

HONORS PROGRAM NEWS

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Spring Arts & Culture Festival

Honors Program students hosted several important forums at the 2023 NWACC Spring Arts & Culture Festival.



- **Thanaisawan Hill** ('23), **Yullyana Laguna**, and **Ally Davidson** presented data from the NWACC hunger survey during the session "The Food Picture: Hunger in NWA." They were joined on stage by representatives from around the state: Cathy May of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance; Jennie Popp, Associate Dean of the Honors College and a professor of Agricultural Economics and Business at UA; and Daniel Smith, NWA Food Bank Programs Data Manager. **Hill** said the presentation "really opened my eyes to the hardships people around me experienced."

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Alumni Interviews

ALUMNUS REECE HODGSON ('23), an NWACC Honors Program Graduate, wrapped up his final year at the UA Walton College of Business, earning six senior awards (listed below). We caught up with him to talk about the University of Arkansas and to reflect on his time at NWACC.



When did you graduate from NWACC?

After moving to Arkansas from the United Kingdom, I started at NWACC in December 2017. I finished at NWACC three semesters later, in May 2019, and started at UARK that August. I was 18 at the time.

How did you get interested in the Walton College of Business? What path did you take?

I had planned to study finance since I was 12 years old. When I left NWACC, the University of Arkansas offered me an \$80,000 scholarship, called the Honors College Fellowship, that would fully fund four years of study and provide housing, food, and research funding. Due to the Walton College being a highly ranked business school, my plans to stay in Northwest Arkansas after graduation, and this scholarship offer, attending UARK was a no-brainer for me! I started out as a Finance major. I soon added two more majors in Accounting and Information Systems and a minor in Data Analytics. I am graduating with a triple major and

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Laguna also commented on "how important it is to be open and aware to learning about topics like these that could affect people close to us." This presentation also provided **Davidson** with new perspectives, including that "influences other than money that can hinder getting food, such as transportation."

- **Kelly Smothers** led a heartfelt discussion of the National best selling book *Sissy, A Coming of Gender Story* by Jacob Tobias. Both presenters and audience members shared emotional experiences and commentary about their own lives and loved ones. **Smothers** said, "I think one of my favorite things about reading it myself was that I could gain the insight I needed to understand the mindset and the struggles that transgender people experience. I have transgender friends and I know that I will benefit them by having this understanding." **Becca Trammell**, also part of the presentation, said, "It was interesting to see a large variety of people from across campus come together and discuss what for some is a new or difficult topic."
- **Professor Sabrina Chesne's** Honors Composition II students researched banned books...

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minor and Summa Cum Laude this May, with a 4.0 GPA.

Senior Honor Citation - Awarded to the top two seniors across the entire UA each year, determined by extracurricular involvement, demonstrated leadership skills, and academic achievement

Walton College Outstanding Graduating Senior - Awarded to one student from the Walton College of Business each year, determined by faculty recommendations and extracurricular involvement

Razorback Classic - Awarded to the top twenty seniors across the entire UA each year

Senior of Significance - Awarded to the top 71 seniors across the entire UA each year

Outstanding Information Systems Senior - Awarded to three students in the Department of Information Systems each year

First-Ranked Senior Scholar - Awarded to nine students in the Walton College of Business this year for maintaining a 4.0 GPA and taking all classes at UARK after starting at UARK

What are your plans?

I'll start in August as a Financial Analyst II at Walmart in their Accounting and Finance Development Program. I will rotate through four different finance roles, with six months in each position, and will then be promoted to Finance Manager II.

What is your favorite memory from the Honors Program?

Without a doubt, my favorite memory from NWACC Honors was the game nights that we organized. A group of up to a dozen of us would meet up biweekly to eat an ungodly amount of pizza rolls and play board games.

Favorite class or instructor?

My favorite classes at NWACC were World Civilizations from 1650 with Dr. Sevin Gallo and World Literature II with Professor Megan Looney. World Civ was a particularly fun class because we learned about human history through the lens of food, conducting lots of our lectures and class discussions at restaurants serving myriad cuisines. I enjoyed World Lit II because of the creativity of Professor Looney's assignments. For my final, I wrote a Hunger Games-esque short story, pitting the characters we had studied throughout the semester against each other.

What did the Honors Program offer you?

Aside from financial assistance via scholarships, NWACC Honors provided me with a tight knit community. After

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...and presented them to winners in the game-style session "The (Dis)appearing Body and Bodies of Academic Freedom at NWACC and Academia". Class member **Steve Garretson** said, the session "started some sidebar conversations about censorship within earshot of me." **Adeola Abe** came to a conclusion that "to ban something, especially if it's a piece of intellectual work like a book, a clear reason needs to be given and the same standard should be applied to all books instead of targeting a specific genre or author." **Chesne** was also joined on stage by Honors Political Science professor, **Dr. Matt Evans**, who co-facilitated the project, and said the project "taught basic facts and concepts about academic freedom and the broader context of the first amendment in a college context." *

moving from the United Kingdom at the age of 16, I knew basically no one on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. The game nights, afternoon hangouts, and classroom discussions that I had with my peers in NWACC Honors were a truly instrumental part of adapting to life in the States for me.

What do you wish people knew about Honors courses in the Program?

"Honors" does not mean just "hard"! In my experience, there was little difference in the difficulty of honors and non-honors classes. Instead, honors courses required students to be more creative, think freely, and truly commit to creating something new out of the material taught, such as the Hunger Games adaption of literature from around the world that I wrote. *

ALUMNA VERONICA GARCIA-CARVAJAL ('17) is an NWACC Honors Program Graduate who is currently working on medical school applications. We caught up with her to discuss how the Honors Program affected her and what she's up to now.

*When did you graduate?*

I graduated from NWACC in May 2017 with my associate's degree in business.

How did you get interested in med school? What path did you take?

I was always interested in being a doctor! I remember even while I was at NWACC, I used to volunteer at the Mercy Hospital right next door in between classes and absolutely loved interacting with the care team and patients. I think I was hesitant to pursue medicine at first because I had to prioritize graduating quickly and supporting myself financially. The path to becoming a physician is quite the journey and definitely a privilege to pursue. After graduating with my bachelor's degree in Finance, I started working for AdventHealth in Tampa, FL, and supported the operations of multiple hospitals. I was a behind-the-scenes witness to a worldwide

pandemic and was able to observe the ways it magnified already rampant issues in barriers. While I was excited to be a part of a team indirectly impacting patients' lives, I felt something was missing. I decided to take the risk and return to school to complete prerequisites for medical school. It was the scariest yet most relieving decision I've ever made, and I'm thankful for the opportunity.

What are your plans after?

Having completed my post-baccalaureate certificate at UPenn, I am ready to apply to medical school this summer. I am still unsure about what I would like to specialize in; however, my ultimate goal is to focus on women's health.

What is your favorite memory from the Honors Program?

One of my favorite memories from the Honors Program was working on a project regarding the nature preserve on NWACC's campus. During Honors Biology with Ellen Turner, my classmates and I learned all about the unique attributes of the preserve and were able to present our findings to the Board of Trustees. Overall, it was an extremely rewarding project, and I was excited to learn about the unique plot of land on our very own campus!

What was your favorite class and/or instructor?

Professor Laughton's English Composition course was a defining moment for me. He not only fostered a supportive and creative learning environment, but he was one of the first professors that made me feel capable in my academic pursuits.

What do you feel the Honors Program gave you?

From the moment I joined, I was welcomed into a close-knit community of students and professors who shared my passion for learning and personal growth. The program offered me access to phenomenal professors who took a special interest in my academic pursuits, as well as countless opportunities to get involved in community service and leadership activities. I also made wonderful friends who continue to inspire and support me to this day.

What do you wish people knew about Honors courses in the Program?

Connor & The Ivys



Recent graduate **Connor Odom** ('22) visited with Honors students via Zoom this past March, discussing his journey of becoming a transfer student at Princeton University in Fall of 2022.

Current Honors student **Angela Deneke** was inspired by the discussion, saying, "After listening to Connor and his story on how he was able to be a non-traditional student and still achieve being accepted to such a prestige school, it opened the door for me to believe that I can do it too. He also showed me the great and supportive community that our Honors Program has where even when Connor graduated, he continued to share and help the students that might be in a similar situation."

Watch the full video [here](#) *

As a student myself, I know that some classes can feel like a chore, and it's tempting to treat them as boxes to be checked off. However, I encourage other students to take ownership of their education and embrace the experience. Especially with the support of the Honors Program community, the time invested in studies and projects is well worth it. I know I gained priceless new perspectives and skills that I continue to carry with me. *

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Kate Auld



Astronomy Professor and Physical Science Department Chair Dr. Kate Auld, was one of 24 teachers selected as a 2022 NASA Astronomy Activation Ambassador by the [SETI Institute](#). Because of this honor, she was able to visit NASA's InfraRed Telescope Facility (IRTF) at the summit of Maunakea, Hawai'i. The telescope was built for the 1977 Voyager mission and currently supports deep space exploration. Because the telescope captures infrared light, it can "see" heat from planetary objects. It is also useful because light has been stretched by the expansion of the Universe. High-

energy light given off by early stars that formed shortly after the Big Bang has been traveling through space for billions of years. During that time, space itself has expanded, stretching the wavelengths of the light from very short to larger waves that we define as infrared.

Dr. Auld on her experience: "The IRTF, NASA's only ground-based infrared telescope, is located on Maunakea at 13,796 feet because infrared light cannot pass through our atmosphere. The wavelength is sized so that it runs into the atoms and particles in our atmosphere and is absorbed. The night we were observing, we were collecting data about the heat given off by the moons of Uranus to learn about tidal heating and to determine whether or not the moons are causing the orbit and/or rotation of Uranus to change over time. We were able to tour the inner workings of the telescope - the mirror of the IRFT is 3 meters. The following day, we received a tour of the 8.1 meter Gemini North telescope. It was fascinating to be able to see how its engineering allows light from a star or distant galaxy to be split between multiple instruments at the same time. Over the next few days we received tours of several University of Hawai'i facilities at sea level where the data is processed and shared with the public."

Dr. Auld is also a member of NASA Community College Network and a NASA Solar System Ambassador.

How do your special interests feature in your Honors teachings?

I include the AAA experience in all my classes, but my Honors class gets an in-depth lecture on Hawaii. My publications on gully formation on Mars also play an enhanced role in the Honors class. The students read my articles and we have a discussion on simulation and models in the development of science. All of these activities link back to my belief that science is all around us and intricately fused into all areas of our lives. We need only be introduced to those links to see them for ourselves and that is the entire reason for a college education. To further share this, I am very involved in Boy Scouts, teaching many science-based merit badges and organizing science and technology activities for local units, districts, and councils.

How did you fall in love with space?

My appreciation of the night sky began as a young child watching the Perseid meteor shower, sitting on a blanket in a pasture in Texas with my grandmother. We ate cheese and crackers while the sky lit up with falling meteorites. The following day we went to the library so I could find a book on meteors. My fascination with space began later that same fall when my fourth grade class watched Columbia's launch plume billow out as it lifted off the pad in November 1981.

Check out the article about the 24 teachers selected as 2022 NASA Airborne Astronomy Ambassadors [here](#). *

Honors Awards Gala (April 25, 2023)

The annual Honors Awards Gala honored outstanding students (chosen by faculty) and outstanding instructors (chosen by students), as well as Honors Program Graduates and Honors Program Distinguished students. Graduates were also awarded their Honors Program graduation medallions. The awards are as follows:

Honors Program Graduates (medallions):

Kass Bauer - Associate of Science, General Business
Thanaisawan Hill - Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences
D. Ryan Howard - Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences
Stephanie Palacios - Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences
Maria G. Tapia Parra - Associate of Arts

Honors Program Distinction:

Caiten Knight - Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences

Honors Glass Awards:

Brown Chesne Honors Program Award:

Thanaisawan Hill - *For dedication to Community, Curiosity, and Diversity*

Olivia and Benjamin Schaap Honors Program Award:

D. Ryan Howard - *For outstanding dedication to Honors scholarship*

Dodd Huggard Honors Program Award:

Yullyana Laguna - *For outstanding work in Honors Social or Behavioral Sciences*

Fox Looney Laughton Honors Program Award:

Trevor Heitzman & Becca Trammell - *For outstanding work in Honors English, Literature, or Humanities*

Turner Honors Program Award:

Thanaisawan Hill - *For outstanding work in Honors Life or Physical Sciences*

Cooper Honors Program Award:

Ally Davidson & Angela Deneke - *For outstanding work in Honors Arts, Communication, Music, or Theatre*

Honors Program Advocate Extraordinaire:

Veronica Nieto

Graduation Paperweights:

Thanaisawan Hill - HSA President, Spring 2023

Stephanie Palacios - HSA President, Fall 2022

Maria G. Tapia Parra - HSA Secretary, Fall 2022

Outstanding Honors Student Association Member:

Yullyana Laguna - 2022-2023



Outstanding Honors Program Instructor Awards:

For outstanding dedication to the Honors mission and Honors students

Sabrina Chesne

Matt Evans

Sevin Gallo