

SPRING 2024 | NO. 6

CHC Alumni Newsletter

UPDATES FROM THE COOK HONORS COLLEGE

Spring Forward

DR. CHAUNA CRAIG, CHC DIRECTOR

Dear Alumni Friends,

We hope you are enjoying a spring-time surge of energy—without the frantic edge that dominates our own end-of-semester as we wrap up another academic year and prepare to honor our graduates.

First, a huge thank you to Amy Kukula, the student editor who has pulled this newsletter together under tight deadlines for the last few years. She is graduating summa cum laude in May with a double major in English Education and Interdisciplinary Fine Arts. Though we will miss her energy, kindness, and can-do attitude, we know her future students will be so blessed to have her.



*Photo by
Hannah Colen,
CHC '21*

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Spring Forward (continued...)

Also, this will be our last newsletter for a while. I will be on sabbatical in the fall, our small staff will be taking on additional duties, and we plan to build a new team of students to take responsibility for our social media and news. We will continue to post on Facebook and Instagram but look for the next version of this newsletter sometime in 2025.

In this issue, you can read my interview with Bob Cook, our honors college benefactor, about his new political thriller, *The Mahdi*. The book is full of action, high-tech gadgets (including a dangerous AI named Emilie), cultural and religious conflict in the Middle East, and some fun Easter eggs for readers familiar with the CHC. We also share with you, as we always do, news of the wonderful research and service activities for which our students are celebrated.

Thank you as always to all of you for the ways you give back, and please keep us posted on what you're doing now.

All best,



Dr. Chauna Craig
Director, CHC

Przybys Selected for Research Experience

Alayna Przybys was recently selected for a National Science Foundation funded Research Experience for Undergraduates entitled Data Science and Crime Analytics at the University of North Carolina- Charlotte. She was one of nine students selected from 170 applicants.

Przybys shared, "During this internship, we will be collecting data, going to workshops about different aspects of Crime Analytics, and we even get to present our findings to other people for a chance to win at a sort of Scholar's Forum! Overall, it is a really great opportunity that was totally unexpected!" She will be paid a \$6,000 stipend for the 10-week experience and housing will be provided on campus. Students will also visit industry leaders in data technology and the CMPD Crime Analysis lab and participate in social events.

"Since I had taken a Violence and Victimology class the semester before," Przybys wrote, "I loved the idea of studying this and figuring out why people, mostly adolescents, act in a negative way towards their peers. I applied on a whim because I never thought that me, a girl from a small town in Pennsylvania, out of all the people that could apply would get this internship, but I applied anyways!" Przybys will take part in the experience from May 27 to August 3.



Helping Out(doors)

CHC students participated in the **White's Woods Invasive Species Pulling Competition** on April 6, 2024. These students dedicated their Saturday morning to community service, pulling countless barberry plants. With the help of 8 other teams from local organizations, volunteers removed approximately 150 garbage bags of invasive barberry. For more information, visit the [White Township website](#).

CHC Students Compete in Social Innovation Challenge

Basil Servey (Psychology, '26) and Reia Sanchez (Sociology, '26) represented IUP at the 2024 Social Innovation Challenge sponsored by the Entrepreneurial Leadership Council. Eighteen colleges and universities in the region worked in teams during the two-day conference to suggest solutions to real-world problems. This year's challenge question was "How might we address food insecurities on campuses and surrounding areas to better student performance?"



Basil Servey
(left) and Reia
Sanchez
(right) at the
Social
Innovation
Challenge,
2024

Students had the opportunity to network with other students and leaders in industry and entrepreneurship while using Human-Centered Design to compete for the best campaign to tackle this problem. Basil was a member of the winning team! ■

Two CHC
student
athletes were
recognized as
Scholars of
Distinction by
the National
Field Hockey
Coaches
Association,
first year
students

**Cassidy
Kibler**
(Political
Science)
and
**Sydney
Schmouder**
(Exercise
Science).

This distinction
is reserved for
field hockey
players with a
3.9 or above
grade point
average.



photos provided by Aaron Kovach
and the Friends of Yellow Creek



Friends of Yellow Creek **Bike Trail Restoration Day**

A group of Cook Honors College students took on a series of small projects that stacked up to prepare the bike trail at Yellow Creek for the warmer seasons. The Friends of Yellow Creek generously provided tools and lunch, and a group of CHC students generously provided their time efforts.



Cook Honors College Benefactor Publishes New Political Thriller

AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN ROBERT COOK AND CHAUNA CRAIG

Most of you recognize Bob Cook as the philanthropist whose vision brought the Cook Honors College to life, and earlier alumni classes may have met him in person at events and graduation. You may know that in his long career as a software developer, he also owned a winery and wrote political techno-thriller novels featuring CIA operative Alex Cuchulain.

You may not know that even in retirement Bob is as busy as ever, thinking about the knotty problems of global politics and how we might begin to unravel them. His latest novel is *The Madhi*, which he describes as a “[f]un, violent novel, told through the lens of a modern Muslim Bedouin-American. It’s a modern Sunni lens. I think it provides a far better narrative for the world than the one we have in Gaza.”

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Cook Honors College Benefactor Publishes New Political Thriller (continued...)

Although written before the current violence between Hamas and Israel, Cook's new book offers a fictional direction for how we might imagine, eventually, a more peaceful Middle East.

Through e-mail, Chauna Craig, current director of the Cook Honors College, asked Bob Cook to share thoughts on his latest novel. This conversation has been edited for clarity and space.

This book is a thriller to be read for its twists and turns, but it's also inherently political given that the main character is a modern Muslim Bedouin-American negotiating complex global politics. What do you hope readers will consider more deeply upon reading *The Mahdi*?"

COOK: It is all about the time frame, the historical horizon considered in the plot, and current conflict. I try to relate them. There is a scene in *The Mahdi* with the number two guy in Mossad asking Cooch, the novel's protagonist, "What should I consider that I haven't? What advice do you have for me?"

Cooch answers, "Look at the ten-year result, not the five-year result."

When asking, "What therefore, shall I do?" on a ten year horizon, one must look at the Thucydides Trap described in the novel. If your military edge is in technology and the technological gap is closing, sooner or later conflict comes down to boots on the ground. In Israel's case, the numbers are two billion for Muslims, 6 million for Israelis. Those are not good ten-year odds.

I mention that Chairman Mao, apocryphally, said about the impact of well-armed and trained American troops crossing into China during the Korean War, "What am I going to lose, ten million men?" It's a matter of perspective.

This is not a good time for Israel to declare a theocracy and abolish the Rule of law. The West Bank situation described in *The Mahdi* is just a tool to illustrate the problems of Israel's current approach. Reality is the current destruction of Gaza to eliminate Hamas. If 250,000 Gazans get killed to get at Hamas and eliminate it, there are still 1,750,000 Muslim Gazans trying to survive and dreaming of revenge. Come on people, think it through. Teach their children, educate their gifted, find work for the rest or support them somehow. That is the hard part.

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Cook Honors College Benefactor Publishes New Political Thriller (continued...)

I want readers to think about the ten-year picture. Israel has an enormous contribution to make to growth in the Middle East. Logic and history argue that the contribution won't be as a sovereign military power.

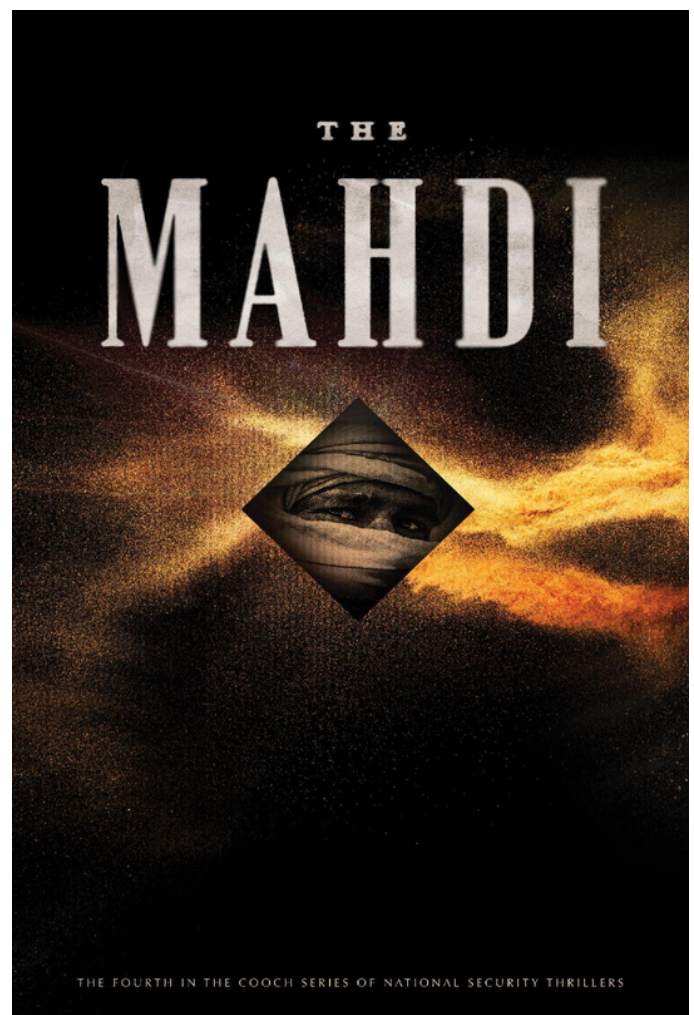
The central character, Alex Cuchulain / Kufdani, straddles political, cultural, and religious worlds, and the current war in Gaza makes it impossible to read your fictional book without considering how the real conflict might play out. Alex holds the position that for him, as a half-Bedouin Arab whose people are denied their land, violence as a strategy is never off the table. While we expect violence in reading a thriller genre (and this book does deliver), we also tend to privilege political negotiation in recent history (e.g. a Nobel Peace Prize as one outcome of the Oslo Accords). But peace talks haven't created any lasting solutions. Tell me more about how your book imagines alternative narratives to this ongoing conflict and its possible resolution.

The narrative selected is through the lens of the modern liberal Muslim (Kufdani) supported to some degree by the modern liberal Jew.

I've been trying to sell the US public intellectual on the fact that no narrative exists today, and one is needed. Why not ours/mine?

The *Mahdi* is available this month from online booksellers, including [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com).

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Cook Honors College Benefactor Publishes New Political Thriller (continued...)

As a fiction writer, I believe that fiction is inherently hopeful because it allows us to see possibilities for change, but at the end of the day, I write because I love getting into the minds of other people, even people I've only invented. But I tend toward psychological realism. I imagine it would be incredibly fun to speculate on the next technology as you do with the quantum computer and Emilie. What motivates you to write? What have you learned about yourself as a writer? And what comes next?

The Mahdi was conceived after I read an article in The Economist about the controversy in Israel and world-wide over the confiscation of Bedouin West Bank lands to house the ultra-Orthodox Jewish population, the Haredim. The treatment of the Bedouins became a larger and more visible problem over time, so I decided to address it in a new Cooch book. The carnage of the Hamas October 2023 attacks made the story even more current.

Technology will continue to influence the way war is waged and AI is a ripe topic, but Cooch will likely try to continue to solve the problems of the Middle East, which seems to be getting worse, not better. ■



Want to share a life update that we will include in an upcoming issue of the official CHC Alumni Newsletter? Fill out the form (linked below) to let us know any news you want to share--career, promotion, or personal achievement. We'd love to hear from you!

www.alumni.iup.edu/chcalumnicontract

Layout by Amy Kukula