Honorable Works



2026

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Cover art by Elene Kodanashvili. Learn more about Elene's work and artistic process on p.17.

Designed by Olivia Bishop.

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letter from the editors



Riley Dunn



Isaac Branch



Ava Neumaier

Hello, Reader!

We are honored to present the 2026 issue of Honorable Works.

Here, Honors Publications members showcase students at the UI whom they find profoundly creative, working together to share their work with you. Ranging from 3D art to statistical analysis, court briefers, children's book illustrations, and much more, these pieces represent the interests and versatility of honors students. As you dive into this collection of the curious and creative, we hope you are as intrigued as we TAs were, and become inspired to pursue joy with the same fervor as our contributors.

Welcome to the fifth issue of Honorable Works!

On behalf of the Honors Publication Team, Riley Dunn (BA27), Isaac Branch (BBA28), Ava Neumaier (BA27)

Story Time

Writing for Children

Featured Honors Student: Ashlyn Solinsky

Edited by: Karina Murray



Ashlyn Solinsky

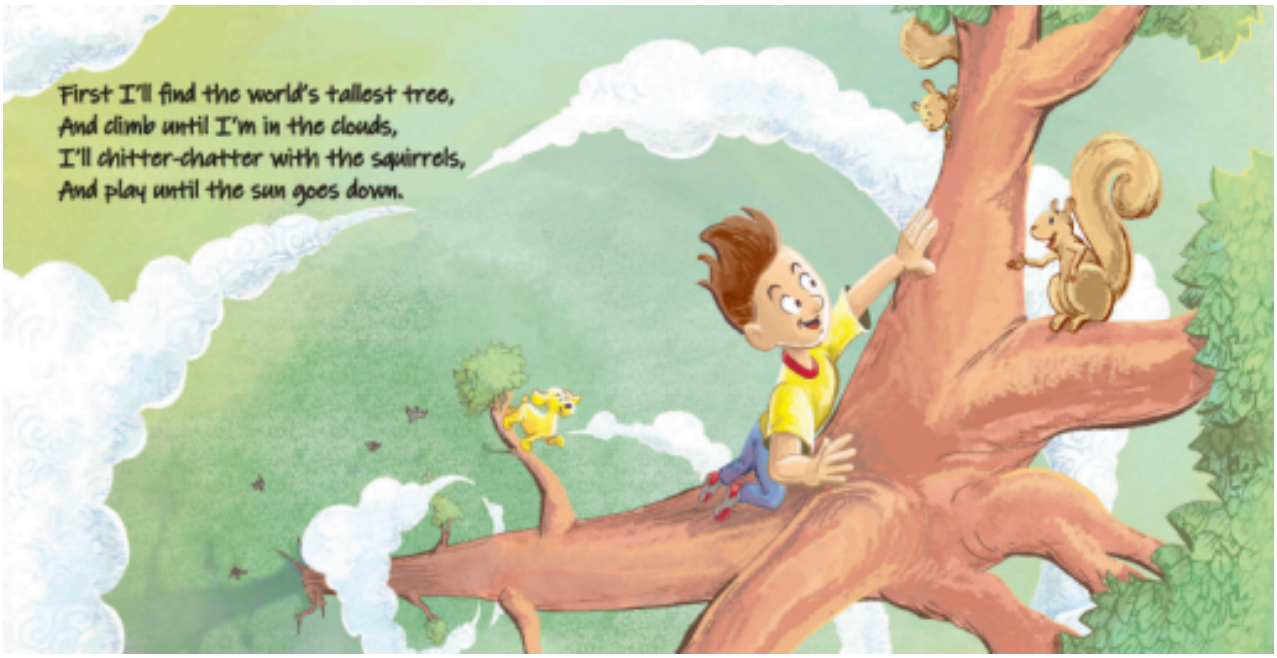
The first children's book Ashlyn Solinsky completed and published was "Happy Snappy Wonderful Places to Go!" in 2020. It is a story about a little girl named Little Annie Rosy Rainbow who dreams of all the places she could go from her backyard swing. It is inspired by a story she thought of when she herself was a little girl, where she would swing so high she would travel the whole world.

A year later, she published a second book, "The Adventures of Sammy C. Sunshine." Her second book features a little boy, Sammy C. Sunshine, who brings happiness to the world around him. In her third book, "Jack's Unexpected Journeys," a preteen boy is forced to get off his phone and explore, which leads him to a love for reading.



The Adventures of Sammy C. Sunshine
Written by Ashlyn Solinsky, Illustrated by Rob Peters. Published by Nico 11 Publishing & Design (2021).

Solinsky started writing when she was six years old. “As soon as I started reading, I wanted to be a writer,” said Solinsky. Her inspiration to write is to inspire the next generation to go out and explore the world, and perhaps start writing. As she continued writing children’s books, she purposefully made them more mature and intricate so that her first readers could continue to enjoy her books. There is a noticeable difference between “Happy Snappy Wonderful Places to Go!” and “Jack’s Unexpected Journeys” in terms of audience.



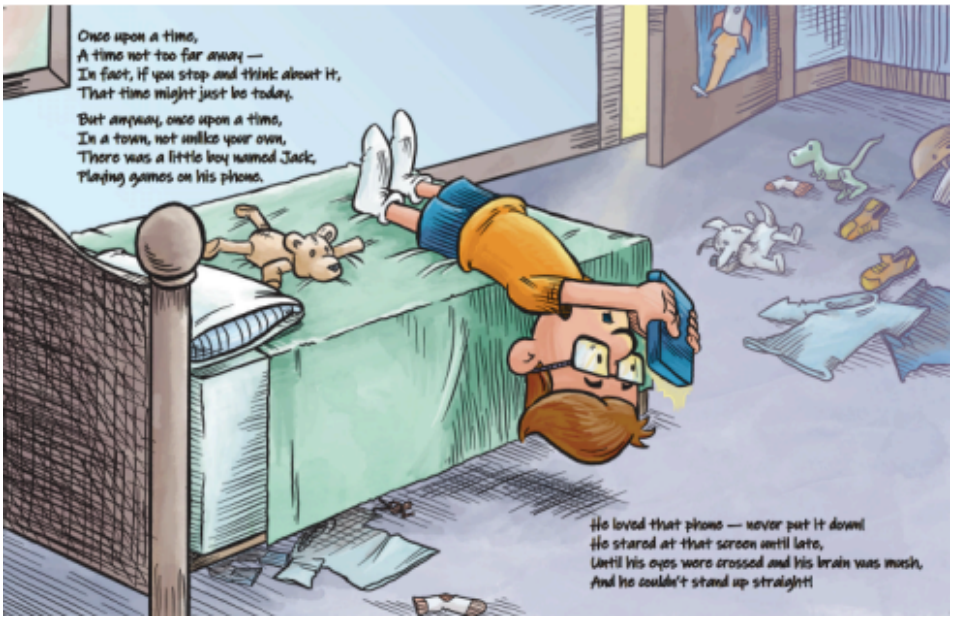
The Adventures of Sammy C. Sunshine Written by Ashlyn Solinsky, Illustrated by Rob Peters. Published by Nico 11 Publishing & Design (2021).

Solinsky has a fond relationship with libraries, as it can be noticed that a librarian is featured in “Jack’s Unexpected Journeys.” “She was sort of inspired by my elementary school librarian,” explained Solinsky. “She was so kind and met kids where they were at.” Solinsky enjoys having story time with her books at local children’s libraries in Wisconsin. “It’s so validating, it’s a reminder that this is what I do it for, this is it,” said Solinsky.

In the future, Solinsky plans to continue writing children’s books and be an editor at a publishing company to help other authors' dreams come true. She is currently on the eighth draft of her next book, which will be a middle-grade level children’s novel.



Happy Snappy Wonderful Places to Go! Written by Ashlyn Solinsky, Illustrated by Rob Peters. Published by Nico 11 Publishing & Design (2020).



Jack's Unexpected Journeys Written by Ashlyn Solinsky, Illustrated by Rob Peters. Published by Nico 11 Publishing & Design (2022).

Ashlyn Solinsky is a second-year honors student studying English and creative writing on the publishing track and minoring in communications. She is from Stratford, Wisconsin, and she enjoys being outside in nature, hiking, fishing, and reading poetry to geese. She is a designer at earthwords, a UI literary magazine, and she is an organizer for the Living Memoirs Project in Iowa City.

Wedding Case

Featured Honors Student: Lauren Begich
Edited by: Jenna Crowley



Lauren Begich

Lauren Begich is a second-year student from Rosemount, Missouri, majoring in English and creative writing with minors in biology and American Sign Language (ASL) and a certificate in museum studies. They enjoy zoos, Prince (the musician), and the Museum of Natural History in Macbride.

While Lauren Begich plans to attend graduate school and become a genetic counselor, they also have a longstanding passion for museums and spend much of their time at the Dakota City Heritage Village in Farmington, Missouri. They described their job there as “being a real-life American Girl doll,” and fondly recalled the many artifacts they discovered in the far-reaching corners of the archive room. Alongside managing and caring for items housed in the museum, Begich has also designed displays. One of their creative visions, “Wedding Case,” embodies their love for public learning and reflects the beauty of breathing life into historical objects.

The mannequin is dressed and positioned based on a wedding photo donated from 1920, pulling together both donated and archived items to replicate the look. “I just feel like it’s so important for people to do that work,” they said, “to share all the information that we have with other people and make it digestible for them.” To find out more about the Dakota City Heritage Village, see their website at https://dakotacity.org/about-us/.



Begich’s exhibit, which pays homage to a wedding photo from the early 1900s, is displayed at the Dakota City Heritage Village.

Rift

Featured Honors Student: Robin Habecker
Edited by: Mia Edison



Robin Habecker

Rift is an excerpt from a longer piece Robin Habecker wrote for the annual creative writing challenge, NaNoWriMo, which stands for National Novel Writing Month. Participants of this challenge are given the task of writing a 50,000 word novel draft during the month of November. The NaNoWriMo challenge provides community and a sense of encouragement to its writers, attempting to help them overcome every writer's greatest nemesis—writing block.

Chapter 1: Into The Storm

"That stupid water heater! It never works!" I mutter under my breath as I listen to it make that odd rumbling noise yet again. I walk down the unfinished concrete stairs to the basement, the stone is cold against my unsocked feet. I kneel down in front of the heater and start to fiddle with one of the valves, cursing all the while. It makes a popping noise that tells me the issue is resolved, for now, at least. I've fixed the ancient thing more times than I can count.

I sulk back up to my room. Upon entering, I immediately hear a soft beeping noise. One of my radars has detected something strange. But what? Sitting down in my worn navy desk chair, I glance over at the flashing screen surrounded by endless amounts of papers, leftover food, and a forgotten Casey's cup. Glancing around the room, I see the chaos I've created: a corkboard that's so uncomfortably overcrowded with notes it's like a sardine can, filled with midnight scribbles of ideas.

I turn my gaze back to the radar's screen. I built this from a mail-order kit when I was 15. It's still the most expensive piece of equipment I've ever bought, my most prized possession. Because my lifelong obsession, my quest really, has been learning everything I can about the strange weather patterns of River Forest, Illinois. I've watched the progression of countless storms, cataloging their movements in my journal, but this one is particularly strange.

I can hear the distant drone of the TV in the living room, set to the weather channel as always. The reporter is going on about the storm, following its movements over a simplified map of the area. By her calm, almost bored tone of voice, I can tell she's not seeing what I am. I know more.

The sound of my doorbell ringing takes me out of single-minded obsession. "Riley!" an annoyed voice calls out from the front porch, "I'm freezing my ass off, girl!"

"Coming!" I call back, recognizing the voice of my best friend Nadia. I can tell she's pissed and I almost trip down the stairs with how fast I run to the door to let her inside. Nadia's wearing a purple shirt and a pair of plaid green pants that don't go together at all. With equally purple headphones slung around her neck, and her frizzy chocolate-colored afro sticking out from under a neon orange beanie, I can't help but laugh a little when I see her; she sort of resembles a traffic cone.

“Hey, sorry about that,” I half-heartedly apologize as she walks past me into the house.

“Oh really, you’re the one who left me out in the cold,” she says. “I’m covered in snow!” She takes off her offensively orange beanie, shaking off the snow with a grimace on her face.

“So, this is what you’ve been up to?” She gestures around my office dramatically, “What’s that?” She jabs a polished fingernail at my flashing radar screen.

“Actually, I have no clue,” I shrug. “It just looks different.” Nadia shoots me a disbelieving look; she doesn’t share my passion for tracking storms.

I know, I think, wincing internally. She must think I’m nuts! I know full well I am a little. I mean, what seventeen-year-old spends all her free time watching storms pass by?

“Boring is what it is! You gotta live a little, Riley.” Nadia waggles her eyebrows.

“Come on! Let’s go find something interesting to do.”

“Maybe I’ll never see anything like this again!” I throw up my hands, exasperatedly, “I want to see how this turns out!”

“Well, if I can’t pull you away from it, then let’s see it for ourselves,” She suggests. I gape at her, I’m shocked she would even be willing to do that with me.

“Uh, yeah,” is all I can muster in response. I’m so surprised, my bones are vibrating with excitement. I wonder if it shows on my face.

I grab my coat and boots from under my old pewter coat rack, opening my front door and facing the outside. It's a terrifying winter wonderland, the snow swirls around and beats at our faces, making our skin tickle with an irritating, burning sensation. I can’t even see what I think is the sidewalk under my feet.

The trees planted beside it are the only indicator of place. A few hundred feet from my house, we come to a sudden stop.

The air is shimmery and buzzing with a strange energy; there’s something enchanting about it, making me want to keep walking. It draws me in, enticing me. Taking a closer look, I can see the rainbow of colors that dance across the surface. It looks almost magical as I reach out to touch it. I hear Nadia’s warbled voice say, “Are you sure?” and that’s the last thing I hear before the world goes black.

Robin Habecker is a second-year honors student from Longmont, Colorado, studying speech and hearing science. In their time at Iowa, they've become the president of the knitting and crochet club, and an undergradate research assistant in a cochlear implant lab, and they hope to become an audiologist.

Three Bronze Bison

Featured Honors Student: Maria Savas

Edited by: Samantha Salituro



Maria Savas

Maria Savas wrote this article as part of her role as a news reporter for *The Daily Iowan*. Savas has enjoyed the added challenge of writing for *The Daily Iowan* to strengthen her journalistic background. She found herself reaching out to numerous sculptors and museum specialists to gather additional information about three bison that would be displayed at the University of Iowa (UI) Museum of Natural History.

To celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, three bronze bison sculptures will be displayed at the UI Museum of Natural History on March 15 from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. Curators specializing in mammals from the Smithsonian Institution will be present to answer questions, as will a film crew shooting a documentary about the momentous trip.

The 2,000-pound bison will make the journey from Colorado to Washington, D.C., to be shown in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. They will make stops at the University of Nebraska State Museum, the Chicago Field Museum, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and the UI Museum of Natural History.



Wildlife artist Gary Staab adds finishing touches to his bull bison sculpture. Contributed by Gary Staab.

“This is a really incredible way to get involved right here in your community with something that is important at the national level,” Jessica Smith, the communications specialist for Pentacrest Museums, said. “It’s really special that Iowa City and the University of Iowa have been designated as an important stop.”

While the bison was named the national mammal of the U.S. in 2016, they have held historic significance for centuries. In the late 19th century, bison faced extinction.

According to the National Park Service, the number of bison went from 30-60 million to less than 1,000 bison, but after Theodore Roosevelt and others created the American Bison Society in 1905, their population recovered. Gary Staab, sculptor and owner of Staab Studios located in Missouri, is the artist behind the statues.

He has created wildlife-inspired pieces for clients like the National Geographic Society, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Discover Magazine, and the Smithsonian. Like many others, he sees bison as an inspiring and fascinating species.

“It would be really easy to be melancholy about this whole experience, but the Smithsonian is choosing to tell the story in a positive way. People got together, and they figured out how to save the species, which is extraordinary," Staab said.

The bison statues took over a year for Staab to create. While the sculptures are 25 percent larger than life, they start out as small statues used to determine the pose and gesture of the animal. Once he and the client are satisfied with the design, the final statue is created. The top shoulder of the bison reaches 10 feet tall, and its size can be compared to a small elephant.



A taxidermy bison calf nuzzles a taxidermy bison cow on a third-floor display at the University of Iowa Natural History Museum in Macbride Hall. Contributed by Travis Crabb.

Surrounded by 30 bison-related decorations in her office, Liz Crooks, director of the Pentacrest Museums, said bison play a large role in supporting ecological health in Iowa.

“They are very important to Iowa because, as a prairie state, they were integral to keeping the prairie rich, thriving, and vital,” Crooks said. “Their grazing with their hooves and the mud wallows they created all played an important part in keeping the native areas healthy.

The UI showcases many historical artifacts in their Natural Museum to document bison’s importance to Iowa. These exhibits include bison skeletons, prairie exhibits, taxidermies, and bison bones that Native Americans used as scrapers. Those who come to see the sculptures at the UI will have the opportunity to bid the bison farewell as they travel to their final destination.

Maria Savas is a first-year honors student from Batavia, Illinois, studying journalism with a minor in psychology. In her time at Iowa, she’s worked as a news reporter for *The Daily Iowan*, is a member of the Moment of Magic Foundation, and hopes to work as a journalist for a large publication in the future.

Untitled

Featured Honors Student: Elene Kodanashvili
Edited by: Clare Gaughan



Elene Kodanashvili

Elene Kodanashvili is a second-year student at the University of Iowa. She is a double major in art and cinema, pursuing a bachelor of fine arts (BFA) in drawing. Kodanashvili has had a passion for art for her entire life, and it was in high school that it became something she was serious about pursuing in her future.

Though Elene Kodanashvili has a preference for drawing, she was determined to create a ceramic piece she was proud of. She was tasked with finding different inspirations for this work, which she found at the Stanley Museum of Art. A main inspiration came from the many wire sculptures in the artist Hayward Oubre's exhibit. Kodanashvili wanted to create something that similarly "defied gravity," and after many weeks of sketching, sculpting, and painting, "Untitled" was created. In much of her work, Kodanashvili incorporates narrative, comedic elements, and dialogue. She typically has a specific intention she wants viewers to find. To her, "ambiguous work feels like taking a shortcut."

However, ambiguity is a major theme in “Untitled,” which is amplified by its name and surreal appearance. Kodanashvili explained that “the more you look at it the more you find, so it’s fun for people to make their own conclusions about this one.”



Inspired by a handful of works displayed at the Stanley Museum of Art, this piece is characterized by intersecting forms, both angular and rounded. It features a fantastical, brightly colored, and patterned city of sorts, complete with recognizable urban elements. Atop the chaos, a lone character looks to an imagined sky.

Scholars at Risk

Featured Honors Student: Maggie McKinney
Edited by: Daniel Fuentes



Maggie McKinney

This piece was developed through Maggie McKinney's Advocacy in Action course, where she serves as a peer mentor for student interns working with Scholars at Risk. As part of her project, she created a two-page policy briefer on the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission to be used in direct advocacy efforts with members of Congress during a trip to Washington, D.C. The briefer was designed to help advance the sponsorship of scholars wrongfully imprisoned abroad. The project is part of a broader Scholars at Risk initiative that connects student advocacy with ongoing international human rights cases.

Presented by Scholars at Risk University of Iowa Cohort

SCHOLARS AT RISK

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of institutions and individuals whose mission it is to protect scholars and promote academic freedom. By arranging temporary academic positions at member universities and colleges, Scholars at Risk offers safety to scholars facing grave threats, so scholars' ideas are not lost and they can keep working until conditions improve and they are able to return to their home countries.

Scholars at Risk also provides advisory services for scholars and hosts, campaigns for scholars who are imprisoned or silenced in their home countries, monitoring of attacks on higher education communities worldwide, and leadership in deploying new tools and strategies for promoting academic freedom and improving respect for university values everywhere.

Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali: DR. DJALALI'S CASE

- Dr. Djalali is a scholar of disaster medicine and a Swedish-Iranian dual citizen He was arrested in April 2016 while in Iran for an academic conference.
- He was wrongfully accused and sentenced to death for "acting against national security" and is imprisoned in Evin Prison.
- His trial was grossly unfair; there was no evidence, he was denied access to an attorney, and he was tortured into a false confession.
- Throughout his imprisonment, Dr. Djalali has been denied access to necessary medical care and placed in solitary confinement for extended periods of time.

WHY THIS MATTERS

- International Precedent: The imprisonment of Dr. Djalali is an example of a widespread issue of oppressive regimes targeting scholars for political gains. This is an international issue, and U.S. scholars are also at risk.
- Recent Escalation: With the recent conflict in Iran, advocating for vulnerable prisoners, like Dr. Djalali, is paramount to their survival.

Bahruz Samadov: SAMADOV'S CASE

- Bahruz Samadov was arrested by Azeri forces in August 2024 while he was staying with his grandmother.

- He was charged with high treason, but human rights organizations. suspect the charges are in response to his research on the use of military forces in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- On June 23, 2025, he was found guilty in a closed-door and grossly unfair trial.
- Since his conviction, Samadov has been moved to a maximum security prison, where he has not been able to contact his lawyer or grandmother.
- He has also been denied medical care.

WHY THIS MATTERS?

- Bahruz Samadov is an active journalist covering relations and activities in both Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- Limiting his journalism is a direct violation of Article 19 (free media) of the UDHR that Azerbaijan has agreed to enforce.
- In January 2026, Samadov was moved to a notoriously violent prison farther from the capital city of Baku
- He penned an article titled, “The State Plans to End My Life,” accounting that while the government led by President Aliyev will not directly end his life, it will play a passive role in allowing death to occur
- In February 2026, the United States and Azerbaijan signed a strategic partnership agreement.
- Strengthening the bilateral partnership and the future of both nations.

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC) works to promote and defend human rights recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among other international covenants and frameworks. The TLHRC operates in a nonpartisan manner both inside and outside of the halls of Congress. Members of the TLHRC are encouraged to:

- Advocate on behalf of individuals or groups whose human rights are violated or are in danger of being violated.
- Collaborate closely with all branches of government, as well as recognized national and international human rights entities, to promote human rights initiatives in the United States Congress.
- Encourage Members of Congress to actively engage in human rights matters.

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Maggie McKinney is a fourth-year honors student from Des Moines, IA, majoring in philosophy and minoring in rhetoric on the pre-law track. In her time at Iowa, she served as vice president of Students for Human Rights at Iowa and worked as a peer mentor with the Scholars at Risk program. She's also held leadership roles in the Pre-Law Association of Women, Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Law Fraternity, and she hopes to pursue a career in law.

Ode to a Familiar Friend

Featured Honors Student: Ayva Kemper
Edited by: Pepper Williams



Avya Kemper

Inspired by a late-night conversation with a friend who wondered if “the moon was lonely,” Avya Kemper’s story reflects on the quiet beauty of everyday things we often overlook. At its heart, it invites readers to pause and rediscover a sense of wonder for something as familiar as the moon. Written as part of an application to the Iowa Young Writers Studio during her junior year of high school, this was one of the first stories Kemper not only began but truly completed, making it the moment she first felt like a real writer. With a gentle, reflective tone, the piece encourages readers to follow along and find meaning in simplicity.

Under a blackened sky, you embraced me within your comforting glow. The warmth of your aura encapsulated me and diminished the cold that bit at my fingertips. My eyes watered against the wind, but yet, I couldn’t seem to close them as to take my eyes off of you. The dim lamp light surrounding me screamed against the quiet city, silently viewed by you and I, two spectators of a sleeping world below.

Earlier that evening, I sat in front of my bedroom window, watching the snowflakes dance, intertwining amongst each other with a lighthearted playfulness. My breath left fog on the pane, where my finger painted masterpieces as I waited for the time to pass.

When my temporary canvas gave way, I glanced at the clock for probably the hundredth time that evening, having been waiting for the hours to drift by. After what had felt like an eternity, the shorthand faced twelve, midnight, signaling it was time to make my way to you.

Winter's relentlessness inspired me to bundle up the same way I'd always protested as a child. A thick winter coat, a scarf, heavy wool mittens and a yellow knit hat as bright as the afternoon sun. Winter boots finalized my suit of armor in a battle against frostbite, as I noticed the blanket of snow had already thickened by the time I'd looked outside again.

Taking a final look in the mirror, I wiped the sleep from my eyes, and adjusted the few stray hairs that never seemed to stay in place. I made my way down the stairs, which protested the shifting of my weight with a groan that shattered the silence of a quiet night. Off of the entryway table, I grabbed my wallet and my house key, locking the door behind me as I left.

Subjected to the freezing temperatures, I shivered violently as my feet drove through the layers of collecting ice that would soon drown the entire city in a cast of white. Though my mortality may've been offended by my decision to leave the calm warmth of home on a night as cruel as this, I continued on. To me, the feeling of rosy cheeks and damp eyelashes, soon to freeze into a hundred small, cascading icicles, made me feel at peace. There's nothing to fear on a cold winter's night, because the world is quiet.

No worries, in conditions suitable for the arctic tundra, because if you look up at the sky, and witness the chaotic silence within the flurry of white, you may notice you have a sense of understanding. Because what is life if not chaotic silence? The constant jumble of thoughts and worries that flood your mind both day and night, which we may call unwanted or ugly, are silent too. But these flakes, we call them beautiful.

Though they’re just as chaotic and individual as those things that cross our mind; The way they coat the world in a new perspective, just as our emotions might; The way they fall in and out of rhythm with one another just as people do every day. There’s beauty and peace in a cold winter's night, and ironically it’s found within the depths of its own chaos.

I stood there for a while, my head upturned towards the stars, catching ice on my cheeks that soon after seceded into droplets. My cheeks grew numb from the wind against the dampness of my face, so I readjusted my scarf, this time to cover my nose, and proceeded onwards. I was heading towards the city park, the one on the very outside of town. It was only about a half-mile or so from where I lived, but once you ascended the hill near the edge, you were blessed with a view that was uncharacteristically beautiful compared to the otherwise unimpressive landscape.

As I turned the corner where the sidewalk turns to grass, I looked up to see the park entrance. Eagerly, I began to speed up my pace, knowing that soon, you and I would be reunited once again. At the foot of the hill, I looked up upon its pristine sheet of glittering snow. Smooth as butter, undisturbed by the reckless children and their sleds that were sure to come tomorrow, I felt guilty to leave my footprints and taint the surface. But I glanced up and saw you peeking between the trees, and without hesitation made my way up the steep slope.

My breath hitched as I climbed, the exhaustion from the late hour catching up with me, and the cold air that I huffed burning my lungs with each intake. My legs, regardless of the temperature, felt like raging fire, only to be put out by the bench at the top rather than the ice surrounding them. At last, I reached the summit, feeling like I’d climbed Mt. Everest. With a sigh of relief, I let my exhaustion take over as I plopped myself down on the seat below. Once I had caught my breath, clarity returned to my mind and I took in the view below me.

I turned my head to the left, allowing you to capture my full attention. You remained fixed in your place, so beautifully contrasted against the midnight sky. Like the snow, except you were alive. Alive and breathing life into a world stuck still. Your bleeding light acted as a point of refuge within the unforgiving unpredictability of the dark, which made me wonder: is the moon lonely too?

You sit there, ascending above all else, with no one there to comfort you. Though you act as the point of safety for the scared child who fears the horrors of the night, you have to brave it all alone. Maybe that's why I feel the pressure to visit you like this. Though my fingertips ache from the biting of the wind, finally making its way through the lining of my mittens. Though you can't speak, so we simply sit alone in silence. Though I'll never know if you even realize I'm here, none of that seems to bother me. Because the sun has the company of the people who go about their daily life in normal circadian rhythm, simply making their days just by shining. But when it's your turn to take the stage, all but a few of those people slip away into sleep, to pass by the time with you, waiting for the sun to come up again.

The night passes by quickly, though it feels still up here all alone, the dim light you cast upon me dusting my cheekbones like a gentle caress. Soon enough the sun begins to rise, and you're on your way to hold the other half of the globe within your embrace. I wonder if anyone there sits with you like I do. I wonder if the moon is lonely too.

Ayva Kemper is a first-year honors student from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, majoring in journalism and mass communications, minoring in political science, and is working toward a certificate in Nonprofit Leadership and Philanthropy. In her time at Iowa, she's become a member of the Student Advancement Network and in the 2026-2027 school year, she is serving as the Community Engagement Director for the Homecoming Council. She hopes to pursue a career in Strategic Communication.

Inspired by Romance

Featured Honors Student: Kalleigh Young
Edited by: Sofia Gregorio

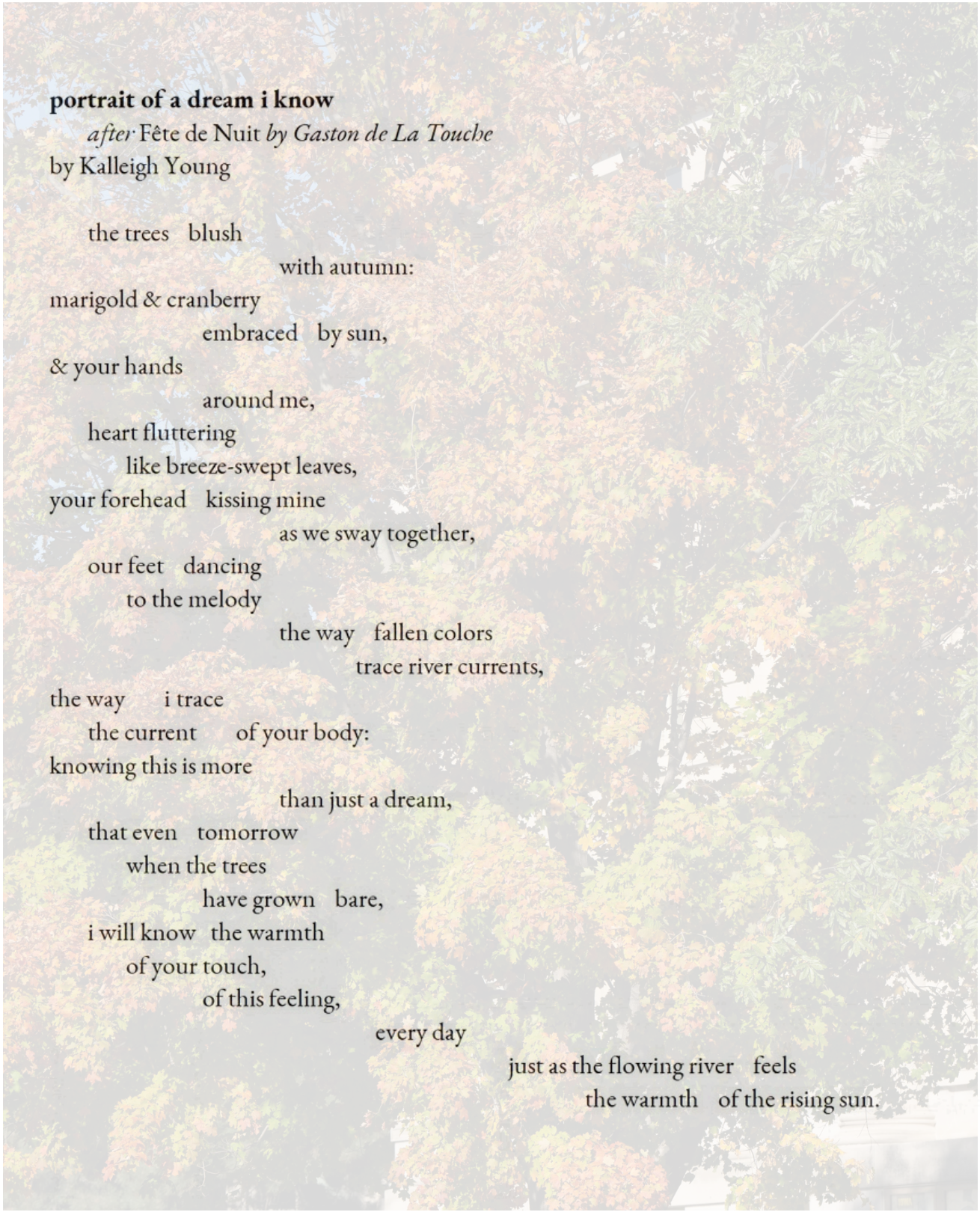


Kalleigh Young

Frequently inspired by nature, food, and art, Kalleigh Young writes poetry and has been published in many undergraduate literary magazines on campus, including Horizon, Catharsis, Fools Magazine, New Moon, and Venus. Young previously worked as the assistant creative director of Venus literary magazine and started as the sole creative director in fall of 2026.

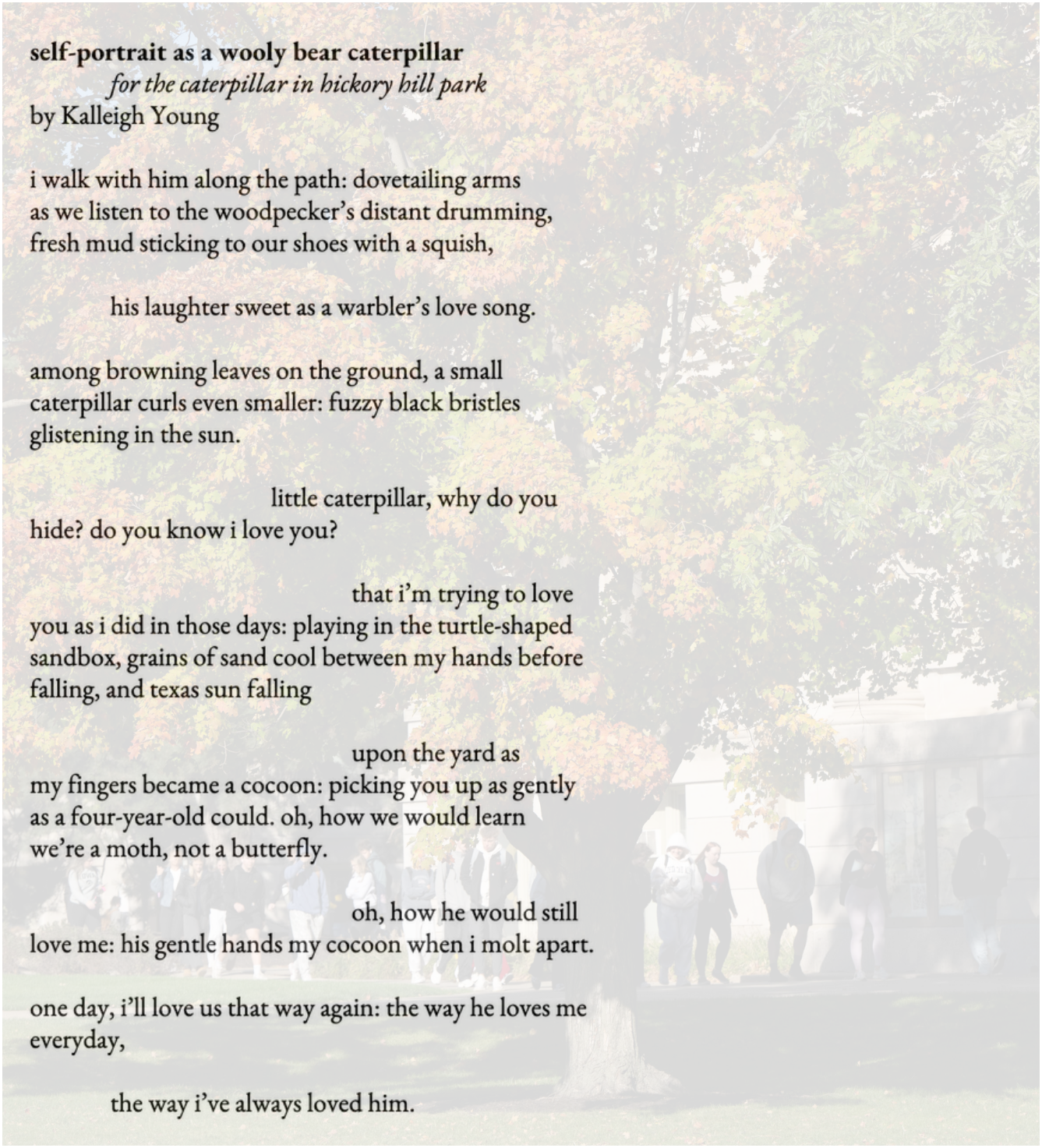
Kalleigh Young often writes poems centered around romance, dubbing herself a life-long romantic who appreciates the soft, sweet, delicate details of love. On the following page are two poems by Young. The poem, “portrait of a dream i know,” was inspired by a painting Young saw whilst studying abroad in Vasai and will soon be published in Venus magazine. The poem, “self-portrait of a wooly bear caterpillar,” is a new poem by Young that has yet to be published. Young loves to imbue her poems with emotions, both surface-level and bone-deep, and keeps herself open to the world and its inspiration as she moves about her days.

Although her poems often contain the theme of love, Young does not wish to romanticize her experiences, but instead hopes to provide her readers with a sense of reality and vulnerability when they read her work.



portrait of a dream i know
after Fête de Nuit *by Gaston de La Touche*
by Kalleigh Young

the trees blush
with autumn:
marigold & cranberry
embraced by sun,
& your hands
around me,
heart fluttering
like breeze-swept leaves,
your forehead kissing mine
as we sway together,
our feet dancing
to the melody
the way fallen colors
trace river currents,
the way i trace
the current of your body:
knowing this is more
than just a dream,
that even tomorrow
when the trees
have grown bare,
i will know the warmth
of your touch,
of this feeling,
every day
just as the flowing river feels
the warmth of the rising sun.



self-portrait as a wooly bear caterpillar
for the caterpillar in hickory hill park
by Kalleigh Young

i walk with him along the path: dovetailing arms
as we listen to the woodpecker's distant drumming,
fresh mud sticking to our shoes with a squish,

his laughter sweet as a warbler's love song.

among browning leaves on the ground, a small
caterpillar curls even smaller: fuzzy black bristles
glistening in the sun.

little caterpillar, why do you
hide? do you know i love you?

that i'm trying to love
you as i did in those days: playing in the turtle-shaped
sandbox, grains of sand cool between my hands before
falling, and texas sun falling

upon the yard as
my fingers became a cocoon: picking you up as gently
as a four-year-old could. oh, how we would learn
we're a moth, not a butterfly.

oh, how he would still
love me: his gentle hands my cocoon when i molt apart.

one day, i'll love us that way again: the way he loves me
everyday,

the way i've always loved him.

Kalleigh Young is a third-year student studying English and creative writing at the University of Iowa. When she's not writing love poems, she enjoys walking along the Iowa River, eating brunch at The Dandy Lion, and getting coffee with friends. You can find more of her work on Instagram @kalleigh_young.

Strike Zone

Featured Honors Student: Keithan Sharp

Edited by: Chase Orinski



Keithan Sharp

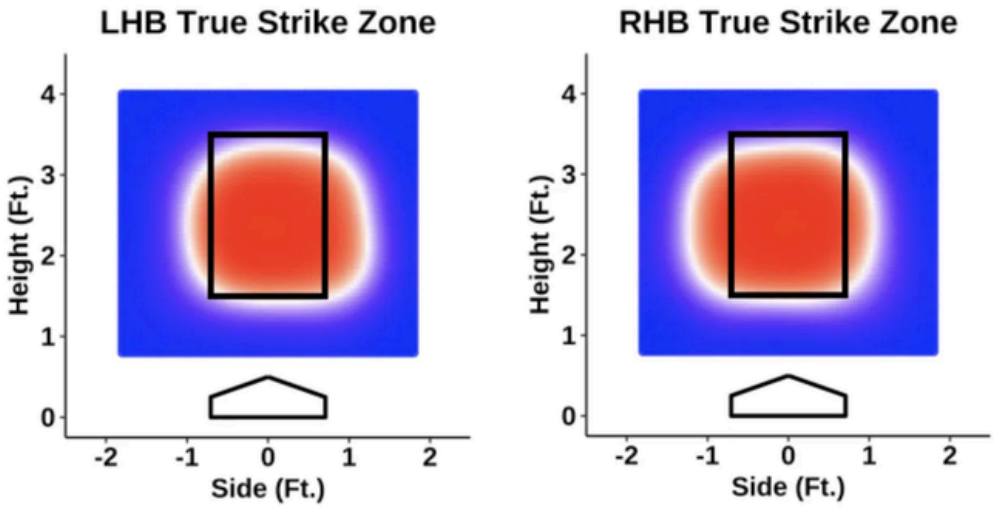
Keithan Sharp blogged to feature his research while working with the Iowa Baseball team. As a data analyst for the team, he studied TrackMan and Baseball Savant data thoroughly. He was curious about the tendencies of umpires to call the strike zone in baseball, since it is subjective, depending on each umpire. When he made this post, he wanted it to get some traction with Major League Baseball organizations to get a job in the future. He used R and R Studio to scrape data and create the visuals that he put into his blog post.

Despite what baseball tradition may suggest, the strike zone is not a rectangle. The strike zone is constantly shifting depending on the umpire, the batter, the catcher's receiving skills, and even the count. Called strikes are a vital component of on-field success, leading to frequent objections about umpire accuracy and the ambiguity of the zone. Using Trackman data across NCAA Division I baseball, we created a model to predict the called strike probability of an individual pitch and identify the location of the true college strike zone.

Our model predicts the probability of a called strike, independent of a swing. To make this prediction, we utilized the location of the pitch, pitch metrics, the batter's handedness, and additional situational variables.

This approach provides us with a called strike probability for every pitch in our dataset.

While the resulting college strike zone shares similarities with the traditional zone, it expands beyond the edge of the plate and is slightly lower than a zone what is typically shown on Trackman or television broadcasts. In practice, the true strike zone more closely resembles an ellipse, expanding outward depending on the batter's handedness.



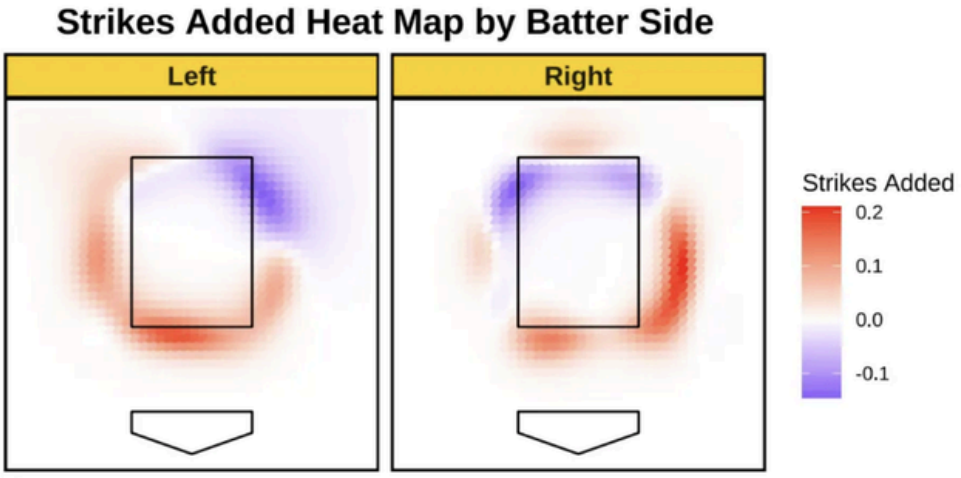
The True NCAA D1 Strike Zone for LHB and RHB

Catcher Evaluation

Most catcher evaluation systems assess receiving by crediting the catcher for called strikes outside of the traditional strike zone and penalizing the catcher for balls called within the strike zone. This assumes all pitches outside of the zone are equally likely to be called strikes and does not distinguish between the count, batter handedness, or other factors we know to be significant.

Objective strike zone data allow us to evaluate catchers in much greater detail. We can compare the called strike probability of each pitch with the actual call throughout a game to evaluate catcher framing and identify the locations and pitch types that catchers receive best. This allows us to compute how many strikes each catcher adds over the course of an at-bat, game, or entire season.

One objection may be that this method is extremely dependent on the umpire. While the umpire does have a significant impact on the strike zone in a single game, over the course of a full season, the metrics stabilize, and the strikes added metric reflects catcher receiving more than umpire accuracy.



The plot above shows a catcher with elite receiving skills on pitches away from each batter side and at the bottom of the zone. However, our model suggests there is room for improvement on elevated pitches, specifically on the inner half. Since this plot contains data across multiple games, we know it is unlikely to be a reflection of the umpire. The strikes added are attributed solely to the catcher's receiving ability.

Umpire Evaluation

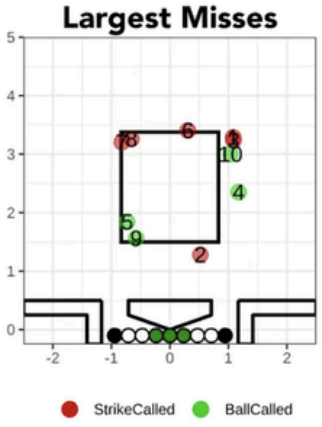
As alluded to earlier, umpires have the ultimate decision when it comes to defining the zone on a nightly basis. We know that all umpires have slightly different zones. Judging umpires strictly based on accuracy is an antiquated and ill-informed method. Instead, we can use called strike probability to grade umpires in the same manner that we evaluate catchers. Over the course of a game, our model will identify the largest misses, as defined by called strike probability. This information allows umpires to evaluate their performance against the average NCAA umpire instead of relying upon a rectangular zone that is proven to be an inaccurate representation of the strike zone.

In the previous plot, pitch #4 is outside of the traditional strike zone and would be considered a ball by most players and coaches. However, according to actual umpire tendencies across college baseball, this pitch is called a strike 73% of the time. Our model reflects this probability to add greater context when assessing umpires. In addition to post-game evaluation, we can scout umpires across the league and understand their tendencies and zone sizes before the game begins. This enables our hitters to know which areas to expect strikes in and allows our pitchers to understand that night's zone before the first pitch is even thrown.

Pitcher Evaluation

Additionally, we can use the true college zone to evaluate strike-throwing capabilities. How often a pitcher is in the zone can be a misleading metric if the strike zone, as traditionally defined, only contains a fraction of the pitches that are actually called strikes. This led us to create an Adjusted-Zone percentage that reflects how many pitches a pitcher throws with a called strike probability greater than 50%. This is a much more realistic measure of control and credits pitchers with called strikes outside of the traditional rectangular strike zone. If a pitch is called a strike 70% of the time, a pitcher should not be penalized for throwing to that location, even if that pitch is off the plate and outside the rectangle. Instead, we should teach pitchers to exploit this zone and force the batter to expand beyond the plate. If the batter swings, they are unlikely to make hard contact, given the location of the pitch. If they don't swing, our data suggest the pitch is going to be called a strike more often than not.

Number	Count	Pitch Type	Pitch Call	Called Strike Probability
1	1-1	Cutter	StrikeCalled	12%
2	3-0	Fastball	StrikeCalled	17%
3	0-0	Cutter	StrikeCalled	19%
4	1-0	ChangeUp	BallCalled	73%
5	0-0	Fastball	BallCalled	71%
6	0-0	Cutter	StrikeCalled	33%
7	1-2	Splitter	StrikeCalled	41%
8	3-2	Cutter	StrikeCalled	41%
9	1-1	Fastball	BallCalled	55%
10	2-1	ChangeUp	BallCalled	55%



Conclusion

The college strike zone is much wider and larger than the traditional box that most people envision. In addition to visualizing the actual strike zone, our called strike probability model can be used to evaluate catcher receiving by identifying where catchers gain and lose the most strikes.

We can also use this metric to evaluate umpire performance in a more accurate and objective manner, as well as to quantify exactly how large each missed call was relative to other college umpires. Lastly, by identifying the true strike zone, we can quantify pitcher control more accurately and understand that most pitches off the plate, regardless of batter side, are going to be called strikes.

The traditional rectangle is not an accurate representation of the college strike zone. By using called strike probability, we can objectively define the strike zone and evaluate players and umpires with much greater accuracy.

Works Cited

Article Link: https://medium.com/iowabaseballmanagers/what-is-the-strike-zone-b89beaf9e37e

Keithan Sharp is a graduate honors student from Olathe, KS studying business analytics. In his time at Iowa, he's worked in the MLB commissioners office as an internship as well as being a key part of the Iowa Baseball data analyst department, and he plans to continue to work in baseball after his time in Iowa.

Fog

Featured Honors Student: Lynne Inouye
Edited by: Kaitlyn Brustkern



Lynne Inouye

This excerpt comes from an untitled novella Lynne Inouye wrote for her honors capstone project for English and creative writing honors in the major. She was inspired by an interest in memory, the lines between reality and unreality, and her status as a science-fiction fan. Inouye's novella focuses on two characters who are stranded on a deserted, alien planet, and they're forced to work together to find an escape—all the while, the planet's fog plays mind-tricks on them, threatening to pull them in completely. The selected excerpt comes from around mid-story.

They gathered Meredith's things. The most glaring part was a pile of knives, or knife adjacents: shards of glass, metal twisted into pikes, all sorts of sharp things along a pile of plastic polyfoam. Meredith didn't mention them, and Wendi ignored them in turn. Beyond that, there were blankets, containers of water, and a stockpile of food—a dwindling portion of standard space rations, plus dried fruits, plants, and tons and tons of brittle insect lookalikes. "You dig enough in the trash, and these things are everywhere," Meredith told her. "I freeze them in a stream not too far from here. It gets ice-cold, especially at night."

And sure enough the sun was setting, somewhere in the murky depths of the fog. The world became red-tinged, muted, with even the color of violence distorted into something softer.

Wendi had always loved sunsets. It's something, a piece of her, she couldn't quite divorce from her mother. But this sunset was as distant as everything else, and she focused once again on Meredith. And how long had they been walking? Hours surely, but also how long since Meredith had stopped her stream of words? Hours more, and yet Wendi could still hear the echo of them, a sort of disturbance, like ripples along once-still water.

The red deepened further. Soon, the world was not gray or red, but black. Meredith paused to pull out a strange, squat cylinder, and when she tapped the top, the whole thing glowed. It didn't feel like it made a difference. The darkness pressed in on them until even Meredith's story was lost, until they were nothing but the crunch of metal underfoot, the sound of breathing. And still, hand-to-wrist with fingers shielding her pulse point. 'A while to walk,' Meredith had said. Hours and hours, and Wendi had the sudden need to talk, to break the silence, but when she opened her mouth, it felt like the darkness was choking her out.

She formed the words in her mind. *How much longer?* She had been so swept away by the past, the story, that she had forgotten to ask the very direction they were going. At some point, the city had dwindled into a scattering of suburbs, and as they walked, even those ramshackled neighborhoods grew more and more infrequent. There was trash still, but not a junkyard. And now, it felt like there was nothing at all. Wendi thought of the ship, back in the thickest part of the empty city, one more thing abandoned in pursuit of something else. Maybe she should've stayed there. Or at least put more effort into convincing Meredith to stay. They could've tried to break in, override the system.

How much longer? She stopped walking, and Meredith, not letting go, had to stop too. They just looked at each through the glow of the alien-lantern. Lit from below, Wendi could see the bags under Meredith's eyes, the sudden paleness of her face against the night. She pulled her hand away and gestured to the ghost of a nearby building. Instead of how much longer, she said, "We should probably stop for now."

"Oh," Meredith said, blinking, "I suppose you're right."

"Never thought I'd hear you say the words."

They made camp nearby. Meredith gave her an extra blanket. Wendi ate a bug, and it was, predictably, disgusting. They laid on the floor, on opposite sides of the room, as Wendi stared at a ceiling consumed by dark. Perhaps it was one of those popcorn ceilings, that still seemed to be everywhere on Earth despite being wildly out of style. Perhaps it was her childhood bedroom with the peel-and-stick stars. But, no, she needed to stop imagining. She needed to sleep and then *ask how much longer* and then get the hell out of this place, this planet.

Meredith breathed deeply, then out in a gust. They were on opposite sides of the room; Wendi had huddled in the furthest corner. And yet still, it felt like they were next to each other, side by side in some nightly intimacy. The last time Wendi had slept next to someone…God. It would've been Jo. She sat up and stared at Meredith, whose back was to her and facing the wall.

How could she already be asleep? Wendi felt her skin itching with the need to leave, to get some air.

The fog spun, still there, on the edge of the room: a reminder. That would be a terrible idea. Not when she was still thinking of ceilings, of Earth buildings. So instead, Wendi laid back down with her hands clasped over her stomach. She waited for the tiredness to come. It never did.

She slept in fits and starts through the night—every time she drifted deeper, she would open her eyes and look to Meredith. She always expected Meredith to be staring back, but each time, she just saw the curve of her back, her spine curled inward in sleep. The next morning, Wendi managed to ask her question, and she didn't much like the answer of *weeks*.

She wanted to move faster, beyond this aimless, half-wandering, but she didn't know where to go.

Meredith set the pace, and they bickered about it endlessly. Their fighting was intercepted by long periods of silence, where if it wasn't for the way they held on to each other, Wendi would've forgotten she was there at all. They always slept in the same room, and they fought about that, too. Wendi wanted space. Meredith warned about the fog, and especially about the fog in sleep. "If we stay in the same room," she said, "the worst that can happen is the dreams."

Lynne Inouye is a fourth-year honors student from Minnesota studying English and creative writing. In her time at Iowa, she's been the assistant publisher for Ink Lit Mag and published her work in on-campus publications such as earthwords and New Moon. She hopes to write a novel after graduation.

The Look of Real Paint Texture

Featured Honors Student: Anora Klauke

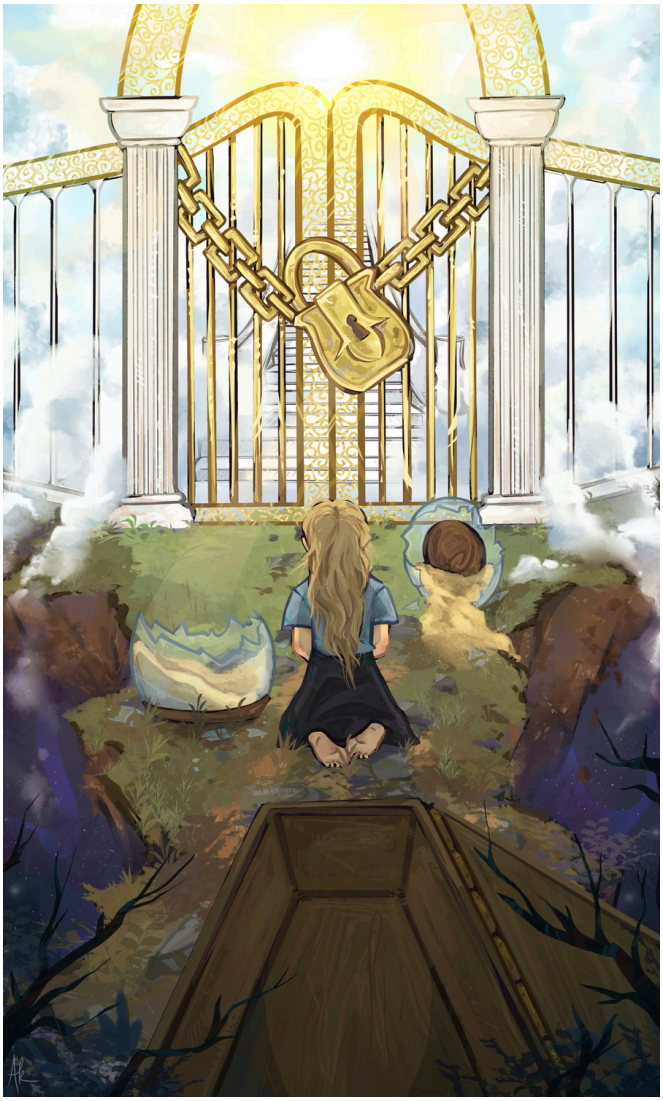
Edited by: Jacob Wynkoop



Anora Klauke

Anora Klauke started creating art during the COVID-19 pandemic, experimenting with different digital styles because of how accessible it felt. “I didn’t need to go and buy a bunch of different materials,” Klauke said, “but I like the look of having real paint texture.” Texture is an incredibly important part of Klauke’s art, inspired by her love for animated movies and some of her favorite painters (she cites Claude Monet as a special idol). Klauke takes inspiration from wherever she finds it, from literature to real-world events to films to, in her words, “random [things] I want to draw.” As an example of this last pursuit, she cited the piece “A Marketplace Visitor.”







1. *A Marketplace Visitor* - Digital painting of a medieval fantasy-esque marketplace [p.39].
2. *Locked Out* - Digital painting considering death, afterlife, and atheism [left].
3. *Moth Essay* - Digital painting inspired by Annie Dillard's essay, "The Death of a Moth" [right].

Anora Klauke is a first-year honors student from Iowa City, Iowa, studying English and creative writing and history. In her time at Iowa, she's worked as a student office assistant at the university, and hopes to go to law school and work in entertainment law.

Vale Decem

Featured Honors Student: Carden Green

Edited by: Bailey Vergara



Carden Green

Carden Green originally wrote his short film, “Vale Decem,” as a stage play, which was performed for a weekend at John’s Creek High School in 2024. After seeing his work on stage, Green felt that many of the script’s horror elements could be better accentuated through film. Production lasted from October 2025 to February 2026, and the short was screened at the Short and Sweet Mini Film Festival in late February. The film draws inspiration from the 1960s horror serial “The Twilight Zone” and follows two downtrodden strangers as they enter a mysterious lottery called Monty’s Millions, which offers vague but flashy promises of untold riches. Green said this idea came from a place of dissatisfaction with corporate America and seeks to satirize what our capitalist system does to the working class.



Director Carden Green and his cinematography team work with the actors for Mr. White, Mr. Black, and Mr. Gray on staging a tense confrontation scene in Green’s short film “Vale Decem.”



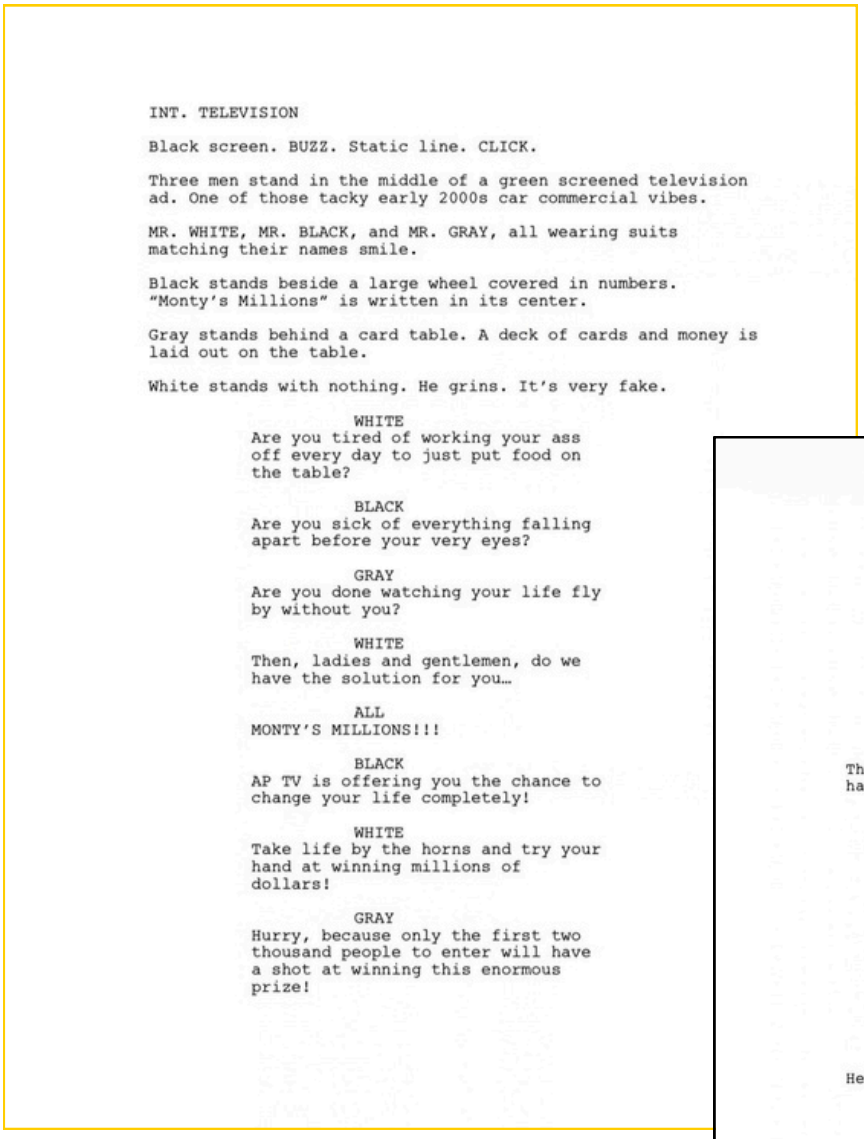
Mr. White (left, played by Ephram Sinwell), Mr. Black (center, Hayden Bailey), and Mr. Gray (right, Maddux Lamb), entice viewers to enter Monty's Millions in the opening scene of Carden Green's short film, "Vale Decem."



Director Carden Green (right) and director of photography Carter Routt (left) film an emotional scene between the two main characters of Green's short film "Vale Decem."



Monty's Millions hopefuls Tessa Hope (left, played by Rhya Cowden) and Harry Barnes (right, Creyton Conrey) comfort each other as they wait for the winner to be announced in Carden Green's short film, "Vale Decem."



INT. TELEVISION

Black screen. BUZZ. Static line. CLICK.

Three men stand in the middle of a green screened television ad. One of those tacky early 2000s car commercial vibes.

MR. WHITE, MR. BLACK, and MR. GRAY, all wearing suits matching their names smile.

Black stands beside a large wheel covered in numbers. "Monty's Millions" is written in its center.

Gray stands behind a card table. A deck of cards and money is laid out on the table.

White stands with nothing. He grins. It's very fake.

WHITE
Are you tired of working your ass off every day to just put food on the table?

BLACK
Are you sick of everything falling apart before your very eyes?

GRAY
Are you done watching your life fly by without you?

WHITE
Then, ladies and gentlemen, do we have the solution for you…

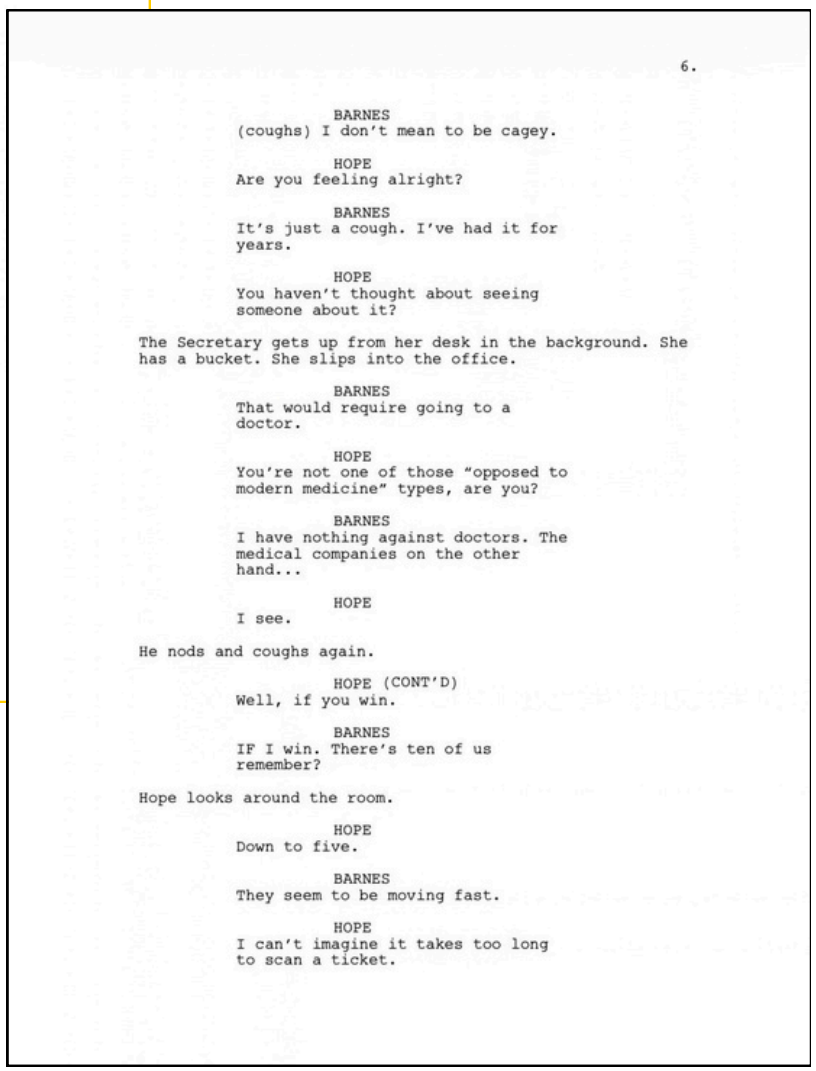
ALL
MONTY'S MILLIONS!!!

BLACK
AP TV is offering you the chance to change your life completely!

WHITE
Take life by the horns and try your hand at winning millions of dollars!

GRAY
Hurry, because only the first two thousand people to enter will have a shot at winning this enormous prize!

The opening page of the "Vale Decem" screenplay, written by Carden Green.



6.

BARNES
(coughs) I don't mean to be cagey.

HOPE
Are you feeling alright?

BARNES
It's just a cough. I've had it for years.

HOPE
You haven't thought about seeing someone about it?

The Secretary gets up from her desk in the background. She has a bucket. She slips into the office.

BARNES
That would require going to a doctor.

HOPE
You're not one of those "opposed to modern medicine" types, are you?

BARNES
I have nothing against doctors. The medical companies on the other hand...

HOPE
I see.

He nods and coughs again.

HOPE (CONT'D)
Well, if you win.

BARNES
IF I win. There's ten of us remember?

Hope looks around the room.

HOPE
Down to five.

BARNES
They seem to be moving fast.

HOPE
I can't imagine it takes too long to scan a ticket.

Page 6 of the "Vale Decem" screenplay, written by Carden Green.

Carden Green is a second-year honors student with a screenwriting and theatre arts double major. He is a member of Student Video Productions, a collaborative organization where students develop creative multimedia projects from pre- to post-production. Green also spends his free time writing, directing, and producing independent short films with collaborators from the Department of Cinematic Arts.

meet the team

honors student writers and editors



Holly Blosser Yoder

Holly Blosser Yoder serves as staff advisor to Honors Publications, supervising the student editors and writers who produce the Honors Newsletter, Alumni Connection, and Honorable Works. Yoder is the Honors Program's advising director.



Isaac Branch

Isaac Branch is a third-year economics student from Aurora, Colorado. Branch is the family relations chair for his business fraternity, Alpha Kappa Psi, is a certified personal trainer, and is the vice president of UI TPUSA.



Riley Dunn

Riley Dunn is a fourth-year student from Washington, Pennsylvania, majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track with a minor in news and media literacy. Outside of class, she enjoys reading, writing, and playing with her cat, Rory.



Ava Neumaier

Ava Neumaier is a fourth-year student from New York majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track with a minor in communications. She is a DJ at KRUI, a photographer at *The Daily Iowan*, and a current Fulbright nominee.



Kaitlyn Brustkern

Kaitlyn Brustkern is a third-year student majoring in English and creative writing on the publishing track. She plans to pursue a career in the publishing field.



Jenna Crowley

Jenna Crowley is a fourth-year student studying English on the publishing track with a minor in communication studies. Originally from San Diego, California, Jenna has also developed an interest in museum studies and event management during her time as an undergraduate.



Mia Edison

Mia Edison is a second-year student studying English and creative writing, with a minor in French. From St. Louis, Missouri, Mia will be studying writing abroad in Dublin next fall.



Daniel Fuentes

Daniel Fuentes is a first-year student studying psychology and English. From Rock Valley, Iowa, Daniel is on the pre-law track as part of his academic focus.



Clare Gaughan

Clare Gaughan is a second-year student studying English and creative writing and English education. From West Des Moines, Iowa, Clare is currently working on her writing portfolio.



Sophia Gregorio

Sofia Gregorio is a first-year student double majoring in psychology and journalism and mass communication. From Barrington, Illinois, Sofia is excited to continue her pursuit of academics at Iowa.



Karina Murray

Karina Murray is a first-year student studying English. She is from Webster City, IA. In her free time, she enjoys reading, playing video games, and singing with her choir, Camerata Singers.



Chase Orinski

Chase is a second-year student studying sport and recreation management with a minor in business administration. He is from Bethlehem, PA, and is a student manager for the Iowa baseball team working in video and technology.



Samantha Salituro

Samantha Salituro is a first-year student majoring in biomedical sciences on the pre-medicine track, with a minor in Spanish. From Palatine, Illinois, Samantha plans to pursue a career in healthcare.



Bailey Vergara

Bailey Vergara is a second-year student from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, studying screenwriting and journalism. Outside of classes, you'll most likely find her reviewing local stand-up comedy for the campus radio station, KRUI, or watching classic sitcoms at home with her two cats.



Jacob Wynkoop

Jacob Wynkoop is a first-year English and creative writing major. Originally from Fresno, California, he once saw lightning strike a tree right in front of him.



Pepper Williams

Pepper Williams is a first-year student from Madison, Wisconsin, with majors in English and creative writing on the publishing track and secondary education, with a theatre arts minor. She is working towards applying to the teaching education program.

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HONORS
PROGRAM

