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Dominican Hosts International Big History Conference

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Dominican Hosts International Big History Conference

The conference was hosted by Dominican's First Year Big History program which, in the last two years, hosted educators from the United States, South Korea, Brazil and Australia on campus for its annual Big History Summer Institute.

Dominican's founding director of Big History, Associate Provost Mojgan Behmand, was thrilled that the IBHA conference was held on campus.

"We are the only higher education institution in the world that requires Big History of all its first-year students," Behmand said. "Having Big Historians from all over the world converge on this campus is an acknowledgement of our hard work and dedication."

Behmand and program coordinators Jill Thomas and Jaime Castner joined forces with IBHA Board members -- including Dominican's Resident Big Historian Cynthia Brown, IBHA vice president Fred Spier of the University of Amsterdam, Lowell Gustafson of Villanova University, Joseph Voros of Swineburne University in Australia, and Craig Benjamin of Grand Valley State University -- to organize the 2014 IBHA Conference.

The inaugural IBHA conference was held in 2012 at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, and this year's conference sought to continue dialogue from that. The theme of this year's IBHA conference was "Teaching and Researching Big History: Big Picture, Big Questions."

In addition, IBHA seeks to create a forum for the articulation, discussion and distillation of questions central to Big History and how it is flourishing. The conference showcased the many different kinds of research, teaching and creativity that the field is generating. A select group of papers was included in a compilation of Big History Research that will be published after this year's conference.

The IBHA defines its purpose as "to promote, support, and sponsor the diffusion and improvement of the academic and scholarly knowledge of the scientific field of endeavor commonly known as 'Big History' by means of teaching and research and to engage in activities related thereto."

Big History is an emerging academic discipline that provides a unifying overview of the 14 billion-year history of the universe, from the Big Bang to the present day. Big History synthesizes astronomy, chemistry, biology, geology, sociology, history, and other fields to provide a cohesive picture, to scale, of the history of the human race and its present and future relationship to the planet.

Dominican's path to Big History formally began in 2008 when the University overhauled its general education curriculum and first-year programming. The first-year seminars were to be foundational and global in intent and incorporate the teaching of competencies, such as writing and research. Big History became the focus of the seminars. The faculty -- from many disciplines, including art, art history, biology business, English, history, humanities, music, occupational therapy, political science, psychology, religion and women and gender studies -- has been relentless in its efforts to tell the Big History story in the most engaging and interactive manner. In fact, the continuous collaboration of the Dominican faculty has led to the writing and

publication of the first book on Big History pedagogy, *Teaching Big History*, which is being published by the University of California Press in November 2014. Richard B. Simon, Mojgan Behmand, and Thomas Burke are co-editors.

For more information, contact bighistory@dominican.edu or www.ibhanet.org.

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