



THE DISTINCTION

FALL 2020



UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Omaha

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Hannah Im, Editor

December 2020 Graduates

Maggie Bockart

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Biology

“The Impact of White-Nose Syndrome on Cave Dwelling Bats During Their Pre-Hibernation Season in Eastern Nebraska”

Mentor: Jeremy White

Jackson Cunningham

College of Information Science and Technology

Major: Computer Science

Minor: Studio Art

“Expanded Pull List Functionalities”

Mentor: Harvey Siy

Tara Goering

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Psychology

“Beneficial Benevolence: Gender Interdependence, Attitudes Toward Men, and Preservation of an Advantageous Status Quo”

Mentor: Carey Ryan

Halsie Guenther

College of Business Administration

Concentrations: Management, Marketing

“The Way the Cookie Crumbles: a Consultative Look Inside a Local Omaha Food Truck”

Mentor: Leif Lundmark

Alicia Laufenberg

College of Education

Major: Elementary Education/Special Education

Concentration: Sign Language Interpreter

“Linking Social Emotional Learning and Literacy”

Mentor: Saundra Shillingstad

McKenzie Nutter

College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Biology

Minor: Chemistry

“Disparities in Oral Health Behaviors: A Review of Socioeconomic Factors and Their Influence on Access to Primary Dental Care”

Mentor: Liam Heerten-Rodriguez

Kolten Schnack

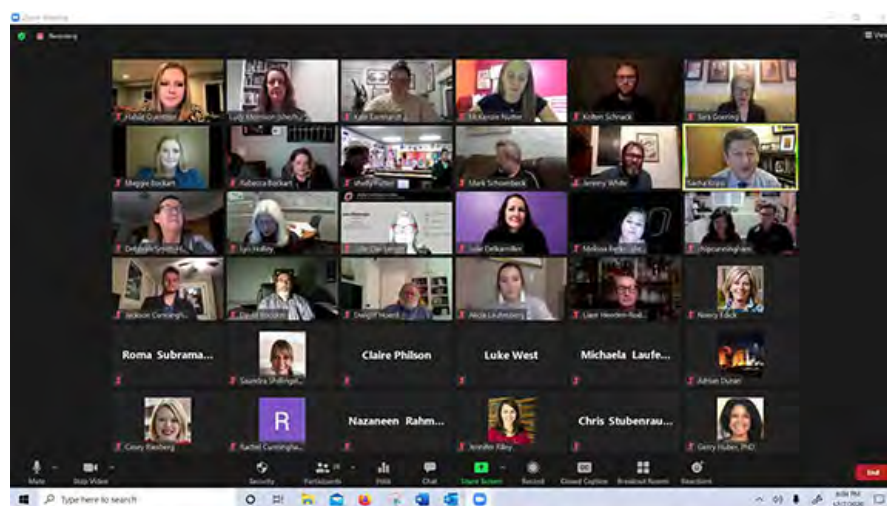
College of Education

Major: Elementary Education/Special Education

Concentration: Sign Language Interpreter

“Social Isolation, Anxiety, and Stress Among VRS/VRI Sign Language Interpreters”

Mentor: Julie Delkamiller



HONORS SYMPOSIUM

The Honors Program virtually hosted the Fall 2020 Symposium on December 7th. Graduates had the chance to showcase their thesis or capstone projects and celebrate their accomplishments with attendees.

Your HSA Representatives

Contact your representatives any time throughout the year for advice and feedback.
We would love to hear from you!



Lavanya Uppala-President
Majors: Bioinformatics, Biology
Minor: Computer Science



Katie Hill-Vice President
Major: Secondary Education
Minor: Spanish



Afrah Rasheed-4th Year Representative
Majors: Psychology, Sociology
Minor: Medical Humanities



Andrew Leavitt-4th Year Representative
Majors: Neuroscience, Biology
Minors: Chemistry, Medical Humanities



Grant Van Robays-3rd Year Representative
Major: Political Science
Minor: Sociology



Alaina Mann-2nd Year Representative
Majors: Biology, Studio Art
Minor: Chemistry



Michaela Woods-2nd Year Representative
Major: Speech-Language Pathology
Minor: Business for Non-Business Majors



Daniel Anderson-1st Year Representative
Major: Mathematics

The Honors Student Association (HSA) is the student led organization of the UNO Honors Program. The student elected committee works to bring social events and volunteering opportunities to Honors students. Weekly meetings are open to all Honors students, and questions, concerns, and event ideas are always welcome. You can contact the board any time through the HSA social media accounts and on the University student group involvement platform, Presence.

Your HSA Representatives



Luis Rodriguez-Treasurer

Majors: Mathematics, Economics



Noah Polacek-Secretary

Majors: Economics, Mathematics
Minor: Computer Science



Hannah Im-Public Relations Officer

Majors: Neuroscience, Philosophy
Minors: Human Rights, Medical Humanities



Alaina Wallick-3rd Year Representative

Major: Secondary Education



Elizabeth Russman-3rd Year Representative

Major: Bioinformatics
Minor: Spanish



Meena Rahmanzai-2nd Year Representative

Major: Molecular and Biomedical Biology
Minors: Chemistry, Medical Humanities



Mya Winjum-1st Year Representative

Majors: Spanish, Molecular Biology
Minor: Medical Humanities



Amy Wagner-1st Year Representative

Major: History Education



Oscar Biesanz-Graphic Designer

Major: Molecular and Biomedical Biology

Stay updated on HSA happenings



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PPIA Summer 2020

Lizbeth Perez Hernandez



Lizbeth Perez Hernandez shares her summer experience as a fellow in the prestigious PPIA program.

During the summer of 2020, I had the opportunity to participate in the PPIA Program at Carnegie Mellon University. The Public Policy and International Affairs Program Junior Summer Institute is a national fellowship program that prepares students for an advanced degree and ultimately for careers and influential roles serving the public good.

The PPIA-JSI is a rigorous seven-week training offered each summer for rising college seniors, with coursework focused on quantitative, analytical, and communication skills. I was selected as one of the 20 fellows nationwide to participate in this rigorous program, but I was also selected to be in the

Data Analytics Track, which prepares fellows who are passionate about using big data and analytics to address societal problems.

The program was supposed to take place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania but given the pandemic, it was held virtually. Our current situation was not an obstacle to connect with fellows and faculty as we tried to tackle ongoing social issues in the country.

“... it allowed me to identify resources that can help me to continue to help my community”

During the program I had the opportunity to take graduate level courses in Data Analytics, Applied Statistics for Public Policy, Research Study on Race, and Leadership.

Through the duration of the program, I was able to participate in simulations about voting by mail as the election approaches. The simulation allowed me to do research about voting and present supporting evidence to support my decision given that I was given a title such as Senator of a particular state. This made it challenging for me, given that the senator I was representing doesn't share the same perspectives as I do, but it allowed me to see both sides of politics. Additionally, I had the opportunity to attend graduate college fairs where I could meet with representatives from top universities across the country.

My favorite part of the program was that I had the opportunity to do independent research about housing segregation in the country. By taking on this topic, I was able to identify the roots of societal issues and I could even identify policies that could help alleviate these issues.

PPIA has been the highlight of my undergraduate career. It allowed me to discuss social issues that affect my daily life with students from underrepresented groups who are already in some ways trying to address them by doing community service, research, or even starting organizations. I say it was the highlight of my career because it allowed me to identify resources that can help me to continue to help my community; it allowed me to identify like-minded individuals with whom potentially to work; and it opens doors for me to grow as a leader and potentially a policy maker.

Summer Recap

Brooke Bluhm



here as well. I have noticed that I say some words differently, such as pecan, coupon, and even UNO. Also the roads here are rather odd. I am from a small town in Oklahoma and I have never been on a road that you cannot make a left turn on. The biggest adjustment would have to be that I am now living on

Like for many others, the pandemic presented unique adversities to Brooke Bluhm's transition to college.

Summer of 2020 did not go as I had always envisioned it. I had always thought the summer after my senior year would be spent with my friends: that it would be my last full summer in my hometown of Bartlesville, Oklahoma; that this summer was going to be full of crazy memories with the people I love the most; that it would be one last chance to say goodbye.

However, Covid-19 envisioned a different ending. Instead of moving to Lincoln in August, my family wanted to move in May. Our house sold, and the next thing I know I'm packing up all my things and loading them onto a truck. Late May, we were all moved in and enjoying the good life here in Nebraska. I spent most of the summer on FaceTime with my friends from home, or on the Xbox. Everyday, my dad and I would go out on the bike trails and see how far we could go before we had to turn around.

July came rolling in and boredom began to set in so I thought the best way to earn some quick money was detasseling. I had no idea what corn even looked like, if it wasn't cooked. I thought I caught on pretty quickly, but one thing I did find out is that I am allergic to grass. Guess what corn is? A grass.

I went back to Oklahoma for our graduation in late July. I was so proud to see all my friends walk across that stage. I think it gave all of us some much needed closure. It marked the end of an era at Bartlesville High School. The rest of the summer I shopped for dorm room necessities, and prepared for life on campus. Needless to say, I was extremely excited to start the next chapter in my life.

The biggest difference I have experienced between Nebraska and Oklahoma is Nebraska doesn't have Braums, which is a fast food restaurant with some of the best ice cream I have ever had. I guess I could compare it to Culver's, but it's better. The accent is a bit different

my own and there are only a few classes that I can attend in person. It has been a bit of a struggle for most freshman. The pandemic has impacted my college experience in almost every way. You see all these movies about what college is like, and all the functions where you can meet new people, try a bunch of food, go to concerts, etc. I had always imagined my first year of college to be just like those movies, but I was mistaken. I was really nervous coming to college because of the pandemic and also because I moved 6 hours away from everyone that I have ever known. I was afraid that I would not meet anyone and I would end up not having any friends. However, I have met some pretty amazing people who live in my building, and they have made me realize that I am not alone; even though I met them less than six months ago, they have become some of my dearest friends. Those people have been the ones who have pretty much got me through the semester, and I am extremely grateful to have met them.

Representation in Music

Hannah Fisher

Hannah Fisher presented “LGBTWho?? Affirming LGBTQ Students in the Music Classroom” at conferences over the summer and will present at a national conference in March.

Last summer, I received an email about an opportunity to present in a poster session at the Nebraska Music Teachers Association conference, to be held at UNO in November 2019. At first, I was dismissive of the whole business - what could I have to say that would be worth a whole poster? Thankfully, my piano instructor, Dr. Taylor, gently harassed me into giving it serious consideration. After about twenty minutes of thought, I hit on a topic. I got excited and ended up working on the first draft well into the night.

That late-night burst of inspiration eventually became my poster, “LGBTWho?? Affirming LGBTQ Students in the Music Classroom.” The basic premise of “LGBTWho??” is that, while teachers care greatly about their students, they can sometimes be oblivious to the struggles those students face.

In the case of LGBTQ students, there are obvious concerns: lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are almost five times as likely to have attempted suicide as their heterosexual peers. Transgender and nonbinary students struggle even more. But the real motivation for the poster is hopeful: the presence of even one accepting adult in the



life of an LGBTQ child reduces their risk of suicide by 40%.

From August to November, I talked to teachers, musicians, LGBTQ students, and every intersection of those groups I could find. I did a lot of reading about identities different from my own to make sure I actually knew what I was talking about. I came up with a list of inclusive practices, frequently asked questions, and terminology. A couple of times, I recruited a friendly cisgender, heterosexual person to help “straight-proof” the explanations. Most importantly, I compiled a list of resources for people to learn more after they left the conference.

I wanted my audience to hear from all sorts of queer people, not just me!

I was accepted to the state conference, and then applied for another conference, to which I was also accepted. In early 2020, I went with most of the UNO CMTA chapter to the National Collegiate Piano Pedagogy Conference in Muncie, Indiana. I presented “LGBTWho??,” and the rest of the gang presented our whole chapter project, a poster on mental health and musicianship.

In the poster, I tried to provide a starting point for inclusive practices in the classroom, as well as some basic terminology and answers to frequently asked questions. But poster

sessions are short, and people feel awkward standing around reading for more than a minute. When the opportunity came to apply for a split session at the Music Teachers National Association conference, I decided to go for it, knowing my chances were slim. To my surprise, I was accepted for a twenty-minute accelerated learning session.

On March 15, 2021, I’ll either be in Atlanta for an in-person conference or at my desk for a virtual one. Several days of joyful panicking later, I’m writing this article! I’m so excited to share my research with other members of my future profession. Go Mavs!

Pandemic Pen Pals

Amy Wagner

Amy Wagner made the best of the pandemic by bringing back a past practice: writing letters.

Since March, I have heard it said numerous times from all sorts of people that this pandemic has ripped apart relationships left and right. From friendships to family to significant others, Covid-19 has seemingly wrought havoc on relationships everywhere. However, I have not found that to be the case in my own life.

When the world first shut down and I was unexpectedly ripped away from my best friends, it was extremely rough, to say the least. I didn't know what was going to happen or when we would get to be together again. The first couple of weeks into quarantine were filled with seemingly endless tears and anxiety. However, life went on and we discovered new ways to spend time with one another. The most exciting and creative experience involved becoming pen pals.

At the end of March and heading into April, I and several friends decided to begin writing letters to one

another, on top of our frequent phone calls and text messages. These letters were often filled with homemade games such as word searches, mazes, and mad libs as well as filled with fun doodles, goofy jokes and puzzling riddles. We also often included encouraging quotes or small pieces of candy, such as a stick of gum or a chocolate coin. We didn't so much as simply write to one another as we

"life went on and we discovered new ways to spend time with one another"

shared with each other mountains of imaginative entertainment.

These letters quickly became a staple of encouragement in all of our lives as the pandemic crept on. They provided us with a space to be creative as well as a wonderful way to kill up to hours and hours of boring quarantine time decorating and designing the contents of these magical letters. Anticipating receiving a letter in the mail motivated all of us

to continue on as happily as possible with our lives because we knew that, if we were patient and cheerful enough, we would soon be gleefully rewarded with a one of a kind present from friends.

Of all the things 2020 has taught me, the most important lesson I have learned would be to never take your best friends for granted and to never underestimate how far they are willing to go to keep your spirits up and your friendship closer than ever. Organizing the Pandemic Pen Pals Program amongst myself and my best friends will truly go down as my favorite memory of this year. It created a bond between us that is stronger than I ever could have imagined, and I sincerely hope that we all continue to write letters as fervently in the future as we did in the past and are continuing to do today.

With that, I conclude by encouraging all of you to go and pick up a pen and a piece of paper and start your own pen pals program. Pandemic or no, letters are a great way to create endless memories and strengthen your bonds with your best friends.

Make a Difference: Honors Pandemic Cardmaking Project

Starting right before Thanksgiving, the Honors community was invited to create cards with uplifting messages for seniors—and Honors will take care of the details and the mailing. It's a safe socially distanced way for our community to help another community!



Do you have an experience you would like to share?

The Distinction wants your work!

Reflections related to internships, Honors courses, and projects are a few ideas. Creative writing and artwork are welcome as well!

Send your ideas, submissions, and questions to the editor, Hannah, at heim@unomaha.edu



Street Cars

Karoline Ford



Hello! My name is Karoline Ford, and I am a sophomore in the University's Honors program. This spring, I had the opportunity to take an Honors course here at UNO titled "History of Omaha". This class was an opportunity to explore Omaha, from the first pioneering settlers to the bustling city we know today.

The course, taught by Dr. Lucy Morrison, combined aspects of history, government, social justice, the environment, and more. I set into the course unsure of how much I was going to enjoy it, since as a double major in Chemistry and Biology I typically prefer hard science courses.

History of Omaha was surprisingly interesting for me. It gave me the chance to learn about the city I live in, and (prior to courses moving online as a result

of Covid-19) to explore places of historical and cultural significance all over the city. As we progressed through the course, Omaha was constantly being compared to Kansas City. The two locations have a lot in common, and many decisions about Omaha's future are made by analyzing successes and failures in Kansas City.

An example of this that our class studied in detail is public transit. My classmates and I did research on Omaha's bus system, road construction, traffic policies, and more in an attempt to understand exactly why it takes so long to drive down Dodge street to campus each morning. Something that we explored in this research is Omaha considering implementing a form of public transit called a light rail.

Light rail transit systems are similar to a bus, but instead has streetcars that run on tracks with an overhead cable in order to move people around the city. We researched the possibility of a light rail streetcar system being implemented in Omaha, and the various impacts it would have not just on traffic, but also on taxes, the environment, local businesses, and more.

Kansas City implemented a light rail system in 2016, and Omaha policy makers and traffic officials have been

closely monitoring the effectiveness in order to decide if a streetcar is something that would make sense in Omaha.

My friend Sydney Klucas (also a UNO Honors student who took the History of Omaha course) and I decided to go on a road trip before summer ended, and Kansas City seemed like a great spot to spend a few days having fun. In addition to going dorm shopping at IKEA, eating too much ice cream, and getting overly excited about seeing people's dogs, we saw all types of historical architecture we could compare to Omaha's. Also, we saw things like rooftop parks and superblocks for pedestrian traffic that Omaha hopes to eventually implement.

The trip wouldn't have been complete without a ride on the light rail! If not for the University Honors program, I would have never chosen to take a History of Omaha course, but I have continued my learning based on that course in so many ways I didn't anticipate. As the fall semester draws to an end, I hope that anyone worried about a "boring" class finds opportunities for enjoyment and ways to keep learning for fun. After all, that's what the nerdy kids in Honors are all about.



Student Reflection

Abbie Russman



Abbie Russman is an Honors freshman majoring in communication studies and political science. She reflects on how the pandemic has affected her life as a student.

This pandemic has taken so many things away from so many people. For me and for many of my peers, this pandemic has completely flipped our idea of college. We had to go through the struggles of having our final stretch of senior year cancelled, and now we are facing a new educational challenge: adjusting to a new school, a new schedule, and for many of us, a new living space, all under the unprecedented coronavirus's influence. None of us will ever be the same after this pandemic, and things will never return to the normal that they used to be. Despite all of these hardships, I have found comfort and strength in the resiliency I have repeatedly witnessed during these times, and therefore, I have hope for these next four years of college and beyond.

After the pandemic hit, I tried to hold on to certain expectations for college, like meeting plenty of



new people, finding new friends, and basically having the best time of my life. While I have met new people through classes (virtually) and tried to make new friends (also virtually), I eventually had to let go of these expectations. I started to just take things as they were, and because of this new mindset, I have been able to find enjoyment amidst the craziness of my adjustments to college. For one, I live in the John Paul II Newman Center, and the engagement opportunities (following CDC guidelines, of course) I have experienced here have immersed me in a community of new friends and events. All my classes are online, but I have come to appreciate all the effort my professors are putting in to make an optimal learning environment despite the current conditions. I know that administration is working hard to protect us and our health while prioritizing our education. I feel safe on campus and I know that if I need anything, there are so many people who are eager to help. I feel truly protected and taken care of.

It is difficult to imagine a time before this pandemic, but I know that everyone is anxious for

things to return to normal, whatever that normal may look like. In the meantime, I am trying to adjust to a completely online learning environment. It definitely is not what I prefer, and I am struggling with staying motivated and keeping up good study habits, but I know that there are so many other people who are in the same boat as me. My motto throughout this entire semester has been, "It is what it is," and I truly cannot think of a better phrase to represent how I feel. I am aware that I cannot change anything that happens; all I can control is my reactions and how I handle everything that gets thrown my way.

Starting college in a global pandemic is certainly not what anyone would want, but it is the unfortunate state we are in, and I have slowly come to accept this. There are so many people and resources that have helped me through this time, and I have hope that our circumstances will gradually improve. Until then, I find comfort in the fact that there are thousands of other students like me, just taking things for what they are and still trying to do our best.

HSA Park Cleanup

Grant Van Robays



Grant Van Robays, a third year representative on the HSA board, organized a park clean up event that served to not only better the community but also as a volunteering opportunity that got Honors students outside.

On Monday, October 19, 2020 five courageous college students etched their names into Omaha immortality. The students answered a call to action, a call to change, a call to keep Omaha beautiful.

I am referring, of course, to the HSA Elmwood Park cleanup

event. As a third-year representative for HSA, I collaborated with my fellow HSA members in the Volunteer Committee to organize an event to pick up trash at Elmwood Park.

The world can be a fast-paced, crazy place on any given day, but the dual impact of a global pandemic and a volatile political climate further exacerbated any existing tensions. Quarantining in a dorm or basement while “doomscrolling” can take a serious mental, emotional, and physical toll on anyone, let alone a stressed college student. That is why

my fellow committee members and I felt the need to get students out of the house and off Twitter, while helping better our community at the same time. A simple park cleanup posed the perfect solution.

After weeks of deliberation and communication with Omaha Parks and Recreation, my fellow committee members and I successfully organized a park cleanup event for Elmwood Park on October 19. Since the global pandemic is by no means slowing down, we emphasized the need for volunteers to wear masks and socially distance. Since the park offered us plenty of open space, social distancing

came rather naturally.

The morning of the 19th was a brisk one, to say the least. My weather app said it was in the 30s, which felt like the low teens because let’s face it, it should not be in the 30s during mid-October. However, the volunteers who attended came prepared with hats and gloves, ready to take on Mother Nature for the betterment of the community.

“The world can be a fast-paced, crazy place on any given day”

The volunteers and I spent the morning picking up trash around the park while maintaining a safe distance from each other. We played music, talked about the insanity of the world, and discussed how cool the Guardians of the Galaxy movie is. Was it cold? Absolutely. Wet? Definitely. But was it fun? 100%. Getting fresh air and sharing meaningful conversation with peers while cleaning up a community mainstay is, and always will be, a worthwhile experience.

I would like to thank the volunteers who joined me on that cold, fateful morning, as well as those who wanted to attend but could not. I would encourage all of you to seek out opportunities like this (if they’re safe!) to get out of the house and be active in your community. These are trying and unprecedented times, everyone, so please stay strong and stay safe!

Student Perspectives

Attending College During a Pandemic

Luke Schwang

Many people have asked me, “What is it like to go to college during a pandemic?” I am writing today to put this question to rest with three aspects of college life that have been changed due to the pandemic. The first aspect that has changed would be how class is attended. Instead of the classic classroom setting with desks and chairs, the classroom is now Zoom. This has both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage of this is that the classroom can be anywhere; as long as the student has internet access, that can be a classroom. A product of this is an increase in the amount of distractions available. In a normal classroom, the distractions are usually limited to other students and the window, if the room has one. In a Zoom classroom there are many more, depending on where the student is located. That is a disadvantage because distractions lower the student’s ability to focus. Lack of focus usually leads to lower grades.

The second aspect of college that has changed is making friends. Normally a student would meet new people by attending various Welcome Week events. Due to large groups being prohibited, this was not possible this year. Instead, many people were unable to meet the amount of people they normally would leading to a lower number of new friends.

The third and final aspect of college that has changed is getting involved in clubs. A normal year would feature an event at the beginning of the year that showcased all of the clubs available on campus. This event, like many others, was moved online this year. This online event was advertised through email this year rather than physical posters. Lots of people do not check their email every day and may have missed out on this opportunity. I felt like this was much harder for students to get excited about as it was yet another event that involved staring at a screen. Most meetings or club related gatherings are also held on Zoom instead of in person. This leads to a lower attendance rate for meetings because the meeting doesn’t feel personal.

So far, my freshman year of college has been anything but normal. I enjoy a change from the normal and attending college during a pandemic is anything but normal. Eventually life will return to normal and we can receive the real college experience and everything that comes with it. Until then, we need to make the most of what we’ve got.

Shane Sazzman

I am a transferred senior at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, with a major in Business Administration and concentrations in Business Finance as well as Banking and Financial Markets. Also, I have a minor in Accounting. My first three years of school however were at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. I made the switch because a difference in environment is something I have never really experienced before. Kearney is a place that I have lived in for over twelve years. At the age of twenty-one, it was time for a change.

Going through the process of moving to Omaha there were so many questions that occurred in my mind. How will the coronavirus affect my life? Will I be able to make new friends? And then next was jobs. It was always one of my goals to become a tutor at a university. This is my first on-campus job and it has been a great experience thus far despite it being remote. I ended up finding this job on handshake along with many other opportunities that the University of Nebraska at Omaha offers to its students.

Then in November I ended up coming across a job at UNO and UNeTech that piqued my interest. It was a Venture Analyst Intern position with UNeTech, which serves as a third party to inventions created at UNMC, startups, as well as other companies. They create business strategies by doing research and interviews so the entrepreneurs or creators are aware of the different routes they can take with a product. This internship would allow me to do two of my favorite activities, which are research and strategy development.

With all of that information in mind, I applied for the job and ended up getting an email from Dr. Clark, a professor in Entrepreneurship, a few days later. In the interview I was told that Dr. Eesley highly recommended me. Currently, I am taking an Honors entrepreneurship class with him and he went out of his way to refer me. It goes to show the power of doing a great job in all areas of life, because you never know who might give back to you until you are given the opportunity to take the next step forward. I truly am thankful for this opportunity and everything that the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Honors, and UNeTech offers.



Student Art

Savannah Boedigheimer

Savannah is a freshman majoring in library science.



Savannah Boedigheimer on her work:

I created these paintings on vinyl records this summer for a mural entitled “Crescendo” that I was commissioned to create for a local store in my hometown. I did a lot of research on what the most popular songs of all time were, chose ones based on the audience I expected to have at the store, created each design, and painted each record by hand. I created around 60 in total, 40 of those are included on the mural. I enjoyed trying many different techniques and incorporating many different styles throughout. I plan on painting many more in the future as a possible side business.



Flash Fiction

Shayla Fox

Seth has walked from the motel and into the darkness, pleading to the fog and dew to dampen the embers of anxiety beneath his skin. His jacket is slick like he's rolled in the grass, and he shivers in its leather as the cold's countless teeth pierce through. The road and congregation of motels that he and his friends have chosen are a cauterized wound through a forest; the ambling edge of the concrete has him close to the treeline. Light from the street lamps shines into the grassy trench at his feet, coalescing into a sickly gray pit that would've looked convincingly bottomless if it weren't for the gathered rainwater that reflects the trees.

He couldn't sleep in their motel room - not with his friends drinking or the echoes from the basketball court that had been haphazardly painted into the motel's parking lot. His nonchalance, the blessing of being as carefree as them and the crux of their impromptu bus ride through several states, isn't with him. It's a Peter Pan's shadow that takes flight as it likes.

"Goose!"

His boots squeal on wet grass as he turns, the comfort of the nickname a beacon in the night. Ashton, distinguished by his skinny silhouette and the nickname that's exclusive to him, half-skips as he comes closer. He's breathing in tight puffs and Seth knows that Ashton sprinted from the hotel after him. Seth, the tension he'd felt dispelled by a torch, smiles, and Ashton accepts the greeting with the satisfaction that one has as they pluck a uniquely shaped stone from the ground. Tawny waves of hair flutter like living things as Ashton looks to the forest.

"What do you think is out there?" Seth's thoughts teeter from Ashton's nudge, hypotheticals on his tongue, but then Ashton is grinning, wagging his fingers. "Mothman? Bigfoot? There's a brochure in the motel on the states' cryptids. We've been missing them."

"I doubt the others want to look," Seth says but not without a laugh, Ashton charming him into ease he hadn't felt since they'd left home. The void between the motel and the road

feels safer with him. With muscular shoulders, dark hair in an almost-mullet that teases his eyelids, and a knife in his pocket as he stands in the road, Seth thinks of himself as a suspicious effigy that inspires a mother to tell her children to never talk to hitchhikers.

He looks at Ashton, illuminated by street lights, and thinks of angels and benevolent spirits.

"I wanted to check on you," Ashton says, and that holiness manifests in earnest. It's more than Seth deserves, the considerations and the nickname that Ashton has committed to for years, "Because you're funny, Seth."

"I'm all right. It was... loud in there. I thought a walk would be nice." He tells the truth, for lying to Ashton or denying his kindness were in vain; however, he feels more pleasant in Ashton's presence than he had when walking alone. "Let's go back. You can show me that brochure."

Shayla Fox is a first year Honors student majoring in Creative Writing.

Honors Fall Features



FACULTY FEATURE KATE EARNHARDT

The Honors Program invites the UNO community to join us in celebrating the outstanding contributions our faculty members have made to the program and its students over the past several years. Faculty members who choose to teach for the Honors Program have inspired, encouraged, and supported our students steadfastly through the years, helping them, as well as the Honors Program, to grow and thrive. Honors instructors regularly challenge our students to go above and beyond what might usually be expected of them, help students maximize their fullest potentials, and create well-rounded individuals who will learn so much more than they thought they would. They instill surprising skills and knowledge in our students that they'll use for many, many years to come.

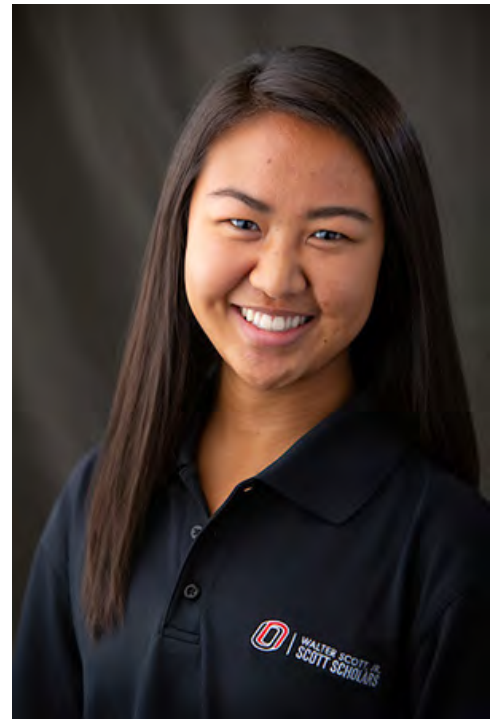
When the Covid-19 pandemic caused the sudden need to shift to remote learning, our faculty members reacted flexibly and with empathy in order to see our students finish that unprecedented semester successfully. Our amazing instructors adapted quickly and had to think on their toes to come up with innovative ways to engage our students in this new remote landscape. It was a tough challenge, but they, along with the entire Maverick community, rose to meet it head-on.

To show our deep gratitude to all Honors faculty, we have proudly conferred stoles to those instructors who have taught two or more Honors classes, in order to showcase their commitment to academic excellence and to mentoring our dynamically talented students. We look forward to continuing to foster relationships with our established Honors faculty and many others in the years to come.

ALUMNI UPDATE

Congratulations to **Quinn R. Eaton**, 2014 Honors graduate, who was recently recognized in the 2020 Great Plains Super Lawyers List for Employment Litigation—Defense. Quinn is a commercial litigation associate at Koley Jessen, PC, LLC here in Omaha.

Do you have updates to share with us? We welcome alumni connecting with us via our website at honors.unomaha.edu or by emailing us on unohonors@unomaha.edu.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Current Honors student **Kaitlyn Baysa** earned first place in the campus Big Idea! Pitch contest virtually hosted by the Center for Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Franchising (CIEF) in October. Baysa, a senior who is set to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in IT Innovation with a minor in Spanish, won with her idea Actívate, a non-profit educational program for Spanish speaking students.

Honors Fall Features

Katie Cooley: The Honors Program's Newest Addition



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT BY NIA ACHARYA

Katie Cooley is the graduate assistant for the Honors Program at UNO. She has been working closely with the new class of first-years this fall semester.

Where are you from?

I grew up in a small town in Iowa called Carroll. My family and I moved to Omaha when I was eight. I went to school at UNL and double-majored in Music Performance and English. I later moved to Holdrege, Nebraska but came back to Omaha in June of 2020. Before working as a graduate assistant at UNO, I was working at Central Community College as the administrative assistant while also teaching adult education classes for any students who were interested in obtaining

their GED. I also worked at the Merryman Performing Arts Center (Kearney) and dealt with people yelling about tickets, getting them seated, all that fun stuff. I've had a million tiny jobs.

What do you like doing for fun?

I am very into baking, and I've done a lot, especially since quarantine started. I got into baking when we lived in Holdrege because we had a huge kitchen and I had never had one that big before. I also got a KitchenAid mixer when my husband and I got married, and we always joke that the real reason we got married was so I could get a KitchenAid mixer because it's my favorite thing in the world. I'm also kind of a home-body, so I just like to hang out at home and watch Netflix with my dog.

What do you enjoy most about working at UNO as compared to other places?

The reason that I ended up at UNO as a student was because I was really drawn to how much they care about first-generation students and how committed they are to making college accessible. I think that UNO really captures that spirit of accessibility and care. I don't think it's that way everywhere, so I think that makes UNO a really special place. That's my favorite part of working for a college that I know cares for its students in every way.

Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?

Five years from now, I will be finishing up my supervised internship for the counseling program that I'm in, which is sort of setting up as an education degree. That would be another three thousand hours and it makes sense to have so much practice before you're officially licensed. I'll most likely do that at a community organization. Ideally, I'll be at a clinic that I like, believe in, and is serving the community well. At some point down the road, I don't want to own my own private practice but instead work in a smaller group of counselors, just because you have a little bit more control over things. I think that the pandemic has really shone a light on taking care of our brains and how important mental health is.

What is something you wish you knew while you were an undergraduate student?

That you just have to take care of yourself and make it a priority. Taking care of yourself can be like packing a sandwich when you know that your lunchtime is going to be in the library. To make that you're drinking water and eating, which sounds like such a small thing but it very quickly went to the bottom of my priority list and I don't recommend it. Also, make connections with your peers. That's also part of the reason why we

Honors Fall Features

have the First Year Council: to have some social aspect. I think that in college, that was one of the best things that I did. The last part is to take gen eds that look interesting to you. It's really easy to write those off, but some of my very favorite classes that I took as an undergraduate ended up being general education credits. I'm grateful that I took advantage of the opportunity instead of just blowing it off as a class that I had to take.

Were there any obstacles that came in your way that made you doubt yourself?

As an undergraduate, I had been struggling with an anxiety disorder for a long time, but around junior year, it got really bad and I was having panic attacks way more than anyone should. It was just because I did not have time to say no to things. I was so overwhelmed all the time and my boiling point was so high that if something would happen, like I spilled my coffee, I would just lose it. I think saying yes has a lot of value, but I also think that it's very important to learn how to say no. When you just say yes, you lose sight of what you actually want. Particularly, as women, we think we have to say yes to everything in order to get a leg up. All in all, prioritizing mental health is hugely important. I want students to know that it's normal and things happen,

panic attacks happen, breakdowns happen, and crying is okay.

What can students get involved in at UNO, right now where everything's online?

I think that a lot of student organizations have done a good job of keeping things moving in some respects. I know that HSA (Honors Student Association) has done a couple of different things. I also think that there's a little bit of a pause happening with teachers and admin because they don't know how to meet students' need right now. I would definitely recommend if there isn't something that looks interesting to you, make it happen. I don't want to shy away from the reality that we're online, it's hard, and it just sucks sometimes. I think that if you have the energy to go to social things, then the Honors Program is there for you guys to talk to each other. So figure out what you're interested in and then put it in the UNO search bar. I think that's a really good place to start because there might be a club that you don't know about, with like-minded people who might be meeting on Zoom on Fridays, and you just don't know about it.

How can the Honors Program be a good resource for students?

I think a huge part of what makes the Honors Program special is that you get to move through your program with other people. It really

helps you build a community of people, whether that's in a major or not. You can connect with like-minded individuals so when you see them later in another gen ed or colloquium, you have that connection there. I think that's something that the Honors Program totally offers. It'll be amplified when we're not remote anymore because the physical space of the Honors office really gives people a chance to congregate, hangout, and study together. You'll also get a better chance to bond with professors that people love. What makes Honors really special is the relationships you get to build with your professors.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Dalton Meister received the first Outstanding First Generation Service Learning Student Award, which recognizes students who have shown leadership and initiated social change in their community.

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