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The Distinction was recognized at the National Honors Collegiate Council Conference in New Orleans in November. Bailey Hoffer, Hailey Stessman, and Annika Kuchar accepted the award.
Fall Semester Events

The semester began with “Meet Your HSA Representatives” over tacos with students at Durango’s Grill.

In October, HSA hosted the “Halloween Spooktacular”, which was filled with snacks and games such as a contest to see who could wrap the best mummy.

HSA hosted “Hot Cocoa for HSA” in November as a way to raise money along with giving students a chance to talk with their reps.

During their weekly meeting, HSA worked together in various bonding activities in order to get to know each other better.

The September event, “Get Smartie with HSA”, featured pizza, trivia, and a chance to get to know fellow Honors students.

Alaina Wallick poses with Alex Ramset after winning the mummy wrapping contest.

During HSA’s “Crafting for a Cause” service day, students helped Omaha Girls Rock make cards to thank volunteers from the summer camps.

To prepare for finals week, HSA hosted a night where students could participate in relaxation activities such as coloring and games.
Kian McIntosh  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Geology  
“Estimation of Evapotranspiration and Other Water Budget Factors of Glacier Creek Preserve”  
Advisor: Ashlee Dere

Sushmita Adhikari  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Neuroscience  
“Variation of biomarkers IL-6, CRP, IGF-1 and TNT- a level present in marmosets once introduced to a stressful environment”  
Advisor: Jeffrey French

Ashton Nanninga  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: English  
“Revision: the Literary Compass”  
Advisor: Lisa Knopp

Tyler Degener  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Chemistry  
“Characterization of the Dimerization Domains on the Mannose-6-phosphate/Insulin-like Growth Factor 2 Receptor”  
Advisor: Jodi Kreiling

Veronica Dubov  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Biology  
“An Analysis of the Similarities and Differences Between Two Vital Roles in Medicine: Physicians and Physician Assistants”  
Advisor: Katie Shirazi

Levi Sandbulte  
College of Engineering  
Major: Construction Management  
“Nelson Mandela Pool Addition”  
Advisors: Patrick Cuddigan and Andrew Balus

Cassandra Griffin  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Major: Political Science  
“The Truth About Crisis Pregnancy Centers”  
Advisor: Jody Neathery-Castro

Michaela VanOeveren  
College of Education  
Major: Secondary Education & English  
“Academicmin: How Visual Rhetoric and Effective Teaching Combine to Form Multiple Literacies”  
Advisor: Margarette Christensen

Jorey Prange  
College of Education  
Major: Early Childhood Inclusive  
“SocioDramatic Work Systems for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder”  
Advisor: Saundra Shillingstad

Jorden Hansen  
College of Business Administration  
Majors: Economics, Management, & Marketing  
“Economic and Strategic Analysis of America’s Wastewater”  
Advisor: Chris Decker

Patrick Hodson  
College of Business Administration  
Majors: Accounting, Investment, & Banking and Finance  
“Tax the Machines: Assessing the Necessity and Feasibility of the Freedom Dividend”  
Advisor: Jillian Poyzer

Ashton Nanninga  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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Your HSA Representatives

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

Alyssa Spartz-Vice President
Major: Emergency Management and Psychology

Elizabeth Bender-Secretary
Majors: Criminology & Criminal Justice and Foreign Languages
Concentration: Spanish
Minor: Political Science

Sidney Hanel-Treasurer
Major: Chemistry
Minor: Biology

Garret Schliep-1st Year Representative
Major: Kinesiology (Pre-Chiropractic)
Minors: Business Administration, Spanish, and Sign Language/Visual Communication

Joey Gruber-2nd Year Representative
Majors: IT Innovation and Communication Studies

Viqtoria Sims-1st Year Representative
Major: Sociology

Hannah Hrbek-1st Year Representative
Major: Biology (Pre-PA)

Katie Hill-1st Year Representative
Major: Political Science
Minors: Sustainability, and Nonprofit Management

Alyssa Wallick-2nd Year Representative
Major: Secondary Education

Alaina Mann-1st Year Representative
Major: Biology
Minor: Chemistry

Claire Figi-3rd Year Representative
Major: Biology
Minor: Medical Humanities

Alaina Wallick-2nd Year Representative
Major: Secondary Education

Rachel Hartgerink-1st Year Representative
Major: Undecided (Pre-Optometry)
Minor: Spanish

Alex Ramsey-3rd Year Representative
Major: Computer Science

Elizabeth Bender-Secretary
Majors: Criminology & Criminal Justice and Foreign Languages
Concentration: Spanish
Minor: Political Science

Sidney Hanel-Treasurer
Major: Chemistry
Minor: Biology

Garret Schliep-1st Year Representative
Major: Kinesiology (Pre-Chiropractic)
Minors: Business Administration, Spanish, and Sign Language/Visual Communication

Katie Hill-1st Year Representative
Major: Political Science
Minors: Sustainability, and Nonprofit Management
Your HSA Representatives

Dalton Meister- 4th Year Representative
Major: Social Work
Minors: Holocaust & Genocide Studies, Human Rights Studies, International Studies, and Medical Humanities

Jon Dormady-4th Year Representative
Major: Bioinformatics

Sam Lauritsen-3rd Year Representative
Major: Business Administration
Concentrations: Legal Studies, Real Estate, and Spanish

Zachary Byar-2nd Year Representative
Major: Business Administration

Lavanya Uppala-2nd Year Representative
Majors: Bioinformatics, Biology
Minor: Computer Science

Annika Kuchar-2nd Year Representative
Major: Biology (Pre-PA)
Minors: Women’s & Gender Studies and Medical Humanities

Morgan Van Orman-1st Year Representative
Major: Biology
Minor: Chemistry

Michaela Woods-1st Year Representative
Major: Speech-Language Pathology
Minor: Business for Non-Business Majors

Alexandra Espinoza-1st Year Representative
Major: Secondary Education

Hailey Stessman-Public Relations Officer
Major: English
Concentration: British/Irish/Anglophone Literature
Minor: Art History

Marissa Recker-Graphic Designer
Major: Architectural Engineering

Hannah Im-Co-Editor
Majors: Neuroscience and Philosophy
Concentration: Mind & Brain
Minors: Medical Humanities and Human Rights Studies
To the Editor of The Distinction:

I hope this letter finds you well; my name is Dalton Meister, and I am writing to you as a founding member of Vote!UNO, a student organization at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, to thank the Honors Student Association for their commitment to voter engagement and to express to your membership the importance of voter engagement on our campus.

Since the start of the Fall 2018 semester, the Honors Student Association has served as a campus partner to the collective action voter engagement initiatives that Vote!UNO is supporting here, through participation in campus-wide efforts, at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Vote!UNO is a registered student organization at the University of Nebraska at Omaha that focuses on collective action, coalition building, and a non-partisan endeavor to increase voter rights literacy, support voter registration, counteract voter suppression, increase accesses to voter resources, and to collect impact data on our efforts to develop more effective interventions to strengthen voter engagement at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

As a campus partner of Vote!UNO, the Honors Student Association has advanced our voter engagement mission with a commitment to support voter registration at our university. The Honors Student Association has hosted three voter registration drives on Dodge Campus, where they contributed a total of over fifty hours of volunteer support to these drives, collectively. As a Vote!UNO campus partner, and through their contribution to the enhancement of voter registration efforts at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the membership of the Honors Student Association have advanced community awareness on the importance of voter engagement at our university.

To those who might be interested in engaging in this work, you can contribute by participating in community voter engagement efforts, attending voter registration initiatives programmed by the Honors Student Association, or by informing your peers on the importance of voting and on how to register. Further information on the importance of voting and how to register in the United States is available at https://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote.

For the contributions of your organization, and for your time and consideration of this letter, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Honors Student Association, and you the reader; thank you, your efforts are genuinely appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dalton Meister
Founding Member, Vote!UNO
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Professor Spotlight: Dr. Adrian Duran

Adrian Duran is an associate professor of Art and Art History at UNO. This past semester, he had the opportunity to teach Honors Survey of Western Art II at the Joslyn Museum.

Hailey Stessman

How did you first become part of the Honors program?

I thought at one point that the art world was this land of weird people who were able to do weird things with a freedom that the rest of the world didn’t have. That was attractive to me because I was a teenage weirdo just like everyone else. I first got into the Honors curriculum out of jealousy. One of my colleagues was teaching an Art Appreciation class and I was bent that I wasn’t a part of it. So I called Dr. Morrison and was like, “What do we do?” Since we’re in the Honors program, that gives you a lot more freedom to do what you want. It means I can teach it at the Joslyn Museum, which I don’t do for my non-Honors class. Before I even give a lecture, we go upstairs and look at the art that is in the same time period. We start with real art that we never do in the non-Honors class. It puts people in more direct contact with that and we turn it into a traveling circus.

How did you expand the scope of the class?

We were at the El Museo Latino doing a walk around South Omaha. I think they thought I was weird because I started to climb the building to point to something. Everyone looked at me like “what are you doing?” I don’t think you see a lot of that in your normal classes. I am a firm believer that the behavior you see in the arts is a little bit more free than a lot of other disciplines. Some people say bizarre. I’ve tried to make my class reflect that. We go to North Omaha to visit the Union of Contemporary Art. We go all over town because Omaha has a lot of great art. If we stay in a classroom in a lecture format, we don’t get any of that. Dr. Morrison empowered me to do an ideal world situation. I did what I thought made sense. I get to do what I love with a diverse group of people.

How can students benefit from learning about art in an Honors setting?

The simple answer for what students get out of the class is getting to be a part of the art world. In my world, you’re supposed to fail. That’s how you learn things. In my world, there’s no right or wrong. There’s just better or worse. We get to freely run with our hair on fire and we expect that. When we’re given directions, we question before we follow. I’m teaching people how to think differently. It’s important to remind ourselves how valuable art is. I had a student who took us out to the walkway outside of the Joslyn for a presentation and talk to us about the civil engineering behind the brickwork. It reminded me that art history is called art history because it involves everything. To do architecture, you need engineers. To do ceramics, you need chemists. I learned very quickly that this class is a place where people can find another version of what they’re already doing and think through it differently. Some days you just have to shut up and follow your students because they know things you’ve never even heard before. We’re better when we’re together. We’re able to speak the same language. Learning is learning; doing is doing. It just has different flavors to it. The beauty of Honors is that it lets you explore what you’re doing in a very safe environment with really smart students who will catch you when you fall. It allows me to be more experimental. It allows us to dip into the best parts of UNO all at the same time. Having conversations with smart students about art is incredibly rewarding. Art is part of our daily lives, so let’s not runaway from it; let’s run toward it.
On April 5, 2019, just five minutes before presenting at the Upper Midwest Regional Honors Conference in Menomonie, Wisconsin, my phone rang. I had been waiting for this call for months. I had just been offered an internship with US Senator Amy Klobuchar from Minnesota in her Washington D.C. office. I was exhilarated! All of my hard work of carefully crafting every resume bullet, perfecting my interview answers, and the agonizing waiting game had finally paid off. Needless to say, I was pretty overwhelmed. But I had to compose myself, walk back in, and deliver my presentation.

Jumping forward to the end of May, I was in D.C. and buzzing with excitement. I had the privilege of serving as a Press and Legislative Intern in Senator Klobuchar’s office for ten weeks this past summer. I was lucky and was able to split my time and responsibilities between the press and legislative teams. This allowed me to learn about the different roles within an elected official’s office and how the entire staff must work together to accomplish legislative goals. I was paired with the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions legislative team because of my interest in healthcare and education policy. I focused on researching healthcare legislation and drafting policy letters. At the same time, I was assisting the press team with transcriptions, staying up to date on local Minnesota news, and monitoring media outlets for any breaking stories.

In addition to my press and legislative work, there were constituent responsibilities that every intern was assigned. These included giving tours of the Capitol building, answering phone calls, and processing constituent mail. These were some of my favorite tasks because I could see how my work was directly impacting Minnesota constituents. I loved to give tours of the Capitol building because, for many of my groups, it was their first time in the Capitol and in a few cases, their first time in D.C. Their energy was infectious as we walked through the halls of the Capitol. I loved to see them get so excited. My favorite tour was with a ten-year-old boy and his grandparents. The grandparents explained that whenever they had a grandchild turn ten years old, they brought them to D.C. Now, this little boy was smart, inquisitive, and very observant. As I was explaining the murals inside the Rotunda, his little hand shot up. Before I even had a chance to describe it, he had correctly identified the mural that showed the first reading of the Declaration of Independence to the Second Continental Congress. My heart nearly exploded because I could see how impactful this tour was on him. He was so excited to learn about the Capitol building and I was just as excited to share the information with him. This was just one of the awesome stories that I was able to bring home with me.

Along with my internship, I participated in the University of Nebraska’s Washington D.C. Professional Enrichment Academy. The academy was comprised of students from all four University of Nebraska campuses. This program hosted a series of seminars for the students to attend to help supplement our internships. These seminars were hosted by different NU alums and allowed us to see the many different sides of a career in D.C. Through the academy, we also had the opportunity to visit the Embassy of Indonesia and get a tour of the West Wing of the White House.

Through this opportunity, I was given a front-row seat to the legislative process in action. The hands-on experience that I received went above and beyond what I could have learned in a classroom. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity and experience that I had because it really validated my career path, and showed me how my studies can directly apply to my career.
Moments in Madrid

Liz Bender

This semester, I was honored to be chosen as one of eight research assistants to Dr. Michelle Black’s research project on deterrence. Dr. Black is working with NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to help develop a new framework to guide NATO deterrence policies and actions in a multi-actor scenario, a completely new concept from the traditional NATO approach. She initially reached out to me at the beginning of the semester to ask if I would be interested in being a student researcher on this project, and I quickly accepted the offer. My research involves creating strategic profiles of potential actors in a futuristic scenario, which will be used to test Dr. Black’s new methodology and allow others within NATO to experiment with these new concepts. In fact, Spain hosted the 2019 Concept Development and Experimentation Conference the final week in October where Dr. Black and her team were able to first introduce the new methodology.

Dr. Black had mentioned the possibility of a few students being able to accompany her to this conference when she first recruited volunteers but, being one of the youngest and most inexperienced researchers, I was pretty sure I would not be selected. However, a few weeks after accepting the position, Dr. Black informed me that I was one of four students selected to take part in the NATO conference as a student researcher. To say I was shocked would be an understatement; I was incredibly grateful for the opportunity to travel to Madrid in Spain and spend the week collaborating with great minds on deterrence and exploring the city.

Having a background in Spanish language learning, I was also thrilled to be able to practice my skills in a real setting, along with the incredible connections I knew we would make by attending this conference.

The conference opened with several interesting speakers, but the last days were spent in our workgroup running through the new methodology with our participants. It was an interesting feeling, to say the least, to be an “expert” on the new methodology in a room of so many respected and experienced minds. Regardless, I will value this experience and all that I learned from it for a very long time. I truly cannot say enough about the amazing people I met during this conference. They treated us with such kindness and were eager to introduce us to others and facilitate us in our first real networking experience within our career field. I am so thankful for all those who helped to get myself and my fellow researchers to this conference and to Dr. Black for opening doors to these awesome opportunities. This conference challenged me in a lot of unexpected ways, but I can already tell that I have grown as a student researcher because of these challenges.

The week that I spent in Spain was filled with research, dialogue, and networking; but also the sights, sounds, and tastes of Spain in the evenings. We made an effort to leave the hotel every night, walk around the city, and enjoy the unique architecture and several incredible plazas. We were able to get to several museums, like El Prado, and even to La Plaza Mayor. The Spanish locals were incredibly friendly and it was a huge boost to my confidence in my Spanish skills to be able to hold casual conversations with everyone we encountered. Overall, Spain was a wonderful experience, and I can’t wait to go back and explore even more of the country’s culture.

Going into this trip, I was so excited for all that I would get to experience, and I’d have to say Spain and NATO exceeded all my expectations. I am so thankful to have been extended an invitation to attend this conference with my peers. I know we all have such fond memories of this opportunity and will continue to stay in contact with each other and the fantastic people we met while in Madrid. Participating in this conference has made me even more eager for what the future holds, whether it is a return trip to Spain or further work with NATO. Either way, this once in a lifetime experience is one that I am proud to share and I know will play an integral part in my future.
From Nov. 6 to Nov. 9, I had the opportunity to attend the 2019 National Collegiate Honors Council Conference in New Orleans, LA with three fellow Honors students. I presented on a panel with the director of the UNO Honors Program and other Honors representatives from Eastern Kentucky University and Saint Leo University. The purpose of this panel was to analyze the effective policies and practices concerning design and execution of service projects for Honors credit. Through this panel, I was able to discuss the successes and failures I have experienced with service learning.

The first experience that I had with service learning arguably changed everything for my academic career. During the fall of 2016, I took an Honors colloquium course called Hate Groups and Terrorism where we participated in a competition with other universities across the country. For our project, we created an online social media campaign targeted at changing the negative perspectives individuals have toward refugees. We were honored to be selected to present our work in Washington D.C at the national competition. Unfortunately, I had a test in every single one of my classes during the time that we would be out of state. I had to make a difficult decision between my course work and a service project that I had spent months working on.

Ultimately, I chose to go to Washington D.C. because I realized how important service is to me. As a result of this experience, I have had the opportunity to combine service and coursework several more times throughout my academic career instead of having to choose between the two. For example, I contracted a nonprofit fundraising course I took in the spring of 2019 for Honors credit. The project for the contract involved designing and hosting a fundraiser for the food pantry located on UNO’s campus. Through this experience, I was able to apply the knowledge that I had learned in this course to directly benefit others on our campus. By the end of the fundraiser, almost $1,500 was donated to the Maverick Food Pantry.

Though I encountered several issues with these projects, such as trying to decide the goal of the fundraiser, I was able to learn the most from these experiences by directly applying my knowledge to a service that was benefiting others. As Theodore Roosevelt once said, “Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”
Danielle Prososki

This October, I decided to start my own photography business, Studio P Photography. Growing up on a farm outside of small town Fullerton, Nebraska, I was constantly surrounded by beautiful scenery. I always wanted to get into photography, but due to a busy schedule throughout high school, it was put on hold. During my first few weeks at UNO I was thoroughly encouraged to begin my journey. Finally, when I was home one weekend I decided to jump into it and have my parents be my first models. The response was surprisingly positive, and from that point forward my business truly began to thrive. I now have both active Facebook and Instagram pages, and earlier this week I launched my first website. I love capturing people in their genuine element and look forward to seeing what the future holds for me!

Micah Dunwoody:
Character in his comic book universe, Kali

James Crotty:
Photography, first-year student majoring in business

Honors students are athletes too, with Abigail Mitchell diving into swim team in her first year.
**Freshman Perspectives**

**Marrisa Recker**

My first year in the Honors Program at UNO has been nothing short of a challenge and an overall great experience. I am currently a freshman majoring in Architectural Engineering through UNL on Omaha’s campus. In my first semester, I am taking an Honors-only course titled ‘Intro to IT Innovation’ and I am also contracting Calculus II. I have had great opportunities to connect with my professors and have gained insight into the rest of my college adventure. Specifically in Calculus II, I have enjoyed taking time outside of class to discuss topics in math that I would not know otherwise. It challenges me to reflect on everything I have learned throughout my life and apply it to larger problems, exactly as I will do in my future career as an engineer. My other course, ‘Intro to IT Innovation’, has pushed me to go beyond my creative limits. Learning about abstract topics such as innovation is something I never had the opportunity to do until arriving at UNO, and I truly enjoy it.

The Honors Program as a whole has made me feel welcomed and supported in all of my endeavors. I appreciate that my opinion matters whether it be with my advisors or in the Honors Student Association, of which I am also a member. The events that are hosted by the Honors Student Association are well thought out and have brought me new friendships that I would not have otherwise. As my first semester comes to a close, I am eagerly waiting to experience Honors Colloquium and all that Honors has to offer.

**Katie Hill**

For the most part, my first-year experience at UNO seems fairly ordinary. Before starting classes, time management was certainly my biggest worry, especially with how I would go about juggling classwork, work, and potential extracurriculars. I’ve had my fair share of ups and downs, but overall I’ve found this year to be much more manageable than I originally anticipated.

During high school, I tended to stay within my little circle of band kids. They were the people that I could easily talk to and go to for advice. I was concerned about not having that support system when I came to college. However, in my Honors classes and through HSA I have found a multitude of people who think like I do. They’ve made this transition much easier, and I’m so glad to have found a home within the Honors community.

One of the Honors classes I’m taking this semester is an Art History class that meets at the Joslyn. I love the Joslyn to begin with, and this class has been my first real experience with outside-the-classroom learning. Occasional trips to places such as the Union for Contemporary Art and El Museo Latino, among others, have been incredible experiences. The art world in Omaha is thriving, and it’s fascinating to see my city through that lens.

Coming into this semester, I was still undeclared in terms of a major, which was causing me quite a bit of stress. Luckily, experiencing a variety of classes in various disciplines has given me a good feel for what I’d like to study, and I have since declared a major in Political Science, along with a few minors. Eventually, I’m hoping to study abroad and find some internships within my discipline. I’m so excited to see what the rest of my college experience has in store.
On Nov. 5th and 6th, I had the amazing opportunity to go to the Women Advance IT Leadership Conference at the Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln. I work at the Center for Collaboration Science, and this lab encourages its student workers to gain new experiences in their preferred fields and expand their networks. On Tuesday, Nov. 5th, the conference opened with Karen Catlin’s speech on “Better Allies Approach - Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive Workspaces.” This talk really set the tone for the rest of the conference and made me reflect on my own experiences, which held underlying bias of which I was not previously aware. The day continued with two hour-long sessions where I learned specific tactics on how to be an ally for my coworkers and deal with language that is used to stereotype and discriminate against others, presented by UNMC and others. The first day concluded with Gloria Feldt, former president of Planned Parenthood, where she explained “The Three Powers of Leadership Intention.” She detailed the differences in women in leadership during her lifetime and her ultimate goal of gender parity by 2025. Regardless of the audience’s beliefs surrounding this topic, I could tell the group of women and other allies were inspired by her message and ready for the next day of talks.

The second day started off better than I could have ever imagined. Beth Ziesenis embraced her nerdiness and revealed her favorite applications for productivity. I honestly could have listened to her speak for multiple hours. She was engaging, unique, and incredibly passionate about the topics she discussed. She even provided app cards with her favorite applications for various aspects, like productivity, money, and travel. The day continued with more speakers, where I had the opportunity to create and practice my own personal brand. This meant talking to strangers, delivering both a technical and social elevator speech. I enjoyed learning about others and improving my ability to network in this exercise.

This conference provided me insightful new perspectives, tools, and so much more. The presentations I attended will help further my career goals and help me to become more aware of my own biases and how to be more inclusive. Overall, this conference was very eye-opening, and I am excited to bring my new found knowledge back to my lab and apply it to all aspects of my life and future career.

Many Honors students are taking on key leadership roles. Aya Yousuf is the current Student Regent for UNO. Honors student Renata Valquier Chaves is the State Relations Intern for the President’s Office for the University of Nebraska.
A Look Back at the Semester

Thank you to everyone who made this semester a great one! We were able to travel to new cities, form bonds through social events, give back to the community with various volunteer projects, and so much more! A huge thanks to the members of HSA, our Honors staff, and all the amazing students who continue to do great work. Here’s to another successful semester!
Dr. Lucy Morrison
Director
lxmorrison@unomaha.edu