

Honors Program Portfolio by Rachel Ann Smith

Honors Courses: English Composition I (Laughton),
English Composition II (Looney), General Psychology
(Slavik), World Civilization from 1500 (Gallo),
International Relations (Evans), Survey of the
Universe (Androes).

Graduating May 12, 2018



To Whom It May Concern

To the professors and peers who made a difference in my life; to who I was two years ago, unsure and curious; to my friends, family, and cherished ones who encouraged me; to the conflicts that have taught me patience and bravery; and to anyone else whom this letter may concern:

Growth takes the cultivation of good soil, an establishment of roots, and the patience of anticipating eyes to see something green sprouting. College takes us all on a similar journey. As a young freshman, all I knew was the soil I prepared as a homeschooler: unpracticed in any sort of academic discipline, and an insecurity of higher education suffocating me as each new homework assignment held its choking grip. Slowly but surely, I trusted the process; I went to class, accomplished each assignment, and broke the grip of anxiety and any remanence of its fingerprints. Once I allowed myself to engage in my newfangled curiosity, I blossomed. In my own words in a self-evaluation of Comp I, Honors, “I showed up to class and always left with something significant”.

The reason I stepped foot on NWACC soil was because of an English professor I babysat for. She offered aid in selecting classes, insight on the best professors, and encouragement along the way. There is a theory that talking to plants helps them grow—whether or not the theory is true, Dr. Burns was there for me, and without her I would not have flourished. Once flabbergasted at the thought of an Honors course, those courses are my best memories. Each relationship I had with a professor, especially the ones Dr. Burns challenged me with in my skepticism, were ones of inspiration and insight. In English Composition I with Jim Laughton, I was encouraged to ask why as I questioned my own thoughts and demanded something deeper from myself. During my first semester, I went through a lot of transition in my personal life, and Mr. Laughton showed me appreciation for the moments I experience while broadening my worldview to the moments where others are both suffering and satisfied. I also established roots in writing as I developed an admiration for constructing captivating sentences. My first semester left me confident in my academic ability, anticipating the new community NWACC had to offer as I officially became part of the Honors Program.

The three themes of the Honors Program are community, curiosity, and diversity. Each thread of the program's mission was woven within my semesters, which made all the difference to my college experience. My community expanded significantly as I learned to network and cultivate connections with peers, professors, and those outside of the classroom. When creating a hallway solar system, my classmates and I tugged at and learned from each other's leadership abilities, and themes of teamwork saturated our proudly finished product. For multiple assignments, I interviewed the greater community for research and insight, including the baristas of Onyx Coffee Lab and the co-director of a global humanitarian organization. These opportunities prompted me to ask deeper and more meaningful questions, as well as develop an

open mind to the world around me because of the answers I would receive. With these interviews, I wrote an essay on the evolution of America's favorite caffeinated drink and a guide for the modern day "superhero". Along the writing process, I found that my worldview was refined with every revision. Not only did my network expand and my communication skills increase, but an adoration for my community strengthened.

Learning about the world around me came with a challenge that was found outside of my comfort zone, including Dr. Gallo's Honors World Civilization class, which became both one of the best and most uncomfortable experiences of my student career. The atmosphere of the class was invigorating and enlightening with Dr. Gallo's diverse topics and the engagement of peers. Our class periods were often spent in a restaurant of the culture we were studying, and we listened to the wisdom of our professor as our taste buds were satisfied. The challenges often did not reside within the classroom, but were presented with the outside experiences that enriched and stretched my perspective. When Dr. Gallo asked for my help making pupusas at Brightwater, I eagerly accepted. Granted, I had never made pupusas before, but I was determined to learn and have a Brightwater kitchen experience. While I rapidly flattened the homemade corn tortilla with my floured palm, I listened to the story of a Dreamer who taught me the technique. He was a student at NWACC, too, and hoped to improve life for his siblings. As we stuffed the beans and cheese into the pupusas, we laughed about life, sharing about things in common and not so common. I was amazed by this stranger who quickly became a friend, despite our drastically diverse backgrounds.

While in Dr. Gallo's Honors class, I participated in Service Learning. I explored and researched the Caribbean culture of the Dominican Republic with the idea of spending one week on the island country in June. I studied creole religions, the racial relationships inside Hispaniola,

and the labor conditions of the Haitian and Dominican people. In the preparation, I was searching for the answer to why I was going, and I found none. The answer did not become clear until I set foot on the rough terrain of Consuelito, a Haitian batey hidden in the stretch of a sugar cane field. The village kids ran to meet my team with bright smiles. I held their hands, unable to speak their language and they unable to speak mine, but we loved each other with a furious, unexplainable love. Not only did the children simply love us, but the whole community welcomed us and offered us chairs when greeted at their doorstep. None of us feared if we would be taken or killed; the community was full of family. We simply felt home. I had gone to the Dominican twice before, and these trips, since year one, have never been about the place of Dominican Republic; it has always been about the people. The Dominican Republic has plagued me with a love for its culture and the kind heart at its core, and the only treatment I have found successful is to return—again and again and again. The Service Learning Project allowed connection and understanding within a culture different from my own, enabling effective humanitarian work while broadening my perspective.

The answer is clear: I am not who I once was in August 2016. If I am honest, I did not know what I was getting myself into when I said yes to the program soon after my first semester, but the experience has been so much more significant and spectacular than I could have ever imagined. A small seed of curiosity was cultivated, roots running deep and saturated with meaning, the green awakening from its sleep in the rich soil. The Honors Program has surely taught me significant life lessons and skills that I can carry on in my journey that I would not have learned otherwise. To the one unsure of their potential and the scary New Thing: do not run away from your curiosity – pursue it. Taste its richness. Explore it with wonder and adventure. And always, always, do the extra credit.

Excerpts and Photos

“Deborah Lacks shows us that the pursuit of truth is possible, but in order to accurately seek truth we must lay our biases to rest, opening our mind to what we never thought possible, and resolve to discover—wherever the research leads. The greatest danger we face when pursuing the truth, whether in life or in research, is falling prey to cognitive biases that keep us from accepting information we do not want to be true.”

- Excerpt from Award Winning Comp II Essay, *Ye Shall Know the Truth*, Spring 2017.

“Germany has taught me to be content in my search for home because I know the people I call home are finding themselves looking up at the same stars. My heart swells at the thought; perhaps we’re not too far from each other after all.”

- Excerpt from Comp I Essay, *Shelf Life: A Journal*, Fall 2016

“Achieving the inner superhero within you will take time and practice as you are active in doing good and pursue to acknowledge your limitations. The most important thing is to not go blindly about things, but be open and accepting of hard truths.”

- Excerpt from Comp II Essay, *The Superhero Complex: A Guide*, Spring 2017.

“Just like you, the coffee cupped greedily in your fingertips experienced change from what it once was to the product presented before you. As you sit and take your next sip, notice the narrative that the bold substance tells as the liquid makes its bitter journey

down your throat. As Onyx Coffee Lab describes, “To us, coffee has always been interesting due to just how many cultures it affects. From farms, all the way to customers in America, Asia, or Europe, and how it can bring all of us as people together” (Onyx Coffee Lab). Coffee holds a story, each cup different from the other, but perhaps persists as the reason for its rich brew.”

- *Excerpt from World Civilization Essay, The Traveler in Your Cup, Spring 2017.*

“Even today we see a similar conflict as women struggle to balance the necessity of income, the pivotal vocation of being a parent, and the desire for fulfillment of purpose, making our narrative of give and take an acutely familiar tale.”

- *Excerpt from Comp I Essay, 5 Filters of Feminism, Fall 2016.*



Making pupusas with Dr. Gallo at Brightwater after she sent me a text the morning of a DREAMERS fundraiser needing help. I had never made pupusas before, so I was happy for the practice!



My Service Learning Project helped serve my time in the Dominican Republic. My team and I visited Dominican villages and Haitian Bateyes. Intentional research for the project beforehand helped prepare me for a more accurate and fulfilling cultural experience as a humanitarian.



My views during my Dominican Republic trip for Service Learning. On the left is a long stretch of sugar cane, which can be harvested for hours. For each long stretch, Haitians earn about 40 pesos (less than \$1). On the right is the Haitian Batey of Alejandro Bass. Despite the intense labor conditions, the people remain alive with loud music and bright colors.



My first day of the Fall 2016 semester and my first day of the Fall 2017 semester. So much life and learning happened in between these photos, and I have the Honors Program to thank for the most impactful and significant of moments.