

“Crises and Challenges: One Hundred Years at Alma College” Exhibit
Abstract for Honors Day Presentation
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The small exhibition entitled “Crises and Challenges: One Hundred Years at Alma College” offers a comprehensive examination of the significant adversities and transformations that Alma College has encountered over the past century. The narrative commences with the profound impacts of the First World War and the Spanish Flu pandemic, events that profoundly shaped the socio-cultural landscape of the late 1910s and early 1920s. Subsequently, the exhibit delves into the ramifications of World War Two, which not only mobilized many American young men to serve abroad - fighting for the freedom of the world - but also fundamentally altered the campus environment from early 1942 to late 1945. This period highlighted the college's resilience amidst external turmoil. The exhibition further addresses internal challenges faced by Alma College, notably the catastrophic fire that devastated Old Main, the institution's inaugural building. This calamity coincided with a transformative era under the leadership of President Dr. Robert Swanson, whose tenure from 1956 to 1980 initiated significant curricular and structural advancements, reflecting a progressive direction in education offerings. The ensuing decades of the 1980s and 1990s presented a period of relative stability for the college; however, the tranquility was interrupted in the early 2000s, notably by the events of September 11, 2001. This pivotal moment not only reshaped American society but also catalyzed responses among students at Alma College striving to bring hope and a sense of community in a time of collective grief. The exhibition also chronicles the institution's navigation through economic downturns and other societal upheavals. Most recently, the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in March 2020 posed unprecedented challenges, leading to a transition to online learning and a significant disengagement of the student body and questions about the viability of the college. Despite these crises, Alma College has demonstrated remarkable resilience, rooted in the enduring legacy, communal pride, and the dedication of its students, faculty, and staff to the purpose of life long learning and community, affirming its status as a steadfast educational institution in the face of adversity.