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Salve Regina College Brings Our Past to Life

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SALVE REGINA COLLEGE BRINGS OUR PAST TO LIFE

Beginning this January, Ben Franklin is going to come to life again. So will Thomas Jefferson, Paul Revere, John Leonard, James Warren and all the other famous and not so famous men who forged our country.

They're all part of a special lecture series on our national heritage sponsored by Salve Regina College in Newport, R. I. Called "Education for Our Bicentennial," the talks will trace America's birth and development and bring our country's past to life all over again. Not just in dry "founding Fathers" terms, but in terms of the real people and real issues involved.

According to Robert McKenna, director of college and community relations, the object of the program is to create renewed interest in our national heritage so all of us will be better able to participate in our nation's 200th birthday.

"We hope to give our students genuine enthusiasm for the Bicentennial by helping them to understand how our past relates to our present lives. This means taking the "history" out of our Bicentennial and looking at our past as an important force in American today. All of us need to understand where our country came from before we can truly appreciate where it is now," Mr. McKenna says.

The program is in three parts tracing various aspects of American independence. According to McKenna, students can enroll in just one series of lectures or all three. Part I, "The Spirit of '76" covers the events leading up to our break with Britain and runs January 3-23, 1974. Part II, "The Phenomena of a Revolution," looks at the Revolutionary War from Concord Bridge to Yorktown. This section will be held from June to July, 1974. Part III, "The Process of Nation Building," winds up the program during the summer of 1975 with a view of our nation from its first unsteady days to the present.

Each segment of the series is worth four college credits. For qualified high school seniors, McKenna says Salve will hold the credits in escrow or transfer them later to the college of their choice.

"The special feature of the program," McKenna adds, "is that students choose the academic area they want to receive their credits in. We'll grant credits in either philosophy, theology, history, sociology, political science or economics for completing the program.

"Our multi-disciplinary approach is the reason we're able to do this. The Revolution was the result of many forces that came together and caught fire, and we're going to recreate that flame by bringing in guest lecturers who'll view the Spirit of '76 from their own particular field. There will be talks on everything from the sociological make-up of the signers

of the Declaration to the similarity between religious and political rituals. This way, we hope to show students that the Revolution was not just a political move, but a sociological, philosophical and economic move as well."

To put it all together, Salve designed the program around a "thesis concept." It works this way: Each student selects the field he wants to receive his credits in. This field becomes his "major" and in addition to the lecture series, he participates in discussion groups with others in his major.

Once a student has chosen his major, he then chooses a thesis from within that field which he will have to defend or reject at the end of the program. For instance, if a student decides on sociology as his major, he may choose to argue for or against the thesis that "The Declaration of Independence was the result of poor communications." His mark for the program is based on the support he can give his argument. There are no tests. Just a written outline making his "case" and a verbal presentation of the last day of class.

"This gives each student a tremendous amount of freedom to explore our past from the point of view that interests him. We hope this will encourage people to view our Revolution as something more than the long list of dates they had to memorize in grade school," McKenna says.

A large part of the program will be devoted to examining the life-style of the 1700's. There will be tours of restored

colonial homes; a visit to the British frigate H.M.S. Rose; dinner at the White Horse Tavern, America's oldest tavern; and a "Colonial Arts Weekend" of 18th century plays and concerts.

According to Sister Ann Nelson, director of Bicentennial Education, the purpose of these events is to help students obtain a feeling for colonial values and attitudes.

"By looking at how the colonists lived we can get some idea of how they thought. For example, we'll be touring the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House built in the 1690's. Here the low ceilings, thick walls and sturdy furniture tell us that the people of the Jacobean era viewed the world as threatening and their house as a fortress. On the other hand, the Hunter House built in 1748, has high ceilings, beautifully ornate furniture and wide, airy windows. From this we can see that by the Georgian period our forefathers saw their home as a jumping-off point to meet the world and bring others home."

The Bicentennial Education Program is open to men and women in or out of college, teachers, qualified high school seniors, history buffs, people on Bicentennial committees or any other person interested in learning about the real people and issues that gave birth to our country.

"The main requirement for admission is a desire to learn about our past," says McKenna. "There are no admission tests and the program is open to everyone. We hope people from all backgrounds will come to Salve to participate in their national heritage as we bring our country's past to life all over again."

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CONTACT: Robert J. McKenna, Director of College and Community Relations, Salve Regina College, Ochre Point Avenue, Newport, RI 02840, 401-847-6650.

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