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Gabbie Meis
Newsletter Editor

Kinsey Phipps
Editorial Support Specialist

Genevieve Cleverley
Design Editor

Holly Blosser Yoder
Staff Adviser

On the cover:
Honors Experiential Learning Director Andrew Willard is pictured at the 2019 Experiential Learning Fair. “Treat it like it’s a candy store,” he advises students; “there are plenty of opportunities out there!” Photo by Angeline Vanle.
Greetings for the Fall of 2019 to our Honors Program students, faculty, alumni, and friends.

HONORS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Experiential learning, which is learning by doing rather than by listening to lecture, is nowadays a common feature of honors education. In our own program, we have for many years put a very high premium on experiential learning. Specifically, it comprises a full half of our curricular requirements. You’ll see several articles in this newsletter that will give you a feel for what our own students are doing for their honors experiential learning. Just a couple examples: there’s an article describing a political science class titled Hawkeye Poll, which could only happen in Iowa and during the presidential and midterm election seasons. Students in this class learn about and then practice polling methodology. Another article outlines some of the experiential learning opportunities available to students in the summer. Study abroad is likely the most popular option for summers, an experience which can be life-changing. Another experiential learning opportunity, which is unique to us, is the Honors Writing Fellows Program. This program gives students who are interested in writing a chance to help other students with their course-related writing assignments. Honors Writing Fellows, besides getting invaluable experience in helping other students to improve their writing, are also paid for their work.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OUR HONORS STUDENTS

Also in this newsletter issue you’ll see several articles that detail some of the recent accomplishments of our students. Probably the accomplishment that got the most attention this last year was one of our honors students, Austin Hughes, being awarded a Rhodes Scholarship. The Rhodes is likely the best-known international award for undergraduate students. It fully funds a student to attend Oxford University to complete a graduate degree. In the article you’ll learn a little about Austin, a most engaging young man, and what the application process entailed for him.

Another type of accomplishment, quite different but also very challenging, is successfully adapting to college life as a first-generation student. Having no family member to help you to understand the sometimes strange culture and practices of the university can be frightening, and, when you add the expectations of coursework and living outside of home, it can be overwhelming. You’ll see an article below that gives you a taste of that particular challenge – what it feels like and how two of our first-gen honors students are courageously meeting the challenge.

AN UNUSUAL HONORS AT IOWA TRADITION

Iowa honors students tell us that the two things they most value about their honors experience are their honors classes and the community the Honors Program offers them. The strongest concentration of honors community is in Daum Honors House, our Honors residence hall for our first-year students. As is common, over the years different types of traditions have arisen in Daum. Below you’ll read about Tub Time, one of the more unusual traditions. I’ll leave it to you to make sense of the ritual of the tradition, which involves standing in a tub full of rubber ducks. What I can confirm is its value: it brings together our honors students and helps them to deal with the pressures of the high expectations they manage daily.

As always, please feel free to contact me via email (art-spisak@uiowa.edu) or phone (319.335.1681) with any comments, questions, or concerns you have about the Honors Program. I’m happy to have such conversations.

Art L. Spisak, PhD
Director, UI Honors Program
Past President, National Collegiate Honors Council
Marking the Constellations
Hannah Gulick’s Musings on Honors

I discovered astronomy lying on my back on the floor of my high school gymnasium, staring up at projections of stars orbiting on the tarp walls of an inflatable star-dome. The star-dome was part of a project I directed in high school which taught students and teachers the basics of astronomy—nebulae, planets, and our place in the universe. By the end of the two-month project, I was completely immersed in the universe that is astronomy.

I learned about dark energy and how it spreads the edges of space and time faster and faster with every second; I learned about black holes feeding on their host galaxies; and I memorized each constellation and the individual or message it honored—all with a roof separating me from the outer atmosphere.

But looking back, I wonder what causes us to honor someone or something enough to fossilize it in a light that will burn for generations past our own. And has this definition changed throughout time, or do we hold these honorable traits constant?

While the individuals we honor have gone from occupations like the Great Hunter Orion and the lightning-wielding Zeus to a professor who champions their students or firefighters who risk their lives, I think the means by which we honor stays constant. Those we hold in the highest regard we look up to for a trait or message, but through honoring these people we become connected with one another.

The things we honor reveal the things which connect us. Our beliefs, our fears, our goals, and our differences all unite to create our own constellations. Where our constellations overlap with those of our friends, family, and strangers, show our similarities. Combining our constellations derives a new pattern, which we assign to the stars in the night sky.

Through the University of Iowa Honors Program, my personal understanding of the word honor has also grown. I met my first research advisor, Professor Lang, in my first-year honors seminar. Professor Lang taught me how to calculate the integrated flux intensity for radio things, even if it means change. From research with Professor Kaaret, I built, tested, launched, and commanded two different satellite missions which has given me invaluable research experience, but one of my main take-aways is that there is honor in teamwork, leadership, and promoting those around you. For part of my Honors experiential learning credits, I traveled to Norway to build a sounding rocket as part of a Canadian-Norwegian rocket-field school. Here, I was able to expand my definition to a global setting, aligning my own constellations to students with different educations, languages, and motivations.

Honor is defined throughout our lives by the people we meet and the experiences we take. The Honors Program has given me a community of students, professors, and advisors who show me what honor looks like every day, who push me to look at the stars and ask why it is we honor the constellations.

What if the stars only came out for one night every fifty years? The rest of the time, the night sky was a black canopy—no cloud covered or hidden, just empty of light, of all suggestions that there is a universe beyond us. Would we all drop what we were doing, gather our friends and family, and lie outside in the grass or dirt or sand or snow from sundown until sunup? To wish on shooting stars and sketch our own constellations among the Greeks’ and Romans’? And who would we choose to honor in our constellations?

The stars are something we all have in common, and tonight the stars will be out, marking the constellations which we make for ourselves. And even if the entire world doesn’t drop what they are doing to go outside and marvel at these constellations, their light is still there, connecting us through honor, changing the night sky, and remembered for generations to come.
Six Honors Students Named Grand Challenges Scholars, Travel to D.C.

Kinsey Phipps

Each semester, applications open for the Grand Challenges Scholars Program at the University of Iowa College of Engineering. This year, six Honors at Iowa students earned the designation and traveled to the 2019 Annual Meeting of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) Grand Challenges Scholars Program (GCSP) in Washington, D.C.

The NAE identified 14 Grand Challenges for Engineering in the 21st century and called on educational institutions around the country to inspire action. The UI’s College of Engineering was the seventh in the country and the first in the Big Ten to have an approved Engineering Grand Challenge Scholars Program in place.

Students can apply to be a Fellow or Scholar. Fellows typically apply in their first year to take full advantage of what the program has to offer. Fellows choose one Grand Challenge and three out of the five curricular components to prepare themselves with. Those curricular components are research experience, interdisciplinary curriculum, entrepreneurship, global dimension, and service learning.

To be promoted to a Scholar, students must apply all five curricular components to their Grand Challenge of choice, be in good standing of the college, and maintain a 3.5 GPA. The program has funding opportunities for students to aid in project efforts.

All six of this year’s scholars are also honors students:
– Senior Chibuzo Nwakama, electrical engineering
– Senior Aaron Silva, biomedical engineering
– Senior Zane Johnson, biomedical engineering
– Senior Russell Martin, biomedical engineering
– Senior Allison Rowe, mechanical engineering
– Junior Collin Sindt, chemical engineering

The Scholars traveled to the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 11-12 for the 2019 Annual Meeting of the National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenges Scholars Program.

Anat Levtov, director of global experiences and academic advisor in the College of Engineering, traveled with the Scholars. “Students had the opportunity to meet Grand Challenges Scholars from institutions around the nation and the world and engage with faculty and industry partners active with the National Academy of Engineering,” Levtov said. “Students attended workshops on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ethical considerations, international partnerships, and alumni mentoring and networking sessions.”

Congratulations to our six Scholars, and best of luck on the continuation of their research.
The expertise of a good writer can help ideas reach a wider target as opposed to a single conversation. Known as the Writing University, honors students at the University of Iowa have been able to bring their expertise to the table for over a decade through the honors Writing Fellows program, passing down skills to fellow students. In turn, the skills taught to honors students through the program have allowed them to reach newer, greater heights in their personal and academic careers.

Now a Fulbright Scholar performing research on scientific outreach in China, former Writing Fellow Dani Lipman believes the program to have been highly beneficial in advancing to where she is now.

“It’s very hard to put your own thoughts down on paper,” Lipman said.

A physics and astronomy major during her time at the University, Lipman keyed to how writing plays such a pivotal role — regardless of the field. In addition to her degrees, Lipman is both a musician and a creative writer. Whether communicating a revolutionary physics theory or crafting a fictional world, the transfer of ideas in writing is vital. And her time as a Writing Fellow brought her success with the challenge of embarking on one of the most prestigious programs in the country.

“It’s a pathway for Fulbrights,” Carol Severino, director of the Writing Fellows program, said. “People have used Writing Fellows to get into professional schools like Harvard Law, Georgetown Law.”

The program has a reputation for being a valuable experience that prepares students for post-undergraduate academic plans. However, the skills and experiences of being a Writing Fellow go far beyond just academic accolades. The Fellows Program helps tremendous synergistic relationships develop between professors and their students.

“[Fellows have] really brought me excellent feedback for my students — talking about organization and structure; this whole logical connection of ideas that is needed for communicating research,” said Professor Lori Adams, Associate Professor of Instruction in the Biology Department at the University.

Adams’ Communicating Research class, working in conjunction with writing fellows at the University, is meant to help students in the sciences approach bringing their ideas, often vastly complex, to the greater public effectively. Adams said her students have always reaped the benefits of working with the Fellows Program, making them more effective communicators.

Paige Stevens, a second year writing fellow, said the same goes for communication development among the fellows. “Time management is the best skill I’ve learned from the program,” Stevens said.

Stevens cited a rewarding stress that came along with the Fellows Program, being tasked with a number of papers to supply feedback on amidst her own exams and papers. Admitting to having missed an important meeting during her first year in the program, she explained how it made her realize the impact of her presence and communication and the need to prioritize.

The work, she added, is not anything that should be taken on alone. Reaching out for help when necessary is critical to the program’s effectiveness for both the fellows and students.

The ability to edit and provide feedback has opened the door for Stevens, like Lipman, for potential careers. Because students commented positively on her feedback, Stevens said she feels confident the experience will stand as a proud piece of her résumé and leave the students with stronger senses of their own writing styles—a definitively symbiotic relationship.

“People come in not wanting to write, not wanting to be in class,” said Lipman. “And after meeting with them, you’ve completely uprooted all the negative things they’ve had about writing.”
Polling with Honors
Surveying the Hawkeye Poll Course

Christopher Borro

Ahead of the 2020 Iowa Caucuses, many Americans might wonder what their fellow citizens believe are important issues for candidates to focus on. Polling can help gauge public reactions towards candidates and their stances, and one political science class at the University of Iowa, aptly named Hawkeye Poll, is allowing Honors students to field their own questions to voters.

Jielu Yao is in her second year of serving as the instructor for the undergraduate Hawkeye Poll course. The class isn’t offered on a semesterly basis, though; its availability is dependent on the cyclical nature of caucuses and elections. Since it also offers three semester hours of experiential learning credits, interested Honors students might not have this opportunity available if they want to pursue their learning-by-doing requirements in an electoral off year.

Beginning in 2007, the UI has pioneered the nationally recognized polling series, which is aided by the efforts of Yao’s students and those who took the course before them. The class provides “a very rare opportunity for students to learn every fundament of survey research,” Yao said. The process behind the poll is simple: students learn about, and practice, polling methodology through an app called Stata. They then design their own questions, collect data via phone interviews, and analyze the resulting information.

Honors students Wenqi Ding and Sophie Janicki didn’t take the course specifically for the experiential learning credit. They both needed to fulfill course requirements, and the class piqued their interests. “I was kind of worried about completing experiential learning, but it turns out this class counts towards it, so that’s a nice coincidence,” Ding, a senior, said. To complete their experiential learning qualifications, both students plan to study abroad in London.

In groups of four or five, Ding, Janicki and the other students have formulated questions to ask poll recipients. Their queries will be fielded in late October; Ding’s about the death penalty and mass incarceration, Janicki’s on attitudes towards the electoral college. “The polling process will take a while…but I think it’ll be a good experience,” Janicki, a junior, said. “I feel like I’m volunteering for something [instead of] taking a class.”

This focus on out-of-class experiences is precisely the reason the course works for experiential learning. Visiting professor David Redlawsk created it based on previous Caucus-related classes he’d taught at the UI. “One of the things I’ve always done as a professor was engage students in real-world activities,” he said. A large focus of these earlier classes was to have students volunteer with political campaigns to acquire experience in conducting polls.

The first Hawkeye Poll in March 2007 had 1,290 participants and was followed by polls throughout the 2008 election cycle. Participation has diminished in recent years, with the October 2018 poll surveying only 496 Iowans. “It costs money every call, and at some point you’re not increasing your precision, your accuracy, enough to warrant the cost,” Redlawsk said. He estimated receiving a response for every 16 to 20 phone calls made in 2007; nowadays, he said, that number might be one in 50.

This year, Yao said, the focus is again exclusively on Iowan voters, so interviewees might be more receptive to the poll. “If they know it’s for [UI] students’ research, they’ll be more willing to answer your call,” she said.
Across the Pond

Meet Austin Hughes, Iowa’s Own Rhodes Scholar

Sonia Beltz

So far, the United Kingdom doesn’t seem all that different from the United States. Austin Hughes has only been there for a short time, but as he starts his first term at Oxford University, he is eager to take in all his new environment has to offer. Hughes, who graduated from the University of Iowa in the spring of 2019 with degrees in English and Creative Writing and Asian Languages and Literature, was one of 32 individuals selected as 2018 Rhodes Scholars.

According to their website, “Rhodes Scholarships are the oldest and most celebrated international fellowship awards in the world.” The program provides two years of funding for exceptional American students to complete a degree at Oxford. Honors Director of Scholar Development Kelly Thornburg cites three essential characteristics of all Rhodes Scholars: “being a voracious reader or learner, caring about and paying attention to how you and your expertise interact with the rest of the world, and being somebody who really knows how to build and maintain genuine relationships.”

When Hughes first came to Thornburg as a sophomore, he showed all of these characteristics. Hughes first became interested in the Rhodes Scholarship after one of his professors, Blaine Greteman, himself a former Rhodes Scholar, suggested he look into the award. After successfully applying to the Beinecke scholarship, which provides graduate school funding, with Thornburg’s help, Hughes began to seriously consider the Rhodes. Thornburg served as a sort of “fairy godmother” to Hughes, who says, “Without [Thornburg] planting that seed and helping me understand I could get it, I probably wouldn’t be in the UK right now.”

Influenced by Thornburg and Greteman, Hughes researched the scholarship and discovered Oxford offers a world-class program in Japanese Studies, part of his core interests. The program was an enormous draw for Hughes, who hopes to study Japanese, with a focus in classical literature. This program, coupled with “Oxford’s reputation for being intellectually rigorous,” convinced Hughes to apply in the fall of his senior year.

The application process was intense and sleep-depriving and truly took a village, Hughes said. Rhodes Scholars must submit a personal statement, a two-page resume, and eight letters of recommendation, the last of which, Thornburg says, makes up the bulk of the application. These letters came from Hughes’ well-developed “community of support,” Thornburg said.

“[Hughes’ community] were incredibly engaged. They took lots of feedback and put so much time into trying to represent what their relationship was with [Hughes], as well as what they saw his role turning into as both a person as well as a scholar,” Thornburg said. These letters spanned everything from academic prowess to volunteer work, bolstering Hughes’ accomplishments – which included reviving the University of Iowa’s English Society and numerous research projects – to create a strong application.

“By the time it came to my interview, I was in this fight-or-flight moment—if I want it, I need to fight for this,” Hughes said about the interview process for finalists. A panel of experts and past Rhodes Scholars were assembled to help Hughes prepare. When he gave his interview, it was “probably better than I have ever done before,” he said.

Hughes has started his first term at Oxford, where he will pursue a Master of Philosophy in Japanese Studies. He hopes to focus on classical Japanese literature, drawing on his interest in poetry and English authors like Chaucer and Milton. As for his next steps, Hughes said, “I want to be some kind of an educator. I want whatever I do to promote second language acquisition specifically in the United States, because it’s not valued very much beyond Spanish.” He is also considering a Master of Fine Arts in poetry as his next step, though not an immediate one.

In the meantime, Hughes is looking forward to his time at Oxford and is ready for all the challenges that await. Having never been to the United Kingdom before, he is certain he will find differences between there and the United States while he works on his degree. “Not that different yet,” he said. “But it’s only been a week.”
“You actually don’t know what the Common App is?” my friends joined together in laughter as our car jolted to an awkward stop. I smiled sheepishly and tried to laugh along, pretending to understand the inside joke.

No, I actually don’t know what the Common App is…

I was riding along on a weekend trip with some of my long-distance friends from West Des Moines. I didn’t come from a small town at all. My hometown is actually quite large—but in a much lower socioeconomic bracket than our ‘capital of Iowa’ counterparts.

This was the first of many times of feeling… it. The feeling that I would grow to become very acquainted with my freshman year at the University of Iowa—the not knowing. I won’t lie and say I quickly overcame this feeling and used it to my advantage, overturning all odds and mastering my destiny. Because, well, that’s not real life. It was quite the opposite, actually.

I encountered it many more times throughout high school and well into my freshman year of college. Navigating the honors route at any university can be difficult. Navigating the honors route can be especially difficult on one’s own. How do you know where to go if you don’t have an outline in front of you? Am I doing this right? How do I know if I should apply here? How do I even apply in the first place? Should I do this experience, or this other one? What should I be doing to go to grad school? Should I go to grad school?

At many universities, there is a growing awareness of the challenges that face first-generation students, which University of Iowa Admissions describes as the first in their family to earn a four year degree. Some of my hardest moments from freshman year had to do with my struggle in navigating this deep, dark unknown. Recently, I sat down with a fellow first-generation honors student, Zafar Khan, to get his perspective.

“You actually don’t know what the Common App is?” my friends joined together in laughter as our car jolted to an awkward stop. I smiled sheepishly and tried to laugh along, pretending to understand the inside joke.

“Being a first-year student with nobody to look up to for some sort of direction was hard to deal with at first but, now, I kind of look at it as more liberating than anything. While you can easily feel lost, you also have this kind of freedom to carve your own path here at Iowa,” he told me.

I asked him about his use of the word “carve” here. To me, the word carve has an innate sense of ownership to it. Carving your own direction implies a sense of confidence, independence, of going after what you want with a purpose. He told me that is exactly the mindset he had to put himself to succeed.

“The pushing through can really suck, especially when you don’t even know what’s on the other side for you. It’s like going through a haunted house and they’ve hung streamers on the ceiling, and you have to haphazardly feel your way through the maze,” Zafar told me.

I had to agree. As an honors student, I feel as though I’m constantly looking for the right answer. But perhaps the not knowing is what can make your experience that much more invigorating.

As an honors outreach ambassador, Emily Reinertson conducts tours and shares her knowledge of University Honors with prospective and new students, including those whose families are sending a student to college for the first time.
From Ab Workouts to Tub Time

Daum Fosters Community for First-Year Students

Airiana Mohr

The University of Iowa can proudly boast that it provides a residence hall strictly for honors students; something not all universities can attest to. Daum Residence Hall, although originally built as an all-women dorm, has since housed decades of first-year honors students, and now includes a skywalk to Blank Honors Center right next door.

Having an honors residence hall is exactly what many honors students feel they need coming to college. Daum currently houses over 300 students from the Honors Program. Each floor has its own study area with private rooms for group projects and collaborations.

Anna Correa, a resident assistant (RA) in Daum, feels that environment has an “overarching academic importance.” As someone who lived in Daum last year as a first-year student and this year as an RA, Correa has both experienced the benefits herself and now has a front seat to watching her residents succeed.

“A lot of my residents have expressed to me that they enjoy that they can hang out in the hallway with everybody, and they can have a good time. But then also if someone says ‘Wait, we gotta do our assignment,’ they’ll go, and they’ll work, and they’ll just enjoy being with each other while also getting their work done,” she recalled.

For first-year Abby Crow, the physical benefits, such as the location, have only added to the social and academic benefits. “I absolutely love how close Daum is to all of my classes. It’s a five minute walk every morning to Macbride, and my closest classes are two minutes away in the chemistry building,” Crow stated. On top of this, the dining halls in Burge Hall and Catlett Hall are only a few steps away.

Living in Daum is similar to living in a Living Learning Community in another residence hall; however, instead of just one floor, it’s the entire building. Daum has its own community created and impacted greatly by the students who live there. Being in a residence hall with like-minded people who all place academics at a high level of importance fosters friendships and promotes a healthy academic environment.

“It’s amazing how many times I’ve been talking with a person in class and we find out we both live in Daum. It’s an instant connection,” Crow stated.

First year honors students Kendra Erdman and Jenna Yang

Photo courtesy of Airian Mohr

Instant connections can often develop into lifelong friendships. Correa noted that there was a group of students on her floor, like many others in Daum, that frequently spend time together. For her, it’s a positive experience to see the same benefits she experienced happening with her residents.

“The community that I built in Daum both last year and this year with my floor and with my staff has been absolutely incredible. I know my best friends now in college are people that I met on my floor or through my floor last year. I can already see those kinds of relationships forming on my floor,” she remarked.

Each floor in Daum does different activities to help its residents develop better relationships with each other. The second and eighth floors have miniature “greenhouses” consisting of small succulents and other plants in the windowsills.

While Correa’s floor does not have a greenhouse, they have their own way to keep everyone involved. “My floor does ab workouts together every night. Not the entire group, but a big group of people. They’ll either go in the lounge or just in the hallway or in a [resident’s] room, and you can hear them counting down the time. The plan is to have six packs by the end of the year.”
Crow, who resides on the third floor, recalled “Sometimes people on our floor host little get togethers, like game night or movie night.”

If there is one thing to define the community of students living in Daum, it would be “Tub Time.” Tub Time was an event inspired by the lone bathtub on the first floor that brought tons of students together for a night in September. Students lined the first floor hallway chanting “Tub Time,” while others ran through each of the floors calling for those who were still in their rooms to join.

While some students ran throughout the halls, others stayed behind to watch as the tub was filled with warm water and rubber ducks. After the students who had gone through the floors returned, with their leaders dressed in only speedos, goggles, flip flops, and the occasional swim cap, the chanting changed from “tub time” to “in the tub” as students were invited to stand or sit in the water.

“The tub was of media interest. Everyone was running through the hallways in speedos and goggles, getting everyone ready,” Correa recalled after being pulled from her room to join the commotion. “Tub Time is the perfect representation of how Daum kids can get so excited about the weirdest things.”

Students who attended even got to take a few of the rubber ducks home to commemorate the occasion along with the hope of another “Tub Time” in the future.

Georgetta Neuschwander, an honors student from another residence hall, often visits Daum to join in the fun of the Honors LLC. She participated in Tub Time and even got into the tub, remarking, “The next day you could walk around and recognize people from Tub Time. Even people who didn’t go had heard about it and knew what I was talking about.”

There is no doubt that Daum provides a positive environment for all residents. “People rarely leave Daum,” Kendal Arthur, who is currently the hall coordinator for Daum, stated. “Many residents are very disappointed that they cannot come back to live there for their sophomore year.”

Daum residents often love the community the residence hall has. Arthur, who has remarked that the hall’s residents have a large passion to learn, enjoys seeing the similar academic identity being brought from the classroom to the living space. “In any of the other halls, you do not have a situation where everyone has that one [academic-minded] identity. In Daum you do.”

“I think even if they’re not in the same classes, having other students around you who are in similar levels of classes is really important. Then also, having resident assistants who have been through that before as well is important. Even if my major is different than my residents, I know what it’s like to maybe be in the honors section of a class, or to be in a lot of credit hours,” Correa reflected.

Dr. Art Spisak, director of the honors program, participated in research on how honors housing impacts the success of the residents. He and his colleagues found having that environment increases academic performance and retention in the honors program. Since the study has just recently been published, it will be interesting to see if other universities begin to add honors housing to their campuses.

“As far as student success goes, the students who did both primetime and honors housing were at the highest on that scale,” Spisak commented. “Student success means GPA here, but it especially means for us, staying in the Honors Program; completing, we call that.”

For now, Daum residents will patiently await another tub time while they study for their upcoming exams.
Members of the pre-law fraternity Phi Alpha Delta (PAD) attended the Chicago Law Forum on Saturday, November 2, 2019 in Chicago, Illinois. Students had the opportunity to meet 1-on-1 with representatives from over 170 law schools through workshops such as tips about the LSAT from an LSAT writer, information about applying, financing a legal education and many more.

PAD member Tarweeh Osman “...learned about the vast resources available to strengthen my skills and confidence when preparing for the LSAT and certain study methods I can incorporate into my routine.” Grace Wenstrom thoroughly enjoyed the knowledge gained from learning about the law school admissions process as she “…learned that the personal statement is often the first thing that admissions committees look at when viewing a student’s law school application.”

Following the conference, PAD members bonded in the windy city through their countless steps and slices of Chicago deep-dish pizza as they stewed over their new insight into law school admission processes.

Overall, Lauryn Schnack PAD President felt, “The LSAC forum in Chicago was as energetic as it was informative. Our chapter got to meet with dozens of law school representatives, hear from representatives of the American Bar Association and the Law School Admissions Council, attend financial aid and diversity-focused workshops. Before this forum, I was anxious to take the LSAT on a tablet instead of paper, but trying it out in person showed me that the tablets are quite helpful. I am very glad our members got to attend.”

PAD wishes to extend a special thank you to Honors at Iowa, the Department of Political Science, and TRiO who helped make this trip possible.
National Collegiate Honors Council Recognizes UI Student in November Publication

April Bannister was in the car on her way back from an off-the-grid climbing trip when she found out her piece had been accepted into the 2019 NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity. Bannister, in her excitement, started to yell as she shared the news with those around her.

Formed in the fall of 2015, UReCA was formed as a vision for a web-based journal publishing the work of undergraduates internationally. The work is collectively selected, peer-reviewed, and formatted for the web by a group of 31 undergraduate honors students from a wide range of educational disciplines.

“Our mission is to curate relevant, progressive and academic content that appeals to the undergraduate student. We, the creators, are also the audience, and therefore are attuned to the interests of our peers; we commit ourselves to becoming the number one undergraduate journal in the nation,” UReCA’s website states. “Though diverse, we share a common goal: the production of a prestigious national journal, for students, by students.”

Bannister found out about the program through the Honors at Iowa newsletter last year, she said, and she kept the idea in the back of her head for months. In August, she decided to submit her essay for consideration a few days before the deadline.

“Writing is, and always has been, one of the most important aspects of my life. I’ve wanted to make a career out of writing from the moment I learned to read, and while I know I still have quite a bit of work ahead of me, I’m proud of any and all progress I can make toward this goal. I am grateful every day for the role of writing in my life, especially for the catharsis it brings me personally and the incredible connections it allows me to form with others,” Bannister said.

Her piece, “I Owe You An Apology You Will Never Receive,” is a story about the loss of a teammate, the grief that came with it, and moving forward.

“Most of all, I wanted to use my essay to explore my long-repressed feelings on an extremely sensitive subject. I have never wanted to take away from the severity of my teammate’s personal situation and the devastation of her death, nor do I want to hurt anyone who knew her better than I did by using her story for my own,” Bannister said. “All this being said, I know that my feelings and experiences also merit attention; suicide reaches so far beyond what many recognize as its immediate effects, and I wanted to articulate why this matters and why it is crucial that we destigmatize conversations surrounding the topic. The more we are able to talk about these sensitive subjects, the more we empower ourselves rather than let the pain control the narrative.”

Congratulations to Bannister on getting published. Read her story at nchcureca.com.
Ample Opportunities in the Summer for Honors Students

Priyanka Srinivasan

Have you started planning for the upcoming summer? Do you want to study abroad, research, or take on an internship? Honors students have always been heavily involved, and summer is not the time to waste. Getting involved in the summer is rewarded not only in professional experience, but also in the form of experiential learning credit, the second component to University Honors.

Experiential Learning Director Dr. Andy Willard advises students considering experiential learning: “Treat it like it’s a candy store, there’s plenty of opportunities out there. The limitation of experiential learning year-round is really up to the student’s imagination.”

One way to plan for the upcoming summer is by looking ahead to opportunities like study abroad, internships, and research.

Study abroad is a great opportunity for many honors students. Studying abroad not only provides experiential learning credit, but it also gives honors students the chance to live in another country for a period of time, often getting to experience a new culture and a set of values.

For instance, senior Isabella Senno travelled to San Sebastián, Spain during the spring of 2019. Senno said, “Everything was new while I was in Spain, from the language I spoke to the people I was spending time with to the activities that I did. For the first time in my entire life I was living outside of a social structure I was familiar with”

Senno added, “I’m not even slightly exaggerating when I say that this was one of the best decisions I have made at the University of Iowa. I not only changed my mindset as a scholar, but I also matured into a more well-rounded human being.”

If you’re interested in also stepping outside of your comfort zone like Senno, make an appointment with the UI Study Abroad advisors to plan your trip.

Internships are another career-preparing opportunity for honors students. They allow students to experience a possible future career outside of the classroom. One way to get involved in an internship locally is through the Iowa Youth Writing Project. Their mission statement is to “Join Iowa City’s unique literary heritage with Iowa’s larger community by empowering, inspiring, and educating Iowa’s youth through language arts and creative thinking.”

Isabella Senno at Piene del Viento in San Sebastián, Spain. Photo courtesy of Isabella Senno.
Cheyenne Puetz, a 2019 graduate, spent her 2018 summer with the IYWP and would recommend the experience to prospective applicants. Following her initial involvement as a summer intern, Puetz decided to continue working with the IYWP until she graduated.

Puetz said, “It can be easy for college students to live in their academic bubble and put so much focus into their schoolwork, but taking the time to come up for air, get out of your head, and interact with other people is crucial to staying sane, inspired, and motivated . . . I hope I helped the students [of IYWP] be their truest selves both inside and outside their writing because I know they did that for me.”

To explore internship opportunities and prepare for your applications, visit the Pomerantz Career Center for more information.

Lastly, research: Coming into college, many students decide to participate in research at some point in their years as an undergraduate student, especially those pursuing STEM majors. The Iowa Center for Undergraduate Research (ICRU) has many resources to facilitate the research occurring on and off campus. Schedule an appointment with them or meet with an Honors Peer Mentor to find ways to get involved.

Delaney Mcdowell, a 2022 prospective graduate, does research in the University of Iowa Department of Health and Human Physiology under the coaching of Dr. Thorsten Rudroff.

Mcdowell states, “Our lab focuses on understanding the fatigue and pain of multiple sclerosis through strength and fatigue tests as well as with brain stimulation to measure their muscle contractions on their legs.”

During the summer, she averaged about 10 hours a week in addition to managing a few other jobs. Her main advice to honors students considering research in their undergraduate years is “to not be afraid of professors and labs that interest you.”

Research is available in every field of study. If being part of groundbreaking explorations in your field interests you, consider exploring opportunities in your area of study.

These are just a few of the options available to honors students on campus during the summer. Planning ahead of time for the summer is the best option if you are seeking a rewarding experience and some experiential learning credit. Spots for study abroad trips, internships, and research opportunities fill up quickly. Therefore, start applying for opportunities to take advantage of your summer.

Not sure where to start? Meet with an Honors Peer Mentor or Experiential Learning Director Dr. Andy Willard.

“I’m not even slightly exaggerating when I say that this was one of the best decisions I have made at the University of Iowa. I not only changed my mindset as a scholar, but I also matured into a more well-rounded human being.”
Meet the Writers
Honors Students at Your Service

Sonia Beltz
Sonia is a freshman from Beavercreek, Ohio, studying English and creative writing. In addition to writing and reading, she enjoys listening to music and spending hours researching European history.

Airiana Mohr
Airiana is a freshman from Machesney Park, IL studying biochemistry with minors in Spanish and Chemistry. In her free time, she enjoys touring Iowa City by foot, listening to the soundtracks of Broadway musicals, and playing volleyball. During the summer, you can find her reading on the warm sand of Manhattan Beach, CA.

Emily Reinertson
Emily is a sophomore at Iowa with a passion for medicine. She is an honors student studying psychology, and hopes to become an obstetrician in the future. Though she excels in science, she also has a deep love for reading and writing.

Christopher Borro
Christopher is a junior from Hoffman Estates, IL, and is majoring in journalism and creative writing. In addition to being a Newsletter contributor, he is the vice president of the University’s Nightingale Writers’ Group. When not in class, he can be found writing stories, watching hockey games, reading books or exploring Iowa City.

Kyler Johnson
Kyler is a current freshman at the University embarking on an English and creative writing major with minors in German, French, and Chinese. Having spent the last year abroad in Belgium, he’s happy to be a bit closer to home, hoping with the stories he shares to really connect with his new college community.

Priyanka Srinivasan
Priyanka, a freshman from Bettendorf, Iowa, is studying Health and Human Physiology on the Pre-Medicine track. She is also planning on pursuing a minor in Spanish. During her free time, she enjoys volunteering at the University of Iowa Stead Family Children’s Hospital. Apart from this, she likes to dance, play the piano, and spend time with her friends and family.
Kinsey Phipps

Kinsey Phipps is a sophomore studying English and Creative Writing with minors in Spanish and Translation. Apart from editing and writing, she enjoys baking bread, drinking Starbucks refreshers, and reading whatever she can get her hands on.

Gabbie Meis

Gabbie Meis is a senior studying English and Creative Writing with minors in Spanish and Translation. Apart from editing and writing, she enjoys baking bread, drinking Starbucks refreshers, and reading whatever she can get her hands on.

Genevieve Cleverley

Genevieve is a fourth-year Psychology and Studio Art major, with Human Relations and Social Work minors. She is an admin and graphic designer for the Honors Program. In her free time, she enjoys working at the Iowa Children’s Museum, printmaking, NPR podcasts, and her cat.

Eleanor Abbott

Eleanor Abbott is an open major freshman who loves English, Spanish, math, and drawing. After graduation she plans to pack a travel bag and see the world. She’s always looking for a chance to learn a new skill.

Jack Lauer

Jack is a freshman from Pleasantville, IA. He is pursuing degrees in history and gender, women’s, and sexuality studies on a pre-law interest. In his free time, Jack loves political advocacy, baking, and gabbing to anyone and everyone about ice cream.

Ruby Nye

Rubye, a freshman from Wellman, Iowa, is a double major in international studies and journalism with a minor in Arabic. She loves eating at Masala’s lunch buffet, playing with her friend’s kittens, and listening to the Hamilton soundtrack.
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