Spisak Joins Honors Program

The University of Iowa Honors Program is pleased to welcome a new director, Art Spisak. Director Spisak isn’t new to the University of Iowa—in fact, he served as a visiting professor of classics before directing Missouri State University’s Honors College from 2006–2011. Under his direction, the Honors College at Missouri State University grew from 800 students to 1,200 in just five years.

His own education started at Youngstown State University where he studied Classical Studies. He later completed his masters at John Carroll University, followed by his doctorate at Loyola University of Chicago, both in Classical Studies. Spisak is an avid handball player and owns Siberian Husky, Yukon, who is more than happy to take on Iowa’s cold winters.

He describes his approach to Honors education as student-centered. His goals for the University of Iowa Honors Program are to give one-on-one attention to students and to make sure that they are considered in every step of the decision-making process. At Iowa, where the program’s membership already includes thousands of students, he looks forward to leading a caring and open team of professionals to assist students pursuing an Honors education.

Welcome, Director Spisak!
Primetime: a glimpse into Honors education

For the third consecutive year, first-year Honors students were given the unique opportunity to participate in Honors Primetime. This popular program allows Honors students to preview what their Honors education might become. Over two days, students engaged in workshops with topics ranging from archaeology to public policy to chemistry. “The workshops were really fun and laid back. The best part of all of Primetime was the presentations at the end where we got to see what everyone else did. All the groups worked on projects that were so diverse and interesting,” Andrea Jackson, a participant in Vinicius Lima’s Graphic Design and Visual Meaning workshop, noted.

In true Hawkeye fashion, first-year Honors students worked as teammates as well as classmates during their time at the workshops. “By the end of the two days, they [the students] were all talking and rooting for each other, particularly when we put together the presentation for the final night. The students did 100% of the work designing and presenting their slides, and their enthusiasm and support for each other really showed in the final product,” one proud instructor, Lori Adams, remarked. “I think the students felt a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work when they were asked to work together as a team to present their research findings.”

“It was a great segue into the Honors program because of the discussions that we had and the connection of the people who were there with a single motivation,” another participant in the Graphic Design workshop, Ada Vargas, commented. “Our instructor helped us understand the basics of graphic design and guided us to build a design that pleased the crowd. I made some amazing friendships and had tons of fun! It was a wonderful experience.”

Beyond Primetime, Honors at Iowa provides ongoing opportunities for new students to interact closely with peers and professors through classes such as Honors General Education Seminars and Honors Designations. “One of Primetime’s best benefits is that it allows our new Honors students to start building community even before the semester officially begins,” Art Spisak, director, said. “They come away from the experience knowing many of their peers as well as at least one professor fairly well.”

“It made such a large school like the University of Iowa feel smaller and more personal,” Andrea Jackson echoed. “Now instead of coming into my first year at the University of Iowa not knowing anyone and probably feeling overwhelmed, I recognize people all over campus and have a shared experience to talk to them about.”
Andrea Stone vividly remembers the contagious enthusiasm of the Honors Ambassadors who helped introduce her to the Honors Program during her Summer 2008 Orientation. “They were really helpful, kind and so full of energy,” she recalled. In her sophomore year, Andrea took on a similar role helping other students as an Honors Peer Advisor. Now a senior psychology major, she serves as an undergraduate teaching assistant for Peer Advising and as an Honors Student Staff member, programming Arts activities for fellow Honors students.

Kavin Sundaram, a senior journalism and human physiology major, traces a similar trajectory in reflecting on his involvement with Honors. “My first year I was mostly a consumer of Honors resources; my second year, I wanted to shift to being a producer,” said Sundaram, who coordinates advertising and event planning for Honors Peer Advising. “The community aspect is one of the most important parts of the Honors Program, and the way that I could be a part of that was by becoming a Peer Advisor.”

The facilitation of students helping students has become a hallmark of Honors at Iowa over the past several years. As Summer Orientation Ambassadors, Peer Advisors, Student Staff members and Research Ambassadors, experienced Honors students share their knowledge and stories of the Honors Program with new and returning students seeking to strengthen their learning and engagement within Honors.

According to Associate Director Robert Kirby, who joined the program in 2000, the importance of students’ mentoring other students has long been recognized by the Honors Program, and has driven the ongoing prioritization of student staff and service opportunities.

Twenty-one Honors Orientation Ambassadors in various majors helped orient first-year students and their parents during Orientation 2011; 27 Honors Peer Advisors are training to assist current and prospective students in 2011–2012; and 13 student staff members are programming events and activities for fellow Honors students in such areas as Volunteering, Faculty-Student Discourses, Gallery and Iowa City Foreign Relations Council.

In reflecting on the role of fellow students in her own learning, Stone observed that the “whole group” of students she encountered as part of the process of learning about the Honors Program was “really influential,” and added, “It makes me realize what potential we have as students advising other students.”
Reflections and Lessons

By Maggie Brigl

Three years ago I moved to the second floor of Daum. My roommate was a girl from my high school math class who laughed easily. It was raining that day. My mother still laments that it was as if the sky was “reflecting her feelings.” When my parents left, I stood crying for a good ten minutes outside before walking mournfully back into my room. I was surprised at myself—the oldest, the strongest of the three Brigl kids, and here I was—feeling alone.

I ran into some fellow Daumers in the entry hall, all as confused as I was, and we walked downtown to get dinner together. Later, back in my room, I called another high school acquaintance to keep me company. I cried that night.

Flash forward. It’s now the beginning of my senior year, with two years of Honors internships under my belt and two internships left to go this year. That first night I met three of my best friends to this day (two are pictured below). We became friends on the walk from Daum to the crepe stand. The high school acquaintance who comforted me in 5203 Daum Hall is now my roommate. Little did I realize the impact that first day would have on my life at the University of Iowa. Though there were always ups and downs, I had those people with me every step of the way. The lessons I learned that first year were difficult, but well worth it, and here are a few that had the most impact:

**Keep up with your reading.** I fell behind just one day, and when it came to the next time I had to read, I had twice as much to read—so, naturally, I just didn’t do it. You could say I learned my lesson quickly.

**Go to class.** Even if professors post the lectures, they will always say something in lecture that will be on the test and not in the notes. What else are you going to do, watch the Food Network in your room? Yup, I did that too. The last question on my final? “What was the answer I gave you last week in lecture?”

**Go see your parents.** I probably visited my parents once my first semester. It wasn’t until later that I missed them, but now I go to see them once or twice a month. They want to know what’s going on in your life, and though you may not feel it—you need them. (My mom is pictured above, much to her chagrin.)

**Take advantage of opportunities.** I still know people who haven’t had any experience and expect to find a job the second they are given a diploma. But they won’t. Go to the BHC and ask the Honors Peer Advisors or senior staff how to further your education. Whatever you do—research, internships, service learning—do something. It will teach you what you love, what you hate, but even better—it looks good on a resume, and you’ll need that once you graduate.

**Savor it.** I’m about to leave and I’m only now beginning to realize why people say that these are the greatest years of your life.

Maggie Brigl is an Honors undergraduate writing fellow for Honors@Iowa.
Honors Activities: “Get involved!”

Student groups and staff encouraged first-year students to get involved at the Fall 2011 Honors Activities Fair, held August 27 in the Blank Honors Center. This year’s theme was “Brains and Memories.” Exhibits were scattered throughout the first four floors of the building, showing new students activities, societies, awards, and art. As an added bonus, each participating student received a raffle ticket from each presenter they were bold enough to approach. This year there were more than 40 prizes for students who chose to attend.

Among the presenters were the student staff programmers, who introduced the various opportunities that they plan for the Honors students, including events in the Arts, Volunteering, Discourses, and the Gallery.

Honors Peer Advisors were also on hand to answer new students’ questions and to promote Peer Advising as a service opportunity. Cathy Oswald, a member of both the Honors Peer Advisors and the Summer Ambassador Program, said of her experience as a peer advisor, “It gives you a closer, more in-depth look at the University of Iowa Honors program and allows you to meet really awesome people. You get to know the pro-staff and incoming students more, and encourage those students to take part in an experience you are enjoying so much.”

Also participating were several Honors societies—officers of each honor society are advised by Honors Advising Director Holly Yoder, also in attendance. Each society member encouraged freshmen to join their organization to take advantage of Honors opportunities. Ashlee Venema, Phi Eta Sigma co-president, said of her organization, “There are good scholarship opportunities, and it's a great way to get involved with other students.”

NSCS (National Society of Collegiate Scholars), was also in attendance. The president, senior Senuri Jayatilleka, told first-year students that participating in NSCS is “a great way to build relationships, both within the school and in other colleges, with people you don't normally see. It provides a lot of service opportunities.”

The Honors program at Iowa emphasizes a growing and ever-changing experience for students. To find out more about opportunities and activities, please see our website at http://honors.uiowa.edu/activities/index.shtml

To submit to Honors@Iowa, or to contact the editor, please email: margaret-brigl@uiowa.edu