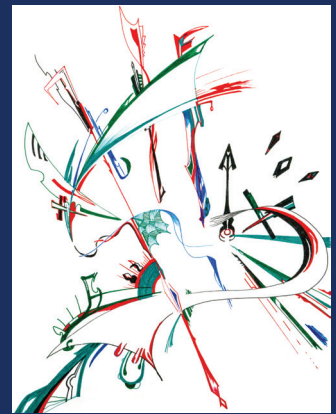


# COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE



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Summer 2022



## The Art of Donovan Snider



The cover art on this issue of *Colloquy* was drawn by Gutenberg student Donovan Snider and displayed at the Student Art

Show in the spring. Donovan will be a senior this fall, and he has shared his creativity and interest in the arts with Gutenberg during the last three years. His photographs have appeared in *Colloquy* and other publications, and he has produced videos for Gutenberg. We look forward to seeing how Donovan uses his creativity and Gutenberg education in the years to come!

## Congratulations to Chris Stollar!

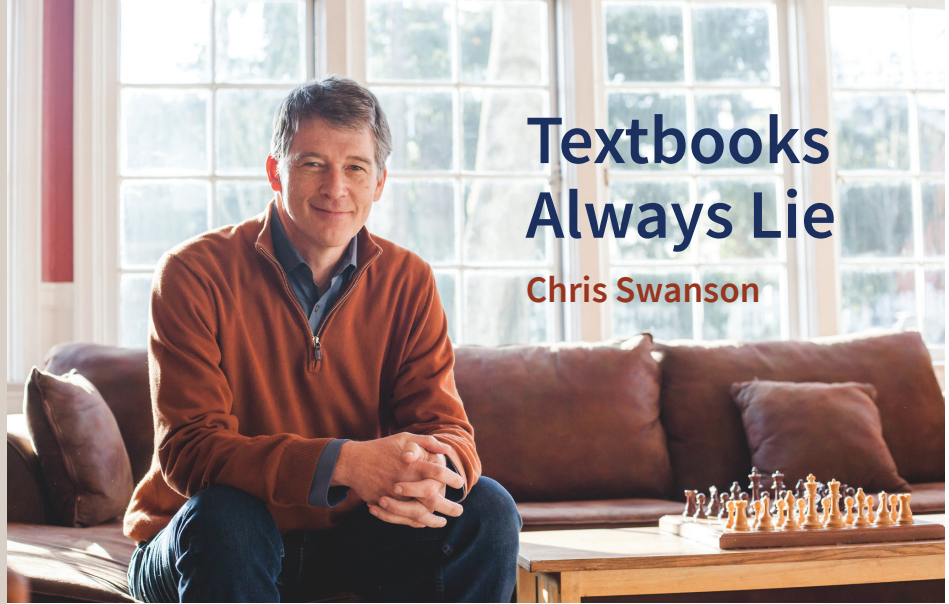


Gutenberg alumnus Chris Stollar was the 2022 Volunteer of the Year Honoree at Nationwide Insurance, where he has

worked in marketing since 2012. Chris has volunteered for more than ten years with She Has A Name, an anti-human trafficking organization based in Columbus, Ohio. He became vice chair of the organization with a unanimous vote by his peers. Chris also raised awareness about sex trafficking in his debut novel, *The Black Lens* (2016), which you can read about at [gutenberg.edu/colloquy](http://gutenberg.edu/colloquy) in the Winter 2019 issue.

## Fall Preview Days For info and to register: [gutenberg.edu/preview](http://gutenberg.edu/preview)

At Preview Days, Gutenberg opens its doors to high school students and transfer students who are considering Gutenberg's bachelor's degree program in liberal arts. They will meet tutors who have devoted their lives to learning and helping others learn, discuss works by great thinkers, fellowship with a community of caring people who work together in pursuit of goodness, and learn how to become Gutenberg students. A supervised on-campus overnight experience is also an option. Join us at Preview Days to discover if Gutenberg is the college for you!



## Textbooks Always Lie

Chris Swanson

A lot of what we learn and believe has come from textbooks. They contain a great deal of information from experts in various fields. And because they are so influential, a great deal of debate about their content has ensued, especially on controversial topics. However, I do not want to discuss the debates about the various facts and claims in textbooks. I propose that the reason textbooks lie is not in what they say but in the way they say it. My problem with textbooks is not their content but their existence.

To understand the problem, compare reading literature to studying mathematics or science. Students studying literature are often asked to interact with the books they read. Maybe they write book reports or papers, or they discuss the book with others. This is an unstated assumption: the student can have an opinion and explore questions raised by the book. Students are asked to dive in and find new discoveries for themselves. Raising real questions gives students an implicit motivation to find answers and understand.

At Gutenberg, our students recently read and discussed the dauntingly long novel *Middlemarch* by George Eliot. One of the (many) themes in the book has to do with choosing a spouse. In discussion, students had a chance to explore which characters made good marriage decisions and why. They also considered which characters made poor decisions and how those decisions impacted the various characters. It is not surprising that this class full of single twenty-somethings was highly motivated to explore the issues.

Mathematics and science education, however, is different from studying literature. When I studied science and mathematics, I found the material interesting, but in all of my years of studying, I was never given the opportunity to explore on my own. There were no live questions. In other words, no questions were raised that both mattered and were unanswered. I was not asked to give my opinion on what was happening during a chemical reaction. I never got to explore whether the law of inertia was universal or where it came from. Nobody ever asked me what a number is. (What an incredibly rich and worthwhile question that is! I have spent years discussing this question with my students, and I still have no definitive answer.) What did I do in school? Well obviously, I studied textbooks.

If textbooks are a problem, then why are they so ubiquitous? Textbooks are a response to the needs of teachers and students. Few teachers have the requisite background, expertise, and time to teach a course from their own base of knowledge. They, like the rest of us, rely on a textbook. (In a sense, textbooks perform the same function for teachers that the Associated Press performs for newspaper and media outlets across the country. Small Town Gazette can't send a reporter to Ukraine to report on the war, so it relays the expertise and writing of reporters who are more knowledgeable.) Textbooks are an efficient and economical way for schools and teachers to get information to teach their students. They represent a carefully constructed and filtered picture of a subject drawn from innumerable sources and scholarly works.

Textbooks also serve the student, especially young students. If teachers tried to teach from original sources or scholarly treatises, students would be completely lost. Textbooks provide an account appropriate to the age and ability of the students while also providing an “authority,” which is satisfying and comforting and removes the disquiet of complexity and uncertainty.

So why am I so concerned with textbooks? After all, they provide a service to teachers and students. It almost seems like we cannot do without them. The problem with textbooks is not necessarily with the content they provide but with all the unspoken assumptions about truth, learning, and knowledge they invariably instill in us and our children. Those assumptions are relentlessly and implicitly taught year after year at a particularly formative period during students’ lives. These assumptions are incredibly profound and impact our whole view of life, our values, and our interest in truth. The impact of any undesirable or mistaken content pales in comparison to the impact of assumptions that underlie the whole textbook phenomenon.

So what are all of these “nefarious” assumptions? They are not intentionally malicious; rather, they are everyday assumptions rooted in how most of us view knowledge and how schools transmit it. To understand them, let us begin by asking some rarely asked questions.

First, what is the content common to all textbooks? They all contain lots of information, information that is assumed to be true and that students are supposed to learn. In other words, textbooks *tell* us “what is.” They do not *show* or *ask*. Arts and literature teach by showing, or inviting us to participate experientially. Philosophers, like Socrates, *ask*, raising the key questions that need to be considered. Textbooks *tell*.

Second, how do we know that the information in a textbook is right? In my experience, this question was never raised. I simply assumed the textbook to be right since it had been compiled by an expert and an expert is in a position to know. Besides, the teacher assumed the textbook was right, so who was I to question? The “facts” textbooks contain are not open to question.

Third, who cares most about the information that textbooks promote? The information in textbooks answers the questions that the authors of the textbooks think are important and interesting. Students are not consulted on what is important or interesting. And because none of the questions are student generated, students generally don’t care about them and, therefore, have little internal motivation for learning the information.

Fourth, why do students study the information in the textbooks? Generally, a set of rewards accompanies studying textbooks. Some rewards are explicit, like gold stars or grades from teachers, and students compete with one another for these rewards. Other rewards may be implicit, like parental pressure, parental approval, avoidance of disciplinary measures, or, in some cases, peer pressure. As students get older, the rewards shift. Students seek a lucrative career or self respect. On rare occasions, students find the information in a textbook interesting, and they pursue it because they want to know.

Students are clever and savvy, even the ones with bad grades. If you put them in a system with textbooks, they soon learn how to work within that system. To them, school becomes a game they play in which they strive to maximize rewards with a minimum of effort. If social rewards, like being popular or excelling in athletics or music, become more satisfying than academic rewards, then students devote little effort to the academic game and focus on things more important to them. By the time students get to graduate school where they are supposed to pursue their own questions and seek out their own knowledge, they are limited by their experience. They don’t value or understand how to ask really good questions. Instead, they play a more sophisticated academic game of career rewards by publishing on current academic fads.

Textbooks are an educational tragedy. The assumptions that every textbook implicitly teaches are far more powerful than their content. Students may forget their history or math lessons, but they will never forget that gaining knowledge means learning established facts that other people care about. Textbooks discourage students’ natural curiosity and sense of wonder rather than encouraging it. Students become machines to be programmed, not creative and caring individuals humbly seeking understanding.

*(Continued on page 4)*



## COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE

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**Editor** Robby Julian

**Colloquy team** Chris Alderman, Brian Julian, Eliot Grasso, Chris Swanson

**Cover Photo** Donovan Snider (Class of 2023)

**Other Photography** Erin Greco (Class of 2010), Donovan Snider (Class of 2023), Elizabeth Steeb (Class of 2009)

**Layout** Robby Julian

**Proofreaders** Bob Blanchard, Karen Peters (Class of 2012), Walter Steeb (Class of 2009)

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**President** Chris Swanson, Ph.D.

**Vice President** Eliot Grasso, Ph.D.

**Academic Dean** Thomas (Charley) Dewberry, Ph.D.

**Website** [gutenberg.edu](http://gutenberg.edu)

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## Textbooks Always Lie

### Continued from page 3

There is a better way to educate that starts with a completely different view of knowledge that encourages curiosity and allows students to be personally involved in coming to the truth. Again, how most literature is taught is a good example. Students read books or make observations and are encouraged to pursue their own questions. They are not given all of the answers but rather work out what is true in a community of others also trying to find answers. They gain skill in making judgments about what a book is saying and can wrestle with whether they agree. They implicitly know that there are limitations and uncertainties in knowing. The knowledge gained in this way is not a set of facts given to us by experts; rather, it is a living, working knowledge that embeds in our thinking and action because it matters to us.


This may all sound fine for literature, but how could you apply this approach to other, nonliterary subjects like history or science? Consider a couple of examples. In describing Europe immediately after World War II, history textbooks typically explain a number of facts about the various events, countries, and leaders. Students learn these facts and dates to become “educated.” But a different approach could be taken. For example, President Roosevelt and his advisors made a number of foreign policy decisions regarding postwar conflicts. As a result, Stalin was able to march in and control a number of eastern European countries. The number of people murdered by Stalin and the level of suffering the populace subsequently endured was incredible. Explaining some of these consequences might engage the sympathy of students. Students could then be encouraged to figure out why things went down as they did. What led the president to make those decisions? What advantages to the US did those decisions have? What was American responsibility in this situation? Could they have done something different? Would you have decided differently? What else was at stake? Do we ever make similar decisions, and what are the consequences of them? Such an approach is radically different from studying the “facts” of the post-war period.

In science, the situation is the same. Science textbooks all present scientific principles and terms in an impersonal and factual way. But a little bit of study of scientific history shows that none of the principles or terms we now use were obvious or easy to come by. In every situation, there were alternative explanations and passionate debates. In the rare cases where textbooks discuss science history, the emphasis is on lauding the scientific successes, not understanding the debate. For example, every student in physical science learns about the law of inertia that says objects in motion stay in motion in a straight line unless acted on by a force. Even the use of the word “law” puts the concept beyond question. But our experience is not particularly supportive of the law of inertia. In our experience, things in motion tend not to go in a straight line. If I throw a ball, it curves down and slows down. If you throw a beach ball, it might actually curve up for a bit. If I am walking and then suddenly stop, I don’t keep sliding across the floor in a straight line. To keep my car going in a straight line, I have to use a lot of gasoline and keep my steering wheel properly adjusted. The birds and clouds don’t move straight. Even objects on the surface of the earth are moving in a giant circle as the earth rotates. Students can be given the opportunity to think about all of these experiences. They can be encouraged to explore how motion works by asking questions and considering different experiences, like air hockey and ice skating. They can get new experiences and ultimately decide whether the Greek view of motion (natural motion is up and down) or the enlightenment view of motion (law of inertia) better fits their experience. This knowledge would be significant because it would be what they had figured out in a group searching after truth.

These are obviously only examples. To teach in this way would require a major shift in the entire approach to education. It would require teachers to learn new skills. Instead of becoming great lecturers, they would need to become great questioners. They would need guidance about what subjects to pursue but retain some freedom to pursue questions that students find interesting. I am not advocating that we get rid of assignments or development

of discipline but, rather, that we simply reconsider the way we present “all that is known.” We may need to give up on the idea of efficiently presenting all of the information we think students should know; they often forget much of that information anyway. The approach to education I am advocating offers great gains in terms of the assumptions about truth and knowledge. The skills developed in learning this way are far more valuable than specific facts, facts we can find on our phone at any time. These gains are worth considering.

Textbooks have created for us a picture of knowledge as impersonal facts to be known, and they fulfill the needs of our culture that accepts that view of knowledge. Knowledge important for our lives, however, does not consist of impersonal facts. People who are constantly telling other people obscure facts they have learned from the internet may know lots of stuff, but they may not have any knowledge leading to wisdom. Knowledge leading to wisdom is personal and meaningful. It is part of a connected structure that makes sense of our lives. It matters to us. It also takes skill and judgment to determine what knowledge is true and what is false. Memorization only takes us so far.

Our culture will undoubtedly continue to use textbooks, and since textbooks have authority, there will continue to be debates. When reality is determined for us by the experts writing textbooks (who incidentally are playing their own academic game), a lot is at stake regarding content. But it doesn’t have to be that way. We don’t have to play the authority game. We don’t have to try to control how others think. We can lead and guide them with questions and rich experiences. We can trust them as intelligent creatures created by God to make their own decisions and to pursue the truth for themselves. Jesus never used his authority to force anyone to follow Him. He did invite them to choose. We can do the same. 

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**Chris Swanson** is the president and a tutor at Gutenberg College where he teaches science and leads discussions in *Microexegesis*, *Western Civilization*, and the *Great Conversation*. He holds a Ph.D. in Physics from the University of Oregon.





Movies, music, television shows, video games—the elements of pop culture are all around us. These are often seen as just pastimes, with the goal being to enjoy ourselves or escape reality for a while. In the best instances, however, they can do more than this. They display beautiful craftsmanship. They move us. They form community as we experience them together and talk about them. Popular culture is a major way that we as a society come together, express ourselves

artistically, and tell the stories that matter to us.

Given this importance, it is worth asking a few questions. What messages is pop culture sending, and how is it sending them? What do we think about the ideas we find embedded in pop culture, and are we even aware that those ideas are there? What distinguishes a profound artistic creation from mere escapism? We invite high-school-aged students to join us for Young Philosophers in 2022-23,

as we examine some prominent examples of pop culture and discuss their artistry, ideas, and significance. (And if you enjoy yourself in the process, that's just fine!)

To receive dates and descriptions for the classes, go to [gutenberg.edu/updates](https://gutenberg.edu/updates) and mark that you would like information about attending Gutenberg and about events for high school students.

The next class will be September 15: “Identity in Disney’s *Moana* and *Encanto*.” Register at [gutenberg.edu/yp](https://gutenberg.edu/yp).

## Gutenberg Podcast Coming This Fall!

Gutenberg College may be ten years late to the podcast party, but it is never too late to throw our hat in the ring! The podcast format is a perfect fit for Gutenberg. We at Gutenberg spend a lot of our time reading great works of literature and then raising interesting questions for discussion. Practically podcast perfection!

This fall, Gutenberg alumni Gil Greco (host) and Andrew Weber (producer) will be joining forces to create a series of conversations intended to bring the complex world of ideas to a broader audience. The guests will be Gutenberg tutors, and they will explore the Great Books from a Christian perspective,

recognizing their complexity in the light of competing views.

The new podcast will be published on our website and on most major podcast distribution sites. Stay tuned for more details.

With our new podcast, we must, alas, say goodbye to our old friend, the community classes. We have all enjoyed these classes, but as “the times they are a-changin’,” we are regrettably shifting gears. We hope everyone

has a chance to listen to the new podcast, and if it piques your interest, you are welcome, as always, to connect for a conversation.



Gil Greco



Andrew Weber



GUTENBERG  
COLLEGE

# Learning for Life

EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2022  
SEPTEMBER 8-10



**F**undamentally, educating is the passing on of knowledge and values from one generation to the next to promote living wisely and well. As with all communication, however, the “how” of what we say impacts the “what.” A good educator is at root a good learner who models patient listening and skilled questioning. This year we will explore the “how” by focusing on the art of discussion, where teachers become fellow learners and, together with students, cultivate a lifelong passion for truth and a life well lived.

In addition to plenary talks, two small-group breakout discussions will focus on the nature of education and the skill of discussion leading.

**WHEN:**

Thursday, September 8 (evening)  
Friday, September 9 (all day)  
Friday Banquet: 6 PM (ticket required)  
Saturday, September 10 (morning)

**WHERE:**

Cove Church  
1790 Charnelton Street  
Eugene, OR 97401

**REGISTER BY AUGUST 8** to receive price discounts on the full conference and livestreaming of plenary talks.

**INFORMATION & REGISTRATION:**

[gutenberg.edu/edcon](http://gutenberg.edu/edcon)



We are excited to welcome these nationally recognized speakers:



Scott Postma  
Kepler  
Education



Andrew  
Pudewa  
Institute for  
Excellence in  
Writing



Heather  
Shirley  
Classical  
Conversations



Kathryn  
Smith  
Templeton  
Honors College



Andrew  
Zwerneman  
Cana Academy

These speakers bring insights and experience to help us be better learners and educators.

These Gutenberg tutors will also speak at the conference:



Chris  
Swanson  
President of  
Gutenberg  
College



Eliot Grasso  
Vice President  
of Gutenberg  
College



# Three Poems

By Eliot Grasso, Tutor

## Beauty

What is beauty?  
Tell me this.

While I strain, and stir, and twist  
My mind enshrined in feckless mist  
And ponder on a child's kiss.

That little being full of life  
Knows nothing of my inner strife  
And sees alone just what she wants  
Not failure, fool, or selfish dunce  
But one alone who spins and sings  
Who laughs with her 'bout silly things  
And starts each day afresh, anew  
For beauty, she sees only you.

## Still Borne

From the palm of His hand He hears her laughter,  
From the palm of His hand He sees him cry,  
With the palm of His hand He cradles frailty,  
And wipes the tears from every eye.

The stillborn  
born still  
is still borne  
borne still  
by the Bearer of all.

---

"Listen mother," said the elder [Zosima].  
"Once, long ago, a great saint saw a mother  
in church, weeping just as you are over her  
child, her only child, whom the Lord had also  
called to him. 'Do you not know,' the saint  
said to her, 'how bold these infants are before  
the throne of God? No one is bolder in the  
Kingdom of Heaven: Lord, you granted us life,  
they say to God, and just as we beheld it, you  
took it back from us. And they beg and plead  
so boldly that the Lord immediately puts them  
in the ranks of the angels. And therefore,' said  
the saint, 'you, too, woman, rejoice and do not  
weep. Your infant, too, now abides with the  
Lord in the host of his angels.'"

— Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (49)

## Where shall it be colder?

Where shall it be colder:  
Sitting by the fire wrapped in lies that you despise?  
Or wandering in the frozen tundra  
In search of one true root  
That shall tear your life asunder?

# Renovations are underway at Gutenberg College this summer!

Renovations are underway at Gutenberg College! What began as a simple project to fix a plumbing leak has led to the demolition and reconstruction of a large part of the men's bathroom, leaving male residents with twice as many working showers as before. In the process, a hole was made in the office ceiling; and because this had to be repaired and repainted, we figured we might as well repaint the rest of the office as well! Who knows what else will be done along the way . . .



COLLOQUY SUMMER 2022



1883 University Street  
Eugene, OR 97403

541.683.5141 | [office@gutenberg.edu](mailto:office@gutenberg.edu)  
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## Board Matching Campaign

July – August 2022

Help us raise \$28,700 for  
Student Financial Aid!

