God is with the materially poor.

Why? Because the materially poor know how to form community better than anyone else. For Los Tres Brazos, community is a part of their culture. Life is a celebration, and it is celebrated together. No material wealth? No problem. They have wealth in the purest sense; they join together and praise God for the beautiful gift of each other. Allow me to be the first to tell you: there is no greater gift.

Once again, let me remind you that I am only here, writing this piece, as a witness. I desired to write this primarily to inform the reader that God is alive and well. If you do not believe me, start planning your trip and go see for yourself. What happens in Santo Domingo and many other countries (like the undying preservation of hope in Haiti) is nothing short of a phenomenon; spiritually and pragmatically. These unbelievable people have crafted a divine tapestry of love and peace in the midst of suffering and have given us the blueprints to actualize fulfillment. Gracias la Republica Dominicana! Paz y Bien!

(To see more of Alvernia’s trip to Santo Domingo, Youtube “El viaje al barrio parte 1,” founded under Chris’s Youtube username, YoAmoElBarrio. There are 38 parts altogether.)
The Working Class Student: The Story of a Student Trying To Make Ends Meet

By, Tesia Smucker
Features Editor

Let me start this column by saying that education is the most important thing in my life. Ever since I can remember I have wanted to be a college student (my secondary career was to be a writer, but I never thought about making money by writing). If not a college student, I wanted to be a ballerina while saving the dolphins. In short, education is my way to achieve all my wildest dreams.

However, there was a glitch in my plan. I was not willing to stiff myself on a good education, but I was not set up with money for college. My parents do not pay for college, or my car and car insurance. They help me with books when they can but most of the financial responsibility is on my shoulders. As a result, I work three jobs, and go to school full time, and I try to have a productive social life. I also have an anxiety disorder which causes me to shut down when I am overwhelmed by my responsibilities.

I started my college education at Philadelphia University. I lasted there for four days. While the campus was beautiful, the people marvelously friendly, and the program exactly what I thought I wanted (I was there for Graphic Design), I could not stop having panic attacks. I spent most of my time curled into the fetal position on my bed. I lost about fifteen pounds in four days, checked myself into the hospital for a night, and came home promptly after. I felt like all of my college dreams were derailed. How could I have the best education when I could not even leave home? I enrolled in Reading Area Community College (RACC) two weeks later as a Communications Transfer major. I had overcome my ignorant dislike of community colleges and decided to start there and then transfer to one of four area schools: Albright, Alvernia, Kutztown, or West Chester. The nice thing about RACC was that it was possible for me to work sixty hours a week during the summer and then be able to afford tuition for the whole year out of pocket, and not work myself to death during the school term. It was not until I decided to go to Alvernia that it hit me again just how much money a good education was going to cost me. Philadelphia University is a $30,000 a year school and when I was going there I just took out a loan and dealt with it, but RACC had given me a taste of what being debt-free was like and I rather enjoyed it. But I knew I wanted to go to Alvernia, and would just have to deal with being over my head in debt. As of this first column I have taken out approximately $20,000 in loans (which is actually not bad considering the cost of tuition here), and I still have one year until I graduate. This is where working comes into the picture. I currently work three jobs during the school year, two of which I work year-round: as a cashier at Marshalls and as an assistant to a Mary Kay sales director. I also work at the RACC bookstore during the beginning and end of the semester. This means that during the first two and last two weeks of the semester I almost never do homework because I am working nearly forty hours a week (not including weekends). I also end up doing double shifts. This means that I will work from 9am until I have to go to class, then go work another shift until 10pm. By the time I get home I am so tired from working and going to school all day that I just end up passing out—and not doing any of the homework I need to finish for the next day. I also get a stress overload and end up not doing anything because I just want to sleep.

I am currently waiting on my W2’s from each of my jobs so I can file my taxes and then fill out the always lovely FAFSA. Each previous time I have filled out the FAFSA I have not received any financial aid, other than Stafford Loans. This is because the FAFSA judges my financial situation based on my parents’ income since I am still classified as a dependent. I live with my parents because there is no possible way I could afford to live on my own without working full time and still go to school, and my parents make living with them pretty cool. However, they make considerably more money than I do (which is to be expected) and therefore I am not eligible for governmental support. This leaves all the rest of the expenses to me. My parents do not pay for college. I love this, because it gives me the freedom to take whichever classes I want to try and when I was going there I just took out a loan and dealt with it, but RACC had given me a taste of what being debt-free was like and I rather enjoyed it. But I knew I wanted to go to Alvernia, and would just have to deal with being over my head in debt. As of this first column I have taken out approximately $20,000 in loans (which is actually not bad considering the cost of tuition here), and I still have one year until I graduate. This is where working comes into the picture. I currently work three jobs during the school year, two of which I work year-round: as a cashier at Marshalls and as an assistant to a Mary Kay sales director. I also work at the RACC bookstore during the beginning and end of the semester. This means that during the first two and last two weeks of the semester I almost never do homework because I am working nearly forty hours a week (not including weekends). I also end up doing double shifts. This means that I will work from 9am until I have to go to class, then go work another shift until 10pm. By the time I get home I am so tired from working and going to school all day that I just end up passing out—and not doing any of the homework I need to finish for the next day. I also get a stress overload and end up not doing anything because I just want to sleep. I am currently waiting on my W2’s from each of my jobs so I can file my taxes and then fill out the always lovely FAFSA. Each previous time I have filled out the FAFSA I have not received any financial aid, other than Stafford Loans. This is because the FAFSA judges my financial situation based on my parents’ income since I am still classified as a dependent. I live with my parents because there is no possible way I could afford to live on my own without working full time and still go to school, and my parents make living with them pretty cool. However, they make considerably more money than I do (which is to be expected) and therefore I am not eligible for governmental support. This leaves all the rest of the expenses to me. My parents do not pay for college. I love this, because it gives me the freedom to take whichever classes I want to try and
During this entire Iverson controversy, I have watched and read many sportscasters blast fan voting. One of the worst suggestions to come across was to cut fan voting down to a lowly 25 percent, with players making up another 25 and writers making up an overwhelming 50 percent. I know the sports media is generally smarter than your average fan, but it is not as though they walk on water when it comes to making decisions.

The All-Star Game is just an exhibition. It means nothing. The game itself is generally only competitive because the teams can score at will since no one wants to risk injury or play defense (the last time anyone scored below 100 points was when the West scored 84 in the 72-73 season). I am all for scaling back fan voting to an extent, but I still think they should make up the major- ity. Players should make up another sizeable chunk, and writers should decide the last one or two bench spots, so players like Chris Bosh get in (if you look at his numbers you will be shocked he is not a starter).

Joe Johnson, Rajon Rondo, and Derek Rose are all better than Iverson. They are all having better seasons, and at this point in their careers they are all better players. If Gilbert Arenas had any common sense, he would likely be the second guard behind Dwayne Wade. However, the length of his ban from the NBA will not be known until next week. But the fact of the matter is that Arenas is the man that people wanted to see in the game. There is no argument about voting populace either (Iver- son had Philly, Rondo had Boston, Rose had Chicago, all three are major markets, and Atlanta is no slouch). Truth be told, Iverson will probably receive the same treatment that Michael Jordan did in 2002-03. He will be allowed to play as long he wants and take as many shots (Jor- dan took 27 shots to score 20 points). This is likely Iverson’s final season. He was brought back to the team that he will forever be synonym- ous with and they are going nowhere. He deserves to take center stage un- der the bright lights one more time before taking his place in Springfield. At least he does not have to practice for this one.

I want and also gives me a sense of accountability. If I fail a class, I am the one paying for it and all mistakes I make fall on me. However, I do not have a lot of mon- ey. I have almost no savings because I use the money I save by working to pay for school (at least part of it), car insurance, or any unforeseen expenses (like parking tickets). I am skeptical I almost had to drop out because I needed a loan for approximately $10,000 for the year (this is after scholarships and federal loans). I ended up having both of my parents co-sign so I could get the loan and stay in school. I was not able to get an alternative loan by myself because I have no credit (no credit cards, store cards, etc.). Next year I am circumventing this prob- lem by moving in with my father, which will at least show I am trying to get some sort of financial assistance.

I can never understand why it is so hard to actually go to college. I have never had a problem staying in college, but I have had the hardest time coming up with the funds to con- tinue my education. This is the great- est failing of the American economic system. In order to get a well-paying job – in most cases – it is imperative that one gets a college degree. But for some people there is no way for them to gain a higher education – the funds just are not there. It is also very hard to muddle through the process of applying for financial aid. What I hope to do with this column is to figure out a little bit. You will be able to see what I go through as a working student, and in return, I would like to answer any questions you have about finan- cial aid, budgeting money, finding a job, anything. Send them to my email at tesia.smucker@alvernia.edu and I will address them in my next column.

The life of a working student is stressful, and nowhere near easy, but it is worth working hard for something important. And I figure, if you have to go into debt for anything, education is worth it.
Movies Promise More Romance, Less Death

By Angela Miller
Entertainment Editor

The death trend that has been so apparent during these last few months seems to have taken a back seat. The trend is still there but since it is getting close to February romantic comedies and romances are surfacing. Most of the major movies coming out this February linger in these two particular genres, not all of them, but some of them.

A good example to start out with is the movie *Dear John* that comes out in early February. This is a story about two lovers, John and Savannah, who fall in love during her spring vacation of college. John is a soldier, and during their relationship has to go overseas for increasingly dangerous deployments. The two stay in touch by sending continuous love letters across the seas, which will inevitably lead to fateful consequences. This romantic movie would be great to see on Valentine’s Day, so couples can have a sense of how lucky they really are to have each other—and be together with no fear of losing one another.

Another interesting movie that comes out the week of Valentine’s Day is actually called Valentine’s Day. The movie has some big stars including Anne Hathaway, Jessica Biel, Julia Roberts, Bradley Cooper, Ashton Kutcher, and Taylor Lautner. Valentine’s Day is not about one specific story, but rather it is a combination of stories of what people are doing on their Valentine’s Day. There is the young high school couple, the bitter women who do not have men, and a married couple who all find their way through romance over the course of one specific Valentine’s Day. 

*Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* is obviously not a romance or a romantic comedy, but it is a highly anticipated movie. It has received much publicity and has caught the eye of critics and viewers alike. Audiences are getting excited to see this movie, which means it could be on top or a major flop. The movie is about high school student Percy Jackson who finds out he is actually Poseidon’s son. When Zeus’ lightning bolt is stolen and Percy’s mother suddenly disappears, it is up to Percy to overcome the battling titans of Mt. Olympus, catch the real lightning thief, and save his mother.

Another non-romantic movie to look out for is *The Wolfman*. The movie follows Lawrence Talbot’s life from the tragedy of losing his mother during his childhood to helping his brother’s fiancée, Gwen Conliffe, find her missing love. During this search Talbot discovers that something with massive strength and an insatiable bloodlust has been killing people in the village. As he puts together the puzzle he learns of an ancient curse that turns the afflicted into werewolves during a full moon. It is up to Talbot to save the village and the woman he has grown to love from the vicious creature living in the woods, but in the process he will learn about a beastly side of himself that he never knew about.

There are many other movies coming out that audiences can look forward to watching, but these are the more advertised ones to look for when going to the theater. When movies have a hype built up around them they can either be a great movie or a box office failure. Sometimes the critics are wrong in how they judge movies. It is really up to the audience to decide what they want to watch; after all everyone has their own specific taste when it comes to what is entertaining.