



# The Honors Challenge

*People  
Places  
Projects*



Sabine Gross

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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:

For a number of years now, the Honors Program has invited every student admitted to Letters & Science to apply to the Honors Program: if you are passionate about knowledge and looking to dig deeper, and if you are committed to the ideals of a liberal arts education, then Honors is the place for you! This past winter, I spent many hours reading applications to the L&S Honors Program in which prospective students described a conversation that changed their outlook or their response to a difficult situation where they were at odds with others. The profiles that emerged—honest, moving, respectful of others' positions—are impressive; and they are encouraging at a time when incidents of hate and bias and a spirit of intolerance and fear toward others have increased both locally and nationally. These young students are remarkably thoughtful, eager to reflect

on their own convictions and experiences, and able to revise their own point of view based on sometimes uncomfortable encounters or conversations with others. The applications show young adults who strive to understand others across differences in background and divides of opinion, and who are passionate about acquiring more and deeper knowledge—about issues close to their heart, and about the world.

I hope all of the pieces in this newsletter will make you feel connected to this marvelous institution and to the Honors Program that so centrally embodies much of its vision.

*On, Wisconsin!*

L&S Honors Program Director  
and Professor of German  
[director@honors.ls.wisc.edu](mailto:director@honors.ls.wisc.edu)

## From the Dean's Desk

Here at UW–Madison, the leaves are turning and the view from Bascom Hill is as beautiful as ever. But under the tranquility is a current of unrest. Issues of race, inclusivity and free speech have caused (and will likely continue to cause) divisiveness on our campus, just as they have on many other campuses around the country. This time is as tense as any I can remember on campus—and I have been here 30 years.

In this climate, what we do in L&S is more important than ever. The education we provide in Letters & Science teaches people to confront problems from many

perspectives, to imagine alternatives, to put themselves in others' shoes. Together, we create a welcoming place to learn.

As Letters & Science Honors alumni we hope you draw daily, not only on the knowledge you gained, but on the values you absorbed here. We are counting on you in an uncertain world. Thank you for all you do to support the College of Letters & Science at UW–Madison.

*On, Wisconsin!*

Dean John Karl Scholz

# Pathways to Inclusion

Some students know from the start that Honors is the perfect opportunity for them. But what about high-potential students who may not take up our invitation because they don't have Honors on their radar? Enabling personal encounters and conversations that may open up new possibilities and perspectives for the future is a hallmark of the UW Letters & Science Honors experience. We partnered with the Center for Academic Excellence for a special dinner on February 16, 2017, that brought together

**The work of changing perceptions needs personal contact, investment, and authenticity.**

UW–Madison students from under-represented backgrounds with faculty and Honors advisors to affirm that the Honors Program exists in order to help every motivated student achieve their educational dream. Supported by a grant from the William Cronon Pathways to Excellence Fund, CAE students joined faculty members—selected for their dedication to Honors, diversity, and student success—for an evening program of brief presentations and extended conversation about campus resources, personal career paths, goals, and the values of a liberal arts education. Enabling students to feel comfortable with faculty, to realize faculty are approachable and interested in them, to find out about research opportunities, and to think of Honors as a welcoming opportunity for them are important outcomes as part of a longer-term strategy to acquaint targeted-minority students with Honors and dispel notions that Honors might “not be for them.” Learning about faculty career trajectories from disadvantaged backgrounds to success

can be eye-opening. Faculty members shared personal stories, allowing students to “see a different side beside their profession and how Honors is an option for me as a student of color,” as one participant put it.

The work of changing perceptions cannot be done effectively through

informational handouts: it needs personal contact, investment, and authenticity. This opportunity provided by the William Cronon Fund was an important and successful step in a more sustained collaboration between CAE and Honors.



# From Raising Heifers to the US Department of Agriculture

“I loved that program,” Beth Walter Honadle (’75) sums up her years as a UW–Madison Honors Program student in Letters & Science. **“The Honors program is one of the reasons I never felt like UW–Madison was overwhelming. I had a lot of personal interaction with faculty members. I formed lifelong friendships with people. But what I loved about it being big was the feeling that it was boundless in terms of opportunities to explore.”** Graduating with an Honors BA in Political Science from UW–Madison launched Beth on a career that combined scholarly work and teaching with public service. In the course of more than three decades, having earned a PhD in Public Administration at Syracuse University, she was a faculty member at several major universities and held government positions in the US Department of Agriculture and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The first woman in her family to attend college, Beth came to the Dairy State from New York State,



Katherine Griffin

where she grew up on a farm. “I raised heifers in high school and sold them to help pay for college,” she says. After Beth’s hometown was flooded by Hurricane Agnes just before her high school graduation, the family had very little money for a college education. UW–Madison offered her a grant that crucially included an out-of-state tuition waiver in addition to a Gilbert and Edith Hodges Scholarship. Beth recalls the realization that “two people

gave that money, which allowed me to attend my dream school.”

Beth draws a direct line from the Honors Program to her career choices and success: **“My pursuit of graduate work and a career in public service were helped immensely by the liberal arts education I received in the L&S Honors Program.** In almost every class—regardless of the discipline—the broader societal implications or historical dimensions of subjects were pursued. The literature we read in my Spanish and French classes dealt with art, war, revolution, and philosophy.” Beth recalls outstanding Honors advising and “the very creative and ingenious ways of engaging students” she experienced in Professor Booth Fowler’s classes in Political Science. (He directed the L&S Honors Program from 1983 to 1986.) His teaching provided inspiration for her own teaching of classes in American government and “shaped the ways in which I seek to understand different political philosophies,” Beth affirms.

Coming from an interdisciplinary background herself, Beth embraced collaborative endeavors directed toward practical social issues—workforce development, public policy, housing, and rural development, among others: “I loved working with people who knew things I didn’t. I always said that working at places like the National Institute of Food & Agriculture was like going to college every day. You always learned about some scientific advancement in a field like aquaculture or entomology that had real value in feeding people and fighting diseases.” Beth’s career included many occasions when she herself brought people together and established community connections.

Beth has traveled widely and worked internationally, including consulting assignments in Egypt and



Bonnie Lynn

Paddling the Chemung River between Elmira, NY, and Sayre, PA.

# Culture: *A Portrait of Beth Walter Honadle '75*

Ukraine. One of them resulted in an article titled “Making Social Science Research Applicable,” which Beth calls “a theme of my career.” Her retirement last year took her from Washington, DC, back to rural New York State. She now lives with her husband on the same farm where she raised those heifers many years ago.

She has returned to Madison on several occasions over the years: **“I always feel nostalgic and proud when I go back. I love to sit by the lake at Memorial Union just as I did**

**back in the day. But it is the intellectual stimulation and passion of people who have gone there and continue to go there that always makes me proud of my alma mater.”**

Reading the L&S Honors Newsletter helps Beth stay connected: **“I was delighted to see that the students are so passionate about their education and are committed to making a difference in the world and their hometowns.** University of Wisconsin was, for me, a place where I met people from a lot of different circumstances

and backgrounds. But we all wanted to learn and have a better life and contribute. I hope that the students who are in the program now maintain their idealism and never forget the values of a liberal arts education.”

## Your support enriches our students' Wisconsin Honors Experience!

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

Your generosity allows us to provide research, Senior Honors Thesis, and Leadership awards and offer more Honors events for students that help build the Honors community.

**Thank you!**

## Alumni News



**Roads to Rhodes:** Drew Birrenkott ('14), Russ Feingold ('75), and Colin Higgins ('15, MPA'16) gathered at the Rhodes House in Oxford, England. Former senator Feingold addressed a small group of scholars after the 2016 election. Alexis Brown ('12, not pictured) also attended.

The very first Honors graduate, **Bill Matuszeski '62**, writes: “I went on from Madison to Harvard Law School and the Peace Corps (Venezuela), then into a career in the federal government in various environmental programs, retiring in 2001 after 10 years in charge of the Chesapeake Bay clean-up for the EPA. I still do a lot of public speaking; I write a monthly article for the local newspapers; and I teach Ikebana. Still in good health at age 76, I took a bike ride around Ireland in April.”

**Andrew O'Connor '10** (History with a Certificate in Religious Studies), PhD Candidate at the University of Notre

Dame, has been awarded a Fulbright Research Scholarship to conduct dissertation research on the Qur'an and early Islamic history in Amman, Jordan, for the 2017–2018 academic year.

Honors alum **Brian Drout '14** (Political Science with a Certificate in Environmental Science) has been awarded a Schwarzman Scholarship that provides full tuition for a one-year MA program in Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. Inspired by the Rhodes Scholarship, the Schwarzman Scholarship aims to “prepare the next generation of global leaders for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.”

## DONATING IS EASY

### By Mail

Send a check made payable to the UW Foundation (indicate “L&S Honors Program”; do 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  
US Bank Lockbox  
P.O. Box 78808  
Milwaukee, WI 53278-0807

### Online

Please use the following URL 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](http://go.wisc.edu/DonateToHonors)

**Please contact** me anytime with your questions and suggestions!  
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608-308-5326, [russ.austin@supportuw.org](mailto:russ.austin@supportuw.org)

# Knowing Where You Are—a New Course on the Wisconsin Landscape

There's little secret to what makes a great university course: combine an interesting topic with a dynamic instructor and engaged students, and good things tend to happen. The small Honors seminars that students take while part of the L&S Honors Program are one way for top students to connect with the great faculty at UW–Madison. (If you remember an Honors course as being particularly transformative, please write to us at [honors@honors.ls.wisc.edu](mailto:honors@honors.ls.wisc.edu), and your reflection may be used in a future newsletter.) Every semester, there are some classes that make alums wish they could be transported back to Wisconsin to enroll. If you could take Botany Professor Anne Pringle's course on "Science in a Changed Landscape: Wisconsin," you might not only feel nostalgia for Wisconsin, you would also emerge with a different view of the state's environment.



Anrudha Srivastava

**Dr. Pringle with students Story Sandy and Spencer Jastrow at an outing to the Wisconsin Institutes of Discovery.**

Pringle was inspired to develop the Spring 2017 course (funded partly through Honors) by one she taught while on faculty at Harvard. The Harvard course was taught on Borneo; the Wisconsin version required some adaptations. (Pringle plans to teach

the Borneo field course version in Summer 2018.) The seminar included freshmen through graduate students from a variety of majors and specializations. What brought them together was an interest in ecology, a commitment to the responsible use of natural resources, and a desire to know more about how to be good stewards of the environment. The course touched on some classic readings by authors like John Muir and William Cronon—two authors with connections to Wisconsin—but also sparked timely debates on topics such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Pringle and the students all enjoyed the fact that in the class, "every person's voice was valued," with Pringle adding that "as a newcomer to Wisconsin, I especially valued the students' stories about their places, and I learned a tremendous amount about the state." One student noted that the small-class format "allowed us to incorporate our own experiences and perceptions, which is great in a class that aims to investigate how people have used land, and how science has affected that usage."



Rudolf Doling

# A Family's Decision Benefits Honors Students

By Sabine Gross

On April 12, 2017, I strolled through the rotunda of the State Capitol with Caroline Mensink, where undergraduate students from across Wisconsin, representing all UW campuses, presented their work at the annual "Posters in the Rotunda" public research exhibition. Students discussed their work with lawmakers and members of the public, and Emily Burg was one of six students representing the Madison campus. Her project, culminating in her Senior Honors Thesis, explored cochlear implants for people with one-sided hearing loss, with potential benefits for thousands of people whose ears have lost some of their acuity.

Emily was able to conduct her work thanks to the Mark Mensink Grant, the most prestigious grant the Honors Program offers to support an outstanding Senior Honors Thesis. Mark Mensink was a promising Honors student whose life was tragically cut



Caroline Mensink and Emily Burg

short by a drunk driver two months before his anticipated graduation in the spring of 1991. To commemorate him and his close connection to the Honors Program and the Honors community, the Mensink family decided to establish an endowment in his name that would support one outstanding Senior Honors thesis every year and pay the student's tuition.

Caroline Mensink moved to Minnesota after a fulfilling 45-year career as a computer scientist and

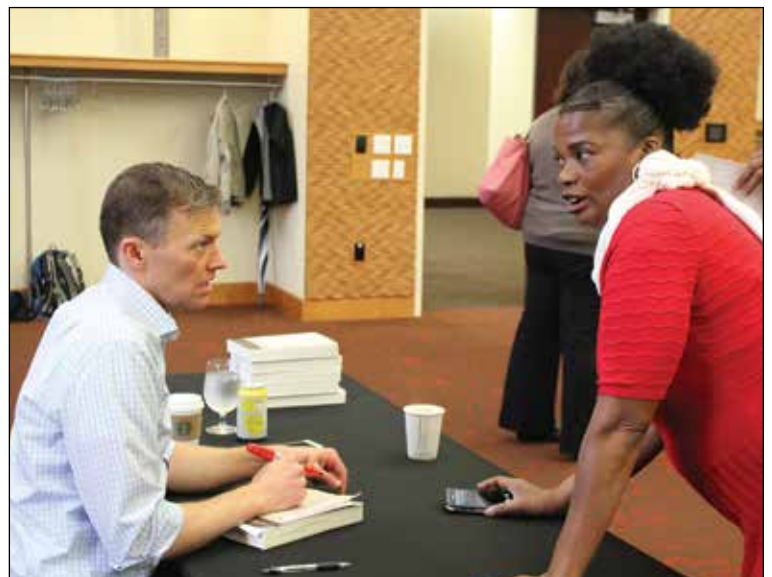
teacher in Wisconsin, but still keeps up with UW events and with current research in general. **"We have to support these young people, since they'll be the ones advancing technological development and healthcare and offering solutions for the problems we face,"** she says. She particularly enjoys the letters in which Mensink award recipients tell her about their projects and describe the purpose and potential benefits of their research. All L&S Honors grants and awards to students are funded by generous supporters who believe in the mission of the Honors Program and in the importance of supporting promising young scholars and leaders-in-training.

Recently, Caroline Mensink has added generously to her family's endowment to assure that tuition will be fully covered for future students as well. She says, **"The University of Wisconsin will always be special to our family. Keep up the good work with the students; they are our future!"**

We will, Caroline, and thank you!

## Wisconsin Study Engages Students and Wins Pulitzer Prize

During the annual Go Big Read event in November 2016, students eagerly turned out for an Honors lunch and discussion with author Matthew Desmond (PhD '10) about his book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction in 2017. Based on immersive fieldwork in Milwaukee, Desmond has provided an extraordinary, eye-opening account of the effect of evictions on Milwaukee residents. His book shows the degree to which eviction is an engine of poverty, and the catastrophic way in which it widens the chasm between the haves and the have-nots, affects whole families, and darkens the formative years of childhood. A faculty member at Harvard University, Desmond has a keen sense of social justice and a remarkable ability to combine empathy and personal stories with hard statistics and generalizing insights. The work on which *Evicted* is based began at UW–Madison, and the book is a shining example of the Wisconsin Idea.



Matthew Desmond continues discussion with students as he signs books.

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## Dean's Prize Winners

Melissa Behling, Samuel Gee, Qihong Lu



Honors Director Sabine Gross  
and Qihong Lu



Melissa Behling and Dean Scholz

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## Distinguished Honors Faculty

**Daniel Quint,**  
Economics  
(nominated by  
Rebekah Dix)

**Jolanda Vanderwal  
Taylor,** German,  
Nordic, and Slavic  
(nominated by  
Gwyneth Delap)

**Thomas Record,**  
Chemistry  
(nominated by Luke  
Valmadrid)

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## Honors Graduation Speakers



Jessica  
Franco-Morales



Story Sandy



Yijie Wang

### From Yijie Wang's Honors graduation address:

*I learned that the value of liberal arts is not just being the master in my field, but discovering other subjects and seeking the connections; it is not just learning from professors but also my peers and those who share different values and ideas; and it is not just reading and understanding the material, but becoming a more educated and disciplined person, academically and spiritually.*