



# THE DISTINCTION

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## SPRING 2021



UNIVERSITY OF  
**Nebraska**  
Omaha

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Hannah Im, Editor



# May 2021 Graduates

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## Gabriela Alvarez

College of Arts and Sciences  
Psychology  
Self-continuity in Adolescence: A Buffer Against  
Decreases in Self-esteem Due to Victimization  
Advisor: Jonathan Santo

## Madison Badje

College of Arts and Sciences  
Biology  
Genetic Counselors' Attitudes towards Telegenetics: The  
Good, The Bad, The In-between  
Advisor: Kelly MacArthur

## Natalie Bauermeister

College of Business Administration  
Business Administration, Economics and Marketing  
concentrations  
A Comprehensive Analysis of Trader Joe's: Exploration  
from National and Omaha Metropolitan Perspectives  
Advisor: Sanith Ray

## Kaitlyn Baysa

College of Information Science and Technology  
IT Innovation  
Exploring an Equitable Computer Science Education for  
Spanish-Speaking Students  
Advisors: Ann Fruhling and Brian Dorn

## Jordyn Bingham

College of Arts and Sciences & College of Public Affairs  
and Community Service  
Psychology and Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Gender Differences in the Effects of Complementary  
versus Competitive Gender Stereotypes on Tolerance of  
Sexism and Ambivalent Sexism  
Advisors: Carey Ryan and Abigail Folberg

## Emily Coleman

College of Business Administration  
Business Administration, Legal Studies and Real Estate  
concentrations  
Building Foundations of Opportunity: A Strategic  
Analysis of the Stephen Center's Permanent Supportive  
Housing Program  
Advisor: Leif Lundmark

## Julia Cormack

College of Arts and Sciences  
English and French  
Pedagogy or Andragogy: Which teaching method  
produces successful ESL tutoring that involves musical  
activities?  
Advisor: Courtney Wheat

## Luke Dickeson

College of Information Science and Technology  
Cybersecurity  
When does a cyber attack constitute an act of warfare?  
Advisor: Lana Obradovic

## Brady Dodds

College of Arts and Sciences  
Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies  
The Relationship of Perceived Parental Social Support  
to Vigilance and Resilience among LGBTQ and Straight  
Cisgender Adults  
Advisor: Carey Ryan

## Daniel Faronbi

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media &  
College of Engineering  
Music and Computer Engineering  
Synthesizer Parameter Approximation by Deep Learning  
Advisor: Alisa Gilmore

## Claire Figi

College of Arts and Sciences  
Biology  
Comparison of Mortality Data from Nebraska's Rural &  
Metropolitan Health Districts  
Advisor: Sarah Dunsmore

## Breanna Johnson

College of Business Administration  
Business Administration, Management and Marketing  
concentrations  
Production Creek: A Consultive Analysis of a Local  
Promotional Products Business  
Advisor: Erin Pleggenkuhle-Miles



# May 2021 Graduates

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## Abigail Kane

College of Arts and Sciences & College of  
Communication, Fine Arts and Media  
Political Science and Communication Studies  
Getting Started: Training Modules for New Employees  
of the UNO Bookstore  
Advisor: Paige Toller

## Samuel Lauritsen

College of Business Administration  
Business Administration, Business and Finance and Real  
Estate concentrations  
A Sweet Future for Sugar Makery: A Deeper Dive into  
Small Business Consulting  
Advisor: Erin Miller

## Andrew Leavitt

College of Arts and Sciences  
Neuroscience and Biology  
What Mentoring Means to Undergraduate Mentors: A  
Meta-analytic Report on Why We are Still Guessing  
Advisor: Christine Cutucache

## Laurel Lux

College of Arts and Sciences  
Political Science  
The Modern Conservative Woman: A Study of Young  
American Women, Conservatism, and Feminism  
Advisor: Jody Neathery-Castro

## Grace Maline

College of Information Science and Technology  
Bioinformatics  
Identification and characterization of butyrate producing  
bacteria in the human gut  
Advisor: Dhundy Bastola

## Keali Mari

College of Education  
Kinesiology  
The Study of High Intensity Interval Training's Effect on  
Enjoyment  
Advisor: Sandra Shillingstad

## Mary McLaughlin

College of Arts and Sciences  
Biology  
COVID-19's Impact of Social Isolation on Seniors in an  
Assisted Living Facility  
Advisor: Timi Barone

## Dalton Meister

College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
Social Work  
Measuring Anti-Fat Bias Among Social Work Students  
Advisor: Liam Heerten-Rodriguez

## Samantha O'Rourke

College of Arts and Sciences  
Mathematics and International Studies  
A Visual Analysis of Historical Lessons Learned during  
Exercises for United States Air Forces Europe (USAFE)  
Advisor: Fabio Torres Vitor

## Andrew Pace

College of Arts and Sciences  
Mathematics and International Studies  
Optimizing Garbage Pick-up in Wahoo, NE  
Advisor: Fabio Torres Vitor

## Lizbeth Perez Hernandez

College of Business Administration  
Business Administration, Economics and Management  
concentrations  
Economic and Strategic Analysis of Minority  
Entrepreneurs in Omaha, Nebraska  
Advisor: Brent Clark

## Aidan Posey

College of Arts and Sciences & College of Business  
Administration  
Spanish and Business Administration, Real Estate and  
Human Resource Management concentrations  
Service Learning: A Translation of Documents into  
Spanish on behalf of Learning for All  
Advisor: Cecilia Tocaimaza-Hatch

# May 2021 Graduates

## Alex Ramsey

College of Information Science and Technology  
Computer Science  
Evolving Efficient Floor Plans for Hospital Emergency Rooms  
Advisor: Brian Ricks

## Kayla Rud

College of Arts and Sciences  
Molecular and Biomedical Biology  
The Impact of Service-Learning on General Chemistry II Students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Advisor: Dana Richter-Egger

## Kayley Scott

College of Arts and Sciences & College of Business Administration  
Mathematics and Business Administration, Management concentration  
Wonderfully Made in the Making: A Strategic Recommendation on Growth Opportunities  
Advisor: Erin Bass

## Eli Smith

College of Arts and Sciences  
Biology  
Sensing Surfaces: A Non-filamentous *C. albicans* Response  
Advisor: Jill Blankenship

## Brittany Sullivan

College of Arts and Sciences  
Psychology and Criminology and Criminal Justice  
The Effect of Parenting Practices on Adolescent Adjustment  
Advisor: Mithra Pirooz

## Alexandra Swanson

College of Arts and Sciences  
Mathematics  
Effect of the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic on Assistive and Interactive Technology Use: In-Person versus Video-Chat Communication  
Advisor: Julie Blaskewicz Boron

## McKensi Uecker

College of Arts and Sciences  
Biology and Medical Humanities  
A Comprehensive Analysis of the Importance and Implementation of Telehealth Behavioral Services in Rural Areas & Schools  
Advisor: Steve Langan

## Jimmy Wood

College of Arts and Sciences  
Physics and Geology  
Joint spacing in the Caples Lake granodiorite of the Sierra Nevada Batholith in Eldorado National Forest, California: A comparative analysis of joint sets and data resolution  
Advisor: Harmon Maher

## Aya Yousuf

College of Arts and Sciences  
Political Science and Economics  
Assessing the Use of Weapons of Mass Destructions in Violent Extremist Organizations  
Advisor: Gina Ligon



## HONORS SYMPOSIUM

This year, the Honors Program virtually celebrated the May graduates and their accomplishments throughout their time at UNO.

# Maeve Hemmer: Student Body President

Maeve Hemmer

Hemmer reflects on her journey leading up to being elected for Student Body President and looks forward to the potential next year holds.

Last year's campus experience was cut short, especially for a kid spending her first year away from home. I remember taking a snap chat video with my best friend celebrating the start of spring break. I figured we would be back to classes and campus shortly; I had no idea what the next year would consist of.

At that time, all I knew was that Jabin Moore and Vanessa Chavez Jurado had just been elected Student Body President and Vice President and that I wanted to be involved in the great things that would happen during their term. I was nearing the end of a year in Freshman Leadership Council and as a First Year Ambassador. I applied for a couple of positions on Jabin and Vanessa's Executive Council and I vividly remember one of the interview questions inquired about my plan to serve in a virtual format. I can't recall what my exact answer was, but I

remember feeling flustered knowing that life was likely going to take a sharp turn into unexplored realities.

A few days later, I was chosen to be Student Government's first Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, a position that had been newly developed a few weeks earlier. The reality that I would be figuring out a brand-new position in a virtual format set in quickly; luckily, I would have the best team by my side to do it. This past year as Director of DEI has been the greatest experience I've had thus far at UNO; collaborating with our campus community to

innovate and implement creative ways to enhance the student experience has been so rewarding.

This year's experiences of our campus' dedication to students inspired me to do more. In February I decided to run for Student Body President alongside Amy Lopez Hernandez as Vice President and our EnvisionUNO party members. Amy and I were sworn in as Student Body President and Vice President on March 31st and we have hit the ground running ever since.

This past year has been a year like no other: a year full of grief; a year full of making the best of what we've got; a year full of struggles and abrupt endings—the hardest year of my life but also the most inspiring. The upcoming school year makes me excited; I am eager to see more students on campus and to continue the important work of making UNO an inclusive campus that fosters innovative pathways for all students. I look forward to my new position and the ability to EnvisionUNO to be better than it's ever been.





# Pandemic! at the Disco

Zander Gibney

The shows go on for UNO's Theatre department even as the pandemic requires some creative adjustments.

From the very first time I apologized to my roommates for being obnoxiously loud during a Zoom call rehearsal, I knew this was not going to be a normal season of theatre.

I was cast in my first production since high school this past Fall here in UNO's Theatre department, the Queer and Women's Inclusive Theatre (QWIT) Festival. I have since followed up with performing in our green-screened Shakespeare collection *Unsex Me Here*, *Shakespeare!* and *The Wind in the Willows*, our first in-person show since I started acting at University. Of course, as my first batch of college productions I was expecting some major changes, but throwing the pandemic into the mix made for a whole new slew of challenges none of us could have seen coming.

Despite everything, however, we have been able to embrace our new theatrical environment with creative vigor, some digital tweaks, and all the liveliness one could expect from performing artists who spent months quarantining.

The aforementioned "Zoom

call rehearsals" and classes have very much been the norm (as well as the accompanying apologies to my roommates) and are the first step of preparing for post-pandemic performances. I have had the pleasure this spring 2021 semester of taking Dr. Cindy Phaneuf's class "Movement for the Actor," a class all about physical expression that I have exclusively attended through my computer with a 42-square-foot dorm bedroom as my stage.

Despite the clear limitations, we have still been able to work on some remarkable pieces where we've embraced Zoom to create interesting exits and interactions not possible in physical space. I've also thrown myself onto my floor and bed for the sake of the performance more times than I can count and injured myself on Zoom calls more times than I would care to admit.

Thankfully, after a few weeks of Zoom rehearsals we always manage to get some time in physical spaces to practice. Transitioning the cast from performing while sitting in front of our computers to getting the script up on its feet has been a rocky but fun experience. However, the exact location of that physical space is where the fun really begins. For QWIT we did every in-person rehearsal on the top of Dodge

Campus's west parking garage to maintain social distancing and create a safe environment for everyone.

*Unsex Me Here* was an entirely different beast. The rest of the cast and I were able to jump straight from Zoom to Theatre, but all the scenery we had to work with was a green screen. It felt more like we were filming an Avengers movie than a college Shakespeare collection, but it was necessary for our director Scott Glaser's digitized vision of the performance. For our most recent show, *The Wind in the Willows*, we have actually gotten the most time in the actual space: a sidewalk, a gate, and the Hayden House on campus. Having actual audiences for this show also brought back a much-needed sense of normalcy for the entire cast and crew.

Overall, we have still managed to do some truly fantastic work in the Theatre department while keeping our casts, crews, and audiences safe. Of course, trying to act and rehearse while constantly needing to adjust my mask is a bit of a drag, and there is a loss of intimacy in a show when the blocking requires all actors stay at least six feet apart. At the end of the day, all that matters is that we are still able to tell stories and perform our hearts out no matter what the universe throws at us.



# How to Sound Impressive to Don Bacon: A Reflection of Presenting at the Upper Midwest Regional Honors Conference 2021

Jared Dingman

Dingman recounts the process of preparing a presentation for the UMRHC.

As I sat down in the squeaky office chair in the office of Don Bacon, there were a string of smiling faces staring at me as I squinted my eyes to appear as though I am smiling under my mask. I was in an interview for their summer internship, and they were perusing my resume like a Dad perusing the ripest and best fruit in a grocery store. In the middle of the interview, the nice lady directly across the table from me squinted at my resume and read “First Year Council. Ohhh what is that?” She seemed intrigued and continued to ask about my experience with the First Year Council (FYC) and presenting at the Upper Midwest Regional Honors Conference (UMRHC).

I told the nice lady about my experience with the FYC throughout the year. I explained my role in FYC and what the council entailed. After that, I delved into the specifics of the UMRHC.

I have never presented at a conference before. To be a little frank, even the sound of presenting at a conference was nerve-racking.

Although it was over Zoom, I was still intimidated at the thought of displaying myself in front of various college Honors Programs from across the Midwest. However, after we (Dr. Morrison, Katie Cooley, Eryn Busenbark, and I) first met to discuss the logistics of how presenting at an online conference would work, I felt more prepared to discuss my experiences in front of a good-sized audience. We decided the order in which we would speak and asserted the need to create conversation in our Zoom room. With adequate conversation, the UNO Honors Program would be able to share what has worked on our FYC and what has not produced desired results. Additionally, our Honors Program would be able to “steal” (for lack of a better term) ideas that our honors students would enjoy. When the time finally came for me to give my spiel about my experiences with FYC, I realized I was worrying over nothing. I talked about myself and my experiences with being a first-year student and a member on the first-year council for a duration of roughly five minutes. Then, I proceeded to answer questions about myself and

my perspective about having my first year of college taking place over Zoom. After the presentation was over, I realized how much fear I had had over nothing. The conference presentation was like a Jolly Rancher: short and sweet. Presenting myself and my perspective to strangers was a new experience that I found to be very rewarding.

After I detailed my experiences at the UMRHC to the nice lady at Don Bacon’s Office, I left the interview. I would love to say I got the summer internship at Don Bacon’s Office. I did not. However, I received an email from them later saying that they were “very impressed” by my interview. They asked if I would be interested in their fall internship. Suffice to say, my experience with the FYC and the UMRHC was very rewarding. It allowed me to have a unique experience of presenting at a regional conference as well as (this might just be my own thinking) be a better candidate for my endeavors outside the UNO Honors Program. And I am now the Nebraska student representative to UMRHC for next year, when I hope to attend the conference in person.

## Honors Happenings

Students had a chance to pick up a succulent from the Honors office during Earth week and an opportunity to earn a prize for sending in a photo of their potted and decorated plant.





# Virus Hunting

Lavanya Uppala and Elizabeth Russman

Uppala and Russman share the developments of their lab project and the potential application of not only their findings but problem solving methods.

In 2017, a series of novel *Pseudomonas* bacteriophages, or viruses that infect only bacteria in the *Pseudomonas* genus, were characterized by the Tappich lab at UNO. These viruses were UNO-SLW1, 2, 3, and 4. Though widespread in the environment, the *Pseudomonas* bacteria and phage family are poorly characterized. However, *Pseudomonas* viruses and bacteria have been shown to have a significant role in various settings, such as biocontrol of fruit disease, in the enhancement of bacterial growth, as well as altering the sensitivity of diseases to antibacterial medications. Like many *Pseudomonas* phages and bacteria, genes and pathways involved in these processes are unknown or uncharacterized. Helping to discover and contribute novel findings to this field of science, even at an undergraduate level, is what first interested us in this research.

The Tappich lab aims to better characterize these new viruses in order to identify novel protein targets

for molecular biology research, as well as find novel strains of *Pseudomonas* viruses and how they might be different from those already in existence. Lab members take water samples collected from around the country and screen them for viruses. These viruses are then plated on petri dishes and then the appearance of the plaques that form are looked at. Since the viruses are grown on a lawn of *Pseudomonas fluorescens* bacteria, the plaques indicate locations where cells have lysed or their membranes have disintegrated (Figure 1). Each virus genus will have a different appearance, whether it's circular or star shaped, clear or cloudy, or whether it's haloed or not. However, the temperment of the bacteria makes every plating an anxious experience to see whether the bacteria grew at all or if the week's work must be repeated. While we always disinfect beakers and flasks to remove any contamination, even the smallest pathogen that makes it into the solutions we work with could make the trial of the experiment fail. Still, every success is celebrated as a major one and is considered another small advancement towards our goal of showing how a virus acts in the environment.

While the appearance of

an unusual plaque may indicate that we've found a new virus, the hypothesis must be confirmed using other methods like sequencing the genome of the phage after extracting its DNA. The intrigue only grows as we wait for the genome data to return from UNMC, so that we can progress on our experiments. The genome tells us whether or not we found something new, and, if we did, helps us to discover what exactly is new about the virus. But processing the virus DNA using a computer can still be frustrating. Sometimes databases don't have enough information to give you a clear answer on what you've found, or sometimes the information is too complicated to traverse through easily. Yet there's always a sign when we finally get the answer and know what we found, whether it's a new virus or something that's already known. But then comes the more difficult questions, like how can investigating these viruses help find new targets for medicine development, or how do they play a role in shaping our environment? Though the questions never end, hunting viruses allows even students to discover a tiny fraction of the world.

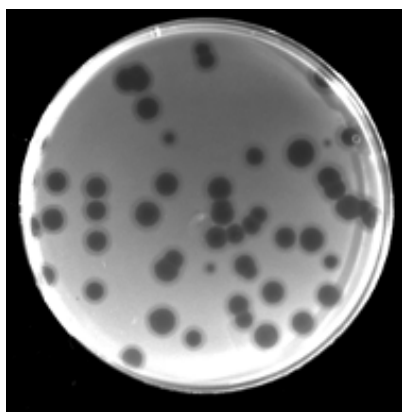


Image of the plaques formed by UNO-SLW2, which are clear, haloed and uniform in shape. The average diameter of a plaque is  $5.37 \text{ mm} \pm 0.86 \text{ mm}$  ( $n = 226$ ). [Credit to Mackenzie Conrin, April 2020]

# Can We Zoom for Fun When We are All Zoom-ed Out?

Andrew Leavitt



Leavitt, an HSA fourth year representative, and the fundraising committee hosted a virtual event for an opportunity for Honors students to socialize.

We have all become more accustomed to using video conferencing for social interaction, yet I doubt most of us would choose to continue using it so frequently under different circumstances. For the majority of our time on Zoom, our conversations are broadcast to everyone in a given conference. We cannot quietly turn to our friends and peers to ask for clarification, make a quick joke, or give looks of solidarity – whether we are confused, excited, or even bored. Our time after class sessions to break out into our own social groups and conduct private conversations has disappeared. These are experiences that are not reproduced in a real-time video setting. Pre-COVID, we were expected to be present for

our classes, which means we did not actively make time for these interactions - they were products of our environment and our schedules, and their absence makes Zoom a colder place.

These opportunities for socializing were by choice, but were also rewarding and incentivized attending class sessions, club meetings, and committee meetings (etc.). Without them, we are left to our own devices – creating our own motivation. For me, this usually means reminding myself that missing material could affect my performance in a course, or feeling a strong sense of responsibility to attend meetings to which I was obliged. There is no counterpart for this when a Zoom event is at our leisure. Missing it won't change how well I score on an exam in Molecular Biology, and it isn't at my leisure if it is obligatory – right?

All of this thoughtful ping-pong began shortly after I hosted a Jeopardy Night event for Honors Program students – a leisurely event. No one was obligated to show (except for me of course), and the Fundraising Committee of the Honors Student Association (the official hosting group) didn't ask anyone to RSVP or even to communicate a “maybe I'll show”. We did not want to force a head count, which I suppose made things a bit confusing for me but hopefully lent to the intended feel – don't show unless you really want to and happen to have the time. The most difficult question while we planned the event was: what would give us a reason to

attend? Our answer: gift cards for food!

Yep, when we announced the event, we also announced that we would be awarding gift cards for a food delivery service to a number of winners (in a tiered fashion... based on attendance). All told, several people joined in on the Jeopardy Game Night fun, and each of them got a gift card in their email inbox. Did we really have fun during the event? I think so – at least I did. Everyone laughed at least once, and probably smiled a few times more than that.

Anecdotally, this was decent attendance for a leisurely Zoom event – a few of my peers who had been involved in similar affairs later reported to me that in their experience either no one shows, or only one or two individuals do. Does this mean that we found the best strategy to gather people on Zoom for fun? I have no idea. The sense of camaraderie and intimacy of being right next to your friends was still lacking. Would I attend a similar event if I could get a gift card to order food with? Sure I would. But I don't have any novel solutions on how to recreate the things that would be missing. I suppose I do believe that we can have fun on Zoom, even now when we are all Zoom-ed out. However, more than anything, hosting this event has left me optimistically and longingly looking toward a future in which I am not pondering these questions.

# Monsters and Aliens

Abigail Williamson



One special opportunity Honors offers is a range of unique courses. Classes exploring monsters and aliens were two of such courses offered this semester.

One of my favorite things I've discovered about college is the ability to study in a more specialized way, especially when involved in the Honors Program. Even the required general education courses have colloquia for specific interests. When it came time to enroll in spring courses, I found not only one, but two colloquia that sounded interesting, and they fit into my general requirements. I enrolled in

Modern Monsters, a class that studied *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and then explored them in conversation with adaptations. I also enrolled in a class about the paranormal and supernatural. One of my favorite things about the Honors Program is that you can take a social sciences class about aliens and fulfill the same requirement as a student who took general anthropology.

I'll admit, I didn't much consider the workload that would be involved in two Honors courses. I was too excited by the subjects and how compelling they were, but honestly it hasn't been too bad. I have found that Honors colloquia don't necessarily require you to do more work; instead, they simply expect better quality work, and I'm 100% okay with that. Like many Honors students, I enjoy being held to a higher standard, because I feel like I am prouder of my work and receive more helpful constructive criticism than I would otherwise.

Every week when I wrote out a rough schedule in my planner, I found myself writing "Monsters 10:00, Aliens 2:30..." and I would think "what even is my schedule?" Sometimes I would sit in class and think "what is this class?" as our professor gave a lecture about

bigfoot. The classes were definitely different from my expectations of college.

In fact, I really didn't know what to expect enrolling in Supernatural 101. Would I be ghost hunting? Would we spend 2.5 hours a week analyzing the CW show? These were all highly entertaining notions, but none were true. Instead, we spent lots of time studying anthropology and history to try and understand where the belief in such ideas originates. We approached inquiries about these concepts from a scientific perspective, and despite our instructor being a ghost hunter and a member of the Mutual UFO Network, he confessed he was only searching for evidence and not that he was convinced these things existed.

As far as monsters class goes, I very much appreciated the ability to study a work so in depth. I couldn't have possibly anticipated how much there was to discuss about just one book. We spent nearly 10 weeks talking about *Frankenstein*, and it still wasn't enough. I recently declared an English major, and I hope that the literature classes I take in the future are just as engaging as this one has been. I'm excited to see what new study topics Honors classes bring in the future.

## Honors Happenings

A group photo from an Honors Colloquium course, Creativity as Survival taught by Professor Steve Langan. Students participated in an in-person event in the Pep Bowl.





# Counting Eggs

Molly Andreasen



Honors contracts can take on many forms to fit individual interests. This includes experiences that explore content application far beyond the classroom.

During the spring of 2021, I completed my first Honors contract. At first, I did not know what my project would entail, as my professor and I had never done an honors contract before. I contracted my Vertebrate Zoology class (BIOL 4780). Coming up with an idea for this project took some brainstorming, as I did not want to write a research paper; I wanted to do research in the field.

After some time, Dr. Robbins and I came up with a hypothesis: to find the rate of predation on a frequently used trail, to see how close the predators would get to “Human

Contact” or where the trail is more used to get their prey (eggs). We decided to use Quail eggs to do this project.

I thought that if animals use the trail, then the resources (eggs) that are closer to the trail will have a higher rate of predation compared to those that are farther from the trail. Predation rates would be highest for the eggs at 2 meters, then 5 meters, then 8 meters. I bet you’re probably thinking, how is this going to work?

First, I needed quail eggs, which are not found at our local Hyvee next to the chicken eggs as you would think. I ended up getting my quail eggs from SYSCO, a food manufacturer for companies and restaurants. The eggs were about the size of the robin egg Easter candy.

After getting the eggs I made a procedure list of what I needed to get

this project done. I decided on doing it over the course of spring break back at home in Columbus, Nebraska in the River trails behind Wagner’s Lake, off the course of the Loup river.

I decided to place the eggs on two different trails to be able to compare the results between both. I put them on the left side of each of the two trails. They were 2 meters, 5 meters, and then 8 meters from the base of the trail. To have more results, I had 7 groups of eggs at each trail site. So, there were a total of 42 eggs placed. To know where the eggs are I used flags and labeled them to know which group of eggs they were. The flags were placed 1 foot behind where the egg was placed to know where it was located. An example of this would be 6A, 8M written on a flag 1 foot behind an egg. 6A (*cont.*)



# Counting Eggs

Molly Andreasen



means the group and A is the trail. The 8 M means 8 meters from the base of the trail.

After going out to check on these eggs every 3 days for 6 days, I found my results to be somewhat scattered. There were groups of eggs in a line taken, as if a predator just walked across the brush picking up the eggs. Overall, this project was a great experience to see what research in the field was like and the process of it. I am excited to contract another upper-level biology course to do another project like this one and get more experience in the Biology field.

I am thankful that Honors contracts don't always have to be a 10-page research paper. I was able to brainstorm, make it enjoyable and worth my time to gain valuable experience in a class that I wouldn't otherwise get to.



Photos from Andreasen's study.

# Religion and Film

Micah Dunwoody

There are no limits to Honors contracts and the topics students can explore. Dunwoody used this opportunity to expand his passion for examining religion in film.

The work that I did for my Honors contract was a comparison piece between the Jedi in the *Star Wars* franchise, and the Shaolin monks who are some of the most prominent practitioners of Kung Fu. While I am a “Star Wars” enthusiast, the main reason I took on this paper was because for a long time, I have been curious about why the Shaolin are able to fight and kill despite Buddhism being against it. This project has allowed me to investigate that seeming contradiction.

Buddhism has been used to justify violence, but the Shaolin have distinct reasons for doing so. Their practices have been justified as spiritual by Chinese Buddhist and Daoist belief; they have received government funding; they began practicing with staffs under the claim that it is not a dangerous weapon; and they appear to have the blessing of a deity. The being is named Vajrapānī, who is worshipped at Shaolin so they may have physical strength. There are some myths about the being, such as when he appears to threatening bandits and scares them off because of his gigantic appearance.

I am glad I pursued this topic because I was able to learn more about the history of Kung Fu, and it gives me a look at the violent facet of religion, which is more common

than one may think. We see it not only with the Shaolin, but in so many other instances. The Crusades, Genghis Khan, and kṣātriyas are all examples of religious violence (to name a few). I was also curious to see whether the Shaolin are their own separate religion from Buddhism. At this point, I would say they are not because they do not hold too many differences from Buddhism. In general, Buddhism has so many variations depending on who is practicing.

I am grateful to have been able to work on this, and I hope that I can get my paper published in the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Kung Fu is something about which many people have misconceptions, and I hope this paper clarifies some of that.

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# The Call to be a Change Agent

Amy Wagner



Wagner explains what it takes to be a Change Agent.

This semester, I am enrolled in Human Relations with Dr. Thompson. Though his class has taught me many things, a key point that stuck out to me was the concept of being a Change Agent. When you hear the term “Change Agent,” you’re probably thinking of people who do something huge in their lives to significantly change the world. Change Agents such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and Jesus Christ have all made major impacts on the world as we know it. However, being a Change Agent doesn’t necessarily mean doing something massive.

Dr. Thompson defines a Change

Agent as anyone who recognizes an opportunity to inflict change and acts upon it in a positive manner. This can be something as simple as holding open the door for strangers or complimenting someone’s shoes. Likewise, it can be something deeper but still easy, such as picking up trash in a local park. As long as whatever you do is done with entirely pure intentions, you’re on the right track to becoming a full-fledged Change Agent. However, becoming a Change Agent isn’t as easy as doing one nice thing and that’s it; true Change Agents are those who practice positive change daily and learn to develop their change-making skills over time.

It’s important to realize the few key traits that are found within every great Change Agent: leads by example, patient yet persistent, asks tough questions, effective listening skills, ownership and responsibility, clear vision, trust, flexibility, diversified knowledge, courageous and empathetic.

While these characteristics may not seem like things you’d need to pick up trash, they are necessary for becoming a true Change Agent. The three simple tasks mentioned earlier are indeed wonderful ways to begin your journey of being a Change Agent; however, you can’t only carry out small acts of kindness and still give yourself that important title. Real Change Agents are fighting for a significant positive change, such

as that of racism or sexism. Change Agents can positively affect racism and sexism in our world by simply treating everyone in their lives (including strangers) equally every single day. But of course, major issues can’t be solved that easily. While basic tasks are the foundation for momentous change, larger concerns require deeper digging and stronger remedies to heal. Even so, basic positivity is the perfect way to start your lifelong journey of being a Change Agent. Whatever you choose to do, recall the traits found within every great Change Agent and strive to perfect those skills in yourself. Then, once you’ve honed your change-making skills, maybe you’ll decide to move into something big and your name too will be revered as an inspiring Change Agent and a fabulous role model for many.

Remember, a Change Agent is defined as anyone who recognizes an opportunity to affect change and acts upon it in a positive manner. So, ask yourself this: how are YOU going to work today to change something for the better?

My challenge to you: get out and face each day with the eyes of a Change Agent. Before you know it, spreading positive change will become like a sixth sense.

Never forget that every one of you has the makings of a strong Change Agent; you just have to dig inside yourself and allow that part of you to grow and thrive.



# A Broader Application

Lavanya Uppala and Ryan Chapman

As Scott Scholars, Uppala and Chapman have used their studies to develop an application that has potential to help fulfill a need in the surrounding community.

The Walter Scott Jr. Scott Scholarship program offers the unique opportunity where scholars are partnered with a nonprofit. The goal of this partnership is to leverage the skills of Scott Scholars to solve problems facing these nonprofits. We are part of a larger group that is partnered with the Open Door Mission.

The Open Door Mission is a gospel rescue homeless shelter which has been serving the Omaha metropolitan area since its inception in 1954. In its early years, the Mission provided shelter for the working men who migrated to Omaha to obtain a job working on

one of the city's 10 railroads. Since then, the organization has evolved and expanded greatly - providing 152,323 nights of safe shelter and 1.27 million nutritious meals to help support the roughly 2000 homeless individuals in Omaha in 2020.

However, even when individuals are able to pull themselves out of homelessness, there remains a gap between a self-sustainable income level and the need for government aid. For instance, CNBC reports that a sustainable income for a family of 4 in Nebraska is approximately \$48,000, but the instant this family makes over \$24,860, they lose any federal benefits they may have been receiving. Living in this transitory gap causes many individuals in financial poverty to fall back into homelessness.

We were apprised of this divide when we first started volunteering with the Open Door

Mission our freshman year at UNO. We hypothesized that improving connections between homeless individuals or clients to case managers, and gaining greater insight into their needs may help address the issue. Speaking with the employees of the shelter, we learned that an issue facing homeless individuals across the Omaha metro is the disconnect between the different shelters in the area. Homeless individuals may schedule appointments at one shelter, and move to another where there is no knowledge of them having this appointment. An additional obstacle we witnessed was that homeless individuals were unable to attend their program appointments and classes because transportation was difficult to manage. Shelter clients are typically reliant on public transportation, which is not always available or on time, in turn affecting their own schedules. (cont.)

AM AppointmentsPM AppointmentsCreate AppointmentAppointments by DateAppointments by IDAdmin

On-Site Appointments

Client ID	Appointment Time	Location	Address	Details
0F3A74D64	01:00 PM	Open Door Mission	Omaha, NE	
64785F0DA	06:00 PM	Open Door Mission	Omaha, NE	

Off-Site Appointments

Client ID	Appointment Time	Location	Address	Details
0F3A74D64	03:00 PM	UNO	Omaha, NE	
1CE8EEF35	04:00 PM	UNMC	Omaha, NE	
64785F0DA	05:00 PM	Stephen Center	Omaha, NE	

A screenshot of Uppala and Chapman's application

# A Broader Application

Lavanya Uppala and Ryan Chapman

Combining this with the fact that individuals may need to manage their childcare and job responsibilities with the added burden and stress of being homeless, it is easy for things to be forgotten.

We further discussed the issue with Steven Frazee, Senior Program Director of the shelter, who cited that an application that helps employees plan transportation and clients manage their busy schedules would be helpful. Yet, to us, it seemed that such a problem would be widespread enough that a software solution would have already been created. Taking this information, and polling other shelters in major cities across the country, we learned that no such program existed. Consequently, we took it upon ourselves to create this tool.

Over the past 2 years, we have developed a new application in collaboration with the Open

Door Mission. Throughout the process we iterated through many prototypes, failures, and successes. The development process was quite difficult, as we started from ground level in terms of web development knowledge. The difficulty is only compounded by the fact that these skills are not taught in classes like Organic Chemistry or Molecular Biology, which bioinformatics majors involved in healthcare, research, and data science are required to take. In order to develop this application, we were required to teach ourselves the programming languages HTML, CSS, JavaScript, and SQL. Often, we took off work or stayed up until 1:00 or 2:00am in the morning on a Saturday to fit development into our schedules. Additionally, the pressure of building a production level application by ourselves was (and still is) immense. The current production build of the application

was built using VueJS and hosted on an Amazon Web Services server.

Now in the final stages of the project, we will be implementing the web application at computer kiosks at various locations around the Open Door Mission's campus. It feels so surreal that the product of 2 years of reading, tweaking, and numerous reboots is finally being implemented. We hope to maintain our partnership with the Open Door Mission to see if our application has potentially reduced the rates of homelessness recidivism in their client base, as well as to facilitate the scaling of our application. Our goal is to eventually institute the application in all Omaha-area shelters as well as shelters which may be facing similar issues, whether it is local to the state of Nebraska or to the entire country.

## Community Impact



In February, HSA organized the *Lending Love* event. The handmade hats were sent to community nursing home residents.



# Changemaking Workshop

Joey Gruber, Marissa Morales, Ryan Chapman, and Lavanya Uppala.

A group of Honors students have taken the initiative to get students involved in bringing about change to campus and developing community.

## **Please describe the process your organization took to conceive, plan, and execute your initiative.**

Through the University Innovation Fellows Program, we (Joey, Marissa, Lavanya, & Ryan) embarked on a 6-week training session during which we investigated resources and issues facing our campus, utilized Design Thinking, and reported our findings to fellow students, university staff, university faculty, and university administration.

We found that many problems facing students at our home institution, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), were rooted in the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on education. We conducted several student interviews regarding these issues. Through the surveys, students reported feeling isolated from other students and felt unheard by both professors and university administration.

Additionally, students did not feel as though they had sufficient financial support to participate in changemaking efforts while supporting their university tuition.

As both a resource for interested students and an experiment to show UNO administration, we developed a 3-day changemaking workshop that aimed to teach students the proponents of leading change, apply design methodologies for developing solutions to change, and compensate students for learning, leading, and improving our university.

We began our planning of the workshop by working with Vice Chancellor Dan Shipp and Assistant Vice Chancellor Kristina Cammarano, and Director of Student Development for Scott Scholars Harnoor Singh. It took our group about 3-months to locate funding to pay students \$9 an hour, create an agenda, design the curriculum, invite students, and execute the overall event.

Participation in our workshop was open to all enrolled UNO undergraduate and graduate students. Our workshop was advertised via social media and via email communication through various university organizations.

Our workshop was held via Zoom over the course of three days. Each day consisted of a two-hour long session split into two hour-long halves.

The first hour of the session was an informational section to teach participants the proponents of that day's activities. Each day also included student speakers who had been involved in student-led change at UNO. The second half of each session was devoted to working in groups to focus on each day's task.

## **What impact did your initiative have on its audience? How do you know?**

Students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) have reported feeling isolated and unheard as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the structures of higher education. Additionally, students report that financial barriers and other adversities are a roadblock preventing them from getting involved in

changemaking efforts. Based on these feelings, we wanted to create a workshop that would inspire and empower students to create change for issues they see on UNO's campus and connect them with faculty to initiate collaboration.

We also wanted to pay the students, so that students with financial adversities had the opportunity to participate. When developing the workshop, we defined our metrics of success as the number of projects that students developed solutions for, the number of students who joined our new organization, Mavs for Change, after the workshop, and the number of faculty who attended the workshop.

We believe that our workshop was successful based on our defined metrics. Our workshop included five student speakers, six faculty, staff, and administrators, and 27 general participants. We had originally only budgeted for 20 students, but based on the level of interest, we expanded.

During the workshop students identified three areas that needed reform: Campus Safety/Security, Accessibility, and Mental Health. Students in our workshop developed five solutions to problems that they have seen at UNO. These included issues in the areas of Accessibility, Mental Health, and Campus Security.

By the conclusion of the workshop all five groups had proposals for carrying out their work in the future. Since our workshop, students have taken several steps to implement change at UNO. One of the groups focused on accessibility of the UNO website has presented to the Chancellor's Wellness Committee and is working with (*cont.*)

# Changemaking Workshop

Joey Gruber, Marissa Morales, Ryan Chapman, and Lavanya Uppala.

administrators to implement their proposed revisions.

Another group from this workshop pursued increasing accessibility to CAPS, through working with administrator Cathy Pettid following the workshop. In total, we had seven participants of our workshop join our organization, Mavs for Change, including the students working on the aforementioned projects. To obtain additional metrics on the impact of our workshop, we created a post-survey gauging student's

experience at the workshop and what they learned. From this survey, we found that students' interest in changemaking at UNO increased, and students reported wanting to continue work on projects. Furthermore, students were able to retain the method of changemaking used in the workshop evident through their descriptions of what they had learned.

## Next Steps

Alongside our workshop, we created a new organization, Mavericks for

Change (MFC), which is a student organization creating an environment where students feel comfortable and welcome to bring forward issues they are passionate about and to foster collaboration between a diverse group of students. If you are a student interested in changemaking and would like to get involved, please email us at [luppala@unomaha.edu](mailto:luppala@unomaha.edu). You can also follow us on Facebook and Instagram at @mavsforchange.

## Honors Awards



Miriam Marcus (top, left) and Elizabeth Bender (bottom, left), were awarded the University Honors Program Student Achievement Award. Afrah Rasheed (above) was recognized with the Outstanding Leadership Award.



# Mindfulness and Accessibility During the Pandemic

Afrah Rasheed

Rasheed provides a reflection on how the pandemic has affected various aspects of student life.

I wanted to write about something that is probably going through all our minds: the pandemic. And for many of us, this pandemic deeply affected our educations, if not our whole life. A few big realizations hit me this year, and that is a lack of accessibility and mindfulness about health during this time.

It's no secret that this pandemic and social isolation has deeply affected so many of our mental states. I cannot count how many times I sent out emails or replies late and felt deep regret, or how many times I begged professors for extensions, or set my head on my desk, or had to cancel meetings, or forgot to do things that I promised to do earlier. The feeling of shame kept lurking in the shadows behind every interaction I had, and it just worsened my mental health. I imagine many other students also resonate with these statements.

It has come to the point where I have been forgetting to carry out basic tasks, like eating or brushing my hair. The stress of keeping up with school causes my hair to fall out and my nails to get brittle. A worsened mental state and greater stress leads to a variety of other health issues and is no joke; it can lead to physical health issues not just now but also later down the road. And with all of this, students must also worry about finances and finding a job. Dropping GPAs was another issue that myself and my peers also

struggled with. The unfortunate thing about GPA is that it does not reflect how much you struggled to earn that number.

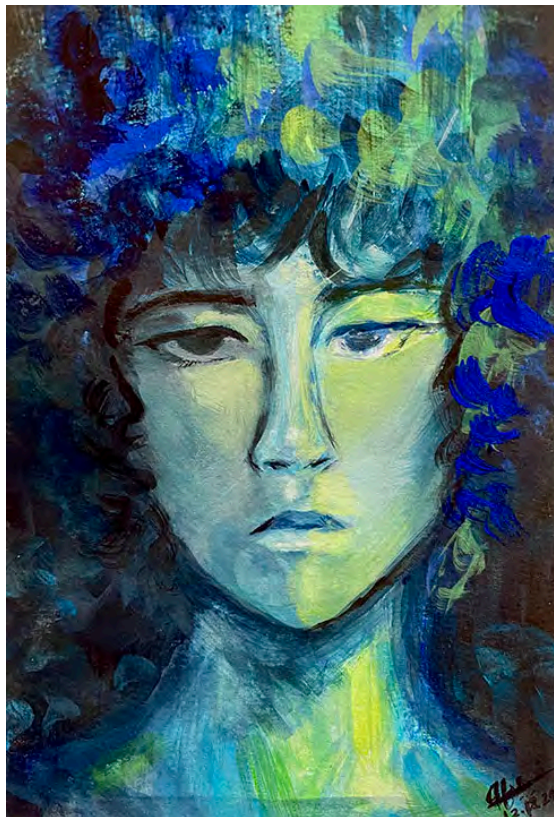
And so I come to my point: why are students (and professors) expected to keep up diligently despite going through a worldwide pandemic and one of the worst economic situations in decades? Where is the mindfulness? How can one focus on their 10-page paper when they are struggling to pay for their rent, or dealing with a chronic condition that already plagues them, or dealing with a tough situation at home?

Beyond our courses, despite there being a greater awareness for diversity, disability and mental health issues, there is still a lack of mindfulness and accessibility to resources in all spheres of our society. For example, I have had

friends completely unaware of Accessibility Services at UNO, and I had to help them apply to get accommodations for their situations. That is unfortunate, and to think that there are still students struggling because they are unaware of the resources they have is saddening.

My hope is that people are more mindful of mental health and more aware of accessibility after this pandemic. For example, if someone is sick or immobile and cannot leave their house, there is no excuse to not allow them to Zoom into lectures. Currently, I am working with a student group to make accessibility to resources on campus more widespread, but this requires an effort on all our parts. Be kind to others and hold no judgements. In the long run, consider how things like accessible pathways are, if language

meant for all communities is equally understood, and if people are able to access the resources they need. If we can't accommodate people during one of the toughest years we experienced, then when will we?



## **Forlorn**

Bristol Paper and  
Gouache, 9"x6",

Description: I spontaneously painted this piece during finals week when I was feeling overwhelmed as painting is an outlet for me. I had no vision or plan for this piece, and somehow this piece was born.



# Honors Highlights



Sarah Alsuleiman (above) earned the prestigious Barry Goldwater Scholarship, which recognizes future research leaders in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. Alsuleiman earned the only Goldwater awarded to a Nebraskan University in 2021.

Afrah Rasheed received the best undergraduate poster presentation award at this year's Research and Creative Activity Fair held on March 26. Rasheed's project, "Adolescent Adjustment: How Social Withdrawal and Number of Friends Affect Peer Victimization," was advised by Dr. Mithra Pirooz, Ph.D. and Dr. Jonathon Santo, Ph.D.

This year's Student Honors Convocation, an event celebrating the accomplishments of UNO students, was held virtually on April 22. 10 of the awardees were Honors students from a diverse field of studies (right).



Dr. Griff Elder (left), who teaches Honors Calculus, was awarded this year's University Honors Program Faculty Award.

## Honors Convocation Awardees

### **Aya Yousuf**

Chancellor's Award for Research or Creative Activity; Dean's Award, College of Arts & Sciences; Undergraduate Major Award, Political Science & Economics

### **Kolten Schnack**

Dean's Award, College of EHHS; Undergraduate Major Award, Special Education & Communication Disorders

### **Kaitlyn Baysa**

Dean's Award, College of IS&T; Undergraduate Major Award, IT Innovation

### **Julia Cormack**

Undergraduate Major Award, English and Foreign Languages

### **Brady Dodds**

Undergraduate Major Award, Women's and Gender Studies and Psychology

### **Luis Rodriguez**

Undergraduate Major Award, Economics & Math

### **Jimmy Wood**

Undergraduate Major Award, Physics & Geology

### **Emily Coleman**

Undergraduate Major Award, Real Estate & Land Use Economics

### **Grace Maline**

Undergraduate Major Award, Bioinformatics

### **Elias Smith**

Undergraduate Major Award, Biology

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