

## **Samantha Hansen**



**Graduation: May 2026**

**Major: Music Education**

**Honors Courses:**

**English Comp II, Intro to Theater, Gender Studies, World Religions.**

## **Section 1: Demonstrating Engagement, Cultivating Curiosity, and Exploring Perspectives.**

“Me? An honors student?” My high-school self would not be able to fathom how that could possibly be. If that lady could see me today, she’d think I’m a completely different person, and in many ways, she’d be right. I don’t recognize her anymore; she’s a different person. That’s not me. She hesitated to speak up in class, worried that her questions might sound silly. She avoided challenges that seemed too big, too complex, or too unfamiliar. She clung to what she knew, never imagining that curiosity could be something to actively grow rather than quietly suppress. For quite literally all practical purposes, she was a different person from me, and it would thus only be appropriate to speak about her in the third person.

It would be that at the age of eighteen, Samantha, in her second semester of community college, having received two recommendations for the honors program, would sign up for a single honors course: Honors English Composition II, not knowing that taking honors courses was not the same as being in the honors program. When she learned about this fact, she found it lamentable, because she did not believe she belonged in the program, and would not sign up. And so it unfolded that one day as she was walking along the sidewalk on campus, she saw a solitary dandelion growing between the cracks of the sidewalk. It was small and unassuming, yet it had pushed its way through concrete and dust to reach the sunlight. Samantha stopped and looked at it, beholding the quiet determination it took to flourish in such an unlikely place. On that day it followed that when the honors program was celebrating its twentieth anniversary, Samantha, inspired by the resilience of a solitary flower, applied to join the program. And so it was that she entered the honors program, and she carried with her the quiet yet profound lesson of the dandelion: that curiosity, like delicate seedlings, can thrive even in the harshest of circumstances if it is tended with patience and courage. She learned that engagement involves focusing on ideas that challenge her, lingering with perspectives she does not yet understand, and actively participating in the growth of knowledge alongside others. This would have a profound impact on how she would understand curiosity and engagement all the rest of her days in the honors program.

She continued to immerse herself in the honors program, and when the Spring Arts and Culture Festival came around, she read aloud a book for an honors project about censored and banned books. She, being nervous about having her face and voice on display, put off the project for many days before finally doing it. When she finally stepped up, she found that sharing her voice and perspective was an exercise in engagement, and that leaning into discomfort could help create change in the world. And so she continued participating in the program—attending meetings, engaging with peers, and speaking up when necessary. She was inspired to lift her voice for causes that mattered, advocating for accessibility on campus, and she was blessed to take on leadership roles, becoming vice president of PRIDE at NWACC and treasurer for Arkansas Young Democrats at NWACC.

## **Section 2: Hard and Soft Skills, Preparing for Workplace/University.**

In time, Samantha would realize that the next stage of her life would not come merely through completing assignments and attending meetings, but through engaging with the world intentionally. In Honors English Composition II, she had Sabrina Chesne as a professor, and not a single essay went unmarked during those days. Each comment, suggestion, and question was as an invitation to dig deeper, and wrestle thoughtfully with what had been looked over. She learned how to structure an argument so that each point built naturally from the last, how to craft a thesis that guided the reader without constraining herself, and how to persuasively use evidence to support her theses, and through this guidance, she was blessed to author essays such as “Censorship of Trans Identities: Trans Historical” and “On Artificial Intelligence: Is the Music Industry Losing Creativity?,” each a reflection of her growing ability to think critically, reason clearly, and express her ideas with confidence and care. The dandelion, once small and unassuming, was reaching the sunlight through the cracks.

It would also be that, alongside writing essays, Samantha would learn from the stage. In the fall semester, Samantha would come to decide to try an experience, the iceberg of which she had never even scratched: Honors Theater. There she learned practical skills: how to project her voice so that it could reach an audience, and how to use movement, timing, and expression to communicate meaning. Samantha, a woman highly acquainted with learning things through theory, realized that these skills could not be acquired through theory alone, but required her to be willing to practice them in the open in front of other people. Samantha found that these skills would help her work alongside others in collaborative efforts, which are skills that carry over to university and the workplace.

### **Section 3: Experiences in the Honors Program.**

Samantha grew fond of the honors hub, a lounge that, apart from giving her a quiet place to study, would be a place where she could build and nurture friendships. Here, she discovered a community of peers who were ambitious in the same way she was but also shared many similar weaknesses to her. The honors hub was a space where she could learn even outside of a classroom. It would be there that Samantha would use conversations as forms of engagement. She discussed essays, projects, and could even be vulnerable with those whom she would meet. She would come to learn that the honors program is not an elitist club for all the perfect people, but something that anyone could strive for, and that honors is more about showing up even when nervous than about being completely perfect.

In the spring semester of her second year at NWACC, Samantha would take Honors World Religions and Honors Gender Studies, and she found it profitable to her engagement to treat these classes as if they were book clubs. In fact, she even participated in a book club discussion on *Is Love the Answer?* by Uta Isaki as part of Honors Gender Studies.

### **Section 4: Advice for New Members.**

And now, beloved reader, I speak not of my past self but of myself in the present. Do you think the accolades from enduring through this program mean anything to me? I tell you that they do not. Medallion may appear beautiful on the outside, but I tell you it shall rot in storage, never to be seen again. What endures longer, even throughout the entire span of my life is the lessons learned and the bonds formed. One day I may join another, greater, more prestigious honors program, and the accolades from this one will be a mustard seed in comparison, but I tell you that even the medallion from that program shall rot. In light of this, dear reader, I leave you with the words first written by Paul of Tarsus to the churches in Ancient Corinth and taught to me by my grandfather, who was taught these words by his mother: “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love” (Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:13).