



The Honors Challenge



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From the Director



We are back in person, and it feels GREAT! My first year as the Faculty Director of the L&S Honors Program, in 2021-2022, coincided with the easing of campus pandemic restrictions. While Omicron limited the number and types of events we could hold, it was wonderful to see some return to normalcy.

Our students were able to interact with their instructors and peers in classrooms and labs, and to return to conference travel and study abroad. We had the largest Honors graduating class in living memory, and nearly doubled the number of applications for Honors in the Liberal Arts submitted by incoming students. Our program is thriving!

This edition of the Honors Challenge celebrates that our in-person interactions feel far more valuable than they ever did before. In the Honors offices in Washburn Observatory, in my classes, and in my lab, I feel deeply grateful to be interacting face-to-face after so much time apart. Even wearing our masks, we can't stop smiling with the pleasure of being together again!

These pages highlight some of the opportunities our students have had to engage with their communities on and off campus. They also highlight ways in which our donors have supported our students' experiences by funding research, study abroad, conference travel, and community outreach. I hope that you are able to share in our students' joy in discovering aspects of the in-person L&S Honors experience that perhaps we didn't fully appreciate before the pandemic.

On Wisconsin!

Jenny Saffran

Faculty Director, L&S Honors Program
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Bridging the Divide, One Cup of Coffee at a Time

By Yonah Davis x'24



Students meet each other and start conversation at one of the It's Just Coffee pop-up cafés.

Students packed into the Festival Room at Memorial Union. Most didn't know each other. For many, this experience pushed them out of their comfort zone. But a common purpose united all who participated: Meet students with different perspectives, listen, and learn.

College is the ideal time to meet new people and wrestle with new ideas, yet many students get stuck in echo chambers throughout their college careers. Supported by the Letters & Science Honors Program's Cyrena Pondrom Leadership Award, It's Just Coffee took on this issue of polarization by facilitating face-to-face conversations. In three easy steps, students signed up, matched with another student, and dove into thought-provoking discussions. Some students met on their own time in coffee shops. Others attended a pop-up café with free coffee and pastries.

In a Daily Cardinal article, sophomore Charlie Fahey reflected on his experience at one of the pop-up cafés. "It's a breath of fresh air to have honest, low-pressure conversations about deeply-rooted and contentious issues," he said. "It's Just Coffee certainly opened my mind to different attitudes and perspectives. I think self-censorship is a plague in many environments—events like these are an antidote."

It's Just Coffee was an experiment to see if students were open to exploring new ideas. Over 600 students engaged in the initiative throughout the Spring 2022 semester. After participating, 85% of survey respondents felt that they were exposed to new perspectives through the experience. 94% said they are interested in participating again.

Polarization remains a pressing issue. There is more work to be done, but it doesn't necessarily require a formal program. After all, it's just coffee.

Attending the American Indian Science and Engineering Society Leadership Summit

By Cayden Kirkpatrick x'24

The 2022 American Indian Science and Engineering Society Leadership Summit was a meeting of Native American students and professionals from across the country designed to encourage students to be more confident and advocate for themselves in their workplaces and communities. It included a number of individual sessions in which presenters discussed leadership qualities they were familiar with. In addition to this, there was time allotted for meeting and networking with other Native students and professionals.

I had a wonderful time attending the AISES Leadership Summit. I talked to and developed lasting connections with multiple students from other institutions.



I was able to get advice directly from Native professionals and elders in the scientific community, which I would not be able to receive any other way. In addition to this, I really enjoyed learning about the Pechanga Band of Indians as a part of the cultural activities offered.

One session in particular that I remember focused on utilizing “warrior wisdom” and incorporating Native identity in a work environment. While it was especially nice to hear this in the context of supporting Native cultural values, I think that the general message of accepting who you are and incorporating this into your professional actions is really important. I know personally that I have taken this message to heart and learned to respect myself more and stop trying to mold myself into a stereotypical image of what a “perfect student” should look like.

I also had the opportunity to learn a lot from the experiences of the Pechanga Band of Indians. Their president, Mark Macarro, gave a presentation to the whole conference describing the history of the tribe, and focusing on the leadership that was necessary to advance the tribal community to the position they are in today. In addition, we were offered tours of the tribe’s reservation where we were able to witness the work the tribe has done to strengthen the community. What stuck out to me the most was getting to visit “The Great Oak” or “Wi’áašal,” a 1,000 year-old oak tree in the Pechanga homeland, which the tribe was recently able to buy back and protect. This experience really clearly illustrated to me the powerful effects that leadership can have. I am immensely grateful to Joyce Bromley for her generous donation of funds to support conference travel for L&S Honors students.

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Cover photo
First-year Honors students meet and play yard games, including Spikeball, at the fall semester kickoff outside Washburn Observatory in September 2021.

Honors Impacts *Becoming the First UW–Madison Wolff Fellow*

By Claire James, '22

You might not think a stellar refreshment spread during freshman orientation week would land you at the top of a volcano in Japan, but life has a way of surprising you.

As a freshman entering UW–Madison four years ago this fall, I was committed to the L&S Honors Program on paper, but perhaps not entirely in conviction. I decided to apply for the program because I was interested in the honors courses, opportunities for research and scholarship, and emphasis on service described on the website. How the Honors Program could influence my post-graduate decisions was not something with which my freshman-self was particularly concerned. But...the Honors Program knows how to cater, and that convinced me to stick around to learn what the L&S Honors Program offered beyond delicious food. I'm so, so glad I did.

My Honors experience was integral in shaping my undergrad years, from giving me the chance to get to know peers and professors in smaller classes to introducing me to an editor position with the *Journal of Undergraduate International Studies*. My involvement with the Honors Program provided opportunities for especially spirited discussions with other honors students who were studying a range of disciplines. Those conversations offered new ways of thinking about the world and my place in it. When I heard about the Wolff Fellowship, I had no shortage of ideas about how I might spend my first post-graduate year learning and volunteering without limits.

I am honored to have been selected as the inaugural Wolff Fellow, and I am so grateful to the Honors Program for encouraging us to ask the harder questions, push a bit further, and challenge conventional wisdom. My interests in meaningful cross-cultural engagement and both equitable and sustainable economic development – interests fostered

by the Honor Program's rigor and support – have led me to a year full of purpose and learning. I recently completed an internship in Nagasaki, Japan, where I volunteered at GHJ International's English language summer camps for elementary school students. I will continue English language instruction this fall in South Korea, working with students planning on studying at Wisconsin universities. In the spring, I will be interning in Malawi with ACADES, a group that

focuses on the sustainable development of small-scale farms. Similarly, as an intern with the Sehgal Foundation in India, I will be contributing to their work and research on community-led development initiatives in rural areas. My final fellowship months will feature an immersive Spanish-language course in Argentina. My love of languages and learning, nurtured in the College of L&S, continues!

I will be honest. Heading off for a year to countries where I knew no one was intimidating. But if my first stop in Japan is any indication of the year ahead, I'm so excited for what's next! In Japan, I met extraordinarily determined students rising to the challenge of learning English, gained a deeper understanding of Japanese history and culture, and even

hiked to the volcanic crater of Mt. Fuji, a sacred cultural site. My concerns about making friends were completely unfounded, as I have been truly blessed by the overwhelming generosity and kindness of people I now call friends.

So many people and groups at UW–Madison influenced my journey from an eager freshman to a graduate who hasn't stopped learning. Importantly, I do not underestimate the continued influence of an educational experience that was both deep and wide. The impact of the Honors Program on my life has been tremendous thus far, and I'm just getting started.



Graduate School Demystified for First- and Second-Year Students

By Christine Evans

Though many Honors students consider continuing their education after earning an undergraduate degree, it is very common to have questions about what graduate school is, whether it could be good fit, and how you can get there. To help early-career students better understand the graduate school landscape and address common misconceptions, the L&S Honors Program cohosted a new event this spring: Demystifying Graduate School.

On March 29, 2022, over 70 first- and second-year undergraduate students gathered to enjoy dinner and to interact with twelve current UW graduate students. The undergraduate students were all in the Honors Program and/or other high-impact programs across the College of Letters & Science, including Undergraduate Research Scholars, BioCore, First-Year Interest Groups, and the Center for Academic Excellence. The panel of graduate students offered representation from a range of L&S-affiliated programs, such as art history, bacteriology, German studies, neuroscience, and psychology, and even included L&S Honors Program alumna Megan Binkley, who is pursuing her Ph.D. in anthropology at UW. Among both the undergraduate and graduate participants were first-generation college students and students who would be the first in their families to complete graduate school.

After dinner and opening introductions from the graduate panel, attendees spoke with graduate students individually and in small groups. Graduate panelists shared their experiences and answered big picture questions such as “What is the best advice you have for someone considering, but unsure, about grad school?” and “What is something you wish you knew before you started grad school?” They also addressed student questions about gap years, ways to finance graduate education, how to start preparing for graduate school as an undergraduate, and life as a graduate student.

Feedback from students and panelists was overwhelmingly positive. Undergraduates shared that they learned a lot about common structures of graduate programs, different paths and timelines available, and what research can look like across disciplines. They also heard graduate students stress the importance of figuring out what is best for you as an individual before embarking on any graduate school path. The graduate students, too, said they truly enjoyed talking with and supporting current undergraduates throughout the evening. As an added bonus, all had great things to say about the buffet!

Sincere thanks to the Bill Cronon Fund for Pathways to Excellence for sponsoring this event. The Honors Program also shares many thanks to planning committee members and the graduate panelists who offered their time and expertise to make this event possible. The Honors Program looks forward to cohosting this event again in 2023.

L&S HONORS PROGRAM GENERAL FUND

[supportuw.org/giveto/
lshonors](https://supportuw.org/giveto/lshonors)

The L&S Honors General Fund allows us to support students' projects and experiences based on both merit and need, to organize Honors events for students, and to design new initiatives. Your gift provides the margin of excellence in a great public research university.

PLANNED GIVING

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

WOULD YOU LIKE TO OFFER SPECIFIC SUPPORT?

Please contact Jenny at director@honors.lsu.wisc.edu to share your ideas, find out what Honors is doing, and discuss what additional possibilities we envision.

On the Ground *Honors Sophomore Summer Research Apprenticeships*

By Jenny Saffran

This program (formerly known as the Welton Apprenticeship) is one of the most impactful opportunities that we offer. Our goal is to provide an introductory research experience early in students' college careers. It is also important that this is a paid research experience, in order to ensure that financial barriers do not keep students from participating.

Students can apply before or after their second year at UW–Madison. They need to have identified a faculty member as a research mentor, but we do not require (or expect) prior research experience. Their summer projects span every L&S discipline and research methodology, from fieldwork to lab experiences to archival research to generating novel creative products. We term this experience an “apprenticeship,” since the goal is to have students get their feet wet in research, rather than pursuing fully independent work—though many students do continue with

their same mentor all the way through completion of a senior Honors thesis. The program includes a day-long retreat during which students share their research findings and experiences, and have the chance to network with faculty, staff, and peers from across L&S.

One of this year's apprentices was Emmett Lockwood. Working with his mentor, Dr. Barry Burden, Emmett's project is focused on understanding how polling places in Madison address the needs of voters with disabilities. I spent several hours with Emmett on August 9, the day of the Wisconsin primary election, as he visited polling places armed with a yardstick and a checklist of all of the regulations each polling place must adhere to, from the width of entrances to the pitch of wheelchair ramps and the font size of signage. Emmett shared the following thoughts with me:

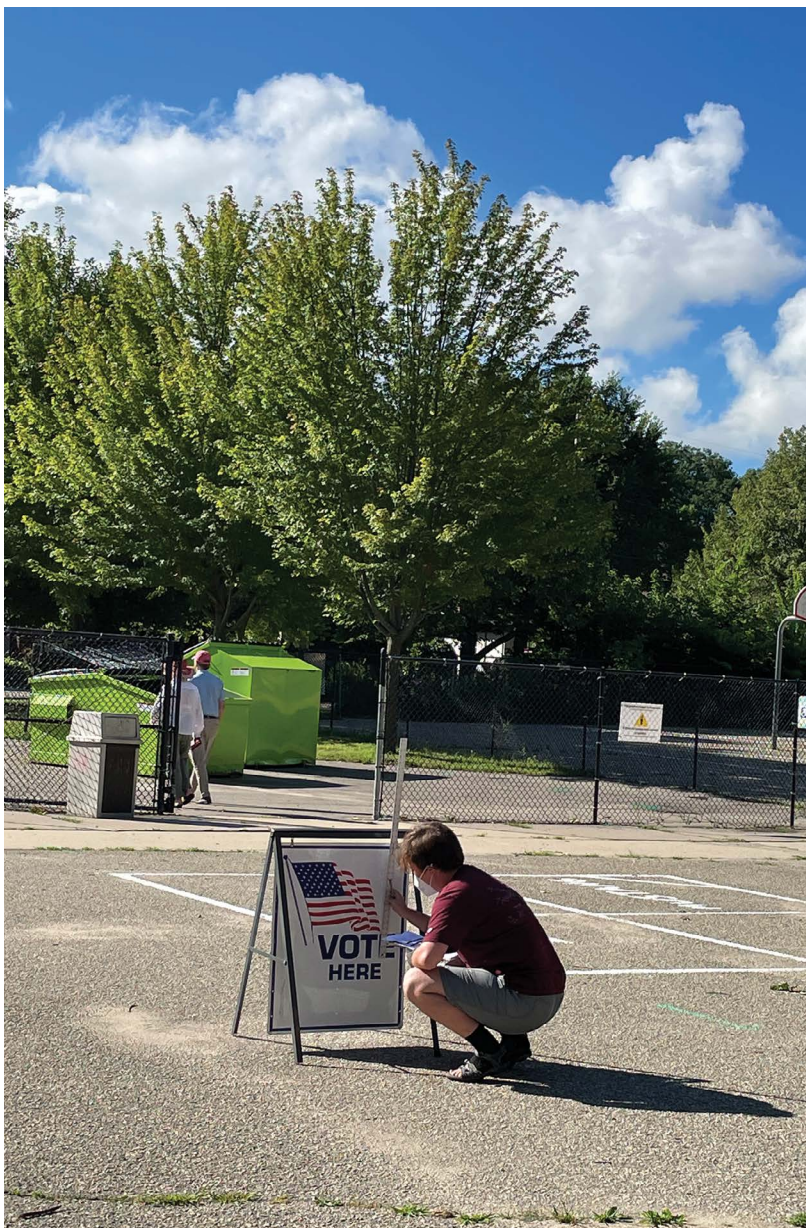
“Often, as political science students, we talk about legislative bills, including the Americans with Disabilities Act

(ADA) and the Helping America Vote Act (HAVA), without considering how their implementation looks like on the ground. For instance, the Government Accountability Board reported in 2013 that Wisconsin polling sites had on average 6.5 violations of the ADA and HAVA. In my opinion, this is often not due to malice; more often, it is due to oversight. If an individual isn't disabled or hasn't really engaged in anti-ableist work, what might be a barrier to another disabled person or me might be invisible to them.

It is important that everyone has the ability to vote, and due to recent actions taken by the Wisconsin Supreme Court to limit unmanned drop-boxes, we are going to see more and more people who need accommodations to vote at polls. Our political system is based on the idea that our elected officials are elected based on the will of the people. But, is it truly the will of the people if we are making it harder for a quarter



Research apprentices share updates on their projects with each other during the summer retreat.



of American adults to exercise their constitutional right because there are no readily available enforcement measures for the ADA and HAVA?”

Emmett, along with his peers in the Apprenticeship program, had the opportunity to learn how ideas become research questions, and how research questions are addressed by scholars at the top of their fields. These are the kinds of experiences that are often transformative for students as they discover that beyond consuming knowledge as students, they can actually produce new knowledge.

During the Wisconsin primary election, research apprentice Emmett Lockwood checks whether a polling place meets regulations that support voters with disabilities.

“Understanding Ukraine” Interdisciplinary Panel a Success!

By Pete Keys

On April 25, 2022, the L&S Honors Program and Chadbourne Residential College cosponsored an interdisciplinary panel, *Understanding Ukraine*. The event brought together eight faculty experts from UW with the aim of enlightening primarily first- and second-year undergraduates about the Russian invasion and its application to students’ lives. Professor Jon Pevehouse shared that “it was really fascinating to hear scholars ranging from nuclear engineers to law to German languages discuss the different dimensions of the crisis.” He went on to note that he had done “a number of Ukraine-related events, and this was one of the most diverse in terms of perspective and most active in terms of student engagement.”

The event welcomed over 70 student attendees and was moderated by three current L&S Honors students: Paige Bester (x’24), Chandra Chouhan (x’24), and Rachel Rosen (’22). The panelists were captivating, both in their responses to questions and in how they interacted and conversed with each other. Chandra Chouhan, a junior who works with the US Department of State, shared that she felt that “[it] was a really fulfilling experience to moderate this and meet with the panelists. Their wide range of expertise left no gaps in gaining a comprehensive understanding of this crisis, one I lacked.”

Many thanks to the faculty panelists and student moderators as well as to Pete Keys and Sari Judge for organizing this event. We also thank the Bill Cronon Fund for Pathways to Excellence for financial support of both this *Understanding Ukraine* panel and the *Demystifying Graduate School* dinner held earlier in the spring semester.

Distinguished Honors Faculty Awards 2021–2022

Awardees are selected based on student nominations (excerpts below). Congratulations to these outstanding, dedicated educators!



**Martha Alibali,
Psychology**

“Professor Alibali has been incredibly supportive of

my involvement in research[.] [...] While having high expectations for me, she is [...] always willing to find time to help me through any questions or setbacks.”



**Martin Zanni,
Chemistry**

“It is not only crazily amazing what he knows, but also amazing how he can

simplify complex topics to educate first years. [...] His encouragement and feedback [...] has inspired me to work hard and to never feel hopeless when classes and exams don’t go as well as I hoped.”



**William Aylward,
Classics**

“Prof. Aylward has [...] opened my eyes to how themes from antiquity remain

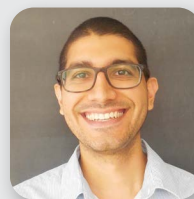
present in our everyday world.”

“His pedagogy includes lots of small details that [...] make a class genuinely enjoyable, especially for me, a very tired senior!”



**Anja Jovic-Humphrey,
English**

“She is not only incredibly passionate and knowledgeable about what she teaches, but she also cares so much about her students. [...] My experiences in her class have had a huge positive impact on my life.”



**Jose Rodriguez,
Mathematics**

“He showed me grace and patience that I have not seen from other faculty members; he created a safe environment for me to grow as a researcher.”