



The Honors Challenge

Forging Connections

Incoming Honors freshmen gather outside Washburn Observatory before classes begin at the annual Fall Kickoff Picnic.



Tell us about your Honors experience! Visit our Facebook page (go.wisc.edu/LSHonorsFacebook) or email us at director@honors.ls.wisc.edu.

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

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Sarah Morton

From the Director Sabine Gross

Dear alumni, friends, supporters:

I'm writing this as Washburn Observatory is beginning to hum with the energy of a new academic year. Honors freshmen are participating in small-group advising during the first week of classes, and the whole Honors team is in the building, fielding questions, directing students to the library where sessions are held and meeting with students about the inevitable beginning-of-the-semester queries. You can see on the front cover what our annual Fall Kickoff picnic looked like, with students happily mingling, enjoying brats and burgers and starting to form some of the new friendships that will frame many of their enterprises over their years at UW-Madison. Talking to them, I was struck by their enthusiasm, their willingness to engage and communicate, and their readiness to challenge themselves and explore. Throughout my first year as Honors Director, whether I was talking to students, learning about their projects or meeting with them individually and in small groups, I was deeply impressed by our students' combination of talent and eagerness: eagerness to achieve more, to reach out and forge connections (thus the title of this year's newsletter), to put in the hard work it takes to succeed, and to make the world a better place for others. Just three examples:

- Supported by generous grants, four Leadership Trust awardees strive to improve the lives of the aged and those living in poverty, and to provide middle-schoolers and first-generation

aspiring medical students with the tools for success.

- Having recruited two Honors students for a high-level College search committee, I was awed to see (along with my committee colleagues, drawn from across campus) their dedication, quick instincts and professionalism.
- It is remarkable to hear about the breadth, scope, originality and complexity of students' research with faculty at the Senior Honors Thesis Symposium or the Welton Summer Apprenticeship retreat.

There are many reasons why directing Honors is the most rewarding position I have held in 20-plus years in the College of Letters & Science: interacting with and guiding our amazing students; connecting with equally amazing faculty eager to work with Honors students; and working with the dedicated Honors team here in Washburn. Getting to know our alumni and supporters is high on that list. I have enjoyed meeting and hearing from a number of you this past year, and am looking forward to forging new connections. I'm thrilled by your successes, fascinated by the stories you share and I am looking forward to hearing from you. Please write or visit!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sabine Gross". The signature is fluid and cursive.

L&S Honors Program Director
and Professor of German
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Your Support Makes a Difference

I am always amazed by L&S alumni. Not only do you take your L&S experiences out into the world, becoming leaders and innovators and wonderful community members, but you also give back. The generous financial support from L&S alumni amplifies all that makes the College great. But what also touches me is your willingness to help our students.

To date, more than 300 L&S alumni are directly engaged in mentoring, networking and opening doors for L&S students as part of the ever-growing L&S Career Initiative, launched in 2012. Many serve as mentors for our Taking Initiative course (Inter-LS 210), which teaches students how to identify their unique talents and articulate their skills to employers. L&S alumnus Steve Pogorzelski (former president of Monster.com) has been a Taking Initiative mentor since the course was launched in fall 2015. Why does he give back



University Communications

this way? Pogorzelski says he's had many mentors over the years and is committed to providing guidance for others, whether it's his two grown children, the boards on which he serves, his employees or UW students.

"I believe that coaching is a gift and one should give it and receive it in that spirit," he has said. "I derive tremendous satisfaction from the whole process."

I get this question a lot: "Dean Scholz, what can I do to help students map their future path?"

Your financial support for the L&S Career Initiative is vitally important, of course. We are leading the way among public research universities with our focus on career success for liberal arts graduates, and the entire LSCI is funded by sponsors and donors. But there are so many ways to be involved! Here are just a few:

- Sign up for the new Badger Bridge online networking program to connect with students exploring careers in your field (badgerbridge.com)
- Post an internship
- Offer job shadows
- Help students network

Visit careers.ls.wisc.edu for more information on all of the above. And know that we are beyond grateful for your support.

On, Wisconsin!

Dean John Karl Scholz

2016 Distinguished Honors Faculty Award Winners

Each year, students nominate faculty for the Distinguished Honors Faculty Award.

Harry Brighthouse, Professor of Philosophy

"A class that was far and away the best I've ever taken, inspiring months of vigorous debate among classmates and introducing me to ideas I'll likely be turning over in my mind for years to come."

JOHN MOSS



Professor Harry Brighthouse in the Washburn Honors Library with two of the students who nominated him.

Eric Carlsson, Associate Lecturer, History

"I don't think he knew how much he would shape the path my undergraduate career was to take. Because of him, a casual interest in the history of ideas has turned into a passion and a calling."

SAM GEE

Loredana Comparone, Assistant Professor of Spanish and Portuguese

"She is the ideal professor: a genuinely empathetic person, immensely knowledgeable in and out of her fields of study and driven to teach and help her students."

WALTER DEKOCK



Faculty members Loredana Comparone and Eric Carlsson (in back) with students at the Distinguished Honors Faculty Award Reception.

Judith Harackiewicz, Professor of Psychology

Michelle Harris, Faculty Associate, Biocore

Cora Lee Kluge, Professor of German

Supporting Transformational Research Experiences

Patrick Welton ('82, English and Molecular Biology) knows a thing or two about the impact that undergraduate research opportunities can have. He credits his undergraduate research under faculty advisor Richard (Dick) Burgess with helping him down his path twice over. As a junior at UW–Madison, Welton provided some of the computer programming for the genetics research being done in Burgess's lab. Welton recalls: "In the early 1980s DNA sequencing was labor-intensive. As we were studying the regulation of expression of the DNA Polymerase enzyme, there would never be enough resources to sequence our way to an answer. It was by precisely targeting the probable promoter region in search for insights that we ultimately found success."

The genetics background ended up being useful for Welton throughout medical and graduate school in biophysics and into his career as an oncologist. When Welton, always an investor, decided to open his own fund, his programming experience was essential to his ability to identify investing opportunities. He explains, "I still draw upon my undergraduate research experience today. More than just finding answers, I learned a lifelong lesson in reasoning under Dr. Burgess's guidance on how to frame and hone the important question."

Co-founders in the Welton Investment Partners, Pat Welton and his wife Annette are also partners in promoting research among UW–Madison undergraduates. The Summer Sophomore Research Apprenticeship has helped connect motivated undergraduates with faculty researchers for more than 20 years. In 2012 it was named the "Welton Summer Sophomore Research Apprenticeship" in honor of Pat and



Patrick and Annette Welton

"It is Annette's and my hope that Honors scholars will benefit from this type of foundational direct experience for years to come."

Annette Welton's major and ongoing support for the program.

Welton apprentices revel in the excitement of scientific and scholarly discovery. Talking to them, one understands just how much the opportunity

to develop research skills means to them. Not surprisingly, over the years, former Welton apprentices have gone on to be awarded the Rhodes, Beinecke and Udall Scholarships; they have been featured in statewide research symposia such as Posters in the Rotunda; and they have completed excellent senior theses. Former apprentices have also been able to use their research experiences to impress potential employers: talking about how they took an initial research idea and turned it into a finished product sounds a lot like project management to businesses.

Welton Research Awards provide a stipend to students that allows them to take what would otherwise be an unpaid research opportunity. Pat Welton affirms: "It is Annette's and my hope that Honors scholars will benefit from this type of foundational direct experience for years to come." Given the decisive impact that a Welton apprenticeship can have on a student's future, the Weltons want the research awards to be as broadly available as



“I still draw upon my undergraduate research experience today. More than just finding answers, I learned a lifelong lesson in reasoning under Dr. Burgess’s guidance on how to frame and hone the important question.”



Meyer Jackson, K.C. Cole Professor of Neuroscience, with Lindsy London and Amanda Hoyer

possible. The Welton awards provide a first-time research experience for some students, whereas others may have already completed some research. Even for students already involved in research, the apprentice program can create a turning point. Hannah Lou (x'18), a 2016 apprentice, had been doing research with Professor Vatsan Raman previously, but being awarded the apprenticeship encouraged her

to ask for a weekly meeting with her research mentor. “Without the apprenticeship, I might not have thought to request the extra time, but it’s been so valuable.” Hannah plans to turn her research on amino acid bonding into a senior thesis before continuing on to graduate work.



Julie D’Acci, Evjue Bascom Professor of Gender and Women’s Studies, with Maric Xiao



Welton Research Apprentice Summer Retreat at the secluded Hilltop Farm in Spring Green in July 2016, where apprentices met in groups for research presentations, and everyone enjoyed the views.



Lou Roberts, Distinguished Professor of History, with Emma Strenski

Taking Center Stage in Student Accomplishment



University Communications

L&S Honors student Calla Buttke's work combines the local and the global. She has pursued two foreign languages, Mandarin Chinese and German. This summer, after graduating with Honors in the Major, she headed to Suzhou, China, for two months of Intensive Chinese on a State Department Critical Language Scholarship. On the local side, Calla has delved deeply into Milwaukee history. Her work with faculty mentor Cora Lee Kluge (Professor of German and co-Director of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies) began with a Welton Summer Sophomore Apprenticeship that enabled her to find more than 1,600 articles and other news items as historical sources, documenting the history of the famed Milwaukee German theater during the second half of the 19th century. This Honors grant led to an exhaustively researched

Senior Honors Thesis, "Taking Center Stage: Bringing Light to the Golden Era of the Milwaukee German Theater," which included rich background materials as well as a detailed analysis of two previously unpublished plays, *Im gelobten Land Amerika* (*In the Promised Land America*) and *Greenhorns in Amerika*. Calla believes that "giving scholarly attention to Milwaukee's German-language theater is important because it tells part of the unknown or hidden story of immigrant Milwaukee" and adds yet another facet to our picture of American cultural history.

Calla's presentation at the Senior Honors Thesis Symposium on April 2 was a highlight of the event, with a number of her family members attending. Calla was also selected to present her research at the 13th annual Posters in the Rotunda at the State Capitol in April 2016. She was joined

Graduating senior Calla Buttke with Chancellor Rebecca Blank at the State Capitol.

by fellow L&S Honors student Colleen Miller, who presented her Senior Thesis research (undertaken with Ben Zuckerberg, Professor of Forest and Wildlife Ecology) on "Allen's Rule and the Impact of Warming Winters on Northern Cardinal Morphology." Along with four other UW-Madison students and a total of 130 student presenters from all 26 UW System campuses, their poster displays were viewed by Wisconsin legislators, state leaders, UW alumni and members of the public. Calla recalls: "My Posters in the Rotunda experience was fabulous. I had the wonderful opportunity to meet many influential university leaders, professors and promising students from UW-Madison as well as other UW institutions. Moreover, I met with my state senator and talked to him about

my research and the value of university education and research. It was an honor to meet Chancellor Blank, Provost Sarah Mangelsdorf and other UW System leaders.”

Calla has taken advantage of many of the special opportunities the L&S Honors Program offers, while giving back to the campus community and beyond as a volunteer in numerous ways. She recalls the significance of her Honors experience: “Participating in the L&S Honors Program was one of the most rewarding parts of my undergraduate career. Doing extra projects for each of the courses I took for Honors allowed me to learn for the joy of obtaining new knowledge, not just attempting to get an A in the course. Moreover, it allowed me to connect with professors on a deeper level and develop solid academic relationships with them. Working so closely with Cora Lee in the past few years, first through a Welton Honors Apprenticeship and then a Senior Honors Thesis, allowed me to contribute directly to UW research, learn how the research

process works, effectively express my ideas through writing and presentations, and develop a strong professional relationship with a professor. All of this really allowed me to flourish.” Calla successfully nominated her mentor and advisor Cora Lee Kluge for a Distinguished Honors Faculty award, acknowledging the close and fruitful working relationship she was able to establish with Professor Kluge. Calla is quick to point out that the significance of her Honors experiences goes beyond her classroom achievements: “They gave me the confidence to succeed academically and, in turn, affected my overall well-being and contentment outside of the classroom.”

It is not surprising that an Honors student who triple-majored in German, Chinese, and East Asian Studies; obtained certificates in Leadership and Medieval Studies; and garnered more than a dozen significant awards and honors in the course of her undergraduate career would receive numerous prestigious offers for graduate school. Calla has opted to attend Stanford

University for a Master of Arts in East Asian Studies, supported by two fellowships and a degree of confidence in her own abilities and future that she attributes to the L&S Honors Program: “Over the course of the last four years I grew a lot, and participating in the Honors Program was a key factor in this. I feel very well prepared for graduate school at Stanford, and a big part of that is due to the experiences made possible by the Honors Program.”

Alumni News

Honors graduates lead varied lives:

Brad Vogel ('06, Journalism, Political Science) published his debut collection of poetry, *Broad Meadow Bird*. A poet by night, Vogel works as a finance lawyer by day in New York City, having previously earned his juris doctorate at Tulane and served as a historic preservation fellow for the National Trust for Historic Preservation in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Mary Sarah Bilder ('87), a professor at Boston College Law School, was awarded one of the highest distinctions in the field of American history, the prestigious Bancroft Prize, for her book *Madison's Hand: Revisiting the Constitutional Convention* (Harvard UP, 2015).

Joanna Lawrence ('14) has received a Gates Cambridge Scholarship to pursue a doctorate in archaeology at the University of Cambridge in England.

We'd love to hear from you. Please write with your news to Honors Faculty Director Sabine Gross, director@honors.ls.wisc.edu.



Kay Gurling

Calla Buttke discusses her presentation in the State Capitol rotunda as her Honors Thesis advisor, Professor Cora Lee Kluge, looks on.

From Madison to Oxford: Portrait of a Rhodes Scholar

Students in the L&S Honors Program do not match a single profile: each approaches academic and life experience in individual and distinct ways. So how does one manage to receive the Rhodes Scholarship, one of the most prestigious international awards? L&S Honors Director Sabine Gross sat down with Colin Higgins to find out.

“I couldn’t have gotten here without all the support from the L&S Honors Program over the years. It all started with that Welton Apprenticeship!”

That is what Colin ('15, MPA'16) tells me on a snowy February day over lunch at UW–Madison’s comfortable and well-appointed University Club.

Colin hails from Middleton, just a few miles from campus and Washburn Observatory. The beginnings, he tells me, were not auspicious: “I barely got into UW–Madison; I was waitlisted.” And he joined the Honors Program as a sophomore, almost like an afterthought: “I didn’t intend to be an Honors student coming to UW.” But then again, “I tend to apply for things” is how he modestly characterizes an attitude that over the years has contributed to what by now is a distinguished list of awards and achievements. And as of that day in November 2015 when the most recent crop of American Rhodes Scholars was announced, he belongs to a select group of 32 students from all over the U.S. who were awarded two years of study at Oxford University. Colin recalls that feeling of his “whole life trajectory changing within 25 minutes” vividly. His manner is unassuming, tinged with humor; this is not someone



Colin Higgins

whose ego has grown, even though the world has suddenly started attributing importance to who he is and what he has to say. “I am asked to speak publicly now at least every couple of weeks,” he says; two days after our chat, he is scheduled to address the University of Wisconsin Regents.

In his Commencement speech at the May 2015 Honors reception, Colin (who triple-majored in History, Environmental Studies and Geography) spoke about dandelions. Yes, those dandelions that grow (occasionally) in the lawn that surrounds Washburn Observatory, the Honors “home” on Observatory Hill. But Colin used that initial observation for a double comparison.

“First, dandelions are analogous to a liberal arts education. They have deep roots once they take hold, spread quickly, and are hard to extinguish. They are beautiful

markers of the world’s unresolved questions.

Second, they represent the wonders of the mundane. The Honors Program has repeatedly given me occasions to jump down the proverbial rabbit holes behind dandelions, to learn the fascinating stories just beneath the surface of everyday life.”

Colin’s assessment of how the Honors Program has allowed him to succeed may come as a surprise. “The Honors Program has given me the freedom to mis-step,” he explains, as he recounts his development from that first Welton Summer Apprenticeship (his work on suburban agriculture taught him that “I am not a quantifier,”

he recalls) to receiving the most prestigious award for thesis research that the UW offers, the Mark Mensink Honors Thesis Research Grant, for a Senior Honors Thesis on “Biodiversity and the Politics of Market-Based Conservation in the UK.” Along the way, he received writing and leadership awards as well as an Udall Foundation Scholarship for his environmental work, and became a campus leader for sustainability.

When I ask Colin to speak about teachers who influenced him at UW–Madison, his enthusiasm is palpable. About Professor Neil Kodesh, whose Honors Seminar he took right after the Welton Summer Apprenticeship, he says, quite simply: “He’s the reason I’m a history major.” And Colin still has an essay that he submitted to Professor Bill Cronon in an early Honors section. Cronon, he tells me, meticulously corrected every grammatical error, returned the essay with a full page of

“one of the harshest reviews imaginable,” and concluded: “Someone as smart as you should not write as poorly as you did.” Colin says, “That essay and his response did more for me than any other paper. Bill made me an editor; he made me a writer.”

In May 2016, Colin received a master’s degree from the La Follette School of Public Affairs. His plans for his time in Oxford center around geography and environmental studies, with an emphasis on environmental governance.

Like Colin Higgins, Drew Birrenkott (2014) and Alexis Brown (2012), the two most recent previous UW–Madison Rhodes Scholars, both graduated with Comprehensive Honors degrees from the College of Letters & Science.

A Conversation about Social Justice



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Bryan Stevenson, acclaimed author of *Just Mercy*, spoke to students at the Honors “Go Big Read” luncheon in fall 2015.

From Thomas Sorenson’s Honors Graduation Speech

Without the encouragement of this remarkable Honors Program, my interests would be less diverse, and I would be generally far less informed.



This program, the advisors, the professors and my fellow students all encouraged me to stray outside my comfort zone and take on the challenge and risk of something new. Reflecting back, I have learned so much over the past four years, inside the classroom and out, and I leave this university and Honors Program prepared to pursue excellence in all aspects of my life. I can say with certainty that I will rarely, if ever, be the most knowledgeable person in a room, but I will never stop trying.

**Thomas Sorenson ('16),
Comprehensive Honors**

From AnaElise Beckman’s Honors Graduation Speech

Honors students make connections with just about anyone. We want to know people beyond the surface level. We assume everyone has something interesting to offer and we delve deeper to find those characteristics unique to that person. This genuine interest in other people’s passions and talents drives us to connect with people regardless of major, age, gender, race, or sexuality.

**AnaElise Beckman ('16),
Honors in the Liberal Arts**



AnaElise Beckman (center, with fellow GOALies) is founding president of the student organization GOAL (Getting Off-campus Adolescents to be Leaders), started with an Honors Leadership Trust Award. Members teach middle-school students leadership and public-speaking skills.

Dean's Prize Winners

In 2016, the Dean's Prize winners were an exemplary mix of students with cross-disciplinary interests and pursuits.

Finola Kane-Grade, from Sauk Prairie, Wisconsin, graduated with comprehensive honors and majors in Psychology and Music Performance (flute). While at UW–Madison, she worked in three research labs simultaneously; was a peer mentor, tutor and food pantry volunteer; and performed with the wind ensemble and the concert band. Professor Seth Pollak, the director of one of the labs where she worked, wrote, “Finola is not a one-dimensional student ... She is one of the strongest students I have mentored in 20 years.” Finola is undertaking a predoctoral fellowship at Yale University in 2016-2017, with the hope of attending a doctoral program in clinical psychology to study anxiety and depression in adolescence.



Finola Kane-Grade



Beah L'Huillier

Joseph L'Huillier with Dean Scholz and Honors Faculty Director Sabine Gross

Joseph L'Huillier, from Sobieski, Wisconsin, graduated with psychology and honors biology majors, while also completing the Biology Core Curriculum program. His volunteer and extracurricular activities included science education at the Boys and Girls Club; working at the UW Hospital and Clinics Emergency Room and Department of Psychiatry; campus

governance and hiring committees; and ballroom and swing dancing groups. Joe is beginning medical school at the UW–Madison School of Medicine and Public Health, where he will continue to apply his conscientiousness, hard work and pleasant demeanor, to borrow a description used by his senior thesis advisor, Professor Nansi Colley.

Phoenix Rice-Johnson grew up in Pahoia, Hawaii, in what she described in her moving L&S Honors Graduation speech as the poorest district in her state. Nevertheless, she says she always “dreamed of going to college” and “find[ing] a way out of the cycle of poverty that so many of my friends were struggling with.” Her passion for helping others has driven her interest in International Studies and Political Science, her majors, as well as her postgraduate plans at the Brennan Center for Justice as a Research Program Associate with a focus on voting rights. Her senior thesis under Professor David Canon, which was awarded the Mark Mensink Senior Honors Thesis Award, examined the impact of bipartisan redistricting commissions on legislative districts.



Phoenix Rice-Johnson with her father Bruce Johnson

From Phoenix Rice-Johnson’s Honors Graduation Speech

My father’s jobs entailed hard manual labor, and oftentimes didn’t pay a living wage. For many of these years we lived without electricity or running water, and relied on government programs to survive. I’ve found new words to describe my upbringing that I never previously thought to use, words like “working class” and “low-income.” But, for all those years, growing up with a dad who rarely took a day off work, I only ever saw myself as coming from an industrious, proud and resilient household.

When your parents don’t have college degrees, you don’t grow up hearing about their silly college mistakes or getting advice on how to avoid them. When you come from the poorest school district in your state, you get a brochure for the local community college, not from prestigious four-year universities, and when you get to campus, you don’t know who to turn to when your grades are faltering or when you can’t afford rent.

Many students from low-income families or from historically under-represented backgrounds struggle to believe they deserve to be here. Initially I was overwhelmed and my grades suffered. After getting a C on every single one of my midterms my first semester, I called my parents panicking and crying. They assured me that it would all work out if I stuck with it. And it did. I stand before you today a successful product of this great institution; a high-achieving student and a leader within the campus community.

I have grown so much while being here. I feel empowered leaving this campus, and I want every student from a background like my own to someday have this same feeling, to believe they belong. My deepest hope is that this university works harder than ever before to prioritize marginalized students, spreading the Wisconsin idea to greater reaches, new communities, and to those who need it most.

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS OUR STUDENTS REALIZE THEIR DREAMS

We rely on you, our alumni and supporters, to help our students explore their goals and turn dreams into reality. Your gift matters!

We are hoping to offer more research and Senior Honors Thesis awards, to provide more study abroad and conference travel scholarships and to add more Honors events for students. We also need funds that will enable departments to offer more high-demand Honors courses!

With your help, we can do more:

- 60 alumni donating \$100 each will fund an additional Honors course.
- 50% of L&S Honors alumni donating \$50 each would make all of the above possible.

Thank you!

DONATING IS EASY

By Mail

Send a check made payable to the UW Foundation (indicate “L&S Honors Program”; also note if you prefer your donation to go to a specific fund such as the Spector Excellence Fund or the Director’s Fund) to: University of Wisconsin Foundation
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Online

Please use the following link to make an online gift directly to the main fund that supports the L&S Honors Program: L&S Honors General Fund at go.wisc.edu/DonateToHonors

Please contact me anytime with your questions and suggestions — I am happy to talk to you!

Sabine Gross,
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Commencement May 2016: Honors graduate James Holden striding into a bright future.

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