



**SPRING 2021**

**HONORS**

**NEWSLETTER**



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



**University of Iowa  
Honors Program**



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# WORD FROM THE **DIRECTOR**

Greetings for the spring of 2021 to our Honors Program students, faculty, alumni/ae, and friends. I trust you are staying safe and well during these very challenging times.

**By Dr. Art Spisak**

## **SHORT UPDATE ON COVID-19 CONDITIONS**

The Honors Program staff, both our professional staff and our student staff, have worked remotely throughout the spring semester, although we have met with students face-to-face at their request. We are expecting to be able to return to campus during the summer months and to be working from our offices for the fall semester. We also expect fall classes to be primarily in-person.

## **HONORS PROGRAM RHODES SCHOLARS**

Probably the biggest news this academic year regarding our students is that Marissa Mueller, a fourth-year honors student who will graduate this May with a degree in biomedical engineering, was named a Rhodes Scholar. She is the 22nd UI student to receive the honor and the second female. You'll read more about Marissa in this newsletter; she is incredibly talented and also has been very supportive of the Honors

Program. For example, she was our student guest speaker at the Fall Honors Program Advisory Board meeting, at which she much impressed board members. Other recent Honors Program students who were also named Rhodes Scholars are Austin Hughes (2019), Jeffrey Ding (2015), and Renugan Raidoo (2011). Additionally, one of our Advisory Board members, Dr. Ali Husain, a UI Honors Program alumnus, was also a Rhodes Scholar (1994).

## **HONORS PROGRAM DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION EFFORTS**

Since the death of George Floyd nearly a year ago, we have increased our work on improving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the Honors Program. We've included DEI in our strategic plan, have had training sessions for our staff in recognizing and addressing implicit biases, and have taken a public stance on DEI, as published on our website. In this newsletter, you'll read about another DEI initiative, this one student-created and student-led. Specifically, earlier in the semester, two of our honors students, Samalya Thenuwara and Amna Haider, created the University of Iowa Honors Program Diversity Advisory Board. Its purpose is to promote a more equitable space and more inclusive community for honors students. The Honors Program is grateful to Samalya and Amna for their vision and all their work on bringing the Diversity Advisory Board into existence.

**Art Spisak**



Pictured: Dr. Art Spisak. Provided by Art Spisak.



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

## CHANGE IN HONORS PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

This will be my last Honors Newsletter post since at the end of this semester, I'm returning to my faculty position as a professor in the Classics Department. I've directed the UI Honors Program for nearly ten years, and through the work of some very talented Honors staff, and the efforts of many faculty, staff and administrators in the university community, I have seen the Program come more into alignment with national standards for honors education. I've much enjoyed the contact I've had with our students over the years, and I take with me many good memories. I've made good acquaintances and friends with

many faculty and staff, and seeing their incredible work with the students has reinforced my belief that education is indeed the highest profession. Finally, I want to recognize and thank the many donors to our program, and in particular our Advisory Board members, who have given so unselfishly of both their time and resources to help our students. Their belief in our students, our program, and in education has brought about an incredible amount of good.

Normally, I would say here to feel free to contact me via email ([art-spisak@uiowa.edu](mailto:art-spisak@uiowa.edu)) or phone with any comments, questions, or concerns you have about the Honors Program. As of May 14th, however, the interim director of

Honors will be Dr. Emily Hill. After that date, I defer questions and comments to her ([emily-d-hill@uiowa.edu](mailto:emily-d-hill@uiowa.edu)). Also, you can direct questions on anything related to the Honors Program experience to [honors-program@uiowa.edu](mailto:honors-program@uiowa.edu).

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Art L. Spisak". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

Art L. Spisak, PhD  
 Director, UI Honors Program  
 Professor, Classics Department  
 Past President (2017), National Collegiate Honors Council

# ADAPTING AND EXCELLING: HONORS FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS

By Finch Davis

Honors First-Year Seminars, one of the signature perks available to honors students, saw just as much disruption as other classes in the 2020-21 school year. But with the University of Iowa forecasting a fall 2021 semester with much more in-person learning, professors are preparing for a return to these beloved seminars.

The Energy Future, an Honors First-Year Seminar taught by Professor David Murhammer, is one of those returning in the fall after a turbulent year. Murhammer's seminar, which focuses on how humanity will supply itself with energy in the near future, continued in person last year with social distancing measures. "I couldn't imagine [teaching the class] virtually. I wouldn't be nearly as effective," he admitted. The honors students in his seminar impressed him, demonstrating excellent engagement despite the obstacles they confronted.

Murhammer looks forward to returning to the classroom. He believes "[last fall's] students appreciated having it in person, with all of the other virtual classes," and he is certain next year's incoming class will love the in-person seminars as much as past honors students.

Professor Carol Severino had a somewhat different experience while teaching her seminar, *Bicycles, Kayaks, and Snowshoes: Writing About Travel*, online and exploring the role and processes of traveling in writing. Although she quickly learned how to make the most of virtual learning—culminating in a dazzling self-made class website—she found it was sometimes harder to get discussions going with students.



David Murhammer

However, when those discussions happened, she was always pleasantly surprised by the wealth of knowledge and creativity her students brought to their assignments and debates.

Murhammer's students' final independent presentations had a similar effect on him. Tasked with designing their own off-grid sustainable housing, the students offered a massive variety of ideas on both scientific form and aesthetic function. He is always impressed by the research and creativity the students demonstrate. To him, that diversity and rigor shows just how well inquisitive students take to niche topics in Honors First-Year Seminars, even on subjects outside their usual fields of study. "It amazes me how much they've

"Hopefully, they've learned a fair amount from what I've presented to them, but they go well beyond that, find out things on their own just because they're interested."

- David Murhammer,  
Professor

learned," he commented. "Hopefully, they've learned a fair amount from what I've presented to them, but they go well beyond that, find out things on their own just because they're interested."

Severino also enjoyed the enthusiasm students showed. Although the sparsity of travel during the pandemic led to a lack of "conventional" travel writing, Severino loved how well her students adapted to circumstances and took to the challenge. She said her class wrote about "not traveling, or longing to travel, or being very bored in their home, or driving around their city looking for something to see and do, or their jobs during COVID...I got some of the best travel writing ever!" For her, teaching



Pictured: Julian Wemmie, one of Professor Carol Severino's students, used as inspiration for a piece in her seminar.  
 Provided by: Julian Wemmie.

such a personal passion in such an intimate space was "a soul-nourishing experience," and getting to enjoy it with motivated and curious students was a welcome shake-up to her routine.

While both professors noted that maintaining the flow of group discussions was a challenge, their students rose to the challenge. Even in a tumultuous semester, they got to witness the stellar qualities new honors students bring to the table: their shared enthusiasm for the seminar topics, their creativity during projects, and their respectful and open-minded behavior during discussions. No matter how these seminars look in the fall, they will continue to bring out the best in the new class of honors students.



**Carol Severino**

"[The class wrote about] not traveling, or longing to travel, or being very bored in their home...I got some of the **best travel writing ever!**"

- **Carol Severino,**  
 Professor

# OUTSTANDING **OUTREACH:**

## Connecting to Prospective Students Virtually

By Erin Bughman

Which dorm is best? Where are the best study spots? Is it worth it to bring a car to campus? All of these questions spinning around in prospective students' heads seem too troublesome to ask professional staff yet too simple to put in an email. Luckily, the Honors Outreach Ambassadors—a group of honors students who serve as a resource to current and incoming students—have given prospective students the chance to have these questions, and many more, answered through their recent personalized emails.

"I think [the website] shows the honors students that the Program **cares** and **wants to reach out.**"

- **Kim Lybrand,**  
Honors Outreach  
Ambassador

Prior to the pandemic, most of the outreach the Honors Outreach Ambassadors did for prospective students was done in person. Ambassadors attended Hawkeye Visit Days and gave tours of both Daum and Blank Honors Center to admitted students. This provided incoming students with insight into the Honors Program and life as a college student.

However, the pandemic caused a halt in much of the outreach the Ambassadors previously did. With in-person events canceled and Blank Honors Center closing, all of their outreach



Pictured: Honors Outreach Ambassadors participating in a Zoom meeting. Provided by: Delaney McDowell.



was focused online with Instagram lives, takeovers, and virtual informational roadshows. In order to expand their outreach, the Ambassadors were asked to send personalized emails to prospective students. These emails detailed some of their favorite experiences in the Honors Program and showed the impact that the Program has had on them. Many chose to write about why they chose Honors at Iowa and their favorite opportunities within it.

Delaney McDowell, a Teaching Assistant for the Honors Outreach Ambassadors and a third-year Ambassador, states, "I think emails have kind of become the main source of contacting people since [the pandemic]. We want to make sure [prospective students] have that student perspective before they come to the University of Iowa."

"The emails help put a **face to the program** and not just a face of a pro-staff member. I think it's really nice **connecting** to someone who is your age and **thinks** about college in the same way that you do."

**- Anna Luria,**  
*Honors Outreach*  
*Ambassador*

Each Ambassador was paired with around 25 prospective honors students based on the similarity of their chosen areas of study. Pairings were made to be as close as possible, but if the students had questions about other majors or minors, they were re-directed to the Ambassador with the best expertise. The Ambassadors then sent out emails providing their own background and experience with the Program. These emails gave prospective students an outlook on topics such as Honors Primetime and Honors First-Year Seminars. In addition to putting in their own student viewpoints, the Ambassadors also included online links and resources to the Honors Outreach Ambassadors website and social media pages to further connect with prospective students.

Ambassador Kim Lybrand says, "I think it shows the Honors students that the Program cares and wants to reach out and help their students."

The emails also encouraged prospective students to reach out to their assigned Ambassadors with any questions they had regarding Honors, the University of Iowa, or college life in general. This gave these students the opportunity to receive answers to some questions they may not have been able to ask before.

Another Ambassador, Anna Luria, says, "The emails help put a face to the program and not just a face of a pro-staff member. It's someone that they can relate to. I think it's really nice connecting to someone who is your age and thinks about college in the same way that you do."

These emails sparked many conversations between students and their Ambassadors. Some reached out with

"We want to make sure [prospective students] have that **student perspective** before they come to the University of Iowa."

**- Delaney McDowell,**  
*Honors Outreach*  
*Ambassador*

simple questions about further explaining seminars or which dorms are the best for first-year students, while others requested to meet with their Ambassadors over Zoom.

Luria, on top of responding to other students' emails, met virtually with one of her prospective students. Through a Zoom meeting, she was able to help the student receive information about the university, typical Honors classes students take, and the best residence hall to live in if Daum is unavailable. Luria says, "Being able to answer all of her questions and her being able to ask follow-up questions over Zoom was really helpful. I would've really appreciated that when I was a prospective student."

Although some of the outreach the Ambassadors typically do has changed, these personalized emails have effectively reached prospective students and have assisted in guiding them through admissions during a pandemic.

**TO LEARN MORE: <https://honors.uiowa.edu/ambassadors>**

# FROM THE GROUND UP: CREATING THE DEI COUNCIL

By Izzie Wilcox

**W**hat does the Honors Program application look like? For students entering from high school, it requires an essay about a topic the applicant is passionate about, an opportunity to “GEEK out,” as the essay prompt says. However, this component wasn’t always included in the application; it was introduced in 2016 as a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiative to promote a more holistic application approach. This was one of the first steps the Honors Program took toward furthering DEI initiatives.

This introduction of a more holistic application process was an important move toward making the Honors Program more equitable and accessible. Everybody has a different background, especially with their relationship to education. While one’s Grade Point Average is an important factor for the Honors Program, a holistic application allows students to highlight other aspects of their lives where they excel. Some students work full-time, others spend significant portions of their day in extracurricular activities or sports. A holistic application process allows reviewers to look at all of these aspects when determining acceptance into the Honors Program.

Addison Woll, Honors Assessment Manager and Admissions Coordinator since early 2020, spoke about how the Honors Program is making further changes to support DEI initiatives. “When I started, there was no DEI strategic or action plan at the time,” Woll stated. However, the program has since made huge strides. Honors students Samalya D. Thenuwara and Amna Heider created a DEI strategic

plan while taking the President’s Leadership Class (LS:1022). They then presented their work to the Honors Program which was quickly approved.

Their plan included an outline of steps to help achieve overarching DEI goals—a strategic plan to ensure that words get turned into actions that promote real change. They spent the fall constructing one of the largest components of their DEI strategic plans: creating an Honors DEI Council. An Honors DEI Council provides an outlet for students to voice their concerns and develop plans to solve issues they experience as students. It acts as the leading force for change surrounding DEI within the Honors Program. After marketing the new council and sifting through applicants, the student-led council was created. This spring, they have begun exploring ways to improve the Honors Program.

While the council is still in its formative stage, council members have started to understand what changes need to be made. “Our first main focus is on retention of underrepresented students within the program,” said council member Solange Bolger. “A lot of [the solution] is creating communities where students can feel welcomed.” The main topics the council is addressing thus far are creating more inclusive housing spaces for all honors students, including outside of the Honors residence hall, Daum. West-side residence halls, and even off-campus housing, can be more cost-effective than living in newer east-side residence halls, such as Daum.

Retention rates and housing are just the tip of the iceberg for the DEI coun-

cil. “This is only our first semester,” Bolger expressed, adding, “We have a lot of ideas.”



**Solange Bolger**

“Our first main focus is on retention of **underrepresented students** within the program...a lot of [the solution] is creating **communities** where students can feel **welcomed.**”

**- Solange Bolger,  
DEI Council Member**

# IRRAPLACEABLE

## Expectations Versus On-the-Job Realities

By Sydney Disabato

Everyone is familiar with the concept of a Resident Assistant (RA). For some, they're a warm presence who fills the halls with laughter and the lounges with board games and hula parties. And for others, they may seem like a ghost cop, roaming the halls and keeping students in line. Nonetheless, everyone who lives on campus has one, and many students have thought about becoming one. With the application process having come to a close, some fellow floormates are going to be the next year's generation of RAs.

Kiara Ligenfelter, a first-year English and creative writing major has been staying in Daum Residence Hall all year and recently applied to become an RA. Sarah King, a first-year majoring in sustainable sciences also applied, and

"Balancing my own academic life and mental health is **difficult** in itself, but acting as a resource for **20 or 30 other people** in addition to that would be **much harder.**"

- *Kiara Ligenfelter,*  
*Daum Resident Assistant*

both answered a variety of RA-related questions.

### How would you describe what an RA actually is?

Ligenfelter's definition is practical, realistic, and sweet: "Someone who is put in place at a university to help the other students feel more welcome and involved in dorm life. I also think that RAs help out the university a lot too, by doing things like monitoring residence halls and performing basic maintenance tasks."

King, on the other hand, offered a slightly more optimistic response: "They help keep order, but they also serve as a resource and a role model for students on the floor. RAs are super important for building community, and making sure that the living environment is positive for everyone involved."

Many RAs agree that they are meant to be the heart of the hall. Taking care of students' emotional and academic questions, hosting fun get-togethers, and dealing with many Hawkeye issues. Similarly, both students acknowledge that the job is harder than it seems.

### Do you think being an RA is easy work?

"It's a big time commitment," Ligenfelter explains, "especially if you want to do the most you can to serve the needs of the other students on your floor". Surprisingly, many RAs believe it fluctuates in difficulty. Getting to know one's floor, and keeping a positive atmosphere are the easy parts. However, RAs are required to do much more challenging tasks, such as event programming or dealing with sensitive academic and emotional support.



Pictured: Daum students studying in one of the resident hall's lounges. Provided by Sydney Disabato.



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

### **What do you think RAs struggle with the most?**

"Time management," Ligenfelter quickly responded, "Balancing my own academic life and mental health is difficult in itself, but acting as a resource for 20 or 30 other people in addition to that would be much harder."

Similarly, King was also thinking about balance. "Probably finding the perfect balance between being friends with your residents," and shortly added, "while still enforcing the rules." She elaborated by explaining, "You want the people on your floor to feel comfortable around you, but you also want to maintain a certain level of respect and discipline."

Although they answered differently, both students share a common thread: keeping the people on their floors happy. But when rolling over actual responsibilities, Ligenfelter was able to hit the nail on the head. The most natural response for many RAs concerned healthy time management. Having the

need to balance floor residents, school work, social life, and other daily RA duties can cause schedules to be jammed packed and for RAs to be spread thin.

### **What do you think the average responsibilities of an RA are?**

Ligenfelter responded by stating, "I'd say the main responsibilities include acting as a resource and mentor for students, organizing events and Hawk Talks and such, and obviously enforcing the rules of the residence hall." In spite of all of these responsibilities, Ligenfelter would be like any other RA, simply a student trying their best to provide for their floormates.

In a typical semester, being an RA consists of designing bulletin boards with topical information, monthly community events, hosting Hawk Talks with each floor resident, providing available hours for student help, attending staff meetings, and conducting daily check-up rounds throughout the residence hall.

Work aside, there is a lot to be gained from being an RA. Not only in leadership and management skills but also from the fellow students each RA cares for. "Because of the nature of the job, RAs aren't treated the same as any other resident," King elaborates. "There are definitely some people who think of RAs like police, only there to enforce rules, but there are also those who think of RAs as valuable resources and people who are always there to help."

However difficult for some to accept, ultimately this professional behavior is seen as the best course of action for an RA. There will always be a bit of a respectful and professional buffer most RAs try to maintain, to not cause any further complications. Being an RA is tough work, and it will never be a cut-and-dry responsibility. It's time-consuming, sensitive, active, and persistent work. But it's also a rewarding, kind, and emotional responsibility like no other. Despite it all, Hawkeyes find theirs irRAplaceable.

# SURVIVING STRESS

## Helping Students' Mental Health

By Nathan Bielecki

For many students, the spring semester is often a beacon of light. As the ground thaws and leaves begin to form on trees after another bone-chilling winter season, the warmer weather is often seen as a sign of optimism for an exciting summer ahead. The seasonal shift can be exactly what students need to improve their mental health. For honors students this spring, the University Counseling Services (UCS) has partnered with the Honors Program to provide even more resources for students to focus on improving their mental health amidst a year with many challenges, including the absence of spring break.

UCS is the school's primary mental health service provider, offering services for a wide range of needs. These services are not exclusive to any group, and honors students can still take advantage of them to help them when struggling. The UCS website allows for easy appointment scheduling where confidentiality is promised, allowing students to feel safe and secure.

This semester, UCS has also spearheaded a few new programs for honors students, tackling concepts that affect honors students at a greater rate such as burnout, imposter syndrome, and others. The content is tailored to students who have been labeled gifted or advanced which allows for greater relatability within the honors students that attend these events.

The first of these programs was held on March 2, when Heidi Schmitt held a presentation about burnout and time management. On March 23, a presentation about imposter syndrome was delivered by Audrey Bahrck, who is a licensed therapist with UCS. Finally, on April 16, UCS gave a presentation on



Pictured: Barry Schreier, director of University Counseling Services.  
Photo courtesy of the University of Iowa Office of Strategic Communication.

"This club has utilized social features on Instagram, such as polls and surveys, in order to **build community** in the virtual world,"

**- Heidi Schmitt,**  
*Program Coordinator*

perfectionism.

From meetings with counselors to Honors-specific programs, UCS has demonstrated its commitment to help-

ing educate honors students about the importance of mental health. However, the Honors Program did not stop there. Many students rely on engagement and social interaction as means to take care of their mental health, yet with the ability to socialize in person greatly restricted this Spring, the Honors Program had to get creative to provide the connectedness that students cherish and desire. Heidi Schmitt, Program Coordinator for the Honors Program, detailed how the program has used various programming to keep students engaged and connected during this semester.

One of the main new ways the program had done this is with the establishment of the Social Squad Club. "This club has utilized social features on Instagram, such as polls and surveys, in order to build community in the virtual world," said Schmitt. Though



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

Honors staff members can provide outside perspective, the Social Squad Club is student-led. The club has made it easier for honors students to interact with each other and the program as a whole in one virtual, connected space.

Along with the Social Squad Club, the Honors Program offered a large variety of opportunities and events to help keep students involved. Some of these events include “Lunch and Learn” presentations, workshops, bingo, trivia, and many more. These events can provide a break from the monotony of student life, giving honors students something exciting to look forward to and participate in.

Plenty of events have been held for honors students outside of the classroom, but these opportunities have also extended into the classroom this semester. Dr. Emily Hill, Assistant Director of the Honors Program, is leading a seminar course titled “High Ability College Students and Wellness” (HONR:2600) that focuses on the mental health of honors students. This course allows honors students to talk about their own personal mental health in a group of like-minded people. Hill will be offering the course again in the fall.

## BURNOUT

AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT

INFORMATION PRESENTED BY  
UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICE

### SOME BURNOUT TIPS

- **Be organized!** Make a schedule and plan out your tasks based on how much you can handle
- **Stay balanced!** Take short breaks, maintain a routine, reach out to supports

Instagram posts regarding a UCS presentation about burnout and time management.

Though the spring semester can typically be a mental struggle, the Honors Program has worked to find ways to help improve students’ mental health. With a wide variety of events, clubs, and other options, the Honors Program has helped give students an opportunity to disconnect from the stress of the spring semester and connect with the Honors community.

As Schmitt put it, “I think the pandemic has allowed our team to get creative and connect with students in ways we haven’t before.”

“I think the pandemic has allowed our team to get **creative** and **connect** with students in ways we haven’t before.”

- Heidi Schmitt,  
Program Coordinator

# ON THE “RHODES” TO SUCCESS

Marissa Mueller Awarded Rhodes Scholarship

By Olivia Tonelli

Coming from a small town in Ontario, Canada, Marissa Mueller knew very little about the Rhodes Scholarship until arriving at the University of Iowa. “I had vaguely heard of what the fellowship was, but I didn’t know too much. I just knew that it was something prestigious and way outside my pay grade,” Mueller explained. But after encouragement from several professors and the Director of Scholar Development, Kelly Thornburg, Mueller began seriously pursuing the scholarship.

As of last October, Mueller is the twenty-second UI student to have been awarded this prestigious scholarship, and she will begin her study at the University of Oxford in fall 2021. Still, it was a long road to get to this point.

Mueller is a biomedical engineering pre-medicine major with an elective focus area on cellular engineering. In her time at the UI, Mueller has been involved with accelerometer and physical therapy rehabilitation research with Dr. Frey Law—an opportunity that significantly changed her plans for the future. “I had never heard of undergrad research, but I was actually in an Honors freshman chemistry class when [Iowa Center for Research by Undergraduates] came in and gave a presentation. Some professors encouraged me to consider getting involved,” Mueller said, reflecting on how her experiences in the University of Iowa Honors Program have influenced the trajectory of her interests.

Mueller reached out to Law and began working in her lab on the spot after an interview. “Everything fell into place, and I’m just so happy that it did—it’s one of the best decisions I’ve ever made,” Mueller said. “I joke that you can catch the research bug, and that definitely happened. Now, I know I want



to do research for the rest of my life.”

Mueller’s involvements with research as well as track and field at the university were key in her journey to receiving the Rhodes Scholarship, but the time she spent working on her application for the scholarship also provided her with a lot of guidance. “I saw it as a really great opportunity to learn more



**Marissa Mueller**

“I could not have done any of this without **opportunities** at Iowa—the mentors, the people, the professors, the teammates, the coaches, the friends, the peers...it takes a **community** for something like this to happen.”

**- Marissa Mueller**

about myself in writing the personal statement and in getting advice from Kelly because she just has so much experience in this area,” Mueller explained. “I learned so much during the interview prep phase. Kelly Thornburg, again, arranged so many mock interviews and panel interviews, and a mock social event. That was invaluable.”

“[Mueller] is a very intentional person,” Thornburg explained. “And she came to me her first year here at Iowa and said, ‘I want to apply for the Rhodes Scholarship. What do I need to do to do that?’” In the three years before Mueller could begin applying for the fellowship, Thornburg provided resources and learning opportunities to allow Mueller to not only develop her application skills but also to exercise self-growth. Thornburg described Mueller’s dogged determination to improve herself in order to achieve her goal: “She didn’t just do her homework but instead saw [the assignments] as ways to really look at who she was and what she believed.”

“I could not have done any of this without opportunities at Iowa—the mentors, the people, the professors, the teammates, the coaches, the friends, the peers,” Mueller said. “It takes a community for something like this to happen.” Mueller is incredibly thankful for all the guidance she received that has allowed her to reach this achievement—even though it all still feels surreal. “It’s going to be hard to believe for a really long time, and I don’t think it will fully feel real until I get on that plane—and even then, I’m not sure if it will,” Mueller said.

Once Mueller gets to Oxford, she will study in the Masters in Neuroscience program, which she will then follow with another year-long master’s program. Mueller also has a lot of interest in studying stem cells: “When I was growing up, I had six knee surgeries, and they really enabled me to play sports. And now, I’m able to compete in NCAA athletics. Two of those surgeries involved stem cells, and so, when I was younger, I thought stem cells... were magical—they could turn into anything in the body.” She hopes to incor-

“There are just so many areas of medicine that I haven’t been **exposed** to yet. There is so much I don’t know that I’m **excited to learn.**”

**- Marissa Mueller**

porate stem cells as a tool in her future research.

Mueller also looks forward to interacting with other students at Oxford. “We already have these group chats that are going on within our new Rhodes class of 2021, and just seeing their biographies, I keep thinking, ‘There must be some mistake that mine is getting counted alongside theirs,’” Mueller exclaimed. “I’m just so looking forward to being classmates with these people and being able to learn from them. And, in doing so, think about the world in new and different ways that I never have before.”

Looking beyond the Rhodes Scholarship, Mueller has also been accepted into the Harvard/MIT MD-PhD program but will be deferring entrance until after her time at Oxford. She hopes to have another opportunity to study within the field of stem cells and regenerative medicine in her doctoral program.

As for her future beyond education, Mueller is interested in becoming a physician-scientist but is unsure of which medical field she will work in. “I want to be practicing medicine. I want to be serving patients in the hospital and in the research lab—a bench-to-bedside philosophy,” Mueller explained. For now, Mueller is simply excited for all of the learning experiences that await her: “There are just so many areas of medicine that I haven’t been exposed to yet. There is so much I don’t know that I’m excited to learn.”



# OPINION: HONORS COMMUNITY A WIN FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

By Dylan Mihalke

Dylan Mihalke is a third-year sports and recreation management major in the Honors Program. He also serves as a manager for the University of Iowa Men's Basketball team.

The term "student-athlete" is commonly used when referring to the individuals competing on teams for their respective universities. Many of these players spend more of their time dedicated to athletics than their peers due to the travel, practices, film, treatment, and other team duties. However, the Honors Program provides an opportunity for student-athletes to find both a community of driven individuals among other benefits of being in the Program.

The demands of being a collegiate athlete are more strenuous than one may think. Practices, travel, games, film, and treatment contribute to much of a student-athlete's time. In addition to this, they have their regular classes, tutoring, and community service events. This leaves little free time in comparison to non-athletes. Additionally, the University of Iowa is a Division I program, which requires more time commitment than athletes who compete in other divisions.

Due to all of these time constraints, student-athletes find it difficult to be involved in various academic programs, such as the Honors Program. Per the NCAA, all student-athletes need to maintain a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.3 or better in order to be eligible to compete in athletic contests at the Division I level. While all student-athletes reach this threshold, many of them also would qualify to be a member of

## SPORTS IN HONORS

**60** out of 806  
total student-athletes

**3.33** minimum  
GPA  
required

the Honors Program which has a GPA requirement of a 3.33 or better.

According to Liz Tovar, formerly the Associate Athletics Director for Student-Athlete Academic Services and current Executive Office for Diversity Equity and Inclusion, there are currently 50-60 student-athletes who are members of the Honors Program, about six to seven percent, a small portion of the 806 total student-athletes; however, many others would be eligible to apply. The Honors Program has many benefits that would serve student-athletes



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



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

well.

By joining the Honors Program student-athletes can interact with many exclusive Honors events, opportunities, scholarships, and resources. These include small, Honors-only classes featuring an enriched classroom environment and hands-on experiences as well as the opportunity to graduate with University Honors. All of these benefits make the Honors Program attractive to both scholarship and walk-on student-athletes.

While scholarship athletes typically commit to play at the university prior to graduation, there are some athletes who go through a try-out process to compete on the team. If they make the team, these athletes are considered to be “walk-ons.” Many of these walk-on players are the top-achieving academic students within the athletic department and may not go on to pursue a professional career within their respective sports. The connections and relationships built through the Honors Program could be a beneficial asset moving into the future post-graduation.

Student-athletes can **enhance** their college experience **socially, intellectually, and academically** through becoming a member of the Honors Program by **expanding** their network and **improving** their academic efforts through this **prestigious program.**

- *Dylan Mihalke*

The majority of student-athletes live in the west-side residence halls due to proximity to athletic facilities. This often prevents them from the community building aspect of Honors housing. Although Daum Residence Hall is the main location honors students live, a smaller Living Learning Community of honors students could open this opportunity for athletes and other honors students living on the west side of campus. The connections made will help student-athletes connect to the community more outside of their classes.

Although many of these student-athletes may not be able to take advantage of some of the Honors benefits due to athletics constraints, the Honors Program still provides them the ability to dive deep into the Honors community. Student-athletes can enhance their college experience socially, intellectually, and academically through becoming a member of the Honors Program by expanding their network and improving their academic efforts through this prestigious program.

# DIVING IN: THE LIFE OF AN HONORS STUDENT-ATHLETE

By Dimia Burrell

It's no secret that University of Iowa Honors Program students have taken the initiative to push themselves academically. It can be difficult to manage the Honors course load, which is more than the average student, but imagine this responsibility doubled. Honors student-athletes willingly take on this challenge to not only push themselves mentally but physically as well.

First-year pre-dentistry student Drew Hawthorne clearly demonstrates how different his daily routine is from his peers. He graduated from high school in Ames, Iowa, where he had a successful swimming and academic career. Hawthorne was already accustomed

"It's important to work on **time management** and keep an **organized schedule** of practices, classes, due dates, and anything else."

- **Drew Hawthorne**

to the challenge of juggling the best of both worlds but took it all to the next level when he committed to the University of Iowa for swimming. Shortly after committing, Hawthorne applied for the University's Honors Program.

Honors students often take on a heavier course load than most, and adding Hawthorne's swimming schedule on top of this just shows how little free time he actually gets. "A typical routine for me starts with a lift or swim practice before breakfast, morning classes followed by lunch, a second practice shortly after, and the rest of my day is when I do my homework, spend time with friends, and recover before I get up



Pictured: Drew Hawthorne competing in the 100-yard butterfly event. Provided by Drew Hawthorne.

## A Day In the Life of Hawthorne



Pictured: Drew Hawthorne's daily schedule. Provided by Dimia Burrell.

and do it all again tomorrow," explained Hawthorne.

While most students can sleep in before their first classes, or spend time throughout the day working on homework, athletes like Hawthorne have to manage their time wisely. They must ensure they have enough time to finish their homework along with their multiple practices and classes.

"I typically spend 3-4 hours per week-day on sports and a little more than 3 hours per weekday in classes or studying," Hawthorne said. To put this into perspective, that's 15-20 hours each week that Hawthorne and other Honors athletes don't have available for other priorities. This is approximately one-sixth of the total 120 hours available within a five-day span.

A busy schedule once in a while is something that many honors students experience. However, having a schedule similar to Hawthorne's for 16 weeks at a time is not typical. Student-athletes often have shorter breaks between semesters as well. For example, often-

times student-athletes are required to come back from winter break two to three weeks sooner than the average student.

Honors student-athletes don't strictly have to sacrifice study time on a daily basis but have to work towards prioritizing what is most important at the moment. During a heavy academic

**"I get to see the best of both worlds. I've met amazing, unique people through both [Honors Program and swimming]."**

**- Drew Hawthorne**

week, they have less time to focus on sports, and according to Hawthorne "[His teammates] can focus more on training and recovery." While during a heavy athletics week, "[His Honors peers] also have the ability to devote more time to a class or study more for an exam that athletes don't have as much time for."

However, devotion to these two responsibilities is not always a sacrifice and can be beneficial. Student-athletes maintain a lifestyle in which they have to carefully manage their time each day. "It's important to work on time management and keep an organized schedule of practices, classes, due dates, and anything else," said Hawthorne. These skills will directly translate to their careers and persist in their everyday lives.

The reward has proven to be great as many Honors student-athletes find a family within both communities. Hawthorne explains that every day, "I get to see the best of both worlds. I've met amazing, unique people through both fields." It is important that everyone has a good support group behind them, and Honors student-athletes are lucky enough to have two.

Whether this lifestyle seems overwhelming, Hawthorne and many others make it work every day. They encourage themselves to remain challenged in every aspect of their life and continuously make goals for themselves. While they all may be different from each other, they always reach high. Hawthorne, for example, has goals of "getting into dental school and earning an invite to the NCAA championship meet."

Being a student-athlete in the Honors Program is an opportunity as well as a challenge. Students like Hawthorne dive into these waters head-on, and often with no complaints. For Hawthorne, role models have been important. Knowing "[he] had examples [he] could look up to and strive to be like" was a reminder that he could do this. He and many others can be that same inspiration for future students by encouraging like-minded individuals to challenge themselves in the same way.

# PERFORMANCES OF QUALITY: HONORS IN MUSIC

By Seth Foster

**M**usic is just one of the many fields of study represented within the University of Iowa Honors Program. But for high-achieving music students, the opportunity to earn honors in music—a form of departmental honors—offers aspiring student-musicians a way to improve their career standing before it formally begins.

Those intending to take advantage of the benefits of honors in music must meet some very high standards. Students have to maintain a minimum 3.8 GPA throughout their core music courses and earn six honors-in-the-major credits in upper-level music classes. Three of those required honors credits can be earned in MUS:4995 Honors in Music, a largely independent application-of-study course. The course entails a music-related project, such as participation in an additional hour-long musical recital, composition and performance of original musical works or arrangements, and/or assisting professors or other students with their own musical efforts. As in any field of study, large-scale projects offer insight and experience.

Amy Schendel, current director of Honors in Music, has seen a number of creative projects while working with students. Schendel recalls one student who worked with her professor to conduct research in music therapy, something that aligned with the student's interest in music therapy and her specialization as a vocalist. "When I talked to her about the project, this isn't something she was planning on, ever...It was just something she wanted to explore," Schendel says. Honors in music allows majors to discover their own interests

"It's just nice to have that honor...that recognition...I think that speaks volumes about the students and their hard work."

- Amy Schendel,

*Director of Honors in Music*

on the path to future pursuits.

Those planning to meet the University Honors requirements as music majors might consider Honors contracts in upper-level music courses as a way to earn credit towards the coursework

component of University Honors. The hands-on experience offered in departmental honors in music, meanwhile, fulfills the experiential learning component of University Honors, allowing honors students to mesh their musical interests with Honors requirements.

Many students also regard the honors in music program as an opportunity to get their feet wet in the process of making music while exploring personal interests. "It's a good opportunity for high-achieving students to gain... more experience in an area they want to explore a little bit more," summarizes Schendel. "It's just nice to have that honor...that recognition...I think that speaks volumes about the students and their hard work." Indeed, the achievement that is honors in music demonstrates these students' academic excellence, responsibility, and personal growth.



Amy Schendel

Pictured: Amy Schendel, current director of Honors in Music.  
Provided by: Amy Schendel.

# SUSAN WERNER

By Josh O'Leary

Originally published in 2020 Alumni Connection

**M**usical chameleon Susan Werner (86BM) came to the UI School of Music to study vocal performance, but she also found an academic home in the University of Iowa Honors Program. "It was like a selective college within a university, and I liked that," says Werner, who has fond memories of living in the Honors house. "Some of us go to college and want to run on the treadmill at 15 miles per hour and like the challenge of that. I was like, 'How fast can I go?' The Honors Program matches that kind of ambition."

Werner says the Honors Program taught her to set and meet lofty goals—an essential tool for self-directed careers like hers. "For more and more people, you don't take a job that's pre-defined; you create the job for yourself," she says. "That self-starting mentality is welcomed and rewarded in a setting like the Honors Program."

Thirty years and a trove of albums later, the Philadelphia-based singer-songwriter has earned critical acclaim, a loyal fanbase and—through virtual concerts during the pandemic—a vibrant

social media following. She regularly returns to Iowa to perform, including in 2014, when she played at a special beam-signing during construction of the new Hancher Auditorium.



Susan Werner

Pictured: Susan Werner playing a guitar at Hancher Auditorium's "Leave Your Mark" event in 2014. Provided by: Hancher Auditorium.

# JOSH YEM

By Abi Paravasthuresh

Originally published in 2018 Alumni Connection

**J**osh Yem (20BS, 20BM), graduated with degrees in human physiology and music on the pre-medicine track and, during his time in the Honors Program, received the Rhodes Dunlap Scholarship, among others. Yem had an extremely rewarding experience in his pursuit of a double major in two drastically different areas of study.

During his time at the UI, he was involved in numerous ensembles, including the Honors Undergraduate Woodwind Quartet, part of the honors in music program. Additionally, he served as an Honors Outreach Ambassador

and volunteered at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in two positions: the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit and the Recreational Music Program, playing piano in the Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Yem's involvement with Honors and its unique opportunities did more than just improve his time at the UI. "The ability to study music on top of my pre-med classes has provided me with countless unique and enriching experiences that I believe have well prepared me for a career in medicine."



JOSH YEM

# COMPUTER TO CANVAS

## Communicating Through Art

By Sam Eliassen

Throughout the self-isolation of the pandemic, art has played an important role in anchoring students and reminding them to seek beauty in times of difficulty. As the world shut down, people hunkered in and turned eyes to televisions, social media, books, and magazines. Artists breathed life and inspiration into quarantine, providing temporary relief from never-ending anxiety and allowing people to find community. Here on campus, windows bloomed with sticky note hearts, and driveways thanked University of Iowa Health Care staff with chalk exclamation points. In the midst of a public health crisis, one thing has become clear: art is imperative.

Even as the pandemic passes, artists continue to respond to crises through their works. Here at the University of Iowa, Black Lives Matter and the ubiquitous clenched fist have become symbols of protest and solidarity, marking posters and building sides, front lawns and student dorm walls.

One faculty member has taken note

"The great thing about Honors is the students.

In class, you're getting exposed to some of the most driven and inspired people, who are ready to respond to current events."

- Anita Jung,  
Honors in Studio Art Advisor

of art's historic use as a tool of protest and politics. Anita Jung, a professor of art here at the UI, leads the class ART: 2100 Printmaking and the Politics of Protest, which specifically highlights the importance of art to political movements and cultural change. Additionally, Jung is the advisor for the Honors in Studio Arts.

She notes how her teaching approach has had to adapt to relevant issues throughout these last three semesters: "Over the past year, I've had to change the structure of [ART: 2100] to keep up with the times. First, we had COVID, then summer protests. Just recently, we've dealt with The Capital riots." Jung believes that art is not confined by its final product. In some of its most effective forms, she thinks, it is protest and criticism. The entire artistic process, from initial brainstorming to final execution, exhibition, and discussion, should involve active engagement and critical thinking. This approach translates directly to her teaching, especially in difficult times.

"Sometimes, it's important to process events as you're going through them," says Jung. "This can be done most effectively through art."

When cultivating rich artistic communities that discuss and address these events in their art, Jung points to honors students as a prime example. "The great thing about Honors is the students. In class, you're getting exposed to some of the most driven and inspired people, who are ready to respond to current events," Jung explains.

She also points to opportunities for students to connect with honors within art majors. "Art students thinking of honors should consider the classroom environment," she says, emphasizing

"Each day, I try to challenge myself to see beauty in different places and in different ways. Living in Iowa City and being able to connect with the university and its surroundings are inspirational to me."

- Rabiah Na'Allah

the benefit of forming an artistic community that is held to a higher standard of technical performance and thematic action within the Honors Art Studio.

Rabiah Na'Allah is one such honors student whose dedication has allowed her to apply her art to everyday life. A first-year studying art with a concentration in graphic design, Na'Allah also works as an Honors Outreach Ambassador, where she talks to prospective students about her experiences on campus and in Honors. Na'Allah's work draws on current events and surroundings, from the Iowa City community to national movements.

"Each day, I try to challenge myself to see beauty in different places and in different ways," says Na'Allah on her sources of inspiration. "Living in Iowa City and being able to connect with the university and its surroundings are inspirational to me." Indeed, a visit to Na'Allah's photography Instagram page

reveals a series of stunning shots of local surroundings and inventive takes on the natural world. However, her work does not stop there.

“When it comes to some of the racial issues that we’ve dealt with over these past years, it has really encouraged me to gear my art toward marginalized communities.” Na’Allah notes, “I’m trying to focus my art on Black women and Black art.”

Na’Allah also draws on the UI’s artistic community to workshop ideas, relate experiences, and give constructive critiques of work. She notes how these connections would not be possible without help from the advising center. “Staying in touch with my advisor has given me some opportunities to explore and to meet other people,” she says. “They actually helped me make my first out-of-class contact with other artists through a departmental museum trip.” While Na’Allah is just getting started on her collegiate artistic journey, there are

abounding opportunities for students to showcase their work and receive constructive feedback from a diverse artistic community.

“One of the best ways for students in art to get involved and find engagement is to start exhibitions,” says Jung. “These train students in pitching and executing their ideas and [allow] students to really get to know their work through presentation. It’s also a great opportunity to gain technical skills, like lighting arrangement and art photography.”

These exhibitions are continually cycling, with student-generated art presentations on display at the Art Building West. Though these exhibitions are typically geared for students at the graduate level, they are welcome to students seeking to complete their cumulative BFA show. Students in Honors who are looking for other ways to exhibit their art should consider showing off at the Honors Student Gallery, a

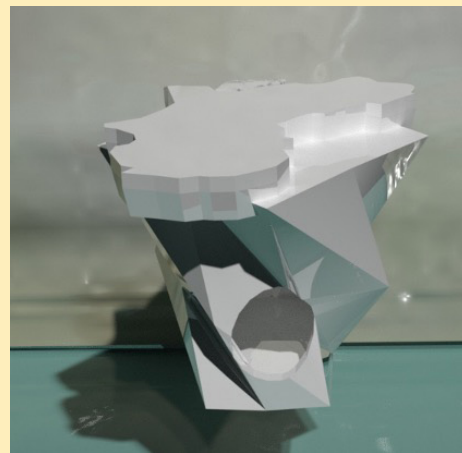
showcase on the fourth floor of Blank Honors Center that exhibits art from all levels of honors students.

The development of artistic networks and professional skills is integral to creative education, and the dedicated honors community can help get the ball rolling in both of these regards. Smaller classes, more direct communication with faculty, and exposure to a dedicated student body spur UI art students to new heights, especially when coupled with presentation opportunities available to honors and non-honors students alike.

Even honors students who are unskilled with paintbrushes or digital cameras can join this community effort by supporting art and artists. Those who cannot attend exhibitions are encouraged to support artists over social media. After all, it just may empower a community, start a political movement, or simply create beauty in a world that sometimes looks bleak.



**Rabiah Na’Allah**



Pictured: Rabiah Na’Allah’s digital graphic art. Provided by: Rabiah Na’Allah.

In some of her pieces, Na’Allah uses straight camera shots, simple background editing, and light modification to place a subject up-front and center. These shots, like her portrait example (right), allow a level of intimacy and connection between the viewer and subject, creating a quiet understanding between two people who may never have met in real life. In other shots, Na’Allah challenges herself in the abstract, rendering photos with other-worldly geometric formations that challenge the viewer and invoke a strange sense of familiarity. While each of her pieces is visually stunning, their underpinning inspiration creates a narrative with resounding meaning and significance. See more on Na’Allah’s Instagram: @rabnaalphotos



Pictured: A portrait of Rimike Oluwa, taken by Rabiah Na’Allah. Provided by: Rabiah Na’Allah.

**READ MORE ABOUT THE HONORS  
STUDENT GALLERY ON PAGE 25!**



# CAPTURING (AND PAINTING) ATTENTION

## The Honors Student Gallery

By Axel Ohrvall

The Honors Program has many students with artistic talents, but where can they show them off? The Honors Student Gallery displays artwork on the 4th floor of Blank Honors Center. The Gallery is currently closed due to the pandemic, but once it subsides, the art displays will return and reopen to the public once again.

The Gallery takes up one of the floor's longer hallways for maximum space. The Gallery accepts photos, canvases, and paintings. Although the hall doesn't allow for sculptures because the artwork cannot interfere with the normal

flow of traffic, there's plenty of room on the walls for all manner of flat pieces.

Olivia Peters is a third-year human psychology major and a contributor to the Gallery last year. She said, "I'm not an art major, but I'm an art minor. I do have a lot of artwork and was excited by the opportunity to present it on campus." Her piece is titled "Woman" and is meant to represent the "unique but united experience" of womanhood. It's composed of many figures flowing into each other, sparsely colored but brimming with unique facial expressions and postures.



Olivia Peters



Pictured: "Woman" by Olivia Peters, a piece signifying the power of womanhood. Provided by: Olivia Peters.

As Peters demonstrated, you don't have to be an art major to make a submission. Art is accepted from across the whole honors student body. Michelle Waller is a second-year English major who submitted "Desire Lines," a piece composed of multi-colored lines zigzagging across a black background. Waller said, "This piece was all about experimentation. Everything I tried was new and enjoyable to me as a beginner. I love color and abstract work."

The Gallery submission process is promoted on the Honors Program's social media. Olivia Peters found out about the program on the Honors Facebook page. She also received an email about the opportunity to exhibit student artwork. "I sent them an email asking about it, and they provided more information," she said.

Graduate student Genevieve Cleverley brought back the Gallery from inactivity last year. She said, "Starting up this program again seemed like a great opportunity to give honors artists a way to share their art." Cleverley served the role of Honors Student Gallery coordinator. She started working at the Honors Program in 2018 as an Honors Admin and graphic designer and found value in the inactive Gallery. Her efforts allowed artistic students to show what they could do with a good outlet.

Cleverley outlined the structure of the Gallery as it existed in fall 2020. She said, "We started out by hanging everything on the third floor, but ended up moving to the fourth floor when the College of Education took over some of that space."

The staff maintaining the Gallery proved nothing but helpful in getting student's artwork safely into and out of the building during the process. Peters said, "I talked to [Cleverley], who had been coordinating it when I was involved, and she helped me to put it up and was very conscientious about if I



## Genevieve Cleverley

thought it looked nice and had a good spot in the building. She was super involved."

Waller also gave a glowing review. "I didn't have the hooks I needed, and they gladly helped me out. All I had to do was bring my art in once it was accepted," she said.

"Starting up this program again seemed like a great opportunity to give honors artists a way to share their art."

- Genevieve Cleverley

Submissions to the Honors Student Gallery can be sent through their webpage on the Honors Program site, which is slated to re-open in time for fall semester. A great deal of helpful information about the Gallery can be found there, too. Until then, keep on being creative!



Pictured: "Desire Lines" by Michelle Waller, a digital photograph in which the human makes shortcuts using lights. Provided by: Michelle Waller.

TO LEARN MORE: <https://honors.uiowa.edu/studentgallery>

# COMING HOME: BHC IS BACK!

By Isabella Holaday

**D**rum roll, please! Our beloved Blank Honors Center (BHC) is scheduled to return for the fall 2021 semester! It is not official, but after a long year, the BHC Honors Student Center will most likely be reopening to student traffic next semester. Located 221 N. Clinton Street, BHC is home to state-of-the-art classrooms (first and second floors), the Honors Student Center (third floor), Honors Program offices (fourth floor), as well as the Belin-Blank Center (fifth and sixth floors) which serves the international gifted community.

Due to renovations and the pandemic, students have not had access to the BHC Honors Student Center since last March. Thus, all current and incoming students will meet a newly renovated space in the fall. These fresh renova-

"We are anxious to get it **open again** for our students...Right now, we are hopeful that things will open up, that there will be enough people **vaccinated** so that things can open back **up in the fall.**"

- **Art Spisak**,  
Honors Program Director

tions mainly focused on the third floor and the lobby area lounge of BHC.

So, what's new? About half of the third floor of Blank, the north end, is the Honors Student Center, a 5,000 square foot space dedicated to studying and student life. To provide a versatile study environment, the north end of the third floor will have four small group study rooms, all of which can seat up to six people. In addition, there will be six personal computer stations, a printing station, two larger general study areas, and a balcony area on the south end of the floor. The Honors Student Center will provide many amenities for students, including large tables, multiple whiteboards, ample seating space, and a computer with a wall display.

The other half of the floor (the south end) is a large shared space with the Iowa Reading Research Center. This center focuses on improving literacy skills through research, instructional strategies, and collaboration with education agencies to provide technical assistance.

The ground floor lobby area will also look different to those already familiar with BHC. Instead of the few couches and wooden benches, modern furniture pieces will be added to accommodate more seating space for socializing and comfort. Almost as if they were straight out of a sci-fi novel, these modern furniture designs will match the modern exterior architecture of BHC, giving the atmosphere an advanced technological and contemporary feel.

What makes Blank Honors Center such a convenient building is its easy-access skywalk from Daum Res-



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

idence Hall to the third floor of BHC. Students only have to travel a short distance to a private study room or any of the other amenities BHC has to offer. The outdoor balcony area is perfect for socializing and soaking up some good Vitamin D, not to mention the building's state-of-the-art classrooms, academic resources, and so much more.

Pre-pandemic, one student expresses her personal love for the Honors Student Center. Third-year honors student Tyler Voas says, "Blank was definitely my go-to study space...if I wasn't in class, I was in Blank." Even though Voas lived in Catlett at the time, she remembers how she and her friends who lived in Daum and Burge would get

together and meet up at BHC for study sessions. Sitting right next to Daum and a building away from Catlett and Burge, BHC's location serves as a hub for all students living on the east side.

Director of the University Honors Program Dr. Art Spisak feels optimistic for the future. "We are anxious to get it open again for our students...Right now, we are hopeful that things will open up, that there will be enough people vaccinated so that things can open back up in the fall," says Spisak. Even if life doesn't go back to normal in the fall semester, it is likely that Blank Honors Center will remain open; however, there is no guarantee. If it were to remain open while still in the midst of the

pandemic, Blank would adhere to all CDC guidelines. As expected, students would be required to wear face masks and observe social distancing. Some seats would most likely be blocked off to prevent close proximities to maintain the six-foot distance expectation.

In a nutshell, we expect the renovated study space to be open for the fall semester. Instead of walking distances to find a quiet place to study, BHC is a perfect building for working, collaborating, and brainstorming. After a year of longing for it, students who have yet to encounter BHC will finally be able to experience the invigorating atmosphere that is felt the second someone steps foot inside.

## RENOVATED STUDY SPACE



Pictured: South end of the third floor, shared library and study area.



Pictured: Mock-up of the general study area of the Honors Student Center on the north end of the third floor.



Pictured: Mock-up of a private study room on the north end of the third floor.



Pictured: Mock-up of the modern furniture for the first-floor lounge.

# BREAKING DOWN BUCKSBAUM

## The University of Iowa's Early Entrance Academy

By Morgan Corbett

The average high school experience consists of four years of building one's knowledge and comprehension while finding a passion in one or more possible career paths, tasks that seem daunting as a teenager. It's hard to imagine being 16 years old and already having begun a college education, but that's exactly what one will find on the top floor of Daum Residence Hall in the Belin-Blank Center's Bucksbaum Early Entrance Academy.

The Bucksbaum Early Entrance Academy is a program offered by the Belin-Blank Center that allows high-achieving high school students to enter as full-time college students before graduating high school. Students ranging from ages 15–17 move into the eighth floor of Daum Residence Hall to begin taking college-level courses with the help of multiple dedicated staff members who keep their health, success, and wellbeing in mind at all times.

Cole Denisen, Graduate Assistant for the Bucksbaum Early Entrance Academy, regularly conducts personal meetings with first- and second-year students in the program, and assists with hour-long seminars for both cohorts.

While the content of the meetings is up to the student, Denisen designs activities that actively engage students in class, and occasionally takes over the class himself. "They involve everything from how to acclimate to the university experience to how to navigate social relationships to things like mindfulness, study habits, job searching, and even graduate school tips."

This program works by using a cohort-based model, meaning that all students learn with their group of approximately ten students by taking courses

"That makes a world of difference just having someone there to talk them through whatever they're going through. I just want to be that connection point...I like to tell the students that I don't have all the resources, but 99% of the time, I can refer them to someone who does."

- Cole Denisen,  
Graduate Assistant

and completing the program together. Keishanique Moton-Tyler, a fourth-year student from the Bucksbaum Early Entrance Academy who now works as an ambassador for the program, remembered how she got to know her cohort. "We became this community. We would go on trips together on weekends and spend hours on the bus together."

Moton-Tyler went on to explain that she is still good friends with many of them, and found her best friend in her cohort as well. "We just found things in common, and then we'd have meals together. It was just a lot of time we spent with each other so we just naturally became close." Because of this, it also became clear that their circumstances lead to unique challenges.

Entering college years in advance can be difficult. It is rare to find someone who has the mental capacity to become a full-time undergraduate student be-



Pictured: Keishanique, second from left, with friends in her cohort. Provided by: Jan Warren.



Pictured: Bucksbaum First Year Seminar, 2019. Provided by: Jan Warren.

fore their third year of high school without feeling displaced or overwhelmed.

Denisen has no doubt that all of the students will succeed academically. "What we're worried about is the anxiety, the stress that comes with engaging in college work and just being a 15-year-old in college." What he sees the most is that the students are very self-critical and strive for perfection, something that can turn into a bad habit without the proper support.

Moton-Tyler talked about how she tries to be as honest as possible when she works as an ambassador. She talks frequently with early high school students who are thinking of joining the program, but that doesn't mean she will be glorifying the experience. "I feel like if you're gifted enough to make it in the program, that's fine. But you also have to be prepared for other aspects," she explains. "It takes a lot of maturity because you are sixteen and you can do whatever you want."

Jan Warren, the Assistant Director for Student Services in the Belin-Blank Center and Coordinator of the Bucksbaum Academy, gave an overview of how they carefully select students that they know can handle the transition

into the program and its mission. "Part of what we are looking for is students who are academically well-rounded." Not only do applicants need to convey this in their application, but their parents must be interviewed and submit essays as well. These questions try to

"As a student, I knew that they really care, but they really want to craft every aspect of our time together to be like a **useful balance**, and I see that now ... I love watching the **students grow**. I see them when they're really young, and they grow into themselves. **It's amazing.**"

- **Keishanique Moton-Tyler**

find the personal wants and goals of these students. If a student is only focused on one area of study and is not willing to branch out and explore more, then they might not be a good fit.

"The other thing that we're looking for is students who aren't necessarily just looking to get something from the Academy, but to give something to the Academy." Bucksbaum uses this step to make sure each cohort is built as a team of students that can rely on each other, and already know how to work together to better one another. "You don't want all quarterbacks," Warren explains.

The biggest role Denisen plays in the Bucksbaum Early Entrance Academy is being an active listener. "That makes a world of difference just having someone there to talk them through whatever they're going through," he says. "I just want to be that connection point...I like to tell the students that I don't have all the resources, but 99% of the time, I can refer them to someone who does."

Reflecting back on her earlier comment, Moton-Tyler realized that her position has also given her an inside view of how much the staff behind the program work to make every student's experience as beneficial as possible. "I just see how much work goes into everything," she said. "As a student, I knew that they really care, but they really want to craft every aspect of our time together to be like a useful balance, and I see that now."

Moton-Tyler can honestly tell the prospective students that she has benefited from the program immensely, and she's seen others do the same. "I love watching the students grow." She explains that her position means she can see new Bucksbaum students before they even apply. "I see them when they're really young, and they grow into themselves. It's amazing."

Denisen had something similar to note. "I have seen students come into the program and I've seen students graduate from the program," Denisen adds. "I am super excited to see where they go and to see the impact that they make on the world."

# SCHOLARSHIP AND SERVICE: PHI ETA SIGMA

By Reese Bobitt

For college students everywhere, finding a community on campus aids their self-discovery by helping them to explore their passions and interests as well as work towards the future they envision for themselves. In the Honors Program, students have the chance to find communities and organizations that best fit their interests and goals.

One of these programs, Phi Eta Sigma, is geared toward encouraging academic achievement among first-year college students. Phi Eta Sigma is the only honors society associated with the Honors Program. Invitations to join are extended to the top first-year students after their first semester at the university.

Phi Eta Sigma focuses on developing academically, professionally, and personally successful members. "The biggest mission of our organization is to build community within the Honors Program," said Amanda Barrett, the current Vice President of Phi Eta Sigma's University of Iowa chapter. "Our events are not only social events but also service events, professional development, [and] guest speakers."

Members of the honors society participate in a wide array of events in order to give them a well-rounded experience that will ultimately help them grow towards their goals. Phi Eta Sigma members have the chance to participate in service projects that benefit the community, such as blanket making for the Ronald McDonald house, creating literacy kits for Student United Way, and hosting blood drives. From these opportunities, members of Phi Eta Sigma gain an enhanced sense of community and develop a passion for community

"The biggest mission of our organization is to build community within the Honors Program. Our events are not only social events but also service events, professional development, [and] guest speakers."

- Amanda Barrett

service and outreach.

Barrett, who joined the honors society in the spring of 2019, has found in Phi Eta Sigma a community of like-minded and academically driven students. As the Vice President, Barrett's responsibilities include member interaction, supporting the executive team, and miscellaneous tasks that help the organization run smoothly.

In addition to developing the abilities of their members, Phi Eta Sigma also does community outreach and works to keep a strong connection with communities in the greater Iowa City area. Barrett's favorite event during her time in Phi Eta Sigma has been working on literacy kits for United Way. These kits are typically made up of different books



Pictured: Phi Eta Sigma members participated in a trash pick up day, November 10, 2020. Provided by: Reese Bobitt.

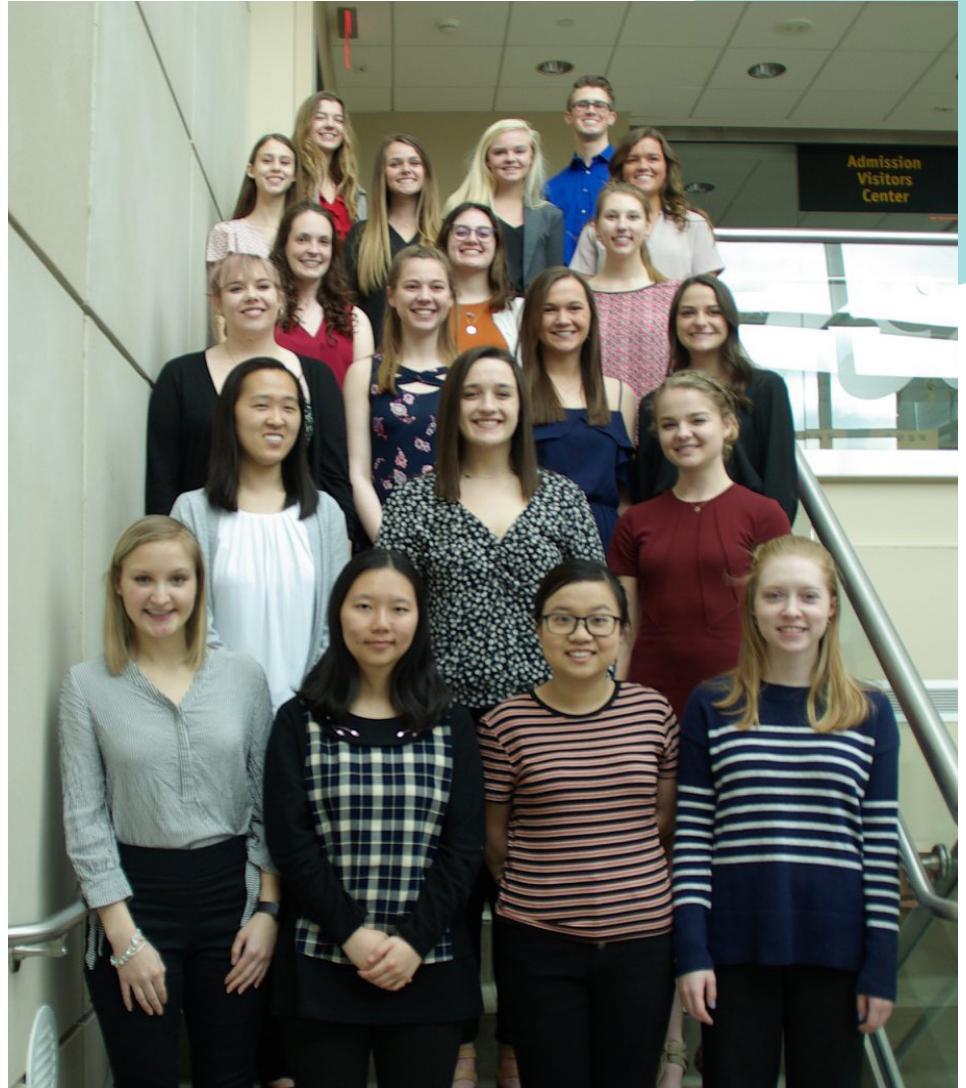
## JOHN BRIGGS AWARD

Goes to the active member with the highest GPA

and activities and are designed to help encourage young students to embrace reading. By participating in this event, Phi Eta Sigma helped provide young students in the Iowa City area with the resources they need to be successful in the classroom.

Phi Eta Sigma members also have a unique opportunity to apply for competitive scholarships and awards that are offered. "We offer scholarships at the national level as well. There are a lot of opportunities for members there," states Barrett. In addition to national scholarship opportunities, the John Briggs award is only available to members of the University of Iowa Phi Eta Sigma chapter. The John Briggs award "goes to the active member with the highest GPA," Barrett explained. The student who is granted the award receives it towards the end of their studies to put toward starting a career or supporting the cost of a graduate program.

As most aspects of the student experience at the University of Iowa have changed this year, so have those of the Phi Eta Sigma members. While Barrett acknowledges that the move to online meetings and social distancing has been a challenging adjustment, the members of the honors society are keeping a positive attitude about the situation. "We've still managed to do fun social events and even some member meetups," says Barrett. In addition to member meetings and gatherings held over Zoom, Phi Eta Sigma has found ways to continue community engagement through socially distanced



Pictured: Phi Eta Sigma composite photo. Provided by: Phi Eta Sigma Facebook page.

"We offer **scholarships** at the national level as well... There are a lot of **opportunities** for members there."

- **Amanda Barrett**

events such as a trash pick-up day.

As many communities in the Honors Program have discovered, there are ways that students can continue to make connections and support one another. As Phi Eta Sigma has shown, honors students can continue to support other students as well as the Iowa City community by lifting one another up and working towards a common good.

TO LEARN MORE: <https://honors.uiowa.edu/phetasigma>



# SUPPORTING SELF-DISCOVERY

## Richard Tyner Inspires Honors Students

By Tyler Strand

Tyler Strand is a writer/editor for the University of Iowa Center for Advancement

**R**unning on four hours of sleep a night, Joseph McDonell (20BS) questioned how he'd continue pursuing a human physiology degree at the University of Iowa. In his first semester in Iowa City, the single father commuted daily from Cedar Rapids where he was completing two other degrees and working as a teaching assistant at Kirkwood Community College. Balancing his rigorous academic schedule with work, caring for his two sons, and fixing up his parents' house, McDonell struggled to find adequate time to study and sleep.

The Coggon, Iowa, native persisted, eventually earning the Richard Tyner Scholarship from the University of Iowa Honors Program. McDonell moved his family to Iowa City, improved his grades, pursued research opportunities, and coordinated free medical care for underserved populations at the UI's Mobile Clinic. In June, he will attain a master's degree in health and human physiology before starting medical school at the UI Roy J. and Lucille A.



**JOSEPH MCDONELL**

Carver College of Medicine this fall.

"The Tyner Scholarship has played such an enormous role in my life because it created the time I needed to study to be successful," says McDonell. "I went from barely scraping by to having everything I need."

McDonell exemplifies the type of student the Tyner Scholarship aims to help: talented scholars who haven't received a major scholarship or award and need additional support to reach their potential. Tyner (70BA), who earned entry into the Honors Program as a freshman and became a Marshall Scholar, established his scholarship in 2015 to create opportunities for high-achieving honors students. He recently increased the scholarship endowment to support four students annually and provided additional support to the Honors Program's student enrichment fund and excellence fund, allowing more students to participate in experiential learning.

Beyond his financial support, Tyner is an active member of the Honors Pro-

"The Tyner Scholarship has played such an enormous role in my life because it created the time I needed to study to be successful. I went from barely scraping by to having everything I need."

- **Joseph McDonell**



**RICHARD TYNER**

gram Advisory Board and mentors students who are applying for major scholarships. The Shenandoah, Iowa, native annually shares his story of self-discovery with students at an Honors seminar. Demonstrating the importance of an education in opening many career paths, Tyner details his journey from a farm boy who became a top Honors Program scholar at Iowa to attaining degrees at the University of Manchester, the London School of Economics, and Yale Law School. Along the way, his career trajectory evolved from wanting to teach in higher education to becoming a successful international lawyer in Saudi Arabia.

"You can't plan your whole life at 18 or even 22, but the education you get is a solid base for whatever you're going to do in the future," says Tyner, who majored in political science and French at Iowa. "You can lose a job or change a career, but you can't lose your education."

Tyner also connects with each of his scholarship recipients—offering advice

"You can't plan your whole life at 18 or even 22, but the education you get is a **solid base** for whatever you're going to do in the future. You can lose a job or change a career, but you can't lose your **education.**"

**- Richard Tyner,**  
Honors Program Advisory  
Board Member

and encouragement—whether it's at a yearly scholarship recognition ceremony or through email. Grateful for the opportunities he was provided at Iowa, Tyner aims to open similar doors for more honors students.

"The Honors Program was very important to me as a student," says Tyner. "The teaching was excellent—and when you're around the best students, you push each other."

McDonell learned that firsthand, seeing his grades rise as he modeled his study habits after those of his peers. Starting his academic journey at age 29, after more than a decade working in heavy construction, he felt a calling to pursue a healthcare career. His interest in nursing evolved to medicine as he researched gas-exchange abnormalities in premature infants in the neonatal intensive care unit. McDonell's research will provide another data point for clinicians to determine whether an infant's

lungs are exchanging gas efficiently to guide more targeted treatment. He will continue his neonatal research at the Carver College of Medicine and hopes to do a residency at UI Stead Family Children's Hospital. Passionate about his small-town roots, McDonell also hopes to expand telehealth networks to rural communities.

Getting a chance to meet Tyner left an indelible impression on McDonell. "It really stuck with me that he knows who I am, my story, and where I came from," says McDonell. "I hope to one day be as generous as he is."

Eli Bratsch-Prince (20BA) developed into a top Honors Program scholar in his first year at Iowa. Immediately applying himself, he earned entry into the program in his second semester and received the inaugural Tyner Scholarship, which grew his confidence and opened new doors. "I credit [Tyner] with giving me the confidence to put myself out there and take every opportunity," says Bratsch-Prince. "That kickstarted my will to apply for competitive national scholarships and have confidence in myself and my studies, which I didn't in high school."

The Ames, Iowa, native earned the



**SIERRA WICKS**

"[Tyner] is helping students with their own **self-discovery** ... The impact he's had in his many roles is **incalculable.**"

**- Art Spisak,**  
Honors Program Director

U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship and the David L. Boren Scholarship and studied in Morocco, Jordan, and Oman. Bratsch-Prince, who majored in political science with an Arabic minor, is pursuing international relations work for the U.S. government and is a Semi-Finalist for a 2021 Fulbright Award.

Thanks to the Tyner Scholarship, Sierra Wicks has more time to get involved and pursue her career interests as the governmental relations committee chair for Undergraduate Student Government and the events coordinator for Ignite UI, a student organization that empowers women to be involved in politics. A second-year majoring in politics and ethics and public policy, the Johnston, Iowa, native appreciates the financial support amid a challenging school year. "It has eased my college stress, which has been really helpful this year with the pandemic," says Wicks.

From financial support and mentorship to working on the Honors Program Advisory Board and sharing his story with students, Tyner is inspiring countless students at Iowa.

"[Tyner] is helping students with their own self-discovery and making the most of their time at the university," says Art Spisak, director of the Honors Program. "The impact he's had in his many roles is incalculable."

**TO LEARN MORE:** <https://honors.uiowa.edu/richard-tyner-scholarship>

# MEET THE WRITERS



**Nathan Bielecki**

Nathan is a first-year student from Ankeny, Iowa, majoring in management. While attending the University of Iowa, he participates in various clubs and activities, including the school's Ultimate Frisbee team.



**Sonia Beltz**

Sonia is a second-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.



**Reese Bobitt**

Reese is a second-year student from Forsyth, Illinois, majoring in political science with a minor in environmental policy and planning on the pre-law track. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to develop her writing and speaking skills in preparation for law school.



**Erin Bughman**

Erin is a first-year student from Dubuque, Iowa. She is an open major interested in psychology and journalism. She is excited to pursue her interest in writing through Honors Publications and build her leadership skills by being an Honors Outreach Ambassador. Outside of class, she enjoys embroidering, scrolling through Pinterest, and making oddly specific Spotify playlists.



**Dimia Burrell**

Dimia is a first-year student from Marion, Iowa, majoring in journalism and mass communications. She runs track and field for the University of Iowa and loves to stay active in addition to writing and reading. During her time at Iowa, she hopes to develop relationships with others and focus on her writing and interviewing skills.



**Morgan Corbett**

Morgan is a third-year student from Flemington, New Jersey, majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track. Her writing crosses a variety of mediums including short films, plays, poetry, and prose. At Iowa, she hopes to continue following new writing opportunities while preparing to become an editor and published author.



### Finch Davis

Finch is a first-year student from Delray Beach, Florida, majoring in English and creative writing. He hopes to qualify for Navy officer training after college and finally finish his first novel.



### Sydney Disabato

Sydney is a first-year student from Chicago, Illinois, and Dallas, Texas, majoring in journalism and Spanish. She loves photography, art, and video games. Her dream is to create bilingual articles and documentaries here in the U.S.



### Thomas Duong

Thomas is a second-year student from Iowa City, Iowa, on the pre-medicine track. He is a design editor for Honors Newsletter, president of UNICEF Iowa, and an undergraduate researcher. He enjoys sports, playing drums, and traveling.



### Sam Eliassen

Sam is a first-year student from LeClaire, Iowa, majoring in neuroscience on the pre-medicine track. At Iowa, he hopes to build experience in scientific research and in creative publishing. In his free time, he enjoys reading books, listening to folk music, and spending days outside at the local park.



### Seth Foster

Seth is a second-year student from Mason City, Iowa, majoring in computer science. He is earning his computer science degree to gear himself up for a career in video game design, which is his lifelong passion.



### Lydia Guo

Lydia is a second-year student from Iowa City, Iowa, majoring in biomedical sciences. She is a design editor for the Honors Newsletter and an administrative assistant for the Honors Program. She works as an undergraduate research assistant in her free time. Lydia enjoys oil painting at her local art studio.



### Isabella Holaday

Isabella is a first-year student from Lake Zurich, Illinois, majoring in neuroscience on the pre-medicine track. While at the University of Iowa, she hopes to work as an undergraduate research assistant and volunteer at the UIHC when it opens back up. Outside of school, she enjoys spending time with friends and finding cool study spots on campus.



### Dylan Mihalke

Dylan is a third-year student from Los Angeles, California, majoring in sport and recreation management with a minor in religious studies. Dylan is a student manager for the men's basketball team. Upon graduation in the spring, he hopes to continue working in college basketball as a coach.



### Airiana Mohr

Airiana is a second-year student from Machesney Park, Illinois, majoring in 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.



### Axel Ohrvall

Axel is a second-year student from Bolingbrook, Illinois, majoring in English and creative writing and journalism. An avid writer of stories, poetry, and fanfiction, he is currently working on the third draft of a novel he wishes to publish this year. He reads sci-fi novels and practices fencing in his free time.



### Jacob Sammon

Jacob is a second-year student from Urbandale, Iowa, majoring in 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.



### Olivia Tonelli

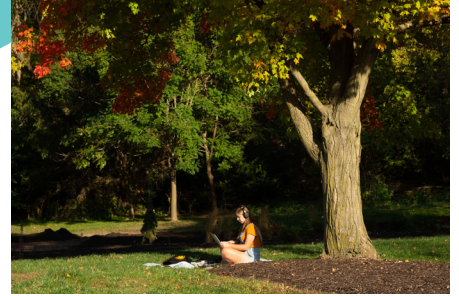
Olivia is a second-year student from Joliet, Illinois, majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track with a minor in Spanish. Through her academic pursuits and collaboration among her peers, she hopes to refine her artistic voice as a writer and elevate her skill set as an editor.



### Izzie Wilcox

Izzie is a second-year student from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, majoring in economics on the pre-law track with a minor in art history. In her free time, she performs in an Iowa City improv team and is a tour guide for the university.

# GIVING TO HONORS



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

The financial support we receive from our alumni and friends is given back directly to our students in the form of scholarships, professional development opportunities, and stipends for students to study abroad when not in a pandemic. Your gift directly affects the lives and careers of honors students.

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