



**SPRING 2024**

# **HONORS NEWSLETTER**

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University of Iowa  
Honors Program



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# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Shaun Vecera

As another Honors Newsletter arrives, I'm sure you're starting to look toward the end of the semester and the academic year. I hope you take some time to look through the stories in this newsletter to learn about events and opportunities in the Honors Program and about what some students in the program are involved with.

In this newsletter, you'll find a group of stories that center on writing or interpreting writing: Dr. Wuehle's upcoming class Poetics (Taylor's Version), writing fellows, and lit magazines. The story on Primetime also features several

of the workshops that involved writing. These pieces seem fitting for the Writing University.

After reading these pieces on writing, it was then time for me to turn to this Letter from the Director. As I took a few notes about what I might write, I realized that there was value in sharing something that we all experience but often don't express: writing is hard. That last sentence, for example, was a few days in the making. It took that long in part because of distractions—the email that landed in my inbox that needed a timely reply—and because of other schedule demands.

There are more interesting reasons why writing is hard, though. Here I'm going to take a familiar tack and talk about why writing is cognitively hard. (I'll conveniently gloss over my perfectionist tendencies that contribute to making writing hard for me.)

Linda Flowers and Dick Hayes developed an early and influential cognitive model of writing composition. One of their insights was that writing is problem

solving. Writing shares many mental demands in common with computing an integral, playing a game of chess, or navigating public transportation to arrive at an appointment on time. Prob-

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**[W]riting is hard. That last sentence, for example, was a few days in the making.**

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lems have goals, and the problem solving process involves changing the problem from its current state, such as a blank Google doc, toward the goal. But this high-level view doesn't capture why writing, or solving problems, can be challenging.

A main reason that writing is hard is because it is dependent on working memory, which is the current contents of your thinking. As you write, you have to keep in mind (read: keep in working memory) what you've just written but also where you're going—what you'll write next to get closer to your goal. There are many ways to lessen this burden on working memory.

One was to reduce working



Shaun Vecera

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## **“Writing shares many mental demands in common with computing an integral, playing a game of chess, or navigating public transportation to arrive at an appointment on time.”**

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memory load, which Hayes studied, was to change the amount of text that was visible during writing. He found (and I’m not sure if he ever published this) that larger computer monitors, compared to smaller monitors,



Dr. Candice Wuehle will teach an honors class on the poetics of Taylor Swift in the fall.

allow a writer to display more of their text. With more text visible, a writer can review what they’ve just written by re-reading it, rather than relying on working memory.

Another way to free up working memory is probably more familiar to most writers, including “professional” writers who write for a living: write about things you’re familiar with. Not only is writing

dependent on working memory, it is also dependent on long-term memory—all of the facts and information you know. When you write, your long-term memory can influence your writing by giving you information about your audience. Writers will often know something about their audience and will write accordingly.

Long-term memory also can contain information about the writing format, such as the structure of the 5-paragraph essay or the format of an empirical journal article. I have decades of practice writing empirical journal articles and know the structure well: introduction, methods, results, discussion. Move me to a new format, such as a Letter to the Director, and I have less long-term memory support for the overall structure of the written product.

But, maybe the largest influence of long-term memory on writing is through the writer’s knowledge of the topic being written about. If you already know about a topic, that knowledge in your long-term memory requires less working memory during writing to maintain the memory of what you’ve just written or what you need to write next. When you know a lot about

a topic, your working memory is organized more efficiently than when you know less about a topic.

Now you know why I tend to pivot toward certain topics. Those topics make my writing task easier.

For this same reason, if you need to come up with a topic for a paper, choose something that connects to something you already know or want to know more about. The first article or link suggested by a quick internet search will probably not connect with you in the same way, and writing on that topic will be harder than it needs to be.

Finally, because writing is supported by long-term memory, writing becomes easier with practice. That practice helps build the long-term memory structures that support easier (never easy) writing. Many writers have commented on this, but Octavia Butler made this point nicely about writing when she wrote:

“First forget inspiration. Habit is more dependable. Habit will sustain you whether you’re inspired or not. Habit will help you finish and polish your stories. Inspiration won’t. Habit is persistence in practice.”

Sincerely,

Shaun Vecera  
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 Honors Program  
 Professor, Department of  
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# HONORABLE WORKERS

## Student Staff Help the Honors Center Run

### Kate Andersen

Ever wondered how the University of Iowa (UI) Honors Program runs so smoothly? And how honors students themselves can help the program? Look no further than honors student employees!

The UI has countless opportunities for on-campus jobs, and there are several options within the honors program. Two such positions are honors administration staff, otherwise known as “admins,” and peer mentors. These positions are filled by students, and they are an integral part of the honors program.

Veronica Sanchez, the administration and communications coordinator of the honors program, oversees student admins. Sanchez helps both the student employees and the professional staff fulfill their responsibilities in the program.

The professional and student staff work together to make the honors program successful, and Sanchez facilitates the connection between these two groups. Whether with a question, a letter of recommendation, or just a listening ear, the honors professional staff is eager to help its student employees.

“Working with the honors program, you develop relationships with a lot of the professional staff,” Sanchez said. “Making those connections, I think, is a really great thing for your undergraduate career because you’re able to take those with you wherever you go after you graduate.”

These relationships are beneficial all around,

even for professional staff.

“Having honors student admin at the front desk while I’m working is always fun because I get to learn about their lives, their classes, and their careers,” Sanchez added. “It’s enjoyable and makes my workday go by faster.”

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**“It’s a great way to give back to the honors program that provides so much for us.”**

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Jasmyn Jordan, a third-year political science and international relations major and admin at the honors program front desk, agreed.

“I would highly encourage any honors student to get a job with the honors program,” Jordan said. “I think it’s a great way to really connect with honors staff members.”

As an admin, Jordan answers emails, phone calls, and questions at the front desk and helps to maintain the fourth floor of the Blank Honors Center. Jordan feels this work will be a great experience for her future career.



Administration and Communications Coordinator Veronica Sanchez

"I would say the most important thing that I've learned is better outreach skills because I'm interested in political communications," she said. "I think this job has really helped me gain the skills for knowing how to respond quickly and also making sure I have all the right information when answering questions."

Jordan appreciates the chance to connect with her fellow honors students through her job, a sentiment that was echoed by several student employees—employees

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**"I would highly encourage any honors student to get a job with the honors program."**

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like Quinn Eldridge and Grace Hahn, two peer mentors in the honors program.

Hahn is a third-year speech and hearing sciences and psychology double major, and Eldridge is a third-year biomedical sciences major. Peer mentors meet with students, answer emails, send out reminders, answer questions, and overall act as a guide to honor students.

Eldridge emphasized the importance of knowing the "nitty gritty" of honors program requirements.



Honors peer mentors pose for a photo in front of the BHC during annual training. Photo provided by Holly Yoder

It sounds like a lot to balance all of these duties and a college education, but Hahn and Eldridge have it down.

"[The professional staff] is always supportive," Hahn said. "They're really understanding, so it's been good. It hasn't added a lot of stress."

"It's very flexible," Eldridge echoed. "I get to set my own hours most of the time."

Even with flexible hours and good experiences, all of the honors student workers agreed: The best part of the job was the people.

"I really do like my coworkers; we're all friends," Eldridge said. "I feel like it's like a little peer mentor family, so that's really special to me."

All the student employees emphasized how student employment helped them feel connected to the honors program.

"It's a great way to give back to the honors program that provides so much for us," Jordan said.

"It definitely gives me a greater appreciation for the behind-the-scenes work of running an honors program," Hahn agreed.

But what sort of student does it take to be an honors employee? When interviewing students for both peer mentors and admin employees, Sanchez has an eye out for the socially outgoing.

"[I] look for people who are competent and talkative because I think that, especially for peer mentors, you have to be personable. We also really just look for somebody who's friendly and willing to learn more and already has a little bit of knowl-

edge of the honors program."

Altogether, honors student staff not only keep the program running smoothly but connect with the professional staff and fellow honors students and connect the two together to foster strong, valuable experiences within the UI Honors Program.



Grace Hahn



Quinn Eldridge



Jasmyn Jordan

# STUDENT LEADERSHIP ROLES WITHIN THE

**How does the Honors Program compensate students who serve in leadership roles?**

## Wages

Honors Admins

Honors Publications Co-Editors

## Scholarship/Stipend

Honors Peer Mentors

Honors Writing Fellows

## Experiential Learning Credit\*

Student Organization Leadership

## Semester-Hour Credit

Honors Outreach Ambassadors  
(HONR:3170)

Honors Outreach Ambassador  
Teaching Assistants (TAs)  
(HONR:3100)

TAs for University Honors  
curricular courses (HONR:3100)

TAs for electives/gen eds taught  
by Honors Program staff  
(HONR:3100)

Honors Publications Writers  
(HONR:2900)

\*Experiential learning credit also available to all honors leadership positions if not automatically counted.



# UNIVERSITY OF IOWA HONORS PROGRAM

## Who advises or supervises the student leaders?

### Student Engagement Coordinator

DEI Council Officers

Phi Eta Sigma Officers

Honors Outreach Ambassadors  
(HONR:3170)

Honors Outreach Ambassador TAs  
(HONR:3100)

### Advising Director

Honors Peer Mentors

Honors Publications Writers  
(HONR:2900)

Honors Publications Co-Editors

### Honors Director, Associate Director & Staff as Assigned

TAs for University Honors curricular courses (HONR:3100)

### Honors Staff (various)

TAs for electives/gen eds taught by Honors Program staff (HONR:3100)

### Faculty Supervisor (not honors staff) Carol Severino

Honors Writing Fellows

### Scholarship Coordinator

Presidential Scholars Officers

### Administration and Communications Coordinator

Honors Admins

# FROM DREAMS TO REALITY

## A Moment of Magic's Inspiring Work

### Isabelle Friedman

If you are looking for a fun club with an important mission, check out A Moment of Magic!

A Moment of Magic, formerly known as The Princess Project, is a national nonprofit organization with active chapters across 18 states. As of 2021, it has 29 chapters and has served more than 100,000 children. The University of Iowa houses the only chapter in Iowa and was founded in 2019 with 100 active members.

A Moment of Magic is the perfect name for this organization that works to create magic for vulnerable children. Their students dress up as princesses, superheroes, and other characters to visit sick and disadvantaged children—and usher the magic in.

"Magic isn't something that just happens," the UI student engagement page states. "It takes hard work, determination, countless hours, and a whole lot of heart to make magic possible."

Ana Laura Leyser is a second-year biomedical sciences honors student on the pre-medicine track who joined A Moment of Magic in her first year. She discovered the club at the student organization fair and was immediately interested in its mission.

She joined as a volunteer before applying to play a character role. She now plays an adventurer of the Madrigal family on her visits. Her first visit was to the Children's Museum in Coralville, but she has also visited ChildServe, Iowa

Camp Courageous, Ronald McDonald House, Stead Family Hospital, and 4Cs of Johnson County Child-care.

Leyser describes the goal of A Moment of Magic as helping medically vulnerable children through a tough time.



A Moment of Magic volunteers, featuring Ana Laura Leyser in the middle, help children with their crafts.

"Our goal is to make sure that they remember to just be kids and forget everything else that's going on by having a little magical moment with our characters," Leyser said.

A Moment of Magic is meaningful to Leyser because she gets to work with children and bring a spark of happiness to their day.

"I see a little kid, and their face just lights up every time," Leyser said. "And I feel like I'm really making a difference in that moment by making it as magical as it can be."

Leyser says the best part of A Moment of Magic is watching the children's shyness turn to glee when they recognize the characters.

"Their eyes brighten up, and they come running towards you," Leyser said. "It's just the most amazing feeling when they recog-



The characters in A Moment of Magic take a picture with one of the children they interacted with that day. Photo provided

nize you.”

The UI Honors Program helps to facilitate getting involved in clubs like A Moment of Magic, and it made all the difference for Leyser when she was looking at clubs her first year.

She explains that the honors program encourages students to become well-rounded and develop many different skills, such as public speaking and organization, both of which Leyser acquired through A Moment of Magic.

“Being in the honors program pushed me toward wanting to develop that well-rounded education that includes things outside of academics,” Leyser said. “The extracurriculars also matter.”

The honors program also works hard to support Leyser as she

works toward her academic and professional goals. Leyser recently applied for an experiential learning grant, which she hopes will supply her with the financial support she needs to pursue her plans, including attending a pre-medicine conference located outside of Iowa.

Leyser is interested in pediatrics, so she believes A Moment of Magic is a great stepping stone in learning how to interact with children going through a tough time.

Leyser also developed a community in A Moment of Magic, where she met other people who are passionate about helping kids. She bonded with other members through their training protocols on how to approach conversations with these kids and answer

difficult questions the kids might ask.

“We also bonded over this common goal of wanting to make kids happy and wanting to make them smile,” Leyser said. “We’re all there to help each other work toward that purpose.”

Leyser recommended this club to everyone, whether they want to play a character or not, because there is a place for everyone.

Students can audition to be a character by sending in full body portraits, a



Ana Laura Leyser dresses as her character: an adventurer for the Madrigal family. Photo provided

video of them talking, and a video of them singing—although they do not have to be a good singer to audition.

The national committee goes through the file and finds the best fit. Then, the auditionee fundraises the cost of the costume, which is usually around \$500. However, A Moment of Magic also has volunteer spots for those who do not want to play a character. Leyser said many people are not characters but participate in other ways to bring joy to kids.

“Go to our first new member meetings, which are at the beginning of every semester, and see what it’s all about because it’s worth it,” Leyser advised.

*The University of Iowa supports over 600 registered student organizations. Find one that fits you at [leadandengage.uiowa.edu/student-organizations](http://leadandengage.uiowa.edu/student-organizations).*



A Moment of Magic characters pose with a mascot at a hockey match, where they raised awareness for their mission. Photo provided

# TAKE ME TO THE CLASS WHERE ALL THE POETS WENT TO LEARN

The Honors Program is Offering a Poetics Class on Taylor Swift

Josephine Geiger-Lee

Between Taylor Swift's Eras Tour and the recent buzz about her forthcoming eleventh album, Swift is experiencing new heights of attention and intrigue. Dr. Candice Wuehle's class entitled Poetics (Taylor's Version), gives students the chance to learn Taylor Swift and her music "all too well."

Wuehle serves as the scholarship coordinator for the University of Iowa's Honors Department, but before that, her background was in poetry. She holds an MA in literature from the University of Minnesota, an MFA in poetry from the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop, and a PhD in creative writing from the University of Kansas.

To Wuehle, this class gives her an exciting chance to explore both what she describes as "maybe the last monoculture we'll ever have

in America" and how poetry works mechanically and in the world.

"We think of Taylor Swift doing and implementing lots of literary techniques or poetic techniques," Wuehle said. "But I think that, on

through many different media including close readings, poetic devices, critical lenses, and writing "imitations" of one of Swift's eras. Within those, Wuehle is especially excited to focus on songs

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**"[M]y biggest hope is that students have walked away from the class better able to explain what a profound impact the humanities and literary arts in particular have on shaping our culture."**

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an authorial scale, what she's doing is just huge. Also fascinating to me is that her fans love her for that."

The class will allow students from all majors to explore Swift

such as All Too Well (10 Minute Version) (Taylor's Version) from Swift's rerecorded album, Red, and My Tears Ricochet from Folklore.

As for Swift's latest album, The

Tortured Poets Department, Wuehle says it continues to justify taking the class for Swifties.

"I feel like it's her saying, 'This has been poetry all along,'" Wuehle said.

For students who take the class, she hopes they have fun working through the assignments and learning more about poetry. However, she does have a larger goal in mind.

"I think that my biggest hope is that students have walked away from the class better able to explain what a profound impact the humanities and literary arts in particular have on shaping our

culture," Wuehle said.

Ben Ahlrichs, a second-year honors student studying English and creative writing and future teaching assistant for the course, took one of Wuehle's classes in the spring. He hopes to take this deep dive into Taylor Swift with her in the fall.

He already imagines what songs and concepts the class may take.

"[Swift's] rhyming is often very interesting," Ahlrichs explains. "Not only does she do the typical rhyme schemes, but a lot of her songs utilize slant rhymes, and she gets really creative with some of the ways. Like in Paris, she says

'somewhere else' and 'Paris'."

He imagines the class will cover Folklore—both the original release and the Long Pond Recording Sessions—and Evermore, but he personally hopes the class will also touch on Fearless.

"That's one of my favorites," Ahlrichs says.

Those interested in the class can add it to their schedule under the course code HONR:2994. Other classes offered by honors program staff include Classic Cult Cinema, taught by Dr. Emily Hill, and Honors Publications: From Pitch to Print, taught by Holly Blosser Yoder.

# POETICS

*(Taylor's Version)*

**HONR:2994:0001 | 2:00P - 3:15P W/F**

**140 BHC | Dr. Candice Wuehle**

# THE ROAD NOW TAKEN

## How Primetime Steered the Futures of Honors Students

### Raezel Valencia

As part of the UI Honors Program, first-year students have the option of participating in Honors Primetime, a program that takes place a week before their first semester of college.

Primetime serves as a short, hands-on experience where students can delve into their interests. Workshops like *Cities: Ancient and Modern* and *City of Literature: A Writer's Guide to Iowa* are just a couple of the titles meant to entice first-years to spend a week exploring their curiosity with their new classmates.

Dr. Emily Hill, associate director of the honors program is the organizer of Primetime.

"I hope, first and foremost, they make connections with their peers," Hill said. "All of them are

new students to the university. I hope—and I know—that my colleagues at honors hope that they find a sense of community within there."

Primetime is one of the first settings in which new students interact with both each other and the staff. Hill hopes the program provides the opportunity to foster friendships with like-minded students as well as gain connections with faculty members.

Alongside building a community, Primetime is also a place where students can figure out where they might want their university journey to take them. Staff members are handpicked with students' interests in mind. Primetime teachers are versed in many topics to give the students someone who can speak to a wide range of their pas-

sions.

As a result, some students find a growing interest in those subjects they delved into during Primetime, sometimes leading them to pursue it for the rest of their university experience.

For Sydney

Smithgall, this was exactly the case. Smithgall is a third-year honors student studying English and creative writing on the publishing track. They work as the executive editor of the *New Moon* magazine, an on-campus publication led by students.

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**"I hope, first and foremost, they make connections with their peers."**

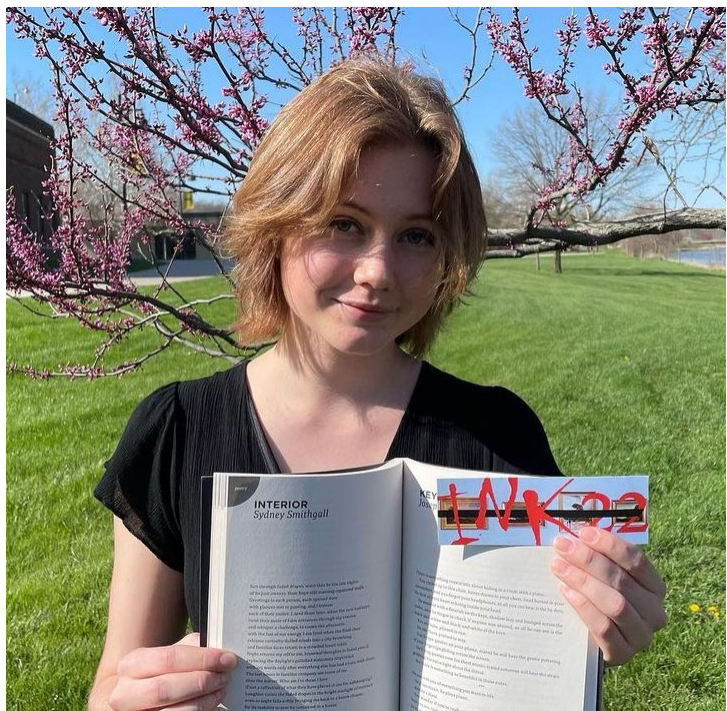
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Their journey to this position began in a Primetime workshop called *On Paper, In Print* where they met a panel of honors students who were working in *InkLit*, a publication aimed at first-years. They started as a beta reader—someone who reads submissions and helps editors pick stories to showcase in a publication—before becoming an editor for *InkLit*. Afterward, they joined *New Moon* as a beta reader and now serve as its executive editor.

"Primetime was really like the start of that very long process that



Honors Primetime 2023. Photo provided by Iris Peimann



Smithgall holds the InkJit 2022 magazine. Photo provided by Smithgall

has now led me to running a publication, which is somewhere that I never expected to be, especially as a freshman sitting in a classroom not knowing where anything is on campus,” Smithgall said.

However, this experience isn't the same for everyone. Moon Simpson, another third-year student who went to the exact same Primetime as Smithgall, began as an English and creative writing major. However, after spending only a couple of days writing and learning about publishing in Primetime, they realized they didn't want to pursue writing as a career.

“I realized I can't write a book,” Simpson said. “I like storytelling more than I like actually writing.”

Where Smithgall found the beginnings of their literary path, Simpson realized this was where theirs would end.

Attending the workshop wasn't a waste for Simpson, however. As a part of Primetime, students must make videos depicting their activities during their workshop.

This meant doing filming, editing, voicing, and subtitling—all in a very short amount of time.

Simpson oversaw the whole process, which sparked their passions for videography and editing.

As of now, Simpson has dropped all writing pretenses and is studying cinema.

For Simpson, Primetime was a reevaluation of their future.

“It helped me realize what I did want to do, but it also helped me realize what I didn't want to do,” they said. “You might really think you're interested in one area, but you might not have much actual practical experience in that area.”

In a few short days, Primetime gave them insight on that experience, allowing them to find what they really wanted to do.

Primetime is an incredible first experience for first-year honors students, allowing students the space and small classroom size to meet with people who may be interested in the same subjects as them. It is also a place of discovery, whether that be uncovering a future career or a new path forward. Either way, it continues to stand as a memorable experience for many honors students.



On Paper In Print group photo with Herky. Photo provided

# BEHIND THE SCENES AT LIT MAGAZINES

## An Honors Perspective

### Kenna Wolbers

The University of Iowa's literary magazines offer undergraduate students a place to showcase their creativity through art and writing. Looking behind the scenes of campus literary magazines, you will often find honors students leading their editing teams throughout the publishing journey.

Solenn Vincent, a first-year honors student, was inspired to join InkLit during her Honors Primetime course, *On Paper, In Print*.

"All of the literary magazines

came in and spoke to us," Vincent said. "InkLit stood out because it was a freshman magazine."

As the only undergrad literary magazine staffed entirely by first-year students, InkLit's mission is to provide newcomers a place to refine their writing and editing skills before joining other campus publications.

As editor-in-chief of InkLit for the fall 2023 semester, Vincent oversaw the entire publishing process for its 25th edition. Each edition of the magazine takes a semester to produce, with the

fall semester's submission period opening at the beginning of September.

It's after the submission period closes at the end of the month that InkLit's work truly begins.

"It's literally right at midnight," said Vincent. "Once submissions close, we get

up, get on Zoom, and assign the pieces to all the editors and readers and everything."

Editors act as the leaders for each team of readers and are usually organized by genre. For InkLit, those genres include poetry, fiction, nonfiction, drama, and art/photography.

Archer Bouslog, an honors student and one of InkLit's poetry editors, said they had to create two poetry teams this fall semester because of the sheer volume of submissions.

"There's always a lot of poetry," Bouslog said. "We talked with the readers and decided what got sent through the next round of voting."

Once editors have selected a few pieces for their genre, they assemble the entire editing team to read and vote on what goes into the final magazine. Bouslog said they saw a lot of people "championing" certain pieces, citing their artistic qualities and emotional impact.

"If you really liked [a piece], you had to convince everyone to take it," Bouslog said. "That was a little bit of a struggle."

In the event of a tie between yes and no votes on a piece, the editor-in-chief serves as the tie-breaking vote.



InkLit staff hosting their first meeting for the fall 2023 semester



"I had to break a tie last semester," Vincent said. "It was a 50/50 split ...You have to think of what people want to see and go with

nity," Selvarajaguru said. "With Earthwords, we're always doing events and different competitions."

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## **"This is cheesy to say, but I feel a lot of pride and joy... You think, 'Oh my gosh, what an outpouring of creativity!'"**

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your first gut instinct. Knowing my first feelings for a piece helps me decide."

Other UI literary magazines follow a routine similar to InkLit. Amritha Selvarajaguru, an honors student who serves as an illustrator for Snapshots and a nonfiction editor for Earthwords, said both magazines also have two rounds of voting—one round for the editors and readers and a second round for the entire staff.

When Selvarajaguru finds submitted writing she enjoys, she tries to highlight its objective qualities over her subjective experience reading it.

"You have to think this is an important piece of literature for us to include because it talks about this really important current topic, or it has this really intriguing use of framing in the narrative," Selvarajaguru said.

Snapshots is a relatively new magazine that specializes in publishing children's literature, while Earthwords is the UI's oldest undergraduate literary magazine with over 40 years of history.

"The environment of Snapshots is so nice because it's all focused on benefiting kids in the commu-

After the final votes are made, the selected pieces of each magazine are formatted and proofread by the editors. Then they have the choice of posting their completed edition online, printing physical copies, or both.

Publishing is usually followed by a launch party, an event where the magazine staff and the published authors come together to celebrate and distribute the physical copies of their work.

Vincent was thrilled to get her own copy of InkLit's 25th edition during their launch party at the Dey House.

"It was great seeing how excited they were, and I got to see all my hard work put into a magazine and hold it for the first time," Vincent said. "It's just amazing."

Snapshots held the launch party for its fourth edition in the Phillips Hall auditorium in late February.

"This is cheesy to say, but I feel

a lot of pride and joy," Selvarajaguru said about holding her latest volume of Snapshots. "All of that is so beautiful but also overwhelming. You think, 'Oh my gosh, what an outpouring of creativity!'"

Selvarajaguru believes her experience as an Honors Writing Fellow has contributed to her growth as an editor.

"It's taught me methods of providing feedback," Selvarajaguru said. "I think I've become a more conscious and critical reader as a result of being an honors student."

Vincent, Bouslog, and Selvarajaguru recommend joining a literary magazine as a way to practice networking, public speaking, and collaboration in a professional environment. Despite the challenges



Copies of InkLit's 25th edition displayed in their launch party in the Dey House. Photo provided

that come with publishing a magazine, honors students demonstrate how curating a publication is an art all its own.

# CALLING ALL FELLOW WRITERS

Honors Writing Fellows program provides help and feedback to essay writers everywhere

Riley Dunn

At some point while in college, every student is faced with the daunting task of writing an academic paper. This task may cause some anxiety as students are left to ponder what exactly their professor might want.

There are certain classes, however, that offer help to such students in the form of the Honors Writing Fellows program. Since the program's inception in 2003, Writing Fellows has been tutoring peers in essay writing all across different subjects.

Fellows—who are all undergraduates—are assigned to 10-12 students each semester upon joining the program. Their task is to provide written feedback to each student on two writing assignments that will take place throughout the semester. In addition, they will have conferences with both the students they are mentoring and the professor in charge of the class.

"As a Fellow, you have to personalize every piece of writing," fifth-year student Ian Ryan said. "You can't copy and paste comments because everybody is unique. At the same time, usually you will see the same problems across

many different papers."

Ryan has been in the Writing Fellows program for four years now and has gained much experience working with professors

and is on the same page."

Generally, writing fellows will be assigned to general education courses such as Interpretation of Literature and Rhetoric. Occa-

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**"I'm a very competent writer, but I am also a big fan of getting other people to look at my papers with a different set of eyes."**

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across many disciplines. For example, Ryan has been involved in two psychology courses, which involve more scientific writing, as well as courses such as Rhetoric, which includes more argumentative writing.

Many students feel a certain degree of comfort when interacting with other undergrads and may be more willing to share their work with a peer.

"You're sort of like a translator between the professor and the student—regardless of the course," Ryan said, "You're making sure everybody understands the prompt, knows what's going on,

sionally, upper-level courses will be included as well, giving fellows a wide range of courses to work with.

Aside from their written commentary on essays, fellows are also expected to hold conferences with the students they are assigned to. According to the program director, Carol Severino, during these conversations, fellows are supposed to talk about their ideas for revising as well as potentially begin the revising process.

"The program has impacted fellows in that it helps with their writing, especially their academic writing," Severino said. "They

become a lot more cognitively and rhetorically aware of what they're doing during the writing process."

During the application process, prospective fellows are expected to fill out a form that includes written personal reflections. They must also complete an interview and obtain a letter of recommendation from a trusted professor. When Severino is reviewing applications, she mainly looks for interpersonal skills as well as writing skills and academic competence.

She also mentioned that "fellowing" requires having a certain amount of organization. Since writing fellows tend to be ambitious and driven individuals, Fellows must be able to balance all

these responsibilities. This might mean moving some responsibilities around in order to complete all their work and meet deadlines.

Elisa Burba, who is currently in her fourth semester as a writing fellow, has experience on both sides of the job—as both a student and as a fellow herself.

"I'm a very competent writer, but I am also a big fan of getting other people to look at my papers with a different set of eyes," Burba said.

Last semester, as a student in one of Lori Branch's English classes, Burba was paired with one of her fellow fellows. Because of her own experience as a writing fellow, Burba knew exactly which comments to bring up during her writing conference.

On the other hand, Burba also learned what it was like to be a student listening to critiques on their writing and can now empathize better with nervous or unmo-

when he and the other fellows learned how to give feedback in "the right way"—meaning he learned how to give feedback in a way where the writer will actually



Four writing fellows give a presentation about their experiences at the Midwest Writers Association in St. Charles, MO. Photo provided

tivated students.

Throughout her work as a fellow, Burba has primarily worked alongside English courses.

"Personally, I try to stick to a lot of the paper-heavy classes," Burba said. "I may not have taken a variety of classes, but I think doing English classes over and over means that I'm really confident in what an English essay should look like."

However, since some fellows may work outside their comfort zone, the program provides training through a three-credit class called Writing Theory and Practice, which they take in their first semester of being a fellow.

For Ryan, one of the most influential aspects of the course was

receive it well and take those revisions to heart.

Being overly critical could be demoralizing for certain students, so fellows should always try to be kind—even when faced with "less than-stellar" papers.

"I think this program is a really important resource," Ryan said, "A lot of people come into college without developed writing skills. So it's helpful to have another undergrad who can guide them through the process."

*The Writing Fellows program is administered through the University of Iowa's Writing Center. Those interested in the program can check out their website: <https://writing-center.uiowa.edu/>*

# DE-STRESS FOR SUCCESS

## Opportunities and Strategies to Manage Mental Wellness

**Alex Lumish**

Every student at the University of Iowa is familiar with stress. Every staff and faculty member is too.

As students, we often associate stress with deadlines: classwork, projects, essays, exams, finals, and even simply showing up to class. For honors students, regular stressors become combined with a higher intake of coursework, more vigorous classes, and additional responsibilities. Regardless of how it presents itself, stress is nearly guaranteed to follow us anywhere.

So how do the honors students at the UI manage it?

Olivia Heller, a biochemical major and first-year honors student at the UI, has unique ways of de-stressing when it comes to exam seasons.

“When I was in high school, I wasn’t the most on-top of things when it came to stress management, so going into college I knew I had to change that, especially since I decided to join the honors program.” Heller said.

When asked about her main ways of combat-

ing anxiety in school, she mentions that she tried out multiple stress management strategies before finding out what really worked for her.

“I even tried meditation in the beginning of the year around midterms,” she said. “I was so overwhelmed and stressed out that I just started trying out random things.”

It’s not uncommon for new college students to feel lost when it comes to stress management and general studying tactics. However, different strategies to ease stress might help honors

students through these overwhelming times.

“Eventually I figured out what works for me, which made it a lot easier to manage stress especially around exam and midterm seasons,” Heller continued.

She talked about how her work at the Campus Recreation and Wellness Center encouraged her to explore some of the workout classes offered in the same building.

“One day I was looking through the workout class options on the website and decided I would come in and try out a yoga class,”



Photo by Tim Schoon, Office of Strategic Communications

Heller said.

It was harder than she expected, but she found that it succeeded in taking her mind off her work for an hour and providing her a “brain break,” as she called it.

It can be helpful to branch out and see what other opportunities the university has to offer. The UI offers various wellness opportunities—such as wellness courses and resources of help centers—to promote one’s well-being.

Honors students may find it hard to separate themselves from academic obligations sometimes, but these resources give opportunities to distance oneself from their stressors.

When it comes to faculty specifically, the university offers the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which aims to assist staff members in grief and loss, stress management, financial counseling, sleep concerns, alcohol and substance abuse, and more.

Shaun Vecera, a UI professor of psychological and brain sciences and the director of the honors program, changed his definition of stress management as he navigated the transitions implicit with growing up.

When asked about his personal strategies for managing stress, Vecera emphasized the importance of social balance.

“If you look at stress management, having a good social network is almost universally important,” Vecera said.

He explained how having a network of friends and family that you can talk to helps ground you and helps you recognize that your identity goes beyond the work that you’re doing—in a career or in the classroom.



Photo by Tim Schoon, Office of Strategic Communications

In times of great stress, it can be hard to remember to prioritize these relationships, and sometimes they can be pushed to the back of your mind. Vecera emphasized the necessity of having people that you can interact with in order to separate yourself from your career or work when needed.

“What’s really useful is being mindful of the systems you have and how important they are because those are fluid,” Vecera said. “It’s OK if your friend network changes. It doesn’t make them any less supportive.”

Prioritizing your physical and mental well-being can be just as important as maintaining these social circles. In his personal life, Vecera places emphasis on getting outside and into a differ-

ent environment.

“I try to give myself some space away from those things that can be stressful,” Vecera said. “I do that mostly by spending a lot of time outside walking the dogs. I also do a lot of outside conservation work. These things force me to be very focused and present on what I’m doing.”

Honors students are encouraged to explore resources beyond the honors program during times of stress—as you never know what will work best for you. Regardless of whether you’re a student, honors student, faculty member, or a local in Iowa City, the UI is here to support your wellness and provide opportunities for you to better manage your stress and mental health.

# HONORS STUDENTS SHINE AT RESEARCH FESTIVALS

Sharing their research, students build communication skills and networks

## Nadia Shaaban

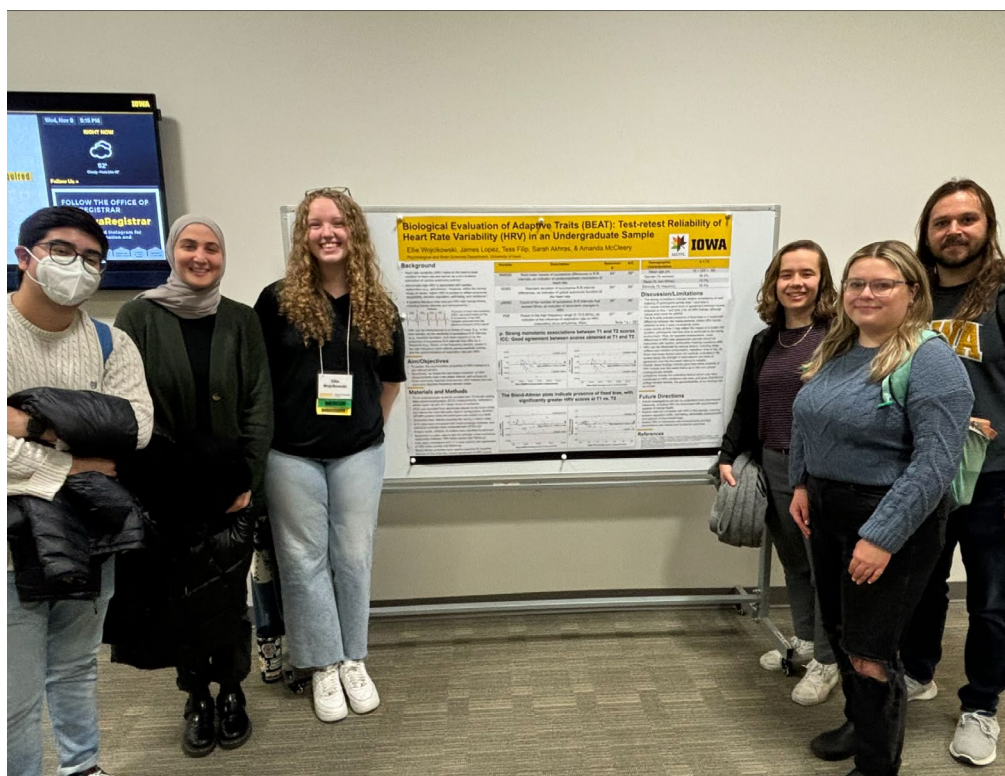
Each semester, the University of Iowa Office of Undergraduate Research hosts an undergraduate research festival: a showcase of student research work. And it gives honors students a chance to boast the hard work and progress they've made in their studies.

Students involved with mentored research receive the opportunity to create visual displays and presentations of their work, and the festivals then invite an audience of their peers, faculty, and community members to come appreciate them.

This year, the Fall Undergraduate Research Festival had over 120 participants, while the spring event had 160, many being honors students.

Ellie Wojcikowski, a second-year honors student studying neuroscience, presented in the fall festival. She knew as soon as she arrived at the university she wanted to get involved with research.

"With neuroscience [having] newer field research, [that] would be somewhere I could make a dif-



Wojcikowski and her team presenting their poster at FURF 2023. Photo provided

ference," Wojcikowski said.

The inspiration to complete her own research project came from working alongside graduate students in the lab. When she assisted a graduate student processing data in heart rate variability, she realized she could lead a research project of her own — resulting in a piece she could proudly demon-

strate to an audience at the festival.

Though getting started with research may be intimidating due to its density and time requirements, the experience of research benefits many honors students.

"Take advantage of every single resource that you can here on campus," Wojcikowski said. "If

you reach out your hand, someone's going to be there to grab it."

Other honors students, like psychology student Natalie Kehrli, take longer to get involved in research. Kehrli came to the UI as a pre-medicine student before realizing research would be a better fit for her.

"I realized that the only thing I would want to do in medicine is psychiatry," Kehrli said. "After talking to a couple of current PhD students and faculty members on campus, I realized that exactly what I wanted to do was get a PhD [in psychology]."

From there, Kehrli needed to navigate how best to get involved with research. As a first-generation student, she was initially unsure where to find guidance, but the UI Office of Undergraduate Research and the UI Marc Scholars program helped her find her footing.

Research also helps with re-

sume-building.

"Without [research], I probably wouldn't be very competitive for a PhD program because they want

Lauryn Bunn, an honors pre-dental student, said working with her mentor allowed her to explore other careers in her field.

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**"Take advantage of every single resource that you can here on campus," Wojcikowski said. "If you reach out your hand, someone's going to be there to grab it."**

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to hear what your research interests are," Kehrli said. "If you've never touched research in your life, how are you going to communicate any of those interests?"

At the research festival itself, honors students gain the opportunity to build their communication skills while presenting their work.

"The festival was where I started to feel confident in myself to communicate my research effectively as a scientist," Kehrli said.

One of the greatest benefits of undergraduate research cited by honors students is the opportunity to work with an experienced mentor. Working with a mentor allows students to gain knowledge and skills from those with more experience and see what working as a researcher can look like in the real world.

"[My mentor] has been a great resource to determine what options there are for me in the dental world if I ever decided I didn't want to go into private practice," Bunn said.

Bunn added that presenting at the festival allowed her to network with other students in similar fields and gain exposure to knowledge she otherwise wouldn't have.

Many honors students opt to turn their research into satisfying the honors experiential learning requirement, allowing them to earn honors credit for their work too. One key component of the experiential learning requirement is the reflection.

"[Experiential learning] helped me organize my thoughts better," Bunn said. "Now, when I talk to people about my research, I'm better able to explain it coherently."

*Many types of experiences can count for experiential learning. For more information and steps to honors credit see the Spring Newsletter back page.*



Wojcikowski wearing an EEG for neurology research. Photo provided

# BANDAGES AND BACHELORS DEGREES

## How Honors Benefits Nursing Majors

**Ashley Perez**

**T**he University of Iowa Honors Program consists of a variety of students and majors. All contain hardworking students challenging themselves to succeed—including the students over at the UI College of Nursing!

The UI College of Nursing is proud to house a number of honors students within its walls. With a national reputation for excellence,

the UI College of Nursing was ranked No. 4 in the nation for Best Bachelor of Science in Nursing by US News and World Reports.

Having such a prestigious ranking makes one wonder how these students balance the nursing major and university honors. Nursing as a major is known to be an intense four years. But does adding honors to your course load have any other benefits than just a

name on a degree?

Linda Meyers is an academic advisor for the UI College of Nursing. She is a phased retiree now but has been a part of the college for over 20 years. While meeting with a number of honors nursing students, she has heard of many different experiences and worked with a multitude of honors students.

She tells the nursing students she



Soon to be College of Nursing graduates take their ceremonial leap into the pool shortly after completing their last final exam as a nursing student. Photo by Tim Schoon, Office of Strategic Communications



works with that university honors is an opportunity you cannot miss out on.

"I think the fact that [the honors program] constructed it where some of our finest professors on campus are the ones that teach the honors courses [is something to take advantage of]," Meyers said. "You have access to that—and particularly if they line up with what you want to learn."

About 50 percent of nursing students are a part of the honors program. Having an already challenging major and adding on honors seems like an extra case-load to many. So then why do they do it?

"You came here to be challenged," Meyers said.

"You came here to be part of the best. Well, why not do honors? It's a no-brainer in my opinion."

Hallie McMillan is a second-year student majoring in nursing and has been a part of the UI Honors Program since her first semester. She is applying for standard admission to the UI College of Nursing this spring in the hopes of continuing her education here in Iowa City.

McMillan has taken a variety of honors courses in her first two years and has felt they have benefited her and her community as well as her pursuit of the nursing path.

"I've been able to participate in community-engaged sections of courses, and I've been able to see the impact of our suggestions on the community," McMillan said.



Photo by Rebecca Miller, Office of Strategic Communications

She feels these opportunities have helped lay the foundation for her future in nursing. Being able to be a part of a program that connects her with her surrounding community was a decision she does not regret.

Furthering her participation in the community, McMillan hopes to fulfill her honors experiential learning credit through a study abroad trip to Greece and a learning assistant position for General Chemistry One and Two—general education courses all nursing students are required to take in their first year. Having the patience and willingness to help these students through their coursework are characteristics she feels will carry over to her future in nursing.

Experiential learning for UI College of Nursing students can also be fulfilled through nursing

practicums, better known as clinicals. This is a great opportunity for students to complete their honors experiential coursework while doing live application of their nursing knowledge and skills in real-life situations and events.

Clinicals count as honors internship credit through the honors reflection process, which requires a reflection on the experience. Within such a reflection, nursing students can recognize the benefits and successes of their experience that ultimately deepens their learning.

So why do honors?

With opportunities like this laid out for nursing students, nursing students in the honors program truly benefit and continue to step up to the challenge.

"How can you not have a ball?" Meyers asked.

# 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*.



## 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.



## 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. Hannah hopes to make the world a better place (and maybe have some fun while doing it).



## Colin Votzmeyer

Colin Votzmeyer is a third-year honors student from Mt. Prospect, Illinois, studying journalism and mass communication. He intends on attending a law school in the Midwest upon graduation and pursuing a career in criminal defense law.



## Kate Andersen

Kate Andersen is a second-year student from Eldridge, Iowa. She is studying English with a goal of pursuing a degree in English secondary education and becoming a high school teacher after graduation.



## Josie Boyle

Josie Boyle is a first-year student from Peosta, Iowa, studying English on the publishing track and communications studies. Upon graduation, she will attend graduate school with hopes to become an editor and post-secondary educator.



**Riley Dunn**

Riley Dunn is a first-year student from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track as well as journalism and mass communication. In her free time, she loves reading, writing, swimming, and traveling.



**Isabelle Friedman**

Isabelle Friedman is a second-year student from Polk City, Iowa, studying English and creative writing with a minor in criminology, law, and justice. She is attending law school upon graduation with hopes to pursue a career in family law.



**Alex Lumish**

Alexandra (Alex) Lumish is a first-year student from the Bay Area, California. She is majoring in English and creative writing. Alex hopes to develop her nonfiction and journalistic writing skills to become a more well-rounded writer.



**Ashley Perez**

Ashley Perez is a second-year student studying nursing. She is from Orland Park, Illinois, and hopes to move back to Chicago post-graduation to be a pediatric nurse. She is an active member and officer of Alpha Delta Pi sorority.



**Nadia Shaaban**

Nadia Shaaban is a first-year honors student from South Barrington, Illinois, studying English and creative writing. She hopes to attend graduate school and pursue a career in either children's writing or screenwriting for television.



**Raezel Valencia**

Raezel Valencia is a third-year student from Eldersburg, Maryland, studying English and creative writing. She came to the University of Iowa in hopes of polishing her writing skills and publishing skills.



**Kenna Wolbers**

Kenna Wolbers is a first-year student from Dubuque, Iowa, studying film and creative writing. She enjoys drawing, playing the drums, and volunteering with the Iowa Youth Writers Project.

# WHAT'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING?

Experiential learning is “learning by doing” and gives students an opportunity to apply classroom learning to out-of-classroom situations. These practices and experiences range from personal development to professional development to exploring your academic passions. Students choose experiential learning opportunities that will cultivate knowledge and skills that interest them.

For most honors experiential learning, students will undertake a reflection process to better understand and articulate their experience and how it connected to their broader interests and goals.

## HONORS REFLECTION PROCESS

Steps to turn your experiences into credit for University Honors

**Find an  
Opportunity**



**Complete  
Pre-Experience  
Survey**



**Engage!**



**Complete  
Post-Experience  
Survey**



**Complete  
Narrative  
Reflection**



### Types of Experiential Learning

- Internship or Job
- Study Abroad
- Study Abroad with an Internship
- Service or Volunteering
- Leadership Position
- Research or Creative Project
- Teaching Assistant (TA) or Learning Assistant (LA)
- Honors Writing Fellow
- Resident Assistant

**Credit will be recorded on your University Honors degree audit**



**Have questions?**

**Email [honors-explearning@uiowa.edu](mailto:honors-explearning@uiowa.edu)!**