



The Honors Challenge

Looking to the Future

2021 Honors graduates | page 13



"My research lab provided me a group of long-term mentors for my time at UW all of whom I am beyond grateful for. Through this experience and the many others that the Honors Program provided, I learned how to struggle, learn and grow."

Isabella Marsden

B.S. with Comprehensive Honors | Major(s):
Biochemistry (Honors) | Certificate: Biocore

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From the Director



As this newsletter goes to press, I am midway through my first semester as the new director of the L&S Honors Program. Even in just the short time I've been part of the Honors team, I have been blown away by the engagement of our students and the dedication of our staff. Being back on campus and working in the beautiful Washburn Observatory building (with its beautiful lake views and resident Sandhill Crane family) has been immensely energizing. I am lucky to follow in the footsteps of the amazing Sabine Gross, who has done so much for our program. Sabine has been a fantastic resource throughout the transition process! I am eager to continue all of her efforts in strengthening our programming and curriculum, and excited to move forward with new initiatives ... so please stay tuned.

Jenny Saffran

L&S Honors Program Director
and Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor of Psychology

Greetings to you, alumni and friends of the L&S Honors Program! With campus reopening and offering the large majority of classes in person, we look back on a challenging year and a half. There's general agreement that we've all been faced with an unprecedented situation, and that students have met it with remarkable resilience. But what does that mean specifically? This newsletter gives you a few glimpses of that, as Honors students and peer advisors Hannah Emberts and Megan Binkley describe their experiences and we offer a few excerpts from the Honors Student Faculty Chats that helped connect incoming

students with faculty this past year. Honors students did more than cope: they engaged strongly in research, supported by Honors grants for students at the apprentice and senior thesis levels; they won major awards; they developed and participated in projects that showed civic engagement and socially responsible leadership; and they contributed to racial-justice projects and to our knowledge about the pandemic, with at least one project investigating the effects of COVID on mental health. Students tell us that these research experiences are transformative and frequently open new horizons as they make decisions about their future. And a detailed survey of Honors students in January 2021 confirmed what students like particularly about the Honors program. Highest on the list: our outstanding and comprehensive advising, challenging and engaging Honors-only classes on a range of topics, connections with faculty, research opportunities, and research funding.

For six years, it has been my privilege to direct the L&S Honors Program, to work with our remarkable students and with dedicated faculty colleagues, and to interact with outstanding alumni and generous supporters. As I complete my final year as Honors Faculty Director, I look back on these rewarding and enjoyable years—notwithstanding the challenges they brought—with pleasure and gratitude. Incoming Honors Faculty Director Jenny Saffran is one of the people who make this campus special: a cherished colleague whom I've known for many years, a dedicated supporter of Honors as a faculty member and mentor to students, an innovative and award-winning teacher, and a stellar researcher with an international reputation. She will be a wonderful leader of the Honors Program! Heartfelt good wishes and On, Wisconsin—

Sabine Gross

L&S Honors Program Director (outgoing) and
Gribsch Bascom Professor of German



Fall 2021 Message from the Dean



Paulus Musteliks

This fall marked a return to in-person classes and events, and it is exciting to be back on campus with students and colleagues! Our classrooms are full, our labs are humming, and the frisbees are flying again on Bascom Hill. The university's COVID-19 protocols are continually adjusted based on the shifting state of the virus. With safe behavior and a campus vaccination rate of more than 90 percent, I am hopeful that we will successfully navigate the fall and winter.

There is much good news to share. UW–Madison welcomed our largest-ever freshman class, with more than 8,400 new students arriving in early September. In October, we celebrated the conclusion of the wildly successful All Ways Forward campaign, which raised \$4 billion for UW–Madison, and \$652 million for the College of Letters & Science. Annual giving, too, is on track this year, mirroring strong pre-COVID giving trends. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to alumni whose unwavering support through the hardest of times enabled us to emerge stronger and ready to meet future challenges.

We have great news on capital projects to share. The Wisconsin

legislature has approved funding for a new academic building for the College of Letters & Science. Departments and classes currently housed in the deteriorating Humanities Building will be relocated to a modern, interactive, and world-class space that will transform the student learning experience.

A new building for our School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences is also underway, paving the way for this powerhouse new unit to meet a global need for students trained in computational thinking, big data, AI, and related fields.

Finally—our highly anticipated new Chemistry Building should open in 2022, and the impact on our STEM programs will be profound.

It feels great to look forward to so much. As always, a heartfelt thank you for all you do to support L&S. It means the world to us.

On, Wisconsin!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eric M. Wilcots".

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

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“Music Gizmos” and the Honors Experience

By Sabine Gross

Music 151: Basic Concepts of Music Theory may not sound riveting; but reading Dr. Jamie Henke’s course description and syllabus of her Honors-only course shows that in a single semester, the course offers a remarkable array of engagement and enrichment, from hands-on experience to discussions of human creativity. Small wonder that the course usually has a waiting list. Enrollment in the Honors-only version of this course is limited to a maximum of 25 students, and there are numerous small-group activities, such as a video-game music project carried out over several weeks collaboratively.

A distinguished faculty associate and alumna of the UW–Madison School of Music, Dr. Henke is a multiple award-winning instructor whose innovative teaching has garnered her a passionate following at UW–Madison and beyond (her video on “How to write a melody” has been viewed well over a million

times, with one viewer commenting: “I just learned more about music in these 33 minutes than I have in the previous 56 years!”). Honors students benefit from her double passion for music and for teaching: her aim is “to transform the students from passive to active listeners” while taking them through theoretical concepts as well as music history. Student activities include feeling triad chords on a keyboard installed on their computer screen, writing their own melodies, and performing beat boxing rhythms in small groups. Participants in the class apply their newly attained knowledge about musical styles and history in a group role-play by constructing a composer’s webpage and having “their” composer comment on other composers in a social network: what would Bach say to Stravinsky after hearing his music?

Dr. Henke’s personal investment in her students’ experience is reflected by stellar student evaluations and by

student comments such as “phenomenal teacher,” “fantastic class,” “loved everything about it,” “the most enjoyable class I have ever taken at UW,” “awesome class,” and more. (The effect is not limited to undergraduates—a couple of years ago Dr. Henke generously joined my graduate seminar on “Rhythm” as a guest, resulting in a memorable session for participants that culminated in the collective writing of a rap song in German.) Students who already play an instrument find themselves approaching it with a new depth of knowledge and understanding. While not everyone signs up for the class out of interest in the subject matter, Dr. Henke’s passion seems to be contagious, as one of several student comments affirms: “I signed up for this class to fulfill an Honors Humanities credit, and it ended up being my favorite class this semester.”

While Dr. Henke is also a pioneer of online instruction and e-learning, she values the in-person engagement in

Music 151. In fall 2020, when the large majority of courses were switched to remote format due to COVID-19, she went to great lengths to preserve the in-person format for Honors students. And in our conversation she shares that “a set of students from a former Honors class made it possible for me to continue a very important part of my course content”—helping students understand rhythm and meter—during the COVID-19 situation in fall 2020. She explains:

“Several years ago, one group of students in the Honors class was really uncomfortable with the idea of having to do those beat boxing sounds, all made with your mouth, in front of the class. So, over a weekend, they created a way to make each of those sounds using their hands or utensils at their desk. They came to class on Monday and asked me if they could use those sounds instead for the project. I of course told them they could, and it worked so well I have since then offered that option to any other students who aren’t comfortable making those beat boxing sounds the regular way. Well, making any beat boxing sounds this past fall was not safe, some of the sounds have even more potential for spreading droplets than singing, even socially distanced and with masks. The project was saved by the Honors method! For these semesters we’ve all been doing that beat boxing project using hands and utensils instead!”

Honors students clearly appreciate her efforts and commitment. Kwame Frimpong (’21, HLA and Biochemistry major), who took her fall 2020 course, tells me that “Dr. Henke was fantastic in every way as a teacher and the class was filled with opportunities to grow.” Frimpong, who plays the piano, particularly valued the way in which Music 151 appealed to students “regardless of the level of music each student came into the class with.” He sums up: “My experience taking Music 151 with Dr. Jamie Henke was a blast!”

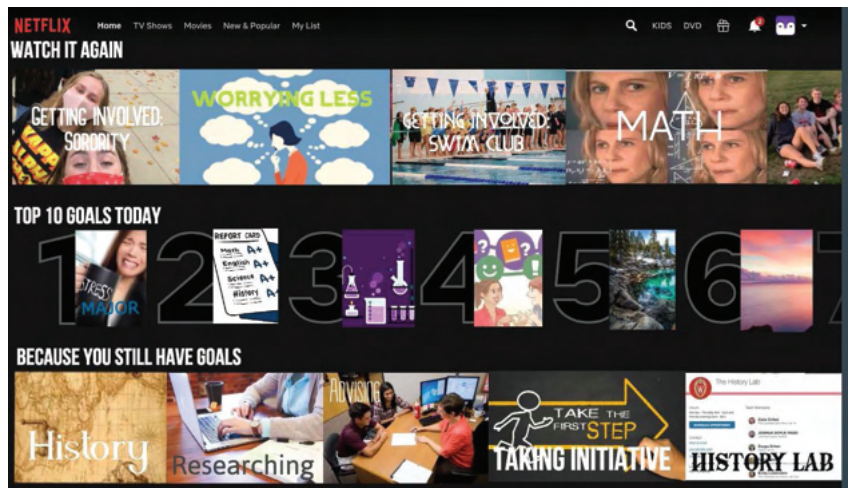
New First-Year Honors Seminar

By Christine Evans

A rewarding collaboration between the Honors Program and Chadbourne Residential College (CRC) led to an Honors section of a liberal arts-focused first-year seminar in fall 2020. Four Honors students in the CRC participated in an Honors section of Integrated Liberal Arts 138: Foundations of a Liberal Arts Education, facilitated by Honors advisor Christine Evans and current Honors senior Ben Dellheim (x’22). The one-credit course provided these Honors students a small, encouraging community while exploring campus resources, articulating personal successes and challenges, and reflecting on the values and outcomes of a liberal arts education. As part of the Honors section, each student took a leadership role in weekly discussion and read the campus Go Big Read selection *Parkland* before having the chance to meet author Dave Cullen at an intimate online event hosted by the Honors Program.

In a final portfolio one student shared, “Overall, this ILS course and the Honors Program experiences linked in well with my life as a student, making for a semester of personal growth.” Other student reflections reiterated the value of the small discussion-based courses at the heart of the Honors Program: “The smaller class size and more personal assignments helped keep me engaged. I also felt far more confident and comfortable speaking up in class than I did in any other course.”

For fall 2021, the Honors Program is working with CRC again to pilot a one-credit seminar open to all first-year Honors students. In ILS 139: Building Your Honors Education, students critically reflect on the history and possibility of Honors education and connect the themes of education, leadership, and social justice. This course adds to the array of opportunities that can help Honors students transition to UW–Madison and prepare to make the most of their undergraduate experience.



For a personal artifact project in ILS 138, Claire Stiles (x’24) used the Netflix homepage format to represent her first-semester experience and capture her future goals.

Connecting Students with Faculty During COVID Times—the Honors Student Faculty Chats

By Sabine Gross

In fall 2020, holding large in-person events was plainly impossible. Instead of hosting our popular First-Year Dinner that brings together incoming students with faculty, we had to devise other formats enabling first-year students to have personal conversations with faculty members. Faculty colleagues responded most generously when asked to participate in a series of informal small-group conversations via Zoom with incoming students—and the HSFC (Honors Student Faculty Chat) format was born. All first-year students were invited to sign up for one or more chats throughout fall semester.

In a series of 20 talks, students assembled in small groups of between five and 20 participants and got to know renowned UW–Madison faculty

members up close, who shared their life trajectories and experiences, gave overviews of cutting-edge research, provided illuminating advice, and answered many questions from students. They chatted about favorite music and TV programs and foods with students, and about their kids and pets. These thoughtful conversations took students far beyond contact with faculty in courses or official settings.

Many of the chats and intellectual profiles affirmed the engagement for social justice and the desire to improve people's lives that is one of the hallmarks of a public land-grant university—with ongoing research on Alzheimer's, infectious diseases, and muscular dystrophy; poverty and inequality; mental health and aging; health disparities and miscarriages of justice.

Patti Coffey (Psychology) talked about her community engagement and harm-reduction work with criminals, noting that “even serious crimes usually have a back story.” Diane Gooding (Psychology) has testified before Congress on schizophrenia; Timothy Smeeding (Institute for Research on Poverty) engaged with national lawmakers on public health and economic equality. Barbara Bendlin (Medical School) directs a program in “Neuroscience and Public Policy.”

Topics varied widely. To give a few examples, Jordan Ellenberg, author of a bestselling book about mathematics (*How Not To Be Wrong*) talked about the topic of his new book (*Shape*, 2021) in culinary terms: “Geometry is the cilantro of math: people either love or hate it!” Participants learned about



Professor Simon Gilroy (Botany)

Byoe Richter



Professor Timothy Smeeding (Public Affairs and Economics)

Animal Studies from Mario Ortiz-Robles, author of the first textbook on animal studies in literature. Steve Nadler (Philosophy) challenged students to think about what it means to experience happiness or joy. Neil Kodesh (African History) talked about how Colonialism redefined health and healing, and about sociocultural aspects of COVID. Justin Sydnor (an Honors alum and professor in the Business School) gave an introduction to the fascinating field of behavioral economics. Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor (Dutch/GNS) provided insights into international and language studies. Simon Gilroy (Botany) spoke about the difficulties of watering plants in space (no gravity!) and how growing plants in space served not only practical purposes, but also linked astronauts to Earth and helped preserve their sanity. Ralph Grunewald (Legal Studies) laid out international differences in the justice system and in police training. Students also learned about major companies that had been founded

by UW alums, and about ongoing research projects. Randall Goldsmith (Chemistry) encouraged students to ask about research posts rather than wait for jobs to be posted and to “play the Honors card: Honors students are in demand for research jobs.” Faculty distilled years of research into helpful hints; and they were eager to learn about students’ views and hopes. Many speakers came from small towns and a background where attending a leading research university was not part of the horizon at all. They talked about planned and unplanned developments in their lives, and looked back upon decisive influences and mentors. (Renowned Asian visual-culture expert Adam Kern had been on a straight path to medical school when he got derailed by his love of comic books and Japanese manga.) A perhaps surprising number shared that they had stumbled into their first research experiences, without plans to go into academia. Theresa Duello (Medical School) started out as a first-generation college student from

a dairy farm in Iowa and founded First Generation Connect at UW–Madison. Hearing their stories was inspiring.

How do you decide on your future path? “Stay flexible and listen with your heart” was Duello’s advice. Many chat guests affirmed the crucial value of being open to opportunities and of making connections. They advocated for breadth and branching out into different disciplines. All of them emphasized that universities are unique places where one can “pursue ideas and try out things” (Jon Pevehouse, Political Science) and where you can “hang out with a bunch of people who are interested in things” (Gilroy).

As moderator of the series, I came away with an even higher opinion of my colleagues’ scholarship as well as their dedication to both research and to student success. Faculty guests did not merely talk about the importance of building relationships: every session ended with a warm invitation for students to email them with any questions or if they wanted to talk further.



Jeff Miller



Professor Diane Gooding (Psychology)

Honors Alum Profile: Andrew Wright

Understanding Someone Else's Experience: An Honors Path from Literature to Medicine

By Sabine Gross

I've posed a question to Andy Wright, MD, about his trajectory from double-majoring in Comparative Literature with Honors and zoology to becoming a family physician. Part of the answer arrives when he tells me that we have to reschedule our meeting: he is dealing with a medical emergency. Expecting the unexpected, beyond any regular working hours, is part of his daily routine.

I spend part of the next morning, a Saturday, virtually via Zoom with Andy ('94) and his wife, Blossom ('97, Comparative Literature and Spanish). The two met in Ogg Hall and both hail from Wisconsin originally: Andy grew up "between Kewaunee and Green Bay," Blossom in Lime Ridge, not far from where they live now. They returned to Wisconsin after postgraduation stops in Houston, West Virginia, and Washington. While in Houston, they joined a Catholic Worker Movement community that serves the poor. Blossom recalls that life in Houston made her years on campus feel like a protected bubble, even though both she and Andy had volunteered with social causes during their studies: "There was a lot of reality there, a lot of actually helping people. That was so refreshing for me." Both worked mainly with immigrants—Blossom with abused women, Andy with youth and with the sick. Working in a Spanish-language environment was thrilling after their language studies, and this continued in Andy's medical schooling at the Baylor College of Medicine.

Their coursework and learning experience at the UW prepared them for community outreach as well as for designing a homeschool curriculum for their children. Blossom did Honors work in a lot of classes, but recalls with



a smile how she felt she was "too cool" to care about Honors credit. Andy describes the Honors curriculum as "sort of like the golden ticket in the chocolate factory." He remembers "exhilarating" Honors-only discussion sections in a variety of disciplines and the opportunity to meet more faculty members. He recalls talking to Sociology Professor (and future L&S Dean) Gary Sandefur about race relations as a freshman. And he had a memorable in-depth conversation with then-Honors Director (1989–92) and Professor of Art History Gail Geiger during an early campus visit: "She was so welcoming. I'd never had an experience like that where someone was so interested in my ideas."

Andy credits Luís Madureira, then a faculty member in Department of Comparative Literature (and now in African Cultural Studies), as a major shaping force for him. He recalls being assigned Edward Said's *Orientalism*—"the most influential book in college for me: the idea of the West co-opting the East and trying to speak for

someone else." Said's treatise "has such practical applications for how we treat each other as human beings," Andy says. One of Madureira's enduring lessons was the constant invitation to see things from the perspective of others. It's something Andy applied to his senior Honors thesis, writing about the immigrant experience and about the role of the reader in novels by Chicano author Tomás Rivera and John Steinbeck. Receiving a Hilldale fellowship for his thesis enabled him to complement that textual work with actual interviews about the Mexican immigrant experience in Wisconsin, making him realize that "we're all transient passengers, we're all migrants."

While at the UW, Andy participated in the Biocore Honors program and other traditional pre-med activities. But he draws for me a surprisingly direct line from his senior Honors thesis in comparative literature to becoming a physician: the importance of putting himself in the patients' shoes and understanding their subjective position.

Andy feels that his senior Honors thesis shaped his trajectory in other important ways. “Luis didn’t tell me what to do, he just asked questions—what do you really want to do with looking at these parallel tracks of migration—and on to the more general challenge of trying to understand someone else’s experience.” Speaking metaphorically, Andy’s thesis “Harvesting the Text” led to a life-long sowing of relationships. (In 2018 the Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians elected him Family Physician of the Year.)

Andy is also a clinical adjunct professor in UW–Madison’s family medicine residency program, and he’s found that teaching residents and fourth-year students sustains him. “This is not a job, it’s a passion, asking the questions that really help them dig and finding out what makes someone tick That sort of awakening process is a two-way street: they’re teaching me where they’re coming from,” he says. He views his numerous international stints as a physician in similar terms, emphasizing community and the participatory experience: “I like to connect with people.” Andy’s words, not coincidentally, recall the closing words of “The 10 Qualities of a Liberally Educated Person,” a much-discussed text by Bill Cronon, former Honors Program director (1996–98) and a pioneering professor of environmental history. Cronon’s text ends with a directive from writer E. M. Forster: *Only Connect*.

Andy’s advice to current Honors students is to “take Honors classes outside your areas of interest; find a mentor; become part of the community outside campus; don’t be afraid to fail.” Forging connections that benefit others, decentering one’s own perspective, becoming a participant rather than a spectator—it’s clear Andy and Blossom have put the ideals of a liberal-arts education to the best possible use.

HONORS STUDENTS NEED YOUR SUPPORT

Your generosity provides the funding for awards that allow 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.

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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/)

Contact me anytime with your questions and suggestions!
Jenny Saffran, L&S Honors Faculty Director, director@honors.ls.wisc.edu

For planned giving information, please contact Abby Funseth at the UW Foundation: 608.405.0433 (mobile), abby.funseth@supportuw.org

Navigating the Pandemic as an Honors Student and Peer Advisor

By Megan Binkley

On June 22, 2020, two other Letters & Science Honors peer advisors and I logged on for the first-ever virtual SOAR (Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration) program. In previous years, Letters & Science Honors SOAR sessions were characterized by on-campus panels and advising sessions, tours through shaded campus paths and terraces, and in-person discussions about the research and engagement opportunities available to new UW–Madison students. While COVID-19 precluded our ability to greet new students face-to-face, we had spent the last several months working with the faculty, staff, and other students in the L&S Honors Program to create an online Honors SOAR experience that preserved the core values of the UW’s annual welcome program while supplementing them with a range of virtual activities.

Thanks to virtual academic and student life advising platforms, we were still able to meet with students from around the globe. For the first time ever, the students’ families and greater communities—understandably uncertain about what the coming semesters might entail—were also able to participate in these conversations, and to engage directly with the support systems provided by the L&S Honors Program. In-person meet-and-greet activities were replaced by social video calls, in which students demonstrated their resilience and indefatigable sense of fun by hosting virtual drawing competitions. Throughout the summer, my fellow peer advisors and I discussed the ways in which our advisees’ flexibility inspired us, and the ways in which their strength would

inform our own upcoming online academic year.

My own journey as an Honors undergraduate senior during a global pandemic was also fundamentally shaped by the L&S Honors Program’s response to the crisis. Despite going into lockdown one month before the submission deadline for my undergraduate archaeological Honors thesis, I was able to finish on-schedule—in large part due to the guidance and encouragement offered by Honors advisors and my faculty supervisor. Inspired and empowered by this experience, I deepened my collaboration with this community to encompass an exploration of at-home archaeological research opportunities (no digging required). This cooperative effort yielded the first-ever study of methods

for identifying nonperishable indicators of dyes, pigments, and textiles in the Mexican archaeological record from ~2,000 years ago. Finally, the L&S Honors Program redefined the criteria for their grants supporting undergraduate conference participation. This decision allowed me and several other Honors students to safely practice presenting research at field-specific conferences during the pandemic.

As campus begins to reopen and we catch glimpses of what life after the pandemic might look like, my peers and I have found ourselves reflecting on the insights that the last year and a half has given us. The preparation that our undergraduate Honors tracks have provided us with—the desire to dig deeper, to take extra initiative, to seek new ways of fostering community and collaboration, and to centralize diverse voices in every conversation—has prepared us for anything and everything the future has to offer.



Megan Binkley

Megan Binkley graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Madison College of Letters & Science and the Letters & Science Honors Program in May 2021, earning a double major in anthropology and environmental studies, and an archaeology certificate. This summer, Megan is studying Huasteca Nabuatl—the most widely spoken Indigenous language in Central Mexico—through the University of Utah, and enjoying the newly reopened Dane County Farmers’ Market. In the fall, Megan will return to UW–Madison to begin the anthropology PhD program.

Face Those Challenges and Thrive

By Hannah Emberts

Along with many of my peers, I experienced massive changes in the classroom and workplace once COVID-19 restrictions began in March of 2020. I was set to be a SOAR peer advisor for the Honors Program in the upcoming summer, and yet, with the unexpected transition online, I entered the position with great uncertainty on how to succeed in my role. Despite my fears, I had coworkers who encouraged me to be creative with online communications and to adapt to the challenges that we faced. Working remotely as a peer advisor allowed me to develop skills in utilizing technology to build relationships. I participated in and moderated message boards, group meetings, and daily office hours for students to meet with a peer advisor and ask questions about their courses or the transition into college. A remote SOAR experience made it difficult for incoming students and SOAR employees to form meaningful connections, but we all created innovative solutions to combat these difficulties and provide a positive student orientation experience. Beyond that summer, being a peer advisor was ultimately an incredibly beneficial experience, as it prepared me for my fully remote fall semester.

In fall 2020, all my classes were online, and many were asynchronous. I initially struggled with the lack of face-to-face interaction, especially as it turned into a lack of accountability. By digging into the skills I learned as a peer advisor, however, I created weekly schedules in which I organized my classes, work, and homework time to keep me on track throughout the fall semester. I also made sure to engage with my professors by attending their office hours or reaching out to them through email,



On March 13, 2020, signs posted at entrances to one of the lakeshore residence halls at the UW-Madison serve to remind students departing for Spring Break of an unknown future of online instruction and increasing campus restrictions. Due to rapidly-evolving coronavirus (COVID-19) health concerns, UW-Madison encouraged as many students as possible to move off campus and return to their permanent family residence if and when possible.

utilizing the communication skills I developed as a peer advisor. In addition, as the academic chair for HSO, I was challenged on how to best run virtual events in the fall of 2020. Utilizing my skills gained as a peer advisor, I prepared virtual monthly lectures in which professors would have the opportunity to discuss their research with Honors students. I was able to host a Post-2020 Presidential Election discussion with Professor David Canon and a lecture on new technology in COVID-19 testing led by Dr. Shelby O'Connor, both of which drew in the interest of many Honors students. Looking back at the last year, I feel as though despite the difficulties that COVID-19 presented to the University of Wisconsin, its students found a way to face those challenges and thrive. Having online courses and student

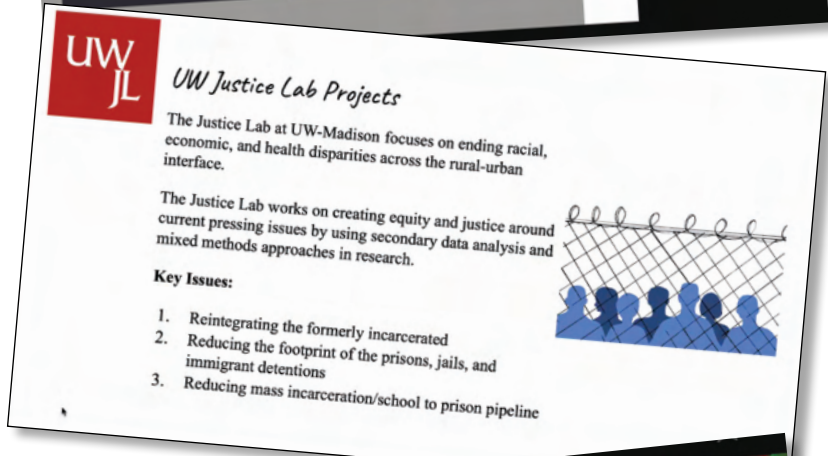
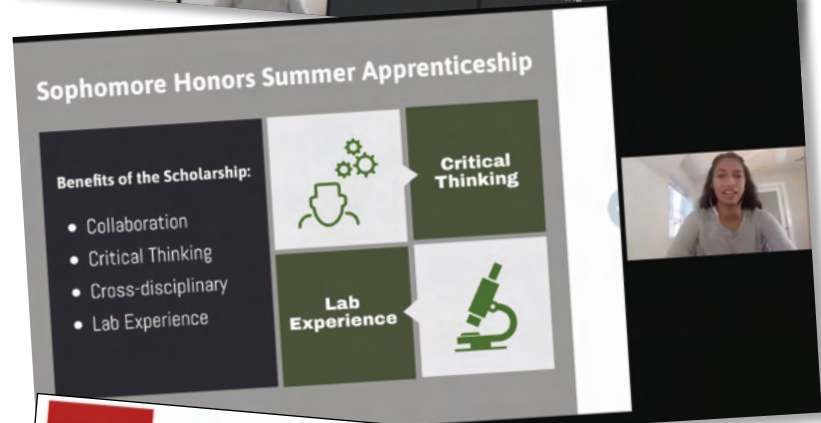
events was an unexpected experience, yet those experiences forced me to adapt to the online medium and grow in my creativity and ability to connect with others. Through my virtual interactions with my fellow Badgers in HSO and in class, I can confidently say that students in the Honors Program faced this unique school year as a community and succeeded in our journey to learn and grow here at UW-Madison.

Hannah Emberts is a senior majoring in history and political science in the L&S Honors Program at UW-Madison. She is the co-president of the Honors Student Organization and is working as a program intern at the International Law Institute and as an administrative assistant at the School of Medicine and Public Health this past summer.

Jeff Miller

Honors Research Experiences Continue during COVID Year

Not being able to bring students together in person to discuss and share their research felt like a loss—but there were opportunities in that loss, as we discovered when we hosted virtual symposia and research retreats! In our traditional gatherings of senior Honors thesis writers and summer sophomore research awardees, attendees were slotted into one of several concurrent sessions and throughout the day had to make choices about which panel they were going to attend. In going virtual, we made the decision to go with slightly shorter presentations, which allowed for a whole-group experience that enabled every participant to listen to all presentations. This made for an intense and tightly scheduled day of discussion and exploration for everyone, but it was exhilarating to hear all presentations, to witness the range and sophistication of projects Honors students engage in, to hear them ask smart questions of each other, to experience the passion as they talked about achievements, tentative results, and future plans. Most recently, at the July 30 Summer Sophomore Research Apprenticeship Virtual Retreat, more than 30 apprentices shared their summer's work, coming together for the day in a virtual community that felt real and alive. Topics covered a truly remarkable range—from evolutionary mutation to local ponds, from the history of pandemics to the history of opera divas, from temporal-lobe epilepsy to plant defense systems, from tribal food sovereignty to 3D visual processing. Projects aimed to improve lives, health, justice, and awareness of inequities. Students uncovered historical documents, spliced genes, worked on a reservation, and assisted in film-making. Frequently, discussion spilled over into the breaks. Many participants additionally reflected on the process and on what they had learned beyond the actual research project—about themselves, and about what it means to conduct research, organize and analyze data, collaborate with a mentor, and work in a team. Faculty mentors and program sponsors are enabling these students to investigate, explore, and discover in ways that will shape their futures and those of others.



Looking to the Future

Parting thoughts from 2021 Honors Graduates



JACOB GOSS

B.S. with Comprehensive Honors
| Major(s): Physics, Economics
(Honors), Mathematics

I've loved being a part of the Honors Program at UW-Madison. As a freshman, Honors-level courses helped me find a community on campus, and Honors advisors helped me adapt to UW-Madison and make the most of my college career.



NIKITA ANIL MENON

B.S. with Honors in the Major |
Major(s): Psychology, Molecular & Cell
Biology (Honors) | Certificate: Biocore

While in the Honors program, I was able to meet so many wonderful individuals who had the same passion for learning and curiosity as I do. I was able to challenge myself with both the material and the way I apply what I've learned.



JESSICA KUZNIEWSKI

B.A. with Comprehensive Honors
| Major(s): Sociology, French
(Honors) | Certificates: Education and Educational Services,
Gender & Women's Studies

Being involved with the Honors program gave me a starting point to meet lots of like-minded, passionate people through fun events. I met my closest friend at the first Honors event my freshman year and I am so thankful for the experiences this program has brought me!



PAYTON GENTGES

B.S. with Honors in the Liberal Arts | Major(s): Biology |
Certificates: Gender & Women's Studies, Global Health

I absolutely loved my Honors experience. Being able to get to know my professors and my peers better due to having small, discussion-based classes was amazing. I met some of my best friends because of the Honors program!



ANANDA DEACON

B.A. with Honors in the Liberal Arts | Majors: Spanish,
Political Science | Certificate: Afro-American Studies

I liked the challenge my Honors classes gave me, and it was refreshing to be around other students who actually appreciated that challenge too, and found the topics at hand as interesting as I did.

Highest Honors

By Aaron Conklin

Four outstanding seniors graduating with Comprehensive Honors were awarded the 2021 Dean's Prize, the highest undergraduate award in the College of Letters & Science



ALYSSA MEURER is a Sociology and Spanish major from Elm Grove, Wisconsin, who showed a passion for improving the criminal justice system through public policy during her undergraduate career. Several of her undergraduate research projects, including her senior Honors thesis on the moral framing of solitary confinement, focused on the impact of jail visits on prisoners' quality of life. She combined her academic work with a long list of high-impact internships, including stints in the Wisconsin State Public Defender's Office in Milwaukee and the Wisconsin Department of Children & Families. She also spent a semester studying abroad in Madrid, Spain.

"Alyssa is a great student, but she does so much more than get straight As," says Leann Tigges, the professor emerita of sociology who worked with Meurer on one of her undergraduate research projects. "She goes beyond what is required and expected. She challenges herself to understand the 'why' not just the 'what' of her course material."

Meurer also served in several leadership positions of the UW–Madison student chapter of the Food Recovery Network, serving surplus food from campus dining halls to low-income citizens. She plans to attend the University of California–Berkeley School of Law in the fall.



MAX HERTEEN is an English and History major from Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, who also graduated with a certificate in French. Herteen used his natural ability to connect with others to great advantage during his time at UW–Madison, serving as the student representative on the committee to explore a new Letters & Science Academic Building and as the principal bassist of the All-University Strings Orchestra for three of his four years in Madison. His senior Honors thesis examined integration, equity, and reform at Milwaukee's North Division High School.

"Max struck me as a uniquely motivated and intellectually curious student, and that impression has only deepened as I have worked more closely with him as his History Department senior thesis advisor and as his instructor for a graduate-level seminar," says Walter Stern, an assistant professor of history.

A four-year National Merit Scholar and Vilas Scholarship recipient, Herteen served as co-president of the Honors Student Organization, and was a member of the first Letters & Science Dean's Ambassadors cohort. Herteen will begin graduate work in education policy and leadership at Marquette University in the fall.



LAUREN SCHILLING is a Psychology and Education Studies major from Minoqua, Wisconsin, with Honors certificates in the liberal arts and psychology. She quickly connected with her academic interests, taking upper-level psychology classes as a freshman and translating her academic work into various channels of community service, including becoming involved in the Building Academic, Social and Emotional Supports (BASES) program, designed to help children experiencing homelessness. Working with fellow students, she revived and served as editor of the *Journal of Undergraduate International Studies* (JUIS), a magazine featuring the work of contributors from universities around the country.

“Lauren has been an outstanding undergraduate researcher in the lab, and she’s thoughtful, careful, and very highly engaged in the work she’s doing,” says MaryEllen MacDonald, a professor of psychology with whom Schilling worked as an undergraduate. “Her work in the lab has stoked her passion for research and graduate study, and I expect her to be a successful applicant to a top graduate program in her chosen area of research.”

Schilling was a Hildale Scholar and one of only 18 juniors nationwide to win a Beinecke Scholarship in support of graduate studies. She is spending the year working in the UW Language and Cognitive Neuroscience Lab with psychology professor Mark Seidenberg and research assistant Matt Cooper Borkenhagen, expanding work on her senior Honors thesis, related to early reading education. She plans to pursue a PhD in psychology.



ZACHARY DEMKO is a French major from Milwaukee, who also received Honors in the Liberal Arts and psychology. He combined cutting-edge research opportunities, both in Madison and internationally, with a deep spirit of volunteerism. In Madison, he has given his time to a wide range of organizations, including the Urban League of Greater Madison, Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, and the Catholic Charities Adult Day Care Center. Through UW–Madison’s Undergraduate Research Scholars (URS) program, Demko spent several months in Germany working on a research project related to prisons—and spent a year abroad at the Institut de Touraine, in France, honing his language skills. He continues to work on a Madison-based research project related to video game addiction.

“I would rate him among the top students who have passed through my lab in terms of matching the foundational pillars of the Wisconsin Experience,” says Shawn Green, a professor of psychology and the principal investigator on the project.

Demko received a Hildale Research Fellowship and was named an Outstanding Undergraduate Research Scholar. He will spend the next two years as a researcher at the National Institute of Drug Abuse and then pursue graduate school, where he hopes to complete a PhD in clinical psychology and then work as a mental health clinician and researcher.



L&S Honors Program
Washburn Observatory
1401 Observatory Drive
Madison, WI 53706-1209

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Nordic Ski Event

On Saturday, February 20, 2021, the Honors Student Organization partnered with the Hoofers Outing Club to co-host a Nordic Skiing event on Lake Mendota. It was a great way for Honors students to meet new people (safely distanced and with masks that in winter weren't unwelcome) and finally see some faces off-screen!

