



# The Honors Challenge



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### Cover photo

*First-year Honors students gather on Bascom Hill following an Honors Program welcome, part of Convocation Day activities on September 5, 2023.*

## From the Director



It's autumn outside; I can hear the Badger football game from my office as I type these words. This time of year is always ripe for reflection and renewal.

Amidst many

wonderful things that happened over the past year, our program (and the campus community) suffered a terrible loss – the death of former Faculty Honors Director Charles T. Snowdon. Chuck directed the L&S Honors Program for 5 formative years, 2007-2012. As Director, he built up our undergraduate research program – something he was very passionate about in his own research lab. He also facilitated the renovation of our wonderful space in Washburn Observatory.

This edition of the newsletter is dedicated to Chuck's memory. We highlight some of the programs that Chuck cared about most – the engagement of undergrads in research (*An Honors Summer*) and service (*Making a Difference*),

and the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to key societal questions (*Interdisciplinary Insights*). We also share insights about Chuck's impact on the program from three of his Honors Program senior staff members (Jennifer Kaufman Bueler, Molly McGlone, and Jeff Shokler) and two former Faculty Honors Directors (Cyrena Pondrom and Sabine Gross).

On a personal note, Chuck and I shared more than just our faculty roles as Psychology professors and our engagement in the Honors Program. We both loved to sing. I'll never forget that in 1996, on my first visit to Madison as a faculty candidate, Chuck carved out time in my schedule to bring me to his choir rehearsal – the Choral Union, singing Brahms – as a way to entice me to accept a job here. It worked! He was a magnificent human and I think of him constantly.

On Wisconsin!



### Jenny Saffran

Faculty Director, L&S Honors Program  
Letters & Science Mary Herman Rubinstein Professor

## Interdisciplinary Insights

### *Exploring the First Amendment and the Impact of AI on the UW campus*

By Pete Keys

The L&S Honors Program believes that an emphasis on collaboration among students and faculty leads to a more enriching undergraduate experience and a true liberal arts education. In order to facilitate this engagement for students, the L&S Honors Program

and the Chadbourne Residential College (CRC) collaborated on two student-focused interdisciplinary panels during the 2022-23 academic year.

On the evening of Wednesday, October 12, the collaboration between the two programs facilitated a panel

titled, “First Thoughts on the First Amendment.” The event brought together five UW faculty and staff experts including Howard Schweber (Political Science, UW Law School, Integrated Liberal Studies), Susan Ridgely (Religious Studies), Harry Brighthouse (Philosophy), Riana Bloom (UW Libraries), and Jenson Lee (UW Police Department), to share their thoughts on the evolution of the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment, and the applicability of that evolution to the lives of first- and second-year undergraduates. The relaxed setting set the stage for an exceptionally approachable and engaging experience for undergraduate students, and over 50 signed in throughout the night.

The event was moderated by three current L&S Honors students, Ria Dhingra, Anna Nelson, and Allison Keeley. The three moderators led the panelists through opening remarks on what each panelist felt undergraduate students should know about the changing interpretations of the First Amendment, followed by a robust question and answer component. Topics covered throughout the event included freedom of speech both inside and outside of the classroom, speakers appearing on campus, book bans and the role the libraries play in the dissemination of information, distinctions related to the expression of religious beliefs, the enforcement of violations of the Amendment, and much more!

The second semester iteration of the collaboration occurred on the evening of Tuesday, February 28, with a timely panel titled, “The Rise of Artificial Intelligence: The Impact on College Campuses.” The event brought together six UW faculty and staff experts, including Jerry Zhu (Computer

Curriculum), to share their thoughts on the growth and expansion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the immediate and long-term potential impacts.

This event, too, was moderated by three current L&S Honors students, Jackson Kunde, Lauren Stoneman, and Anushka Pradhan. The moderators led the panelists through opening remarks on whether each felt that access to generative AI, like that used to power ChatGPT and other chatbots, would have a net positive or negative on college campuses. The conversation highlighted how campus classrooms, student lives, and “College,” as an idea, may change in this new age of technology.

Sincere thanks to the Bill Cronon Fund for Pathways to Excellence for sponsoring these events. We also share many thanks to the planning committee members, the panelists, and the student moderators who offered their time and expertise to make these events possible. These interdisciplinary panels exemplify a dedication to collaborative dialogue and expanding intellectual horizons for undergraduate students. By delving into critical topics such as the First Amendment’s evolution and the influence of Artificial Intelligence, it is the hope of the L&S Honors Program

that these events encourage a deeper understanding of the dynamics that shape the undergraduate experience and underscore the importance of informed discussions with our incredible UW faculty and staff.



*L&S Honors students crowd the lounge within Chadbourne Residential Hall to listen to Professor Jerry Zhu (top left) and his fellow faculty discuss the impact of ChatGPT on campus.*

Sciences), Molly Harris (Instructional Design Collaborative), Tonya Schmidt (Office of Student Conduct), Gary Lupyán (Psychology), Jordan Ellenberg (Mathematics), and Emily Hall (Writing Fellows and Writing Across the

# An Honors Summer

By Kristen Jenkins (x'25) and Helen Simpson (x'25)

This past summer, two students in the Honors Program, Helen Simpson and Kristen Jenkins, worked as Honors peer advisors throughout Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration (SOAR) and also conducted research as Honors Summer Research Apprentices. Helen is a junior double majoring in political science and legal studies with certificates in gender and women's studies and public policy. Kristen is a junior majoring in political science with certificates in French, public policy, and leadership. Below they reflect on their "Honors summer."

We both joined the SOAR advising team because we wanted to help cultivate the incoming group of Honors students and provide them with the support that the Honors Program has given us these past few years. We were able to contribute to both the academic advising and social aspect of SOAR, which allows students to acclimate to the UW community. Letting students know they have the information and resources for success in the Honors Program as well as creating a space where students can engage with their fellow incoming Honors peers enables them to feel comfortable at UW before they move onto campus. We also found ourselves regularly applying the motivational interviewing techniques we learned during training, and our active listening and communication skills grew over the summer. Kristen even ended up following her own SOAR advice and changed her fall schedule to include a class selected out of pure interest, which helped her feel much more excited about her fall semester.

In addition to working as SOAR peer advisors, we also worked as research assistants thanks to Honors Summer Research Apprenticeship grants. Helen has been working as a research assistant with the UW Law School for the last two years and wanted to continue this work over the summer term. This apprenticeship allowed her to dedicate a significant chunk of her summer to continuing her existing research in corporate governance. Kristen was drawn to this research opportunity because she was interested in research and completing a senior thesis, but she did not know what research looked like in the humanities and social sciences. Through her research experience working with philosophy professor James Messina in his study of Kant's metaphysical views on space, she was able to become more familiar with a research process in the humanities and hopes to apply what she learned in her senior thesis. Kristen also helped out the UW Library and future scholars by identifying and reporting a miscataloged



book. We both plan to pursue graduate degrees, and this apprenticeship allowed us to get a better idea of what type of post-graduate degree we may want to pursue while forming connections with esteemed UW faculty members. We were also able to talk about research and graduate school with the third Honors peer advisor at SOAR, Sam Downey. Sam is starting a PhD program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and stressed to us the role that the Honors staff played in supporting them throughout undergrad and their graduate school application process.

Although not all Honors students are as consumed with the Honors Program as we were, the opportunities provided to us this summer are examples of the academic and professional development opportunities the Honors Program works so hard to provide its students. The Honors Program staff was incredibly supportive of both of us this summer. The staff ensured that our experiences as Honors students was considered in the formulation of curriculum and programming of SOAR and the apprenticeship program, with our feedback and suggestions incorporated throughout the summer. Supervisors were always cognizant of our outside obligations and flexible with scheduling. Our Honors summer shows how the Honors Program helps students form valuable connections inside and outside of the classroom and feel supported in the exploration and pursuit of their goals.



Kristen Jenkins joins her fellow L&S Honors Summer Apprentices to discuss their research at the annual Apprenticeship Retreat.



# Making a Difference: Honors Students' Time and Talent in Volunteering

By Pete Keys

One of the key tenets of the L&S Honors Program mission statement is to promote leadership, service, and engaged citizenship with respect for all. During the 2022-23 academic year, L&S Honors students sought to put that tenet into practice by donating their time and energy to impact the greater UW community, both on and off campus.

On the morning of Sunday, October 2, L&S Honors students gathered at the Frautschi Point parking lot, then traversed into the UW–Madison Lakeshore Nature Preserve. As a group, these environmentally minded students worked with the Preserve's volunteer coordinator to support the effort of the Oak Savanna Restoration Project. As part of their efforts, students worked in teams to remove invasive shrubs and collect native prairie seeds.

Later that month, on the afternoon of Friday, October 21, a host of L&S Honors students made their way out into the greater Madison community to lend a hand to those in need through a partnership event with Goodman Community Center. At the Center, these motivated students worked with other volunteers to sort through various donations and stock shelves in the food pantry. Goodman staff reported that they were delighted to host the Honors students and were impressed with their enthusiasm and work ethic.

To help embrace spring on the UW campus, a group of seven L&S Honors students joined the Allen Centennial Garden staff on Wednesday, April 26, in a host of projects to help restore the Garden after a long winter. The students, led by L&S Honors Student Ambassador, Sam Downey, contributed in the following ways: cleaning the beds outside the fence (next to the entrance), clearing dirt and debris spilling onto the sidewalk, transplanting grasses, and conducting general maintenance to the entryway.

The act of volunteering not only improves the lives of those being served but also enriches the lives of the volunteers themselves. By donating their time, these Honors students have given us all an opportunity to remember that small acts of kindness and generosity can have a great impact on a community, inspiring others to help make the campus a better place for everyone.



## 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](mailto:abby.funseth@supportuw.org)).

### WOULD YOU LIKE TO OFFER SPECIFIC SUPPORT?

Please contact Jenny at [director@honors.ls.wisc.edu](mailto:director@honors.ls.wisc.edu) to share your ideas, find out what Honors is doing, and discuss what additional possibilities we envision.

# Remembering Chuck Snowdon

**Former L&S Honors staff and Faculty Directors share their memories and perspectives in honor of Chuck.**

**Jeff Shokler, Director of Technology and Assessment, Office of Academic and Career Success**

I had the distinct pleasure of working with Chuck as Associate Director of the L&S Honors Program during the five years he served as Director between 2007-2012. During this time under Chuck's leadership, the program grew and succeeded in numerous ways, including settling into its permanent home in Washburn Observatory, implementing an entirely new admissions philosophy and practice that continues to this day, and very successfully fundraising to expand and sustain the opportunities for Honors students to engage in research both early in their careers and at the senior thesis level.

While those achievements — and so many more — were notable, what I always valued about Chuck was that he was “people first.” Chuck was incredibly kind and generous and always made himself accessible to both staff and students. He was invested in our success and helped guide so many people in making progress toward their goals, whatever they might be. I think Chuck's and my favorite Honors activity was the annual Summer Sophomore Research Apprenticeship Retreat held at the beautiful Hilltop Farm site near Spring Green. At the Retreat, we would hear about the experiences of 30-40 students who served over the course of the summer as research apprentices with faculty in a wide array of disciplines. Chuck and I would meet, usually with bright eyes and big grins on our faces, on the open-air porch at Hilltop in between student sessions to discuss what exciting things the students had done and how well they had presented their experiences to their peers and faculty

mentors gathered at the Retreat. Chuck was always so energized, smiling, and excited at that event. On the often hot and sweaty school bus ride home, he would sit in the middle of the bus surrounded by students listening to them, chatting with them, and continuing the spirit of the event all the way back to Madison. While working that event was often exhausting for staff (major events almost always are), you could just see how energized Chuck was by it, and that energy was infectious.

The enthusiasm he displayed for the Sophomore Apprentices at the Sophomore Retreats manifested in his day-to-day work and activities as Director with students and with the Honors Program staff. Always helpful, always kind, Chuck led with an eye toward innovation and with a solid vision for the program, its staff, its students, and its future success. It was with great sadness that I learned of Chuck's passing. I feel so fortunate that our paths in life crossed. It was an honor to work with Chuck and such a pleasure to get to know him as a person, a leader, and a scholar.

**Jennifer Kaufmann-Buhler, PhD, Associate Professor of Design History, Purdue University**

**Molly McGlone, PhD, Associate Dean and Director of Academic Affairs for the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania**

From the beginning of his time as Director of the Honors Program, Chuck arrived like a breath of fresh air—his infectious energy and warmth brought new life to the office. Chuck was deeply passionate about the importance of undergraduate education and



*Chuck Snowdon*

the value of the liberal arts in facilitating student growth, development, and exploration. As Faculty Director, he advocated for a vision of the program that emphasized student engagement rather than academic credentialing, and this philosophy underpinned many of the changes we made in this period.

He was also instrumental in helping to forge a stronger sense of community and identity in the program among students, faculty, and staff as we moved into our new home at Washburn Observatory. At every Honors event from the Fall Kick-off to graduation, he was the consummate host; always mixing in the crowd, rubbing elbows with students or chatting with parents. He particularly loved our regular research events including the Summer Sophomore retreat at Hilltop, the First Year Fall Retreat, and the Senior Thesis Symposium. No matter the research area, Chuck was always interested, curious, and ready to ask questions about any student project.

For those of us who had the privilege of working with him during his five years as the Faculty Director, we saw firsthand his generosity, compassion, and investment in the program and its mission. At moments of crisis, whether personal or professional, his door was always open and he was willing to listen, to provide counsel, support, and encouragement whenever it was needed. He was also

always ready to leap into the fray and help whenever he was called on—one hot summer day he even stepped into the honors advising room at SOAR to help manage first year enrollment when we were short-staffed. When the new admissions process required all of us to participate, Chuck was right there with us, rolling up his sleeves during admissions season to review incoming student applications.

Chuck was the kind of mentor who lived his values and put the energy he wanted to see into the world. The change to a more inclusive Honors admissions process started with student applications but persisted far beyond that one initiative and into the life of Honors itself. He gave warm, welcoming messages to the incoming class that normalized failure (sharing his own failure in college-level calculus and yet persisting to become a faculty member), his support of staff participating in leadership institutes focused on diversity, equity, and belonging long before it was in the national news, and allowing all participants (students and staff) in Honors to develop their own programs or initiatives. Chuck remained the first to admit when he made a mistake and modeled how to stay engaged by continuously listening, asking questions, and following up when it made sense for him to intervene.

Years later, even as we have both moved on to other institutions and different positions, we feel deep appreciation for all that he did for us and for the program in the time that he was there. It is no coincidence that we both finished our PhDs while working for the program because Chuck recognized the importance of our academic work, and gave us space and flexibility to build in time for writing and research. He recognized that part of what made Honors a special place was that it nurtured growth for its students, its faculty, and its staff. He saw his own

success as intimately bound up with those he mentored and he encouraged his students, staff, and fellow faculty to bring their full selves into the service of others by trying new things, reckoning with negative outcomes, and celebrating the successes.

#### **Dr. Cyrena Pondrom, faculty emerit**

When I was Honors director (2001-2005), I worked with a faculty committee. One of the members of that committee, Chuck Snowdon, was so outstanding I determined to try to make him my successor. In good time, fortunately that came to pass. One of the things Chuck recognized as critical was the Sophomore Summer Apprenticeship Program. That program enlists students during their sophomore summer to work with a faculty member in their research. Some of those students would continue to work on faculty projects for the rest of their undergraduate days and were listed on published papers as co-authors.

Chuck also was extremely responsive to first-generation students, recognizing that they could often excel in Honors work, even if they needed a boost at first. The University of Wisconsin-Madison was fortunate indeed to draw upon Chuck's leadership in the Honors Program.

#### **Dr. Sabine Gross, faculty emerit**

Chuck Snowdon was an inspiring colleague and human being, and I'm grateful to have known him. I owe him the most rewarding six years of my career at the UW-Madison, when I served as faculty director of the Honors Program (2015-2021). He had encouraged me to consider this early on (when I served on the Faculty Advisory Committee of the Honors Program). Throughout my tenure as Director, I'd have regular lunches with him to tap his experience. He was a quietly extraordinary person: a productive and

internationally renowned scholar and someone who served both the university and the Madison community in numerous ways, continuing into his retirement.

Chuck left his mark on the Honors Program in a number of ways:

- He organized a 50-year anniversary celebration that brought dozens of Honors alums together and back to campus. He also persuaded historian Joyce Bromley to research and write what became a substantial history of the Honors Program's first 50 years.
- He shaped the future of the Program in decisive ways by changing the admissions process and placing motivation and inclusion center stage. Inviting every student admitted to L&S to apply to Honors rather than pre-selecting students made the program more open, welcoming, and diverse.
- Chuck was deeply invested in students' well-being and success. There were few things he loved better than discussing students' research projects and plans with them. In any gathering that included students, I would observe and admire the way he immediately connected and engaged with them.

His authoritative knowledge, relaxed style of leadership, and collegiality made Honors meetings a pleasure. In spite of his distinguished profile as a researcher, he did not have a shred of ego or vanity and was able to view the absurdities of academic and administrative culture with gentle skepticism and his trademark quiet humor.

He combined his intellectual exploits with an exhilarating breadth of interests – travel and exploring, music and theater. He and his wife Ann had been generous patrons of the latter for many years.

## College of Letters and Science Dean's Prize Winners

These incredible Honors graduates are the 2023 recipients of the Dean's Prize. Awardees were recognized by Dean Eric Wilcots at the Honors Program commencement ceremonies in May. Their accomplishments reflect the values and possibilities of the Wisconsin Idea.



**Reilly Coon '23 — BA with Honors in the Major**

Coon is passionate about making higher education more accessible to students. As a Bucky's

Classroom Coordinator for UW Connects, she improved college prep outreach for seventh grade students in Wisconsin. She was also a facilitator for Adventure Learning Programs and an editor for UW-Madison History journal, ARCHIVE. She was the equity and inclusion intern with the Associated Students of Madison and served on the boards of the University General Education Committee and Union Council, and the University Health Services Health Care Advisory Committee. Her inclusion work on campus proved her dedication to future generations.



**Alanna Goldstein '22 — BS with Comprehensive Honors**

Goldstein is a committed community activist, advocating for

minority groups. They wrote multiple publications for *Sifting & Winnowing*, promoting policies that support people with disabilities, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ community. They worked for Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers in multiple departments, including the Wisconsin Department of Administration where they helped administer funding to Wisconsin communities and organizations to help recover from the impacts of the COVID-19. Their empathy and scholarship will be assets as they continue working in civil service and pursue a career in public-interest law.



**Abdullah Marei '23 — BS with Honors in the Major**

Marei completed three independent research projects, investigating

topics of white guilt and responsibility, cultural values of queer people of color, and PTSD treatments for children. Marei founded and led the QTPOC student organization, which works to build community for students with multiple marginalized identities. He also contributed to the Multicultural Student Center, the Daily Cardinal, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and the McBurney Disability Resource Center. Marei embodied purposeful action in all the work that he completed on campus.