

honorable mention

a publication of the university of iowa honors program

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Honorable Mention is published four times each academic year by students of the University Honors Program.

The newsletter welcomes comments, suggestions, and ideas.

Submissions can be sent to the editor Nicole Lukan at nicole-lukan@uiowa.edu

Undergrads in research

The brand new Honors Advisory Committee

A word from the director

Everything you wanted to know about NSCS

Update from an honors student overseas

in this issue . . .

Iowa students strut their stuff . . .

Research in the Capitol

By Nicole Lukan
Newsletter Editor

On February 28th, nine University of Iowa honors students presented their research to a bunch of people who probably had no idea what they were talking about. These people also happen to be the lawmakers for the state of Iowa, who welcomed the chance to learn more.

This was the inaugural year for the event, called Research in the Capitol (RiC), which was held in the rotunda of the Statehouse in Des Moines. The idea behind the program is to bring together undergraduate student researchers from Iowa's three Regents institutions (Iowa, ISU, and UNI) and state legislators to showcase the work done by undergraduates at these schools.

Bob Kirby, Assistant Director of the University of Iowa Honors Program was given the idea for the event when chatting with the Director of Undergraduate Research at the University of North Carolina. They had a similar event, and Kirby said he thought it would be fun to do something like that in Iowa.

After working with the Board of Regents, three university presidents' offices, and honors programs, Kirby and UHP Director John Nelson pulled together the very first RiC to give the lawmakers a small taste of all the exciting work being done by undergrads at their state's universities. The U of I alone has over 1,500 undergraduates involved in research.

Students to represent each university were chosen by faculty nominations and represent a broad range of subject matter as well as dis-



Undergrads in Research

Honors student and newly-elected student body vice president Addison Killean Stark explains his research on magnetically modified fuel cells.

tricts in the state, a factor Kirby thought was very important. "Each university wanted to highlight what they thought to be unique to their institution." The undergrad researchers displayed their findings on posters for legislators and regents to see as they make their way through the rotunda.

According to Kirby, research is a fundamental part of undergraduate education, especially at a research institution like Iowa. He says RiC offers state lawmakers concrete examples of its importance. "I don't think they get too many opportunities to see it firsthand. We really want to focus on the students and what they've accomplished as independent researchers," he said.

The event also provides a unique opportunity for the students to showcase their work for the general public. "In some ways it's less

sharing knowledge

with the world



► State Representative Mike May, an Iowa State student, Travis Witt, and State Senator David Johnson

University of Iowa participants in the first annual Research in the Capitol included:

Evan Herrnstadt, political science

“Do Legislators act as delegates or trustees in setting the legislative agenda?”

Tara Olds, civil engineering

“Minimizing home energy use through wood-soy foam insulation”

Melanie Simet, physics and astronomy

“Examining X-ray flares from an intermediate-mass black hole at the Very Large Array radio telescope”

Jacqueline Alcántar, chemical engineering

“Hybrid photopolymerization: effects of light intensity and temperature”

Christian Urrutia, political science

“Comparing corruption and its perception in mid and large-sized cities”

Megan Roy, history,

“Architecture and the elite in colonial Virginia houses”

Lindsey Reighard, marketing

“Sexual harassment coverage by the media”

Addison Killean Stark, chemistry

“Magnetically modified fuel cells”

Travis Witt, biochemistry

“Use of X-ray crystallography to determine potassium influence on Calmodulin binding of calcium”

even more undergrads in research...

SURF's Up!

The University Honors Program is hosting the Spring Undergraduate Research Forum on **Saturday, April 1st**. Don't miss your chance to check out a variety of student work in the atrium of the BHC. The Excellence in Undergraduate Research Awards will also be presented. For details, go to <http://www.uiowa.edu/~honors/research/htm#SURF>

RiC, continued from Page 1

about the research but more about the type of experience the students are getting out of this—to see them get excited about their very own projects and stand up and represent that,” Kirby explained.

Research in the Capitol is only one of the efforts The University of Iowa is making to highlight undergraduate research this year. The Excellence in Undergraduate Research Awards recognize outstanding achievements by undergraduate researchers; application materials for the awards are due by Friday, March 3rd. The winners will be announced at the Spring Undergraduate Research Forum (SURF), an event for students to present their work to the University, on April 1st.

A New Knowledge of Reality

By John Nelson
UHP Director

As the month started, I walked through a keening wind to begin my day at the Blank Honors Center. Clichés roamed my mind. The gusts were literally taking my breath away. I was striding into the teeth of the gale. The wind was biting my face and nipping at my clothes. It was whipping a light, sadly optimistic jacket against my arms and thin pants against my legs. But why was I thinking about words? Why not let myself settle into feelings alone, without any of the little labels? Why not open my senses unscreened to the possible onset of spring?

I came to the wall of windows and paused again at the artwork: IN LINE WITH A <spiral> THING IN ITSELF. In the grace of the moment, my mind heard one phrase then another from a poem by Wallace Stevens, “Not Ideas about the Thing But the Thing Itself.” And I knew.

I knew the moment. I knew its sources, spiraling inward toward me. I knew its lessons, turning outward onto others. I knew its complications, its criticisms. I knew its incompletions and its coy promises of things to come. As Stevens concludes, in the last line of the last entry for his five-hundred-plus pages of *Collected Poems*, “It was like a new knowledge of reality.” The lyric isn’t long. Here: see – and sense – it for yourself:

At the earliest ending of winter,
In March, a scrawny cry from outside
Seemed like a sound in his mind.
He knew that he heard it,
A bird’s cry, at daylight or before,
In the early March wind.
The sun was rising at six,
No longer a battered panache above snow . . .
It would have been outside.
It was not from the vast ventriloquism
Of sleep’s faded papier-mâché . . .

The sun was coming from outside.
That scrawny cry — it was
A chorister whose c preceded the choir.
It was part of the colossal sun,
Surrounded by its choral rings,
Still far away. It was like
A new knowledge of reality.

Especially I knew what I might write for this note from the honors director. I’d been pondering events on the last day of February, when I went along for the ride with a couple of handfuls of honors students. UISG President Mark Kresowik drove us to Des Moines to begin the Iowa version of Research in the Capitol. Learning about student research from all three Regents institutions was exciting for me, and the car percolated with conversation (until many napped on the way back). But what should I say about the experience? Now I knew.

The words on the windows were putting me in mind of the Stevens poem, but they were able to take me there not just because I’d loved the poem for years but also because a confluence of other little experiences left me ready for the moment. In this sense, the experience now was over-determined. Stevens was an insurance executive in New Haven, Connecticut; and I’d spoken by cell phone earlier that day with my daughter, who lives there. She’d reminded me that my birthday, a personal bit of beginning to echo the start of spring, is also in March. Note, though, that hers were words too. So in this moment, I knew that I would try for some words about the sources of learning in experience, yes, but in words as well.

Courtesy of Mark Kresowik, Lauren McCarthy, Bob Kirby, and lots of others associated with Honors at Iowa, we are moving into a time of renewed respect for what the buzz currently calls “Experiential Learning.” This is the personal acquisition of knowledge through practice. In a phrase I love, it is “learning by doing.” When students do research, write literature, teach

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STOP THE PRESSES!

The University Honors Program would like to congratulate our recent scholarship recipients:

▶ Three students were awarded the prestigious **Goldwater Scholarship**, a \$7,500 award given to outstanding sophomores and juniors in math, science, and engineering. University of Iowa winners included:

James Ankrum, biomedical engineering
Adam Heiniger, physics and mathematics
Craig Kilburg, biochemistry, microbiology, and psychology

▶ Two students have also been awarded **Humanity in Action Fellowships**. These highly competitive summer internships send outstanding students to cities in Europe to work on human rights issues. University of Iowa winners included:

Molly Spellman, political science and international studies
Alicia Sutton, literature, science and the arts

Adventures abroad...

UPDATE: Cambridge

By Hans Friedrichsen
2005 Gates-Cambridge Scholarship Winner

Cambridge is an amazing city. Upon arrival I figured that the stereotypical image of an academic in a gown racing around on a rickety bicycle was just a picture they put on calendars. Not so; I have seen these folks, gown tails flying behind them. I purchased both bicycle and gown back in October, but have not yet had the occasion to join their ranks, in part because I rarely ride my bicycle. My first trip into town, I took note of the magnificent buildings and cobblestoned streets. After a peaceful walk down to the lab looking at such scenery, I kind of locked up the bike and forgot about it.

Most of my weekdays and some of my weekends are spent in a lab in the Department of Biochemistry. I have been working with a graduate student to investigate the mechanisms underlying diabetic neuropathy, a topic with which I was completely unfamiliar when I arrived. My ten month MPhil course does not leave all that much room for dallying about, so I read up on my new topic and got started. Results have been slow in coming and are still relatively confusing at this point, but it is hard not to be optimistic and easy to get caught up in the excitement of so many brilliant people working right next to you. The opportunity to work in such an outstanding department surrounded by people who challenge me to work through the frustrating sections of a methodologically difficult project is more than enough to keep me plugging away and eager to see what I will find tomorrow.

The most interesting part of my stay here has been my college. The system is somewhat different from that in the States, in that you aren't tied so much to the university as to your college. Although I did not choose St. Edmund's when filling out my application, I'm extremely pleased to have been placed here. Edmund's provides accommodation, meals, and avenues to whatever activities interest me. So far I have dabbled in table tennis, football (soccer, mind you), bartending, and rowing. Yet to come is a hitchhike from Cambridge to Morocco to raise money for charity.

The U of I Honors Program played an integral part in getting me here. A kind man with a ponytail and a friendly woman skilled in the art that is application essay-writing/tweaking convinced me to apply for the Gates-Cambridge Scholarship. Already toward the end of application season, I definitely remember thinking that I should just call it good, pass on this "extra" application, and relax for awhile. Fortunately, Bob and Sarah helped me finish it all up and send in the forms. My time here has been remarkable and was made possible through my involvement with the University Honors Program. Cheers.

New Voices...

Honors Advisory Committee Speaks Up

By John Nelson
UHP Director

The Honors Advisory Committee is a new group that helps the professional staff of the University Honors Program improve its courses, policies, and programs. There are seventeen members for the spring, and a new round of applications will be sought for the 2006-07 year.

Meeting in Monday and Tuesday subgroups once a month, the committee is joined on Fridays by the Honors Student Staff in serving as a sounding board for UHP initiatives, and it can venture its own projects too. So far these three sets of students have lobbied the UHP to give students two more weeks at a semester's start to declare courses for honors designation. This happens next fall. Now they are launching an annual award for great honors teaching, with faculty recipients to be nominated and chosen by UHP students.

The committee's biggest effort this year has become working with the staff to improve early contact by the UHP with entering students. In response to committee ideas, the UHP is experimenting with major changes in its contact letters, information sheets, and especially its plans for summer orientation. The mandate includes sizable roles for veteran students in orientation, then provisions for peer advising during regular terms. Innovations also likely by the fall are special College Transitions courses and additional first-year seminars for entering honors students. And plans extend to early-in-the-term orientations for UI students newly qualified for the UHP.

Lemonade
+ sunshine on the porch

springtime
at the BHC
come check it out!

Everything you ever wanted to know about...

National Society of Collegiate Scholars

By Courtney Farrell

The National Society of Collegiate Scholars is an honor society with chapters at hundreds of universities across the nation, including the University of Iowa. Our mission statement is: "Honoring and inspiring academic excellence and engaged citizenship for a lifetime." First and second year students are eligible for membership if they obtain a 3.4 GPA and are in the top 20th percentile of their class. Students eligible for membership have received a letter on University of Iowa letterhead inviting them to join. The cost is a \$75 onetime fee, and students are considered lifetime members after being inducted. Locally, the primary goal of our chapter is to get students involved in various community service opportunities on campus, and to discourage the idea that honor societies are just resume builders. We started the Sack Drive benefitting the Crisis Center, where we set up a table in the IMU and collect plastic sacks for the Crisis Center to use for packing up items for those in

need. We also were the top-money raising student organization (in regards to money raised per dancer) for Dance Marathon this year, raising over \$13,000 among 17 participants. We also have been very involved with Habitat for Humanity, the NAMI walk, River Run, the Longfellow Carnival, the Iowa City Spells Spelling Bee, and are looking to get involved with the Premie Project sometime in the near future. We also make cards for the veterans at the VA hospital on a regular basis. We encourage students to get involved not only because of the amazing opportunities we encourage in the community, but because of all the benefits the national office has to offer, such as scholarships for study abroad, semester at sea, or graduate school, as well as spring break service opportunities. Three of our members have participated in Habitat for Humanity builds across the country (Seattle and Boston), and I spent spring break teaching school-children how to sail on a tall ship in Hawaii. We have monthly meetings (the last Tuesday of every month at 9pm in the Blank Honors Center) and encourage all those curious about NSCS to attend.

Experiential Learning, continued from page 3

class, edit an essay, intern at an office, or serve the community, their learning is experiential.

This enables universities to configure experiential learning in diverse forms. Field work, laboratory experiments, and simulations can enrich classroom-based courses. Practicums can complete professional educations. Internships can add practical skills to academic principles. Studies abroad, cultural events, and artistic or political performances can refine and extend the preparations that students make in earlier courses. Service-learning arrangements can turn volunteer efforts into experiences enlightening for students and social organizations alike. Then the situation or the exercise offers students experiences that they otherwise might lack.

Yet universities encourage critical reflection on experiences, so the principle is that they award academic credit for experiential learning only when it includes analysis of experience in light of systematically developed networks of knowledge. Casual talk occasionally contrasts "experiential learning" to "book learning," but the university versions of experiential learning should make detailed, mutually informative connections between them.

And that's when we notice the words, but it isn't when they

start their work. To analyze an experience puts it into words, so that we can re-cognize it in relationship to who we are and what we've experienced before. With its dedication to analysis, the university is, to paraphrase Maurice Sendak, where the word things are. Maybe it's an entirely different place from where the wild things are, but that's not because experiences and words are mostly separate or even separable. Instead it's because words help us sense disparate aspects of experiences. Words let us assert ourselves as distinct from experiences, because they enable us to specify and compare even the most personal events and feelings in our minds and conversations. In these acts are beginnings of the self-critical learning and tested knowledge that distinguish the university.

Honors education emphasizes active participation in knowledge, so it makes plenty of room for experiential learning. Many are the complicated terms for a sustained, self-critical focus on how knowledge comes from experience: epistemology, phenomenology, aesthetics, psychology, neuroscience, and more. Each taps a different facet of learning from experience; yet each finds our words, deeds, and feelings deeply, intrinsically entangled. And that's what the first of March was meaning to me in the experiential moment. It was a cold and windy day, as Snoopy or Mary Shelley could have said: with every gust and sight and word awakening for me, in line with a thing in itself, a new knowledge of reality.

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