

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA HONORS PROGRAM ALUMNI CONNECTION



IOWA FALL 2021

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Dr. Shaun Vecera



SHAUN VECERA

Greetings from the University of Iowa campus! I'm excited to introduce myself as the newly appointed director of the honors program. The program exists to enrich students' experiences both in and out of the classroom. As such, this new role is an opportunity for me to take in new directions my in-

volvement with undergraduate student success and honors education at the UI.

Inside this issue, you will read about the University of Iowa's process for searching for a new director. Although you'll see some of what I shared during the interview process, I wanted to use

this space to tell you a bit more about myself, my career at the university, and why I am excited to be a part of the honors program.

I have been at the University of Iowa since 1998 as a professor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. The first step in this academic journey was earning a Bachelor of Science in psychology from the University of Oregon, where I graduated as a first-generation college student. At Oregon, like many students bound for graduate school, I completed an undergraduate honors thesis—the capstone experience for honors in the major—and that thesis became my initial first-authored publication in my academic specialization of visual attention and perception. I was fortunate to work with two supportive faculty advisors. Their research reputations would have allowed them to focus their time exclusively on graduate students and postdoctoral research scientists, but they actively supported undergraduate teaching, learning, and research. My personal experience with faculty who balanced rigorous research with exceptional undergraduate mentoring is a model that I have tried to emulate during my time at the UI.

My next academic stop was Carnegie Mellon University, where I earned a doctorate in cognitive psychology in 1995. The psychology department was a vibrant place of study that included both founders of cognitive science as well as the next generation of scholars who took the field in new directions from purely behavioral research into cognitive neuroscience, artificial neural networks, and neuroimaging. My graduate school cohort has become the source

of lasting friendships.

Following graduate school and my first faculty position at the University of Utah, I was recruited to the University of Iowa as an assistant professor. Throughout my time as a faculty member, I have been fortunate to work with many talented graduate and undergraduate students. It's been rewarding to watch an undergraduate research assistant develop a passion for visual attention and then continue in the field. I have watched students from my lab continue their training with colleagues at some of the top programs and find their way to careers in industry and academia. For some of those students, I supervised their honors theses for honors in the major in what was some of my earliest work with honors.

Since 2000, I have been one of my department's instructors for Elementary Psychology, a large enrollment, general education course. Those of you who are more recent graduates might have taken my course. (If you did, email me and let me know. I might remember you from where you sat in Macbride Auditorium.) Teaching Elementary Psychology gave me a greater opportunity to work with undergraduate students and to increase my campus-wide involvement with supporting student success and undergraduate learning initiatives, including those that have intersected with the honors program.

In my Elementary Psychology course, I developed an honors contract "book club" option for interested students. One year, we read Michael Pollan's book *How to Change Your Mind*, which led to wide-ranging discussions about mushroom identification, psychological assessment, and neurotransmitters. As some of my students from that class know, reading the book led me to learn to cultivate my own oyster mushrooms. I continue to teach an honors first-year seminar titled *How Psychology Can Save the Planet* and to participate in Honors Primetime.

"My work to support undergraduate student success and my academic background help guide my thinking about the honors program. Students are at the forefront of our work, whether thinking about their connectedness or sense of belonging to the program or about their out-of-classroom experiential learning activities."

I am grateful to have been recognized by the university and by students for my teaching and student support. Among that recognition includes the Honors Program Teaching Award, the President and Provost Award for Teaching Excellence, and my tenure as the Herman J. and Eileen S. Schmidt Chair for Leadership in Undergraduate Education.

My work to support undergraduate student success and my academic background help guide my thinking about the honors program. Students are at the forefront of our work, whether thinking about their connectedness or sense of belonging to the program or about their out-of-classroom experiential learning activities. I suspect that many of you have personal examples of how a connection or a relationship with someone on campus or in the pro-

gram contributed to your success, gave you a new perspective, or affected you in a meaningful way. In psychological science, we know that having a sense of belonging is critical to students' academic success and their educational outcomes. The honors program has a unique position in providing students a campus identity and helping them find like-minded others, which in turn builds community and a sense of belonging.

In my non-academic life, my wife and I became empty-nesters this fall, as our older son (a UI 2021 graduate in mathematics, physics, and percussion performance) landed on the West Coast for graduate school in mathematics, and our younger son, who spent most of last year "doing college" from his childhood bedroom, has settled into his second year of college in Maine studying marine science. Our cat loves all the extra attention he is getting from us. Some of my greatest non-academic passions include invasive plant species removal, doing what I can to reconstruct Iowa's prairies, and appreciating ecological systems wherever I go.

As I have transitioned to my new role as director, I have been excited to visit with many of my previous students and to hear about their successes, questions, and challenges. I look forward to hearing your stories and memories about the program, too, and I hope that you continue to have a sense of belonging with the honors program. Please feel free to contact me at shaun-vecera@uiowa.edu with your questions or experiences.

Sincerely,



Shaun Vecera
Director, UI Honors Program
Professor, Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences

MEET DR. VECERA

New Honors Program Director

By Kate Perez

On September 14, Dr. Shaun Vecera was announced as the new Director of the University of Iowa Honors Program. Vecera has been a professor at the UI in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences since 1998 and has led numerous honors classes, Honors First-Year Seminars, and Honors Primetime sessions. Vecera was chosen after a summer full of interviews and searching by the honors program.

As the newly appointed Honors Program Director, Vecera said he is excited to work with students and impact them positively. What students get out of his classes has always been one of his main focuses, he noted.

"The thing that excites me the most and really the reason that I considered this position is the students in programs," Vecera said. "I think I would be very uninterested in doing much if it didn't have some direct connection to or impact on students, and that fits with a lot of what I've done as a faculty member over the past 20 years."

One of Vecera's main goals is to ensure that the identity of being in the honors program at the UI extends past a student's first year.

"In your first year, you've got a very strong honors community, especially if you're in Daum and you're in a first-year seminar. You've got a lot of these opportunities to have honors as an identity," he said. "I'd like to make sure that we have students [with] a strong sense of belonging with the program and also [graduating] with a very strong connection to the program...[I want students] to look back and say, 'I'm glad I was in the honors program because it allowed

"I'd like to make sure that we have students [with] a strong sense of belonging with the program and also [graduating] with a very strong connection to the program...[I want students] to look back and say, 'I'm glad I was in the honors program because it allowed me to have these experiences.'"

- Dr. Shaun Vecera
UIHP Director

me to have these experiences."

Vecera has also brainstormed other ideas, including potentially starting an honors colloquium. A colloquium is a seminar or program where a presenter speaks on a topic. The presentation is then followed by a session where questions or comments can be made. Vecera's proposed colloquium would be open to students in their second year and beyond and would fulfill Part 1 of university honors—the honors coursework component, he said.

Vecera envisions "using a colloquium as a way of getting honors students

out to all of the talks and performances and other unique opportunities that exist on campus that when we get busy, we just never make time for."

The search for the new Honors Program Director began in early summer, but for Vecera, his experience with the selection process for the new director was fit into only one day.

There were meetings with the search committee and steering committee [comprised of] other UI faculty and instructors who provide oversight, give input, and help shape the direction of the program, Vecera said. There was also an external advisory board of alumni who were in some of the meetings.

"I had an opportunity to meet with the honors staff, to hear their questions, and get their impressions of the program but also give them an opportunity to find out what my thoughts are," Vecera said.

Along with the various boards and staff, videos of the candidates' open forum discussions were shared out to honors students, where they could watch the videos and then share their feedback in a survey.

Anne Zalenski and Andrew Beckett, both associate deans for the University College and members of the selection committee, said the selection process was very traditional but had many steps.

"First you provide a job description, and then put out a set of dates that put the hiring position out there," Zalenski said. "Then [you] collect the applicants, and go through the applicants to determine who meets the qualifications [of] the job description."

The committee then interviewed the potential candidates, where they made sure to ask every candidate the same questions, Zalenski said. They then gave the pros and cons of each candidate to the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, who serves as the supervisor for the position.

"The search committee does not make recommendations to the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, we just say, here are the strengths, weaknesses, pros, and cons of the four candidates," Zalenski said. "We report on what the search committee agrees upon based on the interviews we've held."

Along with interviewing with the search committee, the potential candidates also had to interview with other groups including Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education Tanya Uden-Holman, who ultimately made the decision.

"What was interesting is that there were very consistent results in terms of who people felt were the strongest candidates for the position," Zalenski said.

The search was confined to candidates already a part of the UI, rather than a national search, Beckett said. Because it was internal, this search and hiring process was different from past ones.

"One of the findings on the review was that we need more classes in honors. We need more connections between the departments and the Honors Program, or courses in the majors of students," Beckett said. "I think [it was] important having someone who was already a faculty member at Iowa [who] has those relationships so that they can go to the various departments and try to find ways of expanding options for students to take courses in honors."

Vecera hit every quality they wanted in the new director, Zalenski said. The director needed to have extensive experience, demonstrate innovation and



Pictured: Dr. Vecera at his desk in Blank Honors Center. Provided by: Kate Perez.

collaboration, and understand issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion.

"He did a really nice job with his open forum," Zalenski said. "He inspired confidence. He's a very level-headed person. Even when he's talking about his great big idea, he's focused and contained, and [has] confidence in what he knows and what he would like to see."

Zalenski and Beckett, who have both known Vecera for years, noted that he is an accumulation of everything they felt they needed in the new director.

"[Vecera's] been involved in so much on campus already. He was one of the first faculty members that participated in that first year we did On Iowa! [the University's welcome and community immersion event for new students]. He's been a big advocate for increasing supplemental instruction and tutoring," Beckett said.

"He has a lot of interest in the environment; he actually has done some first-

year seminars on sustainability issues. For the longest time, he was one of the Boy Scout leaders, so he did a lot of hiking and camping. He has a lot of interests beyond his own research. It's interesting to talk to him because he has a lot of different research interests, too," Beckett added.

Overall, the general consensus is that people are satisfied with the appointment and eager to see what Vecera does as the new Honors Director.

Vecera is excited to be in this new position, he said. His main focus as he begins as the UI Honors Program Director is the happiness and experiences of the students, and that is what he is most looking forward to expanding on, he said.

"That's always what I sort of keep my mind on is 'What are the students getting out of the experience?' and 'What can we do at the program level to make sure that students are happy?'"

ALL A-BOARD

Advisory Board Convenes with President Wilson

By Jacob Sammon

An aroma of honey and walnuts swirled about the compact conference room. Splashes of coffee and creamer landed upon the table as people entered the space, filled their cups, and took seats. Projected on the screen against the far wall were the names and faces of the University of Iowa Honors Program Advisory Board. From around the country, board members called into a Zoom conference call to discuss the state of the honors program and its ambitions under the new director, Dr. Shaun Vecera.

The advisory board serves as a supportive infrastructure for the honors program, offering advice and assistance to staff, faculty, and administrators. The individuals who serve as board members are advocates and representatives for the honors program and its mission and initiatives. As a board, the members work to establish connections amongst students, alumni, and the community to enhance the undergraduate experience at the university. Typically, the board will meet twice per year, over the phone in April and on campus in October; however, the pandemic has inspired the board to innovate how they connect with one another.

University of Iowa President Barbara Wilson joined the meeting as an honored guest. She began speaking to the board by thanking the members for being in attendance and inviting her to the discussion. Then, she explained that her approach to the university's priorities would be a communal one, positing that a singular leader will not be successful if they attempt to command



BARBARA WILSON

Photo courtesy of University of Iowa Office of Strategic Communication.

change unilaterally. Instead, President Wilson intends to work side-by-side with the honors program staff, faculty, and administrators to best serve the student community.

President Wilson outlined three primary priorities in her work: student success, mental health and wellness, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Regarding student success, she stated, "That's really what an honors program is all about. It's one of the ways we ensure that students get connected early and start to feel part of our community...When I think about success, I think about retention and graduation." President Wilson described her hopes to continue the University of Iowa's cur-

rent work in this field.

She went on to say, "We are focused on [retention metrics] for moral and ethical reasons. We can't bring students here, charge them tuition, and then say 'sink or swim.' We don't believe in it. It is morally our obligation to do whatever we can to ensure students succeed beyond the first year."

President Wilson's point resonated with the advisory board members. Vecera echoed her sentiments when analyzing how students have historically engaged with the program. His vision is to expand the students' sense of belonging to the honors program beyond their first year. He urged the board to keep this in their minds at all times.

As a method of assessing student connection to the program throughout their undergraduate studies, a “climate” survey was first produced three years ago. The survey asks students to voluntarily report on their experiences in the honors program to help the professional staff better understand and support them. After reflecting on the survey, Vecera offered potential solutions to maintaining students’ sense of belonging.

He stated, “It is important for us to help remind students that part of their identity is in the honors program. I think we can do that in a couple of ways... having some opportunities for students that aren’t maybe just first-year housing opportunities in Daum, but seeing if we can get more beds for our students in other dorms.” Vecera hopes that the honors program can create additional Living Learning Communities in other residence halls to encourage students to live on campus during later years of study. He continued, “We can have...additional coursework that students can take that we can offer within the program as opposed to trying to find someone in another department to teach a class...that way we can give students a continued connection to the program.”

Another barrier that presents itself to student success is imposter syndrome, which is an internal experience that disproportionately affects high-achieving individuals and involves feelings of self-doubt and perceived fraudulence. Members of the board and President Wilson commented on the prevalence of this emotional experience. President Wilson stated, “There are honors students who wonder ‘Am I going to make it here?’ or, ‘Do I really have what it takes?’...I think the honors program is... [an] important way for us to help [students succeed].”

Honors students’ mental health and wellness are constantly at the forefront of the advisory board’s considerations. Some board members, such as Assistant Director Emily Hill, specifically

“We are really trying to embed in our curriculum various aspects of resiliency, coping skills, [and mindfulness],...these are skills we all need right now during a global pandemic...We want to become the kind of university that tells students, ‘When you come here, we’re going to take care of the whole self, not just your academics.’”

- Barbara Wilson
UI President

target their research toward psychology and student wellness support. The mental health of students has a direct correlation to their academic success.

Highlighting the importance of caring for students’ mental health, President Wilson stated, “We are really trying to embed in our curriculum various aspects of resiliency, coping skills, [and mindfulness],...these are skills we all need right now during a global pandemic...We want to become the kind of university that tells students, ‘When you come here, we’re going to take care of the whole self, not just your academics.’”

Cases of imposter syndrome can become heightened when a student lacks a feeling of belonging in their academic spaces. For students who have underrepresented identities on campus, those feelings are ever-present. Pres-

ident Wilson praised the honors program for its work to support DEI initiatives at the university. She said, “I know [the honors program] is thinking about that a lot and is earnestly designing efforts to open the gates more broadly to more and more students and to ensure that students succeed no matter what their backgrounds are.”

To provide a more equitable admissions process, the honors program adopted a holistic application model. Vecera explained, “Historically...[admission to] honors was based entirely on high school GPA and ACT composite scores. We’ve added an essay to that to try and be able to capture students who...may have not had opportunities that show up in those traditional metrics.”

Recently, the honors program has had the ability to measure the success of the holistic application model. “Our students who came in under these holistic admissions are still doing as well in their first semester at Iowa as those students who were brought in under the old admissions process. Holistic admissions is working,” Vecera said.

President Wilson emphasized, “We have to continue that quest to open our doors as broadly as possible, invite students from all backgrounds, and then make sure when they get here, they get connected early, they feel supported, they feel welcome, and we wrap services around them to ensure their success. DEI is woven into every strategic planning effort we are engaged in right now.”

The advisory board continues to oversee the program’s initiatives to support its community through targeted adaptation and evolution. With the introduction of a new honors director and university president this year, the honors program has been infused with a breath of fresh air that will propel it forward in its mission of student support. The priorities of the president and the board will undoubtedly carry beyond the walls of that honey and walnut-scented conference room.

IN THEIR PRIME

New Students Hit Their Stride in Honors Primetime Workshop

By Madison Bruce

The University of Iowa was buzzing with anticipation as the fall semester approached, particularly after a relatively quiet year brought on by the pandemic. Among the first students to return to activity on campus were incoming first-year and transfer students in the honors program, ready to begin their university experience with Honors Primetime.

Each year, first-year and transfer students in the honors program have the opportunity to engage in Honors Primetime—a three-and-a-half-day workshop with a variety of sections led by professors with an enthusiasm for working with honors students. This workshop occurs the week before fall classes begin and is an opportunity for new honors students to begin their adjustment to campus life.

Heidi Schmitt, who has been the honors program coordinator since 2018, said that the program has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from instructors. “Professors often say that Primetime has a really great group of students. The students are super engaged and ask a lot of questions,” Schmitt said. Primetime helps students connect with professors while engaging with subjects that those professors are passionate about. The sections this year incorporated both indoor and outdoor workshops and focusing on a diverse range of subjects. These sections were then narrowed down, and students were able to register for the courses they found most interesting. Previously, sections had been randomly assigned, but Schmitt says switching to individual selection by students has

“The main focus is to learn something new, have fun, and then have that final presentation so they aren’t just jumping into that first ten-page paper. We want to be mindful of that transition.”

- Heidi Schmitt

UIHP Program Coordinator

been a positive change.

Professor Joe Sulentic said he was “amazed at how engaged and vocal the students were for the duration of the workshop.” Sulentic taught a course entitled Visualize Your Way to Happiness that focused on providing a macro-view of college resources and a micro-view on student happiness and well-being. “Before entering class on the first day, I could hear them halfway down the hall before I even got to the classroom!” Sulentic said.

Another Primetime section called International Iowa: Getting to Know the World, taught by Armando Duarte, introduced students to international issues and cultures through literature, art, and dance. Duarte said that his students had an “excellent sense of community inside and outside the classroom. They

were supportive and open to share personal experiences and expectations toward the future.” Honors Primetime provides students with a smaller community to connect with as soon as they arrive in Iowa City, and the experience helps integrate them into the larger community of the university.

Primetime workshops conclude with a symposium, which is now held virtually. Students create final presentations over what they’ve learned during the course and share them with students in other sections. Schmitt speaks of the program’s impact on students academically. “We don’t want to overwhelm students, so the main focus is to learn something new, have fun, and then have that final presentation so they aren’t just jumping into that first ten-page paper. We want to be mindful of that transition.” The presentation gives students a taste of college-level coursework before classes start, helping them begin their college careers with a head-start in what to expect.

First-year Jaden Bartlett participated in Primetime in the fall of 2021 in a section entitled To Know is to Tell taught by Benjamin Hassman. His section offered a philosophical inspection of how learning and teaching connect. “I liked that it was almost like a day at camp,” Bartlett said. “It wasn’t your typical orientation, and it was really in-depth.” Bartlett also said that the experience helped him make friends, some of whom he later reconnected with in classes they shared, which he said helped him in his transition to campus.

Like Bartlett, Erin Bughman, a second-year honors student and honors

ambassador, felt that Primetime eased her transition to college. "Primetime definitely positively impacted my transition," Bughman said, "especially coming to a large state school. Having a smaller transition period with academically- motivated peers allowed me to break out of my shell and get adjusted." Primetime also allows students further opportunities to explore their interests. "I came in undecided, so I picked a writing Primetime to explore that field," Bughman said. Bughman was considering both psychology and journalism at the time, and while she decided that psychology was a better fit, she said that her Primetime writing experience helped her develop her skills. Her Primetime experience in the fall of 2020 was largely virtual, but she was still able to meet other students during lunch breaks. Bughman also

said that moving into the dorms early helped her become more familiar with the campus.

Two years later, third-year honors student and honors ambassador Molly Harris can still recall her Primetime experience. "I remember feeling like I was part of a community as soon as I got to campus. I still have friendships from Primetime, and it was awesome to get some familiarity with my professor with whom I've had other classes since," Harris said.

Primetime continues to evolve to cater to the needs of incoming honors students. The program was able to be held largely in-person this fall, but a number of virtual events were still offered. Some activities offered in 2021 Primetime included scavenger hunts, online bingo and trivia, and campus and downtown tours to familiarize stu-

dents with Iowa City. Schmitt said of the experience, "We had more of an opportunity for in-person presence and were still able to hold small, intimate workshops throughout campus. It was a sigh of relief to finally get people together."

Primetime has a lasting impact on honors students, particularly in getting them acclimated to campus. "Primetime is about the community aspect as well as utilizing your resources within honors. It's an opportunity to get to know staff, faculty, and peers. Primetime students get to learn about these resources at an earlier stage," Schmitt said. "My favorite part of the whole thing is seeing photos of happy students on the final day. Watching the final presentations and seeing all of the work they've done is a rewarding experience."



Students participating in an insect science Primetime course. Provided by: Heidi Schmitt

"Primetime definitely positively impacted my transition especially coming to a large state school. Having a smaller transition period with academically-motivated peers allowed me to break out of my shell and get adjusted."

- Erin Bughman

EXCEPTIONAL EXPLORATION

Honors Students and the Health Behind Them

By Sydney Disabato

Twice-exceptionality is something that many of the greatest minds have in common. In reality, research has shown that being twice-exceptional isn't as extraordinary as one thinks. Within the last year, a new class focused on wellness and self-care has started within the honors program. However, no one expected for the class to be pushed online due to the pandemic. Despite the challenge, Honors Associate Director Dr. Emily Hill has been researching on what she likes to call, "twice-exceptional college students." Although the name sounds great, twice-exceptionality is not a familiar concept. "Twice-exceptional can mean that you're a high-ability individual and you might have a mental health issue, a physical disability, or a learning disability," she explained. Hill has been conducting research through her new class Honors Special Topics: High Ability College Students and Wellness.

When Hill started out as an academic advisor and instructor at her former university, she formed bonds with many honors students. "Some of them were really struggling. [They were] still doing really well in school, but they were struggling with their social life and struggling emotionally," she recalled. Hill sadly acknowledged that honors students often mask their mental health issues, adding that few of these students knew how to help themselves. In the worst cases, they participated in harmful behavior to relieve themselves from their mental struggles.

Hill connected with them, knowing she was familiar with their experiences. When she began her PhD work at



Pictured: Samantha Stucky, Dr. Emily Hill, and Gabrielle Taylor. Provided by Dr. Emily Hill.

the University of North Dakota in Educational Foundations and Research, she centered her research on high achieving college students living with mental health issues. When she came to the University of Iowa, she centered her research on the topic. Her goal became to normalize mental health issues on campus and to give extra support to students who struggle to ask for it. Now being at the University of Iowa and observing the adverse effects of the pandemic on mental health, Hill developed her High Ability College Student and Wellness seminar. In October, 2021, she and two of her former students from her seminar presented at the National Collegiate Honors Council

Conference.

Her two students, Gavielle Taylor and Samantha Stucky, volunteered to present at the national conference convention to share their stories and facilitate discussion about being twice-exceptional students. Taylor recognized that honors students don't prioritize themselves often. As a student who survived the pandemic she remembered, "[Dr. Hill's] class was the only [place] I had any source of interaction... It was really just me and my computer having

If you would like to support the exceptional work of our faculty and their interactions with students, go to givetoiowa.org/2022HPg9 and support the Honors Program Excellence Fund.



Pictured: Stucky, Hill, and Taylor at the National Honors Conference in Orlando, 2021. Provided by Dr. Emily Hill.

a very intimate relationship with one another,” The class taught her so much about herself while giving her a sense of community in the honors program.

Taylor joined Hill’s mission and wanted to add much her experience to their presentation. “I talked about my own experience in the class and how it impacted me”, Taylor stated. Taylor knew that the discussion was directed at twice-exceptional students and that many came to the conference to learn about themselves and learn how to help themselves through school. She explained how to “better yourself and find strategies to work on your mental health or find new resources for faculty.” Through their hard work at the conference Taylor hopes that they can end some harmful stigmas. Taylor explained how harmful it was that honors students were often put on pedestals. They simply have different needs and function a bit differently. “It’s already really stressful and difficult [to be an honors student]... the student community needs to not put that extra pressure on honors students”, she expressed.

Taylor and Stucky had built a community together during their time in

class. Stucky revealed more of what was presented at the conference noting the research her experience from the class. “The outcomes of the courses [are] where we really come in,” she explained, “because we [got] to talk about the student perspective.” Diving further in their presentation she elaborated how the students are imperative to understanding the effects of the class and how they believe it can be implemented at other universities. Stucky additionally appreciated that the course was graded as satisfactory/unsatisfactory. She remarks, “The focus was more on reflection than having a perfect understanding of the terminology.” With these in mind Stucky, Taylor, and Hill presented in hopes that other honors students, staff, and faculty in the audience could replicate some of the seminar experiences at their honors programs/colleges. relate with their research. Whether they were talking about excitabilities, challenges, or personal demons, they stressed how important it was for teachers and students to create that safe space where things could be shared. Stucky summed up all of their goals by stating,

“If we take steps to notice how students are feeling and counteract that through programming and resources, we’ll set a precedent for other universities as well.”

After all was said and done, Hill recalled many audience members taking pictures of slides, and lining up to ask questions and obtain business cards. The three presenters couldn’t have been more thrilled with how well they were received by the big crowd. Hill exclaimed how she wished she had for more time to discuss challenges with student mental health and share interventions with other conference attendees., and although she learned a lot, she was disappointed to need to be brief with people. However, the experience only strengthened her reasons for her research in the first place. Hill advocated, “[It’s about] the importance of the community... We can read all the things that we want about mental health and well-being, but the most important thing for me is that students meet and support each other in this class.”

“[It’s about] the importance of the **community**... We can read all the things that we want about mental health and well-being, but the most important thing for me is that **students meet** and **support each other** in this class.”

- Dr. Emily Hill
UIHP Associate Director

UNDER PRESSURE

How Honors Students Manage a Disability

By Natalie Kehrli

Students in the University of Iowa Honors Program are known for their accomplishments in both academics and extracurriculars. But what happens when you are a high achieving student who also has a disability?

Many students on the University of Iowa campus live with disabilities. According to the University of Iowa Student Disability Services (SDS), 1,431 students are currently registered with the program. However, these disabilities can become even more complex when students experience pressure to fulfill their high-achieving potential.

To best comprehend what an honors student with a disability might face, one must first understand the struggles of being a high-ability student.

Dr. Emily Hill, the Assistant Director for the University of Iowa Honors Program, teaches a course for honors students titled High Ability College Students and Wellness. As part of her doctoral work, she conducted research involving high-ability students and the effects that academic potential can have on their mental health. Hill believes some of the labels, pressures, and stereotypes that can come with being an honors student alone are difficult to deal with. It is more concerning that many students are labeled when they are young children.

"Many students in my class mentioned that the label of being gifted or high-achieving or whatever label was placed on them in K-12 education. [That] can bring a lot of stigmas. People expect a lot from you. People put pressure on you. Then, this external pressure turns into internal pressure,"

"The pressures that come from being labeled as a high-ability student at a young age can be **so destructive.**

Your entire personality is being smart. But when you get older, suddenly **it's not a party trick anymore.** I didn't even know who I was."

- L

states Hill.

Because of this concerning level of pressure on some students, Hill notes that it can lead to many other problems, including a phenomenon known as "academic burnout." It occurs when students have emotional, physical, and mental reactions as a result of being overworked, exhausted, and frustrated.

"I asked the class that I teach how many of them have experienced burnout before they even got to college, and the majority of the class raised their hands. It all just gets to be too much. I even have students tell me they forget to eat sometimes because of all the stress and studying. It is scary to know that young people get so stressed that

they forget to take care of themselves," says Hill.

Allissa Cox, a student in Hill's course, is one of the many students who knows all too well the concerns Hill has for honors students.

"There are too many expectations that come with the label. I'm always supposed to keep the 4.0 GPA, keep myself in check, and hold my own. Sometimes I don't even feel like I get the chance to be a normal human being," Cox explains.

Although these issues surrounding high ability students seem concerning enough, there seems to be a new level of difficulty added when an honors student also deals with a disability. A student in Hill's course who prefers to remain anonymous and will be referred to as "E" shares her experiences being labeled as a high-ability student with ADHD.

"I constantly feel held back by my disability. I always feel like I have to work harder than my peers, yet I still feel like I can't do as well as I am expected to academically because sometimes I have to prioritize my health. It is hard because I still feel like I should be able to do it all even though I have this mental illness I deal with daily," E says.

Another student in Hill's course who prefers to remain anonymous and will be referred to as "L" shares her perspective of being an honors student with depression and eating disorders.

"The pressures that come from being labeled as a high-ability student at a young age can be so destructive. Your entire personality is being smart. But when you get older, suddenly it's not a



Pictured: New University of Iowa Student Disability Services office at the University Capitol Centre.
Photo courtesy of Student Disability Services.

party trick anymore. I didn't even know who I was," L says.

L also notes there are difficulties aside from being an honors student that make her life feel off-balance. "It almost makes me feel like I'm wasting my abilities. It feels like being in a relationship with someone who is out of your league, but you are in the relationship with yourself," L states.

Although honors students dealing with disabilities face many struggles, there are resources prepared to help Hawkeyes navigate college, and SDS is one of them. Director of SDS Michael Venzon explains that SDS wants to help students reach their full potential.

"I think it is so important that students

look at what they need to do in order to be successful," Venzon remarks. "Disabilities are something that we look to celebrate. We want to work to reduce stigma and offer students what they need to be successful."

All students are encouraged to reach out regardless of their mental or physical disability and how it affects them. There are many different accommodations available to suit each student's needs, such as extended testing time, memory aid, and deadline modifications. If students are interested in applying for accommodations, students can contact SDS by emailing sds-info@uiowa.edu or by visiting their new office at the University Capitol Centre.

"Disabilities are something that we look to **celebrate**. We want to work to **reduce stigma** and offer students what they need to be successful."

- Michael Venzon
Director of SDS

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

How Intersectionality Complicates Belonging

By Raquel Valladolid

The rush of cars on the street made it hard to hear second-year student Lizbeth Celaya on the patio of High Ground Cafe. A late summer breeze played with the leaves on the ground as Celaya, who identifies as a Mexican woman, recalled the community she found within Daum Residence Hall during her first year.

It started on the first day she moved in when she noticed how most residents on her floor would leave their doors open to welcome visitors. "I just went outside [my room], and I started playing cards with these people I had never met in my life before," Celaya recalled. She credits finding like-minded individuals, friends who prioritize academics while still enjoying campus life, to living in Daum. "You could knock on anyone's door and say, 'Hey, want to study together?' and they'd be down...The people there, they allow you to thrive."

Rabiah Na'Allah, a second-year student, remembers her experience living in Daum as positive, too. She made friends she is still in contact with, but as her first year went on, Na'Allah realized she only knew people who related to the academic part of her identity as an honors student. However, she had no friends who related to her experiences as a Nigerian American woman. Na'Allah began to reckon with the concept of intersectionality: understanding the relationship between different parts of someone's identity. This is a familiar concept to Isabela Flores.

As the coordinator of the Latino Native American Cultural Center (LNACC), Flores understands the importance of intersectionality within organizations

"When we create programs or initiatives, what's really hard... is thinking about the intersections of identity that we highlight, and why we are choosing to highlight those identities."

- **Isabela Flores**
LNACC Coordinator

that cater towards specific identities. "When we create programs or initiatives, what's really hard...is thinking about the intersections of identity that we highlight, and why we are choosing to highlight those identities," Flores says. Within the LNACC, Flores and her colleagues strive to make the space as inclusive as possible, but the most difficult part is the self-imposed pressure to center every identity without mistakes. Despite this, Flores acknowledges it is a good challenge for the center to have. Intersectionality is an integral part of identity development, especially for college students coming of age.

Third-year honors student Solange Bolger struggled with belonging in the Latinx community when she first came to campus. Bolger explained she felt

like she needed to prove she was "Latina enough" to other Latina/o/x people. This mindset took root because she identifies as Venezuelan, while the majority of Latinx people she met were Mexican American. Looking back on the experience, she remembers not trying so hard after three months. Bolger affirms, "You don't have to please everyone. Live for yourself." After confronting the intersections of her identity, she developed her understanding of herself and grew as a person.

Many other students navigate this process and take the initiative to understand their identity. Na'Allah, for example, decided she was tired of not knowing other Black people on campus and messaged the Afro-American Cultural Center on Instagram. A student staff member responded and helped connect her to the African Student Union and Muslim Student Association, where she was able to find people she related to. "There's a lot of resources this campus has, but you won't necessarily know about them until somebody tells you, like if you happen to be checking your email, or you stumble upon something...It's just getting to that point when you finally open your laptop and decide to reach out," she says.

Another example is the Honors Diversity Council; an organization started in 2020 after a few students saw a need for a multi-affinity (BIPOC, LGBTQ+,

LOOK OUT FOR FUTURE EVENTS OR GO TO THEIR WEB PAGE TO LEARN MORE:
honors.uiowa.edu/diversitycouncil



Solange Bolger



Rabiah Na'Allah



Lizbeth Celaya

etc.) group within the honors program.

Community is based on members giving and taking time, support, and participation. Na'Allah gave her time and received resources. The Honors Diversity Council gave their time and participation to create a stronger honors community and engage in identity development with peers.

The diversity council is one of many new efforts within the honors program to add community building to the program's academic focus. Their latest initiative expands on past "climate surveys" to determine the current needs of the program, including a closer look at the community. Assessment Manager and Admissions Coordinator Addison Woll will be coupling the University of Iowa Honors Program Climate Survey with interviews, focus groups, and listening sessions specifically on community building and needs within the program. At the end of the survey, there is an external link for honors students willing to participate in an interview while keeping their survey responses anonymous. The data will support cre-

To support current honors students and their development through programs such as the Diversity Council, Honors Primetime, and the Conversation Center, visit givetoioowa.org/2022HP99 and give to the **Honors Program Student Enrichment Fund**.

ating new services and growth within the honors program.

Celaya is one student who found a strong community with the honors program. "It took a while," she started, "but I definitely feel like I belong. I don't know what I would do without this place," she gestured to the High Ground Cafe sign above her, "and the friends I made in Daum." She is still in touch with them, but they had each expanded their community to people outside honors.

Other students, like Bolger, feel distant from the honors program. "If [the university] found a way to include sophomores, juniors, and seniors within the [honors] program with events or conversations, I might feel more included," she states. Bolger feels like she had to put in a lot of work to create a space for

herself on campus.

Meanwhile, Na'Allah says she feels like she belongs on a surface level. "I'm a student; I pay tuition to go here, I have a university email, I'm a University of Iowa student...But, fundamentally... maybe I would feel like I belonged here if I was white." She expresses feeling like an outsider despite the emphasis the university places on diversity. Where she feels most like she belongs are in diverse spaces, like African Student Association meetings and Women of Color Network events.

Both Na'Allah and Bolger joined the Diversity Council with hopes to promote community within the program. Even with differing feelings about belonging on campus and within honors, each student says they can enjoy a sense of community. Their advice? Don't be afraid to connect with people, join a student organization, and try different things. "Go to those cultural centers... Go to the events, hang out with people, meet your people, and if you don't like your people, then leave," Bolger concludes. "Find who makes you happy."

OUT OF THE ECHO CHAMBER

Welcome to the Conversation Center

By Julia Fout

On a rainy morning this past summer, I grabbed my notebook full of scribbled-in conversation starters and my laptop, selected a quiet area, and prepared to have an hour-long conversation with three people I had never met before. They, like me, were awake, sitting anxiously in front of their computers, but at one in the morning in a country across the globe.

This meeting was part of my work in the Conversation Center this summer, a continuation of my involvement during the spring. I had enrolled in Conversation Practicum (RHET:2090) led by Dr. Benjamin Hassman and Dr. Sonja Mayrhofer anticipating a fun and interesting course and a way to get immediate honors experiential learning credit. But I learned the Center plays a far more important role.

When I began having these scheduled conversations, I was very anxious. What would I have to talk about? What if I was not liked? What if there was awkward silence? I wasn't alone. Everyone enrolled in the practicum felt similarly. But we weren't alone either. The students and people we engaged with had just as many if not more worries about whether the conversation would run smoothly.

The majority of people who book appointments with the Center are international students and scholars on the University of Iowa campus. This engagement between domestic and international students was the reason the Center was formed in the first place. The Conversation Center was created in 2015 by students who sought to address deficiencies in domestic student

"It is a great way to really listen to people and make them feel welcome and heard by making them feel like **their identities matter** and that they don't need to leave that behind. It's a way of **honoring their history** as well."

- **Julia So**

involvement with international students and address anti-Asian discrimination, issues that are still prevalent today.

Not only must international students stand up to language barriers, but most often, they also come head-to-head with racism, discrimination, and exclusion. For Julia So, these issues "really fire [her] up," driving her passion and commitment to inclusionary practices. Many of So's family members have immigrated to the United States, so these issues hit home for her.

Growing up in a predominantly white area, So says, "something that was really important to me...that was really emphasized, is being proud of your heritage and being proud of where you came from." Often, as So remarks, the pressure to assimilate leads to an erasure of one's cultural heritage. Part of the Conversation Center's mission is



Photo illustrations provided by Benjamin Hassman.

to encourage students to recognize, appreciate, and honor others' heritage without perceiving their whole identities through that lens. So remarks, "It is a great way to really listen to people and make them feel welcome and heard by making them feel like their identities matter and that they don't need to leave that behind. It's a way of honoring their history as well."

Domestic students are usually less inclined to talk to an international student in any of their courses like they would a fellow domestic student. The smallest omissions of a friendly "hi" or "how are you?" can make all the difference in whether a student feels welcome on campus. Dr. Benjamin Hassman, director of the Conversation Center, says "The Conversation Center is incredibly important as it does provide a really clear and concrete place for those interesting conversations that students

"The Conversation Center is incredibly important as it does provide a really clear and **concrete place** for those interesting **conversations** that students want to have, but away from so many of the **social barriers** that keep those conversations from happening."

- Benjamin Hassman

Conversation Center Director

want to have, but away from so many of the social barriers that keep those conversations from happening."

International students put in a lot of work to overcome language and cultural differences, and this "invisible labor" goes into their every interaction. That may make it more difficult for international students to have a conversation or interaction in passing like domestic students may have after class or in a dining hall.

The Conversation Center creates space for these connections to happen, taking a step towards forging a more inclusive campus. Here, conversants have opportunities to make personal intercultural connections, a goal at the forefront of the UI academic community and the University of Iowa Honors Program.

Through every conversation, domestic students and international students work to bridge the gaps which are inherently present, created, and ever-changing. For international students, booking an appointment is a chance to practice the English language and to connect with a domestic student, which helps in adjusting to being in a new country. Many domestic students even become great friends with the people they meet through these conversations, once they

"Each of us ought to leave the university with the ability to sit down across [from] basically anybody and **engage them in conversation.**"

- Benjamin Hassman

Conversation Center Director

push beyond and embrace the awkwardness and silences.

For domestic students, this type of communication invites them, as Dr. Sonja Mayrhofer puts it, "out of the echo-chambers." As Mayrhofer describes, students realize, "Oh wait, our food, our culture, and our belief systems are different, but we can sit here for a half-hour or an hour and have a really pleasant conversation." These students recognize that even people from a particular culture have vast experiences. An unofficial, but omnipresent guiding principle for the Conversation Practicum is that "culture is not a monolith," Mayrhofer expresses, "even



Photo illustrations provided by Benjamin Hassman.

our domestic students have various experiences.”

When I have conversations with international students, our topics range from food, to family, to favorite video games, to what we even ate that day. Though I often converse about cultural differences, I always walk away recognizing how similar we are as fellow peers in college. And I realized just how easy it is to connect with people from all over the world on a fundamental

human level, language barriers aside. Learning these intercultural skills is an integral part of how I identify with being an honors student. As Hassman remarks, “Each of us ought to leave the university with the ability to sit down across [from] basically anybody and engage them in conversation.”

We all enjoy certain ways to celebrate different holidays, we all have fun ways to de-stress, and we all want to feel welcome and included. It is our col-

lective duty not only to recognize and celebrate the power of our differences but also to understand and operate on the strength of our collective humanity. Hassman says this practice “makes the world into a smaller place but a smaller place that is for everyone.”

As So says about the issues the Conversation Center addresses and alleviates, “Inclusion isn’t something that is one and done with. It’s an ongoing issue that requires an ongoing solution.”

WHO’S WHO?



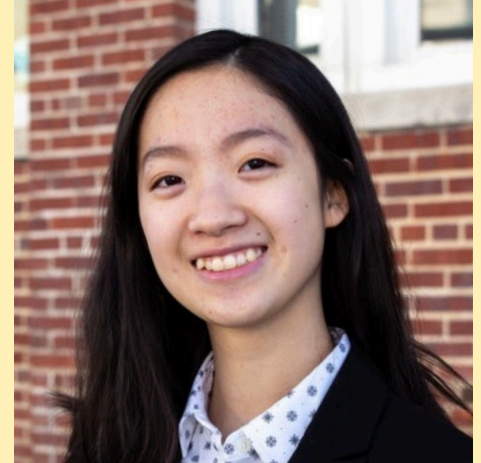
Benjamin Hassman

Dr. Benjamin Hassman has been involved in the Conversation Center since its inception in 2016 when he was made co-director. Since then he has directed the Center, creating its logos, starting up the peer leadership aspect of the course, developing partnerships with the local community and nonprofits to extend conversation hours beyond the classroom, and much more. He says the Center “aligns with [his] professional and pedagogical leanings,” as he asserts these “informal conversations can essentially activate our intellect and creativity to make the sort of transformative educational experience that we want higher education to be.”



Sonja Mayrhofer

Sonja Mayrhofer (15PhD) received a doctorate from the University of Iowa’s English Department and is assistant director of the Conversation Center and a lecturer in the Rhetoric Department. In the Rhetoric Department, her teaching explores many of her interests: the rhetoric of self-hood, forensic rhetoric, and intercultural experiences. She enjoys co-directing the Conversation Practicum and fostering intercultural empathy on campus.



Julia So

Julia So is a fourth-year honors student double majoring in marketing and business analytics with minors in rhetoric and psychology. So has been involved in the Conversation Practicum since her first year at the university, completing projects for the Conversation Center as a peer leader, engaging in outreach, and working to make the space available to anyone.



GIFTED AND GUTSY

Meet Iowa's Newest Goldwater Scholars

By Chloe Wiedl

As of the spring of 2021, the University of Iowa can now boast two new Goldwater Scholarship recipients: Nyah Davis, a mathematics major, and Jack Lynn, a biomedical engineering major. Out of over 5,000 eligible natural science, engineering, and mathematics students, Davis and Lynn displayed an impressive drive to “help their discipline progress,” a key characteristic of competitive applicants, says Kelly Thornburg, Director of the Office of Scholar Development.

Established in 1956, the Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation awards scholarships to college students in their second or third year who intend to pursue research careers in the natural sciences, mathematics, or engineering. But Davis and Lynn bring so much more to the table. In working with each of them, Thornburg notes their commitment to learning and pushing beyond their professors’ and research mentors’ initial expectations. She says, “Both of them trust themselves enough to be respectful of the original question, but also to know that it’s worthwhile to take some risks and play around and not always stop.”

Davis, from Des Moines, Iowa, and Lynn, from Bettendorf, Iowa, are both members of the University of Iowa Honors Program and are actively involved in research on campus. Both Davis and Lynn offered the same initial reason for choosing the UI: money. In addition to in-state tuition, both received scholarships that slashed tuition costs, making Iowa a safe financial decision.

Financial support was not the only



Jack Lynn

Pictured: Jack Lynn during the National Science Foundation's Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) program.

Provided by: Jack Lynn

factor, however: the university's range of programs meant that Davis and Lynn could explore a number of fields and interests, even those not related to their majors. For example, Davis, who holds an art minor, has taken classes in literature, political science, philosophy, and music. “I wanted to be able to explore, play, learn,” says Davis about her decision to attend Iowa. She emphasizes the importance of exploring as many options as possible while a student, especially when those options are so limited in high school.

Lynn, knowing he wanted to pursue engineering from the beginning, took advantage of Iowa's programs to explore and refine his interests. Before he landed on biomedical engineering, Lynn switched his major six times in attempt to find his future path. Working with Dr. Michael Schnieders—who himself was a member of the honors pro-

gram and a Goldwater scholar during his undergraduate studies—had a great influence on Lynn's academic pursuits. Compared to other labs which were more focused on graduate students, the Schnieders Lab gave him mentorship at an undergraduate level and helped him delve deeper into the STEM world.

“[Schnieders] is really good at helping direct people toward what they're interested in, which was especially helpful to me because I didn't really know what I wanted to do...he presented me with plenty of opportunities to refine what I was looking for,” says Lynn.

Lynn has been involved in the honors program since day one at the UI. A member of the Presidential Scholars Program (PSP), he participated in some of the many seminars the honors program has to offer, including ones that prompted him to step outside his comfort zone. He recalls a particular seminar that took place his first year, saying, “[It] was on mindfulness, and so we had to go and attend events on what we learned and [discuss] how we experienced them.”

The unique range of honors seminar topics and classes allowed Lynn to explore academic opportunities beyond the scope of his major, fueling his curiosity. “I feel like you can get stuck in a bubble, like I'm constantly doing engineering stuff now, but then it made me go out and do things that were atypical of what I would normally do,” says Lynn.

Having worked closely with Lynn during the Goldwater application process, Thornburg expresses her admiration for his ability to go beyond his own

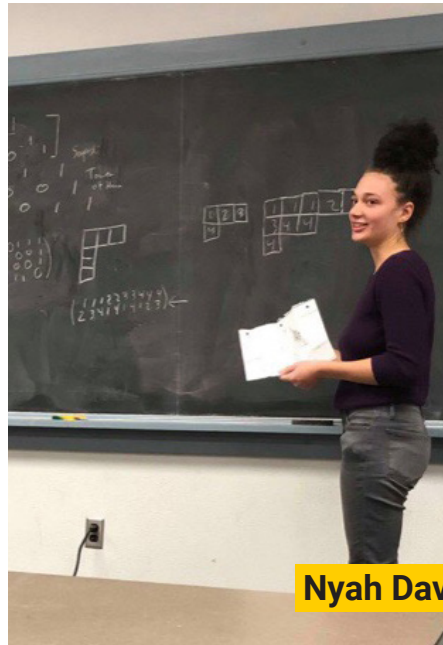
“There are tons of **resources** [about racial dynamics] that have been put out there, and they’re not all going to be applicable to all situations...but you’ll find a resource that will provide some information on educating yourself on racial issues, on **supporting** underrepresented people in academic spaces.”

- Nyah Davis

ideas.

“[In STEM], you have to know when you need to ask questions, and when you do need to ask them, it is important to hear and apply [the answer] in a way that makes sense and is accurate to the people you’re taking advice from,” says Thornburg. “I think [Lynn] really saw the Goldwater process and research and his education as an opportunity to explore his own ideas but also [to] stay open to other people’s as well.”

Unlike Lynn, Davis’s path through the honors program was more unconventional. In addition to participating in traditional experiences, such as Honors Primetime, she earned a substantial amount of her honors credits by applying honors contracts to many of her courses. Having come to Iowa with dual enrollment credits and an associ-



Nyah Davis

Pictured: Nyah Davis presenting during Math Club, of which she is the current president. Provided by: Nyah Davis.



ate’s degree, she wanted to use her college experience to explore options not available to her in high school.

“I knew that I wanted to go to a bigger school with a lot of different options where I would have access to different departments because I knew that I wouldn’t have a ton of gen eds that I had to take,” says Davis. By applying honors contracts to her classes, which required her to take on self-directed projects within traditionally non-honors sections, she was able to integrate the honors experience into her personalized academic path.

“[Davis] has done a really great job of both being the kind of independent and self-aware scholar that she’ll continue to be [and] advocating for other people in her department and in math,” says Thornburg. “[She is] doing a lot to

bring real substance and accountability to conversations about representation in STEM.”

Speaking from the perspective of a Black student in a largely white academic field, Davis emphasizes the importance of educating oneself on racial diversity. She initiates discussions of accountability in her department when she can, but she also encourages her peers and mentors to inform themselves on their own time.

“There are tons of resources [about racial dynamics] that have been put out there, and they’re not all going to be applicable to all situations...but you’ll find a resource that will provide some information on educating yourself on racial issues, on supporting underrepresented people in academic spaces,” says Davis.

As the 2021 Goldwater scholarship application process took place during the pandemic, Davis and Lynn worked on their applications and met with Thornburg and their research advisors remotely. This added another challenge to an already intense intellectual and emotional process, but both students were up for it.

“They were patient and kind and helped me keep my sense of humor on days when that was harder to do so,” Thornburg says. “‘We are in this together’ is an apt description of the last few application cycles and that was in great part because of students like [Davis] and [Lynn] and the community of current faculty, past scholars, and program alumni who support our nominees.”

Davis and Lynn took on roles as students, researchers, scholarship candidates, and honors program members who continued to push themselves beyond initial challenges. Says Thornburg, “That kind of support creates space to ask big questions, to find a rabbit hole and see how far it goes.” For both Davis and Lynn, that curiosity will carry through their academic and personal endeavors for years to come.

KEEPING TEMPO WITH COMMITMENTS

Honors Achievers Catch Marching Band Fevers

By Dell Harbaugh

The average college student has a busy day-to-day life. Undertaking classes and jobs, enjoying extracurriculars and hobbies, and spending time with family and friends requires a level of time management that most young adults have yet to learn when they arrive at college. Though certain combinations of activities place great demands on students' time, these gradually help them balance the many responsibilities they juggle. Two such commitments are the University of Iowa Marching Band and Honors Program, and those who participate in both are prime examples of what it means to be well-rounded students.

Honors students spin many plates because of the honors coursework and experiential learning requirements they must fulfill, but especially ambitious students also commit numerous hours every week to practicing their instruments, rehearsing drills, and performing at University of Iowa home football games.

Marching band performer and first-year honors student Claire K. who asked for her last name not to be shared, joined the University of Iowa Marching Band as a piccoloist after playing and competing in her high school band. "We have practice four days a week and two practices on Tuesdays," she says of the demanding schedule band players must juggle. "Also, we sometimes have

"These students learn to manage themselves, set priorities, learn tolerances of other viewpoints, and form deeper, more meaningful relationships with others. The stereotype of the quietly studying kid with their nose buried in a book is definitely not my experience with the students I see."

- **Holly Yoder**
UIHP Advising Director

personal practice outside of class, especially when playing more difficult pieces. On game days, we spend an extra ten hours with the marching band from the time we arrive for rehearsal to when we leave the game."

Students like Claire are dedicated to their love of music through the Hawkeyes' 260-member marching band as well as to their love of learning through the honors program. But these passions are not so different. In fact, Holly Yoder, Director of Honors Advising, believes one may lend a helping hand to the other.

"I think of my work as helping students to think more broadly about what their goals are. Honors students were the students who were most involved in high school; it's who they are," Yoder says.

Rather than overextending themselves or not rising to their full potential, these students have struck a careful balance in managing the physical, mental, and emotional demands of their schedules. As Yoder says, "These students learn to manage themselves, set priorities, learn tolerances of other viewpoints, and form deeper, more meaningful relationships with others. The stereotype of the quietly studying kid with their nose buried in a book is definitely not my experience with the students I see."

Third-year student Ben S., who also asked to remain anonymous, has been



The band enters the field for their performance at the football game versus the University of Indiana. Provided by: HMB Media Team.

in both honors and the marching band for two years and has built “some great relationships” along the way. “It keeps me really busy, but some of my best college memories have been in [Honors] Primetime or marching band camp,” Ben says. “You get to meet so many interesting people.”

Similarly, Claire mentions that she “like[s] to reach out to section leaders for advice” when she feels overwhelmed. Older students and leaders in honors and marching band have had practice maintaining academic excellence, their musical performance, and their social lives, and can provide valuable insight to uncertain first-years. “They kind of have it figured out, and they’re always happy to help us,” Claire remarks.

Older honors students have the opportunity to become peer mentors within the program. Through advising

meetings, peer mentors offer general advice and help first- and second-year honors students build connections to other students and staff. Yoder, who leads the peer mentors, is proud of their place in the program as they help the next generation of honors students. She remarks, “Experienced students are your best resource. Activities like the marching band are such a great accompaniment to academics because they’re collaborative and you’re able to get to know other students and their ambitions.”

Although participating in both the University of Iowa Honors Program and the marching band is a serious time commitment, UI honors students are up to the task. “I feel like after marching band season is over, my class schedule is going to feel like a breeze,” Claire says. And Ben agreed. “When you get a good balance going, it’s so rewarding.”

“It keeps me really busy, but some of my **best college memories** have been in [Honors] Primetime or marching band camp...You get to meet so many interesting people.”

- Ben S.



FAREWELL TO ANDY WILLARD

By Sonia Beltz

Come this spring, there will be an empty office on the fourth floor of Blank Honors Center and a hole in the heart of the University of Iowa Honors Program. After 15 years in the honors program, Andrew Willard, the honors experiential learning director, will step away on January 14, 2022.

Willard, who earned a bachelor's degree from Stanford University in 1975, began his career in higher education at Yale University, where he initially enrolled as a graduate student. "The program I was in was not a great match for me, but I met a professor who was a great mentor who became a colleague and close friend," Willard says. He also enjoyed the diverse and thriving college community in New Haven, Connecticut: Willard spent over two decades at Yale as a research scholar, professional school teacher, and briefly, as an undergraduate instructor.

Though Willard specialized in international law and policy—"policy sciences" more generally—it was his undergraduate students, rather than those at the law school, whom he was most impassioned to teach.

"[Undergraduates] were more open to exploring a wider range of phenomena, including things about themselves. The graduate students had to be more focused on developing practical knowledge and skills for particular careers. And why else would you go to law school?" Willard says. Once he realized this, Willard took an academic-year teaching appointment in 2004–05 at Sarah Lawrence College, a small liberal arts school in New York.

During this academic year, Willard's career took a turn, as his wife, Cynthia Joyce, accepted a position as the uni-

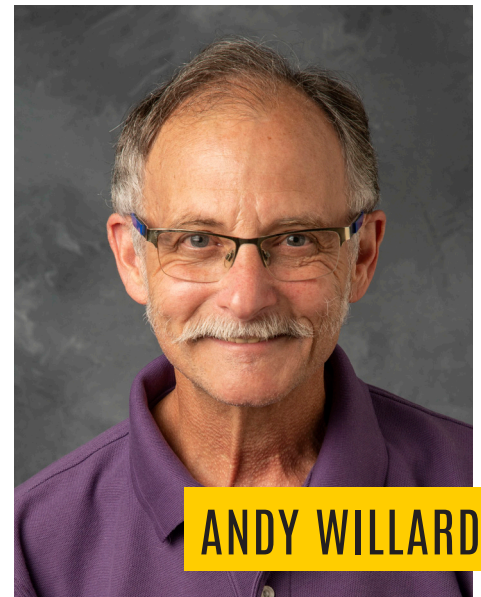
versity ombudsperson at the University of Iowa. Willard was elated for his wife's new job, and he was excited to begin a new chapter at the UI.

So while his wife moved forward with her career in Iowa City, Willard worked remotely at Yale. But slowly, he began talking to others in the UI community, many of whom urged him to take up a position at the law school. "And I said that was okay, but I really would rather work with undergraduate students," Willard says.

Fortunately for Willard, John Nelson, then-director of the UI Honors Program, was looking to expand his staff. He suggested that Willard teach an honors first-year seminar on international law and human rights in the spring semester of 2006. Willard recalls, "I had a wonderful time teaching the course, which didn't surprise me because I loved teaching undergraduates at Sarah Lawrence College."

Even better was that Willard discovered connections between his expertise in policy sciences and the "trendy" new field of experiential learning, which encouraged students to take on learning opportunities in real-world contexts. And thus, his position as honors experiential learning director was born, even if the role did look a bit different at the time.

"I've done a lot of different things for our program depending on its needs," Willard points out, noting that his initial role involved teaching honors public policy seminars and working with students on independent honors projects connected to their internships or study abroad experiences. He also helped to develop and manage the honors commendation program, which offered



ANDY WILLARD

"I can get very caught up **in their experience.** It doesn't matter whether you're [in] education or nursing or college of liberal arts and sciences... Everything under the sun, potentially, is of interest to undergraduates. And I've **enjoyed working with them.**"

- Andy Willard

UIHP Experiential Learning Director

merits to students for many experiences now under the experiential learning umbrella like study-abroad and internships. Later, he managed the honors student staff, whose positions also looked a lot different than they do today. Willard proudly expressed that he feels the honors program's evolution has benefited students, saying that its current curriculum and set-up are better than when he first arrived.

For the last several years, Willard's role has primarily been about connecting with honors students and guiding them through experiential learning opportunities. "I can get very caught up in their experience. It doesn't matter whether you're [in] education or nursing or college of liberal arts and sciences... Everything under the sun, potentially, is of interest to undergraduates. And I've enjoyed working with them," he says.

Colleagues of Willard's on the honors professional staff witness this passion and commitment on a daily basis. "[Willard] has been a delight to work with," says Honors Program Associate Director Emily Hill. "[He] always has the student at the forefront of his mind and looks for ways for our program to better serve our honors students." Heidi Schmitt, the honors program coordinator, agrees, citing Willard's "aura of kindness" as a core factor in his being "an instrumental team member within the honors program."

"[Willard] is a great colleague who is able to think outside the box but who also has a healthy respect for process," adds Holly Yoder, honors advising director. "There have been many times over the more than 10 years that we have worked together when I went to [Willard] for help...and came out of that conversation feeling enlightened." Willard credits this to his policy science background: "That is the frame of reference for me...That's how I solve problems, personal problems, broader problems." Whatever the reason, his creativity and wisdom have been key

assets to the program during his tenure.

However, just as a family commitment brought Willard to the UI, another one is pulling him away. In February 2020, his daughter and son-in-law adopted two children, and Willard was ecstatic for a trip to California to meet his grandchildren. But when the pandemic hit, Willard was forced to reevaluate his priorities. "I had to make a tragic choice," he says. "I'm not happy that I'm leaving our program, but I am happy that I get to be part of these little kids' lives."

Willard is still emphatic about his love of working with students during their college experience. "[It's] a time when [students] get away from the home environment, and even if they're staying at home, their mind[s] [are] moving in different ways. And I love being part of that adventure," he says. Some of his

most rewarding moments have come from helping students on their paths to discover their interests, and he still cherishes the feeling of receiving a thank-you note for a letter of recommendation or of seeing one of his past students succeed.

But the relationship wasn't all one-sided, he says: "I've learned a lot. Every interaction I have with an honors student, I learn something about the student and about myself. And I really miss that. I think working with young people has kept me young, and I think that's a good thing."

As for what comes next, Willard isn't sure just yet. But if his time in the UI Honors Program has taught him anything, it's that the future is bright. "If I get depressed about the future, I think about the honors students...It makes me hopeful," he says.



Andy Willard converses with a student at a 2014 event in the BHC Atrium. Willard has been with the Honors Program for 15 years. Photo courtesy of the University of Iowa Honors Program.

MEET THE STAFF



Sonia Beltz

Sonia is a third-year student from the Dayton, Ohio, area majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track with a minor in religious studies. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to develop her skills as an editor and writer.



Thomas Duong

Thomas is a third-year from Iowa City, Iowa, with an microbiology major on the pre-medical track. Besides his studies, Thomas is president of UNICEF Iowa and is an undergraduate researcher. He enjoys sports, playing drums, and traveling.



Julia Fout

Julia is a third-year from Moline, Illinois, studying French and psychology with a minor in rhetoric and persuasion. Outside of class, she enjoys biking, going to local bakeries, and practicing French.



Lydia Guo

Lydia is a third-year studying biomedical sciences and is a designer for the Honors Newsletter. She works as an undergraduate research assistant focusing on cystic fibrosis and volunteers at the UIHC. In her free time, Lydia enjoys oil painting at her local art studio.



Airiana Mohr

Airiana is a third-year from Machesney Park, Illinois, studying neuroscience with minors in Spanish, chemistry, and psychology. Aside from her studies, Airiana is a member of numerous groups on campus including USG and Homecoming Executive Council.



Jacob Sammon

Jacob is a third-year from Urbandale, Iowa, studying English and creative writing on the publishing track with a minor in communication studies. He hopes to continue developing his skills as a writer by learning from his dedicated peers and the City of Literature's culture.



Madison Bruce

Madison is a first-year student from Red Oak, Iowa. She is majoring in political science and is considering adding a second major in journalism and mass communication. She hopes to further explore her interests and strengthen her writing and speaking abilities at the University of Iowa.



Sydney Disabato

Sydney is a nerdy second-year student from Flower Mound, Texas, who is majoring in both Spanish and journalism and mass communication. She loves to write about the world around her, fiction or not, and hopes to be able to write more about life in the future.



Dell Harbaugh

Dell is a first-year student from Dubuque, Iowa, majoring in biomedical engineering. While at the University of Iowa, she wants to travel abroad, take part in research, and continue to write!



Madeline Harp

Madeline is a fourth-year from Kalamazoo, Michigan. She is majoring in informatics with a minor in German. Outside of school, she can be found working at the CRWC as a lifeguard, reading something new, or catching up on various television series.



Natalie Kehrl

Natalie is a first-year student from Manchester, Iowa, majoring in psychology on the pre-medicine track. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to develop her writing and journalism skills.



Patrick McDermott

Patrick is a second-year student from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, currently undeclared for a major, but is interested in elementary education. He is the communications director for the university's Amnesty International chapter, and in his free time, Patrick enjoys reading and creative writing.



Kate Perez

Kate is a first-year student from Aurora, Illinois, majoring in journalism and mass communication and English and creative writing. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to develop her skills as a journalist and creative writer.



Raquel Valladolid

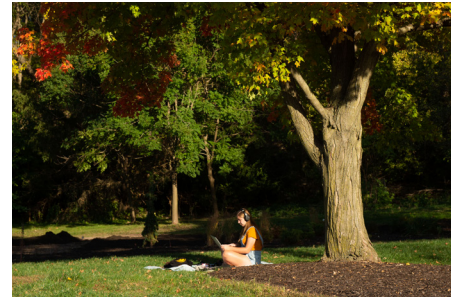
Raquel is a second-year student from Sioux City, Iowa, majoring in Spanish and English and creative writing with minors in Latina/o/x studies, communication studies, and translation for global literacy. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to develop her skills as an editor and translator.



Chloe Wied

Chloe is a third-year student from Saint Charles, Illinois. She is majoring in communication studies, minoring in ancient civilizations, and earning a certificate in writing at the University of Iowa. While at the university, she hopes to improve her mass communication skills and build relationships with students and staff.

GIVING TO HONORS



Photos courtesy of the University of Iowa Office of Strategic Communication.

If you are interested in supporting honors students and their participation in and outside of the classroom in programs such as those mentioned in this newsletter, please visit givetoioowa.org/2022HP99.

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