

# HONORS PROGRAM SPRING NEWSLETTER

Honors Student Association  
Madison Larimore, Co-editor  
Harim Won, PR Officer

## HSA Professor Panel

Sydney Edens

As a part of my Media Storytelling 1 class, I've been interviewing different Honors students about the research they've been conducting this semester. I changed it up a little bit on March 12 when I attended an HSA event.

In light of the upcoming election this fall, the Honors Student Association presented the Spring 2016 Professor Panel. UNO professors Dr. Marx, Dr. Chalecki, and Dr. Shaughnessy were the panelists at the event, along with a voting registrar, Ann Chalson, as the guest speaker.

The event started out with Ananya Mitra introducing the panelists and telling everyone how the event would be carried out. HSA President Emily Pachunka spoke, giving the students a reminder about how the HSA elections are coming up soon. After that, the panelists jumped right in by addressing the group of Honors students about the importance of voting. The panel had a very open format, allowing students to ask questions whenever they thought of one. A lot of questions revolved around why people should get informed about the election and how to do so.

After taking a break to grab food provided at the event, the panel continued by talking about campaign rhetoric. Overall, it was refreshing to hear what other students have been thinking about this year's election campaigns without getting into arguments over political beliefs.

When the event had ended, Ann Chalson was able to stick around and help students get registered to vote. The majority of the students were already registered, which is a good sign for this generation of voters. Make sure to do your part to get informed and vote this November!

April 2016 Issue



# Graduating Honors Seniors

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The Honors Program commends the Honors Students who are graduating this May! These students are leaders across UNO and are exemplars of what it means to be Honors Students. Each presented their thesis at one of the two Honors Symposia held this spring; they have worked very hard during their time as undergraduates. We celebrate this accomplishment with them and wish them the best in all of their future endeavors.

Listed are each of the graduates, their college, major, thesis title, and faculty advisor.

## **Claire Cunningham**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Psychology

“Implementation of a Play Protocol in a Toddler with Autism”

Advisor: Brigitte Ryalls

## **Shelby Dechow**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Biotechnology and German

“The Role of Septins: Identifying the Septin-modifying Proteins that Lead to Pathogenesis in *Candida albicans*”

Advisor: Jill Blankenship

## **Taryn Derickson**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Neuroscience

“The Effect of Stress on Maternal Cortisol Level”

Advisor: Jeffrey French

## **Gabriella Hezel**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: English and Spanish

“‘Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey’: Parallels between Memory and Nature”

Advisor: Kristin Girten

## **Madeline Holscher**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Neuroscience

“The effect of activity levels on function in patients with

Peripheral Artery Disease”

Advisor: Sara Myers



## **Anthony Hughes**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: History and Political Science

“Conservatives Combating Climate Change: Energy and Environmental Policy in the U.K.”

Advisors: Jody Neathery-Castro and Beth Chalecki

## **Emily Pachunka**

College of Information Science and Technology

Major: Bioinformatics

“Functional Redundancy of Compound Mutations in Cancer: Analysis of mtDNA and nDNA Mutations in Protein-Coding Genes for Oxidative Phosphorylation”

Advisor: Dhundy Bastola

## **Andrew Pulfer**

College of Information Science and Technology

Major: Bioinformatics

“In-silico Modeling and Analysis of Leber’s Hereditary Optic Neuropathy”

Advisor: Dhundy Bastola

# Graduating Honors Seniors

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**Robia Qasimyar**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Psychology

“The Risks in Lists: Cognitive Effects of List Length in Healthcare Consent Forms”

Advisor: Joseph Brown

**Samantha Robb**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Political Science

“Gender Imbalance in State Legislatures: The Understatement of the Century”

Advisor: Jody Neathery-Castro

**Bailey Rosecrans**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Political Science

“The First Amendment Online: Technology vs. Time”

Advisor: Paul Landow

**Clayton Taylor**

College of Information Science and Technology

Major: Information Technology Innovation

“LockerRoom: A Tool Built by Student Athletes for Student Athletes”

Advisor: Doug Derrick

**Shaylea Valentine**

College of Engineering

Major: Civil Engineering

“Sustainable Development and LEED”

Advisor: Tian Zhang

**Aaron Welch**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Biology

“Phylogenetic Diversity comparison between prairies at different latitudes”

Advisor: Roxi Kellar

**Kelly Bast**

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media

Major: Journalism and Media Communication

“Eppley Airfield Commemorative Book”

Advisor: Karen Weber

**Emily Berry**

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media

Major: Music Education

“Assessment in the Elementary Music Classroom”

Advisor: Melissa Berke

**Megan Black**

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media

Majors: Studio Art and Art History

“Representations of the American Dream: Norman Rockwell and Andy Warhol”

Advisor: Adrian Duran

**Alexander Clarke**

College of Information Science and Technology

Major: Bioinformatics

“Determining Close Bacterial Relatives of Human Mitochondria by Clustering Analysis of a Sequence Similarity Network”

Advisor: Dhundy Bastola

**Nathan Cornelius**

College of Information Science and Technology and College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Computer Science and Mathematics

“Planar Subgraphs as Biological Graph Filters”

Advisors: Hesham Ali and Sanjukta Bhowmick

**Jenna DeWilde**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service

Major: Criminology and Criminal Justice

“Take Me to Your Leader: An Inside Look at Air Force ROTC Education”

Advisor: Chris Chocolaad



# Graduating Honors Seniors

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## **Ashley Eisert**

College of Business Administration

Major: Business Administration

“From Startup to Global Energy Innovator, General Electric Engages ‘Current’”

Advisor: Erin Bass

## **Jeremy Gutierrez**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: History

“The Real Native American President”

Advisor: Mark Scherer

## **Mark Irvine**

College of Information Science and Technology

Major: Management Information Systems

“Designing an Inventory Database Application for a Local Small Business”

Advisor: Leah Pietron

## **Jordan Jenison**

College of Education

Major: Secondary Education

“Assessment of Secondary Close Reading and Writing Skills”

Advisor: Chuck Peterson

## **Laura Komenda**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service

Major: Social Work

“Students with Developmental Disabilities’ Outlook on Employment”

Advisor: Ann Coyne

## **Harmon Lian**

College of Arts and Sciences and College of Business Administration

Majors: Political Science and Business Administration

“Democratization in Myanmar”

Advisor: Ramazan Kilinc

## **Roni McClellen**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Biology

“Canine Transitions to New Homes: The Difference in

Puppy Temperaments from Foster Home to New Homes?”

Advisor: Rosemary Strasser

## **Sandra Ojer Viejo**

College of Business Administration

Major: Business Administration

“The Ambitious Spirit of Spirithoods”

Advisor: Erin Bass

## **Aaron Peplinski**

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media and College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Writer’s Workshop and English

“Lost in the Low Beams”

Advisor: Miles Waggener

## **Maggie Peterson**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service

Major: Social Work

“Heartland Family Service Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Program”

Advisor: Judy Dierkhising

## **Miles Russell**

College of Business Administration

Major: Business Administration

“Drive for Show, Putt for Dough: Using Data Analysis to Challenge Golf’s Conventional Wisdom”

Advisor: Chris Decker





# Event Recap

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## Honors Program Fall Blood Drive | Thursday, Feb. 18th

HPER

Cristian Valquier, HSA Vice President

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The Blood Drive was an incredible success! Despite the overwhelming effort it took to schedule 86 appointments when there were only 90 possible slots, we had so many people help out on the day. You may remember that our drive in November collected 64 units; for the spring, we collected 72 units. Overall, the Honors Program helped save 408 lives the 2015/16 academic year! Great job to everybody involved; thank you all.



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## Honors Program and TLC Quiz Bowl | Saturday, Feb. 20th

Durham Science Center

Harim Won, HSA Public Relations Officer

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The Honors Program and the Thompson Learning Community partnered this year again to hold its second High School Quiz Bowl. Teams of four to five students from various local high schools competed and dazzled the UNO volunteer moderators and scorekeepers with their erudition! Fielding questions on a wide assortment of categories, the competition was stiff among each of the teams present. Congratulations to the team from Grand Island for winning the Quiz Bowl and thanks to each of the Honors and TLC students who gave up their Saturday to volunteer!



# Event Recap

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## Honors First Year Reception | Thursday, Feb. 25 Milo Bail Student Center

The 2016 Honors First Year Reception recognized high-achieving Honors freshpeople across all of the UNO colleges. Adjusting to the rigor of college can certainly be a difficult task - especially when undertaking Honors work from the very start! We commend all of our stellar students for rising to the challenge so well and wish you even greater success in the years to come.



# Event Recap

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## Distinguished Scholarship Competition | Saturday, Feb. 27

Mammel Hall

Ananya Mitra

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The Distinguished Scholarship Competition is an event aimed to recognize the brightest and most distinguished applicants to receive scholarships for the upcoming year. As a transfer student, I never participated in the Distinguished Scholar Competition myself, but it was great to be a part of it this year.

As an interviewer, I was able to talk to a lot of students and was very impressed by how bright the students were. The questions were designed to force the students to think outside of the box and I was very surprised by how easily they were able to come up with creative answers on the spot!

The event also had a student panel where the incoming freshmen were given the opportunity to ask current honors students questions. I think the students felt far more comfortable asking questions in this setting in the absence of their parents. They were very engaged and asked about housing, academics, extra-curricular activities, etc.

Overall, my experience regarding the Distinguished Scholarship Competition was very pleasant and I am thrilled that our upcoming class of Honors students is filled with such intelligent and creative people.



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## 2016 Research and Creative Activity Fair | Friday, Mar. 4

Criss Library

Bejan Mahmud

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It was my immense pleasure to present my research work to the public at the 2016 Research and Creative Activity Fair. The poster I presented summarized my *CHEM 4950 – Research in Chemistry* project with Dr. Douglas Stack entitled, “Synthesis of Bisphenol-A Quinones Using 2 Iodoxybenzoic Acid (IBX).” This project focused on developing various organic synthesis reactions that would assist in the study of potential cancer-causing properties of Bisphenol-A (BPA), commonly found in plastic products. It was a great and eye-opening experience to enlighten individuals from various backgrounds about our work; additionally, it was a privilege to learn about the many areas of research conducted at UNO from other students such as myself.



# Event Recap

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## BIOL 1750 - Honors Biology II Laboratory | Spring 2016

Allwine Hall and Glacier Creek Preserve

Gabriela Garaycochea

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In Honors Biology II Lab we were able to experience real hands-on lab work and utilize critical thinking skills. We started with the great feat of sequencing hundreds of plant species across twelve vastly different counties in Nebraska. This was done on modern biometric assessment programs that we learned to use by trial and error in small groups during lab. We created scientific-grade phylogenies and statistics that will be used and published in future papers. My peers in this class, especially, all exemplified an infectious level of commitment and passion for school, which was a great motivation for me throughout the semester.



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## Honors Shadow Day | Wednesday, Apr. 6

The Honors Program held its annual Shadow Day, which invites high school students to pair up with mentors and learn from them what being an Honors Student at UNO is like. It is a great opportunity for those students who are trying to decide where they would like to spend the next four years of their life to see what our great university has to offer! The day started out with orientation and breakfast in the CPACS building. Shadows were then assigned to their mentors, and Shadow Day continued from there. Groups toured the campus, visited various classes, rode around on the shuttle systems, and stopped by the Honors office in Kayser 208! Shadow Day concluded with a fantastic lunch in the Milo Bail Student Center. If you are interested in mentoring, or if being a shadow yourself was something that helped you decide on coming to UNO, consider volunteering to be a mentor at Honors Shadow Day next year!





# Outstanding Honors Student Activities

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## Union Pacific Case Study Competition | Friday, Mar. 11

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Ashley Eisert

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On March 11, sixteen UNO undergraduate students competed in the first round of the Union Pacific Case Study Collegiate Competition. These students were selected among a group of applicants and placed into four teams (consisting of four students each). Students were welcomed to the competition by Union Pacific employees across multiple departments, including Human Resources and Intern Recruiting. The same case study was presented to each team who then had five hours to discuss, analyze, and strategize to create a proposal that would be made to the Assistant Vice Presidents on the panel of judges. Each team was evaluated on data, analysis, market viability, strategy, and overall presentation skills.

After discussion among the judges, awards were presented to the first and second place teams. Awarded first place, and representing UNO in the final round, were Ashley Eisert (Senior - Honors Student); Joshua Stokes (Senior); Adrienne Cavill (Freshman - CBA Scholars Academy and Honors Student); and Carter Purdy. These four students competed against the top teams from University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Iowa State, and Kansas State at the Union Pacific Center Headquarters in Omaha on April 1.

Teams competing in the final round had two weeks to analyze the case study and prepare their proposal. Each team was assigned a Union Pacific coach and mentor, who provided valuable advice and insights. On Friday, April 1 each team presented their proposal to a panel of judges and other Union Pacific employees. Working on the case study allowed the students to analyze a real world situation and to apply their gained academic knowledge. Although the UNO team did not take first place in the final round of the competition, each student gained a great deal of experience and network connections within the company.

Union Pacific is a proud sponsor of the Collegiate Competition as it allows the company to connect with undergraduate students whom they seek to hire for internships and full-time positions.



Pictured (left to right): Joe Jensen (UNO Coach; UP Employee), Ashley Eisert, Carter Purdy, Joshua Stokes, and Adrienne Cavill

# Outstanding Honors Student Activities

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## Camping is In-tents: Back from the Backcountry | Spring Break

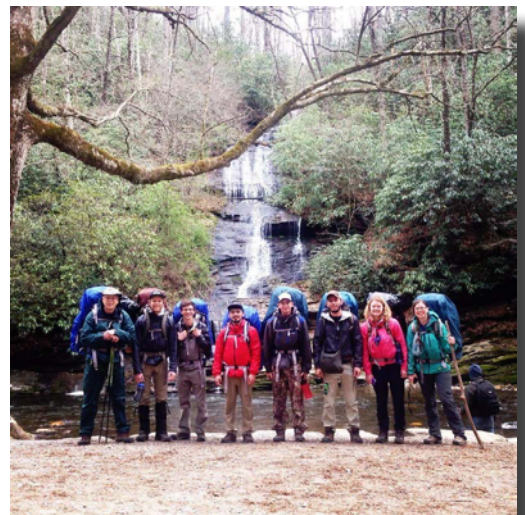
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Michael Palandri

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During Spring Break, I led a group of students backpacking in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, located in the Appalachian Mountains on the border between Tennessee and North Carolina. The trip was sponsored by the Outdoor Venture Center, an outdoor recreation program on the UNO campus that leads outdoor trips, rents equipment, and manages the climbing wall. Two groups of eight participants (composed of UNO students and the general public) each went out to different areas of the park. I co-led with my boss, Joseph Hanseling, the Assistant Director of the Outdoor Venture Center. The week-long trip included six days and five nights in the backcountry. The “backcountry” is a generalized term for being in an area with no running water, bathrooms, power, or other luxuries, basically in the middle of nowhere, where all you have is what you carry on your back. This trip offered physical challenges, adventures, outdoor education, relaxation, and personal learning moments.

There is a set of ethics known as Leave No Trace Policies that people are encouraged to follow when they camp in protected areas. These policies are something the Outdoor Venture Center chooses to follow in order to maintain natural areas and to minimize the impact we have on the environment when we travel. Some policies include packing out any trash we make, taking any other trash people leave, keeping our distance from wildlife, and other practices. This creates a unique challenge when it comes to food. One thing we have to do is clean dishes, which is very difficult to do when there are no trash cans or sinks. You can package all of the leftover food, but you have to carry it and it gets gross. One common thing to do instead is to make “gray water”, where you put boiling water with your left over food and drink it, no matter how gross it is. The participants who hadn’t done this before were shocked, and less than excited to drink left over food. Having done it many times before, it doesn’t bother me anymore. I have had to drink more oatmeal water than should ever have to be consumed.



In order to navigate through the park, we took a number of different trails (you have to use the trails to minimize impact) and one of these included the Appalachian Trail. This is a historically significant trail that runs a stunning length through the Appalachian Mountain range, across fourteen different states. Many hikers make



it their goal to hike the entire trail. Our group camped amongst many of these adventurous people along the way, who, just as you would imagine, had many stories to tell. Although the trail never reaches an elevation above 7,000 feet, those who hike the entire trail will end up going an equivalent distance to climbing Mount Everest 16 times. We only spent a short time on the trail because it is usually very busy with people trying to hike it. We took the trail to Clingmans Dome, the highest point in the park as well as one of the highest points in the entire mountain range. Our hiking took us through a large number of steep inclines, steep declines, stream

# Outstanding Honors Student Activities

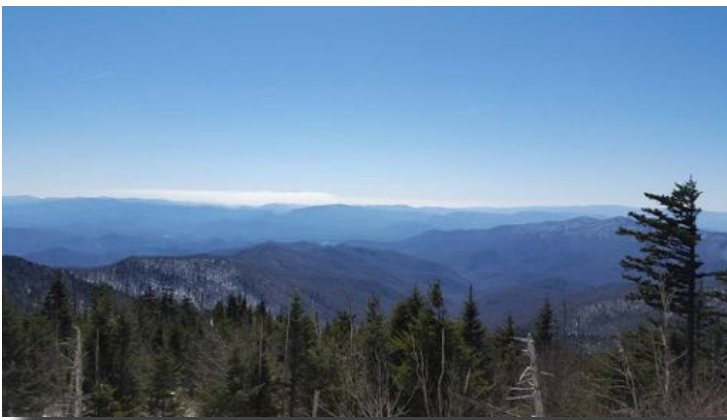
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crossings, drifts of snow, deep mud, jagged rocks, and fallen trees. The hike to Clingmans Dome alone was five straight miles uphill.

There were several areas where our trails crossed streams, but there were no bridges. These ranged in size from five feet wide and a few inches deep to twenty feet wide and 5 feet deep. Many involved precariously hopping from rock to rock hoping that your enormous backpack wouldn't sway your weight dragging you into the water. Other times there were not enough rocks, and a slippery log would have to suffice. One particular log was too wet to walk across, so we had to straddle it and inch our way across. Overall there must have been around 15 crossings, each producing their own specific challenge and adventure to the other side. There were a couple of people who fell into the streams, but hey, it's all about the adventure.



As I mentioned earlier, there are no showers out there, but we had to get clean somehow (a sixteen hour drive in a cramped van with eight people who haven't showered in a week is less than enjoyable). We found a still pool in a stream about five feet deep half a mile from our campsite. We hiked down to the pool and everyone lined up, immediately regretting their decision when they dipped their feet in the water (it must have been close to freezing from the prior days' snow melt). It was too painful to go in slowly, so everyone had to suck it up and just jump in! Everyone was stunned by the initial shock of the cold water and struggled to find their way out in a frenzy. After a few seconds in the freezing water you got used to it, sort of, and we all washed up, and everyone decided to jump in several more times. Something about dangerously cold water is good for the soul! Like my boss says, "Never regret a swim."



In addition to the physical rewards and being able to experience the stunning beauty of the outdoors, one of the greatest things about these trips, I think, is the bond that forms between the participants. Most of the people that go on one of our trips do not know each other when we leave, but, by the first night, it is like we have all been friends for years. Everyone has a common interest in the outdoors and it really fosters a connection. It is truly a great experience to lead these trips and to be able to bring people together into such a friendly and enjoyable atmosphere. No matter how bad the weather is, how

heavy the packs are, or how long the drive gets, it is always fun. I truly enjoy being able to give people the opportunity to experience nature and to witness the happiness and peace it provides them. This was a great experience for not just me but I think for all of the participants, and I strongly recommend that anyone interested in the outdoors come on a trip to claim their own adventure.



# Outstanding Honors Student Activities

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## National Conference on Undergraduate Research | Apr. 7-9

Asheville, North Carolina

Bashayer Hammadi

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The Honors program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha shared a wonderful opportunity last Fall 2015 with their honors students. The opportunity was to apply to present previously conducted research on the national level at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR 2016). After applying competitively, I and two other Honors students, Sara and Gabrielle, had the privilege to be accepted to present our research studies at NCUR in Asheville, North Carolina.

From Wednesday, April 6th, 2016 until Saturday, April 9th, 2016, we spent a great time exploring the Smoky Mountains, driving through the natural fog that hangs over the range of the Smokies, hiking the Appalachian Trail, taking the steps all the way up to the Clingman's Dome - as well as presenting research about a home located in the Aksarben area, attending different poster sessions, learning about graduate schools from the graduate fair, and eating delicious food from different restaurants.

I am grateful that I had the chance to take a role in this wonderful trip. This experience empowered my skills as an undergraduate student by presenting my poster presentation at a national conference.



Kayser Hall 208 | 402-554-2696 | [honors.unomaha.edu](http://honors.unomaha.edu)

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