

# Honors Program Newsletter

BALANCING ACTS • CELEBRATING 20 YEARS • MODEL UN • DEBATE • GPHCC • AWARDS GALA



## Balancing Acts

*From classrooms to kitchens, fields, and offices, our Honors students, faculty, deans, athletes, and even chefs are showing us what it means to wear more than one hat. This issue highlights the drive, creativity, and resilience it takes to balance rigorous academics with leadership, passions, and second roles that shape who they are and how they inspire others.*

**MARIAN HENDRICKS (pictured above) talks about participating in NWACC Athletics and balancing cross country with Honors classes.**

**How did you end up an Eagle (cross country)? Why did you get into sports at NWACC?**

Growing up, I was always in sports, or doing some sort of activity. In high school, I played volleyball at BHS. My junior year of high school I got sick and was in the hospital for sometime, and my team was my biggest support system to me and my family. Since that day, I have always wanted to be on a sports team. I decided to go to NWACC because it was close to home, and I did not want to go to the University of Arkansas yet. So when I came in, I knew I had to get involved with athletics. I showed up to the athletic office and asked what I had to do to be a part of the team. I made the commitment and I have been running since.

## Honors Celebrates 20 Years!

NWACC's Honors Program marked its 20th anniversary this spring with both reflection and celebration.

Chris Huggard, the program's founding director (2004–2007), and current director Sabrina Chesne (since 2015) joined Kyle Kellums on KUAF's Ozarks at Large on March 20, 2025, to share what the program has meant to students and faculty over two decades.

**cont. pg 2**

**What's it like to balance NWACC Athletics and honors? What do you hope balancing the two has taught you that you can carry to a university and into the workforce?**

Balancing both things is very hard. It's a heavy workload both academically and physically. Being in athletics holds us to a higher standard than most students, likewise honors does the same thing. Honors challenges our minds and ways of thinking. Athletics challenges our body and how hard we are willing to push to achieve our goal. What can I take from this experience? Two things:

1. Discipline - to get better you gotta show up and work hard, and you gotta show up everyday.
2. Priorities - your goals come first, you are going to show up for what you want to achieve.

**What was your favorite honors class or instructor and why?**

It was public speaking with Kendra James, I personally like public speaking, and she let us pick a topic we were interested in to talk about. Professor James was really intentional about making the class fun. She didn't ever just sit there and talk, it was very interactive, lots of learning-based games. Also, public speaking is just fun, that fear you feel when you step in front of everyone before you speak is something I enjoy (it's crazy, I know).

**What's your favorite Honors memory, so far?**

Probably the Gala from last year. It was really fun to actually see how many people are involved in Honors, and their families. The food was good, the vibes were light and chill, and I had a grand old time. Also, taking the picture of the whole program was so chaotic and funny.

**What does the Honors Program offer you? What do you wish people knew about Honors?**

Honors is more than just a challenge. It's a place where you meet great friends and actually feel like you belong. Honestly, I wish more people knew how awesome honors professors really are. They don't just teach you stuff; they push you to be better and help you see what you're truly capable of. Being part of that community makes a big difference.

**What are your future plans?**

After finishing my sophomore year at NWACC, I plan to go to University of Arkansas or Kansas State to study hospitality. I want to work on the customer service side of things and find little ways to make people's experience better. •

**20 Years cont.**

Huggard recalled the program's early vision: "to create a space where motivated students could pursue deeper learning and build close connections with faculty."

Chesne highlighted how the program has grown, "offering diverse opportunities for research, leadership, and personal growth." Both noted that Honors not only strengthens academics but also builds confidence, critical thinking, and community.

On campus, the anniversary was celebrated with cake, commemorative t-shirts and stickers, and stories from current students and alumni. Together, the events and reflections marked twenty years of fostering curiosity, collaboration, and scholarship at NWACC — and set the stage for the program's future. •



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**MAXIMUS GIBBON ('25) reflects on his culinary interests from high school and how food led him to Brightwater.****How did you end up at Brightwater? Why did you get into food at NWACC?**

My culinary journey began at Fayetteville High School, where I took a food class that set everything in motion. During the class, I competed in a food truck competition, crafting a dish that won the event and gave me the opportunity to serve meals at the school's food truck. That moment showed me how food connects people - it wasn't just about cooking, but about the shared experience created. Seeing my passion, my teacher handed me a flyer for Brightwater's Concurrent Program, which was launching at my high school. Intrigued, I attended a lecture and enrolled, becoming one of its first students. That decision set me on my path, allowing me to take college-level culinary courses while still in high school. From then on, I knew food would be my lifelong pursuit.

***Model Un to NYC***

In April 2025, as part of the Intro to UN Honors course (PLSC 1303H), Cooper Chiddister, Angela Deneke, Mandy Lopez, and Taryn Settle attended the National Model United Nations conference in New York City, competing against several thousands of college students from around the world. They toured New York City and spent time in the United Nations building, during their time at the conference.

**How did you balance Brightwater and Honors? Any lessons you carried forward?**

Balancing Brightwater and the Honors Program wasn't easy. I was challenged me in two completely different ways: one immersed me in the fast-paced, hands-on world of kitchen experience, while the other pushed me through academic rigor across multiple disciplines. These distinct experiences strengthened my leadership skills, improved my ability to communicate across different fields, and pushed me beyond my own limits.

**What was your favorite Honors class and Honors instructor?**

Choosing only one Instructor is difficult to do, but to choose the one class that truly stood out to me was Music Appreciation. It reminded me of my time as 1st chair double bass in string orchestra, as well as my involvement in chamber ensembles. The course explored how different instruments harmonize to create a melody, which I saw as a direct parallel to how ingredients blend together to create a dish. Just as music follows tempo, dynamics, and rhythm, culinary arts rely on timing, balance, and layering flavors. This class deepened my appreciation for both art forms, showing how creativity translates across disciplines.

**What is your favorite Honors memory?**

One of my favorite Honors Program memories was attending my first event game night. It wasn't just about playing games but about meeting new people, hearing their stories, and understanding their diverse goals. That moment solidified that I was exactly where I needed to be.



**What did the Honors Program offer you? What's one thing you wish you knew before?**

One of the biggest lessons Honors taught me was to push myself and value my achievements. There were times when I overlooked my own milestones, yet others recognized them. I learned that taking pride in your work and continuously pushing forward will ultimately open new opportunities. Thanks to Honors, I've had experiences I never expected, such as my Culinary R&D internship, becoming an Honors Ambassador, and participating in academic and food research projects, including working with the K-Food sensory research department. I want others to know that Honors isn't just about academics. The Program challenges you, opens doors, and offers a chance to create something greater.

**What are your future plans?**

After completing my Culinary Research & Development Internship at Simmons Foods, my next goal is to earn my Certified Research Chef (CRC) and Certified Culinary Scientist (CCS) certifications through the RCA. With my honors distinction and minors at the University of Arkansas, I aim to become an R&D Chef or Product Development Chef, focusing on culinary innovation, food science, and making high-quality meals more accessible, or to open my place to provide great quality meals to those in need. •

## Service Learning

Last semester, Vashon Nguyen received the Excellent Contribution service learning award for his work with the Arkansas History Service Learning Project, modernizing the archives at the Benton County Historical Society and doing research on northwest Arkansans in the Civil War. He also won a Service Learning Scholarship for his work in the community. •

**LOIS CHUN, Dean of Science and Mathematics, and professor of Chemistry, takes a look at what brought her to NWACC.****How did you end up teaching chemistry? At NWACC?**

My father was an agricultural chemist. I grew up surrounded by soil and water samples, which my dad would collect on long family road trips. Because of my dad, I have always loved science and especially chemistry, which I subsequently studied as an undergraduate. In graduate school, I branched out to biochemistry and molecular biology thinking I would go into research. Soon after finishing graduate school, my husband's job brought us to Northwest Arkansas. On our second day in Arkansas, we explored the NWACC campus, and I knew immediately that I wanted to work here.

**What do you love about chemistry and want to students to also love?**

Chemistry touches every part of our lives. I would love for everyone to see their lives, down to the molecules, through the lens of a chemist.

**As Dean, what was it like to balance the role of dean and all that position entails and teaching an Honors Chem class?**

I enjoy teaching. The honors students are an especially delightful group to teach, as they embody academic curiosity. As a Dean, I have a unique opportunity to help improve the student experience at NWACC. Teaching in the classroom allows me to interact with students and gain a better understanding of their needs, so I can advocate for them.

**What do you hope balancing the two is taught you that you can share with students? Any advice on how to do well in different roles?**

I feel like I have always managed my time well, but it is tricky juggling these two jobs. Despite the busy schedule, it's still important to take a little time for yourself to prevent burnout. Pickleball is a great way to accomplish that.

**What's your favorite Honors memory?**

My favorite memory is working with an Honors group on developing a safe titration lab for online students. We had a lot of laughs while experimenting with different products and techniques.

**What did the Honors Program offer you in terms of teaching ? What do you wish people knew about Honors?**

Teaching Honors gave me an opportunity to work with some of the most inquisitive students. I wish students knew that an Honors class is not necessarily more difficult but is more engaged learning. •



**SHARON FOX, Dean of Communications and Arts, and professor of Humanities, tells us about her love for English and writing.**

**How did you end up teaching English? At NWACC?**

I apparently taught myself to read at the age of 3 - my Mum thinks I got tired of waiting for people to read me stories.

But my first sentence was also “I do it,” and I don’t think I have become any less independent since then. I have loved books my whole life, and reading is basically the only way to really make me sit still for any length of time. As I got older, I learned to love talking about books and sharing my experiences in them. I also love words and how they are constructed. I love language and how it helps us communicate. It just all ties together for me in what is done in an English course.

***NWACC Forensics Team Returns with Early Success***

After several dormant years, the Forensics Club is again active at NWACC, under the leadership of Professor Kendrea James. The team wasted no time making an impact at the Border Wars Tournament, hosted by Tulsa Community College and Sterling College, competing against more than a dozen institutions.

Honors students Judah Tate and Israel Martinez earned the award for “Top Community College Competitor” after excelling in impromptu and informative speaking.

***cont. pg 6***



### **Forensics cont.**

Judges praised their preparation, delivery, and poise under pressure.

For Martinez, the experience was about more than the recognition. “I found my voice in Public Speaking early on and wanted to expand my mind even more,” he said. “It was a fantastic opportunity and competition was SOOO fun! I 110% recommend it if you like giving speeches!”

Tate reflected on his path from Honors Public Speaking to competing at tournaments: “I found the experience of public speaking to be rewarding...”

**cont. pg 7**

When I really thought about what I wanted to do as a career, finding a way to talk about books and language professionally meant being an English teacher.

I didn’t end up becoming an English teacher for a long time. I had other careers and then I started here at NWACC as a student about 13 years ago and just loved my experience. The instructors were so engaged and interested in me as a person, not just a name on a roster. My classes were thoughtful and challenged me. I took every honors class I could (both here and at UARK) and that was really a big part of shaping what I wanted to do in this second phase of my career. When I left NWACC, my only goal was to come back as full time faculty. I transferred to UARK and got BAs in English and History (My love of history is also tied to my love of books - I always need to know “why” things happen). I got my MA in English from UARK, which allowed me to teach at NWACC, but my husband talked me into continuing on to get my PhD.

I still have to complete my dissertation, but I will get there and at that time there will be much celebration. When I had finished all my course work and exams, Professor Chesne reached out to me and asked if I was available to teach the Introduction to Gender Studies that next semester. I knew this was an opportunity I shouldn’t pass up. The following semester I was asked to teach American Lit. Then in summer, I was asked to teach Exploring the Humanities. An a FT position opened, and despite not being finished with my PhD, I knew I needed to at least apply, even if it was for the experience and to get feedback on what I needed to do to be a better candidate (never underestimate what you learn from doing interviews, even for jobs you don’t think you will get). I was hired for the following fall as FT English faculty and as the Composition I Coordinator.

### **What do you love about English and want students to also love?**

I have said some of this already, but I love the stories that you can share if you know how to write. Yes, we can record our stories, and I really believe in the value of recorded stories (huge audiobook fan), but you still need to be able to write them down at some point. I think about how much history is lost because it was never written down. While we have gone through all kinds of ways of making recordings, so many houses have VHS tapes they can no longer look at. While writing, on any medium, is still able to be read. I also see all writing as storytelling, really. Even my shopping list tells a story if you stop me in the store and ask



**Forensics cont.**

“...I enjoyed running around to the next event and practicing in between rounds. In the end, NWACC’s forensics team would win Best Community College award at the event.” Looking back, he describes his time on the Forensics team as one of the highlights of his Honors and NWACC experience, combining both academic challenge and personal growth.

Beyond competition, the club offers students the chance to sharpen debate strategies, practice critical thinking, and grow as communicators in fast-paced settings. The early success highlights not only the dedication of its members but also Professor James’s vision to reestablish NWACC’s presence in collegiate speech and debate. With momentum already building, the Forensics Club is once again becoming a space where Honors students can challenge themselves, celebrate teamwork, and find their voices. •

me why I need those particular things. I think too many students see an English class as a chore, as a check mark on the way to completing something else. I have never seen writing that way. I want students to understand that language and writing is at the core of almost everything we do. If you can’t write down directions for someone they may never complete a task. If you can’t write down your ideas, you will have trouble bringing others along with you. Students should look for the story in their writing and realize that it has importance for them and for those they interact with.

**As Dean, what was it like to balance the role of dean and all that position entails and teaching class?**

Teaching will always be one of my first loves, so no matter what is going on I will make time to teach. I only get to teach at night or online, and that sometimes means I can’t teach the classes I would love to teach. I keep my teaching work for outside of my time as Dean, so this means making materials and videos for classes have to be done at night or on the weekend. I don’t mind that. Keeping the two parts of my work life separate actually helps me focus on each individually.

What I do want to say is that continuing to teach is why I think I can be an effective Dean. I am still in touch with the faculty experience - I know when technology is not doing what we need it to do because I am having the same struggle in my own class. I know when students have “changed” and have new needs and expectations, because my students have changed and have different expectations. For me, this is really important. I promised myself when I was in grad school that if I ever found myself in a position like “Dean,” I would continue to teach in order to do my best in serving the people I represent. I definitely don’t have being “Dean” all figured out yet, and may never, but I am enjoying the experience of learning through the process and, for me, that requires both doing all the administrative work AND being an instructor.

**What’s your favorite Honors memory?**

I have a lot of honors memories both through my own experiences as an NWACC honors student and with my students in the honors courses I am privileged to teach. I think most of my favorite memories have been in my Gender Studies courses. The classes are often small and we get to know one another really well. There is maybe not a specific memory that I am comfortable sharing because a lot of it is pretty personal for the students, but I do get to see students have real epiphanies about how they fit into the world and how they can be a source of support in their world for others who may be struggling.

I believe those students are better equipped to be managers and leaders of people because they have taken the time to walk in others' shoes. We have cried in class, laughed, and gotten frustrated.

There are a lot of real emotions in class because we are talking about people - real people and their experiences. We do not all see the topics covered in the same way, and that is okay, it is not required to do well in the course. What we do learn is how to have real conversations about often difficult topics and that skill can be taken outside of the classroom daily.

**What did the Honors Program offer you in terms of teaching ? What do you wish people knew about Honors?**

As a professor in an Honors class I love that I get to work with students who are really here to learn - I see this in all my courses, but it is almost guaranteed in my honors courses. They want to question what is shared and I love answering questions and ensuring I have the right understanding of what I am sharing. I should always be learning alongside my students - that should never be over. I wish more students understood that we want you to question what we teach - we just want you to be respectful in your questioning. We want students to bring new ideas to the classrooms - we just want them to also be open to new ideas. Honors classes encourage students to be explorers on their education journey - we want students to enjoy the trip and not just rush towards an end goal without taking a look around them and seeing all the possibilities. I want the instructors in honors classes to enjoy the journey with the students and to look around with them. I want the community to know that we want to send out all students at NWACC, but particularly our honors students, with the ability to look around them critically and see the opportunities for them to make a difference and to improve the world around them. •

## ***Another Year, Another GPHCC!***



The largest group yet of NWACC Honors students traveled in March 2025 to the Great Plains Honors Council Annual Conference at North Texas College in Denton, Texas. This year's theme, "Great Plains, Greater Possibilities," set the stage for a weekend of learning, networking, and sharing research with peers from across six states.

**GPHCC cont.**

Three NWACC students presented original research: Angela Deneke, “Beyond the Battlefield: The Burden of Traumatic Brain Injuries in the Armed Forces”; Nadia Moutria, “Ida B. Wells: Resistance through Shining Truth” (developed from Dr. Chris Huggard’s History of the American People (HIST 2003H) course); and Ethan Petersen ’25, “Digitalization, Culture, and Agency.”

They were joined by fellow honors students Brittany Jones ’25, Taryn Settle ’25, Alberto Leon, and Anna Harcourt, who attended presentations and engaged with students and faculty from other colleges.

Each student described the experience with a single word:

**Angela - “Memorable”**

**Ethan - “Encouraging”**

**Alberto - “Novel”**

**Nadia - “Exciting”**

**Anna - “Motivating”**

**Brittany - “Adventurous”**

**Taryn - “Inspiring”**



For many, the conference was more than just a weekend trip. Deneke reflected, “The trip to GPHCC was a catalyst event for my future academic plans because it was an opportunity to connect with other honors students and share my own research.” Now an undergraduate research assistant at the University of Arkansas, she credits GPHCC with helping her build confidence and discover new opportunities.

Petersen shared that presenting alongside students across disciplines “inspired me to pursue other opportunities in interdisciplinary undergraduate research,” which has already led to fellowships in technology policy. Moutria called the conference “super eye-opening” noting as a first-generation student, noting how the depth of other projects encouraged her to push her own work further.

Events like GPHCC highlight the value of honors education beyond the classroom, offering students a platform to showcase their work, make connections, and imagine greater possibilities for their academic and professional futures. •



# 8th Annual Honors Awards Gala

On April 21, 2025, the Honors Program hosted its annual Honors Gala, a celebration of graduating students, faculty, and the many achievements of the year. The evening featured dinner, community, and recognition of 20 Honors Program graduates, 12 graduates with Distinction, along with awards in honors disciplines and events.



## HONORS MEDALLIONS

### HONORS PROGRAM GRADUATES

#### ANDREA HERNANDEZ

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)*

#### BRITTANY KAY JONES

*AAS, Health Care Studies*

#### EKATERINA “KAT” KOUZNETSOVA

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)*

#### VICTORIA PATTEN

*Associate of Science, Business, General Transfer*

#### MAILY PHAM

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)*

#### TRISTEN WILLIAMS

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)*

### HONORS PROGRAM GRADUATES WITH DISTINCTION

#### ROSA ALDANA

*Associate of Arts*

#### BRAIDEN “CAPTAIN” BURTON

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)*

#### COOPER C. CHIDDISTER

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and STEM*

#### ALLISON DAVIDSON

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and STEM*

#### MAXIMUS GIBBON

*Associate of Science, Agriculture, Food, & Life Science;*

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM);*

*AAS, Food Studies, Culinary Arts; Associate of Arts*

#### SHANNON GRAHAM

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)*

#### RAIN HORNER

*Associate of Arts*

#### NANCY LEMUS

*Associate of Science, Business Administration - Walton College Transfer*

#### ETHAN PETERSON

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)*

#### TARYN SETTLE

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)*

#### JUDAH TATE

*Associate of Science, Business Administration - Walton College Transfer*

#### AVI VADLAMANI

*Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)*



2025 Honors graduates with Program Director Sabrina Chesne (left)

**HONORS GLASS AWARDS****BROWN CHESNE HONORS AWARD***For dedication to Community, Curiosity, and Diversity***Maximus Gibbon****OLIVIA AND BENJAMIN SCHAAP  
HONORS AWARD***For outstanding dedication to Honors scholarship***Evan Petersen****DODD HUGGARD HONORS AWARD***For outstanding work in Honors Social or Behavioral Sciences***Brittany Kay Jones****Nadia Moutria****Charista Paine****FOX LOONEY LAUGHTON HONORS AWARD***For outstanding work in Honors English, Literature, or Humanities***Rebecca Babington-Baptist****Rain Horner****TURNER HONORS AWARD***For outstanding work in Honors Life or Physical Sciences***Ekaterina “Kat” Kouznetsova****COOPER HONORS AWARD***For outstanding work in Honors Arts, Communication, Music, or Theatre***Judah Tate****HONORS PYOTR KROPOTKIN AWARD  
FOR MUTUAL AID***For outstanding commitment to community service and collective action***Taryn Settle****GPHCC MEDALLIONS****Angela Deneke****Nadia Moutria****Ethan Petersen****JADE AWARDS***For outstanding dedication to Honors students***Jenna Bateman****Matt Evans****Kendrea James****HONORS STUDENT  
ASSOCIATION PAPERWEIGHTS****Braiden Burton***HSA President, Fall 2024***Avi Vadlamani***HSA Secretary, 2024; President, 2025***Maximus Gibbon***HSA Vice President, 2024-2025***Ally Davidson***HSA Vice President 2023-2024; Treasurer, Fall 2024***Cooper Chiddister***HSA Treasurer, 2024-2025***SUNBURST AWARD***Outstanding HSA Members, 2024-2025***Maximus Gibbon****Avi Vadlamani**