

ALUMNI CONNECTION

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA HONORS PROGRAM | FALL 2023



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Cover Photo: The infamous Black Angel at Oakland Cemetery. Photo Provided by Beth Hendricks.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Shaun Vecera

Although the Fall semester is winding down, it's still one of the busiest times on campus and in the Honors Program. We're all looking forward to Winter Break, but the last days of the semester, and finals, are more immediate.

Since our last Alumni Connection newsletter, we've added two new professional staff to the program. The first is Madison (Maddie) Schulte, who started as our Student Engagement Coordinator after the Spring 2023 semester wrapped up. It feels strange to me to describe Maddie as a new addition to the Honors Program staff because she has become such an integral part of our group and has created many events and opportunities for our students.

Maddie has multiple degrees from Iowa. Her master's degree is from the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program in the College of Education, and her bachelor's degree is in psychology. Maddie came to Honors with experience as a Living Learning Community coordinator with University Housing and Dining and with experience in student academic success with Academic Support and Retention. In addition to her most recent professional experiences, and maybe most exciting for those of you who are already closely following the Iowa Women's Basketball season,

Maddie was also a student manager for Iowa Women's Basketball when she was an undergraduate.

In addition to introducing Maddie, I should also introduce the Student Engagement Coordinator position, which is also new to the program. When our previous Experiential Learning Coordinator left the university for a position at Purdue, we took the opportunity to ask what the program was needed to support and engage honors students as much as possible. Unlike many peer programs, we lacked a staff position to provide students with educational and social experiences that are critical to student success and to retaining students in the program. This position also contributes to the honors community through training and supervising the Honors Outreach Ambassadors, who help recruit students into the program, and by advising honors student organizations. The program is already benefitting from Maddie's time in this new role: This Fall semester, Maddie and our graduate intern Iris Peimann organized and hosted many different events, ranging from a visit to the Iowa City Farmers Market to study abroad information sessions. These events have attracted hundreds of students throughout the Fall semester.

Our second new addition to our

professional staff is Mark Archibald, who is our new Records, Enrollment & Analytics Specialist starting in August. Mark brings to honors a deep knowledge of Iowa's campus and of student affairs work. Mark is enrolled in Iowa's HESA Ph.D. program and has a master's degree from the HESA program at Loyola University and bachelor's degrees in philosophy and English from Iowa. Mark's work in higher education has included positions in housing and residence life and advising. His previous work in student support at Iowa has been in the Tippie College of Business, where he spent over a decade developing and managing the First Year Experience program at Tippie. This program involved student advising and coordinating scholarship support for experiential learning opportunities, as well as teaching multiple sections of Tippie's first-year seminar. Since his arrival in the Honors Program, Mark has been developing a range of assessment tools to help us support students more proactively and effectively. You can learn more about our newest staff members in the Orientation Guide for new students at [this link](#).

The Honors Program staff had the opportunity to attend the National Collegiate Honors Council conference early in November. The conference was a great way



Shaun Vecera. Photo by Gabriella Estlund.

to hear about honors practices on other campuses, and we gave several presentations that showcased the work that we're doing. Congrats and thanks to Dr. Emily Hill, Holly Blosser Yoder, Dave Gould, and to graduate students Iris Peimann, Luz Alcalá, and Claire Peters, for sharing their work at the conference!

Turning to the most important part of our program, the students, the current Alumni Connection newsletter shares many student-written pieces that highlight the student experience. There is a set of articles that cover the connection between the Honors Program and Iowa as The Writing University. These articles highlight writing opportunities for honors students, the writing career of one of our alumni and advisory board members, and the recent writer's strike. Another pair of articles shares the first-year student experience in Honors Primetime. One

of the Primetime classes that is featured is at the intersection of writing in honors and the first-year experience: Dr. Candice Wuehle offered a Primetime course that focused on the places in Iowa City and on campus that connect to writing and the Iowa Writer's Workshop. A high point in Candice's class was a haunted tour of Iowa City, including a visit to the Black Angel in Oakland Cemetery. The tour, which Candice gave again for honors students around Halloween,

has received rave reviews and has given students a unique perspective on Iowa City and campus.

A pair of articles about The James Gang closes out this issue. Founded by honors students more than 20 years ago, this nonprofit and the vision of its young founders left a legacy of service in both Iowa City and the university.

I want to close by sharing two additional pieces of news from the program. The first piece of news is the publication of the second issue of the Honorable Works, the publication that debuted last fall as outlet where Honors Program students can share their creative works. This issue of Honorable Works resulted from the dedicated effort by student editors Hannah Cargo, Colin Votzmeyer, and Josephine Geiger-Lee. And, as with all of our publications, Holly Blosser-Yoder provided advising and support for the writers, cre-

ators, and editors. The Honorable Works is available on our website at [this link](#), and I encourage you to see what students in the program have created.

The second piece of news is the program's receipt of a gift that will endow a new scholarship for Honors Program students. In August, I learned from the University of Iowa Center for Advancement of Carl and Carla Fackler's gift to sponsor a scholarship with preference for Iowa residents who are first-generation college students. Carl (64BA, 69MD, 67MS) and Carla (65BA, 70MA) have strong connections to the University and the Honors Program. Both Carl and Carla received scholarships while attending Iowa, and their gift is a wonderful way to "pay it forward" by creating educational opportunities for current and future generations of Hawkeyes.

I hope that you enjoy connecting with the Honors Program through this issue of the Alumni Connection. As always, please feel free to share your experiences, stories, and memories about the program with me (shaun-vecera@uiowa.edu) or with the program (honors-program@uiowa.edu).

Sincerely,

Shaun Vecera
shaun-vecera@uiowa.edu
Director, University of Iowa Honors Program
Professor, Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

A Haunted History of Iowa City

By Beth Hendricks

Though the University of Iowa (UI) holds many distinguishing features, the rich literary culture and beautiful Victorian homes of Iowa City compelled me to enroll. In Honors Primetime, a course held during the first week on campus to help honors students adjust to college, I learned about an even more interesting aspect of the city—its haunted history.

My Primetime section, *City of Literature: A Writer's Guide to Iowa*, focused on Iowa City's long history of literature. And while we did discuss renowned writers like Flannery O'Connor and Kurt Vonnegut, what really caught my attention was Iowa City's ghost stories.

As part of the class, we toured Iowa City's most haunted locations. While I am not superstitious, the urban legends surrounding these locations fascinated me.

The tour centered around Brown Street, north of the university, and was led by our instructor, Dr. Candice Wuehle. Wuehle is Iowa City native and novelist as well as the scholarship coordinator for the University of Iowa Honors Program. She provided us with both commonly known myths and more personal stories, as she grew up surrounded by paranormal legends from her neighbors, friends, and relatives.

Many of these stories took place in the city's numerous Victorian houses, which are considered haunted due to their histories of

funeral visitations.

"Young kids who live there say they can see doors rattling and figures in the windows," Wuehle said.

While Wuehle has not experienced paranormal activity herself, she has a connection to the house at 327 Brown Street, where guests reported seeing a large, hairy

white dog despite the house's owner not having pets.

At the time, Wuehle was taking a class on supernatural literature at the UI, affectionately dubbed "magic class" by her and her fellow students. They visited 327 Brown Street and attempted to contact the dog's spirit one night, and Wuehle recounted odd things



Brown Street, the site of the haunted tour. Photo Provided by Beth Hendricks.

occurring, though she conceded they can probably be debunked.

Next, we visited Gaslight Village, a quiet living complex for student writers and artists since the 1950s. According to Wuehle, the apartments have an “indescribable vibe of discomfort and disease” due to their dark atmosphere, strange architecture, and seclusion from the rest of the neighborhood.

She mentioned hearing multiple stories about how the village’s residents often undergo a personal tragedy while living there and exhibit “erratic, scary behavior.”

Our last stop on the tour was Oakland Cemetery and its Black Angel statue, regarded by locals and tourists alike as Iowa City’s most haunted landmark. Commissioned by Czech immigrant Teresa Dolezal Feldevert in the early twentieth century for her dead husband, the angel’s color rapidly changed from bronze to black upon its arrival, which 20th-century citizens interpreted as a curse.

Though we now know this to be oxidation, many conflicting myths exist about the cause of the angel’s drastic color change.

Some believe it serves as a reminder of Feldevert’s sins, and others claim that lightning struck it on the night of her burial. Still others remove the Feldeverts from the picture, believing that a man erected the monument over his wife’s grave, and the color change originated from her unfaithfulness during their marriage.

In addition to the numerous legends that surround it, this landmark inspired a poem by Michael S. Harper, in which the poet describes “a natural oxygen tent” and says “the air is heavy in trees... closest to the angel’s skin.”

Despite the disparate explana-



The infamous Black Angel at Oakland Cemetery. Photo Provided by Beth Hendricks.

tions, all myth proponents agree that touching the angel will result in death from anywhere within the next day to the next seven years.

Julia Alves-Dunkerson, a first-year student at the UI, also participated in the haunted tour. Originally from Des Moines, Alves-Dunkerson remarked that, while she had visited Iowa City a few times prior to moving there, the tour was her first time hearing about its haunted history, as most of it is built on word-of-mouth rumors.

She considers Gaslight Village to be the city’s most chilling location on account of its rich history and the number of people who have

passed through there.

“I’m not superstitious,” Alves-Dunkerson said, “but the stories still creep me out.”

Iowa City in general is not known for its haunted history. Unlike cities like Salem, Massachusetts, and New Orleans, Louisiana, its legends are mostly unknown to tourists and short-term residents. I believe the secrecy only makes the myths and the city itself more interesting. They add depth to its culture and history outside of what is presented in a book or on a website, and my appreciation for Iowa City has only grown after my experience in Honors Prime-time as I learned its ghost stories.

OPEN HOUSE

First-Years Find a Home in Honors

By Elizabeth Von Loh

On Aug. 25, spectators milled around the airy atrium of the Blank Honors Center. Two rows of back-to-back corkboards, colorful posters, and small groups of students filled the space. These first-years were preparing to present a half-week's worth of learning on their chosen topics, ranging from children's literature to comparing Ancient Rome to their new home, Iowa City.

This event, the Honors Program Open House, was the capstone of Honors Primetime, a first-year experience through which new honors students gain knowledge, friends, and one or two honors credits. Students in the experiential section of Primetime attended a three-and-a-half day workshop led by professors the week before classes commenced.

Recently, these first-years left their nests to settle into their new residence: the University of Iowa (UI). As honors students, that change involved adjusting to a new program too.

Olivia Bishop and Nina Osborne, first-years in the honors program, said they initially held few expectations of the program beyond its academic requirements, but Honors Primetime, the open house, and other first week opportunities quickly enhanced their expectations.

"I thought it was going to be a good bit of more work," Bishop said. "I thought I was going to have to take harder classes, but,

really, it's an opportunity to take different classes aside from stereotypical lectures."

In her Honors Primetime workshop, *Once Upon a Time: Exploring Storytelling Through Children's Literature*, Bishop and her classmates visited the Iowa City Public Library children's section, learned how to curate book collections for

rounding city, and UI professors in the process.

"It was the first time I had ever seen a college professor and how college professors work," Osborne said. "[Professor] Glenn [Storey] could basically talk from his head for three straight hours about history, and that was the expectation I had to have for all my



Honors students present at the Honors Open House event on Friday Aug. 25, 2023. Photo provided by Veronica Sanchez.

kids, and thought critically about writing children's stories—lessons not easily taught within the walls of a classroom.

Osborne recounted how she toured Iowa City as part of her *Cities: Ancient and Modern* workshop. Her group compared architectural elements like the white columns of Iowa City's gold-topped Old Capital to Ancient Roman temples. They gained familiarity with the campus, its sur-

college professors."

She noted how this differed from her initial expectation of professors. Instead of being strict or uptight, she laughingly recalled how Glenn "nerded out on us about all the stuff he really likes."

Beyond the unique lessons, these experiences provided a social network for Bishop's and Osborne's adjustments to campus and the honors program. Bishop described how the open house

offered a chance to see what her group learned in comparison to other Honors Primetime sections.

"It was cool to see [our experience] blown up in real life for the poster," Bishop said. "Ours was bright and colorful, which looked like what we had been learning about: children's literature. It was fun to see what everyone else worked on in comparison to our display."

The open house brought together students from many different workshops and their self-designed posters under the same roof. There, they presented and connected with fellow honors students.

"So far, [the honors program] has been an environment to meet people," Osborne said. "You have a built-in little group of peers."

Dr. Emily Hill, Associate Director of the honors program, said staff have been working especially hard to foster this engagement within the honors community.

This year introduced a pilot shift in the Primetime experience. Students now had two options. One was to keep the standard pre-semester workshop, now with supplemental events during the rest of the semester. The second option, in a move to include even more students, provided asynchronous programming for students with pre-semester commitments like Hawkeye Marching Band, Iowa Edge, and International Student Orientation.

"We're really hoping that this Primetime experience, because of these requirements that we're asking students to complete, will give these students even more of a chance to understand the expectations of the honors program and set them up for success," Hill explained. "I think it encourages them to learn more about this

community that they applied to be in, maybe in a more intentional way."

Beyond the Primetime restructuring, another change to foster engagement within the program involved a new hire. The program recently employed a student engagement coordinator in Madison Schulte.

"This is the first time we've had a professional staff member solely focused on cultivating that community we are so proud of," Hill

sulted in astounding success. For example, the farmer's market meet-up this semester, a social event for honors students to visit the Iowa City Farmers Market, received an influx of participants at a level not seen within the program before.

"I'm honestly just really happy I'm in it," Bishop said of the honors program.

She believes her experiences in the program will allow her to figure out what engages her interest. In



Students head to downtown Iowa City on a fall afternoon. Photo by Justin Torner.

said on the addition of the position.

The role provides a new, centralized emphasis on student programming, events, and engagement within honors to provide educational, service-oriented, and social connection opportunities.

So far, the development has re-

the meantime, she plans to attend honors events, take advantage of networking, and investigate experiential learning opportunities like studying abroad.

Though students only recently walked through the program's threshold, they could very well find their future home there.

BEYOND THE SYLLABUS

Student Leaders Gain Experience and Help Peers

By Heidi Du

Along with experiential learning and honors coursework, the honors program offers a community for students willing to put in extra effort to learn both in and out of the classroom. An integral part of this community are the student leaders within the honors program.

For some students, taking on leadership roles within the honors program is a natural fit, aligning with their commitment to seek out purposeful opportunities, going above and beyond—a benefit Honors Peer Mentor Miles Kramer appreciates.

“I thought being a peer mentor would be a really great way to make sure that students who are coming into the program who don’t have as much experience as I do are able to talk to someone and get the most out of [the program] that they can,” Kramer said.

Kramer entered the University of Iowa (UI) as a pre-medicine student. However, after discovering his interest in history during a particularly engaging class, Kramer changed his major. As a fifth-year history major, he now intends to research Imperial Chinese history, pursue a PhD, and become a professor.

“When I was looking for ways to both expand my résumé and work in the area that I’m planning on doing as a career, I was looking for a way to work with students,” Kramer said. “One reason why I was really interested in [being] a

peer mentor is because it’s a great way to interact with college students on an academic level, which is not something I really get to do otherwise.”

Kramer advises students to explore their choices and not feel obligated to follow a rigid path when it comes to earning credits.

“There’s a lot of flexibility, and that’s one of the benefits of the program,” Kramer said. “Taking the time to look through [options] and find out what fits you the best and what you think is going to benefit you the most in the long run is the way to go.”

Kramer elected to earn his experiential learning credits by doing honors in the major, which involved a full year of research on a topic of his choice and a final thesis. As a mentor, he thinks it is a great way for students to prepare for their future careers.

“It was an experience that I’m really happy I did because it’s something that will 100% help me in the future



Anna Ottavi, a third-year anthropology major, is an Honors Primetime TA. Photo provided by Anna Ottavi.



Miles Kramer is an Honors Peer Mentor and fifth-year majoring in history. Photo provided by Miles Kramer.

as I write a graduate thesis or if I go on to get my PhD,” Kramer said.

Anna Ottavi is a third-year anthropology major who began her position as an Honors Primetime TA this semester. The Honors Primetime courses are unique because

“A couple of times throughout the semester, I’ll personally invite my cohort out to an event I specifically am interested in or an event for an organization I’m a part of,” Ottavi said. “Then, everyone comes out and attends our event

which was really, really cool, being able to go out into the field and do an excavation,” Ottavi said.

She also interned with Iowa City’s Domestic Violence Intervention Program (DVIP). According to Ottavi, these two experiences played a direct role in her decision to pursue a career in social work.

“It made me realize that I was really interested in that subfield, which I hadn’t really considered before,” Ottavi said. “It was so helpful for me to really clarify what my interests were. Working in the courthouse gave me so much insight into the social work issues that I do want to eventually work with but approaching them from an anthropological standpoint.”

Ottavi believes there are diverse opportunities for students to explore within the honors curriculum.

“I think that’s what’s really great about the honors experiential learning program,” Ottavi said. “There’s a lot of experiences that you can do directly through the university that the honors program offers up. But also, it serves as a way for people to get interested in and involved in a lot of different areas, and it all counts toward the same goal, which is making people explore.”

Kramer has similar ideas about his leadership role.

“I think that this position is really exciting just because it gives me an opportunity to help people make the most of their time at the University of Iowa,” Kramer said.

The honors program is rich with opportunities for students to discover. For students looking to give back to and support the honors community, becoming a Primetime TA, peer mentor, or any of the other student leadership roles the program offers could open the gates to broader experiences.



Students pass the Blank Honors Center. Photo by Justin Torner.

they begin a week before the fall semester, with first-year students participating in pre-semester workshops before completing online assignments throughout the semester.

As a TA, Ottavi is assigned to a cohort of 30 to 40 Primetime participants. She attends in-person honors events, grades assignments, and organizes activities.

together. It’s another way to get people involved with various organizations and things on campus.”

Through the honors program, Ottavi became involved in an experience, which helped her determine her specialty in the anthropology field.

“I did an archaeology dig through Iowa Lakeside Labs that counted as an experiential learning credit,

NAVIGATING DEI AT IOWA

How Students Experience Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Honors

By Dana Egan

The University of Iowa Honors Program is home to top students from diverse backgrounds around the world. However, it can sometimes be challenging for underrepresented students to see themselves represented within the honors community.

Angeline Vanle, an alumna of the honors program, is the current assistant director of inclusive education and strategic initiatives within the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) at the University of Iowa (UI). Vanle obtained a Bachelor of Science in human physiology on the pre-medicine track with a minor in philosophy in 2019.

"I got a scholarship from the honors program, and after visiting, I noticed how students spoke about the program: a community within a community," Vanle said. "I got to meet a variety of individuals, and I felt like that benefited me because I got exposed to many different perspectives."

Overall, the University of Iowa Honors Program has higher percentages of underrepresented students compared to the University undergraduate population as a whole, according to Honors Records, Enrollment and Analytics Specialist Mark Archibald.

Vanle believes the honors program helped her recognize the experiences she had as a student with intersecting first-generation,

Vietnamese, and queer identities. That said, Vanle also noted how there is room for improvement.

"Like any other university, we need to see more people with underrepresented identities in positions of leadership," Vanle asserted. "I value transparency, and as someone with a lot of underrepresented identities, that starts with transparency regarding the very real barriers to opportunities for those with underrepresented and historically marginalized identities."

One population that has lower representation in the honors program is first-generation students. Honors program staff, in partnership with First Gen Hawks and the university's four cultural centers, have begun incorporating practices to recruit more first-generation students to the program.

Vanle has become a role model for others, and it can be seen through her impressive list of achievements. She was a Bright Scholar of Iowa and a Summer Health Professions Education Program (SHPEP) scholar, both of which uplift historically marginalized communities. Later, Vanle



Angeline Vanle as a medical student at the University of Iowa. Provided by Angeline Vanle.

served as the student body president for the Carver College of Medicine Student Government.

Vanle currently works with first-generation college faculty and staff and talks about the power of discovering one's purpose. She believes the honors program helped her make a greater impact on the world around her.

"Being in the honors program was one of my inspirations for sharing my story," Vanle said. "Instead of flattening experiences, the program really believed, 'Yes, be unique, be individual, and seek out whatever you want.' I appreciated that flexibility in my education."

Finally, Vanle advocated for a more expansive view of difference.

“When talking about underrepresented identities, there tends to be an assumption that it only includes things like race, gender, or legal status,” Vanle said. “It also includes students who are parents, work many jobs, or are nontraditional students. The honors program’s flexibility makes it accessible no matter where you are at.”

Quinn Eldridge, a third-year biomedical sciences major on the pre-medicine track who identifies as Black, joined the honors program because he was in an accelerated program in high school and wanted to continue into college.

He has had impactful experiences as a member of Phi Eta Sigma, Undergraduate Student Government, Campus Activities Board, Academic Affairs, and Iowa Sciences Academy. Eldridge also serves as an honors peer mentor and teaching assistant for the Honors Primetime class, and conducts research about chlamydia at the Weber Lab.

A high-achieving student, Eldridge reflected on how the honors program aided in his success.

“[The honors program] taught me



Quinn Eldridge. Provided by Quinn Eldridge.

to understand what my skills are,” he said. “It reminds students to do things that make meaningful college experiences, not just résumé building. Honors also helps me interact with people outside my field of study. I talk to many people across different majors and learn about unique events on campus.”

Despite these successes, Eldridge noted some challenges in being a Black student in the honors program.

“There are not enough of us, so it can feel weird at times,” he said. “I never feel out of place, but I never feel like I fit the criteria either.”

“I want to see more Black and Latinx students in the honors program,” Eldridge said when asked about initiatives to create a welcoming climate for underrepresented students. “In general, making the program a place where minority students can belong [is important]. These students are just as capable and driven and deserve the opportunities.”

Anuvva Prabhakaran is a third-year psychology major on the pre-medicine track who identifies as South Asian. Like Eldridge, she was an honors student throughout high school.

“So far, I have had a positive experience in the honors program,” Prabhakaran said. “I have made a few friends, and the course load is exactly what I expected.”

Prabhakaran currently works in a research lab, an opportunity that was brought to her by a connection in Daum, the honors residence hall. She



Anuvva Prabhakaran. Provided by Anuvva Prabhakaran.

also received the Rhodes Dunlap Scholarship during her second year.

“I feel like I can always ask my honors advisors questions if I am confused, which has been very helpful,” Prabhakaran said about how the honors program helped her find success.

As Prabhakaran, Eldridge, and Vanle expressed, it is important to have resources highlighting and uplifting diverse identities—both within the honors program and across the university.

For more information, visit any of the resources below:
Honors Program Diversity Council (a student group):
<https://honors.uiowa.edu/diversity-council>
Honors Program Mission, Vision, and Inclusion statements:
<https://honors.uiowa.edu/about>
DEI at Iowa:
<https://diversity.uiowa.edu/>

FINDING ROOTS

BEYOND STEM

Student Publications Provide Experiential Opportunities for Writers in University Honors

By Sophia Connolly

For writing-focused majors in the honors program, there are numerous experiences and ways to get involved. However, compared to the research and internship opportunities that honors students in the Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) pursue, they may look different.

According to Honors Records, Enrollment, and Analytics Specialist Mark Archibald, at least eight percent of honors students are enrolled in a writing-focused major.

As these students look around at the wealth of research, volunteering, and internship opportunities available for STEM majors, it may seem that similar opportunities for writing focused majors are absent.

Fourth-year honors student Miranda Miller emphasized this idea as she said there weren't typical labs or research available for her major. Rather, experiential oppor-

tunities for her took the form of literary magazines.

Miller stressed that being involved with literary magazines and the writing community was very important for gaining professional experience on campus and pursuing a career post-graduation.

Miller got involved when she submitted a piece to Wilder Things, a literary magazine focusing on speculative fiction, during her first year. She had read the magazine and decided to join, eventually be-

coming the editor-in-chief.

"The purpose of the magazine was that we noticed, in the literary scene, genre fiction can sometimes be left by the wayside, so we wanted to create a space specifically to uplift genre fiction," Miller said. Genre fiction includes science fiction, fantasy, humor and horror, all of which are welcome in the magazine..

Miller said publications can teach many different skills. With Wilder Things, she taught her staff members how to update



Senior reporter Kate Perez stands in front of the Daily Iowan Newsroom. Provided by Kate Perez.

their LinkedIn profiles and workshop their own pieces, setting themselves up for future success.

Another benefit of joining publications is the sense of community that comes with it. Miller believes working on student-run publications creates connections throughout the literary community. "You make an effort to know who's on the other magazines because you can promote each other's stuff and support each other in their work," Miller said.

"It's been good to get to know the literary community, which I feel like being involved in is a very 'honors' thing to do," she asserted.

Kate Perez, an honors student and senior reporter for The Daily Iowan, majors in journalism and

and jobs. Perez most recently interned for USA Today over the summer.

"As an honor student, and if you've been an honors student in high school, it's easy to get really academically focused and have that be an entire college career," Perez said. "I think being in publications like The Daily Iowan just gives you a creative outlet to use and have fun and isn't necessarily academic."

Honors student Noelle Franzone is the founder and executive editor of Snapshots, which she and her friends created as a literary magazine for children in August of 2021. She said their purpose was to spread a love of children's literature throughout the university

With Snapshots, honors students learn through experiences working with children. Snapshots sends its magazines to local elementary schools and the Stead Family Children's Hospital. The publication also hosts cover contests for children to design their book covers. For the past two years, they have conducted readings at the hospital over Zoom due to COVID-19.

"[The readings are] just so fun; we got to go last week to see the library and the children's hospital and talk to the people who worked there because we will be doing in-person meetings this semester," Franzone said. "That was a really cool experience to see what they're doing."

Through her work on Snapshots, Franzone discovered how much she enjoyed being in a leadership role. She developed skills such as email communication and agenda development. She encourages honors students to join the literary community as a fun way to get involved.

"We host a lot of events that hit at our love of children's literature but also the more casual atmosphere we want to create," Franzone said. "I think we're also very passionate about the stuff we do, and that passion helped us create really good bonds within our team."

That engagement in such team atmospheres across student publications will benefit honors students not just in their writing today but in their careers beyond the UI tomorrow.



Snapshots covers are designed by children from local elementary schools. Photo provided by Noelle Franzone.

mass communication. When she arrived at the University of Iowa (UI), she knew she wanted to be involved in journalism, and decided to join The Daily Iowan.

For Perez, this experience gave her foundational skills in the field and helped her land internships

and Iowa City community.

"A lot of people grew up reading kids' literature, and it's what made them like writing and like reading," Franzone said. "It's something that isn't explored as much in college courses. We wanted to put it in the spotlight."

THE “WRITE” WAY

Alumni and Students Find Success in Journalism

Riley Dunn

“Why did you choose here? What are you going to get out of studying here?”

These are questions every college student receives at some point during their years at the University of Iowa. Many of the UI Honors Program alumni have gone on to achieve successful careers after leaving college, specifically those who have pursued professions in journalism. While that task may seem daunting, current honors students are working hard in order to succeed.

Achieving success after college can be hard. Here at the Writing University, there are many others who are all hoping for the same careers. It can be hard for students to stand out from the crowd. However, success is possible. And there are many ways for students to chase it.

Lana Zak (00BA) went on to a career in broadcast news after her time studying journalism at the UI. Currently, she works as a national correspondent and anchor for CBS News. While at the UI, Zak was a member of the honors program and believed the program helped her on her path to success.

“The honors program was helpful in so many ways,” Zak said. “It provided me with a home in the middle of this big university, and the relationships that I developed with the staff really propelled me forward.”

Zak encouraged students to be

curious and discover more about their passions during their time in the honors program and at the UI as a whole. Students willing to put themselves out there and gain a receptive audience can easily connect with other people.

For example, during her time at the UI, Zak and a few of her friends worked together to create a book club centered on books written by graduates of the Iowa Writers’

Workshop. After they read and discussed these books, authors were invited to come and meet with the club members to read a piece of their work.

Outside of the honors program, Zak stressed that her college experience was enhanced by the UI’s wide breadth of fields of study. When she first came to the UI, she never thought she would one day enter the journalism field, as her



Jami Martin-Trainor has strengthened her skills through two journalism internships. Photo Courtesy of Jami Martin-Trainor

“[The honors program] provided me with a home in the middle of this big university, and the relationships that I developed with the staff really propelled me forward.”

primary interest was in political science.

“Lots of people who graduate end up having life take them in a different direction than what they originally thought,” Zak said. “Having



Honors alumna Lana Zak has anchored many breaking news stories during her time at CBS news. CBS News.

the opportunity to study multiple things I was passionate about was such a gift. Iowa allowed me to do that and round out my experience.”

Aside from writing opportunities, there are important tools that can be useful when crafting the perfect story or report. For example, according to Zak, aspiring reporters should be clear when telling their stories.

The key to being a good journalist mainly involves two important ideas. The first is that journalists should see themselves in service to their viewers, readers, and listeners. The other—and often more difficult part—is to try to be interesting. Journalists should take the headline story and dig deeper in order to find something that is unique.

Beyond journalism majors, Zak offered advice to all honors students: “Take advantage of all opportunities and feel free to chase them. This is important to every career. There are few times that you will have so many resources at your fingertips and people who want you to succeed.”

The UI’s wide range of opportunities aided current third-year honors student Jami Martin-Trainor, who is double majoring in journalism and mass communication and political science with a minor in gender, women’s, and sexuality studies.

Martin-Trainor is currently exploring her options for after college, when she hopes to pursue a career in digital production, which is the focus of her work for The Daily Iowan.

Additionally, Martin-Trainor’s writing skills have grown while at the UI. So far, she has participated in two separate journal-

ism internships: at the Cedar Rapids Gazette and with KCCI in Des Moines. During her time at these internships, Martin-Trainor strengthened her digital skills and gained experience working on daily media outlets.

She has achieved success through The Daily Iowan, which she believes is the most useful tool for aspiring journalism students who want to advance their careers.

Although she is deeply engaged in experiential learning—something that honors promotes strongly—Martin-Trainor says her favorite aspect of the honors program is the ability to enroll in honors classes.

“I really like how fun and engaging honors classes are,” Martin-Trainor said. “The students there speak with passion and genuinely care about what they’re learning. I also believe honors courses help you develop learning skills.”

No matter where a student’s specific interests may lie, the UI has a lot of experiences and internship opportunities to offer to aspiring writers and journalists. Students should not be afraid to work with others in order to achieve the most success possible and get fulfillment out of the work they do.

HONORS STUDENTS STRIKE BACK

Honors Screenwriting Students Discuss the Hollywood Writers' Strikes

Emma Gaughan

As the spring semester ended and students began looking forward to three months away from campus, screenwriting and cinema students—particularly those in the honors program—were faced with a serious question: What does the future of their field look like?

In May, the Writers Guild of America went on strike, halting many productions in Hollywood. The motivation for the strike came from issues of pay, artificial intelligence concerns, and other concerns. In July, SAG-AFTRA, the actors guild, went on strike in solidarity. The impact has been widespread, especially for future-thinking honors students on campus who are hoping to work in Hollywood.

Joey Crittenden is a third-year honors student at the University of Iowa (UI) and is currently a TA in the honors course Cult Cinema. Crittenden shared that while he has an interest in screenwriting, the current situation in Hollywood discourages him from pursuing that.

"I feel like the strikes are really indicative of this growing frustration and this feeling of inability to do anything," Crittenden said.

Crittenden attributed some of this struggle and frustration to the competition between streaming

services and trend cycles. He said that it is hard to focus on writing with how the market is currently.



University of Iowa student Kat Trout-Baron works on a park bench. Photo provided by Kat Trout-Baron.

He believes there is more focus on what will sell rather than staying true to artistic vision.

Despite not wanting to work in Hollywood, Crittenden shared that for him and other artists on campus, the strikes have an impact. Hollywood is a major player in the art world, because of how widespread it is and because its products are an accessible visual medium.

has been sure about what they want to do.

"It is fully my belief that I will be a writer in Hollywood and primarily for features," Trout-Baron said. "First and foremost, what I want to do is connect with people."

As of late, however, connecting with people in the film industry has been difficult. Trout-Baron shared how they have found great joy in seeing a crowd in a movie theater,

look like going forward.

"It's very strange to have that conversation change so quickly," Trout-Baron said. "In the first half of the summer, you're talking about how great you're doing, and in the second half, it's 'How do you make it through this?'"

During the strikes, there were still some studios who agreed to the unions' requirements and were allowed to work with writers, such as independent studio A24. For FilmScene, that means there will still be new movies they can present. Trout-Baron also highlighted some of these studios being in production as a display of the power of independent cinema.

When the strikes began, Trout-Baron shared how they were in a long-form screenwriting class. Trout-Baron and other students had looked to the professor for answers on what was going to happen, but they were met with none. Trout-Baron realized that, in art, the world is constantly changing.

"Everyone's on the same playing field," Trout-Baron said. "It doesn't matter how old, doesn't matter how much experience you have, you're still in the same boat, specifically with this instance where everyone was out of work."

The WGA concluded its strike in late September and signed a deal in early October, but SAG-AFTRA negotiations with studios continued into December.

For someone who is beginning to think about entering the workforce after college, Trout-Baron was hopeful that the studios would listen to creatives. Despite the hardships, they shared how the strikes are a good opportunity for independent studios to take the spotlight.

"We have this power to shape the future," Trout-Baron said. "We're part of this huge change."



Students study on the Pentacrest in the spring. Photo provided by Justin Torner.

"[Hollywood] controls the trends of our society. It's easy for people to go and see a movie," Crittenden said. "Whether we like it or not, we should care about and for people who are creatives."

Kat Trout-Baron, a third-year honors student studying cinema and screenwriting, has always wanted to be a writer. They decided on screenwriting at age 16 after driving two hours to see "The Lighthouse" in theaters. Ever since that moment, Trout-Baron

and it is what draws them to the film world. But in recent years, crowds have not been flocking to theaters in the same way.

One way that Trout-Baron is working toward their future as a screenwriter is through their position as executive director at the Bijou Film Board, which works with the FilmScene, an independent movie theater in Iowa City. Due to the halt of filmmaking, Trout-Baron is unsure of what the situation of movie theaters will

THAT GOES NUCLEAR!

How Honors Students are Using Policy Debate in Academic Pursuits

Ryan Cavanaugh

Given the in-depth research and highly competitive atmosphere required for policy debate, it is no surprise the debate program at the University of Iowa has regularly attracted honors students to its midst.

Both debate and the University of Iowa Honors Program are aimed at providing learning experiences beyond the classroom that give students experiential academic opportunities. For students who have a passion for rigorous study and rhetorical persuasion, debate and honors go hand-in-hand.

The A. Craig Baird Debate Forum at Iowa was founded in 1860 and is the oldest student organization on campus. Throughout its 163-year history, the program has seen many successes in policy debate including winning the National Debate Tournament in 2001, earning first and second place at the 2018 Cross Examination Debate Association National Championship, and making it to the final four of the same tournament in 2022.

Policy debate is an event in which two teams of two students debate over the desirability of a proposed plan. A debate round consists of eight speeches between the 'affirmative' and 'negative' team, and each tournament generally consists of between six and eight preliminary rounds followed by a single-elimination bracket to decide the winner.

Each year, a "resolution" is chosen, which broadly defines what topic affirmatives will be discussing. This year's topic, which discusses the efficacy of reducing the United States' nuclear arsenal, is rooted in historical disarmament movements and timely discussions about the role of nuclear weapons in society.

Many students, including those at the University of Iowa (UI), take a theoretical approach to the topic as well by diving into critical theory and performance studies in order to call attention to the discursive dimensions of nuclear policy.

The debate team's year kicked off at the season opener hosted at Northwestern University, with second-year honors student Maile Huffman and first-year honors student Nate Weimar competing alongside six other debaters from Iowa. Fourth- and fifth-year students Ryan Cavanaugh and Maeve Ella competed in the round of 16 and earned top 20 speaker awards in a pool of 214 students.

Cavanaugh and Ella recently received an invitation to a prestigious tournament held by the University of Kentucky, to which only seven teams in the country are invited. This tournament, distinguished by its "round robin" style bracket in which each team debates and is ranked by the number of ballots they receive by the end of the tournament, is an opportunity to establish a win

record against other highly competitive teams.

This year's first tournament saw four first-year students competing at their first college debate tournament with impressive results. Nate Weimar began college debate with three years of prior experience, but he said the transition to college debate was not an easy one. This tournament was an opportunity to get introduced to other people in the community.

"The debate community gave me the chance to be surrounded by a range of people with similar interests," Weimar said.

Maile Huffman, who is from Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri, came to Iowa with four years of speech and debate experience from high school. In her experience, overlap between the honors program and debate has helped in pursuing her research interests.

Following last year's topic which included a discussion of artificial intelligence (AI) personhood, Huffman is now working on an honors thesis project that explores the question of AI ethics. Looking back at her first year, Huffman found being in both debate and the honors program has helped in her transition from high school to college.

As Huffman said, "Debate provides a community—one where peers have similar academic pursuits and goals."

THE JAMES GANG BUILDS COMMUNITY

Nonprofit founded by honors students marks more than 20 years serving Iowa City

Jennifer New

In true Midwestern form, potlucks are at the heart of this story. Over takeout pizza and Oreos in the early aughts, an informal gathering of University of Iowa honors students interested in service, community engagement, and the arts led to the formation of a nonprofit incubator called The James Gang.

Twenty-one years later, the organization is still going strong, providing a range of services and experiences to the Iowa City area. At a recent reunion, participants wondered how many people had been touched by The James Gang. Recalling initiatives such as the Mission Creek Festival, Iowa Youth Writing Project, and free Wi-Fi downtown, the estimate landed in the hundreds of thousands.

An exact assessment of The James Gang's impact is impossible to measure. What is clear is the indelible mark it made on its members. "I got a career out of it without even intending to," says Andy Stoll (03BA, 03BBA), a former UI Student Government president who is now senior program officer in entrepreneurship at the Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City.



Members of "Era 2", the second generation of JG members gather on the steps of PS1. Photo by Jason Smith

The James Gang, which helps fledgling organizations obtain 501c3 status, emerged during the 2001-02 academic year through the meeting of many minds and aspirations. UI honors students Jesse Elliott (03BA) and Mike Brooks (03BA) were inspired via one of their classes by philosopher William James' theory of

pragmatism that encouraged people to act upon their ideas. They began hosting potlucks for their peers to share the creative endeavors they'd like to launch in the community. The prompt spurred multiple projects and collaborations.

At one potluck, Spencer Griffin (04BA) shared his need to find

a performance venue. When the theater student couldn't find a place on campus to produce a play, the group's connections enabled him to access a space above The Deadwood bar on North Dubuque Street. He produced several plays and sold student art in the location—named Public Space One. The organization continues today

along Gilbert Street as an anchor of Iowa City's arts scene.

Another project that evolved into something bigger was inspired by a music festival that attracted more than 800 people, which engineering student Forrest Meggers (03BSE, 05MS) hosted on his parents' farm. Its popularity led James Gang members to

create The 10,000 Hours Show, a new project linking live music and service. For nearly a decade, UI students who volunteered 10 hours got free tickets to a concert by major acts. The model was so successful that other campuses and United Way adopted it.

Today, The James Gang continues to provide support to Iowa City nonprofits. Current endeavors include Brink literary journal, the Immigrant Welcome Network of Johnson County, and The Quire, a mixed voice chorus.

Some early members still work in community engagement, influenced by this collegiate experience, while others have followed their original academic paths. Elliott now works with regional arts and family philanthropies out of Arkansas and Chicago. Brooks runs a social impact agency in Washington, D.C. Meggers leads the CHAOS Lab, or Cooling and Heating for Architecturally Optimized Systems, at Princeton University. Tyler Lechtenberg (03BA), who directed The 10,000 Hours Show, became a speechwriter in the Obama White House. Griffin is a television producer in Los Angeles.

The James Gang is now mainly community-run. Bob Kirby, director of the Office for Undergraduate Research and an honors mentor to early members, believes the UI can learn from these alumni. "There's tremendous focus right now on experiential learning," he says. "What The James Gang showed is how competent our undergraduates are to make an impact and develop that confidence in themselves."

Jennifer New (88BA) is a writer, community engagement specialist for Initiative for Sustainable Communities, and a member of the James Gang's board of directors.



Members of "Era 2", the second generation of JG members gather on the steps of PS1. Photo by Jason Smith.



The James Gang (JG) 21st birthday included several events. Members of the original group had a dinner to celebrate Bob Kirby. Multiple generations of JG members gathered for a potluck lunch on the lawn of Public Space One (PS1), followed by a history event inside, facilitated by Jennifer New, a current JG member. In a variation of a "fish bowl" activity (above), New broke members into "eras," beginning with the earliest and moving to the current era of the organization. Chairs in the middle could only be filled by members of a specific era and only people in that inner circle could speak. They could switch in and out, so if someone from that era hadn't had a chance to speak yet, they could tap the shoulder of someone in the circle and change places, allowing participants to have a more intimate conversation and for all voices to be heard.

THE JAMES GANG LEGACY IN HONORS

A Conversation with Bob and Dave

Holly Blosser Yoder

Sitting down for a conversation in the honors program's current home on the fourth floor of the Blank Honors Center, Bob Kirby, former honors program associate director (2000-2019), and Dave Gould, a professor and long-time friend of the honors program, recalled the formation and impact of The James Gang in other honors settings two decades before.

After honors students inspired by the American pragmatist philosopher William James began exploring ideas about community engagement, the honors program created a group studies course in 2002 to provide structure for discussion and planning.

At the time, the program was housed in the Jefferson Building downtown as the Blank Honors Center was under construction. "We met once a week in the mornings," Kirby recalled, "and ideas would come forward about what we want to try to do."

Initiatives in performance, music, and service were formed and tested in that group. "The whole drive was community engagement, and how do we utilize the resources of the university, both the student body and other resources, to get more engagement by students?" Kirby recalled.

Undeterred by obstacles or fear of failure, The James Gang attitude was "Let' just try things," Kirby said.

about some of the impediments that might be out there, and introduce them to people within the university who might be a re-



Audience members, including Bob Kirby and Dave Gould, back row, listen in as generations of The James Gang members recall their era of involvement. Photo by Jason Smith.

"They were very resourceful students and they came from many different backgrounds," according to Kirby. "You had people in engineering, in liberal arts and sciences, in business, and they had these very different perspectives, all with interest in the common good."

With a roomful of motivated students, Kirby said his role was to "help structure that meeting, talk

source."

Gould in those years was scaling up a general education course about leisure and play, and his 250 students were among those who volunteered to help staff the 10,000 Hours Show.

Both men say that the James Gang influenced their understanding of what was possible in their careers working with undergraduates.

“When you create a supportive community, and you have talented students with ideas, and staff to facilitate, you can make something magical happen.”



Students stroll near the Jefferson Building during fall semester 2023. The Jefferson Building served as the temporary home of the honors program when The James Gang formed. Photo by Justin Tomer.

“The James Gang and that vision was really critical as a model of what students could do,” said Gould.

Gould was present at Kirby’s house one evening in late summer 2023 when original members of the James Gang gathered on the deck, talking and reminiscing until the early hours of the morning.

“The one thing I heard over and over again was the ability for Bob to trust them and to say yes,” Gould observed.

“Bob would make sure they were doing the work, but he didn’t have a ceiling over their heads, and he would say yes to big ideas and give them range to run and chase it,” Gould summarized.

Gould and Kirby collaborated in later years on various initiatives in the honors program that built on the lessons of the James Gang including the Green Room, a class that invited the community into the college classroom, and the Engaged Social Innovation major, which led to initiatives such as the University of Iowa food pantry.

“None of this would have happened without the honors program,” Gould said of the genesis of the James Gang. “When you create a supportive community, and you have talented students with ideas, and staff to facilitate, you can make something magical happen.”

MEET THE TEAM



Holly Blosser-Yoder

Holly serves as the advisor to Honors Publications, the student editors and writers who produce the Honors Newsletter, Alumni Connection and many articles on the Honors Program blog. A writer with an interest in history and culture. Holly is the author of *The Same Spirit: History of Iowa-Nebraska Mennonites*.



Ryan Cavanaugh

Ryan Cavanaugh is a fourth-year student from Chicago, Illinois. They are studying American studies and theatre arts with a minor in cinema, and are a member of the A. Craig Baird Debate Forum at Iowa.



Hannah Cargo

Hannah is a third-year student from the Dallas–Forth Worth area in Texas. She’s majoring in creative writing and environmental planning and is enjoying her time in Iowa. Hannah hopes to make the world a better place (and maybe have some fun while doing it).



Sophia Connolly

Sophia Connolly is a first-year student at the University of Iowa majoring in journalism and mass communication. She is excited to work for the Honors Publication and pursue her love of writing. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music, drinking coffee, and hanging out with friends in Iowa City.



Heidi Du

Heidi Du is a first-year biomedical sciences major on the pre-medicine track. She likes to swim and read in her free time. At the University of Iowa, she hopes to explore the medical humanities through her passions for journalism, creative writing, music, and art.



Riley Dunn

Riley Dunn is a first-year student from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who plans on majoring in English and creative writing. She is enjoying her time at the University of Iowa so far and hopes to continue to improve her writing. In her free time, she loves reading, writing, swimming, and traveling to new and exciting places.



Josephine Geiger-Lee

Josephine Geiger-Lee is majoring in English and creative writing as well as journalism and mass communication, and is pursuing a certificate in event management. She is in her third year at the University of Iowa.



Emma Gaughan

Emma Gaughan is a second-year studying psychology and criminology. She is pursuing a writing certificate. This is her first year with Honors Publications, but she also writes at the Daily Iowan.

Beth Hendricks

Beth Hendricks is a first-year majoring in English and creative writing. While she loves fiction, the world of journalism interests her, and she is excited to explore it through Honors Publications. When she isn't in class, she can be found in downtown Iowa City drinking coffee, watching Gilmore Girls, and petting dogs.



Dana Eagan

Dana Eagan is a third-year at the University of Iowa with a major in anthropology and minors in communications and dance. When writing, Eagan aims to uplift and inspire others. In her free time, she choreographs hip-hop routines for the University of Iowa's multicultural organization Walk It Out, and models for local Johnson County businesses and fashion shows.



Elizabeth Von Loh

Elizabeth Von Loh is a second-year English and creative writing major on the publishing track. She is also earning a Certificate in Medieval Studies and a religious studies minor. During her time in Iowa, Elizabeth plans to nourish her craft by working on campus literary magazines and hanging out in Prairie Lights.



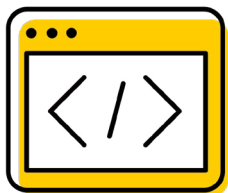
Colin Votzmeyer

Colin is a third-year student from Mount Prospect, Illinois, majoring in journalism and mass communications with minors in history and sports studies. In his time at the University of Iowa, he hopes to perfect his writing skills for a career in sports writing.

GIVE TO HONORS

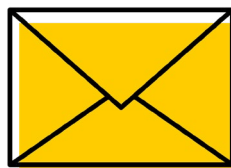


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