



# The DISTINCTION

Spring 2019



UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha



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Hailey Stessman, Co-Editor

Annika Kuchar, Co-Editor

Bailey Hoffer, Co-Editor



# Thanks to Your 2018-19 HSA Representatives



***Dalton Meister - President***  
Major: Social Work  
Minors: Gerontology, Holocaust and  
Genocide Studies, Human Rights Studies,  
International Studies, and Medical  
Humanities



***Alyssa Spartz - Vice President***  
Majors: Psychology and Emergency  
Management  
Minors: Nonprofit Management, Public  
Health, and Sociology  
Concentrations: Public Health and Nonprofit  
Management



***Abby Kane - Treasurer***  
Majors: Communication Studies  
and Political Science  
Minor: International Studies



***McKenzie Nutter - Secretary***  
Major: Biology (Pre-Dental)  
Minor: Chemistry



***Savana Nawojski - 3rd Year Representative***  
Major: Molecular and Biomedical Biology



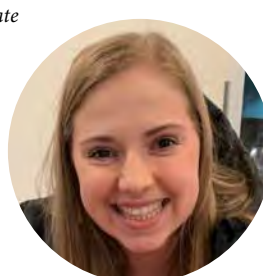
***Sam Lauritsen - 2nd Year Representative***  
Major: Business Administration  
Minor: Spanish  
Concentrations: Legal Studies and Real  
Estate



***Elizabeth Bender - 1st Year Representative***  
Majors: Criminology & Criminal  
Justice and Foreign Language  
Minor: Political Science



***Lavanya Uppala - 1st Year Representative***  
Majors: Bioinformatics, Biology and  
Chemistry  
Minor: Computer Science



***Sidney Hanel - 1st Year Representative***  
Major: Chemistry  
Minor: Biology



***Hailey Stessman - Public Relations***  
Majors: English and Creative Writing  
Minor: Environmental Science  
Concentrations: British/Irish/Anglophone  
Literature and Creative Nonfiction



***Annika Kuchar - Graphic Design Specialist***  
Major: Biology  
Minor: Medical Humanities



***Skylar Gubbels - Social Media Specialist***  
Major: Molecular and Biomedical Biology

# MAY 2019 GRADUATES

## **Elise Beal**

College of Education  
Major: Physical Education  
"Dance: Music, Movement, and Performance"  
Advisor: Jessica Baldwin

## **David Carlson**

College of Business Administration  
Majors: Finance & Entrepreneurship  
"Peloton's Predicament Case Study"  
Advisor: Erin Miles

## **Mark Carter**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Neuroscience  
"Current Challenges Facing Physical Therapists in Urban Nebraska"  
Advisor: Katie Langenfeld

## **Sophie Clark**

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media; College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: Creative Writing & English  
"Sunday Dinners"  
Advisor: Lisa Fay Coutley

## **David Connolly**

College of Engineering  
Major: Electrical Engineering  
"Granny Pod Virtual Assistant"  
Advisor: Bing Chen

## **Powers Dicus**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
Major: Aviation  
"Pilot Training Methods for Runway Incursion Mitigation"  
Advisor: Scott Tarry

## **Matthew Eller**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: Math & Physics  
"Computational Methods for Double-Well Potential Solved Through Variational Methods"  
Advisor: Wai-Ning Mei

## **Emma Franklin**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: English & Political Science  
"Living the All-American Dream"  
Advisor: John Price

## **Abi Heller**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Neuroscience  
"Assessing Empathy Across the Lifespan: Functional Near Infrared Spectroscopy (fNIRS) Approach"  
Advisor: Janelle Beadle

## **Michael Herndon**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: Political Science & International Studies  
"Identity in Congress: How Ethnicity is Shaping Caucus Membership"  
Advisor: Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado

## **Tiffany Hunter**

College of Business Administration  
Major: Real Estate  
"Revitalizing the Street of Dreams"  
Advisor: David Beberwyk

## **Dominika Jedinak**

College of Business Administration  
Majors: Management & Economics  
"Shades of Beige: Tarte Cosmetics and Racial Inclusivity"  
Advisor: Brent Clark

## **Tristan Martin**

College of Information, Science & Technology  
Major: Computer Science  
"Developing an Artificial Intelligence for Grant Anon - A Real-Time Strategy Game"  
Advisors: Brian Ricks and Harvey Siy

## **Evan Meduna**

College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
Major: Social Work  
"Case Manager and Client Relationships for HIV Related Care Services in Rural Areas"  
Advisor: Amy West

## **Libby Moberg**

College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: Biology & Spanish  
"Pilot Study of Empathy in Bilingual Adults"  
Advisor: Janelle Beadle

## **Bailey Morley**

College of Arts and Sciences; College of Education  
Majors: Spanish & Secondary Education  
"La Universidad in a Comprehensible Input Foreign Language Classroom"  
Advisor: Saundra Shillingstad

# MAY 2019 GRADUATES

## **Barbara Mullen**

College of Engineering; College of Arts and Sciences  
Majors: Architectural Engineering & Molecular/  
Biomedical Biology

"Examining Electrochemical Properties of *o*-Quinone  
and Sulfur Adducts Using Bisphenol A-3, 4-Quinone  
Platform"

Advisor: Douglas Stack

## **Summer Murray**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Spanish & International Studies

"Complete Makeover Mission Trip Edition:  
Improving the Effectiveness of Mission Trips" Advisor:  
Patrick McNamara

## **Crystian Neaman**

College of Business Administration

Majors: Economics & Marketing

"STARS Dance Academy: Strategic Revision Project"

Advisor: Erin Miles

## **Charlotte Reilly**

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media Major:  
Journalism

"Nothing Wrong with Prejudice and Discrimination:  
Omaha Newspaper Coverage of the Civil Rights  
Movement in 1968"

Advisor: Karen Weber

## **Justin Robbins**

College of Information, Science & Technology

Major: Computer Science

"Grant Anon Minigame Extensions:

Advisor: Harvey Siy

## **Zachary Sabata**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Physics, Math & Chemistry

"Visualizing the Nanostructure of Chiral-Doped Flexible  
Bent-Core Liquid Crystal Dimers"

Advisor: Renat Sabirianov

## **Simon Saqueton**

College of Information, Science & Technology; College  
of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Computer Science & Math

"Once Upon a Time"

Advisor: Todd Richardson

## **Amanda Shurtliff**

College of Education

Majors: English & Secondary Education

"The Writing Process Revisited"

Advisor: Saundra Shillingstad

## **Nathan Skalka**

College of Information, Science & Technology

Major: Computer Science

"Building an Artificial Intelligence to Learn Go"

Advisor: Raj Dasgupta

## **Jennifer Solheim**

College of Engineering

Major: Architectural Engineering

"Investigation and Development of Multiphysics Modeling Software  
Applications for Building Noise Control"

Advisor: Erica Ryherd

## **Sam Underwood**

College of Engineering

Major: Architectural Engineering

"Application of Effective Noise Control Strategies in Speech Perception  
Testing Rooms"

Advisor: Erica Ryherd

## **Sean Watson**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Economics & Molecular/Biomedical Biology

"Elucidating the Mode of Action of AntiToxoplasma Compound SW33"

Advisor: Paul Davis

## **Erin Wiebe**

College of Arts and Sciences

Majors: Philosophy & English

"Collaborative Disagreement: Coming to See the Evidence in a New  
Light"

Advisor: William Melanson

## **Chris Winchester**

College of Business Administration

Majors: Marketing, Management & Entrepreneurship

"A Model of Workload Assignment Preference"

Advisor: Amy Rodie

## **Olivia Zeman-Renner**

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Political Science

"Medical Decision Making: An Analysis of the Effects of Societal and  
Legal Influences on Patient Care"

Advisor: Kamazan Kiline



# Semester in Uruguay

Aidan Posey

**H**i there! My name is Aidan Posey and I am a sophomore in CBA and the College of Arts and Sciences. Right now, I am spending the Spring semester studying abroad in the beautiful city of Montevideo, Uruguay. While sometimes it's been hard to adjust to the culture and the different way of life, studying abroad has absolutely been one of the best decisions I have ever made.

To begin, I am living with the most wonderful host family an exchange student could possibly ask for. I live with my host mom and dad, their two kids (who attend the same university as I do), and their dog. They have been here for me to guide me through the local customs, teach me the ins and outs of the city, and of course show me all of the different foods Uruguay has to offer. Thanks to them, I have been able to try "Yerba Maté," one of the native drinks to the region, fried shark, and the classic "Chivito," which is essentially just a sandwich stuffed with every condiment imaginable. For me, living with a host family has been a great way to improve my ability to speak in Spanish due to the fact that they speak very limited amounts of English. Occasionally, it can be a bit difficult to explain what I am trying to say, but their patience and their help has made me so much better!

Another aspect of studying abroad that I have really enjoyed is being able to meet not only Uruguayans, but students from all around the world. I've met so many interesting people with different stories that brought us all together at the same time and place. Some of my best friends are from Germany, the United States, Mexico, and Brazil. Due to this, the majority of the time we have no choice but to speak in Spanish if we have any hope at all of being able to understand each other. I have also learned that nearly nobody can actually say where Nebraska is. From some 25 people that I have talked to, every single person says, "Oh, in the North, right?" Do I need to be checking textbooks from other countries? I don't understand how every single person from vastly different countries around the globe all believe the same thing.

Thank you for reading about my study abroad experience. I can't believe almost two months have already gone by, but thankfully I still have three more to go.  
¡Adiós!



*One of the waterfalls that can be found in Montevideo*



*Alexandra accompanied by her sister, Kerstin, standing outside of Chranche Cave*

*Posey standing in front of the city's sign where he is living in Uruguay*



*Posey with his host family*

# Adventures in Switzerland

Alexandra Swanson

**M**y adventure in Switzerland has gone by so incredibly fast, and I am shocked to already be at the halfway mark in my program. I have been through so many new and exciting experiences that I know I will cherish forever and I still have more to come! At this point in my trip, I am amazed by the personal and academic growth taking place.

Upon arrival, I experienced a bit of culture shock. For starters, they are much less friendly here than I am used to in Nebraska. I am sure much of that has to do with the language barrier, but much of it can be attributed to their cultural beliefs as well. Many Swiss people are very reserved and closed off. When walking by them on the street, you don't say good morning, hello, or even give them a gentle smile/nod. This took me a while to get used to, as I am quite familiar with "Nebraska Nice." Another challenge I did not anticipate is that nothing is open on Sundays! It's great to force yourself to take a day off but also feels like you're losing out on a day of the week. The accessibility and availability of products are just not quite the same as in the U. S. Lastly, the language barrier has been extremely tough to get over. As a student coming to improve my French, it is great practice to be immersed in the language, but also quite daunting. I have had so many good but also difficult experiences when trying to communicate with natives but that was to be expected.

On the flip side, there were some things about the culture that I immediately appreciated. Their respect for the Earth is unlike any place I have ever been to. They charge a great amount for trash bags so people are encouraged to sort through their paper products, cans, plastics, and glass. I rarely ever see trash on the ground, nor have I ever seen anyone litter before. Escalators and lights are motion activated in order to save energy, and lots of cars' engines momentarily turn off while at stoplights as well. I think we all could learn a little from Switzerland when it comes to this. Another thing I absolutely love about Switzerland is the diversity. Within just Switzerland, a country just larger than the state of Maryland, there are four national languages: German, French, Italian, and English.

I can travel outside the French-speaking city of Lausanne where I am studying to a German-speaking territory in just 45 minutes. This is incredible to me and I find it fascinating to listen to the vast array of languages I hear being spoken on an everyday basis. Lausanne itself is so diverse that it's impossible to know whether someone is a local or not or whether you can expect someone to speak French, English, etc. I love being part of such a multicultural city.

My trip here has really pushed me out of my comfort zone and led to lots of personal growth. This is the first time I have truly lived alone, with no roommates or family, and I have had to figure out how to be 100% independent when it comes to cooking, cleaning, accountability, etc. I have also been taking public transportation for the first time in my life! I still remember the first time I navigated my way home all by myself; I felt such pride. And now it is just a part of my everyday life! I also have really been tested through my French and ability to adapt. I have had to learn just to go for it and try my best to communicate with people, even when I am nervous and would rather not do it. Even going to the grocery store used to be intimidating, but my confidence level is slowly but surely rising.

As for the academics, my experience at the University of Lausanne has been nothing short of exceptional. They offer French classes for students of every level and I had the ability to create a schedule filled with French electives that truly interested me. I am taking a handful of courses, ranging from grammar to pronunciation to writing and reading. The professors have been amazing so far. They know how to tread the line between pushing you enough so that you're challenged, but still teaching in a manner that allows you to understand what they're saying. I have learned so much about the French language and its nuances and particularities and it's so helpful to learn French from people who have been speaking French their entire life.

Last but not least, this experience has made me appreciate the Earth and all it has to offer. I am incredibly lucky to be in one of the most beautiful places in the world! So far, I have been to several cities in Switzerland and visited France and Italy as well. I am so excited to see what the rest of my stay has to offer.

# From Dream to Reality

Chris Winchester

When I think back to my start of college, it always begins with my dream the night before my first day of class. I dreamt I was standing on stage being named the best student at UNO. However, I woke up the next day to completely embarrass myself on the first day of class instead.

My professor asked a question to the class, and like any good Honors freshman, I raised my hand. The only problem was my classmate had set her coffee (with no lid) next to me and when I went to raise my hand, I spilled it all over her. To add insult to injury, my answer to the question was also wrong.

Fast forward three years from the worst first day of class I have ever experienced to now where I am being honored with the Senior Vice Chancellor Outstanding Undergraduate Student Award. This is the top honor given to an undergraduate student each year at UNO, and after the first day of class, I never thought this day to even be a possibility, let alone a reality.

When I arrived at UNO, I was an excited and highly motivated student fresh out of high school. I can still remember my Honors orientation day where I signed up for classes, took a tour of campus, and received my MavCard. Now, I'm days away from walking across the stage at Baxter Arena. All the days in-between have been truly unforgettable and have shaped me into the man I am today: accomplished, happy, and a proud nerd.

As with many students, I experienced major ups and down throughout this time. My sophomore year, in particular, was one of the biggest examples of why earning this award is even more meaningful.

In the first semester of my sophomore year, I was forced to miss nearly a month of school due to a disease that had been manifesting in my stomach since high school. During this time, I was on a strict diet essentially made up of oats and water. While this set me back in productivity, I refused to let it set me back in my overall accomplishments. I finished the semester and came back even stronger in my next semester by taking a combined total of 38 credit hours across three colleges. The next summer I became a part-owner of a wedding planning and floral design business.

While I have experienced my fair share of ups and downs, the one common thread that kept me going through all of college was the Honors Program.

The Honors Program gave me my first leadership position in the first semester of my freshman year, which was something no other club could do. This led to a national award and a camaraderie amongst life-long friends. It also gave me the opportunity to partake in select and advanced courses not offered to anyone else. This led to me co-founding a day-long workshop for high schoolers and a semester-long business focused on scheduling. In addition to this, Honors has printed hundreds of pages for projects for me (for free), advised me in what the best opportunities are for me, given me connections that I will carry through my life, and hundreds of other intangible benefits I could list for pages. Overall, Honors is one of the main reasons I have achieved everything I have, and it has molded me into the proud young man I am today. The Senior Vice Chancellor Outstanding Undergraduate Student Award is not only an award for me but an award for all of Honors to share.

I am beyond grateful to be awarded the top honor in the University. To be honest, this always seemed to be more of a dream to me than a potential reality, and for it to be coming true has made all of my hard work and sacrifice well worth it. Thankfully I have not spilled coffee over another student since the first day of class, but I constantly have nightmares about it. However, while that scenario fills my dreams, my original dream of being named the top student at UNO has now become a reality. Thanks to Honors, I was able to make an embarrassing moment nothing but a nightmare, and one of my biggest dreams a reality.

Christopher  
Winchester,  
College of Business  
Administration,  
Bachelor of Science  
in Business  
Administration for  
Management,  
Marketing, and  
INEN





# Make Room for Unexpected Plans

Aya Yousuf

I started my spring semester as I have always started my other college semesters: preparing my backpack, creating a daily schedule, and planning what I want to achieve, learn, and be involved with. But I never planned for a student presidential win. Yes, I wanted to make a change and planned on running during December, but the results were unexpected. Before the results were announced, I was in class anxiously waiting. As soon as I saw the notification, I quickly went out to watch the video. I had to repeat it twice to make sure what I listened to was correct.

Jabin Moore and my genuine goal was and is always to get to know students. More than anything I wanted to meet new students, know about their experiences, their concerns, and what they like or do not like about our campus. At the end of the day, we are all students trying to get the best out of our experience here at UNO. I have yet to meet two students who are alike and share the same experience. That was the beauty and motive for running; it was all unexpected. The presidential race was exactly how everyone describes it: stressful. Yet, it was very rewarding. I did not expect to learn and grow the way that I did during our campaign. It was truly a moment of growth and I will forever remain grateful for the people who both challenged me and supported me along the way. The Honors program, the Goodrich program, and so many other departments have been instrumental in supporting my journey along with the countless other students here at UNO.

The opportunities are endless. If you are a first year or a last year student, make room for the unexpected plans and opportunities that might come your way. Sometimes, as students, it might get easy to lose sight of how far we have come because we get fixed and concentrated on our next step. We are always questioning what we are going to do next year, what our plans for after graduation will be, or what steps we are going to take to be successful. It becomes easy to forget to take a step back and reflect on your journey, accomplishments, and the people you met along the way. All of our experiences were unexpected, yet it gave us memories, growth, and opportunities we will hold onto and cherish.

Every student I met inspired me in so many

different ways. It has been a great honor meeting the wonderful students that make up UNO and I am absolutely honored and thrilled to work for our students.



Aya  
Yousuf,  
2019-20  
Student  
Body  
President



Yousuf and running mate, Jabin Moore

# Social Work at the UN Student

In March, I had the opportunity to attend the 2019 Social Work Day at the UN Student Conference as a student presenter, which

helped me to discern how I would like to approach social work practice moving forward.

It all started in January when, upon beginning a new social work course focused on documenting social change through research, I was informed by my professor, Dr. Peter Szto, that the Grace Abbott School of Social Work at UNO would be willing to financially support a trip to New York to attend Social Work Day at the UN in 2019.

The support of the school came with the condition that those of us who were to attend would either be required to present on our experiences upon our return, so as to enrich the lives of our peers through an account of our experiences, or, that we would need to submit an abstract and present at the conference; I chose the latter. For our submissions, we were asked to select a social protection issue related to global child welfare and the advancement of human relationships, as that was the theme of the conference. So, as I attempted to determine a topic, I had to remain mindful of the fact that I would be required to describe the issue, note the population and region impacted, provide evidence as to why I felt the topic was important to discuss, address how it related to the NU mission of promoting human rights, and conclude with how social workers could make a difference in the years to come. After an extensive review of topics that impact child welfare, I decided to discuss the normally environmentally-conceptualized topic of water scarcity and the unique impact that it has on child refugee populations.

The discussion initially began with the idea that it is a well-known fact that water, by its very nature, is integral to the ability to sustain life and promote good health. We then expanded upon this by remarking that, according to a recent NU-Water report, one of the present realities we face in our world today is that approximately 2.1 billion people live each day facing water scarcity in some form, which drastically affects the quality of life those individuals experience. Furthermore, we discussed that it is important to note that the various impacts of water scarcity are directly related to the mission of the UN at the moment, as in both RES/64/292

## Conference

**Dalton Meister**

and CESCR General Comment No. 15, and that the UN affirmed and acknowledged the importance of water access as something that is

not only a human right but something that is also an indicator of the advancement of other human rights.

The conversation then shifted as we discussed, as social workers, what we must now ask ourselves to understand what this present water scarcity crisis will mean for the future, and, more specifically, in the context of the forum, what the crisis will mean for the future of children around the world. In order to answer that question, I challenged my peers to conceptualize it as a crisis that would require a variety of different approaches and research initiatives.

This discussion then focused on examining the impact of water scarcity on refugee populations, and more distinctly, how water scarcity impacts child refugees in the variety of spaces in which they are present. We concluded with a brief intervention-based discussion as to how we could best respond to water scarcity while also supporting these aforementioned refugee populations moving forward as we could soon return to our communities with what we had learned.

As I was researching water scarcity, and, more specifically, the impact that this has on refugee populations, I developed a deep interest in the idea of water rights. I am hopeful that, as I move forward with my education, I will have the opportunity to pursue further research and opportunities related to water rights and environmental justice as it intersects with social justice.

I am so thankful that I had this opportunity, as, truly, it has changed my life for the better.

*Meister (far right) at the 2019 UN Student Conference in New York*





# Student Research and Creative

**T**he study that I did for the Student Research and Creative Activity Fair was named "Trying to Save the Game(r): Understanding the meaning-making process of YouTube subscribers surrounding mental health and video game vlogging," which I worked on with Dr. Andrea Weare as my advisor in Spring 2018. This study discusses the interactions between gaming YouTube content creators and their subscribers when discussing mental health issues on YouTube. The gaming YouTuber will either (1) play a mental health video game and include commentary about it as well as helpful hotlines after the gameplay is over, (2) play a non-mental health-related video game and speak about their own mental health during gameplay (as GameGrumps did), or (3) not play a video game at all and just speak personally to their audience. When these gaming YouTuber leaders, those who had more than one million subscribers, make themselves vulnerable, especially with a topic such as mental health, their subscribers feel comfortable to write about their personal stories and current situations dealing with their own mental health within the gaming YouTuber's video comment section. By interviewing four GameGrumps subscribers from the U. S. and abroad, I discovered that subscribers feel comfortable commenting about their own mental illness stories due to (1) the positive experience it gave and letting go, (2) not being alone, (3) the anonymity YouTube gave them, and (4) being able to relate and feel comfortable with the gaming YouTuber. This study aimed to focus on the topic of stigma when dealing with mental health and sharing about one self's experience online to a community.

This was the first thesis that I ever had written and the first research fair in which I was participating. I did not know what I would say, how I should act, or if anyone would be interested in talking about YouTube gamers and mental health, though I had a good hunch that the "gaming" aspect might draw some people in. When I first went to the fair to check in and locate my poster spot, all I saw were science projects. I did not want to downgrade my work, but I sure felt the pressure. As a communications major, I have been told that my major is a waste of time and that it's an easy way out. Something that comes to mind when thinking

## Fair

**Maria Mickles**

about studying communications is, "What could I really study? How people talk?" Well, yes! People talk every day! They talk through nonverbal and verbal cues, social media, images and advertisements, and more. You do not need to say a word to "talk." So, I felt proud. I was here representing the School of Communications with a research project; I spent an entire year on a topic that I truly loved and was highly passionate about. Yes, I did not have many statistics as it was a qualitative paper, but that doesn't mean that my findings and results were less important than that of science-related research.

As many people walked past my poster and asked me questions, I got even more immersed within my study. I realized aspects within my study that I didn't even notice when looking at my poster by myself. Many people found my topic very interesting, mostly because it was something that was easy to comprehend and impacted a large range of people. Plus, it was social media. I was also approached by Professor Steve Langan from medical humanities and Dr. Jeremy Harris Lipschultz from social media. Both professors, who visited me at separate times, were highly interested in my study. Dr. Lipschultz even told me that my topic is something that could be continued and turned into a master's thesis. This overall experience was amazing, and I began to feel more confident about my research. On April 5, I presented my research again at the Central States Communication Association. I was still nervous, but because of my experience with the research fair, I feel confident in myself as well as my research.



*Mickles, a third year Communication Studies major with International Studies and Psychology minors*

# Studying in Oman

Liz Bender

Oman is a small country on the Saudi Arabia Peninsula in the Middle East. I wouldn't be surprised if you had never heard of it, and based on my experiences in Oman, the Omani people are very proud of this fact. But due to the nature of its location, the typical response I received from people when I told them where I would be spending spring break was, "Wait. Where? Oh boy, you better be careful." Of course it didn't help that the primary reason I was going to Oman was to study counterterrorism strategies as a part of my Political Violence class, but, nonetheless, it was astounding how fearful some people were for my trip to the Middle East. Shockingly, Oman has never had a terrorist attack, which made my study even more interesting.

Oman is unique within the region. Some even call Oman "the Switzerland of the Middle East" because the country refuses to pick sides in a conflict and instead focuses on providing aid and an unbiased location for negotiations between warring parties. They emphasize the importance of community in their country, and it was easy to see this reflected in their foreign policy and the treatment of their neighbors. The lectures we received on Omani culture also attribute the sense of community to the fact terrorist organizations are unsuccessful in the recruitment of Omanis or in their establishment of cells within the country. The fact that Oman is a police state surely helped, but it was also apparent Omanis had a strong sense of pride in their growing country and felt the need to protect it and honor its image. My fascination with Oman and its international work reached an all-time high after our visit with the U. S. Ambassador to Oman. Meeting the Ambassador was one of the coolest experiences of my life, and at that point, I was ready to apply to intern in his office from the moment we left the meeting. The experience of traveling to Oman and getting the opportunity to meet very important people has completely altered my plans for the future, and I can't even begin to express how grateful I am to have had this opportunity.

Aside from everything we learned about Oman from a political viewpoint, I also learned so much about the culture that I feel like I have matured in the way I view the world. I spent only 10 days in Oman, but those 10 days provided me with enough experience

to contradict nearly every stereotype regarding the Middle East. Honestly, the only thing that held true was the fact there was a desert, which was in fact extremely hot, and camels wander it aimlessly (except for the fact they return home every couple of days for water, but that's neither here nor there). While the U. S. does have a Muslim community, I had very little understanding as to the basics of the religion. I was fortunate enough during my trip to visit the Grand Mosque where we were given a mini lesson on Islam and its many sects. I could not wait to get home and share with people what I had learned so they too could develop a newfound respect and understanding of the religion. I saw first-hand just how important it is to take time to learn about a given culture in order to understand the actions of people and become more tolerant to thinking that may differ from your own.

I did my best to go into this trip with an open mind, but even so, Oman completely shattered my wildest expectations. I cannot say enough about how life-changing this experience was and I would encourage anyone who is thinking about traveling abroad to go for it and make the most out of every experience. It can be hard to immerse yourself in a culture that seems to contradict your own ideals, but when you watch the sunrise over a city of white while listening to the beauty of Adhan, the world doesn't feel so large and even the biggest of problems have an answer.



*Bender modeling a kuma in a traditional Omani souq (market)*



# FUSE Grant: Interviewing

**B**efore I became an actual student at the University, I had the opportunity to be an intern for the College of Information, Science and Technology over the summer. While I only had a semester worth of programming knowledge and was going to be in the College of Engineering, I thought it would expand my skills. To my surprise, I interned in the Chattr Lab developing two chatbots to improve hospital flow through automation. The professor, Dr. Schuetzler, gave me the opportunity to continue to work in his lab when the fall semester began. Now, for almost a year, I have been developing various chatbots for a variety of individuals, alongside graduate students.

In the start of 2019, my professor asked me if I would consider leading an undergraduate research project. This seemed like something completely out of reach for myself as I was only a first-year student. Still, I began researching the requirements of a FUSE grant and continued to work with him. Eventually, his question led to an embarrassingly long list of tensions in our world but ultimately to a singly chatbot, which is simply a computer program that is designed to conduct conversations with humans. My chatbot will conduct first round, entry-level job screening interviews. For most jobs, an initial interview takes an average of 54 to 65 minutes, and the average amount of applicants for any job is estimated to be around 36. This means that the hiring company or individual is spending over 36 hours conducting initial screening for one job. Automating the initial interview conducted in person will enable companies to spend 36 hours on more valuable candidates and even other aspects of the company itself. Furthermore, it may reduce stress for the individuals being interviewed because they are not being interviewed by an actual human being. These are just a few examples of the importance of this chatbot to be developed.

The process to apply for a FUSE grant is clear and simple. First, I had to have a mentor who would advise my project. Once this was completed, a proposal outlining the methodology, budget, and purpose of the project must be completed and submitted. After both my mentor and I approved the application, we waited around two months for approval from the Office of Research and Creative Activity. Now that I am approved, I can begin my research in developing my chatbot in June. I will first

## Chatbots

**Joey Gruber**

develop dialog for the chatbot to use in the initial interviewing. This includes, but may not be limited to, interview questions, interviewee

questions, affirmations, small talk, and greetings. The conversation is basically both sides of any conversation you would have with another human but used in an algorithm for the bot to understand. To accomplish this, I may talk to experts in this field, like industrial psychologists. Once this is completed, I will create a text-based chatbot using natural language processing software and chatbot development software. There is a variety of software available to develop these bots and some require little programming background. After that step is complete, I will program the chatbot into a vocal conversation, so that it may eventually conduct actual interviews. Once the project is finished, I will present my research at the annual fair alongside other FUSE recipients.

Receiving this grant is going to be an amazing opportunity to improve our workforce and further my skills as an undergraduate student. I am excited to utilize my previous programming and conversational skills to develop this bot. Furthermore, I am thrilled to learn the exact initial interview process, through connecting with other professors and industry members around campus. I cannot wait to begin tackling this challenge and present my findings next February at the Annual Research and Creative Activity Fair.



*Gruber, a freshman undeclared Engineering major at UNO*

# Upper Midwest Regional Honors Conference

Savana Nawojski

I have never been to Wisconsin. Furthermore, I have never presented at a conference. The Upper Midwest Regional Honors Conference (UMHC) held at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie checked both of these things off my bucket list. The UNO Honors Program generously supplied a group of ten honors students with a trip to Wisconsin to present original research or projects at UMHC 2019. Not only was this a great experience to present our work, but the conference was filled with a wealth of learning opportunities. For example, I was able to watch a presentation about South Dakota's Second Pork War, which is when the governor of South Dakota banned all port imports from Canada due to an associated health risk with a certain chemical they were using in the meat. This historical event is something I never would have known about without this opportunity. The conference was enjoyable, but the best part for me was the bonding and loads of free food.

Even though the weather was frigid in Menomonie, mentalities were warm and humorous. Half of the fun was simply the drive up and back. The trip allowed me to build stronger relationships with fellow honors students. We formed inside jokes and laughed a ton. On one of these days, we all went to a local restaurant after morning presentations and scarfed down the most scrumptious cheese curds. When in Wisconsin, it would be a sin not to consume some amount of cheese. During this meal, we conversed about the taboos of the conference as well as some of the interesting presentations we watched. Afterwards, we toured the small town of Menomonie. Although you cannot swim in the lake that surrounds the town (due to the aggressive algal blooms), Menomonie has plenty of charm.

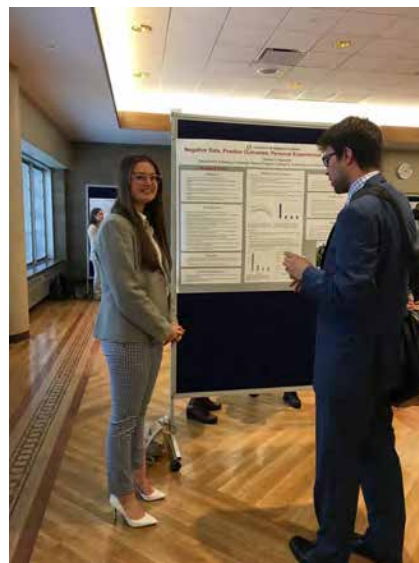


*The best of Wisconsin's cheese curds*

There were impressive historical buildings as well as a bookshop that stole a few hearts. I believe we all had experiences that will last a lifetime. Post conference, if I were to give one piece of advice to young Honors students, I would say that if you are presented with an opportunity like this, do it. Yes, preparing for a conference takes work, but the reward gained through experience far outshines any anxiety or nerves you may have going in. Through greasy Culver stops and necessary coffee breaks, the trip to the 2019 UMHC was definitely worth the time and commitment.



*Students who represented UNO at the Upper Midwest Regional Honors Conference; Back row, left to right: Tristan Martin, Catie Yaggie Heinen, Delaney Simmonds, Alyssa Spartz, Savana Nawojski. Front row, left to right: Andrew Pace, Kylee Beyea, Claire Figi, Abigail Kane. Not pictured: Dalton Meister*



*Nawojski presenting her research at University of Wisconsin-Stout*



# A Semester in Review - HSA

## Events



Members of HSA teamed up with UNO College Democrats on the MLK Signature Day of Service to volunteer their time at Heartland Family Services. Projects included cleaning out a warehouse space and loading up furniture to be delivered to local refugees.



At the February All-Member Meeting, HSA members created Valentines to be delivered to patients at Methodist Hospital.



HSA participated in a friendly competition of UNO history at the Winter Social in January. Students were able to create their own tasty drinks with a hot chocolate bar and enjoy sweet treats on the side.



The top three winners of the Kahoot received prizes including candy and stationery packs!



UNO Honors Seniors were recognized for their achievements at the end of the year symposium, where the Chancellor congratulated them.



At the April All-Member meeting, Professor Rodie visited students and gave a presentation about the benefits of nature. Afterward, students were able to plant their own choice of a mint or lavender plant to take home.



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