



# The Distinction

Winter 2018

A collaboration by  
the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Honors Program

**Recognized in the 2017 Student  
Electronic Category by the  
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First Runner Up in the Nation!**

UNIVERSITY OF  
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## HSA Snapshot

### An overview of HSA's winter activities

By: Alex Wasinger

Welcome back Honors students! As we enter February, we are now in full force for the new semester. The time away from our everyday tasks are becoming a distant memory and we have returned to work with renewed enthusiasm and vigor. While we begin the year in the depths of winter, the warmth and beauty of spring will be right around the corner.

The start of a new year provides an ideal time to reflect on where we have been and where we are going. Last semester we made a lot of new friends and gained a little more knowledge during our time here at UNO. We continued to honor the tradition of helping the Red Cross by holding a blood drive and helping support those in need. We delivered survival bag packages during those grueling final days of studying to offer motivation (and to have an excuse to eat more food). Finally, we continue to build on the amazing Honors newsletter to keep you connected to our great program.

This semester will be a busy one. Academic life is at the heart of everything we do here. The Honors Student Association (HSA), which is led by twenty exceptional Honors students and

open to all Honors students, knows how challenging balancing school with other activities can be. We realize the semester can become overwhelming; however, we encourage you to attend some of our events that we will offer this Spring; whether it be a social event to help you take a break from long hours of studying and make new connections with students, or just joining in on community service to contribute lasting, positive impacts on society. Keep an eye out in the Hump Day emails for ways to get involved!

Finally, we also have a new suggestion box in the Honors computer lounge for ideas and what you would like to see for future events. If you want to be a part of a great group of students and learn more about what we are doing, come to our weekly meetings in Kayser 224 on Tuesdays at 5:00PM. Our goal this year is to give you all the tools to be a successful Honors student and to have fun while doing it. Thank you for all that you do to make the UNO Honors Program a thriving community and have a great semester!



*Standing in line for food, Honors officers enjoy talking about the upcoming semester.*



*Two Honors officers run the HSA blood drive table to sign up volunteers.*

## New HSA Logo

Exploring the details behind the new HSA logo

By: Emily Redd

**D**esigning the new logo for the Honors Student Association (HSA) was a lot of things; it was challenging, rewarding, and educational. It required a lot of communication with HSA about their design preferences as well as the values of the organization. As someone who previously was not as active in the group, I attended a meeting and met with Chris Winchester, who is the public relations officer for HSA. I would not have been able to come up with the design without his guidance. Although we talked mostly over email after our initial meeting, our communication was vital for the design.

HSA told me they wanted their group's values (community of peers, academics, community service, and leadership) represented within the logo. Originally, I created a few different mockups with one value for each, but we eventually decided that it should all be incorporated into one design. I decided to use a shield, similar to how family crests work, to combine all the values. A previous design had the book icon (now in the center of the final design) and the group really loved it, so I

built the final draft around that. The top-left icon, a group of people sharing a thought cloud, represents the tight-knit community the Honors Program and HSA provide, the crossed quill and test tube in the top-right represents academics (both the humanities and the sciences), the heart/hand icon on the bottom-left represents commu-

nity service, and the bottom-right person with a gear symbol in the head represents leadership.

After I had the skeleton of the design down, the main issue was color. HSA needed a printable version, and we needed it to be in line with UNO's branding policy, which limits the colors and amounts of color you can have. The group decided we needed a general use

logo, a branding logo/icon, and a printable logo, so they are all slightly different but contain the same shield with the book and value icons.

I am really happy with how it turned out, and surprised that it took so long! I think, as a graphic designer, I learned a lot about working together with a client to get the best possible final product.



*The new Honors Student Association logo.*



## Intern on the Hill

Honors student earns competitive congressional internship in DC

By: Michael Herndon



*Michael Herndon standing next to the Mexican flag.*

This semester I will have the opportunity to intern on Capital Hill for the office of Rep. Norma Torres (D-CA35) as part of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI). I first found out about CHCI in 2016 at my fraternity's national convention in Dallas where they had an informational table. I did a little research on who the members of the Hispanic Caucus were and what issues they were most concerned with, and I knew right away I would one day apply for their internship program. At UNO I major in political science and international studies and minor in Chicano Latino studies. I hope to one day work in diplomacy and represent the United States as a diplomat somewhere in Latin America, but I am

also passionate about domestic issues such as immigration, health care, and education.

The process to apply for and get placed in an office was long to say the least. For starters, the internship program is very competitive and only selects twenty participants nationwide. Luckily, I got a spectacular letter of recommendation from Dr. Jonathan Benjamin-Alvarado who has been a great mentor to me. I was also able to demonstrate my dedication to the Latin community and commitment to academics through my essay questions. Once accepted, CHCI floated my resume to members of congress for whom I was interested in working. I was delighted to receive an offer from Rep. Torres because of her seats on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Western Hemisphere Subcommittee. I am excited to learn more about Latin America and work with the issues hands-on as they unfold on the Hill.

As an intern on the Hill, I will be attending hearings, doing legislative research, answering constituent letters, and of course doing general office work. As someone whose career revolves around what happens in Washington, I hope to learn more about the inner workings of Congress while also expanding my professional network. While there, CHCI will be providing housing for me in Silver Springs and will be giving me a bi-weekly stipend to support my living expenses.

Finally, the Honors Program has been a huge help to me in getting this opportunity. From the start, Dr. Morrison has pointed out opportunities for me and pushed me to be a better student. Because of the Honors Program, I have a rigorous academic background with various experiences I would not have been able to get if it was not for their support.

## Student STEM's Growth in Others

### Honors student teaches computer science

By: Isidore Sossa

**M**y name is Isidore Sossa and I am an international student from Benin. I am a freshman majoring in computer science at UNO, a great place to study. Because of its exceptional cultural diversity, it enables you to be at many places at once. Also, it has great faculty members willing to help students grow. Since I began my study in Computer Science this year, I have been having a very productive year.

Last summer, I worked for the ITEST - SPARCS program, a program funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), which aims to bring computer science (CS) to middle and high schools; I was a tutor in JavaScript programming. There were teachers from diverse backgrounds of music, science, history, and language. My goal was to follow these teachers' progress when taking the online

courses and to ensure that they and their students understood the thinking process behind computational problem-solving. I worked with bright people, and the diversity of disciplines present at that summer program proved to me that CS is an open-science field of study.

Students had a deeply interesting and profound understanding of what CS could be used for. For only one week of activity, they built their own game using online platforms such as MIT Scratch and App Inventor. When you give opportunity to students or kids to express themselves, they can come up with great ideas, which in turn could eventually become a great achievement. Having this experience showed

me that not only is CS flexible, but that it is also very useful regardless of one's education level, age, or domain of study.

I really wish I would have learned how to code when I was younger. Alongside learning how to code, you grow in efficiency at solving problems capable of affecting thousands and even millions of lives. Moreover, the skills one gains could be used wherever one goes. I strongly encourage anyone to have a major or at least a minor in computer science or any other STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) related-field.

As interdisciplinary studies, they provide one with life-needed skills, such as problem-

solving, that would help one to be more efficient at what one is doing in life. More importantly, it is also about passion, en-

“Because of its [UNO's] exceptional cultural diversity, it enables you to be at many places at once”

-Isidore Sossa

ergy, dreams, creativity, and progress. There is a large range of domains one can choose from and apply skills to. Our generation and the future generations will need people with passion, creativity, and problem-solving skills to handle humanity's challenges, which are growing more and more. Computer science and STEM fields open new horizons to humanity today more than ever and all are welcomed. However, regardless of one's choice, it is important to keep in mind that the end-goal of using technology is to solve humanity's crucial problems and make a better place to live in around us. I hope computer science will soon be taught to middle and high schools students on a worldwide scale so they can understand as the people I tutored this past summer did.

## Getting Creative with Ceramics Project

Contracting a ceramics class with unique Honors project

By: Jackson Cunningham

**M**y first year at UNO I majored in psychology, but while I found the topics very interesting, it did not feel like a perfect fit for me. Last semester I decided to change my major to computer science because I felt it would allow me to study something I was interested in, while also offering more opportunities for creativity such as in computer graphics or game design. In addition to my new class requirements, I was able to take a class on ceramics – a medium I had loved for a while but never had time to fit into my college schedule.

At the beginning of last semester, I talked with my ceramics teacher, Luke Severson, about completing an Honors contract for the course. He helped me to start a contract for the class that entailed completing a new project along with the intermediate ceramics class where I learned about an entirely

new technique. In the main class I learned about the core fundamentals of ceramics, which revolved around manipulating clay into a sculpture or a functional ceramic piece.

The project I did for the contract focused on slip-casting, which looked at ceramics from a different perspective. Instead of starting with clay and forming objects from that same clay, we built plaster molds, creating hollow shells of different forms that we then used to make various unique statues. With the help of Luke and the opportunity this Honors contract presented, I was able to spend a lot of time learning in-depth about a subject that I love, but otherwise would not have been able to devote much time towards due to increasing coursework towards my major.



*These four photos display the ceramics pieces Jackson Cunningham completed during the course of his Honors contract.*

## Hearing the Future

Analyzing modern cochlear implants to propose new changes to Joslyn

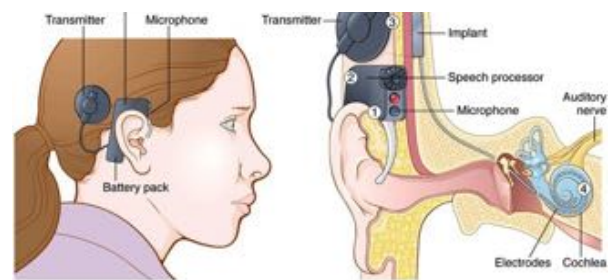
By: Madi Klingenberg

When I was in fourth grade I met a deaf student named Luke, who came to my elementary school while his was under construction because he was unable to attend the typical temporary school due to the background noise. Later in my life I worked with other youth such as Luke and was determined to make cochlear implants more efficient with their surroundings. While I myself do not use cochlear implants or hearing aids, my interest in audiology, working with youth who do use them, and shadowing of researchers who are working to make them more efficient has led me to be more aware of situations where their functionality could be compromised, which I analyzed in a presentation in Dr. Duran's course.

Both cochlear implants and hearing aids use microphones to enhance sound from the surrounding environment. The microphones used currently do not hold the ability for the users to distinguish the sound they would like to focus on, a function the typical ear has the ability to do. The Joslyn's architecture does not lend itself well to these systems. The large amount of background noise from the angles of the walls, other visitors, and ex-

hibits that feature sound create difficult environments to navigate. The Joslyn's current accessibility plan for those with auditory needs is providing an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter booked four weeks in advance. Providing an interpreter is a great solution for those who use ASL, but if the individual does not know ASL or uses a different form of sign language, the Joslyn becomes less accessible.

The Joslyn needs to look to other art museums and provide a similar solution. Some museums provide a T-coil system that allows for sound being produced to directly feed into a microphone and then transmitted to an assistive device. Some museums offer a pre-recorded tour that can be directly hooked up to a device, and some even provide events specifically for the deaf and hard of hearing community. Solutions do not need to be grand and expensive to be effective and inclusive.



*A diagram depicting the parts of a cochlear implant and how it is integrated with the human ear as used by Madi Klingenberg in her presentation.*



## From Honors to Honorable

Honors Program alumnus speaks to his successes after UNO

By: Dr. Brent Ruswick

**F**or me, UNO started out as the hometown backup plan. I applied to it as an afterthought, but upon winning a full-ride academic scholarship, plus living stipend, from an Omaha World Herald program, I reevaluated my plans and enrolled in 1995. I then spent the next four years failing to appreciate what a good choice I had made.

The scholarship mandated completing the Honors Program, which I did in conjunction with my degree, a B.S. in Secondary Education, with teacher certification in history and political science. I did, eventually, spend much of my professional career working with secondary education, but to get there I took the scenic route. From UNO, I completed a PhD at Wisconsin in 2006, in the history of science and medicine. Six years as a visiting assistant professor at the University of Central Arkansas gave me a wealth of experience working with history education students in their student teaching placements, a variety of published scholarly articles, and a book, and at the end of it, fifteen months of unemployment in 2012-2013.

I used the unwanted vacation time to return to Omaha, where I renewed my secondary school teaching license with graduate coursework at UNO. That, and getting the book published, attracted interest from universities looking to hire faculty in social studies education. Since 2013 I have taught at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, where I supervise social studies teacher candidates in their student teaching internship, administer the social studies education program, teach courses and publish in the history of science, medicine, nuclear weapons, and disability, among other topics, and have served in a variety of faculty leadership positions that help coordinate the different teacher certification programs.

My time(s) at UNO proved invaluable in my professional and personal development. History classes with Dr. Angelo Louisa, political science classes with Drs. Loree Bykerk, Kent Kirwan, and Orville Menard, and Honors courses with Drs.

Kirwan, Boyd Littrell from sociology, and Linda Johnson from English inspired my interests in the intersection of science and medicine with politics and culture. Dr. Littrell's Honors seminar, studying sociological issues concerning health care, proved especially helpful to my new career aspirations. Until then I had not understood either the diversity or complexity of different models for understanding medicine and health, and the analytical skills Littrell introduced most closely resembled what I soon would be asked to develop in my graduate coursework. Dr. Kirwan's Honors seminar on models of leadership and Dr. Johnson's on academic analysis and research similarly stuck with me as, in my professional life, I am responsible for modeling and teaching these methods to others. Financially, the support of the World Herald scholarship during my undergraduate degree allowed me to save enough money to be able to afford staying in graduate school.

Personally, the Honors Program supported me at a time in my life when I most needed advocates. Program Director Dr. Rosalie Saltzman, and all the faculty I have just mentioned and more, encouraged and cultivated scholarly interests and leadership skills I did not know I possessed. Every day now I do work that I love and that draws on the scholarly and professional skills and interests I first encountered through UNO and its Honors Program.



*UNO Honors Program alumnus, Dr. Brent Ruswick.*

## Professor Profile

Dr. Gina Ligon

By: Dr. Gina Scott Ligon

It all started when I was asked to teach the Honors College Colloquium “Hate and Terrorism” in the fall of 2016. I can, without hyperbole, state that teaching this course—and getting to know the talented students in it—changed my life as well as earned all of us university, community, and national awards. In a nice email about the class, my dean, Louis C. Pol wrote, “I always admire how you can take a seemingly ordinary experience and make it outstanding.” This is what happened in our colloquium—but it was not me, it was the Honors students who transformed the work out of the classroom.

We entered a national competition sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security, and the goal of this contest was to develop a social media campaign to counter online extremism and hate. So, in place of an exam or long paper, I decided to have this project as the major learning assessment in the Honors Colloquium. Instead of telling me what they had learned about hate and terrorism, they would show me—and the world, apparently—what they had learned by applying it in a real test bed: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram.

Their campaign—targeted to provide positive stories about refugees in Omaha to UNO students during a time when Far Right Extremist groups were fighting to fill students’ opinions with negativity about them—earned national attention. The students won a trip to Washington DC to present their campaign to members of the US Government, Facebook, and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). From the campaign, a student organization grew: UNO’s Refugee Perspective, and this club was just asked to compete again for the 2018 prize sponsored by the ADL and EdVenture Partners! So, stay tuned for another life-changing ride...I have learned to expect nothing less when I work with UNO Honors students.

## Student Spotlight

Lily Gilliland

By: Lily Gilliland

My name is Lily Gilliland, and other than the fact that I have a lot of Ls in my name, this is my first year here at UNO and my first semester in the Honors Program. I am a sophomore studying political science and cognitive sciences, accompanied by a minor in philosophy, all with which I hope to attend law school. I am also a member of Chi Omega and Maverick Students for Life here on campus. When I am not engrossed in a paper I am writing, or a book I am reading for class (which are actually my favorite types of assignments), you can find me at the record store adding to my vinyl collection.

I also have an affinity for eating healthy, drinking Kombucha, and making lists. Even though I have only been in Honors for a few months, I already enjoy many facets about it. I have had the opportunity to meet some intelligent, talented, and driven students in my Honors classes and around the Honors lounge, as well as being able to study under such dedicated and passionate teachers, all of whom contribute to a meaningful learning experience for me. All put together, I look forward to expanding my knowledge and experiences while in the Honors Program and HSA!



*Honors student and active HSA member, Lily Gilliland.*



## Honors' Winter of Fun





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