



The Honors Challenge

Honors Makes a Difference

“We have a responsibility, given the education we get, to share the knowledge that is generated here with others. This adds a vision to what we are doing that extends beyond ourselves, and I see this as really unique to UW-Madison.”

Jacob Roble



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The Honors Challenge is the alumni and friends newsletter of the L&S Honors Program

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From the Director Sissel Schroeder

Transformational Experiences

In the 1870s, Bob La Follette and Charles Van Hise were among the students to hear UW President John Bascom's message that they had a moral duty to broadly share the expertise they were gaining through their UW educations. This seed grew into the Wisconsin Idea, the principle that the university should improve people's lives beyond the boundaries of the classroom and campus. There is something about being a part of the campus community that inserts the Wisconsin Idea into the DNA of every Badger, a principle so deeply valued by alumni, students, staff, and faculty that support for it cross-cuts political and ideological boundaries.

As the director of the L&S Honors Program for the past three years, and a member of the Faculty Honors Committee for the preceding four, I have watched the faces of our students transform from earnest yet uncertain first-years to confident and articulate young adults who are motivated to make the world a better place. Each student's path is unique, but small classes with world-class faculty, sustained engagement with research early in their undergraduate careers, student organizations, abundant opportunities to interact and bond with other highly motivated students, original senior honors thesis research, and study abroad and other prospects for travel are among the many unforgettable experiences that transform them into Badgers who live the Wisconsin Idea.

I hope you will see a bit of your own transformative Honors experiences in each of the stories featured in this newsletter—the

small French class, the early research opportunity, the intensive senior honors thesis research that launched your career, the influential faculty with whom you had meaningful conversations and honors classes, or the deep and abiding sense that you are a Badger through and through.

Transformation is also the theme of my career right now. The experiences of directing a program that spans the arts, humanities, social sciences, and physical/natural sciences have strengthened my interest in developing greater depth and breadth to my interdisciplinary teaching and research, where I have long sought to blend the social, physical, and natural sciences. A fellowship in the UW–Madison Institute for Research in the Humanities has given me a unique opportunity to expand the boundaries of my knowledge and expertise into the humanities. Prof. Sabine Gross from the Department of German stepped in to the role of director at the end of August. It's been a privilege to serve as director and I am grateful to the students, donors, supporters, members of the Faculty Honors Committee, and program staff who have made this position so rewarding for me.

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Help Keep UW–Madison Strong



University Communications

Where would you be today without your degree from the College of Letters & Science at UW–Madison?

As a father of three daughters—one of them in college—I think often about the impact of education on their lives. From selecting a major to landing that first job to pursuing a fulfilling career, their choices will be greatly influenced by their academic experiences.

I hope your degree has opened doors for you, as it does for more than 2,000 new L&S graduates every year.

And when you graduated, UW–Madison was one of the nation’s best public institutions. Now, we need your support to keep it that way.

This fall, we are embarking on a comprehensive fundraising campaign to ensure that UW–Madison remains not only strong now, but for the next 167 years. The College of Letters & Science—the heart of our great university—is critical to UW–Madison’s global standing as a research and teaching powerhouse.

Please consider giving back. By doing so, you will be helping to create a legacy of excellence for future generations.

As we launch this campaign, I ask you to remember the professors and programs, the opportunities and insights, the depth and breadth of learning that set you on your path to success in life and work. Help us ensure that future Badgers will enjoy the same experiences, and so much more.

To find out about what your support can do for the L&S Honors Program and the College of Letters & Science, visit supportuw.org. Thank you for all that you do on behalf of this great university.

On, Wisconsin!

John Karl Scholz
*Dean and Nellie June Gray Professor
of Economics
College of Letters & Science*

The **Dean’s Prize** is awarded annually to the college’s most outstanding undergraduate scholars in the senior class. To be considered, students must possess a minimum grade point average of 3.90; be a comprehensive honors candidate in the L&S Honors Program; have completed a thesis or other major research project; and have made significant contributions to the university or broader community.



Colin Higgins, a 2014 Udall Scholarship recipient from Middleton, Wis., majored in environmental studies, geography, and history, with a certificate in African studies. He is working toward a Master of Public Affairs degree in the La Follette School at UW–Madison and hopes to one day work on public policy in the areas of environmental conservation and economic justice.



Emily McKinney, an environmental studies and sociology major from Green Bay, Wis., is working at a market research firm in Boulder, Colo. Long-term, she hopes to use big data to address social problems.



Austin Yantes, of St. Michael, Minn., majored in biological aspects of conservation and zoology with a certificate in environmental studies and is currently doing an internship with the Bureau of Land Management in Oregon. She plans to attend graduate school in fall 2016 to study freshwater science or water resource management.

Leadership Trust Makes One Student's UW–Madison

As a high school student in Illinois, Jacob Roble wanted to be a doctor. But he didn't follow the traditional path—instead of heading straight to college after graduation, he took a year off from school. Rather than taking introductory courses in chemistry, biology, and more, Roble worked full-time in a hospital, earned his EMT license, and spent several months in Ghana, learning about health care access in the developing world.

“In Ghana, seeing what happened when people either didn't have access to quality healthcare—or were denied it because they were poor—was shocking to me. It was the first time I started to think about access to healthcare as a basic human right,” he says.

During his visit to the West African country, Roble met people his own age who had worked since they were young children but yearned for an education. He saw infants dying from infections that would be treatable in many hospitals and clinics in the United States. The stark contrast caused him to reflect on

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Jacob Roble's work in Prof. Shelley Jansky's Horticulture Lab in the summer of 2013 was made possible by a Welton Honors Summer Sophomore Research Apprenticeship Grant.

the foundational role health plays in our lives. The experience transformed his interest in a medical career into a passion—a passion to understand why medicine sometimes fails to make people healthy and to understand how the natural, social, and economic environments in which one lives can make them sick. He wanted to think about health from a global perspective.

Roble came to UW–Madison to pursue those passions. But two years into his undergraduate education, he realized he wouldn't be able to afford to stay here. By that time, he was a Badger through and through, and he had come to recognize that this great state institution offered more opportunities than

he would find somewhere else: small honors classes taught by award-winning faculty, strong relationships built through research and class experiences, unique courses that resonated with his interests in global health, and more. He liked the culture, and the Wisconsin Idea connected strongly with his own moral compass—he had even started a student organization, a local chapter of Partners in Health | Engage-Madison, with two other L&S Honors students, Alice Wei (B.S.'15) and Mary Findore.

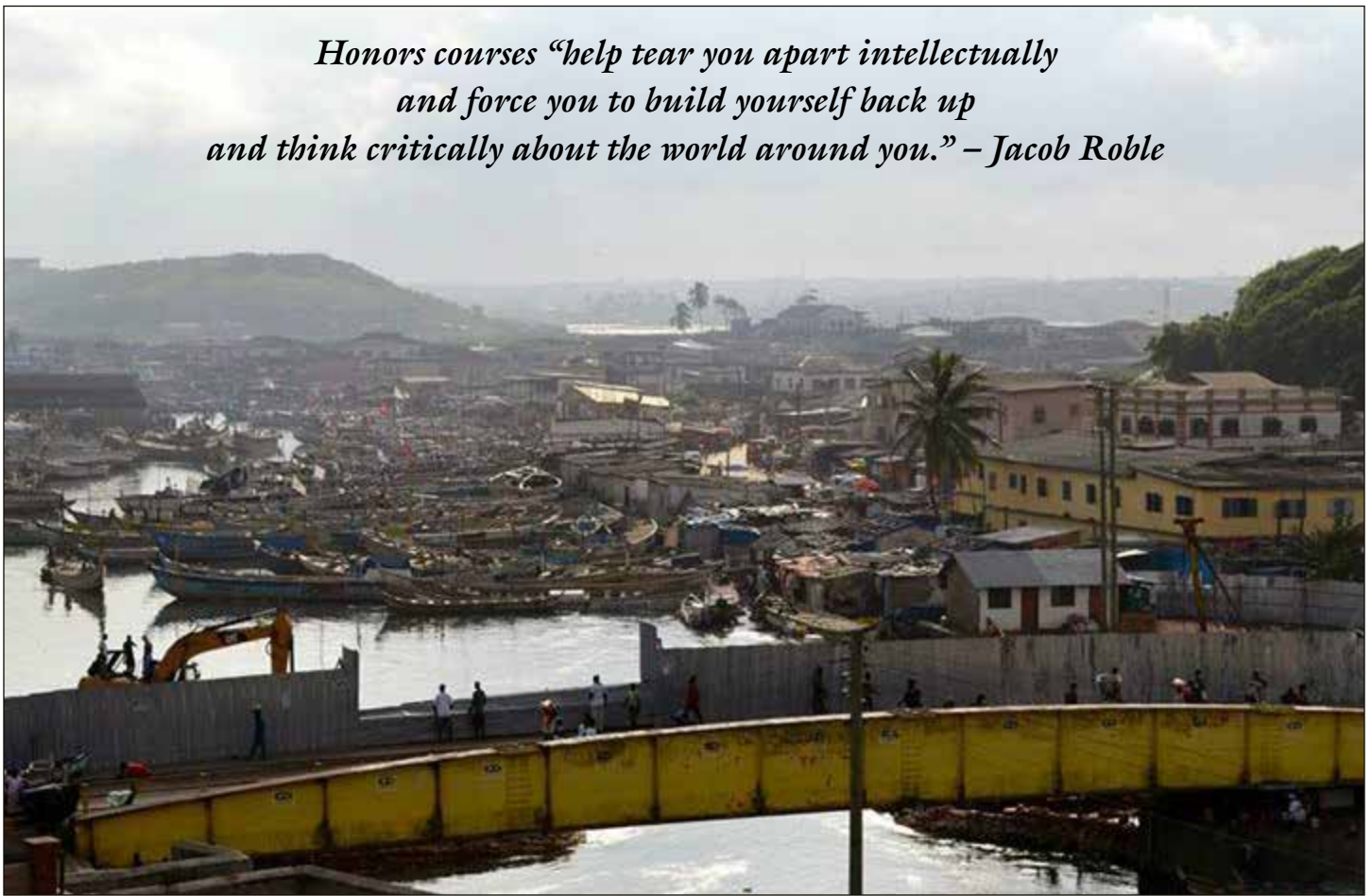
So Roble took another year off from school, a year he spent working two jobs—one with developmentally disabled adults and a second in an emergency room—to earn money to support his studies, and he made another trip to Ghana. He's returned this fall, thanks in part to a Leadership Trust award from

the L&S Honors Program. The award, one of the most prestigious the Honors Program offers, goes to a student who has proposed a sustainable project that will benefit UW–Madison, the surrounding community, or the student body. The Leadership Trust will provide Roble with two semesters of in-state tuition and a supply budget.

Roble's outreach project scales his global health interests to the local level by focusing on racial health disparities and inequities within Madison. He and two other Honors students, Laura Block and Mary Findore, will mobilize student volunteers who will amplify the work of existing local community organizations that already address health disparities in

Experience Possible

Honors courses “help tear you apart intellectually and force you to build yourself back up and think critically about the world around you.” – Jacob Roble



View of Cape Coast, Ghana.

the Madison community. The student volunteers will help connect patients in south Madison to diverse social and economic resources in the community that can improve health.

“We have a responsibility, given the education we get, to share the knowledge that is generated here with others. This adds a vision to what we are doing that extends beyond ourselves, and I see this as really unique to UW–Madison,” says Robles about his passion for his Leadership Trust project and deep commitment to gaining a UW education.

Roble says Honors courses at UW–Madison “help tear you apart intellectually and force you to build

yourself back up and think critically about the world around you.”

In the short term, Roble is savoring his experience back on campus: visiting the Terrace, running to Picnic Point, taking Honors courses, and studying in one of his favorite secret study spots—the reading room at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

And long term?

“My dream would be to practice emergency medicine or primary care, to study health and poverty, and work with governments in the developing world to create public health systems that are accessible,” Roble says.

He’s already shown he’s not afraid of a challenge.



With your help,

the L&S Honors Program can continue to provide grants, awards and assistance to help our outstanding students reach their full potential.

Donate online at:

www.honors.ls.wisc.edu/giving

For more information, please contact Ann Lippincott: ann.lippincott@supportuw.org or 608-263-3604

Honors Students Get a Taste of Cajun Culture

When L&S Honors student Signe Bedi arrived at UW–Madison, he had a solid background in French language, but he wanted to learn more about French culture. He signed up for Professor Jennifer Gipson’s French 228 class, Intermediate Language and Culture, and the small Honors seminar became the perfect venue to deepen his knowledge of Francophone cultures around the world.

“It is the type of opportunity every university language class should offer.”

– Signe Bedi

When the class covered Cajun culture, a subgroup of French-Canadian colonists who were forced from Canada and migrated to Louisiana in the 1760s, Gipson sought ways to bring the topic alive for her students. Luckily, Karen Holden, Professor Emeritus of Public Affairs and Consumer Science, had a resource available: her group of Cajun music enthusiasts, the Prairie Bayou Cajun Band. Andrew Irving, director of the French House, provided the venue, with French House chef Karen Ladell cooking up some Cajun fare.

But it was Gipson’s nine students who gave the evening its special flair.



Sarah Morton

Karen Holden and Signe Bedi dancing to Prairie Bayou Cajun Band at the French House.

“Without a doubt, the experience enriched my understanding of francophone culture and helped me grow close with my professor and classmates.”

– Signe Bedi

Each student gave an informal presentation on some aspect of Cajun culture, with the band playing related musical interludes. The rules were: everyone tried the dances, and everyone spoke French. In the end, the students needed

no cajoling. And when the French House residents arrived for dinner, the band played on. As the fall sun set over Lake Mendota, French 228 students reveled in good food, good music, and good conversation.

2015 Distinguished Honors Faculty Award Winners

Randall Goldsmith

Assistant Professor
Department of Chemistry
Nominated by Caitlin Randell

Margarita Kaushanskaya

Associate Professor
Department of Communication
Sciences & Disorders
Nominated by Emily Mech

Mario Ortiz-Robles

Professor
Department of English
Nominated by Mckenna Koblenberg

Tim Rogers

Professor
Department of Psychology
Nominated by Qibong Lu

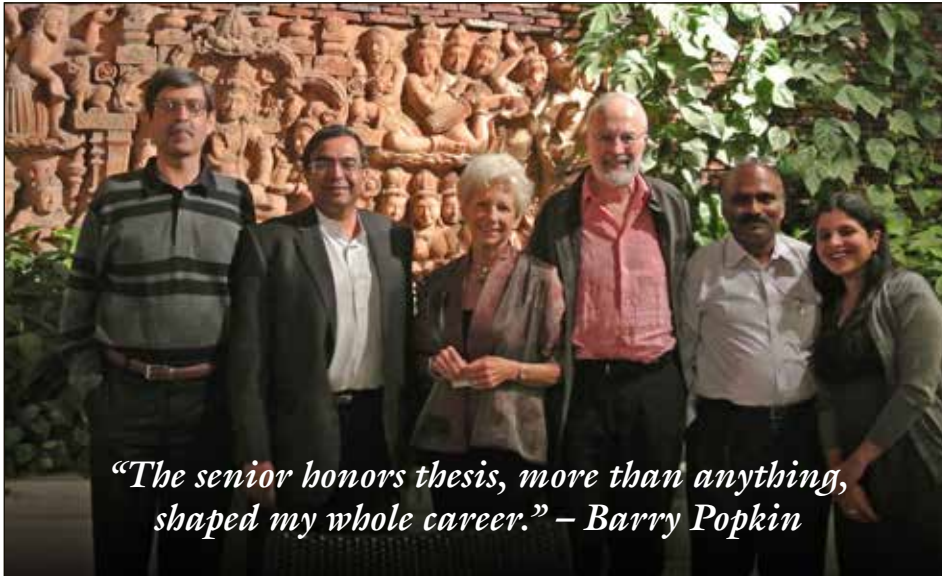
Howard Schweber

Professor
Department of Political Science
Nominated by Aubrie Goodreau

Scott Straus

Professor
Department of Political Science
Nominated by Allison Perlin

Supporting Transformational Research Experiences

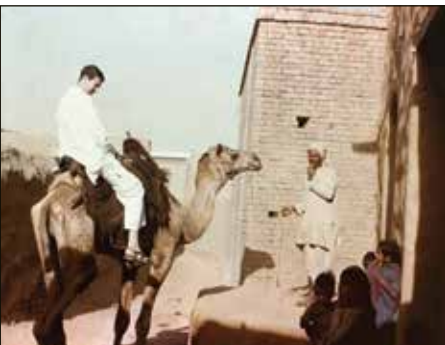


“The senior honors thesis, more than anything, shaped my whole career.” – Barry Popkin

Barry Popkin (third from right) and his partner Cay Stratton (third from left) with colleagues in India.

When Barry Popkin (B.S.’67, M.S.’69, Economics) first came to UW–Madison from Superior, Wis., little did he know that his experiences writing a senior honors thesis and studying abroad in India would shape his career and the rest of his life.

Living and working in a desperately poor part of Delhi in North India sparked his interest in health and welfare and, when he returned to UW–Madison, he decided to focus his senior honors thesis on the economics of nutrition. He enrolled in a small



Barry Popkin in India during his study abroad experience, 1965-1966.

faculty-led senior honors thesis seminar which allowed him to delve deeply into his singular and unique research.

“The senior honors thesis, more than anything, shaped my whole career,” he says.

Popkin’s thesis experience still informs his career today as the W. R. Kenan, Jr. Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, where he teaches about and conducts research, outreach, and public service at the interface of economics, nutrition, and public health.

In recognition of his transformative experience, Popkin has established an endowment to provide annual funding for an undergraduate honors student majoring in economics or another social science to conduct original research in a lower-middle income country outside of Europe and to lay a foundation for a career in global work. “Going to a third world country was a critical piece of changing my life and I think the exposure to different cultures and the work I got to do during that year abroad really mattered,” says Popkin.

Always a Badger

ALUMNI UPDATES

Grace Blitzer (B.S.’13, Biology) is working on her medical degree at the Medical College of Wisconsin. As an undergraduate, Grace was a recipient of the Leadership Trust Award and a Summer Senior Honors Thesis Grant that supported her research in oncology.

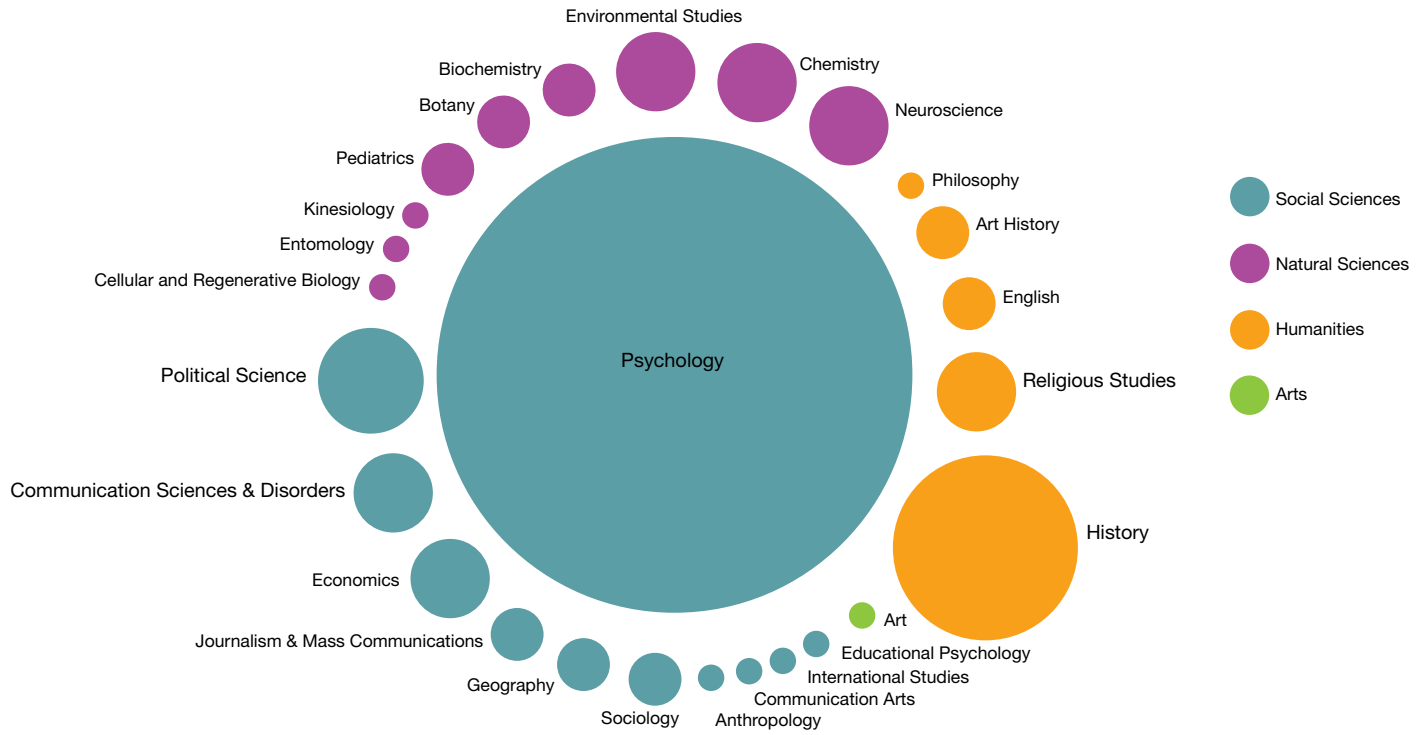
Andrew J. O’Connor (B.A.’10, History) received a Master of Arts degree in Middle Eastern studies from the University of Chicago in 2013 and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in theology at the University of Notre Dame. Andrew was given the Mensink Award for his senior honors thesis research, which allowed him to study Medieval Islamic history in Cairo, Egypt.

Fred Plotkin (B.A.’78, History, Theater and Opera Production) frequently appears on National Public Radio and is the author of *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Opera*, as well as six books on Italian cuisine and culture. Following graduation, Fred went to Italy as a Fulbright Scholar where he had the opportunity to work at La Scala. After returning to the U.S., he earned a Master of Science degree in journalism, with a specialization in broadcasting and arts reporting, from Columbia University. His career has included work at many major opera companies, including the Metropolitan, the Royal Opera in London, and the Salzburg Festival.

Lindsay K. Taylor (B.S.’09, English and Spanish) works for an international language software company, SDL, in Chicago and is pursuing her Master of Business Administration degree in international business at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

What's Trending in Student Research?

Senior Honors Theses and Welton Honors Summer Sophomore Research Apprenticeships Span Disciplines



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