Thank You to Our Alumni and Friends

Honors would like to take this opportunity to say THANK YOU. Thank you for your ongoing interest in Honors. Thank you for staying engaged with current students as mentors, recruiters, career advisors, and parents. And thank you for your generous financial support. As you read through this newsletter, know that you have helped make the Honors Program a success by supporting social activities, research opportunities, attendance at academic and professional conferences, and many more of the unique and wonderful perks Honors students enjoy. We are grateful for your ongoing support.

To make a gift in support of the Honors Program, go to
honors.iastate.edu/giving

Honors in the Time of COVID-19
We are making it work!

Things look and feel a bit different around campus this fall, and the same goes for life in Jischke. The novel coronavirus threw universities a curveball last spring, and when it became clear the fall semester would be affected as well, Honors staff tackled the tough question: “How do we continue to offer a true Honors experience and meet CDC and university guidelines?”

Iowa State moved its large, introductory lecture classes from in-person to virtual instruction this fall, and labs and offices reduced the number of students being hired. The result was that most students – especially first-year students – had few opportunities to be on campus or in a classroom with their peers. Likewise, events and opportunities for social engagement typically organized through the 800+ student organizations, fraternities and sororities, academic units as well as athletics were limited in number and scope.

It is within this new reality that Honors recognized providing safe and physically distanced opportunities for face-to-face interaction, conversation, and on-site learning was not only needed for our students, but that we, unlike other academic units, were well positioned to adapt and accommodate these unique circumstances.

We’ve made it work – and are proud of what we have been able to offer our students. We’d like to share with you here some of the ways we’ve adapted to these unique circumstances.

The Jischke Honors Building remains open 24/7, with social-distancing and masking requirements. Honors staff are working onsite daily. They remain available for quick consults in the lounge or conference room, and have even held outdoor office hours.

Most Honors seminars continued to meet in person and were moved to larger university classrooms and lecture halls, where students had ample space to spread out. Thirty-six sections of the FHP seminar were scheduled in Jischke and converted to a hybrid course. Sections were split in half, with one day dedicated to in-person classroom activities, and the remote-learning day dedicated to lessons that lent themselves to a virtual format.

The Honors Student Board remained busy hosting virtual and in-person events as well. They included several presentations, including a leadership lecture by Honors alum Dennis Muilenburg, who is currently an Iowa State University Innovator in Residence. HSB also hosted the wildly popular “Successulents” (Success + Succulents) event, providing nearly 300 individual painting kits, mini clay pots, and succulents to students. Participants were invited to sit outside...
Students, instructors, and staff have all learned to adjust to ever-changing circumstances. Despite its challenges, the pandemic has strengthened our community and commitment to the Honors mission and vision.

**Quarantine Care Packages**

Honors students care about their peers. That was clear this fall when FHP co-leaders Hanna Stec and Jordan Rindels included a service project in their lesson plans that focused on Honors students who were missing out on quality in-the-classroom time because of COVID-19. In some cases the students were isolating in the Oak/Elm residence hall following a positive test. In other cases the students had moved to remote-only learning after being notified of a direct exposure and mandatory 14-day quarantine. Many of these were first-year students missing out on opportunities to bond with classmates, meet instructors, and experience the excitement of their first semester on campus. Hanna and Jordan wanted to reach out to them and proposed having their HON 121 section put together care packages for contact-less delivery. With the help of Honors staff and financial support from our fabulous alumni and friends, Section A2 – and later their peers in several other sections – delivered more than 30 care packages filled with snacks and handmade cards. Their message: We can’t wait to see you back in Jischke! We’re happy to share that this project truly brightened these students’ days!

**FHP Retreat Was a GO!**

*By Undergraduate Assistant Drew Daly*

One of the classic FHP Honors memories is the FHP Retreat, where the whole program gets together, sometimes in one room, with a lot of hand contact, and space crunching. You might be asking yourself: But how did the retreat happen this year with, oh I don’t know, a GLOBAL PANDEMIC?

At the start of the semester we weren’t sure holding the retreat would even be possible. Thankfully, as COVID-19 cases tapered off, we were given the green light. By that time, though, we had only a little over a month to plan everything, from location to food to activities, and figure out how to rework the event to meet university guidelines. Challenge accepted! The result: three “mini”-retreats, each comprising the 12 sections assigned to one of the three undergraduate assistants.

The retreats took place over three consecutive Fridays in October, and were scheduled across spaces in Hoover, Howe, and Marston halls. Although students were not able to participate in traditional retreat activities, such as relays, space crunch, or section skits, we instituted new ones: yoga, charades, paper airplane contest, and more. We even created new games, like Human Foosball Broomball (what?!) where students were given a broom and an X to stand on, and challenged with getting the ball into the opponents’ goal using only their broom and without leaving their X. Students also used Tik Tok to film short, funny videos that everyone was invited to watch at the end of the night.

With the final retreat behind us, we all breathed a sigh of relief. We had pulled it off – safely! – and had tons of fun. Three retreats during a pandemic surely deserves a footnote in the history of the program.
A Research Mentee Shares Words of Thanks

It’s a story we hear often from students and is thus worth sharing as a reminder of the life-changing impact the Honors Program and the undergraduate research experiences it offers can have on students’ lives. Stephanie Law (‘06 physics) is a faculty member at the University of Delaware, where she was recently promoted to associate professor with tenure in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. Her focus is on undergraduate research and the undergraduate experience. Stephanie decided to give it a try.

“Paul was an important mentor for me from the start. I had a difficult time in my second semester physics courses at ISU. He reassured me that my difficulties were normal. He taught me how to do crystal growth himself and was always available to me if I had questions.”

Stephanie enjoyed her work in the lab so much that she stuck with physics, working in Dr. Canfield’s research lab throughout her undergraduate career, completing her senior honors project under his advisement, and seeking his input for post-graduation plans, too. “Paul helped me decide which grad schools to apply to, and he was the first one I called when I got accepted. I am quite sure that I wouldn’t have gone to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign if I hadn’t had such a strong undergraduate research experience. My undergraduate research experience was instrumental in helping me get where I am today, and I love where I am today.”

Who WOULDN’T Want to Take This Seminar?!

Honors seminars are a beloved tradition and, of course, a program of study requirement. Every semester there are one or two seminars that resonate with a large cross-section of students and, during online registration, reach enrollment capacity within a matter of minutes. Last semester “Get Outside! – A History and Exploration of Our State and National Park Systems,” and “It’s a Musical! Oklahoma to Hamilton to Hadesett,” had waiting lists almost immediately.

The highly coveted chair this semester was in “Yes We Catan! Teaching and Learning with Settlers of Catan.” Emily Wilcox had a difficult time in my second semester physics courses at ISU. He reassured me that my difficulties were normal. He taught me how to do crystal growth himself and was always available to me if I had questions.”

Stephanie enjoyed her work in the lab so much that she stuck with physics, working in Dr. Canfield’s research lab throughout her undergraduate career, completing her senior honors project under his advisement, and seeking his input for post-graduation plans, too. “Paul helped me decide which grad schools to apply to, and he was the first one I called when I got accepted. I am quite sure that I wouldn’t have gone to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign if I hadn’t had such a strong undergraduate research experience. My undergraduate research experience was instrumental in helping me get where I am today, and I love where I am today.”

Catan! Teaching and Learning with Settlers of Catan,” taught by senior Honors student Erik Francois and our Assistant Director of First-Year Programs, Emily Wilcox. Here’s a description, courtesy of Erik, himself:

Here’s a description, courtesy of Erik, himself:

Being part of the University Honors Program, I have seen firsthand the benefits of having a peer group from diverse backgrounds and ideologies. This, paired with my love of board games, was the inspiration for creating the seminar Yes We Catan!

The seminar utilized the diverse themes present in the board game Settlers of Catan as a springboard for interdisciplinary discussion. Guest speakers discussed statistics and dice probability, the economics of Catan, psychology (competition, biases, and motivation), and geology/natural resources. In the final two weeks, students put skills to the test, playing in a two-round tournament which crowned a class champion.

I believe board games have excellent potential as tools for learning. The abstract thinking and problem solving involved has a very real-world application. In addition, I believe everyone could use a little more ‘play’ in their lives. I am confident that Honors Program will continue to demonstrate the value of diversity of opinions and experiences, fostering this diversity by providing real learning in unique and abstract ways.

Here are a few of the other new and innovative seminars being offered in Spring 2021:

- Storytelling with Digital Maps
- From Slavery to the Holocaust: Race, Violence, and the State, 1865-1945
- Global Groceries: Stories behind Your Favorite Fruits and Vegetables
- Zombie Statistics: The Apocalypse and How to Avoid It
- Is It Says What in the Constitution?!!
- Uncovering the Mysteries of Microbes

Staff Updates

Molly Helmers joined the Honors Program staff in October 2019. She handles a variety of administrative and communication tasks, including managing student grants and assisting with alumni and donor relations. Some of you may recognize Molly from her time with the Iowa State University Lectures Program, where she worked as an event coordinator for 13 years. Prior to that she was a program assistant with Iowa State’s Center for Excellence in the Arts and Humanities.

Katherine (Kat) Sterk is the new program assistant for the Upper-Division Honors Program. In many ways Kat never left us! She is a two-time alum of ISU and graduated with university honors herself. After earning a degree in psychology, Kat completed her MEd in Student Affairs in Higher Education, during which time she served as a graduate assistant in our office. With her strong ties to Honors, Kat was well positioned to join the staff in an

Honors welcomed three new staff members this past year.

Nikita Kozak (‘20 mechanical engineering) has joined the Honors staff as the coordinator of Nationally Competitive Awards. Gene is an ISU alum and comes to Honors from the Department of English, where for many years he was a lecturer with ISUComm. He also taught at Ellsworth Community College in Iowa Falls and Hawkeye Community College in Waterloo. Prior to that, he spent 16 years working as a radio announcer and news director and freelancing in print journalism.

ISU’s First Knight-Hennessy Scholar

Honors student Nikita Kozak, (20 mechanical engineering), was the first student from Iowa to be named a Stanford University Knight-Hennessy Scholar. Stanford’s Knight-Hennessy Scholars program aims to develop an interdisciplinary community of future global leaders to address the world’s complex challenges through collaboration and innovation. Now in its third year, the program’s level of prestige and competition rivals that of the world’s most renowned awards.

Nikita is one of 76 scholars selected from 6,171 applicants worldwide. He is pursuing a PhD in mechanical engineering and a master’s degree in computer science at Stanford this fall. He aspires to revolutionize vehicles to enable urban air transportation by coupling machine learning and computational engineering.
**Goldwater Scholars Named**

Three Honors students were named 2020 Goldwater Scholars in March 2020. The Goldwater Scholarship is the premier undergraduate scholarship in mathematics, natural sciences and engineering in the United States.

Madeline Farringer (biochemistry) will pursue a PhD in biomedical sciences. She wants to lead an academic lab that conducts research on parasite cellular biology using functional genomics.

Divyesh Kumar (chemical engineering) will pursue an MD and PhD in neuroscience. He plans to perform research on stem cell therapies for the treatment of various neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and multiple sclerosis.

Behnia Rezaadze Shirazi (biology, biophysics and biochemistry) will pursue an MD and PhD in biomedical sciences. His goal is to perform translational research through the National Institutes of Health on innovative techniques for the prognosis and prevention of cardiovascular disease.

A total of 396 Goldwater Scholars were selected on the basis of academic merit from a field of 1,343 applicants nationwide. Iowa State candidates are selected by a faculty committee coordinated by the assistant director for Nationally Competitive Awards.

**ISU Alumni Association STATEment Makers**

Two Honors alumni were among the ISU Alumni Association’s 2020 ‘STATEment Makers.’ The honor recognizes the early personal and professional accomplishments and contributions to society of young alumni.

**GSU Alumni Engage with Students**

Honors is grateful for the many alumni who engage with current students. This year the program hosted several alums, who shared their personal experiences and professional advice.

Dr. Nico Dimenstein (’15 biology), a pediatrician in his first year of residency at the Seattle Children’s Hospital, met with students and staff to talk about his experience in medical school. Nico, who earned his Master of Public Health from Johns Hopkins, discussed the intersection of medicine and public health as well as his interests in immigrant health and LGBTQ+ competent care. His visit coincided with the announcement of the first cases of the novel coronavirus in the United States.

Mark Law (’81 computer engineering) paired up last spring with Iowa State Honors director Laurie Law (no relation!) to offer a unique seminar on a topic near and dear to their hearts – Broadway musicals! The seminar gave insight into business trends of theater and Broadway musicals. Mark, who directs the University of Florida’s Honors Program and is a member of your Honors Alumni Board, describes himself as a lifelong musical theater buff who ended up as an electrical engineer. He drew on his experience as an associate producer of the hit Off-Broadway show Puffs and interest in investing in theater productions. The two packed the entire 1-credit seminar into a single weekend, running from 5pm Friday to 3pm Sunday. It also included tickets to two live performances: Jesus Christ Superstar at the Des Moines Civic Center and Waitress at Stephens Auditorium.

Nick Terhalle (’15 aerospace engineering) joined us last winter when he was on campus to recruit for his employer, MODUS, where he currently works as a mechanical engineer. Nick met with eight engineering students in Joischke for breakfast prior to the spring Engineering Career Fair. The students took advantage of the opportunity to solicit some tips for the career fair and ask questions about how to maximize their ISU and Honors Program experiences. He spoke to the students about his unique career path in engineering, how he landed his job at MODUS, the type of work he’s doing now, and what he likes about his position and life as a young professional at a small Iowa-based company.

**Student engagement opportunities**

Keep your eyes open for an email from an Honors Student Board member. They will be reaching out to alumni about small, focused conversations by discipline or interest as well as opportunities to write blog posts for their weekly e-newsletter, THE JISCHK. Students love to hear about life after Iowa State, the twists and turns of job searches and career paths, and the ways in which they can draw upon theirHonors experience in their professional lives.

**Updates and Reminiscences**

Remember last year, before there was a pandemic, and we asked you for personal and professional updates and memories about your Honors experience. Wasn’t life so much simpler then. But, really, we were so happy to hear from you! Here are a few items to share:

The Honorable Mark Ritchie (’71 distributed studies) was appointed the state of Minnesota’s Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army in February 2020. Ritchie’s leadership experience spans government, nonprofit, education and advocacy organizations.

Ted Neiland (’84 physics/computer science) joined Codex IT/Codex Techworks as a System Engineer in August 2019.

Robert Kruse (’88 computer engineering) recalls going to Camp Hantera in the fall of 1984 for the FHP retreat: “It was quite chilly, and we did all of our activities in Clayton Lodge. I don’t recall the exact activities or the dates, but I remember sleeping overnight on the floor in a sleeping bag brought from home because it was cold and uncomfortable.”

Matt Kuhns (’00 graphic design) sent several pictures and stories, including one of friends Brian Decker and Nate Roller with the mountain of matchbooks acquired on a lightning-round trip to Mystic Lake Casino for one of the Kaleidoquiz scavenger hunts. Matt claims Harwood won the points for this one, having returned with many more matchbooks than the other teams that also made the journey.

Lissandra Villa (’16 journalism & political science) is a staff writer for TIME magazine, where she covers national politics. Think of a national news story, and chances are that Lissandra has covered it. She spent last year on the campaign trail covering the 2020 Democratic primary. Since her graduation from Iowa State, Lissandra has reported on a range of topics, including allegations of sexual harassment and abuse of power in Congress during the height of the #MeToo Movement and a shooting at the Republican Party baseball practice in 2017. Prior to reporting for TIME, she spent two and a half years at BuzzFeed News after interning at National Public Radio and The Des Moines Register.

Updates and Reminiscences

Remember last year, before there was a pandemic, and we asked you for personal and professional updates and memories about your Honors experience. Wasn’t life so much simpler then. But, really, we were so happy to hear from you! Here are a few items to share:

The Honorable Mark Ritchie (’71 distributed studies) was appointed the state of Minnesota’s Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army in February 2020. Ritchie’s leadership experience spans government, nonprofit, education and advocacy organizations.

Ted Neiland (’84 physics/computer science) joined Codex IT/Codex Techworks as a System Engineer in August 2019.

Robert Kruse (’88 computer engineering) recalls going to Camp Hantera in the fall of 1984 for the FHP retreat: “It was quite chilly, and we did all of our activities in Clayton Lodge. I don’t recall the exact activities or the dates, but I remember sleeping overnight on the floor in a sleeping bag brought from home because it was cold and uncomfortable.”

Matt Kuhns (’00 graphic design) sent several pictures and stories, including one of friends Brian Decker and Nate Roller with the mountain of matchbooks acquired on a lightning-round trip to Mystic Lake Casino for one of the Kaleidoquiz scavenger hunts. Matt claims Harwood won the points for this one, having returned with many more matchbooks than the other teams that also made the journey.

Lissandra Villa (’16 journalism & political science) is a staff writer for TIME magazine, where she covers national politics. Think of a national news story, and chances are that Lissandra has covered it. She spent last year on the campaign trail covering the 2020 Democratic primary. Since her graduation from Iowa State, Lissandra has reported on a range of topics, including allegations of sexual harassment and abuse of power in Congress during the height of the #MeToo Movement and a shooting at the Republican Party baseball practice in 2017. Prior to reporting for TIME, she spent two and a half years at BuzzFeed News after interning at National Public Radio and The Des Moines Register.
**Poster Session Goes Virtual**

Most years, the third week in April means a trip to the Memorial Union Great Hall for the Honors Poster Session. This year that longstanding annual event was adapted as an online gallery. Alumni and friends are invited to visit the online gallery and explore the variety of research projects students completed: www.honors.iastate.edu. While you are there, read more about our Fall 2020 graduates!

---

**Keep an Eye on Your Inbox for E-Newsletter**

Honors staff know that in our highly digital world e-mail can become a bit overwhelming. We also know that e-mail, social media, and other digital formats are the best way for us to reach you with current happenings, short updates, and funny and inspiring stories. We will continue to share this annual printed newsletter with our alumni and encourage you to keep an eye on your inbox for more frequent news and events.

---

**Keep in Touch!**

There are many ways to keep in touch with Honors and your fellow alumni. Join the Iowa State University Honors Program Alumni Group on LinkedIn. Get involved with the Alumni Board. Send updates, stories, and photos to honors@iastate.edu. Check out our student blog: honorslife.wordpress.com. Find us on social media. We love to hear from you!