



# The Honors Challenge

*Crises and Opportunities*

University Communications

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## *From the Director*



Greetings from Madison, and I hope you are well and healthy; words that have lost the casualness with which we used to utter them before the arrival of COVID-19. As I write, the sunny warm fall weather and gorgeous fall colors outside belie the dramatic and distressing events of this year. Upheavals have affected each and every one of us and created turmoil in our students' lives and those of their families. In March, campus responded to the very real danger of COVID-19 by transitioning quickly and efficiently to remote teaching and operations, which was then extended through the end of the semester and into summer. In spring, I was teaching an in-person, high-interaction course in German theater practice. I was faced with the challenge of converting our live discussion, rehearsal, and performance meetings to a "synchronous remote" format via screen. For the most part, the transition worked surprisingly well, thanks to students' flexibility and engagement.

After holding advising meetings virtually over the last half of the spring semester, the Honors Advising Team welcomed more than 400 new students to UW–Madison via virtual orientation.

We communicated with students and faculty instructors throughout summer as the university poured resources into preparing for fall, devising safe modes for in-person teaching, and helping instructors to develop remotely taught courses—many of them including real-time virtual meetings and discussions—that maintained pedagogical best practices and intellectual rigor.

Honors shifted research gatherings to virtual modes and relied on faculty mentors to find different and safe ways for students to work on research projects (see the articles on Green Sheets and Summer Apprenticeships in this newsletter). Honors students have continued to engage in ambitious projects, many of them in the fields of health care, medical innovation, social justice, and technical innovation, all intended to improve lives and help us confront current challenges and crises. A partial list of projects is included in this newsletter.

We shared graduating seniors' and their families' disappointment when they had to find new ways of celebrating, since the large gatherings that usually are such a big part of Commencement festivities were impossible this year. Technology has been essential and helpful in all aspects of how we carry on, but you probably share my sense that the situation has given all of us a new appreciation for the human ties that connect us to each other. As our customary ways of interacting and socializing have been upended, there's so much to everyday experience that we can no longer take for granted.

Beyond our anxieties about health, the economy, and an uncertain future, we have had to grapple with appalling acts of violence against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in recent months. Increasing awareness of the deeply systemic nature of racial bias and injustice has led to a sense of urgency to act for a better future: this is among the positives to emerge from this

crisis. We need to do better, we need to work harder at creating equality and justice, we can do better—as individuals, as educational institutions, as a society. I find support for that confidence in the ongoing engagement with social justice by so many Honors students, be it in leadership projects that benefit underserved community members or in research and outreach, investigating and fighting bias and prejudice.

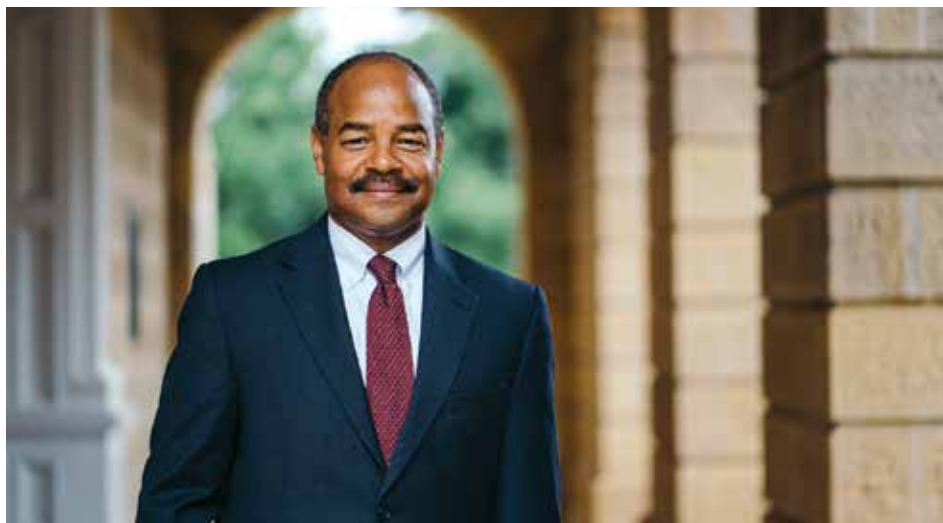
How do we create community among Honors students while it's unsafe to bring groups together in person? While we've had to give up our traditional large first-year gatherings, we have instituted a new series of "Honors Student Faculty Connection" virtual chats: every week this fall at least one or two of my renowned faculty colleagues are meeting (virtually) with small groups of Honors freshmen to talk about their research, their career trajectory, and their lived experience, to answer questions and share advice for success.

In all of this, our students have shown an amazing degree of fortitude, adaptability, and resilience. UW–Madison has pulled together, everyone fully committed to making it possible for this university to keep doing what it does so well: educate students, open intellectual and career doors, offer leadership opportunities, and enable research and collaborations that will help address the current challenges. I hope you will enjoy reading about current students' experiences. Please know that we are grateful for your continuing support and cherish the enduring Badger connection to you, our alumni and friends! Warmest well-wishes, and On, Wisconsin!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sabine Gross".

**Sabine Gross**  
**L&S Honors Program Director and**  
**Professor of German**

# Fall 2020 Message from the Dean



Paulius Musteikis

In June, I was honored to assume the role of Dean of the College of Letters & Science, during one of the most challenging times in my 25 years at UW–Madison. As we wrestle with a global pandemic, social unrest, and economic turmoil all at once, I am reminded of what makes a Letters & Science education so timelessly important. The values we teach—compassion, intellectual curiosity, tolerance, and resilience—prepare our students not only to flourish in good times, but to learn, grow, and change during periods of challenge and hardship.

Hard times—particularly times of protest—often bring about change. That’s overdue here at UW–Madison, where many of our students of color have, for far too long, experienced a UW that feels less welcoming to them. We pride ourselves on the world-class experience offered to our students, preparing them for positions of leadership and illuminating their path forward. A key leadership priority for me is creating an inclusive environment where *all* students can feel at home and thrive.

Another priority is research. We are an “R1” (preeminent) research institution, and much of this groundbreaking work happens right here in

L&S. I intend to support and elevate research opportunities for faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. The knowledge that we take for granted today is based on curiosity-driven scholarship and creativity that started decades ago. Now, more than ever, we need to feed that intellectual flame. We need those big-picture thinkers to help us solve complex problems and expand the horizons of what we know.

By the time you read this, if all goes as planned, the fall semester will be well underway, with a mix of remote learning and in-person courses, as well as comprehensive protocols for keeping everyone safe. The year ahead will not be easy, but we will not lose heart. We will dig in—because that’s what Badgers do.

Thank you for all you do to support L&S. It means the world to us.

**On, Wisconsin!**

**Eric M. Wilcots**  
**Dean of the College of Letters & Science and Mary C. Jacoby**  
**Professor of Astronomy**

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### Cover photo

Comet NEOWISE passed overhead in the night sky in Cross Plains in July. UW–Madison’s Pine Bluff Observatory is located in Cross Plains, but the comet was actually visible to the naked eye.

*The Honors Challenge* is the alumni and friends newsletter of the L&S Honors Program, and is produced using gifts from alumni and friends.

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# Honors Students Conduct Research During the Pandemic

## Students Adapt Green Sheet Projects During Disrupted Semester

By Christine Evans

Each semester, several dozen Honors students design a project for one of their courses and submit a proposal to the L&S Honors Program to earn Honors credit for that experience. Named after the original color of the proposal forms, the “Green Sheet” process enables students to collaborate with their professors and expand their learning in a course for which no Honors credit is regularly available. Project topics for the Spring 2020 semester ranged from the evolution of circadian rhythms to contemporary impacts of anti-trust regulation and disparities in health care for bisexual women of color.

The Spring 2020 deadline for Green Sheet proposals fell two days after Chancellor Rebecca Blank announced that face-to-face instruction would be suspended following spring break and one day after Governor Evers declared a public-health emergency in Wisconsin due to COVID-19. Given the uncertainty of the coming weeks, students completing Green Sheet projects and their professors were encouraged to be flexible and adapt projects in response to the new situation.

Many projects could transition online with little modification. For example, Comprehensive Honors

candidate Ellen Hickman (x’21) analyzed Bong Joon-Ho’s 2019 film *Parasite* and recorded a podcast interview about the film from the perspectives of theorists Marx, Weber, and Tocqueville for her Classical Sociological Theory course. Rather than visiting the physical Chazen Museum of Art in Madison, Greta Schwiesow (Honors in the Liberal Arts, x’22) visited the museum’s website and virtual gallery. Fortunately, Greta still had access to supplies and space to



Oil painting on canvas by Greta Schwiesow (2020).

produce the oil painting portion of her project as intended. Her piece, a visual representation of redlining, reflects her research on housing discrimination in Milwaukee since the mid-twentieth century, and she embraced the style and technique of a piece she discovered

through the Chazen. Ben Severt (Comprehensive Honors, x’22), found that the increased availability of digital resources this spring actually aided his research, an analysis of two novels by contemporary Indian author U.R. Ananthamurthy. Ben submitted presentation slides to a virtual version of the Undergraduate Research Symposium and did a live video presentation for his classmates; he is now in the process of submitting his work for publication. For everyone, meetings with professors and presentations were held via video-conferencing tools like Teams and Blackboard Collaborate.

Sam Wood (Honors in the Liberal Arts, x’22) shared that his Green Sheet project seemed even more worthwhile than it would have been in a regular semester. Sam and Robert Mathieu, Albert E. Whitford Professor of Astronomy, met for about an hour after class every two weeks to discuss the materials Sam had prepared, which ranged from historic works like Kepler’s novel *Somnium* to the original Star Trek television show. In Sam’s words, “I really appreciated the one-on-one interaction that the Green Sheet provided during this time of such separation. Meeting with Professor Mathieu throughout the change from in-person to online allowed me to stay connected and engaged in a very unique way, not only academically but personally.” At the end of the semester, Professor Mathieu invited all students in Astronomy 140 to Sam’s informal but informative virtual lecture, entitled “Looking Back to Look Forward: The Implications of History and Pop Culture in the Search for Intelligent Life.”

For several students' Green Sheet plans, COVID-19 and its impacts were more disruptive. The ability to attend talks at a professional conference or volunteer at the Henry Vilas Zoo had vanished. When possible, however, Honors students adjusted their projects to lean into the moment they found themselves in. Megan Johnston (Honors in the Liberal Arts, '20) had always intended for her project in a Literature and Medicine course to

connect to health care. She had planned to research exhibits and objects from the special collections of Ebling Health Sciences Library and explore how literature and art influence how society thinks about topics in medicine. After the Ebling Library closed in March, she and her instructor, Dr. Colin Gillis, revised the plan: Megan would write about the developments with COVID-19, incorporating five or six artifacts that, as Megan explained, "crystallize

something about what this crisis means for us as a society or how and why it's unfolding the way it is."

The Green Sheet experience regularly fosters deeper interaction with course material and ideas. In Spring 2020, the experience also required adapting plans to rapidly changing conditions and finding alternative ways to meet one's goals. Honors students responded to these challenges with grace and an eagerness to learn.

## Honors Summer Research Apprentices Meet Remotely

By Honors graduate Emma Langer

On July 24, twenty-two Honors Summer Research Apprentices gathered virtually to share their summer research projects with their peers. While Apprentices traditionally assemble in July for a retreat in the beautiful driftless area to the west of Madison, the new format proved to be a well-received adaptation to the current circumstances. Unlike the all-day retreat with longer presentations and concurrent panels, the virtual symposium allowed apprentices and mentors to join remotely and hear short "flash talks" about the fascinating undergraduate research. Screen-sharing via the virtual meeting platform Webex allowed students to explain their topics using visual aids. Groupings this year followed guiding themes, including chemical and mathematical analytics, medical microbiology and entomology, environmental studies and conservation, behavioral studies and disorders, human pathology, and language and communication. Honors students were engaged and excited to both present and learn about other groundbreaking



Upper Left: Vivian Phan, Upper Right: Brandon Dawning, Lower Left: Tristan Argall, Lower Right: Aishwarya Bangalore Sunil

research being conducted at UW–Madison.

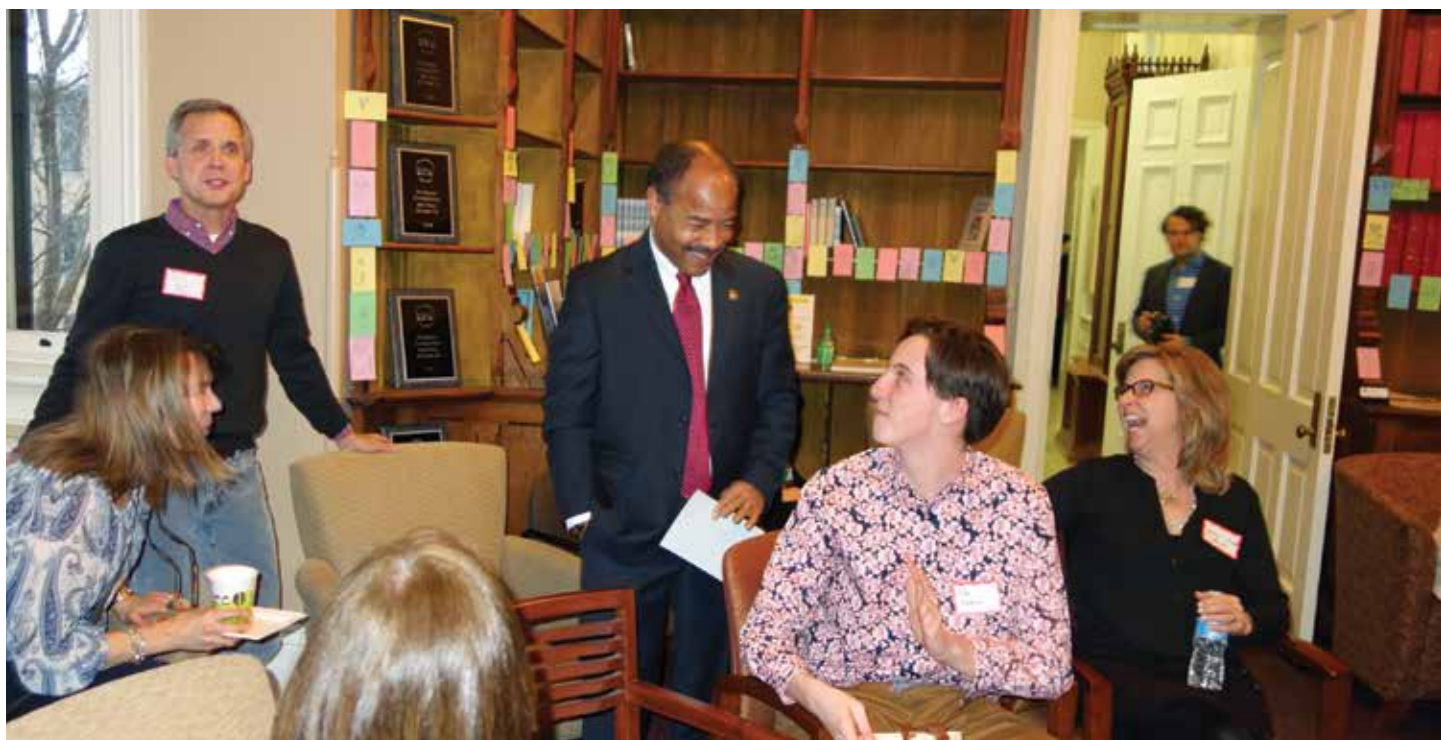
Adaptability, a skill we are all learning amidst a global pandemic, was in evidence in every aspect of the virtual Research Apprentice symposium. Some students acknowledged changes in their research that occurred due to COVID-19. Shuyi Zhang, presenting his research on Polydicyclopentadiene Thermoset Material, stated he "can't actually be in the lab, so [his] study has shifted a little bit to focus more on the topic in general rather than specifics." Like Shuyi, many Apprentices circumnavigated roadblocks and took a spin on traditional laboratory research, often stepping back to reveal a bigger picture. Others emphasized the long-term plans for their research. Amy Yadev

explained how she had been working more on literature review and data analysis, so that "once fully present in lab in the fall" she may "conduct her experiments and test her hypotheses." Despite less than ideal conditions, Research Apprentices took the opportunity to participate in other aspects of the research process, staying safe yet engaged.

Bringing together students and faculty by way of research is integral to the Honors Program and something not lost despite uncertain circumstances—circumstances that required flexibility of students, staff, and faculty. Together we navigated uncertainty and explored new modes of conducting and presenting research that may extend to a post-pandemic world.

## In summer 2020, Honors students received Honors funding for the following Senior Honors Thesis Research projects:

- Swedish Neutrality during the Second World War: The Writings of Stig Dagerman and Eyvind Johnson
- How Does Modern Life Affect Memory Retrieval?
- Behavioral Differences between Video Game Addicts and Non-Addicted Video Game Players
- For Freedom and Democracy? American Post-WWII Global Interventionism and Modern Impacts
- The Battle of the Bodies: Investigating the Erotic and the Ideal Body in Italian Renaissance Art
- Identity Construction and Maintenance Among Transnational Adoptees: Creating One World Out of Two
- Xenophobic Policies in the Name of Gratitude: Refugee Experiences with the German and Austrian Governments
- Effect of the Affordable Care Act Medicaid Expansion on Health-Care Expenditures for Low-Income Adults
- Identification of Phagocytizing Myeloid Cells in Central Nervous System Tuberculosis
- High-Energy Gamma Ray Astronomy with the Prototype Schwarzschild-Couder Telescope
- Music, Meaning and Disintegration: Exploring the Power of Musical Sound
- Infectious-Disease Response: A Century in Review
- Explainable Machine Learning (XAI) Algorithms for Day Trading in the Stock Market
- From UNEEM to Nous Pas Bouger: Mali's Youth as a Force of Change
- Interactions Between Categorical Representations and Physical Knowledge
- Bolstering the US-India Strategic Partnership: Insight from France, Israel, and Russia
- Grapheme-Phoneme Predictability: A Targeted Approach to Phonics



**DECEMBER 2019:** The Honors Winter Commencement (before COVID-19 struck) was a relaxed yet festive celebration held in Washburn Observatory. L&S Dean Eric Wilcots chats with graduates and family members after addressing remarks to the group.



# May 2020 Distinguished Honors Faculty Awards

Every year, we invite Honors students to nominate faculty who have had a special impact as teachers of Honors courses, as supervisors of Honors theses, or as teachers and mentors of Honors students for the Distinguished Honors Faculty Award. The Honors Faculty Advisory Committee selects the most outstanding nominees for the award. With the March 2020 shift to remote instruction made necessary by COVID-19 and the resulting changes and challenges, we expected fewer nominations this year. We were wrong—in the midst of upheaval, more than thirty Honors students took the time to nominate faculty instructors and mentors for an Honors Distinguished Faculty Award in eloquent testimonials, expressing appreciation and gratitude for the engagement of faculty in the Letters & Science Honors Program. In May 2020, the Faculty Honors Committee conferred Distinguished Honors Faculty status on six outstanding faculty colleagues and an additional “Honorable Mention” for five more colleagues. (A list of Distinguished Honors Faculty, including awardees of years past, can be found on the L&S Honors website in the “About” tab at [honors.ls.wisc.edu/distinguished-honors-faculty-award](https://honors.ls.wisc.edu/distinguished-honors-faculty-award).)

## Distinguished Honors Faculty Honorable Mention 2020:

**STEVEN BROOKE**, Political Science

**KRISTINA HUANG**, English

**DAN KAPUST**, Political Science

**JONATHAN MARTIN**, Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences

**STEVE NADLER**, Philosophy

**YURI SAALMAN**, Psychology



### **WILLIAM BEMENT**

Professor of Integrative Biology

“Professor Bement made a topic that I didn’t think I would enjoy very fun by being super upbeat and engaging. He deeply cared about all of the students and is very friendly and approachable!”



### **KAREN BRITLAND**

Professor of English

“I am not one to fill out forms like this, but Professor Britland is truly deserving of recognition. She is kind-hearted, compassionate, and absolutely hilarious.”



### **SHUCHI CHAWLA**

Professor of Computer Sciences

“Professor Chawla has been an amazing academic advisor for me. She has been there to guide me every step of the way. Professor Chawla excels at helping students and I would never be where I am today without her help.”



### **SONG GAO**

Professor of Geography

“Professor Gao is hands-down the most caring and passionate professor I have had. Over the two years I spent in his courses, he did not treat me differently compared to his graduate students. Rather, he encouraged me to share my ideas and to have critical discussions with all his students in and out of class.”



### **PATRICK IBER**

Professor of History

“Professor Patrick Iber taught me the importance of challenging my personal beliefs and worldview through rigorous debate and understanding of new perspectives. While initially taking his class to fulfill the geography breadth requirement in pursuit of a degree in history, my experience with Professor Iber quickly became hugely impactful.”



### **MARIO ORTIZ ROBLES**

Professor of English

“I have been surprised at every turn how supportive and willing Professor Ortiz Robles is to help me with my projects. He has truly gone above and beyond to improve my undergraduate experience. He is deserving of this honor and many others.”

# Beyond Weather

**H**ow do you take your knowledge of weather and climate beyond the level of the daily weather forecast? If you're a UW–Madison student, you have the opportunity to enroll in Jonathan Martin's Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences 101: Weather and Climate. For the past two years, this course has included a discussion section for Honors students led by Professor Martin himself. Martin has been a faculty member in the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences for 27 years. His enthusiasm about the weather is infectious: he is apt to mention "its phenomenological beauty and its physical elegance" and the ways in which "the atmosphere influences almost every facet of our lives." For more than 20 years, Martin has also teamed up with his colleague Steve Ackerman as the "Weather Guys." In their weekly column in the *Wisconsin State Journal* (also as a blog at <https://wxguys.ssec.wisc.edu/>) and monthly radio broadcast on Wisconsin

Public Radio, they answer an amazing array of questions about the weather and its phenomena posed by members of the public.

Martin's syllabus for AOS 101 promises "we will end up speaking intelligently about fascinating and dazzling entities like cyclones, severe weather, and hurricanes." The course has always been popular with Honors (and non-Honors) students. Being able to earn Honors credit by enrolling for weekly meetings with Martin makes it even better.

Unlike some faculty members, Martin is not fazed by the fact that many students take his course to fulfill a science requirement rather than pre-existing interest in the topic. He appreciates "the reality that almost none of my students in AOS 101 are as interested in the weather as I was at their age," which has led him to devise a unique format for his Honors discussion section: "Each student (or occasionally pair of students) is

responsible for one week's discussion topic in the broad category of 'Science in the News.' Importantly, *science* can mean physical, mathematical, natural, social, or biological sciences." The student in charge selects readings in advance, delivers an opening statement and an outline for the discussion, which they then moderate. Martin provides initial guidance, including tips on public speaking, and describes his own role for the remainder of the semester as follows: "I keep track of who is participating and almost always say nothing so as to encourage completely free exchange among the Honors students themselves." He is pleased with the result: "What happens, seemingly magically, is that the conversation takes on a life of its own and is informed by the various interests and developing expertise of the students."

Students second his enthusiasm, as noted by a participant in Martin's Spring 2020 Honors section, "Over the semester, we have discussed reusable batteries, philosophy questions that have made me think harder than I ever thought I could, politics, and so



Colorful bands of the Aurora Borealis, or "northern lights," glow in the nighttime sky above boats in Lake Mendota mooring field near the Memorial Union Terrace during a strong solar storm in 2015.

University Communications





Sabine Gross

Jonathan Martin points out features of clouds on a fine autumn morning in Madison.

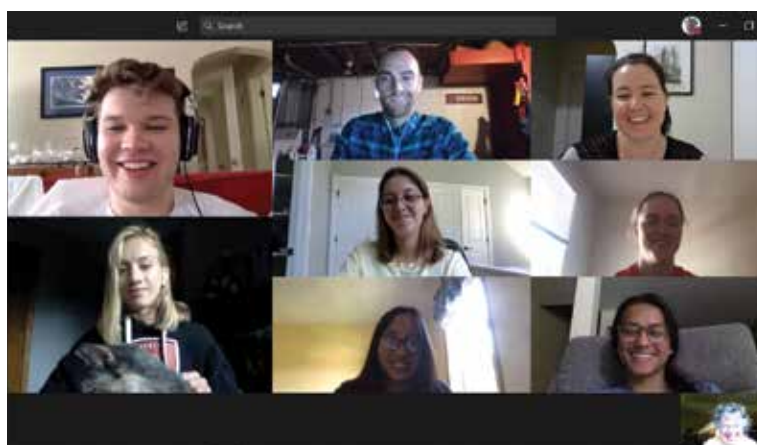
many more topics that relate to the interests of all the students in the class. As a result of this class, I have felt like my critical thinking has immensely sharpened to an amount where I have noticed it, and I have been exposed to topics that I never found interest in yet I have learned so much.” (Other recent topics have included “Symbiosis of the Sciences and Humanities,” “The Bystander Effect,” “The Problem of

Induction,” “The Role of Standardized Tests in American Education,” and “Recycling Batteries in the Tesla Era.”) Clearly the Honors section achieves one of the goals Martin formulates in his syllabus, namely, to convince his students “that there is no such thing as ‘humanities thinking’ or ‘business thinking’ or ‘science thinking’—there is just thinking—and success in this course will require thinking!”

Martin is thrilled when students share questions, stories, or their excitement about the weather with him; he makes time before and after class to connect with students, and students mention that he makes an effort to get to know them personally. In perhaps too many courses, Honors credit is conferred through the writing of an additional or longer paper; Martin feels that he “reaps the dividend of intellectual creativity that comes from their being freed from that expectation.” Students in the course, says Martin, “do not work less seriously, they just work differently in the context I try to provide for them, and it is really invigorating.” Honors students appreciate the wide-ranging format Martin provides: it allows them to engage broadly and deeply. Martin, in turn, feels that he benefits as well: “I want to take advantage of *their* interests and learn new things myself.” Second-year Honors student and political science major Cordy Nguyen took AOS 101 in Spring 2020 and sums up the impact of the course on her: “This is what I came to UW–Madison to experience. I know that I will remember Professor Martin for many, many years to come.”

## Creating Community for Fellow Students

The Honors Student Organization (HSO) enables Honors students to get engaged more deeply in the Honors community. For 2020–21, HSO has re-designed its executive board and devised better communication avenues to reach all students. This year, HSO leadership places a special emphasis on community building through the creation of Tea & Talk, “a socially-driven time at which HSO members can tune in and connect with peers and board members.” Additional initiatives include virtual study groups, the longstanding tradition of “Wednesdays at Washburn” with some of the most entertaining speakers on campus, and an increased service-oriented presence on campus through a partnership with the Morgridge Center for Public Service. HSO has great plans for this year!



The 2020–21 Honors Student Organization: Co-presidents Asha Jain and Max Herteen and board members Hannah Emberts (Academic Chair), Julia Tuttle (Social Chair), Anisa Ciaciura (Communications Chair) and Lucy Kuo (Service Chair) hold a remote meeting on August 13 with Honors advisors Christine Evans and Pete Keys and Director Sabine Gross.

# Parting Thoughts from 2020 Honors Graduates about their Honors Experience

## LAUREN HARTMAN

BA with Comprehensive Honors | Major: English | Certificate: Business

*Throughout my four years at Madison, I have loved the opportunities and relationships that being a part of the Honors program has given me. When I took smaller Honors courses that were led by professors, attended Honors academic advising appointments with advisors who actually knew my name, and recognized fellow Honors students in my classes, I felt like more than just another number at a massive university. I will miss being a part of the Honors community!*



## LAURA DOWNER

BA with Honors in the Liberal Arts | Majors: German, International Studies, Political Science

*My Honors experience was a constant reminder to challenge myself to go beyond the assigned lectures and reading. Completing extra projects in Honors-designated courses somehow made me want to go beyond the syllabus in all my other courses.*



## MARY GRACE LARSON

BA with Honors in the Liberal Arts | Majors: Political Science, Spanish | Certificates: Gender & Women's Studies, Environmental Studies

*The Honors experience gave me a unique opportunity to engage more closely with professors and think more critically about my courses. I am very grateful that I had the chance to get such individualized attention and feedback throughout my education.*



## AARON BARENBaum

BS with Comprehensive Honors | Majors: Neurobiology, Psychology (Honors)

*One of the most rewarding experiences in my time as an undergraduate at UW-Madison was the conduction of my Senior Honors Thesis. Being given the opportunity to design and conduct my own original research project and see some of the interesting results that were found was a rare moment of genuine pride.*



## CARLIE SERVAIS

BA with Honors in the Liberal Arts | Majors: Neurobiology, Psychology

*Being an Honors student allowed me to meet and interact with so many amazing people. All of my Honors classes were led by amazing professors and the Honors discussion sections were chances for me to meet classmates and peers that shared the same interests as me. Some of my best friends are people I met in Honors classes! Without these opportunities, I definitely would not have had the chance to experience so many different perspectives and personalities.*





### ADITYA EASWARAN KRISHNAN

BS with Comprehensive Honors | Major: Geology & Geophysics | Certificate: Scandinavian Studies

*Between the people, experiences, and resources, joining the University of Wisconsin and the Honors program was without a doubt one of the best decisions of my life. My experience of taking honors classes is unparalleled. They felt like an infusion of fresh ideas and perspectives. This program has allowed me to make the most out of my college experience and excel at life.*



### ELIZABETH WAHMHOF

BA with Comprehensive Honors | Major: English | Certificate: Digital Studies

*Joining the Honors program was one of the best decisions I made during my time at UW–Madison because it allowed me to go above and beyond in a wide variety of disciplines. While I am an English major, the Honors courses I took in the sciences were some of my favorites and I developed a passion for sustainability because of them. My Honors experience has made me a better thinker and a more rounded individual who is able to look at a problem from multiple perspectives.*

### REBECCA HANKS

BA with Comprehensive Honors | Majors: International Studies, Political Science (Honors) | Certificate: African Studies

*I'm so fortunate to have been part of the L&S Honors community for the past four years! This program allowed me to take on an enriching and diverse course load, to develop lasting connections with peers and professors alike, and to attend a wide variety of interesting events and workshops. It gave me so many amazing memories and experiences here in Madison, all of which I will bring with me as I start new professional and personal journeys in the years to come.*



### LEAH GERLACH

BS with Honors in the Liberal Arts | Major: Neurobiology | Certificate: Global Health

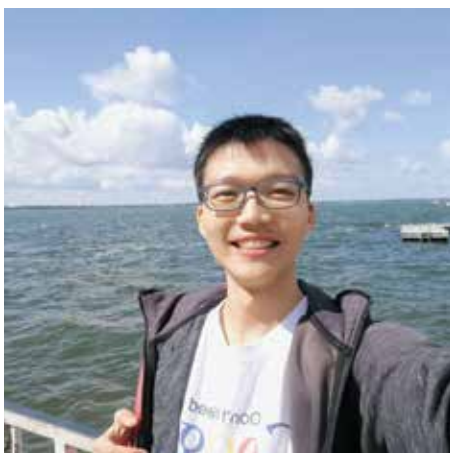
*My Honors courses have been some of the most memorable throughout my undergraduate career. They have given me the opportunity to study topics far outside my major and gain knowledge in a wide variety of topics. I have also met some great friends and mentors through the Honors program, and I will always look back on it as an important part of my time at UW–Madison.*



### JUNDA CHEN

BS with Comprehensive Honors | Majors: Computer Sciences (Honors), Mathematics

*I came here because I didn't just want to learn about math or just computer science. I wanted to learn more about the world, this broader existence that I shall have the ability to appreciate it and live with it. I didn't want my major to restrain my eyesight. I wanted to be liberally educated. The Comprehensive Honors program gave me the drive to spend my days and nights on subjects that I had never thought of learning: French literature, philosophy, astronomy, biochemistry, rhetoric, architecture, and design. It also gave me the opportunity to connect and learn with amazing people.*





## HONORS STUDENTS NEED YOUR SUPPORT

Your generosity provides the funding for awards that allows Honors students to engage in groundbreaking research, supports Research Apprenticeships and ambitious Senior Honors Theses, and enables students to carry out leadership projects that benefit campus and the broader community. We are proud of what Honors students have achieved with your help. Your gifts make it possible for us to support students this coming year and in the future, and to continue building an Honors community on campus! We rely on you, our alumni and friends, to help our students realize their goals and turn dreams into reality.

### By Mail

Send a check made payable to the UW Foundation to:  
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Milwaukee, WI 53278-0807

Indicate **"L&S Honors Program"** for donations to our General Fund; please note if you prefer your donation to go to a specific fund such as the Spector Excellence Fund or the Director's Fund. You can find a gift form to download and send with your check at the "Make a Gift" link on our website.

### Online

Please use the "Make a Gift" link on the L&S Honors website to make an online gift directly ([honors.ls.wisc.edu/make-a-gift](https://honors.ls.wisc.edu/make-a-gift)).

### Contact me anytime with your questions and suggestions!

Sabine Gross, L&S Honors Faculty Director,  
[director@honors.ls.wisc.edu](mailto:director@honors.ls.wisc.edu), (608) 246-9937

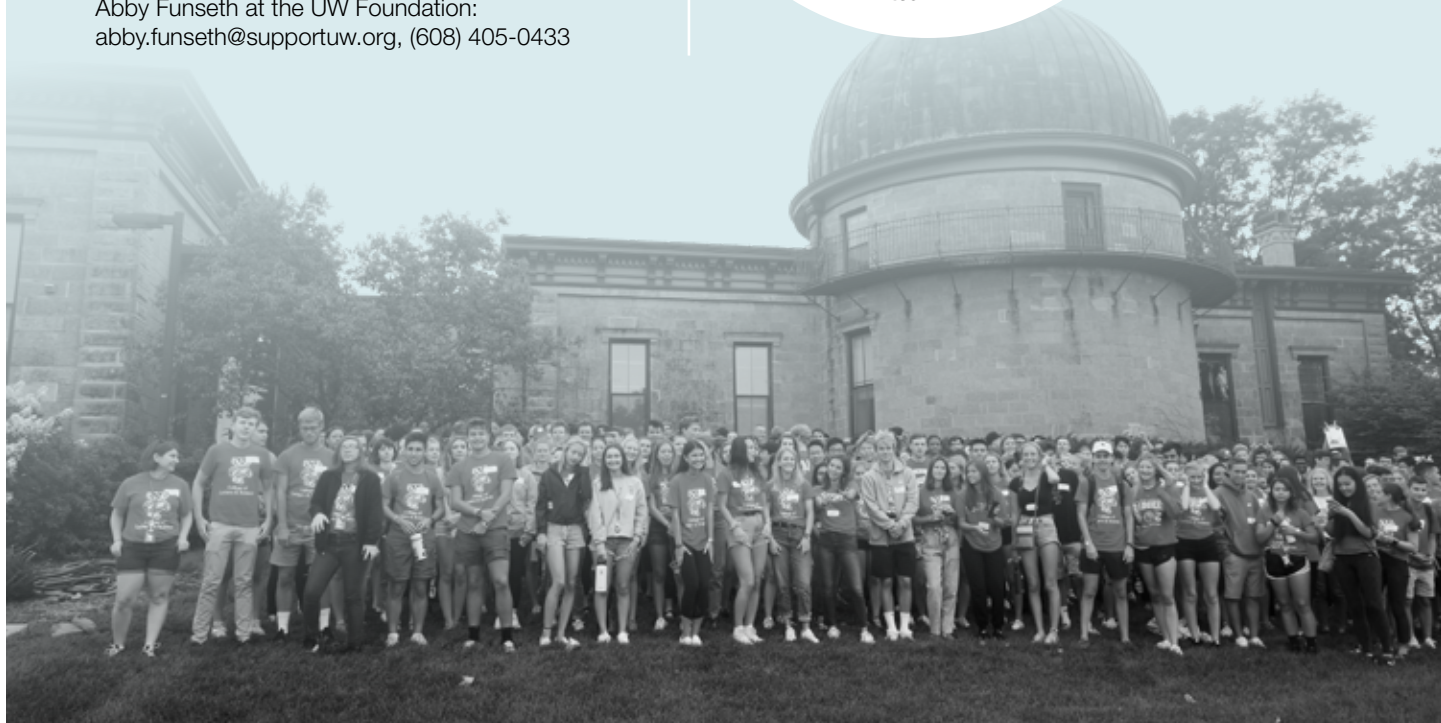
For planned giving information, please contact Abby Funseth at the UW Foundation:  
[abby.funseth@supportuw.org](mailto:abby.funseth@supportuw.org), (608) 405-0433

**SOPHIA NEHRING  
FIRMINO** ('20, BS with  
Honors in the Major,  
Molecular Biology)  
on her Senior Honors  
Thesis grant

"I have been giddy whenever I walk to my lab in excitement for the work that is leading the charge for all research like it. I have a commitment to you, as donors, and the rest of the scientific community to ensure that I do the best that I can in order not to waste your investment and advance our knowledge in healthcare."

"While I was able to get involved with cutting-edge research investigating gene mutations as a cause of Rett syndrome, I was also able to develop lasting and respectful relationships with my mentors. This apprenticeship led to an invitation to join their team as an undergraduate research assistant which then led to an expansion of my network into other research labs on campus. It also positioned me to provide training and mentoring opportunities of my own as a trusted senior member of their team."

**GRETA BROWN**  
('20, BS with  
Comprehensive  
Honors) on her  
Honors Research  
Apprenticeship grant



## Additional Honors Student Projects Made Possible by Honors Supporters

With funding from Honors supporters, Honors students completed these and other projects this year as Summer Research Apprentices, in Senior Thesis research, or through Leadership Award community involvement.

- A campuswide initiative to improve first response to heart attacks
- An elementary-school literacy initiative that incorporates current research in the selection of texts
- The effects of social media use on young adults
- Analyzing complex nonlinear turbulent dynamical systems
- Soil sampling and herbivore behavior
- The origin of life
- Better ways of measuring air pollution
- Stress and mindfulness
- Analysis of functionally distinct smiles in human interaction
- Cold tolerance of reproductive structures in plants
- The effect of vocal emotion on infant word learning
- Cell structure and aging
- Improvements in human wound healing
- Working with collaborative robots
- Developing effective approaches to combat inflammation, infections, neurodegeneration, neuropathology, diabetes, colon and pancreatic cancer, leukemia, Parkinson's and dementia, and COVID-19

## Spring 2020 Honors Graduation Speaker

Claire Evensen, the Spring 2020 Honors graduation speaker, graduated in May with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry and mathematics and with Comprehensive Honors. She has begun a master's degree program in mathematical modeling and scientific computing at the University of Oxford in Oxford, England. Claire is a Marshall, Goldwater, and Astronaut scholar; she has won a number of campus awards for her research; and she was one of three recipients of the 2020 Dean's Prize, awarded annually to the most outstanding scholars in the graduating senior class in the College of Letters & Science.

Here are excerpts from Claire's Honors Commencement address (full text/recording on the Honors website at [honors.ls.wisc.edu/spring-2020-honors-commencement](https://honors.ls.wisc.edu/spring-2020-honors-commencement)):

*By pursuing an Honors Program, we challenged ourselves to stretch our abilities, to find the willingness to fail sometimes, and to develop*



*creativity as a writer, scientist, artist, and thinker.*

*Through it all, we've found the things we love, we've probably found a couple of things we hate, and, most importantly, we've found that we don't need to be defined by a singular passion or goal.*

*Unfortunately, liberal arts educations are facing challenges right now as some universities shift their focus toward preparing students for particular career paths. I think this kind of shift ignores one of the most important aspects of a college education: exploration and flexibility. If there was ever a prime time to support the love of learning, college is it; when else will an aspiring programmer have the chance to read a wide range of Asian American literature, or a future psychologist have the chance to take a class on climate change? Once we have moved on from UW–Madison, we will have to work much harder to find the same diverse learning opportunities, so a liberal arts education can quite literally be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.*

# From a Pioneering Geographer to Urban Wildlife Studies at the UW–Madison

## *Tracing a Line of Continuity in Research and Support for Honors Students*

**H**ow do Madison residents feel about coyotes in their neighborhood? This is the question Raina Eddy investigated in her Senior Honors Thesis, “Living with Coyotes: Madison Citizens’ Experiences and Attitudes,” conducted with Professor of Geography Lisa Naughton. Raina was awarded a Trewartha Senior Honors Thesis grant for her work. This is a timely topic—there is abundant wildlife on campus and in Madison, as well as in many other residential areas in the US, showing how well some wild animals can adapt to urban conditions. Following the news confirms that this is a hotly contested topic. While some citizens welcome the evidence of animals’ presence, others feel fearful, especially in the case of wild carnivores. Insights into the public’s attitudes can help shape policy, an area of research for Lisa Naughton. Affiliated as well with the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, Naughton conducts research in conservation biology both internationally—focusing on tropical forests, for instance in Ecuador—and locally, in the Midwest and in Madison. Naughton has been on the UW faculty for more than two decades. This year she was elected as a member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. She has received a Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching award and is a sought-after mentor for students.

Raina Eddy’s study (based on a detailed survey sent to 275 residents) focused on the extent to which actual encounters with wildlife shaped residents’ perceptions of coyotes. Among her findings: inhabitants of a westside neighborhood adjacent to Owen Conservancy in Madison have a surprisingly positive attitude toward



**Lisa and Raina at the door of Lisa’s office. Lisa has removed her name plate for this photo so that the original writing – Glenn Trewartha’s name – is visible.**

coyotes and for the most part value their presence. This is true even for some residents who have lost pets to coyotes! For Raina and Naughton, Raina’s Senior Thesis award was particularly meaningful, as Naughton explains: “I’m especially delighted that Raina Eddy won a Trewartha award to support her Senior Honors Thesis research. Glenn Trewartha is a major figure in the field of geography and he was on the UW faculty. In fact, I’m fortunate to have inherited his office in Science Hall on campus.”

Glenn Trewartha, who died in 1984 and was survived by his wife Sarita (†2011), was a faculty member on campus for four decades, a passionate and rigorous teacher and mentor, and an internationally renowned authority in his field. He coined the term “the greenhouse effect” in 1937, in his textbook *An Introduction to Weather and Climate*, which he saw through five editions over the next forty years.

Fifty years ago, Glenn and Sarita Trewartha made a gift in support of outstanding undergraduate research at UW–Madison that continues supporting students’

Senior Honors Thesis projects to this day. Over the past half-century, it has allowed hundreds of students to carry out research with faculty, engaging in a special culminating experience of their undergraduate studies at UW–Madison that often is also an important step toward graduate studies and continuing in research. Many careers of Honors students have been shaped decisively by research carried out thanks to the support of the Trewartha Undergraduate Research Fund.

Raina has been working with Naughton to prepare her insights into human-coyote interactions for publication in her free time while holding a position as a geospatial technician with Continental Mapping. Her findings have the potential to help shape public policy, and her work is a continuation of the beneficial influence that Glenn Trewartha, his work, and the Trewarthas’ generosity in supporting student research have had over many decades.



**Raina Eddy celebrates her graduation with Professor Lisa Naughton, her Senior Thesis supervisor.**





Sabine Gross (3)

After her talk and discussion with Honors students, Deborah Blum signs copies of her book.

## A Riveting Story of Food Safety

### Honors Students Meet with Go Big Read Author Deborah Blum

“Eating food was one of the top ten causes of death in the nineteenth century!” This was not the only surprising and illuminating insight offered by Deborah Blum, author of the 2019 Go Big Read book *The Poison Squad* during her campus visit. Reading her book profoundly changes the way you look at, drink, eat, think about, and taste your food. The book includes gruesome accounts of how adulterated milk killed hundreds of children in the past; it features a chemist who deliberately poisoned his staff (they were willing and committed participants); and it presents stories of political chicanery, maneuvering, and mayhem. The book tackles chemistry and corruption, idealism and profit, civic engagement and government, individual courage and the impact of legislation. It is an impeccably researched, original, and eye-opening work of historical scholarship. The author, a Pulitzer-winning journalist and writer of popular-science nonfiction at its best, taught at UW–Madison until 2015 and now directs the Knight Science Journalism program at MIT.

Honors students were treated to a luncheon and informal discussion with the Go Big Read author during her campus visit in October 2019. A bit of history: The Honors Program had a book-of-the-year initiative of its own, as one way of creating an intellectual community for Honors students, years before the campus “Go Big Read” program was started. Some of you, our cherished alumni and readers, may remember: in 2003, the second year of the Honors book initiative, the choice was Deborah Blum’s unforgettable *Love at Goon Park*.

Blum is a lively and engaging speaker; listeners are exposed to new knowledge as well as surprises, such as her statement “I really love poisonous things.” (She admits to being “a failed Honors chemistry major.”) Indeed, *The Poison Squad* is Blum’s second book-length foray into poisons, after her 2010 *The Poisoner’s Handbook*, and for some years she wrote a monthly “Poison Pen” column on environmental chemistry for the *New York Times*. Blum enjoyed Honors students’ questions and shared a wealth of details about her motivation to write (“Every book author looks for the ‘why’ behind events”) as well as the amount of historical research (boxes and boxes of material) that goes into each project and the process of writing (make your style transparent to make it do its job). According to Blum, all her books have something in common: “I write books in which it is very clear that one person can make a difference. It’s really important to know that we have people in our history who can make a difference.” Blum makes history and chemistry come alive, fleshes out the social and political dimension, and creates vivid characters from solid historical facts and archival material. She speaks the way she writes: clear, engaging, driven by common sense and with the conviction that knowledge can be power and make the world better. Asked what she considers the best thing about journalism, she sums up: “Someone else pays you to learn!”





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