



ALUMNI CONNECTION

FALL 2024

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**University of Iowa
Honors Program**



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Cover photo taken in 1932 shows a white oak outside West-lawn, towering over Ford Model T cars. The tree was felled earlier this year at an estimated 300 years of age. Full photo and story on page 18.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Shaun Vecera

Each fall semester as I start to draft this Letter from the Director, I look over my past letters as a way to reflect on how the Honors Program has changed over the past year. (Admittedly, I also look back to make sure I'm not just recycling what I've written before.)

For the past several years my letters have started with an introduction of our newest staff members. This year is no different. I'm happy to introduce Nora Higgins as our new graduate student intern. You can read more about Nora in this Alumni Connection, but Nora is currently a second-year master's student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program in the College of Education. Nora has been working closely with Maddie Schulte, our student engagement coordinator, to create opportunities for students to connect with each other and with the program. Nora has been so successful with events, such as 80+ students at a Late Night Study & Snacks event, that the attendance has forced us to consider larger rooms. We have only had a graduate intern since 2022, but the new internship position has been a wonderful way for the Honors Program to support the professional development of a graduate student and for the program to benefit from new ideas and events for students.

Also on the staffing front, for the

past year we've had a stable full-time professional staff—we've had no retirements or migrations to other offices at the university, which were more common across campus immediately after the pandemic. This stability has allowed us to look at the various parts of the program and its curriculum to make sure that we're supporting students as best as possible. We're now offering two honors courses as part of the curriculum: Introduction to Honors and a Second Year Seminar on experiential learning. These courses have been in planning and testing for a while, but this Fall semester they rolled out as critical pieces to help students navigate the program.

I want to highlight the Second Year Seminar on experiential learning because it connects to two of the articles in this issue. Elizabeth Connor's article interviews Mark Archibald, our records, enrollment & analytics specialist, who helps us assess various aspects of the program. Shortly after I started as director, our assessment work helped us understand which aspects of the honors curriculum were most challenging for students. The answer was the experiential learning requirement. Although we had several supports for experiential learning—including experiential learning grants, which Monica Thomas writes

about—we received the most questions from students about this piece of the curriculum.

The experiential learning course is designed to help students better understand what experiential learning is but also how to find and get the most out of these opportunities. The course, taught by Dr. Candice Wuehle, also helps students learn and practice skills that aren't always taught explicitly, such as how to manage longer-term projects, including an experiential learning opportunity. The course includes topics around goal setting, reflection and metacognition, and campus resources for experiential learning. Students who have taken the course are telling us that it has been extraordinarily helpful, not just for honors experiential learning but for organizing and managing other projects.

Circling back to the experiential learning grants we offer, I want to thank all of our alumni who have helped support these grants. Since I have been director, we have used the One Day for Iowa (ODFI) philanthropy event to support experiential learning. We used ODFI to help expand our experiential learning grants. Over the past several years, we have been able to fund more students as they study abroad, present at a conference, or complete an internship. The back page of this issue



Shaun Vecera. Photo by Gabriella Estlund.

Charles received the James D. Robertson Award, which is given to students in their senior year to help provide support to students who show promise of success either in graduate school or in a business career. The Montange/Patterson Scholarship Fund will support a senior who graduated from an Iowa high school and is majoring in mathematics, philosophy, history, physics, chemistry, biology, or geoscience. Their gift is a wonderful way for Charles and Kathleen to “pay it forward” by supporting current and future generations of Hawkeyes.

Thanks for 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. And here I’ll call out Cheryl Brown’s article on honors housing to ask for your memories and experiences with honors housing. University Housing helped us move honors housing to the top two floors of Catlett Hall to give our students access to the newest residence hall on campus and to better manage campus’ housing space. We’d love to hear from you! Feel free to email me directly (shaunvecera@uiowa.edu) or follow us on social media (@uiowahonors on Instagram).

Sincerely,

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

includes information for how to give to the program. Gifts can be made out to the Honors Program Excellence Fund or the Honors Program Student Enrichment Fund.

As with my past letters in the Alumni Connection, I want to highlight the publication of our latest issue of the Honorable Works, which provides Honors Program students a venue for their creative works. The latest issue 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 and editors. Please be sure to see what students in the program have created.

Finally, I’m also excited to share some wonderful news from the program: The program received a gift that will endow another new scholarship for Honors Program students. In July, I learned from the University of Iowa Center for Advancement of Charles Montange (72BGS, 72BA) and Dr. Kathleen Patterson’s (76MD) gift to sponsor a scholarship. During his time in the Honors Program,

INSIDE ‘THE TORTURED POETS DEPARTMENT’

New honors class examines the poetic lyrics of Taylor Swift and inspires students to pen their own

By Vivian Wang

Whether or not you’re a fan, you know her. Her name regularly makes headlines, her face graces magazine covers, and her music fills coffee shops, shopping malls, and football stadiums.

Taylor Swift’s undeniable cultural impact begins with her chart-topping hits and Eras world tour, but University of Iowa honors program instructor Candice Wuehle (08BA, 14MFA) also credits the singer’s special relationship with her fans, her journey to re-record and reclaim copyright of her music, and her unprecedented power and visibility as a young woman.

The current “monoculture” around the megastar, as Wuehle describes it, is what inspired Wuehle to teach Poetics (Taylor’s Version), a UI honors course centered on Swift’s songwriting.

“There’s never been an artist like this in my lifetime, someone who—whether you like her or don’t—you have at least one strongly held opinion on her,” says Wuehle.

A poet herself and graduate of the esteemed Iowa Writers’ Workshop, Wuehle fused her love for poetry and Swift into the UI introductory and intermediate poetry course, which debuted this fall.

The 22 honors students in the course explore different elements of poetry such as imagery, sound, and rhythm, which they practice by writing imitations of songs from Swift’s different eras. (See example on page 4, contributed by first-year student Charli Harkins.)

The class also discusses biographical criticism on topics such as gender, race, trauma, and memory in the context of Swift’s songwriting.

As the students learn about these elements of poetry, they co-author The Taylor Swift Dictionary of Literary Terms, compiling definitions along with examples from Swift’s discography.

What makes Swift’s lyricism such an ideal lens through which to learn about poetry?

“If you think of your average poet, they’re writing in one voice and genre for their whole career,” Wuehle says. But Swift is anything but average. From country pop to folk-inspired ballads to “almost kitschy melodramatic” songs like “But Daddy I Love Him,” Swift’s musical exploration knows no bounds, Wuehle said.

Swift not only defies musical genres, she also defies literary genres. In addition to albums like

folklore, which explore the “more fictive” side of her storytelling, Swift has woven “herself as a character throughout her catalog,” according to Wuehle.

“She’s built this multiverse where she’s not just building chronologically on her work, but she’s commenting back to other albums,” she says. “The plot isn’t just progressing—it’s thickening.”

For example, Wuehle recalled being blown away when she realized Swift’s “my tears ricochet” from folklore pulls lyrics from Swift’s previous albums and combines them “to create this really cohesive chorus.”

On its last day, Dec. 13 (which also happens to be Swift’s birthday), the class will culminate in a “Swiftposium.” This public “Eras-style conference event” will include students’ presentations of their final papers, friendship bracelet-making, and possibly even a Taylor Swift impersonator, Wuehle said.

“I feel like Taylor Swift is so much about community that it’s really important to have some fun moments of community building throughout the semester,” she said.

As they move through the course,



Swifties learn the elements of poetry and how to analyze it. But Wuehle also hopes students can use what they learn to “succinctly prove to their uncle at Thanksgiving who thinks Taylor Swift is just a pretty pop star” that Swift is a poet too—and a great one at that.

This article first appeared in Iowa Magazine and is re-printed with permission.

Honors program instructor Candice Wuehle invites students to learn about poetry through the music of Taylor Swift. Photo by John Charlson/The Daily Iowan.

I HEAR ECHOES

By Charli Harkins

I hear echoes at 3 AM, like secrets in the dark
They whisper in colors, in bruises and scars
I’m haunted by feelings that faded maroon
Left chasing the shadows beneath the same moon

And I let the light in, but it’s never quite right
My hands grasp at memories slipping like night
You were my sunshine, and I was the rain
A storm in the making, so we never remained
I tried to forget you, to bury your name
But I hear it in whispers, like smoke and flame
I can’t shake these echoes, these half-faded dreams
Love never dies; it just hides in between

Charli Harkins is a student in Poetics (Taylor’s Version), an honors class that debuted this fall.

FULL **CIRCLE**

Honors alumna joins staff as graduate student intern

By Angela Knipper

There's a new kid on the block when it comes to the fourth floor of the Blank Honors Center. Nora Higgins is the newest addition to the University of Iowa Honors Program staff, joining this fall as the student engagement intern.

Higgins was born and raised on a family farm in Brandon, Iowa. After high school, she attended Iowa and graduated in May of 2023 with a BA in English.

She was on track to become an English teacher, but after working as a resident assistant in Stanley Hall with the Iowa Writers Living Learning Community and at Student Life Communications as a social media producer, that trajectory changed.

These jobs shared a lot when it came to creating awareness of resources and connecting students to them on campus. After this, Higgins realized she was more interested in working with college-aged students rather than high school students.

Higgins decided to study higher education student affairs for her master's degree. She is currently in the second year of that program, which requires an internship along with coursework.

Higgins heard about the internship with the honors program through a friend and was interested in it because it focused on student engagement.

"I graduated with honors in my

undergrad, so having the perspective of being a student in the program, I was really excited to see what I could bring to the position," Higgins said.

Madison Schulte, honors student engagement coordinator, is Higgins' supervisor and was responsible for hiring her onto the team.

"She was honest about what she did and did not know, which was cool," Schulte said. "She also seemed very committed."

One of Higgins' favorite parts about the internship is the focus on engagement. She hosts social events for the honors program and helps teach the Honors Outreach Ambassador course. Higgins works to build community and helps students find success outside of classroom settings.

Schulte emphasized that the honors program is not all about academics. It's also about how students are doing as people and about being well-rounded because that is what will give students success in the long run.

Bringing in a graduate intern was beneficial because it expanded the range of things the program could do.

"She's done a great job of taking everything for what it is and adding her own little

twist," Schulte said. "I have been really grateful for her partnership."

Shaun Vecera, director of the honors program, is appreciative of Higgins as well.

"It is useful to have a graduate student on staff because they bring a unique perspective that may be closer in age to our students," Vecera said.

It's a two-way street. Higgins, who is the second graduate student to serve in this position, is getting professional experience from the internship — all while the work she is doing contributes back to the university, specifically the honors program and its students.

Schulte and Higgins will be putting on events for the honors program all year, and they are excited about what's in store.



Nora Higgins. Photo provided by the University of Iowa Office of Strategic Communications.

GOODBYE DAUM, HELLO CATLETT

A look back at honors housing

By Cheryl Brown

Move-in day at Catlett Residence Hall was nothing short of a frenzy. I stood in line for what felt like hours, surrounded by other frantic first-year students and their parents, all wrestling boxes and bags into overcrowded elevators. Little did we know, this day signified a new era for University of Iowa Honors Program housing.

This year, honors housing made the leap from Daum Residence Hall to Catlett, which houses over 1,000 students in total. Honors students like myself had the chance to live on one of two designated floors, and now around 170 of us call the 11th and 12th floors of Catlett home.

But what about the history that led us here?

Before Daum became honors housing, there was Shambaugh House, which had been home to professor Benjamin F. Sham-



Catlett Hall, where honors housing has relocated this year, is now home to around 170 honors students on the 11th and 12th floors. Photo by Cheryl Brown.

“While it may be a change of scenery, honors students still feel a strong sense of community and excitement.”

baugh. Built in 1902, this historic building became the home of the honors program in the decades after its 1958 founding, and later, the upper floors served as a residence for honors students.

The honors program left Shambaugh in 2001 when staff moved to temporary offices in the Jefferson Building, awaiting the completion of the Blank Honors Center.



Daum Hall opened in 1964 as an all-women's dormitory and later became honors housing. Many alumni remember it fondly as a home for honors students. Photo by Cheryl Brown.



Shambaugh House once housed honors students. In 2001, it moved three blocks north to make space for the Blank Honors Center and now hosts the International Writing Program. Photo by Cheryl Brown.

Honors housing had moved to Daum in 1998, when University Housing established a living and learning community (LLC) there for honors students.

These included a secret tunnel to Burge and a skywalk to the third floor of the Blank Honors Center. However, despite being being

demand since its opening in 2017. Now, with honors housing relocated to Catlett, residents are busy enjoying the building's modern amenities.

"It's helpful to live with other students in the honors program and get to know them because you might have a class together at some point," Neibuhr said."

"I enjoy living in Catlett," said Aden Niebuhr, an honors student on the 12th floor. "The hall lounge is perfect for studying or hanging out, and it's super convenient since it's close."

In the evenings, honors students on the 12th floor frequently gather there to watch movies, play games, and unwind together.

"It's helpful to live with other students in the honors program and get to know them because you might have a class together at some point," Niebuhr said.

While it may be a change of scenery, honors students still feel a strong sense of community and excitement.

"You have an affinity for the building not because of the building itself but because of the good experiences you had there," Vecera said.

For honors students like Niebuhr, those positive experiences are already beginning to take shape.

Daum had opened as a women's dormitory in 1964. The smaller residence hall quickly acquired the nickname "Baby Burge."

During the more than two decades that Daum served as the honors residence, honors outreach ambassadors, giving tours for prospective students, promoted the advantages of life in Daum.

loved for its unique features, Daum struggled with occupancy in the 2020s. As UI Honors Program Director Dr. Shaun Vecera explained, "The numbers simply weren't adding up."

With Daum struggling to fill its beds, the move to Catlett this year became necessary, especially as Catlett has seen increased

ANOTHER ONE FOR THE BOOKS

Honors professor and Iowa City native Candice Wuehle announces second novel

By Virginia Simone

University of Iowa Honors Program professor Candice Wuehle announced a book deal with the University of Iowa Press for her second novel, *Ultratural*, in July — adding a chapter to the rich literary history of Iowa City.

For those who take her classes, this serves as a testament to the possibilities available to UI honors students like them — students whose shoes Wuehle once walked in herself. Originally from Iowa City, Wuehle is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and holds a PhD in literature and creative writing from the University of Kansas.

Much like her previous book, *Monarch*, *Ultratural* was born out of the convergence of a theoretical question and a conspiracy theory.

"My question for *Ultratural* was, 'How is our internal life changing the more we monetize that interiority?'" Wuehle said.

"I don't necessarily mean 'monetize' in terms of money but the way we sell ourselves on social media through online presentation and how that changes the way you think," she explained.

This question led her to the lives

of celebrity pop stars like Britney Spears and the ways in which they had to navigate fame.

Meredith Wadkins-Stabel, the acquisitions editor for the University of Iowa Press, said it was this combination of pop culture with a "wonderfully weird twist" that made Wuehle's story stand out to her.

The result was a story about a young Appalachian woman rising to stardom and making impossible decisions about how much of her life to share with the world.

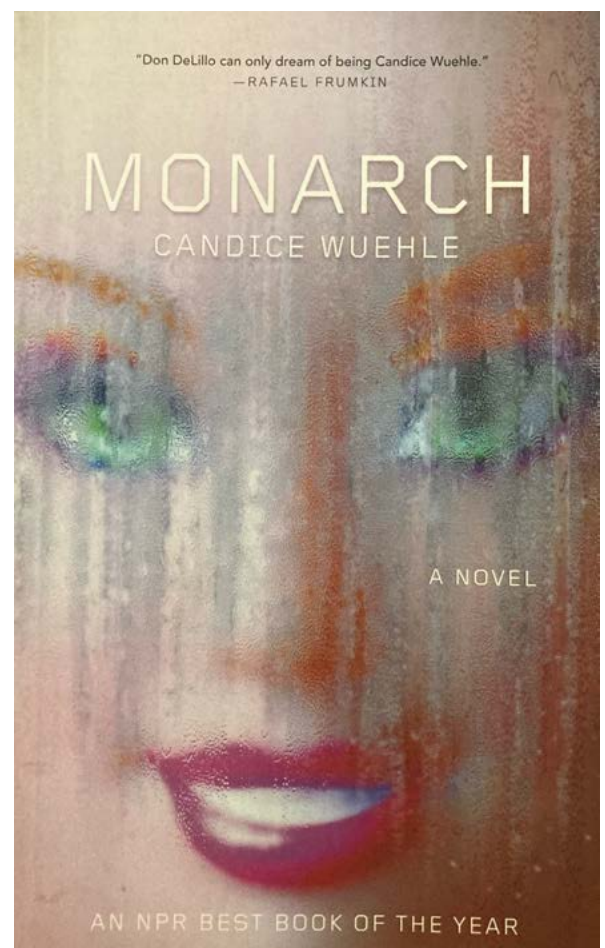
Through what Wadkins-Stabel describes as this "slippery and insidious trade," the young pop icon struggles to maintain her safety and autonomy.

"My favorite thing about this is how it draws on pop star lore and millennial icons of the era," Wadkins-Stabel said. "*Ultratural* peels back those layers and explores what's behind the social media posts."

Although they had a similar genesis, Wuehle's

journey with *Ultratural* was very different from her first novel.

When writing *Monarch*, Wuehle was in graduate school at the University of Kansas and had time to work on it every day as part of her dissertation. For *Ultratural*



Wuehle's first novel was published in 2022.

ral, though, she was teaching full time at Hollins University and had to carve out the time herself.

"It was a lot of, 'Alright, I just had dinner with [poet laureate] Ada Limon, and now I'm going to go to my office at 8:30 at night because this is when I have time to work on this book,'" Wuehle said.

ist, and even that was something she had to learn to believe in.

As an Iowa City native, Wuehle has always been surrounded by literature. She found her love of writing at a very early age. By kindergarten, she was telling stories and "making newspapers about the neighborhood dogs."

"Once I was here, I was really focused," Wuehle said. "From getting into honors in the major, I knew that I wanted to go to grad school."

It was in graduate school that Wuehle would write her first book and realize her love of teaching. Today, she is for her students

"There's a really special and potentially challenging thing in a literature or creative writing classroom where you are talking about the craft, but you're also giving people tools to talk about themselves and live a more thoughtful and meaningful life"

The commitment paid off.

Wadkins-Stabel loved the manuscript from the first read, and some Zoom meetings and negotiation later, the contract was signed. Wuehle announced her deal with the University of Iowa Press soon after.

Wuehle's decision to publish with the University of Iowa Press was unrelated to her time as a student or her position as a professor at the university. It was the connection she made with Wadkins-Stabel and the Press that influenced the partnership.

"It's actually a lot like dating," Wuehle said. "It only takes one person, and then it's your whole life."

The other difference between *Untranatural* and *Monarch* is that, this time around, Wuehle knew it was possible to see her work through to the end. Prior to her first book's release, Wuehle had her doubts. She had spent the first 12 years of her career as a poet, not a novel-

"I was always innately drawn to literature," Wuehle said. "I wasn't really interested in too much else, to be honest."

However, it wasn't until high school when a teacher encouraged her craft that she really realized a career in writing was possible. That teacher was poet and National Book Award winner Mary Szybist.

Szybist, who had just graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, invited a 16-year-old Wuehle to her first reading at Prairie Lights. Under Szybist's mentorship, Wuehle began to see herself as a writer.

"[Her guidance was] the really big thing that made me feel confident and I think changed the course of my life," Wuehle said.

After high school, Wuehle attended Kirkwood Community College and then came to the UI to study English. She quickly landed in the honors program, a pivotal moment in her career.

what Szybist was for her, using her lived experiences to help shape her students' perspectives on their potential.

"There's a really special and potentially challenging thing in a literature or creative writing classroom where you're talking about the craft, but you're also giving people tools to talk about themselves and live a more thoughtful and meaningful life," Wuehle said.

The most valuable lesson that Wuehle expresses to her students is the resiliency that comes from seeing the bigger picture, something she has learned from her own writing journey. Her words are a reminder for them and anyone else dreaming of writing that it takes time — but it's possible if they're willing to have a little faith.

"A lot of what you're going to feel is failure is really just waiting," Wuehle said. "[It's] just believing in yourself when you have no reason to."

TICKET TO RIDE

Experiential Learning Grant helps students to go far

By Monica Thomas

Ever wanted to roam the streets of Paris for inspiration for your novel? Or to present research at a conference with the world's leading professionals? The University of Iowa Honors Program offers a unique and intriguing grant program for students with ambitious plans to complete their experiential learning requirements.

The Honors Experiential Learning Grant is an option for students in situations where finances may make the opportunity difficult or impossible. This is where the honors program can step in to help students afford their rightly deserved chance to experience the world.

Nora Higgins, the student engagement intern at the honors program, is conducting a research project reviewing the grant's post-experience reflections, which collect information about how students use the grant, whether it be for studying or traveling abroad or for career development opportunities such as conferences or presentations.

Higgins has found that about 50 percent of students use the grant for internships or research, 30 percent for studying abroad, and 17 percent for conferences.

In their reflections, students also provide a description of how the grant contributed to their academic or personal success and whether or not the grant significantly contributed to accomplish-



Elise Koltonowski volunteering during her Summer 2022 internship. They worked together to build a house, which brought them all closer. Photo provided by Elise Koltonowski.

ing their goals. The response has been 100 percent affirmative.

Elise Koltonowski is a fourth-year student with a chemical engineering major, focusing on computation, data science, and computer learning. She also has a minor in computer science. In 2022, she used the grant for a technical engineering internship at Northrop Grumman in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where she worked on software development for test result analysis in aircraft and on various contracts and presentations for the company.

Koltonowski said this internship was incredibly worthwhile to her and is thankful that the grant made it possible.

"Of course, go do these experiences," she said. "They're so

worth it. I'm a firm believer, even though my degree is so technical, the experiences teach you so much more than a degree ever really could."

Alyssa Thompson is a second-year graduate student getting her masters in speech-language pathology. In July 2023, she used the grant to attend a Cognitive Science Conference in Sydney, Australia.

"This grant contributed to both my personal and academic success because it assisted me in attending my first research conference," she said. "This conference gave me the opportunity to network with research professionals around the world and present my work to interested researchers."



Alyssa Thompson traveled to Sydney, Australia, to present her research at the Cognitive Science Conference in July 2023. Photo provided by Alyssa Thomson.



Annelise Richardson explored the ruins of the Roman Forum with guests staying at the hostel she volunteered at in the Summer of 2024. Photo provided by Annelise Richardson.

"Thank you to all of the donors who made this trip possible for me," she added.

Annelise Richardson, a 2024 UI graduate with a major in English and creative writing, used the grant to spend two months in Rome, Italy this past summer.

There, she worked at a hostel and undertook a creative nonfiction writing project. She traveled across the country to find inspiration for her writing and improved her Italian language abilities.

"I am passionate about engaging with the world on a greater scale and engaging with all its cultural complexities," she said. "I believe there is much to be learned from traveling and meeting people who live differently than I do, and it is a great goal in my life to travel as much of the world as possible to become more culturally aware and intelligent."

Richardson is interested in living

abroad and is currently applying to various global graduate programs. Because of the grant's opportunities, she now feels better equipped to do so.

Grace Heiden, a fourth-year student majoring in anthropology, political science, and ethics and public policy, used the grant similarly. This summer, she attended a four-week course in Greece and Denmark entitled Tasting Culture: Nordic & Mediterranean Food, Tradition & Nutrition.

She traveled across Europe to visit organic and conventional farms and learned how to cook traditional cultural meals.

"As an anthropology major, it was a dream come true to get to spend time immersed in two distinct cultures with such unique food cultures," she said. "I was able to take the practices of cultural relativism, reflexivity, denaturalization, and ethnographic methods

that I've learned in my anthropology classes at Iowa and apply them outside of the classroom."

Candice Wuehle is the honors student scholarship and development specialist who oversees the grant process from beginning to end. She finds great fulfillment out of the many hours she dedicates to this grant.

The UI Honors Experiential Learning Grant is an amazing opportunity for students who seek to broaden their horizons and expand their self-confidence — students who are already embarking on incredible feats to grow their professional development and to engage with vast parts of the world.

As Wuehle put it best, the grant makes possible "lots of very unique experiences that students wouldn't have the opportunity to do unless they were enrolled at the University of Iowa."

BEHIND BIJOU

How UI honors students and faculty engage others through the Bijou Film Board

By Hannah Smith

Saturday night at 10 p.m. is a coveted hour for college students at the University of Iowa. Many students are busy downtown. English and creative writing student Grace Pignolo is one of them. As a member of the Bijou Film Executive Board, Pignolo is a key contributor to the After Hours Series.

The Bijou Film Board, housed in local theater Film Scene, is a student-run non-profit organization which, according to its website, is “dedicated to the exhibition of independent, foreign, and classic cinema.”

Bijou was founded in 1972 by a group of UI students who wanted to make space for the artistic and loving community of students in Iowa City. All Bijou programming is free for UI students.

The After Hours Series, which screens a film every Saturday at 10 p.m., offers a fun, late-night, weekend activity that supports a positive student culture.

“Rather than going out to the bars, you can go see a movie with your friends, and it’s a lot safer, and it’s more educational,” Pignolo said.

“It’s alternative programming for people who are looking for that experience in college.”

Pignolo, who is pursuing honors in the major at the UI, has transitioned into her role at Film Scene from being a general member in 2023 to the partnerships director this year.

Pignolo organizes all of the part-

nership events between Bijou and other students clubs, organizations, and the university. Often, there are also conversations about the films that happen directly after the screenings. These conversations are typically facilitated by Bijou members.

These films aren’t always easy watches, though. Bijou shows films in foreign languages with closed captions and from decades past. One of Bijou’s goals is to challenge students to witness new perspectives, ideas, and films that they would not otherwise be

exposed to.

“We’re really trying to make these movies, these conversations, these new cultures or perspectives available to anyone who wants to be exposed to them and be a part of the conversation,” Pignolo said.

Bijou partnered with Film Scene during its founding in 2013. Before having Film Scene as a space to host screenings, Bijou was housed in the Iowa Memorial Union.

David Gould, a faculty member and honors program associate,



Bijou members above are captured dressed for Halloween. Bijou frequently hosts themed events and screenings. Photo provided by Grace Pignolo.



Bijou members introduce a film prior to the screening. Bijou members introduce films such as those in their After Hours series. Photo provided by Grace Pignolo.

sat at the first planning meeting of Film Scene, founded by entrepreneurs Andy Brodie and Andrew Sherburne. According to Gould, Bijou’s transition from the IMU to the downtown Film Scene location happened “seamlessly.”

local artistic spaces, as competitors, Film Scene and Pignolo see them as partners in a larger effort of making art accessible to Iowa City and Iowa at large.

Although Film Scene faced challenges during the COVID-19 pan-

always seems to be somebody from Cinema [department] who’s on it as well as a lot of community leaders.”

“Its ties to the university are pretty strong,” added Gould.

“One really great part about being on Bijou [Executive Board] is we’re matched up with our counterpart who works at Film Scene, and they sort of act in a mentor role,” Pignolo added.

As a previous member of the Film Scene’s board, Gould described how members of Bijou act and are treated as fully legitimate and valued members of Film Scene. They sit at the same meetings as the “adults” in the room and pitch ideas and discuss changes in leadership.

This mentorship and leadership opportunity has helped Pignolo to realize the impact of her work on a larger scale.

“Being in Bijou widened the community of people that I knew on campus, and that’s what has impacted me the most,” Pignolo said.

“Rather than going out to the bars, you can go see a movie with your friends, and it’s a lot safer, and it’s more educational.”

“I think that Film Scene, from everything I’ve observed, has really seen Bijou as a partner,” said Gould, who served as a member of the executive board for nearly a decade. “There’s a real fondness there.”

Rather than seeing The Englert and Hancher Auditorium, two

demic in 2020, it is again a thriving place of community whose partnership with Bijou—and the UI, including honors students and the campus population as a whole—is mutually beneficial.

“There’ve always been faculty from the university that are on the board,” Gould said. “There

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Honors beyond the Blank Honors Center

By Elizabeth Connor

When Mark Archibald began working for the University of Iowa Honors Program, he quickly realized it was much more than its common stereotypes.

Archibald, honors records, enrollment, and analytics specialist, started at the program with a common misconception: honors is only for overachieving students with unreachable test scores, a plethora of advanced credits, towering grade-point averages (GPA), and lives entirely devoted to their academic pursuits. Nothing else.

This misconception is shared by students. First-year honors student Abby Jager thought the program was “full of students with only academic priorities.”

In fact, honors students aren't one homogenous mass of high school valedictorians but are instead a diverse group of students with different programs of study, hobbies, and interests.

This insight led Archibald to conclude that the program isn't meant to be a stark separation from other students and aspects of the college experience. Rather, it's meant to enrich every other kind of endeavor that students participate in.

“We need to approach our students as having purposes and

identities that aren't honors,” Archibald said.

For example, in conducting a welcome session held for students this past August, Archibald made sure to emphasize all aspects of the UI experience. This could include participating in Mock Trial, attending Prairie Lights readings, or simply going to a Hawkeye football game.

Knowing that students aren't only here for honors, Archibald aims to encourage them to be well-rounded individuals who bring their honors education and mindset into every aspect of their lives — academic or not.

In the welcome sessions, Archibald explained that honors isn't only about rigorous coursework or a high GPA, but the ability to reflect and thoughtfully engage with any activities they take part in on campus.

Most students assumed the written reflections assigned in Intro to Honors class would have to be about study nights, academic-related extracurriculars, or academic advising appointments. However, Archibald shocked students by telling them they could write about going to non-academic activities such as Hawkeye football games or enthusiastic bingo nights.



Mark Archibald. Photo by Justin Torner.



Abby Trosper. Photo provided by Abby Trosper.

“You're supposed to figure out how the honors program helps you with the plan that you either preconceived or are currently constructing,” he said. “You yourself are in charge of your plan, and

you get to leverage honors to your own benefit.”

This idea was well-publicized in the first-year welcome sessions as Jager came out of her session and defined the program as “a collection and network of students and staff who work together to facilitate the growth and learning of students — academically but also personally, socially, and emotionally.”

Sophomore honors peer mentor Abby Trospen defined the program as “a support system of people who want to see you succeed.”

To Trospen, an accurate understanding of the program helped her to take part in experiential learning credits — another requirement of the program — that she was truly interested in.

“I am someone who has many different interests, and when I was initially exploring ways to gain experiential learning credits, I thought I had to focus on one or my ‘biggest priority,’” she said. “Since the qualifications for experiential learning are so wide-open, I am able to more fully explore all those interests rather than trying to hyperfocus on one.”

A human physiology and economics double-major, Trospen lists health economics research, sports medicine internships, insurance internships, hospital-based patient care technician, coaching, and being a teaching assistant or tutor among the experiences that interest her. And serving as an honors peer mentor, her current role, may also count as experiential learning.

Trospen’s involvement in experiential learning is a direct result of an honors program that is comprehensive of every student’s interest, not selective in what it does and does not want to help the student explore. This perception of the program is exactly what Archibald wants to instill in

students.

Archibald knows the one thing that unites honors students is their aptitude to think critically and explore the opportunities given to them. To him, that’s an obvious part of the program.

However, instead of only using those skills to take harder classes and achieve higher scores, honors is meant to push students to

engage with the world around them in a thoughtful manner. It’s meant to bring those skills into their classes, social lives, hobbies, and every other aspect of their lives.

“Honors is just how [students] do their thing with a little more reflection,” Archibald said. “Life’s just better when you use your brain more.”



Students in Intro to Honors class reflected on a wide range of college experiences, including participation in Hawkeye football culture. Photos by Tim Schoon.

FROM ISOLATION TO ALLIANCE

UI student creates community through new organization

By Teagan Harris

The Hawkeye Chronic Health Alliance, established in spring of 2024, is a new student organization that provides support for students with disabilities and chronic illnesses and brings awareness to these conditions. While the organization is young, it's set to create a long-lasting impact.

Around one-half of young adults reported having at least one chronic condition in 2019, according to the CDC. Nearly half of these adults are also students.

Chronic illness is categorized as any long-lasting or permanent disease. Those affected may experience chronic pain and fatigue or be left bedridden. Chronically ill college students face frequent absences, falling behind in classes, and social isolation.

Sarah Winternitz, a third-year majoring in human physiology, suffers from a variety of chronic illnesses. During her first year at the University of Iowa, Winternitz was hospitalized multiple times, forcing her to drop her entire first semester.

"I wasn't able to even go to class, so I wasn't really able to meet people because I was confined to my room or going to the doctor all the time," Winternitz said.

She received support from Iowa's Student Health and Student Disability Services, which Winternitz described as a positive experience, while other entities on campus seemed to be less accommodating. While navigating university resources, Winternitz noticed a lack of support for chronically ill students.

She was surprised the university had no club related to chronic illness and realized she could make a difference. Winternitz felt a student organization dedicated to chronic illness could provide a social network and advocate for students such as herself.

"[My friends] helped give me a lot of support, whether it was emotional or things I should be saying to the doctor to advocate for myself," she said. "And I realized not everyone has that."

Along with a group of friends, both with chronic illnesses and without, Winternitz established the Hawkeye Chronic Health Alliance during the 2024 spring semester and became the organization's first president.

Another member of the club government is Lauren Hughes, a third-



Sarah Winternitz is the founder and president of the Hawkeye Chronic Health Alliance. Photo provided by Sara Winternitz.

year honors student majoring in criminology. Hughes described how she suffers from an invisible illness, which means she does not appear physically disabled but still experiences many symptoms.

She struggled with finding accommodations and resources on her own after moving to university, and she has felt isolated.

"I just thought of myself as on my own because there's not going to be a lot of people with illnesses like mine," Hughes said.

Hughes lived in Daum, the prior

honors residence hall, in her first year, so she was able to connect and become friends with other honors students. She also found community through her relationships with other chronically ill students, such as Winternitz.

"[Winternitz] wanted to start this club, and I said, 'Sign me up,'" she recalled.

The founders of the Hawkeye Chronic Health Alliance stand in a long and honorable tradition of student visionaries as previous UI honors students have pioneered similar organizations. Dave Gould, a faculty member and honors program associate, instructed the honors course Field Work and Social Innovation where students created an initiative to solve a world issue.

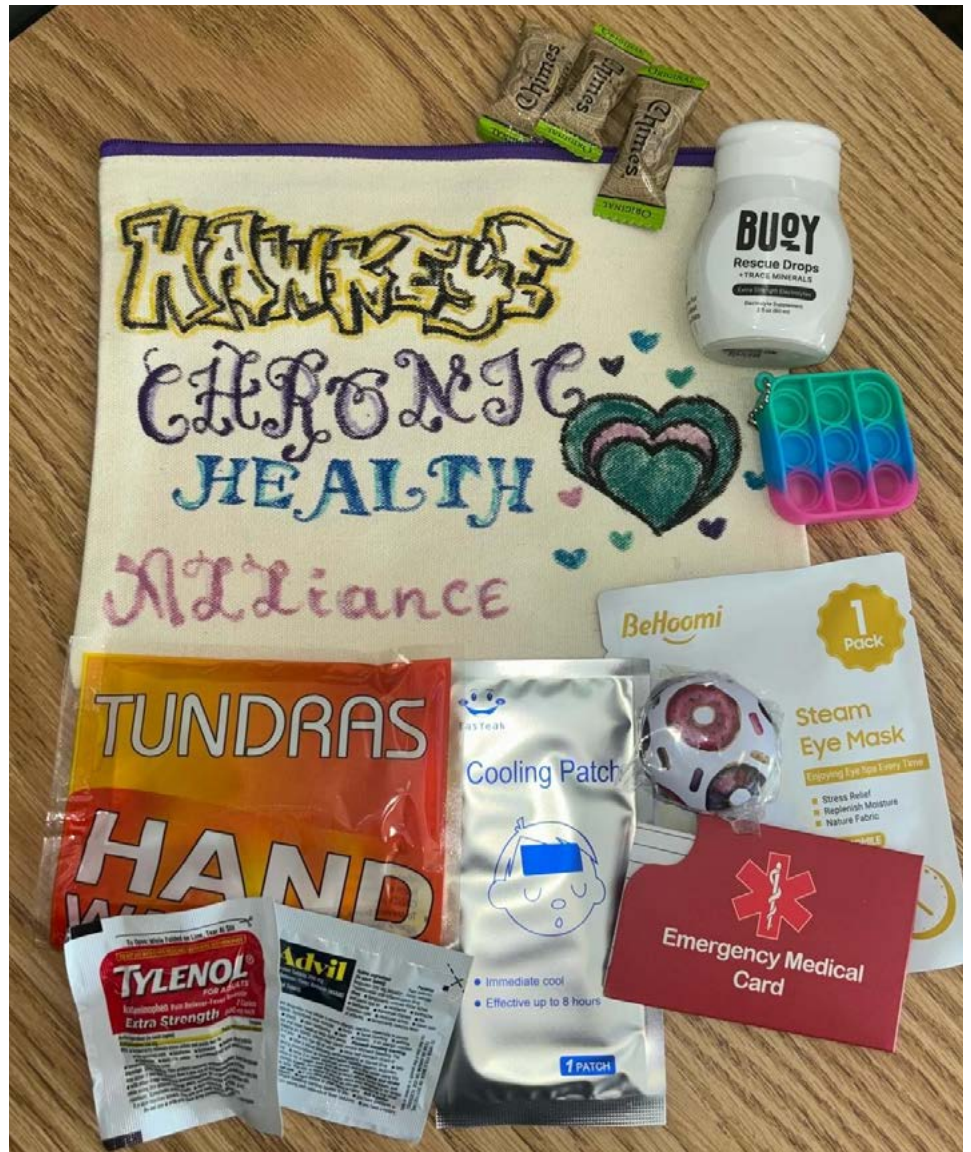
Gould shared one such initiative created by honors students was the Food Pantry at Iowa. Students noticed their peers were struggling with food insecurity and felt moved to create a solution. The students received pushback from the university when they first pitched their idea, but with perseverance, the food pantry took off.

More than a decade before, in 2002, a group of honors students calling themselves the James Gang established a volunteer database and encouraged all students to get involved. That led to the founding of the Ten Thousand Hours Show and, later, Public Space One. Over 20 years later, the James Gang continues as a successful nonprofit.

In August of 2024, the Hawkeye Chronic Health Alliance became an official university student organization. According to Winternitz, the club provides a support network for students to connect and share resources, along with putting on social events, raising awareness, and holding fundraisers.

"I love talking to everyone," Winternitz said. "I love giving everyone an opportunity to be able to help each other. It feels good to be able to do something to help

tives, Gould discussed how many of these honors student leaders have gone on to achieve something consequential. Whether they are now professors, philan-



Contents of a Chronic Illness Kit. The Hawkeye Chronic Health Alliance provided these kits at an organization event. Photo provided by Shay Pechter.

people on campus."

An important impact of the organization, Hughes said, is how "people aren't afraid to ask questions."

"They're not afraid to ask for advice," she added. "And I think that, especially if you're coming into college, that's a pretty daunting task."

Recalling earlier student initia-

thropists, or presidential speechwriters, college students who are inspired to build a better world continue to have a revolutionary impact.

"One of the things that I have learned over the years is that young adults – college students – are unique in their ability to take on initiatives and create change," Gould said.

ROOTED IN HISTORY

UI's trees and their tales

By Andrew Prommer

Did you know the black walnut tree outside Macbride Hall is older than the building itself? Or that the University of Iowa has four state-record trees? How about the fact that the Iowa campus is an accredited Type II Arboretum, next to only 144 other institutions worldwide?

While a rich tapestry of trees, gardens, and natural spaces await exploration, many students, staff, and alumni remain unaware of the ecological treasures that surround them. These remarkable facts highlight the importance of fostering awareness and appreciation for the natural wonders that

enrich our campus.

My 2022 Honors Primetime section, Go Out and Play, focused on the university's horticulture, Iowa's native biodiversity, and our own appreciation for the natural beauty that permeates our surroundings. Though birdwatching, hiking, and canoeing at Kent Park was lively, what truly piqued my interest was the university's own grounds.

Our lead instructor, Shaun Vecera, director of the UI Honors Program, invited Campus Arborist and Supervisor of Urban Forestry Andy Dahl to lead lectures and campus tree tours. As we strolled

along paths shaded by towering oaks and majestic maples, I began to appreciate how our campus' wooden residents have witnessed, and even shaped, the evolution of our campus over the years.

"Trees are repositories for history," Dahl said. "Each has a unique story, not told in paper pages but in wooden rings."

Dahl's passion for trees is infectious and, as he spoke, I found myself captivated by the layers of meaning behind each species. He explained how the university's designation as a Type II Arboretum not only highlights the diversity of trees on campus but also emphasizes their ecological importance.

According to UI Facilities Management and UI Tree Map, we have over 8,000 trees of more than 300 species, including four state record holders.

These lumbering giants are more than just scenery; they are essential contributors to a balanced ecosystem.

"Beyond their size, these trees provide vital habitat, combat pests, improve air quality, and even enhance our mental well-being," noted Dahl.

Despite the ingrained function and history of our trees, I couldn't help but wonder how many UI students are



150-year-old state champion Black Walnut lumbers outside Macbride Hall. Photo provided by Andy Dahl.



A 200-year old white oak towers over Ford Model T cars outside Westlawn in this 1932 photograph. The tree was taken down in 2024. Photo provided by Andy Dahl.

truly aware of the natural legacy surrounding them.

“I would guess probably not,” Vecera said when asked if Iowa students are educated on the campus’s natural life.

Still, as Dahl explained, the UI isn’t a land grant university like Iowa State University, which usually has more botany, landscape architecture, and forestry classes. Although the UI has made a concerted effort to maintain our trees and keep campus beautiful, Dahl said there has been less and less emphasis on teaching it.

As Vecera pointed out, it’s “hit or miss” when it comes to how students encounter this information, with majors like environmental science benefiting more than others. While Iowa Facilities Management offers tree tours, and some professors like Vecera weave discussions about campus flora into their curricula, these opportunities are sporadic.

“If I were to just pick a random psychology major, I don’t know if there would be an easy way for

them to pick up knowledge about the natural landscape,” he said.

Fortunately, some professors are seizing the initiative and dedicating class time to environmental education.

“Recently, I’ve been giving tours, meetings, and talks all the time,” Dahl said. “Even though these kiddos aren’t going to school for this, they have a genuine interest. You can see it in their faces. They’re not even sleeping or going on their phones.”

One notable example of this initiative is Vecera’s Honors Prime-time course, *Go Out and Play*, which actively engages students with the outdoors. Vecera, who grew up in southern Idaho, developed a love for nature over the course of a lifetime of camping, hiking, and volunteer conservation work.

Vecera is also a professor in the UI Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. When prompted about the importance of his course, Dr. Vecera pointed to the links between natural expo-

sure and psychological benefits.

“It’s almost as if you can see students sort of recognizing and appreciating nature differently in real time,” Vecera said. “The goal is to get students to not just see nature but to interact with it.”

Through hands-on activities, like identifying tree species and understanding their ecological roles, students develop a tangible connection to their surroundings. This experiential learning fosters a sense of stewardship.

“Once students realize how much history and life is contained in these trees, they start to care more about preserving that legacy,” Vecera said.

Reflecting on a 194-year-old oak that was recently taken down, Dahl shared how it “sprouted around 1830 — decades before the Civil War, before the capital was built, before the university, and before the state of Iowa was even a state.”

“Trees transcend generations,” he said. “They are a living, breathing part of our campus’ legacy.”

MEET THE TEAM



Holly Blosser-Yoder

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



Hannah Cargo

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



Colin Votzmeyer

Colin is a fourth-year student from Mount Prospect, Illinois, majoring in journalism and mass communications with minors in history and law. Upon graduation he will attend law school with ambitions of becoming a federal prosecutor.



Cheryl Brown

Cheryl Brown is a first-year honors student majoring in English and creative writing. She's passionate about storytelling, particularly in the sci-fi and fantasy genres, and is interested in pursuing a career in publishing.



Elizabeth Connor

Elizabeth Connor is a first-year honors student from Kansas City studying English and political science on the pre-law track. She has enjoyed Honors Publications so far and hopes to improve her writing skills while meeting other honors students.



Teagan Harris

Teagan Harris is a second-year honors student studying biomedical sciences on the pre-medicine track. She plans to attend medical school and pursue a career in oncology. In her free time, Harris enjoys hiking and the arts.



Angela Knipper

Angela Knipper is a first-year honors student studying history with a minor in cinema. She hopes to pursue a career in secondary education.



Andrew Prommer

Andrew Prommer is a third-year honors student double majoring in finance and business analytics and information systems. He anticipates pursuing a career as a data analyst.



Virginia Simone

Virginia Simone is a second-year creative writing student. She is from San Antonio, Texas, and now lives in Denver, Colorado. Currently an editor's assistant at University of Iowa Press, she plans to pursue a career in editing after graduation.



Hannah Smith

Hannah Smith is a third-year honors student studying English and creative writing who is in the Teacher Education Program. She plans to pursue a career in English education.



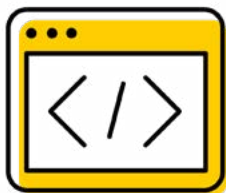
Monica Thomas

Monica Thomas is a third-year honors student studying communication with minors in political science and criminology, law, and justice. She will graduate this May and plans to enter a career in political communication or recruiting.

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