

THE HONORS BEACON

Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato



LEADERSHIP • RESEARCH • GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Issue XIV, Fall 2018



Emily Robinson and the rest of the "Zambia" team at the Heifer Ranch

Photo by: Heifer International

Redefining Poverty

by Emily Robinson, '22 (Communication Arts & Literature Education BS; Osceola, WI)

Visualize poverty. Where in the world does your mind travel? Who and what do you see? For many, the connotation of this word is the same. Through an American lens, poverty is often distant African villages with brick houses, women carrying water for miles, and children ridden with starvation and disease. The question remains: how can we end world hunger and poverty? Often, it appears that the answer lies in a simple distribution of wealth. What this idea lacks, however, is education and sustainability. Simply providing resources only creates temporary relief. Without proper education resources are aimless, un-integrated, and in the long run, ineffective.

This is where Heifer International comes in; Heifer is an international aid organization that gifts animals and agriculture education to impoverished communities. Their mission lies in the core of their model, "Passing on the Gift." The poorest family in a community is given an animal, which pro-

vides them with both a source of food and a stable income. For example, a heifer can provide enough milk to feed a family after she gives birth to her first calf. If that heifer's first offspring is female, the calf will be given to another family in the community. Meanwhile, the original heifer will continue to produce more offspring, creating a surplus of milk that can be sold for profit. Over time, this continuous sharing of resources helps to mitigate the effects of poverty in the community in a sustainable fashion. This process exemplifies Passing on the Gift.

Ever since I can remember, my hometown of Osceola, WI has held a massive fundraiser for Heifer International. Students throughout the entire school district participate in penny collections, reading pledges, and the selling of pottery and artwork at a yearly Empty Bowls event. Heifer and its mission is such a core part of our students' education and of our community that even

the youngest of elementary students can explain the motto of "Passing on the Gift." My senior year of high school, I was given the opportunity to travel to Perryville, Arkansas to participate in a "poverty simulation" at the Heifer Ranch with fifty of my peers. Known as the Heifer Trip, this biyearly experience was famed in my community for being incredibly life-changing, having altered the worldview of teachers and impacted the career choices of participating students. Naturally, the expectations were high.

After thirteen hours of driving cross-country, we finally arrived at the 1,200 acre Ranch nestled in the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains. Sheep, cattle, chickens, and goats roamed freely about the Ranch, which included the Global Village where we would be staying. For many of us, this would be our first personal experience with poverty. Upon arriving, we were given

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The Honors Beacon newsletter was awarded 1st place in the student print category of the National Collegiate Honors Council's newsletter contest for the 2014-2015 academic year.



Director's Note


by Dr. Leah White, Interim Director of the Honors Program



The Beacon Staff has selected the theme of “connection” to ground the Fall 2018 edition. A desire to build meaningful connections with others is a primary reason I chose a career as an educator.

As a student, I quickly realized I found my most meaningful learning experiences in classrooms where the teacher and students developed a sense of mutual respect. Instructors who took the time to know me and in turn support me on my own personal growth journey became life-long mentors. Fortunately, I already felt a strong connection to the Honors Program before taking on the role of Interim Director this summer. My previous experiences with the program showed me that the program fosters the kind of engaged learning

environment I value. The Honors Program helps students invest in their education in ways that connect them to peers, faculty and the community beyond what a more traditional college experience would allow.

I am also enjoying working with students as they build connections between the new observations and realizations that emerge during their studies. The competency rubric is a valuable tool to guide students through this ideological growth. Students enrolled in HONR 475 quickly became used to me pushing them to explain the “why” behind the claims they were making in their portfolios. As a Communication Studies scholar, I believe the ability to communicate clearly and directly how the pieces of an argument connect and come together is a crucial life skill. The honors portfolio provides students the opportunity to develop this skill. I am looking forward to the months ahead of continuing to build connections with students in the Honors Program. 

Editor's Note

by Josie Braaten, '19 (Creative Writing; Glasgow, Mont.)




Welcome to our fourteenth issue of the Honors Beacon. With the theme of “connection”, our hope is to showcase all the valuable ways in which our honors students have been able to connect with their families, campus, the community, and themselves on a deeper level through each of their unique experiences.

Not only has working on this issue of the Honors Beacon provided me the privilege of learning about the incredibly impactful connections my fellow honors students have made, but it has also allowed me to

connect with myself in very specific and meaningful ways through the process of compiling articles and working closely with the Beacon and honors staff.

Building a publication with so many moving parts is never easy, but with the support of a talented team of writers, a dedicated Honors staff, and the wonderful patience of my co-Editor Emily Schiltz, this unique issue of the Honors Beacon came together successfully!

Thank you for taking the time to read our Honors Beacon. We hope you enjoy reading as much as we enjoyed putting it together! 

The Fall 2018 Beacon Team

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Dr. Rachael Hanel

by Jonathan Fjeld, '21 (Mass Media & Communication Studies; Mendota Heights, Minn.)

Dr. Rachael Hanel is the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies and an Associate Professor in the Department of Mass Media. Dr. Hanel became interested in mass media at a very young age through reading the newspaper with her dad and watching the news with her family. "I was really captivated by drama and [news] events are really dramatic. I was drawn into

that," Dr. Hanel recalls. This interest, coupled with Dr. Hanel's inclination for reading and writing, led her to pursue a career in mass media. She shares, "I always liked to read and I always liked to write, so when I was about ten, I thought it'd be fun to be a reporter."

Holding a Bachelor's degree in both History and Mass Communication, as well as a Master's degree in History from Minnesota State University, Mankato, Dr. Hanel's roots run deep at the university. She also holds her Ph.D. in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University in Bath England.


In 2002 she began teaching as an adjunct professor at Minnesota State University, Mankato while also working as a reporter and editor for the Mankato Free Press. At the end of 2004, Dr. Hanel left the Free Press in order to focus on teaching and taught at both Minnesota State University, Mankato and Bethany Lutheran College. "I thought, 'Well I really like teaching, so I'd like to teach more.' So I kept teaching here and then I also taught for a couple of schools that were primarily online," Dr. Hanel states. These schools included Rasmussen College and Kaplan University, where she worked as a curriculum manager for their online courses.

In 2013, Dr. Hanel began teaching full-time at Minnesota State University, Mankato in the Department of Mass Media. Since then, she has taught a variety of classes, including Introduction to Mass Media and Media Writing. This semester (Fall 2018), Dr. Hanel is teaching the Honors Seminar, "Reading the News" which focuses on media literacy, a topic she is passionate about. Hanel became par-

ticularly interested in media literacy after teaching Introduction to Mass Media. She noticed that the course covered a wide scope of subjects, while barely addressing media literacy: a skill crucial for those interested in pursuing a career in Mass Media or simply for anyone who follows the news. "I was still seeing students either in that class or in the major seeming confused about where to find legitimate news or where to look," Dr. Hanel notes.

With the current political climate and this knowledge gap in mind, Dr. Hanel began thinking of a media literacy specific course. She states, "I thought it'd be fun to teach a class that was just really focused on, 'Let's be media literate, let's address the more in-depth issues we're facing today with the media and credibility and issues like fake news.'" Dr. Hanel then began to build the course, designing it specifically to meet these goals. This course would become Reading the News. "I saw the Honors class as a way to spend an entire semester being able to engage with these really meatier issues when we're trying to talk about media literacy," says Dr. Hanel about her creation of Reading the News.

Teaching a new course comes with its challenges though. Due to the constantly evolving and compounding nature of the news, Dr. Hanel shares that it has been difficult to set a specific structure for classes in regards to lesson plans and class activities. She is not obsessing over this unpredictability though; instead, Dr. Hanel is more focused on her students thinking deeply about what they're learning and applying this new knowledge and awareness in all other aspects of their lives.

"I almost think of it as a toolbox," Dr. Hanel states, "What kinds of tools can I give students so they can leave the class at the end of the semester and remember these things and keep engaging with the media using these tools and skills?" This general media literacy and self-awareness is her ultimate goal for the course. Teaching students how to effectively take in information, reflect on it, and be able to act on it is far more important to Dr. Hanel than homework completion and specific classwork. Of this, she concludes, "That's really my goal, to make it [engaging efficiently with media] a lifelong thing." 



Make a difference in the lives of those preparing to make a difference.

Because they have the opportunity to push themselves to do more here at Minnesota State Mankato, students in the Honors Program will be ready to push for success in the real world as well.

Supporting the Honors Program has an impact on students who will become widely recognized, prominent, distinguished leaders, researchers and global citizens who are able to bring about change in the world, no matter what their chosen discipline may be.

Giving to the Honors Program is easy; simply visit mnsu.edu/giving and designate your gift to the Honors Program.

a tour of the Village and each of the homes within it. Appalachia, a run-down cabin with no electricity and running water, was meant to represent the home of a family in the United States experiencing hidden poverty. The Slum, a graffiti-covered shack of sorts without doors or windows, was similar to those that house the homeless on the edges of major cities. A Guatemalan-style home had only a few bunks and old mattresses. The Refugee Camp, a wood and metal structure in the shape of a tent, had no walls. Lastly there was Zambia- two tiny dirt huts nestled at the top of a hill, like those found in rural Africa.

Following the tour, we were divided into "families," and assigned to one of the homes in the village in which we would spend the next three days. I was assigned to Zambia, and because of my original bias, I believed that my experience would be the most genuine. Over the course of the next three days, each "family" was tasked with cooking their own meals, trading for food and resources, and doing work that corresponded with what members of each community would normally do to provide for their family.


Although I would love to share the details of my time in Zambia- the intimate conversations, fear, loss, and overwhelming joy- I am actually sworn to secrecy. What happens at Heifer stays at Heifer. What is

important, though, is what I learned. One would assume that living in poverty would strengthen your morality while increasing your sympathy for those who are less fortunate, and it did. I now understand the dimensions of poverty and can see it in places I had not before. It showed me that poverty does not only exist in the foreign places that we most often visualize- the African huts and dry deserts- but also in the slums of cities, peaks of the Appalachian Mountains, and refugee camps just outside our borders. These are the types of things I had expected to learn.

However, attending Heifer did far more than simply help me understand the concrete, specific nature of poverty. My experience in Zambia forced me to redefine my personal definition of poverty. Back home, I was constantly overwhelmed with the stress of school, graduation, college, relationships, and social responsibilities. At the Heifer Ranch all of that faded away. I had never felt so at peace. For my whole life, I had always known what was coming next, but at the Ranch I was forced to live in each moment with my family. I found new value in conversation and laughter and togetherness.

Although I had never previously experienced physical poverty, my way of life was poor. My outlook and joy was poor. Through a lens of sympathy, we often seek to Americanize the dirt huts and the water

carrying, not because it is inherently poor, but because it is different. Impoverished countries like Zambia, though, do not need our way of life; they need clean water and animals and vaccines. The solution does not lie in simply providing for these countries but in teaching, sharing, and "Passing on the Gift." So think of poverty then with an understanding of the complexity of our own lives and a thought to the value of simpler things that exist so strongly elsewhere. Think about cooking, talking, and laughing together- finding value in family and community. Not because it is simply there, but because there is a dependence on one another for survival and for contentment. Immerse yourself in simplicity, not for lack of material necessities but for joy.

The Heifer Trip changed my worldview. I no longer pity those in poverty. I admire them for their strength, and I want to find solutions not in simply giving but in educating. Further, I find myself searching for simplicity in my life and striving to make choices that will simplify my future. Upon leaving the Heifer Ranch, we drove past a sign that read, "Blessed Are the Peacemakers. Go in Peace". It's a lovely sentiment, but I've come to realize that it isn't that simple. Being a true peacemaker and coming to a place where one can genuinely change the world for the better, I know now, starts with finding peace in yourself. 

Honorable Mentions

-The following students have received scholarships for the 2018-2019 academic year: Anna Hagan, Andreea Bogdan, Shelby Hartmann, Karla Balbuena, and Cassidy Tocco.

-The following senior students passed their Honors Portfolio Defenses: Katherine Albers, Brittany Skroch, Kylie Gaeth, Spencer Sulflow, Sedona Kintz, Lauren Reiman, Hunter Berbrich, Ugochi Nwachukwu, Mackenzie Dockendorf, Rachel Newinski, Steven Arriaza, Alex Salzar, and Sara Baranczyk.

-The following students were awarded grants from the Center for Undergraduate Research: Eryn Zuiker, Bethany Haus, Casey Schneider, Lillie McDermott, Hunter Herber, Anjola Onadipe, Ibelizet Dominguez, Olivia Marquette, Brennah McCorkell, Marissa Swenson, Macenzie Hays, and Rebecca Peterson.

-The following students currently serve as Executive Officers in Recognized Student Organizations on Campus: Eryn Zuiker, Lissette Garza, Ethan Praska, Jonathan Fjeld, Emily Schiltz, Nwando Ikeogu, Shayla Schumacher, Ashim Adhikari, Cassidy Tocco, Avery Woodley, Amber Chrischilles and Monalisha Pandey.

-The following students served as Learning Community Coordinators for the Learning Communities in the 2017-2018 academic year: Amber Chrischilles, Emily Smith, Anjola Onadipe, Emily Hoyt, Ana Leyva, and Jacqueline Tomas.

-Megan Svir was selected to present at the National Collegiate Honors Conference 2018. Other attendees included Ginny Walters and Dr. Leah White.

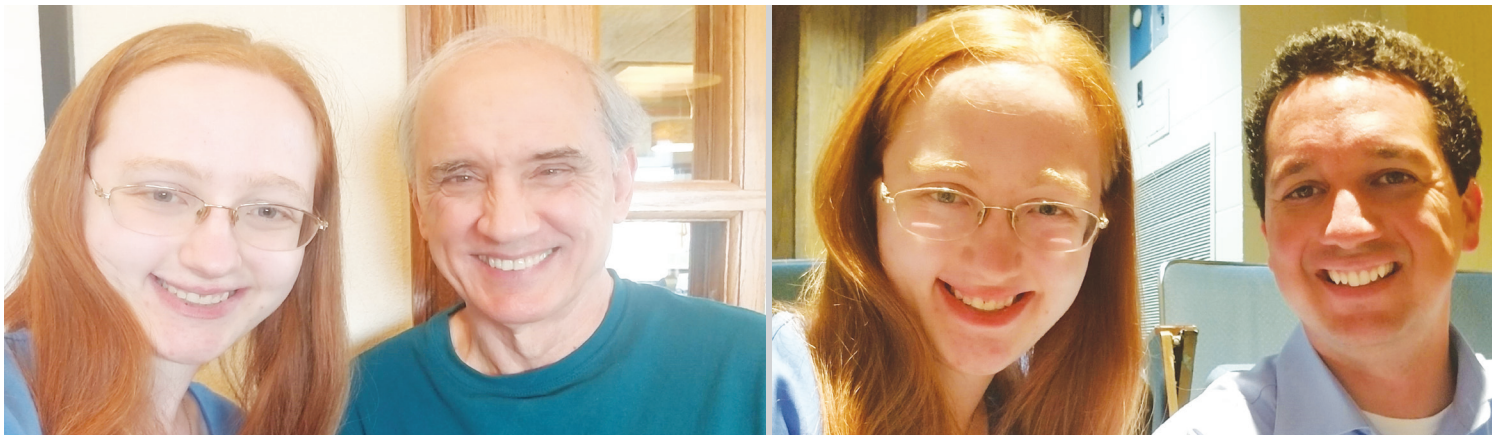
-Alicia Utecht presented at the National Communication Association Convention and received a Top Contributed Performance award.

-Michelle Baldrige was hired as an intern with the Minnesota Twins for the 2019 baseball season.

-Ana Leyva and Kellie Wong presented at the National Society for Minorities in Honors Conference.

-Steven Arriaza was chosen as the Commencement speaker for the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences for Fall 2018 graduation.

-Ana Levya received second place in the Upper College Music Theatre Women's Division at the Minnesota Chapter National Association of Teachers of Singing's Student Auditions.



A Great Debate, a Greater Discovery

by Alicia Utecht, '19 (Communication Studies & Creative Writing; Rogers Minn.)

On September 24, 2018, the CatholicMavs and the Secular Student Alliance collaborated to sponsor a truly incredible event: a debate between two brilliant experts in their respective fields, focusing on the question “Does the Christian God Exist?” The Secular Student Alliance brought in Dan Barker, a former Evangelical minister turned atheist and co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, an organization which promotes nontheism (the lack of belief in God or gods) and focuses primarily on the separation of church and state. The CatholicMavs recruited Trent Horn, a former atheist turned Catholic and staff apologist for Catholic Answers, an organization which focuses on answering questions and correcting misconceptions about what the Catholic Church teaches through radio shows, a bimonthly magazine, and community outreach events. The debate had a massive turnout, filling the Elias J. Halling Recital Hall in the Performing Arts building, with the still-growing crowd being redirected to watch the livestream of the debate at the St. Thomas More Catholic Newman Center.

Before the debate, I had the chance to interview both Dan Barker and Trent Horn. Without a doubt, I was most eager to ask them what it is that their current views answer, that their previous beliefs did not and if there are any questions that are still not answered by their current standpoints. Answering the first question, Barker spoke about a bottom-up approach to life as an atheist by finding purpose and meaning in life based on what’s around you: “For example, say you have a relative who passes away because of some rare disease. So you devote your life to finding the cure for

that disease. That’s a bottom-up purpose. That gives life more meaning than the top-down approach of everything being for the glory of this master.” However, his answer to the second question impressed me the most. Barker openly admitted that his current views do not answer everything, such as the origin of the Big Bang, but stated, “Science thrives on the gaps in knowledge. If all the gaps were closed, there’d be no more science. Those gaps are what drives science. I have a lot more questions and less answers now, which is a good thing to have in life.” To seek knowledge and understanding is an admirable trait, and for Barker, his views as an atheist inspire him to do just that.

Horn’s answers were equally compelling. When explaining which questions his former beliefs did not answer that his current beliefs do, he listed several questions ranging from “What is the nature of morality?” to “Who is Jesus and why should I care?” He stated, “My previous beliefs [as an atheist] may have not answered those questions, answered them incorrectly, or answered in an unsatisfying way. On the other hand, my current beliefs have answered [them] and given me a coherent world view to go from.” His response to the second question though was among the most impactful answer of the day for me. When I asked if there were any questions that his current beliefs do not answer, he simply said, “What’s going to happen tomorrow?” I thought that this was a wonderful answer and found it interesting how it echoed Barker’s answer. Neither of these men claim to be all-knowing. They have both embraced answers which they have found for themselves. Yet while these answers shape their individual

world views, they not only recognize that they will never have the answers for everything but continue forward excited by the missing answers.

At the end of each interview, I asked the men if there was anything else they would like to share. Barker stated, “The motivation that drove me to the pulpit is the same motivation that drove me out. I wanted to know what was true and speak what was true, so in a sense, I haven’t changed at all.” He also encouraged me to emphasize that he does think that most believers, regardless of religion, are good people, as are most atheists. “Every group has its bad apples. ... But people are basically good, and it’s that goodness that unites us. The basic human goodness, I think, can bring us all together.” With that being said, Horn stated, “The Catholic faith is a reasonable one and is backed by evidence. I do these debates to show people that there is evidence for it and to show that we can engage our critics in a charitable way, and I think we’ll be able to do that tonight here with Dan.”

Though I was continually impressed throughout both interviews, there was one aspect in particular that struck me. Before each of the interviews, I had braced myself to be asked in return where my own beliefs lay and for the interview to shift to an attempt to change each other’s views. It was a pleasant surprise for me that neither Dan nor Trent asked me such questions. While they were clear about their own perspectives, it was not with the goal of convincing me, but of being true to themselves and simply sharing their beliefs. This demonstrated to me that people who have strong beliefs about religion are still simply peo-

[Continued on page 11](#)



Rachel Newinski: Alpha Chi Omega

by Meghan Keohane, '22 (Biology; Rapid City, S. Dakota)

As a freshman, she was the Vice-President of Finance. In this position, she was responsible for overseeing the budgeting of Alpha Chi Omega, which required that she learn how to use accounting software. From this experience Newsinski says that she “learned a lot of new things” and is “thankful for the experience to develop her leadership skills.” Sophomore year, Newinski acted as Vice-President of Ritual and Fraternity Appreciation. This involved promoting Alpha Chi Omega’s values, managing alumni and active members, recording history from the sorority’s present year, and planning events to celebrate founding dates and chapter holidays. During these years she also served on the Alpha Chi Omega Executive Board with a team of eleven other vice-presidents and one president. Currently, Newinski is the Senior Peer Facilitator for the MyJourney Program. In this position, she leads monthly meetings for fellow senior Al-

pha Chi Omega members to address questions, concerns, and problems they may face during senior year and post-graduation.

Being a member of Alpha Chi Omega has also helped Newinski to develop her own core values. “I would definitely say that Greek organizations are typically values-driven organizations,” Newinski explained. “By joining an organization that is values driven, I was able to identify some of those values in myself.” Wisdom, devotion, and achievement are the core values of Alpha Chi Omega that Newinski believes helped to shape her own leadership philosophy and develop further toward proficiency in the leadership competency.

Newinski described how Alpha Chi Omega has also prepared her professionally to be a better interviewer, public speaker, and business professional. She explains that Alpha Chi Omega has taught her how to dress for a business meeting and speak

in a professional manner. This knowledge has been beneficial in her pursuit of medical school as she undergoes the rigorous application and interview process. “Being a member of Alpha Chi Omega has given me a lot to talk about in medical school interviews, especially about certain attributes being developed through the leadership process,” said Newinski.

Along with professional and leadership development, being a part of Alpha Chi Omega has helped Newinski to find a community at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Newinski shares, “I think it [being a member of Alpha Chi Omega] has been the most impactful part of my undergraduate experience. I have made the best friends I’ve ever had through this organization.” 

Rachel Newinski (Biomedical Sciences, '19) has been a member of the Minnesota State University, Mankato chapter of Alpha Chi Omega since the spring semester of her freshman year. Being a member of Alpha Chi Omega has been a large part of Newinski’s college experience which has allowed her to take on many leadership roles, make life-long friends, and acquire professional connections. All while helping her fulfill her leadership competency and build her resume for applying to medical schools.

Newinski has held a wide range of leadership roles in her sorority since her induction.



Hunter Brings: Sigma Nu

by Sara Baranczyk, '19 (Communication Are and Literature Education & Physics Education; Saint Paul, Minn.)

nity became the community in which he could fit and has helped him grow both as a leader and a global citizen.

When Brings was in high school, he belonged to several sports teams and extracurricular clubs. He became very close to his teammates in high school, stating, “We all became really good friends, and I wanted to find something like that when I came to college.” What he found when he joined Sigma Nu in the fall of 2017 was much more than a group of good friends. “They’re like family. I know that some of the guys

that I’ve met [in the fraternity] are going to be in my wedding one day. That’s how close we all are,” Brings said. For him, the fraternity went above and beyond what he was looking for in a community, and it also enabled him to grow as an individual, leader, and global citizen.

Brings is currently the Social Chair of Sigma Nu. This role has provided both challenges and rewards as a leader. He is responsible for organizing events that help build a community within Sigma Nu and connect their fraternity to the campus and greater Mankato commu-

nity. “We do a lot of service events, like cleaning up highways, walking dogs for BENCHS [Blue Earth Nicollet County Human Society], raising money for St. Jude’s Children’s hospital, and working with Habitat for Humanity,” said Brings. “We really try to give back to the community, which is a huge part of who we are and what we try do.” Taking responsibilities within the fraternity, such as organizing events and being involved in service projects, has pushed Brings out of his comfort zone and has allowed him to grow as a leader. *Continued on page 7*

For many students entering their first year of college, and finding a community to fit into can be challenging. For Hunter Brings (Mechanical Engineering, '21), the Sigma Nu fratern-


"It can be nerve-wracking at times to try to pull separate parts of an event together successfully, but it's definitely worth it," Brings said, adding that he feels more confident in taking on leadership roles because of his responsibilities in Sigma Nu. "I wouldn't be where I am today without Sigma Nu," he said.

His experiences have also helped him grow as a global citizen. When coordinating some of the homecoming events this year, Brings was able to work

with various departments, other student organizations, and even alumni. He said, "I get to work with people from different paths and backgrounds who are interested in different things ... I get to learn about people's different cultures and ideas and really embrace their differences." Brings commented on the involvement of alumni of Sigma Nu, saying that "being a part of this [Greek] community creates a lot of opportunities and support ... Everybody in the community has my back, and I have theirs. I've made con-

nections with alumni whom I would have never met without Sigma Nu."

When asked what advice he would give to students considering joining a sorority or fraternity, Brings suggested to "do your research." He said that a lot of the stereotypes of fraternities are not true, and that, "If you're looking for the movie experience, you're not going to find it here ... Being a part of Greek life is really about the community and the bonds you create." Brings said that

Sigma Nu is a self-governing and self-sustaining fraternity focused on character development within its members and challenges all members to go outside of their comfort zones. "You get out of it what you put in," said Brings. "It's about bettering yourself and your future." On a final note, Brings said to "join whatever group feels like home," and that being a part of Greek life, or any student organization, is great way to find one's place in a community. 



Sedona Kintz: Alpha Sigma Alpha

by Natasha Laskey, '22 (Law Enforcement; Mankato, Minn.)

her love it even more. One of these experiences which has allowed her to feel more connected to the community was the Polar Plunge in St. Peter, Minnesota. Sedona felt that this event allowed her to grow by helping her bond with her sorority through their service, as well as connect to the community by getting directly involved in its activities. Overall it was a fun experience which gave her a boost of confidence in her abilities and a stronger connection to the surrounding Mankato area. Greek life does a lot of these sorts of community-based philanthropy or service events, which foster good relations between the school and the surrounding area.


Beyond allowing Sedona to make tighter connections with the Mankato area, Alpha Sigma Alpha has given her many other beneficial experiences. One of her favorite experiences in her sorority is the big sister program, where an upper classwoman takes an underclasswoman under their wing and assists her. Sedona felt connected to her big sister as she helped her gain an understanding of what it meant to be part of Alpha Sigma Alpha and gave her a support system on cam-

pus. It helped to have someone to rely on when she needed it, especially in the beginning of her college experience. She has also really enjoyed being a big sister to three of the younger girls in the sorority and by being a big sister herself, she has been able to see things from a different perspective. By helping the younger girls acclimate to the sorority life and giving them guidance, she was able to develop new leadership skills and discover more about her leadership style.

Greek life has also helped Sedona fill her honors leadership competency. Along with being a big sister, two years ago she was the president of her sorority. These experiences have helped her form her leadership style. Being President helped her grow as a leader by helping her understand that you won't always be able to please everyone, so sometimes you just have to do the best you can. The experiences she has had through her sorority have helped her with her honors competencies, but will also carry over into her future.

Being a member of her sorority has even helped Sedona in her future career aspirations. As a double major in psychology

and alcohol and drug studies, she hopes to one day be an alcohol and drug counselor. One of the alumni working at an alcohol and drug treatment center in the cities recognized the Greek letters on her sweatshirt and has now set up an interview for her in the field, an opportunity she would not have had if not for Greek life.

Greek life has been a major part of Sedona's college experience and has helped her connect to the Minnesota State University, Mankato campus and the Mankato community. In addition, it has helped her form ties to her future profession and allowed her to grow as a leader. She found that the experiences she had with the program made her more confident, and with the knowledge that she had her sorority to back her up, helped her come out of her shell. Sedona encourages everyone to check out Greek life, even if you feel it isn't for you. It's a great way to meet new people and make connections both on campus and in your future career. 

Coming to Mankato from South Dakota, Sedona Kintz was beginning her college experience far from home and her comfort zone. Due to the connection she felt with the girls, Sedona joined Alpha Sigma Alpha her freshman year which fostered a feeling of comfort for her in this foreign place. It also provided her with a way to seek out similar leadership positions to those she held in high school.

As a fifth-year student, Sedona now looks back on her experiences with the sorority and sees how it helped her form a connection with the Mankato and Minnesota State University, Mankato community. She now feels that she has a place to come back to after she graduates and that the experiences she has had through Greek life have allowed her to branch out into the community, making

Facing Fears and Finding Strength

by Sophia Hoiseth, '21 (Social Studies Education; Doha, Qatar)



During the summer of 2018, I had the wonderful opportunity to work for the office of New Student and Family Programs as an Orientation Peer Assistant (OPA). According to the job description, this position involved assisting new and transfer students with their transition to Minnesota State University, Mankato through being a student leader at summer orientations. As a result, I spent May through July living and working on campus, guiding almost 3,000 incoming freshman and transfer students through their orientations sessions.

My days were spent answering questions, mingling with nervous parents, singing karaoke, helping select classes for education majors, and relaying the same information over and over again. OPAs worked both one and two-day orientations that started as early as 7:20am and could run until midnight. Every orientation ended with a sense of accomplishment in my fellow coworkers and me as students left with a schedule of their classes in hand- a satisfying finish to an intense and involved event.

I chose a rigorous and intensive job, because I love helping peo-


ple and have a deep affection and passion for this university. I am the true definition of an extrovert and get energy from the people I meet. The nervous energy from an incoming student excites me, because it reminds me of how exciting it was to start college and makes me think of each student's potential. In addition, as an incoming freshman (Fall 2017), I was not only starting a new chapter of schooling, but also moving 8,000 miles away from my home in Doha, Qatar. It was terrifying and invigorating to be able to start over. Minnesota State University, Mankato gave me a new home, an opportunity to grow and learn as an individual, and friendships that mean the world to me. I wanted to get incoming students fired up about attending this incredible institution that offers them so much.

Being an OPA helped me to develop my leadership skills through intense leadership immersion. I was required to lead group discussion and activities with 20 students, all while still being available to direct other students and families who needed assistance. This constant demand of my job tested my ability to be

a compassionate leader when I was extremely tired and becoming exhausted of repeating the same process. The way I kept my head level was to remind myself that each group was experiencing orientation for the first time when it could have been my sixth or seventh time saying something. I found that treating each group with kindness and understanding allowed me to communicate more effectively with incoming students and their families, consequently making my job easier. In this way I learned that leadership requires empathy and compassion, just as much as it requires confidence and a loud speaking voice.

I also became more aware as a leader from giving advice to the nervous incoming students. At each two-day orientation, we led a small group of students in an activity called "Fear in a Hat." In this exercise students wrote down a fear that they might have coming to college for the first time. Then the fears were put in a hat, passed around so that each student read out someone else's fear, and discussed by the group. This was an effective activity for many reasons. First, it allowed the students and OPAs to brain-

storm how some of these fears can be addressed at college by connecting them to resources and assuring them that they are capable of success. Second, it showed the students that they were not alone in their fears. Being afraid is a negative feeling no one wants to experience, but being afraid and feeling alone is a unique and miserable form of suffering. It is a relief to hear that your fears and worries are shared by your peers. What I learned from this activity is that we are all, for the most part, afraid of the same things and that by reaching out for help we can find ways to be lifted out of that. This knowledge and realization showed me the importance of being transparent about anxieties in a group in order to find the solution to most effectively work through them.

Overall, it was a very successful yet busy summer. Though I did not sleep as much as I would have liked, I was truly able to grow as a leader. I was lucky to have worked with amazing friends and supervisors who helped me keep my cool even when it was difficult. Being an OPA showed me that we are never alone when we are a part of a group and that the connections we can create from open, empathetic communication benefits both the leaders and those being led. I know that these are lessons I will carry with me into all my future endeavors. 

Pumpkins for Pathstone

by Samantha K ozelek, '22 (Communication Disorders; Waukesha, Wisc.)




On Tuesday October 16, the Honors Student Body met for their monthly service project, and all honors students were invited. The name of the project was “Pumpkins for Pathstone”, and our goal was to make Halloween decorations of all kinds for the social areas of the Ecumen Pathstone Nursing Home. Materials were provided, and

the rest was left up to the imaginations of the creators! At the end of the evening, those attending were able to enter their projects into a competition where the Honors Student Body awarded prizes to the most creative projects. There were also refreshments such as candy and drinks.

The fun social environment was an escape from the stress of homework, but the experience also helped me to grow as a leader. All who attended worked together to reach the same goal: to create decorations for the nursing home. We worked as a team which helped to develop the team portion of the leadership competency. Working as a team at this event was a multi-role process. Each student did their part and created something, and all the creations were put together to make a larger impact as a group. I developed personally, because I learned the simplicity it can take to work as a team. I noticed that if each student does his or

her role and contributes, the team functions smoothly and completes the project.

From this event, I gained knowledge to better understand service. It is important to realize that volunteering should be something that one chooses to do. Feeling compelled to help others results in a gracious act for the community. Volunteering time of your own to another demonstrates compassion. Any act of service is satisfying, no matter the type of volunteering. I grew to understand that even doing something small yourself adds up in a group and can make a big difference to another.

This event helped connect the Honors Program community to the Mankato area by bridging a path between the nursing home and ourselves at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The ties between our school and the nursing home will create a long lasting relationship and harmony in the Mankato community. 

A Fall-tastic Time


by Kaitlyn Rogers, '22 (Exercise Science; Bettendorf, Iowa)



On September 22nd, honors students gathered for the annual Honors Fall Retreat in Highland Park. Honors Program upperclassmen, who are working toward developing their leadership competency, ran the retreat which was attended by first year honors students.

The event was set up in a fun way which encouraged students to interact with each other while learning about the honors competencies: leadership, research, and global citizenship. Each event had its own activity in order to give students a better understanding of the competency. Leadership was represented in an activity where one team member was blindfolded, and the other team members had to use communication skills in order to help them find a cone and bring it back to the starting point. The research activity required students to rank the importance of an assortment of items that would be important if they were stranded on the moon. With the global citizenship activity, students had to practice the cultural norms of one culture, while conversing with students who had been assigned a different cultural norm.

I found the Honors Retreat to be very informative, while still entertaining. My favorite part of the retreat, which was most beneficial to me, was the question and answer session with some of the older students. It allowed my own specific questions to be answered, and listening to the other questions helped me to gain an even stronger understanding of what it means to be an honors student.

At the retreat, it was crucial to interact with other students in order for the activities to be successful. The activities forced me to go outside my comfort zone. In this way, I was able to meet other incoming freshmen who were also experiencing the difficult transition to college, and it was a relief to realize that I was not alone. After attending the retreat, I completely understand why it is encouraged that new students attend. The Honors Fall Retreat is the perfect way to learn more about the Honors Program and get to know people who are in similar circumstances as you. 

Honors in Pictures



The Honors Learning Communities at the Homecoming Bonfire!



Kirsten, our Homecoming Royalty for this Fall!



A Couple Upperclassmen Retreat Leaders from the Fall Retreat!



The two Learning Communities together for their Speed Friending event!



Kellie and Ana showing some Mav pride while presenting their research!



A Retreat Leader leading a group activity!



The First Year Learning Community getting together for dinner with staff!

Honors Student Body: Renewed

by Emma Gale, '20 (Communication Disorders; Rosemount, Minn.)

The Honors Student Body (HSB) is an organization within the Honors Program whose purpose is to represent all Honors students to the administration, campus, and Mankato community. They meet once a month, as a collective body, to plan service events or activities for all honors students to attend. On top of those meetings, the HSB meets with the Honors Council which consists of representatives from various departments around campus.

Until 2017 the organization was known as the "Honors Student Council." The name was changed, because many students reported that they were confused as to what it and its role was. As a result, attendance was low at meetings and activities. The hope was that with this name change, the confusion would decrease and participation would increase. Currently, there is a common theme in attendance where the majority of students who attend HSB sponsored events are part of the Honors Learning Communities (HLC). As Dr. Leah White, Interim Honors Director, puts it, "It would be great if more honors students saw this group as a way to be connected with the program." While the HSB members and the honors staff hope for more participation, trends from previous years with only HLC involvement are still being seen. However, the HSB is finally settling into the swing of things and intends to figure out ways to get more students involved and aware of events happening.

This year the Honors Student Body began with a rocky start as there were several vacant positions before the fall semester started. However, with some moving around, all positions were filled by the beginning of October. The Honors Program was also left without a Graduate Assistant (GA) at the beginning of the semester, and one of the GA's roles is to help with the line of communication between the HSB and the directors. The majority of the HSB are new members, and beginning the semester without a GA resulted in some confusion for members regarding their roles in the organization. However, a new GA was hired and began working with the HSB in November. Together, they were able to get a more clear idea of their roles and began to plan events for the rest of the semester.


There are many reasons to get more involved with events happening in the Honors Program and the Honors Student Body. An interview with Amber Chrischilles, the HSB Secretary, shows the benefits of becoming more involved. Amber joined the HSB last year, making her the only returning member this year, because she had



served on student council all throughout her high school career. She had joined student council in high school because she wanted to "feel more connected to the community and plan events." Since she had many fun memories and learning experiences from student council in high school, she wanted to have the same opportunity in college as well.

Not only does involvement in the HSB lead to more connections with the program, but it can also help students fulfill competency requirements. Amber explains, "I was able to fulfill part of my leadership competency and develop leadership skills that helped in other aspects of my life."

It has helped her and other members connect with the program and the greater Mankato community because of the service events the HSB hosts. Each month the HSB holds service events in which all honors students are invited to come participate in an activity that typically gives back to the community or campus. Some service events from the past year include Rake the Town, making no-sew hats for REACH, and Pumpkins for Pathstone. Therefore, those involved are able to connect and work with the community through these service events.


Though the Honors Student Body has faced challenges this semester, including vacant student positions and the absence of a Graduate Assistant, these circumstances have not stopped them from providing activities for the honors students to give back to the community and form new relationships with both faculty and other honors students. The Honors Student Body is finishing the semester strong and cannot wait to hit the ground running next semester! 

Article Continued (continued from page 5)

ple, no matter where their beliefs lie on the religious spectrum. It was my own preconceptions about both strong atheists and strong Christians that caused my concern. For me, this was an important realization for Global Citizenship. Atheists and Christians are huge population groups in the world, and interacting with people on both sides of that line doesn't have to be so divisive if we acknowledge each other as human beings first and foremost, all trying to

make our way in the world.

Overall, I truly enjoyed interviewing both men, and it definitely enhanced my experience watching the debate. Throughout the interviews, Barker and Horn each struck a chord with me. Even when my personal beliefs were challenged, I admired and respected their passion for this subject. Religion is often a topic about which individuals have strong convictions, no matter

on which end of the spectrum they are on. In order to grow as strong global citizens, though, it is essential to engage with those with whom you disagree. Minds may never change, but behaviors must in order to become individuals who do not listen in order to reply, but rather listen to understand. In this divisive world, that is an essential piece of living out our lives as good people, which is the ultimate goal for us all. 

Balance: A Discovery of Yoga

by Cassidy Tocco, '21 (Special Education; Marshall, Minn.)

Taking HONR 401: Exploration of Yoga: A Journey of Discovery has been a unique classroom experience. In contrast to a typical lecture class, classes are part discussion and part practice. During our discussions we examine the eight limbs of yoga and our personal yoga journey. In addition, we study the philosophy of yoga, especially how it relates to social, religious, historical, holistic, and political issues around the globe.

There are many misconceptions about yoga being simply impressive poses for good exercise, but our class discussions have shown me that it is far more complex than that. Yoga has a rich cultural, religious, philosophical, and even scientific history. Throughout the semester we have looked at studies which demonstrate the physiological benefits of practicing yoga- from decreasing blood pressure, to changing the physical structure of the brain, to even alleviating depression. In addition to these physical benefits, many people turn to guide their attitudes, outlooks, and actions in order to respect themselves, others, and the universe. It has been fascinating to learn how versatile yoga can be. Through our discussions I have come to realize that yoga can mean so many different things to different people, and each way is no better than another.

Though I genuinely enjoy our in-class discussions, the practice session aspect of this course is my favorite part. I truly enjoy our yoga practices and meditations. The first sessions left me feeling more relaxed than I've ever been before which was a good indicator that I needed to be doing more for both my mind and body, and I was not alone. I began to realize that practicing yoga may be the key to alleviating the stress and anxieties of college. As the semester progressed, I became adept at correctly identifying and understanding my own stress, and through practicing yoga consistently, have learned what I need to do to relax physically and mentally.

I have also grown to find meditating incredibly helpful in reach-

ing this relaxed state. Of course, it depends on the day; sometimes I'm focused and my meditation is effective, and other times it is not. This, I have learned, is totally normal. I truly appreciate how instructor Carly Hopper emphasizes that everyone is different and consequently will feel comfortable with and like different things. She stresses that the point of this class is to find what works best for your body and mind. This journey to a higher self-awareness has allowed me to understand myself on a deeper level. I have become more comfortable with myself and abilities, because I recognize that everyone is unique. If I am in a different place physically or mentally than the person next to me when doing a pose, meditating, or anything else in class, that's totally okay. Through this process I have come to realize that being self-aware is an essential part in leadership. The more effectively I can take care of myself and understand my stress, the more efficiently I will be able to lead others, especially in high intensity situations.

This class has taught me so much, but most of all it has reinforced in my mind that nobody is the same. We all use yoga in different ways through finding different poses or meditations to be more beneficial than others. This is an individual journey that varies for everyone. I believe that this can be applied to a broader life journey. We all are trying different things, gaining different experiences, and making different decisions which is natural, healthy, and should be expected. Recognizing this is an important part of being an informed leader and global citizen. Understanding that everyone is on their own journey and that no group is homogeneous is necessary in order to effectively lead and exchange culture. With this in mind, I aim at taking yoga off the mat after this class by keeping a positive attitude, speaking kindly to myself and others, and being grateful for my life in order to be the best version of myself. 🧘

Honors in Pictures Continued!



All of the students who came to the Leadership Panel!



Students at one of the Honors Student Body meetings!



All of the students who came to the Research Panel!

Aiming for Perfection with Reflection

by Amber Chrischilles, '21 (Mass Media; Storm Lake, Iowa)



This semester Dr. Leah White (Interim Director of the Honors Program) and Ginny Walters (Assistant Director of the Honors Program) hosted workshops in order to answer questions and address students' concerns regarding the online honors portfolios. Their goal with these workshops was to provide students with the tools they need to build more effective portfolios.

The first workshop was held in the Honors Lounge on September 19th at 4 pm. This workshop, "Understanding Your Portfolio Review," helped students make sense of the feedback they received in their Spring 2018 portfolio reviews. The next two workshops, titled "Writing Effective Reflections," were held in October, and aimed to help students understand what they should be focusing on when writing their portfolio reflections each year.


Creating a personal honors portfolio on your own can be quite challenging and confusing. Portfolios are very individualized and can look different from one student to the next. These workshops were highly beneficial to students, because they allowed students to ask specific questions about the portfolio process. Students were then able to receive direct and individual feedback about their portfolios from White and Walters. Being able to have questions answered right away about mistakes or misunderstandings will not only help for future portfolio reviews, but will make the portfolio process easier for students throughout the rest of their time in the Honors Program.

After attending any of these three workshops, honors students were able to under-

stand that the language they use in their portfolios is very important in order to fulfill their competencies, obtain a favorable portfolio review, and ultimately graduate from the Honors Program. Instead of simply explaining how a certain experience is related to a competency, students should aim to be specific about which level they were able to reach and why it was a relevant experience for their personal growth.

One of the most helpful aspects about these portfolio workshops was the "Writing Effective Reflective Arguments" handout. The document provided descriptions of the competency levels and guiding questions to facilitate reflection. This information will help honors students better communicate their personal growth within their portfolio. As explained in the workshop by White, the reflections are "giving the audience a roadmap" to help understand the goals of your portfolio. After attending these portfolio workshops, I was able to understand better that our reflections are not only a description of our experiences, but they also need to include how they have helped us to fulfill competencies and have helped develop important skills we will apply to the rest of our lives.

The main goal of completing an honors portfolio is that once we get into a professional interview setting, we are better able to answer questions that reflect on our proficiency in all three competencies. Instead of just answering a question, we will have solid examples and experiences to help explain our capabilities.

Attending these workshops helped to remind me why I chose to be a part of the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. When I graduate from the Honors Program, I will not only have a degree behind my name, but I will also have gained invaluable experiences through the Honors Program. Without it, I'm unsure if I would have had the drive to learn a second language, assume leadership roles, or pursue undergraduate research. Having an electronic portfolio to help organize important aspects of my personal growth and learning throughout college will help me fulfill the steps I take after college with ease. 

Courses

Spring 2019

Public Speaking (CMST102)

Dr. Chris Brown

This is an introductory course in the theory and practice of public speaking. The skills you will develop in this course include analyzing the speaking situation, choosing appropriate topics, conducting research, organizing ideas, delivering speeches effectively, and the ability to listen critically.

Introduction to Psychological Science (PSYC101), Dr. Karla Lassonde

The goal of this course is to give you a broad overview of the concepts and themes involved in the field of psychology, the scientific study of behavior. In this course we will explore the science of psychology by examining theoretical aspects and then applying them in class discussions, assignments/exams, and everyday situations.

Somali and Somali American Literature, Art and Music, Dr. Danielle Haque

How does the historical movement of people across boundaries of language, culture, and place, together with globalization, transform our understandings of culture and citizenship? We will tackle this question and others through exploring contemporary Somali literature and film, thinking about how these texts enable us to arrive at a sense of how we belong to our cultures, and to the world.

Exploring Personal Leadership

Mrs. Ginny Walters

This course will introduce students to various perspectives on leadership through the lens of the social change model of leadership development. Students will explore and develop their personal understanding of leadership by studying leaders of social changes movements, analyzing their actions, and engaging with organizations on campus or in the community.

Fair Trade Study Abroad in Belize, Dr. Kristin Scott

This course meets once a week during the semester, both before and after spring break. The structure of the course is focused on reading, discussions, and papers before the trip, and during the trip they will participate in a service learning activity.

Full course descriptions can be found at: mnsu.edu/honors/currentstudents/courses14html.html

Finding Connection Through Community

by Grace Anne Ludvik, '22 (Biology; Mankato, Minn.)



Entering the college environment, I found myself to be a bit nervous, as most students are, about meeting new people and making friends. With this concern in mind, I decided to join the first-year Honors Learning Community (HLC). This opportunity created an immediate group of people that I have been able to go to for support and encouragement throughout my adjustment to college.

One of my favorite events that I have been involved with as a learning community member so far has been the priority move-in day. I was able to meet my roommate and fellow learning community members a day early and then assist fellow dorm-mates with moving in the following day. Having this time to get to know one another prior to the dorms being full of people, allowed me to begin to learn about everyone within the community on a more personal level.


During welcome week, our learning community went as a group to different events taking place on campus. Having a group of people whose names I already knew made it less intimidating to attend different activities with which I was unfamiliar. Exploring campus with my fellow HLC members before the semester started helped me to get oriented in the new environment prior to the first day of class, while also allowing me the opportunity to discover common interests among other HLC members and myself.

More recently, we went to the rock climbing wall in the Myers Fieldhouse. I had little experience participating in the sport but thought that since I had the opportunity to go I would utilize the resources presented on campus. It ended up being a great time that allowed me to overcome new challenges by growing in the trust that I have in myself and abilities. I was also able to deepen my relationships with the other HLC members. We each faced our own troubles with climbing the wall, but grew as a group by offering verbal support while each other climbed. It was fun to see how, as a learning community, we were able to come together and cheer on the people who would make it to the top of the wall. The support we have for one another was obvious.

I also had the chance to attend the S'mores and Portfolios event held by our Learning Community Coordinator. This event helped grow my understanding in the expectations for my e-portfolio. I was also provided with support and clear verbal explanations on how to create a successful portfolio that will effectively reflect my global citizenship, leadership, and research throughout college.

Another opportunity I came across was pairing with an Honors Program mentor. Through speaking with her I have been able to debrief my school and life stressors and actively seek out support and advice through her personal experiences as a college student. Through reflective conversations, she has also aided me in identifying areas to excel in as a student and areas of potential growth. Having an older student to confide in has helped reduce the stress of being in a new environment through support, validation, and reassurance.

Coming to campus, I was excited to become a member of a scholarly community by joining the Honors Program. While I wasn't sure what being involved with the program would entail, I decided to embark on the journey with the intention of meeting a variety of academically focused students within a community. Before class even started, the second-year Honors Learning Community members began assuring us that being a part of the program was not something to be stressed about. They spoke with us about the chances we would have to build support networks between other honors students and faculty while developing ourselves to our full potentials through experiences and reflections in leadership, research, and global citizenship. This early encouragement reassured me that as a community, we would be able to work together to solve our problems and hold one another accountable in our coursework.

Choosing to become not only an honors student, but a member of the Learning Community, has provided a network of scholarly students with whom to study and explore campus and the community. Above all, the most significant part about being an HLC member has been the abundant support for trying new experiences offered on campus. This support has helped me to discover a deeper level of self-confidence. Because of this personal development I have been more willing to attend events offered on campus and join different student led organizations. Having this group of people has truly helped make Minnesota State University a home away from home, complete with a family. 

Ferdinand Joins the Corral

by Emily Schiltz, '20 (Exercise Science & Psychology; Detroit Lakes, Minn.)

This fall we have welcomed a new addition to our community in the Honors Program, Ferdinand the Stress Bull. The idea behind Ferdinand occurred this summer and started off as a joke between staff members. As Dr. White and Ginny worked this summer, they would make jokes about the stress bulls. It came to the point where the stress bull ended up travelling home with them, and they would snap a picture of it and send it to each other. This inside joke continued to grow throughout the summer and the stress bull continued to go on their adventures with them.

When the school year began and the adventures of the stress bull were shared, the staff agreed that the stress bull should be given a name and shared with all members of the Honors Program. The students chose a name, and this became the birth of Ferdinand.

To some, Ferdinand is just a stress bull that was given a name. But to many, Ferdinand is a piece of the honors community that can travel with each individual throughout their adventures and their lives. He is a reminder that this community will be a part of us forever no matter where we go. By sharing Ferdinand with the community, the Honors Program aims to engage students in the program by allowing them to share their adventures, whether it be through studying abroad or traveling, going to a conference, or participating in events on campus.

This summer, Ferdinand travelled to the Grand Canyon on vaca-

tion and went to Cincinnati for some tasty food. He also went to Grand Marais to do some swimming then stopped in Duluth for a little hiking.

As for this semester, Ferdinand has spent lots of quality time with the students. Ferdinand accompanied the women's cross country team to their conference and regional meets in Joplin, Missouri and Aberdeen, South Dakota. He also bonded with the First Year Honors Learning Community this by joining them at the outdoor ropes course and game nights!

Ferdinand has also travelled with both students and faculty to events around the country. He has been to Sonoma, California to celebrate a wedding; he spent his time bathing in the sunshine and soaking in some warmth before the winter and Boston, Massachusetts with Dr. White and Ginny when they went to the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference!

Students can become involved with Ferdinand by coming into the honors lounge to claim their own stress bull. They can bring Ferdinand along on their travels and adventures with and then take a picture to show he was there and what they were doing! If students would like to share their adventures with the honors community, they can post their picture on Instagram with the #mnsuferdinand, or they can email someone in the office! Ferdinand's adventures are shared every Friday through social media. 📷

The Adventures of Ferdinand the Stress Bull!



Ferdinand at the Grand Canyon!



Ferdinand and his travels to Boston!



Ferdinand eating some delicious looking food during his trip to Cincinnati!



Ferdinand on his trip to Spain!

Monsters Among Us

by Brian Swancutt, '22 (Community Health Education; Rochester, Minn.)

(This semester we are introducing a new article to the Honors Beacon array: a creative piece. With the creative piece, we hope to showcase our Honors Students' creative projects. The projects may include poetry, short stories, creative essays, songs, or visual art. The following inaugural creative piece is an excerpt from a short story written as a passion project by one of our first year Beacon Writers: Brian Swancutt. The excerpt will be continued in the spring 2019 issue of the Honors Beacon. We are excited to present this new addition, and hope you enjoy this example of the amazing creativity in our honors students!)

"Wow, it sure is dark down here," you think to yourself. Why you're so surprised, it's hard to guess. I mean, you are 27,000 feet underwater, and counting. It's been a long and slow ride down with only Rowan to keep you company. It's not that Rowan is boring to you, it's that, well... Things are complicated, okay?

30,000 feet down, and it's seems to be getting darker, and darker, and darker. Things are starting to get creepy down here. Every once in awhile, you think you hear the beginning of your demise- a light thump, followed by the submarine, and you, getting crushed like a pop can. Luckily, it's only Rowan being a klutz, per usual.

"Dammit Rowan, can't you keep it down? My nerves are shot as it is! What are you trying to do?" You usually don't snap at him like this. He did, however, throw you into a door frame earlier. You feel like you have the right to be a little miffed.

"It's not like I'm trying to Nile, I'm just looking at specimens that have been collected here before, but the submarine keeps tilting. If you actually knew how to drive this, we wouldn't be having this problem, now would we? Can you actually do something and try to figure it out? It's bugging the hell out of me."

"What?" you snap. "What do you mean by tilting? I haven't felt a tilt the entire time we've been down here. And yeah, I'll fix it if it means I can get the heck away from you, cranky-pants. I didn't throw you into the door frame, now did I?"

"Well that's interesting, Nile. Perhaps it's because you're sitting down and I'm standing up? I feel like that would make me the better judge of whether there's a tilt or not. Don't you dare bring that up, that was all on you. You didn't have to jump on my back."

"I guess. Plus you have shitty balance to begin with," you say as he takes a swipe at you. As he does, the entire submarine rattles. Violently. Rowan, overextending himself, falls and hits his head on the corner of the polished metal table he'd been working at. He's out cold. Then, the siren goes off. There's something outside of the submarine, and it's big. You go to the cockpit to check to see what's going on, and what you see almost makes you evacuate your bowels.

They tell you that you learn something new every day, and you can't say that's false. Not today anyway. Today, you learned that you don't need man-made light 34,000 feet under the sea- there's a pair of eyes down there that more than do the trick.

7 hours before....

"Are we really commandeering a submarine from the United States Navy and exploring the Marianas Trench just because your boss told us not to?" asked Rowan incredulously.

"Well, when you put it that way, it sounds really dumb and petty, but yes," you shoot back. We could be making history by doing this- it's basically undiscovered territory."

Yeah that's great and all, Nile, but this isn't the only submarine they have. They could easily overtake us, blow us out of the water, or decide not to rescue us if something goes wrong... This was a horrible idea, and you know it."

"You're not wrong, but it's not like we can go back right now. Might as well see what we can see before we get caught, I guess."

Rowan steps up, raises his hand, and proceeds to slap you across the face. "You think we're gonna get off easy for this? Think again. We're going to be made examples of, and you know it. Turn this damn submarine around, now!"

"I'm not going to do that. We could make HISTORY Rowan."

"Fine," he huffs as he storms away from you. "I'll end this myself"

"NO!" you shout. You leap on his back, trying to make him change his mind. He's stronger than you, however. Always has been. He flings you off of him, and you hit your head of the edge of a door-frame. Your ears start ringing, and you can hear Rowan yell "Shit!" before you pass out. Unfortunately, this is only the first of many times you'll pass out today.

You wake up, groggy as all living hell. You put your hand to the back of your head, and when you pull it away, there's some blood on your hand.

Damn you, Rowan.

Slowly, you start to get up. You turn around, only to find the door of the cockpit closed. All of a sudden it bursts open, and Rowan stumbles out, pale as a ghost. He looks shaken- more shaken than you've ever seen him.

"Rowan!" you exclaim. "What the fresh hell? What happened?"

"Um, uh, um, I don't, uh," he stutters. "I'm gonna be sick!"

Much to your dismay, he actually does get sick. Too bad it's a submarine, and it can't exactly "air out." That's not your main concern at the moment, however. Your main concern is what made Rowan sick. With your heart pounding and your palms sweaty, you push open the door. You hear Rowan in the back warning you not to, but you ignore him. You enter the cockpit, and turn to the windshield. What you expected to see was a super gross undiscovered fish, or something along those lines.

What you didn't expect to see was the barely recognizable corpse of your rear admiral.

To be continued... 