TOWSON UNIVERSITY

OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE

Winter Zoom Lecture Series

January 14–February 17, 2027

Osher membership required.

Six Zoom lectures.
$10 each or $50 for all.

Towson.edu/OsherRegistration

Osher at Towson University — Winter Lecture Series

In January and February, we bring you our Winter Lecture Series on Zoom. Grab a hot beverage and get cozy for these great lectures!

The lectures will be recorded and made available to those who register.

Membership is not required to attend, so encourage anyone who may be new to Osher to participate.

Pricing: $10 per lecture or $50 for all six Zoom lectures.

TOPIC	SPEAKER	DATE	TIME
Baltimore Before Baltimore: Exploring the Region's Indigenous Past Through Archaeology	Katherine Ahlrichs	Wednesday, January 13	10–11:30 a.m.
The Amazing Life and Mysterious Death of Harry Houdini	Paula Mister	Wednesday, January 20	10–11:30 a.m.
The Graffiti Squad: From the Baltimore Mural Program to Graffiti Alley, 1975 – Present	Menika Dirkson	Wednesday, January 27	10–11:30 a.m.
Positive Aging: The Spirituality of Later Life	Drew Leder	Wednesday, February 3	10–11:30 a.m.
Fake News and War of the Worlds	Daniel H. Foster	Wednesday, February 10	10–11:30 a.m.
The South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club and the Johnstown Flood of 1889	Samuel Clevenger	Wednesday, February 17	10–11:30 a.m.



Baltimore Before Baltimore: Exploring the Region's Indigenous Past Through Archaeology

Katherine Ahlrichs

Wednesday, January 13, 10–11:30 a.m., Zoom

Long before Baltimore's streets, rowhouses and neighborhoods took shape, Indigenous communities lived along the rivers, streams and shores of the Chesapeake Bay. For thousands of years, these communities shaped and adapted to the region's changing landscapes, leaving behind a rich archaeological record that remains largely invisible. We will explore the region's Indigenous history and the archaeological discoveries that are helping us understand its earliest inhabitants. Drawing on recent archaeological investigations at Herring Run Park in Baltimore City and North Point State Park in Baltimore County, this lecture examines what stone tools, pottery, food remains and other archaeological evidence reveal about the daily lives, environments and cultural traditions of the people who inhabited this region long before colonization. Learn how Indigenous communities interacted with the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, how their ways of life changed over thousands of years, and how archaeologists reconstruct the past from often subtle traces of human activity. Discover the challenges and opportunities of conducting archaeological research in urban landscapes and public parks, as well as the growing importance of collaboration with contemporary Indigenous communities in shaping archaeological research and interpretation.

Katherine M.S. Ahlrichs, Ph.D., is an associate professor of anthropology at Towson University and director of the Baltimore Community Archaeology Lab (BCAL). Her research focuses on the archaeology of the Chesapeake Bay region, with an emphasis on Indigenous history, community-engaged archaeology, and cultural heritage preservation. Through BCAL, she leads archaeological investigations throughout Maryland that provide hands-on training for students while engaging local communities in the study and preservation of their heritage. Her work emphasizes collaboration with Indigenous communities, public participation in archaeological research, and making the region's rich archaeological history accessible to broader audiences.



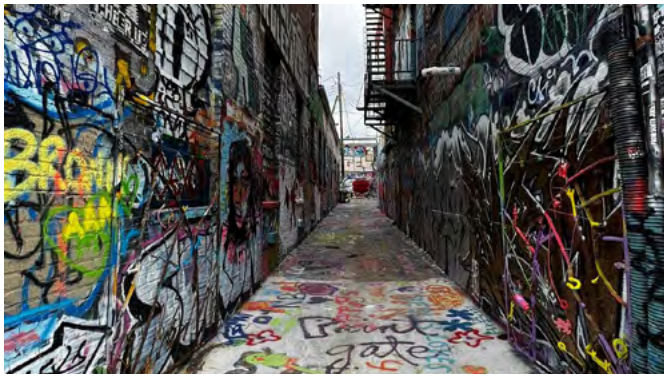
The Amazing Life and Mysterious Death of Harry Houdini

Paula Mister

Wednesday, January 20, 10–11:30 a.m., Zoom

Join us for a presentation on the intriguing life and career of the world's greatest escape artist, Harry Houdini. Born in Hungary, Ehrich Weiss, emigrated to the United States with his family as a young boy, later taking on his famous stage persona. Houdini's illusionist act brought him to circuses, dime museums, and vaudeville stages across the country. He also gained acclaim performing across Europe where he continued to awe spectators with his mystifying feats and dramatic escapes. With a career spanning stage and screen, Houdini was a master of reinvention. In addition to entertaining, he worked tirelessly to expose Spiritualist mediums and the Spiritualist movement as it gained in popularity. In this presentation, learn about the elusive life of one of the world's greatest entertainers.

Paula C. Mister is a retired microbiologist and educator formerly with Johns Hopkins Hospital Pathology Department. She has a master's degree in biology from Towson University and a specialty certification in clinical microbiology. She currently teaches in the biology department at CCBC and has given numerous presentations to seniors' groups. Paula enjoys sharing her passion for recognizing unsung heroes and heroines of science and medicine.



The Graffiti Squad: From the Baltimore Mural Program to Graffiti Alley, 1975–Present

Menika Dirkson

Wednesday, January 27, 10–11:30 a.m., Zoom

This lecture will explore the graffiti art movement among teenagers and adults in Baltimore during the 1970s through the 2000s. Graffiti was popularized by teenagers who tagged buildings, bridges, and public transportation under names like Sparky, Blinky, and Teen127. In 1975, the city responded to this form of vandalism by issuing fines and jail time, but also by establishing a mural arts program. Baltimore Mayor Donald Schaefer and city officials associated with the Mayor's Coordinating Council on Criminal Justice (MCCCJ) later recruited professional artists and juveniles arrested for vandalism to create murals throughout the city over the decades. By 2006, Baltimore permitted residents to have legal spaces for producing graffiti, like Graffiti Alley in the Station North neighborhood, while also establishing free admission for all visitors to the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Walters Art Museum.

Menika Dirkson is an Associate Professor of African American History at Morgan State University. She received her Ph.D. in history from Temple University and master's and bachelor's degrees in history from Villanova University. She is the author of the 2024 book, Hope and Struggle in the Policed City: Black Criminalization and Resistance in Philadelphia. She recently was an ASCEND Faculty Research Fellow at Yale University and is currently researching race, crime, policing and graffiti in post-1968 Philadelphia.



Positive Aging: The Spirituality of Later Life

Drew Leder

Wednesday, February 3, 10–11:30 a.m., Zoom

In our ageist culture, growing older is often associated with diminishment, physical and social. However, research has shown that those with positive attitudes toward aging live as much as seven years longer than those who are negative. Using Hindu, Native American, and Judeo-Christian stories and interviews, we will look at archetypes of positive, spiritual elderhood, including that of the contemplative, contributor, compassionate companion and creative. We will explore positive spiritual archetypes of elderhood, challenge stereotypes, and learn how these perspectives can enrich and extend our lives.

Drew Leder, MD, Ph.D., is professor of Eastern and Western philosophy at Loyola University Maryland. He is the author of six books including his latest, The Healing Body: Creative Responses to Illness, Aging, and Affliction. A national speaker on topics such as illness and the medical system, prison education and cross-cultural spirituality and aging, his work has been featured in media outlets ranging from the Washington Post and Chicago Tribune to Family Circle. His book on aging, Spiritual Passages: Embracing Life's Sacred Journey, has been reviewed as a book which "could revolutionize the aging of society." He lives in Baltimore with his wife, two dogs and (occasionally) two daughters.



Fake News and *War of the Worlds*

Daniel H. Foster

Wednesday, February 10, 10–11:30 a.m., Zoom

On the evening of October 30, 1938, between 6 and 12 million Americans tuned in the radio version of New York City's experimental Mercury Theater. It was a decision that some, no doubt, came to regret. What they heard was an all-male chorus of talking heads — scientists, journalists, politicians, and military experts — repeatedly telling them that New Jersey was being invaded by Martians. The ensuing hours were alarming ones for those who did not realize they were listening to an adaptation of the classic H.G. Wells science fiction novel War of the Worlds. The performance, directed by and starring Orson Welles, pushed the still young medium of radio drama further than many had pushed it before. Its masterful use of music, sound effects, and silence showed how radio could ignite the imagination and make listeners fear the worst. Revisit that classic moment and learn what lessons it holds for us today. Aired during a period of rapid modern change, marked by the rise of dictators in Europe to the recent fiery destruction of the Hindenburg, the broadcast tapped into widespread anxiety about new technologies and invading forces. Often labeled as an early case of "fake news," it exposed deep questions about the institutions listeners trusted: education, the media, government and the military. To emphasize the mischief radio can bring to the world, Orson Welles compared the radio to a jack-o-lantern and warned us to beware this "invader of the living room."

Daniel H. Foster chairs the Liberal Arts Department at the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University. A scholar with a particular interest in the intersection of music, literature, and drama, he is the author of Wagner's Ring Cycle and the Greeks (Cambridge 2010) and is currently at work on From Bards to Blackface, or How the Minstrel Changed His Tune. His papers and articles have been published in journals and outlets ranging from Journal of American Drama and Theatre to Smithsonian Magazine to the Huffington Post. Foster received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago's Comparative Literature Department. He was awarded a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship by the University of Pennsylvania Humanities Forum and taught in Penn's Music Department.



The South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club and the Johnstown Flood of 1889

Samuel Clevenger

Wednesday, February 17, 10–11:30 a.m., Zoom

The Johnstown Flood of 1889 remains, to date, one of the deadliest floods in United States history, with over 2,200 people having lost their lives and much of the industrial city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania destroyed. Beyond its scale and cultural significance, the Johnstown Flood is also remembered for its impact on American tort law and for serving as the first major relief effort of the American Red Cross. What should also be remembered are the ways in which the calamity was tied to an elite, exclusive resort named the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club. Among the club's members were some of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the U.S.—including Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and Andrew Mellon. The club made a handful of fateful decisions concerning their enjoyment of an artificial lake in the mountains northeast of Johnstown, that helped create the conditions for what became the 1889 flood. This lecture revisits the history of the Johnstown Flood and the infamous decisions made by the South Fork club. The lecture contextualizes the club's sporting and leisure activities, and comments on its significance in illustrating the complex historical connections between sport, leisure, and environmental change in U.S. history.

Samuel M. Clevenger, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Sport Management at Towson University. His research and expertise centers on the history of sport, leisure, and other forms of "physical culture." The first book, published in 2025, is titled Physical Culture and the Biopolitics of the International Garden City Movement (Palgrave Macmillan).

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Pricing: $10 per lecture or $50 for all six!

REGISTER HERE

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bit.ly/OsherWinter2027