

Spring 2026 Honors Reflection
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Graduating May 9, 2026



Honors Courses Taken:
Introduction to the United Nations
Environmental Science + Lab
Introduction to Comparative Politics
Introduction to Biological Anthropology + Lab
Intermediate Spanish I

Section 1: In what ways did the Program help you “demonstrate engagement,” “cultivate curiosity,” and “explore perspectives” (community, curiosity, and diversity)? Talk about specific events and classes.

The Honors program designs its classes to cater to the student and class instead of standardizing material and curriculum, even in STEM-based classes, where the subject tends to be more “objective”. At any chance they got, the professors in my honors classes always opened up the discussion to different perspectives, and allowed students to tackle assignments in their own way, making way for diversity of thought. One of my favorite examples is in my very first Honors science class, Environmental Science. I took the class with Dr. Zawada, who was always interested in what the class had to say, even mid-lecture. I specifically remember when we were doing a [water lab](#) while the class was conversing. It was still fairly early in the semester and she was

figuring out how to design the last few unassigned lab days to interest us as much as possible. Our class only had around ten people, so on most days (like this one), we would have a casual conversation just as a class all together. She was listening to all of us discuss the results of our water lab and connect them to our interests or field of study. For example, one of my classmates was connecting poor water quality to unequal access to clean water based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors, and briefly brought up how many powerful corporations are massive contributors to unequal access to water. Another classmate was talking about how his water sample was from an area home to many animals and unique species to the Ozarks, and was upset to see how poor the water was in quality. I had a sample from my younger sister's turtle tank, and I mentioned that the hard water in Arkansas is a million times cleaner than it is in Los Angeles, so the turtle was very fortunate to be receiving clean water rather than the polluted, dirty water I used to have in a poor area of Los Angeles. I brought up how so many politicians in California are overly concerned with the wrong problems—rather than getting cleaner water for those in poverty, combating homelessness, or allocating more funding towards our public school district, the politicians in California were focused on anti-homeless (and anti-low income, even) infrastructure and legislature, reallocating funding to the police departments, or making deals with lobbyists to further a certain agenda.

After we all finished our labs, Dr. Zawada brought up how we had such fascinating discussions and said she really enjoyed hearing us discuss our interests while finding a connection to Environmental Science. This was when she brought up her idea to fill in the unassigned lab days with seminars based on a topic that meant a lot to us with a strong connection to Environmental Science. The seminars would be hosted and guided by one student, and the host would write a summary on the topic and questions or subtopics for everyone else to research before the day of the seminar. For the last thirty minutes of class, we each raised our hands to bring up a topic we loved while she wrote it on the board enthusiastically. I brought up the impact of [nuclear proliferation on the environment](#) since I have a deep interest in disarmament, which she positively received. On the day of my seminar, she asked me a variety of questions, ones that I never even considered, like how long you can hold a nuclear weapon before it begins to break down. She enthusiastically asked me for my thoughts on how we could possibly take steps towards non-proliferation, particularly in the environmental context, and asked me to elaborate further on why my ideas for action would be effective. Lastly, Dr. Zawada encouraged everyone to take a quick look at my attached position paper that I wrote for a Model United Nations conference, saying that it helped gather important international information that might help us broaden our perspectives later on.

Other seminar topics included animals, specifically big cats, in captivity, the environmental impact of the American lawn, artificial intelligence and data centers, and how species are adapting to climate change. I look back on this experience so fondly because the professor was just so excited to see us make connections between seemingly irrelevant topics and Environmental Science. By making this effort to integrate our interests in the class itself, she fostered an environment that encouraged us to be curious, explore, and learn about the world around us, rather than sticking to a textbook, which is exactly what the Honors experience should be like.

Section 2: How did this program prepare you for a university (or for a workplace, if you aren't transferring at this point)? What hard or soft skills will you take with you? How and where did you learn these?

The Honors program encouraged me to use my “less academic” skills, like public speaking, connections to the real world, or negotiation. While Honors classes (and NWACC classes as a whole) have various research, writing, and collaborative components to their courses, Honors allowed me to expand more on my seemingly “useless” skills in a way that would help me advance in my career later on. I am working towards becoming a foreign service officer, which requires a lot of negotiation, compromise, formal speechmaking, and intense leadership. Many of my regular classes never focused much on any of these, even during group projects. While I often took on a leadership role that delegated and oversaw tasks, there is only so much you can work with in a group project.

However, my Honors classes were designed around making these overlooked skills stronger. For instance, my Introduction to the United Nations class with Dr. Evans had a Model United Nations (MUN) component to the class, which focused greatly on diplomatic debate and interactions. I already had years worth of prior experience in MUN, but experiencing MUN with a course backing it made me see certain aspects in a deeper, more complex manner. I clearly understood the boundaries of a UN body and what actions they are actually able to take, strengthened my speeches using academic terminology and case studies from the class, and connecting these topics to the real world allowed me to [creatively craft a realistic, extensively detailed solution with many others](#) to the proposed problem in MUN. The research and assignments in my Introduction to the United Nations class certainly helped me with my knowledge on the UN, allowing me to negotiate and compromise



As part of MUN, we attend a conference in New York, which hosts a closing ceremony in the UN capital.

with others to a stronger degree, write impactful speeches, and overall, conduct myself with better confidence because I understood more. While a lot of this seems irrelevant, it helped me uncover and strengthen my most underrated, yet my most valuable skills. After years of honing the same skills over and over again throughout high school and most of college (which are often promoted as the only skills that will get you anywhere, simply not true), it was refreshing seeing a class value the more “minimized” skills.



On the left: Angela and I were codelegates in the National MUN 2025 conference, representing Barbados
On the right: Ghazal and I were codelegates in the National MUN 2026 conference, representing Mongolia.
In the 2025-2026 academic year, I became one of the captains of the team!



In short, Honors classes strengthened my inner confidence, decision making, debate, negotiation, compromise, public speaking, diplomatic relations with others, leadership, solution-building, and connections between research and the real world, while further building on my already existing skills, like researching, writing, and complex analysis. Although most of these skills are not as valuable in a traditional class, they will help me flourish in extracurricular activities by allowing me to take the lead and conduct myself professionally, and my career in the future.

Section 3: What is one experience you had while a member that you'd like to share?

This experience has nothing to do with academics or learning, but I still look upon it fondly, and I feel that it reflects the community aspect of the Honors Program. I was sitting in Dr. Bandy's class for Introduction to Biological Anthropology when she had one of the counselors from the Wellness Center come in and speak to us about what resources we had available to us. It was the usual Wellness Center pitch to all students, letting all students know that they are there for them at any moment, even if their problems seem small. Personally, I had heard the same presentation several times—I was one of the student speakers for the in-person summer orientations, so I saw all the presentations over and over again, including the Wellness Center's. As someone that

has struggled with their mental health, I always appreciate when the Wellness Center makes it known that they are there, but admittedly, I was a tad bit checked out. Eventually, I heard Dr. Bandy chime in and give her own input. She gave a sentimental speech about how she is always there for us, and we could walk into her office, stay after class, or email her if we ever had any problems that we felt comfortable with expressing to her. One of the most touching parts was when she related to us, talking about how she was in our shoes at one point, sharing that she herself had some of the most difficult moments in her life throughout college. She encouraged us to reach out for help whenever we needed it, whether it was through the Wellness Center, a friend or family member, or herself. Above anything, she told us to continue and push through. I felt the class intently listen to every word she said. Afterwards, I heard some students express appreciation for her words. This moment replays in my head pretty often. I have always felt excessive shame for asking for help, and I still struggle with asking to this day, but Dr. Bandy made it feel less shameful. Dr. Bandy and her genuine care for students is one of the many things that sets the Honors program apart from the general population. When your community is close knit, you are able to have these difficult conversations with one another, listen and understand, and lean on each other for encouragement and support.

[Counseling and Wellness Center](#): Student Center, 2nd floor; (479) 619-4128;
counseling@nwacc.edu
Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

Section 4: Considering all you have written for the above, what advice do you have for new members? This answer should be “short and sweet.”

I was struggling immensely throughout my final year here at NWACC. I faced some of the most difficult, unpredictable things that impacted me so much that I could not keep up in any of my classes for some portions of the fall and spring semester. While it was shameful for me to talk about at first, I ended up opening up and requesting extensions or being transparent about my situation, which helped me get back on track and, most importantly, stay in school. My biggest advice to anyone who is struggling, whether it is at home or in class, is to communicate with your professors. Remember that it is not shameful to need help. Your professor’s main goal is to make sure you learn, apply their teachings, and move on to the next step, so they will be your number one supporters throughout any hard times.